

Strengthening Your Marriage

Introduction. I looked on Amazon the other day and there were over 4,000 titles for marriage counseling books. That's a lot of books, right? But let's try to understand the scale of that number. If you read a book per week, it would take you twenty years to read all the books that are just available today! Now you could do that, and you'd be a marital genius, but your marriage is probably going to die in the meantime.

In a day when the shelves of bookstores are stocked with books claiming to answer the question, the real solution to creating and keeping a haven that can be "home sweet home" is found right under our noses in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 — and it only takes about twenty seconds to read!

In spite of all the helpful books that have been written to improve marriage, marriage is of God and the best marriages result in following His teachings. So we're going to study the best passage I know to study to help your marriage today, and it won't bury you in a mountain of tips that you'll struggle to remember.

I. Love Suffereth Long

- A. "Suffereth long" comes from a Greek word that is "a compound word made up of *makros* which means 'long' and *thumos* which means 'temper;'" hence, it basically means to be long-tempered.
 - 1. In English, we speak of short-tempered people, though we never use the corresponding phrase "long-tempered." However, it would be a perfect translation of this word in the original language.
 - 2. The word also describes the man who, having power to avenge himself, does not do so. It is that self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong; it endures injuries and evil deeds without being provoked to anger or revenge.
- B. Hasty retaliation to every perceived wrong will harm your relationship. A spouse must endure sleights — or perceived sleights — without being provoked to anger or revenge. I will take and take, and be long-tempered with my mate.

II. Love Is Kind

- A. Love shows mercy, and mercy is what prevents us from being harsh toward others, even toward our enemies (Luke 10:33-35). Kindness can be an action (2 Samuel 2:5) or spoken (Genesis 40:14).
- B. If love's kindness is to lead us to be merciful to enemies, to what should it lead regarding those we say we love?

III. Love Envieth Not

- A. The Bible tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15), and that is simple unless envy rears its ugly head. It is hard to rejoice with your mate when you are secretly wishing the source of his or her joy would disappear.
- B. It is no surprise that envy has destroyed many friendships, and it should go without saying that it will harm and even destroy marriages. It has the capacity to drain the affection out of loved ones through a continual sense of injustice and

covetousness over friends, careers, or hobbies. It also keeps some nasty company as seen in Romans 1:29.

- C. Love shows no resentment over other's blessings. Loving husbands or wives are not envious when their spouse succeeds and is happy (cp. John 3:30).

IV. Love Vaunteth Not Itself

- A. Love makes no display of itself. Love does not heap praise or brag about one's own gifts.
- B. When we boast or brag, we can provoke our mate in one of two ways. First, we can tempt our mate to equal us by vaunting themselves. Second, we can tempt them to feel that what they do is never good enough.
- C. Competition among a married couple rarely ends well, and because of your bragging and constantly trying to "one-up" your mate, your unloving attitude will hurt rather than help your marriage.

V. Love Is Not Puffed Up

- A. Behind boastful bragging there lies conceit, an overestimation of one's own importance, abilities, or achievements (Matthew 6:2).
- B. The puffed up person will be tempted to direct his love toward himself or herself. Therefore, the praise one dishes out is self-praise. Such a one often provokes strife in his or her relationship with others (Proverbs 13:10). Pride is an enemy of your marriage.

VI. Love Doth Not Behave Itself Unseemly

- A. Love is courteous and polite. It avoids rudeness and harshness. It is concerned with how it is viewed by others. It is sad that sometimes husbands and wives treat each other by saying and acting in ways that they would never do to others.
- B. Rudeness is contagious. If someone is rude to me, I get offended and want to be rude in return. What kind of atmosphere does this create in a home? Love should cause me to care about how I behave toward my mate.

VII. Love Seeketh Not Its Own

- A. Examining the life of Christ shows the nobility of a love that seeks the welfare of others (Philippians 2:3-5).
- B. Selfish ambition is the pursuit of one's own welfare, even at the expense of others. It ruins friendships and divides families. It creates rivalries.
 - 1. Married people will not survive long in wedded bliss unless they build their union on selflessness. The home will become a battlefield of egos and competing interests.
 - 2. What we should be doing is put God first (Matthew 6:33). After that, we are to put our mates first, even above ourselves. In fact, we should be putting our mates above our children.
 - 3. Love is unselfish. It sacrifices. It seeks the well-being of others. "Love" is a verb, as is seen in John 3:16. Will you pursue vigorously what is best for your mate and not for yourself?

VIII. Love Is Not Easily Provoked

- A. It certainly seems as if our culture has trended toward being too easily provoked to anger and hurt feelings, and obsessed with victimization. The problem is sometimes not a matter of insensitivity on the part of the spouse making a comment. Rather, it is that spouses are overly sensitive.
- B. You know a marriage is in trouble when a husband or wife is always finding a reason to be offended. Innocent remarks are taken the wrong way and then blown out of proportion. Love is not displayed in constant irritation (a “chip on its shoulder”).

