

The Evolution of Marriage

All marriages evolve. No marriage relationship stays stagnant. Sometimes the progression of this evolution goes in a healthy direction; and sometimes in an unhealthy direction. Honestly, Cindy and I (Steve) have been in both camps. Probably you have, too. We aren't talking about evolution regarding the creation of our world. For our purposes here's the definition we can build a good evolution of marriage upon: "forming something new; growth or development."

I think all of us agree — the goal is to have our marriage evolve to a better place. Replace what isn't working with things that do work. Why would we get married if we wanted our relationship to evolve to an unloving place?

Evolution of a Marriage

As I write this, I am reflecting back through our nearly five decades together. Here's a quick glimpse into what the evolution of our marriage looked like:

— Cindy and I got married. I remember thinking how beautiful she was in her long red hair as she walked down the aisle to marry me. I was one lucky guy! It was one of the best days of my life!

— Our first year of marriage: There were no major marital problems. We experienced the usual newlywed adjustment period.

I have to say though, that many couples DO experience some real difficulties in their first year together. Adjusting to married life together can be tough! So don't be surprised if you go through a difficult time building a new life together, right from the start. That isn't unusual at all. You can get to a better place in your relationship if you put intentionality into evolving into marriage partners, rather than marriage adversaries. Just keep looking to the Lord to teach you how to do just that.

— Now, for us—it was our second year of marriage where we encountered the need to learn how to be better partners. We had our first son, David. And of course, THAT ushered in some big changes for us. They were good changes. But it was also challenging

— However, in our third year of marriage I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. That event threw our marriage into a tailspin. It was a very difficult evolution to navigate as I was trying to grasp all the changes diabetes threw at me/us. Unfortunately, I made life very difficult for Cindy. And for that reason, we separated later that year.

A Difficult Evolution Direction

This was the WORST evolution in our marriage. But through a series of events, Cindy met Jesus Christ in a personal way. She then returned home

and I eventually accepted Christ. (This is a very short version of all that happened.) But we can tell you that was the BEST DECISION ever for BOTH of us!

— From that point on to today: There has been an ongoing evolution of our marriage FOR THE BETTER. Sometimes we have taken two steps forward, and one step back. Sometimes we've taken two steps back and only one step forward. Other times we fell forward. And other times we have leaped forward in building a healthy, loving marriage. It has been a mixed bag. But step-by-step God has helped us so that it has all worked together for good (whenever we give it to Him).

I know this is an oversimplified example of the evolution of marriage. But it points out the ups and the downs that we went through. The evolution of your marriage may look quite different; but we all go through some type of changes.

Here's where I'd like us to go: We want to share with you the working principles I mentioned earlier concerning the evolution of marriage. This will involve "forming something new" that will cause "growth or development." The things I'll be sharing have worked for us; and we believe they can work for you too. You may have to do some tweaking here there to make these things work; but that's okay. Every marriage is different. Just look to God to show you what will work—what won't, and what will need adjusting.

Forming Something New

Under the headings of forming something new, growth or development there are hundreds of topics we could talk about that we've implemented. But to respect your time, I will give you just a few to work on now.

A Few Thoughts

Forming Something New in the evolution of marriage means examining what is and isn't working. They say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again—expecting different results. If you and your spouse are there—then purpose to change the things that aren't working to form something new. But make sure you do it God's way. If you don't, you may change one thing and make it worse. Whatever you do, however, don't dump out. Find ways to work within the situations to form new approaches to how you handle them. For example:

New Speech Patterns

One of the first ways we needed to evolve forward in our marriage was to form new speech patterns. Rarely does a couple enter into marriage and think they need to do this. We were no different. We thought we would be excellent communicators together in our marriage. But we were wrong. This took us by

surprise. Eventually Cindy and I developed some pretty sarcastic, hurtful patterns. And sadly, it got worse and worse.

But when we turned to scripture it became clear about how we were/are to communicate with one another. We haven't always wanted to make those changes. But for the health of our marriage relationship, we have had to do so. Here are just a few examples:

Proverbs 12:18 *“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*

Proverbs 15:1 *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

[It's really challenging to give “*soft*” answers when you're angry. But it's true that harsh words DO stir up anger. And softening your approach can most often tamp down the harsh words you exchange with each other when you're arguing.]

James 1:19 *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”*

The Evolution of our Speech Patterns

As we studied the scriptures God began to convict us about the ways we spoke to one another. We were using harsh words that stabbed each other like the thrusts of a sword. There's no doubt that we needed to learn how to communicate with each other in healthier ways. We knew/know that is what God wants of us. It's important to learn how to communicate with each other in respectful, responsible ways. If not, our marriages will evolve into something that is ugly. We HAVE to communicate in marriage. How we do it is a matter of choices we make—either wise or stupid choices.

