

Tools You Can Use

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Here are a few **tools** that you can start using today to keep your relationship strong. Use them regularly and enjoy being married!

Tool #1: Level

A level is an instrument designed to indicate whether a surface is horizontal (level) or vertical (plumb).

Check for balance in your life. How much of your time, energy and resources are you investing in each of the following:

- work/career
- parenting
- interests/hobbies
- spiritual life/faith
- marriage
- friendships

If you could create a perfectly balanced life, what would it look like? How does that compare to your life today? Are you spending your limited resources of time, energy and money in ways that are congruent with what you desire? If so, great! If not, it's time to make an intentional effort to restore balance. Prioritize time with your spouse, children, friends and God. Stop doing things that divert your energy away from your priorities and learn to say "no" to the unnecessary.

Tool # 2: Jumper Cables

Jumper cables are a pair of heavy gauge, insulated cables with alligator clips at each end used to start an automobile or other vehicle when the vehicle's battery has been discharged.

Get something started!! Don't wait for your wife to suggest or initiate something – take the initiative to do something. Go online and check out marriage enrichment weekends (such as [Weekend to Remember](#)); call and arrange for a babysitter so you and your wife can enjoy dinner and a walk by the lake; buy a couple's devotion book and start reading it together every morning when you first wake up (such as [Devotions for Couples- Man in the Mirror Edition: For Busy Couples Who Want More Intimacy in Their Relationships](#)); be creative and get started!

Tool # 3: Grease Gun

A grease gun is a common workshop and garage tool used for lubrication. The purpose of the grease gun is to apply lubricant through an aperture to a specific point, so that the object being lubricated continues to function.

After your barber cuts your hair, he graciously accepts the tip you give him on the way out. The unspoken message in this exchange is two-fold: First, you are communicating, "I appreciate your time and talent and service"; and second, "I want you to think I'm a good customer so that you will keep doing a good job cutting my hair just the way I like it each time I come back." Other relationships thrive through the frequent application of similar "lubrication". You speak respectfully and courteously to your doctor, thank him for his services and pay him promptly. You send a nice note and a fruit basket at Christmas to the elderly couple who gives you permission to hunt on their land every deer season. Doesn't it make sense that your marriage relationship would benefit from similar attention? Find ways to tell your wife that you value her for both who she is and what she does. Use words, use money, use gifts.

Think about what makes her happy – not what you think would make you happy if you were her! She is created differently than you. If she doesn't wear much jewelry, don't get her jewelry just because you think every man should get his wife jewelry. If you don't know what would be meaningful, ask her! If she loves flowers, don't get her a dozen roses once a year – get her one rose twelve times during the year. If she likes presents, get her at least six presents each year (yes, six: her birthday, your wedding anniversary, Valentine's day, Christmas, Mother's Day, and one other day of your choosing "just because"). If she likes football, get tickets to an Iowa, Iowa State, or UNI game! The most important thing is to do something that's meaningful to her. She will notice and appreciate the thought you put into it.

Tool # 4: Screw Driver

A screw driver is a common tool used to turn a screw.

What relationships, habits, addictions are pulling you away from the marriage that you want? Turn. Turn away from the temptation to spend hours flipping channels. Turn away from pornography, which has a severely corrosive effect on your marriage, even though you may not yet realize it. Turn away from relationships with other women that give cause for your wife to feel insecure. Take an honest self-assessment, and then begin to turn. Finally, enlist the help of a male friend and ask him to hold you accountable.

Tool # 5: Rope

Rope is commonly used to tie knots that hold things securely in place.

Ever wonder why the phrase, "tie the knot", is used to describe getting married? While not known for certain, some say that the expression comes from the net of knotted string, which supported a mattress in the days before metal bedsprings. In order to make a marriage bed, you needed to "tie the knot". What are the "knots" that holds your marriage together?

