"Keep the "Joy Gap" Short!

"*The more joy you bring into your marriage, the more that feeling of being "in love" stays strong and growing. Love is all about joy. When you fell in love with someone, you experienced a "joy explosion" in your brain that flooded your body with hormones …. Couples who stay in love throughout their married life are couples who excel in the art of keeping their joy levels high. The opposite is also true…. "Falling out of love" is all about the absence of joy*." **Marcus Warner**

This is my second Marriage Encouragement on the importance of joy in our marriage. You can read the first one from our archived encouragements on our website: Growing Joy in Your Marriage (It's a good foundation for what I want to share here!) It's been said that joy is the fuel our brain runs on and affects our overall mental health. People have laughed their way back to health from terminal illnesses! Joy releases chemicals in our body that improve our mood and emotional resilience to bounce back from difficult or hard situations in life and our marriage. Some of the hormones released when we experience joy enhance our ability to feel good, experience more pleasure, feel contentment, and make us feel safe and more connected to others. This in turn reduces feelings of anxiety and depression, lowers stress levels, and enhances brain health!

The Benefits of More Joy

When there is Joy, life just seems to work better! We can all have big negative emotions like being overwhelmed, depressed, under pressure, disappointed, or rejected. How we handle them determines how well our relationships with our spouse and children will go! Everyone is triggered in different ways by different circumstances or situations, but we all have had those moments when our relational circuits switch off, and we go into "enemy mode." (I talk about this more in my first encouragement.) I don't have time to explain enemy mode here, but you can imagine what that looks like when we are attacking the other person, shutting down, responding out of our pain, or looking for ways to get even. Over time, this becomes very damaging to the relationship and our marriage. As Sue and I have purposefully added more joy into our marriage, we find ourselves defaulting to enemy mode much less, and even if we do shut down, the other person is quick to work on getting the joy back and turning the relational switch back on! We like the feeling of love, peace, joy, and harmony much better and work hard to keep it there! All of us go offline for a variety of reasons. Joy isn't the cure for all our relational problems, and some issues may need a professional counselor's help. But more joy in everyone's life will make life together with your spouse and children much sweeter!

Joy enhances every part of your relationship with each other, your children, friends, and our heavenly Father. Learning more about the power of joy to help me have a better marriage and relationships with others has caused me to change the way I interact with Sue. This has had a major impact on both of us since I retired and we started focusing more on our ministry together. By removing the intensity of heated arguments, fighting, and negative reactions towards each other, Sue and I can now connect heart-to-heart with each other and keep the atmosphere of the house at a cool and comfortable level. We have more time and ability to engage in meaningful conversations, share scriptures and revelations from Father, do things together, and support others who may be experiencing difficult or hard situations. Our joy with each other can bring peace and calming into situations, change the atmosphere, and inspire others to increase their joy levels too.

How can we build more joy into our marriage?

One of the major sources of joy is knowing that someone is pleased to be with us. When a child is born into this world, they immediately start searching for someone who is pleased to be with them. As the brain grows, it also increases the capacity to experience and store more joy. Joy from someone being pleased to be with us can also happen in our marriage relationship as we let our spouse know that we are pleased to be with them! However, people with few joyful experiences in their life have an underdeveloped joy center and a lower level of joy. The good news is that our joy center can start growing again as we increase our joyful experiences regardless of age!

Ways to communicate to your spouse that you are pleased to be with them:
- **eye contact** – looks that express your pleasure to be with them
- **facial expressions –** smile a lot! – a face that lights up when they come into your presence!
- **tone of voice** – gentle and loving words
- **actions you take** like writing notes, cards, flowers, phone calls, hugs, kisses, holding hands, sitting or lying together, embracing or holding each other, sit knee-to-knee and look into each other's eyes
- **words we speak** – praise, encouragement, support, thankfulness, commitment, appreciation
- **journalling** – write down your thoughts of love and affection and share them with your spouse
- **playfulness** – do things with each other that you see children do to have fun (make sure your spouse is okay with the kind of play you are thinking of doing first!)
- **telling joy stories** – recount joyful memories from the past – re-experience the feelings and emotions
- **watch funny movies**
- **do silly things** that make your spouse smile or laugh
- **do fun things together** – painting, dancing, making something, swimming, skating, hiking, riding

The Joy Gap

The Joy Gap is the length of time since you last experienced joy with your spouse! The shorter the gap, the more joy you will have in your marriage and the healthier your marriage will become!!!

Start experiencing more joy in your marriage!

Dialogue Questions

1. Where is our Joy Gap right now? How does that make me feel? Then exchange your answers and talk about ways you can shorten the time between joy with your spouse. Pick a new target and start shortening your Joy Gap!

2. List 10 things that you want to start doing to shorten your Joy Gap. How does that make you feel?

Fun Night Ideas

1. Look at some old pictures of when you were dating or first married. Talk about the experiences and how that makes you feel as you relive them with your spouse. Then celebrate your marriage and go out to one of your favorite places for a special dessert together!

2. Plan a fun night for just the two of you where you focus on doing something fun together that you don't often do. Give your full undivided attention to each other.