

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 3: TO MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE, WORK...

“Live together in harmony and love, as though you only had one mind and spirit between you.” Phil. 2:2

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...” Eph. 4:3

Your immediate question as we consider the title of this message is probably the misplaced comma. It's not misplaced! To make your marriage work, takes work. There are no mystical incantations recited, or magic stardust sprinkled, or secret shortcuts revealed at any wedding ceremony I've ever seen or been part of.

Yes, God's spirit does the miraculous work of uniting two different hearts, but the truth of the matter is that if you want to make your marriage work, you will have to work at it. Whether married or single, if you want any relationship to work for you, you will have to work at it. Good relationships and godly marriages just don't happen automatically, they take work, sometimes, hard work! *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit...”*

Today I want to visit with you about the six secrets of a satisfying marriage. They are not really secrets; I'm just trying to bend your ears to the importance of this subject. Today, I want you not just to listen, but to do some work already. I want you to evaluate yourself, and your spouse in each of these following 6 areas. At the end of each point I've included a little graph to help you indicate how you think you are doing, and how you think your spouse is doing in each of these 'secret' areas! Put an X mark on each scale for how you rate yourself; put an S for how you rate your spouse. This should make for some interesting discussions over the dinner table!

SIX SECRETS TO MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE, WORK:

1. COMMUNICATION *“Reliable communication permits progress.” Prov. 13:17*

Note the word progress, in the verse. Do you want your relationships to be making progress? If you want to make progress in your marriage, you have to talk.

I believe that a majority of modern marriage problems result from poor communication. In 1998 Newsweek reported a statistic that said; “The average American Couple spends 4 minutes a day talking. The average couple spends 47 hours a week in front of the TV. Is it any wonder our communication is breaking down? Communication is a skill you’ve got to learn through practice. Men and women have different communication skills, and needs, but we can all learn.

A little girl, when she’s born, develops linguistic skills much faster and is much more proficient in conversation than little boys. The result...I know this will come as a shock to many: women like to talk more than men. It’s estimated that the average man speaks about 20,000 words a day. The average woman speaks about 30,000 words a day. When the couples finally meet at home after a hard day at work, the man has usually used up about 19,950 words, and has only 50 left. So as we discussed last week, he’s likely to ‘grunt’ his way through the evening. But the wife has a bigger storage capacity, she’s got 10,000 left to expend, and she’s dying to talk. Especially those moms who stay home with little children have been exchanging baby talk all day, they want to talk even more. You see how this can be a source of difficulty? We’ve all got to work to be better communicators, even when we don’t feel like it! Even when extra effort is required. Evaluate yourself and your spouse in communication – one to ten. If communication in your marriage is at a minimum level, give yourself a “1”. If you say, ‘Sometimes we’re on the same wavelength, give yourself a “4”. If you plan to talk together, schedule times to talk, give yourself a “10”. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. CONSIDERATION *“show your love by being helpful to each other.”* Eph. 4:2

Consideration simply means paying attention, being attentive, being nice, showing common courtesy, treating each other with respect, and love.

Consideration means you go out and bring in the groceries, even if it is tied in the 4th quarter.

Consideration means you wait until she has both legs in the car before you pull out of the driveway! Being considerate means being ready on time when you know it's important to him to do so!

It's amazing how quickly consideration vanishes once we get married. We're usually quite considerate when we're dating. This is reflected in the five stages of a married; "cold".

1st year - "baby, darling, I'm worried about that snuffle you have. I've called the paramedics to rush you to Medcenter for a checkup and some much deserved rest. I know you don't like hospital food so I'll cook and bring your favorite meals."

2nd year - "Sweetheart, I don't like the sound of that cough. I've arranged for Dr. Johnson to make a house call. Let me tuck you into bed until he gets here."

3rd year - "You look like you've got a fever. Why don't you drive yourself down to the walk-in clinic and get some medicine. I'll watch the kids for you till you get back."

4th year - "Look, be sensible. After you've fed and bathed the kids and washed the dishes, you really ought to go to bed."

