

What can my spouse and I do to build a strong marriage?

Scripture: Proverbs 31:30; 1 Peter 3:3–4; Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4

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You should both recognize that your marriage is first of all a commitment to Jesus Christ and then to each other. Your best defense against forces that will erode your marriage is for you both to maintain a deep, profound, and shared relationship with Jesus Christ and a commitment to obey God's Word. Your faithful, obedient walk with the Lord will keep you from stumbling.

Here are a few practical principles to follow:

- Concentrate on your heart, not your appearance.** Your inner life is more important than your outer appearance. The writer of Proverbs said as much when he remarked, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30). Peter gave this principle to wives in 1 Peter 3:3-4, but it applies to husbands as well: "Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God." If you focus on developing your love for Christ, your inner qualities of godliness will mature, develop, and strengthen your marriage.
- Concentrate on who your spouse really is, not on an ideal partner.** Many marriages falter simply because the partners never have taken the time to get to know each other. Your spouse, as wonderful as he or she seemed at the altar, is not perfect. If you cling to an ideal of what you want your spouse or marriage to be like, you'll hurt your marriage. Abandon the idea of a perfect mate and marriage and begin learning to understand and love the spouse you have—as he or she is today. That is what Peter meant when he told husbands to live with their wives "with understanding" (1 Peter 3:7).
- Concentrate on loving your spouse, not on your compatibility.** No matter who your spouse is, you can learn to love each other. In contrast to the prevailing idea that love is something that just happens, Paul commanded husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25) and wives to love their husbands (Titus 2:4). Scripture doesn't even recognize the possibility of incompatibility between two marriage partners—God simply commands both the husband and the wife to love each other.

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