

**ADVICE THIS ONE QUESTION CAN IMPROVE ANY MARRIAGE**

<https://fiercemarriage.com/this-one-question-can-improve-any-marriage>

[00:00:00]

**Ryan:** All right, Selena, I contend this one thing that we're going to tell our amazing listeners and viewers today is that I think the simplest and quickest way to make any marriage better. Any marriage better. All right. So, listener, viewer, I hope you're titillated because we're going to see you on the other side.

[00:00:20] <music>

**Ryan:** Selena, does that make you feel awkward when I say the word titillated?

**Selena:** Always.

**Ryan:** Always. *[laughs]* By the way, listeners, if you're hearing this, of course, you're hearing this if you're a listener, we improved our Mike situation. We had a technical difficulty I think the last two or three episodes where, unbeknownst to me, one of the cables was steadily going out and it was causing problems obviously in the audio side. So we apologize for that. But I think we've got it fixed, Lord willing. But here we are.

**Selena:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** Yeah. So if you don't know who we are, my name is Ryan. This is my lovely wife, Selena. We have our youngest daughter. She's two months old. Sunny Alethea Bess is here with us. We're thankful to have your time. Selena, you just gave the fast finger.

**Selena:** Well, this is take two, friends *[chuckles]* and we're trying to be quicker about these things. You want to be halfway through this.

**Ryan:** We're at 8 minutes, but we're like 2 minutes in. So just back off. *[Selena laughs]*

**Selena:** All sounds the same.

**Ryan:** You know what? Just back off, lady. *[both laughs]* All right. So here it is. I think it's the quickest way for any marriage to improve. And it's simply by asking this question: How can I love you better today?

**Selena:** Yeah. I love when you ask me this question. It's usually right in the midst of chaos and I think you can tell that I'm about to melt down and go crazy. Not

really. *[Ryan laughs]* But whenever you ask me this... Like you asked me this this morning, and I was like, "Well, I feel like all my requests are met with a happy attitude, a heart that's willing and serving." And, you know, I didn't have many... there weren't other... it's in the hard moments that I'm like, "Oh, I have an answer for you, let me tell you." And it's not like that, though. It's out of the kindness of my heart. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** So if I ask you right now, how can I love you better, you would say, You can't because-

**Selena:** You have loved me so perfectly. *[baby crying]* She want to know.

**Ryan:** Oh, she knows the line. Did you hear the line? *[both laughs]*

**Selena:** Here's one.

**Ryan:** Sunny-girl, just right in the middle of that naptime. So yeah. We're going to share some scriptures with you. That's not the entirety of the podcast episode. We want to actually give you some tangible reasons why we strongly believe this is probably the quickest way to improve your marriage.

**Selena:** No matter where it's at.

**Ryan:** Well-

**Selena:** I mean, it matters.

**Ryan:** If you can genuinely ask and get a genuine response to this question, I think it probably doesn't matter where you're at in a marriage. I mean-

**Selena:** And I think we'll get into why. It's such a powerful tool.

**Ryan:** Even if you've gone through kind of a cataclysmic event, catastrophic event where there's a betrayal of trust, maybe there's even an affair, adultery or things like that and you're struggling through that, even hearing this question, I think, may be a way forward, even if it doesn't feel like... Anyway, that's kind of on one far end of the spectrum, I should say. Selena, you had some scriptures in here.

**Selena:** I did, because I really think that this statement gives you an opportunity to be obedient to Christ, to live out what He says in John 15:12-13. "This is my commandment that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends."

So by asking, "How can I love you better today?" you're not asking for yourself. I mean, you're asking for yourself so that you can serve and love, not so that you can get something from your spouse. It really is fulfilling that commitment of loving one another and that greater love. Right?

**Ryan:** Well, that's really interesting because I feel like oftentimes our default posture, we may not see it like this, but our default posture in marriage is to look at one another and say, "What can I get from you?" Meaning that, what are you giving to me? We have to be very mindful of maybe that tendency.

