

Creating a happy marriage is possible and this site is dedicated to providing resources to help couples who want to stay together. By providing information about qualified marriage counseling, we hope to encourage couples to get the help they need. The site also features articles, other websites, books, and workshops which offer the tools needed to create happy, lasting marriages.



## Strengthening Intimacy with your Spouse

*This is Episode number 61 of Stay Happily Married, "Strengthening Intimacy with your Spouse."*

*Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.*

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Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here by telephone with Terry Northcutt. He's the director of marriage enrichment programs at Family Dynamics Institute's Nashville office. Terry has served as a senior pastor for 24 years in churches all over the country. He's been in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Texas, California; and he's been with Family Dynamics Institute since 1995.

Now, one thing that I am happy to be able to say, given that we're talking about staying married, is that Terry has been married for 38 years to his wife Glenda.

And Terry, welcome to the show. How you doing?

Terry Northcutt: I'm doing very wonderful. Thank you.

Lee Rosen: Now, you have three grown children, right?

Terry Northcutt: That's correct.

Lee Rosen: Thirty-eight years of marriage. You know, that's a record in the culture we live in today. You should get like a gold star on your forehead or something like that.

Terry Northcutt: I find that actually sad that we have to say that.

Lee Rosen: Well, it's just --

Terry Northcutt: I understand what you're saying, but it's sad that we have so many people who haven't figured out how to stay married and be happy.

Lee Rosen: Right. It really is. It's just a mess out there. But hopefully in the next few minutes we will do some things to straighten that out.

You know, you're with us about people's sex life and this whole idea of strengthening intimacy. And that's really -- I guess the cliché is that problems with intimacy are more common for couples that have been married a long time. You've been married 38 years. Do you find that that's generally the case?

Terry Northcutt: Well, clichés are much like conventional wisdom. It often sounds good but it's not necessarily true. If you're asking questions like, do couples who have been married for a number of years have sex as often as couples who are young, probably not. But that's totally normal. If you're asking if they have the heights of passion at 50 or 60 that they did at 20, probably not either. But there's nothing the matter with that either.

Interestingly enough, there's a lot of research out there that says things like couples that have been married for a number of years have a much more fulfilling sex life than couples that aren't married and are just having sex. And I think that speaks volumes about conventional wisdom.

Lee Rosen: Well, that's interesting. They're happier with their sex lives. They're much more fulfilled, I guess, after years of really getting to know one another.

Terry Northcutt: Yes.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Well, it makes sense.

Terry Northcutt: I heard one person -- I can't remember who it was -- say several years ago that couples in their 50s and 60s had the most satisfying and rewarding sex of any decade simply because the moment of the passion was not necessarily the most important thing; it was that commitment and that fulfillment with each other.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'm 47. I'm about to have my 48th birthday. So that's good news for me; I've got a lot to look forward to.

Terry Northcutt: Well, it's especially good news for me because I'm 60 and I'm right in the middle of that.

Lee Rosen: Well, that's good. Let me ask you this. Now, I think this would be a point of contention in a lot of marriages. Is there a normal amount of sex from a frequency standpoint? I hear husbands say one thing, wives say another thing. You're an expert. What do you think?

Terry Northcutt: I would say an expert. My wife would definitely question that one. But if we're going to talk about normal -- normal is I guess what's normal for couples because everybody's different. But there's some research out there that says that about twice a week will be a pretty fulfilling time for most couples, although some couples when they're younger want it much more often than that. But as you get older, if you can manage to have sex twice a week you are in the gold standard, as we say.

Lee Rosen: The gold standard. Okay. And you know, I do think -- that does strike me as probably -- people don't necessarily come out and say, "Hey, we did it twice this week." But I do think that that sounds like the sort of feedback that I get from folks.

Now, let me ask you this. When people are not happy with their sex lives, with the level of intimacy physically, what does the relationship look like? How can you tell that that's an issue looking at that relationship?

Terry Northcutt: Well, sometimes you can just see it in the body language, the fact that they don't talk to each other or they don't want to spend much time together. Other times people are just very good at hiding it from anyone else. But it very definitely has an affected home, whether or not there are outward symptoms or not.

