

“A marriage without love makes no sense. It’s like a concert without music.” — Charles R. Swindoll

“in love” comes from giving one’s self. Remember giving is not to get or take advantage of the other person’s generosity. The happiest marriages are those where each partner gives 100 percent and gets back 100

percent in return. The most important aspect of love is knowing

how to forgive—not by shelving our hurts and disappointments but genuinely releasing our injuries and wounds.⁴

Make a Lifetime Commitment

For a marriage to survive, commitment must be priority number one.

The ancient prophet Hosea is a prime example of uncommon loyalty, grace, and commitment.

He was a victim of marital infidelity and by law was not required to remain married, yet he chose to rebuild his marriage, not once but three times. That is total commitment in my book!

Hosea understood that marriage, like life, involves sinful individuals and needs lots of healing, forgiveness, and mercy. The British Prime Minister Sir Winston

Churchill once was asked, “Sir, if you could live your life again, what would you want to be?” Although known for his razor-sharp wit and tough demeanor, he gave an answer that truly expressed his feelings for his wife, Clementine. With a twinkle, he replied, “Being Mrs. Churchill’s second husband.”⁷ He understood, as we should, that commitment is a scriptural mandate for a lasting marriage.



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MARRIAGE FOR A LIFETIME

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Last year, I picked up a couple of fun news stories on marital relationships. The first one deals with a Texas man who allegedly staged his own kidnapping so he could spend time with his buddies without his wife’s permission. He was grabbed from his home by two of his friends posing as masked intruders. They seized him at gunpoint as his petrified spouse looked on.¹ The second story is about a 70-year-old Kansas gentleman who robbed a bank at gunpoint. He stole \$3,000 from his local branch and then sat down in the lobby, telling the security guard, “I’m the guy you’re looking for.” In the police interview he confessed he had argued with his spouse earlier in the day and stated he’d “rather be in jail than at home.” He was charged with bank robbery and released. However, it is not clear whether he returned home or not.²

These are two examples of something we all know: marital relationships are not perfect, and we do have our ups and downs from time to time. We all need to be reminded of certain principles that will make our marriages and all relationships run a little smoother.



Resolve Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in all relationships, including marriage. Some people believe conflict signals a lack of love, but in fact it means that love is very much alive. Hence, the goals of resolving marital conflict are twofold: to air your point of view and listen to what your spouse has to say. Follow these four steps:

1. Begin by defining the problem. Maybe write out a summary of the issue.

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.

“What is the formula for a good marriage?” — “the same as for a successful car – stick to one model.” — Henry Ford

2. Identify who needs a solution and the other’s contribution to the situation.
3. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible. Laughing about your crazy ideas will help relieve the tension.
4. Select a plan you both agree on and are willing to live with.³

Focus on the Good

Most couples that are constantly nagging at each other are usually just noticing the negative things in their relationship. One therapist has a simple answer for this. She suggests that couples stay for a few moments at the table after the evening meal and swap compliments about each other. Most spouses are absolutely amazed at how many wonderful and enjoyable things they can say about each other.⁴ Remember the biblical adage “What so ever things are good. ...”



Stop Recycling

For many couples, a fight becomes a ritual with the same situations or circumstances repeated over and over again. It is like a tape recorder that just repeats the same long-standing gripes or arguments about money, children, sex, in-laws, etc. Sometimes one spouse wants to continuously be the victim. Don’t continue to penalize your mate: just say you feel hurt over a situation, forgive, and take the attitude that your loving husband or wife doesn’t wish for you to be unhappy and feel upset again. An example of this would be a continuing war over your spouse’s chronic lateness. Instead of pouting, why not plan to have a book or magazine in your vehicle to read while you wait, or have a cordless vacuum cleaner in your trunk and keep the cleanest car in the neighborhood?⁵

Are You the Right Mate?

At some point in any relationship, it is natural to ask an age-old question: is your other half the

right one for you? If you let it go at that, you are probably missing the opportunity of a lifetime. Terrace Real says it is not unusual for this disillusionment to exist. He calls it the first day of your *real* marriage. It is the time to grow up, stop yearning for the perfect spouse, and realize you are living with an imperfect human being. Those first few months or years of infatuation have one overwhelming conclusion: partners overestimate their similarities. She may love her boyfriend because they both enjoy Chinese food, cruises, and bird watching, but she overlooks his devotion to reading late into the night and gardening. Mature love focuses on the good and takes responsibility for our own negative reactions and emotions.⁶

Expect Change

The majority of married individuals believe that solid relationships don’t change from year to year. The real truth is that marital relationships do change. Fortunately, ongoing change is for the best. Couples sometimes resist change because they fear change will break up their marriage.

Welcome change with a positive attitude and permit each other to grow. You will be surprised by the difference in your marriage.

Need a Face Lift?

If you have been married for several years, often boredom, monotony, and staleness creep into your relationship and may even threaten your marital ties. Get a face-lift! The best method is to use “I” statements. “I am tired of the same restaurant for our weekly date night, can we try a variety of cafés?” Using the “I feel” statement helps avoid attacking your lover and yet gets your desires across. Be willing to take a few risks, be creative, and surprise both of you with a “new” marriage.³

Give and Receive

Spontaneous unselfishness is the core of mature love. Everyday real love reminds us to put our needs and desires on hold and respond to our partner’s wants and wishes. The feeling of being

