

KEEPING YOUR  
MARRIAGE  
STRONG

TEN TIPS FOR A  
DYNAMIC MARRIAGE



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L.M.H.C.

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*This is dedicated with love to my husband  
Jeff, who helped me write this! Thank-you  
for the adventure in our 29 years of  
marriage. You are awesome!*



# KEEPING YOUR MARRIAGE STRONG



## 10 TIPS FOR A DYNAMIC MARRIAGE

**BOTTOM LINE:** *Marriage is not easy! It takes work and effort to make and keep your marriage strong.*

When a couple is dating and engaged, their relationship centers around infatuation and their interest in one another. After marriage, however, the nature of the relationship gradually changes from a focus on the other person to a focus on solving the problems of day-to-day life. In the process, the relationship can seem to take a lesser priority. As the years go by, the couple has to be intentional about finding ways to make and keep the marriage relationship strong. The following 10 tips will assist you in doing just that.

**TIP 1:** *Be healthy inside and out.*

Two healthy people make a dynamic relationship. However, even those who are generally well-adjusted individuals have room to grow. When a couple marries, each spouse brings his or her own unresolved emotional issues into the marriage, whether knowingly or unknowingly. A relationship will also be affected by physical issues and spiritual dynamics. Mak-

ing it a habit to reassess these areas from time to time is important to maintaining health.

Take the risk to grow emotionally and spiritually. When your marriage relationship puts a spotlight on an emotional issue, view it as an opportunity to grow and mature. If your partner “pushes your button” in an area, be willing to examine the situation to see if there is an adjustment you need to make in your attitude, response, or expectation. As you and your spouse seek to learn from problems that arise, your relationship will be strengthened in the long run.

Also, look at what you need to do to take care of yourself physically. Your spouse cannot do this for you. For instance, can you exercise even if your spouse chooses not to? Can you change your negative eating habits, even if your spouse does not?

Each spouse should focus on other interests and hobbies as well. It is okay to have interests that are different than your spouse’s hobbies. You will also benefit from developing outlets and ways to reduce stress, separately as well as together. Since men and women are so different, it is healthy for women to have other women to confide in, to be accountable to, and to do things with. Conversely, men need to have other men to spend time with, and with whom they can be accountable as well.

Healthy people know the importance of spiritual matters. Dependence upon God, regular prayer, and feeding yourself with truth from the Bible are impor-

tant to your well-being. Make sure that you are giving attention to this aspect of your life. Again, your spouse cannot do this for you.

Ask yourself, “Can I be intentional about resolving emotional, spiritual, or physical issues that could be negatively affecting my marriage?” Be determined to maintain a healthy stance and disposition with your spouse on all fronts. The idea here is that you want to mature and become all you can be in order to better meet your spouse’s needs. The marital benefits will be worth your energy and efforts!

### **TIP 2: *Set aside a date night.***

Plan a weekly date night and put a boundary around that time for you and your spouse. This is not only important for you both, but for your children as well. It is healthy for your children to see their mother and father making each other a priority by going out on a date. Besides, your spouse should be your priority (see Tip 5).

Take turns planning the date and surprise each other. When it is your turn, keep the night’s plans a secret. Surprise your spouse by taking him or her to a new restaurant for dinner. Or, if your surprise involves a little more adventurous activity, such as putt-putt golf, a movie, boating—or even bungee jumping—provide your spouse with a clue of how to dress for the evening’s activities. In other words, find little ways to build a sense of anticipation and make it a special night.

Think back to the time period when you were dating and then became engaged. You were living in a stage of infatuation. When you married, the relationship transitioned into a day-to-day problem-solving mode. Therefore, you have to intentionally create romance as the years go by. Setting time aside and creatively working on keeping romance alive has to be ongoing and intentional on the part of both spouses.

**TIP 3:** *Accept the fact that you are wired differently than your spouse.*

Be sensitive to the God-given design that men and women are “wired” differently. Men and women are often oblivious to the fact that their emotional needs are different! Couples often assume that their partner has the same needs or desires as them. They do not! Realize that men and women do not just communicate differently, but they also love, think, feel, hear, and respond differently.

Make deliberate efforts to recognize and understand the male vs. female differences that arise in your marriage. When you acknowledge these realities, misunderstandings and conflict can be addressed within a better context, and conflict can be reduced.

**TIP 4:** *Plan overnight getaways.*

Due to the everyday activities and demands that pull people in separate directions, spouses can gradually

and unknowingly begin to disconnect. Planning overnight getaways enables you and your spouse to stay better connected. For this reason, it is important to set aside time at least once a quarter to get away from your day-to-day routine, the children, and other daily obligations.

If finances are tight, become creative in finding a way to carve out time for you and your spouse to get alone together. It is important to routinely connect and communicate—without interruptions—and just have fun! Plus, it is a great way to create romance and recharge the relationship.

**TIP 5: *Keep each other first place.***

Couples often get into trouble when they put their children, work, or personal interests and hobbies before their spouse. Resentments will build when couples put other activities or things before each other! As you endeavor to keep the Lord your first priority, and then each other, the tendency is for other things to fall into a healthy order and balance.

Again, remember that it is emotionally healthy for your children to see you make your spouse your priority. A healthy sense of security is built into your children's lives when they see their mother and father keeping each other first place and being happy together. Plus, these observations serve to establish and reinforce the same relational patterns within them.

**TIP 6: *Be quick to forgive.***

When two completely different people are trying to make a marriage work, there are bound to be hurts, disappointments, and misunderstandings. Forgiveness is an essential ingredient for a marriage to stand strong over time. When you do not forgive your spouse, it causes an unintended and pervasive ripple effect. Unforgiveness begins to affect your health, peace, joy, and, most importantly, your walk with the Lord!

