

## How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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I want to talk to you about something today that is incredibly important. I want to talk to you about relationships and, in particular, marriage. Now, if you are not married, just hang on for a second, okay? I believe that having healthy, good relationships is sort of the oil in the gears of life. Without it, you have sand in the gears. When you have good, healthy friendships, when there is a good relationship with your kids, with your siblings, with your family, with co-workers—but when things are bad, if relationships are bad with people at work, you don't look forward to getting up in the morning and going to work. You may like what you do, but if these grating relationships are there, it can make life miserable. The most important relationship next to our relationship with God is our relationship with our spouse.

Now, if you are happily married, listen; you can learn more. You can have a better marriage than you have now. In fact, somebody with a good marriage is going to be interested in this because they know that good marriages just don't happen by accident. They are always growing and always wanting to learn. If you have a bad marriage, you really need to listen to this. If you are divorced and never want to get married again, you need to listen to this. If you are single and want to get married really bad, you need to listen to this. If you are single, never want to get married, and are not interested in getting married, you really need to listen to this because there will be some principles that will apply to all relationships. There will be some things that, if you listen, you will be able to apply to your life personally right now. I guarantee that these things will help you.

The thoughts that I am going to share with you are taken from the Scriptures. God designed us. He created man because He wanted relationship. God is the master of good, great, perfect, growing, and loving relationships. I actually got on a legal pad some time ago, and just sort of scribbled down some thoughts from the Scriptures. I'm going to share them with you. No one goes into anything, and no one starts any endeavor planning to fail. No one goes into business planning to fail. No one starts playing a sport wanting to end up in last place. In fact, I can remember even as a little kid, when I started playing Little League Baseball, there was a team that no one wanted to get picked for. It was the Giants. There was a team that everyone wanted to get picked for. It was the Braves because, virtually every year, the Braves finished first, and virtually every year, the Giants finished last. It wasn't just because the Braves got lucky. They had good coaching. They were always learning, and they practiced the things that made them successful over and over. They diligently practiced.

If you have a great marriage, you didn't just get lucky. People with great marriages and great relationships, are result of good coaching. It's the result of being willing to learn and wanting to learn. Then, employing and putting into practice those things that make relationships great. What I have done is just taken the word success, and we're going to use it as an acrostic. So, you are going to know when the message is nearing the end, that is, if you can spell. We begin with the letter S. If you want to have a great marriage, a growing marriage, there needs to be sacrifice. So, the first S stands for sacrifice. No marriage can flourish or reach its maximum potential without a willingness to sacrifice. Ephesians 5:25 NKJV says this,

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<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

Jesus sacrificed for the church. Jesus gave Himself. The Living Bible puts it this way. Ephesians 5:25 TLB says,

<sup>25</sup> And you husbands, show the same kind of love to your wives as Christ showed to the Church when he died for her.

I think it's the Message Bible. It says something along the lines of that it's a love marked by giving, not by getting. Selfishness is one of the greatest cancers to a marriage that there is, or to any relationship for that matter. It's been said that in marriage, two become one. The Scripture says that. God joins them together; the two are one. The problem is that a lot of couples spend the rest of their lives fighting over which one. He wants to have his way, and she wants to have her way. When sacrifice doesn't come into the picture, the marriage tears itself apart. We are called to be like Christ, especially men. I want to tell you guys, having a successful marriage, the brunt of the responsibility rests on our shoulders because we are called to be like Christ. We are called to sacrifice for our girls, to put others before ourselves, especially our wives. Philippians 2:3–4 NKJV, listen to it. It says, "Let nothing," that's a big word.

<sup>3</sup> Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,

In other words, don't be selfish. It goes on and says,

But in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

How appropriate for marriage. Both should try to outdo one another when it comes to putting the other first. Two marvelous things happen when we begin to sacrifice. Number one, you reap what you sow. It is a law that God has put into the earth. My friend, it works without fail. Galatians 6:7b NKJV says,

<sup>7</sup> For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

When I sacrifice for my Janet, my girl, we've been married for 42 years. Listen, we have a great marriage. She's my wife, she's my girl, and I'm just thankful to be married to her. I found out that when I put her first, when I maybe put my own desires, my own things that I perhaps want or want to do, I put that aside and put my wife first. It comes back to me, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. I always reap what I sow. Jesus sacrificed. We are to be like Christ, who sacrificed His life. Well, He reaped a whole lot of sons when He sacrificed His life. He sowed His life. He talked about His life being like a seed that was sown. Well, He reaped humanity, those who believe in and become part of God's family. When we sacrifice for the benefit of our partner, we put this law of reciprocity into effect, and we always end up being blessed ourselves.

