

you love your spouse. You do owe your spouse desire. If your desires would ruin the poetry of that book then they are ruining your marriage.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. Paul's argument is that you must provide what your spouse needs to be protected from sexual temptation. Does physical fulfillment alone accomplish that? It might help, but is it going to guard against seduction that comes from someone who truly finds your spouse attractive and really, strongly desires your spouse? If you are just doing your physical duty, but your spouse knows that you don't have any real strong, compelling desire to look or touch or whatever, and then someone else comes along who does desire your spouse in that way, you have just placed your spouse into a position of vulnerability to temptation. And Paul calls it fraud because those desires are part of what you owe your spouse. And those kinds of desires can be nurtured the same way as other desires.

A great number of problems in your marriage would disappear if you just made it really clear to your spouse that you are extremely attracted to him or her, and that you have powerful desires. And if you do not have them it is your responsibility before God to develop them.

Being delightful

It is your duty as a married person to take delight in your spouse. And that's also your spouse's duty. And if you love your spouse you will be concerned about assisting him or her in their duty, and so you will strive to become as desirable as possible. God requires that your spouse desire you and delight in you. So if you love your spouse you will make that command easy to follow by becoming as desirable and delightful as you possibly can.

It is selfish to try to manipulate your wife into respecting you more or loving you better or submitting to you more willingly just to make your life more pleasant. And it's selfish for a wife to try to manipulate her husband into loving her in a better way. However that is not to say you should be indifferent about your spouse's love for you. You should want them to love you not for selfish reasons, but because God has revealed that love for your spouse is the path toward joy, and you want your spouse to have joy. There is a world of difference between me saying, "I am going to please my wife so she will treat me better" and "I'm going to please my wife to make it easier for her to find joy in being what God calls her to be as a wife." That first motive is selfish; the second is loving. Ask your spouse what you could do to make it easier to esteem you highly, desire you more, and delight in you.

Food For Your Soul Ministries
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2 How to Increase Your Love

The following excerpts are taken from parts 2&3 of "Building a Joyful Marriage." The full messages are available on **FoodForYourSoul.net**



Love God More

There is no end to the tips out there on how to rekindle the fire of love with your spouse. And over 20 years of marriage I tried every one of them that I could find, and only one worked.

Some things can give a short term boost in the emotions, but love is something that is deeply rooted in the soul. Simple fixes won't work.

The one thing that can have a deep enough impact on the heart to stimulate real and lasting love for someone you don't already love is an increase in love for God. Loving God has a revolutionary effect on the soul. Nothing changes a person more than an increase or decrease in love for God.

How does this advice sound to you? Nothing new, right? Maybe even a cliché? "Love God more" – isn't the basically the same as saying, "Be a better Christian?" It sounds like advice that is true, but not specific enough to be of any real help. But if we understand the meaning of love we find that the advice, "Love God more" is really quite specific. Love is esteem, desire, and delight. Loving God more does not mean "become more committed" or "become more obedient." It means strive to esteem God more highly, train your soul to have greater desire to experience His presence, and then do the things Scripture sets forth as ways to seek God's presence. God will then respond by granting an experience of His presence, which will cause delight in the soul. And when the emotional components of love for God increase, it becomes much easier to increase the emotional components of love for His people.

*If I have not love...
I am nothing*

The following is an extremely brief outline of how to increase love for God. For a much more detailed study refer to the study, "Loving God with all Your Heart" (available free at www.FoodForYourSoul.net)

To increase emotional love for God begin by increasing how highly you esteem Him. Learn all you can about His nature – what He is like. Study the attributes of God. Most studies on the attributes of God present a very short list of attributes. But an attribute is anything that is true about God, which means there are literally hundreds of attributes. The portion of Scripture that is most densely packed with attributes of God is the book of Psalms. Most psalms refer to 2 or 3 different attributes in every verse. An excellent exercise is to read a psalm every morning and make a list of all the attributes stated or implied in that psalm. Here's an example from Ps.63:1 -

O God, you are my God – God is the God of His people as individuals.

earnestly I seek you – God is worthy to be earnestly sought but He is not easily found.

my soul thirsts for you – God is to the soul like water to a dry throat.

