

Question: How can we maintain a good, healthy and happy marriage for the remainder of our lives?

I recommend that you have an affair. I'm not talking about a secretive, romantic sexual relationship between two people not married to one another. Instead, I'm proposing that you turn your marriage into a lifetime love affair. The God who created marriage intended that you and your spouse should have a deeply spiritual, emotional, romantic and passionate love for one another that will end only in death (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:4-6). To accomplish this, I believe Jesus would make the following recommendations.

Begin by establishing God's word, the Bible, as your final authority on love and marriage. Numerous passages in the New Testament and Old Testament speak directly with both positives and negatives about love and marriage (1 Corinthians 7; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Hebrews 13:4; Proverbs 5; Song of Solomon; Hosea). Other passages teach us about the nature of love in any relationship (1 Corinthians 13 and the Book of Ruth). The instructions for Christian life on kindness, honesty, service, unselfishness, grace and forgiveness also apply to the marriage relationship. While there are many books, seminars, marriage retreats and movies that can help us, nothing is more vital to a marriage than the words of the God who created us.

To build your marriage into a lifetime love affair, you must also *make a willful decision to love your mate*. Lasting love is not based on the ups and downs of our emotions. Real love is a choice we must make to continue seeking the highest good of one another no matter how we may feel under the stresses that life brings upon us. Several years ago a study of marriage demonstrated that the level of satisfaction tends to rise to a high very early but declines somewhat when the routine and stresses of a family come upon the couple. Although many become fearful and bailout through divorce at that point, those who persevere usually find that the level of marital satisfaction begins to rise again. Over the years it reaches even higher levels than at the beginning. This choice to continue loving one another is patterned after God's love. He chooses to love us even in our sins (Romans 5:8). In the same way, we must choose to love our mates.

In addition, *you need to commit to a lifetime of learning how to love your mate*. Great love affairs do not just happen; they take a lifetime of continuous work. When we dated, we worked hard at doing everything

we could to please one another. Unfortunately we often do not continue this effort after we marry. We need to continue studying to learn more about one another so we can grow in love through the changing stages of life. We cannot afford to be like the husband who said to his wife, “I told you I love you when we married. If I ever change my mind, I’ll let you know.” If we do not continue to grow in love for one another, the flame of love is soon extinguished.

Finally, *build your marriage on loving instead of being loved, on giving rather than receiving.* A woman wrote Ann Landers, the advice columnist, that she hated her husband and intended to divorce him; however before the divorce, she wanted to know what she could do to really hurt him. Landers proposed that for one month before divorcing him she should do everything loving for him she could—prepare his favorite meals, bring his slippers when he gets home, fluff his pillow, bring him the newspaper. At the end of one month, then leave him. That would really hurt him. After a month, the woman wrote back that she didn’t know why she ever thought of leaving her husband and that he was the finest man in the world. Most of us find it difficult to keep from responding in loving ways to those who act lovingly toward us.

Have a happy and loving Valentine’s Day!

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