

Worksheets Based on *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages* by Shaunti Feldhahn

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Introduction

Sometimes a person gets involved in a project that just grows and grows. While I was writing an article on Shaunti Feldhahn's *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages* and simultaneously trying to understand how to help a friend apply its wisdom to her marriage, it occurred to me that I needed to make a worksheet. A worksheet could make it easier for people apply Shaunti's research to their own marriages, I reasoned as a homeschooling mom whose main focus is making learning easier. That one worksheet has grown into many, and now I'm thrilled to be able to share them with you.

I pray that they will be a blessing to you and help you improve your marriage for God's honor, your family's joy, and the strengthening of your communities.

Learning habits from the happiest couples will lead to much joy. It is worthwhile even for those with terrific marriages and can greatly improve 'mostly happy' marriages. Those in struggling marriages may need outside help, but there is real hope for them as well. In fact, according to *The Good News about Marriage* by Feldhahn and Whitehead (reviewed [here](#)), if those who are most unhappy in their marriage stick with it, they rate their marriages as among the most happy within five years.

These principles can help marriages even if other things are causing problems. That is not to say they are a cure all; in various situations, pastoral care, counselling, and maybe even the law need to be involved. However, I want to reemphasize that the biblical principles Shaunti discovered in her research are extremely powerful and can help in even the most difficult cases. So, no matter what your situation, learn to apply these principles, especially that of putting God first in your life and relationship, and seek other help as needed.

Of course, marriage involves many other aspects not covered in Shaunti's research; they need attention, too, but the biblical principles highlighted in her research are always beneficial. Whether you are currently enjoying a terrific marriage, facing potentially divisive issues, or seriously struggling, applying the Surprising Secrets is a practical and powerful way to serve God in your marriage.

**“Watch in hope for big, happy changes
to come from these small, simple steps.**

Trust God for the outcome.

And start.”

Who are these Worksheets For?

I have written these worksheets for three types of couples:

- Those with happy marriages who want to get even better at loving their spouse.

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- Those with mostly happy marriages who are facing significant challenges that could drive a wedge between them (e.g. busyness, illness, fundamental disagreement, tragedy), because these Surprising Secrets make a huge difference even if things are otherwise hard.
- Those who are struggling, desperate for practical help to transform their marriage from difficult to at least tolerable and maybe even happy.

Ideally both spouses would work on this project together but, let's face it, that's not the way things often work. And that's okay; as Chapter 7 of *The Surprising Secrets* points out, it is important to drop unrealistic expectations about our spouses. Besides, Shaunti relates that marriages are improved even if only one spouse wants to work on the Surprising Secrets in this way. (In fact, both she and I have found that immersing ourselves in these ideas to help others has benefitted our own marriages greatly.) With prayer, patience, determination, a sense of humor, and support, surprising change is possible.

Although these worksheets were written for Christians, non-Christian couples can benefit from them, too; after all, Shaunti's research included both Christians and non-Christians and the principles she discovered apply to all.

What Will These Worksheets Do For You?

You have just read or are reading *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages* by Shaunti Feldhahn. The ideas sound great and you are excited to work on your marriage. Your mind is spinning with things to do or change and you are full of enthusiasm to get going, but you don't know where to start. Even the chapter on making it practical isn't hands-on enough for you. And you are worried this will become just one more thing you read about and then forget.

These worksheets will help you with that.

In the worksheets I have combined the results of Shaunti's research with current thought about developing habits and attaining goals. In other words, the worksheets for each habit incorporate important aspects of successful goal setting and habit building in order to help you develop the habits most effectively in your own life. This makes the whole worksheet collection rather long, but the section for each habit is as self-contained as possible for ease of use.

Worksheet Outline

The worksheets begin with the practical tips Shaunti outlined to help readers apply her book (Ch. 14).

Next are worksheets for each chapter. Choose the one for the habit that you want to work on and get started! While you are working on it, you will want to reread the chapter in the book, but at this point the most important thing is to decide what you are going to do, and then just start doing it.

Finally I have written a quick guide to habit building, including a Marriage Habits Table to remind you and to help you keep track of your efforts. The Marriage Habits Table may well be the heart of this workbook because it will help you make your decisions practical and remind you of them every day.

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How to Use the Worksheets

I recommend you print out the sheets now and set a time to go through the “Making It Practical” section prayerfully. However, there are a lot of worksheets. If you not want to print them all immediately, just begin by printing “Making It Practical,” the worksheets for the habit you are planning to work on, and the Marriage Habits Table. Eventually it would be helpful to put the sheets into a binder or folder, but don’t wait for that to get started.

