The Ten Commandments  
of a Successful Marriage

Good marriages don’t just happen.  It is not just because you married the right person and got lucky.  Good marriages are built on more than passion.  They are built on principle. In the Scriptures, we find the best guidelines and principles for a healthy marriage.  God’s words and God’s principles are never outdated!  They are just as applicable today as they were to ancient Jews living in Israel.

Let’s look at principles God has given us in a place you might not think was intended for marriage.  That place is the Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20.

Let’s look at the Ten Commandments and see how they are also principles for marriage.

Here they are…

“*You shall have no other gods before Me.  You shall not make for yourself a carved image…  You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain…  Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.  You shall not murder.  You shall not commit adultery.  You shall not steal.  You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s*

**The First Commandment of Marriage:  Exclusivity**

Exodus 20:3 – “*You shall have no other gods before Me.”* This means Godwants to have an exclusive relationship with you. He wants to be your one and only. He will not settle for flavor of the month. And how appropriate in marriage as well. We are to have an exclusive relationship with our spouse. It’s been said that Henry Ford, on his golden wedding anniversary…50 years of marriage…was asked, “What’s the secret of your success in marriage?” And he said, “The secret of my successful marriage is the same secret that I have in business: I stick to the same model.” In traditional wedding vows, the man and woman pledge their devotion until death parts them - for life. There is no competition. My wife has no competition. I am not shopping for a new model. I do not want to trade in the old model. I will not be shopping in the future. One is all I need. When God made man, He said it is good. But then He said, “It is not good that he is alone.  I am going to make a helper suitable for him.”  And the Bible says God took one of Adam’s ribs, and He formed a woman, Eve, and brought her to the man.

God did not take four or five ribs and say, “Okay, Adam, here is Eve, and here is Lois, and here is Samantha, and here is Rachel.”  No, it was just one.  And to have a healthy marriage relationship, that is it. I am committed for life.  An exclusive relationship.  I am not shopping, not even window-shopping.  One God.  One wife.  That is enough.

**The Second Commandment of Marriage:  Don’t Love a Substitute**

Exodus 20:4-6, God commanded that *we not worship carved images, whether in heaven, in earth, or in the sea.* God said, “Do not make images of Me and then worship them. Do not love or worship a substitute for Me. Love Me.” And in marriage we should have no substitutes either. Love your husband only.  Love your wife only.  Do not look for fulfillment in some other relationship or in some other thing.  Find your fulfillment in that relationship. Do not allow any substitute, no matter what it might be, to take the place of intimacy with your spouse.

**The Third Commandment of Marriage:  Speak Well of Your Mate**

Exodus 20:7 - "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.”* Many misunderstand the term, *in vain*.  It means empty, meaningless, insincere, not showing due respect. When we speak flippantly or lightly about someone, we erode our respect for that person.  Some people are just far too casual in the way they speak of their spouse, and it erodes your respect for him or her. In marriage, few things can affect the relationship like words.  Words are containers.  They can contain love; they can contain hate; they can contain joy; they can contain bitterness. The book of James says that our tongue is like a rudder on a ship. It will send the ship of your marriage in whatever direction your words go. Some people are on the brink of divorce because they talk divorce. Just listen to the words they say. Are they negative or positive? Critical or encouraging? Think about what you say.  Are you building up your partner?  Learn to speak well of your mate.  Build him/her up with your words.  Be lavish with your praise.  You will be pleased with where those words will take your relationship.

**The Fourth Commandment of Marriage:  Spend Exclusive Time Together**

The fourth commandment, found in Exodus 20:8-11, refers to the *Sabbath. Sabbath* means an intermission.  It means to put down your work and rest.  Take a break.  And *holy* means separate to the Lord.  “If you want a long-term relationship with Me,” God says, “We have to have time together.  I want special time, exclusive time.  I want a whole day.” In the same way, in order to have a healthy, growing marriage, husbands and wives need time together…special time, exclusive time, sometimes extravagant time.  And typically, if we do not schedule it, it will not happen. Recent research showed the average couple spends 37 minutes or less in face-to-face conversation every week.  No doubt, before you were married you spent a lot more time together in a week, didn’t you? If your marriage is to thrive, you need to spend exclusive time together.  You can’t build a relationship and not spend time together.  It is just not possible.

**The Fifth Commandment of Marriage:  Honor Your Spouse by Showing How Grateful You Are**

The fifth commandment gives us our next principle for a healthy and vibrant marriage.  It is found in Exodus 20:12, *“Honor your father and your mother...”* Among other things, God is saying we must be grateful.  Generally, parents spend a lot of time, labor, and money…sometimes to the point of radical sacrifice…to give their kids an edge in life.

