

Happily Ever After? (How to have a happy marriage)

I didn't marry you because you were perfect. I didn't even marry you because I loved you. I married you because you gave me a promise. That promise made up for your faults. And the promise I gave you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married and it was the promise that made the marriage. And when our children were growing up, it wasn't a house that protected them; and it wasn't our love that protected them - it was that promise.

- Thornton Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth*

Perhaps, true compatibility does not or can never exist. No matter how much two persons love each other, perfect compatibility cannot be achieved. Like all marriages, many new couples still realize that once the honeymoon is over, many of their romantic expectations are also left unmet. It is now common to hear of husbands and wives speak of their marriage as something that did not turn out as they expected it to be.

Some marriages how become nothing more than a power struggle, a competition for money, property, and the affection of their children, if they have any. What was supposed to bring joy and satisfaction has only brought them pain, frustration, and disillusionment. Countless marriages that began with a solemn promise ended in depression, bitter fighting, separation, or divorce. Some cases are even complicated by complaints of physical and emotional abuse. As if it is already a normal thing to happen, one can hear of couples who have been married for decades but still end up separated or divorced. Marital infidelity, financial problems, and irreconcilable differences are among the most cited reasons for separation and divorce.

In many cases, it takes time before one or both parties in marriage decide to end their relationship. It is common to hear of women who have suffered in silence and accepted the physical and verbal abuse from their husbands. There are also men who have become frustrated over the lack of intimacy and support from their wives. Small arguments escalate and turn into all-out shouting matches. A lull in the fighting becomes an extended period of mutual neglect, a war of nerves, and silent treatment. Financial woes also push many marriages to the brink of disaster. The pressure to make both ends meet and lack of time for each other leads to alienation, misunderstanding, and resentment.

Some marriages that had been "on the rocks" were saved through the shared commitment of both parties. Many couples with troubled marriages went into counseling and received the kind of professional and objective help they need to reassess their relationship. In these counseling sessions, the couples are also taught how to be mutually supportive and kind. They are told to work hard at finding the "positive" side of their spouse. Couples in therapy are advised to renew their commitment to strengthen their bond, intimacy, unity, and respect for each another.

During counseling, the professional marriage counselor points out some of the "building blocks" of a good marriage. One such block is compromise --- or the ability and openness to change and acceptance of others opinions. It also entails mutual accommodation of requests and conditions. It is characterized by a shared commitment to seek win-win solutions to their marital problems. Other building blocks or tips to keep a marriage strong include the following:

- No name calling.
- Bring up only specific issues. Don't attack your spouse about his or her personality flaws.
- Stay calm at all times. Avoid having a shouting match.
- Take short breaks from each other and give each other some space.
- Respect each others' point of view.

All relationships have highs and lows. The important thing is to remember why we married our spouse in the first place. Marital problems cannot be avoided. It is vital for a marriage partnership to have the right focus and commitment to look for solutions. To make love and marriage last, men and women should consider all the promises they made on the altar and renew their vows to fulfill them all.

About the Author

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