IX. Love Thinketh No Evil

- A. The word Paul uses is a business term which describes entering a debt on a ledger. It pictures a person obsessed with keeping record of who has wronged him and how, waiting for the opportunity to settle the score.
- B. This is a grudge holder. The irony is that it does far more damage to the grudge holder than other party. The “victim mentality” and desire for revenge eats away at the grudge holder and fills them with bitterness and resentment.
- C. Such record keeping is very dangerous to a relationship like marriage where one’s mate is naturally under closer-than-normal scrutiny anyway.
 - 1. Someone forgets a birthday or anniversary, or what specific gift was requested, etc. Or they do not remember to bring something home from the store, or where the best bargain on something can be had.
 - 2. No amount of apologies suffice. Nothing is ever truly forgiven, just put away for a little while until it is useful again.
 - 3. Poor accountants may be bad for businesses, but they are good for marriages. All people have faults, make mistakes, and sin. Mercy and forgiveness are the answer, not a ledger book.

X. Love Rejoiceth Not In Iniquity

- A. The wicked glory in activities of which they ought to be ashamed (Esther 5:14; Philippians 3:19). Why would anyone rejoice in unrighteousness? A husband or wife should never be happy because their mate has done wrong.
- B. I am holy (1 Peter 1:16). I am a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). I am a child of the King (Revelation 19:16). If I rejoice in unrighteousness, I am not a good example to my mate (Philippians 2:15). Letting the devil in is a sure way for your marriage to fail.

XI. Love Rejoiceth In The Truth

- A. Truth is required for man’s salvation and right standing with God, and love rejoices when the truth is upheld and others walk in truth (John 8:32; 3 John 4).
- B. When I rejoice with the truth, I am showing the right reaction to that which all mankind — including my mate — needs to have a right relationship with God.
- C. If you will only be a faithful Christian, you will be a good spouse. If a couple will not rejoice in truth, then how can they ever listen to proper injunctions regarding how they should act in marriage (Colossians 3:18-19)?

XII. Love Beareth All Things

- A. Love is not overcome by hardships or difficulties. A devoted couple will agree that they will do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to make their marriage work. Winston Churchill, as London was being bombed and voices were telling him to surrender, stood up and said, "Wars are not won by evacuation."
- B. Think of how much God bears in His waiting for man to repent (2 Peter 3:9). We should do everything humanly possible to keep from hurting our mate, to work for their salvation (Ephesians 4:31).

XIII. Love Believeth All Things

- A. This is not saying that one has the right to believe anything no matter how erroneous (Galatians 1:6-9). What Paul is saying is that love is not distrustful or suspicious. Marriages are weakened by doubt, by constantly looking for ulterior motives, or "What did he or she really mean when they said this or that?"
- B. When love has no evidence to the contrary, it believes the best about its fellowman. It refuses to yield itself to unfounded suspicion and doubt; it grants the other person the benefit of every doubt in believing the very best he can about him. Be content to put the best possible motive on your mate's actions.

XIV. Love Hopeth All Things

- A. Love looks for improvement; it is optimistic about the future. It is sad when a husband or wife lets their mate down. It is also sad when the one who has been let down gives up hope.
- B. Have the type of hope reflected in Galatians 6:1 toward your mate. Look for improvement even when you are let down by your spouse. Think, "I will never accept failure as final from my mate. I will always believe that God will use him or her for good."

XV. Love Endureth All Things

- A. McGarvey says that the word "endures" is a military term that means "to sustain an assault;" and, therefore, it has reference "to heavier afflictions than those sustained by the 'beareth' of v. 7. It refers to gross ill-treatment, resistance, strife, etc."
- B. This word appears twice in 2 Timothy 2:9-12. How does love figure into this equation? One good example is the command that Jesus gave to love one's enemies. It requires endurance (Luke 6:35-36). If we can follow Christ's teaching and do good to our enemies, we can act this way toward our spouse. No matter how dark the clouds get, I will never stop loving my spouse.

Conclusion. "Love never faileth." Love is always reliable. Can your mate count on your love? Paul gives a beautiful picture of love in all circumstances. If you want to put some muscle in your marriage, then learn first what real love is and decide that you're going to treat your spouse in the way 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 prescribes. It will do wonders for your marriage. Whatever happens we can know that we have applied the very best means if we practice love as Paul describes it in this passage.

The Father loved us enough to send His Son. Because of this tremendous benefit, we render back to Him heartfelt love and obedience. If that hasn't been the case with you, then maybe you need to change today by obeying Christ or repenting of past sins. May the Lord bless you as you decide to follow Him.