

Marriage: Deep Friendship Inventory

INTRODUCTION AND EXPLANATION:

Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 2:17 and Malachi 2:14 indicate that one of God's purposes for the marriage relationship is a deep and lasting companionship. In fact, when two people marry, part of the commitment they make to one another is that they will be one another's best and closest companion or friend. Because this is true, it is important for married people to know what true friendship involves. The following inventory was designed to provide guidelines for becoming best friends and as an evaluative tool for diagnosing ways in which your friendship needs to be and can be improved.

On a separate sheet of paper number 1-28 to record how you personally are doing in each area. Use these score sheets to compare scores and help you see areas of challenge in your relationship. Read through the statements and think carefully about your relationship with your spouse. After each statement you will find some Scriptural reference on which the statement is based. When you have read the statement on this inventory, you may want to read the Scripture on which it is based. Then, having done that, evaluate the depth of your friendship according to the following scale. 0=never; 1=seldom; 2=sometimes; 3=frequently; 4=almost always; 5=always.

1. A Deep and Growing Friendship in Marriage Involves:

1. Being devoted to one another; a high degree of commitment to each other (Romans 12:10).
2. A growing and deepening love for the other person (1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9, 10).
3. Accepting the other person without being judgmental or condemnatory (Romans 15:7; 14:1, 13).
4. A sincere desire to meet the needs of the other person and a willingness to put the other person's needs ahead of your own (Philippians 2:3,4).
5. A willingness to be forbearing with the other person and to forgive the other person when he/she has sinned against you (Colossians 3:13).
6. Patiently allowing the other person to make mistakes without becoming angry or allowing these mistakes to damage the relationship (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:3).
7. Allowing the other person to be himself in your presence; without putting so much pressure on the other person that he feels condemnation and rejection (Romans 15:6, 7).
8. Doing whatever you can legitimately do to avoid tension and conflict in your relationship (Philippians 2:1-2; 4:2; Romans 12:16, 18; 14:19).
9. Essentially possessing the same moral values, the same reverence for God and the same basic desire to live for Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10, 11).
10. Being fully honest with one another; being trustworthy, truthful, dependable (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9).
11. Quickly seeking reconciliation whenever you have hurt the other person and if you have sinned against the other person quickly asking for forgiveness for sin (Matthew 5:21-26; James 5:16).
12. Actively trying to build the other person up spiritually (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Ephesians 4:29).
13. Seeking to be reconciled to the other person when he has sinned against you (Luke 17:3; Matthew 18:15).
14. Gently and kindly and lovingly rebuking the other person when there is pattern of sin in his/her life (Proverbs 27:5,6,9; Galatians 6:1-2).
15. Making it a habit of meeting as many of his/her personal needs as you can (Galatians 5:13; Luke 10:25-37; John 13:14,15; 1 John 3:17,18).
16. Understanding and feeling the hardships and pain the other person experiences (Romans 12:15; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 Corinthians 12:25,26).
17. Providing comfort for the other person when he/she is experiencing sorrow (2 Corinthians 1:3,4; 1 Thessalonians 4:18).
18. Challenging the other person by your example and thoughtful words to live a holy, pure and obedient life (Hebrews 3:13).
19. Praying regularly for the other person (James 5:16; Ephesians 6:18).
20. Practicing hospitality, being warm and making the other person feel comfortable when he/she is in your presence (1 Peter 4:8,9; Romans 12:13).

21. Making your possessions available to him/her for his/her use (Romans 12:13; Acts 4:36,37; Luke 10:25-37).
22. Joining together with the other person in mutual activities (Philippians 1:5; 4:3).
23. Sharing your heart with the other person on a deep level (John 15:15).
24. Patiently listening to the other person and really being interested in what interests or concerns the other person (Philippians 2:4, Proverbs 18:2; Job 21:1,2).
25. Being faithful and available when the other person is going through adversity (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24).
26. Defending and protecting the other person when he/she is being attacked (Proverbs 18:24; 17:17; 1 John 3:16).
27. Refraining from doing anything that would cause the other person to stumble (Romans 14:13; 1 Corinthians 13:7; Proverbs 27:14).
28. Spending large amounts of time with the other person (Proverbs 18:24; 17:7; 1 Peter 3:7).

