

ADJUSTING TO CHANGING MARITAL DYNAMICS



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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible, except otherwise stated.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a dynamic institution; it changes as people and the life-cycle of people change. Different factors contribute to the dynamism of marriage such as aging, presence of children, health challenges, employment options, etc.

Marriage is not a contract for a few years but a covenant that should last a lifetime. This means you may be spending about 40 to 60 years in your marriage, so you shouldn't expect that everything will stay the same all through.

With the passage of time, marriage passes through different stages and the stages come with their attendant challenges. It is therefore important that couples understand the different stages of marriage and how to cope with them when they come. That's exactly what this book is all about.

STAGES OF MARRIAGE AND HOW TO ADJUST TO THEM

Researchers say there are 7 stages of marriage; understanding the different stages and the phases you'll go through as a couple may help you build a stronger and more fulfilling relationship.



We will now go over the 7 stages of marriage one after the other, looking at the changes that are involved and sharing the ways a couple can succeed in each of them.



Stage
1

PASSION

This is the honeymoon stage when romance and intense attraction bond a couple together and lead to commitment. It is the stage adrenalin is flowing “wella”. But unfortunately some people don't even enjoy this stage. Their “wahala” starts immediately they get married.



Some of the problems in this early stage of marriage are due to the couples getting pregnant too quickly and not giving themselves adequate time to get to know each other on a deeper level and to relish each other's company. There may be other stress causing factors too. So try your best to enjoy this chemical-dominant stage of your life. Have sex anytime and every time. Try to live alone if you can so you can.

To maximize the enjoyment of this stage, you may want to delay getting pregnant till about 6 to 12 months after wedding.

Stage

2

REALIZATION

This is when you wake up to the fact that marriage is more than feelings. In this stage, you discover your spouse is human and can mess up the toilet!

Because sexual feelings have waned, faults become magnified. This period can be tough because reality is now setting in.

In this stage, expect many conflicts and arguments.

Here, the two of you are taking first steps toward accepting each other for who you really are.

So, instead of just arguing and insisting on how you want things done, start the process of adjustment. Identify the things that can change with time, and the things that may never change. The person that snores may never change, the person that is untidy may learn how to be tidy, etc.

The key ingredients for coping in this stage are acceptance, respect and openness to change. You'll need to assertively discuss this as it will create the foundation for being truly known, understood and supported in the years ahead.

Remember, there are many decades awaiting you, so stop fighting and start adjusting.

Stage
3**REBELLION**

This is the stage where you just want to put down your feet on some things. It is kind of like the “I no go gree o, I no go gree” stage. She wants to build her career; he wants to build his career.

This is the time when self-interest often overtakes the interests of the marriage.

Here, there is power struggle between the couple. A lot of men are taken aback when their very gentle wife starts to become assertive.

It may take about four years or more after marriage to get to this stage. You feel you have tried “jare”, “wetin?” You will not take this thing again “joor”.

You both believe you're right, so, of course your partner is wrong. That means you're simultaneously offended at being said to be wrong and claiming the moral high ground. Obviously, this isn't how to run a marriage.

Experts say the drama of the rebellion stage are unavoidable, just learn how to fight fair.

You should both know that the aim of this stage isn't to cause a shipwreck of the marriage. For instance, if your husband said you shouldn't work, and you agreed initially. Five years down the line, you'll probably go crazy if you don't get something doing. You tell him you want to work and he still says NO. Fighting fair here will mean that you take his points into consideration. For example, in the case of taking care of the children, you may not take a job outside of the home or take a job that will keep you out till very late. You still want to take care of the children. But then you get something that will still bring you some income and satisfaction instead of the gentle girl 'yes sir' that you did at the beginning.

When rebellious thoughts meet with anger and frustration, it often leads to rebellious actions such as infidelity, or saying yes to the sudden offer from work to be transferred to a new city. Any of these can spell disaster for a marriage.

If you discover you are in the rebellion stage, please engage a counsellor to help you guys. At this stage, you may need a referee.

Don't do anything drastic just to prove a point or just to say "I no go gree".

Stage
4

COOPERATION



As marriages progress over time, they inevitably become more complicated. Careers grow, families get bigger, personal needs increase, etc.

In the cooperation stage, marriage takes on a business-like personality. Children's

needs must be met and there are lots of financial demands. The earlier you get your rhythm together and know that there are many lives connected to you, the better for everybody.

You both must understand that the children are watching you, so you can't afford all the bickering. This is when the importance of working as a team will suddenly dawn on you.

Here, focus on planning the future for your children, and start planning for your retirement.

In this stage, it won't matter who earns more, or who likes cooking, who does school runs, etc.

It doesn't matter how your friend handles his wife or how your friend treats her husband. It is now a function of what works for you. If you have children, this stage often lasts 10 to 20 years.

Stage

5

REUNION

Now all the children have left the house—off to university.

When the children have been settled, you guys have to come together to start living for you. Now, your parenting commitments have lessened, your finances established, your career set, you have a house, etc. What next?

