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THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

By L. S. Boardman

Rules For A Happy Marriage

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INTRODUCTION

This little pamphlet is coming forth in response to a huge number of requests. Some have suggested that it should be in the hands of every married couple in America. This statement, of course, is extravagant, but at least it is personally gratifying to the author.

For quite some time this material has been in manuscript form and during this time my wife and I have sometimes read it through for sheer enjoyment, and needless to say, we sense the "need" of its admonitions less and less all the time. If it does for you what it has done for us the author will be well rewarded for venturing into its distribution.

It is not that this article contains any new invention in particular. It is merely a "reminder" of things that are as "old as the hills," and yet so fundamentally essential to marital compatibility that we who are married people, happily so or otherwise, can scarcely afford to let slip a single "lot or tittle."

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THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

or

RULES FOR A HAPPY MARRIAGE

In spite of the sobering fact that many people will resort to divorce and remarriage as a means of escape from their marital frustrations, and a percentage of them on Scriptural grounds; yet there is a "More Excellent Way" if one can find it.

When your marriage is headed for the "rocks" there are three possible ways of facing up to it. One of the more heavily traveled roads in seeking a solution is to "break up" and "walk out." This means of escape should, if at all possible, be avoided. Impulsively you may cry out, "In my case it can't." You may be entirely right. Perhaps, in your particular case, it can't be avoided. But have you tried? Have you tried advisedly as well as emotionally? And have you put your entire heart and soul into the trying?

But have patience and read on!

A second means of attempting to face up to the dilemma is to painfully stay with it, endure every minute of married life and stick it out to the bitter end. Just quarrel on and on with life sprinkled with times of explosion, long periods of silence, now and then patches of blue sky with more dark thunder clouds gathering. And not a spark of true love to oil the wheels!

A third solution -- and let us recommend this one -- we will call "THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY." This way is based solidly upon the firm belief that "Love never faileth." Love cannot fail when you can get the love flame burning again with a warm, steady glow. And let me shock you, you can!

More than forty years ago there was a book in circulation entitled, "He Fell In Love With His Wife." I never saw that book and do not know who wrote it. Nor do I know how the author treated the subject. But I remember overhearing some older people talking about this book when I was a very small child and it made a lasting impression on my mind. This is the ideal solution if and when it can be aspired.

Some anonymous individual evidently was struggling with this very problem when he wrote:

If sweethearts were sweethearts always,
Whether as maid or wife,
No drop would be half as pleasant
In the mingled draught of life.

But the sweetheart has smiles and blushes,
When the wife has frowns and sighs,
And the wife has a wrathful glitter,
For the glow in the sweetheart's eyes.

If lovers were lovers always,
The same to sweetheart and wife,
Who would change for a future of Eden
The joys of this checkered life?

But husbands grow grave and silent,
And care on the anxious brow,

Oft replaces the sunshine that perished,
With the words of the marriage vow.

Happy is he whose sweetheart,
Is wife and sweetheart still --
Whose voice, as of old, can charm!
Whose kiss, as of old, can thrill!

Who has plucked the rose to find ever,
Its beauty and fragrance increase,
As the flush of passion is mellowed,
In love's unmeasured peace.

Yes, fall in love again! Sounds easy, yet seems difficult, does it not? And yet, you will find it the best road to recovery for your sick marriage. What about love? The Bible says, "Love never faileth!" And the Bible is true. When you can find a way to keep the love flame burning you've got it made! Come wind! Come weather! You can "wag the world" because love never faileth!

Dark foreboding prophecies and predictions shall fail. Grave ventures as to the hopeless forecast of your tottering "marriage castle" -- they all shall fail! "Tongue shall cease." Pessimistic onlookers will run out of words and stand utterly speechless! Chagrined! Their gloomy forecast concerning the outcome of your rocking marriage shall come to naught. Why? Because the greatest of all is charity! Charity is a "functioning" love; not static and receptive only, but "love at work," exerting and expressing itself. Learning, therefore, to be charitable toward one another is not only a gift that must be bestowed of God, but it also is one of the fine arts which must be nurtured or it will die.

What about love? "Love suffereth long and is kind." Have you really tried it? One may exasperate, "Yes, I have suffered long." But have you also, in the midst of the suffering, been kind? Being kind in response to ill-treatment is another matter, is it not? And yet it works! This matter of returning good for evil will call for the grace of God. So, let me induce you to pour more oil on the rusty wheels of love, and try again.

