

603 How Can I Improve My Marriage

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

A young woman comes into a preacher's office and sits down with a heart-breaking story filled with tears and regret. She says, "I don't know what went wrong. We used to love each other so much, and now all we do is fight. He gets mad and takes off to his shop, and all I do is cry. We know what the Bible says about divorce, but we are both so unhappy. What can we do to get our marriage back and be happy again." The story she tells is familiar to every preacher and every marriage counselor. A recent Rutgers University study reveals that only one in four marriages today are happy after the first ten years. The other three have either ended in divorce or are unhappy. Marriages need God's help today!

Marriage is in decline in the United States. According to Linda Waite of the Institute of American Values, our culture sees marriage as optional, disposable, and redefinable. Cohabitation and out-of-wedlock childbearing are two of our fastest growing family configurations. Many people don't think marriage is all that important. Skyrocketing divorce rates say that "till death do us part" isn't part of their thinking. If the first marriage doesn't work, we trade it in on a new one and hope for better one. Some are even trying to re-define marriage as a union between two people of the same sex. In the 1950s 95 percent of all women married,

But today only 85 percent of women will marry. The number of cohabitating couples is increasing. As many as eight percent of all couples in America are living together without benefit of marriage. Nearly two-thirds of couples in America will live together before they marry. These kinds of statistics reveal that many Americans do not look on marriage the way they once did, as a sacred covenant of love and honor between a man and a woman. Honor in marriage has been the foundation of our society, and as that changes, it is not wonder that we are seeing so many social problems. My friends, our marriages matter to God and to our lives.

Linda Waite in her book, *The Case for Marriage*, reveals numerous benefits to the married person that the single or the cohabiting person misses. Marriage reduces the risk that adults or children will perpetrate or be victims of violent crime. Married women are less depressed, children in homes with intact marriages achieve better grades, and married men earn between 10 and 40 percent more income than single men. Married people live longer and are usually healthier than their single counterparts. Marriage blesses society and is important to the common good. This is why the breakdown of marriage has hurt our country so very much.

When God teaches us about the home, marriage, and family, He is giving us the life that will bless and help us. God's laws are never a curse or burdensome to those who will lovingly follow them; rather they are a blessing, because we have such a wise God to guide us. Surely marriage is better than fornication. Surely the keeping of vows between two people who love each other is better than the insecurity of just living together. Sometimes people think God's ways have failed. Marriage as God ordained it hasn't failed; people fail to live it as He planned it and so fail to gain the blessed He planned for it. For those who love God and each other

Marriage is very much alive and filled with all the joy and love that God ordained for it. People can and do have good marriages when they practice the things God teaches. When two people marry, it is God who makes them one. Just as He united Adam and Eve, so He unites couples today. Marriage is God's idea to bring security, honor, and integrity to mankind. There is still nothing more beautiful than a man and a woman loving each other for an entire lifetime, through all the challenges and heartaches. How can two people

improve their marriage and be what God intended? The answer is in getting back to the basics of Christianity with your spouse.

First, the happiest homes are those right with the Lord. The most important decision anyone makes is to become a Christian. Not a Christian in name only, but a genuine Christian committed to the Lord and to His teaching. A genuine Christian truly loves the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. A true Christian will take his marriage and his family seriously. He will do everything in his power to make the marriage work as it should. He will be a better husband, she will be a better wife, because they are close to God. When God's heart becomes your heart, you will live honestly, openly and lovingly with your mate.

Part of being a Christian means you want your spouse also to be a faithful and committed Christian. When both husband and wife are committed Christians, then marriages are more likely to be happy, according to the National Survey of Marital Strengths. Sharing their faith and their values unites couples. It helps them to become a team, rather than two independent people who happen to live together. Faith in God helps two people to unite in their values, their goals, and their decisions in life. When God is deeply a part of your home, your home will transform into a place where love, joy, peace, patience, and forgiveness abounds.

Second, couples should take some time every day to pray together. When couples pray together before God they find one of the great secrets of harmony. They express their hearts in humility and in gratitude before a loving God. In prayer together they are both in each other's presence seeking the will of God. They are each confessing faults and asking forgiveness. Before God they are softened in heart, regretting the harsh things they have said or done. In prayer before a God who knows all and sees all, the two can open their hearts and lives and be honest with each other. When people pray together, they say "we" and not "I." They feel a wonderful connection with their mate. Prayer unites them in their requests to the Father for their home, their children, and their lives. Prayer reminds both parties of their commitment to the other, to God, and to what is right. Prayer keeps spouses from reacting sinfully to each other. Praying together helps keep down conflicts, anger, and disagreements expressed toward each other. When a man and woman stand together at the foot of the cross and pour out their hearts together, there is a marvelous spiritual intimacy and bond that grows between them unlike any other bond. If you are not praying with your spouse, start doing it today.

