



AUGUST GATE CHURCH

*At August Gate, we are convinced that healthy churches are built on the foundation of healthy families and healthy families require healthy marriages. During this time of uncertainty and anxiety, this is one of the primary points of attack for the enemy, but as Paul told the Corinthians, "**we are not ignorant of his designs.**" (2 Corinthians 2:11)*

*In light of this, we want to provide you with as many tools as possible to help you continue working together to build strength and health in your marriage in this time of quarantine. Please know that your pastors love you and we're praying that you'll honor/love each other as "**coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.**" (1 Peter 3:11)*

TOOLS FOR BUILDING A GODLY MARRIAGE

- **GET ON THE SAME PAGE ... LITERALLY**

Make an old-fashioned paper and pen list of what you value in marriage. Then look for creative ways you can develop and practice those qualities regularly and consistently. This is a tool you should plan to use at least once or twice a year. Because here's the thing: no individual or relationship is static. You and your spouse will change. The question is: Will you choose to change together, developing your storyline together through chapter after chapter of plot twists?

- **THE COMMUNICATION SANDWICH**

Sandwich constructive criticism for your spouse between genuine affirmation. It's human nature to receive criticism better when we know that the other also recognizes and appreciates what we're doing well too. A communication sandwich allows you to share what you'd like to see changed in a way that doesn't put your spouse on the defensive.

- **THE MOTIVE SCALE**

Instead of having a knee-jerk reaction to something your spouse does, take a moment to weigh their motives and assume the best. After you've taken the time to do this, be direct with your spouse. Ask what fueled the actions or words. Then be sure to listen carefully and ask questions if something isn't clear. When you do, be careful not to put them on the defensive. You will get a lot further in your conversation if your spouse feels like you're genuinely trying to understand their driving motivation and really trying to assume the best.

- **THE BREAK ROOM**

If you're having trouble resolving an argument, take a break and give yourself some space to individually calm down and process. Then come back and work through the conflict. Cooler heads prevail. To use this tool, tell your spouse, "I need some time by myself to think about this. Let's take a break and give each other a little room. After that, let's continue this discussion." Just be careful not to use The Break Room as an excuse to avoid dealing with an issue. When you use The Break Room in marriage, it should always be with the full intention of resolving conflict in a way that benefits the long-term health of your relationship.

- **THE SHARED ACTIVITY**

If you want to feel more connected on a daily basis, make shared activities a priority. Be intentional to carve out time each day to do something with each other. Maybe you have coffee and devotions together in the morning. Perhaps it's hitting the gym together or talking over dinner. Make a plan and start putting it into action this week. And, if you find that the shared activity you decide on doesn't work after all, pick something else and give it another try.

- **THE TEAM TOOL**

Marriage is not about winning; it is about pulling together in the same direction. Stop for a moment and look honestly at yourself. Does one of you have a need to win every argument or be right about some insignificant disagreement? Remember you are on the same team. In things that don't matter, drop it. In things that do, plan a time to discuss it calmly and graciously. Sometimes it helps to verbalize the fact that you are a team. Bring in a third party if you repeatedly stalemate on one issue. Think in terms of "I choose us."

- **THE RESPONSE TOOL**

Don't react; respond. Your reactions say more about you than your planned actions do! Take time to think before speak or do things that you will inevitably regret. Evaluate why you react in certain ways and plan ahead of time what you are going to do next time it happens. Know what your buttons are and when you're tempted to react negatively, then choose to be conscious of the "I choose us" frame of mind and think about your reactions. Many couples get on a merry-go-round of reactions and find themselves in a hostile environment neither of them wants. Choose to respond instead.

- **THE SHARING TOOL**

Share as much of life as possible! Share your time, thoughts, and interests. This is a tool that must be deliberately engaged or life will push it aside. Time spent together doing things affords a connection opportunity. History together is built one event at a time. Make sure you are inputting positive events that build a positive archive. Plan dates. A movie night, dinner out, or coffee date is a good way to keep sharing alive! If life has crowded the sharing out of your relationship, be deliberate in building it back in. It's okay to start small and build on the foundation of love and life shared together as you grow.