"Love envieth not." Basically, "is unselfish." This principle alone will carry you leagues up the road toward emotional stability and marital adjustment.

"Love vaunteth not itself," is not boastful with self-esteem and self-importance. It eliminates the "I must be first," tendency; "My plans are of most importance." "Others must give way to me;" "My ideas are best;" "My desires must be gratified;" "Everyone must step aside for me." Love alone will purge one's disposition of these flagrant errors because love will destroy all that is domineering, egocentric and self-opinionated.

Love "is not puffed up." Is not inflated. True love will help you to take criticism gracefully. Love will enable you to step down and admit you are in the wrong. Listening meekly to advice and criticism from your help meet will go a long way toward smooth companionship. Learning to be humble and subordinate is another of the fine arts which must and can be mastered by you.

Love "Doth not behave itself unseemly." True love avoids indecency and the unbecoming as well as the offensive in words and conduct. It speaks, thinks, and lives clean and in a decorous and wholesome manner. It enables one to give his companion someone to admire in the producing of fine qualities. You must not ask your companion to love the unlovely. This is unfair. There is no room in a true love affair for rudeness, sarcasm or any kind of cutting words.

Love "Seeketh not her own." Learn to surrender, not principles of character or religious convictions, but personal notions, plans and habits which are irritating to your companion. All this will help guide your marriage away from the "rocks." Love of the top quality will penetrate every fog, light every pathway, dispel every gloom, and will ring the bell of hope which has for long years hung still and cold.

"Hopeless?" No, not at all hopeless! Because "Love never faileth." Try sitting together, you and your companion, and slowly and thoughtfully reading this thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians (defining archaic terms), until it takes root and your morbid love soon will be on its way to full recovery. There is hope for the stabilizing of your marriage in the assimilation of the tenets of this masterful, healing, love chapter of Saint Paul. Yes, let me convince you that you and your companion can fall in love again if you will.

Were statistics available we, no doubt, would be shocked to learn how few matrimonial problems are ever solved by the relentless grinding wheels of the divorce mills. Problems could better, far better, be solved by the re-establishing of the basic principles which magnetically hold hearts and homes together. This is "The More Excellent Way!" Conscientious parents, attorneys, psychiatrists, as well as Gospel ministers and social workers have been rewarded with the personal satisfaction of having given advice which turned hasty feet away from the divorce courts to a cool-headed, warm-hearted solution of their "half-imaginary" problem.

One receives a heart-rending picture of this whole problem when he realizes how comparatively few couples these days are essentially happy in their married life. Even among some of the more devout-appearing Christians in the average community, it is alarming to discover, when one gets close enough, how very few couples are really happy together.

Right here, in the midst of this matrimonial chaos, the great army of sincere workers, who have the betterment of society at heart and who hate the very word "divorce," can find a wide open and challenging field for the most rewarding labors.

Many unhappy people, we find, do not know why they are unhappy. They often lay the blame on people and circumstances, never dreaming that within their own natures lie, dormant and unspouted, the seeds of emotional recovery. For an unhappy person to become happy, he must begin in the very roots of his own distorted personality. (But don't let me antagonize you.) It naturally is easier, for you and me both, to see the adjustments the other party should make. But, my friend, if you will admit honestly your own faults and analyze your own motives, spirit, attitudes and habits, and be honest, and will humble yourself enough to go the "second mile;" then go the second mile again and again in making the necessary adjustments, presently you will see an entirely new world opening before you which you had formerly thought impossible. After all, it

really takes so very little effort to be happy. To humble one's self and be honest always is the first and hardest step that one must take to recapture the lost bliss of married life.

When married people reach the place where they want to be happy together, they can be. To make a marital change seems to appeal to the great majority of maladjusted people as the easiest means of escape from their dilemma. And since life's deceitful grass can appear greener in the unexplored field, many frustrated persons unwittingly seek to capture the ever elusive state of happiness by making a marital change rather than by making a dispositional adjustment and more times than not they come out disillusioned.

