

Putting Your Marriage in Its Place

When you get married, most people appropriately assume they will be No. 1 to their spouse. There's nothing like the heady days of being in love. Those days make you feel nothing could ever be more important than your marriage.

And yet a few months or years later, too often, your relationship has slipped down on your priority list. You unconsciously allow this to happen. And you wake up one day realizing what you thought would be the most important thing in your life forever is now just a shell of what you expected.

You may also feel stuck in a completely miserable marriage, where conflict, apathy and emotional walls have destroyed any real intimacy between you. Perhaps addiction, infidelity or abuse has taken over your marriage. How can it be possible to go on living, think clearly and experience any semblance of the life God has for you in that situation?

Putting marriage in its proper place in your priority list is important. It may have slipped too low on that list. But it's also possible that it's too high! Marriage only works when you hold it in its correct position among the various elements in your life.

Here's what should be both below and above your marriage on the list of what's most important to you.

Imposter Priorities

After you say "I do," life always happens. Children may come along. Career and business opportunities arise. Old habits and ways of relating won't go away. Here are some common imposters that may try to rise above your marriage on your priority list.

Children. Kids are insatiable. They will take up every single iota of time, energy, attention, money, brain space, prayer time and anything else you have available. You're a parent, and your kids depend on you—rightfully so.

But one day your kids will be gone. Will you still have a marriage? As important a job as parenting is, your marriage must come first. You must intentionally reserve brain space, energy, time, money and so on for your spouse. The security of a healthy marriage will be worth more to your kids than you realize. And your example of prioritizing your spouse even above your children will be invaluable for them when they establish their own home.

Parents. Sadly, many marriages have been wrecked when one or both spouses will not leave their family of origin—physically, financially and emotionally. Honoring your father and mother does not mean putting them above your spouse. If your allegiance to your parents is more important than your marriage, your relationship will not survive. Some parents make leaving more difficult than others, but you must do it anyway.

Leave your father and mother, and cleave to your spouse! (Gen. 2:24).

Success. Whether it looks like money or status or work or pleasure or friends, too many people have put some measure of success above their marriage. But when surveyed at the end of their lives, no one says they wished they had worked more hours or made more money. It's the personal relationships that matter most.

Determine to learn earlier rather than later that prioritizing your marriage over career or any other measure of success is the only way to go. Don't be one of those who only discovers this when it's too late.

The Right No. 1

Marriage can also become an idol. It's possible to sacrifice your own soul, your health or your relationship with God on the altar of your marriage. Because our need and desire for intimacy and connection are so strong, it's easy to slip into the false belief that if you give up everything else, your marriage will somehow satisfy your needs.

In a healthy marriage, many of your needs will be met. But regardless of the health of your marriage, only God is worthy of sitting on the throne of your life. In the places where your spouse is not able to meet your needs, God will. The things about you that your spouse doesn't understand, God does. When your marriage ends through death, divorce or miserable detente, God is the only one who will never leave.

You can tell what your priorities are by looking at your heart, your checkbook and your calendar. What do you think about most? What do you worry about? If a conflict develops between priorities, which one has your allegiance?

A healthy marriage does not happen by accident. It takes learning the important skills needed to love well, and constantly inviting the creator of marriage to remain No. 1.

Keeping God No. 1 doesn't mean super-spiritualizing away the necessary skills needed to love your spouse well. It doesn't mean trying to play junior Holy Spirit to your spouse. It *does* mean when everything else falls away, even your marriage, your relationship with God still stands.

Whether healthy or troubled, keep your marriage No. 2. That's the only place it works.

Your Turn: *Has your marriage slipped down on your priority list? Or have you made your marriage into an idol? Do you need to get your marriage back into its rightful place on your list of what's important? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at .