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What Makes Marriage Happy?





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What Makes Marriage Happy?

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WHEN I ask a young person why he wants to get married he usually looks at me in astonishment, as much as to say, "That's a foolish question." But when I persist he will usually answer in effect, "Because I want to be happy."

The desire to be happy is laudable. It is perfectly proper for everybody, young and old, to crave happiness. It is especially natural and right for an engaged couple to desire happiness and to make appropriate plans for assuring happiness. But there are many mistaken ideas on how happiness may be obtained.

There are five popular formulas for happiness on which young husbands and wives commonly depend. But even following one of these does not necessarily bring the desired result.

Some couples act as though they believed that earning, controlling, and spending money as they choose will bring happiness. But happiness can't be bought.

Those who think it takes money to bring happiness keep trying to earn more and more money in the hope that they will find and increase the happiness they are looking for. But they often become so busy in the enterprise of earning and spending money that this seems to absorb their whole effort, and the happiness they had hoped for passes them by.

Others believe that having a beautiful home is the sure way to find happiness. One couple I know purchased a very attractive place and devoted themselves almost day and night to making it even more attractive and to keeping it in good condition. Their spare time was occupied in hanging draperies, papering and painting the walls, cleaning and polishing, building an attractive fountain in the yard, beautifying the patio, or tending the flowers in the garden.

They kept so busy with their home that they forfeited opportunities for being sociable. They even seemed to place a higher priority on the care of their home than on companionship with their children. The formula that this couple followed in their hope of finding happiness actually made them slaves.

Some believe that children bring happiness. True, a home without children is incomplete. But there must be a fundamental basis for happiness in the home in order for the coming of children to amplify this happiness.

One couple found that their early experience in marriage was not so gratifying as they had expected it to be. They sought counsel for their problems and were advised that having children would provide such a strong common interest that their future happiness would be automatic. Following this advice, they became parents of three lovely children. But the children increased the problems of the home. They could not generate happiness when it did not exist there already.

Personal companionship is thought by many to provide the magic formula. Esther and Harry believed so firmly in this secret of happiness that

they neglected other things in order to provide abundant time to be together.

Unfortunately, they did not realize that companionship is enjoyable only because it provides for pursuing common interests and carrying forward worthy undertakings. Eventually they tired of their empty kind of companionship and found that, instead of bringing happiness as they had supposed, it had become almost boring.

Other couples rely on the simple determination to find happiness at all costs. Surely everyone should desire to be happy. But the world at large has capitalized on the false belief that happiness can be found by anyone who seeks it.

One couple I remember spent their extra money as well as their spare time in artificial activities that they thought would make them happy. They engaged in various amusements and entertainments that had the effect of attracting them to worldly ideals rather than strengthening their Christian experience. They became so busy in this pursuit of happiness that they neglected the elements of Christian living, which lie at the foundation of genuine happiness.

These are the five common formulas that couples follow in the hope of ensuring happiness in marriage. But at the mention of each of these, we have been forced to realize that, of itself, no formula provides assurance of perfect results. If it did, happiness would be reduced to the level of a commodity for which you could bargain.

If you could place a price on happiness, regardless of how high the price, it would soon make it seem cheap. The human heart craves happiness, but if it could be obtained by following a formula, it would not be satisfying.

The couple who adopts the primary goal of finding happiness will discover that happiness is very elusive. The way to obtain happiness is not to pursue it, but to let it overtake you. How do you do this? By uniting your efforts (husband and wife) in the *unselfish* enterprise of living successfully in harmony with God's claims upon you.

And how does a couple live successfully? Reconsider the five formulas and notice how it is possible, by being genuinely *unselfish*, to make these contribute to a total pattern of successful living.

1. *Money*. Every couple has a certain amount of money to handle. Regardless of the income, there is never as much money as the husband and wife feel that they really need. But with an attitude of unselfishness they can cooperate in using their money to best advantage.

The husband needs to recognize that the money belongs as much to the wife as to him. It may be his name that appears on the pay check, but the wife has done her full part—and maybe more—by carrying the burden of homemaking. An attitude of unselfishness will make the husband willing to consider his wife an equal partner in all their financial planning. He will recognize that the welfare of the home is as important as the welfare of the business. A similar attitude will make the wife willing to wait a little longer for the new dress she needs so much.

2. *A house*. Whether the investment in a house is large or small, it still should be the pride and joy of both husband and wife. A house is more than real estate. It is the headquarters for all the family activities. It is the symbol of the most

precious of all human assets. When husband and wife devote themselves unselfishly to making their home represent their fondness for each other, it will take on new qualities that will make them increasingly proud it is theirs.

3. *Children*. Mutual love for the children serves to intensify the love that husband and wife have for each other. Providing for the welfare of the children brings them closer together in sentiment, sympathies, and understanding. There are always problems, but when these are shared in an unselfish, uncritical frame of mind, the wife feels encouraged because she has a stalwart companion, and the husband finds an increasing satisfaction because his counsel is appreciated.

4. *Companionship*. The husband and wife who blend their energies in making their home successful develop a growing fondness for each other because they are interested in the same things. Although their home is their primary common interest, they are careful to keep step as they make advancement in the realms of personal accomplishment, intellectual development, and spiritual insight.

The husband who is truly unselfish will not allow his wife to become so overburdened that she is deprived of the chance to advance by his side. He will make sure that his friends are also his friends. He will find time, in spite of his occupational duties, to spend in companionship.

The unselfish wife will find ways of sharing with her husband in the appreciation of his successes. She will not be as critical of his shortcomings as she will be appreciative of his efforts. She will maintain a cheerful attitude that in itself is a reward for his spending time in companionship.

5. *A determination to be happy.* Attitudes of genuine unselfishness prompt each partner in marriage to be solicitous of the happiness of the other. The unselfish wife caters somewhat to the whims of her husband's appetite. She knows his "pet peeves" and uses her natural, feminine tact to help him overcome his shortcomings. A husband, with a firm desire to promote happiness, will remember to express appreciation for the many little ways in which his wife shows her love for him. Helping each other be happy generates abundant, mutual happiness.

Is *unselfishness*, then, the magic quality that ensures happiness in marriage? To a large extent, yes.

But a person must be unselfish about *something*, not merely unselfish in motive. The logical outlet for unselfishness is in the five areas we have discussed. The husband and wife who learn to be unselfish in these areas will find that happiness overtakes them. Suddenly they will awaken to the pleasant realization that they have become wealthy in this priceless experience of happiness.

It is not because they have made happiness their primary goal that they have been thus blessed, but because they have lived so successfully happiness has come as the reward.