Say, we're having a hard conversation and I feel like you're not listening well or you're not communicating well, I'm not looking to you thinking, "How can I love you better right now in this moment?" I'm looking to you thinking like, "Why aren't you communicate better to me?" or "Why are you acting so messed up toward me?"

**Selena:** Right. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** Even around things like intimacy, we approach it thinking, you know, "I want..." It's good to want your spouse. That's good. It's good to want to take pleasure in your spouse. It's good to want to connect. It's good to want to experience that together. But when that's your only orientation headed into that a time, how much more powerful is it if we're headed into that time we're both asking this question of each other: how can I love you well right now? [00:05:01]

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** How can I give to you? And that answer could be anything if it's asked genuinely. You could say, "You could give to me by maybe waiting. We can postpone this till tomorrow. I'm tired" or whatever. That gives me a chance as a husband to respond and say, "Okay, so be it. I want to love you well. I want to give to you in that way."

**Selena:** So be it. *[both laughs]*

**Ryan:** Your loss. I'm a catch.

**Selena:** You are.

**Ryan:** Maybe next time you'll estimate me. No. Does that make sense? Why do you look like I said something strange there?

- Selena:** No, because I think it sounds easier than it actually is. Because in the moment, you know, if one of you is putting out the vibe and the other one's not picking it up, it can be frustrating to say, "Well, how can I love you better?" and say, "Well, you can just wait until tomorrow." *[both laughs]* Okay, I love you." It's a hard pill to swallow. But it's not-
- Ryan:** Because usually when I put out the vibe, it's pretty irresistible to you. So that's very frustrating.
- Selena:** It is very frustrating. *[both laughs]* But I think that that's why this question is such a test for the person who's asking and the one who's answering it.
- Ryan:** Another verse in here you had. So you mentioned John 15. Also Mark 10.
- Selena:** Mm-hmm.
- Ryan:** Did you read Mark 10:9?
- Selena:** No.
- Ryan:** "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." What was your thinking? That's obviously very important marriage verse but...
- Selena:** Because I think that there's this question of "how can I love you better?" solidifies the joining. Right? It reestablishes it so that no one can separate you. You said asking this question in the middle of like broken trust. Well, broken trust is suffering at what the Lord has brought together, which is you and your spouse. And so by not letting someone separate you or an event separate you, asking this question builds into that.
- Ryan:** That's good. One of the things we talked about in the preshow when we were talking through this-
- Selena:** We have a pre-show now apparently. *[laughs]*
- Ryan:** It's everything that happens up until this point. I said to you, "You're the only person I will ever ask this question to you in this way." You might have a friend or I might have a friend and say, "Hey, how can I be a better friend to you?" or "how can I be a better boss or coworker?" But I only have one wife.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** You know, I'm going to ask this question and I'm going to hear a wifely response.

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** How can I as your husband... We talked about this last week, how you calling me best friend is good but it's a demotion from my status as husband. You don't like that one. Listen to the last week's episode, if you missed it. Luke 6:36, "Treat people the same way you want them to treat you."

**Selena:** 6:31.

**Ryan:** 6:31.

**Selena:** Yes.

**Ryan:** "Or do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I think is another translation rendering of that. 1 Corinthians 16:14, "All that you do must be done in love." That's good. So this is just a very tangible way to, I think, get at your spouse's heart specifically around-

**Selena:** Right. Because you really can't ask these questions or answer them truly and sincerely once your husband soften unless it's been transformed by Jesus, you have a heart that's submitted and oriented to God.

So when you are in those moments of "I'm frustrated, I don't want to ask these questions" or maybe you're just having a cold snap—that's what we talk about in marriage. You have like communication cold snap when you guys just aren't communicating well—this is one phrase to kind of break that ice of saying, "Okay, Lord, I know that I'm wrong here, too. I know that he's done something that's probably wrong, maybe he doesn't know it. I know I've done some wrong things in this situation. Please, God, help us."

