

May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

understand discipline

laugh

prayer

forgive

kindness

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.
a cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Hanging by a Cord of Three Strands: Marriage at Work

By Rev. Kim DeVries

It happened again today. Someone came up to me and told me about their disintegrating marriage and asked for my advice. Most pastors will do everything in their power to help a couple work out their difficulties and strengthen their marriage. But often people come when it is too late and the problems are so deeply rooted and complicated that they are almost beyond solving. With that in mind, some time ago I asked my adult Bible class, couples who have been married from ten to fifty plus years, to write about what had worked in their marriages.

What has been helpful to you to keep your marriage and home a happy one? Comments included respect for each other, the need for patience, friendships with other happily married Christian couples, prayer, Bible reading, and involvement in a church family. Sharing the same faith in God had been crucial for many of the couples, having learned from personal experience the importance of St. Paul's words: *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers* (2 Corinthians 6:14a). As couples pray and worship together, they find the God-given strength and motivation to be patient, forgiving, compassionate, and kind to one another.

What advice would you give a newly married couple? Making your spouse feel loved and appreciated was often cited. Comments ranged from cultivating the ability to laugh together, the willingness to bend and compromise, having similar life goals, eating at least one meal together each day where the talk is about happy things, and frequent forgiving and forgetting. Most of us appreciate and are drawn to people who can find joy and con-

tentment, even in small things, and enjoy just being with us. Joy is the mark of a happy home and is God-pleasing, as the Psalmist writes: *May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful* (Psalm 68:3).

Which aspect of your married life has needed the most fine-tuning? Both men and women mentioned the need for good communication in a marriage to talk things through and resolve issues. Mealtime can be a good time to sit down and discuss the day's events and to get caught up on each other's lives. Wives appreciate when their husbands tell them their thoughts and feelings and not just answer their questions with a yes or a no. They want to hear all the details. Husbands, in turn, appreciate when a wife does not become overly dramatic or appear to be nagging or unduly demanding.

The couples interviewed noted the importance of listening to each other, respecting each other's feelings, and trying to understand what each spouse is experiencing and thinking. They shared that they enjoy doing things together and took an interest in each other's hobbies, while

joy communication respect contentment compassion appreciation honor listen patience

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The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

giving each other the freedom to do some things on their own. Further, they seek out other Christian friends who can encourage and strengthen them in their own marriages and serve as mentors or guides.

How can pitfalls be averted? Couples surveyed said that mature adults, for the most part, try to treat friends and acquaintances politely and courteously, and that same respectful behavior should extend to their loved ones at home. It was also considered unwise to unduly criticize a spouse's family. There is only a certain amount that anyone can do to change another person's behavior or attitudes; at the same time, a caring husband or wife should protect their spouse from unfair and critical treatment from their family members.

Every couple has to make decisions and resolve differences in opinion and outlook. Sometimes no complete resolution of the difference can be achieved immediately, so it is best to give each other time to think and to pray about it and then to come to a decision. Often compromise is needed, and sometimes couples just agree to disagree and then move on. The Bible tells us accordingly: *A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel* (Proverbs 15:18).

What has been helpful regarding financial decisions?

The importance of handling money carefully in a marriage came through loudly and clearly. The couples surveyed had learned the value of going into a marriage as debt-free as possible and avoiding over-spending by learning the difference between wants and needs. Scripture advises: *But godliness with contentment is great gain ... if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that* (1 Timothy 6:6, 8). To achieve financial harmony, couples advised creating a budget and sticking with it, learning to live within their means, and practicing Christian stewardship where God is honored. Doing so helped these couples survive the financial stresses that are common to most people no matter what their economic level.

What advice do you have for couples raising children? Children are a gift from God but can also bring stress into a marriage. Successful parents speak of the importance of teaching by setting a good example and communicating to children the importance of good manners and respect for God, others, and themselves. A Christian parent is to practice loving Christian discipline so a child can learn what is right and wrong, as St. Paul advises: *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord* (Ephesians 6:4). Two-way communication is necessary at every age so both parents can find out what is happening in a child's life and convey their love and concern.

As couples consider their own marriages, it is beneficial to remember that Christian marriage was ordained by God and goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him"* (Genesis 2:18). When a husband and wife love one another and God, their marriage can be a great blessing in their life. Such an enduring marriage is worth all the time and effort a couple puts into it and can be a source of great joy and happiness.

Marriage is God-pleasing. Marriage can be great. What a blessing to know that *a cord of three strands is not quickly broken* (Ecclesiastes 4:12b). [Q](#)



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