

A man and a woman are standing outdoors on a grassy area, facing each other in a romantic pose. The man is on the left, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and blue jeans, with his hands clasped in front of him. The woman is on the right, wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and dark blue jeans, with her hands clasped with the man's. They are both looking at each other. In the background is a light-colored wall with a mural of a grey tree branch with small red hearts and two orange birds perched on it. The text 'Eight principles of a Christ-centered marriage' is overlaid on the wall. The man is wearing a necklace and a watch, and the woman is wearing a bracelet and sandals.

# **Eight principles of a Christ-centered marriage**

*by Jill Briscoe*



**The greatest need of every person is to know how to give love and receive it.**

Just ask any psychologist. However, this relational art depends greatly on what you mean by the English word “love.” The Greek language has several words for love: eros, storge, philia, and agape. In much of the world, we worship eros—the sexual, sensual part of love. It’s the “feeling too big for words” part—the passionate, heady, romantic element. And so often, it’s how we determine if we’re satisfied with our marriage. This is far away from God’s original design for marriage ruled by His agape love. His idea was that all our human loves should be submitted to Himself to rule and fuel. If your marriage today isn’t characterized by unconditional, sacrificial agape love, don’t give up. God’s Word has the answer!

You see, marriage is precious to God because He created it. If we claim to love the Lord, then the things that are precious to Him should be precious to us, too! However, as I serve people around the world, I talk to many people whose marriages are falling apart. When things get tough, Christians too often make a spiritual 911 call to God and ask Him to send Christ to “fix” it and help get their love life back on track. But is that really all it’s about? I don’t think so. Thankfully, the Bible is a wonderful book on the subject and can teach us about God’s design for marriage. What is that design?

First of all, the Bible clearly teaches that God is the source of love and life (1 John 4:7-8 & John 14:6). Therefore, if we truly want a good “love life,” as God intended, our primary focus must be on our relationship with God. He is love and He is Life! The better our life with God is, the richer our marriages will be. I’d like to share with you eight principles that have been essential in my own and others’ marriages.




## Learn what real love is

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. (1 Cor. 13:4-6)*

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he painted a portrait of love with words. Jesus sat for that portrait. Put Jesus' name in the text, and you will see what I mean. Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind, Jesus doesn't boast, Jesus isn't proud, Jesus knows how to forgive, Jesus is love! We are to love our spouse the way Jesus loves us, agape style. God's love is not selfish! Selfishness kills a marriage!

So the way you learn to give agape love in life is by experiencing it through a relationship with Jesus. Loving others—with enduring, sacrificial love—is only possible when you have Jesus in your heart. When the reality of His love begins to flow into us and fill us, then that love can overflow into the lives of others.

God designed marriage so that first our lives might be centered on Him—not ourselves, not our families, not even our spouse. God first. Marriage struggles can be a way of showing us we need to get spiritual priorities sorted out in order for our relationships to work the way He intended them to.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Have you allowed God to love you with that kind of love? Are you willing to let Him fill you with Himself, so you can love your spouse in the same way? 





## Pray about it


*I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.*  
(Ps. 17:6)

Pray about your marriage. Prayer is getting to know God by intentionally recognizing His presence in you and around you and having a conversation. In prayer we admit, “I can’t do anything alone! I need you Jesus! I can’t be patient. I can’t be kind... I can’t agape others without you!” Agape love is being primarily concerned with the other’s well-being irrespective of the cost to itself.

In prayer we can verbalize our lack of love. It reminds us we are dependent creatures. It’s a reaching out of our need to Him.

Again, our personal devotional life will determine the quality of the person we are in our marriage. The deeper our prayer life, the better we will be. Are you getting to know God so well you are learning how He can release His power in you and through you? His patience when you’re impatient? His forgiveness?

