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# LIFESIGNS INSIGHTS®

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Research and insights from LifeSigns Partners, Inc.

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## FIVE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY MARRIAGES



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CONVERSATIONS THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE™

## FIVE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY MARRIAGES



### **What's different about a healthy marriage?**

And more importantly, what can you do to strengthen your marriage for the long run?

We compared LifeSigns data from thousands of marriages and found five major differences. We've listed them in order, from the smallest difference to the largest difference.

### **Difference #1 – People in healthy marriages have strong non-marital relationships.**

People with in the strongest marriages are 43% more likely to say they currently have non-marital relationships that feel safe where they can “go deep” and “talk about real life.” Specifically, they have relationships where it's possible to “be yourself without having to fake it or pretend everything is fine.”

No spouse, no matter how delightful and supportive, can meet all of your emotional needs. God created you to live in community, and He often uses relationships *outside* of your marriage to help you learn and grow. That's why isolating from others, especially when you're struggling in marriage, only makes matters worse. The more you feel like you have nowhere to turn—and that no one can relate—the deeper you'll sink into the pit of isolation. It's a vicious cycle.

### **Difference #2 – People in healthy marriages have a “best friend.”**

Proverbs says, “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (Proverbs 17:17). And who hasn't experienced “times of adversity” in marriage?

Couples in the strongest marriages we measured are 67% more likely to say they have a “best friend” than those in the group of weakest marriages. In LifeSigns, we describe a best friend as “someone you can call at midnight, who asks you the tough questions, laughs at your jokes, pays for lunch, and would tell you about a blind spot.”

You need someone, of the same sex, who will listen to your tale of woe, point you back to Jesus, and still love you in the morning.

### **Difference #3 – People in healthy marriages are also in a healthy small group.**

We're not just talking about any small group. The key factor here is a healthy small group. People with the strongest marriages are 140% more likely to be in a healthy small group. Said differently, they're more than twice as likely to be in a small group that is safe, intimate, and deeply committed to doing life together.

If you've spent much time in a small group, you know it's filled with people whose marriages are imperfect too. That alone can be encouraging. Believe it or not, your marriage struggles are not unique. Others are struggling too.

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### Difference #4 – People in healthy marriages serve and give.

This one may surprise you. The LifeSigns data shows that those in the strongest marriages are *twice* as likely to serve in ministry on a weekly basis and *three times* as likely to give financially at a level they “feel good about.”



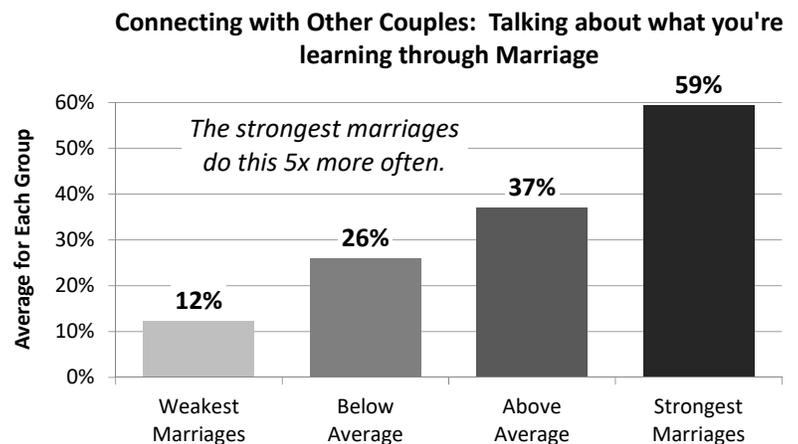
As usual, the Bible sheds some much needed light on this topic. Proverbs says, “A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed” (Proverbs 11:25). Serving fills your tank and recalibrates your compass. Serving is a powerful antidote to your natural inclination towards selfishness. What spouse wouldn’t benefit from a mate whose heart is refreshed, renewed, and recalibrated to be more others oriented?

Serving others will teach you how to better serve your spouse.

### Difference #5 – People in healthy marriages talk to other couples about their marriage issues.

Here’s what we know from the LifeSigns data: Those in healthy marriages are 500% more likely talk with other couples about what God is teaching them *through* marriage (see graph below).

The more you hurt, the more you’ll tend to hide. But hiding never works. Peter reminds us, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). Becoming known to another couple frees you from the prison of isolation and opens the floodgates of God’s grace. Plus, it allows another couple to learn from your experiences, to hold you accountable, and to share what they’ve learned through marriage. It’s a win-win scenario.



So here’s the question: *What would it take for you and your spouse to have this type of candid conversation with another couple? Who would you ask?*

### The Bottom Line?

A healthy, intimate marriage doesn’t just happen by osmosis. Don’t believe the myth: If you find the right person—a soul mate—then you’ll experience wedded bliss, free from conflict or pain. That’s not realistic. Whether your spouse is highly compatible or not, a strong marriage is the product of focused time and effort, close non-marital relationships, and genuine humility—all grounded in the redeeming work of Christ.