

What 11 years of love has taught us

Lasting love is not about finding the perfect person. It is about building a life with a real one. After 11 years together, here are the hard-earned lessons that have kept Alice Mbugua and John Mawili going.

BY GLORIA IRANKUNDA

On the morning of February 16, 2015, Alice Mbugua walked into a Nairobi transport and logistics company for her first day as an intern. Fresh from university and determined to begin her career with focus, she found herself assigned to a workspace that was anything but orderly. A desk sat buried under towers of files. Without a word of complaint or a wait for instructions, she simply began to clear the clutter, methodically creating order from the chaos.

Moments later, John Mawili, a tyre manager at the firm, walked in. He had not been told he would be sharing his office. His colleagues had teased him that a "government official" had commandeered his space. Instead of an official, he found a young woman calmly and quietly taking charge of the mess.

It was a simple, ordinary first meeting. Yet, something profound lingered in the air. Alice was struck by John's immediate composure. He made no attempt to impress or assert his authority over the space. Instead, he projected a calm assurance that made her feel instantly respected.

John, in turn, was captivated by her quiet focus. "She was not drawing attention to herself," he recalls. "She was simply taking responsibility. I admired her energy." Neither knew that this moment of mild confusion would be the first page of their lifelong story.

Building a life on purpose

In the weeks that followed, they discovered an effortless comfort in each other's company. Friendly chats over coffee stretched into hours-long conversations about ambitions, values, and dreams. By the time six months had passed, their connection had deepened into something undeniable. When Alice discovered she was pregnant, it brought a new, profound urgency to their talks about the future. They chose to move in together, to begin building a home.

A year later, they held a traditional introduction ceremony, uniting their families and formally declaring their commitment. For Alice, the decision was rooted in John's unwavering consistency. His actions always matched his words. He showed up, not just in the easy moments, but with maturity when life demanded it.

"I paid attention to the way he carried responsibility and treated others," she says. For John, it was the resilience he saw in Alice, a strength anchored in faith and purpose. "She approached life thoughtfully," he shares. "I knew she was someone worth committing to fully."

In their early years, they guarded

their relationship fiercely, choosing privacy to let their bond grow without outside noise. Their favourite memories are beautifully simple; spontaneous adventures, movie nights at home, and late-evening conversations that built a deep friendship before they ever built a structured life. Their shared

faith was the bedrock, teaching them that marriage was not a contract, but a spiritual covenant.

When the foundation was tested

Their first major test arrived in 2018 with the birth of their second child. The joy was quickly shadowed by the

exhaustion of parenting two little ones. Fatigue and competing demands created an unexpected distance between them. Instead of letting the strain fester, they sought counsel from their pastor and entered marriage counselling.

"That season taught us the value of communication and humility," John shares. For Alice, it meant unlearning anxiety and trusting the process rather than trying to control every outcome. For John, it meant confronting his tendency toward silence and learning to speak openly, even when it was uncomfortable. They learnt to view disagreements not as battles to be won, but as opportunities to understand each other better.

Between 2021 and 2022, their covenant was tested in fire. They lost a daughter. In that same devastating season, Alice lost her job. Grief and finan-

Lessons

More than a decade in, their admiration has shifted from surface traits to substance. Alice cherishes her husband's instinct to protect and anticipate challenges. John is in awe of his wife's intelligence and resourcefulness, the way she strengthens their home through insight and initiative.

