



Highly
Effective

Marriage



NANCY L. VAN PELT

Copyright © 2000 by
Review and Herald® Publishing Association
International copyright secured

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Texts credited to Amplified are from *The Amplified Bible*. Copyright © 1965 by Zondervan Publishing House. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the *New American Standard Bible*, © by The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977.

Texts credited to NIV are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Bible texts credited to RSV are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission.

Verses marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Ill. Used by permission.

10 09 08 07 06 7 6 5 4 3

R&H Cataloging Service

Van Pelt, Nancy Lue

Highly effective marriage

1. Marriage. I. Title.

306.81

ISBN 10: 0-8280-1420-5

ISBN 13: 978-0-8280-1420-5

Contents

Before You Begin

Part 1: Her Needs/His Needs: Decoding the Mystery

Chapter 1 Marriage—Playing for Keeps

The Benefits of Staying Committed • Commitment Isn't Enough • High Expectations

Chapter 2 Her Need for . . .

Love and Affection • Emotional Security • Appreciation for Domestic Efforts • Appreciation for Efforts to Look Attractive • Romantic Attention

Chapter 3 His Need for . . .

Admiration for Appearance, Abilities, and Character Traits • Approval and Support • Respect • Sexual Fulfillment

Part 2: How to Live With an Imperfect Mate

Chapter 4 Acceptance

What Is Acceptance? • Acceptance—An Irrepressible Need to Be Loved and Approved • The Key to Acceptance

Chapter 5 Habits That Destroy Relationships

Destructive Habit Number 1: Nagging • Destructive Habit Number 2: Angry Outbursts • Destructive Habit Number 3: Criticism • Destructive Habit Number 4: Irritating Habits and Annoying Behaviors

Chapter 6 The Effects of Destructive Habits on Relationships

Destructive Habits Create Tension • Destructive Habits Kill Love • Destructive Habits Arouse Defenses • Destructive Habits Don't Produce Change • Another Part of the Problem—You! • How to Point Out Mistakes (if You Must)

Chapter 7 How to Become a More Accepting Person (if You Really Want To)

What to Accept, What to Change • Getting Rid of Your Own Bad Habits • Changing Yourself • Create a Strategy for Change • Must I Accept Everything?

Part 3: Why Can't My Partner Understand What I Say?

Chapter 8 Why We Communicate the Way We Do

Why Couples Can't Communicate • Temperaments • Is There Hope for Achieving Better Communication?

Chapter 9 Listening—A Way to Show You Care

Listening Bloopers • Listening Know-How • Tuning In, and Tuning Out • Actions Speak Louder Than Words • Paraphrasing: Responding to Content • Active Listening: Listening for Emotions • Putting It Into Practice • His and Her Listening Styles: Are They Different? • Six Powerful Listening Rules

Chapter 10 How to Talk to the One You Love

Killer Talk: Barriers to Effective Communication • The Silent Treatment • High Level Talks • Frankly Speaking: I Messages • His and Her Talk Styles: Are They Different?

Chapter 11 Coping With Conflict

Is It OK to Fight? • The Share-Care Plan for Resolving Conflict • His and Her Fight Styles • Making the Most of Talk Time • A Holy Triangle of Communication

Part 4: Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man?

Chapter 12 Is Something Really Wrong With the Male Brain?

Male and Female Brains • Left-Brain, Right-Brain Sex Differences • Sex Differences in Spiritual Matters • Balance Translates Into Wholeness

Chapter 13 What Men Should Understand About Women

A Woman Craves Affection • A Woman Needs to Talk to Feel Close • A

Woman Needs Honesty, Openness, and Trust • PMS: The Real Story • A Woman Needs Financial Security • A Woman Needs Commitment to Family

Chapter 14 What Women Should Understand About Men

Male Ego Strength • A Man Needs an Organized, Tranquil Home • A Man Appreciates an Attractive Wife • A Man Needs Recreational Companionship • A Man Needs Stress Relief • Seek to Understand

Part 5: Who's In Charge Here, Anyway? (Solutions to Power Struggles)

Chapter 15 What's God's Plan for Leadership in Marriage?

