

The Tomczaks' Simple Secrets of 45 Years of Successful Marriage

Don't believe it when people say that in America divorce is declining. The reality is that divorce as a percentage of marriages appears to be less because countless millions are simply living together and not getting married.

A whopping 76% of young Americans believe living together before marriage is fine. Nearly 65% of "altar bound" singles—many of whom identify as "Christians"—live together before marriage, a euphemism for lifestyle fornication.

The latest development is Baby Boomers 50 and up who are now cohabiting as splits, now labeled "gray divorce," have doubled since the 1990s (an increase of 75% since 2007).

What is shameful is that America, supposedly a predominantly "Christian" nation, places in the top five list of countries with the most divorces each year. We actually register having one divorce every six seconds. Understand why we so desperately need a spiritual awakening?

Here's the Deal: We need to rediscover and recommit ourselves to the essentials for healthy marriages that glorify God. The battle is raging with cohabitation, rampant divorce and celebration of homosexual "marriage." The good news is the prophetic promise from Psalm 110:3a is resonating with multitudes as God is stirring the hearts of His people to respond, "Your people will follow You in the day of Your battle."

Married 45 Years/16,425 Days

Days ago, Doris and I celebrated our 45th wedding anniversary.

Fast-forward five more years, and we'll commemorate our golden anniversary as husband and wife. Her parents, who died a few years ago, made it to just weeks short of 70 years married!

Did we by happenstance come upon our "soul mate?" Was I humming Frank Sinatra's classic, "Luck Be a Lady," and poof, Doris miraculously appeared? Are we simply blessed with good genes, something in our DNA that caused us to stay connected?

None of the above.

As we honor God for His faithfulness at this marriage milestone, it provides us with an opportunity to humbly pass along four fundamental keys to encourage others. Like everyone, we've had our difficult times and made many mistakes, but through it all, these fundamentals have carried us through to victory.

Four Non-Negotiables

1. Christ. On my forearm, I have a tattoo that says "Jesus." My wife and I made a total commitment of our lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior before we were married. We pledged to keep Him first in our lives and cultivate an ever-deepening relationship with Him as our bridegroom and dearest friend.

We made a quality decision to "seek first His kingdom" (not the "Magic Kingdom," but the domain of our King) in every area of our lives (Matt. 6:33). We're radicals in devotion, living "for the praise of His glory" (Eph.1:12), and it pays off rich dividends.

2. Covenant. When we exchanged our marriage vows, we understood they were permanent, binding for life. We said to each other in the presence of 1,200 witnesses, "divorce is not an option," and we'd never even use the word when in conflicts (we haven't).

God's dealings with mankind have always been on the basis of covenant, and that's the way He ordained for us to relate in the marriage relationship. This enables us to reveal God's expressed purpose for a marriage, which is a living demonstration of Christ's relationship with His Church before a watching world (Eph. 5:22-28).

While there are three biblical grounds for severing the marriage covenant in divorce, our call is to be faithful to our solemn marriage vows. This is not high-school dating or the modern mentality, "Let's give it a try and see if things work out; if not, we can always get a divorce."

Among the 24 marriages in our extended family, there are no divorces. And among the 140 close couple friends we've known, there's been only two divorces. Praise be to God!

Billy Graham's wife, Ruth, was asked if, during her marriage, she ever thought about divorce? She replied in a joking manner: "Divorce—no. Murder ... well ..." Her point was obvious: Every marriage has challenges; pressure reveals the person, and we don't "run home to Mommy" but rather to God when the heat is on. And we don't rationalize going our separate ways flippantly saying, "The marriage was broken" ... "It just wasn't a good fit" ... or "The time arrived for peace rather than pain."

3. Communication. Most problems in marriage, business and ministries come because of failure regarding communication and expectations. This is why communication is not optional but essential and needs to be planned, consistent, unhurried and in-depth.

Setting aside regular times for catching up and meaningful interaction, establishing a consistent date night and sharing special "overnighter" getaways have enabled us to keep our marriage relationship healthy and fun.

A weekly date night (we practiced this for decades while

children were still at home) is not an hour at the end of the day, just watching some “flick.” Nor is it a family night, time with other couples or reading books in separate rooms. It’s time to stay current and draw out one another’s feelings and perspectives, plus possibly plan, pray and dream together.

4. Community. The Christian life was never intended to be lived independently in isolation. Meaningful involvement in a local church community and other ministries with like-minded followers of Jesus provide the relational support, encouragement and accountability we all need. We thank God for many friends who have been there for us in our times of need as well as Standing Stone Ministry (for pastoral couples) who have all provided depth and experience in addition to being radically committed to the Scriptures versus “therapeutic psychobabble.”

For years, we gathered for a weekend retreat with couples in a similar season of life. We shared meals together and laughter along with transparent discussion about schedules, current challenges, child-rearing, health, romance and the state of our relationship.

Every couple goes through rough patches and periods of unusual stress and conflict. A marriage is not the absence of conflict but the overcoming of it, and we all need help from faithful parents, leaders and friends, ideally in a local church community where every Christian should be planted (Acts 2:42-7).

Turning Things Around

We encourage you to reflect upon these four essentials that we share with you in these turbulent times. Pass them along to your children and any friends who are married or contemplating this big step in their lives.

Multitudes of people in America are tragically living in “silent divorce.” Others are fearful of entering marriage

because of what they witness. Recently one of our family members was awakened in the middle of the night as SWAT teams and a robot surrounded a neighborhood home. For hours, the perilous scene unfolded. When the crisis was resolved, everyone was extremely grateful for the outstanding police who put into practice fundamentals that turned the domestic situation around.

People today need hope. They also need both a declaration and demonstration of strong and successful Christian marriages modeling God's original intent.

Are you a candidate to help turn things around? {eo}

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