



How to Build and Maintain a Hedge

These simple steps can make a world of difference in your marriage.

by Erin Prater

Do You Need a Hedge?

Here are a few simple indicators that your marriage may require hedging:

- You or your spouse has had an extramarital affair
- You and your spouse don't attend church regularly
- You and your spouse don't eat dinner together
- You or your spouse work full time
- You or your spouse are Caucasian, African American, Native American, Hispanic, Asian or any other race
- You or your spouse watch too much TV
- You, and/or your spouse, are human

You may be newlyweds, parents to elementary-aged children or celebrating your 50th wedding anniversary. You may have a large wedding ring and spend lots of time together. You may consider yours a "strong, Christian marriage." Regardless, your marriage needs hedging!

Why? No one is immune to temptation—not married folks, not Christians, not even Jesus! (See Matthew 4.) Think about it. Do you truly expect your house to be robbed or to burn down when you install a security system and sprinklers? Do you truly expect to have an auto accident when you purchase car insurance? You make these investments because you want to protect a valuable asset.

Resolve to Hedge

Your marriage has cost you both a lot: money, "freedom," half the bed and a partial timeshare of the TV remote. But whether you realize it now or not, you've reaped more benefits than you've sown. Come to the conclusion that your marriage is valuable, that it needs hedging and that you're doing both of you a favor by building and maintaining that hedge. Realize that your attempts to build a strong, God-honoring marriage are pleasing to Him. He will bless you for it!

Draw Your Lines and Stay Far Away from Them

Remember life before marriage? If you were raised in a typical church setting, it's likely that a youth pastor encouraged you to set and maintain your sexual boundaries. You knew premarital sex was wrong, but some of you might have gotten just as close to the line as you could without crossing it. Sometimes it's easy to want to push boundary lines in marriage, too. Obviously, having a sex outside of marriage is wrong. Even activities we might have allowed before marriage, such as kissing and cuddling, are clearly wrong when done outside of marriage. But have you deemed some areas, such as emotional affairs, gambling or porn, "grey" and let them slide? Remember, the goal is not to settle for the "thou shalt nots." Clearly state and agree on the obvious "no-nos," then move on to areas society might consider fuzzy, such as spending time with the opposite sex or reading romance novels. Pray for hearts that desire to honor God and your spouse. Protect your marriage from outside, inside, even "minor" threats.

Become Accountability Partners

The need for accountability doesn't end with marriage, rather, it greatens! During your single years your actions probably only affected you. Now, you have two (or more, if you have children) lives affected by your every action. Though additional accountability partners of the same sex can be blessings, your spouse should be your primary. This time, you may find it even harder to be honest. Your spouse has a vested interest in your shortcomings. You may fear hurting him or being knocked off a pedestal if you confess even something as small as a temptation.

They key? The only One who can safely be placed on a pedestal is God. View your spouse as a fellow sinner seated across the kitchen table. Neither of you is immune to temptation. Both of you are sinners sorely in need of grace and mercy from God — and from each other. Don't use this as an excuse to push boundaries; rather, use it as permission to be honest with each other and love each other extravagantly. If your honesty, or that of your spouse, is hard to swallow, run to God together. You'll be amazed at how He'll build intimacy in your marriage and cause your hedge to flourish.

Respect Your Hedge Individually; Build It Corporately

There will be decisions you'll make on your own that fortify your marriage, such as passing up that lotto ticket or closing out of that porn pop-up window. But, as with everything, two hands (or four, rather) are better than ... well, one set. Share your temptations, victories and failures with each other while sharing your favorite snack or meal. Pray and cry together. Forgive and forget. Make time each week for a few transparent, vulnerable minutes for the two of you. Have regular date nights.

If your spouse is unwilling to build a marital hedge with you, know that any hedge you attempt to build yourself will be blessed by God. Tell your spouse about your desire to protect your marriage, the steps you're taking to do so and your shortcomings. Most of all, keep praying. Because your marriage is a portrait of His relationship with His church, you can be sure God desires it to be a beautiful one.

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