

If you want a healthy and happy marriage, then you have to learn to control your selfishness.

On the other hand, if you really want to damage your marriage and increase the pain and misery you experience, then be selfish.

Selfishness is a universal part of the human experience. It is in our nature to be selfish. When we are selfish, we are usually rewarded with pleasure. However, the pleasure is fleeting, but the consequences are not.

Most of us realize that selfishness tends to drive other people away. This is why we hid our selfish tendencies from our spouse when we were dating. After marriage we began to feel secure enough to let our selfish tendencies show.

No matter how strong a relationship you developed while keeping your selfish nature under control, you will begin to poison it as soon as you exhibit selfish behaviors.

The dating experience teaches us we have the ability to control our selfishness. How can we regain this ability once we are married?

Fear of driving away our spouse was the main motivating factor behind our ability to control our selfish nature while we were dating.



While fear can motivate us to change our behavior in the short term, it loses its effectiveness over time.

A long term solution is to replace our selfish tendencies with something positive.

*The antidote to selfishness is service.* It's difficult to be selfish when you are serving your spouse. Service forces you to put the needs of your spouse in front of your own needs.

One of the keys to a strong marriage lies in fulfilling your spouse's needs before your own. When you use this key, a spirit of service will soon permeate your relationship.

This spirit of service is contagious. On average, your spouse will begin to reciprocate within 3 weeks. He or she might first regard your service with suspicion. However, as you are consistent in your service he or she will eventually begin to reciprocate.

Does serving your spouse mean tolerating or subjecting yourself to behavior that is unacceptable? Of course not. Behaviors like domestic violence should never be tolerated. If you are a victim of domestic violence we suggest you seek professional help immediately.

## Action Plan

As you both serve each other, you will begin experiencing the joy and happiness in your marriage that accompanies service.

Make a list of five things you will do every day to serve your spouse. Don't let anything stop you from doing them!

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Take some time each week to add new ideas to your list.



For more information on gaining the skills and knowledge to form and sustain a healthy marriage please visit:

## The Atlanta Healthy Marriage Resource Center

[atl.healthymarriage.org](http://atl.healthymarriage.org)

To print copies of the other topics in this pamphlet series visit [www.healthymarriage.org](http://www.healthymarriage.org)

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# Marriage

Increase the Joy  
Decrease the Misery



# Service

A Key to Unlocking the Door to  
a Healthy and Happy Marriage