



Changes in our world are placing increased stress on today's marriages and families.

The media constantly pummels the family with "alternative lifestyles" that under- mine traditional values. Economic pressures create hardships that pull families apart. And many other dramatic trends are putting modern marriages at risk.

So what can you do to give your marriage some stability in the midst of chaos?

What are some common sense principles you can apply right now that will help you have a successful marriage?

The Bible gives clear principles that can help you establish a strong, successful marriage - and family - in these turbulent times. Here are some of them.



Make Marriage A Lifetime Commitment

Those who enter into marriage are committing to a lifetime relationship. Jesus Christ said, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. And whatsoever God has joined together, no man shall put asunder" (Matthew 19:5).

Marriage is a holy relationship. Both of you are breaking ties with your parents and forming a new unit, a new bond, a new relationship.

But many things are working against you today:

Our society has become more mobile. People are moving because of job opportunities or economic stress, breaking down the old concept of neighborhood and the strong family ties between generations. We've lost a sense of cohesion and community.

Our society has also made divorce very easy. In all 50 states, a person can get a "no-fault" divorce, meaning the marriage can be dissolved for no reason. Yet however "easy" divorce may seem, studies are showing how disruptive it is on the family. Women are often forced into poverty, men suffer greater health problems, not to mention the toll it takes on the children.

With nearly 20 million children living in one-parent households, sociologists have found that children brought up without both parents - especially without a father - grow up more susceptible to peer

pressure, drugs and poor self-esteem. This is the legacy we are leaving to our children.

The divorce rate has gone up more than 400 percent since 1970. But the Bible makes it very clear: God says, "I hate divorce" (Malachi 2:16). And the reason God hates it is because He knows what it does to people's lives.

Of course, there are legitimate grounds for divorce. When one spouse is being emotionally or physically abused, this is intolerable. You don't have to submit to someone who is battering you, beating you or forcing you to do indecent things.

The other grounds for divorce is adultery. If one partner is committing adultery, the other party is not bound by the relationship. But beyond abuse and adultery, there are no other grounds for a Christian to divorce another Christian.

Although these valid, biblical reasons for divorce exist, you shouldn't look to them as a way out of your marriage. Look for ways to redeem your marriage and to make it work.

Realize that your marriage is a solemn, lifetime commitment. You will live more successfully if you enter into marriage carefully, firmly making up your mind that the relationship is for keeps.



Set Good Priorities

Your relationship with God should always come first. When you make time for Him, seeking first His kingdom, all else will be given unto you (Matthew

6:33) .To succeed in marriage, both people must be led in their own devotional life by the Lord.

There are plenty of pressures that pull you away from being centered on Jesus. But you will be able to cope with the pressure - however difficult they may be - if you have a rich devotional life rooted in prayer, talking to and hearing from God, and reading and meditating on the Bible. Nothing can shake you if you are led by the Spirit of God. If not, your life, your family, your children, your work, and your involvement in the community will have no solid basis.

Your family should be your second priority. And within the family, your priority should be to your spouse first, and then to your children. When there is a loving, nurturing, stable relationship between husband and wife, the children feel safe and secure.

And don't think that your family will suffer because it is second behind your devotion to the Lord. When you are obedient to God, He will guide and bless your time with your family.

Your job should be your third priority. You should never place your work above your relationship with God or your commitment to your family. This can be difficult to practice, especially for those who feel strongly committed to their professions.

But successful families have discovered this proper ordering of priorities. Former First Lady Barbara Bush, speaking to a group of students at an all-women's college, said, "At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, winning

one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend, or a parent."

"Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House but on what happens inside your house."

What a moving and important statement. The Bible says, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul (see Luke 9:23). And what good is it to be a "success" in life and lose your family - to see your children grow up to be delinquents or to have your life shattered by divorce? What have you accomplished by that?



Establish A Proper Order At Home

*J*esus Christ must be the head of every household. He has to be the center, the head, the glue, the dynamo. Husbands and wives must put Jesus first.

Husbands must be the high priest of the family. They are supposed to hear from God, lead by God's Spirit, and be the ones who make decisions for the family based on the Lord's leadership. At the same time, the role of the husband is to cherish and nurture his wife as he does his own body, to love his wife as Jesus Christ loves the church and gave Himself for it. For a good example of the husband's godly leadership in the home, consider the life of Joseph, the husband of Mary and earthly father of Jesus (see Matthew 1 and 2).

Wives are to be submissive to Jesus and to their husbands. They are to nurture the family, to create a home environment with Christ as the center and to uphold their husband with prayer.

Marriage is not a relationship of one dominating another, but of each individual having specific roles that complement the other. It's not a question of selfish domination - of someone saying, "I'm the boss and you must do what I say." Marriage is a partnership based on God's Word, to be characterized by preferring one another more than yourself. Couples are to work, live and walk side-by-side as partners.



Maintain Personal Growth

A great tragedy often occurs in marriages where the wife stays at home, looks after the children, cleans up the house, does the laundry and fixes the meals day after day, without taking any opportunity to grow personally.

The husband, meanwhile, is away at the office where he is given increasingly challenging tasks. Over time, the wife has little change in her life, while the husband experiences personal and professional growth.

They become two different people. In many ways, this is good. It is normal and natural for people to change over time. But unless it is dealt with properly it can cause friction.

Husbands and wives need to cultivate and make allowances for their spouse to grow and change over the years. Don't expect your mate to be the same at age 50 as he or she was at 25.

Share each other's interests. Don't take your spouse for granted, but do everything you can to communicate so that new experiences can be shared.

