

Marriage • Parenting • Spiritual Growth • Sexuality • Relationships • Mental Health
Men • Women • Hurts and Emotions • Singles • Ministers and Mentors • Technology



a resource in:

Marriage

Suggestions for a Happy Marriage



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

Counseling and Family Services

Helping the hurting. Nurturing hope. Encouraging growth.

Phone: (309) 263-5536 | www.accounseling.org

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

I. PERSONALITY ADJUSTMENT.

In order to increase your happiness through the years of married life, you will want to cultivate continuously all those traits of personality that strengthen your attraction to each other. Being happy now in the realization of your love is no guarantee of continued happiness. The most reliable evidence of your success in marriage is your inclination and will to employ the means of success.

The reason you are so happy now is that you have attained a real oneness, a union that is possible only in a man and woman whose love for each other has been sealed with marriage vows and divine sanction. Now you have no thought, no aspiration, no act that cannot be shared with the other. Whatever happens, you have each other with whom to share your successes, failures, sorrows, and joys. You have one in whom you confide your closest secrets, your deepest disappointments, your severest temptations, and your greatest victories. Now you want to know what marital skills will keep your love fresh and thrilling – the kind of affection that grows and glows through the years. You must allow no influence to intrude upon your rights to complete marital harmony. You will do everything you can to preserve happiness and to realize divine purpose in your home. This will require your constant commitment to the highest ideals.

A. No reservations.

Marriage allows no mental reservations. You have given yourselves to each other completely. You believe now more than ever before that you are intended for each other. You are ready to work at the task of building an enduring love and a Christian home. This involves many adjustments, agreements, and obligations. But do not let these requirements disturb you. Married life is worth the effort. Enjoy it as you go along. Even though you have been promised greater happiness and deeper love tomorrow, do not be satisfied with mediocre living today. Today's fullness gives prospects of increase tomorrow. Keep your hearts open to each other; express your minds freely to each other; give your bodies completely to each other. In your embrace you gaze deeply into each other's eyes and say (it may not be expressed audibly), *"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine . . ."* (Song of Solomon 6:3).

B. Respect privacy.

A word of caution may help you at this point. The deep intimacies of marriage are not without peril. Unrestrained intimacy may give rise to disrespect. Most couples are very unsuspecting of this possibility. The mere fact that you are married does not allow every liberty. Marriage intimacy and confidence never justify uncleanness in conversation, insistence of privileges, or selfishness in behavior. Both husband and wife are entitled to a personal privacy that must be respected. What right do you have to ransack her handbag? Why should you open his mail? You owe each other the courtesy of knocking before you open the bathroom door and of asking before you remove stationery from the desk. You ought to have separate drawers in the dresser; the masculine hand has no feel for the woman's precision and order. Have an understanding in these matters and respect each other's right to privacy.

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

C. Cultivate unselfishness.

The desire for happiness in marriage finds its greatest antagonist in self. One of the most serious threats to marital success is ordinary selfishness. Here then is an area of experience that needs early and constant attention. Your devotion to each other needs nurture, discipline, and decision. Without your decision to put honest effort into making marriage a success, you will leave too much room for misunderstanding and selfishness. Seek to please the other always in family living, and you will find the benefits of unselfishness very rewarding.

D. Common interests.

Since you have been joined to another person, your interests will become absorbed in the work of the other. A husband and wife who have many interests common to both will find themselves tied together firmly and absorbingly. But if you do not have many common interests, you may be sure that the areas in which you share a common interest can be increased by deliberate and constant effort. If you will acquaint yourselves more thoroughly with each other's hobbies, friends, relatives, ideas, pastimes, and pleasures, your personalities will tend to fuse with compatibility and understanding. You will be enabled to do more things together and draw your aspirations into closer agreement. Husbands and wives who go their own way and who care little about the interests of the other soon grow cold in their love and become weak in their devotion. They cannot be one in a sufficiently full sense to really be happy with each other.

E. Mutual understanding.

Before marriage you satisfied yourselves that you understood each other sufficiently well to promise love and loyalty for life. Then you saw each other occasionally and for short periods at a time. Now you are with each other day after day, and the seamy side of life is turning toward you. You have discovered some things about each other that were not so evident before marriage. Today they present a problem.

