



Four Stages Within a Marriage

~ Adapted from *Sustaining Love*
by David Augsburger

Summary:

- There are typically four “*stages*” or “*marriages*” within a singular marriage.
- We will examine these four stages by examining marital goals, communication, feelings, differences, conflict, intimacy, roles, and meaning.

Closer Look at Goals:

- **Marriage 1: Dream:** we marry to fulfill the “*dream*”- personal, marital, career, & communal dreams.
- **Marriage 2: Disillusionment:** The “*dream*” fails us. Or we sacrifice the marital to gain the career and so on.
- **Marriage 3: Discovery:** We discover reality beyond the “*dream*”; we discover each other.
- **Marriage 4: Depth:** We develop depth in ourselves, our marriage, our life together.

Closer Look at Communication:

- **Marriage 1: Expectation:** We communicate out of expectations of what is meant, needed, wanted, obligated, and necessary.
- **Marriage 2: Manipulation:** We manipulate by persuading, seducing, coercing, evading, & avoiding to get what we want.
- **Marriage 3: Invitation:** We discover that true communication is invitation and work toward equality.
- **Marriage 4: Dialogue:** We develop dialogue with genuine mutuality and equality in our communication.

Closer Look at Feelings:

- **Marriage 1: Excuse:** We are afraid of, embarrassed by, cautious with, concealed about or unaware of feelings.
- **Marriage 2: Explode:** We risk sharing feelings, but find them painfully threatening, often uncontrolled, unfocused, confused, and confusing.
- **Marriage 3: Express:** We own and express feelings with freedom and with both candor and caring.
- **Marriage 4: Experience:** We flow with both our feelings and thoughts.

Closer Look at Differences:

- **Marriage 1: Accommodate:** We tolerate accommodate, overlook differences to avoid conflict and obey the “*dream.*”
- **Marriage 2: Eliminate:** We seek to eliminate the objectionable differences in the spouse by demanding change.
- **Marriage 3: Appreciate:** We discover the differences are creative, necessary parts of each of us and our marriage.
- **Marriage 4: Celebrate:** We delight in our differences and develop them in each other.

Closer Look at Conflict:

- **Marriage 1: Avoid:** We avoid conflict as disruptive and destructive of the “*dream.*”
- **Marriage 2: Attack:** We explode with frustrated feelings, seek to eliminate the differences through fighting, bargaining, and pressuring.
- **Marriage 3: Adjust:** We discover more fair ways of fighting; we seek mutually satisfactory solutions more quickly.
- **Marriage 4: Accept:** We accept conflict as a healthy process and utilize it to work for mutual growth.

Closer Look at Intimacy:

- **Marriage 1: Dependent:** Intimacy is dependent on romance, on the moment, on the other's responses, on his/her "*acting as prescribed*"
- **Marriage 2: Independent:** Intimacy is touch and go, intense when things are going well, absent when there is tension or threat.
- **Marriage 3: Interdependent:** Intimacy now becomes truly possible as autonomy is balanced with solidarity.
- **Marriage 4: Intimate:** Intimacy now develops, freely in emotional, mental, social, and spiritual levels.

Closer Look at Roles:

- **Marriage 1: Complementary:** Relationships are shaped by complementary “*fitting*” of spouse’s strengths & weaknesses.
- **Marriage 2: Symmetrical:** Relationships are now competitive, adversary, tit-for-tat struggles to claim personal identity.
- **Marriage 3: Parallel:** Relationships achieve balance, equal freedom, and responsibility. Autonomy and intimacy are protected.
- **Marriage 4: Intertwined:** Relationships that are mutual, with both partners secure and satisfied whether near or far.

Closer Look at Meaning:

- **Marriage 1: Hopes:** Hope shaped by the “*dream*” are largely false hopes which must eventually die for love to become truly alive.
- **Marriage 2: Hopelessness:** Hope fades, falter, and fail us. Life together becomes empty and alienated.
- **Marriage 3: Hopefulness:** Hope rises as we find that beneath the old hopes there is deeper, richer meaning to our lives together.
- **Marriage 4: Hope:** True hope has emerged and pushes us onward from healing in the past, pulls us forward with the promise of the future.

Conclusion:

- This is only a description of tendencies; not a full-proof analysis.
- There may exist a blending of categories in various areas.
- Love your spouse by sacrifice, self-surrender, meeting practical needs and ever being genuine (1 John 3:16-17)
- Strive for “Oneness”; too much is at stake.
- Pray to God everyday that you would love your spouse more today than you did yesterday.
- Strive daily to have a marriage that reflects God’s beauty.
- Be committed to a local, God-honoring church that sincerely seeks to proclaim, practice, and protect biblical truth.
- Be surrounded by godly couples who will motivate you unto a marriage that seeks godliness and righteousness unto His glory and praise.