

How to Keep Your Marriage Satisfied

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Abstract

Keeping a marriage satisfied is no easy task. With the challenges faced every day, it makes marital satisfaction stressed. To obtain marital satisfaction, each spouse must learn to differentiate and reach an intimate bond with each other. Other factors that cause a marriage to struggle are the various stages throughout life. Parenthood is a great time for parents to grow and come closer as a family. In this stage as well as others, strengths and weaknesses stand out causing conflict that a couple must address to maintain a healthy relationship. In the beginning, God created marriage, and to keep a marriage satisfied, each person must keep God as the center of their lives. Each person is not only serving their spouse but God as well. Every marriage can survive, it just takes two willing partners to surrender their heart to the other.

How to Keep Your Marriage Satisfied

Every person grows up with hopes and expectations about their relationship with their future spouse and what their lives will look like. Unfortunately, these expectations are often unrealistic, usually never met, and are combined with hardships and troubles that couples fail to prepare for resulting in dissatisfaction. With every relationship being so different and unique, marital satisfaction can look different for each couple. However, there are certain contributing factors for satisfaction that can remain the same for all marriages as they go through different stages of life. Finding these factors is the hard part. Overall, any marriage can be satisfied if both spouses are able to help out.

Reasons to Marry with Satisfaction

To keep a marriage satisfied, it takes a team effort. But finding the right spouse can be the most difficult part in making this effort less strenuous. When a marriage is struggling, couples look for the reasons why they married in the first place. There are numerous reasons to marry such as true love, desire for a lifetime companion, or even a financial security. Each presents a common choice to unite as one flesh but at the cost of conflict within the marriage.

Without a solid foundation of the reasons to get married, couples can spoil their marriage. A useful exercise to find these reasons would be to create a list of the pros and cons and share it with your spouse or future spouse. This will allow them to grasp the basic tenets of one's view of marriage and help a couple to work through the issues prohibiting marital satisfaction. Many marriages struggle with communicating issues that it sets the table for an emotional breakdown. A solution would be to keep the idea of not going to bed angry. Although there will be times where space is necessary, it is very important that issues are not left unaddressed. By creating

4MARITAL SATISFACTION

time for discussion as well as venting, emotional scars can be avoided thus moving towards marital satisfaction.

Marital Satisfaction within Parenthood

Another common issue with keeping a marriage satisfied is starting a family. The Bible wants married couples to reproduce but situational awareness should still be addressed. Couples need to understand what social, emotional, and financial changes they are getting themselves into. The social aspect of one's life will change since there will be less free time to hang with friends or go shopping now that a new responsibility has entered the family. Giving up personal things or interactions with others will be shortened. The early stages of development will be a great building experience but babysitters do come in handy. Making time for a one on one date will break the tension at home and bring back the intimacy. Emotional awareness will decrease between each spouse as they deal with the stressors of raising their children. To cope with this, each spouse needs to settle on a type of disciplinary pattern. Their role in the family will keep a healthy balance within the family structure. Finally, finances and spending habits adapt from wants to needs. The average cost of raising a middle class child is approximately 180,000 dollars. Before a couple decides to have a child, they need to secure a financial background and prepare their hearts for a journey. The usual Friday nights out at a fancy restaurant will not happen as much due to the shifting costs. The best solution is for couples to save as much money as they can so they are prepared for the financial struggles they may face with a child. Marital satisfactions for a newlywed couple is almost certain, but as the years pass, expect a tough journey. Some days, one spouse will want to walk out, but they must stop and remember why they fell for the love of their life.

5MARITAL SATISFACTION

Nora Ephron in her book *Heartburn* (1996) wrote, “A child is a grenade. When you have a baby, you set off an explosion in your marriage, and when the dust settles, your marriage is different from what it was. Not better, necessarily; not worse, necessarily; but different.”

Transitioning from couple hood to parenthood is a very critical, and to some degree, permanent period. This time period involves mastering a whole new set of roles and maintaining a satisfactory relationship with your spouse along with a satisfactory relationship with the child. Often times, parental roles can compete with the roles of the relationship. To add to this, economic stressors along with other life stressors begin to magnify. This can put much strain on a relationship and often leads to a decrease in emotional support for each other (Guttman and Lazar, 2004).

According to Guttman and Lazar (2004), many research studies support the notion of a general decline in marital satisfaction after the first child is born. However, Clulow would argue that a decrease in marital satisfaction may not necessarily be due to children but rather a natural process accelerated by children (Guttman and Lazar, 2004). Another opinion by John M. Gottman (1999) is that 70 percent of wives experience a steep drop in their marital satisfaction within the first year of the baby’s birth. The husband’s dissatisfaction often comes as a reaction to the wife’s unhappiness (Gottman, 1999). Of course there are exceptions to these statistics, yet it is common considering what the couple goes through during this new stage of life.

