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Not only Marriage, but All Relationships are Sacred

Next month Bobbie and I will celebrate our 70th Wedding Anniversary. Many people have asked us how we've stayed together that long. It's not only that we happen to like each other and share each other's love of God, music, Crystal Lake, our children and family traditions; but also, we consider all love and relationships Sacred.

Sacred does not mean "religious". It means "highly respected." We like John Gottman's book: "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work," because each principle defines a respectful activity that strengthens relationships, whether or not the relationship is a marriage. Gottman is a marriage counselor and bases his principles on extensive research involving 650 couples.

Principle 1. Share Life Maps. This means understanding your partner's world, including their likes, dislikes, life goals and values, and respecting them. For me it meant understanding Bobbie's parents and early family life.

Principle 2. Nurture Fondness and Admiration. Maintain a sense of respect and appreciation for each other.

Principle 3. Turn toward each other. Respond positively to bids for attention, affection and support from your partner.

Principle 4. Let your partner influence you. Value your partner's opinions and feelings in decision making.

Principle 5. Solve the problems that can be solved. Resolve the problems that can be worked out by discussion, mutual respect and compromise.

Principle 6. Overcome gridlock. Identify and discuss underlying issues that can cause recurring conflict without necessarily solving them. This can mean understanding your differences and respecting them.

Principle 7. Create shared meaning. Build a shared life that includes rituals, goals and values that are meaningful to both partners, like attending a favorite restaurant, watching a favorite movie, having a favorite vacation place, listening to favorite music or attending church together.

Gottman also identifies four negative behaviors to avoid:

1. **Criticism.** Attacking a partner's character instead of addressing specific behaviors.
2. **Defensiveness.** Responding to perceived attacks by blaming the partner, which escalates conflict.
3. **Contempt.** Expressing disdain or superiority, which is the strongest predictor of divorce.
4. **Stonewalling.** Withdrawing from interaction to avoid conflict, leading to emotional disengagement.

For many years we have been using these principles and warnings to test our relationship, our mutual respect and enable a long, hopeful and sacred three score and ten-year time together. Now when I tell Bobbie we have been married 70 years, she says: "What did we do all that time?" See the above.

~Written by Ned Edwards

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