

Happily Ever After

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Believe it or not, during our marriage foundations discipleship journey with couples, one of the measures of success is that the relationship breaks up! You might think this is cruel, but it is better to comprehend the extent of sacrifice required for this life-long relationship they're about to embark on than to realise they're not up to it after all the "I do's" are said and done.

Building a strong marriage would most likely differ for each couple, depending on their marriage stage. It is essential for them to be able to handle the challenges, trials and successes that each stage holds.

The Foundations

During those first exciting and exhilarating months/years that couples are dating, they strive to discover everything about each other. There is much conversation regarding the myriad of topics, such as **family**, money, convictions, dreams, experiences, etc. During the dating phase, couples get to know each other, build trust and communicate openly and honestly. In doing so, they create beautiful memories. This is the start of building a foundation for marriage.

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Building a Functional Marriage

When building marriage foundations, an internal heart process is taking place, much more than an exterior one. You can own the most incredible, expensive car, but if the car's engine is faulty, the car has little or no value. We cannot make our marriages look pretty (external impression) and expect them to be functional. We need to focus on that which matters most. If the car doesn't get

you to where you want to go, it is merely an expensive ornament. We should apply these same principles to marriage.

What matters is what goes on inside the relationship. It might seem dandy on the outside, but if perpetual and unresolved turmoil ensues on the inside, the time has come for significant recalibration and heart introspection. It is time to bring your relationship under the magnifying and healing work of the Holy Spirit, with prayers like, *"Jesus, let me see my spouse through your eyes and love my spouse with Your love and understanding"*.

Another key ingredient to a successful marriage is asking whether you are meeting your spouse's needs. Are you connecting with each other? These things matter. If this is broken, you need to work on getting it fixed.

Five Principles for Building Good Marriage Foundations

The list of things to address will most probably differ for each couple, but the principles remain the same. What follows are a few principles worth noting:

1. Communication

Communication in a marriage is important. Couples need to learn to talk, and often solve problems when one of them starts asking questions, which leads to them talking. We do not mean chatting superficially but conversing on heart issues. Ask a question that might even make yourself vulnerable, and be willing to take the truth on the chin, repent and adjust. For example, *"Do you feel disrespected when I correct you in front of others?"*

Communication is not about knowing your spouse's favourite movie or colour. It is not about how many facts you know about them. It is more about understanding him/her and accepting them for who they are. Remember, in most instances, you originally married your spouse because you liked them and the way they carried themselves.

"Marriage cannot be a trial run just to see if things work out. It should be approached as something dear and unbreakable; a lifelong commitment."

2. Commitment


The Webster dictionary defines commitment as *'dedicated or loyal to something'*. Jesus is our greatest example of commitment. He was committed to the path God had made for Him. And He finished it. Commitment is a choice. It is not a feeling. In our marriage vows, we promise, *"until death do us part"*. That is the commitment you make on your wedding day. That decision says that you will not leave your spouse. If you are not willing to commit to your spouse, you know that your relationship will not last. Commitment means sacrifice. You will have to sacrifice your fleshly and selfish desires for the greater purpose of a successful marriage.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

[Philippians 2:3-4 \(NIV\)](#) 

Begin selflessly. Commitment is seeing something through until the end. This verse above from Philippians 2 would apply even more acutely in a deeper and committed relationship called a [marriage covenant](#). Marriage cannot be a trial run just to see if things work out. It should be approached as something dear and unbreakable; a lifelong commitment.

3. Walking in Unity

A solid marriage is where two people constantly pursue growing in love and respect for each other. [Romans 12:10](#)  says that we should prefer one another. Our fleshly desires will always strive to please themselves. Every problem in marriage is the couple's problem. When issues come up, work together to resolve them and do not place all the responsibility on the other person. Build on similarities. Opposites attract.

Shared Core Values

The most important thing is that core values are shared, such as [how to raise children](#), finances, church life and your kingdom focus. Core values can make or break a marriage. You need to have a kingdom-focus and a [kingdom culture as a shared value](#). Faith in Christ should enhance satisfaction in our relationship.

When creating team-work, you might think of discussing the following: ask your spouse to share meaningful memories and where and how they developed their ideas about important issues. Listen when your spouse speaks and pay attention to what he/she is saying.

Marriage Should Be Fun

More than often a worthy motto for marriage is, '*couples that have fun together, stay together*'. People who enjoy each other and have fun together, always want to spend more time with each other. Play games! Sometimes a stronger bond gets formed when you do.

As mentioned before, it is not the exterior of a car that matters but rather the engine. Avoid the age-old trap of comparison. Most likely, your marriage 'engine' will come up short when compared to the exterior of someone else's marriage. Bear in mind that marriage can also be compared to the hub of a bicycle wheel. Many spokes are connected to the hub, such as faith, fun, respect, consideration, love, sex, temperance etc. Altogether, these many spokes keep the hub in place.

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4. Fighting Fair

I think most of us would agree that the way we deal with conflict within marriage will undoubtedly and significantly affect our relationship. What is a fair fight? All, if not most, couples disagree and have heated conversations and arguments. Words are often used as weapons.

Have rules during arguments

No name-calling. Insults, sarcasm and low blows will always be wrong. These weapons will not help to resolve a disagreement. Make it your goal to be civil during an argument and choose

to use your “inside voice” (which means no screaming or shouting).

Never presume during an argument

Each one comes to a dispute with a certain pre-conceived picture and idea in their mind and is convinced that their perspective is the correct one. They often never consider the other party’s perspective as equally valid when viewed from their vantage point. One can quickly jump to a conclusion in a few minutes. Learn to ask questions to understand where your spouse is coming from and what their take is on the situation. If you don’t ask, you will keep assuming, and it will make it even harder to find your way through the argument.

Listen without interrupting

Why do we fight? Selfish ambition! Take turns talking. If you don’t get it right, you need to practice more. Feeling heard can make a huge difference in the foundation of your marriage. There is a danger that comes up when people don’t feel heard. When one doesn’t feel heard, it builds up over time and then “kaboom!”.

When arguing, try to stick to the issue at hand

It is tempting to rehash past situations to prove our point. We often try to find the quickest solution to arguments just to get it over and done with. To disagree and debate at a slow and steady pace is the way to go if you’re interested in real and lasting solutions. Handle one issue at a time; it will allow you to work through issues fully.

5. Honesty

“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him ...” – [Colossians 3:9 – 10 \(NKJV\)](#)

Honesty is essential to strengthening a trustworthy relationship. Without it, trust and hearts get broken. Always share the truth in a kind and loving way. Once trust is broken, it is hard to regain. Make a commitment to each other to speak the truth daily. If you have fallen into the trap of white lies, ask the Lord to remove the bondage from you.

In conclusion, one’s heart towards one’s spouse needs constant re-working and constant surrendering to the [Holy Spirit](#) to do the necessary adjustments and changes. God only requires our co-operation and willingness to change and He truly will do the rest.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” – [Romans 12:1-2 \(NIV\)](#)