

FROM
ME TO WE

KEYS FOR BUILDING **STRONG FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

LESSON 6 // MAKING MARRIAGE WORK—PART 5

Practically all relationships are challenging and complex. They are a mixture of experiences that produce a multitude of emotions.

This is especially true in marriage with two self-centered, sinful people from different backgrounds, personalities and life experiences, dealing with pressures of daily living, finances, children, decisions and meeting each other's expectations. All too often conflict, tension and stress become the predominant atmosphere in the home.

This was never God's intention for our marriages, families and relationships. We don't function well or produce our best in a "war" atmosphere. To make marriage work, you must pursue the peace that God wants you to experience in your relationships (see Romans 12:17, 18; 14:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Colossians 3:15; James 3:13-18).

Of course, you'll never be at peace with others unless you're at peace within yourself. That's why you need a relationship with God! Also, you'll never find peace in yourself or with others without the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Once you have peace in yourself with the Spirit's help, what steps can you take, especially in marriage, to create an atmosphere of peace in your home and relationships?

1. Discover your differences.

It's amazing how many arguments happen because of basic differences between people that are neither right or wrong, good or bad. There are just differences in personalities, ways of doing things, training and experiences, birth order, family backgrounds and priorities.

Far too often these basic differences create unnecessary conflicts. We make them about right or wrong, good or bad character, villain versus victim. Being aware of the basic differences between you and another person is extremely helpful. It takes the issue out of the right or wrong category to the "different" category. (A classic biblical example of this with two individuals who were very different is found in the story of Jacob and Esau—see Genesis 25:27).

Talk it out:

How can appreciating the "basic differences" between you and another person help build your relationship with them? What are some practical ways you can learn about these differences?

2. Appreciate the positives.

By nature (our sinful nature), we tend to be fault-finders, critics and complainers. When a person consistently finds fault, criticizes and complains about someone they ignite and fuel a horrible emotion called "contempt."

Contempt is defined as, “a lack of respect, despising; treating with disdain and dishonor.” “Contempt is communicated through insults, name-calling, tone of voice, as well as facial expressions” (Jeffrey Bernstein, Psychology Today).

Once fault-finding and criticism begin, it degenerates into “nitpicking.” At this point, the object of our criticism and contempt can do nothing right. They are marked and labeled as not worth loving or caring for.

How do we stop this kind of fault-finding, criticism, nitpicking and contempt in marriage?

- Look for the good.

Philippians 4:8 (NIV) *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

- Reflect on the benefits.
- Write a “letter of recommendation.”
- Observe what other people appreciate.
- Stop unrealistic comparisons.

1 Peter 2:1 (TPT) *So abandon every form of evil, deceit, hypocrisy, feelings of jealousy and slander.*

- Consider what originally attracted you.
- Soften your heart.

Matthew 5:43, 44 (TLB) *There is a saying, “Love your friends and hate your enemies.”
⁴⁴ But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!*

Luke 6:32, 33 (NLT) *If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them!³³ And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!*

- Practice the “golden rule.”

Luke 6:31 (NLT) *Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

- Affirm what you appreciate.

Proverbs 15:1 (NLT) *A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.*

Proverbs 18:21 (NIV) *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

Colossians 3:5 (NLT) *And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

A grateful, appreciative, affirming environment becomes a peaceful environment.

Talk it out:

Read *Philippians 4:8*. How can this help you “look for the good” in others? How can you “affirm what you appreciate” in tangible ways in your relationships?