

Side
by
Side

• LOVE •

COMPANIONSHIP •

GOD •

FORGIVENESS •

CONFLICT •

COMMUNICATION •

COMMITMENT •

• LOVE •

Secrets of a Successful Marriage

When you love someone, you do not love them all the time, in exactly the same way, from moment to moment. It is an impossibility. . . And yet this is exactly what most of us demand. . . We leap at the flow of the tide and resist in terror its ebb. . . Security in a relationship lies in living in the present relationship and accepting it as it is now.

—Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Behind the headlines, the sociological jargon and the statistics on divorce, there are two overlooked realities.

Most marriages succeed. And they succeed even though married couples today face challenges quite different from those faced by earlier generations, including:

- Greater acceptance of divorce as a way of solving marital problems.

- The relatively new but unrealistic expectation that marriage will bring constant and lasting happiness.

- Stresses stemming from longevity or the failure to plan for retirement.

- The departure of grown children at a time when partners may have drifted away from each other because of child-rearing responsibilities.

- Isolation from traditional family supports due to work-related moves.

- Financial problems stemming from life in a consumer society and the desire to provide children with a college education.

- Changing husband-wife roles.

Such challenges raise fresh questions for

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The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, NY 10017
Father John Catoir, Director: Phone: 212-759-4050

Editorial Staff: Joseph R. Thomas, editor-in-chief; Dolores Ciqui and Margaret O'Connell, associate editors.
ISSN: 8755-6901

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those about to marry, for newlyweds and for long-time marrieds.

How do you live so yours will be among the marriages that succeed in terms of happiness and permanency?

How, if the candle has begun to sputter, do you go about reestablishing the flame?

Authorities on marriage, including long-term marrieds, agree on the essentials.

Marriage is a commitment

I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.
—From the wedding ceremony.

The marriage promises speak of permanency, commitment, the future. According to David Thomas, director of the graduate program in family ministry at Regis College, Denver, "they are sacred promises by which a man and a woman express their intentions before each other and God."

Marabel Morgan, author of "The Total Woman," recalls one Christmas Eve when she and her husband had such a terrible argument that at first she thought it meant the end of their love.

She realized, however, that it didn't mean that at all—that it simply meant they'd had a terrible argument. She went to her desk and made a sign saying, "It's always too soon to give up." The sign is still on her desk.

What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mk. 10:9)

Learn to communicate

Communication is as essential to relationship as breathing is to living. . .—John A. Larsen, *Marriage & Family Living*.

Linda Harris of Albion, Wis., writing in *Guideposts*, described how she and her husband, at the start of their marriage, decided to discuss mutual concerns weekly. As the marriage matured, the discussions became arguments—until they began using a "conversation jar."

As topics suggested themselves, they were written down and placed in the jar. Each could

Prayer for a married couple

O God, unite our hearts in the never-ending bond of pure love.

May our children bring You happiness and may Your generous love for them be returned to You many times over.

May the peace of Christ live always in our hearts and in our home.

May we continue to have true friends who stand by us both in joy and in sorrow.

May we be ready to help and comfort all who come to us in need, and may the

blessings promised to the compassionate someday be ours.

May we find happiness and satisfaction in our occupations.

May daily problems never cause us undue anxiety, nor the desire for earthly comforts dominate our lives.

May our hearts' first desire always be the hundredfold You promised to Your faithful people.

May You one day welcome us together into Your eternal kingdom. Amen.

Allow for privacy

A good marriage is that in which each appoints the other guardian of his solitude. . . even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist. . .—Rainer Maria Rilke, *German poet*.

In one of his books on marriage, counselor Urban Steinmetz tells how too much togetherness caused problems in his marriage.

An early riser, he nevertheless needed time alone to "wake up" each morning. His wife, an outgoing type who would have preferred to sleep late, thought it her duty to perk him up.

The result: almost invariably they started their days at odds with each other. Their solution: he rose a little earlier and had his coffee, she slept a little later. Coming together in a friendlier mood, they were then ready for the day and each other.

For everything there is a season. . . a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing. (Ecc. 3:1,5)

Make room for God

It doesn't take ideal men and ideal women to make ideal marriages. Ideal marriages are made by ordinary men and ordinary women in partnership with Jesus Christ.—Bishop Louis E. Gelineau, Providence, R.I.

New studies of marital longevity show that long-term marrieds generally share basic values and goals. There is also a correlation between marital happiness and attendance at religious services.

read the notes in advance and know what was on the other's mind. Nobody felt "on the spot."

"This little grace period of preview and prayer before we talked made us more sensitive to each other's needs and feelings—and to God's intentions for our marriage," Mrs. Harris wrote.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one. (Col. 4:6)

Become companions

Marriage is a call to love a particular imperfect human being as Christ loves him or her. This vocation involves us in faithfulness, forgiveness, generosity and gift-giving. . .—Kathleen and Thomas Hart, *The First Two Years of Marriage*.

