

# The Myth of Happily Ever After vs. A Biblical Worldview Perspective on Marriage

*Sue Bohlin examines unrealistic expectations that can torpedo a marriage that should be based on biblical worldview principles. As she examines these expectations from a Christian perspective, one begins to understand how they run counter to the marriage principles contained in the Bible.*

## Happily Ever After

The wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana was one of the most-watched romantic real-life events of the twentieth century. Between the legitimate longings of our hearts, and the way the Disney empire has fed our romantic fantasies for fairy tales, we are captivated by storybook romance.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who presided at the royal wedding, gave a marvelous sermon that day. In it he said, "Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made, the prince and princess on their wedding day. But fairy tales usually end at this point with the simple phrase, 'They lived happily ever after.' This may be because fairy tales regard marriage as an anticlimax after the romance of courtship. This is not the Christian view. Our faith sees the wedding day not as a place of arrival but the place where the adventure begins."[\[1\]](#)

The divorce rate in our culture is at an all-time high. Whatever happened to "happily ever after"? Why is it so hard to maintain the hopes and dreams that surround a beautiful wedding with all its promises of love and fidelity, sacrifice and service?

Marriage counselors Les and Leslie Parrott have an idea.

In their excellent book *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, they suggest four myths that have torpedoed many marriages because of unrealistic expectations and misconceptions about what marriage should be. In what follows, we'll look at four marriage myths that are the most harmful and most common:

- We expect exactly the same things from marriage.
- Everything good in our marriage will get better.
- Everything bad in my life will disappear.
- My spouse will make me whole.

"For too long," the Parrotts write, "marriage has been saddled with unrealistic expectation and misguided assumptions. Liberated from these four myths, couples can settle into the real world of marriage—with all its joys and sorrows, passion and pain."[\[2\]](#)

Many people know that something is wrong but they don't know what; and you can't fix or change something if you don't know what's wrong in the first place. Many of our marriage problems are due to harmful expectations and beliefs that fly in the face of "real reality." One divorce lawyer told the Parrotts that the number-one reason people split up is that they "refuse to accept the fact that they are married to a *human being*."[\[3\]](#) In this article we bust the myth of "happily ever after."

## **Myth #1: "We Expect Exactly the Same Things From Marriage"**

When people are in love, it's easy to assume that the other person has the same values and expectations as we do. But every family has its own culture, so to speak, and we tend to expect life will continue the same way once we're adults as it was while we were growing up. One way these differing expectations play out is in the unspoken rules of each family.

We are usually not aware of our unspoken rules and expectations until the other person violates them. I recently heard a great word of wisdom: "Expectations are the mother of resentments." How true is that?! When our spouse doesn't live up to our unspoken expectations, we can feel frustrated and irritated, and often we don't even know why we're upset because we don't know what's wrong. It's helpful to think through "the rules" of one's family so that unspoken rules and expectations are brought out into the light of examination. Here are some rules from various families:

- Don't ask for help unless you're desperate.
- Downplay your successes.
- Be invisible.
- Get someone else to do the hard or dirty work.
- Don't get sick.
- Never get angry.
- Don't talk about your body.
- Don't go to bed without cleaning the kitchen.
- Don't talk about your feelings.
- Never order dessert at a restaurant.
- Don't ever upset Daddy.

Can you see how these unspoken rules can cause havoc if a spouse doesn't know about them?

Another source of mismatched expectations is the unconscious roles that spouses fall into, the way an actor follows a script. We inherit expectations about how wives and husbands act by watching our parents and other adults, and we often play out those roles the same way unless we choose to change it. For example, one new husband surprised his wife at dinner by picking up his empty iced tea glass and tinkling the ice cubes. His father had always signaled this way to his mother that he was ready for more tea. The bride was not pleased to learn that her husband expected to play the role of pampered king whose every whim was gladly granted!

The myth that “we expect exactly the same things from marriage” is busted by identifying and talking about unspoken expectations and unconscious roles. The more openly couples discuss their differing expectations, the more likely they are to create a vision of marriage that they can agree on.

