

## Lesson 5

They are the tragedies of divorce—bitter ex-spouses, broken promises, and confused children. Don't let this happen to your family! Whether your marriage is going through tough times or is experiencing marital bliss—or even if you're not yet married but are considering it—the Bible offers proven guidance to help your marriage last. It's advice from God, the one who created and ordained marriage! If you've tried everything else, why not give Him a chance?

### Seventeen Keys for a Happier Marriage

# 1. Establish your own private home.

“A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

**Answer:** God's principle is that a married couple should move out of their parents' homes and establish their own, even if finances require something modest, such as a one-room apartment. A husband and wife should decide this together, as one, and remain firm even if someone opposes. Many marriages would be improved if this principle were carefully followed.



# 2. Continue your courtship.

“Above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’ ” (1 Peter 4:8).

“Her husband ... praises her” (Proverbs 31:28).

“She who is married cares ... how she may please her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:34).

“Be kindly affectionate to one another ... in honor giving preference to one another”  
(Romans 12:10).



**Answer:** Continue—or revive—your courtship into your married life. Successful marriages don’t just happen; they must be developed. Don’t take one another for granted or the resulting monotony could harm your marriage. Keep your love for one another growing by expressing it to each other; otherwise, love might fade and you could drift apart. Love and happiness are not found by seeking them for yourself, but rather by giving them to others. So spend as much time as possible doing things together. Learn to greet each other with enthusiasm. Relax, visit, sightsee, and eat together. Don’t overlook the little courtesies, encouragements, and affectionate acts. Surprise each other with gifts or favors. Try to “out-love” each other. Don’t try to take more out of your marriage than you put into it. Lack of love is the biggest destroyer of marriage.

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### 3. Remember that God joined you together in marriage.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. ... So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:5, 6).

**Answer:** Has love nearly disappeared from your home? While the devil wants to break apart your marriage by tempting you to give up, don’t forget that God Himself joined you

together in marriage, and He desires that you stay together and be happy. He will bring happiness and love into your lives if you will obey His divine commandments. “With God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Don’t despair. God’s Spirit can change your heart and your spouse’s heart if you will ask and let Him.



The wrong kind of thinking can destroy your marriage.

## 4. Guard your thoughts.

“As he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exodus 20:17).

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

“Whatever things are true ... noble ... just ... pure ... lovely ... of good report ... meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

**Answer:** The wrong kind of thinking can profoundly harm your marriage. The devil will tempt you with thoughts like, “Our marriage was a mistake,” “She doesn’t understand me,” “I can’t take much more of this,” “We can always divorce if necessary,” “I’ll go home to mother,” or, “He smiled at that woman.” This kind of thinking is dangerous because your thoughts ultimately govern your actions. Avoid seeing, saying, reading, or hearing anything that—or associating with anyone who—suggests being unfaithful. Thoughts uncontrolled are like an automobile left in neutral on a steep hill; the result could be disaster.



## 5. Never go to bed angry with one another.

“Do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).

“Confess your trespasses to one another” (James 5:16).

“Forgetting those things which are behind” (Philippians 3:13).

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

**Answer:** To remain angry over hurts and grievances—big or little—can be dangerous. Unless addressed in a timely manner, even little problems can become set in your mind as convictions and can adversely affect your outlook on life. This is why God said to let your anger cool before going to bed. Be big enough to forgive and to say, “I’m sorry.” After all, no one is perfect, and you are both on the same team, so be gracious enough to admit a mistake when you make it. Besides, making up is a very pleasant experience, with unusual powers to draw marriage partners closer together. God suggests it! It works!



With Christ in your hearts and home, marriage will be successful.

## 6. Keep Christ in the center of your home.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1).

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

**Answer:** This really is the greatest principle, because it’s the one that enables all the others. The vital ingredient of happiness in the home is not in diplomacy, strategy, or our effort to overcome problems, but rather in a union with Christ. Hearts filled with Christ’s love will not be far apart for long. With Christ in the home, a marriage has a greater chance at being successful. Jesus can wash away bitterness and disappointment and restore love and happiness.

## 7. Pray together.

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

“Pray for one another” (James 5:16).

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally” (James 1:5).

**Answer:** Pray with one another! This is a wonderful activity that will help your marriage succeed beyond your wildest dreams. Kneel before God and ask Him for true love for one another, for forgiveness, for strength, for wisdom—for the solution to problems. God will answer. You won’t be automatically cured of every fault, but God will have greater access to change your heart and actions.



