

Happy Habits *for* *Every Couple*

ROGER and KATHI LIPP



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked NLT are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Verses marked MSG are from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Verses marked NASB are from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Cover by Franke Design and Illustration, Excelsior, Minnesota

Cover photos © themacx, -M-I-S-H-A-/ iStock

Published in association with the literary agency of WordServe Literary Group, Ltd., www.wordserveliterary.com.

HAPPY HABITS FOR EVERY COUPLE

Copyright © 2009 Kathi Lipp

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lipp, Kathi, 1967-

[Marriage project]

Happy habits for every couple / Kathi Lipp and Roger Lipp.

pages cm

Rev. ed. of: The marriage project. c2009.

ISBN 978-0-7369-5573-7 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-5574-4 (eBook)

1. Marriage—Religious aspects—Christianity—Textbooks. I. Title.

BV835.L53 2014

248.8'44—dc23

2014022632

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 / VP-JH / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*This book is lovingly dedicated to my parents,
Bill and Connie Richerson.*

*Thanks for the care, love, and support shown to me and to
everyone that God has brought into my life. Every child should be
blessed to have parents that encourage with such reckless abandon.*

*I pray that through your legacy of love,
I will have the same fearlessness and boldness when it comes
to encouraging my own kids to pursue their dreams.*

Contents

Introduction	11
A Leader's Perspective	15
Acknowledgments	17
Laying a Foundation: Preparing for <i>Happy Habits for Every Couple</i>	
1. Why <i>Happy Habits</i> ?	21
2. Being Married on Purpose	25
3. A Quick How-To Guide	31
4. Why 21 Days?	35
5. Prepping for the Projects	37
6. Creating Your Encouragement Crew	39
Happy Habits for Every Couple <i>Encouragement Covenant</i>	43
7. How to Handle Tough Situations During the Projects	45
8. Planning for Those Barry White Moments: <i>An Introduction to Bonus Projects</i>	51
9. Learning to Date Again: <i>An Introduction to the Major Projects</i>	59
10. "But My Marriage Isn't So Hot": Happy Habits <i>for the Rest of Us</i>	69
11. Glossary of Terms	73
Building Up Your Marriage: Launching <i>Happy Habits for Every Couple</i>	
The Send-Off	77
Week One Projects	
Project 1—In Less Time Than a Bad Sitcom: <i>Give Each Other 30 Minutes</i>	81
Project 2—It's All About Her: <i>Make Her a Hallmark Holiday</i>	89

Project 3—Getting to Know You:	
<i>Get the Vital Stats on Your Mate</i>	95
Project 4—Sweet Treat:	
<i>Doing Something Special Just for Him</i>	101
Project 5—Turning Up the Heat:	
<i>Cooking Together</i>	105
Project 6—Burning Passion and Burning Calories:	
<i>Getting Active Together</i>	109
Project 7—A Day to Pray:	
<i>Present Your Spouse's Requests to God</i>	115
Major Project 1—Date Your Mate:	
<i>Half and Half</i>	119
Bonus Project 1—Sex:	
<i>Circle It in Red on the Calendar</i>	123
 <i>Week Two Projects</i>	
Project 8—A Little Hands-On Attention:	
<i>Give Each Other a Massage</i>	127
Project 9—It's All About Her:	
<i>Love, Love, Love</i>	133
Project 10—Bella Notte:	
<i>Have a Treat by Candlelight</i>	139
Project 11—It's All About Him:	
<i>R-E-S-P-E-C-T—What it Means to Him</i>	143
Project 12—Lingerie	149
Project 13—Check Mates and Check Marks:	
<i>Getting the Job Done</i>	155
Project 14—Candlelight Weather Report:	
<i>Carve Out Some Time to Just Sit and Talk Over Your Day</i>	161
Major Project 2—Date Your Mate:	
<i>Do Something You Enjoyed Before You Got Married</i>	165
Bonus Project 2—Sex:	
<i>Having "The Talk"</i>	171

Week Three Projects

Project 15—Look to the Example of Others:

Who Do You Admire? And Why?175

Project 16—It's All About Her:

Couch Time181

Project 17—Removing Obstacles:

Getting Rid of Something that Drives Your Spouse Crazy185

Project 18—It's All About Him:

Couch Time189

Project 19—All the Kids Are Doing It:

Text or Email Some Sweet Nothings193

Project 20—Clean Toilets Are Sexy:

Help Out with One of Your Spouse's Chores197

Project 21—What I Like About You:

*You Really Know How to Dance, How to Pay the Bills,
How to Be Nice to My Mom*203

Major Project 3—Date Your Mate:

Double Your Pleasure, Double Your Fun207

Bonus Project 3—Sex:

Ladies, It's Ladies' Night211

Tools of Happy Habits for Every Couple

Project Planner215

Recommended Resources219

Dear Reader220



Introduction

Roger Lipp

To the Men

Come on guys, admit it. If you're like me, you've started a lot of projects before. Some of them lie in various stages of "done" or "done-enough."