Third, husbands and wives should worship and be involved together at church. When husbands and wives are active together at church, they share wonderful experiences of serving and blessing the lives of others. In Acts 18, it was Aquila and Priscilla who showed Apollos the "way of the Lord more perfectly." Together they taught him about the Lord Jesus, hosted the church in their home, and joined Paul in writing to the church at Corinth. This loving, spiritual couple were so close you always read their names together. It was not his and hers; it was their faith, their commitment to the cause of Christ that made them spiritually one.

Fourth, loving couples who stay together have a skill that every couple needs. Loving couples differ and get frustrated. They sometimes are irritated and angry, just as others are. But they have learned from their faith the skill of reconciliation—making friends again. They have learned how to say, "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Please forgive me," and "I love you and I forgive you." They have learned

the skill of apologizing and forgiving. We are all human and do wrong things. All of us need forgiving by our spouses. Good marriages reconcile. As Eph. 4:26 says, they “do not let the sun go down upon their anger.” They settle every problem that day.

Some problems are little, like leaving the cap off the toothpaste or forgetting to hang up a towel; but other problems can pierce the heart. Because we know how much, how many sins, God has forgiven us, we can forgive too. We forgive others because we are God’s children and want to be like Him. Paul said in Ephesians 4:31-32, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” When husbands and wives treat each other the way that God has treated them, they will find a better relationship.

Forgiveness is not the same thing as forgetting or ignoring a sin. Forgiveness is “forgetting against.” That is, you know the transgression happened but you do not hold it against the person you have forgiven. You don’t bring it up or throw it in his face, and he or she has repented and promised never to do it again. The relationship is healed by this process and made even stronger by the knowledge that love is able to overcome what hurts may come about. Peter rightly said “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and Endures all things. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:7-8). Patient, enduring love is able to forgive and not quit when things get rough. That’s what every marriage needs.

Fifth, Paul said in Ephesians 5:22-33, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

God wants husbands to love their wives, and wives to respect their husbands. Husbands should love and cherish their wives as their own bodies, even when their wives are not respectful or submissive. And wives are to respect and submit to their husbands as to the Lord, even when he is not loving. When husbands truly love and wives truly respect, life functions the way God intended it. But when either begins to stray from God’s will, the marriage will find itself losing its

strength. God’s ways work! We will realize that, if and when we are willing to practice them. You can make your home the sweetest, happiest place, if you will let God help you.

You can’t shut God out of your life and expect to have joy and lasting love. Why not let God’s teaching help you build your home into a place of joy and comfort, a place of love and security, a place where openness and honesty bring forgiveness and reconciliation, and a place where there is true peace. You can find that peace when you truly put the Lord first in your life, your mate second, and yourself last. If you have not put the Lord first, I hope you’ll do that today. Belief in Him, repent, confess His name and be baptized to be saved. If you haven’t been to church in a while, why not start back today. Let God in your life!

The poet Sam McAlley wrote this touching poem about marriage.

“Just days before my wedding, my grandpa called to me.
He said, “Son, I got something to tell you.”
So I listened patiently.

Now grandpa loved my grandma for fifty years and more.
They had the kind of marriage that I was looking for.
Grandpa didn’t say much, but he meant just what he said.
So I really paid attention for what was up ahead.

“Tend the garden of your home son; make it the best that it can be.
Ev’ryday make her feel special; treat her kind and tenderly.
Don’t let the weeds of bitterness grow up wild within your heart.
Tend the garden of your home, son; and you’ll never grow apart.”

I tried to do what grandpa said, and it worked so well for me
That when my boys get married, I hope they listen patiently.
My grandpa’s words ring loud and clear, I hope they won’t forget.
Their home is what they make it, and the future isn’t set.
I won’t say much to my boys, but I mean just what I say.
I hope they’ll pay attention, like I did on grandpa’s day.

“Tend the garden of your home son; make it the best that it can be.
Ev’ryday make her feel special; treat her kind and tenderly.
Don’t let the weeds of bitterness grow up wild within your heart.
Tend the garden of your home, son;
and you’ll never grow apart.”

Good marriages are made one day at a time, where two people who love God and love each other keep out the bitter things, and keep their love fresh and alive. When two Christians love each other, respect each other, and forgive each other, they have the kind of marriage that the whole world is looking for. I hope you will take to heart the things we have discussed and work hard to make your home the very best that it can be. Don’t wait on your spouse. Take the initiative to make your home the kind of place that the Lord will bless.

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