Let's Talk It Over Together

And now, husband and wife, permit me to talk to you as frankly and as ruthlessly as at times I have had to talk to myself. If you wish to be happily united as long as you both shall live, read these rules together (let me emphasize "together") as often as it may be necessary and your companionship will undergo an immediate and miraculous change until it will be made to run "as smooth as a ribbon." May I further suggest (and this is all important), when either of you come to a point in the reading where you personally are weak or at fault, pause and humbly and frankly confess this weakness to your companion. There is no better therapy for a sick personality than frank and open confession. Say to your companion, "I am weak at that point," and you will find yourself stronger from then on. Thus will tensions float away in a relaxing stream of humor. This is one game you both can play and you both can win.

1. First, by the most meticulous self-discipline keep your thoughts and affections from wandering from your companion to another. When satan crosses your mind with the slightest temptation or suggestion for your eyes to wander or your heart to lust, plead the grace of God at once, dismiss the thought and thus maintain the purity of your most hidden feelings. Jesus taught this principle (Matthew 5:27-29) and insisted upon it. Do not toy with the evil suggestion or temptation for a moment when it pertains to the opposite sex. This practice takes a determined will and a constant guard. A first glance may be accidental, but the second is deliberate, forbidden, and dangerous. Keep your thoughts, desires, affections and feelings only for each other so long as you both shall live.

2. Always, I mean "always," be a person your companion can trust under every circumstance. Never bluff; never work under cover; never betray the confidence of your husband or wife. Always be able to face your mate with an open face and a warm level eye. Do not permit your companion to find you, ever, even once, in an untruth or a cover up deal. A carpenter will tell you that once a nail is bent and straightened he is never quite so sure of it again.

3. Keep all barriers and tensions out of the home. Do not freeze up in a world of silence. The silent treatment is as cruel as the grave. Always be kind; never slurring; never sarcastic. When the slightest tension arises, stop at once and pray together until the tension is entirely gone. God will keep your hearts melted together if you will practice this rule faithfully. Those who diligently have practiced this policy have found that it never fails to work its miracle of healing. Tensions and barriers cannot persist in a Christ-impregnated atmosphere. Therefore, when one allows tensions and barriers to infect the home, the sweet Spirit of God withdraws in grief leaving the

spirit of evil to contaminate the atmosphere and rule or wreck the home. One must never let the love flame go out.

4. Have family prayer every day, preferably twice daily, but do not hurry with it. It does little good to pray under nervous pressure. Keep the family altar a time of melting and basking in the presence of God. Wife and husband, form the habit of sitting side by side when you read from the Bible at family prayer time. Then kneel in the same manner for prayer. Soon you will prefer it this way. This practice will keep wedges of ice from getting in and forcing you apart. Husband, if you will rest your hand upon your wife's shoulder while you pray, you will be forming a habit which will work its miracle in your temperament. Try doing this and see how hard it may be at first to break through the frost line, but how rewarding it becomes once the "break through" is accomplished. It will work a miracle within you akin to the miracle of springtime which brings the flowers up out of the soil and the birds back from the Southland. This practice, when followed consistently, will keep the barriers from getting back into your heart and mind. "The family that prays together stays together," they tell us. When a husband and wife cease praying together their earthly happiness is in peril already.

5. Never allow relatives or friends, however well-meaning they may be, to encroach upon the privacy of your home or married life, to interfere. Keep your family secrets between you. Let your companion know you can be trusted.

6. Discussing various matters is necessary sometimes and differences of opinion are frequently unavoidable, but do not argue. Arguing creates tensions and divisions, while it accomplishes absolutely nothing worth while.

7. Do not go needlessly into debt. Pay as you go and deny yourselves the things you cannot afford. You will be happier and you will learn to be content with such things as you have (Heb. 13:5). To live beyond one's income is to borrow trouble, create frustrations, worries, and tensions which tend to destroy marital compatibility.

8. Make it a practice of anointing your companion with oil and praying for the healing of the body, no matter how slight the disorder. If the illness persists, continue the practice every day without fail until your companion is healed. Do the same with the children. This practice will not only bring miracles of healing to sick bodies and tired minds, but it will also work the miracle of binding the husband and wife together and will forbid barriers coming between them. Barriers are so prevalent in the family circle and yet these barriers cannot survive in an atmosphere such as this practice creates. Try it and see. Remember, if you want to be happily married bad enough to pay the price, you can be.

9. Always play the game fair and do unto your companion as you would like your companion to do unto you. Never belittle or broadcast things which are humiliating or embarrassing to your companion. True love is always thoughtful of the feelings of its object. Fulton Oursler one time wrote, "The wife or husband who is alert to say the heartening thing at the right moment has taken out valuable marriage insurance." Always remember it's the little things that count.