Although there are many reasons for such disgruntlement such as sleepless nights, feeling overwhelmed or unappreciated, the weight of a huge responsibility, economic anxieties, lack of self care, and more, one major contribution to a marriage during parenthood is whether or not the husband and wife experience parenthood together. If only one spouse experiences the life-altering experience, it is more than understandable that there would be natural distance between

6 MARITAL SATISFACTION

them. At the University of Haifa in Israel, a study was conducted on factors that constitute marital satisfaction. The results indicated that couples with children value Agreement, Consideration, and Intimacy at a higher level than couple who do not have children (Guttman and Lazar, 2004). When these, along with other important factors in a marital relationship are not focused on and emphasized, the happiness and satisfaction among the couple has the potential to be affected.

A piece of advice that Gottman (1999) provides in his book, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, is to “focus on your marital friendship” (p. 213). The importance of friendship in a marriage is the most stressed factor by Gottman (1999) as he says:

The determining factor in whether wives feel satisfied with sex, romance, and passion in their marriage is, by 70 percent, the quality of the couple’s friendship. For men, the determining factor is, by 70 percent, the quality of the couple’s friendship (p. 17).

Having this established friendship before the baby comes creates an easier transition as you understand each other and therefore work as a team, remaining in tune with one another. It is also important to make it a “second place” priority to carve out some time for the two of you. However, an important thing to remember is that even if a lot of time is spent discussing the baby, you have succeeded. Also, little intentions such as involving the husband with the child and giving the wife a break and being sensitive to each other’s needs will prevent parenthood from dragging the relationship down but instead help elevate it to a new level of closeness, understanding, and love towards one another (Gottman, 1999).

Strengths and Weaknesses

What is the best way to have a healthy strong marriage? This is a question that has been asked over and over again by many couples. There is no surefire answer to exactly how a marriage works. There are many different “ways” that people have come up with to try and solve the marriage problems, but the truth is that every couple is different. Every couple is going to have their own set of problems. With this said there are a few strengths to every marriage that seem to be universal and good to practice, but with these strengths there are the weaknesses the plague us.

Communication is the first thing that can either strengthen or weaken a marriage. “Self-disclosure appears to be an important aspect of relationship dynamics” when related to marital satisfaction (McCabe, 2006, p. 45). Couples who have poorer communication usually do not have very successful marriages. They tend to fight more about the little which could have been solved using the simple method of communication. “Positive communication skills involved sharing thoughts and feelings, discussing problems together, and listening to the other person’s point of view (Robinson and Blanton, 1993, p. 41).

According to research conducted by Linda Robinson and Priscilla Blanton (1993); involving the interviewing of 15 couples on the strengths in their marriage. Intimacy appeared to be the central concept for these couples. They described ways in which closeness to their spouses permeated the relationship, encompassing the emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of their marriage (Robinson and Blanton, 1993). When experiencing intimacy with your partner you let yourself become vulnerable in ways you would never do with another person. This kind of closeness fuels a marriage relationship and makes it stronger. Without it the flame would fizzle out and become dry. Couples experience the shared joys and pains of life together as they begin

their new family. They experience childbirth, graduations, traveling, and the simple pleasure of time alone in the craziness of life.

Unsurprisingly there was a great agreement among couples that commitment was important in their marriage. “Many couples referred to an expectation that the marriage would endure, citing the fact that divorce was not an option” (Robinson and Blanton., 1993, p. 40). Couples can agree that it makes marriage so much more satisfactory when both can consent to the marriage being a lifetime commitment. Although some couples can think of a time when their spouse or themselves waived in their commitment to one another; but there was always that same commitment that brought them back together.

Religion also played an important role in the satisfaction of couples. Religion provides a ways that the couple can grow and be supported by a community of people who are growing with them. Religion “sustained their relationship through good times as well as bad” (Robinson and Blanton., 1993, p. 44). Couples are provided a place where the family can be supported as the kids grow up. This can provide an eased mind for the parents when they leave their kids with these people; which in turn cause less stress on the marriage. These are just a few things that provide satisfaction in a marriage. Couples who do things together and make time for one another seem to be the more satisfied and content with their lives.