I remember a lady contacted us one time. I actually got the letter. It ended up on my desk. We had some other people, but they said, "Pastor, we just really feel like you need to deal with this one." We have some very gifted people on our team who do their best to give scriptural answers to people who have legitimate questions. They gave this one to me, and I still remember it was a lady. She was just at her wit's end. Her marriage was falling apart. She said, "It seems like my

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husband doesn't even love me. We're like two strangers under the same roof, and I'm so mad at him. I just want to quit."

She just kind of went on and on. It's interesting because I had just been reading in Luke 6, where Jesus said, "Give, and it'll be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will men give into your bosom." The context of that, interestingly enough—we use it a lot of times talking about finances, and you'll hear a lot of preachers using it when it comes to offering time, which is fine. The principle certainly applies there, but that was not the actual context. The context was forgiveness. The context was showing mercy. The context was showing love for your enemies. The context was doing good to those who were not doing good to you. So, when He said, "Give, and it'll be given to you." He's talking about giving forgiveness, giving mercy, giving to someone who doesn't deserve it, blessing someone, and then it'll be given back to you.

So, I wrote this lady back and just shared with her my thoughts that I had got from ruminating on these Scriptures. I just sent a letter off to her, or we shot an email off, whatever it was. It was probably, I don't know, six weeks, maybe eight weeks later, we got another letter from this lady. I think her language was, "I can't believe it! It has worked almost like magic!" She said, "I decided since Jesus said it, these were red letters in my Bible, I was going to start doing it. Even though I was mad at my husband and he was being so selfish, I started putting him first. I started speaking kind words to him, even though I didn't really feel them. I just started being a blessing to him and going out of my way to do things that were of service to him. At first, I saw no change." She said, "But it wasn't long, maybe within a couple of weeks, I began to see changes happen in him. Suddenly, I began to receive things from him that I didn't expect. He began to speak kind words to me. He began to do things for me." Now, it's two months, eight weeks on. She said, "My marriage has been transformed." She said, "I didn't expect it to happen this quickly. But just in simple faith, because Jesus said, if I would do it, I would reap these things." She said, "It is true. It's come back to me. 'Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.' God has blessed me."

So, when we sacrifice, and I know there are some people listening to me right now, you're not happy in your marriage, or maybe some other relationship, like I spoke about when we began here, that this is applicable to so many different relationships in life. You feel like knocking somebody in the jaw with your fist. Instead, be kind. Instead, speak words of life. Instead, do some sacrifice. The Scripture says when we do good to those who don't deserve it, when we do good to our enemies, it's like heaping coals of hot fire on their heads. That is just a metaphor for speaking of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that will come upon them.

Now, certainly people always still have a choice. God is not going to force them to do something beyond their willingness to do it. But it does bring God's presence on the scene. That brings me to the second good thing that happens, amazing thing that happens when we sacrifice is I believe that when we sacrifice because we know it is God's way, when we do it in marriage and in relationships, because we can see it in the Scriptures, that we are to love like Christ, that we are to do nothing through selfishness or personal ambition, but we are to do it for the benefit of others and look for ways to bless them when we do it because it's God's way and because we know that God's Spirit is leading us to do it. I believe that it brings God's presence on the scene.

All throughout Scripture, God met people at the place of sacrifice. And again, this is not about some secret way to manipulate God into doing what we want. But when we are following Scripture and our faith is tied to God's promises and His commands, and we are obeying them, or we know the Spirit is leading us to do something, it brings God's presence. You find out it

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happened with Gideon. It happened with David. It happened with Solomon. God's presence came many times as a consuming fire to the place of sacrifice.

The principle is true today. When we sacrifice, it's because we know it is God's way. We know it is God's Spirit leading us. God's presence comes, and His presence changes things. Do you remember, or perhaps you don't, perhaps you do, the story of when the Philistines captured the Ark of God? Eli, the priest, and his two sons were wicked, especially the boys. They ill-advisedly took the Ark of God into battle against the Philistines. The Ark of God was where the presence of God dwelt under the Old Covenant, between the cherubim, above the mercy seat there. It was where God's manifest presence dwelt. The Philistines captured the Ark of God. They took it, and they put it in the house of Dagon. Dagon was the deity they worshipped. It was a demon god they worshipped. It was half fish and half man. So, they put it in there, but they come in the morning, and their big idol of Dagon has fallen down on its face before the Ark of God. They go, "What the heck? I don't remember an earthquake happening last night. How did our god fall down on his face?" They go, "Well, let's set him up." So, they get their hoist, their pulleys, and they get Dagon back on his throne."