As you learn about God's nature the first goal is to increase your esteem for Him, but that's only the first step. That by itself will not increase your love for God. The next step is to increase your desire for God. This is what Scripture speaks of with the concepts of hunger and thirst for God. When you love someone you desire to experience that person's presence.

The way to increase your desire for God is to interpret the thirst of the soul for what it is – thirst for God. Just as the body gets thirsty, so does the body. When you are depressed, unhappy, uneasy, dissatisfied, etc. that is what the thirst of the soul feels like. And there is only one Spring of soul-satisfying water – the experience of the presence of God. Increase your desire for God by interpreting all the discomfort of the soul as thirst for God. When you are unhappy the solution is not a vacation, a new spouse, more money, or a good night's sleep. It is an experience of the nearness of God's presence.

The third step comes naturally on the heels of the second. The thirstier you get, the more you enjoy the water. Increasing your thirst for God will drive you to seek hard after God, resulting in the experience of God's satisfying presence, which will bring delight to the soul.

It is crucial that you do not merely learn information about the attributes of God, but that you actually experience them. A man could read a thousand pages of information about a woman, but he won't love her until he actually spends time with her and experiences the wonderful things about her personality. It's not enough to discover that God is like a refuge; you must experience Him as refuge. That is, be in some trouble and experience

what it is like for the presence of God to shelter you from that trouble. It's not enough to find out that God is awesome; you must have an experience of His greatness that causes you to tremble in awe. Delight comes only when we experience the attributes of God.

As your heart begins to swell with greater love for God your capacity to love those God loves will increase exponentially. The more you love someone the more you love that person's children. In fact it's possible to love children you have never even met. If your dearest friends tell you that their child is gravely ill, it will cause sadness in your heart. Their child wins a big award; you rejoice. There is emotional love in your heart for those kids simply because of your love for their parents. This is the key to loving the children of God.

Increase Esteem for your Spouse

Just as the first step in loving God was esteem, so it is with your spouse. Love is an emotion that is a response to the assessments made by the soul. So how can you make it so that your assessment of your spouse increases from where it is now? You esteem for your spouse is based on what you know. You know how attractive or unattractive, reliable or unreliable, loving or unloving, truthful or untruthful, etc. your spouse is. And your assessment is based on that knowledge. So how does one increase their assessment of someone they know very well?

You do it by spending time thinking about God's assessment.

Your spouse bears the image of God. The more you love God and the more time you spend thinking about the fact that your spouse bears His image, the more highly you will esteem your spouse. (Jas.3:9-10) How important is God's image to God? Does God have high regard for His own image? If so, the how much more should we! Those who bear the divine likeness should be regarded with the utmost respect and honor and with the highest esteem.

If that has no effect on your heart then study the image of God. Learn some of the amazing differences between human beings and animals and how that teaches us about God's nature, and keep studying that until it starts to have an effect on the way you think about your spouse.

Another way to increase your esteem for your spouse is found in Mt.12:50, where Jesus referred to believers as His brothers and sisters. If your spouse is a believer than he or she is Christ's brother or sister. And love for Christ is measured by love for His brothers. (Mt.25:40)

Additionally, think about how much your spouse is worth to God. What is the worth of a person whose purchase price was nothing less than the blood of the spotless, precious Lamb of God! The NT repeatedly points to the fact that Christ died for someone as a reason why that person ought to be highly valued. (1 Cor.10:8-13, Ro.14:15, Acts 20:28) If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, even a moment's

consideration of the depths of love in the heart of God that drove his Son to the agony of the cross for that person should be enough to elevate your assessment of him or her.

Increase Delight in your Spouse

How do you make it so that when you look at your spouse you really, really like what you see and have an emotional reaction of delight?

Consider God's love for your spouse

This is the most common method Scripture gives us for increasing our love for people. The more you love God, and the time you spend thinking about how delighted He is in your spouse, the greater will be your delight. Here are some passages that will help you think through how delighted God is in His people. Zeph.3:17, Isa.62:5, Jer.32:41, 1 Jn.3:1, 1 Jn.4:9, Ps.31:19, Ps.36:7-9, Jn.3:16, Ro.5:8, Ro.8:32, Eph.2:4-5, Eph.3:18-19, Jer.31:20, Zeph.3:17, Isa.62:5, Jer.32:41. Spend as much time in those passages as it takes to change your heart.