- **THE BLESSING TOOL**

How can you bless your spouse today by expressing honor, devotion, desire, enjoyment, and love? Many marriage partners have come to this special relationship without ever having received these things. Sometimes they come with trust issues because these things were not a part of their heritage. Begin today to put words of honor and devotion into your partner's heart. Speak truth from your heart. Let them know what you appreciate about them. Affirm positive traits. Thank them for their sacrifices and service. Choose them and let them know why. For some, this tool will be easy to use. For others it will feel awkward and hard to put to use. If you draw a blank in finding words of affirmation begin to watch carefully for the little things you can affirm. Ask God, who sees the best in all of us, to reveal to your heart some positive qualities you can affirm.

- **THE CONTACT TOOL**

Make daily contact! It is entirely possible to live with someone and not make any or very little contact. Contact is an excellent building tool and you can use it in a variety of ways. Each day try to connect in one way, whether emotionally, mentally, physically, or spiritually. Think about it and try to be deliberate. Some construction tools look overwhelming, yet when you know how to use them they are extremely valuable in the building project. Endeavor to connect regularly on *all* levels.

- Emotionally – Share a thought that goes beyond picking up milk or confirming the time of an appointment. (Use “I feel...” comments. Offer support emotionally. “You’ve had a lot of pressure lately. Why don’t you sleep in a bit Saturday?” or “I know we are in a financial crunch right now, but we’ll do what we have to do and together we’ll get through it.”) Encourage in any way you can. Remember that communication is only seven percent words we speak and the rest is our tone and body language. Tone and body language are the emotional language we speak.
- Mentally – Connect by sharing a newspaper article you read, a news commentator you listened to or from a book you are reading. Ask him his opinions and listen to them. Share a story from your day or ask a question about something that interests him.
- Physically – Choose non-sexual touching such as a quick hug, a hand on the arm, a pat on the hand or the back. Touching says “I care” and touch is one of our basic human needs. If all touching has become a signal for sex, then be intentional to touch on the way out the door, to touch one another casually, and to touch in passing. Don't neglect sexual touch...but don't neglect to lay the foundation for it either through a regular pattern of physical expression.
- Spiritually – Many couples never share on this level even if they share the same faith. Spiritual sharing gives a third dimension to a relationship. Share a thought or a reading that inspired you. Take time to pray for him. Let him know you are praying for him. Pray together when possible.

- **PRESENCE**

Active involvement allows each spouse to drill into “the thick of things” and fully participate in a growing marriage. Your active involvement in your relationship will help you get to know your spouse more intimately and enable you to show your spouse the depth of your love. No one wants a giant paperweight for a spouse. We want a spouse who jumps in, gets involved, participates in decisions, and helps with the tasks of growing a marriage and family.

- **BACK TO BASICS**

Respectful words tighten up loose connections with your spouse, but they are often neglected. Simple politeness (“thank you,” “please,” & “I’m sorry”) can restore friendship, respect, and closeness in your marriage. Adding in respectful actions like preferring one another in daily shared activities, active listening, and speaking well of your spouse in public will bring even tighter connections.

- **GIVING & RECEIVING GRACE**

Every marriage is the union of a sinful man and a sinful woman in a sinful world. In other words, you will never move beyond your need for God's grace! From occasional selfishness and frustrations to deep betrayal and rejection, only the sovereign grace of God in Christ can give us hope of longevity, health, growth, and change because only the gospel enables us to both give grace (i.e. forgiving one another when sinned against) and receive grace (i.e. repenting when you know you've sinned). These are the two primary tools we need not just as spouses, but as Christians.

- **FOCUSED ATTENTION**

The two extremes of fog and over-familiarity are as dangerous in marriage as in driving. Over time, we can become inattentive to our spouse's needs. We can take our opportunities for communication for granted, as if we expect the road to always be smooth and straight. The solution? Becoming intentional about our connection:

- Give direct eye contact when talking.
- Press “pause” or “mute” on the remote when your spouse approaches. This habit will be a reminder of what's more valuable. (Cellphone etiquette will be discussed later.)
- Initiate conversation about your spouse's concerns instead of waiting for him or her to bring them up.

