

THE
CHOICE

Wine™

7 STEPS TO A
SUPERABUNDANT
MARRIAGE

STEVE BOLLMAN



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First Edition

For Shelly

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Acknowledgments

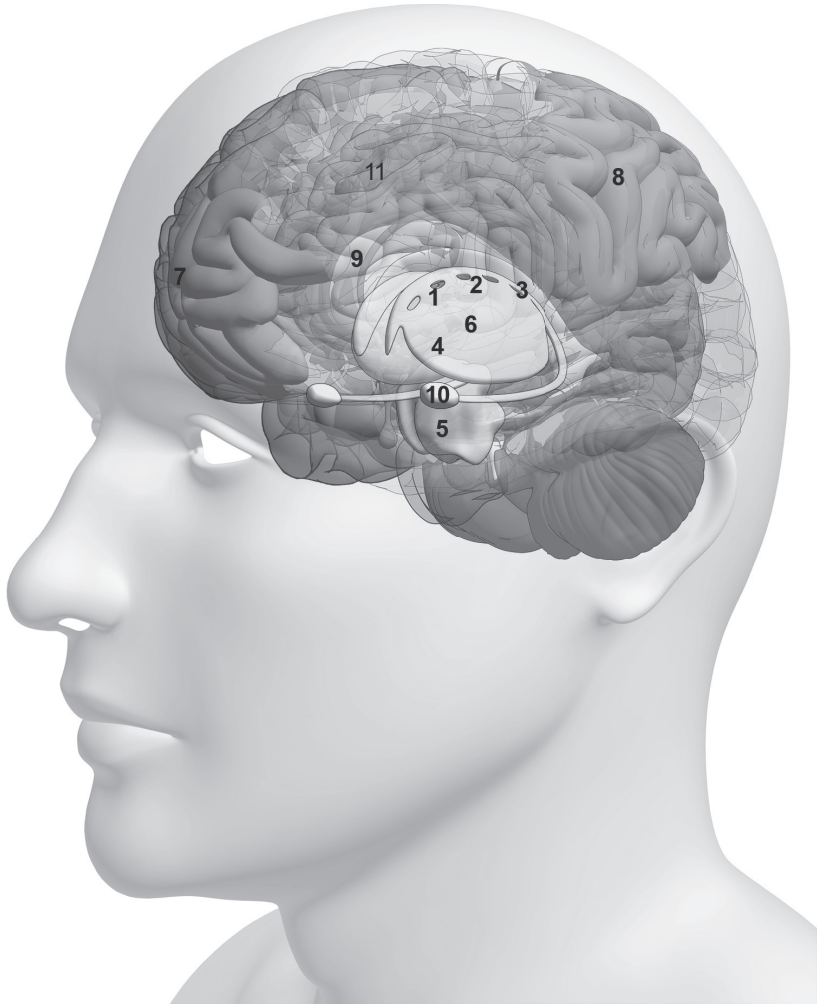
The material in the 7 Steps to a Superabundant Marriage has been in development for over a decade and has been seen by tens of thousands of people. As such, I owe a debt of gratitude to more people than I could ever mention. Of critical importance was a small couples' group where it all began, which included Allan and Connie Klenke, John and Kathleen O'Connor, Robert and Laura Lee Vaio, Bill and Lauren Granberry, Emery and Ann Biro, David and CeeCee Sladic, and Mark and Aileen Hansen.

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Above all, very special thanks go to my own family: Shelly, Anne Marie, and Mary Rose. I love you more than you will ever know. Thank you for making my life superabundant.



