

How to Improve Your Marriage

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bibles and open them to Ephesians 5. Today we start a new series on how to improve your family and we begin by looking at several characteristics of strong marriages. I want us to get started by looking at a typical morning in the life of one family [**show video**].

Sadly, to say, that describes too many families. They show very little consideration for each other. They speak harshly toward one another. They don't enjoy each other. Then they go to church and pretend like they are one happy family. Is that your family? Is that your marriage? God has a better plan for your home than that? God wants your marriage to be one that is under the guidance of the Lord Jesus Christ, where each member is committed to each other, listen to each other, respect each other, enjoy each other and share life together.

Before we get to deep into this let me give you four statements about working on your marriage.

- Most married couples want to make their marriages work.
- All couples have to work on their marriage.
- Many marriages don't work, because they are not worked on.
- Most couples don't know how to work on their marriage.

One of the common words in all four statements is the word **work**. Healthy marriages and healthy families don't just happen, they take work, effort and time. God has a lot to say about marriages and families. God wants your marriage to be successful. He wants your family to reach its full potential. He wants you to work and protect your marriage. The devil is doing everything he can to destroy and tear it down, but God wants you to have a family that can with-stand the attacks of Satan's snares and strategies.

If you want to have a great marriage then you need to work on at least six areas of your marriage. Let's look briefly at each one. Six principles that will help build a solid and lasting foundation for your marriage.

1. CHRIST: He must be the Lord over your marriage.

The first principle deals with **Christ, He must be the Lord over your marriage**. He must be the Leader of your home. **Ephesians 5:25** says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” The example the husband is to follow in loving his wife is Jesus Christ. Then in **Ephesians 5:22** the Bible says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” The example of how a wife is to relate to their husband is based on her relationship with the Lord.

The implied point is the husband and the wife have a relationship with the Lord. They know Jesus. They love Jesus. They have been born again and they are followers of Christ. Jesus is the Lord of their life.

If you want to have a marriage that God blesses it starts with having a relationship with Jesus Christ. It starts with you submitting your life to Jesus Christ. How do you do that? You admit that you are sinner. You are not perfect and you cannot save yourself. You ask Jesus Christ to forgive you of your sins and to help you turn away from them. You accept His Lordship and leadership over your life. When that happens He gives you His Spirit on the inside of you to help you be the person He created you to be and as a result you become more like the spouse God wants you to be. Before He can control your marriage, He must control you.

After each point on your outline I have given you some homework. Some time this week take those questions and discuss them with your spouse. Write down your ideas and begin experimenting with them and see what God does. If your spouse is not interested in doing this, then you write down what you can do personally with each question to improve your marriage.

2. Commitment: You must dedicate yourself to your spouse.

The second key principle deals with **commitment: you must dedicate yourself to your spouse**. We are told in **Malachi 2:16**, “Make sure you do not break your promise to be faithful to your mate” (GN). Many people do not understand the meaning of commitment. Let me give you a simple definition: “Commitment means being willing to be unhappy for awhile until you can work things out.” Every marriage will have difficult days. Days of disagreement. Days of misunderstanding. Days of miscommunication. Days of selfishness. It is during those days you need commitment. There are going to be times where you can’t stand the sight of your spouse, but it doesn’t mean you stop being committed to them.

Good marriages do not just happen. They must be worked on. It takes effort. It takes time. It takes commitment. It takes dedication. It doesn't take a lot of commitment to build a shack, but it does to build a mansion. What kind of marriage do you want? A shabby marriage or a mansion marriage.

3. Communication: You must talk with your spouse.

A third principle to consider is communication. You must talk with your spouse.

Proverbs 13:17 says, "Reliable communication permits progress" (LB). **Proverbs 18:21** says, "The tongue has the power of life and death" (NIV). What you say to your spouse and how you say it has the power to damage your marriage or build your marriage. The way you talk or don't talk to your spouse can create energy in your marriage or take away energy. You need to become a good communicator with your spouse. Get rid of negative and sarcastic statements. Speak with compassion, humility, gentleness, and encouragement. Let what you say and how you say it bring life into your family and not death. Your words can bring energy into the home or take away. Give it energy.