Build a relationship of mutual respect and admiration, while at the same time allowing each partner to have his or her own interests and other intellectual and spiritual pursuits. You don't have to get a Ph.D., but you should grow in the gifts and talents the Lord has given you.

Pray together about crucial decisions in your lives. As you become a conduit of God's blessing for your spouse, the Spirit of God will draw you together. You will grow in the faith, studying and learning together.

Husbands and wives need to communicate. The one problem above all others in marriage is lack of communication. Instead of talking with one another, husbands and wives often watch television or read the newspaper while the kids go off by themselves. There needs to be a time when the family comes together to share, pray, read the Bible together and talk about Jesus.

It's particularly easy to do this with young children. Start when they are two, three or four years old. Read Bible stories, pray together, and talk about these things while their minds are open and inquiring. Parents of young children have an extraordinary opportunity.



Maintain Discipline In Your Home

It's been said that if you can train up a child in the way he should go, when he is of age he will not depart from what you have taught him (see Proverbs 22:7).

There are many who say that if you train a child until he's six or seven years old, he will still follow the teaching he has been given when he's older. This means that when your children are young - when they are the most impressionable, loving and tender - that's the time to pour into them your attention, your love, and particularly the Word of God. When this is done correctly, they will understand that you are submitting yourself to God's Word, and the children in turn will have standards to live by.

The goal of childhood discipline is to make sure your children come to Jesus Christ, because when they develop a personal relationship with Him, the Spirit of God will keep them protected and prepared amidst the pressures they are exposed to today.

But they must see strong examples of faith in the home, an understanding of God's Word, and parents who are willing to read to them and teach them. *That's why parents must instill in their own hearts the commandments of the Bible.*

If you subscribe to cable television, you should not let into your home some of the movie channels that are available. The overt sexuality and obscene language are things you need to police. Your children are not ready to handle

that kind of visual temptation and suggestion. There needs to be a true understanding between the child and the parent as to what is going on in this world - what the consequences of sin are and how misleading the images on television can be about real life.



Get Out - And Stay Out - Of Debt

The number one cause of divorce in America is financial difficulties. If you are caught in the credit card crunch and have a large amount of debt, you must take immediate steps to correct the problem and preserve your family. Otherwise, you will find yourselves growing apart - or worse, giving up - because of it.

First, get a handle on your financial situation. It's not going to hurt any more or less if you know the full scope of it. In fact, knowing exactly where you stand will help you eliminate debt more quickly. So you need to sit down and put before you all your obligations.

Second, tell yourself you want to pay it all off To do this, you have to know what you are capable of paying and commit to living within your income. You must determine to do this or you will always be miserable.

Talk with your creditors to work out a plan, assigning a portion of your income each month to retire the debt. Tell them what you want to do, and begin working it out.

Most importantly, give to the Lord off the top of your income. God will bless you if you give to His work, and often the blessing will be a financial one.

As husband and wife, set apart a little of your salary for recreation. Maybe five percent. Go away to a nice lodge or hotel to get yourselves away from the pressures. Spend some time letting God minister to just the two of you. Little by little, if you are giving to God, God will begin to give you concepts and ideas so you can work your way through your problems.



Stick Together

Hard times come into any marriage, but the most fruitful and healthy way to handle them is by staying together. Talk to each other. Make it clear that you love each other. Discuss the problems and eliminate the irritants - especially overspending or careless conduct between you. And, of course, grow in the Lord and in your love for one another. Together, nothing is impossible for you!

You can work your way out of any situation once you both make up your mind that's what you are going to do.

Remember, it takes a considerable amount of effort to make a marriage work - to cultivate a loving and caring family relationship. A good marriage is a wonderful testimony to the power of God as you seek to serve Him with everything you have.



How To Find *True* Love

I hope you have received some insight into God's plan for marriage and family in this booklet. I also want you to know that there is one Ultimate Answer to every question and problem - Jesus Christ!

The Bible tells us that all men and women are created in such a way that they long for a relationship with their Creator. But ever since Adam and Eve decided to go their own way in the Garden of Eden, that intimate relationship with God has been broken.

Mankind has devised many different ways to try to mend this relationship. Many people believe that if you do enough good things you'll get to heaven. Others try to reach God through religious experiences.

But the Bible tells us that there is only one way to reach God - by coming to a personal understanding of how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ can restore our relationship with God and pave the way for life as He intended it.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

Jesus made a way for you to come to God and have a new start in life. He died to take away your sins and bring you into a personal relationship with God.

You can have that relationship right now, by committing your life to Jesus and receiving His forgiveness. If you don't know how to talk with God, or how to begin telling Him you want to submit your life to His plan, start with this simple prayer. Just speak it from your heart:

"Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. I've done many wrong things (name them if you need to) and I ask you to forgive me. I want you to be Lord of my life. Please help me to live for you, and I thank you for your love. Amen."

Congratulations! If you prayed this prayer, you need to tell someone about this wonderful decision you've made! Call our CBN 24-hour prayer line **-1-800-759-0700**. Someone who cares will rejoice with you, pray with you and send you information on how to live as a new Christian.

This is the most important decision of your life. May God encourage you as you come to understand more about His love for you!



Love & Marriage is adapted from Pat Robertson's audiotape series *Living Successfully in the '90s* ('Power For Your Family').

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Revised and updated in 1998 by The Christian Broadcasting Network, Inc.

All Scripture is quoted from the New International Version (NIV) Bible unless otherwise noted.

Printed In The U.S.A