

# HEALTHY MARRIAGES: How is it possible?

- *Some men say, “I am the man of the house, and the Bible says, wives must submit.” What does the Bible really say about submission?*
- *When it comes to finances, some couples say; “We are two adults. You go your way, I’ll go mine.” or others may say, “He who has the gold has the say.” How can a couple be more unified in their approach to financial decisions?*
- *What are the main ingredients for a successful marriage?*
- *How should we resolve conflict arising from bad decision making? What to do when things go wrong?*
- *What are the spiritual issues that should guide a healthy marriage?*

## *Do you have all the facts?*

As you read through the following questions, you will discover workable solutions to some of the most common assumptions and blunders married couples make as they begin (or continue) their married life together. Ignorance is costly, but it is never too late to change. Take the time to learn and then do the right thing — it will make a difference!

### *Q. Some men say, “I am the man of the house, and the Bible says, wives must submit.” What does the Bible really say about submission?*

**A.** Indeed, the Bible does say that wives should “...submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord.” (*Ephesians 5:23*) But, what does this mean? What is submission?

The word ‘submit’ is a verb. *Submitting* is a voluntary action, something one personally does. It is not something you make *someone else* do. Just as you can’t force another person to love you, you can’t force someone to submit to you either. Of course, you can *make* that person do what you want. But then that’s not true submission. Submission is “voluntarily cooperating with anyone out of love and respect for God first, then secondly, love and respect for that person.” (Omartian, 2001)

The Bible includes many instructions concerning relationships. For example, wives are to submit to their husbands. (*Colossians 3:18*) Husbands are to be loving and kind toward their wives. (*Colossians 3:19*) Children are to obey their parents. (*Colossians 3:20*) Slaves are to obey their masters. (*Colossians 3:22*) Masters are to be just and fair toward their slaves. (*Colossians 4:1*) Most people read these instructions for the other person and ignore the ones that apply to them. But we cannot control another person’s behavior, only our own. As a rule, the Bible expects us to start by following our own instructions and not insisting on the obedience of others first.

Submission is a *choice* we make. It’s something each person must decide to do in their heart. If we don’t *decide in our heart* that we are going to willingly submit to whomever it is we need to submit to, then we are not truly submitting. It may come as a surprise to men, but many wives *want* to submit to their husbands. They *want* their husbands to be the head of the home, and they have no desire to take over that God-given position of leadership. They know what the Bible says on the subject, and discerning wives want to do what God wants because they understand that God’s ways work best.

Unfortunately, problems often arise because a wife is afraid to submit to her husband for two reasons. First, her husband thinks submission is only a noun, and he uses it as a weapon against her. Second, the husband has himself not made the choice in his heart to be fully submitted to God. In both cases, it shows that a misunderstanding about the concept of submission can interfere with a healthy marriage. It should be that, like a triangle, a husband and a wife look up to God for direction, and thus over time, they draw closer together as they draw up to God.

God did not say a wife needs to submit to her husband only if he proves to be worthy. Submission is a matter of trusting in *God* more than trusting in man. But a wife will more easily make the choice to submit to her husband if she knows that he has made the choice to submit to the Lord. It will be a sign to her that it is *safe* to submit to him. And remember, the goal here is to *help* her, not *force* her, into proper alignment.

Many wives have a hard time trusting their husbands or believing that they understand godly submission. Wives know that after the verse, “*Wives, submit to your own husbands*” (***Ephesians 5:22***) the Bible says, “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.*” (***Ephesians 5:25***) The example of Christ and the church shows that He does not neglect, ignore, demean or abuse his bride. He doesn’t treat her rudely or disrespectfully. He never acts arrogantly or insensitively toward her. Nor does He criticize her and make her feel she is not valuable. Rather, He loves her, protects her, provides for her, and cares for her. So while God gives the husband a position of leadership in relationship to his wife, He also requires the price of self-sacrifice from him.

The big question in the minds of many women is, “If I submit myself to my husband, will I become a doormat for him to walk on?” The answer to that question depends entirely upon whether her husband believes he should love his wife like Christ loves the church and willingly sacrifices himself for her, or whether he thinks that submission is a noun and that it is something owed to him. In other words, does he only consider *his* desires and opinions, to the exclusion of *hers*?

A wife has a hard time giving her husband leadership of her life if she doesn’t believe she can trust him to have her best interests at heart as he steers the course of their lives together. She has trouble going along with his decisions when he refuses to consider her thoughts, feelings, and insights on the subject. And if she has submitted to a male in the past and her trust was violated in some way, it is even more difficult for her to trust now.