## **Myth #2: “Everything Good in Our Relationship Will Get Better”**

Most people, when they fall in love, really believe their love will last forever because it’s so intense and intoxicating. It’s hard not to believe that everything good about the relationship will just continue to get better and better as time goes on. But reality “is that not *everything* gets better. Many things improve in relationships, but some things become more difficult. Every successful marriage requires necessary losses, and in choosing to marry, you inevitably go through a mourning process.”[\[4\]](#)

For some, marriage means giving up childhood. It means giving up the safety and security of being your parents’ child, and becoming a full-fledged adult. God makes this statement in Genesis 2:24 when He says, “ For this reason a man *will leave his father and mother* and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Marriage means the end of childhood, and that can feel like a loss to be mourned.

Marriage also “means giving up a carefree lifestyle and coming to terms with new limits. It means unexpected inconveniences.”[\[5\]](#) Marriage means always passing one’s plans and choices through the filter of “us.” Since “the two become one,” many of our even mundane life choices impact someone else. That can feel like a loss to be faced, as well.

The Parrotts write, “By far the most dramatic loss experienced in a new marriage is the idealized image you have of your partner. This was the toughest myth we encountered in our marriage. Each of us had an airbrushed mental picture of who

the other was. But eventually, married life asked us to look reality square in the face and reckon with the fact that we did not marry the person we thought we did.”{6}

It is an illusion that the intense romantic thrill of the beginning of a relationship will last forever. “Debunking the myth of eternal romance will do more than just about anything to help . . . build a lifelong happy marriage.”{7} When we get past the myth of continual bliss with a perfect partner, we can embrace the reality that we married another flawed and fallen human being. This is good news, because God only gives grace for reality, not for illusion or temporary enchantment. And this is good news because intimacy is only available with a real person, not with an idealized image.

## **Myth #3: “Everything Bad in My Life Will Disappear”**

Remember the story of Cinderella? A poor, mistreated stepchild who is forced to serve her wicked stepfamily is magically turned into a beautiful princess. She is rescued by her Prince Charming and they live . . . all together now . . . “happily ever after.” And don’t we all long for a Prince Charming or a beautiful princess to make us happy and wipe away every tear from our eyes?

The myth of a “happily ever after” life is a legitimate longing of our hearts. We ache to return to Eden where everything bad in our lives *will* disappear. God promises that He will eventually make all things right again, but it doesn’t happen in marriage between two fallen human beings living in a fallen world.

Marriage is a glorious institution invented by God, but it “does not erase personal pain or eliminate loneliness. Why? Because people get married primarily to further their own well-being, not to take care of their partners’ needs. The bad traits and feelings you carried around before you were married

remain with you as you leave the wedding chapel. A marriage certificate is not a magical glass slipper.”[\[8\]](#)

The Parrotts write, “Getting married cannot instantly cure all our ills, but marriage *can* become a powerful healing agent over time. If you are patient, marriage can help you overcome even some of the toughest of tribulations.”[\[9\]](#) Perhaps the biggest reason for this is the amazing *power* of love. I believe God’s love is the strongest healing agent in the universe. In marriage, He can love us through our spouses; He can be “Jesus with skin on” to each of us.

A healthy marriage can become a place to wrap up unfinished business from childhood and deal with unresolved hurts. God showed me this truth personally. I had experienced a great deal of rejection in relationships before I met my husband. He told me that we were married ten years before he could say the words, “I need to talk to you about something” and I wouldn’t automatically wince and pull back in fear. Over time, Ray’s faithful love and acceptance of me healed the rejection wounds.

It’s a myth that everything bad in our lives will disappear when we say “I do,” but God’s grace is bigger than the myth. We still live in a fallen world with a fallen spouse, but God can bring much grace through mutual love.