Once you have chosen one or two habits to work on, which you do in “Making It Practical,” the next step is to turn to the relevant worksheets. Go through them carefully and decide what practical actions you can take on a daily basis. As an example, for Chapter 5 and 13 you might decide, “Every evening I will think about what my spouse has done today and thank him/her specifically for the one thing that means most to me at the time. I will do so when he/she is not busy or distracted, and I will look at him/her when I speak. I will not holler my thanks up the stairs while he/she is giving the kids their bath.”

You will most certainly face obstacles. Which ones can you expect? What will you be able to do about them? To continue the above example, you might be too tired some evenings to think of anything you are grateful for, let alone to go to the effort of thanking your spouse. What will you do then?

(You will also have days, week, and maybe even months during which you will not be focusing on your marriage. There can be good reasons for that. When it is time to focus on it again, just pick up again and continue on. Do not get discouraged and, above all, do not give up. Marriage is for a lifetime and requires a lifetime of tending.)

The worksheets will encourage you to set up daily a reminder for yourself. This could be a note in your planner, on your workbench, or your computer. It could be a task on your phone. Or it could be as simple putting the Marriage Habits Table itself where you cannot miss it.

Finally, put a weekly reminder onto your calendar and take a few minutes each week to reflect on what you did, how well it worked, what you could tweak to make it work better, and whether or not your reminders are working for you. There is space on your worksheet for brief notes.

Each habit’s worksheets are for 6 weeks, but feel free to spend more or less time on a habit.

After you feel that you have developed the new habit, put a monthly or quarterly reminder onto your calendar so you won’t slip out of the habit.

And then, give thanks and celebrate!

Finally, go through “Making It Practical” again, choose another habit, and continue on.

How you use the worksheets depends entirely on you. You might want to write on the page, you might not, or you might want to redo some pages every once in a while. (There is a space to write down the date to help you keep see your progress if you redo a page several times.) You might want to consider every section of a habit worksheet, or you might want to ignore some of them. It does not matter *how*

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you use the worksheets; they are merely a tool to help you improve your marriage based on Shaunti's book and on the best ways to develop habits.

I encourage you to focus on your relationship with God as well as on your marriage. Ultimately, the meaning of life is not marriage. As Shaunti has discovered in her research, 'looking higher' is very important (Ch. 11). Just as we would expect, putting God first is the basis for many of the happiest marriages. This focus is built into the Marriage Habits Table.

Note: You must be realistic as you go through these worksheets and it is wise to recognize how your spouse may be sinning, but your efforts to change must always focus on yourself. After all, you are a sinner, too. Never fixate on what the other person is doing wrong; instead pray for wisdom and strength to do what you yourself need to do. You cannot change the other person, and much marital unhappiness comes from expecting what the other person *cannot* give instead of being grateful for who they are and for what is possible (Ch. 5, 7, 13).

Why I Created These Worksheets

As mentioned earlier, these worksheets resulted unexpectedly from my work with *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*.

As I was thinking about them, there seemed to be several reasons to make the effort.

Marriage is the foundational institution in the world. Though it was created perfect it soon succumbed to sin, yet it is still meant to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church. Marriage is so important that the Bible gives specific directives concerning it. It is vital for our daily lives and the future of our children, communities, and cultures.

Some of us have grown up with parents who loved God and each other and were good examples. Others have no idea how a Christian marriage should function. All of us live in a culture that promotes many wrong ideas about how marriage works. Shaunti's research results show, in everyday terms, how marriage does actually work but it can still be difficult to figure out how to apply the habits she highlights.

When Shaunti and her team researched marriage, they discovered many principles that mirror what the Bible says. Every time we learn more about holiness and about sin we face a long-term lifestyle change. Fighting sin and obeying God requires the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as well as deliberate and sustained effort. We need to pray and also to figure out practical ways of being obedient.

As a mom, a homeschooler, a support person, and an inveterate goal-setter, I have discovered the importance of making ideas easy to implement. Many, if not most, people benefit from systematically thinking through their goals and writing them down, but doing so is just one more thing to do and therefore it is easily left undone.

For all these reasons, it seemed worthwhile to make these worksheets.

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Of course there will be people for whom the idea of using worksheets to develop marriage habits will seem too extreme, and that is fine; we are all different. However, there are others who find a worksheet approach both helpful and motivating. This is one more case in which we need to encourage people to obey God in line with their own personalities, not ours. On the one hand, gently encourage the worksheet users you talk to and, on the other hand, do not disrespect those who build their marriage in different ways.

