How To Make Love Last (Part 1 of 2)

by Harold & Bette Gillogly

All the ingredients are on the counter — Let's see...flour, salt, baking powder, eggs....Yep, everything's here. OOPS! Except for...sugar. We forgot the sugar. Oh, well, we have plenty of salt. Salt looks like sugar — same texture, same color. Why, you can hardly tell them apart. No big deal. We'll simply use a cup and a half of salt instead of sugar. The cake won't know the difference. This will work. We'll make it work.

Sounds pretty dumb, huh? Everybody knows you have to use the right ingredients to end up with a good tasting cake. But why is it so difficult for us to translate that simple truth into the reality of our everyday lives? When we put the **right ingredients** in, we get the **right results**.

This is especially true in marriage. In His Word, God gives us specific ingredients to make a marriage relationship successful. Some of them are hard to come by — hard to obey — so we opt for substitutes that sound, even look, good, but are really no better than substituting salt for sugar. And when we reap the consequences, we shake our fists at heaven and blame God for allowing our "cake" to flop. But when we use God's recipe — with the right ingredients — then *in God's timing* we will reap the rewards of obedience. And they are delicious!

Before we look at God's list of ingredients, we need to establish a couple of basic principles. The first principle is that we can not make our mates stick to the recipe. We can't nag them into it, shame them, badger them or convince them into it. Even Hinting doesn't work. But **we can choose** to obey God's recipe ourselves, and in His time He will bless us for it. The hard part is waiting for God's timing. We keep asking, "Isn't it done yet?"

If we can't change our mates, where is the hope for success in our relationship? What good is it if I follow the recipe when he or she isn't? Let me tell you a secret. While it's true that we can not change our mates, it is just as true that we can make them *want* to change! *How* do we do that? By creating an environment where it is safe for them to change. How do we do *that*? By allowing God to change us. By focusing our attention, not on our mate, but on **our own obedience to God** as He conforms us into the image of His Son.

This principle is clearly taught in 1 Peter 3:1-2. The Holy Spirit through Peter proclaims that wives can actually win their husbands over by keeping their mouths shut and living like Jesus. This principle works for husbands as well as wives. It is simply characteristic of human beings — when we see someone else changing, but don't feel pressured ourselves to change, we become *free* to change.

With these principles in mind, let's look at the eight essential ingredients of happy, successful, life-long marriage relationships.

1. The first ingredient is a **Sense Of Permanence** — an ongoing philosophy of permanence that *eliminates divorce* as an option. God is very explicit about the permanence of this mysterious union He created. After Adam exclaims that Eve is "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24), God declares that "a man will leave his father and mother and cleave (be permanently glued) to his wife." This declaration is repeated twice in the New Testament, first by Jesus Himself (Matthew 19:5), then by Paul (Ephesians 5:31).

Permanence is obviously of utmost importance to the Creator. Don't let the "easy out" philosophy of this world fool you. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) — because He knows how two people who have been "glued" together will tear themselves to shreds pulling apart. His plan is for the two of you to be guardians of your marriage relationship. Divorce may cross your mind when you are angry and alienated from your mate, but you must never hold it up as an escape. Remember, God has made you a *guardian of your relationship*!

Some of you know first hand the shredding pain of divorce. Our hearts break for you, because we know for many of you it was not your choice. For those of you who have remarried, we urge you to become the guardian of your present union. If there are issues from your past that sting, take care of them...confront where it is needed...forgive where it is needed. Take care of the issues of the past so that you can be the guardian of your marriage's present and future.

2. The second ingredient in God's marriage recipe is **Loyalty and Trust**. This is the cornerstone characteristic of any true friendship. We must be true, constant and faithful to our friendship — *that* is the quality of being loyal. In turn, loyalty inspires trust, which by definition is "the assured reliance on another's loyalty."

Loyalty and trust are interwoven like a single piece of cloth. They are usually established in the beginning stages of a friendship, and should be built upon continually throughout life. Each day, I have a choice to be trustworthy and loyal to my mate - my friend. Every time I choose rightly, I strengthen our bond of trust. And every time I choose to trust my mate, I strengthen our bond of love. Paul says

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that love "...always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Loyalty and trust make our love comfortable. We can be ourselves with our mates because we can trust their love and they can trust ours. This kind of love gives us a sense of belonging, of safety — a "you and me against the world" point of view. You can begin to develop loyalty and trust in your marriage, even if you haven't been very successful at it in the past. The Holy Spirit says He's ready to pour these ingredients into you any time you choose (Galatians 5:22). You'll need quarts of kindness, bushels of understanding, and a full-strength mixture of empathy and supportive confidence. Use them freely and often.

3. The third ingredient which will make your marriage last a lifetime is **Acceptance**. Remember when you said your wedding vows — promising to "love, honor and cherish" your mate? When you promised to cherish, you were promising to accept your mate, to view and treat them as valuable and special.

The opposite of acceptance and cherishing is criticism. Continual criticism will erode your marriage because it communicates to your mate that you do not accept them. Be honest. We all like to be with those who accept us as we are, and we tend to avoid those who criticize us. Put the shoe on the other foot. Do you make your mate feel accepted and cherished?

You can choose to focus on an endearing quality of your mate instead of an irritating one. Even if you can think of only one good quality to start with, focus on it, meditate on it, and soon you'll be able to see more. One young wife said she had become so critical of her husband, that the only thing she liked about him anymore was the way he played with their little boy. She began to focus on that, to watch them play. She wished her father had taken time to play with her like that. She began to appreciate what a wonderful quality this was in her husband. And before long, she started to see other qualities she had been overlooking. As she began to appreciate her husband more, her affection for him grew. But the most amazing thing of all — her husband began to live up to the new image she had of him.

Let's put our vow into practice and really cherish our mate. "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

4. The next ingredient sounds like one of the easiest to use — **Shared Activity**. It may sound easy, but that's not always the case. Some couples get so busy doing the "important" things — earning a living, taking the children to their games, being involved with their school activities, church activities and responsibilities, home responsibilities — they completely forget to have fun together. Life can get pretty serious and boring.

Friends have fun together. Even mundane activities like running errands are a lot more exciting when we do them together. Shared activities create deep emotional ties between partners. So doing stuff together is "important" too...even more important than *some* of the activities listed above.

Some couples say they don't share any common interests, so she goes her way and he goes his. If that's the case (though it's hard to believe), then find something new to try together. Take up line dancing, a new sport, or volunteer to teach Sunday School together. We are convinced you will find something to enjoy doing together if you *really try*.

The rewards are enormous. You will see your relationship with new perspective. Your affection for your mate will increase. And your communication will be enhanced. If your partner is unwilling to see Shared Activity as a priority, you can start the ball rolling by unselfishly joining them in what *they* already like to do.

(**Note:** Part 2 will include ingredients 5-8 and will be included with our April GTO NEWS HI-LYTER. If you just can't wait until then, call or write us and we'll send it to you early.)

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