

The Threefold Cord of Marriage

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Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

**“Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.
For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.
Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;
But how can one be warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”**

Lately my wife Ana and I have been witnessing some sad break ups in our surrounding, some are the parents of our kids' classmates, some are relatively close family members, and sadly, some are very close friends, friends who made us part of their group of friends and made our integration to La Paz's society much easier and pleasant.

Mexico City is a much more complicated environment and more likely to promote differences between couples, more divorce prone. However, while we lived there, we were lucky enough not to see this sad situations happening and hurting everyone involved and around.

For months I've been trying to find some kind of a vaccine to protect our marriage by trying to understand the reasons for these separations and the truth causes underneath those reasons. On the surface it seems easy, it's all common reasons but the more I search, the deeper and darker it gets and the spookier and colder it feels. So I changed my search and tried to understand why or how other couples stay together no matter what.

So we'll be talking about the signs of a healthy relation, about the good things that will maintain a relationship healthy and fun, the winning strategies from the initial flirting to the aging together and through the living together ever after.

The first thing we need to do is remember God's plan for a couple and try to imagine the necessary relationship to fulfill said plan:

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” Genesis 1:27-28

For starters, if God created us, which is mentioned 3 times, if He created us in His Image, which is mentioned twice, if he blessed us and if He instructs us in person, WE OUGHT TO BE GREAT!! Then the tasks imply that we'll be lovers ever after, as we need to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth, that we'll be partners, friends in order to subdue the earth and have dominion over every living thing. We can't do it if we're not working together as partners, in the same direction as friends and jointly as lovers.

If such is the task, no wonder why God designed us with a powerful attraction for each other... do you remember when you first met your spouse?

“...and they gave each other a smile with a future in it...”

You probably saw only the good things. Very likely you praised or even bragged about it with friends. When it is the right person a special closeness is felt every time we see each other, an inner attraction, not with a beautiful face or personality or wealth but with the person. There is a flavor of secret, curiosity, adventure, amazement and a strong mutual wish for spending time together, for communicating, for learning about each other. Sparks and wood become fire. God designed us that way, He also designed us to enkindle that fire and keep it burning nice and shiny. Love is not just a sentimental feeling, nor is it a simple affection. It is also an act of the will, a determination to give love and look after another person.

Every marriage has problems. From the honeymoon, all along the way, partners struggle with their weaknesses, their differences and with the crises that life brings their way. Every marriage sees conflict. Every marriage has shared more pain than anyone outside knows. Every marriage is a journey of hills and valleys, highs and lows. Although all marriages have troubles, not all marriages are in trouble.

The way I see the threefold cord of marriage, the ideal and lasting marriage is **the combination of three healthy, independent and complementary relationships between 2 people:**

- **Best Friends**
- **Girlfriend-Boyfriend (Couple in Love)**
- **Lovers**

Let me explain each of these three relationships, we'll start with:

Best Friends *"Friendship is always a sweet responsibility, never an opportunity"* Friends develop, achieve and manage many things by spending time together before becoming best friends.

- Friends achieve a good level of **communication**. Communication that is open, attentive, respectful, interested, clear, fun, enjoyable, etc. not only with what we say but with our gestures, expressions, looks, tones, tears, shouts, frustrations, achievements, etc. we learn to know what is going on with our friend, at a glance.
- Friends achieve a good level of **trust and reliability** based on loyalty, honesty and a genuine interest in the growth, happiness, wellbeing and self improvement of each other. *"It is a better compliment to be trusted than to be loved"*
- Friends achieve a good level of **strength and courage** to say and listen criticism, scolding, complaints, exhortations, suggestions, etc that will inevitable be necessary for our individual growth and to strengthen the relationship as friends and as couple. *"The best way out is always through"*
- Friends achieve a good level of **fun and enjoyment**, *"You can't stay mad at somebody who makes you laugh"*. If two people can't have fun together, if they can't make each other laugh, if they can't make each other **think**, if they don't have a big desire to see each other and do things together, if two people don't enjoy being with each other they can't and shouldn't be friends, much less a couple, but sadly they can be lovers and even spouses, at least for some time...
- Friends develop a good level of **mutual admiration**, this is very important because it means that we'll be paying closer attention to the positive things, rather than the negative of our friend or couple. We cannot commit to be friends nor

couple nor give pleasure to a person we don't admire for what it is. To admire someone also helps us to ***“Never let a problem to be solved become more important than a person to be loved”***. Also, admiring someone will make us try to improve ourselves, it makes us seek the admiration of our friend or couple.

- Friends develop a good level of **forgiveness**. In every relationship there will be mistakes, frictions, misunderstandings and more. This can result in break ups or strengthening of the relationship, Depending on our capacity to admit, ask for forgiveness and forgive ***“Love me more when I deserve it the least because that's when I need it the most”***

“Treat your friends as you do your pictures, and place them in their best light”.

