

# Attitudes And Habits Of Marriage

**Introduction.** Is your marriage as happy as you want it to be? Many marriages today are in trouble and the mates are unhappy. Every married couple has exchanged vows which promise “til death do us part,” but for far too many marriages, their dreams of “forever” are crushed by divorce. According to government statistics from the CDC, America averages 876,000 divorces per year. That’s 16,800 divorces every week, 2,400 divorces every day, and one divorce every 36 seconds. That’s 67 divorces in the time it takes to preach this lesson, and that’s enough to clear out all the marriages in this room.

So, how do we stop this epidemic of broken marriages? To bring it even closer to home, how should you protect your marriage? God never intended that marriage be an unhappy state, but for it to be one of the happiest relationships that man would have on this earth. While nothing is foolproof, if you’ll develop the attitudes that strengthen marriage and avoid the habits that lead to divorce, you’ll be well on your way to beating these statistics and creating a healthy and happy marriage that will endure through every season of life. If you believe your marriage is on a downhill slide, then listen carefully and get back to the state that you had in the beginning!

## ***I. Attitudes That Strengthen Marriage***

### **A. Love.**

1. In the marriage relationship the husband and wife become exclusively the possession of each other (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). Marriage fulfills one of the greatest needs of mankind — to love and to be loved. This relationship brings into the life of each mate fulfillment, satisfaction, and contentment.
2. God ordained that the man should rule over his wife (Genesis 3:16), not unjustly as a slave master, but with love (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29). The wife is commanded to love her husband (Titus 2:4). This is to be a self-giving concern for each other — a love that seeks each other’s happiness and well-being at the sacrifice of their own interest and welfare (1 Corinthians 13:5).

### **B. Appreciation.**

1. Express appreciation for everything that is done — whether it is big or small (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). At all times look for the good qualities in your mate and express appreciation for them.
2. Don’t just look for the negative — if you do all of life will begin to appear totally negative. Stay in touch with the reality of the good in your partner, look for it and express appreciation for it.

### **C. Respect.**

1. Husbands (1 Peter 3:7) and wives (Ephesians 5:22) are to respect each other. Respect breeds respect, so if a spouse wants respect they must show respect (Matthew 7:12).
2. Sharp tongues and rolled eyes inflame bad feelings. Treat you mate with respect and dignity, and in time your mate will rise to the same high level.

### **D. Contentment.**

1. Contentment doesn’t come from material stuff — jobs, fame, glory, or money. You’ll never find contentment chasing that stuff. Like was said earlier, be grateful for what you do have today. Don’t look for what you don’t have.

2. You're the only one who can be content (Philippians 4:11, "I"). Your partner can't provide contentment, but you can develop or learn it by following the pureness of God's word (Luke 3:14; Hebrews 13:5).
- E. Forgiveness.
1. An unforgiving attitude inflames tension and strife. Never have the habit of dredging up the past mistakes to put down your companion. That is being unmerciful and unforgiving, and it reopens old wounds.
  2. Everyone wants mercy and forgiveness for his (or her) shortcomings. Many times people forgive everyone but their spouse; but the first place forgiveness should be practiced is at home with one's husband or wife (Matthew 6:14-15; Luke 6:36-38; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).
  3. You and your mate are imperfect human beings who have to live with one another 24/7 (1 John 1:8), so when you are wrong why not simply say, "I am wrong and I'm sorry"? Only an immature and prideful person refuses to admit their shortcomings and sins.
- F. Friendship.
1. Spouses should talk honestly with each other, and treat each other as best friends (because they should be). You want your feelings, needs, and opinions to be heard — and so does your spouse (Proverbs 27:9).
  2. What does it mean to be a friend? The friendship of David and Jonathan provides a superb example. The writer of 1 Samuel said, "... the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David" (18:1), and Jonathan "... loved him [David]: for he loved him as he loved his own soul" (20:17).
  3. Friends love each other dearly, so do mates who are trying to do God's will. A friend offers his best to a friend — husbands and wives who are what they should be offer their best to each other.

