

We have made **several observations** about marriages, after seeing many different problems through the years. Here are some of the most common:

1) If you think that other marriages are happier than yours, or that every husband/wife is better, you haven't lived in their home or know the inner workings of what is happening between them. **Every couple has trouble at some time.** There is no such thing as a perfect spouse or marriage.

2) It is much **easier to help a couple who have been married 5 years or less**, regardless of the problem, than to help a couple married over 25 years. The longer they are married, the more entrenched most couples are in their wrong habit patterns, wrong beliefs, or unhealthy interactions.

3) **The number one problem in marriage is selfishness.** This selfishness is directed towards getting their needs met in their spouse. No spouse can meet enough needs to make the other one happy all the time. **The only lasting solution to that problem is to seek God to meet the needs of your life.** He is the only one who can satisfy you. Then we give to our spouse without expecting anything in return – the essence of unconditional love.

4) The number one factor in making progress in marriage issues is **how teachable each individual is.** Whether each person is willing to look at their own life and see what God wants to change, rather than looking to see if their spouse is changing. **One person can change the climate of a marriage!** One of the first things that I tell new counselees is that I can't change their spouse or their circumstance, and neither can they. **The real issue is their response; it is the only thing that no one can take away or control.**

5) **The happiest couples appreciate their differences.** Those personality habits, abilities, and talents become attributes that bring strength to the marriage. When you see differences as a negative, those differences drive you apart instead of bringing you closer. As we share a warning in marriage seminars, "Before marriage, opposites attract. After marriage, opposites attack." **The key is to see your spouse's strengths that complement and complete you.**

6) **A woman's need for emotional intimacy = a man's need for sexual intimacy.** Women often think their husband's desires for sex are impossible to meet. Women don't understand a man's sexual drive. A woman often dismisses her husband's sexual demands as "his problem." She doesn't try to overcome her sexual inhibitions to meet his needs. Likewise, men don't understand a woman's desire to connect on an emotional level, to talk and listen about thoughts and feelings. A man usually does not sense how his responses affect and, often, hurt his wife on a personal level. Many husbands come to the conclusion "I can't make her happy. I am finished trying. That is her problem." Either or both of these attitudes in marriage become disastrous. If husbands and wives could see the importance of this gender difference, marriages would be much different. **You must carefully listen to the heart of your spouse, and then seek to minister to that need.**

7) **As soon as a person begins to focus on what is missing in their spouse, conflict begins.** This principle holds true in every area of life – **complaining about what you don't have, instead of being grateful for what you do have.** Human nature tends to compare yourself with others who have more than you do, not with those who have less than you do. Ingratitude for the gifts God has given to you brings dissatisfaction and, eventually, anger and even depression. **Make it a habit to thank God for all of the good things He has done for you, especially in your spouse and in your marriage.**

8) **When a person's relationship with the Lord is not the most important relationship in their life, the marriage relationship carries an inordinate weight to satisfaction in life.** When a person meets with God on a consistent basis and seeks to surrender their life to Him, marriage becomes a place of ministry and joy. **Instead of asking God to change your spouse, ask Him to change you and show you ways to minister to your spouse's needs.**