Strong marriages exist when both partners work at communicating. Communication involves both talking and listening – and is best done one at a time! For example, when your wife is talking, try not to be thinking ahead about what you are going to say next. Instead, listen to understand what she is trying to communicate through her words to you. Summarize what you heard her say to see if you heard it correctly, before sharing your own thoughts or feelings. Practice assertive communication: expressing your feelings and asking for what you want. Practice "rigorous honesty" in communication. Be truthful always, but don't be mean. The Biblical imperative to "speak the truth in love" is the foundation for both good communication and trust in a relationship. Don't ever say something that isn't true just to avoid an argument. When she asks you, "How do you like my new dress?", you can say, "Well, to be totally honest it's not my favorite – I really like the red one because you look so great in that every time you wear it." Practice paring compliments with honest and kind critiques. For some ideas on improving communication in your marriage, [CLICK HERE](#). Ongoing, intentional effort strengthens the ropes that hold your marriage knots together.

Tool # 6: Measuring Tape

Measuring tape is a flexible form of ruler, used for measuring things. Its flexibility allows for a measure of great length to be easily carried in a pocket or toolkit and permits one to measure around curves or corners.

Keep this useful tool handy. You will probably need it several times each day as you work to build a healthy marriage. Men who have great relationships with their wives are able to measure the weight of issues as they come up. They have a keen sense of perspective – a capacity to view things in light of their relative importance. What are the little things that bug

you about your wife? Are you able to accept them, or do you carry them around all day, allowing them to get bigger and take on more and more meaning? What's big enough to get mad about? Which ones are inconsequential enough to let go?

When you begin to feel overwhelmed with the little frustrations of daily married life, step back and regain some perspective. Focusing on what is truly important will make your marriage – and your life – much more rewarding. Before he died, Steve Jobs wrote, "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important."

Tool # 7: Blow Torch

A blowtorch is a tool for applying lower-intensity and more diffuse flame and heat for various applications, than the acetylene torch. The blowtorch is commonly used where a diffuse or wide spread high temperature naked flame heat is required, but not so hot as to cause combustion.

Successful marriage partners have the ability to manage conflict in a way that solves problems. Conflict is not avoided, but is sometimes postponed. They have enough self-awareness to know when they need to take a break, cooling off a bit before speaking so they don't risk using an acetylene torch when what is needed is the lower-intensity and more diffuse flame of a blowtorch. How are you at selecting which tools to use and using them productively when you are angry? Recognize when you are too angry to keep going in an argument. It's perfectly okay to say, "I want to have this conversation with you, but I need to take a time-out. Please give me some time to calm down and gather my thoughts. I will be back before supper." Then go for a walk or a drive or take a shower. Take long deep breaths. Pray, write or read. Then return with a clearer head and restored perspective.

Fair fighting – and fighting which resolves conflict – are signs of a healthy marriage. Research has found that every successful couple has approximately ten areas of irreconcilable differences – disagreements that they will never resolve. You are not "headed for divorce" if you and your wife periodically disagree. You are normal. Healthy couples learn that they cannot only live with these differences, but can develop understanding and perhaps even empathy for their partner's opinion.

Tool # 8: Metal Detector

The metal detector is an electronic device used specifically for the detection of buried objects.

Listening to the words your wife uses is important and will make her feel that she has been heard. Listening for the deeper meaning beneath the words she uses is priceless and will make her feel that she is known, not just heard. When your wife is sharing something that seems important, listen for what is underneath. You can't read her mind but you can become more curious about what she's really saying. When she says, "I don't want to go to the ballgame tonight," maybe she's really saying, "I've worked really hard today and I still have things to get done." Be curious and care enough to find out what's beneath the words she's using.

Tool # 9: Goof Off Stain and Spot Remover

Description of Good Off from its manufacturer's website: "Everybody goofs up sometimes – kids, adults, professionals. We all make mistakes or spill from time to time. That's why every household, garage and workshop, homemaker, handyman or professional needs Goof Off® stain and spot remover. Goof Off® removes the tough messes...."