“Marriage will require you to learn how to communicate. ...No matter what your communication bent, marriage will force you to bring your insides out. It will require you to take a good hard look at your opinions, beliefs, ideas, and feelings and share them with another. It will cause you to answer hard questions, and speak difficult truths. That is because communication is a lifeline between two people. There's no way around it. It will cause you to take responsibility for not just what you say, but how you say it—tone, body language, sarcasm and all.” (Debra Fileta, from her article, “10 Secrets You Should Know About Marriage”)

None of this is easy to implement. It takes a lot of effort to learn how to do it well. But we can testify that the payoff is well worth the effort. Doing things God's way always pays off!

The Art of Apologizing

Another BIG step in the evolution of our marriage was learning the art of apology/asking for and giving forgiveness. To form something new here meant implementing practices that don't come easy. But they are absolutely necessary if we want our marriages to reflect Christ.

I admit that earlier in our marriage I did a lot of dumb, thoughtless things that hurt Cindy. (Sometimes I still do.) I would say I was "sorry." But I never truly understood how much I hurt her. That was until I heard a challenge put out by our pastor. The challenge was to get behind the eyes of our spouse. We are to try to see our offense the way she/he sees it. See the pain and hurt that they experienced.

That changed everything for me. God opened my eyes. It took me a while to learn how to do this. But now, if I say or do something that hurts Cindy it's an automatic response for me to try to see it from her stance. As a result this has created an atmosphere where Cindy can forgive me more easily. It's like what Cheri Fuller says:

"Are you living with the consequences of mistakes one of you made? Has resentment built walls between the two of you because of those mistakes? If so, come together to the throne of grace and ask for God's forgiveness to flow between you. Ask Him to help you work together as a team. Keep short accounts by forgiving each other daily. And above all, rely on God and His wisdom for the decisions you make and the trials you encounter in your lives together." (*From the book, "When Couples Pray"*)

Another Marriage Evolution Tip

There are multiple other subjects I could share with you in forming something new in the evolution of your marriage. I'll give you one more. Find ways to laugh together. We say this a lot, as it pertains to marriage. But it's so, so important! We are all aware how serious life can be—especially now. Cindy and I have heard it from you; and we have experienced it ourselves. Fortunately, God impressed it upon both of us to make it a practice to laugh together every day. This one practice has helped us navigate some very difficult things. That's because:

"Humor cultivates intimacy. It's no secret that couples who laugh often together usually have the healthiest and most intimate relationships. When you see your partner after work, share moments with them that made you

smile throughout your day. By reflecting on the things that made you happy and sharing that happiness with your spouse, you invite them into your world and create a new connection.

“Another great way to share humor is to reflect on memories you’ve had together—especially those that make you laugh. ‘Remember that time when...?’ Scheduling activities that are light-hearted and fun are also great ways to add humor into your relationship. Do you love comedy? Schedule a date night! Whatever makes you laugh together, be sure to make more time in your life to do those activities.” (*Drs Les & Leslie Parrott, from their article, “Strengthening the Intimacy in Your Relationship”*)

Adding Joy to Your Marriage

Cindy and I agree with Les and Leslie that humor cultivates intimacy. We strongly encourage you to work this into your marriage, if you haven’t already done so. And we really believe what Maggie Reyes says. In fact, we use this every single day of our marriage:

“Laughing together and keeping that spark of flirtatious marital love alive will add a little joy to every day—even the hard ones.”

Just a quick note: It’s important to avoid sarcastic, hurtful humor. If you need to find some really good, clean humor go here: RD.COM. If you like stand-up comedians search the Internet. Just use the key words, “clean comedians.”

Growth

Growth is also an integral part of the evolution of our marriage. If our marriages aren’t growing, they’re either stagnant or dying.

From where I’m sitting, I can look out the window and see the Oleander bush we planted a couple of months ago. I planted this in the hottest month of the year in the desert. So if I want it to live, I need to water it regularly—especially until it’s well established. If I ignore it, it will die. This principle applies to marriage as well.

I admit that earlier in our marriage I didn’t do a lot to help our relationship grow. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:26 that as Cindy’s husband I am *“to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word...”* In other words, I need to live by the word of God to help my wife to grow. And I need to share God’s word with her to help her in her growth, as well.

I didn’t do a very good job of this earlier in our marriage. However, God got my attention when He opened my eyes to see that Cindy was His daughter. I had to ask myself, *“How am I taking care His precious daughter?”* And I knew

that one day I would stand before Him and give an account for how I handled this precious gift that He entrusts to me.

