

## Remaining Happily Married

Our wedding anniversary is December 21. Since so much is going on in December, my wife and I decided to celebrate early. No matter how long you are married, it must be worked on to remain happy. God intended marriage to be enjoyed, not endured. The Bible says, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22). Being married is a good thing! Oh, that we might always believe this. No one ever plans to be unhappily married. I can think of no one who, on the day of their marriage, had anything other than high ideals to live out and enjoy the rest of their lives together. It is after days, weeks, and months that the seeds of unhappiness are sown. Let’s plant seeds of happiness instead! Hopefully, before you become married you will realize the principles I’m going to share with you. If you have already hit some detours on the road to the happily married life, don’t give up. The destination of married bliss is not just some vestige of our imaginations: it can and should be a reality. In two months from today, Barbara and I will have been married for forty-four years. We are not experts, but we are recipients (we give God praise) of the best God can give a husband and wife. Some life lessons we were taught, but others we learned the hard way. Let me now share with you simple principles that have helped us and, God willing, will help you and your spouse to remain happily married.

### 1. Never forget the original attraction.

Do you remember when you first laid eyes on your partner? Do you remember the first conversation?

I remember so well when I first laid eyes on my wife. My first impression was a strong manifestation of virtuous beauty. My second impression was she would never be available for my pursuit. Fifty-five years later, I still hold the awe of her virtue, and although she (by the grace of God) became available, I never take her presence for granted.

When our daughter Heather was still in college, I remember being in the Campus Church with her one night when she grabbed her mom and me and said with excitement, “Oh, there he is! That’s the boy I’ve been telling you about – the one who sits near me in most of my classes. He is so funny!” I looked at Heather who was casting her gaze in such a manner that was totally different from any look I had ever seen on her face. Talk about the look of love! They were friends and became much friendlier. I have often said the happiest married couples I know, started off as friends.

If I were advising you on how to stay happily married, I would say, keep looking for the humor you found in your courtship; you’ll need it. If she seemed wonderful when you met and courted, then my advice is never lose the wonder. If he was your hero at one time, let him always be your hero.

Here is an important principle Jesus reminded us of: We leave, we do not lose our first love. Great love is a matter of choice. Lasting love is a continuum of making the right choices. Our Lord said, “...Thou has left thy first love. Remember therefore...and do the first works...” (Revelation 2:4, 5). Go back to the early days of your first love and do the first things you did while you were falling in love. The things that brought you into love will help keep you there.

### 2. Concentrate on avoiding altercations altogether.

I shall never forget one man who walked up to my wife (then my fiancé) and me and said, “Well, some people may tell you how wonderful it is to be married but I am here to tell you – it is Hell...at

least at first, until you adjust!" My first impression was (tongue-in-cheek) what a friendly, happy guy! Although this approach was extreme, many share his opinion. It is true that every marriage goes through some adjustments, but it never has to be war. Too often we set ourselves up for failure. We are Christians and we should walk by faith, not by sight (II Corinthians 5:7). Let us then by faith concentrate on getting along. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). Christ is in the believer, so if you are reaching for help to live peaceably, He is there for you! "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13)

I strongly disagree with anyone who pushes having it out with your spouse in angry exchanges. And whoever developed the philosophy that making up is worth the fight is sadly mistaken. The best marriages I know have little or no fighting. There can always be healthy disagreements, but fighting is never right.

Here are some simple guideposts:

- 1) Learn the trouble triggers. Certain subjects, certain comments can sometimes trigger altercations. Don't pull the trigger!
- 2) Look for the positive in them. Let the world criticize them, for they will be criticized in this world. You need to be their encourager! Give them praise for the good you see them do.
- 3) Don't be touchy. If your spouse cannot even kid you without being afraid you will read a wrong message, something is wrong. They should not have to walk around you as though they are on eggshells. Now, I am not defending or allowing emotional abuse. I am promoting a sense of humor. This leads me to the next point of today's talk.

3. Nurture one another in an atmosphere of fun.

The Bible says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). Show me a marriage that is falling apart, and I'll show you a marriage that lost its sense of humor a long time earlier. Take a joke on yourself. If we learn to laugh with our mates at our bloopers, we will be appreciated. If we take ourselves too seriously and fail to see the humor in our faux pas, we will create an atmosphere that "drieth the bones".

4. Stay ravished.

The Bible says in Song of Solomon 4:9, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." The Bible also says, "...be thou ravished always with her love" (Proverbs 5:19). The meaning of "ravished" is very unusual. In Hebrew, the definition is "to be intoxicated". In English, it means to seize and carry away. Although this word is often used in a negative connotation, we will give you a positive way of looking at becoming intoxicated or carried away with your spouse. Drink often at the cup of romance. Be bold in expressing your love. Be generous in loving your wife or husband. Give freely of yourself. Be transparent. Let no one come between you, not even your children. Speak often of them. This also tells the world that you are not available – you are taken. Indeed, you should be taken away with their love. "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love" (Song of Solomon 2:5). There are the words of one who loves so deeply that they are pining for the presence of their beloved.

Let me encourage you to write love letters to your beloved; it will do you both good. Verbalize, vocalize, become mesmerized with your wife or husband. Words will stir us to the ravishing point. Have you read a book, watched something or heard something that brought tears to your eyes or laughter to your heart? Organized, formulated words will enflame love. "Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice..." (Song of Solomon 2:14). Don't wait until next week; this week, walk with your beloved and talk with your beloved. If your schedule is too busy, change your schedule. You started out happily married. Now, with God's help, finish the course by determining today to remain happily married. "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (Proverbs 1:5).

- Pastor Pope -