Brain Structures Important in Marriage

1. CAUDATE NUCLEUS: Forms part of the brain's reward circuitry by helping individuals identify and select specific rewards.
2. VENTRAL TEGMENTAL AREA (VTA): Forms part of the brain's reward circuitry. Contains dopamine producing cells.
3. NUCLEUS ACCUMBENS: Forms part of the brain's reward circuitry. Site where dopamine is released.
4. HYPOTHALAMUS: Contains sexual centers and secretes oxytocin and vasopressin, which are critical in the bonding between spouses.
5. MIDBRAIN: Contains trust centers and helps process fear.
6. DORSAL STRIATUM: Contains trust centers and provides a feedback loop to guide future behavior.
7. PREFRONTAL CORTEX: Center for decision making and planning complex cognitive behavior.
8. PARIETIAL LOBE: Processes sensory information and helps to determine a sense of self relative to surroundings.
9. ANTERIOR CINGULATE CORTEX: Center for empathy and compassion.
10. AMYGDALA: Processes emotion, especially fear and anxiety.
11. INSULA: Helps to control the body's homeostasis and perceives pain.

Tasting the Choice Wine

Is it possible to be truly happily married?

I'll be honest. I never gave the question much thought. I just assumed the answer was yes. I have a basically positive outlook on life and more or less accept the notion that you can accomplish whatever you set your mind to. I've read all the books and watched all the movies. The difficult part is up front when the boy meets the girl but can't have her. Once the boy gets the girl, they live happily ever after.

I first truly confronted the question when Shelly and I became engaged. To be polite, we were more mature than most people entering a first marriage. To be honest, we were old. I was almost 39, and Shelly was 37. When I announced our engagement to the other men at the office, I fully expected to go through the typical male ritual.

"Steve, have you lost your mind?"

"My condolences."

"Guys, Steve's getting ready for the ball and chain."

"Why would you throw away a great life to do that?"

Nonetheless, I had expected these joking comments to give way to more sincere expressions of congratulations. They never did. After a week or so, I began to suspect that behind the half smiles, something more was at work.

At the time, I was trading energy derivatives and nearing the end of a fifteen-year career in the oil industry in Texas. The oil industry has a history filled with colorful characters, with rugged individuals willing to risk everything in the hopes of striking it big and making millions. They thrive on risk

and pride themselves on their ability to live life on the edge, both professionally and personally. It showed in their personal lives. Many were divorced. Some several times. Others had very difficult relationships with their wives and children. Truth be told, I didn't see many people truly happily married. Eventually, I wearied of the sarcastic comments and decided to push back.

"Come on, guys. It can't be that bad. Some of you must be happy." To my surprise, they universally agreed that no one was happily married. Let me make sure that I do not *understate* their response. First, they were not personally happily married. Second, no one they knew was happily married. Finally, they believed it was impossible for anyone to remain happily married. It soon became obvious that they had given up hope of happiness in married life.

Before long, my buddies decided to prove their point to this "starry-eyed lover." They began to ask one another the question, "How long were you happily married before it went bad?" The shortest answer was less than a day.

"We had a horrible fight on our wedding night, and it got worse from there."

The longest answer was a year, which was then very heavily qualified as a theoretical goal to be desired.

"My own marriage wasn't bad through six months, but by a year it had certainly gone down."

Although the answers varied in the length of time given, there was a very clear theme. For these men, happiness in marriage consisted of one thing: good sex. When the "newlywed sex" ended, the happy marriage ended. It then descended into an unwritten point system. To get what you truly wanted you had to give something to your spouse that she truly wanted. "I'll let you go out drinking with the boys if I get to . . ." According to my buddies, your greatest hope in married life was to master this unwritten point system so that the payback never cost more than the joy received from doing what you truly wanted to do.

I'll be honest. I was a bit shaken by the extent of their skepticism. These men had abandoned any hope of "living happily ever after." Nonetheless, the more I pondered their responses, the more I realized they sounded a lot like another group of men—the apostles of Jesus Christ.

Near the end of Christ's public ministry, the leaders of the Jewish community came up to Jesus and asked him a simple question:

"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" (Matthew 19:3). Jesus responded, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Matthew 19:4–6).