## **II. Habits That Lead To Divorce**

- A. Pride and selfishness.
1. Pride makes us "dig in" instead of being patient and forbearing (Proverbs 8:13; 21:4). It prevents us from lovingly finding a peaceful solution, not through fighting, but through negotiating. A happy marriage is not built on stubbornness, but on consideration for each other.
  2. Selfishness is the number one cause of divorce. We are all selfish by nature, but a marriage can only work when we put our selfishness aside and put the needs of our spouse ahead of our own (Philippians 2:3-4).
    - a) When both spouses are willing to selflessly love and serve each other in this way, the marriage will thrive. The hard part is that you have to be willing to go first and be selfless even in those moments when the other one is not reciprocating. Your actions might turn the tide.
    - b) Be a thermostat, not a thermometer. A thermometer always adjusts to the climate in a room, but a thermostat changes the climate in the room. Be the change. You probably have more influence than you think.
- B. Constant criticism.
1. When you get a warning light on your car's dashboard, it means there's something wrong under the hood that needs immediate attention.

2. One of the biggest “warning lights” in a marriage is a tone of constant criticism (Proverbs 19:13; 21:9, 19; 27:15). When a husband and wife start being each other’s biggest critics instead of the biggest encouragers, and when they start focusing only on the negative instead of the positive, it creates a downward spiral that often leads to divorce.
- C. Putting the marriage “on hold” while you’re raising your kids.
1. This is the reason there’s an epidemic of divorce among couples who have been married for 20 years or more. I’ve seen too many marriages fall apart because two well-meaning people put so much focus on their children that they forgot to keep investing in the marriage.
  2. Some couples reduce their relationship to a partnership in co-parenting, and when the kids finally grow up, they discover that they have created an empty nest and an empty marriage.
  3. Give your children the gift that comes from seeing their parents in a loving, passionate marriage. Model the kind of marriage that will make your kids excited to be married someday. For the husband (and wife too), live out the precept of Proverbs 5:15-20 and Ecclesiastes 9:9, and feel the excitement of Song of Solomon 4:1-7.
- D. Trusting your “feelings” more than your commitments.
1. Feelings are the worst way to determine choices in your marriage. There are going to be days when you might not “feel” like being married, but feelings are fickle and they were never intended to be our primary advisor in major decisions (Jeremiah 17:9; cp. Proverbs 28:26; Ecclesiastes 9:3).
  2. The healthiest couples have discovered that love is a commitment; not just a feeling. It is a vow “until death do us part” (Romans 7:2). It is a “cementing” together (Genesis 2:24). Their commitment to each other perseveres regardless of what they’re feeling.
  3. You promised not to give up no matter what the circumstances, even the inconvenient ones. The strength of that commitment allows you to have a deeper intimacy, a stronger connection, and a happier marriage.
- E. Keeping secrets from your spouse.
1. In marriage, secrets are as dangerous as lies, and we shouldn’t be lying to one another (Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8). Marriage must be built on a foundation of total transparency and trust. You have to prioritize these in the marriage ahead of your own personal privacy.
  2. Unless you’re planning a surprise party or hiding a holiday gift, there is no place for secrets in marriage. Anytime you’re having a conversation, making a purchase, sending a text message, typing in an internet address, or doing anything else you hope your spouse never finds out, your secrecy is slowly killing your marriage.
- F. Planning an exit strategy.
1. This is the biggest single step toward an eventual divorce. The healthiest couples have removed the “D-Word” (Divorce) from their vocabularies. When we threaten divorce or when we silently start fantasizing about life without our spouse or with someone new, we’re ripping apart the foundation of the marriage — and God hates it (Malachi 2:14-16).

- a) Emotional infidelity refers to behavior that one partner engages in that fosters emotional intimacy with someone else in the present, and promotes the possibility of sexual intimacy in the future.
  - b) Around 45% of men and 35% of women have admitted to an emotional affair. About 88% of women said that they were more concerned about their partners engaging in an emotional affair than a physical one.
  - c) Emotional affairs often begin innocently with a natural connection with someone at work, on social media, in a social circle, at the gym, or at church, but lines can be quickly crossed (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4).
2. Forget about divorce (1 Corinthians 7:11, 27)! The couples who make it aren't the ones who never had a reason to get divorced; they're the ones whose commitment was always bigger than their differences and flaws.

**Conclusion.** If you had the choice to be happy or unhappy, why would you intentionally choose to be unhappy, especially when you can change it? Choose happiness, and then work to achieve it. Husbands and wives need to act like Christians. When they do, marriages will be happier and more secure, and children will be more secure and encouraged to grow up and have their own happy homes.