

LIFEFAITHFUSION DEVOTIONAL

Success the Biblical Way

LIFEFAITHFUSION DEVOTIONAL DAY THREE

SCRIPTURE STUDY

Proverbs 18:22
Proverbs 31
Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33
Genesis 2:18-24
I Peter 3:7
Ephesians 4:32
Matthew 5:4
Song of Solomon

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

In the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes what real love looks like. Every descriptor of love implies an action and a choice of the will, not just a feeling. Real love challenges us to give of ourselves.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
“Thank you for the opportunities you have given me to express love. Make me a better friend, servant and lover for my spouse.” Amen



LIVE AND LOVE WISELY

King Solomon had lots of marriage advice to offer. He had a lot of practice. With 700 wives and 300 concubines, he would appear to be the ultimate authority on the subject. But the truth be told, the only record we have of King Solomon being in a successful monogamous relationship is his poem to the love of his life penned in the Song of Solomon.

Understanding marriage customs in Hebrew society will give us a clearer view of the context in which Solomon wrote. The patriarch of the family negotiated marriages and covenants for his sons and daughters. Betrothal involved a choice of partners, an agreement on a bride-price, and a dowry. The father of the groom's family sent the bride-price, or gift, to the bride's father. If the young girl's father (and I do mean young) accepted the proposal, he would give his daughter a dowry and allow the prospective husband to take the bride to his house. The married couple then lived with the groom's family until the father chose an heir—the natural or adopted son of the newly-created family.

We can learn much about love and marriage from these customs. God the Father should lead and guide us in our choice of a marriage partner. The groom should value, even lay down his life for his bride. And the bride should give all that she has, “her dowry,” to make the marriage work. As the young couple lived in the house of the groom's father, so every godly marriage should be lived in the presence and blessing of the Heavenly Father.

Solomon believed that having the right marriage partner was a blessing of inestimable value:

“He who finds a wife finds what is good, and receives favor from the Lord.” Prov. 18:22 (NIV)

God’s *favor* in Hebrew implies “fortune” or “blessing.” This word describes that which is pleasing to God, beneficial to life, and abundantly enjoyable. Solomon concludes the Book of Proverbs with these words in Proverbs 31:10:

“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.” (Proverbs 31:10)

- What does a godly marriage look like to you? If you are married, describe in your own words how you value your husband or wife. Do you express your love and appreciation to them? Take that opportunity today.
- Have you invested yourself in your partner? What are some ways that you could pour your life into your partner in a greater way?
- Have you experienced “abundance” and “enjoyment” in your relationship? What would that look like?

PRINCIPLES FOR GODLY MARRIAGE

If King Solomon, with all his wisdom, valued the marriage relationship, so should we. What are some basic biblical principles for living and loving wisely? Let’s begin with the words of Paul the apostle:

“Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”
(Ephesians 5:25)

“And the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33)

First of all, you can’t be truly successful in living life the biblical way when one of the major components of your life—your marriage—is in shambles.

Marriage is not simply something we do; it is part of who we are. It is inseparable from the rest of our lives. Marriage is not something we agree to just because we’re lonely, though God did provide it as a means of ministering to our aloneness (see Genesis 2:18–24). It’s incredibly hard work, and only the selfless, those who are willing and able to work at it will succeed.

Let me give you seven biblical foundations that will help your marriage to be successful:

1. Courtesy

When you are courteous toward your spouse, a great marriage will follow. The word *courteous* means thoughtful, gentlemanly, attentive, considerate, respectful, civil, and so on. If you lack courtesy in the way that you speak, listen, refer to, talk about, touch, or interact with your husband or wife, you undermine every other part of your relationship. For example, if you’re not courteous, even a love note will be seen with contempt.

1 Peter 3:7 tells us, “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

A lack of courtesy will hurt your marriage.

- How do you show courtesy to your partner? One purpose of etiquette is to make others around you comfortable and at ease. Do you make your partner at ease? Do you defer to their wishes?
- What are some ways that you can make your husband or wife feel loved? Take note of those times when they share a preference, or admire something. Write it on your “future gift” list for anniversary, Christmas, or birthday:

2. Esteem

Esteem refers to the way in which we communicate to people their distinctive worth, letting them know how wonderful they are.

