

Remodeling Our Marriages

Christian marriages and “the family” are under a lot of pressure today. There are a variety of sources feeding the tensions that challenge our relationships with our mates and children. Though remaining vigilant is central to the vitality of any marriage—are there any other “keys” we could consider that would insure our success?

Bill Watson

Without a doubt, marriage is the most important “team” of any nation. It goes without saying, what condition the family is in, so goes the neighborhood, the national culture, and by extension, the world. Families, secured by the lifelong monogamous commitment it takes to dedicate a man and a woman to the institution of marriage, for better or worse, is the most assured way of developing a family in the way God originally intended and designed it to be.

However, especially in today’s Western culture, many have forgotten what is fundamental to a successful marriage. This lack of attention to these fundamentals, as for any team, is a recipe for disaster! It doesn’t matter what sport, activity, game, or relationship you might participate in—forget the fundamentals, and you will handicap your ability to accomplish the successful results you’re hoping for.

So what are some of the fundamentals that are so important to keep in mind when aspiring for a happy and joyful marriage, which are also conducive for creating an environment that results in wholesome, well behaved, and emotionally stable children?

For the sake of this article, we’re going to focus on just four areas that need watchful attention and require an active and positive approach in attending the demands these areas have. Be



Marriage

forewarned that it doesn't come easily! It often takes hard work, vigilance, and resourcefulness, with a lot of patience that sometimes is inconvenient for the moment—but if we “soldier on,” usually we will be better for it, and our relationships become stronger because of it.

The Four Points to Consider

Regardless of the performance mandates, most teams recognize there are specific behavioral basics required that are embedded in the mutual understanding of the relationship each has toward the demands of the game and its rules. Marriage is no different. There are requirements that are outgrowths of a few broad foundational points to keep in mind—and if we keep them in mind, our behavioral basics should conform toward supporting and constructing a conducive setting for a blissful marriage.

There are four major foundational points, or concepts, which we should use toward the development of our marital environment that will improve our assurance of success. They are built around four Greek words prominently used throughout the New Testament.

They are: *philia*, *agape*, *eros*, and *pistuo*. Each one goes to underscore what our outlook and intent should be toward our mates. Taking each one for what they mean will illustrate what should be kept in mind when interacting with our mates. Their meaning presents us with an outlook—a “template”—to work from, which can help us steer our behavior.

For instance, *philia* essentially means *friendship*. **Our mate should be our friend.** With this in mind, we should be able to comprehend that if we intend to maintain a friendship with our mate what our behavior should be—it's that simple! Obviously, all the basic detailed behavioral actions on our part should go to serve this ultimate goal. So, if we understand our mate is our friend, our behavior should illustrate and support that objective. Clearly, we need to just keep this in mind: How do you make friends and maintain that friendship? That's fundamental for what you need to do with your mate!

The next one is *agape*, which essentially means **sacrificial love**, but with **emotional affection**. A common English translation for this Greek word is “charity.” Why do you suppose that is? Very simply: It's a word indicative of sacrifice—and that isn't usually done without affection for the one(s) you're with. Affectionate love and care, with a willingness to sacrifice, even when it's not convenient—that is a “point,” if kept in mind, that will go a long way in maintaining the behavioral basics of kindness and selfless service.

Eros is next. Clearly, this is an important point of these four concepts to build a strong and vibrant marriage around. The affection that *agape* portrays is maximized in the erotic and intimate time only the two of you share as enclosed in an exclusive monogamous relationship. This is special, specific to only the two of you. It is the one time “oneness” is revealed in all its glory on the human level and from which children are born. It is the parallel means that God is doing spiritually, with the church, through the impregnation of the Holy Spirit via baptism. Yes,

the bed is undefiled in marriage (Hebrews 13:4)—don't minimize its cohesive importance (1 Corinthians 7:3–5) because it's the very symbol of the intimate, picturesque and personal relationship God has with His church (Ephesians 5:22–33). It is the ultimate sign of what God's *dplan* is all about—the reproduction of Himself—thereby adding to His family! Therein lies the reason marriage, on the human level, is a sacred and holy institution defined only by God and His relationship with the church. Anything outside that imagery is not a true definition of marriage.

The last of these fundamental concepts is *pisteuo*. Essentially, this word is all about the level of commitment that will allow for the perseverance necessary to accomplish the construction of a helpful ambience for weather-ing the storms of life. It will also provide the patience to produce the resourcefulness necessary when confronting the challenges that jeopardize the peace and unity of the “family team.” Without this cohesion, the cultural character of your family team may not be able to stand unaffected by the disruptions of life that blow your way.

However, if indeed you are friends (*philia*) that embrace sacrificial love (*agape*) by means of the strengthening and cohesion that comes from the intimate time spent together (*eros*) that is secured by a bond of trust, which only comes from a boundless commitment (*pisteuo*)—your marriage will stand throughout all the challenges that come your way.