Well, they come in the next day, and Dagon's fallen down again. And this time, he is broken at the torso, and his hands are broken off. That's just showing, my friend, that when the presence of God comes, the powers of darkness will be broken. The devil can't reach out his hand and touch you anymore. The presence of God will burst asunder the works of the enemy. Jesus said, "I came to destroy the works of the devil." And when God's presence comes, my friend, the devil's presence leaves. Now, another thing, obviously, and you probably know this: if you want to bring God's presence into your marriage, into your home, spend some time worshipping Him. God inhabits the praises of His people. Isaiah said that God meets the one who rejoices. So, if you are a person who worships God, do it and do it to excess. Lift your hands. Worship God. Fill your home, fill your apartment, fill your room with the praises of God, step out in faith, obey His Scriptures, and be willing to sacrifice for the sake of your marriage. Then we come to the second letter in our word, success. To have success in marriage, U stands for understanding. You need to dwell with your spouse, with your husband or your wife, with understanding. Let me read to you 1 Peter 3:7 NKJV.

<sup>7</sup> Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

If you don't understand your wife, you can't properly honor her. If you don't understand your husband, you can't properly honor him. It's important to understand both the physical and the psychological differences between a man and a woman, between a husband and a wife. Then, those peculiar, little unique nuances that God has sown into the personality of your spouse, you need to learn those things too and understand what makes them tick. Understand the way that they are wired up. Endeavor to understand your wife. Endeavor to understand your husband. He said when we don't dwell with them with understanding, and we don't honor them, he said that our prayers, interestingly, that our prayers may not be hindered. The literal Greek for that says that our prayers be not cut down, literally the same way that you would cut the branch off a tree or cut a tree off at its roots. There will be no fruitfulness. There will be no fruit of joy. No fruit of love. All of the wonderful things that we want to see happen in our marriage and in our relationships, we won't see our prayers answered. They will be cut down because we don't dwell on them with understanding. I had a little tree my dad gave me. My dad had two green thumbs, as we say. He could make anything grow.

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His basic deal was if you couldn't eat it, he wouldn't plant it. So, if you walked around the front yard of my dad's house in the backyard and they didn't have a big yard, but there was everything under the sun that you could eat. You look down at your feet, and there are strawberries growing. You look up; there's apples and avocados and plums and apricots. He had mangoes, and he had artichokes. I could go on and on and on. He just planted stuff you could grow.

My favorite tree of all the trees he had was a cherimoya. These big fruits sort of looked like a big green acorn in a way. If you have never had one, I just want to tell you they are delicious. So, my dad brings me over this little potted cherimoya tree that he has grown. I plant it in my backyard. I'm so excited. I have fertilized this thing. I have dug around. I've taken care of it, and it grew rapidly. I watered it and watered it. The thing was with it, where it grows, mostly, to my knowledge, they grow down in the nation of Mexico. There are particular insects that will pollinate those. Though we certainly have bees and other things, the main insect that pollinates those cherimoya trees we don't have in our area.

So, my dad said, "When it gets big enough, and it starts flowering, you are going to have to get up on a ladder and knock all the pollen off into a cup. Then take a little paintbrush, and by hand, pollinate all the female flowers." So, I did it. I mean, for weeks and weeks, I'm up on a ladder in this tree, and I'm knocking off the pollen. I have got it in this little porcelain cup. I'm getting it on the end of a paintbrush, and I'm, by hand, pollinating all the flowers on this tree. I have spent so much time out there, but I'm excited. All of a sudden, the fruit starts growing, and I'm out there every day looking at it. They are getting bigger and bigger. I mean, a ripe fruit can get about that big, and they are amazing.

Well, I had a gardener at that time. So, one day, I come home, and the fruit is just about ready to harvest. I go out in the backyard, and he has cut my cherimoya tree down to a stump. He threw all the branches and all the fruit away. I ring him up. I said, "What the heck did you do? You cut down my cherimoya tree." He says, "Well, I was just trimming things. I didn't know what that was. It just sort of looked like giant acorns to me." I said, "Brother, I have been tending that tree for months and months and months waiting to finally harvest that fruit, and you cut it down!" I mean, I wanted to kill him and tell God that I found him dead. I was so mad at him, but I had to forgive him, which I did. I let it go. He apologized, and that was that. I never brought it up again, but I can't tell you how disappointed I was.

Well, the Scripture says: dwell with your wife with understanding and the principle as well as with your husband. If you don't learn to understand one another and if you don't honor them, your prayers can be cut down. We give the devil a license to come in and cut down our prayers. Friend, I want my prayers to be answered. I don't want the disappointment of having prayers cut down right when the fruit is ripe to eat. It's so important to understand our spouse. How can you understand your husband? How can you understand your wife? Well, number one from the Bible. God is the one who made us. He understands us. There are such rich treasures to be mined out of God's Word when it comes to understanding husband and wife. Let me just give you one right now. The verse we read in Ephesians 5:25 goes on and gives a lot of just amazing instructions about how husbands are to love their wives and how wives respond to their husbands. It sort of sums it all up in this one golden nugget. It says this in Ephesians 5:33 NKJV,

<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.



