

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## What are the Greatest Struggles in Marriage?

For the last several years I have been doing a survey of married couples around the country. I have asked husbands and wives to tell me what their greatest struggles are in their marriage. Over one thousand have responded and I would like to convey some of their answers to you. Most of you who read these results will immediately say "Amen," because you will instantly identify with many of the same issues in your own marriage. In addition, I would also like to add some encouragement and instruction as to possible solutions for these common problems so that you can take the necessary action to resolve these issues.

So, what are the greatest struggles couples are having today? I will list these questions as they were given in the survey and then consider their answers.

### 1. What is the one thing you would like to change in your marriage?

Both men and women declared that the one thing they wanted to change most in their marriage was their spiritual life together. This answer was quite a revelation to me personally because I am constantly trying to communicate to couples that the key to changing their marriage is to first change their spiritual life, both personally and with their mate. What blessed me about this answer was that I now realize that most couples already know this truth.

But, you may be thinking, *Why is changing my spiritual life so important to helping me change my mar-*

*riage?* The answer to this question is very simple; every marital problem is first a spiritual problem. If you are selfish, angry, argumentative, or harsh with your mate you have a spiritual problem that must be addressed or your marriage will flounder. If these behaviors are present in your life, obviously your sinful nature rules and controls you instead of the Holy Spirit. Your sin nature can only be controlled by doing what Paul taught: "*Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*" (Gal. 5:16). But, to walk under the control of the Spirit you must develop a deeper relationship with the Father. As you walk closer to Him you will naturally draw closer to your spouse because the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). Therefore, if you want to change your spiritual life with your mate you must first develop your personal relationship with God. If you would like to read some of our discipleship material to help you deepen your relationship with God go to our web site at [www.calvaryag.org](http://www.calvaryag.org) and click on the Discipleship icon.

### 2. What is the greatest spiritual challenge in your marriage?

Both men and women responded that the greatest spiritual challenge for them in their marriage was their lack of prayer time together. This answer revealed several things to me. First, it revealed that most couples want meaningful spiritual fellowship with each other in prayer. If they didn't want to pray with their spouse they wouldn't even be concerned about it. Second, it revealed that couples knew they should have consistent meaningful prayer with one another. They want more than just saying grace at the evening meal. Couples know that prayer should be an

integral part of their marriage and that it builds unity and intimacy with one another.



*Fascinating results!*

What steps should you take if you want to develop an effective prayer life together? (1) Find a mutually agreeable time to pray together that fits both of your schedules. I would suggest if you are both early risers, meet before the children get up. If you both stay up late, pray with each other just before bed. To find an agreeable time to pray may require some sacrifice for one spouse. You may have to purposely turn off the television in the evening or stop doing some activity you enjoy for a short time. (2) Keep the prayer time short and to the point. If you want to successfully change your habits, begin with a short time together at first, possibly just a few minutes. This will keep your partner from becoming discouraged, impatient, or intimidated. (3) Keep your turn to pray short. In other words, don't pray everything before your spouse has a chance to speak. (4) Be personal in your prayers. One thing that greatly encourages effective prayer together is acknowledgment of your personal needs in the presence of your mate. So often in group prayer meetings I

**"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14**

hear people using very impersonal words such as *we* and *us* and never personally confessing *I need You Lord*. But, reflect for a moment when someone humbly confesses their personal need? Doesn't your heart go out to that person as you agree with his or her request? Don't you sense a knitting together with this individual? The same result will occur if you will become very personal with your spouse by acknowledging your individual needs. (5) Pray for your marriage. The best way to handle praying for your marriage is to first thank God for your spouse and request God's help in the areas where you are personally failing. This is the "remove the plank from your own eye" principle that Jesus taught in Matthew 7:5. When you begin asking God for a greater love or a willingness and sensitivity to be a servant to your spouse, he or she will sense your humility. This can only draw two people closer together and change your marriage for the better. For a more detailed instruction on this subject of prayer please take the time to read my article *How does Prayer Build Your Marriage* at our web site [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org)

**3. What is the most serious stumbling-block you face emotionally in your marriage?** Men responded that it was their difficulty in sharing their emotions with their wives. Interestingly, women also believed that this was their greatest stumbling-block in the relationship. However, women placed as the second greatest stumbling-block in their marriage the lack of emotional support from their husbands, but only one percent of men listed the lack of their wife's support as a stumbling-block. This revealed to me that husbands and wives see the issue of emotions very differently.