On the other hand, a woman will do anything for a man who loves her like Christ loves the church. Submission is easy under these conditions. Remember, submission means “to submit yourself.” In light of that, when a husband *demand*s submission from his wife, it is no longer true submission. His demands can become intimidating and oppressive, which breeds resentment. When a husband is more interested in his *wife’s submission to him* than he is in his *own submission to God*, then submission becomes a tool to hurt and destroy.

When we submit to God, He does not suppress who we are. He frees us to become who we are made to be, within the boundaries of His protection. When a wife submits to her husband, she comes under his covering and protection, and this frees her to become all God created her to be. Most mature couples know the benefits of allowing each other to be all that God created them to be. A wife’s greatest gifts will prove to be a husband’s greatest blessing.

If you feel that your wife is not submissive, pray for her to have a submissive heart, first toward God and then toward you. Then ask God to help you love her the way He does. It is almost a guarantee that you will see her submission level rise in direct proportion to the unselfish love you exhibit for her. Let her see that you are seeking God for guidance. If she knows that you are asking God to show you the way, she will follow you anywhere.

***Q. When it comes to finances, some couples say, “We are two adults. You go your way, I’ll go mine.” or others may say, “He who has the gold has the say.” How can a couple be more unified in their approach to financial decisions?***

***A.*** Some couples have a strong his/her mentality when it comes to finances. How can couples have a more unified approach in their financial decisions? Several general principles are provided below to help you sort out one of the greatest tensions in marriage: finances.

First, as the wedding vows indicate, becoming husband and wife means money and possessions are no longer “yours” and

“mine”, but “ours”. The two of you have become one. Neither one should say, “It’s *my* income, *my* children, *my* savings account, *my* home, *my* car, *my* debt, or *my* anything.” A selfish attitude regarding money or possessions will most certainly undermine the relationship. It does not mean that either partner will lose their personality in the personality of the other, but that both should take responsibility for each other’s welfare and love one another above all others. How does this oneness work itself out practically in the area of finances? What follows are a few guidelines to get you started, or back on the right track. These guidelines apply to all couples, irrespective of whether it is the man or the woman or both who are earning the money. Remember you are one!

Second, make sure you’re both working on establishing good financial habits. For example, don’t spend what you don’t have. The credit crunch is waiting to devour anyone — including you — and it will unless you jointly determine to delay purchase until the hard cash is in hand. These days, such an attitude is definitely counter cultural. But rest assured, it will serve you in good stead throughout your married life.

Third, jointly commit your financial goals to paper. This process involves several steps. The following points are summarized from two excellent books on the subject, titled; *Becoming One Financially* (Burch, 2001) and *Basic Steps you can take to Ensure Success in Decision Making: Setting Realistic Financial Goals* (Blue, 2001).

**A. Take time to explore, with your spouse, without self-criticism or self-justification, how you view money in your life:** What is your attitude toward money? What does money mean to you? What assumptions and values about money did you develop while you were growing up? How did your parents deal with issues of money? Did one parent spend money recklessly, making the rest of the family suffer unnecessarily? Did your spouse grow up in a situation of great financial need, where every shilling had to be accounted for? Did one spouse grow up never having to worry where the money they used came from? The two of you may have been raised in families where money matters were handled completely differently. If so, you need to talk about those differences so that you can understand each other and, in turn, build a foundation for mutual understandings about when and how money should be spent. If you start out right, you can avoid a lot of pain and frustration down the road and be way ahead of most other couples. These circumstances in our lives affect our attitudes towards money.

**B. Avoid labeling your spouse’s attitudes as right or wrong:** Try to understand one another’s money history. Listen for the hurts, fears, wishes and hopes that get channeled into money. Try to put yourself in their situation rather than criticizing one another. Respecting each other’s needs and backgrounds can help you respectfully negotiate your financial decisions. Remember: respect breeds trust.

**C. Learn from each other:** Put your own beliefs and attitudes about money aside for a while and see what your spouse has to teach you. A saver can learn a new kind of security when stretched by a spouse who exchanges money for present enjoyment, or who finds satisfaction in giving.

**D. Together, list your priorities:** You are now a couple. You are married. What is valuable to you? Identify the top priorities you share and what this means to your budget. A budget is not as difficult as you may imagine. You have a given amount of money to spend, and a budget helps you decide how you are going to spend it. Some see it as a process of sacrificing short-term spending to accomplish long-term goals. It takes roughly two years to set up a workable budget: one year to figure out how much you are spending and what you’d like to spend and a second year to live according to a first-draft budget to see if it is reasonable. The third year is when a couple can actually begin to live within a realistic budget. A budget can be the most freeing thing any couple can do financially. It gives you a realistic picture of your financial health and, consequently, gives you a better handle on your decision-making.

