

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE? ©

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Paul R. Shockley, PhD

www.prshockley.org

When my wife and I received premarital counseling we were only given one piece of advice, namely, "Lower your expectations!" While there is much truth in the counselor's statement, we would have benefited greatly from receiving additional wisdom, especially from one who had been married to the same spouse for over forty years. Therefore, the following things we share with you are what we learned so far in our marriage and what we have observed in other marriages, whether healthy or broken.

Our earnest desire is that you have the most dynamic, nourishing Christ-centered marriage possible in order that you might not only flourish as a couple and as a family, one that deeply honors God, but one that also offers hope to those who are hurting in your sphere of influence. May your marriage be a haven of rest, refreshment, and reconciliation for others-all unto the glory of God! To be sure, marriage is always tough, but marriage can also be good!

While the following may not be all that needs to be said about what it takes to have a successful marriage, I believe they will help set you on an enriching and nourishing path to achieving a marriage that will not only last, but will also be healthy.

So, let us begin by considering one of life's biggest questions:

I. What is Love?

- A. One of the most thought-provoking questions with staggering implications depending upon the answer given is how one should define love?
 1. Many answers have been given throughout history:
 - a. Love is mere biological instinct;
 - b. Love is a moral value and custom that has evolved over time within one's society or subculture;
 - c. Love is wishful thinking in a meaningless world;
 - e. Love is conformity of nature;
 - f. Love is pleasure;
 - g. Love is an undefinable concept.
 2. However, when we come to the Bible we discover that not only does the God of the Bible define what love is, but He also historically demonstrated that

love beautifully and perfectly in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In essence, "Love is the commitment of the will to the true good of another person." ~ J. Budziszewski

- II. If love is the commitment of the will to the true good of another person, then how does one "unpack" that type of love in marriage? In other words, what does it look like to commit oneself to the true good of your spouse? Consider the following four truths revealed in 1 John 3:16-17:

¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹

From this passage we discover four truths about love that we are called to intentionally inculcate into our lives: (1) Love is sacrificial; (2) love is the surrender of the self in the daily choices one makes; (3) love is proactively meeting each other's practical needs; (4) Love is ever so genuine; love intentionally.

A. Love is Sacrificial (3:16a):

1. 100% commitment by *both sides* (not 50% per partner).
 - a. Statistics are against you succeeding in marriage!
2. Measure every "supposed" sacrifice by the standard set at Calvary.
3. You will have to be willing to sacrifice your separate dreams, plans, & purposes with no jealousy or bitterness.
4. *Every resource* is to be redirected to the commitment of the will to the true good of your spouse.
5. Never allow the unknown, the precarious, and the pleasurable to immobilize you. In other words, never allow your circumstances to dictate the temperature and mood of your marriage. "Oh, Father, with every difficult and pleasurable situation, give us the eyes to see through the temporal and into the eternal!"

B. Love is Self-Surrendering in the moment-by-moment details of daily decisions (3:16b):

1. Love is not self-serving. Said differently, you are called to continuously, constantly, and consistently surrender your schedule, plans, dreams, and goals-if it costs you dearly. Love is the surrender of the self.

¹ *The New King James Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1982, S. 1 Jn 3:16-17

2. Surrendering your self-centered ways demands letting go of your agenda in order to allow the other person to flourish.
3. Self-surrendering also means stepping up to the plate and doing what is in the true good of another. You have to let go of anxiety and fear and do what is right, honorable, and trustworthy.
4. This also means surrendering the loose use of your tongue.
5. Be wise, not foolish.
6. This also means accompanying and striving to enjoy what the other spouse enjoys doing.
7. Learn how to “see” your spouse from his or her point of view.
8. You also have to self-surrender any seed of anger, resentment, and bitterness when you believe or feel that you have been wronged by your spouse. You must learn how to forgive immediately, unconditionally, and repeatedly. You forgive them just as Christ has forgiven you for all your acts of rebellion, contrary desires, and conflicting preferences.
9. Refuse to bring up “past mistakes” that have wounded you in order to use them as tools to get what you selfishly want.
10. Strip yourself of self-centeredness for you can’t change your spouse; they are what they are and you can never change your spouse. Allow God to change their lives as you allow God to control you.
11. Do not deny your spouse intimacy. Instead, allow intimacy to help bring about reconciliation.

C. We Demonstrate Love by *Consistently & Proactively* Meeting each other’s Practical Needs (17a):

1. Anticipate the practical needs of your spouse.
2. Meet the practical needs of your spouse.
3. Exceed the practical needs of your spouse.
 - a. Once again, you can’t change your spouse.
 - b. Meeting needs is on-going.
 - c. Allow Jesus to infuse His strength into you (Phil. 4:13).

D. Love is Ever So Genuine (17b):

1. Love each other intentionally
2. Learn how to forgive-no matter how painful the problems become.
3. Pursue each other as friends and as lovers.
4. Be a companion in every way.

IV. We see these four features throughout the pages of Scriptures (“Hesed”). In fact, “Every utterance of love in Scripture is bathed in the love of God and the love of the Son.” For example:

- A. God’s Covenant with Abraham
- B. God’s unconditional love for Israel
- C. Illustrated with the marriage of Hosea & Gomer
- D. We see this “Hesed” in the life and work of Jesus Christ. God, knowing at every point all our desires, mistakes, propensities, and every act of rebellion-past, present, and future, still died on the cross for our sins and rose bodily from the dead so that we might have eternal life, thus, dwelling in His presence forever more. When we place our trust in Jesus Christ in the open arms of faith, we become benefactors of over 215 incredible riches. These blessings can never be taken away from us!
- E. Promise of the bride, the church, to the Groom, Jesus Christ
 1. He is preparing His bride for the marriage. The day will come when He will marry her. She will be spotless, pure, and holy.
 2. We will be present for the Wedding Feast and celebration
 3. We will see the city where they will dwell.
 4. We will be with them for all eternity.
 5. Absolute and eternal consummation

V. Conclusion:

Love is the commitment of the will to the true good of another. God has your best interests at heart. Will you trust Him? Now because of all that He has done for you and is able to do through you, will you now commit yourself to living out what He has demonstrated before you throughout the pages of Scripture? Will you commit yourselves to reflecting the love through sacrifice and self-surrender? Will you intentionally commit to meeting each other’s practical needs in a way that is ever so genuine? If you will earnestly live out these four truths, then I suspect that you will not only have a dynamic marriage that will be able to stand the test of time with all of its trials and tribulations and ups and downs, but you will also have a marriage that will be a “light” to thousands

of people who have tasted or fully experienced brokenness, incompleteness, and tragedy in the midst of a world that loves darkness, pursues decadence, and generates despair.

VI. Final Thought:

I encourage you to seriously ponder upon, agree, and write out a vision and mission statement for your marriage. In other words, what do you want your marriage to be about? Take your vision and mission statement, frame it, and hang it on a wall where you and others will frequently see it.