

How Much Have You Invested in Your Marriage?

To avoid spiritual bankruptcy in your marriage, it's key to start investing now. Here's how seemingly "small" things can save you big in the long run.

Ask any couple who has survived financial bankruptcy, and you're likely to hear how the process can wreak havoc on all areas of their life. Few things put a strain on a marriage as much as when a bank account is depleted.

Yet countless couples fail to realize the same principle applies in the spiritual realm. A marriage will not survive spiritual bankruptcy unless the couple starts depositing quality investments into the relationship.

When you attempt to strengthen your marriage, however, realize you will likely face opposition. Satan delights in tormenting Christian marriage by stealing faith and joy. Marriages without the practice of spiritual warfare are at great risk. To bolster against the attacks, make these 10 investments in your covenant to spark the fires of faithfulness for a happy marriage!

1. Invest in speaking truth and making right confessions. Be transparent. Don't pretend. Be honest. The secret here is to do it in love, even if your spouse gets angry. When you speak the truth, you have nothing to hide. God always honors and rewards truth. "Rather, let our lives lovingly *express truth* [in all things, *speaking truly*, dealing truly, living truly]" (Eph. 4:15, AMP, emphasis added).

We make the choice of either speaking creatively or destructively, positively or negatively, in doubt or in faith. Our choice will determine the measure by which God will answer our prayers. A negative confession will hinder a person from

receiving the blessing. Making a right choice, holding on to it, and confessing your faith will cause “the power that works in us” to do tremendously and abundantly above anything we can ask or imagine (see Eph. 3:20).

The key here is the power that we have operating in us. You may be a novice, but when you speak truth and confess God’s Word, the power of God in you will equip you as a roaring lion against the attacks of the enemy.

2. Invest in listening. Not listening is a major complaint among discouraged couples. Lack of attention belittles your partner. Some couples stay busy watching TV or working on their computers while their spouses are speaking to them. Constant lack of focused listening will cause a spouse to opt not to communicate about important things. The art of listening is learned; you have to purposefully pause from your own activity and thoughts to intently listen.

I’ve heard many divorced people confess that the reason they fell into temptation was because someone other than their spouse was willing to listen. These people had no one with whom to share intimate feelings. Conversation is considered one of the top needs of a woman. She may be waving the red flags furiously, but if the spouse is looking in the opposite direction, then eventually love walks away. Listening and good communication will also set the pace for a good sexual relationship.

3. Invest in praying together. Prayer will be your most fruitful investment. Prayerlessness is like allowing spiritual parasites to eat away at your relationship. Communicate in the Spirit with your *abba* Father. Allow the Holy Spirit to be your friend and teacher.

The practice of prayer must be a requirement for every Christian home. Without it, all the windows and doors are open for the thief to come in: “Watch and pray, lest you enter into

temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41, NKJV).

Your personal growth depends on prayer. A healthy body needs food, and a healthy spirit needs prayer. In God's presence the battles are won. Prayer creates a thankful spirit, and a thankful spirit brings joy into a marriage.

4. Invest in giving God the glory. Learn to give God the glory (exaltation, credit) for all the big and little things in your life. Glorify Him because He is your Creator and Lord of all. When you give God glory, it brings Him pleasure. You and your spouse are literally saying: "God, we give You all the honor and all the glory. We exalt Your magnificence and awesome splendor. Hallowed (sanctified, respected) be Your name."

Go ahead and amaze yourself by glorifying God. He will be more than delighted to bless you and your home. Glorifying God also opens the door for appreciation and thanksgiving, whether your baskets are full or almost empty.

5. Invest in communicating. Lack of communication was named as the top marital-relationship problem in two surveys I did, one on Facebook and one during a marriage seminar. The ability to interact in conversation about any subject is the fundamental principle of marriage.

Communication isn't always verbal, though. Attitudes are expressed by a frown, a shrug, a smile; and these can be powerful. Yet without communication, there can be no well-being in a marriage. Many experts confirm that lack of communication and understanding will create a rift that will eventually affect every other aspect of a marital relationship.

Communicating must happen consistently and with understanding. Gut-level conversations are necessary and must be open and honest. Your emotions must be made known to your spouse in such a way that he or she understands what you mean. Many

times, keeping your feelings inward after a negative episode will cause animosity and bitterness.

6. Invest in making time for each other and sharing interests. Plan for times of refreshing and enjoyment. Making time for each other communicates love and desire. Too much work and no play will eventually cause friction and arguments. Don't allow busyness and boredom to settle in. The bustle of life will never disappear, but an unattended marriage could.

