



Why? Why! Why are the Gore's separating? Everybody who cares about relationships is trying to figure it out. I too have been trying to understand the Gore phenomenon. Having worked in both marriage and divorce ministry for many years, I've found that sometimes divorce can teach us a lot about the fragility of marriage.

Sometimes it's predictable. A couple gets married too young, for the wrong reasons, with only a soft commitment, or their personalities are just too different for easy day to day living. Most of these couples divorce within the first seven years of marriage though. A couple who has made it four decades is not separating because of personality differences - unless they've been leading parallel lives where they are sheltered from each other rather than sheltered by each other.

We have to get beyond dissecting the Gore's marriage, however, and look for lessons that might help the rest of us. What makes marriages not just last, but thrive? Is it commitment, hard work, knowledge, skills, lack of celebrity, or just dumb luck? Who knows? It's dangerous to compare marriages or children. Each one is unique. The Gore's announcement, however, pulls us to ponder what makes marriages worth keeping.

Granted, sometimes it is just dumb luck, but we can increase our odds. Marrying at 23 and 25, my husband Jim and I had the emotions of love but a lot of naïveté about what might strain a marriage. We didn't know what we didn't know, but were committed to learning and growing old together. Following are some ideas that came to us as we pondered what can make a difference.

**Love and commitment are decisions, not feelings.** Yes, we also feel love for each other, but not always intensely. Sometimes it's more of a quiet comfort in knowing the other is there for us - and will be, till death do us part.

**Stay intellectually connected.** If one person advances in career or education, it can leave the other out of the loop. Companions who share more of our passions start to usurp the energy previously directed toward one's spouse. It's more stimulating to talk with someone who "gets it."

Sex is a bonder. Frequency of sex may diminish but quality should not.

Empty nesting can be a crisis or an opportunity. When the last child leaves home, it creates a gap in many couples' lives. Time and worry that used to be directed toward kids leaves a hole as couples realize that they had a partner in child rearing but not in life. Some intentionally renegotiate roles and discretionary time. For others, it's a welcome freedom to embark on new adventures without worrying whether the teens will have a wild party in their absence. Sure, invest heavily in your children, but don't over-invest to the point of losing your identities.

Link but don't tether. Pursuit of new activities together can reinvigorate but so can independent pursuits that we bring back to share. Jim helps me dig up the garden. I go on bike rides with him - some of the time. We dance, work, pray, and play - often together, but not always.

Focus on mutual challenges. We both still have "almost full time" jobs supplemented by too many volunteer involvements that cost us money rather than bringing it in. This forces us to live simply. It's a shared challenge.

Growing old means a changing physical appearance, but it doesn't have to mean being out of shape. Even for those of us who hate going to a gym, staying fit can mean climbing stairs or walking to the corner store rather than defaulting to the car. Often with age also comes the income and time to eat out more or indulge in comfort foods, leading to weight gain. Eating well - but not everything we could - and doing things for ourselves can save money, pounds, and disenchantment. We both have wrinkles. Some of them match.

Try to please the other. My husband suggested I write this article. I didn't want to do it. I'm certainly not a wimp who does anything he asks. I decided to do it out of love and knowing that gestures of kindness build relationship capital. He knows my favorite candy and periodically hides a chocolate Easter egg in interesting places around the house. It's like many mini-Easters.

Faith isn't magic, but it helps. Having a reason for living beyond one's personal pleasure helps us deal with those mysteries of life that don't always make sense. Having a faith community that supports marriage can balance our "It's all about me," throw-away culture. Enjoy each other. It takes time.