

#210 “Bedrocks of a Strong, Healthy Marriage”

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These days, those who decide to go ahead and make a lifelong commitment to one another in marriage rarely follow through on their promises. Even many “Christian” marriages shatter after just a few years. If marriage was simple and easy, most everybody would choose to marry and would stay married. Sadly, few marriages last “until death do us part” because sickness, lust, financial ups and downs, and just plain old selfishness get in the way. God’s design was never for one partner to leave the other behind, but marriage done God’s way means that not only are promises kept but that as best as is possible the relationship flourishes, leaving a legacy of blessing and joy. By listening to Scripture’s bedrocks for a strong, healthy marriage, we, who love Jesus and believe His Word, have hope for the preservation and sustenance of the most fulfilling earthly relationship that God has ordained.

Bedrock #1: The ultimate anchoring point in a marriage is a 100% shared belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord and in His Word as His infallible instruction for life and marriage. Marriage is much more than a business contract or life strategy. It is a uniting of two into one at the deepest heart and soul level. By definition, marriage involves a spiritual component, which is why the Lord doesn’t want us to marry unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 4:5). He knows that without a common faith, belief, and confession that a marriage will never be what it could and should be. Knowing that one’s spouse believes firmly in what God says regarding marriage gives lasting hope that struggles and frustrations can be overcome because both spouses are following the same roadmap to the same destination. As Scripture’s commands are followed, unity, health, and joy in marriage can only increase.

Bedrock #2: Both spouses must trust one another completely. Proverbs 31:11, speaking of the excellent wife, says that the heart of her husband trusts in her. This goes both ways, of course, that the heart of the wife must also be able to trust in her husband. Trust is a decision we make based upon what we observe and have come to believe to be true about a person. Over time, that trust can be lost, or it can be strengthened. No spouse will ever be perfect, but owning up to mistakes, repenting, and moving forward keeps trust from totally evaporating. Trust shouldn’t have to be blind in marriage, for there should be evidence of trustworthiness. If someone is not trustworthy, he or she shouldn’t be considered as marriage material in the first place. If we don’t trust our spouse or know him or her to be untrustworthy, this will gouge intimacy and lead to great pain and division. An untrustworthy spouse is a person who lacks integrity, and it is hard to rest easy and open up with a person who at any time might stab you in the back. In order for marriages to be strong and healthy, we must be able to trust our spouses enough to share our hearts and lives, not just our checkbooks, though many don’t even trust the other with that.

Bedrock #3: There must be a readiness and willingness to forgive. Spouses will make mistakes and have their ups and downs, and some seasons of marriage will be easier than

others. Even Christians stumble (James 3:2), and it is imperative that forgiveness sets us apart in our marriages (Ephesians 4:32). Forgiveness is a healing and restorative action that prevents seeds of bitterness and anger from arising in the marriage. Love, by definition, does not keep count of wrongs suffered (1 Corinthians 13:5), but it forgives and moves forward together. In even the best marriages, over fifty plus years, a multitude of sins will be committed, but love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). This is not to say that sin doesn't matter, for it can do lasting damage. Rather, it is to say that Jesus' love and grace are stronger still, and it is kindness, not wrath, that leads to repentance and growth (Romans 2:4).

Bedrock #4: Strong, healthy marriages view divorce as a non-option. This is not to say that divorce may never be necessary in the legal sense should a relationship become dangerous, for example, but divorce is never to be viewed as an out when things become difficult (Malachi 2:16). This means that both spouses will always have to think constructively because they know they will have to work things out one way or the other. When divorce is on the table, sin becomes less of a threat, and this is toxic to a marriage.

Bedrock #5: The communication lines must remain open, or a marriage will suffocate and shut down. Yelling and screaming communicates some things but typically not the right things. Compassionate, gentle speaking turns away wrath and anger, and it gives the relationship room to heal, progress, and grow (Proverbs 15:1). When two people live together, stress will arise, but communication enables solutions to be found and marriages to last. Intimacy is directly proportional to openness and consistency in communication.

Bedrock #6: Strong, healthy marriages maintain God's command to be intimate regularly (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). This is not a command to see how many times spouses can make love in a week. Neither is it an excuse to go for long periods of time without being intimate. Regular expressions of physical love flow out of emotional intimacy and connectedness in other aspects of the marriage. Where intimacy fails or is lacking, other troubles may be boiling beneath the surface. Eventually they will overflow into dangerous behavior. Intimacy is God's design and command for marriages that last, and in healthy marriages, it will be a regular occurrence.

Bedrock #7: Unified decision-making moves a marriage forward as one. Because both husband and wife are, spiritually speaking, priests in the kingdom of God with direct access to the throne of grace, both should be able to know God's leading in a matter (1 Peter 2:9). Choosing, for example, to have more children, to buy a new home, to move, or any number of difficult decisions that parents and spouses must make must be done together. Both spouses must believe that they are doing the right thing before God before they do it. Unity in decisions leads to unity in direction and to marriages that last.