I want to encourage men reading this article to take the leadership in this area of your marriage and begin giving more emotional support to your wives. Why? It's very simple: if you want be able to share your emotions with your wife you must first give

her emotional support when she is struggling. In other words, if you want to receive emotional support you must first give it. Jesus said, "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). It is obviously unfair to ask your wife to give support if you are not showing your support. You must look for ways to emotionally encourage and support your wife when she is upset. Ask God to help you understand why she views an issue the way she does so you can encourage her. Sometimes she doesn't want words from you - she simply wants you to hold her.

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### **If you want to change your spiritual life with your mate you must first develop your personal relationship with God.**

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For wives reading this article, do you know what most husbands said were their second and third greatest emotional stumbling-blocks with their wives? It was their inability to accept the emotional differences with their wives and that their wives were too emotional. What does this reveal? You must not allow your emotional differences to divide you from your husband. God has made men and women emotionally different so they will compliment and not hinder one another. Men usually see things from a very practical viewpoint. You must look for ways to see the practical reasons why your husband sees things the way he does. Thus, your emotions will be balanced by his practicality and his view of things will be tempered by your emotions.

**4. What is the greatest hindrance in your communication?** Both men and women agreed that their pride was the greatest hindrance to effectively communicate. Pride is another

one of those spiritual issues that must be addressed in your heart. The problem of pride is one of the greatest reasons for communication breakdown for all of us. Solomon declared: "In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise will preserve them" (Prov. 14:3). In pride we foolishly use words like a rod to beat others, not realizing that these words are destroying the very relationship we seek. Wisdom and humility coming from your lips will preserve your relationship. Scripture also teaches that pride is the source of strife in your communication. Solomon warned: "He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife" (Prov. 28:25). Therefore, if you want to change the way you communicate with your spouse you must humbly acknowledge that your proud words are wrong and hurtful. Ask God for wise and tactful words instead.

**5. What is the greatest cause of division between a husband and wife in the area of parenting?** Interestingly, again both husbands and wives agreed that it was their lack of consistency in their discipline of the children that brought the greatest division between them. The second greatest issue that caused division among couples was their lack of agreement about how to discipline. This fact is important because usually there is a lack of consistency because there is no agreement about if, when, and how to discipline the children. If these issues are where you struggle you are not alone. But, how can you address these issues and become more consistent?

First, you must find an agreement about if, when, and how you are going to discipline. To find this agreement you must determine whom you will listen to as the expert in discipline and where you will find a standard of truth concerning how to discipline. For Christians God is the expert in childrearing because He is the One who created you and He knows best how you should live. Therefore, God has made His will clear on the issue of disciplining your

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children. He declared, “*My son do not despise the chastening (correction) of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens*” (Heb. 12:5-6). God corrects and disciplines you because He loves you. If He disciplines His children then so should you.

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**If you want to receive emotional support you must first give it.**

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But, who is the expert who knows how to discipline effectively and what methods are appropriate? The standard of truth on this question must be the Word of God. The methods that God sets out for how to discipline are clearly taught in Scripture: A. Verbal reproof is where all correction must begin (Prov. 29:15, 17). B. Giving a time out on a chair near where you are working or in their bedroom is another good form of discipline that removes opportunities or withholds something good (Jer. 5:25). The removal of certain privileges or withdrawing some blessing you would have bestowed such as a toy or a trip to the park (Gen. 31:9; Jer. 16:5). C. Allow the natural consequences to fall upon the child. Scripture declares that this is the reason why children should obey their parents “*that it may be well*” with them (Eph. 6:1-3). However, if they do wrong there must be a consequence (Gal. 6:7). D. Spanking is clearly an appropriate method of discipline when the other forms of discipline are ineffective (Prov. 13:24; Prov. 19:18).

Another help to couples in coming to an agreement on how to discipline would be to read good biblically based material together on the subject of parenting. May I suggest, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp, Shepherd Press, Wapwallopen, PA. You may also want to read through my parenting notes at

our web site. Go to [www.calvaryag.org](http://www.calvaryag.org) then click Bible studies, counseling helps, then look for Parenting Principles.