SCORING: After rating all the statements for your relationship with your spouse, add up the total score. As a general guideline, if you scored 102 to 116 for your relationship, you are probably experiencing a deep friendship (companionship) and you are fulfilling one of God's primary purposes for marriage. Praise God for the help he has given you in this area and continue to practice biblical guidelines for your companionship.

If you scored 84 to 101 your friendship is probably not in serious trouble, but it does need some improving. Identify areas in which you need to improve, and discuss these areas with your spouse. Make a commitment and plan to work on these areas, seek God's help for change and put your plans into practice.

If you scored less than 84, you need to seriously consider the fact that your relationship is not fulfilling one of God's primary purposes for marriage. Identify areas in which you need to improve, and if possible, discuss these areas with your spouse. Make a commitment and plan to work on these areas, seek God's help for change and put your plan into practice. It may well be that if you scored your relationship less than 87, you should seek the help of a godly, biblical counselor to make the changes that should be made.

List areas of companionship in which your relationship is flourishing:

List areas of companionship in which your relationship needs improving:



A TRUST QUESTIONNAIRE

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Use the following 22 questions as a barometer to measure the trust in your marriage relationship. You should answer the questions individually, then come back together to discuss your answers. Once you've complete the questionnaire, read on for analysis and follow up for each question.

- 1) Is there more unity, understanding, and love in your marriage now than there has ever been?

- 2) Do you both do what you promise in the time that you have promised?

- 3) Are you attentive to what your spouse sees as important?

- 4) Do you make excuses for failures to do what you have promised, or are you ready to confess?

- 5) Do you listen well to your spouse and act on what you have heard?

6) Do you follow through with mutually agreed-upon plans?

7) Do you work together on planning and scheduling priorities, or do you demand that the other do it your way?

8) Do you share with your spouse your thoughts, desires, hopes, dreams, and concerns, or is it easier for you to be quiet or to share with someone else?

9) Is there any evidence that you have withdrawn from the other in protective distance?

10) Would your spouse say that you are good for your word and faithful to your promises?

11) Do you carry wrongs around with you, or do you trust one another to confront and confess?

12) Do you ever wonder what the other is doing when not with you?

13) Are you conscious of editing your words and withholding your feelings because you can't trust your spouse to deal with them properly?

14) Is your marriage partner the best friend in your life or has your dream of this kind of companionship evaporated?

15) Is your sexual relationship mutually satisfying, or is it hard for you to give yourself physically to your spouse?

16) Do you say things to other people about your spouse that you have not communicated to him or her?

17) Do you look forward to sharing times together, and when you have these times are they peaceful and enjoyable?

18) Are there problems between you that remain unsolved because you don't have the bond of trust necessary to work together on a solution?

19) Are you comfortable with the vulnerability that a good marriage involves?

20) Do you ever wonder if you made a mistake in marrying the person who is your spouse?

21) Do you ever fear that you are being manipulated or taken advantage of in any way?

22) Do you ever wonder if your spouse cares for him- or herself more than for you?

So, how did you do? If the answers are scary, shocking, or saddening, you don't have to despair. Don't run away from these answers or put on a fake righteousness that you don't have. There is help for you, both in the Word of God and in the Body of Christ. It's okay to honestly discuss and reveal the weaknesses and failures in your marriage.

If you have sinned in your marriage - that includes 100% of all readers - you will need to confess and repent to the Lord and to your spouse. Repent vertically before you repent horizontally, and when you do confess to your spouse, don't justify or defend. If they have something to say about your weaknesses and failures, listen with a humble and softended heart.

When your spouse confesses to you, give them grace. Forgive freely, like Christ forgave you. Know that your spouse is a broken person, and that brokenness will touch your life in ways that will leave pain and hurt. But God provides the ultimate example of forgiveness for you to follow.

Finally, seek help. You might not need professional counseling, but find a mature couple and ask them to pray for you and check back on areas of weakness. ***I didn't say run to your pastor;*** the body of Christ was designed for ministry. Take advantage of the church of Jesus Christ.

