

Marriage Building



Keys to Construction and Remodeling

by Jennifer Brady

If you have ever built your own home, you can testify to how much work, time, and effort such a task requires. From drafting the blueprints to laying the foundation to decorating the interior, home building is one difficult, yet rewarding job. In the same way, building your marriage from the ground up is a task which calls for a large investment of time and energy as well as a strong commitment to work through the problems which will inevitably arise in the building process. Marriage building is not always an easy or effortless venture, but the rewards that flow from a strong relationship more than compensate for all the hard work.

In looking at the blueprint for a strong, healthy marriage, one must examine the foundation upon which the relationship is built. Couples who build on any foundation besides Christ and His purposes for marriage are bound to experience some troubles. God desires for husband and wife to share in an all-encompassing, intimate union. This emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual unity can only be developed when a deep sense of commitment is

present...commitment to God and to your spouse. This sense of oneness sets the stage for a healthy relationship in which God can be glorified. Unity in marriage does not mean that each partner loses his/her sense of personal identity, but rather that each partner is in a continual process of growing closer to Christ and to one another.

Once the foundation has been laid, we must shift our attention to other structural components that are vital to the final product. There are several key issues which every marriage will encounter. Let's say that these elements are the walls of the marriage. The strength of the walls will be a determining factor in the strength of the marriage. Four of the main walls are: 1. Communication; 2. Conflict Resolution; 3. Expectations; and, 4. "We" versus "Me" mentality. Of course, these are not the only areas which contribute to the success or failure of your marriage but they are undoubtedly four of the top issues which arise in a relationship.

Communication: The ability to effectively talk with and listen to your partner is a key to your

marital success. Healthy communication is characterized by the honest exchange of ideas, needs, desires, opinions, and even frustrations. It means that you share your mind and heart with your partner in a loving way that is not manipulative. It does not mean that you stuff your feelings or ideas and put on a facade of satisfaction. There are no expectations that your spouse should be able to read your mind in order to figure you out. Direct and authentic communication will allow your marriage to flourish.

Conflict Resolution: Conflict is a natural part of life. Even the strongest of marriages will have times of disagreement. Often, these times of conflict turn out to be large stepping stones for marital growth. However, conflict, in itself, does not promote growth. It is only when two people can deal with conflict in a healthy way that the potential for growth is produced. Good communication is a prerequisite for healthy conflict resolution. In order for positive conflict resolution to occur, disagreements must be dealt with as they arise. Disagreements which are

buried or avoided only set the stage for future problems.

Expectations: In order for your marriage to reach its maximum potential, both partners must have realistic expectations about what it will be like to share your lives together. There should be a clear understanding and agreement about the roles you will play, the responsibilities you will assume, the ways decisions will be made, the needs you can and cannot meet, the time you will spend together, the way you will handle holidays and in-laws, the way you will rear children, and the financial freedoms and limitations. These are only a few of the main areas where unrealistic expectations can give birth to resentment and anger.

"We" versus "Me" Mentality: A strong marriage will be centered around the needs and interests of the couple rather than one individual. This means that your marital relationship is given priority over all other human relationships including those with your children and parents. A strong marital union will provide a true sense of security for your children as

well as allow God to use your love for one another to minister to and encourage others. In addition, the "we" mentality suggests that one spouse is willing to sacrifice some personal gain for the sake of the marriage. It means that each partner is striving to meet the needs of the other not out of obligation or selfishness, but rather because they love and value one another.

What stage of construction is your marriage in? Do you have a solid foundation? Which walls are standing strong? Which ones need a little work? The truth is that these four factors that contribute to a healthy marriage CAN be learned. Good communication, healthy conflict resolution, realistic expectations, and a "we" mentality may not be a part of your life right now but you can begin to remodel anytime you choose. The exciting news is that once the right foundation is laid and the walls are securely in place, the process of interior decorating can begin. You can begin to cultivate an even deeper intimacy and improve your relationship through new and different means.

If you are seeking guidance in your marriage, there are several different options. First, there are many Christian books which deal with the issue of marriage. Education can be a very helpful tool. Second, a counselor or pastor may be able to provide you with practical ways to improve your marriage or help you work through current struggles. Third, it may be beneficial to find a healthy couple in the church who can mentor you. Finally, marriage seminars or retreats will afford you the chance to gain knowledge as well as open the doors for discussion with your spouse.

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