



KEYS FOR BUILDING **STRONG FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

LESSON 4 // MAKING MARRIAGE WORK—PART 3

When your relationships are at their best, you are more likely to be at your best in most of the other areas of life. The positive impact of healthy relationships to our overall healthy functioning should motivate us to work hard at learning the skills and attitudes that make them work well.

Other than our relationship with God, no relationship impacts us more than marriage. That is why our choice in a marriage partner is so important.

Once you are married, the focus shifts from *finding* the right person to *being* and *becoming* the right person to your spouse. Ironically, to make your relationships with others better, you've got to pay attention to yourself first. Let's look at three action steps that help you do this.

1. Stop the blame game.

The blame game is the “finger pointing” game. It summarizes relationship problems as the fault of someone or something outside oneself. This is a tendency of our sinful nature and goes all the way back to the beginning of time (Genesis 3:6-13).

In any relationship, blaming another person for all, or even most of the challenges or difficulties is counterproductive and destructive. Here are eight reasons why blame doesn't work in relationships:

- It's inaccurate.
- It creates defensiveness.
- It creates a “no win” situation.
- It shuts down communication.
- It produces resentment and exasperation.
- It demonstrates a lack of self-awareness and emotional maturity.
- It is an attack against the person and the relationship.
- It becomes a habit or pattern that continues to distance people.

Jesus warned us about this sinful tendency and how to correct it in Matthew 7:1-5. Blame almost never changes anyone. It may cause compliance, but never really produces inward transformation. Only personal conviction can motivate a person to lasting change.

2. Stop playing God with people.

Playing God with another person involves our attempts to convict them of their wrong, convert them to our wishes, control them in our way and change them to our preferences. We try to do this through shaming, naming, “sermoning,” superiority, punishing or becoming the conscience of the other person.

When we do these things, we actually get in the way of the work God wants to do in another person's life. You are not God, and you can't do what only God can do—change someone.

The apostle Peter reminded us that right, loving behavior and attitudes are the best sermons husbands and wives can preach to one another in marriage (1 Peter 3:1-2, 7).

3. Adjust your expectations.

In marriage we often have an internal “list” of things we believe should or will be done in areas like: affection; household responsibilities; finances; attention; extended family relationships; parenting; holidays; vacations and entertainment; work; spiritual pursuits; handling conflicts; completing one another vs. complementing each other.

These expectations may come from our unique personalities, our view of what is “right,” our family backgrounds, the influence of the culture and media on our thinking, the influence of others or our perception of others.

No matter where they come from, expectations create problems in marriages and relationships when they are:

- Unrealistic.
- Unfair.
- Un-communicated.
- Un-negotiated.
- Un-adjusted.
- Un-accepting (of personality differences).

If you're continually disappointed in a relationship, it's generally because you haven't addressed your expectations. Disappointments should drive you to explore the validity of your expectations. They should also deepen your trust in God to meet the needs in your life that others can't meet.

***Psalms 62:5-8 (NKJV)** My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. ⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. ⁷ In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. ⁸ Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.*

Part of focusing on yourself in marriage, or any relationship, involves regularly examining your expectations, and faithfully managing them.

Discussion questions

1. Read Matthew 7:1-5. What do you learn from Jesus in these verses about the value of taking personal responsibility for change rather than blaming others?
2. What does it mean to “stop playing God” with others? What would be a better approach to issues you face in your relationships?
3. Why is it so important to adjust your expectations in marriage or any relationship? What are some practical ways you can do this?