ANALYSIS AND FOLLOW UP

1) *Is there more unity, understanding, and love in your marriage now than there has ever been?* Perhaps this is the best indicator of all. When there is a strong bond of trust, the intimacy of marriage grows. Trust allows a couple to work through differences and build unity. Trust allows you to work to understand your spouse and to know that he or she will work to understand you. When your spouse proves that he cares about you enough to demonstrate to you that he can be trusted, your respect and affection for him will grow. This does not mean that your marriage will be free of difficulty. Remember, you do live in a fallen world, and you do live with a flawed person. Trust won't alleviate all of your problems and differences, but it will give you a means of dealing with them.

2) *Do you both do what you promise in the time that you have promised?* Like it or not, you must face the fact that the way you follow the promises you make will function as a barometer of your trustworthiness to your spouse. And this is how it should be. If you love her, you will take your promises to her seriously. If you love him, you will enjoy the fact that he is able to rest in the assurance that whatever you have committed to do for him, you will do, and you will do it in the time that is best for him.

The problem here is that most of the promises we make in marriage are little-moment promises. They are promises that have to do with the daily needs, duties, and schedule that make up the lifestyle of any couple anywhere. Because these promises are not promises of consequence, it is very tempting not to take them seriously and to fail to consider the consequences of not following through. Remember what we have already considered: the character of a marriage is not built on three or four significant moments. No, the character of a marriage is established through ten thousand little moments. It is the character that is built in the little moments that you carry into the big moments of life. So trust is not built in two or three significant moments of promise (although those moments are formative as well), but trust is built moment by moment and day by day. It is the degree of your daily reliability that tells your spouse that you are a person who can be trusted or not. Loving your spouse means you love to serve her, and you love to gift her with the rest that comes from knowing that you will be faithful to the promises you have made, no matter how small.

3) *Are you attentive to what your spouse sees as important?* Because of the selfishness of sin, it is easy to be self-absorbed and self-focused. It is easy to be captured by your own schedule and interests. Perhaps there is no more dangerous force in marriage than garden-variety selfishness. Perhaps there is no greater marital mistake than to somehow give your spouse a reason to wonder if you really do care about your interests more than you care for hers. Love is about opening yourself to your spouse and her interests. Love means committing yourself to care about what he cares about; to be interested in a thing simply because it interests him. Love is about acknowledging, anticipating, and meeting your spouse's needs. Love is about sharing your sorrows, joys, and concerns. And when you love someone this way, you are building a bond of trust. It is hard to trust a person who cares so much for himself that he fails to care for others.

However, you will entrust yourself to the person who loves you enough to trouble his life with what troubles you.

4) Do you make excuses for failures to do what you have promised, or are you ready to confess?

Self-righteousness, inapproachability, defensiveness, and self-excusing are all toxic to trust.

You will not entrust yourself to your spouse if he is defensive and unapproachable. You will not trust your spouse if, in time of failure, she is unwilling to look at herself. You will not trust your spouse if, when it is time to humbly listen and humbly confess, he fails to be willing to do either. Trust doesn't demand perfection. Trust demands humility. In your heart of hearts, you know you will never marry a perfect person. In your heart of hearts, you know that you will both fail. So, in your heart of hearts you want to live with your spouse with the assurance that when he has failed you in some way, he is willing to face it and deal with it. Patterns of self-excusing tell you that your spouse is more interested in herself than she is in you. Self-defensiveness tells you that he is more interested in being right than in forging with you a relationship of unity, understanding, and love. Humble openness, coupled with the commitment to admit to and confess wrongs, is an essential ingredient of a bond of trust.

5) Do you listen well to your spouse and act on what you have heard? If you are living with someone who just does not listen, sooner or later, confronted with the futility of getting the person to listen, you will quit talking. You and I are drawn to people who listen. One of the most amazing things that God promises to you and me is that he will never turn a deaf ear to our cries. You can run to God with no fear whatsoever as to whether he will ignore you. Yet, there is probably no marital pain that I have heard expressed more frequently than the pain of not being heard. Have you said or thought anything like this?

"She just doesn't listen."

"Talking with him is like talking to a brick wall."

"I can't believe that you won't give me this one thing; just be quiet and listen to what I'm trying to say."

"It took me a while, but it finally became clear: he quickly checks out when I begin to talk.

No, he doesn't walk out of the room, but when I am finished there is no response whatsoever."

