

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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We are here talking about marriage, and in particular, success in marriage. How to have a successful marriage. And listen, stay with me because if you are married and loving it, you have room for growth in your marriage and want to make it better; I have something to share with you that will help you. If you have a bad marriage or a mediocre marriage, you really need to listen. If you are single and don't want to get married, you need to listen. If you are single and do want to get married, you need to listen. There are going to be some principles in this that will help you in any relationship. And you know what? When our relationships are firing on all cylinders, when they are doing well, life can be so good. But when there are problems in relationships, whether it's with a co-worker, a sibling, a spouse, a boss, a friend, a neighbor, whatever, it can kind of drain some of the color out of life, some of the vibrancy out of life.

So, I'm going to be sharing some principles, and we are using the word success as an acrostic. S-U-C-C-E-S-S, success. How to have a successful marriage. I've already talked about a couple of them. The first one was sacrifice. The first S. If we are going to have great marriages, we need to be willing to sacrifice and put our spouse before ourselves. In Ephesians 5:25, Paul said, "Husbands, love your wife like Christ loved the church." In other words, be willing to sacrifice for your spouse. The Scripture says to not do anything through selfishness but to esteem others better than ourselves and to look out for the interests of others, not just for the things that personally concern us. When we are willing to sacrifice, we put into motion God's law of reciprocity. Whatever a man sows, whatever a woman sows, that shall they also reap. If you sow love, if you sow forgiveness, if you sow kindness, it'll come back to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. Then we looked at the letter U, and that stood for understanding. First Peter 3:7 NKJV,

⁷ 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.

So that they're not cut down, not understanding your spouse and not honoring your spouse can drastically affect your prayer life and the fruitfulness of your prayer life. We talked a lot about that, so I'm not going to continue hammering on it. But it's important to understand the differences that God has made between men and women, both physically and psychologically. Then, it's good to understand the personal, little nuances and bits that God has sown into the personality of your spouse that may be very unique to them. Endeavor to understand your husband, and endeavor to understand your wife. We do that by getting into God's Word, by asking people who are a little bit further down the road, and then by communicating and talking to them. That's where we are right now. I want to talk about communication as our first C in the word success. Communication is the lifeblood of any healthy relationship. Without healthy communication, relationships die. It's usually men who need to be encouraged in this area more than women do. I hear so often from wives and women, "It's like he just doesn't talk. He just goes stony silent." Well, part of that is okay. Women, you need to understand that you didn't marry your girlfriend. He's not supposed to chat with you like your best girlfriends do. You married a man, and he's different than you are. And yes, husbands, listen to me.

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 2)

You need to learn to listen, and you need to learn to be a better communicator. I'm not saying that God wants to turn you into a chatty female. He doesn't want that at all.

In fact, if you go back to the garden, I think it'll help us all to understand this. God made man in His own image and in His own likeness. First, there was just Adam, nobody else. And the first thing that God gave to Adam was a job. He put him in the Garden of Eden to tend it, keep it, work in it, and guard it. So, here is Adam. There is nobody else there. He's to work in the garden. He's to tend it. He's to keep it. He's to take care of everything. If he faces a challenge, he is going to just withdraw into himself, internalize, and think, "Okay, this is how I'm going to solve this thing." Or he can talk to God. Apparently, he and God walked in the garden in the cool of the day. But that was it. That was how God made him. "I have a challenge. I have to sort something out. I'm going to just internalize. I don't have anybody else to talk to unless I talk with my Creator. I'm going to go inside myself, and I'm going to figure it out." That's the way most guys are. I tend to not offer a suggestion until I have internalized things and come up with a solution. I've done the math in that secret place. And think, "Okay, this will work." So, I'm going to suggest that we take this road. Now, that's the way the guy was. But then God made the woman out of the man's rib, and it sort of changed everything because the first thing that God gave to the woman was a relationship. The first thing God gave to the man was a task, a job. The first thing God gave to the woman was a relationship. So generally, not always, but generally, when a woman faces a challenge, she wants to talk and discuss things. She wants empathy.

