



A JOYOUS MARRIAGE

Putting All the Pieces Together

Broken marital relationships are becoming the rule rather than the exception. Here are seven areas in which you can strengthen and improve your own marriage.

By Richard Rice

It's tragic, but it's true! Many marriages today are in deep trouble!

Like jigsaw-puzzle pieces that seemingly defy solution, many marital troubles appear to be beyond resolving.

Personal problems, financial pressures, child-rearing difficulties, society's decreasing respect for marriage itself — these and other factors are contributing to

more and more marital failures and breakups.

In the United States, close to one in two marriages now ends in divorce, and the number of divorces is increasing in other countries.

The following letter illustrates the sorrow of this worldwide problem of marital decay.

"Dear Mr. Rice,

"I am writing to you as a last resort to save my marriage. I

don't know what has happened to the beautiful romance that Jim and I once shared. We laughed a lot, did things together and spent many evenings after dinner just sitting and talking at the table.

"We were so much in love for the first few years of our marriage, but something has happened to us.

"We were married in the Church about nine years ago, and have three beautiful young chil-

Photo by Warren Watson

dren. I desperately want them to grow up in a happy home — and ours sure isn't.

"As I now think about it, this frightful change in our relationship began happening about five years ago and our marriage has steadily gone from bad to worse. Our attitudes toward each other today, compared to what they were then, are as different as light is from darkness.

"By the time Jim gets home from work every night, I am completely worn out from cleaning, working, cooking, changing diapers, settling squabbles and all the dozens of chores that mothers must tend to.

"Jim is also tired when he gets home and just wants to relax, have a beer and read the paper. I'd like for him to entertain the children for a while so I can prepare dinner, but they get on his nerves and he yells at them. Then I get mad and yell at Jim.

"The only time Jim ever kisses me or shows any affection is when he wants to go to bed, and that really turns me off. I can't remember the last time he told me he loved me.

"We hardly ever go out anymore, and just don't seem to have any common interests except the children, and even here we can't agree on how they should be trained.

"Every time we try to discuss the problem, we just end up blaming each other. Jim gets mad and I start to cry. This makes him even madder. Yesterday, he finally asked for a divorce.

"Is there any hope for our marriage? I really don't want a divorce, but I can't go on living like this. Can you help us?

Sincerely,
A Troubled Wife"

There are specific reasons why marriages crumble. But there is a cause for every effect. Just as there are causes for marital diffi-

culties, there are steps you and I can take to promote joy and harmony in our marriages.

Here are seven areas in which we can concentrate our efforts to build the kind of happiness God meant every marriage to have.

Keep God at the center

The power to really love another human being with an enduring love comes from God's Spirit (Rom. 5:5). When we walk in fellowship with our Father the great God, He gives us a love with which we can love even our enemies (I John 2:5, Matt. 5:43-44). How much more, then, should we love our friends, and, most important, our own wife or husband and our children?

One reason for fighting and bickering is lack of prayer and Bible study. Frequent communion with God is vital in tapping that great reservoir of love that can smooth out any rough spots in human relationships.

The husband who will get on his knees and ask for God's help to love his family — who will root out selfishness and think of others first — will, through his God-guided actions, inspire his wife and children to return love and affection to him.

Similarly, a wife who does her part — who keeps close to God and acts on what God leads her to do — will inspire her husband.

The action of God's Spirit in a family builds a marvelous, beautiful unity. The absence of God's Spirit leads to a breakdown in character and respect.

Praying together can be a wonderful exercise for you and your mate. Your children can also spend time in prayer with you. Teach them how to pray and ask God to keep you all happy together, to guide your actions and to give you a right attitude, so your marriage and family will always remain strong.

Keep God in your marriage, making Him an integral part of your relationship.

Guard against worldly influences

Years ago marriage was held in

a much higher position of respect in society. Divorce was virtually unheard of and premarital sexual activity was taboo. Today, in sharp contrast, adultery, divorce, sexual promiscuity and pornography are rampant.

A raging devil is pumping his perverse ideas into homes and marriages through the media of radio, television, movies and printed materials. The media also influence us — negatively — with a deluge of advertisements from merchants who use subtle techniques to convince us that their product is not only the best, but also a necessity. Many fall for such strategies to the point of buying what they cannot afford, and end up in serious debt.

The inevitable anxiety and stress in such a situation often spawn bitter conflict. Each mate points an accusing finger at the other. The wife thinks the husband is not providing well enough, and perhaps this is the case. The children are unhappy because they have to wear hand-me-downs, don't have nice toys and lack recreational and educational opportunities.