**E. Tithing:** Tithing to God is a good financial starting point for a married couple. Tithing is giving at least 10% of a family’s combined gross income to God’s work in the world today. The tithe can be given through a local church or to other worthy Christian endeavors. A person who tithes indicates they have a dependency on God for all blessings – especially financial. Tithing is typically the first money that comes in and is given back to God, a practice that follows a biblical pattern of giving. (*Deuteronomy 12:6*) Tithing is not limited to the giving of money because people can also tithe other forms of their physical wealth, including their time and other personal resources. (*Nehemiah 10:37*)

**F. Get sound advice:** Some conflicts over money come from simply not being aware of your options. Ask someone you trust to advise you or to refer you to a qualified financial adviser who will respect your particular priorities. You will find a list of counselors below under [Community Contacts](#).

## ***Q. What are the main ingredients for a successful marriage?***

**A.** No one can be assured that their marriage will be successful from the start. Many variables come into play as two people begin the journey as one. What one couple chooses as their set of priorities and responsibilities may be completely opposite from another couple's set of priorities and responsibilities. However, there are some common ingredients that need to be in any marriage in order for a successful union to develop. What follows are five foundational traits upon which a firm marriage can be built:

**1. Communication:** Do you remember how, as a young person who was interested in someone of the opposite sex, it was so easy for you to spend hours talking? This open and free means of discussion was the communication link that helped each person know the personality, character and feelings of the other person. The tendency in a marriage is to simply stop talking, to stop discussing and to then stop communicating. This loss of communication leads to misunderstanding, mistrust and eventually to hurtful and damaged relationships. So communicate, communicate and communicate!

**2. True love:** Love comes in many colors and varieties. Love for a new radio system is far different than love for a mate. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describes God's idea about love, "*Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails.*" This type of love for a spouse is a vital and necessary ingredient for any successful marriage.

**3. Humility:** Philippians 2:3 says, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*" This command is difficult for human beings, particularly for spouses who have been hurt or embittered. Considering the needs of the other person *first* will help a marriage last and prevent the root of pride from taking hold in a marriage.

**4. Submission:** A lot of discussion has already been offered above concerning this topic. Submission is much more difficult when communication, love and humility are absent from a marriage. Early on in a growing relationship, submission is easy because of the desire to please the other person. That same idea must continue in a marriage where both mates desire to work at pleasing each other.

**5. Forgiveness:** All people sin. All married people disappoint their spouses emotionally and hurt their mates. Therefore, forgiveness must occur. Jesus tells a story of an unmerciful servant. (**Matthew 18:21-38**) Like that servant, the difficulty many people have is that they have forgotten how much (and how often) God and others have forgiven them in the past. If they could remember the many times they have sinned and have desired forgiveness (and received it) then they would be much more willing to overlook the disappointments and errors of their mate and to once again graciously forgive and forget and start again.

In summary, communication, true Godly love, humility, submission and forgiveness are all necessary ingredients for a successful marriage. What can be done, however, when things go wrong? If the problem is constant arguing or mistrust that leads to conflict in a marriage, the first thing to recognize is that a bad habit is forming in the marriage and this habit needs to be rectified. The way to resolve this type of conflict, and to break this habit, is by first admitting your portion of the guilt and asking for forgiveness. Second, it is important to learn from the other person their perspective on the matter and try to compromise in order to find a solution. If the conflict has escalated to the point of mistrust or even sexual infidelity, this is a much more serious level of conflict, which requires a lot more patience, forgiveness and qualified assistance. And finally, trust your spouse, because all marriage relationships need this foundational element in order to flourish.

## ***Q. How should we resolve conflict in a marriage? What to do when things go wrong?***

**A.** Conflict in a marriage can be looked at positively. It is normal and natural for two unique individuals who enter into an intimate union to struggle in the development of their marriage. In marriage, conflicts arise because husbands and wives have different opinions, values, philosophies, and methods. Conflicts can work towards developing the marriage, or destroying the marriage. This depends on how each conflict is handled. The art of resolving conflicts is a key to keeping a marriage healthy. It is a measure of maturity, and part of the lifelong process of 'two becoming one'. One person may

be more logical and objective, the other, more emotional and impulsive. One may be active and aggressive, while the other is more sensitive and passive. Whatever their differences, the husband and wife must work together to understand and support one another.

