

# Seven Principles for a Great Marriage; Or, How To Avoid Divorce

There are certain overriding principles that are to be applied to marriage in order to make it successful and fulfilling. Ignore these principles, and you are courting disaster: your marriage will end with a whimper, grinding its way to a slow, agonizing death.

## 1. The principle of vows: God holds people accountable for vows they make.

### 1.1 The nature of vows.

Numbers 30:2: “If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

Ecclesiastes 5:4-6:

- 4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it,  
For He takes no delight in fools.  
Pay what you vow!
- 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.
- 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

The response of God to vow-breakers is to destroy the work of their hands. Possible meaning, they will find no success in that activity for which they made the vows. Marital vow-breakers cannot consider marriage to ever again be successful for them.

## 2. The principle of little things (Song of Solomon 2:15): disasters do not destroy mar-

The one who makes a vow and does not fulfill it is a fool. And it is no defense to say to God that you did not mean it or did not understand what you were getting into.

We glibly speak our wedding vows, but they are more than just something that is expected at a wedding: they are contractual agreements attested to be God as the executor of the contract. They are holy promises that we make, not just to our intended spouse, but to God.

### 1.2 The commitment in vows: Deuteronomy 23:21-23.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23:

21 When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you.

22 But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you.

23 That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.

If we think that breaking a vow is anything less than sin, we are kidding ourselves.

Vow-breaking is not an option that is available to Christians.

## 2. The principle of little things (Song of Solomon 2:15): disasters do not destroy marriages: little failures do.

Song of Solomon 2:15 Catch us the foxes,  
The little foxes that spoil the vines,  
For our vines have tender grapes.

### 2.1 The little fox of petty irritations.

2. The principle of little things (Song of Solomon 2:15): disasters do not destroy mar-

Proverbs 25:15b: a soft tongue breaks the bone.

Proverbs 17:14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water,  
So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.

2.2 The little fox of careless treatment.

C. S. Lewis (*The Four Loves*): The event of falling in love . . . . In one high bound it has overleaped the massive wall of our selfhood; it has made appetite itself altruistic, tossed personal happiness aside as a triviality and planted the interests of another in the centre of our being.

Song of Solomon 5:2-6:

2 I sleep, but my heart is awake;  
It is the voice of my beloved!  
He knocks, saying,  
“Open for me, my sister, my love,  
My dove, my perfect one;  
For my head is covered with dew,  
My locks with the drops of the night.”

3 I have taken off my robe;  
How can I put it on again?  
I have washed my feet;  
How can I defile them?

4 My beloved put his hand  
By the latch of the door,  
And my heart yearned for him.

5 I arose to open for my beloved,  
And my hands dripped with myrrh,

3. The principle of personal needs: although two have become one flesh, both partners

My fingers with liquid myrrh,  
On the handles of the lock.

6 I opened for my beloved,  
But my beloved had turned away and was gone.  
My heart leaped up when he spoke.  
I sought him, but I could not find him;  
I called him, but he gave me no answer.

2.3 The little fox of financial pressures (most brought on by ourselves).

Proverbs 17:1: Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full  
of feasting with strife.

3. **The principle of personal needs: although two have become one flesh, both partners have needs to be met within marriage.**

3.1 The personal need for sexual fulfillment.

1 Corinthians 7:1-5:

- 1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.
- 2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.
- 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.
- 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.
- 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that

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you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. The context of this passage is sexual purity. The debt that is owed in verse three is the duty to give sexual pleasure to one's mate.

The result of sexual deprivation is sexual immorality (see v. 5).

Sensuous love with erotic overtones is God's intent for the marriage relationship.

#### 3.2 The personal need for encouragement.

Proverbs 31:23, 30-31.

23 Her husband is known in the gates,  
When he sits among the elders of the land.

30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain,  
But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
And let her own works praise her in the gates.

The reason that the husband is known in the gates as he sits with the elders is due to the fact that his wife is his own personal cheering section, and her desire is to build up her husband so that he will be successful out in the world.

In verse thirty-one, the work that will praise the godly woman in the gates is that confident husband: he is her greatest work.

The wife's self-esteem will come from the success, confidence, and happiness of her family (see verses 15, 21, 27).

4. The principle of reconciliation and forgiveness: true love is seen in its powers to heal

4. **The principle of reconciliation and forgiveness: true love is seen in its powers to heal and to restore.**

4.1 A. Forgiveness is not based on the merit of the one forgiven.

4.1.1 God and Israel: Isaiah 1:24-26.

God was under no burden to forgive and restore Israel: the Mosaic Covenant was conditional upon the obedience of Israel. God would still have been just in destroying utterly the nation, but, in love, He forgave and then promised restoration.

He showed a willingness to work with the guilty ones in order to effect the reconciliation.

4.1.2 Hosea and Gomer: Hosea 3:1.

Hosea 1:2: Hosea is ordered by God to marry a prostitute.

Hosea 3:1: After running away from her husband and ending up where she began, Hosea is ordered to find her and to restore her to her position in his home.

The picture is one of God's desire to forgive Israel, even though that nation had played the harlot with the false gods of Canaan.

