

Making Your Marriage a Sanctuary – Aug.2025

LWCC Marriage Ministries Email for August 2025

Greetings once again. And yes, another month has flashed by!!!! As I prepare the final draft of this month's email, I'm sitting in Hanmer with snow-capped hills all around us after some 'enjoyable' heavy snow flurries yesterday in the village. Which was very timely in terms of what follows. But first, let me ask another of my awkward questions:

At the end of a difficult or stressful day, is your marriage a soft place to land? Is it a comforting place you can turn to when you're feeling down and out, vulnerable, or overwhelmed?

Of course we'd like to say the answer is always "yes," but the reality is that sometimes marriage itself can be a source of stress and tension. It is quite normal for marriages to have what feels like a 'winter' season. While it's definitely not a permanent state you want your marriage to be in, if you can learn to recognize and accept that this is one of those seasons, face the issues and work through them together, it can actually be a positive sign of relationship growth.

Most of the time, we want our marriage to be that comforting home base we can turn to. So how can you make your marriage more of a sanctuary? Have a look at the following five tips we think might help turn this one around for you.

1. Cultivate emotional safety:

In order to let your guard down, you need to feel comfortable expressing your true emotions. That requires a sense of emotional safety – feeling fully accepted and loved for who you are, and not worrying about being judged or criticized even when you're not at your best. It takes effort from both of you to create this dynamic within your marriage. Increased self-awareness leads to decreased defensiveness, and that creates an environment where you can be vulnerable and raw with each other. (Look back to the series of 3 emails - June, July, August last year - on this subject headed up - Communication in the Pressure Moments; Creating an Emotion & Communication Safety Zone in Your Marriage Pt.1 & 2. They can be viewed on the Church website - go to Departments - Marriage Ministries - scroll down and click on 'Articles' and there you'll find all the emails we've sent out over the past 3 years.).

2. Set and enforce boundaries:

One of the main reasons we look to our marriage for refuge is the various factors that can wear on us outside of it, whether it's stress from work, family drama, difficult friendships, current events, keeping pace with all the events that go with church and family life etc. Creating boundaries together helps prevent these things from bleeding into your marriage and having a negative effect on your relationship. For example, you might have found the pressure of work responsibilities means you have to bring work home. So together you have the challenging discussion to ensure you have a good work-life balance and don't bring your work home with you, or how often that will happen in any given week. Or you prioritize each other's opinions and preferences over pushy family members, or avoid getting involved in friends' marriage issues because of the stress it has inflicted on your own relationship. By establishing boundaries like these, you ensure your marriage doesn't become an extension of these external sources of stress and negativity. These conversations can be challenging,

but if you get in the habit of having them, non the less, you will go a long way to building that place of refuge.

3. Lean into empathy:

When you need a comforting place to turn, the last thing you want to be met with is criticism or judgment or disconnection at home. Create a warm refuge by leading with empathy in your responses and interactions with one another. It promotes the sense of emotional safety mentioned earlier and kicks off a positive communication cycle and environment between you. These days with technology being what it is, go so far as to set a regular reminder - every few days or weekly - in one of your devices, that prompts you to pause and think: hows the environment in our marriage at the moment; what have I done recently to contribute towards our relationship being a 'warm refuge'; what can I do in the next few days to strengthen that 'warm refuge'. Check in with your spouse - how are you really; have I been there for you as much as you have needed lately; what can I do to be more conscious of you and your needs.

4. Nip resentment in the bud:

While we've been focusing on sources of stress outside your marriage, the reality is sometimes your marriage can stress you out, too - which can make it the opposite of a sanctuary. A most common reason? Resentment. Unresolved issues or conflicts cause tension and resentments can build up between you, and that can make you feel uneasy or like you're walking on eggshells in your own marriage. Avoid this pitfall by working on having open, honest, and assertive communication. Address issues head on when they come up instead of letting them fester. Resentment often comes because after an incident between you, one feels like the situation has not been completely resolved, often because you felt you were not properly heard and therefore your opinion not properly respected. Get into the habit when a problem arises, to complete the handling of it by asking each other, "Are you ok? Have I heard you? Have we really resolved this for you?"

5. Know when to support versus solve:

Some people are natural problem-solvers - when your spouse comes to you with a problem, you're quick to offer a solution. But sometimes, a solution isn't what they want, or need, or are ready for. Sometimes they just need your support and validation. Offer support through active listening, an affectionate touch, or simply asking what they need from you. Validate their experience by acknowledging what they're going through and leaving space for their feelings. It's not easy witnessing your spouse having a hard time, but it's not always your job to fix their feelings or the situation either - *just be there for them*. Assess in these moments especially, how is our 'Warm Refuge' right now; what can I do in this moment to let my spouse feel they are loved and embraced in your place of refuge.

Making your marriage feel like a refuge doesn't always happen on its own. Just like the difference between a stark, cold room and a cozy, comforting one, it requires effort and intention to create the kind of environment you want to spend time in - a welcoming retreat that you can turn to whenever you need it. I just wish someone had told me back at the beginning, that marriage is a wonderful institution, that has incredible benefits when you get it right, but just like any institution, it takes work. The key is recognizing the moments when work is required, facing the moment when it happens, and not putting it on the 'things to do list' for when you have a convenient moment. Have you noticed, in marriage, most of those moments don't generally occur at the most convenient of moments!!!! So, here's another thought: try to get better at recognizing those moments, and responding to them more quickly, with a greater level of engagement and empathy, and see what it

does in taking your relationship to new places, building a new level of intimacy in your sanctuary, in the process.

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

(Adapted From an Article from Les & Leslie Parrott)