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Introduction

Building a Godly Marriage is the second of the expanded books in the *Relational Self Help Series*. This book is not intended to be the answer to all marital problems. It is intended to be a guide for couples to be able to get their marriages on track with God's will and keep it there.

I have attempted to show, by using numerous Bible passages, not only what God wants a marriage to be, but also how He expects us to go about it.

I think Premarital Counseling is one of the most important steps a couple can take when they contemplate marriage. It should be done before they even set a wedding date, definitely before they order invitations. This is because I feel that many marriages should never happen. I know that's a bold statement, but I stand by it. I have seen too many couples and counseled many of them who never should have gotten married in the first place.

For this reason, I have included Chapter One, Before You Marry. If you want a Godly marriage, you need to start with two people who at least want to be close to the Lord. Therefore, the best way to have a Godly marriage is to start it off that way.

As I mention later, the best way for a marriage to stay Godly is to practice a little preventive maintenance. That means that if both spouses treat each other right from the beginning, then there will be no major problems to be dealt with along the way. This is what I discuss in Chapter Two, Working Together.

One of the most important aspects of any relationship, especially a marriage relationship, is communication. I feel that communication is so important that I devote a whole chapter to it, Chapter Three, Communication.

Compatibility or a lack thereof is important to a marriage. If you don't have perfect compatibility, you need to learn how to make your differences come together to form a Godly marriage. This is what Chapter Four, Compatibility is all about.

The horrible fact is that some marriages include an abusive relationship. This is such a crucial subject that, again, I have included an entire chapter on it, Chapter Five, Abusive Behavior.

This chapter includes a list of what to look for in a potentially abusive person.

There are many situations that a marriage can fall into, and many of them are outlined in Chapter Six, Interpersonal Relations. Each situation is outlined with possible solutions listed as well.

Marriage would be easy if there was no outside influence, such as relatives, friends, and jobs. Chapter Seven, External Pressures, goes into each of these potential problem areas.

Many of the situations mentioned in Chapters Four through Seven cause many different reactions from either or both spouses. Chapter Eight, Reactions, deals with the most common of these reactions.

Finally, Chapter Nine, Put It All Together, does just that. It is a review of Chapter Two, which is really how the marriage should be all along.

Please, do not think that the suggestions in this book will solve every issue every time. There may come a time when you and your spouse will need professional counseling. Make sure that you go to a counselor who not only believes in and practices what the Bible teaches, but also will use the Bible along with prayer to help you.

Chapter One: Before You Marry

Pray

I always say that I don't give advice in my counseling, I simply help my client to list all possible options, and then they choose the one they feel is best for their needs. However, I will say this one thing, and you can take it as advice if you want. I like to think of it as a warning instead of advice.

The best way to build a Godly marriage is very simple.

Choose your marriage partner prayerfully!

You need to spend as much time as necessary in determining whom you are going to marry. Remember, God looks at marriage as permanent. That means you are choosing your lifetime partner, not someone you can leave down the road if it doesn't work out. Therefore, find the marriage partner that God intended for you to have.

The first thing you must do is pray that God will guide you to the person He wants you to marry. Then, listen to Him, and follow His guidance. That means keep on praying as you meet and get to know the person you think you want to marry. Keep asking God to help you discern if this is His chosen mate for you.

Do a Spiritual Evaluation

Is your potential marriage partner a believer?

2 Corinthians 6:14-15, Do not be bound together with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? What agreement has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

I once had a Christian woman ask me if she should marry her fiancé and then try to get him to become a Christian or wait. I quoted 2 Corinthians 6:14-15 to her and talked about the

importance of going into a marriage equal in their faith. A few weeks later, I learned that she didn't marry him. She moved in with him!

About a year later, she came to me and told me they wanted to get married since her fiancé had become a Christian. That was not the way it should be done.

As you are getting to know each other, make sure that he or she knows how important your faith is to you. If the other person is not a Christian, it's up to you as to how you proceed from there.

