

## AAA Marriage

*“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:28-31).*

There is no more important relationship than the one you have with God. However, if you are married, your spouse is your most important human relationship. He/she is your closest neighbor. Wedlock has the potential of not only being the most joyful and fulfilling relationship, but also the most difficult. What a person imagines marriage will be like and what marriage is actually like can be two different things. Even the best marriages have trials and tribulations.

The difficulty of the relationship is evident by the divorce rate. Statistics indicate that the divorce rate among second and third marriages is even higher than first marriages. So, swapping spouse number one for spouse number two or three has not proven to be the solution to the problem.

Marriage counselors make a living trying to keep marriages together. Priests, preachers and church leaders are often called upon to comfort and guide husbands and wives. Many spouses have given it everything they had, but because their partners did not, the marriages did not make it. It is possible to bounce back from a dissolved marriage with God’s help, but few have entered marriage with the idea that it would not work out.

Although marriage is part of God’s design, it is not God’s plan for every person. Some individuals are called to live singly. Paul addresses that issue in 1 Corinthians 7.

This study is addressed to a specific group of married people – men and women who are both Christians striving to glorify God in their lives and their marriages. They realize there are spiritual standards that apply to them. What are those standards and how can a Christian couple apply them to daily living?

In school, teachers have a standard: a letter grade that is evidence of the student’s achievements. Top students earn an A, while students who have perfect scores rate an A+. Superior businesses are given AAA rating. With few exceptions, students who achieve an A or A+ and businesses that have a AAA rating do so with a great deal of work, dedication and sacrifice. They believe excellence is worth the effort.

Being willing to apply Biblical principles and to put the other person first, Christians should be dedicated to the personal sacrifice that makes their marriage work – Accept, Adapt and Aim – AAA marriage.

## ACCEPT

It is true that opposites attract. Very few couples are like in temperaments. Complications come with that attraction, however, because different ways of doing things and opposite views can result in friction. In the courting stage, couples often see the other person as “completing” him/her. That sometimes means the strengths of one person are contrary to the strengths of the other. It actually may be a weakness of the other person.

A good example is neatness or orderliness. One spouse is often a very organized person while the other is a bit sloppy. You get the picture. That can lead to some interesting situations.

Some people erroneously believe they can change their spouse after marriage. People do change as they grow older, but expecting a certain change in someone leads to inevitable disappointment. Even as we grow, our temperaments remain the same. An introverted child remains introverted as an adult and an extroverted child remains extroverted as an adult. The difference comes in learning to harness the strengths of a temperament and control the weaknesses. However, only an individual can do this for himself. No one else can do it for him.

Men and women think differently and react differently to circumstances. This results in a gender culture shock after marriage. Other cultural differences such as race, nationality, age and faith can further complicate the relationship. Differences that are so attractive before marriage often become conflict after marriage.

Once a person plans to marry or is married, the first “A” is to accept his partner just the way she is. Different is not necessarily wrong – it is often just another point of view – distinct from the other person’s. Different is often just . . . different.

Accepting another person is only possible if one has a proper view of oneself. In order to accept someone else, you have to accept yourself. Sometime that takes more work than accepting your spouse. Examine the wording of Mark 12:28-31. Jesus said that you should love your neighbor as you love yourself.

## ADAPT

Adjustments are necessary in the marriage relationship. You must adapt to the differences you have accepted in the other person. The primary adjustment is the relationship itself: *Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh* (Genesis 2:24).

Both Paul and Peter, apostles of Jesus, had important things to say about the roles of a husband and wife. Adapting to these roles takes a lot of work for both parties.

After the apostle Paul instructed believers to *walk in love . . . be filled with the Spirit . . . and [submit] to one another in the fear of God* (Ephesians 5:2, 18, 21), he addressed marriage partners. Knowing that adaptation is a hard process, the Bible has some specific helps about how to make the adjustment.

Scripture and Questions for Reflection:

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything* (Ephesians 5:22-24).

- These verses have been misinterpreted, misunderstood and avoided. There is no indication here or elsewhere in Scripture, of women being inferior. Do these verses state that women are to be subject to men? See verse 21.
- A hierarchy exists in business with the President being followed by a Vice President, etc. Opinions of other leadership figures are often consulted, but the responsibility for a decision lies with the President. There cannot be two Presidents. Nothing would ever be decided on. Is there a correlation between the roles of husband and wife and President/Vice President?
- Every Christian is to be subject to Christ. Paul here states that the wife's submission to her husband is similar to their submission to the Lord. It has been said that where there is no responsibility, there is no accountability. If a decision is made according to these standards and it is wrong, who is responsible?
- Compare 1 Peter 3:1-6 with these verses in Ephesians.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish* (Ephesians 5:25-27).

- Christ died for His Bride, the Church. What is the standard that Christ sets for the role of the husband?

*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church* (Ephesians 5:28-29).

- How does these verses relate to Mark 12:28-31?

*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband* (Ephesians 5:32-33).

- What does a woman generally want most from her husband?
- How does respect express a wife's love for her husband?
- Compare Ephesians 5:25-33 with 1 Peter 3:7. What does Scripture say can hinder the prayers of a man?

How can spouses accept each other's differences and adapt to them? Scripture gives the criteria for true love: *Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT).

- Often it is the little things of life that cause constant irritation in a couple's relationship. Have you ever known a spouse who "kept a record of wrongs" and was ready to relate it at any moment?
- Do you need to change anything in order to apply this standard of love to your marriage relationship?

#### AIM

*Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints* (Revelation 19:7-8).

Remembering that this study is structured for Christians, it is easy to understand that the AIM of a Christian marriage is to put Christ first. If a Christian understands and accepts God's love for her in her own life, she will be able to love her spouse with a greater love than a non-believer. The Bible has a lot to say about marriage on earth and in heaven. From Genesis to Revelation, marriage is mentioned, sometimes in context of an earthly marriage, but many times with a future spiritual application.

Examine the following passages with the thought that marriage on earth is preparation for marriage of eternity.

- The Lamb in Revelation is Jesus. Compare Revelation 19:7-8 with Ephesians 5:25-27 and reflect on the husband's role in marriage.
- Believers are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. They are the only ones who will be with Jesus, the Bridegroom, for eternity. See Revelation 3:5. What is the symbolism of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2, 9-10) and who gets to enter there (21:27)?
- Read Jesus' parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14. The king in the parable cast out the person who did not have the proper wedding garment (11-

14). Compare this parable to Revelation 3:5 and 21:27. Who wears the proper wedding garment to the wedding and what color is it?

- No one has really been pure except Christ. How can His Bride come to the wedding feast with a white garment? See Revelation 7:14.

Life on earth is preparation for life eternally. Paul tells believers to *set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth* (Colossians 3:2) and *whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him* (Colossians 3:17). Further on in that chapter, he repeats *whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ* (Colossians 3:23-24). Wedged in between verses 17 and 23, he again addresses believers who are in a marriage relationship.

Believers are to be holy, set apart, from those who do not believe. They are to *put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do* (Colossians 3:12-13). The primary goal or aim of Christ's life was to bring people to God through His sacrificial love. As He served, He asks His followers to serve (John 13:1-17), stating "A servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Christians can *know* [the] *things* [that honor God in a marriage]. *Blessed are you if you do them*. The world is watching closely for evidence that faith in God makes a difference in a marriage relationship.

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