

3 Simple Ways to Keep Your Marriage Strong

I received a letter once from a lady who was struggling in her marriage. She wrote:

“Dear Pastor Rick,

“When I first fell in love with my husband I was sure, absolutely sure that he was the right person for me. But over the years as we’ve lived together through a lot of messy situations, I’ve seen many sides of my husband that I don’t like. My feelings toward him have turned from respect and attraction to disappointment and sometimes even disgust. I now feel like maybe I married the wrong person. Why do I feel this way and what can I do about it? Something has to change.”

If you’re in ministry, you know that this story is all too common. But having mentored and trained thousands of pastors, I can also say that it’s all too common among ministry marriages. And one of the reasons we read about so many moral failures among ministry leaders today is that we’ve failed to keep our marriages strong and to make them the priority over ministry. Success at home is way more important than success in professional or ministry leadership.

The Bible has a couple of things to say about that that are very important. Proverbs 24:3 says, “Homes are built on the foundation of wisdom and understanding.” Paul prays in Philippians 1:9, “I pray that your love will keep on growing because of your knowledge and insight.” It takes wisdom and understanding to keep your marriage growing, along with knowledge and insight. Marriages do not automatically grow—not even ministry marriages.

One dangerous assumption among ministry leaders is that being in ministry insulates and vaccinates you from the problems

that most marriages face. In fact, the opposite is true. You have a target on your back, as does your family, and being intentional matters.

Here are three practices for keeping your marriage strong:

1. Pay attention to your spouse. Attention means love. It's one of the most loving things you do when you give somebody your attention. When you're paying attention to somebody, you're saying to them, "I value you. You matter to me. You're worth listening to." When you give somebody your attention, you're actually giving them your life. Your time is your life, and you're never going to get that time back. The truth is, that's how you fell in love. You fell in love because you began to pay attention to somebody and somebody began to pay attention to you.

Do you remember how much attention you used to give to your husband or your wife before you got married? You bought flowers, wrote notes, made phone calls and talked for hours. You spent a lot of time together. In many, many ways during dating and engagement, you said, "You have my undivided attention." In fact, you thought about them all the time when you weren't with them.

Over time, we tend to pay less attention to our spouse rather than more attention. We start paying attention to things like bills and babies and budgets and ministry and work and hobbies and sports and all kinds of other things. When that happens, the marriage begins to deteriorate.

I show I care by staying aware. If your marriage is going to keep on growing, you've got to figure out a way to keep on paying attention to each other. If you don't do that, your marriage is going to start to crumble. You've got to keep on paying attention.

2. Show affection for your spouse. The Bible tells us in Romans 12 to "love each other with genuine affection and take

delight in honoring each other.” I’m sure you would all agree that it’s easier to fall in love than it is to stay in love. How do you rekindle lost love when the feelings aren’t there? How do you rekindle the affection you felt for each other at the beginning of your marriage?

You do what Jesus told a church to do. In the book of Revelation, Jesus told some Christians at the church of Ephesus, “You guys have lost your first love for Me. Here’s how you get your first love for Me back.” And He tells them four things to do. I’ve found that these are the same four things you need to do if you’ve lost the romantic feelings of affection for your husband or your wife.

The Bible says in Revelation 2, “Jesus said ‘The love you had at first is gone. Remember how far you have fallen. Return to Me. Change the way you think and act and do what you did at first.’” He says here four things: remember, return, repent, repeat.

3. Give affirmation to your spouse. One reason that you fell in love with your mate is they affirmed you. You fall in love with people who express the fact that they love you. Your mate desperately needs affirmation from you. One of your God-given roles as a husband is to be your wife’s greatest fan. It’s desperately needed in a world where there are a lot of critics. So one of the most important things that you do is you lift up your wife by affirmation.

How often are we supposed to do this? The Bible says in Hebrews 3:13, “Encourage each other every day while it is today.” It’s a daily habit, something we do everyday.

What do you affirm? Three things you can affirm in your spouse:

1. Affirm their value. You can raise someone else in value as you appreciate them. As you appreciate them, you raise their value and you raise the value of your marriage. Proverbs 12:25

says, "A word of encouragement does wonders."

2. You can also affirm each other's strengths. You build each other up. The power of praise, of seeing someone's strength and praising that strength, is amazing. All of us blossom with affirmation. That's how our lives are strengthened. We become what other people see in us. As you affirm those strengths, you help someone to grow.

3. You can also affirm each other's ministry. Affirm what you're doing for God's sake in the world today. Romans 1:12 says, "I want us to help each other with the faith that we have. Your faith will help me, and my faith will help you."

The most important thing you must do in order to keep your marriage growing is to keep on following Jesus. He is the glue. He is what holds you together when ministry gets hard and the demands get high. Pray with and for each other. James 5:16 says, "Make this your common practice. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed."

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