And I'm going to start this by saying, How can I love you better? I know that we have not been connecting. I know that we're feeling estranged a little bit. How can I honestly ask you... You know, I'm not trying to get something from you, but I am in terms of information so that I can act on it. But I really want to know how I can love you better in this situation.

**Ryan:** That's good. So I propose there are four really tangible effects. So you may have already picked up on some of these. But there's four tangible effects that really you can expect, I think, by asking this question of each other.

Now, one thing that I love about this exercise is that it can be one-sided and still accomplish most of what we're going to say here. Meaning if you have... I mean, how many times have we been going through a hard spell—you said a

cold snap—and it just takes one person to break it, to disarm the minefield, so to speak. This, I think, is one of the quickest way to do that.

So four effects of asking this question: how can I love you better? [00:10:00] Number one, Selena mentioned this, it takes the focus off yourself and puts it on to your spouse.

**Selena:** We're very self-focused in marriage. *[chuckles]* I think we're-

**Ryan:** I think as individuals, yeah, we are.

**Selena:** I'm not saying us personally, even though I do think we are. It's our tendency, it's our sin nature to be focused on ourselves.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I mean, we're all the protagonists in our story, right? And we think that everyone, you know, at the grocery store is paying attention to us, and everyone at the gym is seeing how awesome we are, or everyone in the crowd is seeing how cool we look. We tend to think everyone is noticing.

And I think that just speaks to the fact that we are the center of our own story. Unless we dethrone ourselves and put Christ there. And that's a dying to our flesh, that's being a living sacrificing, is saying, Christ is the center of my story, not me. Like, how countercultural is that?

So if I can say, in this marriage, I'm not the center of my story, yes, Christ is the center of our marriage and you are the center of my love orientation. I mean, it takes the focus off of me. Not just my grievances, not the things that I need to get you to do. But now how, as a husband, can I love you well?

And as you have this conversation, I really want to encourage you, listener, to lean into the biblically ordained roles for husband and wife. So how as a husband can I serve you more selflessly? How can I lead you more faithfully? How can I-

**Selena:** Biblically, how can you love us-

**Ryan:** Sacrificially.

**Selena:** ...sacrificially and loving as it's laid out in Ephesians 5? By being the head of our home. That is a loving and sacrificial... The call of that role is to be loving and sacrificial. And as a wife, how can I do the same thing? How can I submit and be glorifying to you, to the Lord in submitting myself in the best, most biblical, most beautiful sense?

- Ryan:** Right. And we do realize that the word "submission" is a swear word-
- Selena:** It's been misused-
- Ryan:** ...in many people's ears. But it's a beautiful thing.
- Selena:** ...and misapplied.
- Ryan:** And biblically speaking, it's a very beautiful thing. So that's number one. Takes focus off yourself, puts it on your spouse.
- Number two, it disarms your spouse in the best possible ways. So it can bring warmth to a cold, disconnected, and hurting spouse. It can rekindle the fire. You know, if you picture you in a cabin out in the woods together, you're building a life together. And what you're doing by asking this question is you're setting a fire in the heart of your home and you're saying, How can I love you better in this cold snap or in this moment we're in and whatever you're going through?
- Maybe you have a spouse, maybe you're not in conflict with your spouse, or maybe something has happened and they've turned inward. Maybe you've had a disappointment at work or Lord forbid, you suffer some sort of miscarriage and you know, the woman, the wife is bearing a unique burden there and she turns inward. Husband can say, "How can I love you well? It disarms you, which I think one of the reasons it disarms you is going to be our reason number three here, our effect number three, which is... This is obvious, but it will make your spouse feel loved.
- Selena:** Right. I like the feelings of love but I want to just have a reminder here that the aim of love is not to simply feel loved. It's to know you're loved. We know that we're loved by Christ. We don't feel that we're loved by Christ. We do feel His love in different ways. But feeling love in a marriage-
- Ryan:** Christ's love is far more objective than we give it credit for. It just is.
- Selena:** It just is, yes.
- Ryan:** It's just like gravity. Jesus loves you. When you're in Christ, you are saved. It's like gravity. It is what it is regardless of whether or not you feel it's important-
- Selena:** I think that feelings they have a place in how and when you love. Like I love you and so therefore I want to love you in a way that you know you're loved, first of all and it's just a fact. But you also want to feel that, right? So the primary objective, again, for asking this question of "how can I love you

better?" is not just to feel love. That's the primary objection. Although it does make you feel loved, it's really to demonstrate your love for one another or to one another.

