

FOUR GUIDELINES FOR A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Martin and Victoria Herbert 14 July 2012

Martin & Victoria – congratulations! May you be very happy in your new life together

There are many recipes for a happy and long-lasting marriage.

- Henry Ford said the secret was the same as making cars – “*Stick to the same model!*”
- Rabbi Brickner said ‘*Success in marriage is more than finding the right person; it is being the right person*’
- After 50 years of happy marriage an old American farmer explained the secret in these terms: “*At home I rule the roost – and my wife rules the rooster!*”

This afternoon I want to suggest four guidelines for a happy marriage based on Paul’s ‘hymn’ to love found in 1 Cor 13.

1. Love involves commitment

At the moment you’re both head-over-heels in love. If not, then heaven help you.

BUT marriage is more than being head-over-heels in love.

In the wedding service I did not ask you, Victoria: “Are you in love?” with Martin. Nor did I ask Martin: “Do you love Victoria?” I asked you “Will you love?” one another. To which each of you said: “***I will***”

Marriage is about our will. It is about making up our minds and promising to keep our word.

It is about commitment. So when you gave rings to one another each of you said: “*I give you this ring as a sign of our commitment to one another*”.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said to a couple: “*It is not your love that sustains marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love*”. That may seem very unromantic – but it’s true.

If your marriage simply depends on your feeling loving toward one another, then it will not last.

For there will be times when you feel anything but love. At those times it will be your commitment which will sustain your loving.

Never forget that that true love involves commitment. Indeed, love may be described as ‘*An unconditional commitment to an imperfect person*’.

In the words of Paul here in 1 Cor 13: “**Love never gives up**” (v7)

2. Love involves work

If marriages are made in heaven, then they need to be worked out on earth. Great marriages do not drop from heaven ready-made. They have to be worked at – to be worked at constantly.

- In this respect, marriage work may be likened to running a farm, with cows to be milked, horses to be mucked out and goodness knows what. You have to start all over again each morning.
- Or to use a different analogy. It’s a bit like making a garden. The first cleaning of the ground is very labour intensive. But once done, you can’t leave it – you have to keep clearing the weeds, otherwise it’ll go back to wilderness again.

The fact is that you cannot afford to take one another granted.

The courting that has gone on in the past, has to continue to go on – and on – and on.

Love is not a state of being – love is always of state of doing.

The English translations of 1 Cor 13 are misleading: they give the impression that love is this and love is that – whereas actually Paul here is using a series of verbs: ***love works at being patient, works at being kind*** etc

3. Love involves forgiveness

At the moment all may be very lovey-dovey between you two – you are so head-over-heels in love, that you are blind to one another's faults. But the day will come when your eyes are opened – and you will see one another as you actually are, imperfect people.

There will be days when you will rub one another up the wrong way – you will annoy one another - with justification. What then? The secret is to forgive.

Marriage is, in fact, only three parts love and seven parts forgiveness.

“A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers”. **“Love does not keep a record of wrongs”** (v5)

4. Love involves tolerance

Frank Muir used to say that many a bride's attitude towards her betrothed can be summed up in three words: *‘Aisle, Altar, Him’*. Gosh I hope that isn't your attitude, Victoria.

If your marriage is to succeed, then you need to be tolerant of one another by accepting one another as you are. Victoria, don't try to change Martin – he is as he is. Martin is not made in your image – but in God's image, how God intended him to be. And what's true of your attitude, Victoria, to Martin, should be true too of your attitude, Martin, to Victoria.

In the coming months & years you will make compromises – you will adjust to one another's ways/needs. But such compromises and adjustments are a form of loving adaptation, as distinct from a manipulation the other.

“Love is not selfish” (v5), says Paul – it does not insist on its own way. It is tolerant. Let the anagram **WYSIWYG** mark your marriage: What You See Is What You Get.

Learn to be tolerant of one another's differences.

In summary: commitment – work – forgiveness – tolerance.
These are four key ingredients to a happy marriage.