

Marriage and Ministry

By Pastor Alan Utting



'A strong marriage is one of the greatest ministries you will ever have.' Anonymous

Sustaining a fulfilling marriage, especially when involved in ministry, takes ongoing effort. Every marriage has ups and downs. Practising the following principles can help you develop a strong bond with your spouse.

Biblical Perspective

Marriage, as described in Genesis 2:24–25, was initially defined as a union between a man and a woman: 'That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.' Most cultures publicly recognize marriage in some form, and for many Christians, this commitment is affirmed in a church ceremony.

God's design for marriage includes three primary purposes:

1. Companionship and mutual support.
Genesis 2:18 'The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'
Marriage provides a lifelong companion to walk alongside, support, and encourage one another through all of life's seasons.
2. Procreation and raising children.
Genesis 4:1 'Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.'
Marriage is a context for bringing children into the world and nurturing them in a secure, loving environment.
3. An expression of love, including sexual intimacy.
(Ephesians 5:25) 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...' (v28) 'In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.' (v31) 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.'
Marriage is intended to reflect Christ's love, expressed through selflessness, unity, and intimacy.

Observations

1. Satan is out to undermine Christian marriages regardless of how long a couple have been together. No one is exempt from his attempts.
2. Each partner contributes their individual background to the marriage, resulting in different approaches and viewpoints. It is useful to acknowledge that multiple valid ways may exist for addressing tasks or situations.
3. After 46 years of marriage, a marriage enrichment course taught me that maintaining your relationship is essential—never let ministry take its place. Losing your marriage could mean losing your ministry as well.
4. Prioritise your spouse as your closest friend by spending quality time together each week. This doesn't require a big budget—choose a regular meal or activity

you both enjoy. Decide when and how you'll commit to strengthening your relationship.

5. Avoid having heavy or emotionally charged discussions late at night, especially when you're angry or exhausted. It's wiser to address important issues when both of you are feeling refreshed and calm. 'In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold' (Ephesians 4:26).
6. Learn to pray together about important matters. Your heavenly Father cares deeply for both of you. Praying as a couple can sometimes be a point of tension, especially if you're not in sync. One partner may prefer a thorough, detailed approach to prayer, while the other may prefer to be more concise and direct. If that's the case, try to find a respectful compromise that honours both styles and keeps unity at the centre.
7. Love is first and foremost a commitment—not merely a matter of romantic feelings. TRUST between partners is a fundamental foundation for a strong and lasting marriage. Faithfulness is essential, infidelity is one of the quickest ways to damage and erode that trust.
8. Good communication and practical acts of service play a vital role in a healthy marriage. In 'The Five Love Languages', Gary Chapman identifies five key ways people express and receive love: Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch. Each person usually has a primary love language that makes them feel most appreciated and cared for. Learning to understand and impart your partner's love language can significantly strengthen communication, deepen emotional connection, and lead to a more fulfilling and lasting relationship.
9. The physical aspect of lovemaking is an important part of a healthy marriage. It is a God-given expression of love, intimacy, and unity between husband and wife. Maintaining tenderness, mutual respect, and open communication in this area helps nurture emotional closeness and strengthen the overall bond in the relationship.
10. Finances are a common source of tension in marriage. Ideally, the partner most capable of managing the budget should take responsibility for handling the bills. Not everything you buy needs to be brand new or top of the line. Much of the world is shaped by a consumer-driven culture that encourages unnecessary spending. Do your best to avoid debt and excessive debt is unbiblical and can be a heavy burden to carry.
11. In times of difficulty, it is advisable to seek assistance from trusted individuals or pursue professional guidance when appropriate. Seeking support is not indicative of marital failure or personal shortcomings. Instead, it demonstrates sound judgment and dedication to enhancing the relationship. Additionally, literature on marriage can offer valuable insights.
12. Forgiving your partner for wrong doing is essential, even if it's challenging. Jesus taught that forgiveness should be on going (Matthew 18:22). 'May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 15:5,6).

Resources

John M Gottman, *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*