

Secrets to a Happy Marriage

June 21-22, 2014

Gary Post

- I. Relationships and The Easy Button
 - A. Profound sense of discouragement about marriage in our culture
 - B. False and depressing misconceptions cause couples to lose hope
“The greatest threat to marriage is not divorce—it is discouragement.”
Shaunti Feldhahn, *Good News About Marriage*
- II. The Good News About Marriage
 - A. The vast majority of marriages last for a lifetime
 - B. Most marriages are happy
 - C. Divorce rates are overstated—even lower for practicing Christians
- III. What God Says About What Makes a Marriage Work
 - A. It’s not magic—It’s about things we do
 - B. Checking the Owner’s Manual (Ephesians 5:22-33)
Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement.” Genesis 2:18
 - C. Love and respect: A call to actions before feelings
- IV. Marriage Killers: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse
 - A. Criticism: Attacking your partner’s personality or character
“The power of life and death is in the tongue.” Proverbs 18:1
 - B. Contempt: Attacking your partner’s sense of self to insult/abuse
 - C. Defensiveness: Seeing oneself as the victim, making excuses
 - D. Stonewalling: Using silence and distance as a weapon
- V. Secrets to a Happy Marriage
 - A. Choose to view marriage as a covenant—not a contract
“Rejoice in the wife of your youth.” Proverbs 5:18
 - B. Choose to Make God the Center of Your Marriage
“Couples in which both partners agree that ‘God is at the center of our marriage’ are twice as likely to report that they are very happy than those who do not agree.” Dr. Brad Wilcox
 - C. Choose to Believe the Best About Your Partner
“Highly happy spouses *choose* to believe their mate cares for them—no matter what they’re seeing from their spouse or feeling at the time—and they act accordingly.” Shaunti Feldhahn, *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*

D. Choose to Love and Forgive

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Colossians 1:12-14

“Bitterness is the enemy of love, because it makes you unforgiving and unwilling to give love unconditionally. It is the enemy of hope because you keep living in the past and become incapable of seeing a better future.” Erwin McManus

“Marital generosity is one of the greatest contributing factors to happy marriages. Generosity is defined as being when one partner will simply do nice things for the other, getting nothing in return.”
Dr. Brad Wilcox

E. Choose to Cultivate Your Friendship

“Married couples who spent some sort of time talking or sharing an activity at least once a week were five times more likely to be “very happy” in their marriages than those who didn’t.” Dr. Brad Wilcox

“Highly happy couples aren’t just spending time together because they are happy; a big part of the reason they’re so happy is that they are spending time together.” Shaunti Feldhahn, *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*

F. Choose to Do the Small Things that Make a Big Difference

1. The Fantastic Five for Him

- She notices his effort and sincerely thanks him for it.
- She says, “You did a great job at _____.”
- She mentions in front of others something he did well.
- She shows that she desires him sexually
- She makes it clear to him that he makes her happy.

2. The Fantastic Five for Her

- He takes her hand when walking or at the movies
- He leaves her a message to tell her he is thinking of her
- He puts his arm around her when in public together
- He tells her sincerely that she is beautiful
- He does not withdraw emotionally when upset

VI. A World Record to Shoot For: Meet Herbert and Zelmyra Fisher

Notes and Quotes:

Marriage and Divorce

- 72% of those ever married are still married to their first spouse
- Of the 28% whose marriages ended, as many as 8% may be widowed
- Actual divorce rate is about 20% for first marriages, 33% remarriages
- Even among those married multiple times, only 3 in 10 have divorced
- Regular church attendance alone decreases divorce by 27-50% (depending on the particular study parameters and results)
- For couples engaged together in prayer, Bible study, supportive community, etc., the divorce rate may be in the low single digits
- Approximately 80% of couples say they are “very happy” in marriages
- 90-93% of partners are glad they married their spouse and would again
- Among those who responded that they were “very unhappy” and avoided divorce, 8 out of 10 were “very happy” five years later
- Of unhappy couples who considered divorce, but stayed together at least seven years, 95% reported they were glad they stayed together
- Couples who spent time talking or sharing an activity at least once a week were five times more likely to be “very happy” in their marriages¹

“People who enter marriage thinking of it as a contract will usually be disappointed. On many occasions both parties will fail to live up their end of the implicit agreement. That is simply the nature of human existence. However, people who view marriage as a lifelong covenant that depends on their own pledge and honor, not their partner’s perfect adherence to a contract, can better tolerate the inevitable misunderstandings. Furthermore, the covenantal understanding of marriage promotes devotion. Partners expect to be together. Therefore, a covenantal view of marriage actually results in fewer breaches of the implicit contract.”

Everett Worthington, Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling

“Highly happy couples tend to put God at the center of their marriage and focus on Him, rather than on their marriage or spouse, for fulfillment and happiness.” Shaunti Feldhahn, Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages

Couples Who Put God at the Center of Their Marriage:

- They worship together
- They are plugged into a faith community
- They share key values
- They focus on serving their spouses rather than being served
- They look to God for the power to be selfless—it doesn’t come naturally
- Ultimately, they trust God for the outcome²

¹ Shaunti Feldhahn, *The Good News About Marriage*

² Shaunti Feldhahn, *The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages*

Other Factors that Decrease the Probability of Divorce³

Annual Income over \$50K (vs. under \$25K)	-30%
Having a baby seven months or more <u>after</u> marriage (vs. before marriage)	-24%
Marry over 25 years of age (vs. under 18)	-24%
Family of origin intact (vs. divorced parents)	-14%
Religious affiliation (vs. none)	-14%
College (vs. high school dropout)	-25%

Recommended for Further Reading:

The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages	Shaunti Feldhahn
The Good News About Marriage	Shaunti Feldhahn
For Women Only: What You Need to Know About the Inner Lives of Men	Shaunti Feldhahn
For Men Only: A Straightforward Guide to the Inner Lives of Women	Shaunti and Jeff Feldhahn
Moving Forward: Six Steps to Forgiving Yourself and Breaking Free from the Past	Everett Worthington
Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling	Everett Worthington
Love and Respect	Emerson Eggerichs
Desperate Marriages	Gary Chapman
The Marriage You’ve Always Wanted	Gary Chapman
The Five Love Languages	Gary Chapman
Healing the Hurt in Your Marriage	Gary and Barbara Rosberg
Saving Your Second Marriage Before It Starts	Les & Leslie Parrott
Yes, Your Marriage Can Be Saved	Joe & Michelle Williams
The Way to Love Your Wife	Clifford & Joyce Penner
Learning to Live With the Love of Your Life	Neil Clark Warren
The Triumphant Marriage	Neil Clark Warren
How We Love	Milan & Kay Yerkovich
The Meaning of Marriage	Timothy Keller
The Power of Prayer to Change Your Marriage	Stormie Omartian
The Power of a Praying Life	Stormie Omartian
Lead Me Holy Spirit	Stormie Omartian

³ The National Marriage Project, www.stateofourunions.org