Is it any wonder that one Brigham Young University survey concluded, "The couple that stays out of debt is more likely to stay together"?

Respect God-ordained roles

God ordained specific roles for marriage partners that, if performed responsibly, upbuild and strengthen marriage.

Ephesians 5:25 states, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." This admonition is a basic precept of Christian family structure.

God places great responsibility on the man, because he is the leader. He should be showing the way, setting the example, serving his family and looking out for their interests. When he has done these things first, the love his wife and children should have for him will naturally follow.

This is the precedent that Jesus Christ set, and that He is still practicing today. He not only

gave His life for us, but is now looking out for our needs and blessing us in manifold ways.

If you as a husband will follow this instruction and view your position as head of the family as an opportunity to love and serve, you'll find that your wife will reciprocate and do everything she can to help you.

The other part of God's instruction about the functions of marital partners is found in verse 22: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."

The word *submit* means to respond, to uphold your husband and to honor him. It is another way of saying to love him. It means showing concern for him, responding to his needs and encouraging him to face life's challenges and be a success.

You as a wife should want to do these things because your husband loves you, strengthens you, complements you and gives you all he has to offer — his time, energy, thoughts, spiritual help and encouragement — his life.

Keep your first love

When young people are dating, they are very careful to "put their best foot forward." They will dress nicely, make sure they are clean and neat and always show courtesy.

But once into marriage, when the radiance of that first love wanes and those excited feelings of newness and romance start to fade, standards begin to slip and lethargy creeps in.

When husband and wife let down on their appearance, become slovenly and neglect personal standards, their marriage will start suffering. What was once exciting adventure for both partners becomes dull routine.

The husband begins to take his wife for granted — she may no longer seem to be the lovely, romantic, desirable girl he courted. His compliments get farther apart, and he doesn't fully appreciate the effort she puts into the responsibilities she handles. He may not even notice the nice little things she does for him.

The wife becomes disenchanted with her job as housewife and homemaker. The man who was once her "Prince Charming" begins to lose his charm. She may reminisce on those relatively carefree, fun-filled days before marriage and, when she compares, her present life may seem like imprisonment.

In such a situation, an atmosphere of hostility easily develops.

God is the author of marriage. Maintaining personal standards not only shows respect for your partner, but also for Him. Your marriage relationship will greatly benefit if you will always be courteous, thoughtful and well-mannered. Seek to please each other in areas of dress and grooming. Continue to show appreciation for one another. Try to be more affectionate, grateful and understanding.

Communicate

Waiting until emotions have built up steam usually leads to an explosion. If something is really bothering you, get it out in the open and talk about it.

A basic key to marital harmony — and a source of many marital problems — is communication.

Never get angry at the same time. When you and your mate disagree, keep your temper under control. Curb your own anger. Let the other "blow off steam" if need be. One of you should always remain calm when the other is upset. Self-control helps greatly in coming to a peaceful solution.

Choose the right moment to discuss your feelings. For example, the wife shouldn't bring up irritations when her husband comes home tired, exhausted or worried, or when he is feeling pressure from other areas. He probably will not be able to listen with attention and patience. Wait to bring up problems or differences until he's more relaxed and in the right mood.

Really listen to what your mate is saying. God does not change, but we human beings are creatures of temperament. We need

to be aware of our mates' mood changes and not misread them. If you find your mate is having the "blues," don't pry, but be sympathetic and willing to listen if he or she wants to talk.

Likewise, if your mate is irritated by something you are doing, listen patiently to the complaint. Listen with your heart and mind as well as your ears and show that you are willing to resolve the situation.

Don't retaliate or point the finger of blame. Justifying oneself does not solve the problem, nor does accusing the other. Rather, admit where you may be wrong and express a desire to correct your mistakes and make peace. Then follow up with a determined effort to change.

A major key to promoting marital harmony is found in Christ's instruction in Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

And remember, the standards with which you deal with or judge your mate are the same standards by which you yourself will be judged (verse 2).

Stimulate each other

Mental stimulation is a powerful tool to keep a marriage exciting and healthy. Husbands and wives will experience some of their happiest moments when they talk about ideas and concepts they have been thinking about and want to share with someone else.

This sharing of ideas is different from solving conflicts or resolving differences. It has to do with hearty exchanges on a wide range of uplifting and educational subjects.

