

How to Have a Successful Marriage (Part 3)

by Bayless Conley

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No one gets involved in any endeavor with plans to fail. Nobody starts a business hoping to fail. Nobody gets married, hoping the marriage is going to fail. Nobody gets involved in a relationship thinking the thing is going to tank. God wants to help us succeed, particularly and especially in the area of marriage, which is what I'm going to be talking to you about. I've actually been doing a little bit of a series on success in marriage, How to Have a Successful Marriage. Nobody ever said, "I do," while thinking, "I wonder how long this thing is going to last." No, we pledge ourselves until death do us part. The truth is a bad marriage might be the closest thing to hell on earth. A good marriage just may be the closest thing to heaven on earth. I've been married for 42 years, and I'm still in love with my wife. I married someone who loves Jesus more than I do, which is awesome because the more she loves Jesus, the more she loves me. I happen to love Jesus more than I love my wife. He is very particular about the way we treat His sons and daughters. The Father is very particular about how we treat His girls. So, having Jesus number one is number one in importance. So, what I've done is actually use the word success as an acrostic. We are just looking at some principles and things from Scripture about how to have a great marriage.

The first S was sacrifice. If we're going to have a great marriage, there needs to be sacrifice. The Scripture says, "Let nothing be done through selfishness, but we should esteem others better than ourselves and look out for the interests of others and not just for our own things." That is so appropriate in marriage. The U stands for understanding. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:7 that husbands should dwell with your wives with understanding, giving honor to her as to the weaker vessel. It talks about being heirs together, the joint heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers be not hindered. Husbands, we need to understand our wives and wives, you need to seek to understand your husbands. We talked a lot about that. Then, the first C, which is so important, is communication. Communication is the lifeblood of any healthy relationship. Without proper communication, relationships die. God has wired up men and women differently. We communicate differently. So, we talked a lot about that. Then, we came to the second C in the word success, and that is common interests. Marriage is the highest form of agreement between two human beings. You are a spirit, you have a soul, and you live in a physical body. There needs to be agreement to have a great marriage in all three areas: spirit, soul, and body. We talked about those things. You both need to love Jesus. You need to have that soulish connection. Have things in common that you both enjoy, that you can talk about and that you can enjoy together. Then, it's important, but it's the least important, and that is the physical aspect of marriage.

Then, we looked at equality. In our acrostic, it's the letter E. We talked about equality in dialogue and that both need to have a voice in the relationship. We talked about equality with duties and that there needs to be a sharing out of the labor. If the husband expects the wife to do all of the work while he sits around and doesn't do anything, there are going to be problems. If the wife expects the husband to do everything and she doesn't do anything, "I don't want to cook. I don't want to clean. I'm not going to work outside of the house. You need to do it all." You need to communicate about that. There needs to be equality when it comes to duties. Both need to be busy. Both need to be engaged. We talked about that. Then, finally, destiny. God has called both

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the husband and the wife. Sometimes, God has gifted the wife more in a marriage relationship. It's not the husband's place to put a lid on her. He should encourage her. Now, that doesn't mean that she doesn't submit to the husband and doesn't have the biblical role of a wife. You don't want to stifle her gift because you're feeling inadequate. You need to encourage her. Sometimes, it is the wife that has the role of a Deborah, who was a judge of Israel, and her husband was in the background when it came to notoriety and influence. His name was Lapidoth. We assume he was a candlemaker because it's what the name has reference to. Sometimes, you have an Aquila and a Priscilla, like we find in the New Testament. They both seem to be side by side in influence and importance. Sometimes, it's sort of like an Abraham and a Sarah. Abraham was the one in the forefront, and Sarah was the quiet one in the background supporting him. You just need to figure out what God has called you guys to do. There is a way, by the grace of God, to make that work and to make it work in a way that will bring glory to His name.

I'm going to continue on with our acrostic right now. We get to our next letter, and it's another S. It stands for sex. Somebody says, "You're going to talk about sex?" Yes, I am. One time, Janet and I made this list of seven of the most important things to us in marriage. My list was pretty easy. I did it sort of tongue-in-cheek, but I just wrote the word sex seven times. Sex, sex, sex, sex, yeah. Janet says, "Oh, Bayless, don't you ever think of anything else?" I said, "Well, not often." The truth is, guys think about sex a whole lot, and it is really, really important. It's important for both, obviously, but a healthy sex life is important to have a successful marriage. If there are rocks in the marriage, chances are you're going to find most of them under the bed. God is the one who created sex. He designed sex not just for procreation but to be enjoyed within the context of marriage. That's the only place that our sexuality should be expressed freely and honestly, not outside of that context. God made sex, but He made it for marriage. When the husband and wife make love, God doesn't close His eyes. He doesn't turn around. He's the one who invented it. The Song of Solomon is a really interesting book in the Old Testament. It was written by Solomon. Some people talk about how it's this analogy of Christ's love for the church. I can see some truth to that, but more than anything else, it is a romantic book about the love relationship between Solomon and his Shunammite bride. There's a lot in the book about sex.