And it is a tragedy when a child is ungrateful or unthankful.  William Shakespeare said, “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child.”  It is very difficult to have a relationship with an ungrateful, selfish person. “Thank you” are important words to your parents, and an incredibly important phrase in marriage.  It is difficult to live with someone who takes you and all of your efforts for granted. You may be thinking, “I don’t say it, but I am grateful in my heart.  I truly am!”  Well, hooray for you.  You are blessed because in your heart you know you are grateful.  But it does your spouse no good if you do not vocalize it. If you do not demonstrate your gratitude, I doubt if you are really grateful because Jesus said, *“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”*  If it is not being expressed, chances are it is not truly there. Maybe you think you don’t have a lot to be grateful for.  But there must be something you can say “thank you” for.  There is something you can praise your mate for.  Look for those things, and accentuate the positive. Take time today to express thanks to your spouse in some way…through an action, through a card, through words.  That is how you honor your mate.

**The Sixth Commandment of Marriage:  Don’t Destroy Your Spouse But Learn to be Gentle**

The sixth commandment God gave to Israel in Exodus 20:13, *“You shall not murder.”*

While you might think this commandment is not too applicable, it is vital.  It is telling you not to destroy your spouse! Jesus helps us understand this principle in Matthew 5.  He said, “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’  But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment*.” Jesus went right to the root of murder:  anger and hatred.  If you are going to have a good, healthy, lasting marriage, you need to learn to be gentle.  People who are easily angered…who are violent or have an explosive temper…destroy relationships. Anger erodes relationships.  If you have a hot temper, get it under control, or the devil will control you through it. Another way anger is expressed is by going stone cold…using silence and angry moodiness to punish your mate.  Again, not a healthy thing for a marriage.  If you anger quickly and forgive slowly, you are a hard person to live with.  Work at being quick to forgive, and make the controlling of your anger a serious matter of prayer.  God will help you.  If you do not master your temper, it will master you.  And it will not only decay and destroy a marriage relationship, it will harm every other meaningful relationship you have in life.

**The Seventh Commandment of Marriage: Do Not Commit Adultery**

Exodus 20:14 gives us the seventh commandment for marriage and it is aimed directly at marriage, *You shall not commit adultery.* That’s pretty clear and says it all. Needless to say, adultery hurts both the adulterer and the spouse. The hurt and damage may seem irreparable, but through prayer, forgiveness, counseling, honesty and transparency, and recommitment, couples can survive adultery and go on to enjoy years and years of a loving, healthy, and fulfilling marriage.

**The Eighth Commandment of Marriage:  Be a Person of Integrity**

Exodus 20:15 gives us the eighth commandment for marriage, *You shall not steal.*

You may be wondering how stealing applies to marriage.  Simple.  Not to steal is to be a person of integrity. If you are always cheating or cutting corners, it will be hard for your spouse to respect you.  Your uprightness should make your marriage partner feel proud.  Your spouse and your family ought to testify of your integrity.  This is really one of the things at the heart of a good marriage. If you are married to somebody, and you know they cheat their customers, it is just hard to respect that person.  You cannot respect someone who does not have integrity. This is a big issue that many people fly right by.  But it is vital to a healthy and vibrant marriage because it is hard to fully give yourself to someone who does not have integrity. If you find that your spouse is holding back, if you feel like he or she does not respect you, take a look inside and see if you are compromising with your integrity.  Do you cheat on your taxes?  Do you tell that “little white lie” to protect yourself or gain an advantage? Do you represent yourself one way, when in fact in your heart you believe something totally different?  If this is an issue in your life, take it to God today.  He will help you become the person of integrity He desires you to be.  And when you do, you will find your spouse will come to respect you, and your marriage will be strengthened!

**The Ninth Commandment of Marriage:  Be Truthful**

The ninth commandment for marriage speaks to the heart of any marriage, trust.  It is found in Exodus 20:16, *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”*

Someone who would lie about his/her neighbor, for whatever reason, is not going to make a good marriage partner.  Honesty and trust are at the heart of a good marriage. If you take advantage of people for your own gain, speaking untruthfully to get ahead, you are not a person to be trusted.  And you ultimately are the loser. Anyone who is not truthful will ultimately lose.  And if your spouse will lie to someone else, he or she will lie to you.

**The Tenth Commandment of Marriage:  Be Content with What You Have**

We come to the final commandment for marriage.  That commandment is based on the tenth commandment given to the nation of Israel in Exodus 20:17, *"You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

This command is very direct.  *Do not covet*.  Don’t be discontent with what you have.  Do not make what you don’t have the focus of your life.  Accentuate what you do have and what God has blessed you and your spouse with. You do this by celebrating your husband’s or wife’s strengths and gifts rather than thinking, “Oh, I wish he was this way,” or, “I wish she had that.” You will always get into trouble if you think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.  Just water your own grass, because on the other side of the fence, there’s still poop in the grass, and it’s just Astroturf anyway.