I'm a bit embarrassed to tell you this, but I'm going to tell you because I think it might help you. It probably took me a decade of being married to work this out that my wife didn't make a statement because she had reached a conclusion. For me, I'm not going to say something until I've reached a conclusion. But with her, that was her method of reaching a conclusion. She wanted to talk things out. It took me the longest time to figure that out. I thank God I finally did figure that out. I think it goes back to the way that God has made men and the way that God has made women. He's made us differently. And generally, again, not always, but generally, when a woman wants to reach a conclusion, or she has something going on, she wants to chat about it. So, here's a typical scenario. The gal has a problem. It may be where she's working. It may be with the kids. It may be whatever. Just something where she has a bee in her bonnet. So, she wants to talk to her husband. He says, "Okay, what's going on?" She talks. He listens just long enough to where he figures he has enough information. "Okay, I have enough information to solve this thing." From that point, he internalizes, and he stops listening. His wife's mouth is moving. He might be shaking his head, but he's working out a solution. He gets it worked out and says, "Okay, this is what you need to do." Then he gives the solution and she goes, "Uh-huh." Then, she keeps talking about the issue. He thinks, "Well, wait a minute. I had a solution. You just need to do that. Maybe there is something wrong with the solution." So, he internalizes again. The thing is you, have problems. More than anything, she probably knows what she needs to do before she asks the question. She just wants empathy. She wants you to listen to her, and she wants you to talk with her. So, communication is so, so important. When we don't understand how important communication is, problems invariably arise. My wife is different. That area, I worked that out.

My wife loves to shop. She likes to buy things. But I think more than anything, it's this experience of going shopping. For me, I don't mind shopping, but when I go shopping, it's a surgical strike. I already know what store I want to go to. I know what I want to get. I have it worked out before I get there. It's like, "Okay, I need to park here outside of the mall because this is going to be the quickest route into the store." I go right to the rack I need. "Okay, there it is." I get it. Mission accomplished. We're in and out in 13 and a half minutes. Success. My wife

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 2)

can spend 45 minutes in a 12-foot by 12-foot space. It's this experience with her. So, I worked it out. If I go shopping with my wife, I need to learn to be content and just hang out while she does her thing. Thank God for stores that have chairs where the men can sit. But again, just a point: God has wired women and men, most generally, up very differently. It's important to understand that, especially when it comes to communication. Now, it's not always the man who won't talk. Sometimes it's the woman. But when she doesn't talk, it's usually because she's been hurt at some time. She's afraid to become vulnerable. Guys, you just need to understand your girl and love her like Jesus loves you. If you don't learn to communicate, the devil will always try and send someone who will try to compromise your relationship and to lead one or the other into something that is not healthy and is not good. In the Scriptures, interestingly, if you study this in the book of Proverbs in particular, it talks a lot about adultery. Almost always, adulterous relationships begin with flattery. So, the wife is starved for words of affirmation. Let's just say it's a situation where you have a young couple. She's working. Maybe she's a hairstylist or whatever. She's doing this. She's an executive at a bank or whatever. He has his job. Maybe he works in construction. Maybe he's an attorney, whatever. You're both working. But she is starved, absolutely starved, for affirming words and for communication, and he's not providing that for her.

Then, she gets to work, and some guy says, "Man, you look nice today. Did you pick out that wardrobe yourself? Man, you're looking good." She might say, "Oh, thanks a lot." But man, those words registered for her because she's been starving for that. Or a guy comes up, "Man, you solved that so quickly. I can't believe it. You're beautiful, and you're brilliant." Maybe she doesn't want to, but she starts rehearsing those words over and over again. Or maybe she just sort of rags on her husband all the time. She complains all the time. It says, "Better to dwell in the corners of a housetop than with a complaining woman in a wide house." So, maybe she's a complainer. Maybe she's a nag. She never encourages him with her words. She doesn't communicate. Listen, ladies, men are meant to be strong. But the truth is we want to be affirmed as well. Even if it's like you just grab his arms and say, "Sweetie, I love you so much. I feel so safe around you. You are such a good husband." Just little things like that are important. Let's say he's not getting any of that at home. So, it might be at work or somewhere else. Somebody starts complimenting him. Let me read to you from the book of Proverbs 5:3–5 NKJV. This talks about somebody who gets involved in adultery. This is where it starts. It says,

³ For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil;

⁴ But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. ⁵ Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell.

So, he is headed for trouble. He is headed for heartache. He is headed for disaster, but she seduces him with her lips. Her lips drip honey. They are smooth. She knows the right things to say to build him up. Most affairs started with flattery. My friend, flattery is a lot like perfume. It smells good, but you're in trouble if you swallow it. Listen to this from Proverbs 7. I want to read to you. Again, this talks about a guy who gets in trouble with a woman. But it can go either way. Here, it talks about this guy who gets involved in adultery. Proverbs 7:21–23 NKJV says,

²¹ With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him. ²² Immediately he went after her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, ²³ till an arrow struck his liver. As a bird hastens to the snare, he did not know it would cost his life.