**I pray “...that our God may make you worthy of his calling
and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power
so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him....”**

2 Thessalonians 1:11,12

Important Details

These worksheets are based on Shaunti Feldhahn’s book *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages* but are not endorsed by Shaunti Feldhahn.

They are a companion to the book; to understand them you will need to read the book, one of the best things you could do this year. (For more information about this book, see [my review](#) or read my article [“The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages: Research and the Bible.”](#)) The integration with current thought on habit development, the Marriage Habits Table, and the greater emphasis on daily devotions are my own additions.

These worksheets are free for you to use and copy, for yourself and your spouse, or as a support person, provided you do not make any alterations. However, they are not to be sold or used for profit.

I am not a counsellor. Please use these worksheets wisely and ask for help if necessary.

I would love to hear how these worksheets helped you and how I can improve them.

Please send your feedback to 8anniekate [at] gmail [dot] com.

The Worksheets

Date _____

Making It Practical: Ten Tips (Ch. 14)

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is **to choose to work on only one or two habits at a time** and how important it is to set up daily reminders for yourself.

1)As you go through this list of things the happiest couples do, notice what you are already doing well. Seeing the things you already do is a key to keeping them going for the long run. You might want to check them off.

- Regularly do certain little things that make your spouse feel loved. (Ch. 2)
- *Choose* to believe that your spouse loves you even when you don't feel it, even when you feel hurt. (Ch. 3)
- When arguing, reconnect with each other emotionally as soon as it is possible for both of you to do so. Learn the difference between resolving your anger and resolving the issue. (Ch. 4)
- Keep track of the good things your spouse does, not the bad things. (Ch. 5)
- Stop a negative train of thought or action. Replace unhappy or angry thoughts or actions with positive ones, in order to change your feelings from negative to positive. (Ch. 6)
- Do not long for something that is difficult or impossible for your spouse to deliver, but be grateful for the way your spouse *can* meet your needs. Also, do not expect him or her to guess your needs but say (nicely) what you want. (Ch. 7)
- Have a way (often non-verbal) to reconnect with your spouse after hurt. Both offer and accept reconnection and apologies. (Ch. 8)
- Hang out with each other, even when you are busy, travelling, or upset with each other. (Ch. 9)
- Treat each other with intentional kindness and avoid being disrespectful or hurtful in the way you say things. (Ch. 10)
- Put God at the center of your marriage and focus on Him, rather than on your spouse or your marriage, for fulfillment and happiness. (Ch. 11)
- Invest fully in the marriage and do not hold back emotionally or financially. (Ch. 12)
- Give your mate most of the credit for your relationship success and live in regular, conscious gratitude as a result. (Ch. 13)

Thoughts _____

2)Choose *one* habit (or two, at most) from the above list above to begin with, and practice it (them) for several weeks before adding another habit. You may be impatient to improve everything in your marriage all at once, but Shaunti discovered that did not work. People who tried to do too much at once

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became overwhelmed and gave up. Remember that you have your whole life to work on your marriage, one carefully-thought-out improvement at a time.

If putting God at the center of your marriage (Ch. 11) is not part of your life, I encourage you to choose that foundational goal as well as *one* other marriage habit. It is very helpful to write down what you choose to focus on.

Each of the above habits corresponds to a chapter in *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages* and has one or more associated worksheets to help you work through how you can incorporate that particular habit into your life.

Work diligently on only *one or two habits* for several weeks. When that has become habit, you can add another one or two.
Attempting too much at one time leads to failure.

3)As you start implementing the habits, think about what you are doing and keep your eyes open for results. (There is space on the worksheets to record both thoughts and results.)

4)If your spouse is not interested, try doing it on your own. “Each habit requires just *one* partner to begin, and all of them *will help to make you both happy, even if just one of you does them.*”

5)Find a supportive community. This is especially important if your spouse is not involved. What options do you have? How will you connect with them?

6)Pray with and for each other. Ask for guidance in applying these habits.

7)Create reminders for yourself—sticky notes, messages on your calendar or phone, or whatever—so you don’t forget what you are trying to work on. Daily and weekly reminders are a good idea, and some people love checklists. (A reminder to do this is included in the worksheets for each habit. I have developed a Marriage Habits Table as well.)

8)Do what you can, and don’t worry about what you cannot do. Make a commitment to stick with it. Work at it daily. (Again, the individual worksheets and the Marriage Habits Table can help.)

9)Be generous with yourself and each other. Focus on what is going well and be grateful for it. You will certainly run into obstacles; that is part of life. Just forgive yourself and your spouse and continue on. (Each worksheet has a space for you to consider what you will do when you encounter obstacles.)