For me, reading an entire book is a monumental challenge. I recently went through my bookshelves and found all kinds of great books that I've purchased. Man, do I need to read that one. Wouldn't it be great if I mastered that bit of knowledge. My books call out to me.

But as I was pulling the books down in one last admission that I probably won't read them, I noticed a strange pattern. Most of my books have something odd about them: they all have a bookmark in them somewhere between chapters 2 and 3. Alas, I started the challenge, but then faded out. Each book I pick up, I start off with great intentions of completing the book and learning or putting into practice the great advice or ideas found within its pages. But something happens between chapter 1 and chapter 3. Some other project comes along, some other item of great importance develops ("hey, I've been meaning to fix the garage door"), and my best intentions get set aside leaving a memorial marker.

So let me make a few bold promises. First, this is an easy read, even for those of us who may not be into reading that much. Second, you'll discover that *Happy Habits for Every Couple* is a lot of fun. Who knows, you might find some fun in some unexpected ways. Finally, this book is worth seeing it through. We all admit that our relationship

with our wife is the most important relationship we have, but it's all too easy to let it ride (a strategy that is suspect in Vegas and downright devastating in relationships). See this through. You will be amazed at the change in yourself and your spouse!

To the Women

Wives, you may have noticed, but there are a lot of different kinds of men. Some are eager to work on relationships. Others would be happy to swim alligator-infested waters for you, but don't ask them how they feel about their relationship with you. But whatever kind of guy you're hooked up with, grace is needed as you approach *Happy Habits for Every Couple*.

Since we encourage everyone to do this with at least one other couple, there might be a temptation to do some unhealthy comparisons. ("Wow, your husband filled your room with flowers? Mine only bought me a card!") Every guy is different. Every relationship is in a different place. Every circumstance is different. Enjoy the process and don't compare us (you may have noticed that we have pretty fragile egos). Give us credit for just being willing to do this very outside-our-comfort-zone kind of project.

We need all the positive reinforcement we can get.

A Word from Kathi on the Writing of This Book

You know how in your marriage some tasks naturally fall to you and some naturally fall to your spouse? Roger makes the bed and I make sure that everyone has at least one pair of presentable underwear in their drawers. Roger pays the bills and I make sure that we all are fed each night.

But not all of our roles fall along traditional gender lines. Somehow, making sure the garbage gets to the curb has fallen to me. But I can't really complain because on our morning and evening walks, Roger is the designated pooper scooper. (Jake, the puggle, thanks you. And so do our neighbors.)

So when it came to this book, we both went with our strengths. I'm the writer of the family, and trying to go back and forth in two voices seemed confusing, so I put the words to the page.

But let's be clear—every project, every idea has been thought up, executed, and test-driven by both Roger and me and about 200 friends at Church on the Hill in San Jose, California. Roger is the more creative of us two, and the more romantic most of the time, so his fingerprints are all over these pages.

We wanted a practical guide that brought you both out of your comfortable marriage box just a little bit. Between the two of us, and all the contributing husbands and wives, I think we have just the thing for you here.

Here's to enjoying your marriage a little more today than yesterday.



A Leader's Perspective

When I first heard about *Happy Habits for Every Couple* I was sitting in a seminar for Christian communicators. The person presenting asked the audience to shout out topics that churches should address in their sermons, and Kathi Lipp stood up one row in front of me and shared her heart for *Happy Habits for Every Couple*. I wanted to stand up and say, “You’re from the church I pastor. Why haven’t I heard about this yet?” At the end of the seminar I nearly tackled Kathi in the lobby to talk details about piloting her idea in our church. For me, *Happy Habits for Every Couple* was much more than a book. I sensed this would be a movement of God.

