

BUILDING A LASTING MARRIAGE

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith" (Malachi 2:16).

To begin with, it should be noted that lasting marriages are not found, they are created. Couples who want to build a lasting marriage should be lasting partners themselves. To have a lasting marriage is not passive but active; couples need to consciously work on their marriage to keep it moving. In this study we shall consider some seven important keys for building a lasting marriage.

1. OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD IN CHOOSING A LIFE PARTNER

This is a principle that should be in place before the marriage even begins. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Bible says; "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" For the Christian, this also means not dating or marrying anyone who is also not a Christian.

Christians are called to evangelize the non-Christians, not to be intimate with them in marriage. For there will be no spiritual harmony in a marriage between a Christian and non-Christian, because the two have different natures with different interests. Therefore, a Christian who wants a lasting marriage should not make it an option to marry a non-Christian. If this one principle is followed, it would save a lot of heartache and marital problems which may lead to divorce.

2. OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD ABOUT THE ROLES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES

This is another important key to consider. We know that in Christ there is neither male nor female, but when it comes to the marriage relationship, God has made the man the head of the family. A family needs a leader and God has called the husband to take up that role. There is therefore nothing like gender equality in marriage. Two major duties of wives are to love and submit to their husbands.

As Apostle Paul told Titus in 2:3-4; "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children." Ephesians 5:22 also teaches wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord". No matter how beautiful a proud wife is, she will always appear ugly to her husband. Because the beauty of a wife is in her love and submissiveness. Wives should therefore obey God's word to love and submit to their husbands as to the Lord.

In Ephesians 5:25 husbands are also taught to love their wives as Christ love the Church. How does Christ love the Church? The love of Christ for the Church is unconditional. Christ also demonstrates His love to the Church by showing her mercy and grace. A husband should therefore learn to love his wife even when she doesn't meet all his conditions. He should show her grace by giving her what she doesn't deserve, and show her mercy by forgiving her when she offends him.

1Peter 3:7 also says; "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Husbands are therefore called to love their wives, to be considerate with them and to treat them with respect. Husbands playing their roles and wives playing their roles will really promote the longevity of their marriage.

3. FORGIVING EACH OTHER

To build a lasting marriage, couples should learn to forgive each other's offenses. A marriage devoid of forgiveness is very disastrous, for it can break any time. No human being is perfect. The fact that your partner is a Christian doesn't make him an angel; no matter how good your partner is, he or she will one day offend you, and couples should choose in advance to forgive each other's offenses.

4. CARE AND ATTENTION

Marriage is like a farm, proper care of it makes it beautiful and lasting, but lack of care can turn it into the breeding ground of snakes and other wild animals. Couples who want to build a lasting marriage should therefore make a conscious effort to take proper care of their marriage. Have time for your marriage; spend quality time together with your family, be kind, surprise your partner with gifts occasionally, show affection, have good time of communication, offer compliments, and often text your partner with love messages. These things are spices that help build a lasting marriage.

5. PUT YOUR PARTNER BEFORE YOUR KIDS

The beauty of some marriages begins to fade out when kids come along. Some wives begin to sacrifice to their children the love, care and attention they had for their husbands. This badly affects the beauty of some marriages and robs it of its glory. But this shouldn't be so, because "children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from Him" (Psalms 127:3).

One important gift a father can offer his children is to love their mother, and one important gift a mother can offer her children is to love their father. Don't put your children before your spouse. For happy kids come from happy couples. Such kids have good emotional health and usually perform better in their schooling. Couples should therefore enjoy the blessings children come along with, and not make them stumbling blocks to their happy marriage.

6. ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT

There is this story about a student who asked his teacher, “What is love?” The teacher answered, “In order to answer your question, go to the wheat field and choose the best wheat and come back. But the rule is that you can go through them only once and cannot turn back to pick.” The student went to the field, went through the first row, he saw one big wheat which he instantly liked, but he thought that maybe there is a bigger one further. Then he saw another bigger one, but again he thought that maybe there is an even bigger one waiting for him.

Later, when he finished more than half of the wheat field, he started to realize that the wheat is not as big as the previous one he saw. He knew he had missed the biggest one, and he regretted. So, he ended up going back to the teacher empty handed. The teacher told him, “This is love, you keep looking for a better one but when later you realise, you have already missed the person.” The student asked, “What is marriage then?” The Teacher again replied, “In order to answer your question, go to the corn field and choose the biggest corn and come back. But the rule is same as before, you can go through them only once and cannot turn back to pick.”

The student went to the corn field, this time he was careful not to repeat the previous mistake. When he reached to the middle of the field, he picked one medium corn that he felt satisfied with and went back to the teacher. The teacher told him, “This time you didn’t come empty handed. You looked for one that is just nice, and you believe this is the best one you can get. This is marriage.”

Couples who want to build a lasting marriage should therefore commit to each other, accept each other as they are; with their strengths and weaknesses, and help each other to grow together. Marriage is a decision to be committed through ups and downs, good and bad times. When things are going well, commitment is easy. But true love is displayed by remaining committed even through the trials of life, and this makes a marriage last.

7. THE THREE SHORT BUT POWERFUL STATEMENTS

These are: "I love you"; "I'm sorry" and "Thank you". Couples who want to build a lasting marriage should befriend these three statements. Often say "I love you" to your spouse, It keeps the love ablaze. Since offenses in marriage is inevitable, don't hesitate to say "I'm sorry" when you offend your partner. Saying "I'm sorry" doesn't make you weak, it rather makes you strong and shows how much you value your partner. Also learn to say "thank you" even for the little kindness from your partner. Appreciate the little things and much will be done.