

SECRETS OF A SATISFYING MARRIAGE

Sterling UMC
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1 Corinthians 13

A young minister was faced with his first wedding ceremony. He sought counsel from an older preacher. The experienced man told the young man everything he needed to do and made one final suggestion: "If you ever forget what you are supposed to say," he advised, "just quote Scripture. It is always appropriate to quote Scripture." The young man did a great job in conducting the marriage ceremony, until he pronounced the young couple husband and wife. At that point, his mind went blank. He did not know what to say. He remembered the advice of the old preacher to quote Scripture, so he quoted the only verse that came to his mind. It was, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

This morning as we continue our series on Building Strong Families, we are going to look at the subject of marriage. Why marriage? Because a strong marriage is the foundation is the foundation of a strong family.

Now over the course of my 18 years in the ministry I have officiated at the wedding ceremonies of well over 200 couples. From the starry eyed young couples to the mature couples finding love and happiness late in life. Every time I do I am struck once again by the vows that are exchanged and the promises that are made.

At most of these ceremonies I like to read the beautiful and poetic words of 1 Corinthians 13 that you heard a moment ago. Why? Because simply put, love is the glue that holds a marriage together. You see this famous "love passage" helps us understand what love is and what it looks like in daily life. Love is not primarily a feeling but an action.

This kind of love is a selfless and unconditional commitment to imperfect people. And that is what marriage is. Marriage is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person.

Philippians 2:2 (Phillips) *"Live together in harmony and love, as though you only had one mind and spirit between you."*

God's ideal for marriage is harmony, intimacy (love) and unity (one mind). The reality is that a lot of our relationships are disharmony, conflict and disappointment. Have you heard the one about the guy who said "When I got married, I started off with an ideal; a few months later it turned into an ordeal. Now I'm looking for a new deal." What happened? Good marriages don't just happen. It takes energy, effort to make a marriage work.

As we begin this morning, I've got some good news for you: You don't have to change your life completely to make your marriage better. Just some minor changes in the way you relate to your spouse will make major differences in your relationship.

This morning I want to share with six secrets to a satisfying marriage. These so called secrets are not really secrets at all. They are things that are based on the kind of love so eloquently elaborated in 1 Corinthians 13. They are things that every one of us know and understand. It's just that it is good for us to be reminded about them every once in a while. So what are the six ingredients of a satisfying marriage?

1. COMMUNICATION

Proverbs 13:17 (LB) says, "*Reliable communication permits progress.*" For progress to take place in your marriage, you've got to talk to each other. The problem is the average couple only talks to each other together, alone -- four minutes a day. You can't make any progress if you don't talk to each other.

One of the reasons we have problems in communication is because men and women communicate differently.

Have you heard the one about the woman went to a judge and told him "I want to divorce my husband." The judge said, "Do you have any grounds?" She said, "No, but we do own a half acre in the mountains." The judge said, "I mean, do you have a grudge?" She said, "No, we park the car in front of the house." The judge said, "Does your husband beat you up?" She said, "No, I always get up before he does." Frustrated the judge said, "Why do you want a divorce?" She said, "We just aren't able to communicate."

Sometimes in marriage, communication is difficult. It is a skill you must learn. The major reason you have communication problems is you expect your mate to think like you do. And they don't. I can't tell you how many times in our 25 years that Robin and I have gotten frustrated with each other because of communication. We are trying to say the exact same thing, but we each say it differently. We need to learn to listen and to really hear what each other is saying rather than what we think they are saying or want them to say.

And our communication must be based on truth and love. Ephesians 4:15 (NIV) says, "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." A very wise woman I know once said this: "Speaking the truth without love is brutality. Speaking in love without truth is hypocrisy." Paul puts it like this in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

For our marriages to be successful we've got to learn to communicate.

2. CONSIDERATION

1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV), "Love is patient, love is kind." Consideration means paying attention to what people say, paying attention to what people feel not invalidating feelings and saying "You shouldn't feel that way!" It means being patient, showing common courtesy, treating each other with respect and kindness, helping them any way you can. Ephesians 4:2 (TEV) *"Show your love by being helpful to each other."*

Unfortunately we are often more considerate of the needs and wants of others than we are of our own wife or husband. Why is that? Being considerate of others is a fruit of God's Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." The first person one on which we should practice these virtues is with our spouse.

It means I help my mate when they ask. I look for ways to lighten my mate's load. Do you see it as one of your goals in life, how can I make it easier on my wife/husband? How can I lighten the load? That's what consideration is about.

3. COMPROMISE

1 Corinthians 13:5 (LB), *"Love does not demand its own way."* That is a mark of genuine love. It's unselfish. Do you demand your own way in your marriage? Either my way or the highway! Love it or leave it! You're always pushing for your way.

Having been a pastor for many years I know a lot of people stand at the wedding altar and they're saying, "I do" when secretly inside they're going "After I marry him or her, I'll redo them, I'll change him. I'll change her." That just doesn't happen.

What you need to know is this. The facts of life are:

1. Every marriage has conflict
2. No matter who you are, no matter how much you love them, how long you live together, you're always going to have some things you disagree on.

One of the things you have to learn in the school of marriage is how to compromise. You can't get your way all the time. I made a list of some of the things that usually require compromise in a marriage.

