

## 84. STABLE HOMES PRODUCE HAPPY CHILDREN (or Seven Ways to Have a Happy Marriage)

**Bible Reading:** Mark 10:6-9; Ephesians 4:18-33.

**Aim:** To identify, memorise and apply 7 Basic Keys for a strong & happy marriage and secure children.

A preacher, before marrying a couple, once said, "I'd rather have a funeral than a wedding. When you bury someone it stays done." He was a deeply concerned man. He had seen so many marriage break-ups. He asked, "Are these people committed to make it work - no matter what?"

**Note:** Divorce has reached epidemic stages in the US and Australia. It has happened during our lifetime, for example:

In 1900	1 in 100 marriages ended in divorce.
In 1960	14 in 100 marriages ended in divorce.
In 1987	40-50 in 100 marriages ended in divorce.

### Divorce has tripled since 1900.

In an article, *Too Many Divorces, Too Soon*, noted anthropologist, Margaret Mead, showed how selfishness and growing irresponsibility destroys half of all marriages - and many of the children they produce. Writing in the February 1974 *Redbook* magazine, she said:

"In our generation divorce has become a part of the American way of life.....We no longer deeply believe that two people who have made the choice to marry should necessarily try to weather the storms that shake any vital, intimate relationship. Instead, more and more, our answer to a difficulty in marriage is: try it again with someone else."

All too often the motivation for changing marriage partners in such circumstances is the hope of finding someone who will please *me* - do things *my* way - meet *my* standards. If both husband and wife have this selfish, immature "me-first" attitude, someone is certain to be sadly disappointed.

The arrival of a child often triggers the crisis. Immature young couples who have not really learned how to give themselves to "living for the other" cannot cope with the pressure a baby creates. Margaret Mead writes:

"Unprepared for parenthood, two young people who have become very close may see the new baby as an interloper. Or, if they are already restless, the baby may become just one more obstacle to pleasure and freedom. The mother is permanently stuck at home. The father is almost equally confined-or goes out alone. There is no money now for pleasure and almost nowhere the young couple can go for amusement with the baby. Then our current relief that a speedy divorce is the way out of the dilemma begins to take effect..... each accuses the other of things they both fear and long for. These being freedom from responsibility, a chance to get away, longing for better opportunities in life and a way out of their unhealthy situation."

Couples who separate end up with deep hurts. When there are children (and there are millions), they suffer the most. In addition to the millions who actually separate, many couples share a house and children but do not actually have a real home and marriage.

Children from such families suffer in many of the same ways that children do whose parents actually separate. All these tragedies do not have to happen. They can be prevented. Learning and applying seven basic concepts will enable any couple to build a happy, stable and secure home - a home which cannot be destroyed.

These are:

1. The Bible is God's rulebook and instruction manual for marriage.
2. Marriage is a permanent, unbreakable union.
3. Marriage cannot be a 50-50 proposition. Each partner must fulfil his or her own responsibilities 100% whether their partner does or not.
4. Both the husband and wife must recognise they have distinctive personal needs which can be truly satisfied without guilt only in the marriage relationship.
5. At the same time both partners must be committed to recognising and meeting their partner's needs which while different from their own are just as real and deeply felt.
6. All differences must be resolved God's way.
7. Recognise that a stable marriage must be based on trust and that a person can be trusted only as he or she is willing to trust the other completely.

Let us look at and apply these seven concepts in order to have good marriages ourselves, be able to teach others and prevent problems for them.

### 1. FOLLOW GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BIBLE.

God thought up and instituted marriage. Marriages fail when people try to live together by their own rules rather than by God's rules. The tragic results are:

- a) Homes break up.
- b) Lives get shattered.
- c) Loyalties of children become divided.
- d) Children get bruises that hurt them all their lives.
- e) Dreams of the bride and groom become nightmares.

All because a couple ignores the Bible.

When a family regularly attend church together, the divorce rate is 1 in 50 (2%).