As the lead pastor of Church on the Hill, I invited our entire church to put their marriages on project status for 21 days (plus some prep time for couples). During those four weeks the Sunday messages were focused on understanding men’s and women’s unique qualities (and quirkiness) in order for us to become people who were building health into our marriages. We provided small groups for couples to share their daily victories and woes.

Happy Habits for Every Couple is about improving your marriage relationship. For 21 days you will focus your time, energy, and finances on developing happy habits for your marriage, which means you’ll need to put other areas of your life on the back burner.

I get the fact that some of you are thinking, “But my marriage isn’t broken!” By jumping into *Happy Habits for Every Couple* you aren’t admitting failure or crisis; you may just want to improve the good marriage you already have. And most of us have an innate sense that

our marriages have room for improvement or you wouldn't be holding this book right now. Whether your marriage is in crisis or your marriage feels healthy, these 21 days will help you build a marriage that does more than survive—it thrives!

So far this might sound intimidating because you've read other marriage books that had you focus on all your weaknesses and failures. Not this book. Each daily project is about encouraging your spouse rather than listing your five most irritating habits that drive your spouse insane. The essence of *Happy Habits for Every Couple* is about becoming a person of encouragement who serves the one you love. There is tremendous power in these pages that you're about to discover as you practice the art of encouragement.

As a pastor I want our church couples to have the best marriages in our community. However, as I write these words, another story just came across my desk of a couple in our church who felt unfulfilled and found themselves in the throes of an affair. This is a couple that hasn't worked through *Happy Habits for Every Couple*...at least not yet.

God, the author of marriage, designed your marriage to be the most intimate relationship of your life. Your marriage was intended to be filled with joy, laughter, authenticity, transparency, hope, encouragement, and great sex! Why then are so many marriages simply trying to survive instead of thrive?

It's easy for us to forget that people flourish with encouragement. Every marriage should be a refuge of encouragement, and I pray you discover what I did, that as you engage in *Happy Habits for Every Couple*, God will reignite His original design for your marriage, and you'll rediscover how great your spouse really is.

Make no mistake about it: your time, effort, attention, and money will be diverted toward developing a better relationship for the next 21 days. Trust me when I say the rewards far outweigh the costs. You are worth it, and so is your spouse.

Scott Simmerok, Senior Pastor
Church on the Hill, San Jose, California



Acknowledgments

To our son, Justen Hunter, my favorite writer and the teller of all good stories (even if the endings don't always turn out that way). You inspire me with your imagination and humor every day.

To our daughter, Kimberly Hunter, for again letting me get away with trying to be a mom and write a book at the same time. You are more fun every single day, and I am so glad that I not only get to be your mom, but also your friend.

To our daughter, Amanda. You're the kind of kid that parents hope for. Your maturity and beauty grow every single day.

To our son, Jeremy, whose determination and endurance in running are an inspiration to me in writing. I figure if you can run six miles in the rain, surely I can write two more pages.

To Roger's parents, Betty Dobson and Dewayne Lipp, who show us, the next generation, how to love on purpose.

To my group of girls, especially Kim Gonsalves, Angela Bowen, Vikki Francis, Shannon Jordahl, Denise Gaggins, Cindy Anderson, Kelly Simmerok, Tonya Walter, Lynette Furstenberg, Dina Garcia, Susy Flory and Cheri Gregory for your almost constant love, support, encouraging emails, and prayers.

To the team at Harvest House Publishers, including Barb Sherrill, who has held my hand through much of this book, as well as my editor-extraordinaire, Rod Morris, for letting me write like I talk and helping it all make sense in the end.

To Rachelle Gardner. You became an agent at the same time I became a writer. I, and many other writers, owe you a debt of gratitude for guiding all of us on how to navigate the beast known as publishing. The Christian publishing world is much better for having you in it.

To our friends at Church on the Hill in San Jose, California, with a special shout out to Pastor Scott Simmerok and Lisa Akin.

To Cathi Miller. Your contribution to this project will help an untold number of couples realize that each relationship is unique and worthy of attention. Your honesty is an inspiration.

And, once again, all the credit for getting this book done goes to *Teresa Drake*. They say the sophomore book is the hardest to write. I know that no one in the world hopes that is true more than you and I do. You are not only motivating and creative, but you are blessing the lives of many, many people in your ministry.

Laying a Foundation:

**Preparing for
Happy Habits
for Every Couple**



Why Happy Habits?

