

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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Kindness in Marriage

The secret to a happy marriage is quite simple—and really no secret at all.
The trick is training ourselves to practice it consistently.

"What is desired in a man is kindness" (Prov. 19:22).

"She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26).

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).



If we were to take all the books that have been written on the subject of "how to have a happy marriage" and boil their wisdom down into a single word, what would that word be? Emily Esfahani Smith, in an article in *The Atlantic* ("Masters of Love," 6/12/14), argues that the word "kindness" would be the winner.

Smith based her conclusion on the work of researchers at The Gottman Institute, who have been studying happy and unhappy marriages for decades. John Gottman and his colleagues developed a number of innovative techniques to gauge the likelihood of a couple staying happily married or splitting up. They discovered that partners in a close relationship often send out what Gottman

calls "bids"—ordinary little comments designed to elicit a reaction from the spouse. The response of the spouse is the key. If the spouse tends to ignore the bid, or shrug it off with a cursory response (or worst of all, rejects it angrily), the relationship is not healthy. If the spouse responds to the bidder with a genuine interest in the comment, the relationship is likely in good shape.

Gottman explained that in positive relationships, partners "are scanning the social environment for things they can appreciate and say thank you for. They are building this culture of respect and appreciation very purposefully." In the negative relationships, partners "are scanning the social environment for partners' mistakes." Gottman claims that he can predict with up to 94 percent accuracy whether a couple will remain together and happy years later, simply on the basis of observing this kind of "bidding" behavior.

The researchers are approaching this subject from a purely secular perspective, but what they have discovered is a reflection of an age-old principle

rooted in Biblical psychology: Healthy human relationships are built on a foundation of *kindness*. How we treat others, including how we react to their behavior, has enormous influence on the quality of our relationships. The more kindness we display in our conduct—genuine and sincere, not shallow and phoney—the more likely we are to build bridges with those around us, bridges that allow us to connect constructively and navigate whatever conflicts might arise in those relationships. The less kindness we display, the more likely our relationships are to crumble. It's that simple.

Happy marriages are not a product of luck, or some kind of magical chemistry between two people. It's the result of two people committing themselves to a life of kindness. It's not surprising that, as a bonus, couples who practice kindness to each other also tend to have a strong network of positive relationships with other family and friends.

Kindness is a lubricant that makes everything in life run more smoothly. Maybe we should try it more often.

— David King