

Growing Joy In Your Marriage

As I sit here to write this Marriage Encouragement, I am both excited about how what's in this article can begin to transform your marriage and yet challenged and convicted myself to do more to improve my own marriage. Sue and I have a wonderful marriage relationship that has blossomed over the past 15+ years, but even recently, we had a couple difficult days where things did not go smoothly between us and there wasn't much joy! The Holy Spirit was speaking into my own heart this weekend to make some more adjustment in my own life to bring more joy into our relationship too! There will always be room to create more joy in all of our marriages for the rest of our lives together!

Joy's Affect on Our Marriage



Joy comes when we know that someone is pleased to be with us. We are all born with the need for joy in our heart and babies begin their life feeling, listening, and then looking for people who are pleased to be with them. Every gentle touch, tender voice, and loving look or smile builds joy capacity in their heart. And we never outgrow our need for building more joy in our life! Greater joy capacity allows us walk through life's pains and problems with joy and return to joy after experiencing big negative emotions.

Father created our brain to run at its peak performance when it is full of joy. With joy in our heart, life works better and we have a greater capacity to bounce back from difficult situations and emotions. When joy abounds, men feel more secure and less anxious about marriage and women feel more highly valued and care more for their husband. When we were dating our spouse, most of us attempted to focus on having fun and creating joyful experiences which turned into sweet memories and can still bring a smile to our face when we think about them! It was the joy that made us more attracted to each other and the "falling in love stage" was fun, exciting, and built great expectations for our future together. As we continue to grow joy together in our marriage, our feelings of "being in love" will stay strong! Sue is a lot more sensitive to when our joy is waning and the passion is cooling off. So she will suggest telling a joy story about some fun or memorable moment from the past. It usually doesn't take long for the intimacy and passion to start warming up again!

Make Joy a Priority!



We must make joy a priority in our marriage! It has to become the new "normal!" "Falling out of love" is really all about the absence of loving feelings in our marriage. The less joy in the marriage, the less love is felt and the more hopeless we can feel about our marriage. As the "joy gap" widens (the time that passes from the last time you felt joy), the more room there is for resentment to grow, forgiveness becomes harder, and it's more difficult to release the debt for all our spouse may have taken from us. Unforgiveness blocks us from seeing the treasures in our spouse and how the Father sees them. Without joy, the pain and problems become bigger than the relationship and our "relational circuits (RC)" go OFF! Our relational brain goes offline and we want the problem to go away or we lose the desire to even be with the other person. With our circuits OFF, we go into enemy mode and people become enemies to defeat or problems to be solved. During the first 30 years of our marriage, I frequently would shut off my RC's and go into enemy mode. I would either retreat onto my

“island” to hide from the conflict or aggressively attack responding from the pain in my own heart. This was very hurtful to Sue and only pushed us apart. It took healing to the broken parts of my heart and heart forgiveness to start to turn this around. Now we are both much quicker to stay relational and walk in love through whatever the conflict is about.

Growing More Joy



The goal is to still be in love after a lifetime together! The more regularly we experience joy with other people, the larger our joy capacity gets. The bigger it gets, the more emotionally and relationally secure we are with others including our spouse. We all need to keep playing together and keep having fun experiences with each other. Appreciation is one of the most powerful habits we can develop for building more joy. Sue and I regularly will express appreciation to each other which helps keep our RC's ON. We also need to enter each other's sphere of life and find or develop common interests that draw us together. By taking interest in each other's passions, we can find more ways to play and share life together. A third way to share life together is to plan special events like weekend get-a-ways, vacations, trips, romantic times, anniversaries, or making things together. The goal is to create excitement, anticipation of future joy, and memories to share over and over in the future.

One of the most wonderful joy-bonding experiences happens whenever a couple makes love together. “Having sex” is all focused on self, whereas “making love” is giving love to meet the other person's love needs, not your own! Every time we make love may not be off the charts, but always look for the positive aspects of each time you come together. End each time by affirming each other and cuddling. If there is something that needs to be addressed, save it for later and not right after you finish making love. All the good experiences can also add joyful anticipation for the future! Also, keep the passion alive in your marriage. Don't let things become routine and predictable. Be creative – invite Father and the Holy Spirit to join you and give you creative new ways to affirm your covenant with each other!

Make growing Joy a priority in Your marriage!

Dialogue Questions

1. How long has it been since we really experienced joy in our marriage? How does that make me feel? What can we do to shorten our joy gap and have more joy and fun in our marriage?
2. Make a list of 10 fun ideas that you can do together with your spouse? As you write down each one, also write down how you feel when you think about doing that idea with your spouse.

Fun Night Ideas

1. Go out and do something that you both like that is relational and interactive where you can see and hear each other. Go to a coffee shop, eat at a new restaurant, visit a flower garden or arboretum, go bird or butterfly watching, go bowling or ice skating, etc. During this time focus on each other, enjoy their presence, tenderly touch each other, smile, laugh, and have fun!