That is especially true if your spouse is a believer. But it will work even if you are married to an unbeliever, because God loves all human beings. And that love is to serve as a motive for believers to love all people, including enemies. (Mt.5:43-45. See also Ps.35)

God strongly desires that your spouse be loved by you.

Not only does God deeply and energetically love your spouse, but He also strongly desires that you take delight in your spouse. The more you love God the more you will be moved in your heart by what God desires. And one thing God really desires and that really makes Him happy is when you love your spouse. That is why He commands it over and over - because He desires it. So if you love God at all, the more you think about the astonishing fact that you are capable of doing something that makes Him especially happy and that brings Him pleasure, the more you will desire to do it.

So every time you have thoughts of high esteem for your spouse, or you have a feeling of desire for your spouse, or a feeling of delight – however big or small – take a second to think about God's pleasure in that. Every time you do something kind with a good attitude – any expression of love at all toward your spouse – think about the smile of God. Train your soul to become addicted to that feeling of joy that comes when you think about God being pleased with you just for enjoying your spouse. One of the best ways to learn to love is to take pleasure in pleasing God. And you please God by taking pleasure in your spouse. So all you have to do is take pleasure in God's pleasure in your pleasure in your spouse. Enjoy the fact that God is pleased by you taking delight in your spouse.

Consider your spouse's love for God

A third strategy for increasing delight is fixing your attention on what is attractive about your spouse. And if you are married to a believer Ro.14 tells us about something that is extremely attractive. That chapter is all about how to love the people who bug you. The people were irritated at each other, and the solution Paul gives them is to focus on the fact that those people, generally speaking, have the motive of honoring the Lord. (Ro.14:3-6) The soul that truly loves the Lord Jesus will have affection for anyone who is making an honest effort to honor Him.

What is attractive about your spouse? He or she has a desire to please the Lord! Spend time thinking about that until it endears your heart to your spouse. And if it doesn't, it shows that your love for the Lord is weak or nonexistent.

Enjoy being the Conduit of God's love

There are a lot of ways to experience God's attributes but the greatest is to be the means by which those attributes are delivered to people. The most profound religious experience is to experience God's attributes flowing through you to another person. If you want to experience God's peace or wisdom or love or any other attribute, be a conduit or pipeline through which God delivers that grace to your spouse.

If you are a Christian you have, at your disposal, a measure of God's grace. And it is your responsibility to distribute that grace to others as a steward. (1 Pe.4:10-11) The more we distribute that grace to others, the more of it we receive from God. Do an inventory of the stockpiles of divine riches that have been left under your stewardship and spend some time thinking about how the Master would have you distribute them to your spouse. And when you serve your spouse, instead of thinking of it as a burdensome duty, think of it as being what it really is – an experience of the nearness of God's presence as His grace flows through you.

Enjoy God's grace dispensed through your spouse

Every penny of your husband's paychecks over the years has been provision from the hand of a loving Father in heaven. In our country even people who are struggling financially eat like kings (actually even better than most kings who have ever lived). You have clothes to wear and a roof over your head. All those necessities, as well as luxuries so abundant that if your insurance company asked for a list you wouldn't have time to make it. Wives, don't just enjoy all that as gifts from God; enjoy them as gifts from God through the labor and faithfulness of your husband. Take delight in the way God provides for you through your husband.

The same goes for protection. How many times have you felt safe with your husband there in a context when you would have been scared to be alone? When that happens you are experiencing an attribute of God (His protective hand) – through your husband. The same is true of guidance and headship in the home and every other benefit you receive from God through your husband.

And men, consider all the wonderful gifts God gives you through your wife. Your children – gifts from God through her. And all her work as a homemaker, and partner in your ministry, and partner in life in general, and counselor with a unique perspective and special

wisdom, and encourager and supporter - all the things she does as your suitable helper.

Every hour of every day when you experience those things you are experiencing attributes of God - the very presence of God – delivered to you through your wife. The same is true of all the physical pleasures of marital love that you have enjoyed over the years. All that is an experience of God's love too – given to you through your spouse.

