

7 Secrets to Keeping Your Marriage Hot

When I married my wife, Deborah, 30 years ago I had a tiny salary and no money in the bank, so our honeymoon was a budget affair: four nights in Miami Beach, four nights in Orlando, and then back to work. Deborah didn't complain at all, but I always wanted to make it up to her. So this week we are enjoying an anniversary trip to Hawaii—and thinking a lot about God's faithfulness.

How do two people stay in love for 30 years? I don't consider myself a marriage expert, but I can tell you what has worked for us—and what I always advise the younger people I mentor:

1. Pray together. Marriage is more than an emotional and sexual union. It's a deep spiritual bond. I believe the best way a couple can nurture that connection is to pray together regularly. Set aside time each week to pray for your children, extended family members, financial challenges and life decisions. Pray even more often when you are going through difficult spiritual battles. Prayer will knit your hearts like nothing else.

2. Avoid resentment. All couples fight from time to time, but if you don't learn how to kiss and make up, your marriage will unravel. Marriage is like a school of forgiveness. Paul's rule to the Ephesians, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26, NASB), is best applied by husbands and wives. When your spouse hurts you, talk about it, forgive and let it go. Don't keep a list of offenses. If you bury your resentments without resolving them, they will explode like land mines later.

3. Treat each other as equals. Many Christian men believe they are the "head" of the marriage, and they assume this means

they can boss their wives around and demand submission. This can lead to physical or verbal abuse, and it is one of the primary reasons so many Christian marriages end in divorce. The Bible actually tells husbands to treat their wives as “fellow heir[s] of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). If you view your wife as inferior, or if you order her around like she’s under your control, you are guilty of abuse. A husband’s “headship,” as defined by Ephesians 5:23, requires him to be humble, tender and sacrificial—not macho or bossy.

4. Stay involved in a church community. Many couples try to survive in isolation. Either the husband has no friends or the wife has no support network. And I know many couples that don’t have mentors to talk to when they hit rough patches in their relationship. This is dangerous! If I started going off course spiritually, I know my wife would immediately call some of our close friends—and one of them would be at my doorstep demanding my repentance. I have given my friends permission to get in my face! Accountability provides a safety net for your marriage.

5. Keep dating each other. The Bible tells guys, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Prov. 5:18) and then goes farther to say, “Be exhilarated always with her love” (v. 19). That exhilaration might be easy during your honeymoon, but what about when babies arrive, bills pile up, the workload at your job increases and the kids need braces and car insurance? The sizzle can turn to ice if you don’t spend the time necessary to regularly stoke the fire of romance. When we had four little kids at home, my wife and I always tried to go on a date every week—even when we didn’t need the extra expense of a babysitter. We still try to live by this rule now that we are empty nesters. If you invest in your marriage now, you will reap the rewards later.

6. Maintain sexual intimacy. I have counseled many married guys with sexual problems, including porn addiction and adultery. In almost every case, these men stopped having

regular sex at home before their problems began. Sex is a totally natural part of marriage, and it is unhealthy for couples to deprive each other of sex or to use it as a manipulative weapon. Paul told the Corinthians, "The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and also the wife to her husband" (1 Cor. 7:3). Healthy sex is like glue that holds a marriage together.

7. Honor your vows. Many couples in the church today don't have a clear understanding of what a marriage covenant means. We pay a lot of money for weddings, and we take a lot of expensive photos so we can remember the moment. We say our vows in front of an altar, and those vows are solemnly confirmed by a pastor holding a Bible. But many couples still don't take their vows seriously. Marriage is a promise made in the very presence of God! If we view that vow casually, or if we don't keep God at the center of our relationship, a marriage can go from hot to cold in a matter of months.

My wife keeps some of our framed wedding photos on the wall of our family room. Even though the 1980s hairstyles and clothes are horribly out of date, we display those pictures to remind ourselves that we made a covenant with God and with each other on April 28, 1984. We invited Him to make us one, and we know that the grace He gave us to stay married for 30 years can last a lifetime. He can do the same for you.

J. Lee Grady *is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter at @leeegrady. He is the author of Fearless Daughters of the Bible and other books.*