

10 Things I've Learned After 26 Years of Marriage

Recently, my wife, Donna, and I celebrated our 26th wedding anniversary. We've been together for 30 years, since our first date on Aug. 13, 1983. That's a long time together by today's standards.

Here are 10 things I've learned about marriage and relationships along the way:

1. Marriage is worth the investment. Yes, it is an investment. I know that it is not always easy, but it is always worth it. I'm thankful for a strong marriage.

2. You have to invest in a marriage for it to be worth the investment. It sounds strange, but it's true: It takes continual investment on the investment. I've seen "perfect" couples—like some we knew in high school and college—get married, drift apart and end up divorced. We did not. It's not because we are perfect; it's because we work hard.

3. Choosing your marriage partner is the most important human decision you will ever make. I've seen many, many miserable marriages. And a big part of that relates to bad marriage choices. My wife was and is beautiful, but that's a really bad foundation upon which to build a marriage.

4. Most fights are over stupid things that don't matter. When I was younger, I always wanted to prove my point. It's more important to prove your love. You do that by not arguing over stupid things. Note: Most arguments are over stupid things.

5. Most arguments are resolved when both people are more concerned with being in a relationship than with being right. I'm amazed at how many times I thought I was right. I had to be right. I had to show her I was right. And let me say,

that's just wrong. It's dumb. And it does not work.

6. Sex is essential to a marriage relationship. It's not everything, but when you value and prioritize it, your intimacy impacts your relationship. Yet sex does not just happen. It, too, is something you work at. It's fun to do the work, though!

7. Practices (like date nights, long conversations and trips together) make your marriage stronger. Some of these are essential—you need a regular date night if you are married. If you can't afford dinner, you can walk in a park. You won't have a strong marriage if you don't act like you are married.

8. Kids are awesome but stress your marriage. I'm a pretty obsessive parent. I love my kids. I spend time with them. They are a treasure. But they also make marriage more complicated and stressful. Kids should know that your marriage is your first priority. The most important thing you can pass on to your children might not be what you give them but the marriage you show them.

9. Never go to bed angry. Yes, that's true for everyone, according to Ephesians 4:26, but stretching an argument into two days usually leads to stretching it longer. Then bitterness sets in. However, you can't really settle most arguments if you are not willing to just say, "Well, we can't agree, but we can forgive and move on." (See number 5.)

10. You need Jesus. I started dating Donna because of her faith. She had shared her faith with the girls in her neighborhood, came to the Bible study I was leading in high school, and loved the Lord deeply. She still does. When we put Jesus at the center, everything else revolves around Him well.

I really love being married. Without a strong marriage, everything else in my life suffers. And I am well aware that such a marriage is not always so easy for many couples.

However, I learned that in our marriage, I was the cause of many of the challenges and conflicts. Donna was the cure.

Either way, we have learned a lot. We are still learning. But maybe you can be encouraged by our experience.

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