I remember, I'm a brand-new Christian. I was visiting a friend of mine. She lived in a cabin in the woods, and she's a brand-new Christian as well. So, we've both been saved. She maybe had been saved a little longer than me. I had been saved for like a month, and I think she'd been saved maybe five months. Anyway, we're sitting on the porch of her cabin, and I said, "Hey, let's read the Bible." "Okay, well, here's this book, Song of Solomon." We both go, "I wonder what that's about?" So, I'm reading it out loud to her, and I go, "What the heck? She goes, "That's not in the Bible." I said, "It is. Look!" Both of us just laughed and laughed, because we knew what Solomon was talking about. The guy's talking about sex. He's using metaphors for sex, and he's talking about physical intimacy. It's interesting if you read the book, it is just so rich with wisdom when it comes to the success in the sexual part of marriage. I just want to read you some parts of it. There's so much good stuff in the whole book, but I want to start from chapter four in verse one. I want you to notice that Solomon is speaking love words to his wife. He's building her up. He's encouraging her. In Ephesians, when it talks about the bride, about the church being like the bride and Christ being the husband, it says, "He washes her with the water of the word." Jesus speaks words to His bride, and He says that there is no spot in her. There's no blemish on her. I went through the New Testament one time and found out all the things that Jesus said about the church. It's a study worth doing. Jesus builds up the church. He loves the church. He sacrifices for the church. He speaks words of life to the church.

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As husbands, we need to learn to speak words of life to our brides. It's incredibly important because if you open the book up, you find out that this Shunammite bride worked out in the vineyards. Her skin was very tan. She was darkened from the sun, and she felt very insecure in comparison with the pampered ladies of the royal court. She made reference to the fact that she was insecure about her looks. Solomon very wisely built her up in the area where she felt most insecure. Listen to this language as he talks to her, and understand that a lot of this is metaphorical. It might not be something that you'd say in this day and age, but these were very encouraging words. Words that built up in Solomon's time. Song of Solomon 4:1 NKJV,

¹ Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead.

Now, I don't know if my wife, Janet, would like me saying to her, "Your hair looks like a flock of goats," but that was a compliment in that day. Frankly, I've never seen a flock of goats going down Mount Gilead, but it was probably something very interesting to see. He went on, and said, Song of Solomon 4:2–7 NKJV

² Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, every one of which bears twins, and none is barren among them. ³ Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like a piece of pomegranate. ⁴ Your neck is like the tower of David, built for an armory, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. ⁵ Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies. ⁶ Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense. ⁷ You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you.

Now, Jesus washes the church, his bride, with the water of the word. He speaks words to her so that there's no spot or blemish on her. Solomon is doing the same thing. He is building her up regarding her physical appearance because she is insecure in that area. He says, "There is no spot in you." Few men realize the importance their words have upon their wives, especially when it comes to lovemaking, to create an atmosphere for romance that your wife needs. You need to start speaking words to build her up. Listen, guys, we're wired up quite differently than the ladies are. With the guys, and listen, I've been married for 42 years. All it takes, and I'm not trying to be crude, but all it takes is to see my wife disrobe and get ready to jump in the shower. I'm like a bee going to a flower. I'm going straight there. She says, "Bayless!" I said, "Sorry, babe, I can't help it." That's all it takes for most guys. We're stimulated by sight. It doesn't take much. Most women are not wired up that way. They're stimulated by words. You need to speak romantic words. If you want to get your wife in the mood, you need to start speaking the right kind of words to her. Guys, it generally starts around breakfast time in the kitchen. It's not something where you're just going to throw out a sentence or two about 10 minutes before you're ready. No, you need to start in the morning. Say, "Babe, I just want you to know I'm so glad I married you. If I would have searched around the whole world looking for somebody that would have been perfect for me, I couldn't have found anyone better than the one God picked, and that's you. I love you. I appreciate you. You are so beautiful to me." Listen, that will get her in the mood. Speaking words is so important. It takes your wife much longer to warm up than it does for you. Sometimes, when it comes to lovemaking, the guy is like on his way to put out a fire. Then, after a few minutes, he's rolled over like a beached whale. He's snoring, and she's very unsatisfied because it takes her a lot longer. You need to take your time and speak those love words. Let me read you a little more from Song of Solomon here in chapter seven, beginning in verse six. This is just so good. Again, these are very metaphorically graphic things. Solomon has been building his wife up. He's been taking his time. Now, it comes to the physical

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acts of active sex, and he is not in a hurry. He's taking his time. Listen to this. Song of Solomon 7:6–8 NKJV says,

⁶ How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights! ⁷ This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like its clusters. ⁸ I said, "I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches." Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples.

