

THE HERALD

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A Faithful Marriage

By Steve and Ruth Carter

A couple married for over 50 years shares what has made their marriage last and what are their important responsibilities to other believers.

Ruth

We were wed on June 20, 1970. It was a glorious day in New Jersey. The event was carefully slipped in between Steve's sophomore year of medical school and my nursing job at Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago. Doctor was in love with nurse. Nurse was in love with doctor. We shared vows we had written ourselves for the occasion. Promises were made in the presence of friends and family. Our official honeymoon would wait for three months when there would be more time in Steve's medical training schedule. Off we drove back to school. It had been a whirlwind that launched us into the most important season of our lives: marriage.

They say opposites attract. We certainly fit that paradigm. I grew up in Africa, the daughter of missionary parents. I loved school, music, and relationships. Steve was US born and raised, loved sports, the outdoors, and certainly not the classroom! I was contemplative. My feelings were easily hurt. Steve was more impulsive, confident, and stuffed his feelings. And so, though we loved each other, the snarls began.

And why would we expect otherwise? Two very dissimilar, independent, selfish, sin-filled dreamers had become one flesh. In many ways, the idea that two could join for a lifetime seems preposterous, impossible, a total mystery, but that's what happened June 20, 1970. Fifty-two years later, we are still together. Why? What has made it a "faithful marriage"?

1. A promise was made before God, and a promise is to be kept. It doesn't matter if financial woes back us up against the ropes. It doesn't matter if the physical attraction of youth gives way to wrinkles, sagging skin, and gray hair. It doesn't matter if one partner breaks an arm and needs help with the most basic of daily activities. We made a promise to love and cherish the other until death would part us. A promise is to be kept.

2. We both entered marriage with a greater commitment than just to one another. We held a higher commitment to the one who created marriage, our Lord and Savior, Jesus. As individuals, we submitted to Scripture as our authority. When Satan, the enemy of all Christian marriage, sought to shake our relationship, we had something bigger and stronger and more powerful with which to resist his temptation.
3. Since we became husband and wife 52 years ago, we have been surrounded by a host of witnesses we respect. Our parents had modeled godly marriages for us. Our sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren needed an example of a rock-solid marriage. We would never let them down.
4. The New Testament teaches us that marriage is a parable, a word-picture of the relationship between Christ, the Bridegroom, and his bride, the Church. When we ponder what Jesus did for us, we see extravagant love. We see indescribable sacrifice. We see unstoppable forgiveness. We see never-ending second chances. The Holy Spirit inspired the New Testament authors to write of this comparison so that we would know the expectation for us when we enter marriage. The bar is high. As husband and wife, we never wanted to be a counterfeit to the world around us, but rather to have our marriage point to Christ.

Against this backdrop of ideas, let's now talk about where the rubber meets the road. Titus 2:2–8 encourages older men and older women to be examples to the younger adults in the generations that follow them. Here are four practical tips from my notebook:

1. We attended Grace Fellowship Church in Florence, Kentucky, for 12 years. Our pastor, Brad Bigney, often shared the following three steps for conflict resolution. This is so good, one of those adages you write in the back cover of your Bible for easy reference. "See your own sin first. See your own sin as worst. Work on your own sin the most." This concept brought us through many prickly situations.
2. Allow each person to develop into the individual person God intends them to be. We have learned that as husband and wife, we will never see exactly the same on every issue, and that's okay. Don't expect the other partner to turn into another you. We were created to be helpers for each other, complementary to one another. Advice from the other can be the best you will ever receive because your partner loves you. Learn to listen to it. Receive it without taking offense.
3. By the same token, it is good to develop some interests in common that you love to do together. Steve and I enjoy playing golf together. He says he would rather play with me than a whole league of men (and I'm not a very good player!). That makes me feel very special. Another thing we enjoy doing together is reading. We have visited many parts of the world and learned about many different people through the pages of a book. I usually read to Steve daily after lunch and dinner for 15 minutes.
4. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26–27). How many couples have experienced the endless tossing and turning in bed when some-

thing has not been resolved before bedtime? Believe it or not, the sweet peace of reconciliation can still elude us, even after 50 years of faithful marriage. Satan knows that stirring up anger between spouses is one of his most effective tools. James 1:19 says, "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Problems arise when one reverses the order and becomes angry, then speaks, and finally listens. Angry behavior is destructive to marital harmony.