Throughout history, this verse has been critically important in forming Christianity's teaching on marriage and divorce. At least indirectly, reformations and wars can be tied to the interpretation of this verse. However, I would like to simply focus on the response of the apostles:

"If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry" (Matthew 19:10).

It is easy to read the apostle's response without giving it much thought, so let me put it into context. This scene occurs not long before the end of Christ's life. Therefore, the apostles have been living and traveling with Christ for almost three years. They have seen him walk on the water and multiply the loaves. They have seen him give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. They have even seen him raise the dead to life. They have heard him define his moral code in the Sermon on the Mount. They have even identified him as the "son of God." Nonetheless, as soon as Christ says that once you get married, you have to stay married, they effectively respond by saying, "Fine, then we won't get married!" Apparently, the thought of living happily ever after wasn't on the radar screen for the apostles either.

Marriage as a Pathway to Superabundance

It was easy for me to write off the skepticism of the men in the oil industry, but Christ's own apostles? I loved Shelly and couldn't imagine it would ever come to an end. What was a not-so-young, starry-eyed lover to do? Well, if you have an MBA on top of an undergraduate engineering degree, you set out to find some objective data. I quickly discovered that in the past generation, a mountain of research has been conducted on marriage. This research reveals that marriage is really good for you. Indeed, married

people are significantly happier, healthier, and wealthier than people who are not married. That’s not a bad start. Who doesn’t want to be happy, healthy, and wealthy?

Furthermore, the data revealed a very interesting pattern, which I’ve come to call the *marriage premium*. Let’s call the never-married state the base state since everyone begins life as a single person. When you get married, there is a significant increase in happiness, health, and wealth. However, if you get divorced, you lose the marriage premium, and your happiness, health, and wealth fall back to the never-married starting state.

Happiness

Data from one of the largest sociological databanks in the country, the General Social Survey, indicates that married people are happier than single, divorced, separated, or widowed people (see Figure 1.1). Indeed, married people are almost twice as likely as people from the other marital categories to be “very happy” with their lives. This is the marriage premium for happiness. Furthermore, according to the General Social Survey, single, divorced, separated, or widowed people are significantly more likely to be “not too happy” with their lives versus married people.¹

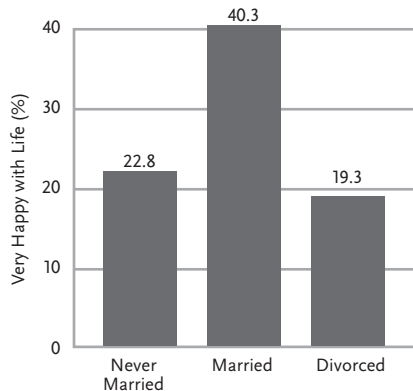


Figure 1.1: Marital Status and Happiness

Source: General Social Survey, 1972–2012.

Health

The data also reveals a marriage premium for health. When the General Social Survey asked respondents for a self-assessment of their general health (excellent, good, fair, or poor), there was a very clear relationship to marital status (see Figure 1.2). On the surface, the marriage premium on health seems fairly small—especially relative to the marriage premium on happiness. But let’s take a look at it from another perspective—those who are struggling with their health. According to the survey, only 2.9 percent of married adults between ages 36–50 are in poor health. Yet, 5.1 percent of never-married adults and 5.5 percent of divorced adults of similar ages are in poor health.² This equates to a 75 percent increase in poor health for those who have never been married and a 90 percent increase for those who have been divorced. That’s a significant change.

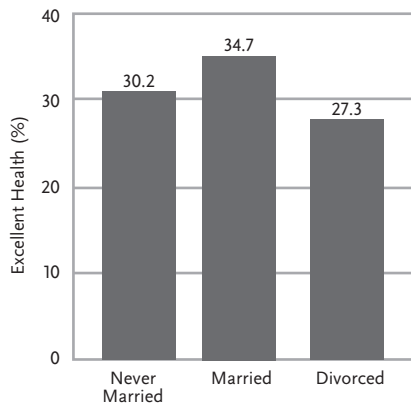


Figure 1.2: Marital Status and Health
Source: General Social Survey, 1972–2012.

