

Marriage: Some Practical Concepts

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In the Unification Church, marriage and family life are our greatest hope and our greatest challenge. While the family is the heart of God's divine ideal, it is also at the root of man's fall. With apologies to Emily Dickinson, marriage is "all we know of heaven and all we need of hell." It is our mission in the Unification movement to separate heaven and hell in family life, creating a situation where God Himself can feel joy and stimulation. It is our responsibility to realize a unity and harmony in marriage which will exclude Satan forever. Where do we begin?

The root of our success is in the Divine Principle. We know the eternal nature of our family bonds. This gives us a sense of stability and security far beyond that of people who see marriage as a temporal or temporary relationship. When I asked my husband to tell me his personal reflections about marriage and family he commented, "Because the relationship between a husband and wife is eternal I am committed to solve any problem that **exists** within me or you or between us. Given eternity anything can be overcome, so we never lose hope." He felt similarly about the

situation of our children. Even though we often carry the cross of separation for the sake of our missions, our children will grow up with a knowledge of eternal relationships with their parents and their brothers and sisters. This, too, provides a security and stability which is lacking in the world at large.

In addition to this, it is our faith that we need each other and our children to reach the perfection God intended for us. Only in family life can we experience and develop mutual and parental love most fully, creating the cornerstone of the Kingdom of Heaven, God's indwelling on earth. It is in family relationships that our love is tested and tried most severely. Overcoming tests of love, we win the greatest thing of all: deeper, wiser, greater love.

Finally, it is helpful to remember that our families are offerings for God. This elevates our respect and love for each member of our family, knowing that each is sacrificing his own gratification for the sake of a larger purpose. Even the love we feel in marriage belongs to our children and to those around us. This joint sharing of our love further unites us.

This, in part, is the philosophical foundation on which we stand, and the truth to which we are committed. It is a sure foundation, a beautiful truth. But as we enter into the daily joys and trials of marriage, it is easy to lose the perspective our Principle lends and find ourselves perplexed by a sea of emotions, including love, hate, tenderness, resentment, compassion and more. Worse still, we may be lonely or without emotions we expect to feel. In keeping with the Principle, how can we understand our marriages

and begin to build the Kingdom of Heaven daily in our family relationships? I would like to share with you some of the things I have found most helpful in finding love and keeping it nourished over the years.

On finding love

"Here I am, married to this person. How do I begin to love him or her?" This thought may have crossed some of your minds. Perhaps you are married to someone different from your concept of "the ideal mate." I truly believe that there is no "ideal mate" other than the one you have married. Joy and happiness come from unity of heart, not from the size of someone's intellect or the shape of his nose. In other words, no matter what type of person you have married, you can feel joy with him or her by experiencing the flow of heart between you. But that takes work!

On nourishing love

There must be many ways to establish the flow of heart and to renew it when it seems to ebb. Many times in marriage we feel the pain of being misunderstood or hurt. Resentment then cuts off our love for a time and a little cold (or heated!) war ensues. In the fallen world partners often offend each other until an insurmountable gulf exists. The logical conclusion is separation and divorce. In our families we must find the qualities of mind and heart to overcome the barriers between us. When facing difficult times in marriage, here are some of the things we can do to keep our love growing.

1) Empathize

See your mate. He or she is a sensitive spirit, so easily hurt, so vulnerable. No matter how difficult it may seem to understand him or her, you can easily do so by recalling the times you have felt joy or sorrow, or the pain of rejection. You may be sure he or she experiences the same emotions and needs your understanding, especially when under pressure or discouraged.

2) Repent

If events have led to a standoff, don't be afraid to be the first to yield. The sooner someone does, the sooner love can flow again. We can forget our pride when we realize we have really hurt our mate through words, or even projection of negative feelings. It's not so terribly hard to say, "I'm sorry. I don't want to feel angry. I need to feel close to you." You may find the typical response to be, "I'm sorry, too," and pretty soon things are back on an even keel.

3) Forgive

This is the other side of the coin of repentance. In fact, practically speaking it's hard to separate the two feelings in marriage, because whenever difficulty arises, there is usually something to forgive and something for which to repent on both sides. Therefore it is usually safest to repent. That leaves your mate free to forgive (which is more acceptable than asking your mate to repent!). Repentance breeds repentance, and forgiveness all around is the logical outcome.

4) Be grateful

How is it that God has given me this person, this small universe, to cherish and to love? How can it be that this precious human being is mine to serve and care for? Do you think your mate has deficiencies which make it hard for you to feel this way? Is he too short? Do some mannerisms bother you? Did she not go to college? Is his position too small? Stop and think about yourself.

5) Be self-aware

It's hard to see your own mannerisms or traits which, in an intimate situation like marriage, may drive another person crazy. There may be one or two unattractive habits or patterns that you save just for your mate. Remember to be grateful that your husband or wife accepts you and is committed to you with all your faults, large and small. Then it's easy to forgive him and love him anyway -- gratefully.

6) Express affection

Words, flowers, gestures, eye contact, a touch, a small gift, doing the dishes if she is too tired, making his favorite dish and lighting candles at dinner when you think he is discouraged -- these are important acts in marriage. Everyone needs to be reassured that he is loved and understood. Do something active to express it. If you are having trouble feeling affection, doing things for him or her, and even more, listening to his voice or his heart, will release the flow of love from your spirit to his.

7) Laugh

If there is a situation where you feel foolish in front of your mate and she in front of you, don't forget to laugh. Laughter can end many foolish arguments and restore perspective to wounded pride.

8) Be faithful

Be determined to be committed to God, the True Parents, and your mate forever. He or she will feel this and reward you with gratitude and a similar fidelity. Once you make this commitment with mind and heart, you are free. With the secure center of commitment and fidelity, we can go anywhere in the garden of marriage without fear of loss. Any problem can be overcome in time. In fact, time is needed to overcome and to reach perfection. If you are truly committed to God, our faith, and each other, you have all the time in this world -- and in the next.

9) Be generous

This trait has a great deal to do with forgiving, repenting, and expressing affection. Generosity of heart will help you to do all three. Try not to hold onto your ideas, your view of things, your privacy, your pride, your preference for how to spend a shared moment. You'll get more out of life by giving these things up.

In summary, though our missions involve suffering and sacrifice, we are also responsible to love and to know joy. Without the latter, the former are meaningless. Because of our present hardships we need each other more than ever. Our True Parents desperately need our love and support for their great mission. God needs our understanding and devotion to His world family. All of the members need the fellowship and example of the blessed families, and the families need each other's support. On the most intimate level, we can lift up or destroy our marriage partners, greatly affecting their missions and their precious spirits. Let us tenderly cherish the minds and hearts of our mates. That is something worth doing for all the reasons above, and actually, for any reason.