

## We Need More “GAMES” in Our Marriage!



With all of the pressures and stress in marriages from finances, children, jobs, COVID 19 lockdowns, relatives, and just living together, we can easily get upset, lose our joy, and respond in negative or hurtful ways to our spouse. Instead of being attracted to each other like when we were first married, we can shut down the relational part of our heart and our spouse can become our enemy. In enemy mode problems become magnified, we want to win regardless of what it takes, and our spouse can repel instead of draw us towards them. Sue and I have been there many times over our 50+ years of marriage, and I can tell you, we both don't like it! But thank God in the past 15 years or so we have discovered some ways to avoid going into enemy mode and stay more relational and enjoy more peace and joy in our marriage.

### Appreciation and Joy



*Appreciation and joy are two powerful ingredients to experiencing a more pleasurable and fulfilling relationship together.* When we express even a seemingly small or insignificant appreciation from our heart, it impacts both us and the recipient. It can be as simple as a compliment or being thankful for something they did, but the effects are powerful. Shared appreciation turns our relational self on and releases chemicals that help us bond with each other, feel connected and peaceful, and have a sense of value. Adding a smile or hug to the appreciation makes it even more impactful, calming our brain, dropping our blood pressure, and making us feel good! Since my love language is Words of Appreciation, it impacts my heart and draws me to Sue every time she expresses appreciation with little notes or gives me a kiss or hug for something I have done for her.

*Just as impactful as appreciation are telling joy stories with each other about joyful memories from the past, especially those you have shared with your spouse.* As we tell joy stories, the good memories and feelings from those stories are reignited in our heart. It can change the atmosphere and dispel the negative emotions in the one who is listening as they connect with us in the story. Now when Sue and I find ourselves stuck in some negative emotion with each other, we are quick to stop and begin looking at pictures of joyful memories or just share joy stories with each other. It's not long until the tension and negative emotions are gone and we can deal with the situation in a healthy loving way!

### GAMES!



Marcus Warner in his book “*Understanding the Wounded Heart*” emphasizes the importance of establishing a new habit of practicing appreciation every day to help your brain think of joy, the new “normal” in our life. He uses the acrostic GAMES to help remember the steps. You can start with your heavenly Father, your spouse, or someone else by every day taking five to ten minutes to express gratitude or thanksgiving to that person. You can write it in your journal, in a letter, tell someone, or just close your eyes and focus on what you appreciate right now.

**Gratitude.** What are you grateful for in the present time in your life? Many people get up early enough to watch the pretty sunrise or look out at the beauty of the flowers, mountains, or fall leaves and give thanks for what they see. Look for what you can appreciate in your spouse or look for the treasure in them even if there still are areas that may need some improvement!

**Anticipation.** Anticipation helps us focus on something joyful or exciting that we can look forward to in the future. Take time to plan some future trips or outings. Part of the fun for Sue and I has always been the time we take planning a special event in the future. With Google searches you can have a virtual trip and allow your imagination to experience where you're going before you even get there!

**Memories.** Memories recall the joyful events from our past. Don't allow Satan to steal your joy by trying to bring up negative parts (splinters) that may be part of a memory. Focus on memories that don't have splinters or the good parts of the memory. Sue and I enjoy looking at old pictures and home movies that bring the memories alive again and put a smile on our face and joy in our heart about the special times we have had together. Thinking about pleasant memories help build our joy capacity and emotional stability too.

**Experiences.** On purpose do things together and with others like picnics, walks in the woods, friends for dinner, or meet for coffee or lunch. Create experiences that will bring joy to your heart every time you think about them in the future. I can remember when Sue and I took a blanket out to a park in the middle of the night and watched the meteor showers a couple years ago. We laughed and got excited every time another meteor streaked across the sky!

**Songs.** Singing, playing an instrument, or listening to music are great ways to improve your mood. Music touches the heart in ways that go beyond reflections about the past or just expressing appreciation. Music can bring back happy feelings and good experiences that you have shared with your spouse. Music can also sooth and quiet your body and mind and put you in a place of peace and rest! Most of our days and evening at our house are filled with Christian music. We also like listening to the "Oldies" that were popular when we were dating!!



*Enjoy your marriage by filling it with appreciation, joy, and GAMES!*



### **Dialogue Questions**

1. When someone expresses appreciation to you, how does that make you feel? How do you feel when I express appreciation to you?
2. When we plan special times together, how does that make you feel?

### ***Fun Night Ideas***

1. Get out your calendar and pick a weekend or longer time for a mini vacation. Spend some time researching where you want to go and what you would like to do. Write down your ideas and start to dream about what that will be like having fun together. Get a picture from the area and put it up so you can continue to look at it and think about this special time coming up.
2. Through one of the online companies like Shutterfly, pick a group of pictures from some special event, vacation, time together, or theme and arrange them into a picture book that you can get published so you can look at it in the future. Have fun picking the page layouts, colors, clip art or words to add for each page. Give the book a special title and cover.