



## KEYS FOR BUILDING **STRONG FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

### **LESSON 2 // MAKING MARRIAGE WORK—PART 1**

People get married believing that their marriage will work. So it's quite an emotional blow when, after a month, a year or more, they feel the marriage isn't "working." The feelings at that point vary from disappointment and depression to frustration, anger and bitterness.

Almost all relationships experience this—going from enchantment to disappointment to discouragement or despair. In group and relational dynamics, psychologists and social-psychologists have observed a pattern in group development: forming, storming, norming, performing.

The first two of these phases are inevitable. The last two are intentional. Any two people coming together form a relationship and over a period of time will inevitably hit storms in their relationship. It's only a certain intentional process that causes relationships to normalize and begin performing in positive, productive ways.

Jesus taught us about the intentional ingredient that makes a marriage work:

**Matthew 19:4-6 (NIV)** *"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'<sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

"Becoming" is a process and in marriage, "becoming one" is an intentional process that both people have a responsibility to contribute to and make happen. In short, marriage only works when we work toward a very specific goal of "becoming one."

In this part of the "From Me to We" series, we're looking at one key point to making marriage (or any relationship) work:

#### **Bring God into your marriage!**

Marriage was God's idea and God's design. It's sad to consider how many couples try to build a marriage (or even a friendship with someone) without consulting God or including Him in a practical, meaningful way.

The beginning point of bringing God into your marriage happens before you are married. A wise choice about who you marry and how well you prepare for marriage will not ensure a problem-free marriage, but it will ensure the opportunity to grow a better marriage.

Preparation for a good marriage involves being intentional about who you are becoming, who you are choosing and what you are learning about marriage challenges and skills before you say, "I do." You need to be working on yourself, continually growing in Christ to be the best God made you to be.

You also need to decide in advance the kind of person you would ever consider as a spouse. This involves someone who shares values, commitments and interests with you, along with levels of maturity, character and stability—spiritually, emotionally and financially. Get to know the person, not the body. Spirit, soul and then body is the right order!

**2 Corinthians 6:14 (NLT)** *Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness?*

You can't develop true intimacy with someone without a meaningful level or degree of unity! The best time to build a healthy marriage is before you get married. Don't let the four "I"s drive you to a poor decision: impurity, insecurity, immaturity, impatience. Bring God into your dating life. When He's involved in your dating life, it's far more likely that He'll be involved in your married life.

What about after you're married? You need to bring God into your marriage and keep Him in the center as the focus point. Notice the difference God's involvement makes in our relationships:

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)** *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: <sup>10</sup> If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

The last verse in this passage refers to "a cord of three strands" and the third strand can be seen as a reference to God in our relationships, especially our marriages.

How do you bring God into your marriage? *The husband and wife: (1) Give their lives to Jesus Christ; (2) Consistently attend and actively participate in church life; (3) Individually develop their relationship with God, including praying (positively) for their spouse; (4) Cultivate a devotional/prayer life together; (5) Surround themselves with Christian friends who are growing in their faith; (6) Make decisions by seeking God's will, guidance and wisdom; (7) Make their faith a part of their home-life; (8) Invest in Christian resources, church groups and studies that grow them in their faith and marriage.*

What do you do if you're in a marriage where your spouse is not a believer, or refuses to move forward in their faith? *(1) Let your difficult marriage drive you deeper into God; (2) Pray lovingly for your spouse; (3) Don't try to "be the Holy Spirit" in the life of your spouse—let God work; (4) Let your light and love shine; (5) Create the boundaries necessary to maintain and grow your faith; (6) Be patient and persevere; (7) Find good spiritual support.*

Bring God into your marriage. He's the "cord" that makes a marriage strong. When your hearts and eyes are fixed on Him, your relationships become closer and stronger!

## Discussion questions

1. Why is it so important to understand that "marriage was God's idea and God's design"? What difference should this make in a marriage?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. In what ways can God strengthen your marriage (or any of your relationships) when He is the "third strand" in the "cord of three strands"?
3. What is the value of married couples investing in "Christian resources, church groups and studies"? How do these help keep the focus on God in the marriage?