This subjective assessment of general health is manifested in real-life experience. When the survey asked the respondents, “How many days of poor physical health did you experience in the past 30 days?” we once again encounter the marriage premium. The average 36- to 50-year-old who has never been married experiences 1.13 additional poor physical health days each month compared to the average 36- to 50-year-old married person. That translates into 13.5 additional poor health days each year, or almost

two weeks of additional poor health! This is a very big number, especially for men and women who are usually in their prime productive years between the ages of 36 and 50.

This correlation between health and marital status endures throughout life until the moment we die. Data from the US Department of Health and Human Services indicates that married people are only half as likely to die in a given year as those in all other marital status categories. This relationship holds true across all age groups.³

Wealth

The data also reveals a marriage premium for wealth. Janet Wilmoth and Gregor Koso from Purdue University tracked 9,824 individuals throughout their adult life history to determine the impact of marital status on preretirement wealth accumulation. Their study indicates that individuals who marry once and remain married their entire adult life accumulate significantly more wealth than any other marital history (see Figure 1.3).

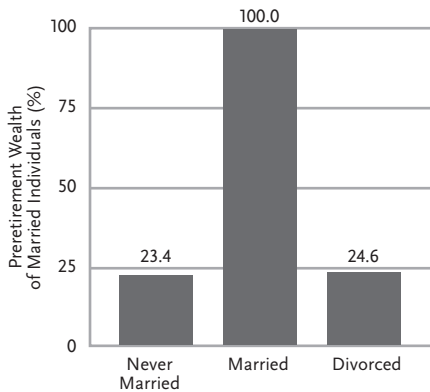


Figure 1.3: Marital Status and Wealth

Source: Wilmoth, J., and Koso, G., "Does Marital History Matter? Marital Status and Wealth Outcomes Among Preretirement Adults," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64 (2002): 254–268.

The magnitude of the difference is almost shocking. Continuously married individuals accumulate approximately four times the net wealth of those individuals who have never been married or who are divorced.⁴ Interestingly,

if a divorced person remarries, they are able to make up much of this lost ground. Their preretirement net wealth is only 30 percent lower than that of continuously married couples.⁵ However, if they get divorced a second time, it's a double whammy. Their accumulated net wealth is approximately five times lower than continuously married individuals.⁶ That's significant!

Other researchers have also discovered the huge financial advantage enjoyed by married individuals. It is frequently assumed that economies of scale largely explain this financial marriage premium. In other words, a married couple has only one house payment as opposed to two, they can specialize in tasks, and so on. Interestingly, Wilmoth and Koso tracked individuals who were never married but were cohabitating. In theory, these cohabitating couples would enjoy the same economies of scale as married couples. Nonetheless, the study indicated that married couples still amass more than four times the preretirement net wealth of never-married but cohabitating couples.⁷ The data clearly indicates that marriage is good for your pocketbook.

The Black Cloud in Marriage Statistics

When it comes to the research on marriage, this is truly just the tip of the iceberg. The good news is that it all points in the same direction. Marriage is really good for you. As such, how can I explain the general skepticism regarding marriage I encountered when Shelly and I got engaged? Simply put, a good portion of my coworkers were either divorced or in very difficult marriages that seemed to be headed toward divorce. They were not experiencing the marriage premium on happiness, health, or wealth. Indeed, many of them had fallen back to their starting point in terms of happiness, health, and wealth, but now they were ten, twenty, or even thirty years older.

