

# How To Strengthen Your Marriage

**Introduction.** How is your marriage? Is it in danger? Are you concerned about how it is going? Or, are you pleased with your marriage? Is it a source of happiness and contentment? What can you do to help your marriage? 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 (1 Corinthians 13:1-7).

In spite of all the helpful books that have been written to help improve marriage, the fact remains that marriage is of God and the best marriages result in following His teachings on the matter.

Love is the greatest inclination, the greatest virtue, the greatest verb Christians must learn, develop and practice. Paul is contending that love should play a major role in the brethren at Corinth's relationships to each other. Love must also play a major role in marriages. Love should lead the husband and wife in their thoughts and intents toward one another. It should be the motivation behind their actions toward one another. You need to make a disciplined effort to fully understand these 15 traits and apply them to your relationship with your mate.

## 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 persons, 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, yet does not. 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 our relationship with our mate. A spouse must endure sleights -- or perceived sleights -- without being provoked to anger or revenge. I will take and take -- determined to be long-tempered with my mate.

## II. ***Love Is Kind***

- A. Love shows mercy, and mercy is what allows us to refrain from being harsh toward others, even toward our enemies (Luke 6:35-36).
- 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 and that is simple unless envy rears its ugly head (Romans 12:15). 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. Hence, it goes 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. It furthermore 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 (cf. John 3:30).

### IV. ***Love Vaunteth Not Itself***

- A. Love makes no display of itself; it is not arrogant or full of self-importance. The one who loves does not sound a trumpet to announce his or her deeds (Matthew 6:2).
- B. When we embark on such a path we can provoke our mate in one of two ways: 1) To attempt to equal us by vaunting himself or herself; and 2) to feel that what they do is never good enough. This hurts rather than helps our marriage.
- C. As we think of this characteristic of love let us resolve within ourselves to never think or say anything more highly of ourselves than we ought, to never try to "one-up" our mate.

### V. ***Love Is Not Puffed Up***

- A. Love is not self-conceited, but humble. The one who loves does not have an overly inflated opinion of himself.
- B. By contrast, the puffed up person will be tempted to direct his love toward himself or herself. Hence, the praise such a one dishes out is self-praise. Such a one often provokes strife in his or her relationship with others (Proverbs 13:10).
- C. The person who loves his or her mate will resolve to kill all pride in the heart. It is an enemy of my 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 get to where they do not care what their mate thinks.
- B. Do we act like we are doing our mate a favor by handing them something at the table? Do we make it seem like it is exhausting just to be kind to our husband or wife?

- C. Rudeness is contagious. If someone is rude to me, I tend to get offended and want to be rude in return. What kind of atmosphere would this create in a home?
- D. Remember that the kind of love of which we are talking cares about others (John 3:16). It should cause me to truly care what my mate thinks of me.

#### **VII. *Love Seeketh Not Its Own***

- A. Examining the life of Christ shows us 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 long survive in wedded bliss unless they found their union on selflessness. The home will become a battlefield of egos and competing interests.
  - 2. 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. When we consider that many in our society think something called "Sensitivity Training" is necessary, it is obvious that we have a problem with being too easily provoked to anger and hurt feelings.
- B. The problem in our society is usually not a matter of insensitivity. Rather, it is that too many are overly sensitive. So many are obsessed with victimization.
- C. You know a marriage is in trouble when the husband or wife is always finding a reason to be offended. Innocent remarks are taken the wrong way and then inflated 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 here is a business term which describes entering a debt on a ledger. The picture it brings forth is that of 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 about this is that it does far more damage to the grudge holder than the target of his discontent. This yearning for revenge and "victim mentality" eats away at the grudge bearer until he is full of 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 (Philippians 3:19; Esther 5:14). Why would anyone rejoice in unrighteousness?
- B. Some rejoice in iniquity because it sometimes brings temporal blessing. Somebody lies on our behalf and we avoid some punishment or expense in the process.
- C. We are also tempted to rejoice in unrighteousness when our enemies are its victims (Proverbs 24:17). If I rejoice in unrighteousness I am not a good example to my mate. Also, a husband or wife should never be happy because their mate has done wrong (cf. Philippians 3:18).

XI. ***Love Rejoiceth In The Truth***

- A. Love rejoices when the truth is upheld, when others walk in truth (3 John 4). The truth is necessary for man's salvation and continued right standing with God (John 8:32).
- B. When I rejoice with the truth I am showing the right reaction to that which all mankind -- including my mate -- needs for having a right relationship with God.
- C. 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.
1. Some mates have no patience with their mate's shortcomings.
  2. Some couples divorce when great difficulties come.
- B. Think of how much God bears in His waiting for man to repent (2 Peter 3:9)! We should resolve to do everything humanly possible to keep from hurting our mate, to work for their salvation.

### **XIII. Love Believeth All Things**

- A. This is not saying that one has the right to believe anything no matter how erroneous it may be (Galatians 1:6-9). What Paul is saying here is that love is not distrustful or suspicious. Marriages are weakened by doubt and suspicion, by constantly looking for ulterior motives, or "what did he or she really mean when they said this or that?"
- B. Paul is saying that 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. Let us be content to put the best possible motive on our mate's actions.

### **XIV. Love Hopeth All Things**

- A. Love looks for improvement; it is optimistic. 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. We need to have the type of hope reflected in Galatians 6:1 regarding our mate. We need to look for improvement even when we are let down by our husband or wife.
- C. This characteristic of love says, "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 that is translated as "endures" (*hupomeno*) (vs. 7) 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 vs. 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 in His sermon on the mount 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 if they are unloving. 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. Applying this passage can do wonders for your marriage -- from saving it to improving it. Whatever happens we can know that we have applied the very best means if we practice love as Paul describes it in this passage.

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