When both partners have received Christ as Saviour and faithfully follow God's guidelines for life and marriage, the divorce rate is 1 in 1525. Therefore, a Godly Christian has a 700 times better chance of success in marriage than has an unbeliever. WHY?

Because, by following God's instructions in the Bible, we can succeed. By ignoring God's way, tragedy results.

**Principle:** For success in any area in life, read and follow the instructions.

Therefore, to improve your chances 700-fold:

- a) Receive Jesus Christ as Saviour now.
- b) Get baptised, testifying that your old life and way of doing things died with Christ and is finished, and that you have been raised to a new way of life to do things God's way.
- c) Commit yourself personally to doing right.
- d) Read your Bible and pray every day with your partner and family.
- e) Be active in and attend every service in a Christ-centred, Bible-believing church, WHETHER IT IS CONVENIENT OR NOT. You will hear God's principles for living explained. You will be challenged to apply them.
- f) Look for opportunities to serve the Lord together. This will make you others-centred. Stable marriages are successful marriages.

## 2. REAFFIRM YOUR MARRIAGE AS A PERMANENT COMMITMENT and AN UNBREAKABLE UNION.

In the marriage vows, you promised “for better or for worse . . . till death do us part.” This is Bible-based. Today, people see this merely as a ritual, but God says, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Matthew 19:6. Because people take their commitment very lightly, many marriages break up for immature and silly reasons. Then the unresolved problems, hurts and conflicts from the first marriage often prevent a second marriage from being really successful. God wants to bless your marriage and use you to bless each other, your children and others.

**Challenge:** *To give stability to your marriage and security to your spouse, commit yourself now to stay married forever, no matter what. Then, tell the children of this commitment if old enough to understand, as it will give them security when they see their friends parents divorcing. It will also build their foundations in the attitude that their marriage is forever as well.*

## 3. MARRIAGE IS NOT A 50/50 PROPOSITION.

**(Each partner must fulfil his/her responsibilities 100%, whether the other partner does or not!)**

Vows, if taken seriously, can keep a marriage together, but vows will not build a happy home. A home which is both secure and happy must be built on a real understanding of what makes a marriage successful. The slogan “marriage is a 50-50 proposition” is heard frequently. It sounds logical. However, the logic behind it can destroy many marriages. The basis of a 50-50 marriage is, “If you will do your part, I will do mine.” It leads to tragedy because there are times in every marriage when someone fails. In a 50-50 marriage, this causes the other partner to step back and refuse to do his 50%. Then the battle rages.

The 50-50 marriage is not God’s way. The husband and wife who start marriage on a 50-50 basis will always be checking to see if the partner is fulfilling his or her 50%. When one partner falls short, bitterness results in the other. The partner who feels cheated will withhold some of his 50% in an attempt to even the score. Things get worse. Even 90%-10% marriages will not work. The partner who is willing to give 90% will have a tendency to check to see if the partner is really fulfilling his or her 10%.

God’s way in marriage is 100% - 100%. Each partner is expected to give his or her 100% even if the other partner fails completely. If only *one* partner in the marriage faithfully gives his 100%, the home cannot be destroyed. God uses right actions and attitudes of the faithful one to straighten out and restore the failing partner.

God’s instructions for the 100% - 100% marriage are found in Ephesians 5:18-33. Different instructions and responsibilities are assigned to both husband and wife:

### Wife:

- a) Submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. (Note that it does not add “if he does right and fulfils his responsibilities.”)
- b) A wife should not nag, complain, lecture or teach her husband. She will win him to Christ by her behaviour. 1 Peter 3:1. When a man fails to be what he should be in marriage, God deals with him. Too often, the man does not hear the Lord or feel the Lord’s pressure because he hears his wife too much and feels her pressure too much.