Lee Rosen: So you feel like when you're having trouble with physical intimacy that you see emotional issues or communication issues, that sort of thing? Is it a chicken or an egg sort of thing?

Terry Northcutt: I don't know which one it is. But I do know that in our courses -- we design courses to help couples, no matter where they are, to have a better marriage. And one of the things that comes up is sometimes there's sexual difficulties and it bleeds over into other things. There are just all sorts of problems that occur when a couple is not intimate with one another on a level that both of them want it to be.

Lee Rosen: But it's hard to know whether the other issues came first or whether the sexual problems came first, I guess.

Terry Northcutt: That's such a complex question and everybody's so different. I don't know even if you could determine the answer if you would know what to do with that simply because everybody's so different.

Lee Rosen: Right. Makes sense. But I guess that leads to the whole significance of a healthy sex life really is important. I mean, you can't neglect that and expect your marriage to work.

Terry Northcutt: Well, for most people it can't. There are always exceptions to that rule, but especially in our society where everything is promoted by sex and people get all the wrong reasons for sex and all the wrong understanding and the emphases, it is so important that couples understand that sex is far more than just a biological function. It's a bonding of two people in intimacy beyond just a physical realm. Until they understand that, it's always going to be disappointing and misunderstood and abused.

Lee Rosen: Right. What do you see as the big factors that are really putting a damper on intimacy in our society now? Anything in particular that's making it tougher?

Terry Northcutt: Well, two things that just immediately pop to my mind. Just the stress of life; you're just doing so many things. And closely combined with that stress is that we tend to make poor choices. We try to do everything. We want the children to be involved in 42 different activities and we want to be involved in 42 activities and there's just not time and energy to do that much things. And as long as we keep running ourselves ragged and putting the stress on us that all those things create, plus just the stress of modern life, sex is going to take a back seat all too often.

Lee Rosen: Right. It's like there's not time for it with everything else we've got. And you don't have the emotional energy left, I guess, with everything else that people put into their daily schedules.

Terry Northcutt: I'm not saying that people are not having sex. But what ends up is, "Well, we've got three minutes. Let's have sex."

Lee Rosen: Right. And that cannot enhance the relationship in the way you'd like it to.

Terry Northcutt: Not at all.

Lee Rosen: No. No. Okay. So folks listening to us are struggling. I mean, they wouldn't be listening to us if everything was working just the way they'd like it to. And what I'm wondering -- you've been at this for many years. If somebody comes and sits down with you and says,

"Look, we just -- the intimacy is lacking. Things are not happening the way we want it to. We're really at square one and we want to rebuild. We want to put things back on track and get things together." Do you have some down to earth practical advice for them?

Terry Northcutt: Well, first of all, that question is coming across like I'm a counselor. And we are not counselors; we are in the business of marriage education. And so rather than talking to people one-on-one, we have courses that we design that get people through all sorts of dynamics -- group dynamics and other things -- to come to understand the principles.

So in our courses, if I can sort of turn the question around a little bit --

Lee Rosen: Yeah.

Terry Northcutt: -- one of the things that we help people to see is that all of us have basic needs that we need fulfilled by our spouse. And when that spouse is not able to meet those, for whatever reason, then we go unfulfilled. And people can make various choices. They can then become very needy and despondent; or they can look other places for meeting of those needs, which is a terrible choice but it's still one that some people go to.

And if you can understand what your spouse needs -- your goal is not to say, "I want you to meet my needs." Each person's goal is to say, "I have a spouse who has needs. What can I do to meet those?" And give the spouse the same dignity and respect to ask the same question back toward us.

And once we understand what it is that the other really wants and how they want it and we're able to then start to find a way to meet each other halfway, as it were, then things begin to fall into place. And believe it or not, even though a little sex education is always helpful, we find that sex comes into play in just almost a normal and natural way when needs are being met.

Lee Rosen: It follows along. Yeah. That just makes a lot of sense. If the relationship is working then the sexual relationship is going to follow right along without any trouble. Makes a tremendous amount of sense.