There is a correct way to approach this situation. If you are committed to understanding each other, you will be able to understand each other's perspectives. One source of misunderstanding lies in difference of home backgrounds. You need to acquaint yourself with the former environment and keep that in mind when you encounter any unfavorable reactions. You will need to take into consideration every factor that constitutes the change your marriage effected in environment and in status. If you have come out of widely differing backgrounds, occasions of misunderstanding may arise from the cultural variations, the social differences, and the economic changes that were involved in your marriage. If in spite of having very similar general cultural, social, and economic backgrounds, you have developed some unwholesome tensions, look for the symptoms of maladjustment in a failure to understand the meanings of marriage. We turn now to a consideration of that item in greater detail.

II. PHYSICAL ADJUSTMENT.

Among the various factors in your new and intimate relationships is the adjustment necessary in achieving physical harmony. *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4). Sex experience is a normal culmination of love and is perfectly honorable within wedlock; within the Christian ideal it becomes a definitely spiritual experience.

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

A. Various purposes.

The physical union of the sexes within wedlock is designed to serve more than one purpose. An understanding of these great purposes leads to richness of spiritual experience and becomes a vital resource of marital happiness.

The most widely accepted purpose of sex experience is procreation, or the propagation of the race. From the beginning God designed that human relations in marriage and family life should be so constituted that the race will *“be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it . . .”*(Genesis 1:28). This emphasizes the glory of parenthood and family living. Unfortunately the strain of modern living, with its attendant exhaustion and fatigue, and the swirl of activity and its social demands, have mitigated against wholesome desire for a family. These factors are in direct opposition to the ideal of the Scripture which speaks commendably of large families. A failure to realize the exalted state of parenthood is a failure to realize the highest in marital functions. Those who choose to be childless rob themselves of many deep satisfactions that come alone through parental responsibility. Children bring into married life a unique joy and make a significant contribution to the expansion of personality.

Sex experience is an occasion in which two people give themselves completely to each other in the most intimate expression of love. The Scriptures say, *“Man shall cleave to his wife,”* intimating that the harmonious physical union of husband and wife is a spiritual relationship. However, achieving this highest expression of love must be an act of mutual agreement and enjoyment, an experience in which both realize complete satisfaction. When this expression of conjugal devotion is mutually satisfying, it becomes a symbol of success in marriage, a perpetual source of marital happiness.

A satisfactory physical adjustment helps to increase the attraction of the two people for each other. The mutual delight in sex experience brings into marriage a sense of marital obligation. The body is an instrument of social purposes, and physical union typifies a spiritual union. The outward sign of that inward unity is a tangible expression of mutual affection and conjugal devotion. Therefore, it serves the purpose of sustaining confidence and commitments confessed in the marriage vow.

The most important factors in creating good atmosphere in the home are those representing the relationship of husband and wife. Success in the area of physical adjustment has a strong bearing upon the promise of happiness in other areas of the domestic scene. Parents whose sex life is completely satisfactory, by that same token, have a sound basis upon which to build wholesome parental relationships. The solitudes and responsibilities that attend the consequences of conjugal relationships permeate the whole of family life. The physical expression of love forms a bond which ties the whole of partnership living into one. In this respect two people become one flesh. Complete physical unity, when it represents marital harmony, becomes a vital factor in the bond that sustains the family unit.

B. Making the adjustment.

The mere fact that two people actually love each other is no guarantee of success in marriage. You may have discovered already that two people do not fall into perfect tune by any magnetic touch or spontaneous response. A married couple must employ social skills to achieve marital success. Let us therefore examine some of the instruments which have in them the elements that can guarantee happiness.

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

A primary factor that leads to success is a purpose to succeed. This includes a determination to make temperamental adjustments. Love must keep on “ticking” after the realities of life begin to disturb the domestic scene. Intimate living within the same household demands love plus a purpose. This purpose is a determination to make adjustments in tastes and interests such as will enhance the happiness of the other. This applies in all areas of human experience, but particularly as it affects the physical adjustment. The couple need have no fears about the possibilities of making the adjustments, but should approach the sex experience with poise and respect.

In order to make the adjustment with satisfaction the couple needs an understanding of the problems involved. The wife should understand that the sex impulses in her husband may be much stronger than her own desire. She can release much of the tension that might otherwise exist by cooperating in the love play which normally precedes the sex experience. If she has discovered any tendency to have a frigid attitude toward sex, she will do well to warm herself with unselfish desire to please her husband. On the other hand, the husband should be equally considerate of his wife and realize that the woman’s desire for sexual union may be less urgent and may require more soliciting. This calls for mutual agreement and mutual understanding. The Scriptures speak clearly on this matter in which the husband is addressed with an appeal to “*render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. . . . Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency*” (1 Corinthians 7:3, 5). With this mutual understanding comes reason to believe that both husband and wife can enter into sex experiences with complete satisfaction and with delight in each other.