5th year - "O, For Pete's sake! Would you stop coughing? I can't hear the television! Would you mind going into the other room while you finish the laundry, I'm trying to watch the game here. You sound like a barking dog."

Reminds me of the guy that said: "When I first got married, my wife brought me my slippers and my dog barked. Now, it's reversed!"

We lose consideration for each other as the years go by. James 3:17 says: "*Consideration is a mark of wisdom.*" Basically translated: When we are inconsiderate, we're stupid!!

If you are considerate when you're in a good mood, give yourself a "1".

If you help your mate out when they ask you, give yourself a “4 or 5”. If you look for ways to lighten your mate’s load, give yourself a “10”. Anticipate; look for ways to out please your spouse.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. COMPROMISE *“Love does not demand its own way.”* I Cor. 13:5

This is a real mark of love. The unloving thing to do is try to change your mate to make him/her see it your way, and give in to your desire. The loving thing is to not demand your own way. Many people at the wedding, while saying “I do” are subconsciously saying, “I’ll re-do!” There is often a progression in marriage that mirrors the wedding: You walk down the aisle, you come to the altar, and then you sing a hymn. After the ceremony the pattern remains: **AISLE – ALTAR – HYMN (I’ll alter him)**

John Eldridge highlights this in his book, *Wild At Heart*: “Women are often attracted to the wilder side of a man, but once having caught him they settle down to the task of domesticating him. (He says little about some of us who need domesticating!) Ironically, if he gives in he’ll resent her for it, and she in turn may well wonder where the ‘passion’ has gone.” The point is, every relationship to be successful, must contain compromise.

Compromise is sometimes viewed and practiced as a game creating winners and losers, and that is wrong thinking. Compromise done correctly, in the spirit of love and consideration creates a winning environment for both parties.

I believe inflexibility and the inability to selflessly compromise can be equally as damaging to a marriage as can an affair, alcoholism, even abuse! It’s a fact, that most of us are just plain stubborn. We’re rigid. We don’t want to change or negotiate, or compromise. We expect submission, and we expect perfection. We want our way and that’s why some marriages die!

If you are stubborn until you get your way, give yourself a “1”, (only because the scale goes no lower). If you stay with an issue until you work it out, give yourself an “8”. If both of you go the second mile with each other, give in, do more than your share, give yourself a “10”. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. COURTSHIP *“Let your mate’s affection fill you at all times with delight...”* Prov. 5:19

I’ve maintained two philosophies throughout my years of being married and performing marriages: “If there was more courting IN MARRIAGE there would be fewer marriages in court!” And, if they paid ministers who do weddings the same that they pay lawyers who do divorces, there’d be fewer divorces!” The real problem with many marriages we discussed a couple weeks ago. What we did to win our mate’s love, we have not continued to do to sustain and grow that love. You’ve stopped courting.

Dating is different than courting, and we don’t have time to delve into all the differences, but our modern dating practices tend to reinforce cultural stereotypes of connection, conflict, and separation! Often that practice carries over sub-consciously into marriages. Courting has a different goal, or objective. To pursue the one we’ll marry, and prepare for that marriage. Some people even believe you should not date anyone but the one you will eventually marry! I’m not there yet, but it is an interesting idea!

Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, *“Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love...”* I want to encourage you couples, to keep dating, long after you are married. Make your relationship a priority, become and work to remain best friends, have fun together. There is room in every relationship for individuality and individualism, but if that is all there is; then there will soon be no relationship. Each couple must discover the balance of jointly shared and joy producing activities, with private interests and hobbies.

If your courtship is nonexistent, or if you’re too busy to have fun, give yourself a “1”. If you schedule at least a weekly date, give yourself a “10”. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. COMMITMENT

It takes commitment for a satisfying, God honoring, holiness producing marriage. Malachi 2:16 states rather emphatically:

“I hate divorce, says the Lord, make sure that you do not break your promise to be faithful to your mate.”