## **Myth #4: “My Spouse Will Make Me Whole”**

One of the greatest lines in all of movie history belongs to Tom Cruise in *Jerry Maguire* where he tells his wife, “You complete me.” It is romantic and feels emotionally satisfying—but in reality, it’s just not true.

Couples who swallow the myth that their spouse will make them whole are in danger of going to one of two extremes. One is an unhealthy dependence on the other that the Parrotts term an *enmeshed* relationship. They unconsciously make their partner

completely responsible for their well-being. They are like ticks that constantly attempt to suck life and love and meaning from their spouse. It is a form of idolatry, because they are looking to their partner to provide emotional “living water” that only God can give.

The other extreme is a *disengaged* relationship of what the Parrotts call “rugged self-reliance.” These spouses are so isolated and independent from each other that they function more like neighbors or business associates than a God-created union of two souls. The first kind of couple is looking for wholeness from their partner; the second kind of couple is looking for wholeness from within. It is also a form of idolatry, because they are looking to themselves instead of God to provide meaning for life.

Neither enmeshed nor disengaged relationships are healthy, and neither will allow the people in them to experience wholeness. A sense of wholeness is found in an *interdependent* relationship where two people with self-respect and dignity make a commitment to nurture their own spiritual and emotional growth as well as their partner’s.

Enmeshed relationships are like the capital letter A. They lean on each other so much that if one moves, the whole structure falls down. Their security is in another person instead of in God. Disengaged relationships are like the letter H. Partners stand virtually alone. If one lets go, the other hardly feels a thing. Interdependent relationships are like the letter M. They could stand on their own, but they choose to stay connected to the other out of their fullness, not out of their emptiness. If one lets go, the other feels a loss but can recover.

Every marriage is between two broken and fallen people who cannot make each other whole. We are called to love and respect each other, serve and celebrate each other—but only God can make us whole.

“Happily ever after” may be for fairy tales, but that doesn’t mean there is no such thing as a happy, rich, fulfilling marriage. But it’s only possible for those who live in reality, not in the fantasy of make-believe myths. May God give us grace to trust Him to walk in truth and not illusion.

## Notes

1. Les and Leslie Parrott. *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 26.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ibid., 23.
4. Ibid., 21.
5. Ibid., 22.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 24.
9. Ibid., 25.

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# The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands: A Christian View

*Sue Bohlin looks at this important book from a distinctly Christian perspective. Filtering the advice through a biblical worldview increases the purity and strength of the message on how to minister effectively to your husband.*

## Why We Need This Book

Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger has written a book that is improving thousands of marriages: *The Proper Care and*



*Feeding of Husbands.*{1} We need this book because millions of wives either don't know how to love their husbands wisely and well, or they're too self-centered to see it as important. Dr. Laura credits this dismal condition to forty years of feminist philosophy, "with its condemnation of just about everything male as evil, stupid, and oppressive, and the denigration of female and male roles in families." {2} While the women's movement certainly had a hand to play in the disintegration of relationships and the family, I believe the core cause is our sinful self-centeredness, just as the Bible says. {3}

Which is why we need help, and God instructs older women to train younger women to love their husband and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. {4} *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* is a great resource for learning these important values and skills.

God gives us great power as women. Dr. Laura says, "Men are borne of women and spend the rest of their lives yearning for a woman's acceptance and approval. . . . Men admittedly are putty in the hands of a woman they love. Give him direct communication, respect, appreciation, food and good lovin', and he'll do just about anything you wish—foolish or not." {5}

We'll be looking at these aspects of the proper care and feeding of husbands in this article, starting with a man's need for *direct communication*.

- We can improve on communication by doing it less. God made us verbal creatures, which can frustrate men with the overwhelming amount of our words. Instead of expecting her husband to be a girlfriend (and men make wonderful husbands, but not girlfriends), the wise wife selects for true connecting value, gives the bottom line first, and chooses her timing well.