The woman in Song of Solomon 2:1 said, “I am the lily of the valley. I am the rose of Sharon.” She was able to describe herself this way because that’s how her beloved treated her. Men, the Bible commands you to treat your wife just like you would nourish your own body (Ephesians 5:28). And wives, respond to your husband’s treatment of you by respecting him in everything (Ephesians 5:25).

- Write a love letter to your spouse. Compliment them for their character traits, not just for their actions or physical appearance. Tell them how important they are to you.
- Spend some time thanking God for your husband or wife. Remember how you first met, and recall your “first love.” What things did you do early in your relationship to show your spouse how precious they were to you?

3. Communication

We have to talk *and* to listen to one another. To be specific, we have to talk sweetly, deeply, easily, and often. And we have to listen intently and patiently. This kind of listening *demand*s face time. Make it a disciplined part of your marriage. You have to have “couch time” where you turn, face each other, and really communicate deeply. Your spouse deserves to have your face pointed toward them, just the way Jesus’s face is pointed toward you whenever you pray!

Now don’t cop out by claiming that you are not a good communicator—you can learn to do it. Just try; you’ll be surprised at how easy it can be!

- Read Ephesians 4:15 and summarize it here. What would “speaking the truth in love” look like?
- How can you “build your partner up according to their needs”? What are your partner’s top three needs? Write them down. Now ask them to write their top three needs down. Compare your lists. Talk about the similarities and differences.

4. Time

We need to spend time with each other. When you first dated, you made time for each other, but for some reason most couples let marriage change that practice. Spending time together should be a sweet delight in your marriage. So date your spouse! And I mean a real date! Shower before you go. Plan special activities. Romance each other. Don’t just go through the motions; enjoy one another!

5. Conflict Cleanly

In times of conflict, especially when you're the one who's been offended, don't release your hurt by damaging accusations and critical speech. Don't slam doors. Proverbs 15:1 says that "a harsh word stirs up anger."

"Honey, what you said hurt me, it really did." If you're the offender, this is a moment when your marriage can be either broken or repaired. Pay attention when your mate says, "You hurt me." No one becomes angry unless they were first hurt. When someone is wounded and the hurt is not processed, all kinds of symptoms result: bitterness, condemnation, depression, and disappointment. There is only one biblical way to heal hurt. Jesus said, "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matt. 5:4) The only way to heal hurt is to mourn the hurt and to allow your partner to comfort it. So when your mate is wounded, ask them questions. How did the hurt make you feel? I am so sorry for (failing to listen, for taking you for granted when I...etc).

- List some of the ways you hurt your spouse and your marriage. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring them to mind. Write them down, and then confess each sin to God. After you have spent time in prayer, go to your partner and ask for forgiveness. Be specific.
- Let your spouse share some hurt that they have experienced in your marriage. Ask them to express their pain, and then comfort them. Use feeling words: "My heart is broken, I hurt because you are hurting."

6. Trust

A marriage is built on trust. You cannot worry your mate over unwise behavior and intimacy with other people of the opposite sex. Let me make this really simple. Do not spend alone time with other women or men. It's completely inappropriate in every way.

- Ask your partner to let you know if there is any behavior with someone of the opposite sex that makes him or her uncomfortable. It could be hugging, teasing, or terms of endearment that might feel comfortable to you, but may make your partner feel insecure.
- Has there ever been a time when you have lied to your husband or wife? What was the lie? Confess the untruth as sin, and ask your spouse's forgiveness. There is no greater foundation for trust than truthfulness.

7. Romance

Romance is an essential part of marriage. King Solomon knew how to romance his Shunammite bride in the Song of Solomon. Take time before bed to read the poem to your spouse and personalize the loving words. The poem is sexy—remember, God invented sex for a husband and wife to enjoy! Be affectionate with your mate. Touch just to touch—it doesn't always have to lead to sex. Hug just to hug. Hold hands.

- Do you still tell your mate you love him or her? Be spontaneous with gifts, notes, and phone calls. In what way will you plan to romance your spouse this week?
- What would an ideal date look like for your spouse? Describe it here. What are the steps you could take to make it happen?

You can't be successful in life the biblical way if you can't be successful in your marriage. It's that simple.