### Husband:

- a) Head of the home. This does not mean that the wife is inferior, as seen from 1 Corinthians 11:3, “The head of Christ is God.” Being under authority is not a position of inferiority. Jesus is God and is equal with the Father in all ways, yet in coming to earth as a man and dying for us, He submitted Himself to His father in all things. (Note: In submitting to His Father, He did not become inferior. He did all things because His Father wanted it, and He loved His father. Submission is not a mark of inferiority.)
- b) Love your wife enough to die for her. God, after telling wives to submit, severely limits the man’s right to do anything that he pleases. God takes away man’s right to use his authority irresponsibly by telling him, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” Christ loves us as in Romans 5:8, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Seeing Christ’s love transform our hearts and brings us to love Him, so too a husband’s patient, long-suffering love will finally win the wife’s heart and change her behaviour. Christ does not cleanse and perfect us by beating on us. He uses His Word. God has no 50/50 marriage arrangements. Each partner is called upon to fulfil his/her own 100%, even if the other does nothing. God is not calling us to a life-long martyrdom, but will use these qualities to change the partner.
- c) Be filled with the Holy Spirit and be not drunk with wine (Eph. 5:18). As we are constantly filled with God’s power and love, we can be the husband and wife He calls us to be.

*What if we have not been giving 100%?*

- a) Confess these failings to the Lord in detail.
- b) Ask your spouse for forgiveness for failing to be the spouse that God wants.
- c) Start submitting sweetly and lovingly.

## 4. RECOGNISE THAT EACH HAS DISTINCTIVE PERSONAL NEEDS.

These needs can be truly satisfied without guilt only in the marriage relationship. Meet each other’s needs. If you do not, then the security and stability of your home will be endangered. Both husband and wife have different but real needs.

### **Question 1: What is one big reason for marriage break-ups here?**

- A: When someone else outside the marriage begins to meet the emotional needs of the other. When this happens, the spouse is drawn almost irresistibly to the outsider. Then comes divorce.

Many fine people get caught in this trap without realising why. They do not understand that the strong attraction they feel for someone other than their partner is just the result of the other person meeting an emotional need which should be fulfilled by the marriage partner. When two people are meeting one another’s basic emotional needs there is a strong and growing desire for a complete physical relationship. Recognising our basic emotional need and seeing that it can be fulfilled without guilt only within the marriage relationship is a vital protection against tragedy.

### **Question 2: What are these basic emotional needs of the husband and wife?**

- A: God tells husbands and wives how to meet each others needs. “Let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”Ephesians 5:33

**Question 3: What does a wife need?**

- A: a) Love.  
 b) To hear that she is loved.  
 c) To receive regular evidence and reassurance of her husband’s love, such as the thrill of little gifts, remembering important dates and events, and tokens of love.  
 d) Security, protection, home maintenance, etc.

**Question 4: What does a husband need?**

- A: a) To be respected and revered.  
 b) To know that his wife really thinks that he is the greatest.  
 c) To be assured of her respect, especially when he fails in some way.  
 d) To know that his wife is dependent on him, just as the church is dependent on Christ.

When the husband and wife do not recognise and work to meet the needs of their partners, grave dangers result. For example, a man who on the job is competent in accomplishing his assignments, and is polite, courteous and appreciative of the help of others, will find a woman respecting him (especially if she works for him). Because the woman is meeting his need for respect, he will be drawn to her. He will start desiring to meet her needs.

Soon he will compare the respect of the woman on the job with the nagging of his wife. The woman at the office or in the plant does not know that he does not take out the garbage and leaves his dirty socks or underwear on the bathroom floor. The woman on the job will not point out his failings (particularly if he is her boss) as his wife does. The woman on the job is in danger also. She does not realise that this very competent, appreciative man at work has all the shortcomings of her own husband. In the casual relationship at work (or wherever) these two people do not have to share unpaid bills, sick children, the need for a new washer, a second car, etc. Without realising it, they soon find themselves meeting one another’s basic needs. The man at work will be supplying the attention and kindness the woman needs. She will be giving the man the respect that he desires. Where two people are meeting these very basic needs for love and respect, the desire for a complete physical relationship becomes overpowering. Soon there is another broken marriage. It is happening all the time.