I wish I could say that their experience was the exception to the rule. But it's not. To be honest, their experience of marriage is all too common. Indeed, to gain a more complete understanding of the impact of marriage on the individual, we need to consider some additional data. According to data published by the US Census Bureau, approximately 40 percent of all first marriages in the United States will end in divorce (see Figure 1.4).⁸ Indeed, 20 percent of first marriages end within 10 years.⁹ The failure rate for second marriages is even higher.¹⁰

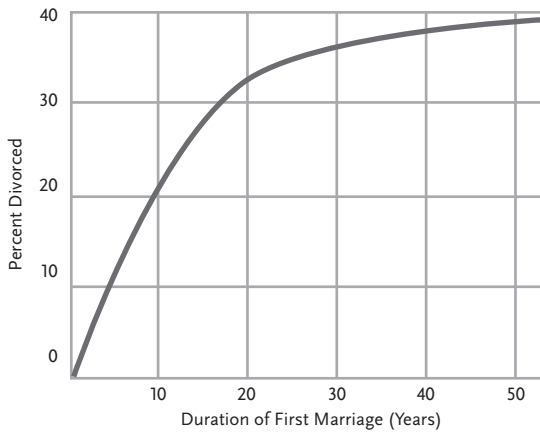


Figure 1.4: First Marriages Ending in Divorce

Source: US Census Bureau, "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces, 2009," (May 2011).

Furthermore, when you consider the data on divorce, it is obvious that staying married has gotten more difficult over time. Returning to survey data, fewer than one in five (18.8 percent) marriages begun during the 1930s ended in divorce.

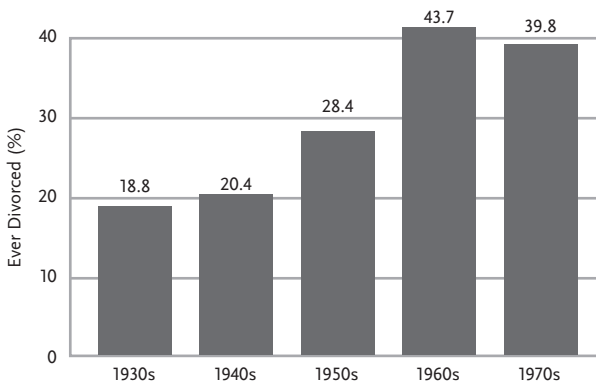


Figure 1.5: Changes in Divorce Rate

Source: US Census Bureau, "Number, Timing and Duration of Marriages and Divorces, 2009," (May 2011).

This number more than doubled to over 40 percent for marriages begun during the 1960s or later. Although we haven't seen the complete picture for marriages begun more recently, the data indicates that the divorce rate for first marriages remains at essentially 40 percent.¹¹

Suddenly, the skepticism I encountered regarding marriage began to make more sense. Marriage can be a risky proposition. When it works out, you experience a marriage premium in terms of happiness, health, and wealth. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that it will work out. Indeed, two in five marriages fail; and when they fail, you fall to a level below your starting point. Although my buddies didn't say it in such simple terms, the conclusion was simple: Marriage just isn't worth the risk.

A Simple Answer to a Difficult Problem

Sifting through the mountains of studies and data on marriage, I was able to better grasp the true issue at hand. Marriage is really good for you when it works, but unfortunately a substantial number of marriages don't work. How was a not-so-young, starry-eyed lover to find the secret to marital success? Fortunately, I knew a great place to turn to: my future father-in-law and mother-in-law.

E. Riley Leggett and Rose Mary Pellerin married on April 27, 1957. They were old enough to be part of what is now called *the Greatest Generation*. Riley was an incredible man. He lived the American Dream to the fullest. Born in a small farming town in East Texas in 1915, Riley was old enough to have personally experienced the harsh reality of the Great Depression. As he said, "I know what it is to hoe a row of cotton in the Texas heat and I know what it is like to go to bed hungry."

When the war came, Riley stayed home to care for his aging parents while his brothers were fully engaged in battle. After the war, Riley set about obtaining an education so that he could escape the harsh reality of his youth. He enrolled at the University of Texas in Austin. He truly walked several miles to school every day, from his aunt's house, where the board was free, to his classes, to his job at a local auto parts dealer, and then back to his aunt's house. Rain or shine, blistering heat or biting cold, the path was always the same. Eventually, the stress of attending classes, working, and

walking several miles every day took its toll, and Riley was unable to finish his degree.

