

# "THE ART OF SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE"

Text: Psalm 37:39

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While this is not a textual sermon, let me begin with the words of a scripture text: "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord. He is their strength in the time of trouble." I would do no injustice to apply this verse to marriage and say: "The salvation of the home is the Lord. He is the strength of the home at all times."

This morning I gave you the opportunity to repeat your marriage vows. For many of us it was years ago that we promised the first time to love and to comfort, to cherish and to protect. Perhaps when you first said those words, you did not realize all that was involved.

Mrs. Rich and I can look back over 30 years of happy marriage. We have had our delights and our difficulties. We have known the joys and the sorrows of married life. We can remember the thrill of the first child. Then we can remember how after what seemed an eternity God gave us our second child, only to have that little one three days before God saw best to call the little fellow back home. Then we had the thrill of adopting a baby we knew about before he came into the world, one we could bring home from the hospital as our very own. We can look back on times when tragedy struck close as when our Son-in-law had to pass through the experience of having both his teenage brother and sister killed as they rode together on a motorbike.

We have had to face responsibility for elderly loved ones. We have a record in that we saw our two mothers, my mother and my wife's mother, live together like two sisters for 25 years as we provided them a separate home. Because we knew that death might separate them, we agreed that the one who was left on this earth would be taken into our home. When God took my mother first, we took "Miss Annie" to be with us. Lastly, we have known the thrill of our first grandson.

All through our marriage I feel that we have grown in love for each other, in personal maturity and also in spiritual depth. We thank God for all the experiences of life. We believe in Romans 8:28, and we especially like the translation: "All that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and if we are fitting into His plans." Let me share with you three secrets of successful marriage.

## **I. YOU CANNOT SURVIVE A LIFETIME TOGETHER UNTIL YOU LEARN TO UNDER STAND EACH OTHER.**

We need to realize that our mates are not story-book characters, always brave and gallant. It reminds me of the man whose wife complained "You are not as gallant as when I was a gal." He retorted, "And you are not as buoyant as when I was a boy" Our life's partners are not fairy-tale princes and princesses. Someone has observed that when you wed, you took not one person but two. You married a person as he is as well as the person you think he is. It is a good thing we do not always see him as he is. My wife would never have married me if she had known what was involved in keeping up with me.

I remember the time as a young preacher I preached on the Old Testament Story of how Jacob worked seven years to get a wife, but at the end of seven years, the wife he got was not the wife he thought he was getting. He had to work another seven years to get Rachel instead of Leah. I made what I thought was a very profound observation that many a man marries what he thinks is a Rachel and he gets instead a Leah. After the sermon a rather heavy-set lady came up to me with fire in her eyes. She said: "Young man, don't forget the other side. A lot of us married what we thought was a Jake and we got a jerk."

There are no two persons who are identical. Each person has his own characteristics, attitudes and habits. Don't be so gullible as to think: "I can change him overnight as soon as we are married." You may never change those differences. You may have to work through those personal differences.

Both men and women have emotional cycles. You have to realize that there are times when they are not themselves. But this is a temporary mood, and fortunately they swing back to more pleasant displays of their temperament. I do not recommend quarrels for the privilege of the make-up, but a broken bone may be stronger before the breakage if it heals properly. It is usually selfishness, which interferes with the healing process!

Unless we learn to understand each other marriage will always be a discord instead of a duet". Paul once used a Greek word (I Cor. 7:5), "symphonia" which literally means "sounds make together". Dr. John W. Drakeford suggests that Paul is saying, "let your marriage be a symphony."

Dr. Drakeford goes on to suggest several kinds of emotions that much be considered as we try to understand each other.

First there are "**DATED EMOTIONS**". One husband said these words: "I don't know why I am so ugly with my wife. I really love her, and yet I often say such ugly things to her. And when I say something ugly, I could bite my tongue. You know it is strange. That's the way I used to be with my mother. She was always wanting to know where I'd been, and whom I had been with until I resented her interference." In other words he was reacting now to his wife in the same way he reacted to his mother. "Dated emotions can be just as unsatisfactory as dated coffee. However, stale coffee will seldom wreck a marriage but dated emotions can!

Another thing to understand is **DISPLACED EMOTIONS**. These are the emotions, which are engendered as we displace the emotions aroused by one situation into another. Have you not discovered that when you have had a hard day at the office, it is so easy to take it out on your wife?

Then there are **DRAINED EMOTIONS**. These emotions have been likened to an old blocked water hose. As pressure builds up, something must give, and water will spurt out at the weakest point in the hose. But if the blocking at one end is removed, and the water is allowed to escape, the hose does not have to burst. I believe that speech is "Man's most ready safety valve." If you and I could talk things over with our life's partners, we might well drain off the emotions instead of causing a bursting experience.

