



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

### **LESSON 5 // MAKING MARRIAGE WORK—PART 4**

When your relationships are at their best, you are more likely to be at your best in most other areas of life. The opposite is also true: broken, painful relationships take their toll on you in many ways—spiritually, mentally, professionally, and even physically.

Other than your relationship with God, no relationship impacts you more than marriage. That's why your 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. In our last lesson, we looked at three action steps that help you do this. Let's consider four more:

#### **1. Take personal responsibility for your words, thoughts, attitudes and actions.**

Taking personal responsibility for your life involves becoming aware of the power you have to choose your words, thoughts, attitudes and actions (Galatians 6:7-9). You are not to live with a sense of powerlessness or blame, but with a full responsibility for what you say, think and do (Proverbs 4:23; 15:4; 19:14; Ephesians 4:29; Philippians 4:8).

Taking responsibility in relationships also involves owning our mistakes with humility, sorrow and acknowledgement (Psalm 51:1-4). One sign of this is genuine apologies that humbly express sorrow and regret, are specific, communicate awareness of the negative impact of wrong actions, avoid "ifs" and "buts," provide context and explanation (without excuses), seek reconciliation, and *request* forgiveness rather than *demanding* it.

##### ***Talk it out:***

*Share a time an apology didn't go the way you planned. If you could go back, what would you change in your approach to that apology?*

#### **2. Replace reactions with responses.**

Part of taking responsibility in a relationship includes replacing reactions with responses. A reaction is an unconsidered action that is based on prejudice, bad beliefs, past situations and pain. It is habitual, defensive, protective and often attacking in nature. Reactions are based on emotions and almost always inflame, escalate and intensify issues and create drama.

Responses are different. They are thoughtful. Emotion is put at bay and consideration is given to the best way to handle a situation that yields positive results. Good responses to someone's words, attitudes or actions usually de-escalates situations. The Bible reminds us of the importance of being responsive in our relationships rather than reactive (see Romans 12:17-21; 14:13).

***Talk it out:***

*What triggers reactions in you? Moving forward how can you move from reacting to responding?*

**3. Develop a personal growth plan.**

The most fulfilling relationships are developed between growing people. It's your responsibility to grow yourself (2 Peter 3:18) and you make yourself more attractive, interesting, mature, intelligent, competent, confident, helpful and desirable to be around when you are growing!

A good growth plan purposely challenges you to grow spiritually, intellectually, relationally, emotionally/psychologically and physically. This will help you grow toward your spouse rather than away from them.

***Talk it out:***

*When communicating, do you lean towards truth or grace? How does this affect your relationships?*

**4. Make time for personal refreshment and renewal.**

Part of focusing on yourself involves discovering and building into your life the regular routines that refresh and renew you. You can't give to others unless you know how to refuel!

Too many marriages are trying to be built by two depleted individuals. When you do nothing that refreshes and renews you, you become dull, numb and drained.

There are certain rituals and routines that are needed in your life to keep you refreshed and renewed. Notice how Jesus did this:

***Mark 1:35 (NIV)*** *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

***Luke 4:16 (NLT)*** *When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures.*

Each one of us need routines and rituals in our lives that refresh and renew us. It's up to you to develop and practice them and this is an important part of focusing on yourself in your marriage.

***Talk it out:***

*Who refreshes you? What do you appreciate about them?*

*What refreshes you? How can you make time in your regular schedule (nightly, weekly, monthly) to do some of those things?*