

What I Wish Somebody Had Told Me Before I Walked Down the Aisle

Have you ever decided to do something and been so head over heels convinced that you had all the answers that you either didn't seek advice from anyone or you ignored valuable wisdom shared with you? On more than one occasion I have listened to couples talk about being so starry eyed in love that in spite of what others tried to tell them, they truly believed love would carry them through their marriage journey. After attending a number of weddings in the past 6 months, I was curious about what kind of advice newlyweds wished they had received once they realized they didn't know it all.

One woman shared that she and her husband have been married 10 months. They lived together before they married. They thought the only thing that would be different after they married was the ring on their finger. Now they know that could not be further from the truth. She wishes someone had told them not to live together before marriage and how steep the learning curve is in the first year.

Many couples preparing for marriage assume living together is the next step before walking down the aisle. Test-driving the marriage to determine compatibility and save money seems logical. The only problem with that is research shows there is no substitute for the real thing. The best way to prepare for a great marriage relationship is to spend time together getting to know the love of your life, participate in premarital preparation to learn skills for healthy communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, goal setting, etc., talk with couples who have been married for a number of years and ask them their secret to keeping their marriage on track or getting back on track after troubled times, and be willing to discuss areas where you don't agree. Dealing with these issues before you tie the knot could be one of the best investments you make in your relationship. As you do all of these things, ask yourself how committed you are to the relationship. The key to a healthy lasting marriage is commitment to make it work.

Another young bride confessed that she and her husband really didn't talk about finances before they walked down the aisle. Even though they had their paychecks automatically deposited and bills set up for automatic payment, she actually had no idea what was in their checking account at any given time. "Not too long after we married, I decided to spend a little extra on payday," said Susan*. "Little did I know, I almost caused us to bounce checks because it was the first of the month, the time when many of our largest bills are paid. To this day, we still haven't established a budget."

Research shows that money is one of the least important factors when couples are considering marriage. However, it is the number one thing that creates distress in marriage. Many couples go deep in debt trying to furnish their home, drive nice cars, and generally "keep up with the Jones'." Instead of trying to immediately have what your parents accumulated over many years, participate in a money management seminar that will teach you how to budget your money. Most money experts agree there are three cardinal rules to follow when it comes to managing your money: Spend

less than you make, avoid going into long-term debt, and put away a little bit for a rainy day.

One couple shared that even though they love each other, adjusting to having someone else around and having to consider their thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes is a huge change. Everything from how they are going to get ready in the morning with only one bathroom, bedtime when one of them is a night owl and the other isn't, to spending habits, how to do the laundry, a clean bathroom, in-laws/extended family, visitors in your home and time for date nights are now topics up for discussion and negotiation.

Learning how to do the marriage dance without stepping on each other's toes is a skill that takes time to master. The best thing you can do is talk about all of these issues as they arise. Keeping your frustration to yourself will only create friction in your relationship. This is where you learn it isn't all about you and your wants and desires. It is learning how to let another person be a part of your life. You have to figure out how to give and receive and compromise. One bride said she wished she had known she would have to sacrifice who she was for the sake of her marriage.

Healthy marriage isn't about sacrificing who you are when you come together as one. Coming together should make you better as an individual and better as a team. Talking about career expectations, children, individual and collective goals before you marry will be helpful. There are seasons in marriage when you choose to make sacrifices because it is honoring to your relationship. This doesn't mean that one person does all the sacrificing.

Finally, almost every couple I spoke with talked about keeping expectations realistic. Just because you marry someone, doesn't mean he/she is going to be able to meet your every need, make you happy and be perfect all the time. There will be disagreements. You will make mistakes. Believe it or not, there will be times when you don't feel head over heels in love. That doesn't mean you married the wrong person. Nobody is perfect. We all have needs and opportunities for growth. Instead of focusing on your own needs and your spouses' weaknesses, focus on your spouses' needs and strengths and on your own opportunities for growth. Even after 17 years of marriage and being immersed in information about how to keep a marriage on track, I still have to keep myself in check when it comes to my expectations of my husband and our marriage.

Getting your marriage off to a great start takes at least as much preparation time as you put into your wedding day. The couples I spoke with have high hopes for a long lasting healthy marriage. If that is your goal, make it a point to start investing now in your relationship. The return on your investment will be worth it! To find out additional information regarding relationship events near your community, see www.marriagemississippi.com.