

# THE COUNSELOR

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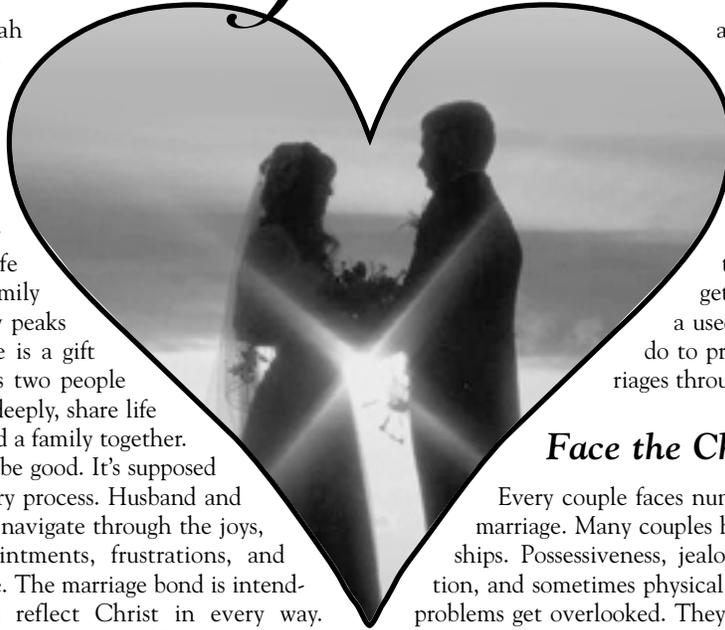
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## *Marriages that Last!*

James and Sarah meet, they get to know one another, their relationship grows, a strong bond develops, they fall in love, and they decide to get married. They go through life together, raise a family and experience many peaks and valleys. Marriage is a gift from God. It enables two people to love one another deeply, share life experiences, and build a family together. Marriage is meant to be good. It's supposed to be a complementary process. Husband and wife help each other navigate through the joys, challenges, disappointments, frustrations, and hardships of this life. The marriage bond is intended to glorify and reflect Christ in every way. Intimate life-long soul mates, bless one another throughout their lives. Disagreements and arguments



are expected in any marriage. Healthy marriages grow through difficulties, they become stronger. Marriage is meant to last. Marriages are under considerable strain these days. The divorce rate is 50% for first time marriages! Why are so many marriages failing? The divorce rate for second and third marriages is higher. It is easier to get out of a marriage than a contract to buy a used car (Rainey 2001). What can couples do to preserve, strengthen, and grow their marriages through difficulties and hardships?

### *Face the Challenges that Arise*

Every couple faces numerous pressures and challenges in their marriage. Many couples have strained premarital dating relationships. Possessiveness, jealousy, unfaithfulness, mistrust, manipulation, and sometimes physical intimacy precede their marriage. These problems get overlooked. They resurface later in their marriage. Other couples have a relatively positive, uneventful premarital relationship only to find themselves wondering what happened shortly after the honeymoon.

New demands develop once they set up house and blend their lives together. Novelty and passion fade with time as their marriage is tested by the pressures of modern living, careers, money concerns, and preparations for raising a family. Marriages can grow from the trials and demands of life. Husband and wife want their marriage and family to thrive. They set out to meet their goals. Inevitable conflicts come. There are basic male-female differences, different notions of how things should go, role expectations, cultural differences and in-laws. Then come the children. Different parenting styles must be integrated to make child rearing effective. Even the most loving, caring, supportive, Christian marriages struggle.

### *Resolving Conflicts*

There are healthy ways to "fight" (Marriage Partnerships, 2001). Many people don't like to deal with conflict so they avoid confrontations. This style always invites conflict.

1. Face your fear of confrontation. Overcome this fear. Hurtful issues can be resolved. Remember that "perfect love casts out all fear," (1 John 4:18).

2. Discuss the conflict as soon as possible . Don't

## **PROBLEMS** *& Issues*

- . Different Personalities and Backgrounds
- . Family Issues
- . Pain and Hurt From The Past
- . Histories of Verbal, Physical, or Sexual Abuse
- . Unhealthy Relationships with In-laws
- . Blended Families
- . Emotional Baggage from Past Relationships
- . Getting Married Too Young
- . Resentments, Unforgiveness
- . Anger, Anxiety, Depression
- . Insecurities
- . Trust Issues



- . Control Issues
- . Jealousy
- . Workaholism
- . Overcommitment and Physical Exhaustion
- . Excessive Credit and Conflict Over How Money Will Be Spent
- . Business Collapse
- . Business Success

let it fester. Choose a time when no one else is around.

