

# TWELVE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

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*My Father's House*

## 1. Jesus.

The most important key to any relationship is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *Jesus is the way. Jesus is the pattern. Jesus is the source.* Every person's deepest needs for love and affection will be met by Jesus. Jesus not only teaches us how to relate, He gives us the wisdom and the love and the power to relate. We literally love one another with the inspired love of His Spirit. Our hearts are made to be filled with Jesus. There is a God-shaped hole in each one of us that can be filled only by Jesus. As Augustine said long ago, "Our hearts are made for Thee O Lord, and will not rest until they rest in Thee."

If you want to be filled with wisdom, look to Jesus. If you want to be filled with love, look to Jesus. If you want to have the power to love, look to Jesus. If you want a love that is wise and good and patient and pure, look to Jesus. Every marriage partner must spend quality time alone with Jesus every day so that He can take away their worries and fears, their doubt and their guilt. So that He can personally tell them how to relate and what to do and what to say. So the first and most important key is Jesus.

## 2. Love.

Jesus IS love. Jesus gives us the ability to love. Jesus shows us how to love. The love of Jesus, called *agape* love, has a height, a depth, a length, and a breadth that only He can give us. The *height* of this love is that it comes from Jesus. Love is the greatest gift of His Spirit. Therefore, in order to have this love we have to stay close to Jesus. We have to pray for love that is patient, understanding, kind, sympathetic, forgiving, and pure.

The *depth* of His love is that it loves in good times and bad, in sickness and in health, when things are going badly or when things are going well. This Christian love, loves the unloveable, forgives the unforgiveable, reaches the unreachable and touches the untouchable.

The *breadth* of this love is that it loves everyone — friend or foe, black or white, Christian or non, old and young. It loves those who hurt us and disappoint us and speak ill of us.

The *length* of this love is that it keeps on loving, even in the face of trial, rejection, and hurt.

### 3. The Eucharist and the Mass

The third powerful key to successful marriage is the Eucharist. The Eucharist feeds and nurtures, strengthens and protects married love. One powerful bit of advice to give to every married couple is to try to go to Mass every day for their marriage and for their spouse and for their children. Jesus says, "With all of the earnestness I possess, I tell you this, unless you feed on the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Young people use the expression, "Get a life." Jesus says, "I am the life." To paraphrase Jesus: "The more you feed on me, the more I will nurture your love and strengthen your marriage." For in the Eucharist, there is patience and understanding, compassion, sensitivity, caring, love, forgiveness, purity, ecstasy, and delight. The more you allow Me to work in you and through you with my wisdom and love, the more you will love your spouse.

### 4. Communication

There is an old Indian legend that describes the first communication problem between a man and a woman. A week after they had been together, the man came back to the Lord and said, "This woman chatters incessantly, never leaves me alone, takes up all my time, and cries so easily. I come to give her back to you as I cannot live with her." So God said, "Very well," and He took her back. After another week, the man came to him again and said, "Lord my life is so lonely. I do not like all the silence now that she is gone. I remember how she would dance and sing to me. Her laughter was music and she was beautiful and soft to touch. Please give her back." So God said, "Very well," and He gave her back. Another week passed and he said, "Lord. I do not know what to do for I do not know how to live with her or without her."

All of us realize that whenever you put two people together, there will be lack of in-depth communication. Each of us sees life through our own perspective—the perspective of *no two of us is alike*. In fact, each of us sees life very differently at age ten, at age twenty, at age thirty, and so forth. And yet, there are some keys to helping us communicate better.

First, look at some of the root causes of hurt that infiltrate the communication process.

*Fear of rejection.* One of the main reasons for lack of communication is that people are often afraid. They fear that if they take off their *masks* and showed the *real me* to their spouse, they no longer would be accepted.

*Wary of criticism.* Another block to communication is fear of criticism if one spouse opens up to the other and reveals how he or she *really* feels. However, by not taking that risk, the spouses turn each other into "an acquaintance" and not really an intimate friend.

*Family background.* Another reason is that many people have never learned in their families how to communicate well. Many families communicate through verbal abuse, through put-downs, through silence, and through constant jokes.

