

Warning Signs Of Marriage

Introduction. Just like warning lights on a car's dashboard indicate that something is "off" underneath the hood, there are certain warning signs in a marriage that signal something is off in the relationship.

A lot of couples who are married for a long time "drift" in opposite directions like two ships that are each just slightly off course. But over time, that slight drift causes a large gap between them. They both have the sense that something is "off," but they don't know how to address it, so they ignore it. The abrupt wakeup call is usually an emotional affair or talk of divorce.

Any marriage left on autopilot will eventually start drifting in the wrong direction. It's important to correct the course the moment you recognize the sometimes very subtle signs that something is off in your relationship. These signs aren't indicators that a marriage is over; they are a wakeup call that immediate action needs to be taken to prevent a crisis and redirect the relationship towards a healthier path.

I. You Rarely Laugh Together

- A. Laughter is one of the strongest indicators of health in a relationship. It's certainly not the only indicator and there are definitely times when the struggles of life limit the laughter, but even in the hard times, healthy couples find reasons to laugh together.
- B. Solomon spoke of enjoying the wife of your youth (Ecclesiastes 9:9). A Christian should experience joy in the Lord (Habakkuk 3:18; Philippians 4:4), and that should overflow into your marriage. There's a shared joy that is stronger than whatever challenges the two of you are facing. A lack of laughter is a warning sign. Don't ignore it.

II. You Spend More Individual Time Than Together Time

- A. There's certainly nothing wrong with having some hobbies you enjoy independently, but if the majority of your free time is wrapped up in activities that don't include your spouse, that's a huge red flag that drift is leading you in the wrong direction.
- B. Another danger is children. Children change the nature of a relationship, but it's intended to be for the better (Psalm 127:3). But parents can get so wrapped up in raising children and supporting their activities that they don't spend appropriate time with one another.
- C. In Genesis 2:24, Adam was to "cleave" to Eve (Malachi 2:14-15). Find some shared activities you both enjoy together, and it could make a huge difference in your marriage. A couple that can play together can often stay together.

III. You Get More Excited About Your Career Or Friends Than Your Marriage

- A. Whenever our best energies, thoughts, and goals are geared towards pursuits outside of our marriage and family, our marriage and family will get our leftovers instead of our best efforts.

- B. It's good to work hard and enjoy friends, but when those endeavors and people eclipse our marriage in terms of our excitement or commitment, then we're drifting in the wrong direction.
- C. A couple who are properly devoted to the Lord and to each other can and should be geared toward what they can achieve in God's work, much like Aquila and Priscilla who taught others (Acts 18:26) and who hosted a congregation in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19). This deep, spiritual bond is priceless.

IV. There's More Criticism/Sarcasm Than Encouragement In Your Conversations

- A. The tone of your words will shape the tone of your marriage. When our tone becomes negative or sarcastic towards each other, it's a huge warning sign that the marriage is in trouble.
- B. When there's more shouting than listening, more criticism than encouragement, or more frustration than warmth in our words, there's a huge problem brewing. Get rid of the bitterness and wrath (Ephesians 4:31), and communicate honestly and calmly with your spouse. Be the encouragement and edification that each other needs. Be a Barnabas (Acts 4:36)!

V. There's Not Much Physical Affection Outside The Bedroom

- A. A lack of intimacy can be its own warning sign, but many couples who are drifting may still enjoy God-directed intimacy frequently (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).
- B. But a better indicator of drift happens to be the amount of affection happening outside of the bedroom. When you rarely hold hands, sit close, put your arm around each other, etc., that's usually a warning sign. Affection is really the glue that holds a relationship together (Genesis 26:8). It is what gets you to that deep, mature love in your relationship (Song of Solomon 8:6-7).

VI. You Hide Things From Each Other

- A. This can start subtly and seem innocent at first, but this is a huge red flag from the moment it begins. If you find yourself hiding purchases, text messages, website history, or anything else from your spouse, you're going to have to bring it out into the open.
- B. A marriage can't survive without complete transparency and trust. If you're doing, saying, texting, spending anything that you hope your spouse doesn't find out about, you're drifting towards a crash if you don't correct the course. This one is so strong that you can pretty much say that any couple doing this will end up in divorce.
- C. God wants the truth from all of us (Colossians 3:9). You gave your heart to your spouse when you took your vows. Keeping information and activities from each other is a form of deceit, and no marriage will survive long under those conditions (cp. Genesis 20:1-2, 8-9).

VII. You Never Talk About Your Future Plans Together

- A. When you get into the daily grind of work or raising children and don't make an intentional effort to keep dreaming new dreams together for the future, you'll slowly start drifting towards a future without each other.

- B. Build each other up and push each other to greater heights of godliness and faithfulness (1 Corinthians 15:58), instead of provoking each other to anger, profanity, and hateful speech. You are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7).
- C. Keep working together to meet new goals and create new adventures and experiences. Those are some of the keys to a lifelong love with each other and creating a legacy through your love that will endure for generations to come. Discuss what you can do in retirement, what you can accomplish in the kingdom, and how you can both be in heaven one day.

Conclusion. Just like the church at Ephesus a marriage can look fantastic from the outside, but it can be a lifeless, loveless relationship on the inside. In Revelation 2:4-5, there are three principles which still apply. The first principle is remember from where you have fallen. Remember the good times, laughter, and happiness associated with the early years of marriage. The second principle is repent. Somebody says, “I have done that. I have repented of the fact that I ever got married.” That is not what the word is talking about! “Repent” does not mean to be sorry; it means a change of heart and action. Choose to act in a loving way, even if you do not feel very loving. The third principle is take action. Communicate with each other; don’t expect your spouse to read your mind. Act the same way toward your mate that you did when you first married. Act toward your mate the way you would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12). It is easier to fall in love than it is to stay in love, and because of drift, we stop doing what we did at first.

Let’s also make sure we remember something else before we conclude. You may, for various reasons, stay together in your marriage — but the marriage is awful. The rest of us will look at you and think you’ve went the distance, but God sees into your home. He sees how you talk and treat one another, and you need to remember that one day you’ll stand before God and answer for your conduct. So don’t worry about what we think of your marriage; worry about what God thinks. We don’t want people who stay together because they feel like they have to; we want couples who stay together because they can’t dream of being apart.

Proverbs 18:22 say, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.” There is no challenge strong enough to destroy your marriage as long as you are willing to stop fighting each other and start fighting for each other.