

This Is How I've Stayed Married for 40 Years

Next month my wife and I will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary. My parents were married for 67 years, so four decades doesn't seem like much of a milestone to me. But I'm aware that in today's culture—when couples consider divorce the easy escape from any conflict—we are blessed to still be together after tying the knot on April 28, 1984.

People often ask me what's the secret to our longevity. A group of men asked me that question a few weeks ago when I was in Uganda—a country where men are often harshly dominant, domestic violence is rampant and men are known to value their cows more than their wives. I gave them a teaching outlining the radical ways Christianity changed the way we should view marriage.

I explained that male domination often leads to abuse in marriage, even in Christian homes, and that such cruelty is rooted in the original fall of man in the Garden of Eden. I also gave some examples from other parts of Africa that remind us of this abuse.

In Kenya, for example, some men in the Masai tribe require their wives to sleep on the floor next to their beds. In some parts of western Uganda, wives aren't allowed to eat the chicken they prepare for their husbands because meat is for men only. And in many parts of Africa, men believe having multiple wives is a sign of prosperity.

The problem of abuse isn't limited to Africa; it is everywhere. This is sometimes because Christian men never allow the Holy Spirit to set them free from the sinful tendencies of male pride and superiority. And sometimes evangelical believers weaponize verses in the Bible about

wifely submission to make an excuse for domestic violence or verbal abuse.

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God never intended marriage to be about hierarchy, domination, control or abuse. If we aim to stop abuse in the wider culture, Christians must begin by discipling men to break free from this patriarchal attitude. We must take these three scriptural steps:

– **A husband must treat his wife as an equal.** It's true that God asks women to submit to their husbands; yet in the same passage in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, husbands and wives are instructed to submit to each other (see Eph. 5:21). Paul taught that married people have authority over each other's bodies (see 1 Cor. 7:3-4), stressing the concept of mutual submission. And Peter warned husbands that their prayers would be "hindered" if they do not treat their wives as "fellow heir[s] of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7, NASB 1977).

If wives are fellow heirs, that means they are equals. The gospel not only restores human beings to a relationship with God, but it reaffirms the dignity of women and their equal value as human beings created in God's image. When a husband understands this and treats his wife with honor and respect, his marriage will reflect heaven's values.

This is not about doing away with gender differences. God wants men to be men and women to be women. Peter described women as "weaker vessels" in 1 Peter 3:7—but this doesn't mean they are less valuable. The word "weaker" here can mean fragile or delicate, in the same way that a crystal flower vase is different from a heavy clay pot. Husbands are called to nurture and protect their wives because of their intrinsic value—not because wives are inferior.

– **A husband should love his wife selflessly.** Many Christian

husbands think Scripture gives them the right to bark orders to their wives, force sex, manipulate them with threats or even hit them. They interpret the verse “the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23a, MEV) to mean that they can reign like kings while their wives do all the housework. But in God’s kingdom, “headship” is not dictatorship—it is servanthood.

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Paul introduced a radical concept in the first century: “So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:28, NASB). This is the opposite of a prideful, macho attitude. A husband who loves Jesus will help with the dishes, play with the children and share the burden of family responsibilities while offering his wife protection and affirmation. A husband’s love should be selfless, tender and sacrificial.

This doesn’t give a wife the right to walk on her husband like a doormat. Just as toxic masculinity can lead to abuse, toxic feminism can lead to reverse forms of cruelty. When couples practice mutual submission, a husband is happy to serve his wife, and she’s happy to serve him in return. A healthy marriage is free of competition, jealousy and bitterness. A husband and wife should seek to outdo each other in showing love and respect.

– **A husband should encourage his wife’s spiritual gifts.** I’ve known many Christian men over the years who kept their wives under tight surveillance. An insecure husband doesn’t want his wife to further her education, start a career, make money or assume a role of leadership because he views her as inferior. But real men aren’t threatened by strong women.

A healthy husband should be his wife’s biggest cheerleader.

The man who was married to the Proverbs 31 woman, for example, openly praised his wife—not only for her virtue but also because of her success in her family, her ministry and the marketplace (see Prov. 31:28-29).

If you want a healthy marriage, let go of toxic ideas about control and domination and invite the Holy Spirit to bring unity, harmony and equality. This is the Jesus way to stay married!

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