

Christian Perspectives: How to prevent marital distress & divorce

Weddings are beautiful, delightful, and blissful occasions. When a couple stands at the altar, holding hands, gazing into each other's eyes, reciting their vows, they are filled with joy and hope. Every couple believes their love is so special and their bond so strong that they will remain together, ?in sickness and in health? and ?for better or worse.?

The reality is however, that most couples will end up on one of three paths: couples who flourish, couples who are conflicted, or couples who quit. It does not take careful observation to realize that marriages, as an institution, has taken a big hit around the world. Everyone knows someone or is related to a couple who has experience divorce. And in some cases, many couples are separated, live separate lives while occupying the same home, or live with high levels of distress. To be sure, most of us have lived through, either firsthand or up close, the pain of strained relationships.

Building a successful marriage is like building a home. It requires a plan and commitment to a lot of hard work. Here are five building steps for a strong and healthy marriage:

1. Build Your Marriage on Real Love ? Real love requires understanding each other's needs and being willing to sometimes practice self-denial for the sake of the relationship. Real love requires much energy and sacrifice but keeps us determined to create the best marriage possible. ?Love is patient and kind; love does not envy our boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; he is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoings, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.?? (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

2. Be Gracious to One Another ? Learn to value each other despite their imperfections. Demonstrate kindness, patients, gentleness, and more; even when you don't feel like it. Why? Because at some point?even daily?your spouse will have to do the same for you. The wonderful thing about grace is that you cannot earn it or buy it. Grace goes beyond guilt and shame and set the stage for growth and renewed commitment in the relationship.

3. Listen to Each Other ? If married people, and people in general, learn to communicate better, they would have much more understanding between them and a basis for a stronger and healthier relationship. Good communication in any relationship is like water and sunshine to a healthy lawn. Good listening is like the fertilizer that will go deep beneath the surface to nourish and enrich the soil. In most relationships when there is complaint, it is because some needs are not being met?voices are not being heard. Couples who communicate well understand that active listening is an essential ingredient in their marriage.

Active listening means listing with your ears, eyes, and heart. It conveys to your spouse that you are more interested in hearing what they have to say than defending yourself and stating your point. When each person in the marriage feels heard and understood, intimacy increases, and commitment to one another and the relationship is strengthened.

4. Forgive Often ? Forgiveness paves the way for healing and reconciliation in every relationship. In marriage, both individuals will inevitable hurt each other. When we forgive, we give up our perceived right to punish or retaliate for the wrong that has been done to us. When we fail to forgive, bitterness and resentment increase in the relationship. Forgiveness releases us from these feelings. Forgiveness in essence is for the forgiver more than the forgiven.

5. Hug More ? Most couples can hardly wait to get married to enjoy its physical benefits. But as daily life takes over and the giddiness wears off, we forget to do the things we did at first. Hugging is an easy way to reconnect daily. When we hug or touch each other, the hormone oxytocin is released, which tightens the marital bond, lowers blood pressure and reduces stress. Couples should be hugging each other every morning before they depart and every evening when they reunite.

With the implementation of these relational skills in your marriage, you will be building a marriage that will weather the storms of life. Although all marriages will experience distress at some time or another, they do not need to dissolve when trials come. Couples who learn to work together as a team during good times and bad times will see their marriage not only survive but thrive, and they

will ?live happily ever after?!

Aundrea Thompson

Pastor ? Shelburne Seventh-day

Adventist Church