Where's the Balance in Power? • God's Original Plan • The Authoritarian • Coleadership • A Supportive Relationship

Chapter 16 Family Leadership

Supportive Leadership • Effective Leadership Principles • Leadership a Woman Really Wants From a Man • Common Objections to Leadership • The Limits of Submission

Chapter 17 Submission—What It Is What It Isn't

Mutual Submission • The Missing Link • What Submission Isn't. A Supportive Wife • Submission Is an Attitude

Chapter 18 Spiritual Leadership

Imperfect Situations • Three Secrets That Will Build Spiritual Oneness • The Benefits of a Mutually Supportive Relationship • Success Is Just Around the Corner

Part 6: Good Sex Doesn't Just Happen

Chapter 19 How Good Sex Happens

Too Tired for Sex? • "Not Tonight, Dear!" • Understanding Female Sexuality • The Four Phases of Sexual Response

Chapter 20 Understanding Sexual Climax

Clitoral vs Vaginal Orgasm • Multiple Orgasms • Tips for Increasing

Pleasure • Problems That Can Ruin Your Sex Life • Premature Ejaculation • Erectile Dysfunction • Pornography • A Word to Preorgasmic Women • Let's Talk About It • Does Sexual Desire Decline With Age?

Chapter 21 His and Her Tips for Great Sex

How to Satisfy a Woman Sexually • How to Satisfy a Man Sexually • The Joy of Quick Sex • Maintaining Fidelity

Part 7: Preventing Marriage Burnout

Chapter 22 Make Love Last a Lifetime

Creative Ways to Keep Romance Alive

Chapter 23 Date Your Mate

Creative Date Ideas

Chapter 24 Play With Your Mate

Creative Play Ideas

Chapter 25 Laugh With Your Mate

Creative Humor Ideas The Romantic Getaway

Appendix

Selected Bibliography

Before You Begin

A fulfilling and highly satisfying marriage can be the most critical factor in achieving happiness throughout life. Ninety-six percent of all Americans marry at some point in their life. A good marriage, what I call a “highly effective marriage,” can be one of life’s greatest joys and the single most important factor in making life worthwhile.

Although people like to *get* married, it is more difficult to *stay* married. Current divorce statistics run at about 50 percent. When both partners are under the age of 21 or have dropped out of high school to get married, the divorce rate soars to 80 percent. In spite of such dismal statistics, we continue to marry rapidly. And divorced people remarry even more quickly. Four-fifths of all people who divorce remarry within five years, and most of those within three years of their divorce. Unfortunately, more than half of those remarriages will end in divorce again! Obviously we have a strong desire to be married but lack understanding about what it takes to make marriage work.¹

The past 25 years of my life have been dedicated to family life education, with an emphasis on marriage. As a family life educator, certified through the National Council on Family Relations, I have taught literally thousands of couples who have attended my marriage seminars. I have talked with hundreds of couples whose marriages ranged from disastrous to fabulous.

About 10 percent of all marriages are what might be termed highly effective marriages. Since 50 percent end in divorce, the remaining 40 percent fall between poor and fairly good.

So why do we keep marrying when marriage is so often fraught with difficulties? People marry for love, companionship, for a family. They marry for friendship and intimacy. The promise of love and happiness appears so desirable that we think we can beat the odds! Even when it is a widely published fact that half of all marriages end in divorce, people still marry.

A word about remarriage. Following divorce, people jump right back into another relationship, and these new relationships stand an even greater chance of encountering serious conflicts than do first marriages. If you are already divorced and contemplating remarriage, I beg you to read my book *Smart Love* to gain perspective.² Marrying hastily may seem like a quick

way to relieve some of your pain. But marriages on the rebound have a very high failure rate. I recommend that people not remarry for a minimum of two years after divorce. People who have just gone through the divorce process need time to recover from the psychological shock of divorce before jumping “heart first” into another relationship without using their heads. Second-time-around marriages based on “heart first” leaps usually don’t last a year.

You don’t want to make the same mistakes the second time around. Since we are creatures of habit, frequently blind impulse lures us into like situations, in which we replay painful events over and over. Regardless of the quality of your first marriage, you are partly responsible for its demise. You must realize this so you will not repeat the same mistakes. One way to prevent this is to acquire as much knowledge as possible about yourself and how you respond in a relationship. Self-knowledge will greatly assist your transition into a new marriage.

This brings me to the purpose for this book—to increase your opportunity to achieve a successful, highly effective marriage. You can be among the 50 percent who make it, and even among the 10 percent who enjoy superior marital happiness.

This book teaches, step by step, how to achieve success. Other books often discuss creative divorce and why relationships fail, rather than how to succeed. They teach couples how to “fight fair” instead of how not to fight. They point to human strategies for success, when this book suggests divine guidance blended with practical biblical instruction.