10. Finally, never grumble or find fault. To do this is nothing but a very bad habit. It does no good but it leaves its wound. And remember, wounds which are under constant irritation may become malignant.

"Laugh at life,
And the world will be back of you.
Growl at life,
And the world will lose track of you."

--Anon --

Now Brace Your Feet, "Hubby!"

And now, husband, let us look at this matter of your individual responsibility. There is a vital contribution that you can make and the results will be most gratifying.

1. You must understand that your wife craves a sense of security. She wants someone on whom she can lean. If she does not get this feeling of security from you, she may hunt for it elsewhere or give up in despair. She wants a strong arm of protection around her. She likes to feel your support.

2. Your wife also wants to be free from financial worries. She does not want her husband to spend much of his time and money on his hobbies and begrudge her the little things she craves. She wants your attention. She naturally resents your being extravagant with yourself and your wants (which is a man's weakness) and irritable when she desires a new dress!

3. Your wife is entitled to fair play on your part. Men, I suppose, have a tendency to be more selfish than women. One must guard against this weakness and make it a habit to bend over backwards in being thoughtful and playing fair. When man wants something, regardless of what it costs, he wants it at once, whether he can afford it or not. A husband who desires a happy home must guard against this weakness, for it creates a lack of balance in the home and makes for discontentment. Subdue the habit of being set in your ways. Develop flexibility.

4. A womanly wife wants affection, not just sex. She wants tenderness. Men have an innate proneness to take the wife for granted, wrap themselves in business and recreation, and give her little attention. Many wives are starving for affection.

5. Your wife wants you to confide in her. She wants to be the most important person in your life and she should be. She is not herein asking the unreasonable. She wants you to succeed and she likes to feel she helped push you over the top. She likes to feel necessary and wanted. She loves spontaneous compliments and will pay her last coin of devotion for a few of the right kind of thoughtful remarks. Men need to break down the tendency to be aloof. Your wife does not like to feel that she is being shoved off as an inferior whose advice is inconsequential or unsafe. She likes to be wanted and needed. She loves the close feeling of partnership. She is not a mere fixture or accessory; she is an "help meet." God intended her to be your companion. Accept her criticism,

even though it is one of the hardest things a man can do sometimes. She undoubtedly sees your weaknesses and she will make you strong where you are inherently weak if you will allow her.

6. Do take her advice, at least, consider it with profound respect. A woman's instincts are usually safe to follow. The wife will seldom miss it when she says to you. "Honey, I have a feeling you are making a wrong move."

7. Learn by deliberate practice (forced if necessary) to make adjustments between you and your wife which are difficult to make. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this practice. Do this for the sake of harmony and the security of your home. These adjustments do not make themselves. Many inter-personality problems will disintegrate once we face them.

Your Turn, Wife!

And now, wife, you have a solemn responsibility too. If you really want to make married life "click," perhaps these suggestions will help you with your task.

1. Your husband wants privacy. Many things that happen are not for publicity. He will feel miserable, self-conscious, humiliated, and resentful if he thinks your friends and relatives know everything that has happened between you. He wants a woman he can trust. He is satisfied only when he can leave you with anyone, even your mother, and be confident that his secrets are locked up within you.

2. Your husband wants, and has a right to expect you to be a good wife. He is not content simply with a good cook or a good housekeeper. This is to be expected. Your responsibility here is included also in the marriage vow. One who wished to fill the role of an "old maid," should never have gotten married. If your attitude toward normal sex experience is such that your husband feels embarrassed or is made to endure a guilt complex as though he had "stolen" something, your basic attitude should be revised. Your mental pattern in this phase of life's responsibility should be very much the same as it is when you cook a fine meal and your husband eats heartily and leans back from the table in complete contentment. One other thought: your husband will not be nearly so inclined to form evil habits if you play fair and treat him as you should in this regard.

3. Your husband wants sunshine in the home. This is a mighty sour old world, sometimes, and he wants a spot of sunshine he can always come into out of the storm.

4. He also would like you to be clean in your habits, in the preparation of food, in your keeping of the home, and in your personal habits in general. A clean man cannot "cleave," as the Bible admonishes him to do, to someone who is unclean and repulsive.

