

5 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

It's time to get down to the nitty-gritty. In other words, there's a need to do something.....and to keep on doing it. Remember all those sentimental Hollywood films you've ever seen, where at the end, "they lived happily ever after"? Forget it! It doesn't work like that. Do nothing, sit back, relax, and you'll end up with a broken marriage which nothing can save – not even the arrival of children. Your marriage is under attack – diabolical attack. Marriage was made in heaven, and Satan's out to destroy everything God has made. The 5 steps you'll read about below aren't suggestions – they're necessities! Put them into practice, and you've got a chance of surviving the devil's attacks. Ignore them, and you're headed for a crash landing!

1. **Receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord.** This is the foundation of the other 4 steps. By-pass this one, and you're guaranteed to come unstuck. God has given married couples a set of very clear guidelines for a successful marriage – but guess what? These guidelines all assume that both parties are vitally related to Jesus Christ. We are to relate to our husband or wife "in the Lord". That human relationship rests entirely on our relationship to Christ. We are able to forgive each other, because we've both been forgiven by Him. We show each other patience because we both know what patience He has demonstrated towards us.

Have you yet received Christ as king? When you think about your hopes of heaven, do you think automatically and exclusively about Jesus dying to deal with your sins? Stop at this point, and make sure that you've truly been reconciled to God through Jesus. Otherwise, it's off to jail. Do not pass "Go", and do not collect £200!

2. **Think of your marriage in terms of what you can give, and not what you're hoping to receive.** I once knew a man whose wife had died, and who within months was living with another woman. He told me quite openly, that here was a woman "who could look after my needs". Not a word of what he might do for her. This is a recipe for disaster. So many marriages go sour because the wife (usually) feels she's being taken for granted. If you're guilty of "using" your wife, or if you're looking for a wife or husband who will meet all your emotional, practical, sexual needs, repent! When Jesus came to earth in search of His "wife" (all those who would receive Him as saviour and lord), He didn't ask what we could do for Him. Instead, He gave Himself for us on the gibbet that was the cross.
3. **Pay careful attention to God's unchanging structures for marriage.** Marriage is not a DIY project. There are divine structures to put into practice. In the Old Testament, King Josiah decided to repair God's temple at Jerusalem. While the renovation was taking place, the workmen came across a dusty old book in the ruins. It turned out to be the Bible...God's word abandoned and forgotten. And when it was read aloud to the king, his reaction was horror, to discover how far the nation had drifted from God's laws in their ignorance. God's blueprint for millions of marriages today lies in ruins. Adultery, unhappiness, separation and divorce mark the spot where marriage once existed. And the cause isn't hard to find. Ignorance of what God has said. God has established radical guidelines for building successful marriages. They may surprise, even shock you. But for thousands of years, they've kept marriages that were in danger of dying, alive. Open the Bible now at Ephesians 5.22-33, or 1 Peter 3,1-7 or Colossians 3.19-20. These are God's words, and what God says once lasts for ever. No need to modernise or adapt them. He had already taken into account all possible circumstances before He said what He's said.
4. **Get rid of the word "divorce" from your vocabulary.** It appears that Hollywood's biggest stars are now so resigned to the fact that their marriages won't work out, that they're writing the divorce settlement of who'll get what when they split up, into the marriage contract! If you start thinking like that, you're onto a loser before you start. There are such things as biblical grounds for a divorce. But even that doesn't mean that if certain things happen, you are obliged to break up. Far from it! In the Bible, God used a prophet called Hosea as a visual aid to teach us what His love for His people is like. Hosea was told to marry a girl called Gomer. Her job? A prostitute. In fact so addicted was his wife to prostitution that Hosea was forced to "buy her out". God's dealings with

us are proof that no hole is too deep to be rescued from, that no sin is too disgusting to be forgiven by someone who's experienced the grace of God. So, if you've reached the point of no return with your husband or wife, go back to God for some more grace, and think again!

5. **Delight in your husband or wife.** Sex is not a dirty word. In fact, the Bible talks about it regularly – a lot more often than some Christians! It tells us that married couples are not to abstain from sexual relations for long periods of time (see 1 Corinthians 7.3-5). Why? Because it will lead one or both of the partners into unnecessary temptation. It also tells us to “delight” in our partner (see Proverbs 5.15-20). Now this is plain speaking....and good common sense. You see, if you're being satisfied at home in the marriage bed, you'll be a lot less likely to be wandering round the streets looking for cheap thrills. But remember (see Step 2 above), as you enjoy your wife's or husband's body in bed, make it your goal to give pleasure before seeking it for yourself.

So there it is – 5 steps for a successful marriage. How many are you putting into practice? Please remember that to survive the storms that will inevitably come your way in life, it's vital that your marriage is already in good shape – in other words, that these 5 characteristics are already in place before you leave port. Are you at peace with God through Jesus Christ? Have you got a view of marriage centred on the fulfilment of your partner rather than yourself? Are you aware of, and under the authority of God's declared guidelines for the marriage relationship? Have you kicked the word “divorce” into touch? Are you delighting in your mate? Maybe you need to get on your knees, and confess that the answer to one, some or maybe, all these questions is a sad “no”, but that from this day on, by God's great grace, you are resolved to go in a new direction.

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