Marriage cannot make anyone happier who does not bring the ingredients for happiness into it. —Sydney J. Harris.

Within the pages of this book are two essential resources: detailed descriptions of important relationship skills and how to build them, as well as step-by-step plans for effecting change where it is needed. Neither one is sufficient by itself.

If your car or washing machine broke down, I doubt you’d attempt to fix it without fully understanding its complex mechanism. Even a set of the most expensive and sophisticated tools won’t help if you don’t know how to use them. Likewise in marriage. Not only do you need tools such as relationship skills, but you also should have an in-depth understanding of how and why changes in your behavior will improve your marriage, and knowledge of

how to implement the changes. With these resources, you will be able to achieve your goal of a highly effective marriage. Here's what you'll discover in this book:

Part 1: Her Needs/His Needs—Decoding the Mystery. The first chapter, “Marriage—Playing the Game for Keeps,” introduces you to Nolan Ryan, the miracle man with an amazing baseball career. But the most amazing aspect of Nolan's life is that he is just as successful in his role as a husband. You will examine how commitment and expectations shape your vision of what marriage can and should be.

The next two chapters describe “her needs and his needs.” You will learn about men's and women's greatest emotional needs. When men and women are asked in surveys how well they are doing in meeting the emotional needs of their partners, the vast majority believe they are doing well. However, when their partners are asked if their needs are being met, they reveal much room for improvement! Either we don't know what we are doing or our partners are misinterpreting what is being done. Take your pick. Meeting these simple needs provides the foundation for a caring relationship. When these needs are met, we want to stay married. When they go unfulfilled, we feel hurt, alienated, and distant from our partners.

Confidential to “Second Time Arounder”: Marriage is like the Army. Everybody complains about it, but a surprising number reenlist.

Part 2: How to Live With an Imperfect Mate. You'll learn about the “emotional bank account” model of relationships. You'll begin to understand that you are making either deposits or withdrawals in the account on a daily basis. When we are loving and kind, hundreds of credits flow into our mate's EBA, creating the feeling that we are loved and accepted the way we are. When we are criticized, the account can be seriously overdrawn.

Many people think they aren't compatible because one is a night person and the other prefers going to bed early. But it's not the differences between partners that cause problems. It's how the differences are handled when they arise. Every couple must learn how to live with and manage these differences. Practical steps are outlined for becoming a more accepting person, as well as the limits of acceptance.

Part 3: Why Can't My Partner Understand What I Say? What are the reasons couples can't communicate? Much of the problem revolves

around the fact that people enter into relationships with no training in communication and no agreed-upon rules or skills for handling the strong negative feelings that are an inevitable part of marriage. Without skills, partners in the face of conflict often resort to destructive guerrilla tactics that can seriously wound each other.

Partners in happy relationships develop good listening skills. These skills have nothing to do with forcing agreement or giving advice. Listening involves understanding and accepting differences in personality as well as likes and dislikes. In a happy marriage a person can count on his or her mate's being a good friend and listening without judging. [Chapter 9](#), "Listening—A Way to Show You Care," describes good listening skills. [Chapter 10](#), "How to Talk to the One You Love," covers how to talk when you are irritated or angry over something and offers a share-care plan for solving conflicts. As a couple master the skills of effective listening and talking they build the foundation for closeness and intimacy in their relationship.

Part 4: Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man? In this section, we not only look at the physical differences between males and females but also discuss differences in their brains. These differences offer some explanation of how the different sexes can process the same information but come up with totally different conclusions, and how these differences can affect health. Armed with this information, you'll be able to figure out why males and females respond and behave so differently.

Part 5: Who's in Charge Here, Anyway? There are peaceful solutions to dominance, submission, and power struggles. Since power struggles tear at the very fabric of relationships and leave people feeling isolated, hurt, and hopeless, we'll search for a model of support that provides each partner with a balanced sense of control, enabling both partners to think of themselves as competent.

A marriage may be made in heaven, but the maintenance must be done on earth.

Another facet of relationship-building explored in this chapter is how a couple can achieve spiritual oneness. The longer I continue in my ministry to families, the more convinced I become that the answer to marital distress is not to be found in more romance, fun, and excitement, or in better problem-solving skills—important as those are—but in the type of depth

that comes when a couple worships and prays together.

Part 6: Good Sex Doesn't Just Happen. This section tackles reports of an epidemic of widespread sexual dissatisfaction among married couples. For those who live complicated, busy lives, there may never be enough time or energy to feel sexual desire. Problems arise when there is a marked difference between the needs and desires of husband and wife.