- Men make terrible mind readers, so be direct. Dropping subtle hints doesn't work with most men, and it doesn't mean a man is insensitive, uncaring, or oblivious.
- Spell out whether you want help and advice, or if you're just venting. God made men to want to be our heroes, so understand you can frustrate him if he can't fix what's hurting you because all you want is someone to listen.
- And finally, take whatever he says at face value. Women tend to overanalyze men when they are just not that complicated.

## Respect

A listener to Dr. Laura's radio show named Edgar wrote, "There are a few things that men want so bad they would do anything for it. I think a good number of men want respect more than love. They like to feel they have some power. I nearly cry when you tell a woman caller to respect her husband. There is so much selfishness in the world—in marriages. Prosperity has allowed women to be so independent, and thus so selfish. I always feel as though I come last—my feelings come last, my needs come last."[\[6\]](#)

*"A good number of men want respect more than love."* God knew this when He made us. His commands to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:33 reflects each one's deepest needs: "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Dr. Emerson Eggerichs of [LoveandRespect.com](http://LoveandRespect.com) points out that this verse commands a husband to love his wife. Why? She needs love like she needs air to breathe. This same verse commands a wife to respect her husband. Why? He needs respect like he needs air to breathe.[\[7\]](#)

- Respect means treating someone in a way that builds him up and doesn't tear him down, never denigrating or attacking.[\[8\]](#)

- Respect means always treating the other person with the dignity they deserve as a person made in the image of God.
- Respect means grasping that a man's needs and wants are every bit as valid and important as a woman's needs and wants.
- Respect means not venting to others, *especially* the children. One woman wrote to Dr. Laura, "No emotional outlet is worth damaging my husband's reputation." [{9}](#)

There are three A's that men long for from their wives: attention, affection, and affirmation. Respect involves paying attention to what they do simply because they're the ones doing it.

Respect means allowing the other person to be different and do things differently than you. One repentant wife told Dr. Laura, "And in the end, it doesn't much matter that they eat PBJ sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a day or that one tooth brushing gets overlooked or whatever little thing that used to set me off!" [{10}](#)

One way to give respect is to give grace instead of resenting the things he does that complicate your life (like leaving drinking glasses in the living room or clothing on a chair). Ask yourself, "Is he *intentionally* doing this to bug me? To make my life difficult? If he were to die tomorrow, what wouldn't I give to have him back leaving these things out?"

## Appreciation

Ask any woman what she wants, and near the top of her list she'll tell you, "I want to be acknowledged and appreciated for the things I do." Well, men want the same thing!

A man named Evan wrote to Dr. Laura: "My wife feels that if she doesn't remind me again and again, something won't get done. But the fact is, it makes me feel like her child and

that Mommy needs to check up on me. It's degrading. I want to be admired. I want to be acknowledged for being the breadwinner and making sure that we are all well taken care of. My greatest pleasure is when I feel like her hero. Like her 'man.' Not her boy."

It doesn't matter what a husband's primary love language is, every man wants to be shown appreciation for who he is and what he does.

I love to suggest to young wives and mothers, "Keep a gratitude journal to help you be on the lookout for the things your husband does that you appreciate. Every night, write down three things you noticed. And then *tell him* the kinds of things that are in your book!"

- Thank him for going to work every morning even when he doesn't feel like it.
- Thank him for being faithful to you.
- Thank him for loving you.
- Thank him for giving you children—or even desiring to.
- Thank him for taking out the garbage, and changing the oil in your car, and mowing the yard.
- Thank him for bringing home his paycheck and not spending it on gambling or booze or drugs or women.

And then there's the opposite of appreciation. The universal complaint of men who e-mailed Dr. Laura about her book "was that their wives criticize, complain, nag, rarely compliment or express appreciation, are difficult to satisfy, and basically are not as nice to them as they'd be to a stranger ringing their doorbell at three A.M.!" So allow me to make some suggestions:

- Request, don't demand. Demanding is rude and disrespectful.
- Don't nag. If you have to ask more than once, ask as if it were the first time you were making the request.
- Keep your mouth shut about things that don't matter. Ask yourself, is this the hill you want to die on?
- Don't be controlling—which is micromanaging. Dr. Laura wrote, “When women micromanage, their husbands give up trying to please them, and then the wives complain that their men don't do anything for them.”[{13}](#)

Proverbs says, “Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.”[{14}](#) (This is truer no place more than in marriage.) Let your words be kind and full of appreciation.