Okay, I know what that means. He is caressing her. He is interested in her. Then he goes on and says, (Song of Solomon 7:9 NKJV)

⁹ And the roof of your mouth like the best wine. The wine goes down smoothly for my beloved, moving gently the lips of sleepers.

How does he know what the roof of her mouth and her breath are like? Well, he's kissing her. Apparently, he's French kissing her if he knows what the roof of her mouth is like. Now, this is in context. This is a husband and wife, and this is not wrong. People think sex is dirty. Christians do because they don't know what the Bible says. God made it. It's lovely, it's pure, and we shouldn't shrink away from talking about it. The reason there are rocks under the bed in the marriage is because people don't talk about these things. Solomon has been taking his time. He's been speaking words of love and building her up and building her up. Now, he's taking his time when they've gotten to the bedchamber. He's caressing her, and he's kissing her. He is not in a hurry. It's so, so important. Like I said, for most guys, 10 minutes is enough time for him to start, finish, and be snoring his head off. But if you take time with her throughout the day, let her know that you love her. Let her know that you appreciate her. Give her a hug and hold her. Look into her eyes. Then, when you get into bed, take your time. Listen, you will be glad that you did. Look at her response we're going to read to this man who has loved her with his words, who has loved her with his caresses, who is familiar with her body, who has not been in a hurry, who is not just putting his own desires first. Here is the response. In verses 10–13, this is his Shunammite bride speaking. She says, and with great confidence,

¹⁰ I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. ¹¹ Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field; let us lodge in the villages. ¹² Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has budded, whether the grape blossoms are open, and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. (Then she says,) ¹³ The mandrakes give off a fragrance, and at our gates are pleasant fruits, all manner, new and old, which I have laid up for you, my beloved.

Now, it's interesting that mandrakes are only mentioned a few times in the Bible. They were a sign, if you would, of sexuality and of desire. You read the few times that they are even spoken of in Scripture; that's what they're spoken of here. So, this is her response to Solomon taking his time and loving her with words. She's planning a love vacation. "Let's get up to the villages. I have plans for you, mister. We're going to get up there, and I'm going to give you my love. I'm all in. I'm not holding anything back." She says, "It's going to be new and old, buddy. It's not going to be stale. It's not going to be boring. I have some surprises in store for you. The way you have been loving me, the way you have been talking to me, and the way you have been taking your time. It's going to come back to you in spades. Good measure pressed down, shaken together and running over." Guys, if we would just learn this, oh, how much better marriage could be, and sex in marriage can be. What a response she has. So, listen, we're going to have a great marriage. Hey, sex is God's idea. Again, I'm not trying to be crude. I think we should talk about this stuff. Janet and I have been married for 42 years. Our sex life is better

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than it has ever been. Neither one of us plans on quitting anytime soon. It's a gift that God has given us, and we enjoy it.

So, I hope you got something out of that, but we do have one final letter. It is another S. This one stands for the Savior. Your marriage needs to revolve around Jesus. All of the things that we shared are important, but the most important thing is Jesus. We shared that there are three realms of agreement in marriage: spirit, soul, and body. First, the spiritual one is the most important. Christ needs to be at the center of your life. I remember one time Janet and I were driving down the road. We hadn't been married very long, less than a year. I was mad at her. So, I'm giving her the silent treatment. I felt so profoundly in my spirit that the Lord was saying to me, "Hey! If you're mistreating her, you're mistreating Me. If you're giving her the silent treatment, you're giving Me the silent treatment. How you treat her is how you treat Me." I turned around and said, "Baby, I'm sorry. Forgive me." I realized Jesus is very important. It is very important to Him how we treat the daughters of God. Listen, the highest purpose in marriage is not to procreate. It's not to enjoy sex. The highest purpose of marriage is not just about meeting our own needs. The highest purpose in marriage of is to glorify God. All these other things are important. It's important to procreate, to have kids, and to have grandkids. We have both of those and in my lifetime, I know I'm going to see great-grandkids coming as well. That's important. We enjoy sexual intimacy. That's important, but the most important purpose of marriage is to glorify God. The Scripture says this in Ephesians 5:31–32 NKJV. Listen to this. It says,

³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." ³² This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

