



OYF228 Bonus Guide: Growing Your Marriage by Growing Yourself

So you're in a marriage that, for whatever reason, isn't leaving you fully satisfied. You've made the admirable decision to stick together rather than call it quits. But is there anything you can do to make your situation better?

At OYF we believe there is always hope and no marriage is too far gone to be helped. But a big part of improving an unsatisfying marriage is changing yourself. Today we're looking at two very simple ways to do this, which might kick-start some real change in your marriage.

Changing Your Viewpoint

If someone asked you why you are staying together when you aren't fully happy in your marriage, what would you say? "Because it's the right thing to do"? "For the sake of the kids"? or maybe "I'm afraid nobody else would want me"?

As we said in this week's episode, reasons for staying committed to a marriage can be split into *reasons for staying* and *barriers to leaving*. Believing that it is right to stay in your marriage is a positive reason to stay: it's a decision to stick things out even when life isn't ideal. Thinking that you'd never find a better partner is a barrier to leaving: it means you're only sticking with your marriage because there's something in the way that's keeping you there.

If you think of your marriage purely in terms of barriers to leaving then you'll end up thinking of your marriage a bit like a prison that you can't escape from. This is bound to make you feel even more unhappy. But if you can try to think of positive reasons for staying in your marriage then this will help you feel more in control of your life, and more able to focus on the positives of your situation.

Think back to the reasons you gave for staying in your marriage. See if you can re-phrase any of them to turn them from barriers into reasons. A slight twist to the reasons you tell yourself can have a big impact on the way you think, feel and act. Try filling in the table below by entering any barriers in the left and transforming them into reasons on the right. Some examples are filled out.

Barrier to leaving	Positive Reasons to Stay
<p><i>Eg. people at church will judge me if I divorce</i></p> <p><i>Eg. I won't be able to cope on my own</i></p>	<p><i>Eg. Marriage is a sacred bond and God is pleased that we uphold it</i></p> <p><i>Eg. my marriage provides for me</i></p>



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Supporting Each Other's Goals

When two people are in an unfulfilling marriage it's easy to feel trapped and powerless. A good way to address this is to find some area of your life that you want to improve in, and start working on it. You might not be able to change the circumstances of your marriage, but you can certainly make changes to your own life that make you into a stronger, more complete person.

Take a moment to think of some life goals. These can be as big or as small as you like. Do you want to work on your physical fitness? Always wanted to learn a particular skill, or visit a certain country? Maybe there's a bigger goal or aim you've always held on to but never been able to fulfill? Why not take the time now to think about how you can make these goals and dreams into a reality? Being able to reach your own life goals will give you a huge boost to your confidence and happiness, and this can really transform your life at home as well.

Now, you and your spouse may not have the same goals in life. That's absolutely fine. Focus on your own growth and your own goals. But see if you can support your spouse in their aspirations too. Instead of getting frustrated that you have different priorities and want different things from life, give your spouse your full support in whatever they choose to focus their time on.

Two people with different life goals and values living together can often get under each other's skin and cause a lot of conflict. Or, they can choose to fully support each other in their individual pursuits, celebrate their successes and feel empowered to live the life that matters to them. Which of these sounds like a better way to live? If both of you are able to pursue your own goals while fully supporting your spouse in theirs, you'll both end up leading much more happy and fulfilling lives. And bringing this strength back into your marriage might just turn things around there as well.