

15 Ways to Refresh Your Marriage

No matter where your marriage is, it can always become stronger. Here are some ideas for those who want to shake things up a bit.

By David Jeremiah

Sometimes it's difficult to understand your spouse. Let's be honest, we communicate and think differently than our other half. To keep your marriage relationship fresh and growing stronger, each spouse must practice being attentive to the other person's needs and desires. When a husband and wife successfully blend their two perspectives, unity and understanding is found in the marriage.

Whether your marriage is struggling or you just want to shake things up a bit, here are some ideas for building unity and getting a grip on bliss:

1. Be romantic. Great romance doesn't just happen, it's planned. Place importance on looking for new ways to say "I love you." Husbands, take the time to be romantic and your wife will be a more passionate lover. Wife, express your thoughts about how you want to be romanced. Don't make him guess!

2. Compliment each other. Decide to compliment your spouse on at least one thing every day. Be careful to listen. Your spouse will compliment you on areas in which he/she wishes to receive compliments. Be sure to refrain from back-handed compliments.

3. Date your spouse. Don't lose that lovin' feeling you had when you first started dating. Commit to regular, scheduled date nights, and take turns choosing the agenda. Don't take calls or texts during your date. Refrain from talking about stressful subjects such as finances, kids, or work. This is the time to rekindle dreams and fresh thoughts for the future.

4. Share your time. This is your life, right now. Don't get so busy that you forget to slow down and enjoy life—and to enjoy it with your spouse. It's a compliment when your spouse wants to spend time with you. Plan out and prioritize your calendar. Designate time for relaxing, going out, and completing chores.

5. Be spontaneous. Do something out of the ordinary for your spouse once a week. Sometimes you need to plan ahead, but do something to surprise your spouse, something they would never expect you to do. Stretching yourself and your spouse can be an incredible growing experience! Draw closer to one another in the midst of the unfamiliar.

6. Make communication a priority. Learn your mate's communication style. Everyone communicates differently. Tell him or her the best way to converse with you. Pay attention and actively listen to what your spouse has to say: nod, reply, and make eye contact.

7. Listen. Devote your full attention to what your spouse is saying rather than using the time to prepare your own response. Restate your spouse's words, reaffirming what they said, and then thoughtfully respond. Discern what role your spouse wants

you to play in a conversation, whether as a passive listener or an active problem solver and opinion giver.

8. Sex—take your role seriously. Great sex is the responsibility of both spouses. Be desirable. Work with what you have and present yourself as appealingly as possible. Seek to fulfill your spouse's needs before your own. And don't be afraid to schedule sex. You can get excited about your plan and look forward to your time together.

9. Support change. You and your spouse will change over the course of your marriage and it's important to accept those changes. Continue to value and trust each other, but don't try to hold the other back from growth—it's easy for resentment to creep in when you do. If you need more support, ask!

10. Serve your spouse. If you are both putting the other first, your needs will never go unmet. Start serving today! Make the first move and watch as your spouse reciprocates. Never stop thanking your spouse for even the seemingly mundane things.

11. Celebrate milestones. Be intentional about making memories with your spouse, especially for holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Create your own celebrations and traditions as a couple. If a day is especially important to one spouse, celebrate it the way he or she wants to. Make sure both of you have fun on holidays!

12. Apologize and forgive. Be the first one to say "I'm sorry." Take your hurt to God and let go of any bitterness, resentment, or power you have over your mate. Are you holding a grudge? Tell your spouse you forgive them. Do you need to ask for forgiveness? Do it today. Take Paul's words to heart: "do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

13. Balance independence and dependence. Sometimes you need space, and sometimes you need more intimacy. Tell your spouse what you need, when you need it. Wives, understand his innate desire to be independent—encourage him in activities that fill that need. Husbands, realize that she wants to be your partner—include her in decision making.

14. Put your spouse's needs before your own. As Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Think of how your marriage would change if you and your spouse both applied this passage!

15. In all these things, seek the Lord first. Husbands and wives, pursue a growing relationship with the Lord. As we grow and change as individuals, so will our marriages. But these changes can make us stronger if we continually seek the Lord and His wisdom, for "...He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).