

# Celebrating 48 Years of Marital Bliss

Thursday, March 14, 2024, marks 48 years of marriage for Nancy and me, and I can truly say that they have been wonderful years. Whatever trials or tests or difficulties or disappointments we have endured have been far overshadowed by the blessed union we have experienced together. As I have often said, outside of my salvation, Nancy is the greatest gift God has given me.

If you ask her for marital advice, she will say, "Make sure you marry the right person!" That means really getting to know the person you marry before you marry them and not being influenced by superficial and transient things. This is a commitment for life.

If you ask me for marital advice, speaking as a husband, I would simply reiterate Paul's words: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25, NIV).

Put your wife first. Put her preferences first. (I often joke that the wedding is the bride's day, and everything after that is the bride's life!) Make her feel loved.

Unless your wife has totally rejected the Lord and you (as a husband), I truly believe that following these guidelines will produce the desired results: Your wife will love you back. And if, as men of God, we are reliable and solid in the Lord, our wives will feel secure.

Outward appearances will change. Finances can go up and down. You'll have good times and bad times with your kids (if you do have kids). You will gain and lose friends. Life itself can be very fickle.

But if, as the husband, you are determined to put your relationship with God ahead of secondary pursuits and to love your wife in a Christlike way (with the Lord's help!), I believe your marriage can thrive, despite the vicissitudes of life.

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As the wife, if your husband is not what you feel you need him to be, criticizing and badgering him will not help. Instead, I encourage you to pray for yourself—that you would become more and more like Jesus—and then to pray that same prayer for your husband. (Yes, this counsel works both ways, for wives and husbands. Let's pray beautiful prayers for our spouses, painting a word picture of who they could be in the Lord.)

It's also important that we don't compare our spouses to others. Remember the words of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that may belong to your neighbor" (Ex. 20:17).

What Nancy and I have learned is that we are uniquely made for each other. She is an absolute realist who can easily become negative. I am an absolute optimist who can easily become Pollyannaish. We balance each other out.

She needs my positivity and words of love, which she receives from me day and night, quite spontaneously, out of a heart overflowing with affection and gratitude for her. And when asked what quality about me she most appreciates, she says that I love her unconditionally, regardless of how she is doing or how she looks.

I need her critiques and cautions, even if I don't always appreciate them at first blush. For example, when I ask her for input on something I have written and she savages it

rather than praises it, my initial reaction might be to be slightly offended. But then I say to myself, "I asked for her input, and she only wants to improve what I've written."

Often, she spots a major flaw that I missed, and by fixing that, the piece that I wrote becomes powerful rather than flawed. That's what marriage is about: a lifelong, holy partnership.

It's also important to be quick to forgive, and that means not holding grudges or building cases against one another. In a healthy marriage, communication is king.

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And keep working to improve your marriage. That's a constant for me, as bad habits are hard to correct.

I have learned that Nancy hates excuses, but when she points out something I left undone (or did wrongly), my first instinct is to make an excuse. It's not my fault! That bothers her more than the thing itself. The moment I say, "You're right. I need to do better," everything changes.

One of my worst habits is not being present, meaning I'm focused on something other than the subject at hand or the person in front of me. I'm there, but I'm not really there, with my mind racing to other projects or engagements.

Nancy, in contrast, is the most single-minded person I know, totally focused and locked in on the task or subject or person of the moment to the exclusion of everything else. And what she wants from me is focused time together, not just time together.

And I'm pleased to say that, after 48 years of marriage, I'm getting better! (I didn't ask Nancy for her opinion on this,

but she *would* say I'm trying.)

The key is that couples make efforts to honor and love and care for each other, to fulfill our marital vows, to remember there's a reason we made a commitment to spend the rest of our lives together and to keep the Lord Himself central.

If you will humble yourselves one to another and put the other first, any marital crisis can be overcome, and your marriage cannot just endure; it can thrive.

There is no gift on earth like a blessed marriage!{eo}

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