

Does Your Marriage Have a Pulse?

Last month, we kicked off the new year talking about how you can take care of your heart in 2024. I won't spoil the main topic of that post here, but trust me, I feel like you're going to benefit greatly from that post! :)

This month, I want to shift the focus a little bit from managing your internal world in a healthy way to how effectively you're taking care of quite possibly the most important relationship God has given you in this life: your marriage.

Before we get into the meat of this conversation, I want to preface this month's focus with some confessions:

- I've been married for almost 15 years.
- I've made many mistakes.
- I've achieved tremendous growth.
- I'll be making mistakes and growing until I take my last breath.

The point is this: In no way am I a marriage expert. Many of the things that I will suggest to you this month are things I'm still getting better at. I don't know about you, but I want one of the crowning jewels of my life to be that I learned to love my wife well. And not only that, but that she truly felt that love. Our marriage had started off in a really tough spot as I was just starting to walk in recovery from my pornography addiction. So we were facing an up hill climb for sure.

Having said all of that, one of the biggest lessons I've learned (and am still learning) is that it is my responsibility to make sure my marriage has a pulse. You may have heard it said before that marriage is 50/50, meaning I give 50% and she gives 50%. But that couldn't be further from the truth. I have to come the realization that because of my love for my wife, I'm going to give 100% to my marriage, no matter what it costs. I'm making the assumption that if you're reading this and you're married, there was a time when you made the decision that you wanted to join your life with someone else for the rest of your life. And so when you made that commitment, it wasn't just that it would be for life, but that it would be a quality life. That means giving everything you've got to your husband or wife.

So how do you take the pulse on your marriage? I want to present a few thoughts in the form of questions you can ask yourself:

- 1. Do you pray together?** Believe it or not, this has been one of the hardest areas for me to make a priority. Yes, the author of this article is admitting he doesn't pray with his wife as much as he should. Guilty as charged. Thinking back, it's easy to think about the "crisis" moments that brought us together. But what about the day in day out moments that we have together to simply give God thanks? Prayer is such a powerful weapon that married couples have at their disposal. It's not only something that we should reserve for the dinner blessing or when we run into the wall. It's a lifeline we need to be tapping into on a daily basis. Especially through recovery and the restoration of our marriage, I've always felt that if it weren't by God's grace, I would not be where I am today, nor would our marriage.
- 2. Do you spend time together?** Let me clarify what I mean by this: Do you spend time together in the same space WITHOUT a screen in your hand or some other kind of distraction looming? In other words, are you being present to each other? This also is something I've had to learn over the years. If my wife is trying to talk to me and I'm on my phone or engaged in another activity, I'm not being present to her. Are intentionally spending time with each other? Whether that be through date nights, vacations, playing cards, or even just snuggling? (and I mean the kind of snuggling that doesn't always include sex) Few things will deepen your marriage than by simply spending time with each other where no other person or object has your attention.
- 3. Do you work through conflict together?** Call me a slow learner - but my wife & I recently came to a pretty stark realization: While we don't argue often, when we do, we have a hard time working through it. Not all the time, but there are some fights that where we feel like we hit the same wall over and over again. When things are good, we're good. But when we (and by we I mean I) feel overwhelmed — whether in circumstances or

emotion — it tends to leak out on to others. Again, we're learning and we're getting better. But we're committed to work through it together. One example I'm working on: In the past as we've dealt with conflict, I've tended to be the one who withdraws or retreats while my wife is the one who is desiring connection. This hasn't been easy to navigate through, but I'm committed to getting better.

4. **Do you laugh together?** Have you ever been out in public and seen a couple who clearly love each other? And it may be in the ways you least expect — including their ability to laugh and have fun together. I believe this area is a call back to the question I asked earlier about spending time together. As you spend time together, you will discover (hopefully) the things that bring you both joy. The things you both find interesting. And yes, the things you can both joke and tease each other about. And when I use the word tease, I certainly mean it in a playful way, not in a mean way. Recovery work is a very serious matter and so whenever you're able to inject something fun or lighthearted in the moment, try to do it.

5. **Do you dream together?** The last one that I really believe will take a couple from simply living together to thriving together is the act of dreaming together. For some couples this is harder than for others. In our marriage, we've found this to be so life giving. We have dreamed about God's plans for our lives, the kind of home we could build, places that we want to visit, and what our future careers could look like. The sky's the limit! There's something really beautiful when two souls who have joined their lives together seek the Lord for their future and all that He has for them. I believe the Lord is honored when seek His heart and His plans for our lives.

For some of you, reading these five questions might feel overwhelming. Where does a couple even begin to take the pulse of their marriage when there are so many indicators of health?

I want to encourage you to take some time to pray together and ask the

Lord where to begin fortifying your relationship with each other. He will tell you. And once you know where to start, only tackle one area at a time. Remember, there is no deadline. You have time. It may take you six months or a year even to start consistently praying together. It may only take a you a week or two to start dreaming together. None of the areas above are accomplished over night. Just keep working at it and loving on each other well.

One of the greatest ways you can support your marriage is through joining Small Groups Online. Each week you'll get to join other men or women who are learning to become the husbands and wives God is calling them to be. SGO is specifically designed for those walking through sexual addiction and even those who are suffering from sexual betrayal. Many couples have found incredible healing and restoration for their marriages through the help of Small Groups Online.

One final thought: Our standard of how to love our spouse well comes from Jesus. He is our model and example. Look at what Ephesians 5:25 TPT says:

"And to the husbands, you are to demonstrate love for your wives with the same tender devotion that Christ demonstrated to us, his bride. For he died for us, sacrificing himself"

When a person with some kind of compulsive behavior comes to the end of themselves and are ready to change, there's a lot of work to do. Identifying the pain they have tried to medicate is one of the primary goals they face. And for those who are married, this complicates things significantly. Because their spouse is essentially pulled into their journey as well. As a matter of fact, they must walk through a recovery journey themselves. Because addiction is like a wrecking ball to a marriage, trust has to be built from the ground up. Over the last 15 years, I've had to learn to love myself well and love my wife well. It hasn't been easy, but I can never forget one of my greatest callings (perhaps THE greatest) is to cherish my wife's heart. I want to encourage you to go after the questions asked in this post together as a couple. It will take work for sure, but believe me when I say, your marriage is worth it!