"It is a grace to have memories of more than a shared routine," says Mitch Finley, author with his wife of "Christian Families in the Real World."

Early in their marriage they "determined, do or die, to make regular time to enjoy being together." One evening a week they take a break from their children "and do something 'for the fun of it.'"

Each year on their anniversary, they "take at least 24 hours away from home and children, to talk, to laugh, to walk through a park holding hands—and, rested and relaxed, to make love in the middle of the day."

It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a companion. . .
(Gen. 2:18)

Marlene Shelton LaRoe, a marriage therapist in Texas, believes that religion can play an important role in helping married people stay together. At a time when couples and families are becoming isolated, they "are turning to churches both for a sense of community and the religious experience."

In one survey of 351 couples married 15 years or more, 300 said they were happily married. Of 18 reasons given for the success of their marriages, both men and women ranked these three among the top five: "Marriage is a long-term commitment," "Marriage is sacred," "We agree on aims and goals."

Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.
(Mt. 18:20)

Put your spouse first

Whatever your other concerns . . . your relationship with your spouse must take precedence.—Daniel Dolesh and Sheryl Lynn Lehman, *Love Me, Love Me Not*

Writer Judith Viorst illustrated a magazine piece with a story about a pre-breakfast argument between "Elsa" and "Steve" that revealed for Elsa her husband's priorities.

The argument hadn't been resolved when Steve started for work. "How can you just go off like that?" Elsa demanded.

Steve returned, called his office and canceled his appointments for the day so the hurt could be healed. For Elsa it meant whatever difficulties might surface, her husband would put their relationship ahead of everything.

No . . . house divided against itself will stand. (Mt. 12:25)

Learn to deal with conflict

Anger is inevitable in an intimate relationship. Managing conflict and dissolving the anger are crucial.—David and Vera Mace, *counselors*

Recalling a "memorable disagreement" between his parents, Robert L. Thornton of Michigan, in a Reader's Digest anecdote, told how his father jumped up from the table, grabbed two sheets of paper, gave one to his wife, and said, "Let's make a list of everything we don't like about each other."

Exchanging glares, they alternated writing. "All down the page," Thornton noted, "Dad had written, 'I love you, I love you, I love you'."

Love does not insist on its own way.
(1 Cor. 13:4)

Seek and give forgiveness

There are many little wounds that spouses inflict on each other . . . They lie open and festering . . . The greatest salve I know for these hurts and harms is the simple act of seeking forgiveness.—Paul A. Mickey, *Tough Marriage*

One woman, on her 50th anniversary, revealed that on her wedding day she decided to make a list of 10 of her husband's faults which, for the sake of their marriage, she would overlook.

Asked to divulge the faults, she said, "I never did get around to writing them down. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him, that's one of the 10!'"

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger . . . be put away from you . . . and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God . . . forgave you. (Eph. 4:31)

Show your love

Love must be manifested, signified, laid out in the open for the beloved to see.—William P. Roberts, *husband and father*

In a letter to Capper's Weekly, a woman told how she had lived for years with the knowledge that she had an incurable eye disease that could deprive her of her sight.

Once she said to her husband, "I don't know what you will do with me if I am blind." His answer was, "I'll take care of you."

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. (SS. 8:7)

Put sex in perspective

Sex is . . . only one part of marriage. There will be times when sex is a disappointment, when it's too early or too late, or the baby's crying. There can be times of abstinence, times of sickness, times of "I just don't feel

like it"—for both of you.—Paula Lubke Kollstedt, *Surviving the Crisis of Motherhood*

While sexual adjustment is integral to a happy marriage, the emphasis is more on "adjustment" than on sex, according to Jeanette Lauer and Robert Lauer in *Psychology Today*. Among couples they studied, "agreement about sex was far down the list of reasons for a happy marriage."

"Fewer than 10 percent of the spouses thought that good sexual relations kept their marriage together," they reported. Where sex life was considered less than ideal, an acceptable accommodation had been reached. What was most important was that each considered the other his or her best friend.

And they became one flesh. (Gen. 2:24)

For the troubled

Whether you are newly married or have been wed a long time, there are things you can do to head off trouble or minimize it.

■ Stress the positive. Make a list of all the things you like about your partner. When trouble develops, weigh its relative importance against the positive attributes.

■ Don't act hastily. Marriage counselors agree that many people separate hastily and come to realize later that they would have been happier had they worked at preserving the marriage.

■ Seek help. Don't wait until the marriage is on the rocks to discuss matters with a clergyman or a counselor.

■ Keep the marriage fresh. Nothing is as deadening as boredom.

■ Look ahead. Change—loss of a job, the departure of children, retirement—can strain the best of relationships. Preparation can ease the problem.

■ Keep trying. Many couples on the verge of divorce have saved their marriages through participation in Retrouvaille weekends. A 10-year-old movement begun under Catholic auspices but open to couples of all denominations, it is geared to couples experiencing marital difficulties. (For information, write to Retrouvaille, 15230 Las Robles, Oak Forest, IL 60452.)