



# Living Well

## Marriage: Friendship vs. Coexistence



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### Friendship ....

**It is when we do things together that friendship springs up.... Friends look in the same direction.**  
C.S. Lewis

When we married over 40 years ago, we could both say without hesitation that **we were close friends**. Yes, there was a romantic interest that sparked between us, but first came several common interests.

During the early child-rearing years, we neglected our friendship at times, while trying to juggle kids, home, and career. It soon became apparent that **our marriage needed our friendship to thrive**.

Based on thousands of assessments, Prepare-Enrich research reveals that the **#1 strength of happy**

**couples is that they feel very close to each other.**

*In any other relationship, how would we **define friendship?***

**A friend is someone with whom I can be myself** - the good, the bad, and the ugly - and the person will still love and accept me. We **share common interests** and **speak honestly from the heart** without fear of criticism or retribution.

## FRIENDS

**To be friends, you have to spend time together and get to know each other more personally. You care about the well-being of the other person. You see the best in him and want the best for him.**

**To develop friendship in marriage, the same principles apply.** You and your spouse won't be alike but **you should be like-minded. You share common interests and values.**

Being friends with your spouse doesn't mean that your spouse is your only friend. **Healthy friendships are not exclusive or based on neediness.**

**Developing friendship** with your spouse must be intentional and takes

time. [see suggestions below]

**Neglecting the friendship** factor in your marriage relationship grows animosity (see the reverse side) and isolation. **Friendship** can be renewed and strengthened!

### Nurturing Friendship ....

Marriage is work but marriage should be fun too!

**Nurturing friendship in marriage starts with the heart. Having a caring and compassionate heart** for another person (most of all your spouse) is Biblical and is a choice we make.

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*  
Ephesians 4:32

These ideas can strengthen a marriage even if only one person is implementing them.

#### Suggestions:

- **Take time every day** to connect, even it's only 15 minutes. Share your day.
- **Respond** to each other **gently and kindly.**
- Find at least **one activity that you can enjoy** doing together - without your children - and **engage in it.**

- **Take time to learn about an interest** of your spouse, whether you share that interest or not. (For example - if your husband is a hunter, learn enough about it to talk to him. If your wife likes crafting, learn about her crafts.)
- **Accept your spouse's differences and affirm their strengths.**
- **Be open with each other.**

On the reverse side:

**Animosity**

.....  
**Antidotes**

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The determining factor in whether couples feel satisfied with the sex, romance, and passion in their marriage is, by **70%**:

**The quality of their FRIENDSHIP with each other**

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## Animosity or ....

### Contempt, disgust, hostility, resentment, and disrespect

A thriving friendship and animosity (contempt) cannot exist at the same time. **Lack of attention to the friendship factor of marriage often grows into animosity.**

After years of marriage research, John Gottman has found that **contempt is the #1 predictor of divorce.**

When we communicate **contempt**, we exhibit **disrespect and disgust**. We may use hostile humor, sarcasm, mockery, name-calling, eye-rolling, or sneering to convey our disgust for the other person.

**Contempt leads to more conflict**, not towards reconciliation. **It's impossible to resolve anything** when one person is sending the message that the other person is **disgusting** to them.

### How does that happen?

**One of two factors loom largely** in the mind of a person where animosity and contempt breed.

**1. If I struggle with my own sense of self-worth**, then I will receive remarks made by my spouse as **criticism**. Since I already doubt my own value, questions or comments are heard as **attacks**. I see any communication that is not overtly

positive as being negative.

**2. The other factor can be an intolerance of differences in another person.** I view my abilities and strengths as exceeding those of my spouse. Or I can't fathom how that trait can exist in another person.

As a married couple, we are certain to have many differences in our personalities. Those differences can become **wedges between us** or **magnets drawing us closer**.

As I **focus on the distasteful habits** of the other person, I build more disgust and contempt for that person.

**BUT we don't have to live in that way.** See antidotes below.

## Antidotes ....

### The antidotes to animosity are available to all!

Being willing to take a small step in the direction of my spouse can douse the flame of contempt and nurture friendship in our marriage.

**1. If the resentment has grown from hearing critical words**, I can step back and evaluate what I hear. *Are they the words that are actually spoken or is my perception of the motive behind the words? Am I wanting something from my spouse that I am not*

*saying but am expecting? Am I expecting my spouse to give me a sense of self-worth and value that only God can instill in me?*

I can assume **good will when they hear something that sounds hurtful**. Instead of assuming a negative connotation, I can ask for clarification. Friends believe the best in each other. In lieu of affirmation, I can **forgive my spouse for the hurt**.

**Friendship flourishes at the fountain of forgiveness.**

William Arthur Ward

**2. In our differences**, I can choose to focus on the **habits of my spouse that I don't like** or I can accept them and focus on the **positive aspects**. **The choice is up to me.** *Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.* (Romans 15:7)

**Building a culture of fondness and appreciation** is an antidote to animosity. Looking at my spouse with **caring, compassion, and admiration** leads to **fondness**. **Offering thanks and gratitude** demonstrates appreciation.