

Vital Ingredients For A Lifetime Marriage

Introduction. Thomas Adams said, "As God by creation made two of one, so again by marriage he made one of two." In 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, the woman learned that she must cover her head when praying or prophesying because of her submission to man. But lest the man should assume too much superiority, and regard the woman as made solely for his pleasure, treating her as inferior and not showing her the proper respect, Paul wrote that the man and woman are united in the tenderest of interests (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). This demands proper respect and regard.

This lesson ends our marriage series. It is my prayer that this series has been beneficial regardless of your marital status. This final lesson is a summary designed to give you four ingredients for a happy, lifelong marriage.

I. **Focus**

A. Attention.

1. We all need attention. When we were little, we would hang by our legs on the monkey bars, and say, "Watch me, mommy. Watch me, daddy." As we get older, we still say, "Watch me," but we just do it in a different way. We say it with clothes, cars, haircuts, etc. The reason you married your spouse is because you caught each other's attention. Do you remember how much attention you paid to your mate when you were dating? You can always tell the unmarried couple at the mall or at the park -- you see them, but they do not see you. They are totally absorbed in one another. But usually after the wedding, the attention erodes and you reach the five stages of the married code:
 - a) Year 1: The husband says to the wife, "Baby darling, I am worried about that sniffle. I called the paramedics, and they are coming right over."
 - b) Year 2: "Sweetheart, I don't like the sound of that cough. Let me put you in bed and tomorrow I am going to take you to the doctor."
 - c) Year 3: "Honey, you look like you have got a fever. Why don't you run down to hospital while I watch the kids."
 - d) Year 4: "Be sensible. After you bathe the kids and tuck them in, get a little rest."
 - e) Year 5: "Would you stop that coughing, you sound like a barking seal. I can't hear the television!"
2. If you care, you will be aware. The opposite of love is not hate, the opposite of love is indifference. That is why Ephesians 5:28-29 needs to be repeated over and over again. If you want to have a

lifelong marriage, paying attention pays off (Genesis 24:67; Esther 2:17).

B. Appreciation.

1. The best way that you can encourage your mate is to express verbal appreciation for them (Ecclesiastes 4:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). You cannot overestimate the power of encouragement. A lot of us want to change our mate. Right after the marriage, we look at our mates as a project. We say, "I do," and then we think, "I will re-do." You do not change your mate by nagging. Do not give pokes, give strokes, because we all blossom under affirmation and appreciation. The definition of "appreciation" is "to raise in value." Whenever you appreciate your spouse, you are increasing their value. That also increases your value, and together it increases the value of the relationship.
2. Our world is so full of put-downs. The last place you need more of it is at home. Every marriage partner needs to give a compliment to the other partner every day, without exception (Proverbs 13:3; James 3:2). Appreciating your spouse is one of the greatest testimonies that you will ever make to a lost world.

C. Affection.

1. The physical expression of your love in marriage is affection. Proverbs 5 is about married love and enjoying your wife and staying away from the adulteress, etc. As food is to your body's health, so touching, tenderness, and contact is to the emotions. It is absolutely indispensable (Proverbs 5:18-19). A lot of marriages are dying from physical and emotional malnutrition because affection does not exist anymore.
2. Let's look at three key thoughts that are evident from 1 Corinthians 7:3-5.
 - a) Intimacy, affection, and sexual intercourse are legitimate needs, and are not to be ignored. Physical love is a natural part of your relationship.
 - b) It is for mutual benefit. It is not just something the husband wants and needs, it is something that both need. Communication breaks down in this area more than any other in marriage. If a husband and wife are not communicating about affection, intimacy, and sexual fulfillment, they are missing the boat altogether.
 - c) It is a spiritual responsibility. If you avoid or deny this physical relationship with your spouse, there are spiritual consequences. Paul said, "By your forced abstinence, you give the devil leeway. He is going to come and wreck everything you have." If you

want a lifelong marriage, then start out by focusing your attention, appreciation, and affection on your mate.

II. **Flexibility**

- A. Lifelong marriages are characterized by flexibility. Earlier in the series, we looked at the stages and seasons of marriage. The point was that there are all kinds of adjustments because a marriage is constantly changing. One person wrote, "My marriage is a continuous process of getting used to what I had not expected." Several years ago, *Better Homes and Gardens* did a survey of why marriages fail. They interviewed 300,000 marriages and found the number one reason, according to their verbiage, was simple immaturity. They were not flexible enough to make the necessary adjustments.
- B. Let me tell you three basic facts of life regarding marriage.
 - 1. You will have conflict and disagreement in your marriage; it is unavoidable. Every person's marriage has some level of conflict within it.
 - 2. There will be some subjects that you never agree on or see the same way. Seventy percent of us marry our opposites. We do this because we want somebody who has what we do not have. Opposites are kind of appealing to us in the dating stages. Then we get married and all of a sudden somebody has to adjust.
 - 3. Your willingness to be flexible and to compromise is a mark of true love. To learn of flexibility, all you have to do is read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and 1 Peter 3:7.