In order to be stimulating to each other in this manner, couples would do well to read widely and to keep their minds attuned to what is happening in the world. Be aware of news and social trends. Become knowledgeable on a wide variety of subjects.

Share your thoughts with each other and ask for feedback. These scintillating conversations will truly endear you to your mate and

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we must live by every word of God. If you live by every word of God, you will live according to the way of life that God has laid down in His Book, the Holy Bible.

It is the way of life that is the *abundant* life. It's the way of the happy, the cheerful life that simply *radiates*. It radiates sunshine and happiness, and it's always happiness within. The well is not dry. It's filled!

Now here is what this kind of life will mean. It means that you will be **RADIANT**. It means that God's Spirit in you will radiate cheerfulness and smiles, friendliness toward others, love, sincerity, vigor, calm courage, goodwill and interest in others, instead of being so self-conscious, with so much overinterest in your own self.

If the Spirit of God is *in* you, you will be plain and simple. You will put on no airs. There will be no posing, as most people do in the world. You will be natural, and not pretending. You will be honest and frank and unaffected, clean in mind and in body. You will be humble. **There won't be self-confidence. There will be faith in God, instead.**

You will be humble, but you will have THE FAITH and THE POWER OF GOD, whose power is unlimited. You will be strong through this faith of God. There will be no weakness, but great strength. You will have wisdom, and you will have courage. You will have everything, every resource you need.

You will be ready always to say "I don't know," if so it be. You will be ready, always, to admit error when it is so proved, to confess wrong and to *change* to what is right, wherever you are wrong. You will be ready to accept correction and reproof, and to act upon it no matter how humiliating or painful. You will diligently study to learn the right way and to live it, and you will study the Bible to find it.

You will face every obstacle that comes along — every difficulty, every problem and trouble — unafraid, in the full faith of

God, looking to Him for wisdom and knowing that He will guide you and deliver you out of it.

The attitude of a Christian

Here is the kind of attitude you will have. You will wish others to live their lives, too, up to their highest, their fullest, their best. You will be concerned for their welfare.

You'll try to help others every way you can, never to hurt or to injure. You will never meddle. You will never dictate, interfere or give unwanted advice, or speak ill of, nor give gossip about others. Never will you go around griping, complaining and murmuring things that make you and others unhappy.

You will always be willing to help others by giving them a chance, and mainly you can help others by helping them to help themselves, by encouragement, by setting a good example, by thus inspiring and uplifting others, giving advice only when it's welcomed, and when they want it and are willing to open their minds to receive it.

You will hew to the line of the one supreme goal of life, which should be to inherit the Kingdom of God, to be really born of God into the very Family of God. You will be relentlessly pursuing this goal with zeal, with enthusiasm, with drive and with energy fired by godly ambition, with hope, with faith, living by every word of God.

The Bible will be the authority that you obey, the authority that you look to for everything in your life.

You will be overcoming your own human nature and the world, resisting Satan, drawing nearer to God by **constant daily Bible study and by prayer, and by occasional fasting and prayer.** That is the Christian life. It's the *happy*, the *abundant life*.

It's yours for the asking. It's yours for the willingness to confess your sins to God and to repent of breaking His laws. It's yours if you're willing to do what He says. □

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vice versa, and expand your mind. This will do much to keep your marriage bright and vibrant.

Also, invite people out or to your home for visits as you can afford it — perhaps just for a cup of coffee. These get-togethers will build and sharpen your powers of observation and mental alertness.

Make a total commitment

Work is the one ingredient that is often missing when marriages collapse and disintegrate. It takes work to build a positive relationship and to keep commitment strong.

King David's prayer, after he was caught in sin, can be encouraging. It is found in Psalm 51. David was very sorry for his mistake and bitterly repented of it. He cried out to his Maker, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).

Like David, you can take your problems to God. Ask Him to create in you a clean heart. Pray for a right spirit and the courage to step out and turn things around. Husbands, take the lead to initiate a reconciliation. Resolve to sit down together in private to iron out differences and start a new life together.

Kneel down together before God in prayer and confess: "We're tired of all this fighting and arguing, and all these conflicts that make us unhappy and miserable. We're tired of doing it our way and ending up total failures. Please, Father, we want to live your way. Restore our love again. Give us love for each other."

Begin now to work at building the love God will provide. Your marriage, with the problems it may have, needn't be like an unsolvable puzzle.

Renew your marriage commitment, founded on God and His great love, and start, together, to build a marriage that is overflowing with happiness, love, accomplishment and success! □