Beyond the natural graces of marriage, if your spouse is a believer then he or she has a set of spiritual gifts. We are all unique. God packed a different set of strengths and gifts and experiences and delights in each individual. And the more you learn about your spouse's unique gifts, and the more you focus your attention on how they point to and reflect the nature of God, the more you will enjoy them. Remember, the goal is to enjoy God through your spouse. It was not good for Adam to be alone – even though he walked with God. God does not want you to *only* enjoy Him directly. You should do that, but He also wants you to enjoy the expressions of His grace that He is giving you through your spouse.

It is important that you know your spouse's spiritual gifts, because those are the main avenue through which you will receive grace from God. If you have lived with those gifts for years it is easy to just take them for granted or think of them as natural abilities. They are God-given fire hoses of grace that you can drink from every day. You can think of your spouse like a drinking straw that connects you to the Fountain of living water.

Uniqueness

Learn to enjoy what is unique about your spouse. That was a huge part of the enjoyment of the couple in the Song of Songs. He says she is like a mare among all Pharaoh's stallions (in other words, she is like the one woman is a world of men in his eyes). And compared to other women she is like a lily among thorns. (1:9, 2:2) In her eyes he is like an apple tree among the common trees of the forest. (2:3) A large part of the joy of marital love is enjoying the uniqueness of your spouse – and then expressing that verbally to each other.

Delight in your spouse's happiness and well-being

This is the mark of genuine love that Jesus gave in Jn.14:28 **If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father.** Love enjoys the happiness and good fortune of the beloved. So the sixth way to increase your delight in your spouse is to make him or her happy. Do something that is especially delightful to them, and then when they are happy, put yourself in his/her shoes and just enjoy their happiness.

Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive, but that only applies to giving out of love. If you give out of mere duty that is not blessed at all, but when you bring joy to another person so that you can enjoy their happiness that is real blessedness.

Increase Desire for your Spouse

In brochure 1 we found that what most people want is to be desired more by their spouse. Your wife doesn't want you to just listen – she wants you to want to hear what she has to say. She wants you not to just spend time with her but to desire to spend time with her. Your husband doesn't want you to simply fulfill his sexual appetites; he wants you to desire physical intimacy. So how do you increase your desire for your spouse?

Taste and see

The biblical formula for increasing desire is "taste and see." The more you sample the delightful things about your spouse the more you will desire them. This is why the section on "delight" came before this section. Once you know who to take delight in your spouse, all that's left to increase your desire is to frequently sample those delightful things.

Nurture good desires

Secondly, make much of your good desires. Sometimes you can have just a fleeting thought about some good thing about your spouse, and you barely pay any attention to it, and a moment later it is forgotten. Don't let that happen. Any time you have any good desire make much of it. Ninety percent of the battle in the Christian life is developing good desires. And so when you have one, pay attention to it, make a big deal about it in your mind, nurture it like a little plant that is about to die that you are trying to save. Try to make it grow – cultivate it and feed it. Just as dwelling on a sinful desire makes it stronger, the same is true of good desires.

Sexual desire

You increase desire for a person by sampling what is delightful about that person and nurturing the desires you already have for those things. That principle applies generally to anyone you are trying to love, but in the marriage relationship there are some unique delights – sexual ones. When it comes to your spouse, in addition to the normal desires of love there should also be physical and romantic desire. The book of Song of Songs is all about marital love, and it begins with the woman expressing her desire. (1:2-3) The word for **love** in v.2 is actually the Hebrew term for lovemaking. She desires his kisses and his way of lovemaking and his unique smell. Just hearing his name is a pleasure for her. We should be doing everything we can to develop that kind of desire for our spouse. If you have little or none of this kind of desire for your spouse you are defrauding your spouse – regardless of what you are doing physically. (As an aside, the energy with which the woman pursues the man in the Song of Songs should dispel any idea that it is somehow not fitting or becoming for a wife to initiate marital intimacy. Both partners should work hard at seducing the other.)

The Song of Songs is God's description of marital love. Read through it and substitute your feelings for your spouse in place of the feelings expressed in that book. Would that destroy the book? If so, there is a need for repentance in the way