*Fatigue.* Another reason is that a person is fatigued, burnt out or tired. In such a state, their ability to communicate or to listen is impaired.

*Distracted and disinterested.* Another reason for lack of communication is that the person is not interested enough to really listen or want to discuss. Sports, for example, has caused many, many men to become distracted and disinterested in family matters.

The true is that good communication needs to be learned. There are no short cuts. It is a complex process, but there are some keys or *do's and don'ts* to communication that we can acquire.

Don't be judgmental.	Be accepting and tolerant.
Don't expect too much from one session.	Be willing to plan to talk again.
Don't bring up your mate's past.	Be forgiving.
Don't butt in or be rude.	Be as courteous as to a stranger.
Don't overstate by saying, "You always . . ." "You never . . ."	Be accurate by saying, "Sometimes..." "Many times . . ." "To me it seems . . ."
Don't lose your temper.	Be in control of yourself.
Don't pout and give the silent treatment.	Be positive, outgoing, and unselfish (even when you don't feel like it).
Don't tell endless stories.	Be concise.
Don't compete.	Be able to see yourself as an equal partner.
Don't think in terms of winning and losing.	Be cooperative and noncombative.
Don't belittle your mate.	Be affirming and building.

After all, communication is more than dispensing information. It is dialogue, an exchange of ideas and opinions in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.

John Power, in *The Secret of Staying in Love*, says, "Dialogue is to enable the partners to come to a deeper knowledge, understanding and fuller acceptance of each other in love. Dialogue is always moving towards encounter, towards the mutual experience of each other's person through this sharing of feelings... No one ever needs a reason, excuse or explanation for the way he or she feels. It's okay to feel whatever we feel. The only real danger is to ignore, deny or refuse to report our feelings... True dialogue is characterized by a sense of collaboration not competition... The only valid motive for dialogue is this desire to give to another the most precious thing I can give: myself in self-disclosure, in the transparency achieved in dialogue."

## 5. Forgiveness

Into every marriage there comes misunderstanding, hurt, disappointment, and even betrayal and rejection. We are all broken human beings. As the song goes, "You always hurt the one you love, the one you shouldn't hurt at all." Every couple must learn to forgive, and then to try to forget. Every married person should go to confession frequently so that they can be cleansed of all sin and guilt. And every couple every evening should try to forgive their partner for any way in which they have been hurt.

My own mother and father used to hold each other and say the *Our Father* every evening. Then they would forgive each other for whatever grievances that day had brought. Forgive, forgive, forgive. Seventy times seven, forgive. Life is too short to hang on to bitterness and resentment, so forgive.

## 6. Priorities

Key your priorities in order — Jesus first, spouse second, children third, work fourth, etc. The best thing you can do for your spouse is to love Jesus. And the best thing you can do for your children is to love their mother and father. Women should try not to work outside of the home. If they do work, they should try to make sure that work does not interfere with their primary responsibilities.

From time to time, write down a weekly schedule setting aside time for Jesus, your spouse and each child. With schedules often fragmented today, you need to consciously search for occasions to share your thoughts, hopes, joys and disappointments.

## 7. Quality Time

There is a time for everything under heaven, especially for fun and enjoying life! God, in His goodness, wants what is best for each of us, and that means finding bliss in the fruits of this life that are all around us. The problem is that in today's hurried, busy society, quality time is hard to find. More often than not, we have to make time for these moments that ultimately give real meaning to our lives. For the truth is that the moments that make life worth living are typically found in the ordinary—and not the extraordinary—events of our lives.

One way to find this time is to *share experiences*. This can be through any assortment of events such as hobbies, interests, work and pleasure. Entertaining friends and family, gardening, camping together, card-playing, attendance at religious and civic events, reading and discussing books, working on community or school projects — all these and more and be shared by couples to strengthen and deepen bonds.

*Enjoy one another.* A well-known psychiatrist was asked, "What is the most important thing parents can do for children (and for each other)?" His answer: "Enjoy each other." ... that is, to you requires

bring sunshine to offset the days of clouds and darkness. It also enables us to be serious about life without being gloomy.

