

Ten Suggestions for a Better Marriage

A self-examination from time to time (1 Cor. 11:28) is a healthy practice to examine your marriage. I hope these suggestions will serve as encouragement, and also useful tools to improve your marriage.

1. **Never consider divorce as an option.** Make an agreement together that we are stuck together and nothing can change that. *My husband and I agree that (we can be loved by each other), and if you should think that you want to leave, (pack my bags, because I am going with you).* God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman for life (Gen. 2:18-24; Mat. 19:1-9). Divorce and remarriage for any cause other than fornication is sinful. Studies show that the majority of those who divorce and remarry do not find happiness. Instead, most second marriages also end in divorce.

2. **Learn to forgive and forget.** During a lifetime together, marriage partners will naturally make mistakes and offend each other. No human being is perfect. God's Word calls upon us to forgive: "...Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13). Continually bringing up past mistakes of one's spouse will not solve present problems. *In my own marriage we made a pact not to bring up past mistakes, it is not profitable. When we ask God or others to forgive us, we do not want to dwell or deal with the same issues each time there is a disagreement.*

3. **Do not be hypercritical.** "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression" (Pro. 19:11). It is easy to get into the faultfinding habit. However, love "taketh not account of evil" (1 Cor. 13:5, ASV). Rather than keeping track of supposed wrongs done by one's mate, one should look for the good things he or she has done and express appreciation appropriately. The results can be surprising. *Remember the golden rule; Treat and talk to others as you would like to be talked and treated.*

4. **Learn to communicate.** One of the most important components in any relationship is communication. Also, the most important component of communication is listening. Scripture teaches: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Do not interrupt your spouse with a response. Remember: "He that answered a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame to him" (Pro. 18:13). Rather than trying to think of how you will respond when one's spouse is finished talking, one should try to understand his or her point of view. *In most cases, before you got married, the one thing that brought you together was being great friends. As my husband as stated many times from the pulpit; What it took to get your spouse is what it will take to keep them!*

5. **Keep outsiders outside.** Do not accept or give affection outside of your marriage. Often when there is trouble between a husband and wife, one or both of them will seek someone else to substitute for a perceived deficiency in the marriage. The following exercise illustrates the intimacy and exclusiveness that must be maintained in a marriage:
On a piece of paper write your name and your spouse's name in the center. Draw a circle around your names, and then draw a larger circle around the first circle. The space between

the circles represents your family and friends. The space outside the circle represents others whom you may know but who are not a part of the immediate family. The circle containing you and your spouse is the marriage relationship. No other person is to be allowed in this circle. Only God has a right to be there along with you and your spouse. Keep outsiders outside! When something or someone is important to you, you want to guard it, right? This is the same thing that you have to do in your marriage.

6. **Learn to trust.** A marriage cannot survive without trust. Whenever trust is broken, it is difficult to repair (*and remember it takes time to repair*). When trust is betrayed, the sense of loyalty is shattered. As in other crisis situations, when there is a loss of trust, one may go through several emotional stages including anger, grief, hostility, resentment, guilt, and depression. The offended spouse must work through these emotions in a Biblical fashion. The one who has broken the trust must work at rebuilding the trust. Sometimes the counsel of a faithful Gospel preacher or Christian therapist is needed to deal with these issues (Prov. 19:20). Trust can be restored, but it will take a great deal of work by both parties.
7. **Do not compare your mate to others.** Every person possesses unique strengths and weaknesses. Each married person is married to an individual who is different from himself or herself in many ways. Likely, these differences are in areas where each is deficient. Marriage has a way of making us complete through the one we married. Therefore, each marriage is unique and can glorify God in its own way. Scripture teaches that it is unwise to compare ourselves with others (2 Cor. 10:12). *We are to build each other up, and should always be considered a safe haven for each other.*
8. **Give positive reinforcement.** A key to any relationship is expressing appreciation. Take every opportunity to give praise to your mate. "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad" (Prov. 12:25). A word of praise from a loved one furnishes compelling motivation to do even more. A poem by Mary Oler expresses it well: "You may not sing in opera or even write a book; But if you like the food you eat, start braggin' on the cook!" *Every likes a kind word, and usually craves it. Don't forget to tell your spouse on a regular (daily) basis that you love them; they look sexy; you could not see yourself without them, etc.*
9. **Pray for your marriage (Phi. 4:6).** Ask God to help you make the changes in your life that will help your be a better mate. Request God's blessings on your spouse in every way. Thank God for qualities in your mate which have enriched your life. Ask to be forgiven for any unloving or selfish behavior in your life. Marriage is God's gift to you. What you make of your marriage is your gift to God. Remember: "God cannot answer a prayer that is not offered." *Don't place blame in your marriage, just pray that God will show you the areas that you can change in your life, and direct your spouse in theirs. Treat your spouse with the respect that you want in your own life. Remember, that you can not make it in your marriage by your self, and you have to have God's help to make it prosper.*
10. **Center your marriage on the Bible (Psa. 119:105).** Set aside a few minutes each day to read the Bible together and pray. If you have not been accustomed to this, determine to start today. You might begin with the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7). Bring the family together and read a few verses each evening. Ask each family member to comment on what the passage teaches. Make the Bible a part of your daily

conversations. Look for ways to apply God's Word to daily situation. Most importantly, make the Bible a part of your life in daily Christian living.

Remember to schedule events on a regular basis to do, and be with your spouse. When someone is important to you, you want to invest your time and energy in it. Outing such as; going out to eat, watching a movie together, plan a weekend together and stay in a motel, etc.

Remember marriage is one of your greatest investment, trust it, protect it, and most importantly make sure God is your most important key.

With Love,
First Lady Lisa Sutton