## Support

A man named Roy wrote to Dr. Laura with some good advice for wives: “If you can't accentuate the positive, at least acknowledge it. The world is full of messages to men that there are standards we don't meet. There is always another man who is more handsome, more virile, or more athletic than we are. None of that matters if the most important person in our life looks up to us, accepts us as we are, and loves us even though we aren't perfect. . . . All I know is that the husband who has a wife who supports him and praises him for the positive things he does is the envy of all the other men who have to live with criticism, sarcasm, and constant reminders of their failures.”[{15}](#)

Men desperately want and need the support of their wives. This is reflected in what God reveals in His Word when He says, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”[{16}](#) And through the apostle Paul, God instructs wives to relate to their husbands in a way that meets this

need when He says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."[{17}](#)

Submission is basically giving support with a willing, cooperative heart.

A wife's submission includes knowing her gifts and strengths, and using them to serve her husband and family.

Service has a bad name, but both husbands and wives are called to serve God first and then each other; husbands are called to sacrificially love and serve their wives with Jesus as their pattern.[{18}](#)

So what does support look like?

- Believing in him. Telling him, "You have what it takes." Being his #1 fan.
- Cultivating a cooperative heart.
- Being generous and openhearted—willing to use your gifts and strengths to help him succeed.
- Understanding the importance of making him look good: never saying anything negative in public.
- Creating a home that's a safe haven from the world.
- Having a warm heart with a positive, cheerful demeanor. Women set the temperature of the home; we are thermostats, not thermometers, of the family. (On the other hand, Proverbs says "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."[{19}](#))
- Being interested in him and his life.
- Showing thoughtfulness. What does he like? Do it.
- And though by no means exhaustive, it also means being a

person of faithfulness and integrity. That means keeping your promises and being dependable. As Proverbs 31 puts it, "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value."[{20}](#)

## Good Lovin'

Dr. Laura writes that men need to feel the approval, acceptance and attachment from their women that comes from physical intimacy.[{21}](#) For women, emotional intimacy leads to physical intimacy. For men, it's the other way around; physical intimacy is the key to opening their hearts.

A man named Chris writes: "I don't understand why women don't understand that sex is a man's number one need for his wife. It's not just the act and sensation of pleasure, but it's the acceptance by a woman of her man. There's a communion that happens during intercourse that will bond a man to his woman, and he in turn will then begin to give of himself emotionally to her."[{22}](#)

Wives can discover that giving themselves sexually to their husbands with a warm, open-hearted, loving spirit, can be the most effective encouragement to getting their husbands to open up emotionally.

"What attracts men to women is their femininity, and femininity isn't only about appearance, it's also about behaviors. Looking womanly and behaving sweetly and flirtatiously are gifts wives give to their husbands." We see this modeled in the Song of Solomon, where the King's bride displays her feminine charms in a holy seduction of her husband, and the way she tells him what she loves about his body.[{23}](#)

Instead, our culture has things backward; many unmarried girls and women flaunt their bodies with a total lack of modesty or propriety. Once they marry, it's flannel nightgowns, wool

socks, and no makeup.

Dr. Laura calls wives to give themselves sexually to their husbands, even when they don't feel like it, as an act of love. It's really no different, she points out, than the fact that they expect their husbands to go to work and earn money to support the family even on days they don't feel like it.

She's echoing what God said in 1 Corinthians 7 about husband and wife both fulfilling their marital duty to each other because each one's body belongs not just to themselves but to each other. He also said not to deprive each other for extended periods of time lest we be tempted.