Conflict in Relationships

Conflict will be seen in any relationship. There is no way of getting around it; however, there is a wrong way of resolving it. Furthermore, not all of the conflict will get resolved. In other words there is not a winner or a loser (Gottman, 1999). What is more, people all ways come to a marriage with a past, there is no way of getting around it and this may cause problem

9MARITAL SATISFACTION

but at the same time it may not. However, it is all ways good to understand one's biases especially in a relationship (Eldredge and Eldredge, 2009).

Arguments will happen but how they are handled is a very important part. Because not all arguments will be resolved, it is critical that those arguments do not end a beautiful marriage. One tip is to a signal of sorts that will end an argument before egos get too bruised to be healed. Of course there are many way of doing this. Here are some examples of what you can do: sticking out a tongue, a touch or jester that is either funny or intimate (Gottman, 1999). Know that it is okay not to agree on everything or even to find a solution. If is okay to agree to disagree on any issue.

Furthermore, the way an argument starts often time predicts how it will end. For example, if one spouse accuses the other of something then the argument will not end well. For that matter ask questions and stop accusing. Also do not criticize their personality because that cannot be changed (Eldredge and Eldredge, 2009). If your goal is to change your spouse then good luck because it is not going to happen. However, there is a way to change you. By changing you then you can affect your marriage. More so, it is damaging to the marriage relationship to start an argument out badly. The best thing a spouse can do to listen to the other one. This means no comments, no interjection, just be silent and make sure the spouse knows that you are listening (Gottman, 1999).

Remember that personal biases do affect how you argue. For example, if one spouse is bitter then no matter what the other says, the bitter spouse will react angrily. Bitterness is an ugly, nasty emotion that eats away at the person who has it. On that note, watch out for the four horsemen (Gottman, 1999). The first is criticism. This is the part where one spouse has nothing

10MARITAL SATISFACTION

good or caring to say about the other. The next is contempt. Contempt is a mixture of sarcasm and cynicism and anything else that speaks poison to a relationship. The third horseman is defensiveness. Now you are thinking that if someone criticism me then I need to defend myself. However, the studies have shown that it does not work but fuels the fire. What defensiveness does is blame the critical partner. The forth horseman is stonewalling. So defensiveness does not work and now stonewalling does not, what then can be done. Well, how about listen and try to improve, change. Another tip to try is forgiveness or have a one sided truce were you do what you can to remedy your part of the argument. Remember all of this can lead to bitterness.

The arguments that seemed so scary should not be scary. Take a deep breath and listen with all your might. Keep in mind the four horsemen and know that they are damaging to a relationship. Also take into account how the argument started and do not forget about those funny signals. Remember that all is not lost and a remedy can be found if you keep trying. Change in a marriage is good but forcing it upon someone is wrong, so look at your own heart first. Finally consider that it is okay to disagree with your spouse. Take heart, something can be done and have a happy argument.

Keeping God the Center of Your Marriage

Marriage between a man and a woman is a beautiful gift and an exciting adventure where two people unite to become one flesh and journey through life together. However, a marriage cannot flourish if God is not its center.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." Apply this to marriage, where the three strands are the husband, the wife, and God. When Christ is placed in the center of a marriage, a spiritual dynamic is released that is much greater than two people

trying to build a marriage on their own. When Christ *is* the center of a marriage then it becomes a three stranded chord that is not easily broken.

With God involved in the marriage relationship, a couple has a hope. With the power of God, a couple can now overcome all obstacles. Authors John and Stasi Eldredge (2009) wrote, “We have no idea how couples make it without God’s help...Asking for your marriage to flourish without God is like asking a tree to blossom without sunshine and water. Some sort of tree might grow, but you are not going to like the looks of it” (p. 18). The Lord sheds light on situations, He always has an answer even when we have none, and He will never leave or forsake us. By participating in constant prayer and communion with God, the common stress and tension between marital partners can be released and bring freedom. God loves marriage because He created it, and He will bless your marriage if you let Him.

Conclusion

These are just a few things that provide satisfaction in a marriage, which takes both partners. A successful marriage requires a solid foundation that includes discussion about future children, occupational and household jobs, strengths and weaknesses, financial planning, and more important issues. Marriage does come with conflict, which is why efficiently communicating, discussing, and positively working through problems is so important in a lifelong relationship. Although a couple will experience many changes and transitions in marriage, it is important to keep in mind that faithful commitment, reciprocal love, and an intimate friendship will dramatically increase satisfaction and will make each other stronger. Couples who do things together and make time for one another seem to be the more satisfied and content with their lives. And remember, the little things, such as a helping hand or kind words, make a big difference! All these things said, without having God as the center of your

relationship, you will never be completely satisfied in marriage without Him. He is important for a lively, exciting, fun, and satisfying marriage.

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13MARITAL SATISFACTION

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