

Five Tips for a Healthy Marriage

By Daniel Cherry

God designed us for community. In the very beginning He declared “[It is not good for man to be alone.](#)” ([Genesis 2:18](#)) So when He created humanity, God made man and woman to come together in marriage and create community together – “[Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.](#)” ([Genesis 1:28](#)) At the foundation of every strong society of human people are healthy and productive marriages.

However, no marriage is easy – they all take a lot of work. The happy, healthy couples that you see in public are the results of some really challenging times, difficult conversations and healthy habits that you don’t see in public. Every building you see is supported by a foundation you don’t see.

God not only designed us for community, He gave us the Bible as a manual on how to build it. The following five tips are Biblically instructed habits of healthy couples; habits that you may not see in public, but that contribute to their strength, longevity and happiness.

Marriage Tip #1 – Listen

“...[Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.](#)” ([James 1:19](#))

Two ears, one mouth – not an accident. This is powerful for marriage. Listen, not just to words, but to your spouse’s heart. “[Slow to become angry](#)” means don’t react. Reacting is an emotional response and rarely helpful. Instead listen, learn and put yourself in your spouse’s position so you can thoughtfully respond. Good listening requires asking questions; not accusing questions, but sincere questions. Fight the urge to respond until your spouse agrees that you understand his/her perspective. Good listening communicates love and protection and builds trust.

If you are struggling in your marriage, be assured, you are not alone. Every relationship goes through challenging times. That’s when it is vital to have some difficult conversations, building the habit of listening. When deeply listening becomes the norm in a marriage, that couple will be much better equipped to stand together in the storms.

In my ministry experience, the most frequent major marriage problem I see is the failure to truly listen – for understanding, not for ammo. So, Listen.

Marriage Tip #2 – Be First

What?! Didn’t Jesus say the first are last? ([Matthew 20:16](#)). The key is, be first in the right things. In [Luke 14:8-11](#), Jesus taught us to be first to show humility. This is gold for marriage!

Be first to say “I’m sorry.” When an argument becomes emotional, winning can be elevated above our spouse. Whether “right” or “wrong”, the first to deescalate with an apology wins!

“I’m sorry for getting angry. You’re more important to me than this argument.” Try it. Mean it. You win.

Be first to say “I love you.” Like oil in an engine – it makes everything run smoother. Say it often and mean it. Prove it by your actions. In the morning, be first - before you leave the house, when you come home, if you’ve done something wrong. Be first – you win.

Be first to say something kind. Sarcastic humor, like radiation, burns deeper than we know. For some, it’s difficult to compliment others. Showing genuine appreciation can even feel vulnerable. But encouraging words of kindness and appreciation are like good vitamins that build deeper healthier and stronger relationships. Practice. Be first – you win.

Being first to humbly apologize and express love and kindness makes every relationship better. In fact, being first in the right things is what Jesus meant by being last. Basically, be first to be last. It sounds simple. If you make it a competition, it is. Be first – your family wins.

Marriage Tip #3 – Maximize and Minimize

Working with many couples over the years and counseling with many marriages I have noticed certain patterns that commonly develop in these relationships. One common destructive pattern in couples with struggling marriages is a tendency to harmfully maximize and minimize. However, a quick flip of the script can make a world of difference!

Destructive maximizing and minimizing happens when one person maximizes the faults of his/her spouse and minimizes their own faults. In [Romans 2:1](#), Paul pointed out that fellow Christians were doing this; judging others for the same things they were doing! This makes reconciliation between two people almost impossible. One or both spouses begin to develop bitterness and a superiority complex which drives a deadly wedge between them.

But Jesus told us to get the plank out of our own eye before tending to the speck in someone else’s. ([Matthew 7:5](#)) This is flipping the script. The key is to maximize the good traits in our spouse and minimize their faults. If you are going to maximize faults, make sure they are your own defects. Seek the positive in others and shower your spouse with compliments rather than complaints.

“But you don’t know my spouse.” I may not, but I do know human nature. And we are prone to downplay our own flaws as a defense mechanism. Jesus does know your spouse and died for his/her failings – and yours.

When we flip the script on maximizing and minimizing, it opens up appreciation and communication which leads to reconciliation.