- **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS**

When we look at an issue from our own perspective, it's too easy to assume that our spouse sees it the same way. This is a common source of irritation and conflict because the assumption ignores the fact that we all have a unique perspective. We need to get in the habit of clarifying meaning early in each conversation. Otherwise, we'll engage regularly in conflict rooted in a lack of understanding rather than genuine disagreement. To help, ask questions that give your spouse the opportunity to explain what they think, believe, expect, and feel instead of assuming you already know.

- **FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS**

During a conversation, it's easy to be focused on forming your reply to your spouse rather than listening well. Instead, if you develop a curiosity about what's under the surface of your spouse's statements, the practice will bring you together. If you respond with your thoughts first, it's often an indication that you're not focused on the other person. But if you simply listen and ask a second question to explore what your spouse has said, it demonstrates caring and builds trust. Just take what he or she has said to the next level:

- "So, what were you feeling when your boss took credit for your work?"
- "You said that was one of the best books you've ever read. What about the book affected you the most?"
- "That seminar sounds really interesting. What would you be looking to take from it?"

- **REFINED TECHNOLOGY**

Technology can be a powerful tool for effective communication. But like any tool, it can be misused. Holding a conversation is tough when someone is distracted by a screen, so when your spouse is present, you need to turn your attention toward him or her. Try these ideas for taming your tech:

- When you go out to dinner, leave your cellphone in the car.
- When you're apart, send several quick, fun text messages during the day to let your spouse know you're thinking about him or her.
- Remove your television from your bedroom so it can be a retreat from tech.

- **STREAK CONNECTING**

A streak is something you do consistently over time. You pick something you want to do every day (exercising, flossing, etc.) and then put a big red X on the calendar every day it happens. Once you see the streak of X's on the calendar, you won't want to break it. Plan for streaks in your marriage and track them:

- **PRAY FOR EACH OTHER INTENTIONALLY**

Prayer changes things because God changes things. When we pray, particularly through Scripture, we begin to align our hearts with God's. That's when miracles happen. If you've never learned the habit of praying intentionally for and with your spouse, perhaps it's time to do something different? Recommended Tool: [The 40-Day Prayer Journey](#) (\$22 for two books)

- **PURSUE EACH OTHER INCREASINGLY**

When you said "I do", you were committing to show one another love in all seasons and circumstances. Many couples forget that love is a commitment first and an emotion second. As marriages mature, it's vital that both people pursue one another with fresh vigor and creativity. Doing so keeps things fresh and ensures you don't drift apart when the feelings of love aren't readily apparent (we've all been there). Recommend Tool: [The 31-Day Pursuit Challenge](#) (\$23 for two books)

- **GROWING WONDER**

When dating, all you can see is how amazing your partner is. After the wedding you see things you didn't notice before and can be tempted to think: "Wait...I didn't sign up for this." We become more realistic as we learn more about the person we married. This is healthy, of course, unless we see only the negative and lose sight of the amazing. It's still there, but we have to intentionally keep it on our radar. How can we do this?

- Write down one thing each evening about your spouse that you're grateful for. Do it for a month, then show it to him or her.
- In conversations with friends, never describe your spouse's faults. Instead, share something specific that you're still amazed by (it'll get back to your spouse).
- Reaffirm your relationship during conflict: "Right now, I'm really frustrated with you. But that doesn't change the fact that I adore you, and I'm not going anywhere."

- **DISCUSS & AGREE ON A SAVING PLAN**

Studies show that couples who discuss and agree on a financial plan enjoy a more stable relationship. It's not about how much you have, it's about how well you steward what God entrusts into your care. No matter which budgeting tool you use, creating and sticking to a plan for how to save, give, and spend your money will create unity in your marriage in an area that often leads only to conflict. For help creating a simple budget (as well as an amazing app) we recommend [Every Dollar](#).