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So, summing it up, husbands love your own wife, and wives respect your own husband. Listen, this right here is worth your price of admission. If you have been listening to me, if you just get the next thing I say, this is going to help you. I can't tell you how much this is going to help you. Listen, what women want more than anything else in the world is to be loved. They want to know that they are loved. What men want more than anything else in the world is to be respected and to know that they are respected. So, wife, your husband wants respect. Some women think, "Well, if I just love him more, maybe he is going to love me more." Listen, giving your husband more of what you need is not the way to get more of what you need. But giving him what he needs is the way that opens the door for him to give you that which you need. Do you need love? Respect him more. He will respond by loving you more. Husband, the way to get your wife to respect you more is to love her more. There was a book written on the different love languages. I think there is a lot to it. Certainly, there could be so many subcategories, but basically, people have a love language. It might be giving gifts. It might be spending quality time. It might be fixing things. It could be the right kind of word spoken, etc. Husband, you need to learn what your wife's love language is.

It would be a terrible thing if you spoke English and your wife spoke German your whole married life. You are just speaking a foreign language. Now, maybe your love language is touch and touch me again. Maybe her language is small gifts. You think you are loving your wife by touching her and caressing her, and really, that doesn't do it for her. But if you go out and think about it and get her some small gift, it doesn't have to be expensive, and say, "Babe, I was just thinking about you. Here you go." That might be what just rings her bell. My wife's, and she wouldn't mind me saying this, love language is fixing stuff and doing practical things around the house. I helped her put a bunch of stuff together in the garage the other day, and truthfully, I can just go through the house and replace burned out light bulbs, and my wife is in the mood. That is her love language. Mine is different than hers, but I have learned to understand my wife.

Women, you need to understand what makes your husband feel respected and understand what makes him feel disrespected. Maybe it's correcting him in public. He says, "Oh man, that was such a long walk!" She says, "A long walk? You got to be kidding me!" You say stuff like that in front of people. He goes, "Man, that car almost hit us." And she's going, "Oh, he missed us by a mile." You're always correcting him. He feels super disrespected because of that. Now, it maybe that or it may be something else like that, but you need to find out. Understand him, find out what makes him feel respected, and show him due respect. Husbands, love your wife. Wives, respect your husband. So, number one, go to the Scriptures. We could go on and on, but that's just one example. Second way on how to understand your spouse is find people who have been successful in their marriages. Proverbs 13:20 NKJV says,

<sup>20</sup> He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.

If you are having issues in your marriage, go find somebody who is doing it right. Find a couple who has had a successful marriage and invite them to lunch, invite them to dinner, and ask them questions. "What do you guys do? How do you deal with conflict? How have you made this thing work over so many years?" But sometimes, what we tend to do is the wife is not happy in her relationship, so she gravitates to somebody else who has a bad marriage, and they commiserate over all the stuff that their husbands aren't doing. It just compounds the problem. So, locate some people who are doing it right, who have a good marriage, learn from them and then grow. Then, the final thing that I want to say is to communicate with your spouse. I'm not going to get into this in detail. I'm certainly not finished with it, but learn to communicate. Here in Ephesians 5:25–26 NKJV, I'm going to read it again.

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<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

It goes on and it says,

<sup>26</sup> that He might sanctify and cleanse her (the church) with the washing of water by the word.

In other words, Jesus speaks words to His spouse. Especially for the guys, I'm going to close with this. If there is a fault with a lack of communication, it usually lands on the guy's side. I can't tell you how many times I hear a wife say, "He just doesn't talk." Listen, being the strong, silent type, I guess, is okay, but it doesn't work well in marriage. You need to learn to communicate. Learn to listen. Learn to talk. I have so much more to say, but I hope you have got something out of this, talking about how to have a successful marriage. I pray that God would give you understanding in His Word. Listen, if you have never made Jesus the Lord of your life, that's where everything starts. He is the anchor for good, healthy relationships. Call on Him today. You will never be disappointed.

Well, obviously, we didn't get all the way through the word success, so you're just going to have to come back and find out what we have to say. Listen, if you miss it, you're going to miss half of your life. We're going to be talking, in particular, as we begin next time, with a little bit more about communication and how God has wired men and women up differently. There's just such good stuff. I wish I had the time to cram it all in one message, but we didn't have time. So, hey, come for the future installments, and I just want to tell you, you may not hear this in your world very much; you are loved. God loves you. He sees you. You're not some number on an endless list to God. You're not a faceless person in a sea of people. He knows you. He loves you, and He wants to help you. Call on His Son, Jesus. And friend, He'll be there for you.

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