Marriage Tip #4 – Love and Respect

A popular marriage book written about 20 years ago has shaped the way many Christians think about marriage. The book, *Love and Respect* addresses “The Love She Most Desires” and “The

Respect He Desperately Needs.” Desperately? Really? The premise of this book by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs is that, in marriage, women prefer love over respect and men prefer respect over love. This seems to align nicely with [Ephesians 5:22](#) and [25](#). Wives submit to your husbands’ authority, and husbands submit to your wives through sacrificial love.

There are some helpful lessons in this book. For example, Dr. Eggerichs describes a harmful cycle where, without love, the woman reacts by disrespecting her husband. When he is disrespected, he reacts by being unloving which leads her to react by showing less respect.

But with the helpful lessons, I think some have gotten the wrong idea that a man doesn’t really need to be loved. And an equally (or more) dangerous misapplication is that a woman doesn’t really need to be respected. My observation is that a woman who is disrespected will also likely react negatively. And a man who is unloved will feel rejected.

Here is the kicker, everyone wants to be loved and respected. Do you want a thriving, healthy and satisfying marriage?

Respect each other – Honor each other’s boundaries. Seek each other’s input. Never talk negatively about each other to anyone.

And

Love each other – Put each other first. Seek what pleases each other and do that to the best of your ability. Sacrifice your selfishness for each other’s sake. Say “I love you” and demonstrate it daily.

God’s word tells us to “[love one another](#)” ([John 13:34](#)). He also instructs men to show your wives respect and honor. ([1 Peter 3:7](#))

Consistently Respecting *and* Loving your spouse will pay the long-lasting dividends of a strong, satisfying and productive marriage.

Marriage Tip #5 – Invest in *Quantity* time over *Quality* Time

“[\[Make\] the most of every opportunity...](#)” ([Ephesians 5:16](#))

We instinctively know that “Life is short”, “Seize the day”, “Make every moment count. These popular sayings illustrate our acceptance of time’s scarcity. Time is a precious and limited commodity. There will be a last time for everything; the last conversation, fishing trip, vacation, opportunity to say I love you, worship service, breath, etc.

So we talk about making “quality” time in our relationships. We plan moments to be special and full of significance. But with the people we love, sometimes the “quality” times we plan end up falling flat. The car breaks down, a kid gets sick, it rains, we get in an argument...

Here is a truth that will not change in relationships: Quality time comes from Quantity time. We can’t artificially contrive quality time. Instead, the most precious moments happen in the unplanned circumstances; driving to the hardware store, sitting in a boat, eating a meal at

home, sitting on the couch, playing frisbee in the back yard, laying sick in bed needing special care, etc. A random question begins an unexpectedly deep conversation on the fly. A look of recognition is exchanged. An appreciation for an act of service – and in a moment that moment becomes precious.

Quality time without Quantity time feels like abandonment and manipulation. But prioritizing Quantity over Quality time feels like love and leads to some amazing, impactful moments of the highest Quality.

Rather than putting stock in Quality moments, pour your efforts into making Quantity time. Be home, be together, serve together, work together, play together, relax together, pray together. Life is short and time is a limited commodity. Therefore, invest as much of it as possible in what and who are most important – and Quality moments will spring up when you least expect them.

So, there they are. These five tips or habits don't sum up the whole of what it means to pursue a healthy, happy and godly marriage. However, God's word teaches these firm principles for relationships. And my experience has shown me that the healthiest marriages have mastered these five habits behind the scenes. Spend enough time with the couples whose relationships you admire most and you will find a strong commitment to these actions.

- 1. Listen**
- 2. Be First**
- 3. Maximize and Minimize**
- 4. Love *and* Respect**
- 5. Invest in *Quantity* time over *Quality* Time**

May God bless you as you build community that honors Him. And may you find health, satisfaction and holiness in your relationships.

No marriage will reach its full potential unless Jesus Christ is at the center of it. Please contact us and let us know how we can encourage you in your faith, in your marriage and in your life. Let us walk beside you on God's amazing journey of Christian discipleship that we may continue to "[spur one another on toward love and good deeds.](#)" (Hebrews 10:24)

Many Blessings,
Daniel

<https://JenksChurchofChrist.com>
850-763-5661
Office@jenkschurchofchrist.com