

Hot Topics for Couples

Steve & Annie Chapman



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HOT TOPICS FOR COUPLES

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The Meat Loaf Revelation

Annie: For the first two years of our marriage I made meat loaf. What all-American family doesn't eat this traditional dish at least once a week? One day, while I was preparing my grocery list, I asked Steve, "Would you like to have meat loaf tonight?" He replied, "No, I don't like meat loaf."

My response was one of shock. I said, "For the past two years you have eaten meat loaf every week. Why didn't you tell me you don't like it?" He answered, "You didn't ask me."

How many couples are going through life with belly aches because the simplest of thoughts are not shared? As a result of silence, they are not enjoying their marriage to the full extent. Still, they never ask or volunteer how they feel or what desires they might possess. There comes a point in the relationship between a husband and wife when it's time to stop being miserable, cease complaining, and start telling the other person what you want. After Steve told me he didn't like meat loaf, I never made it again (when he was home, anyway). Was I trying to complicate his life by feeding him something he didn't want? Of course not. Nor was he trying to play the role of the meat-loaf martyr. We simply didn't communicate about the subject.

Going back through the years I wondered if there were other unaddressed "issues" in our marriage. What else had Steve silently swallowed even though he didn't like it? As I pondered the question, I

realized that in our nearly three decades together there were other meat-loaf revelations we made. And with each one, our relationship grew stronger and sweeter.

For example, it took some time before I could tell my outdoors-loving husband that I really didn't enjoy riding a bicycle along a busy highway. I was not a big fan of the outside mirrors of passing cars and trucks that would barely miss my handlebars as they sped by. My nerves just couldn't take it. Nor did I care for that pin-sized seat on the bike he bought for me...us...to enjoy. Try as I did to like it, my constant squeezing of the brake levers and the accompanying little frantic screams during the downhills didn't contribute much to our having fun. Finally, I had to say something about it. I had to let him know that my idea of a thrill did not include a 40 MPH "fall" off a steep, paved, Tennessee incline as my eye sockets filled up with water!

Thankfully, he took it well. Once Steve understood my reservations about using danger as recreational therapy, he treated my appreciation of the outdoors quite differently. To this day, I am convinced that my willingness to help him see my fears assisted him in altering his expectations in regard to my participation in outside adventures. My willingness to open up about my dread of bicycle "road rash" resulted in the best gardening buddy I have today.

Steve was able to see that my preference for enjoying God's creation is my flower garden. Instead of having a husband who grumbles about me rarely leaving my backyard for adventure, I have a man who, each year on Mother's Day, gives me a most wonderful gift—mulch. That's right! Steve mulches my garden. But the best part is that he mulches and never complains.

Having seen the immeasurable value of a husband and wife experiencing their own meat-loaf revelations like we did, and seeing the rewards of the communication that can follow, we have been motivated to write this book. Rest assured, this text is about much more than dinner items, bicycles, and mulch. These pages address many other subjects that are of great concern but, perhaps, to date, they have not been discussed by spouses.

In order to find out what spouses wanted or needed to be saying to each other, for the past year we have asked approximately 500 couples from all parts of the country to complete a questionnaire we developed

for this book. The pages ahead of you contain many of their responses marked by a 🍖.

The input from those who put their hearts on paper was fascinating. First of all, we discovered that marrieds remain silent for reasons that range from being afraid to talk to being convinced that if they did, it wouldn't do any good. However, when it came to what husbands and wives were keeping to themselves, we discovered that many people were not saying the same things.

We want to give you a glimpse of what others are saying, including our own insights from our marriage. In so doing, you might see yourself in the thoughts of others and find the courage to form your own words about the issues. In addition to revealing some of the things not being said, we offer some helpful direction regarding the subjects. May God bless you as you discover and discuss these hot topics.

Prepared, Repaired, Paired

Did you ever hear the story about the near-sighted snake who got married? Later he bought himself a pair of glasses. When he put them on, and looked at his wife, he realized he'd married a garden hose!

There are far too many husbands and wives who have experienced that kind of shock when it comes to their mates. Thinking they had married their perfect match, they later discovered that's exactly what they got—a lifeless stick of wood with no fire.

The truth is, none of us really knows the one we marry. Not completely. Steve and I met in junior high in 1963, went through high school together, and lived only eight miles apart. We even shared some of the same friends. Yet there was no way at the ripe young age of our early twenties that we could have made a fully rational decision to confidently commit to a lifelong union. Love had certainly blurred our vision.