III. **Faithfulness**

- A. In our permissive, irresponsible, and escapism mentality, commitment has almost become a dirty word (Psalm 12:1; Proverbs 20:6). We are not supposed to be committed to anything except personal happiness. When you married your mate, you vowed before God, and God said, "I expect you to keep that vow." Marriage is one of the precious few covenants that we will enter in our lives. Somebody says, "But God knows I am frail. God knows I am human. He knows I am going to sometimes say what I do not mean." That is right, but that is why a covenant is not just saying something. It is a vow before God (Proverbs 20:25; Ecclesiastes 5:4).
- B. Faithfulness to commitment is the key to permanence in marriage. You will never build a great and lifelong marriage if divorce is always in the background as the way out. If you want a great marriage, lock down the escape hatch and throw away the key. The Jews would divorce their wives for many reasons, including going about with loose hair, spinning in the street, familiarly talking with men, ill-treating her

husband's parents in his presence, brawling, a bad reputation, or the discovery of fraud before marriage (Matthew 19:3). Some had no more commitment than we have today!

- C. Years ago, in the *Nashville Banner*, a woman submitted a sad letter which could have been written by thousands of people around the country. She said, "I am a 51-year-old woman. Right now, I am suffering from the devastation of being fired. For over 30 years, I devoted my life to the job I had. Now I am not very young anymore and my prospects are very slim of being rehired or finding another job. You see I have just been relieved of my duties as a wife. My very successful husband has informed me that he no longer requires my services. He is looking for someone with more practical experience and more advanced techniques. Plenty of applicants seek my former job. His new look of trimness and tans, plenty of money, and no family responsibilities, make his job opening the most sought-after position in town. He even gives flowers, trips, and gifts to any and all who show interest -- fringe benefits he felt unnecessary for his former employee ... I was always so proud to bear my husband's name. Now another woman will be assuming that same name, one I upheld for years and zealously guarded from even the slightest tarnish of taint. I doubt she will be as careful. Many times I have held the pillow over my face to keep the neighbors from hearing my cries in the night."

IV. **Forgiveness**

- A. No marriage can make it without forgiveness. You do not want to be like the fellow who said, "My wife and I have a 'beef stew' relationship. I beef and she stews." If you do not forgive in marriage, the only alternative is resentment. Resentment kills communication, feelings, and trust. When you live with someone in marriage, you will at times hurt them. Sometimes you will hurt them unintentionally, and frankly, sometimes you will do it on purpose. When your spouse hurts you, you have one of two options: you can either rehearse it or you can release it. You can bring up the hurt, and go over and over it again, make it bigger and bigger, and get madder and madder. Or you can just release those hurts and forgive. Which one do you believe will be the more beneficial (Proverbs 24:29; Mark 11:25; 1 Corinthians 4:12-13)?
- B. What do you resent in your marriage? Do you resent your spouse not taking enough responsibility for certain parts of your marriage? Do you resent that your spouse does not clean up their mess? Do you resent your mate for not listening to you or talking to you more? Do you resent your mate because they are insensitive to your sexual needs? Do you resent your mate because they cannot support the family? Resentment always hurts you worse than the person you resent.

C. Forgiveness is focusing on how much God has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). Think about everything that you have forgiven in your mate: their shortcomings, weaknesses, and the times they have hurt you; now stack that list up against everything of which God has forgiven you. Your mate's list will be pretty short.

Conclusion. From our first lesson, remember that the grass is not greener on the other side of the fence. The grass is always greener where you water. Marriage is not so much finding the right person as it is being the right person. Do you know what makes a Christian marriage? You can have two Christians married to each other and not have a Christian marriage because one or neither of them are acting like Christians at all.

There are three necessities of a Christian marriage. First, both parties must follow the teachings of Christ. Second, the spirit of Christ must reside in their hearts. When this happens, both parties will grow. Third, both must genuinely pray for their marriage. There might be people here who have not specifically prayed for their marriage since the day the preacher joined them in holy matrimony. If you have a Christian marriage, pray that God will protect your marriage against everything the devil can throw at it.