

Marriage Improvement

Some of this content is adapted from outlines by David Pratte at http://www.gospelway.com/family/marriage_improvement.php

Loving Our Spouse

1 John 4:7-9 (ESV) ⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

Ephesians 5:25,28 - Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Titus 2:4 - Wives are commanded to love their husbands.

I. Love Requires Giving and Sacrifice.

A. Giving of self is the essence of love.

John 3:16 - God so loved the world that He *gave* His only-begotten Son.

Ephesians 5:25 - Jesus loved the church and *gave* Himself for it.

1 John 3:17 (NKJV) ¹⁷But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Romans 12:20 (NKJV) ²⁰Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

B. The decision to act properly and lovingly toward our spouse should not depend on how our spouse acts, let alone on how a mood hits us.

1. The selfish person doesn't want to give in or sacrifice. They want to please self.

C. Giving and sacrifice is especially essential in solving conflict.

1. We are to give up our own desires for the good of others, even when they are not acting the way we think they should.
2. **James 4:1 (ESV)** ¹What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions (pleasures) are at war within you?
3. **James 3:13-18 (ESV)** ¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
 - a. Don't say, "I'll do right or change my ways if he/she will too."
 - b. Love requires us to **admit our mistakes**, even if no one else does.
 - c. "Why don't we work on this **together**? What can I do to help?"

II. Love Is A Verb - To Be Expressed in Both Word and Action.

1 John 3:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him;

Kind words are important, but not sufficient.

A. Couples should show love in how they treat one another respectfully.

1 Peter 3:1-7 (ESV) ¹Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives— ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing— ⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. ⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. ⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you^Ɛ of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1. We love by showing common politeness and decency, not condescension.
2. We love by considering our spouse’s judgments and viewpoints.

B. Couples should show love by being affectionate.

1 Corinthians 7:3-4 (NKJV) ³Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

1. Couples need to learn that sexual affection is just the culmination of other forms of affection. Without other forms of affection, sexual union is hollow, lacking beauty and meaning. When a couple is affectionate throughout the day, sexual affection has true beauty.
2. You say, "I'm just not an affectionate person. My parents were never affectionate, either." Then **choose to change!** It may be harder for you, but love is a choice not a mood. We express respect and affection **by choice**.

III. Love Denies Self for the Well-being of Others.

A. When one or both companions selfishly insist on their own way, problems are inevitable in the family.

Ephesians 5:25, 28-29 (NKJV) ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and **gave Himself for her**,

1 Corinthians 13:5 - Love does not **seek its own** (is not selfish).

Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV) ³Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Romans 13:10 (NKJV) ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.

B. Selfishness shows in major and minor ways.

1. The husband is lazy and irresponsible and won't work to provide for the family.
2. The wife is lazy and irresponsible and won't care properly for the house and the children.
3. The husband spends money on the things he wants while the wife and children have to go without.
4. The husband treats his wife like a slave. He sits in front of the TV saying, "I need a sandwich. Can you get me a Coke? How about some pretzels." He would be furious if she made similar demands of him.
5. Or the wife has a list of work for the husband to do around the house and gets mad when he watches TV. But while he goes to work she watches TV, reads romance novels, stays on Facebook for hours, or visits with friends, neglecting her own work.

C. Concerns about selfish behavior should be resolved before marriage. Don't marry a person thinking you will change them.

1. If we know a person has habits or character issues that reflect a selfish or immoral nature, resolve it before marriage or don't marry the person.
2. **Don't try to change a person by *dating* them.** You might become emotionally attached, and once you are married you are committed for life. Instead of agreeing to date them, explain your concerns and encourage them to study and talk with stronger, older Christians of their own gender. They must change, not because they know you want them to change, but because God requires it and changing is the right thing to do. Otherwise, they may go through the motions of change just to please you, and then revert to their bad behavior after marriage.
3. Or men think that once they get married and are the head of the family, the wife will have to change to please them. But a woman does not change her character just because you are the head of the family.

IV. Love is a Command and thus is a Choice of the Will.

A. Bible love is not primarily an emotion. It will result in emotions, but it itself results from the will.

1. Love can be commanded (Eph. 5:25), because it is **a matter of the will**.
2. "I just don't love her/him anymore." Have you repented? Have you confessed that sin to God and asked forgiveness?
3. When a marriage lacks love, we choose whether or not to put it in! And if we fail to put it in, we *sin*.

B. Couples can learn to love one another.

1. Young wives can be taught how to love their husbands and children (**Titus 2:4**).
2. Christ didn't love us because we were so loveable. He **chose** to give what we needed.

V. A key way to maintain love in marriage is to do the things that led you to first love one another!

This discussion involves judgment and wisdom, but harmonizes with Bible principles.

A. How do couples learn to love in the first place?

We know how to put love into a relationship. We did it before we were married. We do things to nourish love before marriage, then we get married and quit doing those things!

