

My heart hurt as my friend told me about the struggles one of his adult sons was going through. Alcohol, marijuana, heroin, unwed pregnancy, addictions, DUI arrests. My heart hurt for them, but I'm sure I can't begin to imagine the pain and sorrow a dad and mom feel when they see one of their children like this.

My friend asked me simply, "John, how can I help my son? Do you have any suggestions for me? He's an adult and doesn't very often welcome advice from me. What can I do for him?"

We brainstormed some practical things he could do to strengthen his relationship with his son. More importantly, I encouraged my friend to offer his son *unconditional* love. This is the love that prays and cares constantly for his son. It's the love NOT dependent on his son's response. It's actually GOD'S love flowing through this dad... even when he gets angry rejection in return.

I think of Jesus who, as recorded in Matthew 23, looked down over Jerusalem. In grief and pain, He exclaimed, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." Jesus loved perfectly, but was still rejected. I'm sure Jesus' heart ached. I'm sure He felt the deep pain that results when rebuffed by the very ones we love.

The significant thing is that JESUS DIDN'T QUIT LOVING. The rejection... the pain... the sorrow did not block His *unconditional* love. In fact, that love took Him to death. Even on the cross, He expressed his love, "Father forgive them."

My friend went home, purposing to show this UNconditional love to his wayward, struggling son. I believe this kind of love is only possible as we invite GOD'S love to flow THROUGH us. We become HIS REFLECTORS.... HIS CHANNELS!

Some of you, who are reading this letter, have experienced a situation pretty similar to the one my friend is dealing with. Others, like me, have not faced a situation so severe. But we have all had occasions when our best effort at loving seems to have been shunned. We try so hard to help, to encourage, to give, to LOVE... and our love-motivated outreach is rejected. We might even get a scolding in return! That hurts. Actually, pain at such times is normal and appropriate. Jesus helps us with that wound too.

The really more-important question is, "Will the pain and sorrow hinder my continued expressions of love? Will I keep on loving, EVEN IN the face of rejection?" Will my love be UNconditional?

Yes, May HIS LOVE flow through us!

John (for Sharon and the rest at ALM)



What people **think**,
affects how they **feel**!

How people **feel** affects how they act, speak, and ultimately how they interact with others. Thoughts will determine the direction of an individual's life. And in a marriage, the way spouses *think* about each other, will ultimately lead to the success or failure of their relationship. Following are four healthy mind-sets that, when practiced faithfully, can set the stage for a wonderful life as husband and wife.

Think favorably.

When your thoughts turn to your husband or wife, do you rehash their faults and failures? Do you focus on the gripes and your long list of complaints against him or her? Scripture says, "Be content with the wife of your youth" (Ecclesiastes 9:9). It can be assumed that a wife should also be satisfied with her husband. Think positively of your marriage partner, envisioning their good qualities and all the things he/she has done for which you are thankful. Mentally replay happy memories of good times spent together with them and plan for more good times in the future. The more you focus on the good, the less negative, critical thoughts will consume your attention.

Think forgivingly.

It's inevitable. Your spouse is a human being and therefore will make mistakes and at times wrong you or disappoint you. Couples who make up their minds to practice *instant* forgiveness will experience the greatest contentment and love through their years together. Forgiveness doesn't wait for an apology. It forgives quickly and then focuses on moving forward, not rehashing the wrongs of the past. As Jesus said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15)

Along with instant forgiveness, instant apologies are important too. A good apology is essentially nine words: "I was wrong. I am sorry. Please forgive me." An apology doesn't try to rationalize, justify, or explain away wrong behavior. It takes responsibility for wrongdoing, even if the offender is only one percent at fault.

Think long term.

Couples who entertain the possibility of separation... who daydream about divorce, are more likely to take one of those routes. But since these are not actually options, then it seems we get to decide... will we remain miserable for the rest of our lives or will we choose to fix the problem... simply put, will we **trust** God or will we **doubt** God?

Deciding that the two of you are truly together for life can be a great motivator to work through disagreements, rather than run from them.

Think lovingly.

This is more than just positive thinking. This is planning for the good of your spouse. It is considering what his/her needs are and how you can help. It is dreaming up ways to bless, encourage and satisfy your spouse. It is putting thoughts of helping him/her above thoughts of what you want. Read I Corinthians 13 and Romans 12 for a great description of how a loving attitude really works.



Think prayerfully.

If husbands and wives would spend time each day praying with and for one another, much marital discord would disappear. God invented marriage. He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). So it stands to reason He would want to help His children keep their relationship strong. Throughout the day, whenever your thoughts turn to your husband or wife, instead of thinking critically, ask the Lord to bless your spouse. You will be amazed how a prayerful mindset can make you feel more warm and loving toward your partner. If you're having difficulty in your relationship, prayers of faith will keep you anticipating the best, not the worst.

Proverbs 14:22 says, "Do not those who plot evil go astray, but those who plan what is good will find love and faithfulness." Wonderful marriages don't "just happen." Like most worthwhile things in life, they begin with good thoughts and plans. So, keep your mind focused on building a healthy marriage... and you may very well end up with one that's **better than you ever thought possible!**

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