

1st November 2021 Couples Talk Takeaways

Surviving or Thriving? A walk through the different seasons of love with Jan & Gary Palmer

There are recognised phases or trends in relationships.

These phases often follow a pattern like this (although they are not always in this order):

Romantic phase - What drew us together, how it was in the beginning. You can overlook each other's failings because you're in love!

Adjustment phase – when the disappointments and annoying habits become the focus and we don't feel as close together

Stability phase – following the adjustment phase, you are committed and there is mutual respect. You feel secure in the relationship and are reasonably close. But, you can also feel taken for granted and boredom can creep in.

Challenging phase – you may feel resentful or angry. You may argue more and feel your opinions don't matter. In this phase it's easy to fill the void with other things such as hobbies, kids, other friendships. This is when you are at risk of growing apart and rejecting each other.

Growing phase – you learn to accept your partner, warts and all. You can talk openly about anything. You can adapt to change and overcome challenges. You share common goals and dreams, loyalty and commitment. You feel stronger and closer together.

For more information and for help in navigating these phases, take a look at the Toucan Together app Growing module. <https://toucantogether.com>

Jan & Gary's experiences over 38 years, through all the above phases, have taught them a lot. They have shared with us some things that have helped them to thrive rather than just survive those years and move from the challenging phase into the growing phase. We have included some reflection questions for you to look at together as a couple.

1. **Always have a vision for what we would like our relationship to be in 10 or 20 years' time.**

It can be helpful to look far ahead and know where you are going. This can then shape our immediate actions as well as longer term ones.

So if our long term aim is for a romantic / deep relationship with our partner, where we are still growing together then we need to make sure it's happening now. Letting go of that vision in the nitty gritty of daily life can result in just hanging on to a relationship, rather than enjoying it.

Q: What is our vision for our relationship for the next 5, 10, 20 years? What do we need to change or start now in order to be in that place in the future?

2. Finding stuff we can do together for example:

- Projects – practical things, building, creating, renovating, making music
- Time away - spending quality time as a couple and as a family - making memories.
- Serving together outside the home - Youth work, community opportunities
- Work together with organisations that will keep us focussed on our relationship
e.g. TOUCAN
- Running Events in our home/ street
- Adventures: take on new things like dancing...

Q: *What do we like doing together? Thinking outside the box, what new thing could we try?*

3. Freeing each other to do life-giving things apart for example

- Breaks away with special friends.
- Retreats
- Encourage each other in activities that are helpful to the relationship when done separately e.g. sports - where they bring value back to the relationship as a result of stress being reduced / having something to talk about.

Q: *How can I help my spouse to feel free to pursue something he/she likes doing?*

4. Not allowing our kids to drive a truck through the middle of our relationship by playing us off against each other!

- Try to be aligned on discipline
- Support each other in it
- Talk about the tensions (away from the children)

Q: *If you have children, which areas of parenthood do we need to be more united in?*

5. Date nights

- where we commit time to being alone together and focus on us.
- Make it a regular scheduled event in our diaries
- Take turns to choose the venue / activity
- Make them times when we can choose to talk about anything and be vulnerable with each other (it might be good to agree NOT to talk about the children)

Q: *Are we doing this regularly? If not, what hinders us? What changes do we need to make to prioritise this?*

6. Respect each other

- Appreciate one another - an attitude of gratitude is a gift to our partner
- Tell our partner what we respect about them
- Always speak well of our partner in-front of other people.

Q: *Do I show respect to my partner? How can I do this more? In what ways do they feel respected or disrespected?*

7. Don't try to change the other person

- Accept them - I am the only person that I can change.
- Finding faults with each other is draining and a way of avoiding confronting our own blind spots.
- Let their faults go.

Q: Do I love my partner unconditionally? Am I trying to make them someone they are not? What things do I need to 'bear with'? What things do we need to address?

8. Deal with conflict

- If conflict arises take the issue away initially, reflect on our own part in it, pray, talk to God about it, deal with the wrong attitudes in ourselves (perhaps the need to be right, to have the last word, or to change the other person)
- Decide whether this is a suck it up moment or whether there is a genuine need to air feelings and address something together.
- See the Conflict module within TOUCAN for more on this key area.

Q: How do we deal with conflict well? Where do we need to improve?

9. Make sure we both have close friends who do life with you in a positive way.

- These are the people who will ask us about your marriage and challenge our behaviour, even when we don't want to hear it
- Women are often naturally better at this.
- Men often need to make more effort and be proactive in this area.

Q: How can I encourage my partner to nurture these kinds of friendships?

10. A shared commitment to Faith can really help

- Consider investigating faith with an open mind.
- Find and test the facts around Jesus - who he was, what he did
- Work through the implications of those facts if they are true -with the potential of a relationship with God and doing life with Him rather than without Him
- There are positive knock ons for our relationship with our partner

Q: Have I considered including God in my life? How might this help me and our relationship?

11. How faith helps

- When we each pray to that same God and give him a central role, we gain a common purpose and a common set of values, which is very powerful.
- Knowing that God loves each of us unconditionally takes away the expectation that one partner has to meet all the needs of the other partner for love and acceptance. It is simply not possible for a person to do this... only God can.
- Praying together, searching out what the Bible says about things, commitment to attend church together each week; these things are so significant, and many things naturally flow from them, including how we use our financial resources, supporting people, and serving on teams inside and outside church.

Q: If you are Christians: Do we regularly pray together? Do we involve God in our decision-making? What can we do together to serve others?

12. God there in the tough stuff:

- When the tough stuff does come along, knowing that God is there with us and will always be there, even when we are struggling with the circumstances, He moves through them with us and gives us the strength we need.
- **Jan and Gary concluded that 'This might seem alien to some, but it is the one thing that HAS MADE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE to us and keeps us moving away from surviving and towards thriving in our relationship.'**

Q: *Are there challenges in our life where we have hit a wall? Consider involving God in that Challenge.*

Useful Links:

For more great FamilyLife resources:

<https://familylifeuk.org>

For Toucan Together and to explore the **different phases** of relationship in more detail, download the free Toucan Together app:

<https://toucantogether.com>

Finding a counsellor:

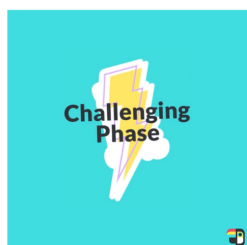
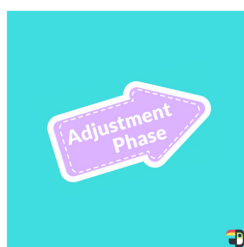
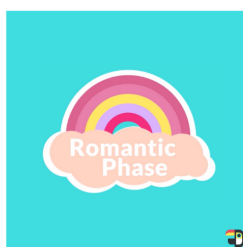
<https://familylifeuk.org/help-for-you/find-a-counsellor/>

To learn more about the Christian faith:

<https://www.everyperson.com>

To find out how to know God personally:

<https://familylifeuk.org/wp-content/uploads/Knowing-God-Personally-FamilyLife-digital-version.pdf>



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