I have another theory; you’ll never build a great marriage if divorce is always an option for you. It seems to me from my work with a number of couples, that when divorce is considered an option in a marriage, it is often the first option exercised when the inevitable difficulty comes. And they will come! (This dynamic is really the underlying fallacy of living together as a preparation for marriage. Living together is usually governed by the “back door” option; which means, if things don’t work out, we’ll just go our separate ways, no harm done.) When divorce lurks in the shadows of a relationship as a potential option, it’s just too easy to walk away. When the times get tough, and every bone in your body says, “I’m not going to take this anymore! I’m splitting! If divorce is an option, you’ll likely take it, before you begin the hard work of any other option!

You know I’m a believer in humor as a disarming technique in relationships, but this is an area Susan and I have agreed to never even joke about! The word divorce is not in the Culver family vocabulary, or either of us might have exercised it on numerous occasions!

Commitment means being willing to be unhappy for a while until you can work things out. One of the greatest enemies of commitment is what Rick Warren calls the Myth of Incompatibility. The word is so unscientific. Usually its defined, ‘there is a problem with his ‘income’, and her ‘patibility’. Paul Tournier, a preeminent psychiatrist calls incompatibility a myth invented by jurists in order to plead for divorce.

Likewise, I believe it is often just a smokescreen from which selfish people hide their true feelings! The issue is not incompatibility; the issue is selfishness, stubbornness, unwillingness to compromise, unwilling to change, unwilling to work to save the relationship. Don't call it incompatibility, call it what it is – SELF-CENTEREDNESS. Let me say one more thing. It will take approximately equal amounts of time, energy, and money to save a marriage in trouble, or dissolve a marriage in trouble...it's just a question of where you want to spend them, and what is your level of commitment. The point is, marriage is what you make it. Your marriage will become what you are both committed to making it.

If you say, I'm toying with the idea of leaving, give yourself a "1". If you use divorce as a threat when you're mad, give yourself a "2". If you say divorce is not an option, give yourself a "10".

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. CHRIST

Jesus Christ gives you the power, and the desire, to do the other five. He gives you love when you run out of love. *"Your attitude toward each other should be the same as that of Jesus Christ."* Phil. 2:5 How do you get that attitude? It comes with the package. You get Christ into your life, and He'll give you his attitude. Ask Him to put his Spirit into you, and help you think the way He thinks, to treat your husband/wife the way Jesus would treat him/her. The greatest thing you can do for your husband or wife, for your kids and your family is to become a Godly person, become like Christ, and treat each other like Jesus would!

It begins with a simple invitation. Jesus, please come into my life. I dedicate myself to living like you want me to. I dedicate myself to becoming the kind of man and husband, and father you want me to be. I commit myself to allowing you to make me the kind of woman, wife, and mother, you desire me to be. Commit yourselves to praying together, reading the Bible together, and discussing spiritual things together.

I can tell you this; spiritual intimacy creates emotional and physical intimacy.

If this message required that our secrets be reduced to one, this would be it! Get Christ into your life, he's the only one who can make your marriage Godly, and your lives holy! Christ at the center of your relationship will allow each of you to Love Jesus more than you love each other, and that my friends is the key, the secret. Does it happen automatically, does He then do the marriage building work for us, can we just sit back and wait for the miracle to transform our spouse into the handsome hottie, or hunk we've always wanted? NO, we still have to do our part; work, and frankly, it can be fun, with Christ in the middle!

Evaluate the place Jesus has in your marriage: If he has no place in your marriage, give yourself a "1". If you attend church together and discuss the messages, give yourself a "5". If you pray and read the Bible together regularly, give yourself a "9". There are no "10"s here; we all have room to grow. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Let us pray!

Prayer:

Marriages at different levels today. Summarize, and pray for each marriage, single, divorced, young old, the church.

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WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE, WORK:

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2. _____ *"show your love by being helpful to each other." Eph. 4:2*

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Study Guide:

1. Discuss and share your impressions of the six “steps” to help make your marriage work. Which ones do you struggle with most / least?
2. Discuss and share what you learned about yourself from the ratings you gave yourself.
3. Discuss and share what you and your spouse learned about each other and your relationship based on the scores you gave yourselves.
4. Talk about some fun/interesting ways that you continue to court your spouse.
5. Discuss what steps you’ll take to make improvements in these areas.