

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING GODLY CHARACTER

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law' (Galatians 5:22-23).

If a husband and wife developed the fruit of the Holy Spirit there would never be any marriage breakdowns or divorce. But unfortunately people, including Christians, can harden their hearts against God and against one another. They become unwilling to confess their sins and they end up walking in darkness instead of God's light.

There are nine godly virtues that we must allow God to grow and develop in our lives. If you are not willing to be corrected and to change, you will eventually reap a lot of bad fruit. If you allow God to cleanse your heart and to smooth your rough edges, you will produce the fruit of righteousness.

1) Love – The foundation of any marriage must be love. God is love and true love comes from God (1 John 4:8). Isaac loved his wife right from the beginning, even though it was an arranged marriage (Genesis 24:61-67).

A man called Amnon, who supposedly was in love with a very beautiful girl, slept with her and then he hated her more than he had ever loved her, such was the wickedness in his heart (2 Samuel 13:15). For human love to become like God's love it has to be purified.

True love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres and this is the kind of love that never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Marriages fail because there is a lack of love.

A husband must choose to love his wife and the wife must choose to love her husband. Love is revealed by sacrifice and by giving (Ephesians 5:2). Love is not based on feelings. There is a sense in which we can put on love or we can take it off (Colossians 3:14). Everything a husband says to his wife must be spoken out of love. When a husband loves his wife like this he will have a great marriage.

2) Joy – A person's wedding day is to be a time of great joy. In the Law of Moses it was written: 'If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married' (Deuteronomy 24:5). A man should enter marriage with this goal in mind: he is to bring happiness and joy to his wife.

3) Peace – The home should be a place of peace and that peace will only exist if the husband and wife are at peace with God and at peace with one another. We must choose to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15).

Peace will remain in a marriage when there is good communication. The wife wants someone to talk to; not someone who is always running off with his friends, too busy with work, or makes her feel like she is being neglected. On the other hand, a husband will find it very difficult if his wife is nagging him all the time.

The book of Proverbs addresses this issue quite strongly: 'Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife' (Proverbs 21:19). 'A quarrelsome wife is like the dripping of a leaky roof in a rainstorm; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand' (Proverbs 27:15-16).

If you have this tendency to argue and your temper gets the better of you, you need to come before God and allow Him to work on your character. You need to focus on changing yourself before you try to change your partner.

4) Forbearance (Patience) – Husbands and wives must have patience with one another. There are going to be times when things are not going your way. 'A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense' (Proverbs 19:11).

Marriage is a test. Are you going to endure the mundane reality of life and continue to grow in God with your marriage partner or are you going to drift apart over time due to your lack of discipline?

It is written: 'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love' (Ephesians 4:2). As a husband and wife learn to develop this godly virtue towards each other their relationship will become stronger and stronger.

5) Kindness – It is written: 'A kind-hearted woman gains honour, but ruthless men gain only wealth. Those who are kind benefit themselves, but the cruel bring ruin on themselves' (Proverbs 11:16-17).

We cannot claim to be walking with God if we have no desire to be kind. Kindness needs to come out of our hearts and that is why we need to keep our hearts pure. A husband and wife must always try to be kind to each other (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

6) Goodness – This can speak of helpfulness. The husband needs to say to his wife from time to time, "Sweetheart, what can I do to help you? What would you like me to do around the house?" Jesus came not to be

served but to serve (Matthew 20:28), so while the wife is to be a suitable helper for her husband, the husband is to also serve his wife in order to be like Christ.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). If your own marriage partner can't see the light of Christ shining through you then you need to make some improvements in your walk with God.

7) Faithfulness – A husband will never flirt with other women and be overcome by the sin of adultery if he has a faithful heart. Love and faithfulness go together (Psalm 85:10).

Faithfulness to one's wife includes refusing to look at pornography (Matthew 5:28; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). If you are having a problem in this area you are going to need to come to a place of deep repentance. You will need to cry out to God as King David did: 'Create in me a pure heart' (Psalm 51:10).

Are you true to your words? Will your marriage last till the end? People fall into the sin of adultery because there is no faithfulness, no love, and no true acknowledgment of God (Hosea 4:1-2). God is faithful to help His people find the right marriage partner, if they trust and seek after Him (Genesis 24:1-27). Every Christian marriage should be a strong and faithful marriage. We cannot make excuses for any failure, but rather we must walk in repentance.

8) Gentleness – Jesus said, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). The nature of Christ is one of gentleness and humility. That is the nature every one of us needs to have outworked in our hearts. A domineering or controlling husband or wife

needs to make some improvements in the area of gentleness.

A woman's true beauty does not come from her outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight (1 Peter 3:3-4). Are you concerned about temporary beauty or eternal beauty?

'Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised' (Proverbs 31:30). Are you looking for a partner by looking at their outward appearance or do you have the wisdom to perceive that greater treasures are found in those who have godly character.

'A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones' (Proverbs 12:4).

9) Self-control – We have to choose our words carefully because the tongue has the power of life and death (Proverbs 18:21). You can tear down your marriage or build it up by what you say. A husband and wife should never argue over what each other would prefer to do, but rather walk with God and work together. A husband and wife who pray together stay together.

If you follow the wisdom of God and develop the fruit of the Holy Spirit, you will have the tremendous blessing of a godly marriage.

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DO YOU HAVE

God's

Love

IN YOUR

Family?

**THE BLESSINGS OF A
GODLY MARRIAGE**