

How to Grow in your Marriage during the Tough Times

by Bill and Brenda Faulkner

Bill: Basic marriage principles apply to every marriage. If we practice those principles, our marriages will remain strong whatever life struggles may come. I did not say that our marriage would be perfect, but it will withstand the strong winds of adversity that will blow into our lives. If we aren't working at our marriage in the first place, then the winds more than likely will blow us over. We would like to share with you some things that we learned about making our marriage work and then make some very specific applications as to how that worked out during the storms that blew into our lives – when the ton of bricks fell!

First of all, we entered into a **covenant relationship**. Not a contractual agreement or a social convenience. That covenant was made to each other and to God. It is a binding agreement. We are in it to the end. Our vows went something like this, "I, Brenda/Bill take you Bill/Brenda, to be my lawful wedded husband/wife. I promise to honor you, to cherish you, to respect you, for better or worse, in sickness and health, for richer or poorer, 'til death do us part." Divorce is a word that we have never used. It is not an option. We renewed those vows 25 years into our marriage, and found what a deeper meaning they took on. We had experienced better and worse, riches and poverty, sickness and health. We discovered that we really were committed to each other!

Brenda: Also, we have a **deep love** for each other: A caring, intimate love, a love that cares about the other's welfare, a love that sacrifices when necessary, a love that forgives and does not hold grudges, a love that is patient and kind, a love that comes from our Heavenly Father. We didn't start out at that level. We had some emotional baggage when we began our marriage. I was extremely jealous. Bill had a serious temper. I dealt with a need to control. Bill did not know how to deal with any conflict. We were both very selfish young people. But we didn't have to stay in those places. We grew emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually – as people. We learned how to **communicate** on a deeper level than "Hi, how was your day?" We learned to sit down face to face and talk about our days, to listen to each other as we were sharing, to enter the other's world and be genuinely interested in what the other is interested in. We learned to allow each other to express emotions and not to shut them down. Emotions are God-given. We all have emotional needs, such as acceptance, encouragement, comfort, security, and respect. Being able to meet the emotional needs of another means that I must esteem others better than myself. To have your emotional needs validated is an incredible feeling, knowing that what I feel is valid, not stupid or insignificant.

As we learn to share on an emotional level, it opens up that deepest of relationships, one that is completely trusting and safe.

Bill: We learned to celebrate our **differences**. Different is not wrong, it is just different. Brenda and I are almost total opposites.

- I love the outdoors. Brenda loves indoors
- I love sports. Brenda loves shopping
- I love long country drives. Brenda loves being home
- I do not need much space. Brenda needs lots of space
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But it is those differences that have stretched us as people and made us better individuals. So, how did these areas carry over into the storms of our lives, especially when we began to deal with our son who had chosen to use drugs and abuse his own life?

What torture that is to a parent—for a child to be slipping past where you can give protection.

Brenda: We have shared four basic marriage principles: **covenant relationship, deep intimate love, communication and differences**. So how did these areas apply when the storms came? The first principle we shared was the fact of **covenant relationship**. We are in a relationship. That means that we are a team (us, not me); two have become one. In fact, Scott wrote in a letter that he knew that we (Mom and Dad) were “tight.” He knew that he was not going to come between us. What I do or feel affects Bill. We are not each other’s enemy. We will not attack each other. We will not blame each other. We will work through this together, not individually. In the wedding ceremony that Bill performs, he says, “In marriage, joys are doubled, and sorrows are halved.” That is true as you realize that you are totally committed to this relationship and are as one.

Bill: Next is our **deep, caring love** for each other, love that is strong and active, not just mushy and passionate. This love must be guarded. Nothing can be allowed to come in to hurt that love. We had to realize that we were both hurting. Hurt people hurt people. We must focus on the reality of God’s sufficiency and trust His promise to work all things together for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. We intended to keep our relationship a priority in the midst of a circumstance that had the potential to tear us apart. We must be careful not to become consumed by the problem and neglect ourselves. We must keep fun in our lives and not feel guilty for enjoying life. Our child has made his/her own choices and the choices aren’t ours.

Bill: The area of **communication** is vital. It is important that we talk together about the situation. We do not let feelings pile up. Some days one of us may be overcome with sadness or fear or anger. We allow each other the freedom to share whatever we are feeling without fear of being put down or having to hear 10 steps to correction. Exhortation is my spiritual gift and I am quick to give those steps to Brenda, even when they are not wanted.

It was during these years of great stress that our communication with our Heavenly Father grew. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” We were intense in prayer, knowing that only through Him were we going to survive this. We prayed together, interceding on behalf of our son, asking for wisdom and direction. asking for peace and for energy to continue keeping on.

Brenda: Realizing that some of you are very **different** in personality, you must know that you will respond to this difficult situation in different ways. I am a fixer. I want to make everything better—now. I get frustrated when I can’t control things. I was always thinking of what we might “do” to bring this pain to an end. One might call it manipulation. Bill is more patient and longsuffering. He has a great ability to watch and wait. One might call it FAITH. I wanted to call it passive, non-confrontational behavior. You may be responding differently, but you are both hurting and you both want the same outcome: your child’s healing and wholeness. Just a few additional words of encouragement:

- Admit your pain to others – admit that you need others to help you through the struggles of life. Don’t be in denial. People will really appreciate your transparency. They will feel comfortable to come to you with their own hurt and struggle.
- Don’t isolate yourselves. People who love you will only want to be there to help and to pray for you.
- Educate yourself on the issues (drugs, manic depression, alcohol, etc.). Go to support groups and conferences. You will gain so much insight and understanding and be more equipped to deal with your situation. You will be encouraged as you share with others going through the same things.

- Focus on the goodness of God and not the badness of the situation. It is Satan who wants to destroy your child, your marriage and your ministry. He wants you to feel unworthy and hopeless and to make your life ineffective. But He does not win! God will be faithful to lift your head, to empower you to persevere and to accomplish what concerns you! **Remain steadfast and stand firm. You are an overcomer in this life!**