## 8. Agree that divorce is not the answer.



“What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6).

“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9).

“The woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives” (Romans 7:2).

**Answer:** The Bible says that the ties of marriage are meant to be unbreakable. Divorce is allowed only in cases of adultery. But even then, it is not demanded. Forgiveness is always better than divorce, even in the case of unfaithfulness.

When God ordained the first marriage in Eden, He designed it for life. Thus, marriage vows are among the most solemn and binding for a person to take on. But remember, God meant for marriage to elevate our lives and meet our needs in every way. Harboring thoughts of divorce will tend to destroy your marriage. Divorce is always destructive and is almost never a solution to the problem; instead, it usually creates greater problems—financial troubles, grieving children, etc.

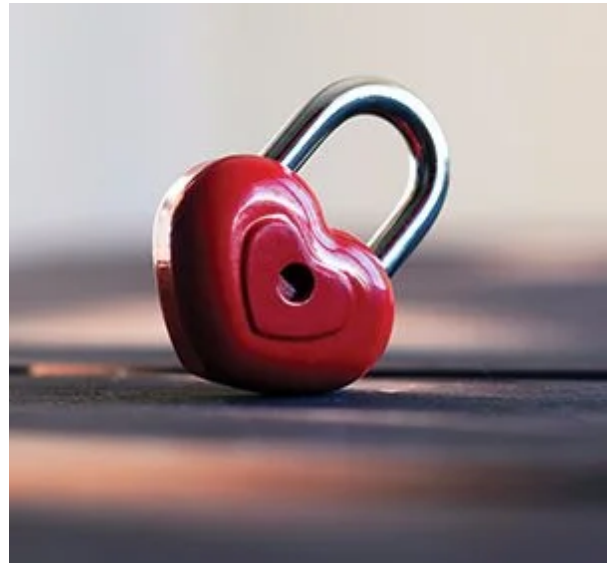
## 9. Keep the family circle closed tightly.

“You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

“The heart of her husband safely trusts her. ... She does him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Proverbs 31:11, 12).

“The Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously” (Malachi 2:14).

“Keep you from the evil woman. ... Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? ... So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent” (Proverbs 6:24, 25, 27, 29).



**Answer:** Private family matters should never be shared with others outside your home—not even parents. A person outside the marriage to sympathize with or listen to complaints can be used by the devil to estrange the hearts of a husband and wife. Solve your private home problems privately. No one else, except a minister or a marriage counselor, should be involved. Always be truthful with each other, and never keep secrets. Avoid telling jokes at the expense of your spouse’s feelings, and vigorously defend each other. Adultery will always hurt you and everyone else in your family. God, who knows our mind, body, and feelings, said, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). If flirtations have already begun, break them off immediately—or shadows could settle over your life that cannot be easily lifted.

## 10. God describes love; make it your daily goal to measure up.

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

**Answer:** This Bible passage is one of God’s greatest descriptions of love. Read it again and again. Have you made these words a part of your marriage experience? True love is not

mere sentimental impulse, but rather a holy principle that involves every aspect of your married life. With true love, your marriage stands a far greater chance for success; without it, a marriage will likely fail quickly.

## 11. Remember that criticism and nagging destroy love.

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them” (Colossians 3:19).



“Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman” (Proverbs 21:19).

“A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike” (Proverbs 27:15).

“Why do you look at the speck [splinter] in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank [whole board] in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3).

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself” (1 Corinthians 13:4).

**Answer:** Stop criticizing, nagging, and finding fault in your partner. Your spouse might lack much, but criticism won’t help. Expecting perfection will bring bitterness to you and your spouse. Overlook faults and hunt for the good things. Don’t try to reform, control, or compel your partner—you will destroy love. Only God can change people. A sense of humor, a cheerful heart, kindness, patience, and affection will banish many of your marriage problems. Try to make your spouse happy rather than good, and the good will likely take care of itself.



The secret of a successful marriage lies not in having the right partner, but in being the right partner.



## 12. Do not overdo in anything; be temperate.

“Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things” (1 Corinthians 9:25).

“Love ... does not seek its own [selfish advantage]” (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5).

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4).

“Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts, and do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin” (Romans 6:12, 13).

