

The Best is Yet to Be

By Daryl Wingerd

Marriage, as designed by God, is the union of a man and woman in a life-long relationship that produces happiness, comfort, companionship, pleasure, and fulfillment for them, and glory and honor for him.



As I write this, my wife and I are preparing to celebrate 33 years together as husband and wife—the larger portion of life for both of us. We *know* that our marriage has produced happiness, companionship, comfort, pleasure, and fulfillment for us. We *hope* it has promoted God's glory as we seek to imitate and reflect in some small way the glorious relationship between Christ and his church (see Eph. 5:25-33).

One thing we have learned through the years is that to experience the kind of marriage that produces these results takes a mutual commitment to certain principles and values. We have become convinced through experience that the consistent application of these values in actual practice will result in a marriage that is not at all like a long slide downhill from a glorious and exciting beginning to a dull and listless end. Instead we are experiencing a rich and fulfilling climb *uphill*, to a vantage point of mutual joy and fulfillment that we have yet to experience in its full measure. Our firm belief and personal experience is that marriage improves with age. Based on this, we have fastened a small sign the wall in our bedroom that says, "Grow Old with Me; The Best is Yet to Be."

But as I mentioned, to obtain these kinds of results, we must maintain the kinds of practices that tend to produce them. Here are a few things we have found helpful—habits we hope to never stop practicing and enjoying as we spend our lifetime together.

Never stop loving Christ and his church together. A husband and wife who are steadfast in their love for, and participation with their local church, understanding it to be a representation of Christ's body, will have a solid standpoint of unity and support in their marriage. Just as a couple's shared love for their child unifies, so does a shared commitment to their church.

Never stop studying the Bible and praying together. We may not always study and pray *together* (meaning at the same time in the same room), but we grow increasingly close as we both love and study the same source of insight into God's ways and will for our lives and our marriage. We make a habit of praying together

each night, sharing our weaknesses and needs, and making mutual requests of our all-sufficient God.

Never stop getting to know each other. Don't permit familiarity with each other to produce contempt or boredom or disinterest. The most pleasant people to be with (as we've all experienced) are those who take a genuine interest in you. Many spouses think they know all they *need* to know about their counterpart, but fewer (and happier) are those who genuinely feel their spouse wants to know and appreciate them more and more.

Never stop overlooking each other's weaknesses and faults. Neither of us will ever stop having these, and neither of us appreciates having them pointed out every time they surface, so both of us are happier if we often—usually—forebear. It is the unwise and ultimately frustrated spouse who makes it his or her task in life to fix everything that's wrong with the other.

Never stop talking things through and working things out. We should overlook much, but some things must be addressed and resolved. There will be disagreement and conflict. It is not the mere *presence* of conflict that strains a marriage; it is the failure to keep working toward reconciliation until it is achieved. A line in our church's membership agreement has often helped: "I will be slow to take offense, and eager to reconcile."

Never stop holding hands. Never stop sitting close. Never stop hugging and kissing. Never stop displaying physical affection for each other in every suitable way. Physical affection may not always be what it was when we were 25 or 30, but it should always characterize our marriage.

Never give up on romance. Write loving notes. Insert those cute little heart-shaped icons when you send a text. Bring flowers ~~or~~ **and** chocolate. Go on dates—regularly! Take romantic walks—or drives—to talk and spend time together. Be excited to see the other. Smile lovingly. Look deeply into each other's eyes. Hold hands across the table in the restaurant. These were not just how you *won* your spouse's affection; they are how you should *demonstrate* affection through the years.

My wife and I may be only halfway to the end of our lifetime together (Lord willing). Another 33 years together is not out of the question. We have much to learn and miles to grow, but our belief is that what God intends for us as he continues to bless us through our marriage is for us to work hard to make our union grow and thrive. What we have already known together has been wonderful, but we believe the best truly is yet to be.