

# How To Stay Married Fifty Years

By  
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"What's your secret?" we are asked when people find out we're celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary.

Since we are asked that question often, Norma Jean and I have come up with some answers we think have made our marriage work. "Secrets" that are not really secrets, but are not always practiced or even accepted by many people today.

In my last new post for the month of August, here are 5 specific things we think make a marriage work. At least they have contributed to the longevity of our relationship.

(1) Commitment to the relationships of marriage is a must. When we married on August 23, 1968, in Trenton, Florida, the preacher, Clinton Hamilton, asked us to take vows that we would be faithful to each other "for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part." We both said, "I do."

In an era when term limit and contract marriages are advocated, or the vows are being changed from "as long as you both shall live" to as long as you both shall love, it is no wonder marriages fall apart before 50 years.

Commitment keeps you together when times are tough. When romance wanes. When mistakes are made. When conflict arises.

When money is tight. When she (or he) just drives you crazy. And when you feel like quitting.

At times like these commitment calls forth our inner strength. Our loyalty. Our dedication. And our personal integrity to honor the promises we made on our wedding day.

(2) "Communication," is always Norma Jean's first answer when asked the secret to a long-lasting relationship. And she's right. As we heard Paul Faulkner say in a marriage seminar we attended years ago, "Communication is to love what blood is to the body. When communication stops, love begins to die."

Good communication builds and bonds. It creates a sense of belonging. It enhances your relationships. It says, "I care about you." "I want to share my feelings, thoughts, and dreams with you." "I want to know you better."

Through the years, we've written a lot about communication on this blog site. It's imperative to any lasting relationship, and especially marriage. Spent time sharing with each other. Learning. Listening. And talking.

(3) Compromise when conflicts arise. The Bible says, "love doesn't demand it's own way." Stubbornness, pride, and selfishness get in the way when a decision must be made and there are differences of opinion.

Don't argue over "who's right." but refocus your energy on "what's right." And sometimes there is no one right or wrong answer. It's just a

matter of opinion and personal preference. Here good communication skills will come into play as you work on a compromise. Sometimes it is necessary to elicit help from a preacher, pastor, or qualified marriage counselor.

But don't allow conflicts to become contentious and combative. Work them out.

(4) Be considerate of each other's feelings. In the great love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) Paul wrote, "love is kind." And "love is not rude." Practicing good manners and common courtesy goes a long way in getting along with one another.

I think men have a bigger challenge in being considerate. Maybe that's why the apostle Peter admonished, "Husbands...be considerate as you live with your wives" (1 Pet 3:7).

Several years ago Norma Jean and I were certified as facilitators by Family Dynamics in a course based on Dr. Willard Harley's book, "His Needs. Her Needs." From it we learned about 10 fundamental emotional needs all couples have in a relationship. Understanding each other's different needs provides a basis for consideration, compassion, attentiveness to fulfilling your mate's specific needs.

(5) Our marriage has been a Christ-centered marriage. I realize that some couples who are not Christians make it to 50. However, I believe that a faith-based marriage gives you an edge. It provides a common value system. A basis for working out problems. A standard with principles that you both agree on.

Our marriage has not been without its challenges. We've survived some bumps in the road. We're not the perfect couple. We still make mistakes. We've learned after 50 years that we're still learning. And as Norma Jean said last night, "You've got to have a sense of humor," if you're going to make it 50 years.

We are thankful God has blessed us with good health and strength at this stage of our lives. We're grateful for the positive influences of Christian mentors that have enhanced our relationship.

And I am eternally thankful that 50 years ago the brown-haired, green-eyed girl I fell in love with said, "I do." It's been quite a ride. But, Lord willing, there's more to come.

So, the journey continues.....