**Answer:** Overdoing will ruin your marriage. So will underdoing. Time with God, work, love, rest, exercise, play, meals, and social contact must be balanced in a marriage or something will snap. Too much work and a lack of rest, proper food, and exercise can lead a person to be critical, intolerant, and negative. The Bible also recommends a temperate sex life (1 Corinthians 7:3–6) because degrading and intemperate sex acts can destroy love and respect for one another. Social contact with others is essential; true happiness won't be found in isolation. We must learn to laugh and enjoy wholesome, good times. To be serious

all the time is dangerous. Overdoing or underdoing in anything weakens the mind, body, conscience, and the ability to love and respect one another. Don't let intemperance damage your marriage.

## 13. Respect each other's personal rights and privacies.



“Love suffers long and is kind; ... Love does not envy ... does not behave rudely, does not seek its own [in selfishness] ... does not rejoice in iniquity ... believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10).

**Answer:** Each spouse has a God-given right to certain personal privacies. Do not tamper with each other's wallets or purses, personal email, and other private property unless given permission. The right to privacy and quietude when preoccupied should be respected. Your husband or wife even has a right to be wrong part of the time and is entitled to an “off-day” without being given the third degree. Marriage partners do not own each other and should never try to force personality changes. Only God can make such changes. Confidence and trust in one another is essential for happiness, so don't check up on each other constantly. Spend less time trying to “figure out” your spouse and more time trying to please her or him. This works wonders.

## 14. Be clean, modest, orderly, and dutiful.



“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel” (1 Timothy 2:9).

“She ... willingly works with her hands. ... She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household. ... She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness” (Proverbs 31:13, 15, 27).

“Be clean” (Isaiah 52:11).

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

“If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8).

“Do not become sluggish [lazy]” (Hebrews 6:12).

**Answer:** Laziness and disorder can be used by the devil to destroy your respect and affection for one another and, thus, harm your marriage. Modest attire and clean, well-groomed bodies are important for both husband and wife. Both partners should take care to create a home environment that is clean and orderly, as this will bring peace and calmness. A lazy, shiftless spouse who does not contribute to the household is a disadvantage to the family and is displeasing to God. Everything done for one another should be done with care and respect. Carelessness in these seemingly small matters has caused division in countless homes.

## 15. Determine to speak softly and kindly.

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

“Live joyfully with the wife whom you love” (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

“When I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

**Answer:** Always speak softly and kindly to your spouse—even in disputes. Decisions made when angry, tired, or discouraged are unreliable anyway, so it’s best to relax and let anger cool before speaking. And when you do speak, let it always be quietly and lovingly. Harsh, angry words can crush your spouse’s desire to please you.



## 16. Be reasonable in money matters.

“Love does not envy [is not possessive] ... does not behave rudely, does not seek its own [selfish advantage]” (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5).

“God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).



**Answer:** Household income should be shared in a marriage, with each partner having the right to spend a certain portion as desired and according to the family budget. Separate bank accounts tend to remove the opportunity to deepen trust, which is vital for a healthy marriage. Money management is a team effort. Both should be involved, but one should take ultimate responsibility. Money management roles should be determined by personal abilities and preferences.

## 17. Talk things over freely with one another.

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up” (1 Corinthians 13:4).



“He who disdains instruction despises his own soul” (Proverbs 15:32).

“Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Proverbs 26:12).

**Answer:** Few things will strengthen your marriage more than open discussions on major decisions. Changing a job, purchasing something expensive, and other life decisions should involve both husband and wife—and differing opinions should be respected. Talking things over together will avoid many blunders that could greatly weaken your marriage. If, after much discussion and earnest prayer, opinions still differ, the wife should submit to her husband’s decision, which should be motivated by his deep love for his wife and his responsibility for her well-being. See Ephesians 5:22–25.

## 18. Do you want your marriage to reflect God’s unselfish, committed, and joyful love for you?



**Answer:**

## Thought Questions

**1. Which marriage partner should be the first to make peace after a quarrel?**

The one who was in the right!

**2. Is there a principle for in-laws interfering in our family decisions?**

Yes! Do not interfere with your son's or daughter's marriage unless your counsel is requested by both partners. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:11.) Many marriages that might have been a little heaven on earth have been damaged by in-laws. The duty of all in-laws is to leave the decisions made in the newly established home strictly alone.

**3. My spouse is godless, and I am trying to be a Christian. His influence is terrible. Should I divorce him?**

No! Read 1 Corinthians 7:12–14 and 1 Peter 3:1, 2. God gives a specific answer.