**Ryan:** I love that. Well said. It's a way of demonstrating your love very tangibly, visibly, audibly. You're asking me specifically how you can love me better. Wow. Okay. Here it goes.

All right, number four. It gives you, as the asker, immediate feedback. Oftentimes, husbands, put your ears up. Sometimes we just we want to love our wives well, but we don't really know how. [00:15:00] At times you know how, at times it's obvious. Other times it's like, I need to ask the question. It gives me immediate feedback, tells me how...

If, Selena, you said, "Okay, here's how you can love me better. Right now, acts of service are really important. We have a young baby. I could really use your help in preparing breakfast in the morning for the girls, getting them dressed, making sure they're out. I need your help keeping structure. I need your help with dinner. I need your help getting them into the car seats," which is my least favorite thing as a parent, car seats." You know, that gives me an immediate... Okay, now I'm on a red alert to serve my wife, look for ways to alleviate her burden, especially around the baby because she's doing what only mom can do, and that's nurture and feed and other mom things, comfort. And I can do some of that, but I can't do it like you can. So I serve you in unique ways in that season. Is that accurate?

**Selena:** Yeah. I think that also that might be a personality thing for wives, you know. Yes, wives. I think they want feedback, but I don't know that it's always like task oriented. Like men are like, "Yes, okay, here's the thing. I want to meet the need. Here's the need, I'm going to meet it."

Women have needs but I don't know that they cannot... they can probably answer. I'm not going to say that all women can't answer their needs. But the feedback is just an interesting... Like when I ask you how can I love you better, what do you say? What would you think? I'll ask you.

**Ryan:** Are you asking me right now?

**Selena:** Yes.

**Ryan:** I put you on the spot. I didn't think you'd put me on the spot.

**Selena:** The spot is a hard place to be, huh? *[chuckles]*



- Ryan:** Yeah. I mean, you are such an awesome wife. I think you let me verbally process a lot. And sometimes I think you want to be helpful, and you'll sometimes offer quick answer-
- Selena:** This is not helpful. *[both laughs]* I'm kidding.
- Ryan:** I do want your help, but I also think the truest help you can give me is not always the first thing that comes to mind.
- Selena:** Yeah. And that's helped me grow in a lot of ways. So again, it's not about me and you cannot... You already saw my pride rise up in that little joke. Right?
- Ryan:** This is a safe place. *[chuckles]*
- Selena:** I'm not ignorant to that. But the feedback can be hard to hear because it is directed at me. But it's helped me grow because I don't want to just be somebody who's flippant with their answers and quick and not taking a moment to stop, think past the first thought as he's always told me. But kind of go a little bit deeper, ask the question why, get to that next layer. Because in that, I am being more loving to you. And that is one way that I can love you better.
- Again, it's not about me, although that is. *[chuckles]* But it's not about me getting the affirmations or me getting frustrated that you're saying you don't like my answers or that you feel dismissed or small. It's about me just submitting that pride and saying, Okay, yes, I hear you. I can definitely grow in this way for sure.
- Ryan:** And you know, here's a caveat. Selena is an awesome listener and you are very quick to listen. Generally, as a husband, I don't I can't think of many ways that I could say love me better. But like, if you're in a marriage where, you know, you can't even get your husband or wife to put their phone down to have a conversation, that's a really clear, obvious one.
- Selena:** Right. So how can you love me better? You can put your phone down when we're talking. Put it away.
- Ryan:** Or like, Be home on time from work.
- Selena:** Spend time with the kids.
- Ryan:** Yeah. Sit down for dinner with us. Set some boundaries with your parents. There's a lot of things that I think, you know, we're going on 20 years married, we've been doing marriage ministry for the last decade. So I think, just as a

caveat, this is a lot of the things that could be answers. I think, by the grace of God, we've worked through a lot of that stuff and it's just kind of become the culture that we have.

