



I Want Happiness Now!

By Dr. Henry Brandt with Phil Landrum

LESSON 10: BUILDING SELF-RESPECT IN MARRIAGE

MANAGING YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUR MARRIAGE PARTNER

There is no one person as intimately involved in your life as your marriage partner. So, your partner will make you more conscious of your inner life than anyone else. The Bible says:

... a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).

Your loyalty to each other, then, will build your self-respect. On the other hand, disloyalty to each other will chip away at your self-respect.

With your partner in mind, consider these verses:

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him (Colossians 3:8-10).

If this is a picture of your inner life, you can keep it to yourself, but you are deceiving your partner, whose presence will be a continuous reminder to you of what you are doing.

Obviously, your self-respect will erode and your partner will have no idea of what is going on inside you. To give expression to such a spirit is equally demoralizing. It is not hard to understand why eventually such a person would flee from the marriage.

On the other hand, with your partner in mind, consider these verses:

Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint

against any one; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you (Colossians 3:12-13).

Clearly, if this is the condition of your inner life, the marriage relationship builds your self-respect.

The management of your inner life is your problem, discussed in detail in chapter 8.

COOPERATION

... be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:21).

The will to cooperate is an important key to building self-respect. Competition between partners will have the opposite effect.

Cooperation implies that both husband and wife make the decision to dedicate time and effort in developing a mutually agreeable way of life.

Regular formal or informal conferences need to be held to assign responsibilities and develop policies, procedures, and rules that both can live with.

These little meetings can be held in the car, the kitchen, the living room—anywhere.

Two attitudes must exist in these meetings: (1) you mean to serve your partner, and (2) you will be bound by the decisions made by the partnership.

Daily effort, constant examination, and frequent changes will keep your relationship going.

The overriding spirit in all of this is to do it as unto the Lord. The Bible says:

I exhort you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Your self-respect will grow if you maintain an attitude of cooperation in the marriage—whether your partner does or not.

SUBMISSION

No matter how committed you are to cooperate, it is inevitable that sooner or later you will become deadlocked over some decision. There is a way to settle a deadlock if you are committed to resolve the divisions between you.

Someone must have the last word.

In a business, it's the president. In sports, it's the coach. In a game, it's the captain. In a marriage, it's the husband. The Bible says:

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22).

In the decision-making process, the wife should participate vigorously and forthrightly in the search for a mutually agreeable solution. The husband should think twice, or more, before going against his wife's judgment.

If the wife still disagrees with her husband's tie-breaking decision, she should say so.

The husband has two options when there is a deadlock:

1. Make the decision himself.
2. Ask his wife to make it.

Once done, both husband and wife submit to the decision and do all in their power to make it work.

Whether husband or wife, a spirit of submission builds self-respect. On the other hand, a spirit of selfishness or rebellion will chip away at self-respect.

COMMITMENT

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25).

As I travel around the country, I am appalled at the number of men who are walking away from their marriages and calling it quits. Granted, many of their wives have worked hard to make life miserable for these men.

If a man approaches his responsibility to marriage as Christ did toward the church, then the man will be committed until death. He will submit to the responsibility for maintaining a wholesome relationship with his wife.

There may be a period of time—perhaps years—when he has no choice but to stand by a totally rebellious, obnoxious, rejecting, or immoral woman, whose behavior is not worthy of his loyalty. His self-respect will remain intact if he retains the will to make it work, even though all his efforts are rejected.

Conversely, the behavior of many husbands can be totally obnoxious, mean, self-centered, even immoral. They may make no effort to be responsible husbands. They

may totally reject any responsibility for the marriage. Yet, the will to stay committed will sustain a woman's self-respect.

... you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior (1 Peter 3:1-2).

The key in either case depends on a higher commitment:

...in the fear of Christ

...as to the Lord

... as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it.

SEXUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Sexual response dies when there are deadlocks and ill will between the partners. Accordingly, when you do not respond to each other, look elsewhere for the reason.

There is a specific directive in the Bible to guide you in managing your physical relations:

The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourself to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Corinthians 7:4-5).

Clearly, your partner's wish is your commandment. Obviously, the spirit here is one of mutual concern for each other.

To deprive your partner is to chip away at your self-respect. To cooperate with your partner is to build your self-respect.

SUMMARY

Marriage, like no other human relationship, will keep you up to date on the condition of your inner life. It is a personal decision, unrelated to marriage, whether or not you repent of a negative inner life, and allow God to flood your soul with His Spirit.

You build your own self-respect or self-love as you remain loyal, cooperative, submissive, and committed unto death to do all in your power to make the marriage work.

The key to maintaining such a spirit depends on a higher commitment:

As unto the lord!

NOTE: The material in this chapter is based on the book, *I want My Marriage to Be Better* (Zondervan), by the same authors.

Review Questions

1. If you are married, who will make you more aware of your inner life than anyone else? Why is this?
2. The will to _____ is an important key to building self-respect. _____ between partners will have the opposite effect.
3. Cooperation implies that both husband and wife make the decision to _____.
4. What is the way to settle a deadlock if you are committed to resolve the divisions between you and your spouse?
5. If a man approaches his responsibility to marriage as Christ did toward the church, then how long will the man be committed?
6. What is the key to maintaining spirit of cooperation in marriage?

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