



MARRIAGE MAKEOVER

by Karen Holford

Kate and Paul had been married for two years. At first everything was rosy and fun. But Paul's ministry meant working long hours during evenings and weekends when Kate was home from her teaching job. He was overtired and stressed. She was lonely and frustrated. Together they argued and complained. What started as a dream was disintegrating into disaster. They took a vacation to refocus on their marriage. They read books, listened to each other's needs and hopes, and began their up-and-down adventure into a new way of living with a deeper way of loving.

Marriages tend to follow a natural growth pattern. We start with the honeymoon buzz of fresh excitement. Everything glows. We do our best to please each other, even when we want to do something else.

This dreamy, romantic phase can't last forever. We need to live in the real world. Soon we settle into routines, relax our guard, and let our imperfections drive wedges between us. We may have hopeless arguments that go 'round in circles. We may feel misunderstood and unloved. The fun disappears. We wonder how we can stay in a relationship where there are so many problems and difficulties. But the challenges are there to nudge us toward discovering a more mature relationship where we learn to live the love described in 1 Corinthians 13. Every marriage needs to work through these challenging

stages if the couple is to experience the "becoming one" kind of love that God intends for them, the kind of love that He wants us to experience with Him.

The developmental stages of a marriage follow a rough sequence:

The dream stage (Solomon and his bride). This is an exciting, passionate, fun stage of marriage. But we often hide our true thoughts, ideas, feelings, and preferences. We may secretly be afraid that if the other person knows what we are really like, he or she won't love us anymore. Love is like a beautiful flower, but it needs to grow deeper roots to survive the reality of life.

The disillusionment stage (Samson and Delilah). We see flaws in one another. Even the things that once attracted us have become irritations. We argue with each other and feel misunderstood, unsupported, unappreciated, disrespected, lonely, hopeless, trapped, or isolated. A ministry marriage can be even more at risk during this stage because of the pressures of work, the long hours away from home, and the expectation that a minister ought to be a more caring spouse.

The discovery stage (maybe Abraham and Sarah, or Joseph and Mary). Here we take the time to relearn who we really are in our marriage and how to love each other well. This is where we can help each other explore the adventurous and varied territory of our hearts, minds, and lives. We learn

to talk openly and lovingly, listen carefully, and respect and appreciate each other's differences and strengths. We learn to forgive each other and comfort each other through life's hurts. We discover how each of us likes to be loved and how to strengthen our marriage relationship by investing time and energy in it.

The depth/delight stage (maybe Zechariah and Elizabeth or Jesus and us). This is where we know each other deeply and honestly. We cherish our differences as strengths and see them as gifts that God has given to enrich our relationship. We believe the best about our spouse and focus on what is good and lovely about him or

her. We also believe our spouse is doing his or her best to love us. We feel at peace in the relationship because any hurts are quickly discussed and forgiven, and there is no chance that our spouse would ever betray us or leave us.

These stages are general guidelines which overlap as we move from one stage to the next. Sometimes we have to backtrack. Life throws us challenges, and we need to rediscover each other in new places, different work situations, as new parents, or in sickness and disability.

This way of looking at your marriage gives hope. If you're in the dream stage, you will know how to identify disillusionment and tackle it before it gets out of hand. If you're disillusioned, it can be a stimulus to rediscover each other and enter a richer phase of your relationship. If you are in the discovery stage, keep going; there are always new things to discover about each other. Keep looking for fresh ways to show love to your spouse. If you manage to reach the depth stage, enjoy the warmth of its mature love and be open to discovering even more.

Where do you think your marriage is on the line below?

Dream Disillusionment Discovery Depth




LOVE DOES NOT
DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT
REJOICES WITH THE
TRUTH. IT ALWAYS
PROTECTS, ALWAYS
TRUSTS, ALWAYS HOPES,
ALWAYS PERSEVERES.

1 Corinthians 13:6, 7



and look for fresh ways to show patience, forgiveness, respect, etc., to each other in your marriage. Ask yourself: "What difference might it make to our marriage if I were to be more patient, kind, forgiving, etc.?"

- Pray that God will help your marriage grow. He's on your side and wants your marriage to be the best it can be because that is good for you, your family, your friends, your church, and His mission in the world.

Note: Watch for future articles in this series, which has been designed to help you rediscover each other in your ministry marriage and grow your love into a place of deeper peace and joy. 

What one thing could you do to move your marriage toward an even deeper love? Here are a few ideas:


- Every day, do something, however small, as a love-gift for your marriage, something that will bless your relationship or your spouse. Record these actions in a notebook and note the effect they have on your spouse and your marriage.

- Notice at least one thing each day that your husband or wife does that you really like. Then tell him or her how much you appreciate it. Positive affirmation is much more powerful and effective than negative nagging! Write these examples in your notebook, too.

- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. List the different qualities of love

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KAREN HOLFORD has been married to Bernie for over 26 years, and they have three young-adult children. Karen and Bernie are both family therapists, and one of the highlights of their ministry is leading out in marriage retreats for ministerial couples. They live in Auchtermuchty, Scotland, where Bernie is the mission president and pastor of the Crieff SDA Church on the edge of the Scottish Highlands. Karen has worked alongside Bernie in family ministries, and she has also been a children's ministries director. She is currently a freelance writer and has written more than a dozen books and over 200 articles. When she has any moments left in her day, she loves to sew quilts!