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10) Notice results. Discuss them. Write them down to encourage yourself later. There is some space on the worksheets for this, or you may want to use a separate journal. Above all, give thanks for results and celebrate them.

Remember, learning habits from the happiest couples will lead to much joy. It is worthwhile even for those with terrific marriages and can greatly improve 'mostly happy' marriages. Those in struggling marriages may need outside help, but there is real hope for them as well.

“Watch in hope for big, happy changes

to come from these small, simple steps.

Trust God for the outcome.

And start.”

Date _____

Small Actions Checklist for the Wife (Ch. 2)

Most likely your husband will feel cared for if you do these five things on a regular basis:

- Notice his effort and sincerely thank him for it.
- Say you did a great job at_____.
- Mention in front of others something he did well.
- Show that you desire him sexually and that he pleases you sexually.
- Make it clear to him that he makes you happy.

Try some of these this week and see how your husband responds. Perhaps discuss them with him, because not all men value them all equally much. Which of these five habits will you work on first, and how/when?

**Obviously, not all habits are appropriate every day,
but develop a mindset to look for simple, everyday opportunities
to show you care in ways that he will appreciate.**

Have you discovered other little things that mean a lot to your husband? These would be individual things that will show him you appreciate him and care about what matters to him.

Keep your eyes open, and note possibilities down.

What will you do when obstacles arise as you are trying to build your habit? Be assured, obstacles will most certainly arise, but if you are prepared for them it will help. Write down what likely obstacles you will encounter and how you will deal with them.

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At what point will you feel ready to move on to another habit while maintaining this one? In other words, what will you consider as 'success' with respect to this habit?

Set up a daily reminder system for yourself—you might want to use the Marriage Habit Table or you might want to use sticky notes, your phone calendar, a bracelet, or something else. How will you do this? Set that in place.

Each week think about how the past week went. There is space on the worksheets to do this, but how will you remind yourself to do it? Set that in place as well.

How is it going? Do you have any thoughts you want to keep track of? After at least 3 weeks you might want to consider if it is time to move on to another habit or if you need to put more time into this one.

Week 1

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4

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Week 5

Week 6

Congratulations! Finally this habit has become a part of your life! You might wish to write down thoughts or memories as you give thanks for the improvement in your relationship. And don't forget to celebrate in some way.

Habits, even the best ones, sometimes tend to slip. A recurring reminder on your calendar every month, quarter, or year, could help you keep it in mind. What is a good, simple way for you to set up a recurring reminder for yourself?

When will you do this? The best time, of course, is right now, but if that is not possible commit to a time that will work.

Date _____

Small Actions Checklist for the Husband (Ch. 2)

(Please note that in a small percentage of struggling marriages a wife feels that the husband needs to earn her trust before she accepts these as signs of love.)

Most likely your wife feel cared for if do these five things on a regular basis.

- 1) Hold her hand.
- 2) Leave her a message during the day to say you love her and are thinking about her.
- 3) Put your arm around her or lay your hand on her knee when you are sitting next to each other in public.
- 4) Tell her sincerely, "You are beautiful."
- 5) Pull yourself out of a funk when you are morose, grumpy, or upset about something instead of withdrawing.

Try some of these this week and see how your wife responds. Perhaps discuss them with her. Not all women like them all equally much. Which of these five habits will you work on this month, and how/when. (Here is something to consider: If you tend to be morose, grumpy, or easily upset, Habit 5 will likely mean a lot to your wife, although it may well be the most difficult for you to work on.)

**Obviously, not all habits are appropriate every day,
but develop a mindset to look for simple, everyday opportunities
to show you care in ways she will appreciate.**

Have you discovered other little things that mean a lot to your wife? These are individual things that will show her you care about what matters to her and that you appreciate her. (For example, I am grateful that my husband puts hot water bottles on my side of the bed every evening because I can never stay warm, but I know many women who would hate this.)

Keep your eyes open, and note possibilities down.

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What will you do when obstacles arise as you are trying to build your habit? Be assured, obstacles will most certainly arise, but if you are prepared for them it will help. Write down what likely obstacles you will encounter and how you will deal with them.

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Assume Your Spouse Cares Deeply (Ch. 3)

“In struggling or even ‘mostly happy’ marriages, hurt spouses routinely but subconsciously assumed that the offending party didn’t really care about them.”

They gauge the reality of how the other person feels about us, or what the other person intends, by *how they feel* in the moment. They forget that they married a well-intentioned person.

On the other hand, those in the happiest marriages “resolutely assumed that their mates cared about them and had no intention of hurting them to begin with.”

This is something that the happiest couples choose to believe even when they don’t feel it.

The research supports this conviction. Even among the *most struggling couples*, 97% care about their spouse!