- Before marriage, the young man sends the girl gifts, flowers, cards.
- Before marriage, the young lady chooses her clothes, her perfume, her hair style deliberately to please him. After marriage, she says, "My girlfriends like this on me. If he doesn't like it, that's his problem."
- Before marriage, he takes time to listen to her.
- Before marriage, he shows politeness and respect: He holds the door for her, lets her go first, says "please" and "thank you"?
- Before marriage, he compliments her hair, her dress. He uses expressions of affection, tells her often how much she means to him.
- Before marriage, he goes places and does things with her.

We all know what cultivates love in a relationship. We did it before! Go back and act the way you acted that led you into love. Don't wait for feelings or special moods to strike you. Make a deliberate choice to do these things.

B. Many couples have excuses for why they don't do these things.

1. **"We don't have time."**

- a. Did you have time before marriage? Why did you have time then, but not now?
The answer is: You made the time, because it was important to you.
- b. Make an **appointment** once a week (at least) to spend time with your spouse.
- c. Once in a while take a few days to get away doing things together, talking, visiting, and just focusing on one another.
- d. Find someone to take the kids for an evening, trade babysitting with friends.
Make an appointment and don't break it except for absolute emergencies.

2. **"We can't afford it."**

- a. You can't afford not to.
- b. You don't have to spend a lot of money. Go for a walk in the park or the mall.
- c. What did you do and where did you go before you got married?
- d. The point is to spend time together.

3. **"We don't enjoy the same things."**

- a. She likes to shop, he can't stand to shop.
- b. He likes ball games, she can't stand ball games. Etc.
- c. When courting, you didn't insist that your spouse do only the things you wanted to do. Did you go shopping with her then? Do you go to ballgames with him then?
- d. If the object is to please the other person, to strengthen your relationship, and to show the other person you care, then find a way to do it.

4. **What is missing in all these excuses? What is the fundamental problem?** It's clear that he or she just isn't that important to you.

Adapted from <http://geraldrogers.com/marriage-advice-i-wish-i-would-have-had/> July 28, 2013

Marriage Advice I wish I would have had... After losing a woman that I loved, and a marriage of almost 16 years, here's the advice I wish I would have had...

NEVER STOP COURTING. *Ephesians 5:29 (NKJV)* ²⁹*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.*

Never stop dating. NEVER EVER take that woman for granted. You promised to be that man who would OWN HER HEART and fiercely protect it. This is the most important and sacred treasure you will ever be entrusted with. SHE CHOSE YOU. Never forget that, and NEVER GET LAZY in your love.

ALWAYS SEE THE BEST IN HER. *1 Cor. 13:7* – *“Love... bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

Focus on what you love about her. If you focus on what bugs you, all you will see is reasons to be bugged. If you focus on what you love, you will know without a doubt that you are the luckiest man on earth to be have this woman as your wife.

TAKE FULL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR YOUR OWN HAPPINESS: *Romans 12:18 (NKJV)* ¹⁸*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

It's not your wife's job to make you happy, and she CAN'T make you sad. You are responsible for finding your own happiness. Never blame your wife If YOU get frustrated or angry at her. They are YOUR emotions, and your responsibility.

BE SILLY... don't take yourself too seriously. *Proverbs 17:22 (NKJV)* ²²*A merry heart does good, like medicine, But a broken spirit dries the bones.*

Laugh. Make her laugh. Laughter makes everything else easier.

ALLOW HER TO BE SAD OR UPSET. *1 Cor. 13:4* – *“Love suffers long and is kind;”*

Do not be quick to express irritation or frustration at her emotions, and do not always try to fix it. It's your job to HOLD HER and let her know it's ok. Let her know that you hear her, and that she's important to you. Stand present and strong and let her know and that you are that pillar on which she can always lean and that you aren't going anywhere.

FORGIVE IMMEDIATELY. *Colossians 3:12-13 (NKJV)* ¹²*...put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

Focus on the future rather than carrying weight from the past. Don't let your history hold you hostage. Holding onto past mistakes that either you or she makes is like a heavy anchor to your marriage and will hold you back.

BE PRESENT. *1 Peter 3:7 (NASB)* ⁷*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

Give her not only your time, but your focus and your attention. Do whatever it takes to clear your head so that when you are with her you are fully WITH HER. Treat her as you would your most valuable client. She is.

DON'T BE AN IDIOT. *Proverbs 11:29 (NKJV)* ²⁹*He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, And the fool will be servant to the wise of heart.*

You will make mistakes and so will she. Try not to make too big of mistakes, and learn from the ones you do make. You're not supposed to be perfect, just try to not be too stupid.

CHOOSE LOVE. Always choose love. Always, always choose love. In the end, this is the only advice you need.