

Your Marriage Can Make It!

- by Dr. Edward Watke Jr. -

“Ten Rules For A Successful Marriage!”

This message is for husbands and wives who want their marriage to succeed. It is also for those who are remarried and are finding it is necessary to work as hard, or harder, the second time. This message is also for the singles who hope to establish a good Christian home someday in the future. This message is for honest marriage partners only. It is not for those who are looking for a way out of their marriage or who are wanting a way to simply exist in a bad arrangement.

I know of no strong marriages that have not been tested, severely. Husbands and wives who experience suffering, pain, misunderstanding and temptation -- can, together rise above it all and enjoy a marriage that is both beautiful, enduring and rewarding. How each partner reacts to crises is the key.

It's very true that fewer marriages are making it in these troubled times. The divorce rate is scary -- and it strikes closer to us each day. It is said there are nearly as many divorcing among those who call themselves Christians as those who are outside the church and outside of any profession. It's almost like a raging flood out of control, sweeping away foundations that have stood for years. Even marriages that have lasted for thirty or forty years are breaking up.

Most of the books on how to improve your marriage are nothing but pulp. At times, I think some of the writers simply dream up their untested, juvenile instructions on how to achieve marital bliss. Often the suggestions are psychological jargon without any substance and surely for those who love the Word of God their ideas are far from truth.

It's not that I don't want help from the “*experts*” to improve my marriage; it is just that few marriage counselors are practical or scriptural. For me, their methods are unworkable at best, and actually damaging at the worse. Instead, if one would ask those who have been married for many years how they made it -- one would receive many good principles from the anvil of marriage life. So, in this message I am giving practical suggestions that come from those who have enjoyed and long and successful marriage. Some of these points have been learned in my own marriage of nearly 50 years as my wife and I struggled to achieve a lasting love.

Here, for your prayerful consideration are TEN WAYS TO HELP MAKE YOUR MARRIAGE WORK!

1. Even in your most heated arguments -- never use the word divorce!

A lovely young wife, whose divorce was to be finalized within the week, confessed, “I wish now that I had never used the word divorce. We have been married nearly five years, but we argued so often. things go pretty bad, and one day I blurted it out -- I think we ought to get a divorce. We were both shocked at first. We had never even thought of divorce before that moment. But after the shock wore off, I realized the seed for divorce had been planted. It was easier to say the next time. Within weeks, that is all we talked about. The seed grew monstrous roots that finally strangled our marriage.”

Others who have said the same thing. Their counsel would be to never use the word divorce. There is something fatal in the very use of the word. Don't plant the seed -- it grows wild and fast. One couple came home from their honeymoon. They both were in the field of education and had prepared their nice library. The young groom called his bride into their library and getting down their dictionaries he said, “*Let's cut out of our dictionaries the words divorce and separation, for we will never speak these words, nor will we ever enter into such action, they are never a viable solution.*”

I agree! The Bible says, “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*” (Proverbs 18:21)

2. Do not think that intense disagreement means there is trouble in your marriage!

Be honest when you disagree. Express your thoughts and even your hurts. Let your feelings show but do it kindly. And God help you if you don't. (Eph. 5:1,2) People who keep things bottled up inside are candidates for all kinds of illnesses. But most married people who have intense disagreements think they are somehow becoming allergic to one another. They think to themselves, “*Oh boy, here we go again. It is a hopeless situation. We must have lost our love and respect for each other.*” You are only human and as two people with different backgrounds, different viewpoints, etc., you are bound to disagree at times. From marriage until we depart from this life we will disagree at times. It is more damaging when one is a controller and must have everything his way, or no way. Mark it down you will have conflicts and disagreements because we have a sin nature as well. (Gal. 5:16-18; 5:22-23; Rom. 7:18)

Learn to get the problems out quickly. (Eph. 4:26-27) Don't ever think of quitting on your marriage because you are still weak in the area of communication. People who keep looking for a perfect relationship with “*no more fighting,*” are heading for real disappointment. Grow up, be mature, consider that difficulties are also stepping stones for growth personally. Put away childishness and any response that is not adult, but child-like. It is so easy to revert back to childish ways of getting back at our spouse. This is sinful, wrong, and damaging to both partners.

