Recipes don’t work with our mates.

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 cannot 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.

Loyalty and Trust – essential ingredients.

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 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.

To cherish requires continued acceptance.

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 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.

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