In truth, marriage is one of the biggest risks anyone ever takes, no matter how well acquainted the two people might be. We nearly shiver today to think of how little we actually knew about the other. Still, we exchanged vows and promised to walk through the remainder of our time side by side.

How did it turn out? We will answer by confessing something we know might be difficult for some folks to accept. We do so with a certain amount of anticipation that our credibility might be damaged in

some doubtful hearts. But here goes: We confess that our married years have been the absolute best of our lives. We are—brace yourself—happily married! As one husband said, “I’m so happy being married to this woman it would make a freight train take a dirt road!” We’re not sure exactly what he meant by his quip, but the gleam in his eyes told us he was a happy man.

You may be wondering, “How can it be that you have found such happiness?” First, each of us arrived at our wedding day on March 29, 1975, as two people who had given their lives to Jesus Christ. Gratefully, both of us knew in the deep recesses of our hearts that our greatest need was not the humanness in the other person. Instead, we each brought to the altar an awareness that our all-encompassing necessity as individuals was our spiritual need for a Savior.

As a young bride and groom, we stood before the preacher that sunny spring day with only the best intentions of fulfilling the other’s dreams. However, it was to our advantage to know that complete contentment in this life is dependent upon God’s presence in us. We knew that we needed to allow God to daily create in us a clean heart so that we could live at peace with Him (see Psalm 51:10). Without hesitation we can say that it was the individual pursuit of a relationship with Christ that contributed most to the oneness we experienced as newlyweds. It remains true today.

Herein lies the most important topic that far too many husbands and wives are not talking about:

“I want to meet your deepest needs and be your dream-mate, but as a weak human being I cannot do it. I know very well that is a God-sized job. I am quite aware, however, that even though I don’t have the power to make you happy, I can make your life miserable and even be a hindrance to God’s work of peace in your heart. As much as I would like to help you, only He can make your spirit smile forever.”

If this is indeed the top statement that spouses have left unspoken, why is it so often unsaid? In many cases, the answer involves an innocent unawareness. Even though the men or women might have made sincere and noble promises to make their mates happy, they simply did not know that it is God alone who can and wants to be the ultimate source of bliss.

Though we were fortunate that it was early on in our relationship that we embraced our human limitations, it was not until more than 20 years of marriage had passed that we were able to verbalize it. Using the valuable tool of retrospect, the following describes our journey to the marriage altar.

Prepared

First, God *prepared* us for each other. After He created man and assessed the situation, He proclaimed that something was amiss. He looked at Adam and addressed his need by saying, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Adam’s problem was not one of sin because at the time God said, “It is not good,” His first man was in a sinless condition. Nor was Adam’s dilemma an environmental problem since he was living in the Garden of Eden, a perfect physical world. Instead, God saw that man was suffering from solitude. So, the Creator prepared some company for Adam. Her name was Eve. Thus it was from the beginning that husbands and wives are made for each other. Drawing on our music background, the following lyric expresses our gratitude for God’s incredible plan.

We

*If He hadn’t made you
If He hadn’t made me
There wouldn’t be us
And we couldn’t say we.
There had to be one
So there could be two
So He could make one
Out of me and you.*

*Two ships
One shore
Two dancers
One floor
Two birds flying in one sky of blue
Baby, that’s me and you.*

*Where do you end
And where do I start
It's hard to tell when God puts two hearts
Together
It doesn't get any better.¹*

Repaired

God not only *prepared* us but He also *repaired* us.

Husbands and wives are like the two halves of a modular home we saw arriving by truck to a setup site in our county. The huge, preformed structures were very nice in their appearance but the strong wind created by their journey down the Tennessee highways had ripped roofing off of one half and some siding off the other. Before the workmen joined the two parts, there was some rebuilding that needed to be done.

It is safe to say that, like the two halves of that modular home, nearly all of us have experienced some kind of emotional damage in the years prior to our wedding days.

To illustrate, the following statements are taken from a few of the questionnaires that were completed. The inquiry was, “What emotions do you struggle with the most as a married person, and where do you think they originated?”