Most important of all-- never drop the “*bomb*” when you argue or disagree. Every husband or wife knows exactly what to say to push their spouse's button. *You know how to get the other person's goat.* Don't say the things that hurt for you only lose ground and make it more difficult to come to agreement and unity. Laugh at how ridiculous you both are. Learn to admit -- “*our marriage is still good, we simply have a failure to communicate.*” Laughter is good for the spirit and will help to clear the air -- by laughing at yourselves you will clear the tension and set the stage to work at the problems.

The Word of God tells us the best advice of all -- “*It is an honor for a man to cease from strife; but every fool will be meddling.*” (Proverbs 20:3)

3. Never make your mate the butt of jokes -- privately or publicly.

Maybe this is the saddest thing I have witness among couples -- the telling of jokes with barbs in them. Humor then becomes a means of getting back at a spouse, a way of lifting up self and tearing down the other person. Comedic partners who poke fun at their mates think it is “*good natured joking.*” It is not! It is degrading and dangerous. Making jokes about the stupid things your husband or wife did at home is another way of putting him or her down before others. Behind most of these jokes is a spirit of anger and malice. (Eph. 4:31-32) It is a way of “*not letting them forget their mistakes.*” It is a way of bringing up the mistakes again so that everybody will know about the failure. Some men are so unsure of themselves, think so poorly of their own lives that they use this means to feel better about their own life -- how juvenile!

Behind all the laughter can be terrible hurt. Being the butt of a joke can be like getting slapped in the face. How often have you heard a husband blurt out to everybody standing nearby, “*Hey, did you hear what my wife did? it was the craziest thing you've every heard.*” Then he proceeds to tell every embarrassing detail. Or she will yoke, “*My husband is a dirty old man -- all he thinks about it sex.*” But it's no joke. Husbands and wife who respect one another do not resort to such foolishness. Joke about things -- but not unclean or demeaning things! Humor -- yes, but the right kind.

4. Practice complimenting each other -- sincerely, and often!

How tragic that some husbands and wives believe they have been called by God to keep their mate humble. They are constantly pricking the balloon so that he or she will not get a big head. Either one may feel it is their right to remind the other of every fault.

One middle-age wife said, *"Someone has to keep my husband humble. He gets too big for his britches. I know just how to straighten him out."* How sad! One day that husband will walk out on her, and seek another woman who will encourage him, respect and build him up. Men especially have such a need to be encouraged and their egos unruffled. God commands a wife to reverence her husband which means to adore, to esteem highly, to appreciate and to brag on. (Eph. 5:33) *It is not a sin to build each other up -- with sincere compliments.* (Eph. 4:29) One of the commands of Scripture is that we ought to edify the other and not say those things that tear down. Praise will go a long way toward building oneness and joy in the marriage.

Anyone who can stand before a sacred altar and make vows for life, surely ought to see enough good in that partner to talk about. A divorced woman was heard to say, *"My husband's been gone now for over three years. I wish he would come back. The loneliness is unbearable. There are a million things I forgot to tell him. If I had only let him know how good he really was, in so many ways. What a fool I was -- I could never learn to compliment him; I was always on his back, pointing out all his mistakes. I see how some husbands and wives treat each other so coldly, and I want to scream at them -- wake up, before it is too late -- quit your sarcasm and encourage each other."*

Wives tend to become as beautiful as the compliments their husbands pay them. They become radiant when told how attractive they are. And husbands will do almost anything to live up to the compliments and encouragement of a proud wife.

The Bible says, *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."* (Proverbs. 25:11)

5. Never smother each other -- set your love free!

It has been said, *"If it's really love, set it free -- and it will always return. If not, it wasn't love from the start."* There is a great measure of truth in that.

A loving husband of 45 years confessed the secret of his enduring marriage to his wife. *"I believe it is my privilege and duty to create an atmosphere in my home in which my wife can reach her full potential. She, in turn, helps me reach mine."*

With his encouragement, she was active in the church; she did volunteer work in the hospital; and she had her own hideaway where she indulged in painting. He said she was a better wife to him because she was free to use her talents, and be herself for this brought much happiness to both of them. She was not being smothered by a husband who was interested in nothing but his own goals, or who felt insecure because she had gifts that he did not have.

Jealousy is a form of bondage -- it is the most smothering human passion known to mankind. Husbands and wives who fear the loss of a partner's love try to over-compensate by holding on too tightly. It becomes a iron grip. A wife who thinks to herself, *"I won't let him out of my sight,"* is actually expressing her fear of losing him. The husband who will not allow his wife plenty of room for growth and expression will one day resent the boredom and narrowness forced on her. And to him she becomes a bore as well.