Consider the wisdom of radio listener Herb: "Sex is to a husband what conversation is to a wife. When a wife deprives her husband of sex for days, even weeks on end, it is tantamount to his refusing to talk to her for days, even weeks. Think of it that way, wives, and realize what a deleterious impact enforced sexual abstinence has on a good man who is determined to remain faithful." [\[24\]](#)

I can't recommend *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* highly enough. In fact, I gave a copy to my new daughter-in-law! Let me close with one more piece of wisdom from Dr. Laura: "[M]en are simple creatures who come from a woman, are nurtured and brought up by a woman, and yearn for the continued love, admiration and approval of a woman. . . Women need to better appreciate the magnitude of their power and influence over men, and not misuse or abuse it." [\[25\]](#) Amen!

## Notes

1. Laura Schlessinger, *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*, New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
2. Schlessinger, 3.
3. Jeremiah 17:9
4. Titus 2:4
5. Schlessinger, xvii.



6. Schlessinger, 1.

7.

<http://www.loveandrespect.com/Articles/article.asp?aid=43&cat=1>

8. Schlessinger, 157.

9. Schlessinger, 159.

10. Schlessinger, 158.

11. Schlessinger, 31.

12. Schlessinger, 37-38.

13. Schlessinger, 57.

14. Prov. 16:24

15. Schlessinger, 47-48.

16. Gen. 2:18.

17. Eph. 5:22, 24.

18. Eph. 2:25, 28.

19. Prov. 27:15.

20. Prov. 31:11.

21. Schlessinger, 25.

22. Schlessings, 129.

23. Song of Solomon 5:10-16

24. Schlessinger, 119.

25. Schlessinger. 10.

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# Trash Your Marriage in Eight Easy Steps – A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin helps us take a biblical perspective on eight activities and attitudes that will tear down our*

*marriage. Fortunately, she also provides us eight Christian alternatives that will help build up our marriages.*

The divorce rate is at an all-time high, and marriages are falling apart everywhere you look. Marriages of church-going people are crashing and burning especially fast. There are forces in our culture that contribute to marriage stresses such as pornography, the prevalence of drivenness, two-career families, and the dynamics of the blended family. But people also make foolish choices to destroy their marriages from within.

Talking about the family, Proverbs 14:1 says, "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands." Ephesians 5:28 exhorts husbands to love their wives as their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing them. God's plan is that we treasure and cultivate our marriages, but it's very easy to trash them instead. Let's take a tongue-in-cheek look at eight ways that people trash their marriages.

## **Be Selfish**

The first step is to *be selfish*. My pastor once said that the AIDS of marriage is justified self-centeredness. Everything needs to revolve around you because, let's face it, you *are* at the center of the universe, right? If you find something you like to do that ignores your spouses' feelings and interests, go ahead and do it! Too bad if they don't like it! You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get!

Always insist on having things your own way. If you don't get your own way, throw a tantrum. Or freeze your spouse out. Get your kids involved in this game by saying things like, "Would you please ask your father to pass the salt?" Don't be afraid to withhold sex if your spouse isn't letting you have things your own way. There's a *lot* of power in that, so don't waste it!

If there's only enough money in your budget for what one of you wants, make sure you get what *you* want. Especially if you're the wage earner, or if you make more than the other. Money is power, and don't be afraid to use it against your spouse!

Make demands instead of requests. Wives, let your husband know that he *will* do things your way, or you'll make his life miserable. Husbands, when you want your wife to do something, just *tell* her to do it. "Please" and "thank you" are for the kids. This is your spouse you're talking about—they don't need it. Save all your courtesy for strangers; don't waste it on the person you said you'd spend the rest of your life with.

What we really mean to say:

Selfishness is guaranteed to hurt marriages, so ask for God's help in putting your husband or wife ahead of yourself so you *don't* trash your marriage.

## **Pick at Each Other**

The second step is to *pick at each other*. If you know that something you do annoys your spouse, be sure to do it often. And intentionally. When she complains about it, tell her to buzz off, it's not as annoying as the stupid things she does to bug *you*. The more childish the annoying habit, the better.