The Growth Process

If every husband and wife realized that we are married to one of God's sons/daughters, it would dramatically change our marriage. You also want to give your partner the space and grace in the growing process. Cindy has been extremely patient (and encouraging) with my growth process. It's like what Sheila Wray Gregoire advises couples:

"If your spouse says they're committed to change and they want to grow, it's not going to change overnight. They may still have old thought patterns they need to get over. If there's healing that needs to come, it may not be instantaneous. But don't let the fact that things aren't 100 per cent better make you believe that your spouse isn't trying. Give him or her the benefit of the doubt. Love your spouse and forge ahead!"
And I love the challenge Gary Thomas gives to us:

"If your spouse is trying to grow, don't hold her or him back by nailing them to the past. Acknowledge the growth. Don't compare them to where you wish they would be, especially if your wish is a perfect spouse. Compare them to what they were, be thankful for the growth and encourage them. ...Let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves something important. Do we acknowledge our spouse's growth? Are we comparing them with how much better they are now than they used to be? Or are we downgrading them because they're still not where we think they should be? Do we think discouragement fosters more change than encouragement?" (*Gary Thomas, from his article, "The Bubble Bursting Spouse"*)

Spiritual Growth

Now, the most important factor for the evolution of marriage is our personal spiritual growth. Someone said:

"When we become Christians, we enter into a relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit that will cause us to grow. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to become more like Jesus and to become more holy. It is this spiritual growth that becomes a birthmark of our faith!"
We can't neglect this and expect our marriages to thrive to the same extent. Jesus' disciples had a very simple request—that if we pray it daily, can have a great impact. In [Luke 17:5](#), the apostles said to the Lord, "*Increase our faith!*"

For me, I add one more thing: “Lord, also increase my love today . . . and help me love Cindy the way You want me to.”

I found a very simple, five-point outline that shows the most dynamic elements that go into our spiritual growth. They come from the Bible scholar, Dr. Richard Ledet.

A) Obey God and His Word in ALL things ([Romans 6:16](#); [James 1:22](#)).

B) Walk daily in the Spirit ([Galatians 5:16-17](#)).

C) Learn to NOT follow the world’s definition of what you NEED ([1 Timothy 6:10-12](#)).

D) Re-train (reprogram) your mind to be “in tune” with God’s way of looking at things ([Romans 12:1-2](#); [Philippians 4:8](#)).

E) Bring your body (desires) under control ([1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:4-5](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:11-12](#)).

We would also add PRAY TOGETHER DAILY.

Foundational Scriptures

Matthew 18:19-20: *“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18... *“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God’s will in Christ Jesus that you do this.”*

These are the beginning/foundational verses to spur us onto spiritual maturity. They in turn will spur us on to marital maturity.

Development for Your Marital Evolution

The last process in the evolution of marriage we’ll examine is “development.” The definition I like for our purpose is: “the process in which someone or something changes, and becomes more advanced.” We would have to say that becoming students of each other helped to positively change our marriage more than anything else. We committed to make this a lifelong process for “as long as we both shall live.”

Dewey Wilson from [StrongMarriages.com](#) says:

“Succeeding in marriage can be a lot like mastering material in a college textbook. Without becoming a good student, the process can be quite difficult. Only in marriage, the object to be studied and mastered is not a particular textbook. It’s your spouse. Now, almost all of us would say we were fairly intentional about spending time with our spouse, getting to know them better when we were in the dating stage. Yet, most of us would also agree that at some point, the busyness of life caused us to become less intentional once we were married.”

This took a few years into our marriage before we really understood the importance of this. But after we grabbed onto this, changes started happening fast. One of the most helpful things we did was to take a **Temperament Inventory** (which you can find on-line). This one tool shed so much light into what makes up our personality traits. It opened the door for some really good communication. And 40 years later we still refer back to this from time to time.

Tools to Help in the Forward Evolution of Marriage

Another really helpful tool for us in our “studies of each other” was the **The 5 Love Languages** written by Dr. Gary Chapman. If you’ve read the book, then you know what we’re talking about. (We highly recommend you do!) This book teaches you how you can best love your spouse the way he/she embraces it.

We are blessed to have so many resources at our fingertips today. A simple search of the Internet can turn up hundreds of possibilities to help you learn more about each other and apply principles that will strengthen your marriage. On the Marriage Missions web site alone, there are over 2,000 articles posted on the subject of marriage. You can also post a comment or a marriage prayer request. We count it a privilege to help you learn how to do this marriage thing well! The important thing is to be intentional in helping our relationships to evolve to better places.

But whatever you do:

“Never stop learning. It’s important to realize that as husbands and wives we should never stop learning about each other. School is always in session.” (*Dewey*)

It’s important to note that sometimes positive evolution in marriage can come quickly. But more often forming something new; growth or development takes place over the long haul. However, Cindy and I have found, from personal experience, that if you try something and it doesn’t work, don’t give up. Try, try again. We’re told in God’s word to persevere. And when we do things God’s way... we always have hope that good will eventually come out of it.

Steve and Cindy Wright