For happy couples, it is a time to appreciate each other again, not as parents and providers but as lovers and friends, thinkers and seekers. Achieve this and there's peace and happiness.

The question is, how many people are patient enough to get to this stage?

Here, the embers of passion need to be rekindled; the disillusionment and distance of middle age needs to be managed; the roles and expectations of the marriage needs recalibrating.

You need to start your romance all over again. Men, please note that if you haven't allowed your wife to get domestic help and she has become old and spent, you won't enjoy this stage. So think ahead, and make her life easy. Help her with chores. Don't let her have too many children. Don't think you will go and marry a fresh blood o. Your children will so deal with you if you try it. Your wife must not die. She must be alive and well.

Woman, please be your husband's friend. Make sure you both bond well so that at stage 5, you can still have things to discuss with him. Otherwise, you will keep clinging to your children and you may end up as a wicked mother-in-law.

Stage
6

EXPLOSION



“Haba!” Which one is this again? “Shebi” we are supposed to be “doing” honeymoon in stage 5. What can go wrong again? Job loss, major health problems, a move to a new city, financial troubles.

Please let us take good care of our health now; none of us will become a liability in Jesus’ name.

Let us also plan our retirement well. It can be stressful to be broke at age 60.

In the explosion phase, either you, your spouse, or both of you are dealing with major, life-shaking events that could affect your relationship for some years, or the rest of your lives.

Imagine someone appearing from nowhere and claiming he is your child—an avoidable mistake that happened when you were posted to Abuja and was playing away match with one woman. Now your sin has found you out. Or imagine a DNA was done and two of your children are not for your husband. Or imagine you are caught sleeping with your house help.

Confronted by a personal crisis, your marriage can be a source of solace but if the crisis is at home, then “wahala dey o”.

While the other six stages tend to occur in order, the explosion stage can happen at any time in a marriage, even though it happens most as we pass through our 50s and 60s.

The mission of the explosion stage: Deal the best you can with life’s challenges and changes, but at the same time, keep yourself happy and healthy.

And please don't do any shady deals because your sin will soon blow up in your face.

Stage
7

COMPLETION



Lots of surveys find that marital happiness soars after several decades of a shared life. Experts say simply that it's because the kids are grown, and couples know each other very, very well.

My prayer for us is that we will all grow old together with our spouses in Jesus' name. Part of being a happy man is to never lose the boy within. The same goes for woman; there is a young girl inside, no matter how many wrinkles edge the eyes. Maintaining a

child-like love of life, laughter, nature, with each other is the real secret to a perpetually blessed relationship.

Let us learn to play with our spouses. True, we need to make money but we also need to have fun. Take your wife out; go on couple vacations, couple weekend getaways, etc.

In the completion stage of marriage, there is never a belief that the best times are over—there should always be today and tomorrow.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Is there an estimated time frame for each of the stages in marriage?

Honeymoon is said to be up to two years but I think it is way shorter here. The reality sets in faster for most people. Imagine having a relative staying with you from day one of marriage? Or starting your married life with plenty debt? You can enter realization stage as early as 3 months. Sometimes you realize you have entered 'one chance'; the person you thought was a Christian was actually an imposter.

Q: Can you throw more light on the Rebellion stage?

It's the stage where you are tired of taking 'rubbish' from your spouse and choosing to be selfish in a way.

I think we need to learn to manage the rebellion stage well. Instead of rebelling, quickly start working as a team. There is no point carrying placards of "I no go gree". Sit together and talk about things, and get help if necessary.

Q: Can a couple jump one stage and later go back to it or omit the stage entirely?

A couple that learns to work together as a team early enough may reach stage 4 very fast and eliminate the rebellion stage entirely.

CONCLUSION

No one ever said marriage was going to be easy. Even Paul the Apostle recommended that people shouldn't get married because those who get married will have many troubles.

The good news is that there are many thriving marriages out there which points us to the fact that we can still enjoy our marriages if we choose to.

In the end, the success or failure of any marriage comes down to the choices of the couples. A wise man once said that "Marriages do not just break, people choose to break them." In other words, divorce is not an event, it is a choice which one or the two parties made.

If you want to have a successful marriage irrespective of the stage of your marriage, it totally depends on you and your spouse. Choose to constantly work on yourselves, go for knowledge, to go for counselling, learn to work as a team and never give up on your marriage.

Jesus, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, the Bible says. What joy have you set ahead of you? What beautiful golden years can you see together with your spouse? Loving each other, serving the Lord? That joy should sustain you on the journey to the golden years.

You will succeed in Jesus' name.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bose Fawehinmi is the Lead Counsellor at Marriage Matters International. She is an Engineer but started her counselling career as a lay counsellor and over the years has trained and gathered expertise in the field of counselling psychology.

With over 14years of counselling experience, she has helped several couples and families to create marital bliss. She is a mentor to many, a coach and well sought for conference speaker.

Bose is also a Teen-sexuality educator, a trained Counsellor of Troubled children and a Parenting on Purpose Facilitator.

She is married to Abayomi Fawehinmi and the 18 years marriage is blessed with two boys.

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