

Resolve to Get a Better Marriage in 2015

*Jenifer and I have been planning for months to start blogging together in order to give both male and female perspectives of common issues that families face. We will even tackle some difficult “conflicts” in the future. We’ve been through 25 years of marriage and family life, and we want to use our experience to provide help for the masses. Anyway, this is our first stab at a “he said/she said” blog. We hope it gets you thinking.

What’s Your New Year’s Resolution?

Typical New Year’s resolutions are about diet, fitness and general self-improvement stuff. While those things are worth looking into, we want to invite you to consider making a specific resolution that centers around getting a better marriage than the one you have now.

If your spouse has ever disappointed you (and what spouse hasn’t?), you have likely been tempted to dump him or her and find a new one. We invite you to consider a better option: Put the energy required to get a new spouse (the diet, fitness and self-improvement stuff mentioned earlier), and instead improve the marriage you currently have. We have provided some suggestions below—ideas for guys from Barrett and ideas for the ladies from Jenifer. In the spirit of getting a “different and better” marriage, we made our suggestions deliberately provocative. We hope a few of these make your list of resolutions for 2015.

Resolve to Get a Better Marriage

Resolution #1 for Husbands: Start a New Romance

Barrett: You know all those romantic things you did back in the day to “woo” your wife? Those things that you aren’t doing much of any more? You need to commit to doing them again. Because she expects them.

I know that Jenifer does. She has every reason to believe that the volume of attention and affection I poured on her to make her fall in love with me will continue until the day I die. Romantic love is the air that most women breathe, so you need to figure out that what that means to your spouse.

Even in the area of sex, you need to redouble your efforts to be a creative and generous lover. Most women are interested in sex, but they need to be romanced, and they need to feel safe. And they need to be pursued. So focus on the girl and resolve to become a hopeless romantic once again.

Resolution #1 for Wives: Ask God to Bring a Better Spouse Into Your Life

Jenifer: Too many times, I have expectations of Barrett that I never verbalize. They are my unrealistic thoughts that usually start with, “If he really loved me, he would _____ right now.” Rarely does he come through. Alone with my thoughts, it makes me wonder if someone else might magically love me better.

I’ve had to ask God to remind me that I am married to a well-intentioned man. The best thing I can do is communicate my expectations and pray that he would deliver. I also have to remember that God has provided me the perfect spouse that is necessary for my own spiritual growth. Ultimately, the better spouse that you need is the one you’re married to. Resolve to being patient because your man is a work in progress. Just like you are!

Resolution #2 for Husbands: Take a Weekend Away With a Woman Who Isn’t a Stressed-Out Mom

Barrett: If you are married to a stressed-out mom, it's probably because that's where she lives 24/7. Your wife is often physically tired and emotionally drained. She will stay that way until you do something drastic to remind her that she's still the lover and friend that first captured your heart so long ago.

When Jenifer and I are caught up in the craziness of life and are not connecting as a couple, one of our go-to solutions is to plan a night or a weekend away. Priceline and VRBO are great resources. It's our way of remembering why we fell in love in the first place.

Breaking the monotony and discovering someplace new together enables us to discover each other again. When I initiate this and put it on the calendar six weeks out, it gives us both something to look forward to. It's not as expensive as you think, and the payoff is enormous. Early in 2015, resolve to "enjoy the wife of your youth" by taking the mother of your kids away for some quality time together.

Resolution #2 for Wives: Trade in Your Dull Husband for a More Energized One

Jenifer: When Barrett's temperament seems melancholy or he seems unmotivated in our relationship, I am amazed at how easily I can energize him with affirming words. When I show him respect and build him up in practical ways, he comes alive. Watching my daughters interact with the young men in their lives, I am reminded of just how much every guy needs that.

From the littlest boy to the most mature senior adult, respect is the air that men breathe. If your natural tendency is to criticize his character or undermine his leadership, his heart will suffer and so will your marriage. In contrast, when you resolve to bless your husband with sincere admiration and appreciation, he will truly come alive."

Resolution #3 for Husbands: Be Okay With the Fact That The Woman You Are With Is Very Different Than the One You Married

Barrett: Over 25 years of marriage, Jenifer has evolved and changed in a million different ways. At times it can be frustrating trying to keep up with the woman she is becoming. The reality is that you married a moving target. And that's OK.

As a relatively static man married to an ever-changing woman, you have to put on your big-boy pants and adjust. You have to realize that her dynamic movement through the different stages of life is what keeps her interesting and keeps you dependent upon God for help. Resolve to be curious of where she is in life and be committed to learning what she needs most from you.

Resolution #3 for Wives: Realize that You Might Need to Start Your Marriage Over Again

Jenifer: You have to admit that there are likely seasons in every marriage when your anger and bitterness toward your husband makes you want to begin again. You can do that by trading in your husband for a new one (which is very complicated and expensive and comes with generational implications) *or* by forgiving the one you have. Grudges can lead to bitterness, and your husband feels it.

If you live that way long enough you will drive him away and burn yourself up from the inside out. When I have felt that way about Barrett, the only thing that resolved it was forgiveness. In those moments, I have to make the choice to forgive, even when my emotions don't feel like it.

Make no mistake: It is never easy, and God has to do a fresh work in my heart. But He *does* do it. The huge blessing comes in the days afterward as my emotions catch up to my obedience. Offering undeserved forgiveness to my husband models exactly

what Christ did for me. It changes everything. Perhaps your New Year's resolution should be to graciously hit the "reset button" in your marriage.

Start 2015 by Reflecting on the Good Things of 2014

As one year ends and another begins, we tend to focus on our regrets. We think: "I have to resolve to get this thing right next year because I didn't measure up last year." Resolutions are great, but don't forget to take time to reflect on the good things from last year. Focus on the wins. Celebrate how your kids have grown and changed. Praise God for His faithfulness. Mountaintop moments are awesome, but the reality is that life is lived out in a million little steps forward.

End this year with a celebration of how far God has taken you. Then commit yourself to being the husband or wife or parent that only God can create in you. Depend on His enabling power and make a few realistic resolutions to bring some fresh, new life to your marriage. Along the way, know that our Imperfect & Normal Family is praying for yours.

*Adapted from , a ministry founded by **Barrett and Jenifer Johnson**. After serving in the local church for 25 years, Barrett and Jenifer launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. Barrett served for 15 years in youth ministry before serving for 8 years as the Family Minister at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the South. He has degrees from Texas A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, but he and Jenifer have received their best education through the no-holds-barred nature of everyday family life.*