

Guidelines for A Successful Marriage

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Topic:

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How can we have a mature and meaningful marriage relationship? Couples everywhere are asking this question. Sometimes the obstacles to a good marriage seem insurmountable. We live in a culture that promotes selfishness—enemy number one to a satisfying marriage. Many come to marriage from unstable family backgrounds. Too few couples are required to complete pre-marital counseling. When we mix these factors with the pressures and demands of life in the real world, it is not surprising that so many marriages are fragile.

Yet we must not give up. A good marriage takes effort. It also requires some *basic relationship commitments*. The following list is offered for your consideration. It will only benefit you to the extent that you are willing to be honest about your *own* actions. It is not an exhaustive list and I welcome your suggestions of additional guidelines.

Relationship commitments

1. **We are teammates not opponents:**

Marriage is based on togetherness. We must not allow dividing forces to separate us. When you have children, there are three social relationships in your home: Parent/child, sibling/sibling, and husband/wife. The only permanent relationship is the third one—your marriage. We must prioritize this relationship in a way that encourages our children to value and respect it. Remember: children build much of their identity and security on the strength of their parents' marriage. Generally, we live in a society that promotes individualism. Yet in marriage we must look beyond the "me" to the "us". We must diligently protect ourselves from the dividing forces in our culture. Are you too busy or too pre-occupied with hobbies or entertainment? Have you allowed bad attitudes or uncontrolled anger to drive a wedge between yourself and your mate? Are you too proud, or too selfish to be a good teammate? Are you too much of a critic and fault finder? Does

your tendency to be argumentative hurt team unity in your marriage?

5 Relationship Commitments:

- We are teammates, not opponents.
- We will value and respect each other.
- We will acknowledge selfishness.
- We will keep our physical relationship active and satisfying.
- We will stay close to God.

Marriage and family life go through a variety of phases (e.g. parenting small children, young adolescents, teens, adult children). The potential changes that come with age, income levels, and family circumstances require that we be flexible and make necessary adjustments to protect marital unity. Remember: We are on the same team—work together!

Questions:

What have you allowed to become a dividing force in your marriage?

What changes could you make to bring team unity to your marriage?

Scriptures:

"Two are better off than one, because they can work more effectively. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up...Two people can resist an attack that defeats one person alone. A rope made up of three cords is hard to break" (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12).

"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud,... Do not be conceited (Romans 12:16).

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:18).

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“Do everything without complaining or arguing” (Philippians 2:14).

“It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel (Proverbs 20:3).

2. We will value and respect each other

In a pre-marital meeting with the pastor who officiated at our wedding, he looked at me and said, “The graces you used to win her love, you should use to keep her love.” Wow! I have not always done a great job fulfilling that challenge. In courtship, I tried extra hard to treat my future wife with value and respect. Yet over time, it became easier to grow complacent and to take each other for granted. As a “typical man”, for example, I do not always listen to my wife as well as I should. I must recognize that lack of listening often communicates disrespect.

Husbands and wives must also work hard to stay in tune to each other's needs. Encouraging words, well-timed compliments, thoughtful notes, a simple hug—these are little but meaningful ways to show that we value and respect our mates. “I appreciate how hard you work around the home.” “I realize that your job has been stressful, let me know how I can help.” “Thank you for _____.” These are ways we can communicate value.

Questions:

Can you identify ways that you have not treated your mate with value and respect?

What specific steps do you plan to take to communicate how much you value and respect your mate?

Scriptures:

“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (Ephesians 5:33)

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (1 Peter 3:7).

“The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor” (Proverbs 15:33).

3. We will acknowledge selfishness

Earlier I referred to selfishness as “enemy number one” to a good marriage. A wise counselor once said, “There are two kinds of people in the world, the givers and the takers. A marriage between two givers can be a beautiful thing. Friction is the order of the day, however, for a giver and a taker. But two takers can claw each other to pieces within a period of six weeks. In short, selfishness will devastate a marriage every time.”