Down but not out, Riley landed on his feet—literally. He hit the streets of Houston in 1952. In coat and tie, Riley trudged through the heat and humidity of Houston to work.

As he put it, “If you don’t have a nickel, you can’t pay the toll to ride the bus.”

After work, he began attending classes at the University of Houston and eventually completed his degree. He tried his hand at teaching, but the small town in which he was teaching ran out of money and dismissed classes early for the year. Realizing teaching would be a hard way to support a family, Riley got a job at a light manufacturing company in Houston. In time, he was able to buy into the partnership and Riley became a successful businessman.

Along the way Riley met the love of his life, Rose Mary Pellerin. Born in New Orleans in 1922, she too knew the struggles of the Great Depression. Her family moved to Houston when she just five years old. Times were difficult and Rose Mary had to wear hand-me-down tennis shoes (black high-tops) given to her by a boy. She was mortified. Rose Mary worked hard and put herself through college, graduating from the University of Houston in 1955—long before college degrees were common for young ladies. Rose Mary was beautiful and charming with a flair for culture and the arts. She traveled internationally when such behavior merited coverage by the Houston papers. Indeed, Rose Mary would grace the society pages of the Houston newspapers on more than one occasion.

When Riley and Rose Mary were married in 1957, she brought a joy into his life that is difficult to put into words, but was easily seen in the sparkle in their eyes. To be in their presence was to experience the joy of a couple in love. Together, they had four children and sixteen grandchildren.

When I met Shelly, Riley and Rose Mary were already living the golden years, fully reaping the rewards of the marriage premium. Their children were busy raising their own families. Riley was retired after a successful career. They were both in good health and had the financial resources and time to enjoy travel together. Indeed, the night Shelly and I went on our first

date, Riley and Rose Mary were busy chaperoning their oldest granddaughter's school trip to Europe! In Riley and Rose Mary, I knew I had a couple that could tell me the secret to their success in marriage.

An opportunity presented itself shortly before Shelly and I married. I found myself sitting on the couch next to Riley and Rose Mary without anyone else around. I thought I had the perfect opportunity to receive a little advice and score big-time with my future father-in-law. I mean, who wouldn't love a future son-in-law who has the humility to ask for a little advice? I asked what I thought was a perfectly brilliant question.

"Riley, in about a month, I'm going to marry your daughter. Considering how well you raised your family, do you have any advice for me?"

Very bad choice! Riley looked at me like I was from another planet. I could see the wheels spinning in Riley's mind: "This guy wants to marry my daughter and he doesn't have a clue what to do? What a dumb question! I can't tell him how to do it. You just do it."

He leaned over to Rose Mary and said, "You tell him. You did all the work."

Rose Mary promptly hit him and was just beginning to answer. But, before a word escaped her lips, Riley got a sparkle in his eye. The kind of sparkle someone gets when they are really proud of themselves. I could tell Riley was quite impressed with himself for coming up with an answer he didn't think he knew.

"I'll tell you what to do. Eat dinner with your family every night and sit in church with your family every Sunday. That just about covers it. Do that and everything will be just fine."

Rose Mary suddenly got a big smile. She didn't know Riley had it in him.

My response? That's a different story. I think it would be accurate to say that I progressed from one awkward moment to another. I mean, how do you respond to such advice? I think I came up with something incredibly brilliant along the lines of "Okay." The couch suddenly seemed very crowded and I began looking for an exit strategy.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I had just had a "Naaman the Syrian moment." Naaman was a general in the Syrian army, famous for fighting and winning battles. Unfortunately, he had the most dreaded disease of his day,

leprosy. One day a little servant girl to his wife suggested that Naaman go to the prophet Elisha in Israel to be cured of his leprosy. Naaman did what every important man of the day would do. He got a letter of introduction from the king and packed the camels with gold, silver, and festal garments.