Show interest in the things you both enjoy. Whether it's dancing, playing golf, going to a concert, watching sports or cooking, do it together or allow each other to enjoy it. Husbands, enjoy her collections, her decorations, her outfits, her taste in art, her body. The key here is to support each other and enjoy doing things together.

If fishing, for example, is not your preference, then don't complain if your spouse goes fishing. But the next time do something you both enjoy. The man who enjoys fishing and does it all the time, while ignoring his wife, is acting selfishly and inconsiderately, especially if she has already voiced her displeasure. You take a major step in personal growth when you love your spouse more than you love yourself.

7. Invest in changing a bad habit. In his book *Invisible Imprint*, Richard D. Dobbins writes: "As long as a person can tolerate being the way they are they are not likely to change. ... *Until the pain of remaining the same hurts more than the pain of changing, people prefer to remain the same.*" Action is necessary to break a bad habit. The more we practice something, the better we get at it, and the more we do it.

A bad habit becomes an instant reaction to negative situations. Anger, for example, instead of finding a solution, lashes out with defenses that cannot be justified by God's Word.

Bad habits produce bad decisions. To break an addiction, it will be necessary to take action, get help, go after the root, yank it out and make a decision to stop taking the drug of anger, lying, controlling, overspending or whatever it is. Your marriage will grow stronger every time you defeat a bad habit and replace it with a good habit.

8. Invest in forgiving. “Try to hold this simple truth in mind: yesterday is gone. No matter what happened then, it’s over. Tomorrow may never come, so the present may be all we have,” writes John Marks Templeton in his book *Discovering the Laws of Life*. Taking control of your thought life rather than seeing yourself as a victim will heal you of unforgiveness.

When we forgive, we release those who hurt us. Unforgiveness is an attitude that constantly invades a person’s mind with thoughts such as: “Don’t come near me.” “I can’t stand you.” “You hurt me too much.” “I would rather see you dead.”

I’ve been there. I wanted to see my father dead many times because of the abuse I experienced as a child. I chose to forgive my father when I understood the meaning of John 20:23: “If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; *if you retain the sins of anyone, they are retained*” (AMP, emphasis added).

Once I made the decision to forgive, I was set free. The memories didn’t disappear, but the sting and hatred dissipated with time. Make a powerful investment in your marriage: forgive! Go to an altar and leave your baggage there. Have someone pray for you. Be set free.

9. Invest in believing in God. If you’re praying for an unbelieving spouse, don’t give up. Continue loving your spouse and hating his or her sin. Keep thanking God for his or her salvation. Spiritual warfare is tenacious. You should never give up. Faith is always based on the promises of God, never on natural considerations. When we allow ourselves to be ruled

by the natural conditions, we will never see a miracle.

Faith is your assurance that God cares for you and your situation and He will do something about it. He needs your active faith and confidence as well as your obedience. Whether your unbelieving spouse decides to walk out or allows God to transform his or her life, God will sustain you as you continue standing with unwavering faith. In the midst of a hellhole you can make it!

Have you ever wondered why Christ spent so much time in prayer? It wasn't that He lacked anything. It was simply that through prayer, the faith that was in Him became activated, alive and irresistible. And in this prayer-born faith, He went out to heal the sick, hush the storm, feed the multitude and show Himself master of all that was in the world. He showed that the greatest function of prayer is to create faith so we may be strong and gloriously overcome the world!

10. Invest in self-examining. Erwin W. Lutzer says: "When something goes wrong in your marriage, rather than think that your spouse is at fault, try taking responsibility yourself. Your first thought should be, *I am at fault!* One partner usually bears greater responsibility for the failure of the marriage, but seldom is one partner wholly responsible. A root cause in marital strife is that we seldom want to 'own our own stuff,' as the saying goes. ... Search your own soul to grasp your part in the conflict."

To *examine* is to, "inspect, test, investigate and study something." We have a hard time examining our own motives and actions. The blame game comes first. I find that humility is one of the greatest attributes we can possess. A prideful spirit will not allow people to truly examine themselves. When strife enters your marriage, ask the Holy Spirit to put His flashlight into your heart to test if there is anything you need to own up to.

Even King David practiced this: "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart" (Ps. 26:2, NASB).

Don't wait until your health and youth start fading away to begin investing in your marriage. It's crucial that you do it as early and as often as possible. Start today!

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