*“With every deed you are sowing a seed,
though the harvest you may not see.”*

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

I (Kathi) have a shelf full of marriage books, and I bet if you’ve been married for any amount of time, you do too.

Most of the books that I own are great books. They talk about God’s desire for a healthy marriage, the theories behind a healthy marriage, and what a healthy marriage should look like if you apply these principles.

Some of those marriage books have had a great impact on my relationship with my husband.

Most of them? They ended up on our bookshelf as things I feel guilty for 1) not implementing daily and 2) not dusting.

When Roger and I got married we both brought two teenagers, a full-time job, and a host of volunteer activities into the relationship. There just wasn’t much time to be sitting up in bed after a long day, taking turns reading pages out of marriage enhancement books and staring longingly, with great resolve, into each other’s eyes.

On the other hand, Roger and I were determined to make this marriage work. We each had been in marriages that ended in divorce, and we were committed to do everything we could, in God’s power, to see that we had a marriage that not only lasted, but also was honoring to Him and filled with joy.

That’s when the crazy ideas started to flow.

First, there was *The Husband Project*, where I challenged my friends (and myself) to bless our men for 21 days without expecting anything in return. While most women kept it a secret from their husbands, I had to tell Roger eventually (he had a right to know what book I was working on seven hours a day).

I gleaned the very best advice from every marriage book on our shelves and adapted it into short, doable projects we could work on together.

After that, Roger and I wanted a project to complete as a couple. The results of that are what you hold in your hand.

I wanted a way to bless my marriage that was practical, fun (and perhaps just a little bit flirty), and that followed God's plan and purpose for marriage. I needed something that wasn't just a theory about what to do about my marriage—I wanted some checkboxes. I wanted something that would instruct me, "This is what you do, now go and do it."

That is what I needed, and that is what I ended up writing.

Becoming an Expert on Your Own Marriage

I'm definitely not a marriage expert. After one failed marriage and just ten years into my second one, I'm probably not the first person you'd approach for marital advice. Although the fact that Roger and I got married with four teenagers between us, and we're still together, should earn us some kind of presidential Medal of Honor. Or at least a nifty certificate in a leatherette case.

So I gleaned and condensed the very best advice from every marriage book on our shelves and adapted it into short, doable steps or projects we could work on together.

This is how I have to manage almost every area of my life, whether it's healthy eating, child rearing, Bible study, or most recently, marriage.

It's not enough that I *know* what I'm supposed to do; I need to have a *plan* to get up and do it.

Through these crazy little projects (most taking less than five or ten minutes), my husband and I learned new things about each other. We rediscovered what makes each other tick, confirmed some basics we already knew, and found new and exciting ways to encourage one another. While I may not be a marriage expert, I became an expert on my marriage.

I love how *The Message* translates the words of James about putting feet to our thoughts:

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? (James 2:14-17 MSG)

We can talk about marriage all day long. We can buy books and listen to podcasts about how we should have great marriages. We can listen to sermons and do Bible studies. But unless we put some God-acts to our God-talk, no one benefits.

Thousands of couples have done the projects before you. These simple acts have been proven to change not only people's behavior, but also their attitudes. I pray that God pours out His blessings on you and your marriage as you put feet to His plan for your relationship.

Being Married on Purpose

“Change is inevitable, growth is intentional.”

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Before Roger and I got married, we had long conversations about what we wanted our marriage to look like. We both had plenty of examples in our lives of other couples’ marriages—some of them we wanted to emulate; some we wanted to avoid.

With both of us heading into our second marriage, it was exciting to dream about what this marriage was going to look like. “This time,” we told ourselves, “it’s going to be different.”

And while a lot of things were different, some things were remarkably familiar. Even though I was married to a different man, many of my same insecurities and fears were very present holdovers from my first marriage. Financial strains and our teenagers’ angst hadn’t magically disappeared in this new marriage (but instead of each of us having two teenagers, now we each had two teenagers and two stepkids).

I had been told over and over that this second marriage was going to be hard. But I guess I secretly hoped we would be the couple that escaped all the drama.

Shocking, I know, but we were not that lucky couple.

Oh, I know annoying things will always happen, but when the toilet overflows, someone in the house gets the flu (again), or the bank sends a friendly note letting us know they happily covered our banking miscalculation (for a nominal fee close to what it costs to feed six at the Golden Arches), I get overly panicked, frustrated, and mad.