Steve

Now it's Steve's turn.

1. In my search for a wife, you can see from the above that I made a "good," no, a "great" choice! Now in our fifth decade of marriage, our sons are all married, and our grandchildren are entering marriageable ages. The Bible gives clear guidance that a Christian should not marry a non-Christian. You simply cannot expect God's favor on the relationship if, from the start, both are found to be disobedient to this counsel. Avail yourself of opportunities that are conducive to "encountering" a Christian spouse. The Christian Medical Society proved to be that meeting place for us when we were in school.
2. One of the purposes of marriage is to have children. We were given four sons, each an incredible blessing to us, but they were never allowed to run our home. It was not a democracy. They knew very clearly that Dad took the lead, and Mom was equally valued but under his headship. They also knew that our greatest goal for them was to see them become young men who loved Jesus and obeyed God's word. Their time with us was

gradually to learn adult responsibilities, which they would use when they launched their own homes one day. It was never an option to make our basement their long-term home. Now, decades later, we are blessed by their kind attentiveness to our needs.

3. The use of money is often a source of friction between husband and wife. Because marriage has molded two into one flesh, the family income is no longer "my money," but "our money." There should be one checking account rather than separate ones. There should be no lone ranger spending of any consequence but instead, mutually-agreed-upon significant purchases. Make money decisions together.
4. Sexual intimacy is designed for the unique experience of marriage. Purity before marriage and fidelity after marriage is the only way to magnify the Lord. God intended that procreation come through marriage, but also physical pleasure. First Corinthians 7:3-5 says in marriage one's body is not their own but also their spouse's. This was God's design from the beginning.

Since our wedding day on June 20, 1970, much has changed. We are now 75 years old. Our nest is empty. Our 4 married sons have produced 13 grandchildren. We are in the final quarter of life. The culture around us screams that times are different now, and they are. But in truth, God's Word and his principles remain exactly the same. He was the Author of marriage. He knows what brings the greatest joy and success. We intend to finish strong and follow him until we are called home.

FUNNIES

Two men were sitting in a restaurant discussing cars. "I was once buying a used car from a dealer," said one. "Of course, he praised it, and since I was a novice, I knew nothing about it. But I found a way of finding out all about its defects."

"That sounds incredible," said the other.

"Well," continued the first man. "I took the car out on a test drive and drove it to another dealer and asked him to buy it."

In a country home that seldom had guests, the young son was eager to help his mother, after his father appeared with two dinner guest from the office.

When the dinner was nearly over, the boy went to the kitchen and proudly carried in the first piece of apple pie, giving it to his father, who passed it to a guest.

The boy came in with a second piece of pie and gave it to his father, who again gave it to a guest.

This was too much for the boy, who said, "It's no use, Dad. The pieces are all the same size."

A father of eight volunteered to babysit one evening so his wife could go away. "Don't let a single one of the children come downstairs," his wife instructed him as she went out. He promised to carry out order to the letter and had just settled down to a book when he heard steps on the stairway. "Get back upstairs and stay there," he commanded sternly.

He read in peace for a few minutes, then again heard soft footsteps. This time he added the threat of spanking. Soon he again detected stealthy sounds, and dashed out in time to see a small lad disappear up the top steps. He had hardly returned to his book when a neighbor came in distractedly. "Oh Fred," she wailed, "I can't find my Willie anywhere. Have you seen him?"

"Here I am, Ma," said a tearful voice from the top of the stairs. "He won't let me go home!"

The ten-year-old son of a physician, together with a friend, was playing in his father's office, during the absence of the doctor, when suddenly the lad threw open a closet door and disclosed, to the terrified gaze of his friend, an articulated skeleton.

When the visitor had sufficiently recovered from his shock, the doctor's son explained that his father was extremely proud of that skeleton.

"Is he?" asked the other. "Why?"

"I don't know," was the answer, "maybe it was his first patient."

The men were out duck hunting. One got to bragging about what a good shot he was and what an accurate gun he had. He said he never missed a shot and then proposed a bet that he would shoot down the first duck that flew over. The other hunter took him up on it. After a while, a duck flew directly over them and not to high. The man aimed, fired...and the duck kept on going.

"You have just witnessed a miracle," the man said. "There flies a dead duck."