Newly married couples should know that complete satisfaction may not be realized in the early stages of marital experience. While some couples may discover complete harmony very soon after the wedding day, others may require months or even years. This means that both need to exercise patience, to learn by experimentation and by selected reading about the anatomy and techniques of physical intimacy. Persons who have determined to succeed in their marital relationships can, through patient experience, discover the methods of most satisfactory adjustment.

The most essential factor in making the sexual relationship of husband and wife completely satisfying is for both persons to have proper consideration for the other. In a very real sense each should live for the joy and satisfaction of the other. The husband should be constantly seeking to meet his wife’s desires and to help her attain her highest joys in their experience with each other. In the same way the wife should not be content to consult her own feelings in the matter, but should rather try to approach this whole issue with an intelligent and sympathetic understanding of her husband. Since the relationship between husband and wife on the physical level is of such great importance, and since happiness in this relationship is one of the essential requirements for genuinely successful marriage, both husband and wife must be able to talk these matters over frankly and reverently. In seeking the guidance of God with respect to their relationship to each other, they have every right to expect Him to make their union a beautiful experience, one that is productive of the joy that He intended. There is no occasion for any couple to be ashamed of the sex relationships in marriage; problems pertaining thereto should be reviewed without hesitancy for mutual consideration, counsel, and prayer.

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

III. GUARDIANS OF HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE.

In the achievement of marital success, one can never say that he has now arrived at any point of finality. Success in marriage is measured by constant growth in understandings and in a continuous deepening of appreciations for each other. To assure the marriage of such increase in personality development and appreciations requires the implementation of personal skills and understandings. It requires vigorous determination and intelligent action. Let us review several factors you may use with profit in your marriage venture.

A. A courageous attitude toward failure.

Social maladjustments, financial disappointments, emotional upheavals, and spiritual disillusionments are some of the potential factors that lead to marital frustration and failure. If one of these should fall into the sanctuary of your home, you must be ready to rise up and deal with the issue courageously. If the problem seems unsolvable, husband and wife can always look at each other reassuringly to say, "We are joined to stand by each other and if necessary to start over again." In spite of frustrations, failures, or freak coincidences, you will find happiness in the fact that there is at least one who understands, cares, and shares in your dilemmas.

B. A constructive attitude toward misunderstanding.

Human nature is so constituted that we do not always give the impression we desire. We do not always receive the impression another intended to give. Within these limitations lie the possibilities of numerous kinds of misunderstanding. To be realistic about this, you must accept the possibility and expect that sooner or later you might misunderstand each other. Your safe guard against shipwreck in such an experience is a resolution that no misunderstanding shall degenerate into misgiving. You cannot afford to allow a single occasion of mistrust. You will avoid entertaining even the slightest suspicion of each other. Here is where you will open the subject kindly and with a genuine desire to clear the misunderstanding. Your happiness is at stake; you will allow nothing to poison your confidence. Happiness rests on frank and objective review of the case. Always talk matters over and hold nothing from each other. You are each deserving of the fullest confidence. Do not let a single day close with an open issue of misunderstanding or disagreement. Bring yourselves to some common ground of understanding and close the affair with a kiss.

C. A conservative attitude toward spending.

Happiness in marriage demands a conservative attitude toward spending. People must learn to live within their income. This calls for self-sacrifice, accurate budgeting, careful buying, and a good sense of stewardship. A steady income does not solve all the money matters in marriage. The question of who shall spend the family money and how much they may spend remains an issue that must be settled by agreement. While some husbands prefer to go to the market to make the weekly purchase of groceries and other household goods, the wife may do a better job of purchasing. If she understands the budget problems, she is more capable of making the necessary savings without sacrificing proper diet and other health necessities. In either case the couple will find happiness in cooperating for the good of the household. Many couples have testified that they were never happier than during those years of financial strain when every penny saved went toward the payment of the mortgage.