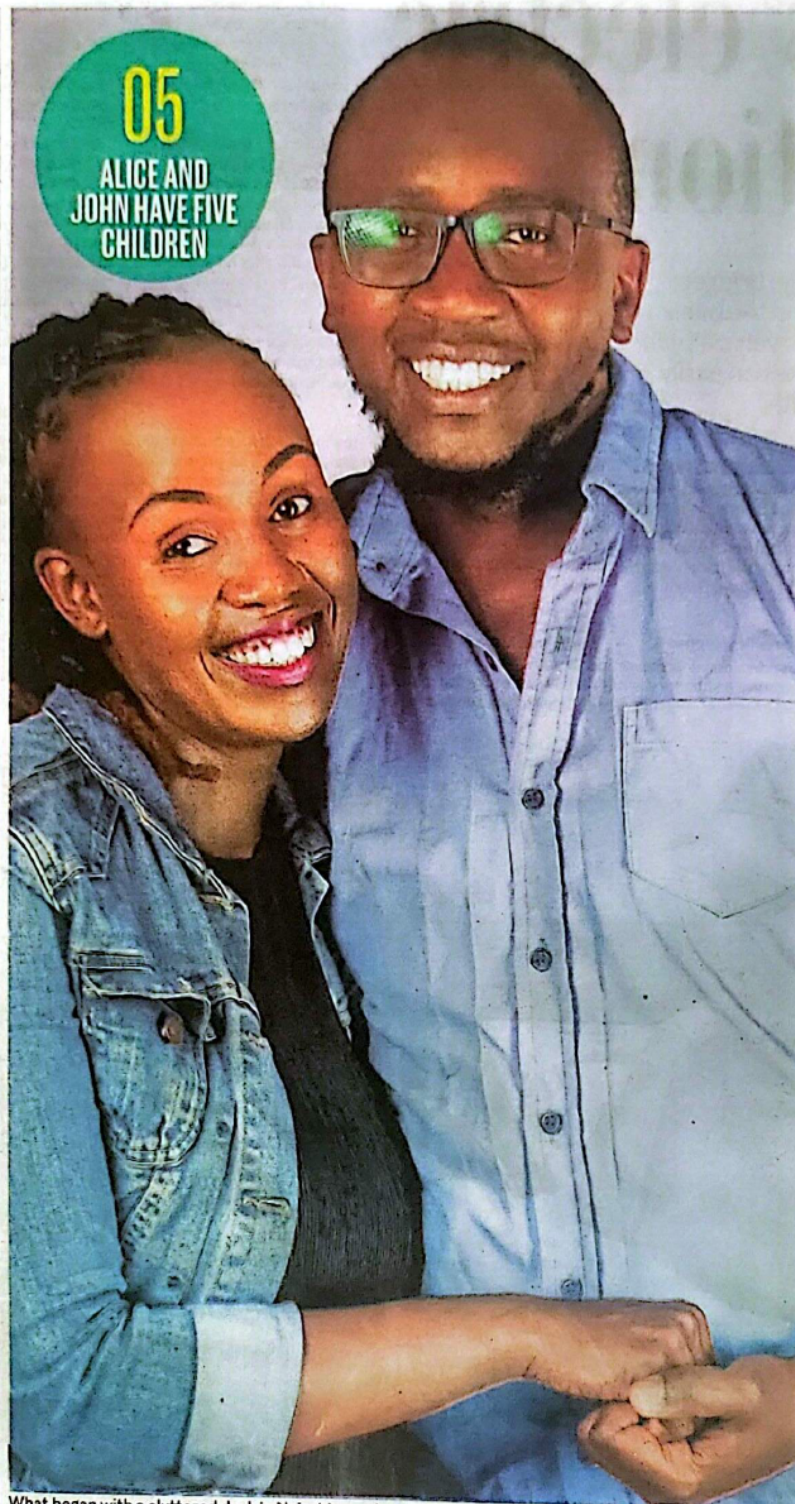
What remains precious is the truth they have lived: that marriage is sustained not by a single, sweeping gesture, but by thousands of small, intentional decisions made behind closed doors. They are partners, shaped by both joy and grief, who have built a legacy on the quiet foundation of a shared covenant.

cial uncertainty flooded their home. The loss reshaped them. For Alice, faith became her daily lifeline. For John, it was a time to step up and steady his family, learning how to love a partner who felt utterly broken. "That season deepened our covenant," he explains. "We leaned on our belief that marriage is permanent, even when the circumstances are not."

A love that keeps growing

Today, their home is full and lively with five children. It is a place of joyful chaos and shared responsibility. They protect their closeness with small, intentional habits; breakfast together, late-night conversations, and brief check-ins during the day. After 11 years of marriage, choosing each other looks different. It is less about grand excitement and more about discipline, patience, and grace when tired or stressed.

Their love, they agree, has grown quieter and deeper. There is less proving and more knowing. If John were to summarise this season in one word, it would be established. Their foundation has been tested, challenged, and proven strong. Alice has learnt that her husband feels most loved through respect and affirmation. John demonstrates his love through responsibility, protection, and a steady, consistent presence.



What began with a cluttered desk in Nairobi grew into five children, a shared covenant, and a love refined by grief and joy. PHOTO/COURTESY