Terry Northcutt: In most cases I would say that's true. And we have some courses that really help people to understand that and they learn by experience through the classes how to make that happen.

Lee Rosen: Now, I want to dig into the courses. Give folks an idea of what you're offering and how it works.

Terry Northcutt: Okay. We have two basic courses and then we have several other things. I'll talk about the two basic ones. We have a course that we call *Dynamic Marriage*. It's eight weeks. It lasts two and a half hours a week for eight weeks in a row and then there's about five hours of homework outside of class. We ask the couples to spend one night a week doing their homework, which is reading, writing, thinking, practicing, learning by experience, sharing with your spouse. Learning, "Is what I'm doing working for you?" "Is this being helpful or do I need to make a course correction?"

And then they come back to class and based on what they've learned they all share and they learn from each other. And it's a powerful course. We've had people make just incredible transformations in their marriages by going through that course.

Lee Rosen: Right. Now, that's one program. What's the other one?

Terry Northcutt: The other one is -- sometimes either couples don't listen or they don't follow through with that or, more likely, they never did anything. They weren't even aware of the course. And all of a sudden they find out that their spouse is saying, "I want a divorce," and they're in trouble and they don't know what to do. And we have a weekend workshop for couples who are in trouble where we get them to calm down, realize what they're doing, why it's not working, and how to change it. And three out of four couples who go through that program we turn around and make their marriage good again.

Lee Rosen: So that's really more like an emergency room treatment when we're really on the brink at that point.

Terry Northcutt: Yes. In the marriage industry they call that a -- it's called an intensive.

Lee Rosen: Intensive. Okay.

Terry Northcutt: Because couples need basically surgery.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, it makes sense. And three out of four are turning things around as a result of your course. That's pretty impressive.

Terry Northcutt: It is. But we worked hard at it for years and we actually train psychologists to lead that one for us.

Lee Rosen: Right. I'll bet that's a very intense weekend

Terry Northcutt: It is.

Lee Rosen: Emotion-packed.

Terry Northcutt: Because of the group dynamics we use in that one, before the weekend is over we've got couples who came in trouble who are now encouraging other couples who are not getting with the program to get with the program because they've come to understand this can be saved and yours can be too.

Lee Rosen: Do you generally find that one spouse is driving attendance at that program and the other one is sort of being dragged along, or is it usually that they're both pretty interested in being there?

Terry Northcutt: Oh, no. It's one of them doesn't want to be there at all.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Terry Northcutt: That's the only reason the other one came to attention and said, "We need to do something." And one says, "I'm checking out." Either literally or metaphorically they're checking out and it scares the other one and now they start doing something that maybe they should have been doing all along and they hadn't.

Lee Rosen: So there are a lot of ultimatums delivered, I guess, before those courses.

Terry Northcutt: Sure.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Now, you guys have two websites that offer an awful lot of information and resources. Let's talk about those for just a minute. First one is the [SaveMyMarriage.com](http://SaveMyMarriage.com). Explain what that one is all about.

Terry Northcutt: We dedicate that particular website, [SaveMyMarriage.com](http://SaveMyMarriage.com), to the couples who need to save their marriage. And so that's all about the New Beginning program. We have articles on that website that people can read if they're in trouble to maybe give them some hope and help. But hopefully they will then call us and one of our ministry consultants will then talk to those people and try to convince them to come to that seminar where we're having such great results. And that whole website is designed to get people who are falling apart to that seminar.

Lee Rosen: Okay. And then [FamilyDynamics.net](http://FamilyDynamics.net), that one is more focused on the programs that you offer. Is that right?

Terry Northcutt: Yes. It's just an overview of everything we do, including A New Beginning. But we try to steer people in trouble away from that one because they can easily get lost in all the other things and they need to concentrate on saving their marriage at the moment.

Lee Rosen: Now, your programs are -- you know, I know that you're in Nashville. But the programs are all for -- in a lot of places, right?

