

Meetup 2017: What Makes for a Happy and Healthy Marriage?

Lesson 4: How to Cultivate Love in Your Marriage Life

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Marriage relationships are like a boat floating on a downward stream. If the couples don't do anything, the boat will naturally go downstream; if they want the boat to go upstream, they must paddle hard together. In sum, happy and strong marriages require commitment, trust, forgiveness, and continuous hard work.

The first area of hard work has to do with improving oneself. If your life is full of joy and meaning, such positive qualities will be contagious and positively affect your spouse. On the other hand, if your life is full of miseries and selfishness, you really don't have much to share with your spouse other than unhappiness. Thus, if you want to improve your marriage, first improve yourself.

The second important consideration is attitude. If you see marriage as a relationship of generously giving your best to your spouse, and if this attitude is reciprocated, you will have a happy marriage. On the other hand, if you see marriage only as a way of getting something from your spouse, you will be unhappy when you don't get what you want; such a self-serving attitude will not build any relationship.

Dr. George Vaillant, the lead researcher of the Harvard Grant Study, published the results in *Triumphs of Experience: The Men of the Harvard Grant Study* (2012). He concluded that two things are essential for a happy life: "One is love. The other is finding a way of coping with life that does not push love away."

Thus, love is the key to a happy marriage and a happy existence. Love is a value that needs to be cultivated and expressed daily. According to Lisa Firestone (2014), a loving relationship should have the following qualities:

- Expressions of affection, both physical and emotional;
- A wish to offer pleasure and satisfaction to another;
- Tenderness, compassion and sensitivity to the needs of the other;
- A desire for shared activities and pursuits;
- An appropriate level of sharing of one's possessions;
- An ongoing, honest exchange of personal feelings; and
- The process of offering concern, comfort and outward assistance for the loved one's aspirations.

Let's take action and work on the simple relational things, such as sharing, showing empathy, expressing an interest in what the spouse is doing, and spending quality time together to laugh and play. When we spend time and effort to develop our capacity for love, it will result in a happy marriage and a more fulfilling life.

References

Firestone, L. (2014). What it means to be loving. *PsychAlive*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychalive.org/means-loving/>

Vaillant, G. E. (2012). *Triumphs of experience: The men of the Harvard Grant Study* (1st Edition ed.). New York, NY: Belknap Press.