- **ESCAPE TOGETHER MORE OFTEN**

Strong marriages are built with the raw materials of good conversations and fun memories. "Getting away" is one of the most important aids in maintaining your friendship over the years. For that reason, couples committed to making quick "escapes" a regular part of their marriage are more likely to thrive than those who do not.

- **THE PRINCIPLE OF FIRST RESPONSE**

The course of a conflict is not ultimately set by the person who initiates, but by the person who responds. One person never has the power to decide whether a fight actually occurs. That power rests with the responder. As Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Jesus has a well-worn track record with the Principle of First Response. Recall the times that the Scribes and the Pharisees came to question Him. They were the initiators in nearly all of their communication. Their intention was to defraud Jesus and corner Him. In how many cases were they successful? None. They failed because the power to decide the direction of each conflict rested with Jesus, the responder (Luke 20:19-26). The implications of following Jesus' example in the context of marriage are huge. Your sin doesn't give your spouse free license to sin in return. And conversely, their sin doesn't you free license either.

- **THE PRINCIPLE OF PHYSICAL TOUCH**

It is difficult to sin against someone while you are tenderly touching them. A difficult time to apply this principle is after an argument has already begun. However, a perfect time is when you know you are about to sit down and have a discussion about something that might lead to tension. You know what those topics are in your marriage. Maybe it's a conversation about a specific child, your in-laws, or your finances. In those moments, you have a choice: to stop fighting so you can keep touching or to stop touching so you can keep fighting. This type of tender touching will serve you in two ways. First, it is a deterrent from arguing. Second, when you do drift into an argument, your physical separation is a visual and physical cue that the conversation is no longer glorifying God. This is an opportunity to acknowledge it, correct it, and get back on the right track.

- **THE PRINCIPLE OF MIRRORING**

Understanding can be enhanced if we measure it often throughout a conversation. The Scriptures inform us that, if we are to understand and become wise, we must be sure to incline our ears. Proverbs 22:17 states, "Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge." Have you ever meant one thing by what you said but the person you were talking to heard something else? It can make for very frustrating communication. If you're not sure if your spouse is getting what you're talking about, check to see if you hear this phrase a lot: "What do you mean by that?" Mirroring can help you test whether you are hearing your spouse properly. Once your spouse makes a point ... repeat it to him or her. Say something like this: "So, what I hear you saying is ..." or, "Are you saying ... ?" Then, in your own words, tell your spouse what you understand to have been said. For this to be helpful, however, you must allow your spouse to either affirm or correct what you've said. The point of mirroring is neither to be right nor to defend yourself, but to make sure you are hearing accurately. If you seek to understand rather than to make yourself understood, then you are primed for success with the principle of mirroring.

- **THE PRINCIPLE OF PRAYER**

Success in communication is more likely when we invite God to be an active participant and guide. This principle is not complicated, but it requires our close attention. We've become so accustomed to hearing about prayer that its importance often passes us by. No matter what principle you might be using at the time or what subject you might be talking about, no scenario is beyond prayer. One of the greatest difficulties that couples face with this principle is awkwardness. They are not used to praying together. So, as they begin to like each other less in the midst of unconstructive communication, the thought of praying together is not very appealing. If that's where you find yourself, you will only make progress if you take your first steps! Begin with 30 seconds of prayer as you go to bed each night. Pray regularly as a family prior to eating. Pick one night a week to pray for your children, your church, and your marriage. Among the enormous benefits that you'll see in your family, the regularity of praying together will make praying in the midst of communication breakdown more probable over time as you grow in this together.

- **INTENTIONALITY**

If you're picking up on a theme, it's because there is one that cannot be overstated: intentionality is key in growing in your marriage. Whether you're learning to grow in your faith, deepen your understanding of your spouse, seeking to experience new things, or tidying up your savings goals, everything requires intentionality. Be intentional, but remember not to get your identity or meaning from what you do, but rather who you are: a child of God, saved by grace and for His glory.

THESE TOOLS HAVE BEEN ADAPTED FROM:

<https://forthefamily.org/>

<https://thelife.com/>

<http://www.honorgracecelebrate.com/>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/>

<https://fiercemarriage.com/>

<https://www.familylife.com/>