4. Consideration: You must treat your spouse with respect.

A fourth truth that will strengthen your marriage deals with consideration. You must treat your spouse with respect. Look at **1 Peter 3:7**, "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect...." Then in **Ephesians 5:33** wives are told, "The wife must respect her husband." How can you be considerate and respectful toward your spouse? Respect means to place a high value on them. To give someone respect means you have decided to treat them as someone important in your life. This does not mean they deserve the respect, it simply means you have decided to give them respect. How can you respect or demonstrate that you have placed a high value on your spouse?

- **Be thoughtful:** Think from your spouses perspective. Think about how your actions, reactions, what you say and don't say affects them. Think of ways to bless and encourage them.
- **Be compassionate:** Care about what they care about. Care about their life, their day, their feelings, and their ideas.

- **Be gentle:** Be tender in how you speak to them. Don't physically or verbally abuse them. Be soft toward them.

Always be considerate to your spouse. When we lose consideration for each other we become foolish. James 3:17 tells us that consideration is a mark of wisdom.¹ When I'm inconsiderate toward Pam, then I'm acting like a foolish husband. When I'm being considerate then I'm a wise husband.

5. Compromise: You must learn to share your life.

A fifth principle to consider is compromise. You must learn to share your life.

Marriage is a give-and-take relationship. Marriage means you will share the house, the bathroom, the closet, the food, the money, the vacation, the car, the dreams, the hopes, the goals, and everything else in life. Marriage is about two people coming together and sharing life together. For that to work successfully, both have to give and take. They both have to compromise.

According to **1 Corinthians 13:5** real "love does not demand its own way." To many people at the wedding, while they are saying "I do" they are really thinking "I'll redo." I'll remake him or her into who I want them to be.

If you ever want to have a successful marriage, then you must learn the art of negotiating, listening, sharing and compromising. If you are always demanding your own way then you are not expressing love. Love does not demand, it may ask, but it want demand. Learn to share your life.

6. Courtship: You must learn to date your mate.

Finally, the sixth key principle deals with courtship. You must learn to date your mate. You must learn to enjoy your spouse. **Proverbs 5:19** says, "Let (your mate's) affection fill you at all times with delight..." (RSV). Then in **Ecclesiastes 9:9** we are told, "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love..." (NIV).

We need to learn to court our mate. If there was more courting in marriage there would be fewer marriages in court. Good marriages still know how to enjoy each other's company. They find things to do together to build memories and to have fun.

¹ The Amplified version of James 3:17 states, "The wisdom from above is first of all pure (undefiled); then it is peace-loving, courteous (considerate, gentle). [It is willing to] yield to reason, full of compassion and good fruits; it is whole hearted and straightforward, impartial and unfeigned – free from doubts, wavering and insincerity."

Conclusion

I realize today that every marriage represented here today is completely different. Some of you have a strong and vibrant marriage, while others are barely hanging on. The rest of the marriages are somewhere in between. But God has a plan. He created marriage. It was His idea. He knows how it's supposed to work. He knows what's wrong with your marriage and He knows what's right about it. He also knows what it will take to make your marriage what it ought to be.

But you have to make a decision today, not for your spouse, but for you. Somebody has to take the first step or maybe the first several steps. You can improve your marriage today by allowing God to improve you. Make a decision today to follow Christ more closely, to dedicate yourself to serving your spouse, to talk too and listen too your spouse's heart, to consider ways to treat them with respect in order to help them feel valuable, to learn how to compromise and not always have to have your own way and to get creative about dating your mate and enjoying them.

All these ideas are not going to happen overnight. God knows which one you need to focus on. Seek His face and let Him show you and guide you to the one you and your marriage needs the most.