In closing the **“Best Friends”** concept has a lot to do with the mind: responsibility, communication, trust, reliability, strength, courage, fun, enjoyment, thinking, admiration and forgiveness are more related to our thoughts, to our will, to things we learn to do and decide to do. They are the ones that make a relationship last, by choice and not by chance.

The next relationship is Boyfriend-Girlfriend, the couple in love, the fire in the heart...

“If there is anything better than to be loved it is loving”

The Boyfriend-Girlfriend relationship contains many of the elements of friendship, of course, but I will describe the complementary elements:

- **Romanticism**, ***“I'd rather have roses in my table than diamonds in my neck”***. This is a basic and marvelous ingredient that unfortunately is not very trendy nowadays. It is perceived as attempt on gender equality, it's considered corny or old fashioned, but when we see an older couple holding hands and watching the sunset, can you imagine all that implies?, the greatness of their achievement? All that they have overcome? how much love was and is necessary? I'm sorry but the red roses, the hug, holding hands, to see each other in the eyes, the note in the mirror, the message in the cel phone, open the car door for her, kiss her hand, see the sunset or moon together, dine with candles, etc. do not attempt against any equality, do not make anyone less and they do give a delicious touch to a couple's relationship.
- **Compliments** ***“I wish I was cross-eyed so I could see you double”*** Everything from noticing the new hair dress, clothes, perfume to complimenting, acknowledging how good she/he looks, said, did or achieved to flattering to proudly introduce him/her when we run into someone to asking her/him to dance when there is an opportunity to admiring to asking for a kiss or hug, etc everything counts ***“With you, I live asleep and dream awake”***
- **Exclusivity**, ***“In love, one and one are one”***. This is the base for the “lovers” relationship and has to do with the shared life, in everything, it has to do with the kisses and mutual attentions, with the shared or fused values with being together before “for better or for worse” it has to do with “for your eyes only” and with a mutual respect in everything.

- **To please.** This has a good dose of taking care of ourselves, with getting ready, with dressing up nicely to please the other, with having nice manners, language to please the other, with not doing what annoys the other and we can concede. With dedicating the most valuable time to share it with our couple. The fat guy in pajama type pants sitting in front of the TV, without having shaved or showered, grumbling and drinking beer all day (or its equivalent in a woman) is exactly what's NOT to please. ***“Very often a change of self is needed more than a change of scene”***. The day we should better dress and get ready and be willing to go out and do things is when we do it for our couple!! Not for our workmates, clients, suppliers, bankers, etc. We should always get ready as when we were trying to conquer her/him. Have a special day or days a week, do trips together, do new things, discover new places, keep the fire alive and avoid boring routines.
- **Future** ***“To make a great dream come true, you must first have a great dream”*** a shared great dream in this case. As the Boyfriend-Girlfriend relationship is also the prelude to marriage, to living together and to creating a new home, then a family, here is where the shared dreams are born, where the plans are created, where the wishes of a new life emerge, the beginning of shared challenges and satisfactions. It's unnecessary to mention that the stronger the friendship and the boyfriend-girlfriend relationships are, the stronger the resulting marriage will be.
- **Sponsors**, ***“The real measure of your wealth is how much you'd be worth if you lost all your money”*** In any relationship there will be good and bad times for one, for the other or for both. Income cannot be ahead of the commitment to love, much less replace it. Nor the one making less money, treated as less worthy. You cannot be lazy either, we can all lose a job or go bankrupt but not stay unemployed or broke forever. We always want more but we cannot destroy a relationship because we don't have everything. ***“If you have much, give of your wealth; if you have little, give of your heart”***.
- **Permanence**, ***“Get a life in which you are not alone. Find a person you love, and who loves you. And remember that love is not leisure; it is work”*** As friendship, the Boyfriend-Girlfriend relationship is not to wear out nor end after marriage because it is a very important base for living in couple all the way from honeymoon to aging together and even to seeing one die. As a matter of fact it needs to grow and be complement of the “lovers” element of the threefold cord and be present every day with the same intensity and care than when we started dating and conquering each other... ***“The future never just happened. It was created”***.

Girlfriend-Boyfriend has more to do with the heart, with the feelings for each other, with the emotions, the closeness and warmth, with the fire in our hearts and it is more delicate to good or bad care, so watch out!! Be diligent in enkindling the fire not just keeping it alive.

“Love doesn't make the world go round. Love is what makes the ride worthwhile”.

Last but not least is the **Lovers** element; a potent drive installed in us by our creator, an instinct type attraction to the opposite sex, the hardest to control, the most likely to make us fall and thus, the most used by our enemy to hurt ourselves and others. On the other hand a beautiful blessing and marvelous gift when in God's planned context.

Lovers, this is where the “love is blind” comes from. Let’s separate it from the other 2 elements for a moment.

You can be lovers without being friends and/or couple in love and obtain as much physical pleasure as being.

