

# Six Principles of a Healthy Marriage

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When I was single, the crazy high divorce rates in our culture never made any sense to me. *You get to live with your best friend and have sex? What could go wrong?* When I fell in love with my wife, I fell hard. We soon got engaged, did premarital counseling, and looked forward to a big wedding and living happily ever after. But then a few months into marriage I had this thought: “Oh, now I get it. This is really hard!”

Marriage is a wonderful gift—the fullest expression of love, intimacy, friendship, and trust we can experience this side of heaven. Marriage is a beautiful covenant that reflects Christ and his people (Eph. 5:22-33). And yet, a healthy, fulfilling, Christ-exalting marriage doesn’t come easy. Nothing good does. After twenty-five years of marriage, I still love my wife. She is still my best friend. And we still fail every day. We’ve learned a few things about how God’s grace can fuel the patterns that build a healthy marriage. Consider these six principles:

## **1. Make your marriage top priority.**

While marriage can be one of the most challenging aspects of life, it has the potential to be the most fulfilling. So, invest time and energy into your relationship. You cannot coast your way into a happy marriage. It takes effort. If two people try to just coast through marriage, they’ll usually coast apart. Focus on being a husband or wife even before you are a father or mother. Did you hear about a young married couple who put so much energy into their marriage they neglected their new baby? No, that has never happened! But the opposite happens all the time, so you may need to overcompensate. A good husband will always be a good father. A good wife will always be a good mother. It does not work the other way.

## **2. Balance the friendship, romance, and partnership.**

A healthy marriage is a combination of a strong friendship (a couple walking shoulder-to-shoulder), a vibrant romance (two lovers in face-to-face intimacy), and an effective partnership (two warriors fighting back-to-back). Often the partnership (managing the finances, raising kids, running a household, etc.) choke out the friendship and romance. Focus on building a strong friendship and the romance and partnership will grow out of this. Spend time together. Find activities you enjoy doing together (if you don’t have any, learn to enjoy what your spouse does!). Talk. Hold hands. Laugh.

## **3. Appreciate your differences.**

Instead of begrudging all the ways your spouse is different from you, seek to be thankful for how God crafted each of you differently. Study your spouse; seek to understand their perspective. Instead of being critical, find ways to appreciate who you married and how you complement one another. Understand how their differences are strengths. Once you have done this, you can trust each other, value each other, and operate together as a team.

## **4. Serve your spouse.**

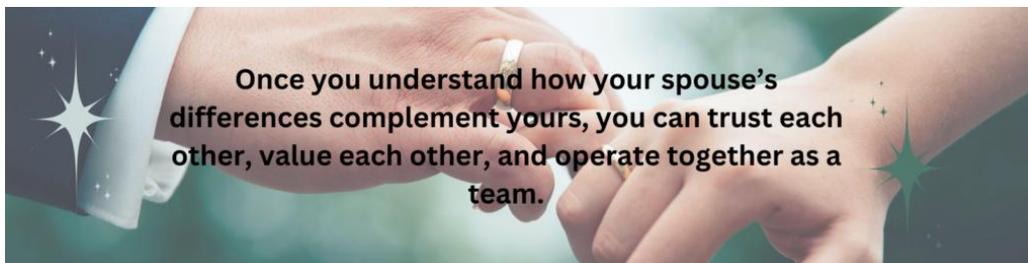
Marriage is nothing if not a lesson in selflessness. Philippians 2:3-4 tells us to count others more significant than ourselves. We can’t just look to our own interests, we must also seek the interests of others. God has called you specifically to serve your spouse. If you try to be selfless and serve in your own strength, you’ll just get tired and bitter. The Spirit of Jesus must work through you. This is a sacrifice, but a sacrifice that honors God and brings joy (to him and to both of you!).

### **5. Sex is a powerful gift.**

God has given sex as a gift in marriage. Beyond just making babies, sex builds emotional and spiritual intimacy. God can use sex to relieve stress, build security, break tension, overcome emotional distance, prevent temptation, and build a relational connection. Studies tell us (see here and here) that a healthy, thriving couple typically enjoys sex a couple times a week (of course physical health, age, and life phase all play a role in this). Don't wait until sparks are flying and you are both in the right mood – then it might never happen! Commit to being consistent. Schedule it if needed. While good sex does not make for a good marriage, a good marriage will usually lead to good sex.

### **6. Connection with God is essential.**

Remember, marriage is ultimately a reflection of Christ and his Bride. Fostering a strong relationship with God is crucial to a strong marriage. You cannot lean on your spouse to meet all of your needs; if you try, you will crush them. Only Christ can handle that task – your identity, security, and purpose must come from him first. If you are looking to God for the love, value, and respect you crave, you will always have love, value, and respect to give your partner (even when they don't reciprocate).



**No marriage is perfect. We all have good days and bad days. But God's grace is deeper than our worst faults and failures. Seek the grace of God. Your marriage depends on it.**