

CONCLUSION

Marriage represents the highest potential of any human relationship. The Bible says that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Wow! In other words, somehow a mystical "union" takes place in which we mysteriously become "one flesh" before God. No other human relationship can come close to that -- none.

When the party is over, the crepe paper droops low, the party hats are strewn all over the floor, the children are grown and gone, and your friends have all retired and moved away, there will only be two rocking chairs sitting side by side. Be sure to "invest" in each other today so that you can fully enjoy those special times.

So, which idea has worked best for you? Which one would you most like "invest" in over the next few days?

Business leader, author, and speaker, Patrick Morley helps men think more deeply about their lives, to be reconciled with Christ, and to be equipped for a larger impact on the world.

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A LOOK IN THE MIRROR™

AN EQUIPPING NEWSLETTER FOR MEN

Number 5

Ten Practical Ideas to Build a Thriving Marriage

Patrick Morley

Adapted from *Devotions for Couples* (Zondervan)

Can you remember how your heart pounded the first time you knew you loved your mate? Whatever happened to those feelings?

A good marriage should be like great music -- passionate, harmonious, colorful. But did you know that today nearly 40% of Christian marriages end in divorce? What can we do about that?

We each marry for the same reasons. We dream of building a life together, meteoric career success, and doting children -- to spend the rest of our life with that person who knocked us off our feet! Yet, under the weight a thousand daily pressures those dreams often fade away. In this article I would like to share with you the ten most practical ideas I know of to help grow that loving feeling -- to make beautiful music with the mate you love.

If you can, read this together with your mate out loud. By the way, if you are single, engaged, or divorced you can still read these ten ideas with great benefit. So, without further adieu. . .

TEN IDEAS

- **Listen to Each Other:** Communication invariably shows up as the number one problem in marriage surveys. The greatest weakness in communication with our mates is the problem of giving *an overly quick reply*. We attach high value to our mates when we listen deeply to each other without giving any overly quick response that *criticizes* or *gives advice* (two things all people dread). Listening lubricates marriage and keeps down the friction.
- **Spend Time Together Alone:** The issue is time -- who gets it? How we spend our time reveals what is really important to us. Successful couples spend time together. They read the Bible together. They develop shared interests, like bowling, reading, hiking, or plays.
- **Touch Each Other:** Successful couples touch each other. They hug, squeeze, embrace, pat, hold hands, put arms around each other, and sit close enough to touch when sitting in front of the tube. Non-sexual touching leads to genuine intimacy. They enjoy sex, and often.

• **Encourage Each Other With Words:** Encouragement is the food of the heart, and every heart is a hungry heart. Our mate has an emotional bank account into which we make deposits and from which we make withdrawals like being grumpy when we get home from work or encouraging our spouse when they feel down. We all need to be lifted up when we are blue, but the most successful couples go another step.

Successful couples create a positive environment. They verbally affirm each other at every opportunity. They try to catch each other doing things "right." They pass along compliments others make about their mate. They never pass up an opportunity to express appreciation: "I love the way you fix your hair." "That was a great dinner." "Thank you for being such a good provider."

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• **Unconditionally Accept Each Other:** A man under stress said, "The reason I love my dog so much is because he loves me no matter what I do." Unconditional love and acceptance forms a crucial foundation in successful marriages. The most intense need of every man and woman is

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to be in relationship with one other person who really cares. Happy couples don't feel like they have to perform to be loved. They don't feel like they will be rejected if they don't meet a sets of standards. Intimacy

means that I know who you are at the deepest level, and I accept you. Jesus accepts us, "Just as I am," and smart mates accept each other as is, too.

• **Be Committed to Each Other:** Successful couples have a commitment to work through troubles. The "divorce" word is not allowed to be uttered, no matter how upset or angry one becomes. They have an agreement on how to handle conflicts. They have talked through issues of how to "fight fair" under peaceful conditions. They try to let the little ones go. They make an active commitment to want the best for their mate, to help them grow as a person. Be sure to pray both "for" and "with" each other -- you may be the only person in the whole world regularly praying for your mate.

• **Take Care of Your Financial Future Together:** Money problems create more stress on marriage than any other outside threat. Here is the issue: is it right to spend so much on a lifestyle today that your mate will be forced to abandon it when you are gone? Successful couples have

resolved to live within their means. They do not live so high today that they fail to provide for retirement and premature death. They don't take on debt. They know that Morley's Money Maxim is true: "Debt is dumb."

• **Laugh With Each Other:** The antidote for boredom in marriage is lively humor. If your partner tells a funny, laugh! (Even if he isn't Bob Hope or she isn't Carol Burnett). If neither one of you is funny, make sure to watch funny movies and be around funny friends.

• **Make Each Other Your Top Priority:**

Once I called three friends to pray for a difficult challenge I faced the next day. One week later I finally called each of them to let them know how it turned out. I'm sure I have shown the same disinterest to my friends. The only one you can fully count on

to be there for you is your mate. *The rule of rules for successful marriage is this: After God, but before all others, make each other your top priority.* Don't let anyone -- not even your children, but especially your parents -- come between you.

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• **Be Each Other's Best Friend:** Oswald Chambers said, "The last mark of intimacy is to share our secret joys." Happy couples commit to spend time together as friends. They share secrets with each other. They enjoy each other's company. They realize they are the only ones who are really in this thing "together." Everyone else is for themselves to some degree, even kids. But couples are "one flesh."

SOME SUGGESTIONS . . .

For Discussion: Each answer: In which of these ten ways have you "invested" in your mate? How? Which ones would you like to improve?

For Application: Make a mark by each of the ways you would really like to improve. What is one thing you can you do this week for each area you want to improve? Ask your mate what you could do to show improvement in each of those areas. Write several of these ideas in the margins of this article and refer to it this week as a reminder.

PRAYER

Both pray: Lord God, I thank you for my mate. I pray that we will have a successful, happy marriage all our days. Lord, I confess that I need to work on the following areas (name them). Grant me the desire and the power to be the kind of mate I know You and my wife/husband would like me to be. Help me to be a blessing. Amen.