So What's Next

Obviously, there are a lot of details that need consideration when attempting to identify the metrics associated with the four fundamentals mentioned above. And it's important we recognize there are behavioral actions, effort, and energy to expend, which are necessary for achieving the right results. As a matter of fact, statistics prove if we are active participants in our Christian faith, we have a good chance of reducing the risk of divorce by 25 to 50 percent. This is a stunning statistic!

But, it must not go unnoticed: We must work at our marital and parental relationships if we want the yielded benefits for our families. A “well oiled” team is always communicating emotionally, mentally, and spiritually; and in the context of marriage with your mates, sexually. We must invest in ourselves, and marriage is an investment of ourselves with each other for the yielded benefits of our families.

Keep in mind these few points while working toward the implementation of the four fundamentals within our marriages, mentioned previously. They are as follows:

- 1) Understand we are all sinners. All have sinned. So be understanding, empathetic, and patient with each other (1 Peter 3:8). Give each other the benefit of the doubt!
- 2) Treat each other with respect and honor (1 Peter 3:5–7). Recognize each has a role to play, and commit to those roles selflessly—not selfishly—serving toward helping each to maximize the gifts you have for the benefit of the family. The sooner you learn to work within the “manners of

love” (1 Corinthians 13:4–13), the sooner you will be able to achieve and maintain the unity and peace so critical for developing the environment all will enjoy as a place that only home can be!

3) Learn to be forgiving (Hebrews 12:14–15). Recognize arguments and disagreements will occur—no doubt; it comes with the marital territory. You will not be able to avoid it, especially when children are involved. Admittedly, children can be a source of stress and tension, especially as they become teenagers. So, it’s important—get “suited up” and “clothe” yourself with forgiveness, lest you allow a bad situation to become worse (Ephesians 4:31–32; Mark 11:25–26). Learn to be tolerantly patient, but without compromise. Everyone is accountable to each other—that is a key “actualization” everyone in the family needs to accept, understand, and be responsible for, concerning the expectation upon them!

4) Be helpful and positively reinforcing. Remember, true love and concern is not about self, but rather the circumstances and condition of the greater whole. This isn’t always easy, since we are basically selfish in nature. But we must learn to value the opinions of others and try to understand their point of view. It’s important we are truthful and honest with each other as we attempt to work through the issues that come our way. Notice Proverbs 10:12 mentions “love covers.” That means to cut each other slack—give some space—don’t negatively obsess about the contentions we face. Instead, look out for each other’s welfare more than self (1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:3–4). Commit to working toward a solution, rather than obsessing over the contention or conflict.

5) Make prayer an important habit of your team’s lifestyle. Remember the old saying, “A family that prays together stays together”? Well, it’s very true! Prayer should be a significant part of a family team’s diet (1 Peter 3:7; Matthew 18:18–20). Don’t underestimate the value and power of family prayer—it can be a very effective tool in the course of your relationship with each other. Children should be included so they, too, can learn the value and benefit of talking with God and have opportunity to experience the miracles of answered prayer!

The Problem and Solution

There is no question the family and fatherhood is under attack! There are too many single mother families suffering from the lack of any father figures. Compound this with parents too young to have children—and we have a volatile situation. This is made worse by the statistical fact there are far too many dysfunctional and abusive family environments having been created by addictions, modern technologies, financial weakness, un-employment, or just the lack of maturity of being equipped to handle the emotional stresses and educational needs of family life. That, sadly, should be no surprise to any of us. That is what feeds some of the reasons for the family break-ups and marital divorces currently experienced!

We must learn to cherish our families! Invest our time and effort, energy and concerns to the success of the family. And if we cherish them, we will take our time picking our mates, considering our compatibility and differences so that we go into these relationships with our eyes

“wide open”—well prepared for the life we want to share with this person. After all, picking a mate is the second most important decision we’ll ever make in our lives next to baptism. Why? Because it has long term reaching effects on our personal lives that could impact decades of our time and quality of life, health, and peace of mind, not to mention the lives of our children that may come from our marriages. So, pick your mates wisely—take your time. Be sure there is fundamental agreement on those things which are important to you, especially when it comes to your relationship with God (2 Corinthians 6:14–18)! Be careful not to underestimate the importance of this, especially when children are involved. The advice Paul provides is a legitimate consideration and not without good reason.

Remember, marriages are the “gardens of our lives,” and they do take effort to maintain the “output and input” quality we get from them. Never undervalue the amount of work and dedicated mental and emotional effort a marriage requires—because if you do, it is a sure recipe for failure. Without a doubt, a marriage that is well maintained by figuratively “watering” and “weeding” with a balanced amount of attention that is focused on the four fundamentals, will go a long way to assuring you of many happy years together and, God willing, children that will make you proud they are yours. Ω



Happy Marriage