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## Happily Ever After?

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

**I** yearn for newly-marrieds to put on their full armor of God and do their very best to create happy, successful marriages. For, after every wedding comes a marriage.

Erich Fromm wrote, “There is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started out with such tremendous hopes and expectations, and yet which fails so regularly, as love.”<sup>1</sup> He speaks to the reality that marriage is a more difficult transition than most couples anticipate. This is true even for couples who are well-prepared for marriage and feel very good about their relationship.

The newlywed stage, roughly the first two years of marriage, can be a difficult transition because partners must put some space between their families of origin, give up some previous independence, and begin to function as a couple. After a lifetime of focusing primarily on “me,” there is a need now to focus primarily on “we.”

Newlywed couples are idealistic. Premarital relationships often are filled with dreams and fantasies, especially the notion that the partner’s undesirable traits will change after marriage. Unfortunately, marriage neither changes people nor makes it easier for others to change them. Marriage often magnifies undesirable traits. A person who arrives late for a date or other activities before marriage typically will arrive late after marriage. A person who is sloppy before marriage likely will remain sloppy after marriage.

While lateness or sloppiness certainly aren’t deal-breakers, dealing with the emotions connected to these disappointments can put a real strain on a new marriage. Other difficult emotions can spring up in adjusting to family members’ expectations, living in new surroundings, changes in relationships and time spent with friends, and the fact that marriage does not necessarily cure boredom and loneliness.

“Besides these external influences on marriage, we each bring thoughts

and feelings deep inside us to the relationship. Love tends to magnify our imperfections as well as our partner’s, which makes it a prime place to experience annoyance and fear,” suggest the authors of *Building Relationships: Developing Skills for Life*.<sup>2</sup> They advise that it is important to acknowledge your feelings, knowing they are a normal part of love. “Accept your feelings and, through communication, they can increase closeness in your relationship. We often assume we should just know how to love. The truth is that love is a constant and conscious process of learning.”<sup>3</sup>

Our internal world influences how we relate to our partner. A positive attitude is essential to create and maintain a sound marital relationship. In everyday ways, we need to be very careful not to do things that are hurtful or threatening to our partner. We need to learn how and when to disagree without harming the foundation of the relationship. It’s not so much about how compatible we are, but how we deal with incompatibility.

So, march on, newlyweds! Go on in grace, knowing God always keeps his promises! Let it be said, “How tenderly you care for each other’s hearts, how sweetly you show God’s love through your marriage.”<sup>4</sup>

Susan E. Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, certified family life educator, and licensed marriage and family therapist.

1. Fromm, E. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.quote-coyote.com/quotes/authors/f/erich-fromm/quote-17529.html> (August 18, 2014).
2. Olson, D.H., DeFrain, J., & Olson, A.K. *Building Relationships: Developing Skills for Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Life Innovations, p. 95 (1999).
3. Ibid.
4. Unattributed.