## **8. Affirmation**

One of the deepest needs of the human heart is to be appreciated, loved and affirmed. Nothing in life has such a fatal result as the experience of not being loved and affirmed. Every human being needs to be affirmed. Affirm each other. There are many ways to communicate affirming thoughts – words, glances, physical affection, laughter. Find many ways to say I love you – a smile, a hug, a kiss, an unexpected gift, a personal card, a love note hidden in the lunchbox, a little note on the bathroom mirror. There are literally thousands of ways to tell each other how special, unique, wonderful, fantastic and loved they are. Each one of us is a unique, irreplaceable masterpiece. Each spouse should communicate that in thousands of affirming ways.

## **9. Self Conversion**

Another great key to married success is ongoing conversion. We are here to grow, to receive more of the light of revelation so that first, we may understand the beauty and dignity of marriage, sexuality and married love. Most married people are not fully aware of the holiness that God has intended for married people. To marry a person in God's eyes is to make a commitment to ongoing conversion from ego-controlled living to Spirit-controlled living. Every married person needs to meditate, to pray to go to confession frequently, to receive the Eucharist as often as possible. Every married person needs to learn how to humbly admit their faults and to speak the truth in love to their spouse. Every married person needs to learn to say, "I was wrong, honey, please forgive me. I am sorry." Every married person needs to learn to be more and more open to God's Spirit so that their minds will be filled with ongoing revelation from Jesus Himself, and their hearts may be inflamed more and more with that love that only He can give.

## **10. Sacramentals**

Another great key is the use of sacramentals to remind us of the presence of God, of Mary, of the saints, and of the Spirit. God has given to married couples the use of sacramentals. Every home should have at least one crucifix hung in a prominent place.

Every home should be enthroned to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He promised that He would bless every home where His image was displayed. Every home should have a little altar with a statue of Mary, Our Mother. Every home should have a little library of sacred books. The main door should have a holy water font nearby. Every father should bless his family with holy water. And both parents should anoint their children with blessed oil, especially when they are sick. Blessed salt is another sacramental sometimes used to bless and to cast out evil. There are so many beautiful paintings of the Holy Family, various saints, and Jesus, Himself that could be hung in different rooms throughout the house as reminders of God's presence and of the necessity to pray.

*A Sacrament.* Marriage is a sacrament because in and through the human love, a couple comes to an awareness and appreciation of God's marvelous love for them. To experience that this man and this woman could so love me as they do in a real way points me beyond them to the love of God for me made perfect in Jesus Christ. Just as every Christian is a sacrament, that is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace, so also is every marriage. In and through their human love they can experience the tenderness, the gentleness, the forgiveness and the delight of God's marvelous love for them.

### **11. Counseling / Spiritual Direction**

Since all of us are broken and constantly in need of wise counsel, every married person should have some Christian counselor, friend in the Lord, or spiritual director to whom they can go for advice, support, and affirmation. It is a wise couple who invites their parish priest to bless their house and, from time to time, to share a family meal with them.

### **12. Support Group**

It is also recommended that every couple become personally involved in movements such as the Marriage Encounter, the Cursillio, the Christian Family Movement (CFM), charismatic, and Marian. Many couples have found strength and guidance from a prayer group or support group. It is a wise couple that thinks seriously about making a yearly retreat. Most movements of these kinds depend chiefly on lay persons to organize, host, promote and speak. By shared experiences, everyone benefits.

Christian marriage was meant by God to be lived out within the context of the extended family and within the Church family. That's why St. Paul writes, "It is for this reason that I kneel before the Father from whom every family both spiritual (the Church) and natural (the home) takes its name, which in the Biblical tradition means its lifestyle, its power and its love. Just as the eye apart from the face become grotesque, so also is a couple alone without the support of father, mother, brothers, sisters, priest, and friends. Just as no man is an island, so also no family should be.

Hang in there. Bishop Fulton Sheen tells the story of an old priest who gave a marvelous, inspirational retreat that touched him very deeply. At the end of the retreat, this holy priest told this story of a wonderful, holy lady whose husband berated her and beat her. Many advised her to leave him. But as she prayed, she felt the Lord say to her, "Hang in there and I will convert him."

When she died, her husband had not been converted. Then the old priest asked, "Do you think that I'm going to end this retreat on such a defeatist note. You see, I am the husband of that lady."