

elevate your RELATIONSHIP

Marriage, a Promise to Work

Marriage isn't designed to make you happy, it is designed to make you married. When caught up in the emotions of love, this statement might not make much sense to you. It really doesn't make much sense if you have been watching any reality TV shows; these programs, although they say they are about love, are about avoiding rejection.

The illusions about living happily ever after is a comforting thought for people to believe in. But for long term happiness, each partner must consider the commitment that they have made to their spouse. Consider this quote by Thornton Wilder from William J. Doherty's book, *Take Back Your Marriage: Sticking Together in a World that Pulls Us Apart* (The Guilford Press, 2003):

"I didn't marry you because you were perfect. I married you because you gave me a promise. That promise made up for your faults. And the promise I made to you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married, and it was the promise that made the marriage. And when our children were growing up, it wasn't a house that protected them; and it wasn't our love that protected them—it was that promise."

Marriage is based on the commitment made to one's partner. So this might very well explain why you can never really fully understand another person's marriage. If two imperfect people marry and work to fulfill their commitment to each other, they will need to be creative in developing habits and rules that work for the two of them.

So marriage isn't just about being in love. It is about the agreement to love and support one another. Love should be an active verb. It is about a person's ability to love their spouse. Granted, it is nice when married people are "in love" with one another, but love isn't enough. One of the advantages of marriage is that when you fall out of love with your partner, your marriage commitment keeps you together until you can find ways to fall in love again.

Marriage itself really is not designed to make you happy. It is supposed to keep you focused on your commitment to your partner—for better or worse. Marriage gives you the structure, support, and security from which you and your partner are free to create happiness.

Based on a national survey of young adults ages 20-29, 88% agreed with the statement that "there is a special person, a soul mate, waiting for you somewhere out there." It's also reassuring to know that most (78%) agreed that a couple should not get married unless they are prepared to stay together for life. In fact, most (86%) young adults realize that marriage is hard work and a full-time job. Over 8 in 10 young adults agree that one reason for divorce is too much focus on expectations for happiness and not enough on the hard work actually needed to make and keep a marriage successful.

If you are married, engaged, or in a relationship that may lead to marriage, celebrate your love and relationship by being committed to your partner. That commitment is a promise to work together at making your relationship last. That is real life and a very different story from what we see on reality TV.

Activity

Reflect on the promises you make. Think about the vows you made to your spouse on your wedding day or that you will make to your future spouse. Discuss with your partner what your vows mean or will mean to your marriage. Consider writing your vows down and post them at a place you will see often as a nice reminder of the commitment you have made or will make to each other.

For more resources, visit healthyrelationships.uga.edu and ElevateCouplesGeorgia.com.

extension.uga.edu

Circular 1052-13

Reviewed July 2026

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