3. State exactly what is bothering you. Speak clearly, plainly, and calmly about what it is that you don't like. Don't water it down, get right to the point so you can begin to discuss solutions.

4. Stick to the subject at hand. Don't drag up past hurts - don't get historical.

5. If your spouse says you do, then it's true. Don't get defensive. Trust your mate when he or she states that you are doing something irritating. Try to see their point of view, and be willing to change for the good of your marriage.

6. Avoid generalizing. Don't use words like, always, never, right, wrong, good, bad. These words cause defensiveness and complicate the matter at hand.

7. Avoid personal insults and character assassination. See the issue as the problem, not your spouse. Stay focused on the issue at hand.

8. Confront with truth. Affirm with love. Start with something positive, then state the issue, and give your mate an opportunity to reflect on the problem presented.

9. Listen to learn. Be ready to listen to your spouse after you confront him or her. Be patient and willing to hear what changes need to be made on your part.

10. Confront to heal, not to win. It's not about right or wrong, win or lose, it's about working out hurtful issues.

Conflict resolution takes work, but the benefits outweigh the risks. Identify problems early.



Approach your spouse with love, a spirit of optimism, and the expectation that you and her will become stronger and closer by working through conflicts. Keep your conversations, clear, brief, honest, and under control. Agree together on the time, keep it private, and watch your words. Bring the conflict to resolution on a positive note. Apologize if necessary, be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving. Seek professional help if you remain stuck and problems escalate. An unbiased coach can help you develop effective problem solving skills. More serious unresolved issues should be addressed before they damage or destroy your marriage.

## Healthy Marriages

The three main conditions for a healthy (successful) marriage include: a Christ-centered home; commitment; and communication (Dobson, 1993). Establish and maintain a Christ-centered home. Everything rests on that



foundation. Deeply committed Christian couples are guided and empowered by God Almighty to run their lives. Meaningful prayer lives, church attendance and relationships with fellow believers, quiet times with God, reading the Bible, and strong relationships with Jesus Christ, enable marriages to survive life's storms. They have a Heavenly Father who hears and answers their prayers. Strong marital commitments keep couples together when the going gets rough. I have worked with many couples who had serious problems, they survived and thrived because of their commitment to stay together and resolve their problems. Divorce was simply not an option. When a couple is committed, nothing should ever come between them, except death. Love is commitment. Communication is essential in marriage. Communication is simply understanding one another. Women are usually more expressive of their feelings and thoughts than men. Many men frustrate their wives by being quiet and reserved. Successful marriages have couples who listen to one another and express their thoughts and feelings. They communicate. They understand one another. Make a concentrated effort to patiently listen to your spouse, repeat what you hear and what your spouse means. Check things out. Eliminate vagueness. Pay attention to your spouse's words and body language.

Healthy marriages have partners who strive to meet each other's top ten intimacy needs (Ferguson and McMinn, 1994). Everyone needs attention, acceptance, appreciation, support, encouragement, affection, approval, security, comfort, and respect. Good things happen when these needs are met. Confidence, peacefulness, optimism, feeling loved, comforted, productivity, flexibility, and compassion, are only a few of the many benefits couples receive when these needs are met in their marriages. Thinking, emotions,

and behavior are positively and profoundly affected. The consequences of thwarting these needs from being met in a marriage can be disastrous.

Married couples should allow their love for one another to deepen as they move through the years together. When this occurs, they behave

accordingly. When they present themselves and their relationship to Christ, they prevail through hard times. Marriages established in Christ have love, trust, reconciliation, forgiveness, and holiness. God blesses and prospers marriages whose primary goal is to reflect Christ.

## Till Death Do Us Part

Successful Christian marriages involve people committed to Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence

for Christ. The husband is the head of the family and his wife submits to his leadership, as the husband loves her with his life. Biblical marriage involves submission, communication, and relationship to God, and one another. Marriage is servitude. Marriage is permanent. Wedding vows are serious loving

covenants before God, promises to love one another other through times of trouble, sickness, disappointment, stress, and difficulty. We cannot do life, let alone marriage, without God's relationship, love, and supernatural power. Healthy marriages depend on God helping them honor their commitment - Till Death Do Us Part.



## F.Y.I.

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## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS INFO: 713.984.1314

**2/19 - Depression/Anxiety/Anger Management  
First Presbyterian Church**

**2/23 - Speaking On: World Violence:  
Living Through Terrorism  
TX Assoc. of Community Colleges  
State Convention**

**3/5 - Performance Orientation Issues  
First Presbyterian Church**

**4/16 - Alcohol and Substance Abuse in  
High School  
First Presbyterian Church**