Explored in these chapters are the complex and intricate sexual response systems designed by our Creator purely to provide sexual pleasure and to bond husband and wife to each other. Maintaining a fulfilling sexual experience that will last for decades of loving requires deliberate action and energy, along with patience, understanding, and creativity.

Part 7: Preventing Marriage Burnout. The final chapters explore how to keep a marriage on track romantically. After couples have been married awhile, the tendency is to give work and children their freshest energy. Marriage gets what's left over. How can a couple make love and romance last a lifetime? The pressures on husband and wife sharing a lifetime together are enormous. At times problems will become intense and seemingly unbearable. What can be done to protect a marriage from marital burnout—from fizzling over the long haul? Explored here are creative ways to keep relationships romantic. The challenge of being married is learning to keep a relationship romantic, interesting, and alive through all the changing years of marriage.

It's possible that after reading this book with your partner, you'll realize you need more help than you can possibly get from a book. You may recognize, perhaps for the first time, that there are problems bigger than you can handle alone. Rather than giving up, accept the fact that your marriage may be stalled in a phase of distress and that you need outside help to survive the crisis. Even the strongest of couples occasionally need direction to see a clear path through a difficult problem. If this is your situation, by all means seek couple counseling.

Finally, I want to compliment the truly outstanding marriages, the highly effective marriages, in which devoted and loving couples are weathering the joys and sorrows of married life together. If you are one of those couples, I congratulate you. You make my work with families rewarding. You are living examples of my vision for what marriage can be—couples who pledge themselves to each other “for better or for worse,” and then work to make it better.

—Nancy L. Van Pelt

¹ Harvey L. Ruben, *Supermarriage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), pp. 11, 12.

² Nancy L. Van Pelt, *Smart Love—A Field Guide for Single Adults* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1997).

Part 1: Her Needs/His Needs:

Chapter 1

Marriage

Playing for Keeps

Nolan Ryan, legendary pitcher for the Texas Rangers, has had an amazing baseball career. Some of his record-breaking feats include striking out his 5,000th batter, pitching seven no-hit games, and winning 324 games. But the most amazing aspect of Nolan Ryan's life is not only that he was successful on the field but that he is just as successful in life—as a husband, father, and businessman. What are his secrets for living wisely?

In his autobiography, *Miracle Man*, Nolan says that the most important number in his life is “one.” There has been only one woman in his life—Ruth—the only girl he has ever wanted to be with since he was a teenager. Throughout his life this has never changed. He considers Ruth his number one best friend. Nolan says that like most guys (especially athletes), he had to learn the hard way how to treat Ruth right. Before they had children, Ruth was stuck in New York while Nolan was on the road with the Mets. When he got home he wanted to stay home, but Ruth wanted to go out. They both had to learn to compromise and be sensitive to the needs of the other.

The biggest adjustment they had to make came when they had children. Nolan, like most other men, had no idea how drastically children would impact his marriage. He comments that most men just keep on doing what's important to them, and their wives end up with all the work. He started out that way. Ballplayers are especially guilty of pushing all parenting obligations off on their wives because they are on the road and gone from home much of the time.

According to Nolan, all men have to learn sooner or later that it takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to raise responsible children. When dumped on the wife to shoulder alone, this responsibility greatly restricts her life. Nolan had to understand that he was not the only one in the marriage who had dreams and goals—that Ruth had some dreams of her own. This was a difficult lesson for someone who became the immediate center of attention everywhere he went just because he could throw a

baseball.

Nolan is the first to admit his marriage isn't perfect. Like any other couple, Nolan and Ruth have had their ups and downs. But the two of them have worked through their downs and celebrated their ups. Many professional athletes think they are above any laws of the land or any rules. They think they are entitled to do whatever they please without answering to anyone. To Nolan's way of thinking, it really says something about values when a superstar athlete with the AIDS virus is made into a hero. If a female athlete announced that she had slept with a couple hundred men and had AIDS, she would hardly be considered a superstar. She would be called a tramp.

Nolan is committed to his marriage. In spite of all his efforts to stay in shape, continue with the game, and win, Nolan says that his family is his main priority. When Nolan was playing in the majors, he commuted on off days to be with his family during baseball season. In the winter he stayed close to home.

Nolan and Ruth often work out together. When they find time to vacation— between baseball and overseeing their four ranches and two banks—they share activities like skiing and diving with their three children. They both believe a healthy lifestyle benefits their three children. They have worked hard to instill in them the proper values in life and let them know the rewards received from living in accordance with them, even though the rewards are not always immediate.

