

# "The Married Couple that Eats Johnny Cake Sticks Together"

Six Brennen Secrets for a happy, long marriage

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Sabbath, July 20, 2002

Grant's Town Church

Alfred & Mary Brennen 51<sup>st</sup> Wedding Anniversary

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Hymn: Living for Jesus

Praise Songs: "I'm satisfied with just a cottage below"

"If you know the Lord"

"Love Wonderful Love"

"He's Everything to Me"

"Lord I lift your Name on High."

A little boy about 10 years old was standing before a shoe store on Broadway, New York, barefooted, peering through the window, and shivering with cold. A lady approached the boy and said: "My little fellow, why are you looking so earnestly in that window?"

"I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes," was the boy's reply. The lady took him by the hand and went into the store, and asked the clerk to get half a dozen pairs of socks for the boy. She then asked if he could give her a basin of water and a towel. He quickly brought them to her. She took the little fellow to the back part of the store and, removing her gloves, knelt down, washed his little feet and dried them with a towel. By this time the clerk had returned with the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy's feet, she purchased him a pair of shoes, and tying up the remaining pairs of socks, gave them to him. She patted him on the head and said, "**No doubt, my little fellow, you feel more comfortable now?**" As she turned to go, the astonished lad caught her by the hand, and looking up in her face, with tears in his eyes, answered the question with these words: "**Are you God's Wife?**"

Perhaps in this little boy's mind, someone who is kind and generous has to be married. Perhaps he had in his mind that kind people never work alone: They are married people. He had a good concept of marriage. The truth is God the Father never works alone. Along with His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, they are the most powerful force in the universe working together. All other energies, and powers come from God. Two are better than one.

The very first occurrence of the word **marriage** used in the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual is found in Revelation 19:9: "**Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.**"

This is telling us that the best imagery for the second coming of Christ is a wedding ceremony--the marriage between a man and a woman. It also tells us that marriage is divine. "**Marriage is the foundation of human society, and true affection between man and woman is ordained of God.**" In the year 2000, the Adventist Church responded to Proposition 22 in California, where Californians were being asked to approve or reject a constitutional amendment on the ballot that said, "*Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.*" Here is one statement from the article we wrote:

"It is self-evident to Adventists that marriage involves a man and a woman. Marriage is the foundation of all society. The health of this institution is a measure of the state of the entire country. The California Protection of Marriage Initiative, Proposition 22, is designed to insure that California need not recognize gay marriages, when and if they become legal in other states. Similar amendments have been approved in many other states. Adventists can strongly support California making a constitutional commitment to traditional marriage."

The Bible does tell us about the advantages of marriage or two becoming one.

**Our text Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says this:**

- <sup>9</sup>. Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:  
<sup>10</sup> If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!  
<sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?  
<sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

**This modern day poem states it so beautifully:**

When two people are at one in their inmost hearts,  
They shatter even the strength of iron or bronze.  
And when two people understand each other in their inmost hearts,  
Their words are sweet and strong, like the fragrance of orchids.

Today we are honoring two people who have become one of the most powerful forces on earth –two of the most beautiful people on earth for their 51 year-long-love-affair, marriage: Alfred and Mary Brennen. Congratulations Mom and Dad. We love you. You have lived together for 51 glorious years.

It was also on July 21, 1977, 25 years ago, in Martinique, when Annick and I joined in holy matrimony. It was also on June 18, 1977, 25 years ago when my beautiful big-eye, sister, Judith got married to Don Edwards in Jamaica. Our parents met on the dance floor, during a slow dance. I met Annick in front of the seat of the scornful, West Indies College, Mandeville Jamaica. Judith met Don in the college chapel at West Indies College.

Most recent American statistics tell us that 5 to 6 marriages out of ten will end in divorce. In the Bahamas, the most recent statistics reveal that 2 out of ten marriages end up in divorce.

Here's what most interesting: The divorce rate for **FIRST** marriages is about 3 to 4 out of every ten marriages. The divorce rate for **SECOND** marriages is about 6 to 7 out of every ten marriages. The divorce rate for **THIRD** marriages is about 7 to 8 out of every ten marriages. Your odds of succeeding are far greater if you stick it out with the one you've got. The divorce rate for couples who "**pray together regularly**" is ONE out of 152. We have reasons to celebrate the long marriage of two people who had no one else. They never sneaked out of the house. They've always been faithful to each other.