- **Worthlessness.** My mom would only accept a boy when she was pregnant with me. I was a disappointment to her. To make matters worse, I was born with a defective kidney that had to be removed. The medical attention and the expense of it all caused a great deal of ongoing stress in her. I have never measured up in my mom's eyes. (Wife—married 18 years)
- **Guilt.** As a little girl I was tortured by an older brother. I fight hatred for him to this day. (Wife—married 36 years)
- **Inferiority.** My father never gave me recognition of my worth to him. I tried desperately to make him proud, but I don't think it ever happened. (Wife—33 years)

- I feel depressed most of the time, and I'm sure being unable to ever please my mother has a lot to do with it. (Wife—11 years)
- I came from a home where incest happened until I was 18 years old and left home. I was beaten, and I struggle now to forgive my dad. (Wife—25 years)
- I don't remember ever being hugged or told I was loved as a child. I grew up with a martyr complex. (Wife—12 years)
- My dad was an alcoholic and his beatings of me and my siblings is too hard to forget. (Husband—22 years)
- If I ever did anything to bring a smile to my dad's face, I don't remember it. I have dealt with sadness about this for a lot of years. (Husband—married 18 years)
- An older neighbor sexually took advantage of me when I was around six years old. Shame and hatred are the emotions I have fought since my childhood. (Husband—married 28 years)
- The memories of watching my dad beat my mother still haunt me. (Husband—14 years)
- Being teased as a kid because of my weight makes it tough to allow anyone to get close to me. (Husband—married 16 years)
- My dad beat me badly one day and then locked me in a closet for hours. I have never pardoned him for it, and I'm not sure if I can. (Husband—married 28 years)

These responses are, to say the least, heart wrenching. Several of these individuals indicated on their questionnaires that they were also divorced and remarried. That information about their history seemed to be a commentary on the likelihood that their unresolved childhood struggles had a negative effect on their relationships in later years.

While not all of those who answered the question noted such excruciating memories of their past, the high numbers that did (7 out of 10) reveals a disturbing pattern. Most of us were in need of repairs prior to saying those two unforgettable words, "I do." We would like to report that we fall into the 3 out of 10 category of those who were

fortunate to have reached marrying age damage free. However, it would not be the truth.

Annie: I was raised on a family-owned-and-operated farm that required the occasional hiring of itinerant workers. When I was five years old, one of the buildings I enjoyed playing in as a child was used by one of the hired hands as a trap where he cruelly raped me.

Though the man was arrested, the trial judge handed down a very light punishment as he said, “Why should we disrupt this man’s life with something this child will soon forget.” Unfortunately, his thinking was typical of the times.

The problem was, I never forgot the incident. In fact, the result was that I eventually began a journey down the dangerous road of rage. [For more of my story, read *Letting Go of Anger*.]

Steve: When I was around seven years old, my mother took me along with her to visit another mom in the neighborhood. There was no way she could have known what awaited me in that home. While playing out of her sight with the neighbor’s son, who was a little older, I was shown a Polaroid pornographic picture that was rather explicit for the 1950s.

That day, I was a little boy who had been introduced to a man-sized battle. Sadly, the years that followed were filled with mental moral struggles that sent me into a spiritual tailspin.

How utterly grateful we both are that God, in His rich love toward us, had mercy on our union by doing some careful repair work on these and other areas of our hearts and minds prior to our marriage. What a wonderful thought that He, as the Master Repairman, was able to mend the damage that life had caused to our “modular halves.” We are convinced that having allowed Him to mend the brokenness in our hearts before our marriage on March 29, 1975, is the key to our longevity as a couple.

We must add that in no way does this testimony imply that God never again had to do another repair job in our lives. The fact is, as we continue to allow Him to assess the condition of our hearts, the occasional repairs still have to be done. The weathering effects of life’s challenges such as fighting and losing battles against sinful temptations, trying to make financial ends meet, parenting, offenses against us, and fears of an uncertain future are a few of the winds that rip at our roofing and tear at our siding. Allowing the Master Repairman to do His

work is paramount to our survival, even though it requires a certain level of vulnerability before Him. The psalmist David provided the words to one of the most important prayers that we, as a husband and wife, can offer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way” (Psalm 139:23-24). In addition, we take comfort in the promise found in Philippians 1:6 NKJV: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

There may be a spouse who, at this moment, is reading our story and is asking, “I am already married and the damage, even since childhood, has never been repaired. Is it too late for me?” With great joy and excitement we say, “Absolutely not!” At any moment in the framework of time, people can present their broken, betrayed, or emotionally bleeding hearts to Christ, and He can mend and restore them. At this hour, Jesus is saying to you through the writings of Luke: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Luke 4:18-19 NKJV).