You will notice that once you are willing to look for the truth rather than being blinded by your hurt feelings, you start to see that you were right to assume the positive.

Your goal is to learn to accept, both consciously and subconsciously, that your spouse is for you, not against you. This will take both time and effort, and you will face setbacks, but it is worthwhile because then the distancing feelings of hurt, anger, and resentment will arise a lot less often.

So it is worth memorizing the statement below, rereading it daily, and putting reminders wherever you are likely to see them when you feel hurt.

**He/she must not have known how that would make me feel
or he/she would not have done it,
so I will take some time to look for another explanation for this behavior.**

Resolve to read this aloud to yourself thoughtfully every day. When could you do this? Would you write it out and hang it somewhere or put it in your wallet or put a reminder up on a screen?

What will you do when obstacles arise as you are trying to build your habit? Be assured, obstacles will most certainly arise, but if you are prepared for them it will help. Write down what likely obstacles you will encounter and how you will deal with them.

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When will you do this? The best time, of course, is right now, but if that is not possible commit to a time that will work.

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Fight Wisely and Try to Make Up Quickly (Ch. 4)

The happiest couples understand there is a difference between the issue they are arguing about and their anger.

- Even if they cannot resolve the *issue*, they try to resolve their *anger* as soon as possible. It is important to know that the relationship is okay, though they may still disagree.
- They reconnect as soon as possible (see Ch. 8), whether or not they have agreed on the issue.
- They give the other spouse the emotional space to sleep on an argument if necessary, but resolve it as soon as possible.

(Chapter 8 is closely tied to these ideas.)

You may wish to write down past experiences, including what went right and what went wrong. What practical thing can you do to fight more wisely?

In very happy or mostly happy marriages, you will most likely not be able to build a daily habit around this, although in struggling couples this may be a daily issue. In any case, it is important to remember that:

**There is a difference between the issue and your anger.
You can resolve your anger before resolving the issue.**

Determine to read this aloud to yourself thoughtfully every day. When could you do this? Would you write it out and hang it somewhere or put it in your wallet or put a reminder up on a screen?

What will you do when obstacles arise as you are trying to build your habit? Be assured, obstacles will most certainly arise, but if you are prepared for them it will help. Write down what likely obstacles you will encounter and how you will deal with them.

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When will you do this? The best time, of course, is right now, but if that is not possible commit to a time that will work.

Date _____

Choose to keep track of the good things the other person is doing (Ch. 5)

Some of these good things are long-term commitments (providing faithfully; preparing tasty, healthy meals; leading family devotions), others are short term extras (caring for sick kids, dealing with work deadlines, volunteering for an event at church), and others may seem small but show love (speaking more gently, wearing a certain outfit, or doing special little things for each other as discussed in Ch. 2). Learn to notice the good things your spouse is and does, and thank God for them.

If you find it difficult to think of good things your spouse does, you may want to start a list.

(Whatever you do, do *not* keep a list of negative things about your spouse, not even in your thoughts.)

It may also be helpful to make a list of ways in which you need and receive grace, patience, and forgiveness from your spouse.

How can you respond regularly to these good things that your spouse is contributing (including his/her patience with your failings)?

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

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Practice Daily Generosity (Ch. 5)

- Perform small acts of kindness
- Express admiration
- Express respect
- Forgive something

These are all related to some of the other chapters, and elaborated on in Ch. 5.

How could you make daily generosity a part of your life with your spouse? What specific actions can you take on a regular basis, or what mindsets do you want to develop?

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Boss Your Feelings Around (Ch. 6)

Stop a negative train of thought. In other words do not focus on or think about annoyances. Replace ungrateful or negative thoughts with positive ones. The chapter contains some helpful examples.

This biblical principle is so misunderstood in our society that it is worth repeating from two different angles. “My self-talk has power and I need to boss it around a bit,” is the popular psychology version Shaunti quotes. In terms of neuroplasticity, rehashing negativity about a person or situation makes you feel and respond negatively, physically reinforcing the neural pathways involved, whereas deliberately focusing on the best enables you to do so more and more. A cheerful heart does have a continual feast. Or, in the words of a happy couple, “We have found that when we act loving, then eventually, wow, we are loving!”

Or, as Paul wrote from prison in Philippians 4:8,

“...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

It is important to remember that physical wellbeing influences our ability to think and act positively. So be sure to prioritize sleep, healthy food, and adequate physical activity.

How could you do this? What could you do to help you take some time to reflect and adjust your thoughts and feelings when you need to?

It is also effective to stop negative actions. How, specifically, could you do this? How could you act positively instead?

