**Is Your Marriage Worth Imitating?**

Lesson 24

Some of you may be thinking, this subject is not applicable to me. I’m single; I’m no longer married; or I’m in a difficult marriage currently.

 Look, whatever your circumstance is right now, good or bad, don’t count yourself out! Please don’t tune me out.

These things that I’m about to share will be helpful to you; if not now, they will in the future as you journey through this life.

Who knows, maybe you will be able to share some of these things with someone else.

**Question:** **How do you decide who to marry? [SLIDE]**

When someone asked **this** question to a group of kids, a 10-year-old girl raised her hand and gave an all-too-insightful answer:

She said, "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry, God decides it **all way** before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with."

The girl’s response may seem hilarious on the surface. But it makes you wonder what her parents' marriage must be like.

Does she really believe that her parents are "stuck with" each other?

And how is her perception of love, intimacy and marriage being shaped by what she sees at home every day?

Rest assured, little eyes are constantly watching you — including what you do with your marriage.

The way you treat your spouse is probably how your children will treat their own spouse someday. (repeat)

Your marriage isn't **just** about you and your spouse;

it becomes your child's blueprint or template of how a marriage relationship should function or be conducted.

Dr. Lisa Firestone, a marriage and family counseling expert writes: ***When it comes to the relationship between their parents, no irritated eye-roll goes unseen, and no whispered criticism goes unheard. No matter how hard we may try to conceal problems, children are sensitive to the tensions between their parents and are directly influenced by the way their parents interact. … They often go on to re-enact them in their own relationships when they reach adulthood.***

Our kids are learning from us all the time. And you'll never know where those lessons will show up.

Gary Smalley is a Christian author and speaker who has written several books on marriage and family.

Gary tells this story about his family.

How he and his wife, Erin, made an effort to have regular date nights.

But one evening several years ago, their youngest daughter, Annie, (4 at the time) didn't want them to leave. She had executed a full body-wrap around Erin's leg — begging **them** to stay home or take **her** with them.

Gary said, “I was sure that we wouldn't be able to leave anytime soon unless I intervened. I was just about to pry Annie from Erin's leg when our son, Garrison, who was 12 at the time, jumped in. He got down on his knee and looked Annie in the eyes. "It's time to let go of Mom," Garrison said tenderly. "We need to let them go out on their date. This is how they keep their marriage strong."

Gary said he was dumbfounded by his son’s statement!

 “I didn't think my pre-teenage son heard anything I ever said. Here he was doling out marriage advice like a seasoned expert.”

The little girl listened. She instantly let go of her mom’s leg. But she then asked her brother the question: "What do they do on their dates?"

"I have no idea," Garrison said. "But I think it ends with kissing."

How would your kids describe your marriage or relationship? Or maybe another way of putting this question out there would be to ask: “When your child or children are a little older what will they learn from your marriage?

I have often used the analogy that marriage is like a car. Whether it is old or new, it still requires “regular maintenance” in order to keep it running right; to get the best mileage or to run more efficiently.

 So does the marriage relationship need a regular “tune up”. And it is important as a couple, that you are pro-active about it! Don’t wait until the car breaks down.

It may be too expensive repair (physically, emotionally or spiritually).

So, I have six points of advice I would like to share with you, on how you can make this incredibly important relationship one worth watching and imitating.

1. **Love God first Read: Mark 12:30-31 )**
* Some of you may know the childhood rhyme:"First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage."
* But the rhyme doesn't mention who that "first love" should be.
* Show your children that God is your “first love.”
* It's God, spouse and then children — in that order.
* When we do that, God can enable you to love your spouse the way He loves you.
* Agape love; unconditional love.
* In spite of the times you may not feel loved, Christ can give you the grace to love your partner even when he or she is unloving.