**Selena:** Which is another beauty I think of this question is, is if it's a constant use in your vocabulary of how you talk to one another, I think that it will grow you as man and wife, that you will fight faster, quicker. You'll resolve faster, I guess, not fight faster. But you'll resolve faster. You'll want that unity because you've experienced it by asking this question so many times and trying to get at the heart of, you know, what is wrong here and how can I really love you better?

**Ryan:** Well, the trick here is asking this question in earnest, but then expecting to maybe hear an answer that you didn't want to hear. I'm going to go through a hypothetical situation. This is all going to be hypothetical. Selena asked me, "Ryan, how can I love you better?" Again, hypothetical. [00:20:00] But I could say to you, "I would feel more loved if you initiated sex more often." And what I hear in your head because you do initiate is, "But I do." You're defensive. "But I do. What are you talking about? I just initiated the other day or whatever?"

**Selena:** Every day last week. *[Ryan laughs]* Just kidding. *[laughs]* I make you blush."

**Ryan:** I'm very depleted. *[both laughs]* Help me hydrate.

**Selena:** Stop. It's a joke, people. It's a joke.

**Ryan:** I lost my train of thought. But by asking the question, you're giving them a chance to give you an honest... Now, they're not going to want to give you an honest response if they think you're just going to get defensive and start throwing it in their face somehow. "What are you talking about? Just initiate. What else do you want from me? I go to work..." I'm thinking about the husband that is neglecting his family because he works too much and the wife voices those.

**Selena:** Or the wife is discontent. Right?

**Ryan:** Sure. Sure. That's the challenge to you as the person asking the question. Ask it in a way that elicits a genuine response, and then have the ears and the heart to hear it without getting defensive. Now, it may be that your spouse is asking for something that is not a legit... Like you have legitimately shown them love in that way. The key is that for whatever reason it's not translating. For whatever reason. So say, Selena, in the hypothetical situation you had been initiating, but it's all very halfhearted and obligatory and it's clear that you're not into it.

- Selena:** Engaged.
- Ryan:** Engaged.
- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** So while yes, you may have been the one to say, "Oh, it's that day. You want to go upstairs and get this over with?" That's technically initiating but for a reason it doesn't feel that way. I'm using, again, hypothetical. But if, you now-
- Selena:** This question is powerful. It can open a can of worms. It's it can be encouraging. It also can force you to work through some hard things that you haven't actually... You know, everything got lost in translation, like you're saying. So why is it that I'm doing this but you don't feel this? "Oh, okay. Well, yeah." And fortunately, you're probably going to get into each other's business and it's going to be frustrating, but it's the best way forward.
- Ryan:** Yeah. And it takes a good bit of, I think, emotional maturity and emotional intelligence to hear their response and not react to it, but instead to respond to their response again. I think they just to give you a quick, obvious tip is just take an extra 5 seconds and think about what you're going to say. And try to think about what is behind the words they're saying and try to see that as clearly as you can without letting your won-
- Selena:** Or ask questions, ask clarifying questions. If you're saying, "Hey," in our hypothetical situation, "well, I thought that I did..." Right? Tone is everything. "I thought that I did but apparently clearly it's not translating. So let's talk about this." You know, again, be slow to be offended, be quick to hear, quick to listen, so to speak. And slow to... Or quick to understand. Don't be slow to understand. *[chuckles]* Be snappy. *[Ryan laughs]*
- Ryan:** Make it snappy. Anyway, that's what we have for you this week. We actually have one other kind of hack... Is that the right word? Technically maybe, I don't know. If you want to take this even a level further, ask in specific areas of your marriage.
- Selena:** Yeah.
- Ryan:** So how can I love you better, to use that example-
- Selena:** ...in these areas? Yeah.