When Naaman arrived, Elisha was not impressed. Indeed, he refused to go out to meet Naaman. Instead, he sent a note to Naaman telling him to go jump in the river: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean” (2 Kings 5:10).

Not surprisingly, Naaman went off in a very big huff. Fortunately, one of his servants reasoned with him, “My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” (2 Kings 5:13).

Naaman listened to the advice of his servant and cooled off—literally. He went and jumped in the river! When he came out his flesh was like that of a little child.

Truth be told, we all have more of Naaman the Syrian in us than we would like to admit. On the one hand, most of us are truly willing to move mountains to make life better for ourselves and those whom we love. On the other hand, that’s the problem. We keep looking for mountains to move. Frequently, small things—if they are the right small things—can make a very big difference. This is the wisdom that Riley Leggett understood and it is the wisdom he proposed to me.

The Wisdom of Riley

Let’s consider some data regarding Riley’s two suggestions to me. First, Riley suggested that I come home and eat dinner with my family every night. Believe it or not, every couple of years, researchers from Columbia University publish a study on the impact of eating dinner together. Amazingly, eating dinner together has a positive impact on just about every measure of a family’s life. Let’s specifically look at the impact on a family’s ability to live harmoniously together. Only 7 percent of families that eat dinner together five or more times a week experience a great deal of tension. However, 19 percent of families who eat dinner together twice or less every week experience a great deal of tension—an increase of more than 170 percent (see Figure 1.6).¹²

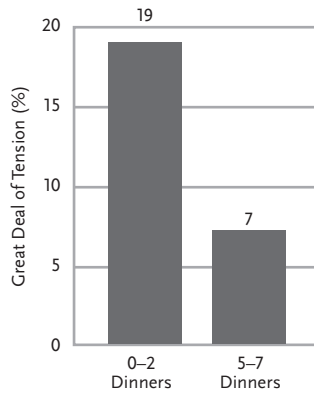


Figure 1.6: Family Dinner and Tension

Source: The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners II" (September 2005): p. 8.

Now let's consider Riley's second suggestion, to "sit in church together with your family every Sunday." Once again, a tremendous amount of research has been done regarding the impact of church attendance on marriage and family life. This research indicates that formal participation in organized worship services has a very strong relationship to marital stability. Returning to data from the General Social Survey, more than 40 percent of the people who never attend formal worship services have been divorced, whereas only 17 percent of those who attend worship services on a weekly basis have been divorced (see Figure 1.7).¹³

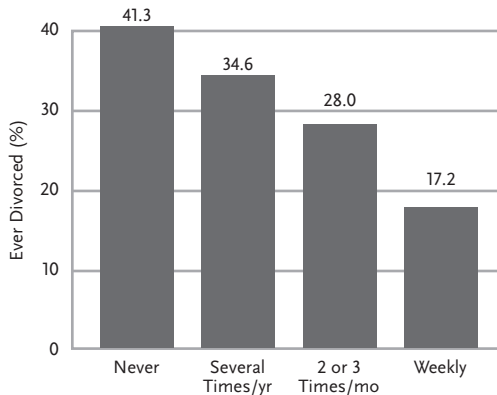


Figure 1.7: Church Attendance and Divorce

Source: General Social Survey, 1972–2012.

Looking at the data, there was good reason for Riley to have a sparkle in his eye. He nailed it. “Sitting in church together with your family every week” and “eating dinner together with your family every night” will profoundly change your family life. Without doing any research, Riley was on to something. He gained his wisdom from the life he had lived. We will continue to encounter this simple wisdom as we progress.

The 7 Steps to a Superabundant Marriage

Although Riley mentioned only two requirements for a happy marriage, there were certainly other things he just took for granted. Being part of the Greatest Generation, he lived by a moral and ethical code that was unquestioned. For instance, he took for granted that you would be a man of your word. In the case of marriage, if you stood at the altar promising to be faithful to his daughter while “forsaking all others,” he expected you to live by your word. If you didn’t, Riley would love to show you his hunting trophies. Indeed, he might just turn you into one of them!