Marriage intimacy comes in many forms: social, spiritual, and sexual. Praying together brings a spiritual companionship that is hard to explain. But why wouldn’t your marriage be enriched by being together in the very throne room of God? And spiritual intimacy with your spouse helps intimacy in other parts of your marriage, too.

Invite your spouse to join you in prayer. Make personal conversation with God a continual thing as you go about your day. Watch for changes in you and your marriage as you go deeper with God. 



## Let the Lord govern your marriage

*My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside.*  
(Job 23:11)

The first miracle Jesus did was at a wedding. He blessed the occasion with His presence. In those times, a governor was in charge of all of the details (like a contemporary wedding planner). At this event the wine ran out, which in that culture meant the governor, as well as the bride and groom's families, would "lose face." Jesus was asked to assume the role of governor and solve the wine situation. He turned the water into wine, and the Bible says it was better than anything served before.

How does this relate to our marriages? Many of us have invited Jesus to be present at our wedding, but only as a guest. He's there to bless the event not take charge. When we allow Him to be the governor of our marriages, they are transformed—like the wine from the wedding miracle—into something better than we could imagine. In other words, ask yourself: "Who's in charge?"

If you have been trying to govern your life and marriage, it's time to let go. Quit trying to control everything. Stop trying to change your spouse. Let Jesus do that. You rest in Him, draw from Him, trust in Him, and look to Him as your source of enabling.

{ Read the wedding story in John, Chapter 2. Spend a few minutes talking to Jesus about specific areas in your marriage where you need to let go and let Him take charge. }







## Guard your heart

*So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.*  
(Mal. 2:15)

In 2 Samuel 11, we have the story of King David and Bathsheba. The story recounts how David stayed behind at his palace instead of going off to war as was typical for the king. Rising at evening, he went to his roof, saw a beautiful married woman, and sent servants to get her. Eros had its way. Later, when David couldn't cover up their sin, he had her husband (one of his closest friends) killed. It's one of the darkest chapters of biblical history. A "man after God's own heart" broke from his faith, left his spirit vulnerable, and allowed his eros love to lead him down soul-destroying paths.

Step by step he made choices contrary to who he was. As king, he should have been at war. When he was on the roof, he could have looked away after he first saw Bathsheba... David didn't guard his heart against temptation. So how do we guard our hearts? By calling things what they really are. Be honest with yourself. If your heart is saying, "Danger! Watch it," listen! David learned the hard way, as we often do, and he wrote about it in Psalm 51:6: "*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.*"

We are all to "guard ourselves in our spirit" because we all will find ourselves on temptation's rooftop at some point in our life.

{ Confess to God any present temptation in your thought life.  
Thank Him that He has promised He will never leave or forsake  
you. Praise Him that His Spirit is in you, ready to show you the  
way of escape off the roof! }





## Respect the differences

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)*

In Genesis, God had a perfect idea for men and women; they were created to be in equal partnership. But the snake entered the garden and persuaded them to disobey God and eat forbidden fruit. Disaster occurred. The blame game began. Adam blamed Eve. Eve blamed the snake, and Satan rejoiced, just as he does today when we allow our differences to cause conflict.

Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, once said, “If Billy and I agreed on everything, one of us would be unnecessary!” The fact that we’re different is what creates the blessings, joys, and, of course, problems in a marriage. If God created us different, He must have had a reason. Have you ever noticed how often opposites attract? That’s God’s plan—to take the part you don’t have, add it to the part you do have, and together you and your spouse become one.

One of the most common reasons for divorce is cited as “irreconcilable differences.” But God is in the reconciliation business! Learn to celebrate the differences in the other and have fun doing it!

Identify differences between you and your spouse that are complementary (even though they might seem conflicting!). Ask God to show you the differences in a new light—as He sees them—as gifts to deepen your intimacy with Him and as an opportunity to love your spouse with agape love.




## Encourage each other

*If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Eccl. 4:10-12)*

God's intent for marriage is to build up both spouses so you are stronger together than you are alone. The word "encouragement" simply means "to put courage into someone," and that's something everyone needs. Learning to do this for each other makes for a strong marriage.