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Have Realistic Expectations (Ch. 7)

This can be divided into three separate attitudes that can make a fundamental difference to marriage. Depending on how your expectations are currently affecting your marriage, you may wish to break this section into two or three habits instead of one.

Do not have expectations your spouse cannot meet but adjust them to be realistic.

One expectation you may have at this point is that your spouse should be interested in reading Shaunti's book and going through these worksheets with you whereas he/she functions completely differently. Adjust your expectations!

What expectations do you have that your spouse does not seem to be able to meet?

How can you adjust your expectations?

What practical steps do you need to take to make this work?

Be grateful for the way your spouse can and does meet your needs.

How does your spouse meet your needs?

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

How can you show your spouse gratitude for this? Thank God as well.

Don't make your spouse guess what it is you want. Instead let him/her know, nicely.

What do you want or need that your spouse does not seem to understand?

Is this an unrealistic expectation which you need to drop, or does he/she just not realize this is important to you?

Rather than be upset, how could you let him/her know, nicely?

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Reconnect after an argument (Ch. 8)

The happiest couples often have a signal that lets them know, "We're okay." Even though the issue may not be resolved, their hearts are softer toward each other. (This is one area where mostly happy couples often can improve.) You will need to remember that there are two sides to reconnection, an initiator and an acceptor.

Go with what's right. Someone has to do it; why not you?

Initiate reconnection, no matter how hard it is for you to do so. What are some ways you could do this next time you have an argument?

Accept reconnection or apologies from your spouse if he/she takes the initiative. First of all you need to recognize when your spouse tries to reconnect or apologize, and then you need to respond appropriately.

How does your spouse try to reconnect or apologize?

How can you accept this? (Either words or actions)

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Does this work for you as a couple?

If not, what could you do differently?

If, as in many struggling marriages, you suspect that your spouse will not want to reconnect or will not accept an apology (see Ch. 7), do it anyhow because it is right; do it for God, not necessarily for your spouse (see Ch. 11). However, do consider carefully whether perhaps you just do not recognize his/her apologies and attempts at reconnection. You may want to write down your thoughts here, or you might want to discuss this with a wise advisor.

How will you be able to work on this habit?

What practical things can you begin with?

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Spend time together (Ch. 9)

Think about what it means to spend positive time together and how you can make it a regular part of your life.

What does 'positive time together' mean to you?

Even if you are working on this by yourself, find out what 'positive time together' means to your spouse.

What practical steps can you take to make the time you spend together positive?

Think about how you can spend positive time together every day. List some options and see which one would work. Make it a priority to spend time with your spouse, the most important person in your life.

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Think about how you can spend a bit more time together every week. See what your spouse says, and then make it happen. It does not have to be a date; it can just be hanging out at home, attending your kids' sporting events, or going for a walk.

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Spend time with other people who support your marriage (Ch. 9)

It helps if your friends, both individually and as a couple, support your marriage. Do you have such friends? Could you arrange to spend more time with them?

If you do not have such friends, where could you find some? Churches are often good places.

How could you connect with them?

How could you make this a regular occurrence? Being involved in a church group is one possible way.

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Never be Brutally Honest (Ch. 10)

Do be honest and open, but don't tell it like it is. Instead

- Be open and honest but never in a way that your spouse would perceive as disrespectful or hurtful.
- Be kind to each other.
- Always treat your spouse at least as well as you treat friends and acquaintances.
- Learn to say things in a softer tone.
- Speak positively to each other.

Think about what kindness, a soft tone, and being treated well would mean to your spouse and how you could do more of these. You might want to ask him/her.

Think about what disrespect and unkindness mean to your spouse, and determine how you can avoid these. Again, you might want to ask him/her.

Consider how you treat friends and acquaintances. Do you treat your spouse like that? Is there anything you should change, and if so, what are practical steps you can take?

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Do you speak negatively or positively to your spouse? How could you speak more positively?

Being kind and loving is no excuse for not being open and honest. Sometimes negative things need to be said. How can you do so in a kind way?

Which of the above ideas will you work on first?

How will you make them practical?

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Look Higher (Ch. 11)

Looking to marriage for happiness means you’re looking in the wrong place, and you will most likely not find it.

**The foundational principle:
Order your home and relationship around God instead of around your spouse,
yourself, or your children.
Look to him for meaning and happiness.**

Personal Habits: Daily devotions

I consider “Look Higher” the foundational chapter of Shaunti’s book, and personal devotions are the foundation of looking higher. They are something a Christian should always be working on and, because they have a huge impact on marriage, I have included them in the Marriage Habits Table.