Be critical of the smallest thing the other one says and does. Don't let your spouse get away with anything! Stay vigilant for every little offense. Be sure to address these small details with an air of superiority . . . unless it works better for you to act like a martyr, as if you deserve the Nobel Prize for putting up with someone who doesn't squeeze the toothpaste from the end.

Always get the last word when you're arguing. Dr. Phil McGraw has said that the most accurate predictor of divorce is when people don't allow their partners to retreat with dignity. So

make your spouse feel whipped and defeated at the end of a fight. As long as you win, that's what matters.

## **Let The Kids Be More Important**

A third step to trashing your marriage is to *let the kids become more important than your spouse*. Moms, make your husband feel left out of the intimate, secret relationship between you and your baby. As the baby grows, continue to draw the line where it's you and your child on one side, your husband on the other. Keep your Mommy hat on all day and all night. Your kids don't care if your hair is brushed and if you put on perfume and a little makeup before Daddy comes home, so why should he?

Dads, invest all your energies into making your child succeed at what he's good at, or what you *want* him to be good at. Squeeze out Mom so that you will be your kid's favorite parent. Work so hard on homework and school projects that there's no time for family time.

Let the kids and your other priorities crowd out your "alone together" time. Date nights are for unmarried people! In order to be fulfilled as a person, it is essential to invest all your energies in parenting, career, housework, church commitments and hobbies, so don't worry if there isn't enough time left over for the two of you. It's no big deal. There's always tomorrow. Or next year.

What we really mean to say:

Hey! If you find yourself doing these things, *stop!* You don't have to trash your marriage!

## **Show Disrespect**

Show disrespect for your spouse, especially in public. One of the best ways to disrespect your partner is ugly name-calling, especially about things he or she can't change. However, the

old standbys of “stupid,” “fat,” “ugly,” “weak,” and “loser” are always effective, too.

Complain about your spouse to your friends. It’s even more powerful if you do it in front of your spouse. Then, if he objects, punch him in the arm and say, “I’m just kidding! You take everything so *seriously!*”

There are a number of ways to show disrespect with nonverbal communication. Roll your eyes, cluck your tongue, narrow your eyes in contempt. The heavy sigh is a real winner, too.

Wives: Straighten out your husband when he makes a mistake, especially in front of others. Lecture him. Ridicule him: his feelings, his behavior, his dreams, his thoughts. Do everything you can to emasculate your husband. Husbands: Let your wife know you think your opinion is better than hers. Interrupt her when she’s speaking.

## Refuse to Meet Emotional Needs

Another easy way to trash your marriage is to *refuse to meet your spouse’s emotional needs*. Men and women need different things from their life partners. Dr. Willard Harley discovered and examined a pattern in his excellent book *His Needs, Her Needs*. Husbands’ top needs, it turns out, are: first of all sexual fulfillment; second, recreational companionship; third, an attractive spouse; fourth, domestic support; and fifth, admiration. Wives, if you want to trash your marriage, ignore his need for sex and that you be there for him in leisure time. Blow off his desire that you look your best and he can be proud that you’re his wife. Make your home as stressful and chaotic as you can, and never, ever tell him what you admire about him.



Wives’ top needs are: first of all affection; second

conversations; third, honesty and openness; fourth, financial commitment; and fifth, family commitment. So guys, if you want to trash your marriage, don't show your wife you love and appreciate her. Don't talk to her. Close off your heart to her. Make her constantly worry about finances. Don't be a faithful husband and father.

Dr. Harley's got a Web site, [MarriageBuilders.com](http://MarriageBuilders.com), that has a lot of good, practical information for building strong marriages, so you'd better stay away from there if you're not interested in being intentional and constructive!

Remember, we're being tongue-in-cheek here. We want you to *build* your marriage, not *trash* it!