Remember the statistics stated that the divorce rate for couples who "**pray together regularly**" is ONE out of 152. I want to conjecture that the divorce rate for couples who "pray, play, eat, and sleep together is ONE out of 500. My point is that the fundamental reason for divorce is that couples grow apart. And they grow apart because they neglect to care for each other and themselves as they first did to capture each other. They neglect to pray, play, eat, and sleep together on a regular basis. They become too busy and selfish.

On a survey I usual conduct at my seminars on marriage, I ask a question about "Challenges in your marriage." The points to choose from include:

- Poor communication
- Spiritual apathy
- Lack of intimacy
- No fun time together
- Abuse
- Too busy

The two that always come out on top is "No fun time together" and "Too busy." This is a strategy of the devil. Keep us busy, so busy we die romantically and spiritually.

Note that my sermon title is "The couple the eats johnny cake stick together." There's a reason

I've chosen this topic as you will soon see.

**"What exactly is marriage?" A man was invited talk to a kindergarten Sabbath School class about marriage and family life.** He asked the question "When you hear the word marriage what do you think about?" A little four-year-old in the front of the group pushed her hand up and said **"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."**

In another setting children were asked the same question and here are their answers:

- Six-year-old Eric answered, "Marriage is when you get to keep your girl and don't have to give her back to her parents."
- Kirsten, age 10, "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all the way before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with."
- Eight-year-old Lynnette had an answer to the question, "What exactly is marriage?" She said, "It's when you go to church, and a man whispers something in your ear, and it makes you cry, and then he gets to kiss you for what you said."
- Nine-year-old Valerie had the best answer, " You have a marriage when you and a boy go to see a preacher, and the preacher changes your name and makes you a lady right there on the spot--in front of everyone."

A childlike view of marriage is fun isn't it? Every answer has an tiny bit of truth in it.

This morning I am going to talk about **six** principles for a healthy, loving, long-lasting, marriage. **What did the Brennens do to have such a long and loving relationship?** I stress the word **"loving"** because having worked with so many couples, literally every day, I discovered that a long marriage is not always a sign of a good marriage. Many just endure, survive, put up, and rough it out. I call them boot-camp marriages. I can say that Alfred and Mary's marriage of 51 years is a good one. It is a loving one. It was and is a passionate one.

Let's look at some of the secrets that keep marriages going on and on and on . . . .

## SIX SECRETS

Here are the Alfred and Mary Brennen's secrets for a happy and long marriage.

1. **They discovered the power in a slice of Johnny Cake.**

**My Text:** Acts 16:34 "Then he took them up into his house and set food before them; and he leaped much for joy and exulted with all his family that he believed in God accepting and joyously welcoming what He had made known through Christ."

Typically all the Brennen family members will get a call, and on the other end of the line would be our mother with the words "Come and get a piece of Johnny Cake." And we would run home like little children for our piece of Johnny Cake. We all love Johnny Cake (especially when Mom makes it with some whole wheat flour). It's a family tradition in our home, I believe, works magic. Well it is not really the Johnny Cake itself, but the tradition of the Brennen's Johnny Cake that reminds me of perhaps the most important ingredients for a good marriage: That is **establishing long lasting family rituals. Eating together** as a family is very important. The family that never eats together is a weak family. Whether it is once a week or every day, eating together should be done regularly. It fosters fellowship, dialogue, and connection. There is something magical about the family pot and the dining room table.

Another important ritual that the Brennen's Johnny cake reminds me of **is family worship time.** There must be a family altar in every home. That's what I've been taught. **The family that prays together stays together.** (Expand. Abraham, etc) Another important ritual is

**family fun-time.** Couples first need to set aside each week a time for themselves alone.

2. **They discovered the magic in a birthday card.** They still give birthday cards to each other, and to all of the family members.

**My text** here is Romans 12:10:

King James Version: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another."

New Living Translation: "Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."

This speaks to the importance of keeping the fires of love burning in marriage. It is continuing to do what you did to get each other in the first place. That is what they did to get each other 51 years ago, they are still doing it to keep each other now. It is so easy to forget to say "I love you," to share those love notes, birthday and Valentines Cards. They are still doing these things. I could remember the first time I saw them kiss. When children know their parents are happy and they can see it, children are happy and secured. (Expand)

3. **They discovered the secret power of a loving tongue.** The favorite passage of my father is this:

**My text:** Proverbs 25:11: "Words fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

**New Living Translation:** "Timely advice is as lovely as golden apples in a silver basket."

**Proverbs 16:24:** "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones."

I've never heard an unkind word coming from my parents. Too many homes are being destroyed everyday simply because someone would not control his or her tongue. **Proverbs 21:23** Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.