"I am so tired of hearing her say, 'Do we have to talk about this now?'"

"The time doesn't ever seem right, so we seldom talk about anything that matters."

I cannot tell you how many times I have sat with couples and heard words like those. The one being ignored quits talking, but not only that; he does something even more debilitating to their marriage—he quits trusting. You tend to trust people who care about you enough to listen to what you have to say and who have demonstrated to you that they are committed to respond to what they have heard with words and actions.

6) Do you follow through with mutually agreed-upon plans? Planning together in things large and small is what marriage is about. It is the life-plan of two people coalescing and becoming one plan. Marriage is the most comprehensive form of shared life that a human being can ever experience. God's goal for marriage is that a husband and wife would live in a relationship so deeply blended and unified that it could only be called "one flesh." So, the work of every husband

and wife is the work of unity. Because you desire life together, you need to plan together. It is no longer his and hers. Therefore, you need to do the give-and-take work of discussing and planning together. And you need to rest assured that when you have agreed together upon a goal with a plan of action, the other will remain loyal to the plan and follow through as you have agreed. When this happens, trust is strengthened, but when you agree to a plan and then go out and do it your way, rather than the mutually decided way, you present yourself as a person who cannot be trusted.

7) Do you work together on planning and scheduling priorities, or do you demand that the other do it your way? Let's be humbly honest here; we all want our own way. The instinct to be sovereign over your little world and to get what you want and what you tell yourself you need doesn't leave when you are publicly mouthing your vows. God is working right now on you so that you would live for something bigger than yourself, but there will be artifacts of the instincts to live selfishly in your heart until you cross over to the other side. Demand and entitlement destroy trust because, as you live with your spouse, she soon comes to understand that no matter what commitments you have made to her, what you really want is your own way. You have vowed to cooperate with her, but what you really want is for your wife to participate in supporting the desires and plans of your little kingdom of one. When she sees you operate this way, she knows that you cannot be trusted to work with her and to care for her.

8) Do you share with your spouse your thoughts, desires, hopes, dreams, and concerns, or is it easier for you to be quiet or to share with someone else? Has your life together encouraged greater and greater levels of trust? Have you learned that you can say anything to your spouse because he approaches you with a heart that is gentle, kind, understanding, and patient? Have you experienced starting at opposite ends of an issue and watching honest and patient communication bring you together? Or has your spouse not taken your concerns seriously? Have you been dismissive of your spouse's thoughts, hopes, and dreams? Are you better able to communicate with one another today than you were earlier? Do you go into a conversation assured that you will get a patient ear? Or do you find it easier to talk candidly with someone other than your husband or wife? When someone outside of the house has become a replacement confidant for your spouse, it is a sure sign that trust has been broken.

9) Is there any evidence that you have withdrawn from the other in protective distance? Are you afraid to be honest with your spouse? Are you afraid to disagree with him? Are you afraid to lovingly confront or contradict her? Are you afraid of what would really happen if you told him what you really think? Are you afraid to stick your neck out and be vulnerable? Do you ever feel that you are walking on eggshells? Do you feel the need to measure your words? Do you ever feel that you need to protect yourself from her? Have you withdrawn in some way? There is no getting around it: withdrawal is a sure sign of a lack of trust. Yet, there are many, many couples out there who have no intention of divorcing, which is a good thing, but they live in self-protective distance from one another, which is a bad thing.

10) Would your spouse say that you are good for your word and faithful to your promises? The Bible holds out the real possibility that your view of yourself may be less than accurate. Yes, I know we all tend to think that we know ourselves better than anyone does. But is that actually true? The Bible teaches that sin blinds, and because it blinds, we do not know ourselves as well as we think we do. I like to say it this way: sin blinds, and guess who it blinds first? We have no problem seeing the weaknesses and failure of others, but we can get surprised when ours is pointed out. So we actually need people in our lives who will help us to see ourselves with accuracy (see Heb. 3:12–13).

This is one of the benefits of marriage. Because you are actually living with your spouse 24/7, he or she has a comprehensive view of who you are and how you operate. No, your spouse's view of you will not be perfectly without bias, but it will tend to be more objective than your view of you. So take this question and the others to your spouse. Ask your spouse if he has come to consider you to be trustworthy and why or why not. Open your heart to see what you could not see by yourself and commit yourself to respond to what your spouse helps you to see with humility and a commitment to change.