It was also a great surprise after three weeks of marriage to discover that those heart palpitations and overwhelming feelings of desperate love were not enough to cover the fact that no one in my new blended family shared my passion to have a sink that wasn't loaded with enough dishes to fill our cupboards.

God's Word tells us not only to expect the good, the bad, and the ugly but also that it comes from or is allowed by Him. We don't always understand the trials, but we can trust the One who sent them.

When times are good, be happy;
but when times are bad, consider this:
God has made the one
as well as the other.
(Ecclesiastes 7:14)

About six months into our marriage, I remember Roger and I looking at each other and saying out loud, "What have we gotten ourselves into?" This wasn't the marriage we had dreamed about. Life was just as stressful as when I was single, but now I had to take into consideration another person's moods and opinions.

We determined
that if we
wanted to
make this
marriage work,
we had to be
intentional in
everything
we did.

And yes, I'm sure Roger would admit to reflecting with some longing on his bachelor days.

After long, heated discussions and a river of tears on my part, we knew we needed to make some changes, fast, if we didn't want this marriage to go the same way as our firsts.

It was about that time that Roger came up with the watchword for our marriage: *intentional*.

We determined that if we wanted to make this marriage work, we had to be intentional in everything we did. We would be intentional about inviting God into our marriage each

day. We would be intentional about our time spent together and the conversations we shared. We would be intentional about supporting each other and looking for the good in each other, instead of constantly recognizing what was driving us nuts.

No, it doesn't always work out perfectly. And yes, we fight and we bicker and we say stupid things. But we have a standard for our marriage, one we can hold each other to in the most stressful times. That standard is to intentionally discover the best in our partner, every day.

Seeing Your Spouse Through New Eyes

The report we overwhelmingly heard over and over from the initial participants in *Happy Habits for Every Couple* was that a lot of things changed for each couple. Some people realized they were putting all their energy and focus into their kids and careers, while giving the meager leftovers to their husband or wife. Some couples realized they had already established some pretty great habits in their marriage, and doing the projects affirmed and reinforced what they had learned over the years: It takes a lot of hard work to have a great marriage.

But by far the realization that most of the original project participants walked away with was this: It wasn't so much that their spouse had changed over the course of their marriage, but *the way they viewed their spouse had changed considerably*.

Look at what my friend, speaker and author Cheri Gregory, said in a blog posting titled "A Healthy Marriage Majors in History (not Math)" about being intentional in the way you see your spouse and your marriage:

Think about a high school math class: What does the teacher put on the board every day? **Problems!** What is the math textbook filled with? **Problems!** What do students have for homework each night? **Problems!**

And what is the goal with all these problems? **Solve them!**

In contrast, think about a high school history class. What does the teacher discuss in class? **Facts!** What is the history

textbook filled with? **Facts!** What do students memorize in preparation for quizzes? **Facts!**

And how do we approach history facts? Do we try to somehow “solve” them? Do we try to change Independence Day from July 4 to, say, May 28? Of course not. We know that we can’t “solve” facts. When it comes to facts, our goal is to accept them, understand them, and learn from them.

So why do I say that a healthy marriage majors in history, not math?

Because no matter how I may be feeling at the moment, my husband is never “a problem”! He does not need me to “solve” him. “Math mode” simply does not work for marriage.

History habits, on the other hand, strengthen marriage. My husband is a living, breathing, walking, talking collection of facts. And **he needs me to accept him, understand him, and learn from him** rather than fix him.

Exactly what do “history habits” look like in day-to-day living?

Back when Daniel and I were dating, I was an expert at “history habits.” I focused on my beloved’s strengths and liberally exercised my bragging rights, telling everyone what he was famous for.

Once we married, however, I quickly slipped into “math mode.” Whenever things didn’t go the way I wanted, I switched to critical thinking, focusing on my husband’s weaknesses, trying harder and harder to “solve” the problem (as I perceived it): him!

The difference between “history habits” and “math mode” is simply a matter of focus. When I’m practicing “history habits,” I’m focused on my husband’s strengths. When I fall into “math mode,” I’m focused on my husband’s weaknesses, trying desperately to “solve” someone I once vowed to accept.

When your spouse doesn't respond in the way you expect to all the project work you've done, when you're cranky and the last thing you want to do is anything with the word *Bonus* in it, remember, this is your opportunity to be intentional about seeing your spouse—and your marriage—in a new way.