

Five Lessons to Help You Enjoy A Lasting Marriage

My wife Carol and I will have been married for 50 years on June 7 – and we're still best friends.

We loved each other before we got married at just 19 and 21 when we were college students. But even after all of these years, we still *like* each other. In fact, we're closer than ever.

Carol and I recently reflected on the lessons we've learned along the way that have kept our marriage alive and helped it thrive. These lessons have carried us through both good and tough seasons, and we want to share them with you, with the hope that they can do the same for you and your spouse.

So, from our family to yours, here are five lessons we learned that will help you enjoy a lasting marriage:

1. Be able to laugh. Laughter helps smooth over a lot of rough edges. I cannot tell you how many times it has de-escalated arguments in our marriage that otherwise would have led us to say hurtful things we'd surely later regret. Laughter cools down our hot tempers and helps us see each other again. From there we can proceed with kindness and love.

2. Embrace change and adversity together. When you first get married, you're so fired up about your exciting new life together. But the reality is that through the stages and seasons of life, every marriage *changes* and every marriage has its *challenges*. It's when you join forces to overcome problems that your marriage gets stronger. Whether it's personal, emotional, physical, or spiritual adversity – face it together.

3. Focus on what you have in common. There will be things that both you and your spouse don't naturally gravitate to, and that's fine. Focus on the things you both like to do, so you can experience joy and happiness in doing them together. And if there's something your spouse is passionate about, become her (or his) biggest champion — you'll quickly find their passion becoming yours as well.

4. Express your appreciation. So many marriages die by a thousand nicks and cuts – a little criticism here, a backhanded comment there. If there's one thing most marriages need, it's a greater dose of expressed respect and appreciation. When you express gratitude to each other, you not only make your spouse feel valued, seen and appreciated but you also reinvigorate your desire to continue loving and serving him or her.

5. Put Jesus first and your spouse second. Of course, this might at first sound counterintuitive, but prioritizing Him doesn't lessen your love for your spouse. In fact, it's the opposite. You'll have more to offer your spouse when your relationship with Christ is strong. This means spending time in the Word of God and prayer individually and *together*. A commitment I made to the Lord on our honeymoon was to read through the Bible each year of our marriage. Let Him and His Word be the foundation that holds your marriage together. ... it won't fail!

These lessons have carried our marriage for 50 years, and I believe they will carry it for many more. Put them into practice and watch your marriage become better and stronger than ever!