Marriage is not something one tries on for size, and then decides whether to keep; it is rather something one decides with a promise, and then bends every effort to keep. —Leon R. Kass.

Since Nolan and Ruth have achieved celebrity status, they could be at a charity ball or a dinner every night of the week. But they recognize that within a few years their children will be out of the nest. Their week is planned around everyone's hectic schedules. Many forces battle to pull the family apart, but "we've worked to stay together," Nolan states.

If you press him, you can get Nolan to tell stories about the greatest game he ever pitched or other great moments in his career. He needs no prompting, however, to tell stories about his family. One of his favorites is about the time he and Ruth were on a road trip and Reese—who was left in

charge of the house— accidentally locked one of their three hunting dogs inside. The dog panicked, destroyed a curtain, and caused \$1,000 in damage trying to find a way out. Reese called a decorator and used his own savings to pay for the damage; he never asked his parents for help. Ruth was flabbergasted, but Nolan recognized that the time, effort, and values they had poured into their children were paying off.

There's something for all of us in examining how Nolan Ryan has ordered his life priorities, how he feels about his wife, his children, his values, and his pursuit of a healthy lifestyle.¹

The Benefits of Staying Committed

The Ryans freely admit their marriage isn't perfect and they've had to work through ups and downs. Talk to any couple who have been married 30 or 40 years. If they are truthful, you'll hear about the bad times as well as the good. But when a couple make it over the long haul, you'll find two strong people who have worked hard to honor the commitment made on their wedding day.

You might ask a couple married this length of time if they ever thought of abandoning ship. Ask about the crisis periods—the big stuff such as career changes, business failures, bankruptcy, the death of a child or another close family member, loss of mental or physical health, financial stress, lawsuits, an out-of-wedlock teen pregnancy, a time when decisions must be made regarding care of aging parents, or their struggles during retirement when they started getting in each other's way. What held the couple together?

Surviving all the crises of marriage over the span of 30, 40, and 50+ years takes commitment. Romantic feelings fail during the tough times. Sex doesn't seem very important, either. Material possessions may not mean much. Now it's the two of them against the world, toughing it out, testing all their resources. Will they make it?

During the early years the couple may not make it unless they have a strong commitment. Some studies show that half of all divorces take place during the first two years of marriage.² During the early years there is a tendency to dramatize the importance of every problem, and the D word rears its ugly head. After 30 years of the good times along with the bad, a couple learns that not every bad time signals divorce. They will survive this crisis, as they have survived many prior crises. Their commitment to survival carries them through.

There are two things you shouldn't enter into prematurely: divorce and embalming. —Charles Swindoll (Strike the Original Match).

Every relationship seems to have its droughts, its dry spells when growth stops and boredom sets in. This can be a dangerous time for couples, especially if a member of the opposite sex comes on the scene during the drought and awakens romantic and/or sexual desire. This is another time that commitment plays a strong role. Can a couple survive the droughts?

It's the kind of commitment we make in marriage that allows us to experience trust, respect, and intimacy. It's hardly possible in a temporary relationship, when you are aware that you could easily be replaced, to develop the openness and trust that comes with commitment. But when you know in the deepest part of your soul that your partner is absolutely committed to you forever and ever, what a powerful difference it makes in your relationship! You know you can reveal things about yourself to this person that no one else is aware of. All of the carefully guarded feelings, memories, and experiences you've kept hidden inside can now be shared with someone who will understand you, love you, and never reject you. A type of trust takes over that forever bonds you together in love.

The wedding vows include promises of love and devotion. The knowledge that you have a partner in life who is devoted to you and loves you is one of the most fulfilling feelings in life. This knowledge of an everlasting kind of love gives a deep inner security that allows you to overcome the struggles of life.

All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes all the trouble.

When both members of a couple are 100 percent committed to each other, and their commitment has been tested and has endured, uneasy fears of abandonment are significantly eased. Whether ever verbalized or not, this fear haunts many, both male and female. We tremble at the thought of facing the future alone without someone at our side to help us over the rough times.

This is why the wedding vows are so important. These vows mean that your partner has promised to stick with you through thick and thin. Your partner will be loyal to you, even when you are away from each other. It is a

promise that says you will always have someone there for better or worse, in sickness and in health, till death parts you. Always and forever.

