

How Do You Build a Strong Marriage?

We hear so much today about compatibility, but the truth is, most people are not compatible in the way that the world sees compatibility. When I married Linda, I married her because I loved her. We were far from the world's standard of compatibility. But, we both had a deep love for each other. We knew that marriage would not be easy because we were both different in many ways. Yet, our love for each other made us willing to work through those hard areas in our lives. And the key that made our marriage what it is today, is our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians should recognize that your marriage is first of all a commitment to Jesus Christ and then to each other. Your best defense against forces that will erode your marriage is for both to maintain a deep, profound, and shared relationship with Jesus Christ and commitment to obey God's Word.

First, concentrate on your heart, not your appearance. Proverbs chapter 31 and verse 30 says: "Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised."

Peter gave the same principle to wives in 1 Peter chapter 3 and verses 3-4, but it applies to husbands as well: "Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But *let it* be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

If you are focused on developing your love for Christ, your inner qualities of godliness will mature and strengthen your marriage.

Second, concentrate on who your spouse really is, not on the ideal partner. Many marriages grow weak and fail because the partners never take time to get to know each other. Your spouse, as wonderful as he or she seemed at the altar, is not perfect. If you hold to the ideal of what you want your spouse or marriage to be like, more than likely you will hurt your marriage. One writer said it well, "Abandon the idea of a perfect mate and marriage and begin learning to understand and love the spouse you have – as he or she is today." This is what Peter meant in 1 Peter chapter 3 and the first part of verse 7: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge." Peter says that the husband is to live with his wife "according to knowledge". In other words, live with your wife "with understanding". See the value of your wife, learn to understand your wife. Don't try to make her what she is not.

Third, concentrate on loving your spouse, not on your compatibility. No matter who your spouse is, you can learn to love each other. In contrast to the prevailing idea that love is something that just happens. Scripture does not even recognize the possibility of incompatibility between two marriage partners – God just simply commands both the husband and wife to love each other.

Fourth, you do the research: Ephesians 5:21-33; Titus 2:4.

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February 2010