There is good sense in talking things over and getting them out into the open. Little is gained by sullen silence. . A sensible discussion of the problem often provides the needed emotional release. Never allow a problem to go on without being settled. This only banks the fire! Have you ever noticed that children go alone and; mutter to themselves their complaints? They are only reacting to one of nature's "emotional tension release" methods.

A good rule for married couples to remember is that no two intelligent people ever lived together who did not disagree. Each should expect the other at times to disagree with his position, idea, or plan. But let us never forget the lesson in an old superstition that certain people could "talk out fire." If a person had been burned, the supposedly charmed person would mumble some words, perhaps rubbing his hands over the burned place, and the burn was, according to this superstition, supposed to be greatly lessened by this. I realize that this is sheer superstition, but I believe that a husband and a wife can "talk the fire out" of a situation that threatens to become serious, if they do not use some good, common sense.

## **II. THE SECOND SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE IS THAT LOVE IS A TENDER PLANT AND REQUIRES CONSTANT ATTENTION.**

So often we are so thoughtful of each other in the days of courtship, and then become positively inconsiderate after marriage. You perhaps have heard of the young couple. The Christmas before they were married, the young lady gave him a book: "*The Perfect Gentlemen*". The Christmas after they were married, she gave him another book: "*Wild Animals I have Known*." There ought not to be that much difference between courtship and marriage. Or to put it another way, courtship should be maintained after marriage. Once we helped her out of the automobile as though she were a Cinderella. Now we yell out: "Get a move on, old lady. Shake a leg."

Discourtesy can creep into a marriage. It is so easy to take love for granted. Some people think that all that is needed is to woo and win a person. After he married her, she should know forever that he chose her because he loved her, and that's that.

Love-making and love life are not accidental. They both require cultivation. Love is not spontaneous. There are forces that enter into love. For example, we never love a person we do not admire. Love should be the accomplishment of a beautiful dream not the end of it. Love is often a thing to be learned.

Husbands should remember that a wife's board, room, clothes, and medical care are not sufficient tokens of his affection to keep her happy. A man may do as much for his sister or housekeeper: A wife wants to know she counts more in his life than anyone else or anything else. So many men are so busy making a living that they neglect to make a life worthwhile for a wife.

It costs so little and means so much to give an occasional box of candy or other remembrance. For some of you, it's been so long since your children saw you come home with a bouquet of flowers for your wife that one of the children might burst out: "Mornrny, is Daddy going to die?"

I repeat that we so often take things for granted. How would you feel if you had some property for rent, and the person to whom you rented it came saying: "Well, I once told you that I am an honest man. If I don't get around to paying the rent it's not because I am dishonest, it's not that I don't care, but it's just that I've been too busy." It is just as inconsistent to say, by your action, "Well, honey, I told you once I love you when I married you. I provide what you need, and I work day and night to make a good living." Isn't that enough? No, it isn't. It is your continuing responsibility to show your love and affection and thoughtfulness. It is as much your responsibility to make living attractive as it is to make a living.

Wives, if you want love, you must prepare for it. Love is not something that is coming to you just because you married a man. You have to encourage love. If you insist, on being an iceberg, don't be surprised if his love cools off!

It isn't good horse sense to nag! Don't scold your husband if he reads the paper. Being away all day, he wants to catch up on the news. Create a cheerful atmosphere in the home. Make yourself attractive. Don't chatter all the time. Tell him the most cheerful news first. Don't meet him at the door and tell him about the bills that are past due, and the screen that needs fixing. Feed him a good meal, and afterwards drop down on his lap sometimes when he is not expecting it. It may be that he will be so surprised that first time he may drop you. There is a trail that leads to the land of marital happiness and on the trail there is a sign with these significant words: "KEEP UP THE LOVE GAME ."

Dr. William S. Deal tells of the dear old couple who had been married for forty years. As Dr. Deal passed their home they had forgotten to draw the window shades. There they were before a large fire place. She was sitting in his lap. The light of love shone on their silver hair. What a picture of devotion across the years. A few years later, the wife died. Not long after she was buried, his relatives found him in bed, his hair neatly combed. The bedclothes had hardly been ruffled. He had gone to sleep- a sleep which was final - longing to be with her whose love had meant so much, and God had granted his wish.

### **III. GOD BLESSES A MARRIAGE, WHICH SEEKS TO PROVIDE A CHRISTIAN HOME.**

J. Edgar Hoover declares that the only hope for American youth is the Christian Home. A Christian home is distinctive. It 'takes the combined efforts of the divine and the human. God supplies the miracle when Christian parents supply "the unction and the gumption."