- Read your Bible daily and attentively. (If this is a challenge for you, here are [Six Tips for Bible Reading](#) that may help.)
- *Think* about your Bible reading and about Scripture passages or Scripture songs you are memorizing. (This is called meditation in the Bible.)
- Pray regularly.
- Be grateful for your spouse and thank God regularly for him/her.

Which of these habits are already a part of your life? Be grateful for them.

Which of these habits will you focus on first, either to strengthen it or to develop it from scratch?

How will you make this habit practical in your everyday life? What, when, where, and how are good questions to answer.

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

What will you do when obstacles arise, as they most certainly will?

One couple moved from a pattern of hurt feelings, explosions, and bitterness to a wonderful marriage when they realized they had to be pleasing to God, and they summed it up well:

**Our main goal now is to make sure we're pleasing God
and we reap the benefits.
If I treat you the way God wants me to, then you'll be happy.
And then I'll be happy.**

Marriage Habits:

- Worship together (at church and at home).
- Be active together in your church community (Bible studies, service projects, and more).
- Share biblical values.
- Focus on serving your spouse instead of on being served.
- Look to God for the power to be selfless, recognizing that it doesn't come naturally.
- Trust God for the outcome. Invest fully in your marriage but put your faith and trust in God, not in your spouse.
- Treat each other the way God commands, not just to please the other but to please God first.

Which of these habits are already part of your life? Be grateful for them.

Some of these habits you can only do with the cooperation of your spouse. If you are going through these worksheets together, which of these do you want to focus on?

If you are going through these worksheets on your own, you can still build a lot of marriage habits that involve looking higher. What possibilities seem important to you?

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Which of these habits will you focus on first?

How will you make it practical in your everyday life?

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Get In Over Your Head (Ch. 12)

Our culture stresses that it is important to protect yourself and always hold something back (money, emotions, resources) in case your marriage fails. The happiest couples in Shaunti’s research discovered that risking it all on their marriage is actually the safest bet.

When there is no other option and you fully invest emotionally because you *have* to make it work, it dramatically increases commitment, certainty, and security.

Four tips to go from ‘mostly in’ to ‘all in’ in your marriage

- Assume that having a happy marriage is not just possible but likely. (The statistics support this. For more information read *The Good News About Marriage: Debunking Discouraging Myths about Marriage and Divorce* by Feldhahn and Whitehead or see [my review](#).)
- Never use the D-word. Divorce isn’t an option since God says marriage is should not be broken, and recognizing that prevents a sense of futility.
- Believe your spouse is there for you and isn’t going to leave.
- Work at it—be determined to have a *good* marriage.

And then do it—commit fully emotionally, financially—even though it may be frightening.

In which ways are you ‘mostly in’ instead of ‘all in’?

How can you commit fully in each of these areas?

Which one will you work on first?

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Plan how you will make it practical—what will you do? How will you do it? When will you do it?

What you have chosen to do may be a one-time action (*e.g.* merging bank accounts) or may be a new habit (*e.g.* confiding in each other). If it is a one-time action, decide how to celebrate when you have taken the leap.

If it is a habit, then follow the usual guidelines for building new habits.

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Be Consciously Grateful for Your Spouse (Ch. 13)

Giving your spouse credit means getting back bliss.

Be consciously grateful for what your spouse is doing for the marriage; do not take him/her for granted in any way. This makes the other person happier and it makes you happier as well.

**Very happy spouses’
‘conscious gratitude for their mates
seemed to have the effect of tempering other concerns
and making them much happier in their marriages.’**

Name specific things about your spouse, or that your spouse does, for which you can be grateful. Remember that even when times are hard, there are always things you can be thankful for. Write down the things you are grateful for so you will notice and focus on them more. Thank God for your spouse and the things he/she is and does. Make this a regular part of your prayers.

List ways you take him/her for granted and figure out how to prevent that.

Learn to be consciously grateful to your spouse and to show that regularly. Each day notice the good he/she is and does (Ch. 5) and thank God. (You might also want to write these things down in a journal, if you like journaling.) Also, each day tell him/her at least one thing you are grateful for about him/her.

How will you make this practical in your life?

