

7 TIPS FOR A LASTING MARRIAGE

BY

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Hurt by Jim's cutting remarks, I grabbed a blanket and stomped out of the master bedroom, planning to sleep as far away from him as possible. My journey ended at the family room sofa. It was the first time in nine years of marriage that I chose to sleep in a separate bed for the night. Thankfully, it was the last time.

Why the big fuss? Eighteen years later, Jim doesn't remember. I recall only a few highlights.

At the time, Jim was in his second year of urology practice. I was busy mothering our three active preschoolers. Although we didn't realize it then, most of our conflicts surfaced because we each held unrealistic expectations of the other.

When Jim came home one day---mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted from caring for patients---he wanted to walk into a tranquil, orderly home. Ideally, his smiling wife would greet him with grateful praise and admiration.

Unfortunately, I was weary from chasing children all day, my hair was in curlers, and the toddlers had dragged out all the toys we had just put away. Jim could barely step inside the door. His patience lasted until bedtime when he commented, "It sure would be nice if you could have the house a little neater when I come home."

Jim's cutting remark was the last straw. Through that distressing night on the sofa, God began to show me how self-centered and stubborn I had become.

At the same time, He spoke to Jim's heart. In the following months, we both searched for ways to improve our relationship. Change began when each of us sought to deepen our commitment to Christ. Through various seminars, we learned new ways to apply Scripture in our daily lives.

As a result, Jim and I found a fresh joy and excitement in our relationship. We tried to understand each other more, to be more patient, and to encourage each other. Since that time we've had our share of frustrations, but now we find more enjoyment in our marriage each year.

Unfortunately, many couples wonder how anyone can ever find marital satisfaction.

These steps have helped Jim and me work toward a long-lasting rewarding relationship:

1. Understand the temperaments.

Do not try to change your mate, but seek to understand him.

A few years ago, Jim and I read books about the various personality types and how we relate to one another. The study was enjoyable and opened a new door of understanding. Jim and I are opposites. He is a dynamic leader, goal-oriented, with the ability to evaluate a situation and to propose a quick solution. He is verbal, optimistic, outgoing, and people-oriented. His strong personality exudes confidence. He is a good financial manager who adheres to minute detail. At night he is the one who makes sure all the doors are locked.

While Jim is more analytical, I tend to be more intuitive and often cannot verbalize my reasons for my conclusions. I care about people and their problems and can easily listen. My approach to an issue is more contemplative, and I usually think things through before making decisions. While I enjoy being with people, working alone is not difficult. I enjoy all types of creativity. I'm the one who forgets to lock the doors.

When Jim's leadership tendencies are taken to extreme, he can seem overbearing and offensive. I avoid confrontation and can be overly sensitive. Now that we understand each other better, I can tell Jim when he hurts my feelings. We clear the air and restore fellowship so small hurts do not pile up.

Now that Jim and I better understand our different points of view, we appreciate each other. We can see how God brought us together for balance. We need each other. Jim helps me gain confidence and encourages me to tackle endeavors I would never have considered otherwise. I've helped Jim learn to relax more. When working on a project, we usually find a better solution together than either of us could reach individually.

2. Adopt the attitude: "We're in this together."

In twenty-seven years together, we've endured two miscarriages, separation for one year because of the Vietnam war, our son's death, and our own surgeries.

The morning I awoke after an emergency surgery, my first sight was Jim asleep in a chair by my bed.

Later, one of the nurses said, "Your husband must really love you. He didn't leave your side all night."

"Yes, I know," I smiled, "we're in this together."

We've also enjoyed happy times together. Jim decided to learn how to sail, and I went along to sailing school. Jim and I teach a Sunday school class. He teaches the lesson and I help with outreach and ministry.

We make up the bed together, take walks together, and do anything else we can think of as a couple. Our "oneness" has been observed by our children, and, I believe, gives them a sense of security.

3. Practice mutual submission and respect.

When I chose to become Jim's wife, I knew patients would often take priority in his time, but trusted I would always be first in his heart. This has proven true.

However, it has been disconcerting for him to receive a call just as we have sat down to a holiday dinner or tried to leave on vacation. Even worse is the telephone ringing just as we're snuggling for a good-night kiss.

Instead of resenting this, I've tried to thank God for choosing me to encourage this talented man. Bitterness cannot take root in a thankful heart.

We also respect each other's opinions in decision-making. Whoever knows the most on a particular subject leads the way. Jim has more expertise in financial matters. I know more about home decorating. I do believe that Jim is the head of our household, however, and has the final authority on all matters.

We've sought to be kind, even in our disagreements. We have not resorted to name-calling or put-downs. We uphold one another to our children and do not belittle each other.

4. Learn to forgive.

No matter how hard we try, offenses still happen. But I can forgive Jim because I know I'm not perfect and will need his forgiveness, too. This freedom releases us to have a deeper, closer, more caring relationship.

5. Take trips without the children.

Willing grandparents often kept our youngsters so Jim and I could get away. These times alone have refreshed us in body, soul, and spirit. On one occasion, we planned a spiritual retreat and spent a day praying, fasting, reading Scriptures together, and talking about future plans. We returned home with renewed perspective.

6. **Keep romance alive.**

Jim has always taken me on dates. When he was a medical student and I a student nurse, we'd sometimes sneak away to the eighth-floor construction project at Parkland Hospital for a panoramic view of the Dallas skyline.

On our twenty-fourth wedding anniversary, we surveyed the same twinkling lights. This time we sat at a linen-covered table beneath the glow of a chandelier, listening to violin music as we dined. It was a romantic evening as we reminisced about our "courting days."

When the stresses of daily living crash in upon us, it's good to recall the "beginnings" of our relationship, the reason we were attracted to each other, and that spark that made us want to be with each other so much.

Jim and I also make time for many hugs every day. We are open to spontaneous outings and try to break away now and then for special times together.

7. **Encourage one another.**

Jim and I have learned that positive motivation through praise and encouragement goes far in building good relationships. We try to look beyond our weaknesses to see something good, some contribution each is making.

We've also become more sensitive to each other. Around our twentieth anniversary, I was discouraged. Jim surprised me with an engraved plaque citing our wedding vows. I was deeply moved and uplifted.

Another time, I spent part of a day thinking about Jim's qualities and posted "Ten reasons I Love and Admire You" on his mirror. Then I wrote the list for our teenagers and titled it, "Ten Reasons I Love and Admire Your Dad." It was worth the time.

We encourage each other by gaining perspective on problems, realizing that in most cases, "this, too, shall pass." Change is inevitable, but growth is intentional. We all constantly change. Rough times will come, but eventually they will pass. We can use difficulties to discover greater depths of God's faithfulness, to become better, not bitter.

Whether a marriage needs a band-aid or a respirator, hope for renewal is alive. Jim and I have found a rewarding relationship together, but it didn't just happen.

The Great Physician who has upheld us through His grace is reaching out to help anyone who wants a better marriage.