## **Treat Your Friends Better than Your Spouse**

The sixth easy step to trashing your marriage is to *treat your friends better than your spouse*. Since a lot of men unfortunately don't even have friends, this is something women tend to do more. Women know how to treat their girlfriends. They call them up just to encourage them. They drop off flowers for no reason. They send them cards, and they listen intently to whatever's going on in their lives. They are emotionally invested in their friends. They are quick to mention when someone looks nice or does something well because women are usually good at affirming each other. If you want to trash your marriage, don't do any of these thoughtful kindnesses for your husband. If your girlfriend is having a bad day, go out of your way to take her a wonderful casserole *and* fresh salad *and* dessert . . . but serve your husband Spaghetti-O's.

But husbands, if your wife needs you for something at home, and your buddy scores some tickets to a game, tell your wife "too bad, so sad." After all, she'll be around forever but tonight's hockey game won't. If someone at church or in the

neighborhood needs something fixed, drop everything to take care of it, even if it means that the broken things around *your* house will continue to go unfixed.

## Be a Pansy

Step number seven for trashing your marriage has two parts. Husbands, *be a pansy*. Retreat into the safety of passivity. Refuse to take initiative or responsibility in making plans or suggestions. That way, when things go wrong, you can say, “Don’t blame me! It’s not my fault!” These are great ways to trash your marriage.

## Be His Mother

Wives, *be a mother* to your husband. When people ask how many children you have, say things like, “Two—three, if you count my husband.” Tell him to wear a coat when it’s cold and take an umbrella when it’s raining, because he can’t figure it out on his own. Be sure to say “I told you so” as often as possible. If he is passive or irresponsible, jump in and rescue him so he won’t have to deal with the consequences of his own choices. Make sure he feels three years old. Tell him how to live his life, down to the smallest detail.

What we really mean to say:

Please, if you find yourself doing these things, ask for God’s help in being *constructive* instead of *destructive*. We want to help you *build* your marriage, not *trash* it.

## When You’re Angry, Blow Up

Let’s talk about one final way to trash your marriage. Yell and scream, or quietly say hurtful words; it doesn’t matter. Inflicting pain is the important thing. Call each other names in the heat of your emotion. Dredge up the past and bring up old hurts. You can hit or slap with words as well as with

hands, and they each leave a different kind of lasting damage to your spouse and to your marriage. Losing control when you're angry is a powerful way to hurt your spouse.

## **Build Your Marriage in Eight *Harder* Steps**

Well, enough of ways to trash your marriage—how about eight steps to build it? All we have to do is look at the opposite of this article's negative, destructive steps.

To build your marriage, fight selfishness by developing a servant's heart. Commit yourself to acting in your spouse's best interests. Do at least one unselfish deed for your husband or wife every day.

Second, instead of picking at each other, choose to let things go. Be grace-givers. Remember that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Third, be intentional in keeping your marriage at the center of your family. Have regular date nights, and schedule times away to invest in the intimacy of your relationship. Go to a FamilyLife Marriage Conference ([www.familylife.com](http://www.familylife.com)).

Fourth, commit to actively be respectful to your spouse by never saying anything negative to other people. Be kind in your words and actions. Treat each other as courteously and with the kind of honor you would bestow on a stranger or a dear friend.

Fifth, talk about your spouse's particular [emotional needs](#). Read Willard Harley's excellent book *His Needs, Her Needs*. Find out which ones are most important to *your* partner, and do everything in your power to meet them.

Sixth, treat your husband or wife at least as well as you treat your friends. Be as thoughtful and encouraging and affirming as you can possibly be.



Seventh: Ladies, resign as your husband's mother. You married an adult; treat him with the respect an adult deserves. Men: Your wife needs a servant-leader—someone who refuses either passivity or tyranny—to love her as Christ loves the church.

And last, when you're angry, express it wisely and constructively. Use words like "I'm angry about this" instead of yelling or hurtful silence. If you're too mad to speak with self-control, wait till you cool down. And don't go to bed without dealing with the situation (Eph. 4:26).

You don't *have* to trash your marriage. You can treasure it instead.

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