

A photograph of a red rose lying on a piano keyboard. The rose is in the foreground, slightly out of focus, with its petals spread out. The piano keys are visible in the background, creating a sense of depth. The overall tone is romantic and artistic.

Marriage ON THE ROCK

Giving Light to Our World

With his head in his hands and tears in his eyes, he told me, "My marriage is on the rocks!" Like a ship wrecking on a rocky coast, his marriage was breaking apart. Countless couples go through this sad and painful experience every year. Children in these broken homes often feel devastated, abandoned, and betrayed. They long for the safety and security of home.

How do couples fall out of love? What leads them to renounce their "till death do us part" vows? It could be the stress of finances, children, or family responsibilities. It could be that they neglected their relationship and grew complacent. Maybe they directed their attention elsewhere. Perhaps unrealistic expectations set them up for failure. Whatever the case, there is hope! The following tips can help you and your spouse steer away from the "rocks."

WHERE'S YOUR FOCUS?

Some people expect their spouses to be perfect while forgetting that they are less than perfect! Jesus once asked a question similar to this: "Why do you see the speck that is in your [spouse's] eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? . . . First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your

[spouse's] eye" (**Matthew 7:3-5**, ESV). Jesus was reminding us that no one is perfect. Instead of looking at our spouse's shortcomings, we can try to be more patient, accepting, and supportive. Let's focus on making positive changes in ourselves!

GOOD COMMUNICATION

Many say they have good communication. By this they usually are referring to the fact that they talk a lot. However, talking is only a small part of good communication. Healthy communication involves assertiveness and active listening. Assertiveness is the ability to express our feelings, likes, dislikes, and desires. Active listening requires us to pay close attention to what the other person is saying, especially the feelings being expressed. Often, when someone speaks to us, we simply respond or react. But in active listening, we listen to understand, and then tell the other person what we heard. This helps us understand what the other person means and feels. It also helps the other person feel heard and understood. The Bible teaches, "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (**James 1:19**, ESV). That's why a wise person once said that God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we would listen twice as much as we talk.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

A proverb states, “A meal of bread and water in contented peace is better than a banquet spiced with quarrels” (**Proverbs 17:1**). Conflict is present in every relationship at one time or another. Couples experience conflict over money, in-laws, sex, child-rearing, time, roles, responsibilities, and much more. We don’t need to eliminate conflict in order to have a happy marriage. Rather, the key to a happy marriage is to manage conflict in healthy ways.

When a discussion becomes heated, how should we handle it?

- Take at least 30 minutes to calm down (go for a walk, take a relaxing shower, pray, or another calming activity).
- Set a specific time together to discuss the disagreement.
- Limit the discussion to the current issue. Never bring up past failures. (They should have already been forgiven!)
- Focus on the issue—not each other. Avoid phrases like “You never,” “You always,” “You should,” or “You shouldn’t.”
- Brainstorm! Write down as many strategies as

possible for solving the problem. Do this without stopping to analyze them.

- Discuss and evaluate the pros and cons of each solution. Narrow down the choices.
- Choose a strategy both spouses feel good about. Agree on what each spouse will do to carry out the solution.
- Set a time to follow up on how things are going.

When we're busy, it's easy to forget the last step—but it's an important one. Following up gives the chance for continual growth. Conflict does not have to destroy our marriages! Instead, we can learn to manage it in a positive way.

FORGIVENESS

We have all said or done something, at some time, to hurt our spouse, or vice-versa. We may be angry and even resentful. We may hold a grudge for a long time. But resentment is like drinking a vial of poison and expecting the other person to die. Resentment and hatred hurt us and our relationships! The healthiest and best thing to do when our spouses hurt us is to forgive them. Scripture teaches, "Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive

one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you" (**Ephesians 4:32**).

Forgiving does not mean that we deny or excuse the harm that was done. Instead, forgiveness is letting go of resentment toward the other person. Someone once said that forgiveness is setting the prisoner free only to realize the prisoner was you.

MARRIAGE ON THE ROCK

Every marriage faces challenges from outside and from inside. Outside pressures include our jobs, traffic, the economy, school, weather, in-laws, and more. Inside pressures would be bills, laundry, our different tastes, parenting, illness, finances, sex, and on and on. All these pressures can push our marriages against the rocky shores of life. A spiritual foundation helps our homes withstand the storms of life. Jesus taught that if we would apply His words to our lives and marriages, we would be like "a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock" (**Matthew 7:24-25**).

Researchers have concluded that one of the greatest strengths couples have is a common spiritual experience. Your marriage does not have to be

on the rocks! God offers to build your marriage on the Solid Rock of His word and of His Son. The Bible is full of practical advice for a life-lasting relationship. For instance, Paul writes, "This provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband" (**Ephesians 5:33**). Also, "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor" (**Romans 12:10**, ESV). One more time, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (**Philippians 2:3**, ESV). Build your marriage on the Rock!

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TO OUR WORLD**

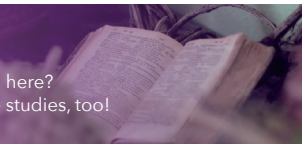


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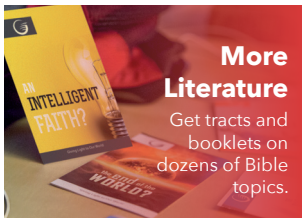
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