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

D. A congenial attitude toward in-laws.

Maintaining a congenial attitude toward your in-laws is important. A congenial attitude with in-laws is an intimate but loose human relationship for which you have had very little preparation. It lacks the binding elements of marriage. You married 'one' for love but you 'married' the relatives because of law. Unfortunately, the traditional view holds a little suspicion on both sides. With the lack of physical attraction, and with little choice in accepting the in-laws, being congenial requires special effort. You are married now, and that means your first allegiance has been shifted from your parents to the person you married. You now give your highest devotion to this new home. Your deepest love is spent on your married companion. You owe the in-laws respect, but you owe each other your all. Your former subordination to parents is now turned into a mutual primary loyalty to each other. Communicate and make decisions together prayerfully, not forgetting the wise counsel of godly parents.

E. A wholesome attitude toward courtesies.

One of the best means of sustaining marital happiness is to keep alive the courtesies you shared in courtship. Remember, you have not yet experienced the climax of love; the delights of affection have not yet reached their peak; the days of deepest devotion are ahead. Marriage is a long adventure into the regions of personal delight and purposeful family living. You have now started down the road and you want to discover the best ways of sustaining happiness and achieving the deepest harmony in marital relationships. More occasions exist now of being your best than existed before the wedding.

A subtle temptation creeps into many new homes when husband and wife begin to take each other for granted. Such an attitude often leads to cold indifference or to stifling frustration; it paves the way for personal offenses that are hard to overcome. On the other hand, the common courtesies of society, when applied to marital relations and home life, will prevent failure and enhance the married state. The romance of courtship extended becomes the romance of marriage.

The little expressions of appreciation that characterized courtship serve useful purposes in marriage. Sincere "I love you," "What sweetness," and "Dearest," cannot fail to help sustain mutual endearment in marriage. The tokens of love so graciously exchanged in courtship are only forerunners of a longer train of gift exchanges between husband and wife. A book, a bouquet, a box of candy, a vase, or what-have-you can serve better purposes now than they did during courtship. Less money spent on such items before the wedding and proportionately more afterwards would do much toward keeping the marriage relations sweet and enduring. A good time to exchange such tokens of affection is on special days, birthdays, and special occasions.

How strange that the sin of ingratitude should make such deep invasions into the home. Neither one of you intends to be ungrateful, but too soon after the wedding you may forget to express your appreciation. The best place to become vocal with gratitude, and to express sentiments of praise is in the home. Gratitude has power to serve as a strong under girding of marital relations and to inspire mutual confidence. Gratitude is not a luxury but a necessity of marriage. Do not fail to say, "Thank you." You cannot live together very long and not do many things for each other that deserve recognition.

Courtesy calls for consideration, too. Some evening very soon your husband may come to the house after a very difficult day. Will he find the house in order? Will the atmosphere of the home be an invitation to relax

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

his tensions? Will your words of greeting warm his spirits and soothe his mental pain? The spirit of a great man can be crushed or revived at the moment of his arrival in the home. The wife's complaints, untidiness, or mere indifference to his comfort can easily turn a man's emotions into despair. The considerate wife, however, will understand her husband's need for a retreat from the maddening crowd. She will have her house in attractive order and clean. She will be ready to engage her husband in delightful conversation, or she will be ready to listen to his "tale of woe." Such care and consideration for the state of his nerves will enhance greatly the atmosphere of the home and avert the possible development of marital tension.

A husband has an even greater need for consideration for his wife. At that time each month when she is more inclined to be nervous and upset, the wife is deserving of the most gracious thoughtfulness and tolerance. The husband's tone of voice, his help with the dishes, his care to avoid offense in words, and his tenderness toward her in every circumstance of the home are all great assets to the marital relationship. Why should our treatment of those we love most be any less considerate than our treatment of strangers? Why should we be any more unkindly frank with each other than we are with friends outside of the home? Why should we think neatness in personal appearance before strangers is more important than before those we love? If you will always be considerate of each other in these and similar matters, your mutual appreciations and marital devotion through the years will increase.

IV. A GROWING SPIRITUAL AFFINITY.

The Christian view of a successful marriage is incomplete without some understanding of the integrating forces in religious experience. The bride and groom may have full evidence of personality adjustment and physical compatibility; but unless they have equal assurance of spiritual affinities, the guarantee for complete marital happiness is invalid. The strongest elements in marital unity are those derived from satisfactory Christian experiences. Marriage is essentially a divine union and therefore finds the genius of its nature in the Christian ideal.