My observation has been that if you don't make a stand for your Christianity right then, you'll quite possibly never have that open opportunity again.

You must make it clear that you are reluctant to marry someone who is not a Christian.

Here are a few more warnings:

1. Beware of false professions, which are done only to placate you.
2. Beware of anyone who tries to talk you out of your faith.
3. Beware of anyone who is so persuasive that they convince you that a difference in faith does not matter.

Does your potential marriage partner's life show evidence of being a Christian?

Galatians 5:22-23, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

This is a difficult area, lest you be accused of judging. Take your cue from Jesus. He said that you would be able to recognize them by their fruit.

Matthew 7:15-20, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their

fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So every good tree produces good fruit, but the bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit nor a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Use caution here, especially since most people can put on a convincing act for a short time and fool almost anybody. Don't be fooled. This is too important.

Are Your Beliefs Compatible?

Even if both of you are Christians, there can still be many potential problems in your marriage. I personally think this point is as important as marrying a Christian. You know the old saying, "Never argue politics or religion." That saying is very true, if there are major differences in your beliefs.

Differences in beliefs will cause troubles on many aspects of your married life.

1. Which church to attend
2. How will children be taught?
3. Even where the children will attend school or not
4. Holiday celebrations
5. Use of alcohol or not (tobacco too)

Please be sure that you and your potential marriage partner believe the same way on the fundamentals of Christianity. Don't try to reconcile these differences after you marry. A happy Christian family is the one who worships together (in the same church).

Check for Emotional Compatibility

Good Marriage Traits

Everyone has their own ideas about what good marriage traits could be. I think you already have some ideas in mind. Let me give you a few questions to answer that may be important to you.

1. Are they ready for the change that being married will make in their life?
2. How well do they share?
3. How responsible are they?
4. How do they act around children? The elderly?
5. How do they act toward your friends?
6. How possessive of you are they?

Adaptability and flexibility

One of the most important things that both spouses need to do is adapt to the other person's quirks, habits, and personality traits. Two people living together is difficult at best, without adding to the mix one or both spouses being inflexible.

You've heard it said that marriage is a give – take relationship. I say no. It is a give – give relationship.

This is where love must take over. If you love the other person enough, you will be willing to adjust your lifestyle to accommodate theirs.

Empathy

There is no place in a marriage for sympathy! However, there is a place for empathy. Empathy is feeling what the other person is feeling and helping them through those feelings.

You must be able to be in every situation together, feeling and experiencing all the same emotions.

Problem solving skills

Marriage has its problems, and most of them are from outside the marriage itself. Be sure that your potential marriage partner is able to help you to face all problems that come your way

rationally. This does not mean that you must dump everything on them. It means that you must do it together, prayerfully.

Emotional stability

This is a difficult one to determine. It partially depends on how long you have known the other person before you decide to get married.

At any rate, you should be able to see the other person in enough situations to have a good idea as to their emotional stability.

Watch out for those who wear their feelings on their fingertips, so to speak. Also, beware of those who hold everything in.

Watch for outbursts of anger or frustration. These are definitely signs of much more to come.

An emotionally stable person is easy to be around. On the other hand, an emotionally unstable person is uncomfortable to be around. How comfortable is your prospective spouse to be around?

Communication ability

Communication is crucial, as you will note by the fact that I have devoted an entire chapter to it. Please spend some time in that chapter before you marry. It tells you all you need to know about successful communication.

Commitment

I can't stress this enough. If you or your potential marriage partner are not properly committed to this marriage lasting for the rest of your lives, STOP right now and think things over very carefully.

Commitment is the one thing about marriage that has begun to lapse over the last forty or fifty years. Too many people go into marriage the same way they would in buying a new car. They only see outward appearances and think that if they don't really like it after they buy it, they can always trade it in on a different model.

God does not look at marriage that way, and neither should you.

Pray

The last thing (the first as well) you must do in choosing a marriage partner is pray that you have truly allowed God to guide you to the person He wants you to marry. Then, listen to Him again, and follow His guidance.