

How You Can Have a No-Regrets Marriage

Marriage is for our benefit here on earth. Marriage can sometimes seem endless and tedious, but it is temporary. And when it's over you will want to be able to look back without regrets.

Every now and then you see a story or video about a couple who was married for many decades and died in their 90s within minutes or hours of each other. Most of us, me included, will not be blessed with that experience. In most marriages, one spouse will precede the other in death by years or even decades.

In looking back at the years I was married, I'm grateful for the ways in which I loved my husband well. I also remember how hard it was on occasion to remember the "long view" during periods of fatigue, sickness or confusion. There are certainly things I wish I had done differently, though my regrets are few.

When your husband or wife dies, it's too late to love them well. Here are a few things I would encourage any married person to embrace, knowing you will want to look back at your marriage without regrets.

1. Say what needs to be said.

Hard conversations are hard! It's so much easier to let things slide. It takes courage to broach the difficult topics. That includes talking about things such as:

- What's important to you about death and final arrangements.
- Financial matters.
- Your and your spouse's eternal standing with God.

- Things you need to ask forgiveness for or forgive your spouse for.
- What you love and appreciate about each other.

These are not topics to get past in a one-and-done conversation; they are things to prayerfully and tenderly talk about at the right times. Choose the setting thoughtfully, study your spouse to know how they will be most able to hear you and be courageous in bringing up the painful or difficult topics. Do a lot of listening.

There will come a time when you will wish you had said what right now seems too difficult to say. I'm so very grateful for the hard conversations Al and I did have. There are more things I wish I would have said, but now I hold on to everything we *did* say to each other. Don't put these conversations off because they are hard. Hard and uncomfortable is better than too late!

2. Deal with your stuff.

You can only love your spouse well to the degree you have dealt with your own junk: habits, false messages, addictions, trauma, selfishness and so on. None of us is perfect! But becoming functional means your stuff is not in charge; you are.

If you've been through trauma in the past (and almost every one of us has been), intentionally seek healing so that your scars don't continue to wound your spouse. Do whatever it takes to deal with your addiction so your spouse is not victimized also. If pornography, anger, food addiction, people pleasing or anything else is an issue for you, get serious and get help if you need to. While you must do this for you, perhaps realizing how it will benefit your husband or wife will give added fuel to your motivation.

The Holy Spirit will continue to work on you as long as you live. But getting past your dysfunctions will dramatically

impact how well you can love your spouse. Do it now; that may be one of the best gifts you can give your husband or wife.

3. Love your spouse well.

That does not always mean being nice! It does mean being the person God needs you to be to your spouse in this season. As you get over your own stuff, you can do this better and better.

Be intentional. Take the time to pay attention. Study your spouse; who are they really? How are you showing up in your marriage? What's it like to be married to you? If your spouse were suddenly not there, would you be able to look back at the way you have been loving them and not have regrets?

Remember that both you and your spouse are sinners; those are the only humans available for marriage! In a healthy marriage God intends for both partners to find significant healing; are you being a vehicle of that healing for your spouse?

4. Say "I love you" often in both words and deeds. Don't make the mistake of thinking your words are enough if you sabotage or demean your spouse in other ways. And don't believe your spouse knows how you love them by your actions alone; they needs words as well. Love languages differ; it helps to know your individual love languages.

As the 6-year-old little girl said, "If you love someone, hurry up and show it!"

Love your spouse well while you can; you will be left with far few regrets.

Your Turn: *If your spouse were suddenly not there, what kind of regrets would you be left with? Few? Many? Is there anything you would like to change now? Leave a comment below.*

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This article originally appeared at .

Hear more about living without regrets in this podcast about Dr. Carol's grief following the loss of her husband.