Forgiveness is a choice. It is a decision you have to consciously make and then walk out. It has to be intentional and deliberate. When deliberating this choice, remember that Jesus chooses to completely forgive you.

Minor offenses will occur in every marriage, but there may also be major offenses that can make it difficult to forgive your spouse. Learn to let the minor offenses go through forgiveness. Do not allow the emotions of anger, bitterness, and resentment overtake you. Learn to fight fair! Remember communication can bring healing in your relationship. Attempt to stay away from words like “you *never*...” or “you *always* do this or that.” Instead, communicate by using “I feel” statements. An example would be, “I feel sad when you do not get home from work most nights until 8:00 PM.” Honesty, along with learning to fight fair, can reestablish equilibrium in the relationship.

Sometimes forgiveness can be a process, not just a

one-time event. If the offense is major, you may need to talk to a trusted individual, counselor, or minister. If you need to talk with a counselor, look at it as having strength not weakness. It is easier to continue on in the same old patterns of behavior. It takes courage to talk with a professional who can bring an objective perspective to your situation.

No matter whether the offense is minor or major, forgiveness is the best revenge!

**TIP 7: *Build a foundation of trust.***

Trusting one another is the foundation of a strong relationship. How do you build a foundation of trust? By choosing to be trustworthy! Be open and honest about what you are doing and where you are going. Choose not to do things that would jeopardize your partner's trust in you. Remember, trust is earned.

Many couples who no longer live together did not separate because they stopped loving each other. The reason they split up is because one or both spouses no longer trust the other. In other words, a major breach of trust was committed, or many smaller breaches accumulated over time.

We live in a culture where marriages are being devastated by infidelity. Make it a point to communicate with your partner about this epidemic. Discuss what you need to do to insulate and protect your marriage from this type of heartbreak. Be intentional about building a firm foundation established upon trust.

**TIP 8: *Set aside time for goal setting.***

There is power in goal setting. Take the time as a couple to write down your goals for your marriage, your finances, and the things that mean the most to you and your future together. When you do this, direction is set in motion.

The Bible instructs us in Habakkuk 2:2 to “*Write the vision, and make it plain...*” Write down the goals for your marriage. Focus on what you want to accomplish for your three-month, six-month, one-year, five-year, and ten-year goals. Think about what you would like your marriage to look like in five years. Where do you want it to be in ten years?

The Bible states in Romans 4:17 that God “*calls those things that be not as though they were.*” As His children, we can do likewise. According to the goals you set together, picture the direction you want your marriage to take. Pray to that end. Then start taking steps of faith in that direction!

**TIP 9: *Read First Corinthians 13 of the Bible together.***

The very premise of love is provided for us in the Bible in First Corinthians 13. This particular passage is commonly referred to by many Bible scholars as “the love chapter” because God’s basic principles of love are found within it. God set these principles in motion in His creation, and they are designed to work for our benefit.

Take some time to sit down together and read First Corinthians 13. Imagine how your marriage would be different if you showed each other the kind of love described in this chapter. Both of you should talk about what you can personally bring forth into the marriage based upon what you have read. For instance, instead of pointing a finger at your spouse—at what you think he or she needs to do to make your marriage stronger—take a look at how you can positively change to further strengthen your relationship in light of First Corinthians 13.

One type of love is sacrificial love. Sacrificial love is self-sacrifice with the pure motivation to alleviate the suffering of others. Sometimes marriage requires this kind of love.

**TIP 10:** *Discover the power of praying together.*

When a couple is willing to invite God into their relationship and pray to Him, mighty things can happen. The Lord promises in Matthew 18:19-20 (paraphrased), “*Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them, and I answer their prayers!*” Think about it: you come together as two human beings to try and make your marriage work, and you have instant access together to ask Almighty God for help in your relationship!

Read Psalm 139. This psalm lets you know that God cares about the details in your lives. He wants you, as a couple, to come to Him! You will see that a

built-in level of intimacy comes from praying together. No matter how long you have been married, you can continually get to know your spouse in a deeper way when you choose to set aside time to pray together.

If spiritual pursuits are new to your marriage, find an inspiring devotional and take turns reading it. Then take the time to pray together. This means simply talking with God. If you don't pray, or have never prayed together, start right now because God is there. To start out, merely bow your head and close your eyes. Just begin by praying two or three sentences. God will meet you right where you are at.

The family that prays together stays together. So get into a routine of setting aside a time that the two of you can meet with the God of the universe!

**IN CLOSING:** *Remember, building and maintaining a healthy marriage takes time and effort. As you follow these tips and invest in your relationship, good things can happen! Start today!*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**VALERIE PETERSON** is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of Florida She is also a Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor, and a National Board Certified Counselor. Valerie received her Bachelors Degree in Social Work from

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In addition to her Mental Health practice, Valerie is a conference speaker and regular guest on radio talk shows addressing current life issues. She is also a licensed minister, having been licensed and ordained through the International Conference of Faith Ministries. Furthermore, Valerie is an award-winning writer, recognized by Parenting Publication of America specializing in psychological, educational and health topics. Valerie is the author of four booklets; *Waiting on God to Move? Six steps to get His attention*, *Bullyproof our Schools*, *Keeping Your Marriage Strong – Ten Tips for a Dynamic Marriage*, and *Tips for Positive Parenting*. She lives in Florida with her husband Jeff. They have been married for 29 years and have three grown children.