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How to Build Habits

I have done my best to incorporate the best habit-building ideas into the worksheets. They include:

- Focus on one habit, or at most two, at a time.
- Know your goal. Think about it and write it down.
- Understand why it is important to you; this will help you continue on when you face obstacles. In this workbook it is assumed that improving your marriage is the reason these things are important to you, so this aspect of habit formation is not addressed in the worksheets.
- Get practical. How will you be able to make it work? You will need to think of specific things you can do and plan when and how you will do them.
- Think ahead. What will you do when, not *if*, obstacles arise? Because they will arise, and if you are not prepared for that they can knock you off course. Write down likely obstacles and determine how you will deal with them. There will also be unexpected obstacles that you cannot really prepare for, but it is still worthwhile consider how you might deal with the unexpected.
- Don't give up. Remember that if you skip a day or a week or even a month, you haven't failed; life in this broken world is a series of ups and downs. Just start again. Be patient with yourself and with your spouse, just as God is patient with you. Forgive, as God forgives you. Do not expect perfection from yourself or your spouse.
- Focus on what *you* should be doing. If your spouse is not doing what you think he/she should do, let it go. Instead, keep track of his/her successes and be consciously grateful for what he/she does. (Ch. 7 and Ch. 13)
- Be grateful. Take time regularly to look back and remember the blessings that have resulted from your diligent habit-building. Thank God for all he has done in you, your spouse, and your marriage.
- Celebrate with your spouse.

One of the most important things about establishing new habits is to give yourself frequent reminders at first. Once a habit is established, schedule a check-in reminder occasionally. I highly encourage you to put a monthly reminder on your calendar to think in general about how your marriage habits are working as well as a yearly reminder to think about the past and plan for the future.

Much has been written about how to develop habits. These brief tips come from a wide variety of sources, including the Charlotte Mason, Charles Duhigg, Gretchen Rubin, Michael Hyatt, Crystal Paine, Ruth Soukup, Andy Andrews, Gary Keller, and others.

How to use the Marriage Habits Table

Many people learn habits more easily with a chart to remind and encourage them. In fact, Gretchen Rubin called her Resolution Chart her conscience. The Marriage Habits Table may help you remember what you planned to do, and can also encourage you by reminding you of how diligent you have been. For some people it could well be the key to a terrific marriage.

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

However, remember that Marriage Habits Table is a tool to help you learn godly habits in marriage. It is not an end in itself and should be adapted to suit you, your spouse, and your circumstances.

One obvious example: You don't have to start on Sunday even though the table does; start today, whatever day it is.

There is space on the table for two marriage habits, which is the maximum you should attempt to develop at a time, but do feel free to choose only one, since that might be more effective in the long run. I have also included the foundational habit of personal devotions, a basis of Christian life and Christian marriage. (Ch. 11)

Each chart is for 3 weeks, because generally habits take at least 21 days to become part of life. After 3 weeks you will need to decide if your current habit needs more time or if you are ready to work on a new one. Or perhaps you will want to strengthen one you worked on previously. Once you decide, you may want to print a new Marriage Habits Table to accompany the worksheet for the habit you are working on.

Worksheets Based on The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Highly Happy Marriage Habits Table

Date _____ to _____

For Habits _____ (Ch. __) and _____ (Ch. __)

Date	Habit	Thoughts	Habit	Thoughts	Personal Devotions	Thoughts
Su						
M						
T						
W						
Th						
F						
Sa						
Su						
M						
T						
W						
Th						
F						
Sa						
Su						
M						
T						
W						
Th						
F						
Sa						

Conclusion

Congratulations, you have put a lot of thought, time, and effort into working on your marriage.

As you look back, I suspect you will notice exactly what I did after immersing myself in writing about the Surprising Secrets, which is also what Shaunti noticed as she worked on the research for her book:

**Learning about these biblical marriage habits,
remembering them, and working on them
improves our marriages.**

So, take time to reflect, to give thanks, and to celebrate the good that God has done in your life!

But no one has ever arrived. Who knows about tomorrow? We are all sinners, selfish and prone to error. And marriage is not a project we work on for a while and then quit working on; instead it is a lifetime relationship that takes careful tending. That tending requires tools and I hope that these worksheets, no matter how you have used them, have been helpful as you developed godly mindsets and practical habits that will last for the rest of your life.

**A godly marriage is not something you build and then ignore,
but the day-by-day outcome of
godly habits that grow for a lifetime.**

Now, with prayer and humble diligence, trusting and obeying God, you can continue on in joy and hope.

There will be tough times, of course, but you can also expect joy, realizing that the habits of the happiest couples can make the good times even better and the hard times easier.

As you learn more about marriage and about living as a Christian, you will notice more and more parallels between the two. You will come to understand that the Surprising Secrets Shaunti discovered in her research mirror what the Bible says, and that by building up your marriage you have also been growing in godliness.

I pray Shaunti Feldhahn's research, made practical in these worksheets, will encourage you to 'make every effort' to add godly virtues to your marriage for the rest of your life.

May God bless your marriage, to his glory, for the good of your family, and for the strengthening of those around you.

Soli Deo Gloria