Recognising your own basic need for reverence and respect (men) or love and attention (women) is an important safeguard against slipping into a relationship where these needs are met outside of marriage.

**5. MAKE IT YOUR LIFE’S GOAL TO MEET YOUR SPOUSE’S NEEDS.**

Their needs are just as real and deeply felt as yours. Husbands cannot know from their own experience how much wives need to be loved. They cannot really understand how wives need regular assurance and evidence of that love. Wives, from their own experience, cannot comprehend how their husbands need reverence and respect. The only way a husband or wife will ever come to realise that their partner has a real and deeply felt need, is to recognise his or her own personal needs.

**The Husband.** By seeing and admitting how much he needs respect and reverence from his wife, the husband is then able and prepared to understand that his wife also has a real, but deeply felt need.

**The Wife.** The only way a wife can really experience, feel or share the great need her husband has to be revered and respected, is to recognise her own deep hunger for love and the assurance of it.

When they see their own need, they are prepared to realise that a partner’s need, while different, is just as deep and real.

**Lesson: Recognising our own emotional needs and seeing that our partner also has needs which are just as real and deeply felt as ours, will bring us a willingness to give ourselves to meeting the needs of our partner. As we do so, God will see to it that the partner begins to meet our needs.**

**The key to blessings in marriage is: Make it your life’s goal to meet the needs of your partner.**

In doing so, you will see your own needs met by God. “Give, and it shall be given unto you.” Luke 6:38. This verse reminds people of money, but the principle goes much deeper than money.

God implies that we will get much more than we give. This principle applies in every area of life:

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|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| If we give LOVE.....        | we will get LOVE.          |
| If we give HELP.....        | we will get HELP.          |
| If we give ENCOURAGEMENT... | we will get ENCOURAGEMENT. |
| If we give A SMILE.....     | we will get A SMILE.       |
| If we give HATE.....        | we will get HATE.          |

Therefore, when we give ourselves to meeting the needs of others, we will find others meeting our needs. This is especially true in marriage, and also true in Christian work, soul winning and disciple-making. Therefore, when both partners satisfy the other’s needs, they become more and more important to each other, every part of the relationship blossoms and becomes fruitful. Problems which brought division will now bring husband and wife closer together. The physical relationship in marriage becomes completely fulfilling, and once other basic needs are met, then a life-long commitment can be made to satisfy the other’s longings.

**6. RESOLVE DIFFERENCES GOD’S WAY.**

**Eight Downward Steps Toward Divorce:**

1. Long before a man or woman “puts away” his or her partner in divorce, there is always a “putting away” of the person from real companionship, communication and oneness.
2. When real closeness and union in marriage is broken, they are forced into a subtle form of adultery. This means that they seek to have their needs for companionship, meaningful conversation, oneness, attention and respect fulfilled by someone other than their marriage partner. This is “adultery” - diluting of marriage. Adultery has a broader meaning than just illicit sex outside marriage. God described Israel’s worship of false gods and seeking help from them as adultery. Adultery (in a broad sense) = seeking to have one’s needs met and fulfilled other than through the God-ordained channels method. Therefore if a man “puts away” his wife from real oneness with himself and she seeks a substitute in soap operas, books, materialism, a job, or other things, he has forced her into a form of adultery. This type of “adultery” always precedes the actual illicit physical union outside marriage.

Such “putting away”..... the breaking of real oneness and communication in marriage....results from unresolved differences, unhealed hurts and unforgiven offences. Often the differences are very small. If they are not resolved, however, they will destroy real communication and oneness in marriage. The couple may continue sharing a house, smiling at each other, and having a physical relationship (although it will not really satisfy). However, the real union is ended. Because some hurt has not been healed, one partner “puts away” the other from the very centre of his life and existence. The “putting away” is done when one partner’s expectations are dashed again and again.