The most fulfilling of all marriages are those in which both husbands and wives commit their love to God's keeping, and who truly set each other free to grow and mature. If God cannot keep you together, charm and sex will never do it. Without freedom, there can be no growth. Not freedom to flirt or fool around -- but freedom to take on new challenges and set new goals.

Truth freedom is based on trust, and trust comes from feeling secure in each other's love. And divine love flowing by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5) sets a couple free to minister to one another. Part of that ministry is to encourage one another in abilities and talents used for God's glory. Read and meditate upon I Peter 3:8-11.

God says, *"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, and to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"* (Isaiah 58:6)

6. Learn how to say, "I'm sorry... I was wrong... please forgive me." -- and mean it!

"Love Story" was a movie whose theme was *"Love is never having to say I'm sorry."* That is a lie from the pit of hell. There can be forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration without admitting sin, admitting wrong and making amends for it.

An irate husband boasted, *"I walked out on my wife last night. She is always right, and I'm always wrong. But not this time. I'm not going to let her walk all over me again. I know I'm right on this matter. I'm always the one who has to give in first. Well -- this time I'm staying away until she crawls on her hands and knees and admits she is dead wrong."* How sad, for this decision will doubtless be death to their marriage.

Along with learning to quickly say *"I'm sorry,"* husbands and wives must learn how to say *"I forgive."* Jesus warned that the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father depends on our forgiving those who trespass or sin against us. (Matthew 18:

Has your husband or wife cheated on you? Have you been wounded by adultery? Did you accidentally discover their secret affair? Was there true repentance? Are you trying hard to forgive and forget? Maybe it was something less severe, but you find it hard to forgive. Do you realize the lack of forgiveness brings emotional divorce to a marriage? Do you realize your lack of forgiving brings coldness, bitterness, and defeat in your own life?

You may never forget - but you must learn to forgive. As long as you live, you may be haunted by the images of your husband or wife in the arms of someone else. You may always hurt and grieve over it. But if he or she has shown evidence of godly sorrow -- and every effort is being made to make it up to you -- you must forgive. More than that, you must stop, once and for all, bringing up the past. Multiplied thousands of marriages have survived infidelity, but only because godly sorrow for sin was followed by Christlike forgiveness. If you keep dragging up all the old, ugly past -- the marriage will be in jeopardy.

You may want to study some other things we have on the web site about forgiveness, restoration, brokenness and keys to a great marriage.

The Bible says, *"The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression...."* (Proverbs 19:11)

7. Never shut each other out -- be open at all times!

It is very important to have an open spirit. The opposite is to have a closed spirit that often comes from anger, bitterness, and resentments held in the heart.

Never “*clam up or walk out*” when things get shaky. One of the most aggravating actions irritating marriages today is the silent treatment. A young wife asked a counselor to “*talk some sense into her husband.*” He was about six feet and four inches tall and weighed over two hundred pounds. “*All he does,*” she said, “*Is close up on me when we disagree. He won’t fight back. He just walks out the door, leaving me to steam in my own juices. When he cools down, he comes home. But he is like ice until I make up with him. He can go for days without saying a word. I hate it. I’d rather he yell or scream or even hit me. But no more silent treatment -- I can’t take it anymore.*”

It is deadly wrong to say to your husband or wife, “*Just leave me alone. I don’t want to talk. I am going through a rough place -- let me work it out by myself. I just don’t want to be around anybody right now.*” That is not only stupid -- it is a genuine put-down. What is marriage all about anyway -- if it is not about sharing and helping one another through every crisis and problem?

I have heard all the excuses: “*It’s that time of the month.*” “*I’m going through the change of life.*” “*I’m not feeling well.*” “*I have had a bad day.*” “*My nerves are bad.*” But none of these excuses give you the moral right to shut out someone who loves you. Did you not marry in order to have a companion? Keep the door to your heart always open to accept help in your time of need. Don’t do those things or build those habits that produce emotional divorce. It is terrible to live under the same roof and to be emotionally separated.

God says, “*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls...*” (Proverbs 25:28)

8. Make a conscious effort to keep the joy flowing!

Joy makes a big difference. God commands us to have joy. Consider these portions: John 15:11; I John 1:4; Nehemiah 8:10; Philippians 4:4.

