

It probably comes as no surprise to learn that happily married couples actually like each other. Yet beneath this almost self-evident truth lies a profound principle for those who want to strengthen or save their marriage. This second principle is based on the idea that couples who believe the other person is worthy of honor and respect tend to weather the storms of life. If you have generally positive feelings towards your spouse then you are able to overlook the little irritants that pop up from time to time.

Another factor plays into this principle – contempt. Contempt is when you look down your nose at someone and sneer at them thinking, “I can’t believe I married this idiot. What a useless, boring, stupid jerk.” Contempt happens when you no longer see value or worth in the other person. You can think of contempt and fondness on a sliding scale. The more fondness and affection you have towards your spouse, the less often contempt will rear its ugly head. By contrast, if you have lost that sense of fondness and affection it will almost certainly be replaced by contempt.

So how do you know if you have lost your sense of fondness and affection? After all, if your marriage is struggling then things are obviously not going very well. It’s highly unlikely for people facing marital challenges to describe their spouse in warm and glowing terms. But just because you can’t say anything nice about your spouse in the present, doesn’t mean you’ve lost all sense of fondness and affection. A good way to check and see if there is any respect left is to go back in time and remember how you met. Think about what drew you to your spouse in the first place. Think of the things you did together and the feelings that made you want to get married, way back when.

If you are able to recall those early days with a smile and warm feelings then there is still hope for your relationship. There is still a dimly burning coal that can be fanned back into a flame. By contrast, if you can’t remember why you got married, if all the good memories are gone, if all you can remember of your past together is pain and fighting – then there’s a good chance the relationship is over for good. If there is no fondness or affection left, there’s nothing to build on.

So how do you build up your fondness and affection for your spouse? What can you do to rekindle those happy feelings when present struggles have nearly snuffed them out?

One thing you can do is to start making a list of all the character traits you admire (or once admired) in your spouse. Do you appreciate that your spouse is loving, resourceful, cheerful, expressive, practical, silly, etc. Get yourself a notebook and just start writing down all the little things about your spouse that make you smile or that you respect or admire. A year or so ago I decided to do this exercise myself and came up with 32 items for my list of things I admire about my wife. It’s good to remind yourself of all those little things.

Another exercise you can do to nurture your fondness and affection is to spend some time discussing the history of your relationship with your spouse. Talk about how you first met. What were your first impressions of each other? What do you remember most about when you were first dating? Talk about how you decided to get married. Of all the people in the world, what led you to decide that this was the person you wanted to marry? You might be surprised how this kind of discussion will unlock your positive memories and start to rebuild that fondness and affection.

Perhaps the most important part of this principle is that you have to continually nurture your fondness and affection. It’s also true that whatever thoughts you feed are the ones that will grow. So if you have negative thoughts (or contemptuous thoughts) towards your spouse, you’ll want to shut that stuff down. Replace those negative thoughts with positive ones. Recite the list of attributes you admire about your spouse. Keep doing that, and over time you can rebuild that system of fondness and affection.

Happy Sabbath  
Pastor Tyler