If you say that you are too busy to begin building a Christian home, you need to take a long look at Susannah Wesley. In addition to being the mother of John and Charles Wesley, she bore 17 other children. She never heard of washing machines electric driers, dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, steam irons or TV dinners. Yet she found time to make a home that was truly Christian because she loved her family and she loved her God. This is where the Christian home begins. A Christian home is where the love of Christ abides.

Let me suggest several things that are in a Christian home.

- 1. There is love.** This is one thing that a Christian home has more of than an ordinary home. I am impressed that law enforcement officers, social workers, psychologists, and other experts agree that one of the major factors causing children to go wrong is that they have been deprived of the assurance of the consistent and continuous love in the home.
- 2. There is a positive example** in a Christian home. Parents, when are you going to learn that what you do, the way you live, the conduct you display, are the most important factors in shaping the lives of your children? A social worker noticed that a girl has welts and bruises on her body. "Where did you get them?" she asked the girl. The girl replied. "My grandmother gave them to me because I talked about my mother. My mother is a prostitute, but I love her." The social worker asked: "And where is your Father" The girl answered: 'He's in jail. He was caught selling dope." It's hard to maintain a good batting average when you start off with two strikes against you, as this girl did!
- 3. There is concern for other members of the family** in a Christian home. Reuben Herring tells of family worship. His nine-year-old daughter was praying for her little baby sister who was in a crib. "Help us to guide our baby sister along the right trails."

**4. A Christian home is one in which each person is respected** as an individual. He does not have to earn his place in the affection of the family. He does not have to be outstanding to be accepted. If he has a handicap or a personality trait, which might cause others to reject him, in a Christian home he will find additional love and consideration.

**5. There is fun and laughter** in a Christian home. Dr. R. Lofton Hudson once said a significant thing. As director of the Midwest Counseling Center, he says that he has known divorced families that had prayed together, but never did he know of a divorced family that had played together. Dr. Hudson went on *to* say that 80 to 90% of the couples who have "sick marriages" never learned how *to* play. .

**6. There is mutual sacrifice on the part of all members of the family** in a truly Christian home. I am sick and tired of hearing the emphasis that the only ones who should sacrifice are parents. There is nothing that will help your child to mature faster than to learn to make some sacrifice of his personal wishes and goals for the good of the family.

**7. There is discipline** in a Christian Home. If you want to make a mess out of your home, give your child everything he wants. Laugh at him and tell him he is cute when he cuts up or does wrong. Let him always have his own way. Do everything for him. Above all, defend him against everyone. When that Sunday School or Training Union worker tells you your child is misbehaving, get real angry because you know they have something against your child, or insist on maintaining your child is being blamed for what someone else is doing. There are two characteristics of good discipline. Let your Heavenly Father give you the perfect pattern. His discipline has two characteristics - love and firmness. God always disciplines in love. Yet his discipline is firm because of his love. Discipline that is not firm is worse than no discipline at all. It is better for you not to say anything than to say "No" and then fail to back up your word.

**8. Last of all, a Christian home has a great witness for Christ.** When people come to your home, it should speak eloquently of your faith in Christ. Your coming to church as a family can speak a witnessing word for Christ. When your family faces a crisis, it should manifest a faith that demonstrates the reality of your testimony. You may give the members of your family everything else, but if you do not give them a developing vital faith in Christ, you have failed. I have asked parents if their children were Christians, and they did not know. Parents should be the first to know whether the child is saved or not. Your home has not achieved its mission until every member of the family has received Christ as Saviour and is being helped to grow toward Christian maturity.

A part of this witness is in family worship. Family worship will not make a home Christian, but a home cannot be all that God wants it to be unless the family takes time to worship together. The Jewish home has been deeply religious since Old Testament times. The Passover meal, one of the Jew's most significant rituals, was observed in the home as a family experience.

Keep your family worship **BIBLE-CENTERED**. Responsive reading, reading in unison, encouraging each one to use his Bible, memorizing scripture are all helpful. Keep your family worship **BRIEF**. You defeat the purpose when you make it a long ordeal to be dreaded. Keep your family worship **DYNAMIC!** Don't let it fall into a rut. Use various methods. Let the children participate.

It takes more than a song or a sentiment to make a marriage successful. The man who became rich with "**SILVER THREADS AMONG THE GOLD**" had his happy married life end up on the rocks. If Christ had been the center, this would never have happened. You need Christ as your Saviour, as your Lord and you also need him as the Protector of your marriage!