If the joy of the Lord is our strength, (Prov. 8:10) then strong marriages should abound with joy. When marriage loses its joy, it become weak and vulnerable. Show me a happy home, and I will show you a joyful couple at the helm. God commands the husband to rejoice with the wife of his youth.

Husbands and wives who no longer laugh and play together, no longer love each other. There is a joyful childishness about true love. I’ve come to the conclusion our marriages are suffering from too many sober, too serious husbands and sad wives.

Sure, there are problems. There is sickness, unexpected difficulties, financial problems, misunderstanding, pain, losses, hurts, and even death. But life goes on -- and it is shame that so many couples never enjoy life. They keep hoping they will someday be happy and contented -- when all the bills are paid, when the kids are grown, when difficulties seem to lessen and/ or when they retire. But life passes by so quickly, and all they have to show for it are the wrinkles and lines on worried, unhappy faces.

Is this for you? Is this what you want life to be like? No amount of perfume, facials, or anything else you do for the physical will take the place of a happy contented heart. The future is now and God is on the throne and He has everything under control. (See Romans 8:32; 8:28; Philippians 2:13) Thank God for a partner who loves you. Plan to enjoy every minute of life. I’m going to keep the joy flowing. There is a time for weeping, but also a time for rejoicing. The good outweighs the bad, especially for those who know the Lord. So look up and live!

“*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.*” (Proverbs 17:22)

9. Never turn to a third party in time of trouble!

There is always someone eager to console a hurting husband or wife. And when there is no one to talk to at home, many go seeking a friend elsewhere -- *“just someone to talk to.”* That is where almost all adultery begins.

Church choirs can be hot beds of adultery -- if the director is not a discerning man of God. Husbands and wives sit at home, while their troubled mate gravitate to a sympathetic friend in that choir. It also happens on the job and in the office. Where ever people are working close together it so easy for the hurting person to find some soul mate in time of trouble. It is especially bad with so many hurting people looking for help and consolation. Many a counselor has allowed himself or herself to be trapped by sympathy for a hurting person. Secret affairs often begin innocently enough -- just talking about mutual hurts. Then follows the *“leaning process.”* All too often, it ends in transference of affection and then it can easily lead into adultery.

Never, never, no, never tell your marriage troubles to a third party. Not even to the closest friends of your own sex. You are setting yourself up for your own wrong attitudes. You can expect your friend to agree with you and even encourage you to take a position against your own spouse. They may be the first to squeal your troubles to the world. And, they are in a position to hurt you when you need them the most. Ask them to pray with you without knowing any details. They can become a support without knowing any facts, or your feelings.

Lean only on Jesus! He never tells - except the Father! It's true, there are so few to talk to about your problems. But husbands and wives ought to be true friends, and as such they should be able to talk about anything. Good communication in the confines of marriage is *“two people being able to talk about anything without anger, but in love and giving support in the process.”* Spouses ought to be able to lean on one another. Leaning in any other direction leads to a fall.

The Bible says, *“Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterward his mouth shall be filled with gravel.”* (Proverbs 20:17)

10. Consult Christ and the Word of God about every detail of your marriage!

Adam and Eve brought deceit into their marriage and then compounded their rebellion by hiding from God's presence. God never hides -- only man does. But God was vitally involved with that first marriage between the first man and woman. And He is just as concerned about every Christian marriage today. God planned marriage to be a wonderful companionship and it is a divine covenant. (see Malachi 2:11-16)

No marriage can make it today if one or both partners are hiding from God. Show me a marriage without a partner that is close to Jesus, and I'll show you a marriage that has little chance for survival. At least one of the partners must be in a daily consultation with the Lord. There must be a hot line to the throne room. It works best when both husband and wife have a vital prayer life together as well as in secret. It is imperative that they know how to walk together in a prayer life and use the closet of prayer for help and direction. A praying wife can often save her marriage -- as can a praying husband. Wonderful is the home where they build a godly life together.

Love is not enough to keep a marriage strong - only God's power can do that. That power is at work, right now, healing and keeping marriages. Divorce is the result of one or both partners losing their faith. ***But where Jesus is King -- the marriage can make it.*** Very few ever divorce who read the Word of God and pray together daily.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...” (Jude 24)