Once you have found agreement on the basic issue of discipline, then you must address the issue of consistency. Consistency in discipline is basically the problem of self-discipline to do the right thing consistently whether you feel like it or not. As a parent that has already raised two children and who is almost finished with the third, I know the greatest problem with consistency is laziness. Many times I have said to myself, *I don't want to get up and do this discipline thing. I would rather keep watching this football game or keep reading.* However, this is when I have to act even though I don't feel like it. Scripture teaches: “*The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich*” (Prov. 13:4). If I am lazy about my responsibilities nothing good is going to happen. Results come with diligence. Knowing the need for diligence is why Moses taught the people concerning teaching their children: “*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*” (Deut. 6:6-7). Therefore, be diligent in your awesome responsibility of disciplining the children God has given you.

**6. What is the greatest sexual challenge you find in your relationship?** The biggest challenge for men was the fact that their wives did not approach them for sex. For women the greatest challenge was the overall lack of intimacy in the relationship. The reason for these dissimilar answers is that men and women see intimacy very differently. Men judge intimacy from the viewpoint of what their wife does or does not do in regards to her responsiveness. Women see intimacy from an overall perspective; is there intimacy in the other

areas of the relationship? The only way to bridge this gap between husbands and wives is to lovingly meet the other person's need for affection in the way they are expecting. Paul explains that this is your responsibility as a spouse. “*Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control*” (1 Cor. 7:3-5). The word *render* in this passage means to give back or yield up the affection due your mate. Why? Because sexual affection is their due or what you owe them because you gave up the right to refuse them when you made the decision to marry them. The only time you have the right to not have sex is when you mutually agree to refrain. However, this session of sex is only for a short time and then you are to come together again.

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**God corrects and disciplines you because He loves you.**

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Therefore, men must see intimacy as more than just sex. You must experience intimacy in all areas of your relationship if you want your wife to be more responsive to you in the bedroom. Why not be more intimate in your communication, share more of your thoughts and emotions with her, and become involved in serving around the house and taking the lead in parenting? When you take such actions you are declaring that she is more than just a sexual object, she is your intimate companion. Wives

regularly convey these desires to me in counseling.

For women, you must understand that if you occasionally initiate sexual relations with your husband you are declaring by your actions that you desire him. By sexually pursuing him you are communicating that you want and need him in this way. Just as you need him to show you in practical ways that he desires intimacy, likewise, you also must express to him in a very practical way that you desire him. Men tell me regularly that they need their wife to express her interest in them sexually. This act of love removes the doubt in their minds that their wife is just doing her duty.

**7. Have you ever committed adultery in this marriage?** The answer to this question was quite revealing especially because of the differences I found in the national statistics on this subject. Let me explain: In the 1994 University of Chicago study entitled *The Social Organization of Sexuality* reported that 25% of married men had committed adultery and 15% of women had been unfaithful while married. In a more recent book in 2003 Peggy Vaughan in *The Monogamy Myth* declared that 60% of men and 40% of women have had extramarital relationships. However, when I surveyed Christians in Bible teaching evangelical churches I found something quite different. From over one thousand people questioned, 85% of the men and 97% of the women said they read their Bible regularly. Of these same individuals only 14% of men and 9% of women had committed adultery. What do these statistics prove? They prove that men and women who are in Bible teaching churches and those who have regular personal devotions in the Word of God are much less vulnerable to the temptation of adultery than the general population. Therefore, if you want to stay faithful to the Lord and committed to your spouse find a good church to attend and get involved. At the same time you should be pursuing the Lord

personally in the Word of God and prayer. This is where you will find the inner strength to follow Christ and remain faithful to your spouse.

I hope that these findings from this survey have been enlightening to you. But, more importantly, I hope that you will heed the encouragements I have given you to work on those areas of your marriage that need change. Remember, a good marriage doesn't just happen; it requires loving and consistent work to build up your relationship and make it enjoyable. Therefore, "through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13).

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For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org) or by email at [ccag@calvaryag.org](mailto:ccag@calvaryag.org) or at 805-481-2320.

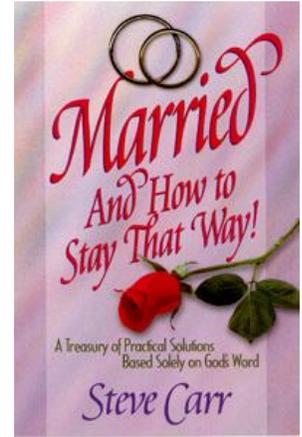
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Counselor Training Manual: The *Counseling Couples in Crisis* manual with accompanying video training material has been developed for pastors and lay counselors to assist them to counsel couples in crisis.

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