No one is perfect. We all make mistakes. It's an every day part of being human. We make mistakes in our checkbook register, at work, with our children, and with our spouses. So don't let pride, ego or self-anger get the best of you when you make a mistake. Admit it, ask for forgiveness and move on. The marriage experts at [Prepare-Enrich](#) (who have created a great relationship inventory and couples assessment tool) lay out these six steps for seeking forgiveness:

1. Admit what you did was wrong or hurtful.
2. Try to understand/empathize with the pain you have caused.
3. Take responsibility for your actions and make restitution if necessary.
4. Assure your partner you will not do it again.
5. Ask for forgiveness.
6. Forgive yourself.

Tool # 10: Winch

A winch is a mechanical device that is used to pull in (wind up) or let out (wind out) or otherwise adjust the tension of a rope or cable.

While the winch is a relatively simple tool to use, its complexity is in knowing when and how much to pull in and when and how much to let out. Okay, we're talking about sex now. Not just sex, as in the act of intercourse, but sexuality in all its mystery and complexity. Great husbands recognize and pay attention to the broad expanse of things sexual that affect their marriage.

Touch is one of these things. Decades of research have shown that human babies need touch not only to thrive, but also to even survive. The same could be said for your marriage! Touch creates positive psychological effects, helping people to feel calm, happy, loved and reassured. Scientists tell us that touch also has biological effects, promoting the release of oxytocin which makes people feel bonded or connected. Touch your wife frequently during the day. Touch in ways that don't always lead to sex.

Mental process is another. It is in this arena where the differences between men and women is most clearly seen and most acutely felt. Someone has been said that 99% of sex happens from the neck up. While men are more adept at living "in the moment", women are more likely to be processing all of the things that happened during the day when it's time to go to bed. Let's say you and she had an argument at dinner, which was left unresolved. You, much more easily than she, will be able to ignore that unresolved issue and be ready for sex by bedtime. The simple fact is how you treat your wife during the day has a monumental impact on how she will treat you later. Here are two good ideas for improving your sexual relationship by developing your non-sexual relationship. Try them – you will soon see the correlation:

1. Compliment her. Tell her she's beautiful. Many women have a negative self-image. If she does not feel good about her body, she may be less interested in sex. Years of comparing herself to the rail-thin models depicted in the media (even though the reality is that these women are unhealthy and their images often computer altered) may have taken their toll, resulting in her feeling uncomfortable about her body. Tell her you think she looks great.
2. Help her finish household chores. Wives who complain of being too tired for sex may be, in fact, too tired for sex! A study recently reported in Reuters affirms previous studies, documenting that, whether it's housework, cooking or childcare, women do about 10 hours more multitasking in the home each week than men -- 48.3 hours compared to 38.9. Folding the last load of laundry or putting the last child to bed will help her to feel like more of a partner with you, both sexually and otherwise.

Finally, develop a comfort level with your wife so that you can talk openly about sex. Don't assume that she wants the same thing you want. Here's a list of questions for you and your wife to ask and answer together to help get you on the same page:

1. What do you need in order to be in the mood for sex?
2. Do you feel comfortable initiating sex? Why? Why not?
3. How often would you prefer or expect sex?
4. What parts of our sex life do you enjoy most?
5. Are there any parts of our sex life that make you feel uncomfortable?
6. How could I help to make our sexual relationship more satisfying for you?

Tool # 11: The Instruction Manual

The instruction manual is a book that comes with a product that typically includes setup, maintenance and trouble shooting instructions as well as warranty information.

Many have lamented that they wish marriage came with a manual. Actually, it does. The Bible is a great place to find the "how to's" for setting up, maintaining and trouble shooting problems in marriage. Here's one, from Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." What does this kind of sacrificial love look like in your relationship to your wife? What *might* it look like? Perhaps it's you not always having to do things your way, or it's you letting her have the remote occasionally. Perhaps it's you putting aside other things that occupy your time so you can spend more time "serving" her: being with her, giving her your undivided attention, or helping more around the house. The Bible depicts Jesus as the bridegroom and the church his bride. He died for his bride. Would you? What would you sacrifice to meet her needs? How often do you put her needs ahead of your own? Spend some time thinking about what you can do to make her life easier, and then do it!