Commitment Isn't Enough

Researchers can now predict with more than 90 percent accuracy who will enjoy a successful relationship and who will suffer distress and divorce. To a large degree the findings in these studies do not line up with popular opinion of what makes marriage work or fail. I've generalized the discrepancies below.

POPULAR OPINION: Whom you marry determines your chances for a happy marriage.

STUDIES SHOW: Marital happiness has little to do with whom you marry and everything to do with how you cope with conflict.

POPULAR OPINION: Personality flaws and irritating faults are the underlying cause of marital distress.

STUDIES SHOW: Personality flaws and irritating faults do not predict marital happiness or marital stability.

POPULAR OPINION: Compatibility and similar likes and dislikes determine relationship success.

STUDIES SHOW: It's not how similar or different you are; it's how you handle differences when they arise that counts.

POPULAR OPINION: Problems experienced during early years will heal themselves and get better in time.

STUDIES SHOW: Problems worsen over time, and it's much wiser to deal with them early, when they are easier to handle.

POPULAR OPINION: Men and women have different needs in marriage and have different approaches to intimacy.

STUDIES SHOW: The major difference between men and women in marriage lies in the way they handle conflict rather than in their approach to intimacy.

POPULAR OPINION: When a couple loves each other enough and are really committed, they can solve any problem.

STUDIES SHOW: Love is needed to begin a relationship, but it doesn't provide enough fuel over time to keep the relationship successful. Nor does commitment. Again, it's how couples manage conflict that makes the difference.³

Highly effective marriages are the result of more than just compatibility

and commitment. Effective communication and conflict management skills are vital. There will always be differences of opinion over likes, desires, and how to get things done. Setting up a home together provides fertile ground for disagreements over how to earn and spend money, keep house, raise children, and spend free time, as well as how to meet each other's needs.

High Expectations

In previous decades roles were clearly defined by society, and a couple could fit into these roles, which limited potential conflict. Today roles have changed, and every couple must work out their own unique compromises. Couples today want more than just security. They are looking for an emotionally rewarding relationship that provides contentment and happiness. When these expectations are not met, disillusion and disenchantment often set in. The high divorce rate may be partly a result of the excessively high expectations we have for marriage, rather than an indication that people are turned off to marriage. The desire to marry has changed little, but the expectations of what marriage can provide have changed greatly. The only way to achieve these high expectations is through the use of communication and conflict management skills.

There is no place we can go to earn a degree in how to be married. We can't purchase a guarantee that ensures us a successful, happy marriage. That's not how marriage works. But several years ago a fascinating study was launched by the Department of Human Development and the Family at the University of Nebraska. The purpose of the study was to discover what specific qualities go into making strong families.

Strong families from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds were selected and asked such questions as "How do you deal with conflict?" "Do you experience power struggles?" and "How do you communicate?"

Nick Stinnett writes of his findings: "Altogether we studied 3,000 families and collected a lot of information. But when we analyzed it all, we found six main qualities in strong families. Strong families (1) are committed to the family; (2) spend time together; (3) have good family communication; (4) express appreciation to each other; (5) have a spiritual commitment; and (6) are able to solve problems in a crisis."⁴

How to put these six factors to work in marriage is the task of this book. Each reader needs to ponder how to apply them to his or her own marriage. Success comes with a price tag: time. Time spent, undivided attention given, energy expended.

Commitment isn't just something that is spoken of in front of a minister during the wedding ceremony. It may begin there, but commitment is a process that continues daily. It has to do with setting priorities and eliminating things that compete with your number one priority—your partner. It is observed and measured in units of time, attention, energy, and willingness to make changes, compromise, and say “I’m sorry.”

“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches,” King Solomon observed in Proverbs 24:3, 4 (RSV). Building such a marriage, establishing it with knowledge and filling the rooms with “precious and pleasant riches,” doesn’t just happen. It is the result of commitment to each other and God, as well as following some well-defined principles for happiness. Are you game? Stick with me! We’ll be examining these principles in the coming chapters.

¹ Nolan Ryan and Jerry Jenkins, *Miracle Man* (Waco, Tex.: Word Publishing, 1992).

² Jeanette C. Lauer and Robert H. Lauer, *Till Death Do Us Part: A Study and Guide to Long-term Marriage* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth Press, 1986), p. 50.

³ Clifford Notarius and Howard Markman, *We Can Work It Out* (New York: Putnam, 1992), pp. 20, 21.

⁴ Nick Stinnett, *Secrets of Strong Families* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1985), quoted in a church newsletter.

End of product sample

This product is available at:

AdventistBookCentre.com.au



Australia