**Psalm 52:2** "The tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

**James 1:26** "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. "

Couples must learn when it is the best time to communicate with their mates. Proverbs 27:14 "If you shout a pleasant greeting to your neighbor too early in the morning, it will be counted as a curse!" Couples must use the tongue to say things that uplift, encourage and comfort each other at the right time.

4. **They discovered the secret of pubic love talk.**

**My text** is Solomon 2:2-4 "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. <sup>4</sup> **He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love."**

I call this the "Columbo effect." What is the Columbo Effect? If you watch the Columbo Detective Series on television, you can't help but notice and fall in love with an actor you never see--Columbo's wife. In every episode Columbo mentions something about his wife and sometimes his children and grandchildren. He takes something home for his wife in every episode. I call this gossiping about each other. It is publically acknowledging your love for your spouse. To protect your marriage and love for each other it is important to

gossip about your partner when he or she is not in your presence. That's one secret in preventing or reducing the risk of infidelity. Too many spouses hide the fact that they are married. They don't sit together in church. They are afraid to hold hands in public.

5. **They discovered the secret of first things first.** One author said "Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least."

**My text** is Ruth 1:16 "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Family come before everything--even church responsibilities. In a world where so much is competing for our attention, if we don't place our spouses, and our families number one they will end up being in last position or our relationships will just dissipate--evaporate in thin air. Think about it: The average child spends seven hours a day watching TV and five minutes with Dad. The average couple spends four to five hours a day watching TV and ten minutes with each other (excluding sleep time together). My parents realized this fact: "The greatest thing you can do for your children is to love your spouse." I've discovered that too many Bahamians are putting their children, career, church above their spouse. If not in word, certainly in action.

**In Ephesians 5: 29 it says** For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church. The verse before says "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself."

The key word is "cherish." The word "cherish" denotes closeness. In the Greek it means "bodily heat" And you cannot create bodily heat if you don't get close, and stay close, not just on Friday nights . . .

6. **They discovered the power of laughter.**

**My Text:** Proverbs 17:22 "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." NIV

The Brennens have a healthy sense of humor. Laughter is one of the spicy secret ingredients for a happy relationship. Too many husbands and wives take their lives too seriously. They have lost the ability to laugh together. If you can't laugh with your spouse your marriage will dry up. There have been many scientific studies that show laughter does help to improve the immune system, because when we laugh, our brain releases all kinds of wonderfully happy hormones into our bodies. Also, learning how to incorporate laughter in marriage will add to the health of the relationship. You must have a sense of humor to keep the fires of love burning in your marriage. Laughter will strengthen the marital immune system--called romance.

What is most painful is that too many Adventist marriages are being messed up by a third party--people having affairs. We have some bold-faced, holy looking women in the church who don't care whether a man is married or not. We have some dark-suit-wearing men who also refuse to control their fantasies and passions and are dangerously pursuing the married and single young women. **Proverbs 6:32 says:** "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding: He who does so destroys his own soul."

The Apostle Paul has something to say about this in Ephesians 5:1-6:

1. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.
2. And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering

and sacrifice to God.

3. But among you there must not be even a **hint of sexual immorality**, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

4. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

5. For of this you can be sure: **No immoral**, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

<sup>6</sup>Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

The point today is that a good, happy and healthy, long-lasting marriage is not by default. If there is a marriage by default, it is an unhappy one. Good marriages take work and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. When we put first things first in our lives and our marriages, by God's help we will have happy marriages.

(Illustration with stones and sand)

In closing I am going to illustrate this. I have here a few rocks and some sand. The sand represents our lives and the rocks represent the things that enrich our lives. The things we must put first in our lives. Just for illustration each stone represents each of the six points I presented as secrets to a happy and long marriage.

1. Family rituals
2. Affection
3. Kind words
4. Columbo Effect - public acknowledgment of our relationships
5. First things firsts.

To get all the stone in you must put them in the jar first. If not, they will not all fit in with the sand. Similarly, we must put first things first in our lives to have a meaningful marriage.

Dear marriage couples, today, remember to put first things first in your marriage, and God will take care of the rest.