I encourage young couples to preface their acknowledgements of wrong with the words, “It was very selfish of me to...” or “I was only thinking about myself when...”. Many people have allowed selfishness to destroy their marriages. Do you tend to demand that things go *your way* in your marriage? Do you always have to be right when you discuss matters with your mate? Are you easily threatened by or overly sensitive to criticism from your mate? Are you generous with your time and resources? Be honest and humble enough to face up to areas where you have been too selfish.

Questions:

How have you displayed selfishness in your marriage? Have you ever acknowledged selfishness to your mate?

How could you become more intentionally other-centered toward your mate?

Scriptures:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:3-5).

“For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16).

“An unfriendly man pursues selfish ends; he defies all sound judgment (Proverbs 18:1).

4. We will keep our physical relationship active and satisfying

Sex is part of marriage. Most men would like it to be a bigger part of their marriages. Frankly, I believe that attention to the first three commitments will improve your sexual relationship. In other words, sexual problems are often indicators of other problems. Remember: men and women approach sex differently. Men are like the microwave; women are like the crock-pot. Because men

often have stronger sexual needs than their wives, women have to be more self-giving in this area. Both men and women would benefit from reading material that helps explain their differences. I recommend two books: *What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men* by Patrick M. Morley and *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* by James Dobson.

This area of the marriage relationship like all others requires open communication. Marriages with communication problems often have many other problems (Please consider the attached communication guidelines).

Another major threat to sexual relationships in marriage is pornography. Far too many men are addicted to pornography. Viewing pornography distorts, perverts and places unrealistic pressures on normal sexual relationships in marriages. The primary source of pornography is the Internet. If you have a problem in this area, I recommend that you either terminate your access to the Web or join an accountability group like Covenant Eyes (note: their program could also protect you from allowing pornography to become a problem). A full description of this program and how to become net accountable can be accessed at www.covenanteyes.com.

We must keep our sexual relationship healthy in our marriages. Do not allow neglect or other issues to ruin sexual intimacy.

Questions:

Have you given proper attention to your sexual relationship?

How could you improve this area of your marriage?

Have you allowed other relationship problems to negatively affect your physical intimacy?

Scriptures:

“The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

See: Proverbs 5-7

5. We will stay close to God

Remember: “a rope made up of three cords is hard to break” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). The “third cord” of a meaningful and lasting marriage is God. As husbands and wives cultivate their relationship with God individually, they will make a strong contribution to their marriages. We were made by our creator to live in a personal relationship with him. He has graciously opened the way for this to be possible (see: John 3:16,17).

We strengthen our relationship with God by listening to him as he speaks through the scriptures. This can be done by reading scripture, sitting under bible teaching and reading books that explain and apply scripture. We also cultivate our relationship with God by praying to him (i.e. offering up praise, thankfulness and requests to God), and through fellowship with other believers (i.e. being vitally connected to a local Church).

On a practical level, it helps marital unity when husbands and wives put themselves under God’s authority. On many issues, it isn’t my view that matters or my wife’s idea, but God’s opinion. A husband or wife who continually examines his or her life according to God’s standards will become a better mate.

Questions:

Have you grown spiritual complacent?

What steps do you plan to take to improve your walk with God?

Scriptures:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Communication Covenant

1. We will express irritations and annoyances we have with one another in a loving, specific and positive way rather than holding them in or being negative in general. (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 4:8; Romans 14:13)

2. We will not exaggerate or attack the other person during the course of a disagreement. (Ephesians 4:32; 5:1-2; 1 Peter 3:8-11)
3. We will attempt to control the emotional level and intensity of arguments. I.e. No yelling, uncontrollable anger, or hurtful remarks. (James 1:19-20; Proverbs 14:29; 15:1; 25:15; 29:11)
4. We will “never let the sun go down on our anger” or never run away from each other during an argument. (Ephesians 4:26-27)
5. We will both try hard not to interrupt the other person when he/she is talking. As a result of this commitment, there will be no need to keep reminding the other person of his/her responsibility, especially during an argument. (1 Corinthians 13:4)
6. We will carefully listen when the other person is talking, rather than spending that time thinking up a defense. (James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13)
7. We will not toss in past failures of the other person in the course of an argument. (Mark 11:25; Colossians 3:13)
8. When something is important enough for one person to discuss, it is also important for the other person. (Philippians 2:3-5)