**Ryan:** ...in the bedroom? As a husband, when we are being married, when we are making love, which is really weird to say... I don't know why. Maybe I need to grow out of that. When we are engaging in sex, how can I love you better. Or when it comes to our parenting, how can I love you better as the father of our children?

**Selena:** When it comes to our priorities and what we commit to, how can I love you better? Well, maybe not go fishing every single weekend or maybe there's something on the schedule that you could just be mindful of before and after kinds of things. Different events.

**Ryan:** How can I love you better in terms of how I lead our household and things like family worship, creating a culture that is actually centered on Christ and isn't just in the back pocket on a Sunday morning but He's actually in the center of our household? How can I love you better in that? How can I love you better in my provision for you?

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** That goes into priorities, but also-

**Selena:** Well, yeah. How as a wife can I love you better? Maybe another word you could put in there is how can I show my gratitude to you? How can I respect you more? How can I show you or tell you or give to you, makes you feel edified, loved, encouraged, respected, wanting to... you know, proud, I guess... As a man, as the husband, as the father, how can I have you excited about that and encourage you in that?

**Ryan:** Here's a challenge to us and I'll challenge our listeners as well. [00:25:00] Set a reminder on your calendar or whatever you can do to remind yourself weekly to ask your spouse this question. How can I love you better this week? How have I loved you? Well, how have I not loved you well? Do that for a month or two months, and then report back, see what that does.

I'm really curious what you would say. Maybe try different times in the week, like on a Friday night we're all kind of haggard, the week's taking its toll versus a Sunday morning. What's the different response there? So maybe that's a challenge. Put that on a calendar. Ask one another.

We'd be remiss if we didn't mention this. We are talking about love because we know love embodied in Jesus Christ Himself. And He is both the exemplar of love, but He is also the one who has given. So He shows us how to love, but He has given us the means to love well. So if you're not a Christian and you try to love, by the grace of God, the common grace of God, you have the ability,

the capacity to love to an extent. But I will say this You will reach the end of yourself very quickly.

You need power that's otherworldly, comes through the Holy Spirit. And we only get the Holy Spirit when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. So we want that for you. We want to call you brother and we want to call you sister in Christ. If that's not you, we encourage you to find someone in your life who you know is a Christian, set up a time to meet with them, talk to them about this and say, "I want to know what does it mean to follow Christ, to be a disciple of Christ." Find a pastor, find a good church.

If you can't find those things, we have a website for you. It's [thenewsisgood.com](http://thenewsisgood.com). Check that out. There's some steps for you to take there.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for loving us so perfectly. I pray that You'd help us love our spouse as well in full light of who You are in light of Your truth. Lord, help us to be the kinds of people that are introspective when it comes to how we love one another, and help us not to be defensive when we are given answers to this question that we ask.

I prayer for the husband who is struggling, the wife who is struggling, Lord, that you would strengthen them, give them wisdom, God, and give them courage to step out in faith, into the wisdom that you give them. Jesus name. Amen.

**Selena:** Amen.

**Ryan:** Thank you for joining us for the Fierce Marriage Podcast. If you noticed, there's no ads. No ads, right? And we could do ads, but we don't do ads because I think they ruin it. So if you want to support this, that would mean a ton to us. It keeps us ad-free. It helps us feed this little baby. I'm not kidding. And the way you do that is go to [fiercemarriage.com/partner](http://fiercemarriage.com/partner). There are benefits, but that's not why we ask you to do it. We ask you to do it if the Lord leads you. So just pray about it. If He leads you, then we'd be honored to have your partnership in that regard.

With that said, this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

**Selena:** In the can.

**Ryan:** We'll see you again in seven days. Until next time—

**Selena:** Stay fierce.

**PODCAST NOTES**

- **Referenced scripture**
  - John 15:12-13
  - Mark 10:9?
  - Luke 6:39
  - 1 Corinthians 16:14
  
- **Recommended resource**
  - [thenewsisgood.com](https://thenewsisgood.com)

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