11) Do you carry wrongs around with you, or do you trust one another to confront and confess? Choosing to be bitter is choosing what feels good to you but not what is best for your spouse or for the relationship to which you have committed yourself. When you are unwilling to go through the difficulty of helping your spouse to see how she has hurt you and the tension of disagreement, you love your comfort more than you love her. When you are not sure that it is safe either to confront or to confess to your spouse, then you are saying that you are not sure that your spouse is a person who can be trusted. Silence is a sign of the lack of trust.

12) Do you ever wonder what the other is doing when not with you? Trust means you have no concern whatsoever about what your spouse is doing when he is out of your presence. The need to follow him, check up on him, and to cross-examine him when he returns are sure indicators that you do not trust him. Trust means that you know that your spouse would not think of doing anything when she is away from you that she would not do in front of you. Being trustworthy means you never feel the need to look over your shoulder to see if you're being seen, and you never feel the need to cover your tracks or rehearse your story. Trust means living with the rest that comes from knowing that neither one of you has anything to hide.

13) Are you conscious of editing your words and withholding your feelings because you can't trust your spouse to deal with them properly? The nature and style of your communication with your spouse is a very good indicator of the degree of trust that exists between you. If you are withholding your thoughts and feelings from the other, it means either that you don't love him enough to share yourself with him, or you don't trust him enough to place yourself in his care. I don't know how many times I have heard a husband or wife say, "I had no idea you felt that way about . . ." Have you experienced situations in which you have shared something with your spouse and he used it against you? Have you ever shared secret things told to you by your spouse with someone else? When you're not sure that you can place the fine china of your life in the other person's hands, then you are being confronted with a weakness in trust in your marriage.

14) Is your marriage partner the best friend in your life or has your dream of this kind of companionship evaporated? Marriage really is a human covenant of companionship. God wasn't so much giving Adam a physical helper for the work in the garden as he was giving him a companion. God knew that he had created a social being, and because of Adam's social hardwiring, it was not good for him to live without the companionship of one made from him and made like him. You could argue that this is the most basic reason for marriage. God created a lifelong companion for Adam, and his relationship with Eve would exist on earth as a visible reminder of God's love relationship with people and as the God-ordained means by which the earth would be populated as God designed. So the character and quality of the friendship between a husband and wife always functions as an accurate measure of the health of their marriage. It is also an accurate barometer of trust. When trust is present between two people, their appreciation and affection will grow, and as these things grow, friendship flourishes.

15) Is your sexual relationship mutually satisfying, or is it hard for you to give yourself physically to your spouse? What does good sex have to do with trust? Everything! I must be honest here. I am a bit tired of Christian marital body-part books. I don't think that the problem for most couples in the area of sex is that people don't know where stuff is! I don't think the average couple needs sexual maps and charts. Now, a little education can be helpful, but I don't think biology is the solution to the overwhelming sexual dysfunction that is the plight of many Christian marriages. I think that this particular dysfunction is directly related to trust. It is important to understand that you do not leave the character and quality of your relationship at the side of the marital bed. You drag the nature of the relationship right in the middle of this naked and vulnerable moment. If you have experienced the selfishness of your spouse in a variety of ways, why would you not conclude that he or she will be selfish in bed as well? If your spouse has been demanding, critical, and vengeful in other times and places, wouldn't it be logical to assume he or she will be the same during the act of sex? On the other hand, if you have been able to entrust yourself to your spouse's care in other situations, would it not be safe to conclude that your spouse will care for you in this most vulnerable of all marriage moments? There is a direct relationship between joyful, mutual, marital sexual satisfaction and trust.

16) Do you say things to other people about your spouse that you have not communicated to him or her? Exchanging honest marital communication for marital gossip is a clear sign of the breakdown of trust. Now, I do not mean talking about your marriage with another person when you have come to the realization that there are things you are facing together that you will not be able to solve together. When you seek out external help, you do it because you have talked, and you now know you need help. No, I'm talking about giving up on your spouse and giving in to releasing your steam by talking about him without his knowledge. Our churches are riddled with women's gatherings, formal and informal, that are not so much times of healthy fellowship but unhealthy times for complaint against the men in their lives. If you are trustworthy, you would not think of saying anything to others that you hadn't first said to your spouse, and you wouldn't say it to others unless they were part of the problem or positioned to be part of the solution. And if you know that you can trust your spouse, you know that you can speak to him with candor, and he will hear and respond. There are too many marriages out there where the husband or wife

has been replaced, when it comes to communication, by a friend who functions as a replacement spouse.