You're going to have to compromise on the way your kids are raised. On the way your money is spent. On when and how often you make love. You will have to compromise on how often you see the in laws. You have to compromise on those kinds of things. More marriages die from inflexibility -- an unwillingness to change than from anything else.

How willing are you to compromise?

4. COURTSHIP

Romance, physical affection, sex, fun, playfulness, having time to enjoy each other. God intended for your marriage to be that way.

Proverbs 5:19 (RSV), "*Let your mate's affection fill you at all times with delight.*" He says "at all times". In other words keep the courting going on in your marriage. If there was more courting in marriages, they'd be fewer marriages in court. The problem is that so often the things you did to win your mate's love, you've stopped doing now that you are married. You've got to keep on dating your mate.

Ladies, men by nature are very achievement oriented. We are goal oriented. They see you and want you in their life. They woo you, romance you, do all kind of things that they would never do -- movies, flowers, candy. The moment you are married, they (in their mind; they don't think this consciously) think subconsciously "Mission Accomplished! Now it's on to the next goal." The next goal is usually, "Now I've got to provide for this woman I love. I've got to provide for the family we're going to raise," which means he takes all that energy and turns it into his work. He is providing for the woman he loves and his kids. He is thinking it seems natural: "I've now got to provide for the people I love."

All of a sudden the wife goes, "What happened? He's not the knight in shining armor anymore. Instead of candy and kisses I get burps and gas. What happened?" She's feeling intense rejection when the guy's thinking, "This is how I show I love you -- the hard work."

We don't think alike. But you've got to have romance in your marriage all the time.

A man went to a psychiatrist with his wife. He said, "My wife is depressed. I'm really concerned. The psychiatrist said, "Could I talk to her privately?" Psychiatrist talks to the woman and finds she is just starving for affection. He brings her man back into the room and to model it, the psychiatrist walks over to the man's wife, gives her a big hug and a big juicy kiss. He said, "She needs this every day of the week." Guys are kind of dumb. The man said, "I think I can only get her here Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. . ."

Ecclesiastes 9:9 (NIV), "*Enjoy life with your mate whom you love.*" We need to date our mate. We need to make our relationship a priority. Keep the courtship going.

5. COMMITMENT

A college man walked into a photography studio with a framed picture of his fiancée. He wanted the picture duplicated. This involved removing it from the frame. In doing this, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back of the photograph: "My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed "Helen," and it contained a

P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back."

How many of you think she was NOT totally committed to that relationship?

When a couple stands before God and takes their vows of marriage they are taking on a very serious commitment. We all know those vows: We commit ourselves to one another "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part." That is a heavy duty commitment.

That is the kind of commitment that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 13:7 (NIV), "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Commitment means be willing to do whatever it takes to make the marriage relationship work. There are many who at the slightest hint of inconvenience and trouble run the other way. Their commitment is shallow and superficial. But that is not God's ideal. It is always too easy to walk out than it is to rebuild a relationship. It's always easier to run, than it is to rebuild. But it is always more rewarding to rebuild than it is to run.

The biggest enemy to commitment is selfishness. Misunderstandings and mistakes can be corrected if there is a willingness to do so. And if communication, and consideration, and compromise are the foundations on which the relationship is built then there is hope.

Now please hear me on this, there are some things that can kill a marriage and for which there is no excuse. Abuse, neglect, adultery, these are things that should not be tolerated and can destroy and permanently sever the vows of marriage. No one should be continually be subjected to these destructive behaviors. Sometimes divorce though regrettable is the only solution. But otherwise there should be an unwavering commitment to this sacred relationship.

6. CHRIST

You need communication. You need consideration. You need compromise. You need courtship. You need all of these things together – and you need commitment. But you need the sixth thing -- Christ -- to give you the power to do those things. Jesus Christ gives you the power and ability to do the other things when human love wears out. The Bible says this in Philippians 2:5 (NIV), "*Your attitude toward each other should be the same as that of Jesus Christ.*"

When you've got a husband and a wife both moving toward Christ it brings you together. Nothing will bring your marriage closer than when you both focus on Christ. When you move toward Him, it automatically brings you together in spite of all your differences.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV) says, "A **cord of three strands** is not quickly broken." The greatest thing you can do for your marriage is put Jesus Christ right in the center of it. How do you do that?

First, you invite Him to come into your life and you say, "Jesus Christ, come in and be the director and Lord of my life." If you haven't done that, do it. Don't wait. Then you say, "Together, we want to commit our marriage to Jesus Christ and we want to treat each other the way Jesus Christ treats us." When you do that you will find Christ bringing you closer and closer.

Good marriages do not just happen. They're not by accident. They take effort. They're built on these six ingredients. This is a great challenge. It's a greater challenge than building a career. But let me tell you that nothing is as rewarding as the fruit of that effort.

As we close this message, I want to remind you that every marriage has room for improvement. Maybe today you and your mate need to make a renewed commitment to say, "Let's work on our relationship making it better during these weeks ahead. Let's try a new start. Maybe let's see some of the barriers fall that have never fallen, that have continued to be there. Let's work through the hurt and the pain and really build our marriage."

Let us pray, "Dear God, help us to learn to better communicate. Help us to be more considerate of each other's feelings. Help us to compromise in areas of disagreement. Help us to make time for courtship. Help us to deepen our commitment, to each other and to You. Jesus Christ, we need You in our lives. In Your name we pray. Amen."