

Mid Life Marriage Makeover

By best selling authors, *Pam and Bill Farrel*

We were both standing with our teen kids at the “To Go” order desk waiting for our dinners to be ready so we could jump back into the fast lane of family life. Two moms, striking up a conversation to bide the time until we both could zoom back into life’s never ending stream of responsibilities. We both longed to be at the spa getting a mini makeover instead standing in yet another endlessly long line. As with most midlife women’s conversations, the topic soon turned to stress. I learned that my new friend was a very high profile leader in her community—someone much like me and you in her role in life. Then, this very seemingly “together” leader I was chatting with asked me what I did for a living. When I shared that Bill and I have a relationship ministry, she said, “Well maybe you can help me with mine.” Then my new friend, did what many women in midlife do, she shared the story of all the stressors, all the responsibilities, all the built up frustrations that accompany many marriages—especially at midlife. She was a woman whom thousands look up to as a leader—a woman in a powerful, influential position in life—every day she helped others solve issue and problems in their lives yet she was ready to throw in the towel on her marriage.

So what’s a mid life married mom to do?

Get Real: When I shared that midlife marriages experience more stress because of the season of life we are in, my new friend seemed to gain hope. Think about it: Midlife moms are either older moms with little kids (exhausting), raising teens (more exhausting) or paying for graduations, cars, college, or weddings (expensively exhausting!) This doesn’t even take into account the rising number of grandparents raising their grandchildren (expensive and exhausting a second time around!) Then add to this, pressures from success: people want your wisdom, your connections, your time, your expertise in ministry, love, or life. And for some add in pressures like: church politics, retirement transitions, health challenges like menopause or peri menopause for her and midlife crisis issues for him. In addition, many parents in midlife marriages are also dealing with teenage hormones and prodigal young adults sowing their wild oats. Often a midlife marriage seems dull and lifeless when all that is really going on is extreme pressure from the life stage you are in (or the church you are in) and you two just needing a vacation and some well deserved R and R! Clergy couples have the added pressure of growing churches, building projects and a myriad of other stressors like long hours for little pay. Hang on, get those kids out of the house, get a substitute preacher or teacher for a week and go a second honeymoon—get a little rest and things will look a whole lot better!

Get educated: For the past year I have been writing a book for women who want to live longer and stronger for God: ***Fantastic After 40!*** My desk is stacked with research on this phase of life. Midlife does come with a prepackaged set of obstacles to overcome, the major one being your age! High blood pressure, rising cholesterol levels, weight gain and diabetes, over 100 symptoms of menopause to deal with and the growing need for medications like Premarin, Prozac, Levitra, and Viagra —these are just a few of the many physical issues that midlifers might have to deal with. If you get educated and get equipped, what looked like a negative can be turned into a positive. For example, when Bill and I hit 45, our church had grown to be the largest in town, we were in the middle of a building project and his blood pressure was up to levels of concern from his doctor and my cholesterol was rising so I to was being chided by my physician to make some lifestyle changes. We needed to do something drastic or we'd be in love—but we'd be dead so we wouldn't enjoy our love much! We took back our schedule and added in some workout time as dates. We lost a little weight and gained some much needed romantic time. For our anniversary last year, we bought each other bikes and now we try to ride to romantic spots.

What Satan means for evil—God means for good. My brother and sister in law also have a ministry minded marriage, and life stress and bad family genes caught up to him in his early 40's and he had a heart attack, so they began walking 2-4 miles every morning where they pray for each other, their family and chat about the coming day. It has become one of their most cherished times of the day. My doctor told me that those of us in people helping careers die 10 years sooner than the average person because we are so busy caring for others that we don't care for ourselves. Look at the DNA of your family tree. What issue can you nip in the bud by twisting it together with a little exercise and romance? (Did you know kissing burn calories?)

Get a new perspective: In our book, ***10 Best Decisions Every Couple Can Make***, we interviewed couples who have been happily married over 20 years. These couples made a deliberate choice: Instead of looking at all the things that are wrong and frustrating about their mate and life after 40, they instead opted to look at all the things they loved and would miss if their mate were no longer around. Last week, three of us women who are over 40 and have been married over 25 years, were sitting together taking about midlife and marriage. We each said how much we'd miss our mate if he were no longer around because he had become our best friend. I shared how on our 25th anniversary, we had a vow renewal ceremony and this time our vows sounded very different from the first go around because we knew what it really took to keep love alive for a lifetime. I commented having a healthy ministry minded marriage is a choice. Bill sees all my flaws and knows them well and he chooses to focus on my strengths instead. For example, he calls my impulsivity "spontaneity". I know Bill pretty much always runs late because he is such a people person, but I choose to focus on the fact he is great at relationships and just ask him to come home 20 minutes earlier than I really need him.

While all these tips are framed in the context of midlife ministry minded marriage, it is actually great advice to work into your life at any stage of marital love—to protect your love—and your life.

As I shared these simple principles, my new friend gained some hope. She said, “We did make a commitment at the altar. I know we meant it, but I think it is time for “us” to go on the front burner of life’s priorities for awhile. I want to get back to seeing him as my best friend and my lover. Maybe life will seem fun again then.” I smiled and winked at her knowingly. This very high profile couple, one whom many look to as a role model might just stay that way now—which is refreshing in a world with so many leaders failing in marriage. How about you, what mini marriage makeovers can you institute to rediscover love – and have a little fun in the process?

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Need a fresh perspective on life and love? Check out Pam and Bill’s books: ***Fantastic After 40*** and ***10 Best Decisions Every Couple Can Make*** at www.farrelcommunications.com. If you are over 40, join www.Seasonedsisters.com. Also, to boost marriage at any stage of life your church might enjoy Pam and Bill’s new DVD marriage curriculum by Lifeway Publishers, ***Men are like Waffles, Women are like Spaghetti***. Meet the Farrels in person at a marriage conference. <http://farrelcommunications.com/calendar.html>

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