So, in this metaphorical section here where the Apostle Paul, by the Spirit of God, talks about the church and the church's relationship to Christ, the husband is likened unto Christ. The church is likened unto the bride of Christ. And so here, a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife. The two become one. But it's a mystery, a great mystery. He said, "I speak concerning Christ and the church." You see, Jesus so loved, lost, dying, broken, and sighing humanity that He left His Father in heaven and was joined to the human race in all of its suffering and all of its brokenness. He literally sacrificed His life to redeem humanity and to bring them into the Father's family. Marriage is a type in a shadow. Marriage is a symbol of that. When people see our marriage, there is just something supernatural about it, something mysterious about it. Sometimes, people will come and say, "What is the secret of your marriage? What's going on? How have you done this for so many years? You're happy. It's like things are good, and we know they are good. You're not just putting on." I say, "Well, listen, it's because of what Christ has done for us." Truthfully, I know I would have been a horrible husband if Christ was not in my life. I was not faithful to my girlfriends when I had girlfriends back before I found Christ or before Christ found me. I would not have been faithful in marriage. I didn't have the capacity, but Jesus changed my life. Janet and I have a great marriage, and it points people to Jesus Christ. We have so many opportunities to talk to people about salvation because of our marriage relationship. That's the way that it should be. This great mystery, I speak concerning Christ and the church. It's the closest picture of God's love and the Son's love for humanity. Our marriages ought to be signposts pointing people to the Savior.

I just want to speak to you for a moment right now. Whatever format you're listening to this on, whether you're viewing me or just listening to my voice, you need to know there is a God in heaven who knows your name. He loves you so much that He sent His own Son to die for you. Jesus was born of a virgin. He came to this world. He lived a sinless life. He showed people

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what God was like, that God was not aloof and uninterested or just this angry Being that sat in the heavens with a big club where He's ready to pull the rug out from under you, make something wrong the moment you did something that displeased Him. No, God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. Jesus was born of a virgin. He was 100% man, but He was still 100% God. He chose to live a human life. He chose to live a limited life. Jesus did not live as the omniscient God. He chose to live with limited knowledge. He chose to live with limited power. The Bible tells us that Jesus became weary and Jesus had to sleep. He was weary, and He sat by a well. It was by choice that He did it. That didn't make Him any less God. And I know some people, they don't want to say it. "We're diminishing Christ." No, He did that by choice. So He could have the full human experience.

The Bible says He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. He understands what it's like to be tempted. He was tempted in His humanity, but He didn't give in like the first Adam did. Jesus is called the last Adam. Then, He was taken by wicked hands and put through a kangaroo court, a mock trial. He was beaten without mercy, and He was crucified. And there on the cross, God's perfect Son died as your sacrifice. He died as my sacrifice. As our substitute, God laid our sins on Jesus and the penalty for our sins. He died under the weight of your sins and under the weight of my sins. After three days and three nights, the claims of God's eternal justice were forever satisfied. Jesus was raised from the dead. The Bible says, if you believe it and if you confess Him as your Lord, literally if you'll die to your rights of independent living and make Jesus the boss of your life, submit your heart and your life to Him and say, "Jesus, I'm all Yours. I put my trust in You for time and eternity to save me." Friend, when you do that, the Holy Spirit will come and change you inwardly. It is so radical that Jesus referred to it as being born again. Literally, it changes your spirit because our spirits are tainted with sin. They have been separated from God because of sin. But when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord, our spirit, the real us that lives inside of these bodies, the real you that will spend eternity somewhere, is put back into connection with God. You're born again. You're made new. You receive life from heaven. Yes, we still have the treasure in our earthen vessel, but one day, we're going to get a new body. In the meantime, we're renewing our minds with the Word of God. We're building up this soulish area to learn to think like God thinks. That's why it's so important to study the Bible. If you have never confessed Christ as your Lord, I want to encourage you to do it now. Say,

Jesus, come into my life. I confess You as my Lord and Savior. I receive You into my heart as my Savior. I submit my will to You, and I give You my all. Amen. Amen.

I hope you join me next time. Looking forward to seeing you. Until then, may God's best and His richest be yours always. Well, there you have it: how to have a successful marriage. And, of course, there's a whole lot more besides that. But we just wanted to keep it into this category of an acrostic. S-U-C-C-E-S-S success. Listen, God wants you to be successful in your relationships. I know there are people watching me. You're struggling so desperately right now. And you're thinking, "Is there any help for me? I've screwed things up so much. I don't know if there's any rescue at all." Listen, all things are possible with God. You may not know what to do, but God always has a next step for you to take. And if you'll seek Him, you will find Him. He will direct your way. I just want to tell you that you're loved by God. You may not hear it much, but you are loved by Him. And by the way, we'd love to hear from you. Let us know if these messages have been a blessing to you. Send us an email. Write me a letter, and I'll read it. Until next time, may God richly bless you.