1. **Honor your marriage**
* [**Hebrews 13:4**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+13%3A4&version=ESV) says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all."
* Honoring marriage begins with a clear lifelong commitment.
* Don't joke about divorce. Don’t be flippit about it; Divorce is a serious matter.
* Threatening your spouse with it during the heat of an argument is never productive.
* In fact, my advice would be for you to remove it from your vocabulary.
* Have the attitude that says, "I will do *whatever* it takes to stay happily married."
* **Another aspect of**[**honoring your marriage**](https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/gods-design-for-marriage/honoring-marriage)**is to prioritize it.**
* Many couples get so caught up in "administrating" their marriage (talking about to-do lists, schedules, finances, etc.) that they don't have meaningful conversations about what is really important to them, **such as:** their joys, fears, stresses, dreams, etc.
* I recommend that you spend 10 minutes a day talking with your spouse about that inner life and then pray about those things, together.
* Maybe read some Scriptures or a short devotional together and talk about it.
* And don't forget to have fun together, too.
* In [**Ecclesiastes 9:9**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ecclesiastes+9%3A9&version=ESV) it says this: "Enjoy life with the one whom you love…."
1. **Treasure your spouse**
* [**Proverbs 18:22**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+18%3A22&version=NLT+) (NLT) says, "The man who finds a wife finds a treasure."
* And **Proverbs 31:10** says: “Who can find a wife of noble character? She is far more precious than rubies.”
* So, show your children how much you treasure their mother or father.
* Compliment your spouse: "Your mother is gorgeous!" you might say.
* [Affirm who your spouse](https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/discover-the-joy-of-helping-your-spouse-succeed/encourage-and-support-your-spouse) is as a person: "Your dad is an amazing provider."
* And don't just use words. *Show* your children how much you value your husband or wife: Kiss her. Hold his hand. Be affectionate, and when your kids squeal "gross!" don’t shy away from doing it, down deep inside, they love it!
* My girls are all grown, but they still cherish those moments Sandy and I are affectionate before them.
* After all, everyone wins when Mom and Dad are affectionate. Even when Grandpa and Grandma get with it, it’s a “grand slam” winner for everyone!
* **(Pic of grandparents)** This is a picture of my grandparents getting their picture taken while sitting in their old red mercury.
* Little eyes were watching then. And through the years, the **one thing** that spoke the loudest to me about them, was how they **treasured** one another.
1. **Practice**[**healthy conflict**](https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/communication-and-conflict/the-power-of-healthy-conflict/the-power-of-healthy-conflict)
* I am not saying “practice conflict”. But if you are going to have conflict, do it in a healthy way!
* You're not going to feel lovey-dovey toward your spouse all the time, of course.
* Conflict is unavoidable but, it **can be** an important part of marriage.
* **(I’ll say it again, “It can be an important part of marriage.)**
* It’s what you do **when** conflict happens; and how you handle it, that matters.
* When you disagree, **show** your children how to **best** work through those issues.
* This teaches them that **differences** are OK; and that you can work out problems in a way that feels good to both people.
* Granted, this isn't an easy thing to model: Watching Mom and Dad "fight," no matter how constructively they do so, is hard on children.
* This is why children (especially younger children) try to referee the conflict.
* Gary Smalley said, that little Annie would draw them pictures and physically make them hold hands during an argument.
* When you find yourselves in a disagreement or argument, and little eyes are watching or little ears are hearing, at some point reassure them that you love each other and we’ll be OK.
* Give them something to do during the conflict (this may sound funny) like ask them to pray for you.
* This helps kids feel safe and secure and helps them to live out their own faith.
* Make sure that your children see you giving each other plenty of grace and forgiveness.

**Read: Ephesians 4:32**

Children need to see that you can disagree and still love someone. They need a model of healthy conflict, and they need to see how you [**find a win-win solution**](https://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast/making-win-win-decisions-in-marriage).

1. **Function as a team**

**Read: Philippians 2:1-4**

* Children need to understand that marriage is a *team* sport. And they need to be reminded of that especially, when they try to pit one parent against the other.
* Show them that you can't be divided and conquered.
* Occasionally, one of our girls would ask one of us, if they could go somewhere or participate in some activity. If one of us said “I don’t think that is a good idea right now.” It was not uncommon for them to try and lobby for a “yes” vote from the other parent.
* If you are neutral about it, make sure you are supporting the other parent’s decision before you give an answer.
* You might say, “I support your mother’s decision. Go ask her, and whatever she says, that is my answer, as well."
* Functioning as a team **also** goes beyond putting up a united front.
* Equally share child and household responsibilities. Do chores together.
* Get involved in ministry together. Pursue big dreams together.
* One of your goals is to train your children to be a “team player”. That life does not revolve around just them.
* Just as Jesus taught His disciples that in order to be the greatest in God’s kingdom one must become “the servant of all.” **(Mark 9:35)**
* So we need to teach our children the same.
1. **Build community and a legacy**
* You have heard the saying, “No person is an island”, well, the same should be true that “No marriage is an island.”
* Every couple needs like-minded friends who are also pursing great marriages, and friends who are willing to speak openly and honestly and sometimes painfully about the shortcomings of their marriages.
* Show your children that [you need friends](https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/the-early-years/your-marriage-needs-community) like that. **(Read: 2 Timothy 2:22)**
* Ask a child about relationships and marriage; their answers can be surprisingly revealing.
* So with that in mind, let me encourage you to ask a few difficult questions of each other — questions you should answer together:
* **What kind of legacy do we want to leave your children or grand children?**
* **What marriage values do we want to pass on?**
* **Is our marriage worthy enough that we'd want our children to replicate it?**
* Answering those questions honestly and honorably can give your children worthwhile answers that just might spill over from generation to generation.

**Read: (Psalm 37:4-6)**