4.1.3 Calvary.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Calvary is the epitome of forgiveness: Christ dying for those who not only needed to be forgiven but who actively hated Him even while He was dying for their sins.

Forgiveness is an expression of love: 1 Corinthians 13: 5, 7, 8a.

Can you talk of love for your mate and still not be able to forgive?

4.2 Forgiveness must be initiated without thought to the response.

5. The principle of purity: a strong love is seen in its refusal to be satisfied elsewhere.

Our example is Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God did not wait until we were repentant, sorry for our sins.

5. The principle of purity: a strong love is seen in its refusal to be satisfied elsewhere.

5.1 Purity comes through commitment.

Proverbs 5:15-23:

15 Drink water from your own cistern,  
And running water from your own well.

16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad,  
Streams of water in the streets?

17 Let them be only your own,  
And not for strangers with you.

18 Let your fountain be blessed,  
And rejoice with the wife of your youth.

19 As a loving deer and a graceful doe,  
Let her breasts satisfy you at all times;  
And always be enraptured with her love.

20 For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman,  
And be embraced in the arms of a seductress?

21 For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD,  
And He ponders all his paths.

5. The principle of purity: a strong love is seen in its refusal to be satisfied elsewhere.

22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked man,  
And he is caught in the cords of his sin.

23 He shall die for lack of instruction,  
And in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.

Ecclesiastes 9:9: Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

Job's commitment to purity: Job 31:1: I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?

The modern epidemic of marital infidelity (this includes Christian families) is the result of the refusal of men and women to make commitments to purity.

5.2 Purity is developed in the thought life of the individual.

What is wrong with lusting?

5.2.1 It will ultimately cause us to sin.

James 1:14, 15:

14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

5.2.2 It is a sinful practice in itself.

Matthew 5:28: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his

6. The principle of romantic love: although not the foundation of marriage (commitment

heart.”

5.2.3 It can be controlled.

Romans 13:13, 14:

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Galatians 5:16: I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

**6. The principle of romantic love: although not the foundation of marriage (commitment is), romantic love is the source of warmth, of excitement, and of surprise in marriage.**

By romantic love, is meant the emotional and physical facets of an intimate relationship between a man and his wife.

6.1 The need for date night: Song of Solomon 7:10-13.

Song of Solomon 7:10-13:

10 I am my beloved's,  
And his desire is toward me.

11 Come, my beloved,  
Let us go forth to the field;  
Let us lodge in the villages.

12 Let us get up early to the vineyards;  
Let us see if the vine has budded,

## 6. The principle of romantic love: although not the foundation of marriage (commitment

Whether the grape blossoms are open,  
And the pomegranates are in bloom.  
There I will give you my love.

13 The mandrakes give off a fragrance,  
And at our gates are pleasant fruits,  
All manner, new and old,  
Which I have laid up for you, my beloved.

The dangers of the marital rut: note the rut the two lovers got into in Song of Solomon 5:2ff.

It has been said that a rut is a coffin with the ends knocked out: it is truly a coffin for any love relationship.

Solomon wants to make love to his wife, but she is too tired, she just went to bed, she has her curlers in, she has a headache. By the time she is aware of her mistake and desires to make it right, he has left, hurt and disappointed.

### 6.2 The healing salve of romantic love.

After rebuffing her lover and his departure, she refuses to speak evil of him (Song Of Solomon 5:9-16). When he next sees her (Song of Solomon 6:4-9), he refuses to give in to wounded pride, but extols her beauty and the reasons why he loves her. He does not, however, mention anything of a sexual nature: he is not interested in making up merely for selfish reasons: he is trying to prove to her that his unselfish love is intact.

### 6.3 The emotional environment of romantic love.

Song of Solomon.

Twice she says "I am my beloved's and he is mine."

7. The principle of change: as with all growing, living things, marital love, properly nur-

Note Song of Solomon 7:10:

I am my beloved's  
And his desire is toward me.

6.4 The sacrificial response of lovers within physical love.

The difference in arousal and climax between men and women means that the man must restrain himself to allow his wife to achieve, not just an orgasm, but a complete love-making experience.

Note the following verses:

Song of Solomon 2:7: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,  
Do not stir up nor awaken love  
Until it pleases.

Song of Solomon 3:5: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,  
Do not stir up nor awaken love  
Until it pleases.

Song of Solomon 8:4: I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
Do not stir up nor awaken love  
Until it pleases.

**7. The principle of change: as with all growing, living things, marital love, properly nurtured, will deepen and intensify through the years.**

7.1 Change happens as we age.

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The need for good grooming and fitness. Note the descriptions of the two lovers in Song of Solomon: these people take care of themselves so that they will be attractive to each other.

The aging process need not diminish the beauty that we see in the other person. Careless physical habits (poor grooming, lack of exercise and physical conditioning, and bad eating habits) can diminish the ability for our spouse to find us attractive, but bad physical habits are not the result of aging, they are the result of carelessness.

7.2 Change will occur if we mature.

Change between lovers means a deepening of love, not a lessening of enjoyment.

7.3 Change is needed if we are to survive.