17) Do you look forward to sharing times together, and when you have these times are they peaceful and enjoyable? Joyful anticipation of time together is a good indicator of the health of a marriage. Actually being able to have peaceful and mutually satisfying times together is an even better indicator. Longing to be together is a sign that you know you can trust the other to share of him- or herself and to care for you. Experiencing peace between you is a sign that you are both willing to make the sacrifices that need to be made in order to experience unity, understanding, and love. Here it is: you anticipate being with people you trust.

18) Are there problems between you that remain unsolved because you don't have the bond of trust necessary to work together on a solution? The inability to solve problems is a sure sign of the breakdown of trust. It takes patient love and persevering humility to work together to solve problems. It takes loving the other person more than you love yourself. It takes a willingness to make concrete sacrifices. It takes exchanging a demanding attitude for servanthood. It takes ears that are ready to hear and a heart that is ready to receive. It takes a commitment to not walk away until the problem is solved. When you gift the other with these things over and over again, your spouse comes to understand that he can trust that, in a moment of difficulty, you won't run over him and do it your way. He knows that you will love and care for him as you are working with him to solve whatever needs to be solved. The more your spouse experiences this, the more she knows she can trust you, and the more she knows she can trust you, the more she will be willing to hang in with you and work toward a solution to the problem of the moment.

19) Are you comfortable with the vulnerability that a good marriage involves? You can't have a relationship without vulnerability, and the reason vulnerability is called vulnerability is that it requires risk. Are you still willing to stick your neck out and be vulnerable because you know that your spouse will care for you when you do? Or have you long since quit putting yourself in any situation of personal vulnerability in your marriage? Think about the fact that marriage without vulnerability is not marriage. Even the most basic of marital acts, cohabitation, requires vulnerability. The degree to which you are comfortable with emotional, physical, and spiritual nakedness in front of your spouse is a sure indicator of the quality of trust that exists between you.

20) Do you ever wonder if you made a mistake in marrying the person who is your spouse? It is probably blatantly obvious, but I will say it anyway: marital regret is a powerful indicator of the breakdown of the relationship and the breakdown of trust. If you are there, I have two words for you: seek help. If there is a fundamental breakdown of trust between you, then you probably do not have the bond that it takes to reconcile and restore your marriage. Let the pain of your regret not tempt you to run but motivate you to seek God's help. Go to your pastor or a mature brother or sister and begin to share your dilemma. Look for someone mature who takes God's Word seriously. Don't wallow in regret. Remember, Jesus died for what you are now facing. He is with you, and he is for you, and he will not leave your marriage, no matter how bad it gets!

21) ***Do you ever fear that you are being manipulated or taken advantage of in any way?*** If you have come to the place where you actually fear the other person, then you are in a situation where there has been a complete breakdown of trust. You simply don't fear someone who loves you. You don't fear someone who takes your best interest to heart. You don't fear someone who has treated you with kindness and gentleness. If your companion has become your adversary, then trust is gone and the marriage cannot work. No, that does not mean it is over; it simply means it needs fundamental change and healing. You cannot let yourself or your spouse live with the status quo. You can't allow yourself to be content with learning how to avoid danger. You must commit to doing every thing in your power to rebuild what has been broken. God will honor your commitment to do what is right by giving you strength as you go.

22) ***Do you ever wonder if your spouse cares for him- or herself more than for you?*** Remember our definition of trust at the beginning of this chapter: ***Trust is being so convinced that you can rely on the integrity, strength, character, and faithfulness of another that you are willing to place yourself in his or her care.*** Don't be willing to live in a marriage where trust has died. Believe that God will never call you to do a thing without giving you the wherewithal to do it. His grace will take you places you hadn't intended to go, but it will also produce in you things that you could never produce on your own.

*What did
you
Expect?*

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