3. To avoid further hurts, the offended partner withdraws and erects a wall of protection.
4. The hurt person may seek to “get even”. This hurts, offends or irritates the other person.
5. He or she then erects a barrier or wall also.
6. Even if divorce does not result (and it does not, in many cases), the marriage relationship becomes a stiff, cold, formal one, without real life, love or meaningful communication.
7. The partners no longer meet one another’s needs.
8. Adultery (physical or emotional) results, as empty people seek fulfilment outside marriage.

**What is the solution to this problem?** God recognised the danger. It can happen in marriage or in any relationship between people. In two places in the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus gives procedures and assigns responsibilities through which all wrongs and hurts can be healed. In Matthew 18:15 the Lord says: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Going to the person who has offended **with a proper attitude** is the key to seeing differences resolved. The proper way to approach a person who has offended is to go quietly and say “I need to ask your forgiveness. I got very upset with you because of.....It was wrong for me to react in this way. Will you forgive me?” In 99 cases out of 100, the other person will grant forgiveness and seek forgiveness for their own wrongdoing. The offender may or may not acknowledge his own wrongdoing immediately. Give God time to work on him, once you have confessed your own wrong attitudes or reactions.

Taking the blame in this way, without looking at the wrongs of the other party, is God’s way of reconciliation. The Lord Jesus, in seeking to restore fellowship between God and man, took upon Himself everything which separated us from God. He took all of man’s sin and shame and guilt. Once He took our sin, we were made free to come back to Him. Our union with Him was renewed. He is to be our pattern. In Ephesians 4:32 we are told to forgive one another as He forgives us, “And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you?”

#### **How did the Lord forgive?**

Christ has done no wrong. Yet He took all of our guilt, blame, shame and punishment. For this reason we were freed to be one with Him again. We should be willing to do the same for others . . . and particularly for our marriage partner. When we truly forgive, we must put ourselves in the place where we can be hurt again. This is what the Lord Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. He said that instead of getting even (an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth) we should turn the other cheek (expose ourselves to getting hurt again). We have the same obligation when we realise that someone (including our husband or wife)

feels wronged by us. God says that if we realise (or sense) that we have offended someone we should go and get it settled. The surest way to settle any difference is by using God’s way of reconciliation. If we ask God, He will show us our fault.

Once forgiveness is granted, the foundation is laid for restoring communication and an openness in marriage. Without it, little differences and hurts erect high walls between two people who are supposed to be one. In effect, one or both partners “puts away” the other. Even if no divorce results (immediately or longterm), one of two things happen. The home may become an ‘armed camp’ or, where there are few ‘open battles’, the relationship becomes a distant, formal one without the real oneness and blessings which marriage should produce. To avoid this tragedy, marriage partners should really commit themselves to resolving differences in God’s way, rather than just “getting over them”.

#### **7. TRUST ONE ANOTHER COMPLETELY.**

A stable marriage must be based on trust. A person can be trusted as he or she can trust the other completely. There must be trust to forgive and to go on when the other person has failed.

The alternatives to trust are (a) jealousy, (b) suspicion, or (c) protective walls built to hide behind.

We can give our partner unconditional trust only if we can trust the Lord to keep him right, and straighten him out if he fails. Husband and wife must commit themselves to earning the trust of their partner. This trust is commanded and demanded by the Word of God.

- a) Husbands must be able to trust their wives. Of woman, God says, “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.” Proverbs 31:10,11.
- b) Wives must also be able to trust their husbands. Only by trusting, can a woman obey the Word of God which says, “Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” Eph. 5:22.

Trusting God or our spouse can’t be based on feelings or what is likely to happen. Trust is the result of a decision which we act upon.

**CONCLUSION:** Accepting and consistently applying these seven basic prerequisites will build stable, secure homes. Husbands and wives should study and memorise the foundational concepts for a stable marriage. Whenever one partner or the other senses that differences are developing in the home, prayerfully checking the list will show the cause. By faithfully following this practice, either partner in the marriage can be used of God to build a stable, secure home which cannot be destroyed.

Excerpts from “**Growing Up God’s Way**” by *John A Stormer*.