

Cultivating Healthy Marriages

I. What is a “Healthy Marriage”?

A. A “healthy marriage” is not necessarily a marriage where both the husband and wife perceive that their *felt* desires and expectations are being met by the other person, the reason being that our *felt* desires and expectations are not always correctly aimed.

1. As we grow in our own discipleship during marriage, it is likely that we will need to actively work on our desires and expectations to conform them toward a biblical ideal.
2. While you should hope that your spouse is growing toward that ideal as well, you cannot demand of them that they act in any particular way. You can communicate your desires, but you cannot demand that they conform to those desires.
3. We must always remember that marriage is a covenant we enter by choice but have a biblical duty to remain within. That biblical framework should push us to conform ourselves to the biblical ideal for our own good as well as our spouse’s.

B. A “healthy marriage” is one in which both spouses are growing in discipleship and committed to the mutual good of each other and for the building up of one another in love.

1. Recall from week 1 of this study that men and women are equal but different (see Eph. 5:22-33). We have equal value and dignity as coheirs with Christ, but we have different roles within marriage and different ways in which we relate to one another.

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2. When one spouse fails to engage in the discipleship role required for a healthy marriage, the other spouse does not gain an excuse for relinquishing his or her role as well. Just as we continue parenting when our kids do not want to be parented, so we should continue fulfilling our roles even when our spouses do not fulfill theirs.

II. Four Habits for Cultivating Healthy Marriages

A. Disciple one another (Deut 6:4–9)

1. Mutual conversation about biblical ideas draws couples closer toward the ideal in Scripture and acts as a constant reminder of that ideal.
2. Praying together helps overcome a multitude of the small irritants that can build up.
3. Regular, engaged church attendance helps keeps couples accountable to each other through the larger efforts of the church family.

B. Avoid contempt (Phil 2:3–4)

1. Contempt is the attitude that someone else is either beneath you or unworthy of you. It is an unjustified feeling of pride and superiority.
2. In marriage, contempt usually begins with small things that you view yourself to be better at or working harder on than your spouse. Left unchecked, these small things can begin to fester into the feeling that your spouse will never be as good as you are at many things, and then expand into the feeling that your spouse will never give as much as you do to the marriage.

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3. Once you have allowed contempt to engrain itself in your marriage relationship, it is very difficult to root out. The person who feels contempt must be humble enough to admit that he or she was wrong in that perspective, and pride is a hard thing to overcome.

C. Communicate openly

1. We face the constant temptation to wish that our spouses just knew what we want or what we wish they would do without us having to tell them. In a twisted way, we think this anticipatory behavior would mean they know us and love us deeply. In reality, the desire is self-focused and unloving. It assumes your spouse is only thinking about you and your perspective at all times.
2. Different people have different communication styles just as we have different love languages. Learn your spouse's communication style and work to meet them there. If both spouses do this, communication lines tend to be open and in use regularly.

D. Seek intimacy regularly (Song of Songs; 1 Cor 7:1-7)

1. Sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed by married couples as a means to be vulnerable, close, and unhindered. We hurt its value by viewing it as a chore, as leverage, or as a mere duty.
2. Sex is the most blatant admission that you are not you own anymore. You belong to your spouse, and together you have entered a covenant to be one flesh.
3. With all of that being said, there are many circumstances in which a consistent sex life becomes difficult. Medical issues, family demands, and many other reasons can disrupt a consistent pattern of marital intimacy. **Talk about these things** so that your spouse knows what is going on and so that you can have a plan to reengage. Do not think that your spouse should "just understand" that things are busy and be fine with it.