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 2)

How many have lost their marriage? They have strained and ruined their relationship with their kids. They have ruined their good character. They have affected so many things that they have literally just ruined their lives and brought hell into their household because they have been unfaithful to the wife of their youth or to the husband of their youth. Most of the time, if you trace it back, it started with flattery. It's because there was a lack of communication in the home. There was this soul that was starved for it. The wrong person started giving it, and it led to disaster. Let's move on. Our second C in the word success stands for common interests. There are three realms of agreement in marriage. You're a spirit. You have a soul. You live in a body. Paul writes to the Thessalonians. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. "May God sanctify you wholly, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Again, you are a spirit being. You have a soul, and you live in a body. When it comes to marriage, two become one; marriage is the highest form of agreement possible between two human beings. To have a great marriage, there needs to be agreement in all three areas.

I'm going to take the physical part. That's the least important, but it's still important. You need to be okay with the way she looks. You need to be okay with the way he looks. Not like the guy who fell in love with this gal in the choir, and she would sing specials. Man, she had the voice of an angel. She would sing, and everyone in the church would just be in rapture. He'd think, "I have to marry this girl." He proposes and they end up getting married. On their wedding night, she takes off her wig. She takes out her glass eye. She takes off her false teeth. He looks at her, and he says, "Sing, woman, sing!" You just need to be okay with the way that person looks. I remember a gal who came to me one day in church. She said, "Pastor, I don't know what to do." I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Well, my boyfriend," and I knew him. He was a lovely guy. She said, "We get along so well. We have so much stuff in common. He loves Jesus. He loves me, and he wants to marry me." I said, "Awesome! What's the problem?" She said, "I can't stand the way he looks." It's not the most important, but it is important and something that you need to consider. What people tend to do, at least in the world, is they make that the most important. He has broad shoulders. "He has muscles. He has a full head of hair. He is super handsome, and I'm marrying this guy."

If that's the number one thing you marry him for, what happens when he starts losing hair? And he has two runways going back on the sides of his head. He gains quite a few pounds around the middle. Or with her, maybe she's the high school cheerleader, and queen and everybody just loves her. She has this beautiful figure. She has these striking blue eyes. All right, that's awesome. It's great that you like the way she looks. However, after she's had her third child, her hips never go back to their original proportions. Gravity takes an effect. If that's the only thing you married for, you're going to be in trouble. Now, again, it is important. So, I want to say that there needs to be agreement there. But it's the least important of the three. The most important is spiritual. She needs to like your hallelujahs. You need to like her hallelujahs. You both need to be in love with Jesus. There needs to be a spiritual agreement. First of all, the Bible says not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Believers shouldn't be marrying a nonbeliever. The most important thing in my life is my relationship with Jesus Christ. If I can't share that with my wife, then I can't share the most important thing in my life. The spiritual has to be in agreement there. That's most important. Physical is the least important, but it is important.

Then, there's that second one, and people tend to overlook it. It's the area of the soul. You need to have common interests. Things that you both like and things that you both tend to share together. Listen, you may both love Jesus and go to church. Maybe you like the way she looks, and she likes the way you look, but you're not going to spend all your time in the bedroom. And

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 2)

in the meantime, what's going to happen? You like to talk about deep political things and stuff that's going on in the world. Maybe she just wants to chirp on about the latest fashion and the latest Hollywood celebrity. It's like there's this total disconnect when it comes to the soul, or it could be vice versa. Maybe she's very interested in taking care of the poor and orphans in this particular region of the world. She has a real heart for the community and for the things that go on. He doesn't share those things at all, and there's just no connection in this area of the soul. So, you need to enjoy some things together and have common interests if you're going to have a great relationship, whether it's sports you both like, riding horses, hiking, shopping, or dining out. I just did a wedding for a friend's daughter down in Mexico; just a wonderful couple. They share some things in common, which is really cool. Number one, they are both foodies. They are both into food and cooking. It's a happy place for them, and they share that in the kitchen. It's just important for them. It might be you both like antiques, or you like to go to garage sales together, or you both enjoy music. There needs to be some things that you enjoy in common. Otherwise, separation inevitably comes. He hangs out with only his friends who like those things. She hangs out with her girlfriends. And to a degree, that's okay. But if you're going to have a true marriage of quality, there needs to be some areas of common interest.