Conflicts are common within a marriage but the question most often asked is, "How do I resolve conflicts in my marriage in a positive manner?" During earlier days, a couple would meet with their extended family or clan if a conflict got out of hand. The families of the couple would be called to resolve the differences because the growing conflict was viewed as affecting both families and no longer only the couple. When the conflict was resolved, a goat or sheep was slaughtered and the bond was cemented once again.

These days, due to work and social economic factors, we may not be in a position to handle conflict that way. However, we can call upon a close relative, a close friend, a best couple of the wedding, a respected person in the community, a pastor, or a trained counselor to help sort things out.

Most of the time, the couple through good communication can resolve conflicts, but when adultery and physical abuse are encountered within the marriage, some couples then call others to help. Unfortunately, this is usually done at the last minute because the couple is hoping to work things out together. By keeping the issue within the family, they hope to avoid shame, guilt and embarrassment that may come about when they share their conflicts with others.

As Christians we should pray about our conflicts. We should realize that things have gone wrong and that we need to let God take control. Sometimes however, it is only one partner who is praying because the other one may be feeling guilty or is not a Christian.

It is important for each spouse to know his or her partner intimately. It is necessary to understand them well, to know what makes them angry, and what makes them 'tick'. It is crucial to know your partner, to communicate with your partner and to know what will work in your marriage when it comes to solving conflicts.

#### Factors that help cause disunity in marriage:

##### Circumstances

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##### Behavior characteristics

- Fatigue
- Unfulfilled needs
- Financial difficulties
- Busy schedule
- Family background
- Relatives
- Lack of fellowship with God
- Tactlessness
- Nagging
- Unrealistic expectations
- Unwillingness to communicate
- Sarcasm or demeaning remarks
- Making false assumptions
- Jumping to conclusions
- Inflexibility
- Irritating habits

#### Four "Don'ts in resolving conflicts given by the Navigators in the book 'Husbands and Wives: God's Design for the Family'

1. Don't wait for your mate to apologize and don't refuse to be the first to change.
2. Don't keep bringing up a matter and not allow the conflict to end.
3. Don't attack the person rather than the conflict (which amounts to character assassination).
4. Don't walk out, killing the conflict in its prime. This just makes the conversation worse.

A few suggestions for resolving conflicts that will be helpful to discuss with your spouse from the book, 'Husbands and Wives: God's Design for the Family'

1. Sit down so you face each other.
2. If the discussion becomes more heated, lower your voice. Avoid shouting.
3. Work at clearly defining the issue so that both of you understand what the conflict is about.
4. Seek counsel from someone you respect and trust (e.g. a pastor or a close friend), if you cannot resolve the conflict yourselves.
5. Make resolving the conflict a priority, don't let anything interfere with resolving it, even if it means canceling a

planned appointment or activity.

Let us summarize by saying that in love, it is important to communicate about issues threatening your marriage. Ask yourself, when did this particular problem start? What is the trigger? And most importantly, discuss your feelings with your partner. Discuss the options and pick the best one. It may help to seek professional help (if needed) because willingness to work at one's marriage is critical. Look forward to the rewards and joys of resolving conflict together and becoming 'one' again. Finally, do not forget to PRAY!

### ***Q. What are the spiritual issues that should guide a healthy marriage?***

**A.** In order to understand how to build a healthy marriage, it is essential that you begin by understanding that marriage is God's idea. (*Genesis 2:18-24*) (*Matthew 19:4-5*) God brought the first man (Adam) and woman (Eve) together in a marriage relationship. God instituted marriage. However, the relationship between a man and a woman was never intended to replace their relationship with God. Only God gives constant love, peace and patient understanding; no human being can do that. Marriage is not for convenience, nor is it man-made or a cultural phenomenon. Marriage is, therefore, not subject to man's view on how it should work. God created marriage and gave His views on how marriage is supposed to operate.

God gave marriage as a gift to Adam and Eve. They were created perfect for each other. Marriage, as God intended, has three basic aspects:

1. The man leaves his parents and, in a public act, promises himself to his wife. (*Genesis 2:24*) (*Matthew 19:5*)
2. The man and woman are joined together by taking responsibility for one another's welfare and by loving each other above all others. (*Ephesians 5:21-33*)
3. The two become one flesh in the intimacy and commitment of sexual union, which is reserved for marriage. (*Hebrews 13:4*) (*I Corinthians 7:3-5*).

Strong marriages include all three of these aspects.

