

ALL ABOUT FAMILIES
FEATURE ARTICLE

IT TAKES A STRONG FRIENDSHIP TO MAKE A STRONG MARRIAGE

by Norman Bales

My wife and I have been married for 36 years, but we've only been friends for about 20 years. We entered marriage with different assumptions, priorities and plans. After sixteen years of battling opposing agendas, we realized we had to get on the same page if we wanted our marriage to continue. We managed to do that by becoming friends.

How do you develop a friendship in a marriage? Pretty much the same way you develop any friendship. Recently, I attended the funeral of a boyhood friend. As I reflected on our relationship, which spanned several years of childhood and adolescence, I saw common ground between our friendship and the friendship in our marriage. Let me explain what I mean.

1. Friends do things together. My boyhood friend and I hunted, fished, swam in the farm ponds (called "tanks" in West Texas) and played country music together. More than that, we talked. We talked about every subject we could think of. Sometimes I thought he was off the wall and I'm sure he thought the same thing about me.

When my wife and I decided to become friends, we started doing things together - meeting for lunch, taking walks in the evening, just sitting and talking about everything from Bible to baseball. We don't take separate vacations. We work together, give one another back rubs and share our deepest feelings with each other. That's friendship. The Bible speaks of the ". . . friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). It takes that kind of friendship to make a marriage work.

2. Friends don't quit on each other. My boyhood friend and I didn't always see things the same way. We quibbled over frivolous matters and sometimes we had big disagreements about the larger issues of life. Occasionally, we got genuinely disgusted with one another, but it never lasted long. We practiced Paul's advice - "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26).

In 36 years of marriage Ann and I have faced much larger issues, but we don't give up on each other. When we first decided to work at becoming friends, I promised her, "We may lose a battle here and there, but we won't lose the war." Friendship means commitment despite disagreement.

I'm still married today because my wife is my very best friend. Who is your best friend? If it's anyone other than your spouse, you need to work at deepening friendship with your marriage partner.