May we suggest that wherever you are on the trail of time, if you haven’t already done so, that you present yourself to God and allow Him the opportunity to “fix your half of the modular”? Whatever damage might have been done, or is being done, give the job to Christ. If you decide to do so, we must offer a warning along with a word of encouragement.

Knowing from experience that God’s initial work of restoration in your heart has two distinct parts to it, we must tell you that the process is not an easy one. Yet, if you allow Him to do this twofold work in your spirit, it could do the absolute most in setting into motion a restoration of the joy you long for as an individual and in your marriage. It is found in being forgiven and forgiving.

To confess that we are in need of our Savior and to receive His pardon for sin is the initial work God wants to do in every heart (Romans 4:7-8). *After* we are blessed with so great a pardon, He wants to help us return that grace to others. Matthew 6:12 NKJV reveals that process: “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Another passage

that makes this progression clear is Colossians 3:12-13 NKJV: “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; *even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do*” (emphasis added).

For the one who was hurt to experience complete healing, forgiveness of that transgressor must follow being forgiven, no matter how unworthy the offender may be. In our case, showing the mercy of Christ to a rapist and a neighbor who was a peddler of porn was paramount to the healing that took place in our hearts before we reached our wedding day.

We are confident that had we not forgiven the ones who had been used as instruments of Satan to wreak havoc on our halves of the home, we would have entered into our marriage with our emotional hands bound behind our backs, unable to fully embrace the other. It would have not been a great way to begin.

Perhaps unforgiveness is the bondage you feel in your heart at this time. So many of the individuals who exposed the depths of their hearts on our questionnaires expressed an ongoing war with emotions such as bitterness. Undeniably, their relationship with their mates suffered because of it, even for some into 40 and 50 years of their marriage. How sad.

Accepting the forgiveness of Christ and extending that grace to others was the key to setting us free to love and be loved. But turning that key required an act of our will. May you find courage to do the same. We urge you to read, memorize, and act upon the tender truth found in Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” May the unconditional love He bestows to you be the motivation you need to use the key of forgiveness. (For more information and guidance on the steps to forgiveness, see Annie’s book *Letting Go of Anger*.)

Paired

Moving on, God first *prepared* us, then *repaired* us, and it was *then* that He *paired* us. When we look back through our years, we can see that it was this divine progression that has contributed most to the quality of our home. We hope you, too, will experience the sweet reward we have

enjoyed from being willing to allow God the freedom to be with us throughout the years.

The Foundation

Drawing once more from the “marriage is a modular home” analogy, one other part of the setup process of this type of home would be valuable to look at. When two modular halves are delivered to the site, there is something already in place. It was there well before the “wedding” of the two parts. That preexisting structure was the block foundation.

How senseless it would have been to go to the effort to deliver two expensive halves of the home to this site in our neighborhood and then place them on unstable dirt. Wisely, the block foundation had been built and was ready, willing, and “longing” for the “couple” to rest on it.

What a beautiful picture of our Father in heaven who has been there forever, willing for the two of us to place all the weight of our lives on Him. As a married couple we cherish the passage in 1 Corinthians 3:11 that comforts us with these words: “...For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” He alone is our foundation, the stone that our house sits upon. The rewards of fulfilling our responsibility in terms of doing things God’s way are revealed in Matthew 7:24-25: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.” Knowing that God holds our house safely on the solid foundation of His love is the reason we can face the storms of this life.

How about your lives as individuals and as a couple? On what do you rest yourself and your home? Is it the raw, sinking, unsteady ground of this world? Or have you placed your lives on Christ, the solid rock?

The following lyric is about our house. These words are not about a house made of wood, nails, brick, and mortar. Instead, they describe two hearts that have survived the threatening weather that this world can throw at us. It was written to celebrate our silver anniversary that took place in the year of 2000. The words are still true for us.

This House Still Stands

*It started as a rumble
Turned into a roar
Do you remember how that wind
Pounded on our door?
We lost some shingles
We lost a window pane
But when that storm had passed us
This old house remained.*

*This house still stands
This house still stands
We built it on the Rock
We didn't build it on the sand
This house still stands*

*It started as a teardrop
And turned into a flood
When troubles came to wash away
These walls that hold our love
But, babe, do you remember
How we called on Jesus' name
And when that flood had passed us
This old house remained.*

*This house still stands
This house still stands
We built it on the Rock
We didn't build it on the sand
This house still stands.²*