God treats the special union of marriage seriously. Marriage was designed to be a permanent commitment between one man and one woman. (*Matthew 19:6*) Commitment is essential to a successful marriage. The goal of marriage is more than friendship and more than having children, although children are a wonderful gift and privilege that can bless a marriage. (*Psalms 127:3-5*) The goal of marriage is oneness. When God made Eve out of Adam's flesh and bone, He illustrated to us that in marriage, man and woman symbolically become one flesh, a mystical union of the couple's hearts and lives. Ideally, only death should dissolve a marriage. (*Romans 7:2, 3*)

So what has gone wrong? Why the lack of 'oneness' that God intended for marriages? Why don't couples esteem each other and submit to one another? The first reason is that many people do not know a better way. Many people are conducting their marriage according to the patterns they see around them or what they observed in their homes as children.

The second and more fundamental reason marriages do not reflect the 'oneness' God intended is because the Bible says that all people (like the first couple Adam and Eve) have sinned. People have rebelled against God's will and, as a result, they have become slaves to sin. They are not able to do what is right. (*Romans 7:14, 15*) (*Romans 8:5-8*) They cannot act justly until they repent and accept God's provision of forgiveness. When God forgives our sins, we are given a new nature that enables us to say 'No' to sinful ways and habits and 'Yes' to God's ways and purposes. (*Romans 6:22, 23*) (*II Corinthians 5:17*) (*Ephesians 4:22-24*)

Without receiving God's forgiveness and new life, we will continue to think that what we are doing is right. (*Proverbs 21:2*) We will continue to trust in our own heart or in our own understanding or in our own cultural practices or personal experiences, instead of trusting in God's ways and truths. (*Proverbs 28:26*) God is the only One who can give us wisdom on issues in our marriages. After all, marriage is His idea! So following God's way is the only sure way to a more successful marriage. (*Proverbs 3:5,6*) (*Proverbs 9:10*)

***Make a Difference!***

The media often paint negative pictures of marriage. On one side, 'perfect' men and women are portrayed as having 'perfect' marriages with a problem-free, unflinching commitment to each other. On the other side are those partners who see their marriage as a relationship for the moment, one that sometimes degenerates to a form of 'bondage' that can be discarded through divorce as necessary. Both of these pictures are terrible distortions of what a healthy marriage looks like.

God intended for a couple to be happily united in marriage for life, maintaining emotional and physical faithfulness "...as long as you both shall live." History proves that those partners who enter marriage with a pure sexual past have a greater chance of keeping that commitment throughout marriage. Statistics show that married people are happier, healthier, and live a longer, more fulfilled life than those who divorce.

Those who choose to ignore God's plan for marriage, either through unfaithfulness or in any way breaking the bonds of marriage, will find only heartache, strife and sorrow.

Despite what is shown on TV, marriage involves more than just love. God's version of marriage requires patience, perseverance, communication, compromise, faithfulness and a life-long commitment to work hard at succeeding. Following God's design for your marriage will truly *make a difference!*

## ***Resources***

Amani Counseling Centre and Training Institute. *Help at hand* [Brochure]. P.O. Box 41738 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-602672/3 or 254-722-626590. E-mail: accti@africaonline.co.ke

Blue, R. (2001). *Basic steps you can take to ensure success in decision making: Setting realistic financial goals*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Burch, B.L. (2001). *Becoming one, financially*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.

International Bible Society. (1973,1978, 1984). New International Version. World Bible Society Publishers.

Lifespring Counseling Centre. [Brochure]. P.O. Box 42905 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-723237. E-mail: june@africaonline.co.ke

Navigators. (1992). *Husbands and wives: God's design for the family*. Navigators publication.

Oasis Counseling Centre and Training Institute. *Guided to the springs of living water (Revelations 7:17)* [Brochure]. P.O. Box 76117 Ufungamano House, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-715023/721157/726494. E-mail: oasiscc@maf.or.ke

Omartian, S. (2001). *The power of a praying husband*. Harvest House Publishing Company.

Wholistic Caring and Counseling Centre. *Reducing ignorance by educating women* [Brochure]. P.O. Box 975 Ruiru, Kenya. Tel: 254-722-73931.

## ***Community Contacts***

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Lifespring Counseling Centre. P.O. Box 42905 Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-723237. E-mail: june@africaonline.co.ke

Oasis Counseling Centre and Training Institute. P.O. Box 76117 Ufungamano House, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Nairobi, Kenya. Tel: 254-2-715023/721157/726494. E-mail: oasiscc@maf.or.ke

Wholistic Caring and Counseling Centre. P.O. Box 975 Ruiru, Kenya. Tel: 254-722-73931.

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