Now, there is stuff that I do that my wife is not into at all. I golf, and I free dive. I do a lot of spearfishing in the ocean. Janet has things that she loves to do. She loves interior decorating, and there's other stuff that she loves. She plays pickleball twice a week. So, we have those things. But she and I spend a lot of time together. We spend a lot of time at the table together. We love food, and we love to take long walks together. There are just a number of things that she and I enjoy together. We like some of the same types of television programs, a particular genre. So, she and I will sit down and watch a series together. We talk about it, and we laugh about it. We both really super enjoy being with family and the grandkids. So, we have these areas of commonality. It's just so important that you have areas of common interest. Spirit is most important. Soul is very important. Incredibly important. Physical is also important. But in that order, spirit, soul, and body. We come to the next letter, I'm trying to get this thing done, is the letter E. And that stands for equality. First Peter 3:7 talks about the husband to understand your wife, giving her due honor because you are heirs together of the grace of life. Heirs together of the grace of life. Marriage is to be a partnership, both carrying their share of responsibility and both sharing in the blessings. Some cultures treat women no better than slaves. In Christianity, it's not so. Jesus always elevated women. When Christianity comes into any culture, women are always elevated. In fact, the Scripture says in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ Jesus, there's neither male nor female. But here are three, talking about marriage, common areas, if you would, of inequality. They are dialogue, duty, and destiny. Let's talk about those things. There should be equality in these areas, but there's not always.

The first is dialogue. In a marriage, a woman should have a voice. However, in marriages with someone, with some men, the opinion of their wife counts for very little and sometimes next to nothing. Yes, there is a divine order in marriage. For the wife, the head is the husband's, and she is to submit to him the same way that he submits to Christ. But guys, let me just tell you, just going to throw this in. The husband is to love the wife like Christ loves the church. Well, Jesus loves the church sacrificially. Jesus loves the church and puts her best interests first. I want to submit to Jesus. He always has my best interest at heart. He always has time to talk to me when I want to talk. He's never too busy. He's always loved me more than I deserve. He is amazing to me. So, I can't wait to submit. "What's the next thing You want to do, Lord?" When a husband loves his wife that way, she has no problem submitting. If there are challenges with the whole submission thing, generally, it has to do with the way the husband is treating and loving the wife. But let me say this. There is a divine order to things. With Janet and I, she absolutely has a voice. I want to know what she thinks. So, we might have something we need to figure out

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 2)

with what we're going to do about this situation. We're either going to go this way, or we're going to go that way. So, I pray about it, and she prays about it. She shares what she thinks, and I share what I think.

Sometimes, she has a better idea than me. If her idea is better, I just admit it. I say, "Okay, babe, we're going to do that." But if, after listening to her and praying about it, I want to go another way, I say, "Babe, I really feel like this is what God wants us to do." Do you know what she says? She says, "Okay." She doesn't throw this anchor of moodiness out and slow everything down and say, "Well, I'm going to make you suffer. I'm going to do what you want, but you're going to pay for it." No, she gets in there and supports me. If it turns out later on that I was wrong, I'll repent. I'll go back and say, "Baby, you were right." When it comes to dialogue, when it comes to a woman's voice, there needs to be equality. The second area, when it comes to duties, is an equal division of labor, and, in particular, if you have both a husband and wife who are working outside of the home, okay. You are both working, you come home, and then maybe you have kids or whatever. The husband throws off his shoes, sits up in his chair, wants to watch sports, and expects his wife to vacuum, cook, and take care of the kids. Wait a minute. She's just worked a full eight hours like you have. There needs to be some equal division of labor there. Share the duties.

Then, finally, when it comes to destiny, I think, unfortunately, some husbands want to keep a lid on their wives. But guys, I want to encourage you to release your wife to fulfill her destiny and her gifting. Sometimes, the guys are insecure. So, rather than being a covering for their wife, they are a lid. I'd say release and give her room and encouragement rather than restraining her. Sometimes, you have a situation where there's a Deborah and a Lapidoth. Deborah was the judge of Israel. She was the spiritual head of Israel as well as the governmental head of Israel. Her husband, Lapidoth, means a candle maker. He was in the background. She was in the forefront. Sometimes, that's the way it is. Sometimes, you have an Aquila and Priscilla, where they are both sort of standing in the forefront. Sometimes, you have an Abraham and a Sarah, where it's a quiet woman who's in the background supporting her husband. But there should be equality because God has gifted you both. God has called you both. These are things that we need to talk about if we're going to have great relationships. With that, I'm going to go ahead and close this. I hope that you have gotten something from it. I have a couple more things that I'd like to share with you, but time doesn't permit. So, until I see you again, may God richly bless you.

Well, I hope that you got something from this message, and I didn't get everything into it that I wanted to. So, you're going to have to come back for the final installment. I just want to let you know a bit of a spoiler alert. We're going to be talking about sex next time. Oh, you're not going to want to miss that. The Bible has some great stuff to say about the subject of sex within the context of marriage. So, we're going to deal with that. We've shared these things about marriage, but the truth is there are principles here that can apply to any relationship. So, I pray that you've had your little antennas up and you've been listening for the Holy Spirit to quicken something to you. God is wanting to guide us. He is wanting to talk to us. The Scripture says the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord. He wants to order your steps. Seek Him, and you will find Him.

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