I must also recognize that every relationship has some of friends and couple in love.

But when we start here, as lovers, it is hard to develop or appreciate the importance of friendship and boyfriend-girlfriend relationships because being lovers is so intense, palpable, obvious, fast, enjoyable, satisfying, etc. that we lose sensitivity and interest in the preceding steps, in the foundations, which we no longer recognize as such. Why walk if we are there already? Or make a fast track? But without the 3legs, the table is going to fall, sooner or later.

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh” Genesis 2:24

At that time “leaving his father and mother” means that you would leave your parent’s home to start your own, so being joined and becoming one flesh was the culmination of a previous enrichment of the relationship, as we just said. This does not go very much with our present culture but it is still true and not following this original plan is probably the main cause of our high divorce rate. Also, this potent drive is temporary as it starts long after we are born, somewhere in our teens, and starts fading away as we become elders and, in most cases, ends before we die.

Before going into the elements of “Lovers” let’s analyze it with the other two parts of the threefold cord so we can see how nicely they complement each other and how vulnerable one or two alone are. We can also see why we ought to start being friends and evolve to couple in love to lovers and not the other way around.

Element:	Friendship	Boyfriend-Girlfriend	Lovers
Governed mainly by:	Mind and Will	Heart-Senses	Instinct
Drive:	Decision	Feeling	Urge
Length:	Lifetime	Relationship/Event	15 to 75
Endurance if it’s the only element to hold from:	High	Medium	Low
Intensity	Low	Medium	High
We are in control	Pretty much	Kind of	Barely
Key concept	Idea	Kiss	Sex
Main characteristics:	responsibility, communication, trust, reliability, strength, courage, fun, enjoyment, thinking, admiration and forgiveness	romanticism, compliment, exclusivity, to please, sharing (plans, dreams, sponsorship, etc), permanence	commandment (be fruitful and multiply) frequent (do not deprive one another), Intense, generous (giving, caressing), oneness, etc.

So Lovers is not a good starting point as it is blind, we are barely in control of it and often causes problems.

“...And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

However, when it is the culmination, the fulfillment, the result and the complement of Best Friend and Couple in Love, “Lovers” is a powerful source of pleasure, passion, self esteem, health both emotional and physical, relaxation, communication, romanticism, flirting, complimenting and permanence. Some characteristics are:

- **Comanmdment, “Be fruitful and multiply”**we are designed for it, it was created for us to fulfill our mission and it was made very pleasurable in order to assure the fruitfulness and multiplication, so enjoy obeying!!
- **Intense, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” Ephesians 5:25** There is no space for reluctance or lack of enthusiasm, every time has to be special, unique and lovely. *“My candle burns at both ends; it will not last the night; but oh, my foes, and oh, my friends (or oh, my love) it gives a lovely light”*
- **Generous, “Love is what’s left in a relationship after all selfishness has been removed”**. The main characteristic of a good lover is that he/she focuses in finding, giving and doing what pleases the other. This usually echoes and forms a virtuous circle of pleasure and satisfaction. **“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” Ephesians 5:28**
- **Frequent, “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” 1 Corinthians 7:3** Frequency is not only a biblical obligation but a good gauge to measure how good is our physical and emotional health and also to measure how strong is the Threefold Cord we need to keep the marriage going on
- **Oneness**, The being one flesh, the caressing, massaging a backache or tired feet are all part of being one **“he who loves his wife loves himself”** (and vice versa) and it’s very important for an effective and lasting relationship.

“Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth...”

“...And always be enraptured with her love”

Proverbs 18a & 19b

Marriage is a wonderful institution, full of blessings, satisfaction and pleasure but a lot of work is needed from both parties to keep it healthy, fun, enjoyable and protected from the many menaces it will have, specially the most dangerous of them all: ourselves.

When husband and wife are Best Friends, when they remain in love as Boyfriend and Girlfriend and when they are dedicated and passionate lovers, their marriage is not only much stronger, but also more fun, enjoyable, warm, successful, etc. Easy? Maybe not, we all have some things to work out but I'm sure it's worth the effort.

Let us all married people improve our friendship, enkindle our love, remember our original dreams and get some new ones, let's love our couple as God commands us to.

Let all young singles be wise and wait for the couple God has for each of you, your perfect match, and develop a strong friendship, a respectful boyfriend-girlfriend relationship and a wonderful threefold cord marriage.

Let God lead our steps and protect our marriages, let God help us do our part, let God choose the right friends and couples for our singles of any age.

God bless you all

God we thank You for this day and for Your blessings and for everything You place in our path.

We thank You for the troubles and challenges too. Many times we do not understand what You are doing in our lives, even then we praise You Lord. And we ask that You give us understanding, strength, patience, courage, peace and faith in the fact that You are in full control and that everything is for Your glory.

We ask that You bless us all this week in our work, our travelling, our homes and our marriages.

In the name of Jesus our Lord we pray. Amen