5. Your husband loves special attention. He likes to be petted and "made over" more than he may be willing to give of the same. When he is sick he wants to be "babied." This fact has to be understood and accepted by you. He likes to find his little notions, in your cooking, your housekeeping, and in your personal appearance, spontaneous. He may not say much, but he is noticing more than you think sometimes. These things are all sinking in and are making a mark in your favor.

6. Your man likes appreciation also. If he hears you bragging on him when he is thought not to be listening, he will prick up his ears and stare blankly at the newspaper which you think he is reading. But he is making a mental note of it all, and you are keeping yourself on the inside track.

7. He wants you to be content with such things as he can provide. He does not enjoy nagging or constant complaining. It is better to get along with less than to be pressed to the point of frustration by indebtedness for things one cannot afford. Being happy with less is a matter of self-discipline.

8. He likes you to be playful; it breaks the tensions. If he finds a stone in his soup, a bottle in the toe of his sock, or his pajama legs sewed up, he will chuckle to himself the next day when he is at the shop and will think you a grand person indeed. Things like this will even help break down the irritation when the foreman is driving him. No matter how rough the trick or how overbearing the foreman, your husband knows there is a spot of sunshine waiting for him at the end of the day. So, when the whistle blows he can hardly wait to get home to be with you.

9. He likes you to believe he is a hero -- the greatest "guy" in the world. And he can be as far as you are concerned, and should be.

10. He will not be happy with interference from in-laws. Unless you keep your parents in their proper place, you will multiply sorrows upon your own head (this works both ways). One of the worst things you can do after you are married is to try to live in the same house with either parents. It is far better to patch your threadbare clothes and live on hasty pudding and maintain the privacy of your own home.

11. Your husband wants to be first in your affections, not even the children pushing him out of this position. The children should be an adhesive to hold you together rather than a wedge to push you apart. My companion, for example, has always made it a point to teach her little boy to love his daddy and to make him believe his daddy is the nicest daddy in the world. Anything she can do to bind us closer together, she will do it. I've known her to whisper a "bug" into the little fellow's ear and he would run, as though it were his own idea, wind his little arms around his daddy's neck and give him a big "smacker" on the cheek. His daddy when alone one day welled up inside with tender feelings for his little boy who had been taught to be affectionate, and as a result he composed this little poem:

He's six and a half years old,
And a real "he-boy," I'll say
But God would have a little problem
If He took him home today.

He'd have to get a sling shot,
And some little racer cars;
Strings and kites and alleys,
And a host of chocolate bars.

Heaven's always neat and tidy,
At least that's what they say;
But 'twould soon be "topsy-turvy"
If He took him home today.

We, too, would have a problem,
For 'twould leave us mighty blue,
And we'd have a stack of "do-dads"
That we'd like to send up, too.

Now I feel a mighty tuggin',
Just a-thinkin' of it so;
And if God reached down and took him,
I guess we all would want to go!

12. Discipline yourself not to challenge your husband's wisdom and authority in the presence of the children when he has corrected or punished them, unless you wish to borrow trouble. If these things must be discussed, it should be done quietly and in private. This, too, works both ways and its importance cannot be over-emphasized.

13. Accustom your inner ear so as to keep your companion's voice the sweetest music in the world. After my companion had left this world I would sometimes hear her voice audibly calling me. This may have been a psychological quirk of a lonely, restless mind, but at least it reveals how precious her voice had become. A few years after her decease my reminiscing heart expressed itself in this fashion:

I placed an apple in that shy little hand;
Over the fence I saw her stand;
Eight summers were hers and mine were ten;
Barefooted youngsters we both were then.

Over the altar and side by side;
We knelt and prayed when the knot was tied;
Nineteen was she now, and I twenty one;
We turned a new page and life had begun.

Over the years we were turning gray --
Time and tide were having their way --
Together we'd wept and together toiled,
'Till our roots were entwined beneath love's soil.

Then from over the river she heard the call;
She answered it quickly and that was all.
Apples ripen these days as they always did,
But they just aren't the same as when I was a "kid!"

Never forget, married folk, that love is what you make it. Happiness is a by-product. This matter of living together and being happily united presents its varying problems, but it normally brings no difficulties that two cannot iron out if they will face their differences and be honest. Being happy and staying together and wanting to be together always is gravely important, and it is within reach of all who are willing to keep the rules of life's wonderful game.

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THE END