Terry Northcutt: Well, not only in this country but in a number of other countries. We have had people just spread the word and so I've done training in Hong Kong and London and we've had others do training in other places as well.

Lee Rosen: So how would I go about -- if I wanted to find your program in my city, how would I figure out if you have one?

Terry Northcutt: Well, actually, all you'd have to do is to go to [FamilyDynamics.net](http://FamilyDynamics.net) and then on the home page you would find the word "schedules" and you would go to that. And actually, I printed that out just in case you asked that question. And if somebody wanted to come to a facilitator training to learn how to help people by leading the class, we actually have a training seminar that will be in Charlotte July 17th through the 19th.

Lee Rosen: So those are folks that want to start a new program in their area, right?

Terry Northcutt: Yeah. We train couples how to go back to usually their churches, but it could be any organization. And then they can lead the course any time they want to.

Lee Rosen: Wow. Do you find that a lot of --

Terry Northcutt: Believe it or not, it takes 22 hours to learn how to lead the class correctly.

Lee Rosen: Are a bunch of the people that the classes people that have graduated from your program?

Terry Northcutt: Probably three out of four have never been to anything. They just come and we train them and they go back. But the neat thing about it is when you're a facilitator of the class -- this is the Dynamic Marriage class. This is not for couples in trouble; this is for people who just want to make it better.



Lee Rosen: Right.

Terry Northcutt: The facilitators are just fellow strugglers in life. They're not perfect and they act as fellow students even while they're leading it because they're going through the materials just like everyone else.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, that is really great and it sounds like just a first class operation with a lot of great resources. So I would encourage folks to check out the websites and get more information.

Terry, I really appreciate you joining us today and filling us in on what you're up to.

Terry Northcutt: Have you got time for one more thought or not?

Lee Rosen: Sure. Yeah. What have you got?

Terry Northcutt: Well, we just started something brand new. We have been experimenting with something and found it -- we've got places where somebody wants to take the eight-week Dynamic Marriage course and they can find any course in their area. And we've not been able to do anything about that. But we have experimented and found it works -- we are now starting Dynamic Marriage courses in groups by telephone and it's working very, very well.

Lee Rosen: Oh, wow. So if you're not able to get there -- it's not in your city or whatever -- you just connect by phone. But you still get that -- that's so much better than just an online thing because you're still going to get all the input from the other couples in the group.

Terry Northcutt: Absolutely. I just did my last beta test a few months ago and I had a couple in Tennessee who -- he was always working Monday through Friday in Alabama and they were never together for the course because the course was on Tuesday nights. And she would call in from her home in Tennessee and he would be somewhere in Alabama on the road and then they'd just spend the weekend working on their homework together and then they'd be together on the phone call. So even if you have to travel it works.

Lee Rosen: That's a lot of people today too. Right.

Terry Northcutt: Oh, sure. So people can go to our website to that schedule and there's a listing of beginnings of telephone courses as well.

Lee Rosen: Right. Oh, terrific resource. That is really -- that just fits the reality of so many people's lives today. This is a really neat thing you guys are doing. Thanks for letting us know about that.

Well, Terry, again thank you so much for joining us. I really appreciate it.

Terry Northcutt: Well, it's been my privilege and honor.

Lee Rosen: And let me remind all of you that you can check out the websites. The Family Dynamics Institute has the website at [FamilyDynamics.net](http://FamilyDynamics.net) and I will be sure and put a link to that in the show notes. You can also go to [SaveMyMarriage.com](http://SaveMyMarriage.com) and both are worth a visit. Go and check it out. The [SaveMyMarriage.com](http://SaveMyMarriage.com) just has a tremendous amount of information that you can put to work immediately in your marriage and so I would encourage you to go and scope it out.

Thank you so much for listening today. I hope that you will join us again next week. I want to thank you for all the feedback you are sending us. Your e-mails are just terrific. You've given us a lot of great ideas about upcoming shows and I really appreciate that. Keep sending your feedback. You can either send us e-mail at [comments@stayhappilymarried.com](mailto:comments@stayhappilymarried.com); you can also reach us by phone at (919) 256-3083.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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