

## Real Marriage

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Marriages often travel through three stages over some period of time. The new couple may well begin **infatuated** with each other and, over time, with the realization that this person has flaws and issues, the relationship may move to one of **disenchantment**. Healthy relationships move through these stages on to **maturity** and genuine love.

How do we get to this maturity stage without getting derailed by anger, bitterness, or apathy? What could we identify as the disciplines and practices that are the marks of a healthy relationship? What sets us up for success or failure? What should I do to prepare myself for a healthy marriage? Is there anything I can do to turn a troubled marriage around?

Hundreds of books, sermons, and seminars have been written and presented by wise, skillful professionals on this topic. As I read my random list of questions, I must confess there is no way I could possibly answer them in the next six hundred words! 😊 Or six hundred pages for that matter!

What follows here are two grossly oversimplified truths that I believe give the greatest prospect of success in marriage!

Forgiveness is the most essential element of any healthy relationship. Consider:

***“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*** Eph. 4:31,32

***“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”*** 1 Peter 3:8,9

I know, to some these are just words on a page – what happens when my raw emotions are introduced into the equation? But what if we actually predetermined to forgive as God in Christ forgave, to extend a blessing instead of reviling? Can anger, bitterness, and evil survive in such an environment? No, it cannot.

As Christ followers, do we really have the right, the audacity, to ignore the commands of scripture? Do I get to pick and choose what parts I believe and practice or are they all “God-breathed?” What if I am genuinely hurt and feel rejected? Am I still to forgive and give a blessing!?! Yes, you are.

The real out workings of these truths are hammered out in open, candid, sometimes excruciatingly difficult communication. Which brings us to our second grossly oversimplified truth.

You would do well to read the book of Proverbs and highlight every time this wisest of all men talks about communication (words like heart, lips, words, speech...). Consider:

***“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,  
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*** Pr. 12:18

The topic of communication is addressed multiple times in nearly every chapter of Proverbs.

Listen to the byproduct of negative communication according to Solomon: poverty, destruction, foolishness, regret, strife, corruption, hatred, separation, contention, shame, crushed spirits... This is the short list, but it is a sampling of what you can expect if your communication is negative and destructive.

Listen to the byproduct of positive communication according to Solomon: wisdom, understanding, delights God, sweetness of life, honor, patience, protection, caring, healing, truth, peace... This also is the short list, but the contrast should be more than apparent.

We have great power in speech and forgiveness - power to destroy and tear down or to heal and build up. The fact that any marriage survives is due to the goodness of God. How can two sinful, broken, selfish people ever hope to come together in such a way as to portray the good purpose of God? Observing and obeying his truths of forgiveness and communication allow us to become men and women who possess the power of God to calm, heal, and preserve life. It's a good start!