**4. My spouse ran off with another person. Now repentant, she wants to return home. My pastor says I should take her back, but God forbids this, doesn't He?**

No. No, indeed! God permits divorce for adultery, yes, but He does not command it. Forgiveness is always better and is always preferred. (See Matthew 6:14, 15.) Divorce will seriously mar your life and the lives of your children. Give her another chance! The golden

rule (Matthew 7:12) applies here. If you and your wife will turn your lives over to Christ, He will make your marriage supremely happy. It is not too late.

## **5. What can I do? Men are always coming on to me.**

Being a woman in this culture isn't easy because some men refuse to control their impulses. However, a few things you might do to help ward off unwanted attention is to dress modestly, avoid suggestive conversation or flirting, or engaging in activities that invite attention. There is something about Christian reserve and dignity that keeps a man in his place. Christ said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

## **6. Can you tell me plainly what God's counsel is to one who has fallen but is repentant?**

Long ago Christ gave a pointed and comforting answer to one who had fallen into immorality but was repentant. "Jesus ... said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more'" (John 8:10, 11). His forgiveness and counsel still apply today.

## **7. Isn't the "innocent party" in a divorce sometimes partially guilty also?**

Certainly. Sometimes the "innocent party," by a lack of love, inattentiveness, self-righteousness, unkindness, selfishness, nagging, or downright coldness, can encourage evil thoughts and actions in his or her spouse. Sometimes the "innocent party" might be as guilty before God as the "guilty" one. God looks upon our motives, seeing past our actions. "The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

## **8. Does God expect me to live with a physically abusive spouse?**

Physical abuse can be life threatening and is a serious problem that demands immediate attention. The spouse and family members who have been physically abused must find a safe environment in which to live. Both husband and wife need to seek professional help through a qualified Christian marriage counselor—and separation is often appropriate.

## **Quiz Questions**

## 1. Marriage is (1)

- The joining of a man and woman together by God for life.
- A temporary, experimental arrangement to see if two people are compatible.
- Not even necessary. Men and women are free to live together without it.

## 2. God recognizes only one reason for divorce. It is (1)

- Incompatibility.
- An irritable spouse.
- Adultery
- Godlessness of marriage partner.

## 3. The courtesies of courtship (1)

- Should be continued in the married life.
- Should be dropped quickly after the wedding.
- Are really silly and unnecessary.

## 4. The best guarantee of success in marriage is (1)

- Having Christ in the hearts and home.
- For the husband to force his wife into line.
- For the wife to get her way by threatening divorce.

## 5. For safety in quarrels, do the following: (3)

- Speak softly and kindly to one another.
- Make your spouse admit error.
- Call in neighbors to settle things.
- Force your spouse to keep quiet.
- Walk out and stay away for several days.
- Pray together.
- Get over your anger before going to bed.

## 6. Check the items that are keys to success in marriage: (2)

- Close the family circle to all third parties.
- Live in your parents' home.
- Run home to mother when angry.
- Tell close friends your spouse's faults.
- Establish your own private home.
- Write an old boyfriend for counsel.
- Never confess first after a spat.

## 7. The best ways to improve your marriage partner are to (2)

- Threaten to leave unless you get your way.
- Nag and criticize.



- Improve your own relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Make your partner sleep alone.
- Be loving, appreciative, and forgiving.
- Force your partner to change.

## **8. Check the items below which endanger a marriage: (6)**

- Criticism.
- A stingy husband.
- A money-wasting wife.
- Laziness.
- A Christian home.
- Praying together.
- Disorder and filthiness.
- A forgiving spirit.
- Jealousy.

## **9. For success in making major decisions, (2)**

- Husband and wife should counsel together.
- You should force your will on your spouse.
- Seek God in prayer together.
- Insist upon having your own way.

## **10. A good rule for in-laws is to (1)**

- Leave newlyweds alone.
- Insist that newlyweds live with you.
- Determine to counsel newlyweds whether they want it or not.

## **11. In case of unfaithfulness by your spouse, the best thing to do is to (1)**

- Leave at once and never come back.
- Immediately tell everyone how "low-down" your partner is.
- Be willing to forgive and to preserve your home, if at all possible.

## **12. Thoughts should be guarded carefully because (2)**

- Impure thoughts lead to impure acts.
- Your spouse can read your thoughts.
- Wrong thinking can severely harm your marriage.

## **13. I want my marriage to reflect God's unselfish, committed, and joyful love for me.**

- Yes
- No

