

Is There A Third Wheel In Your Marriage - Apr.2025

LWCC Marriage Ministries Monthly Email for April 2025

Greetings again as we roll out another of our LWCC Marriage Ministries emails. We trust it finds you all enjoying this balmy Autumn day.

To begin, let me pose a question: How many of you have a Third Wheel in your marriage? Believe me, many couples do. It sneakily steals time and attention normally given to each other. It even interrupts special and intimate moments. In marriages, it almost always exacerbates existing trust issues. Sometimes, you might even spend more time gazing at it than you do your spouse. Instead of trying to distance ourselves from it, many even keep it by their side all the time.

No, it's not a nosy friend or an overbearing family member causing these issues. It's your Phone!!!

Let's be honest – even if you feel like you've got a good handle on how much you're on your phone, it's easy to fall into bad habits. In a restaurant we were at recently recently, there were 7 couples and 2 family groups scattered around the room. Both family groups had at least 3 people on their phones, including the mum and dad. All but one of the couples had one or both spouses on their phones. So maybe it's time to do a bit of a check, dive into what to be aware of, and take another look at how you can ensure your phones aren't coming between you and your spouse.

Are you prioritizing the right kind of connection?

Whether it's mindlessly scrolling social media, perusing products you'd like to purchase, entertaining yourself for a "few" moments, or responding to work emails on the go, it seems like there's always something to be doing on your phone. While this constant connection to the "outside world" has its benefits, does it come at the cost of the connection you have with the most important person in your world - Your Spouse? How often do you find yourselves *together, but not truly present* because you're both looking at your phones? There's a good chance you're missing out on a lot of opportunities for connection, whether it's through conversation, cuddling, or, shall we say, 'other' activities!!! While it's not realistic to say you should never use your phones when you're spending time together, we do need to be mindful about our scrolling. In fact, in some instances, you simply need to set some boundaries around phone usage, and make yourself accountable to help each other, and stick to those boundaries. It could be leaving your phones in another room for a couple of hours each evening or having a digital detox day every weekend. Or, like one couple we talked to a couple of years ago, who set their boundary as a \$5.00 fine each time one or the other had to speak to the other about the 'habit' taking over again. If I remember rightly, they financed a lovely weekend in Akaroa out of the proceeds. So take a few moments to consider together if the phone needs re-prioritising again.

Is it helping or hurting your communication?

Your phone allows you to be in constant communication with others, which can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, you're always reachable – a good thing in emergencies or for staying connected when you're apart. On the other hand, you're always reachable, making constant interruption or distraction a real risk. You've probably experienced it: you're trying to have a conversation with your spouse, but your phone keeps blowing up with texts or your sibling keeps calling. Or perhaps you were about to share something important yourself, but oh look – an update just came in about the

kids' sports schedule. It's one thing if this is happening only occasionally, but when it's a regular occurrence, your overall communication will, and does suffer. Whether you're sharing about your day, confirming household logistics, or engaging in an intimate heart to heart, be aware of whether your phones are helping or hurting the situation. Work on basic communication skills like active listening, as this requires you to give your full, engaged attention instead of only half-listening, because, let's face it, that one has an awful habit of coming back to bite us! In fact, I would go so far as to say, if the phone goes, or a text comes in while you're engaging in family time, or a conversation with your spouse, don't answer it. Show your family and or your spouse, they are more important to you right now. If it's an emergency, the person will certainly call you back.

Does your lock screen build trust?

Everyone is entitled to privacy, even with their spouse. It's a necessary aspect of maintaining a healthy individual sense of self. While it might seem counter-intuitive, it also helps you and your spouse build and nurture trust. By respecting privacy boundaries such as not snooping on each other's phone, you're trusting each other to share the things that are important. Keep in mind, there is a difference between privacy and secrecy. If your phones' lock screens have become synonymous with keeping secrets from each other – and not just a birthday surprise you're planning – then there may be some deeper issues at play. If you're experiencing some tension around this level of trust in your marriage, it's best to address it ASAP. If you can't have a meaningful conversation around this issue together, then talk to us. It's too important to sweep it under the carpet. It's one of those ones that just keeps coming back to haunt us.

Whether you see it as a positive or a negative, your phone does play a role in your daily life. The size and significance of that role – and ultimately, its effect on your marriage – is up to you. By being mindful of the time and attention you devote to it, you can prevent it from taking on third-wheel status and becoming a wedge between you and your spouse.

We trust, rather than stirring up a few waves or a tsunami, this month's contribution stirs up just enough ripples to rebalance the ship and set this one back in its place.

Blessings from your Marriage Ministries Team - Stan & Ronnie, John & Karen