In the Bible, there was a man named Barnabas. His name means the "son of encouragement." He is one of the well-known characters from the early church, in spite of the fact that he didn't author a book in the Bible, none of his spoken words were recorded, and little is said about him. His testimony was simply: "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24). Barnabas spent his life encouraging downcast souls.

The awesome power of a little encouragement can save a ministry or a marriage. What a blessing it is to have our spouse step up to the plate during needy moments, giving us a gentle reminder to be "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith"!

{ Think about practical ways you can encourage your spouse in everyday situations—maybe even with a verse of Scripture. Where does he/she need encouragement at this moment? } 



## Develop integrity

*An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips. (Prov. 24:26)*

An important part of integrity in marriage is being authentic with your spouse. It's a willingness to be open with your life. Integrity is being transparent about what you are thinking and how you are feeling. Often, we don't tell our spouse what we really feel. If we are put out with our partners we want to make them guess what's wrong! Integrity means we're honest with God, with our spouse, and with ourselves about what is going on.

Always remember that our words must flow from agape love in grace—not anger or malice. “Unwholesome” words only hurt and cause more damage.

Spend some focused conversation with the Lord. Where is He leading you to be more transparent with your spouse? What do you think is the best way to communicate this?



## Commitment

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. (Prov. 3:3)*

I like to think in word pictures. Imagine your marriage is like a burning building, and you and your mate hold a key to the fire escape. It is tempting to use the key to freedom and get out of the danger and discomfort, but God didn't intend for you to use the fire escape. His plan is for you to throw the key out the window and fight the flames together.

In every marriage, when trouble comes commitment is tested. But dealing with trouble together is part of the way God can strengthen a marriage. In the midst of problems, we are to put our minds, hearts, and wills together to solve them.

The commitment to seek true love and life in Christ, and to love and serve our spouse through thick and thin, makes for solid unions that honor God. And a Christ-centered marriage is a beacon of hope to people struggling in theirs.

Always remember, you make the choice, but it's the power of God in you that helps you follow through. Consider these words from 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

If you are looking for the fire escape, now is the time to throw away the key. God is with you and in you. Talk to Him about your pain and frustration. Ask Him to give you a willingness to fight the fire, together, until His purposes are accomplished.





Having a vibrant “love life” comes down to one thing—God. You cannot consistently practice these eight principles without the perfect love of God fueling your efforts. If you already have a relationship with the Lord, ask yourself if you are seeking Him and depending on Him to love your spouse through you.

If you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus and would like to know more, visit [tellingthetruth.org](http://tellingthetruth.org) or call us at 800.889.5388 (US) or 0800.652.4120 (UK).

Without Him we can do nothing, but all things are possible through Christ.

### Pray with me:

*Lord, when we get to the end of our ability to figure it out, we know that if you are in our marriages you will give us the strength to do the right thing. Help us to live with integrity, honesty, and openness with each other. Please help us to communicate and seek to understand our differences. Show us ways to build each other up and fill up in the other that which is lacking. Through you, we will seek to submit where we should submit and give up our own selfishness for the good of our marriage and family. Lord, please show us how to have a marriage that honors you and displays the reality of the “Life of Love” we have in Christ.*

*Amen*

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**Jill Briscoe** is real, her words are penetrating and her message challenging. Born and educated in England, Jill has a Bible teaching ministry that spans the globe. Heard on radio and online through Telling the Truth, she is the author of numerous books, speaks extensively around the world, and is executive editor of *Just Between Us*, a magazine for encouraging and equipping women for a life of faith. For over 20 years, Jill served on the boards of World Relief and Christianity Today, Inc. Both Jill and her husband, Stuart Briscoe, have served as ministers-at-large at Elmbrook Church in suburban Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They have three children and thirteen grandchildren.

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