A. Sharing religious experience.

Your happiness in marriage has a very close correlation to your desire to live life at its best. If you are satisfied with a low level of Christian experience, you must be content with second-grade marital happiness. However careful you may be to observe the rules of marriage in other respects, do not think that your religious satisfactions will come automatically. Effort and understanding are necessary to develop a vital spiritual life. Keep in mind, also, that if the deepening of the spiritual life is to enrich the marital experience, this spiritual life must be a mutual and equal growth. That means husband and wife must learn together how to give Christ pre-eminence in private devotions and in public life. For one to have a spurt in spiritual growth when the other lags behind may damage marital devotion. Let each stimulate the other to attain the best in Christian experience.

This plea for mutual experience in your relation to God is not intended to relax your individual private devotions. Each of you has a first loyalty to God, and that relation needs constant cultivation. Family worship does not take the place of private devotions. You will always need to exercise your spiritual privileges in private fellowship with God so that you will have a vital experience to share with another. Marriage simply gives occasion for two people to bring together into a mutual understanding what they have learned from God through individual experience. When you joined hands and hearts for marital loyalty through prosperity or reverses, you opened the way for mutual acceptance of the events of providence. Now you find deep satisfaction in your common trust in God. Your deepest joys will come through the conviction that you are both living in the

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

will of God, and that you are jointly committed to His future care.

B. Worship in the home.

Worship is a first essential in the home. Do not wait until you have children to establish a family altar. A simple and regular worship period in the home will do much toward unifying the aspirations and ideals of husband and wife. To read Scriptures together aloud, to pray with each other and for each other, to sing together, and at times to sit together in silence for holy meditation, are invaluable moments for the integration of marital living. The husband and wife who kneel together in the evening to pray, have less difficulty in understanding each other during the day. Worship in the home tends to simplify emotional adjustments. Genuine worship experience in a mutual search for the will of God brings to united hearts real peace and contentment.

C. Participation in church life and work.

The home is the best channel through which the Church can conserve her spiritual values. The heritage of Christian ideals is best preserved through the loyalty of the family. These ideals serve to underscore part of the difficulty precipitated by mixed marriages. Husband and wife should be members of the same denomination and preferably of the same congregation. A divided loyalty in matters of church attendance, creed, practices, and work is in most cases very unsatisfactory. Of all things on which we need marital agreement, there is none more significant than a common mind in religion.

The Church provides a center for the focus of life activities. What is done at the Church and through the Church tends to draw away from self-interests and self-indulgence. Church activities constitute another element of protection to marital harmony. Do things together often for the welfare of others and you will be happier in your own home.

D. Fulfill the mission of the home.

The Christian home has a social mission to fulfill. This mission must be so uniquely different that it will have a redemptive influence upon every aspect of society. We face intense social pressures against modesty, purity and virtue. A young couple that counteracts these pressures with a positive example of reserve, integrity of character, and devotion to principle is entitled to a deep sense of gratitude in that achievement. The world needs to see that marriage based on the principle of purity yields the deepest satisfaction and greatest happiness. The Christian home is our greatest reinforcement in the struggle against pagan social practices. We must restore wholesome living conditions to the home and recapture the spirit of neighborliness. Make your home a familiar resort for the young people of the Church and mingle freely with older couples of the congregation. Keep the social activities of your home thoroughly Christian. We must impress the world with the reality of Christianity and its redemptive power. This can be done best through creative family living.

The Christian home has an economic mission to perform. We have referred to the principle of stewardship in an earlier section of this writing. Here we mean to underscore the principle as a means of witness in the world. Stewardship is your opportunity to demonstrate the ideals of thrift, economy, industry, cooperation, and giving. Not only will you find these principles a basis of satisfaction in your own home, but you can also realize a sense of gratitude in having made a worthy contribution to the community and church.

Suggestions For A Happy Marriage

The mission of the Christian home is not fulfilled unless it has contributed educational values. This assumes your readiness to accept parental responsibility. You should plan for children to come into your home without postponing too long the arrival of the first baby. The first year of your married life provides sufficient time in ordinary circumstances to make adjustments necessary for parenthood. A wholesome attitude toward children is an essential part of your marital happiness. Nothing compares with the joy of seeing your own children learn to know Christ as their Savior. Witnessing their growth in spiritual interests and achievement is a great delight. Here is an opportunity of a lifetime to make a permanent contribution to the kingdom of God. In your children you have the opportunity to influence a new generation of Christian leaders. You can help them to regain the Christian sense of lasting values. You can help them reestablish in society the principles of a Christian culture. Above all you can realize in them the perpetuation of a witness for Christ and the Church.