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After the Wedding... Comes the Marriage

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Questions newly married couples find themselves asking include: “How do we keep the romance alive?”; “Who is really responsible for the laundry, dishes, money?”; and “We were so happy, but it’s changing. Why?”

The spring and summer brides have now walked down the aisle. The grooms have long returned (hopefully) their tuxedos. Now comes the “happily ever-after.”

While it may seem surprising, most newly married couples come into marriage with dozens of unanswered questions. They often don’t even know the questions to ask until after they get married. This is normal. After the emotional high of planning the wedding ceremonies and related events comes the settling in to the marriage itself.

In our marriage, an early question for me was “How do I get out of here?” No, it wasn’t that I wanted out of the marriage, I wanted out of the bedroom! We found ourselves in conflict over something, neither of us remembers what, and I just wanted to get away from it. So, I went to the bedroom of our two-room apartment and slammed the door!

There I was in a lavender prison, so to speak. Don’s grandmother crocheted us a purple, lavender and yellow afghan for our bed, so we painted the room lavender. I didn’t know what to do, what to say to make it better, and I just wanted to get away from it. But where was I to go? I tried to get out the window, but the windows were made so not even my head would fit in the opening. So, I had a choice: to stay there forever or to go out and deal with it!

Deal with it we did (obviously); but after many years, I can still feel some of the pain. Fortunately, we learned ways to communicate more positively and worked out ways to deal productively with conflicts—which are inevitable in every intimate relationship. On the other hand, we could have endangered the very survival of our marriage by avoiding

any conflict and not discussing issues of dissatisfaction.

In her book, *Uncoupling: How Relationships Come Apart*, researcher Diane Vaughan shares her discovery that couples begin to “uncouple” when one partner becomes dissatisfied with the relationship but refuses to discuss the dissatisfaction with their partner. Instead, the unhappy spouse tries to “fix” the relationship (sometimes by trying to get the partner to change in some way) without talking to their partner about the problem. When attempts to fix the relationship in this way fail, the dissatisfied partner becomes convinced that the relationship can not be salvaged and begins to look for a way to end the relationship.

Diane’s work suggests that the lack of open discussion about problems dooms many relationships. Sadly, she found that the other partner often doesn’t realize there is a serious problem until the dissatisfied partner already wants out. Not being willing to voice one’s frustrations to a spouse is toxic in a marriage.

As Ellen White so aptly put it, “However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the afteryears” (*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 359, 360).

There will continue to be questions in the “afteryears.” How couples choose to deal with life’s questions early in marriage are foundational to the long-term satisfaction and health of their lives together.

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

