

Caring for the Marriage Relationship

Love, Commitment, and Work Keep Marriage Strong

Marriage is like holding on to a treasure that increases in value. It requires a lot of effort, but its rewards are immeasurable! A faithful spouse—a friend of the heart who understands, listens, supports, and forgives—is a treasure worth cherishing.

Luther prized his wife. “I would not want to exchange my Kate for France, not for Venice to boot; to begin with (1) because God has given her to me and me to her; (2) because I often find out that there are more shortcomings in other women than in my Kate; and although she, of course, has some too, these are nonetheless offset by far greater virtues; (3) because she keeps faith and honor in our marriage relationship” (WLS 888).

We all value close, warm, and secure relationships, but many times fall short in their care. Marriage is a covenant between two different people. Like other relationships, there are problems that can break the tie between husband and wife, but working through them can show the direction to a happy life together.

God established marriage and has said that it is not good for man to live alone. Marriage is a gift of God. The Bible says, “a prudent wife is from the Lord” (Prov. 19:14).

Challenges in Married Life Change

In the beginning of marriage, a couple lives in good feelings. However, challenges usually don’t take too long to come as the couple adjusts to living together. When God blesses with children, there is great joy, but now the couple must also take the children into account in everything. Pregnancy can also bring uncertainty, concerns, and fears. A wife’s physical and hormonal changes can be confusing to her husband. The husband’s concern about providing may not be understood by his wife. As the family grows, the focus on children and lack of time for each other can try the relationship. Lack of time for oneself can also cause stress. When children move into adolescence, parents are often at a loss on how they should react to the changing teen. Disagreements and resentment can arise. New adjustments can also come later in life when the nest empties. Another trial some couples experience is that of not being blessed with children at all.

Other challenges can affect and try the marriage relationship: economics, unemployment, work stress, accidents, illness, mental weariness, and loss of life. Stress can make one accuse the other.

In everyday life it does not take much for the flesh and blood to rise to the surface. My weak and faulty “home side” makes me relate more and more to the words of the Apostle: “For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:19). In spite of our own faultiness, the estate of marriage that God has established is not diminished. We often remember at weddings that the holiness and permanence of the estate is “not a burden, but a lasting foundation for its constructive continuation.” For that reason, we do not want to allow our flesh to get the upper hand to diminish the gift God has given, but in order to keep it, we must practice humbleness, patience, kindness, forbearance, and forgiveness (Col. 3:13, Eph 4:2).

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The bond between husband and wife stays strong if each remembers to care for it. Burdens, trials, and difficulties are part of life. The Apostle reminds us that there is also something good in tribulations. They remind us to be patient, to endure, to trust God who gives us hope in Christ. Life’s trials and experiences teach us to be patient with our self and our spouse (Rom. 5:1–6). They teach us that we are sinful and small, but God is almighty and merciful.

How do we care for the marriage relationship? Showing understanding for one another and taking time to lovingly listen and speak to each other from the heart are of utmost importance. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Married life is continuously learning to better know one another. Honesty toward oneself and the other builds the relationship. In this way we get through difficult matters.

The marriage bond is a tender one that is fed by a positive, kind, and tender approach to one another. Complimenting and thanking one’s spouse for smaller and bigger things, as was done in courtship, rekindles the desire of the recipient to serve the other. Doing so in front of others is also good. Laughter and joy also deepen the relationship. It is important to accept, love, value, and honor our spouse for who he or she is. “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10). Remember to lovingly fulfill the needs of your spouse. Making a concerted effort to do what the other likes engenders warmth and harmony. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:4).

In spite of our best efforts, problems do arise. When arguments develop, both are at fault. To resolve differences, it is important to be open and to listen to one’s spouse. Matters are resolved in a peaceful, kind, honest, matter-of-fact, and loving way (Prov. 15:1, James 1:19). We may not understand everything, but forgiving from the heart is key.

Sometimes it is necessary to discuss matters deeper even though they are forgiven. In marriage it is also very important to remember that all problems are not faith-related. Speaking of matters with a close friend or a professional can in some situations be irreplaceable. It isn’t easy to reach out, but there is blessing in doing so.

Because we are faulty human beings, both spouses should be a little blind. Luther has said that “it is impossible to keep peace between man and woman in family life if they do not condone and overlook each other’s faults but watch everything to the smallest point...Therefore those who are married should be prepared to condone and forget their mutual offenses, no matter how great they may be, and should resume their customary loving behavior in their association with each other” (WLS 905).

In marriage, the lesson of “forgive and forget” needs to be learned again and again: “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). When a couple can learn to forgive from the heart, then there is no need or desire to return to matters that have been cared for with the gospel. The gospel is the power of God in marriage also!

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Discussion Suggestions:

1. What characteristics do you most value in your spouse?
2. What challenges are you currently facing in your marriage?
3. What do children learn from the marital relationship of their parents, and what aspects of the relationship give children a feeling of security?
4. What does it mean to forgive and forget?

Sources:

Eero Salin: “The Stages of Marriage,” VZ, June, July, August 1996
What Luther Says, (WLS), Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis

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