Over time I expanded Riley’s list a bit. Indeed, I have identified seven steps that will truly make your marriage superabundant.

1. Honor your wedding vows.
2. Use money for other people.
3. Give God some of your time.
4. Set your mind on the things above.
5. Find God in yourself.
6. Find God in other people.
7. Make it easy to be good and hard to be bad.

Whenever I introduce these 7 Steps to an audience, I most frequently receive a room full of blank stares—not unlike the one I gave Riley. I can almost hear their internal thoughts:

“I can’t believe I got up early on a Saturday morning to drive all the way over here to listen to this.”

To which I reply, “Oh, go jump in a river!”

As we consider these 7 Steps, we will discover an amazing depth hidden beneath their simplicity. To unpack this depth, we'll need to use everything at our disposal. As such, we will move freely between the findings of modern science and the theology of the ages. To many modern readers, this may seem strange. In our modern culture we have built a solid wall separating scientific knowledge and religion. Indeed, in many circles there is subtle antagonism, if not outright hostility, between the two. Some may trace this situation to Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution.¹⁴ Others may point to the Catholic Church's handling of the Galileo case in the seventeenth century.¹⁵ Still others will select some other event in the past. Nevertheless, if we look closely we will see that the tension between science and religion—or, as others would say, the tension between faith and reason—has existed for millennia.

When addressing the Christian community at Corinth, the apostle Paul would complain: “Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:22). There you have it. “Signs” is the code word for “faith,” and “wisdom” is the code word for “reason” or “science.” The tension between faith and reason goes all the way back to the founding of Christianity, two thousand years ago—if not further.

Interestingly enough, the apostle Paul did not take sides. Instead, he boldly proclaimed that Christianity introduced a wisdom based on Christ that breaks down the wall separating Jew and Greek. It therefore breaks down the wall separating faith from reason. It was from this perspective that one of the earliest and most influential Christian writers, St. Augustine of Hippo, could proclaim,

Some people read books in order to find God. Yet there is a great book, the very appearance of created things. Look above you; look below you! Note it; read it! God, whom you wish to find, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, he set before your eyes the things that he had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? Why, heaven and earth cry out to you: “God made me!”¹⁶

We will do our best to read from both books. We will consider some of the best research conducted by some of the top minds at some of the best universities from around the world. We will be particularly interested in research from the social and medical sciences. At the same time, we will happily consider the wisdom that has been handed down through the ages in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In considering both books, we will allow each field its appropriate autonomy. Very frequently, we will be amazed at the harmony that exists between them.

As we progress through the 7 Steps we will discover a certain hierarchy among the steps. The first three steps (honor your wedding vows; use money for others; and give God some of your time) lay a foundation and help to “divorceproof” your marriage. The second three steps (set your mind on the things above; find God in yourself; and find God in other people) allow your marriage to move beyond surviving to become truly thriving. This is the level of superabundance. The final step (make it easy to be good and hard to be bad) will allow you to experience something of a foretaste of Paradise. Yes, our goal is to go to the very end of love to experience its depth and beauty.

To Expand the Human Heart

To achieve this goal, we must be willing to expand our hearts beyond the confines of our broken, wounded world. Believe it or not, God has been working to expand the human heart from the very beginning. Indeed, in the story of Paradise, God leads the man through a type of divine lesson where he teaches humanity what it means to be human.¹⁷

The story begins with God placing humanity in a Paradise that has every “manner of tree, fair to behold, and pleasant to eat of” (Genesis 2:9). Ah! Who has not been struck at some point by the beauty of creation? For me, it is to stand at the summit of Vail Mountain and look out across the back bowls and a valley that seems to stretch for hundreds of miles. It is to stand on the shore of the sea and watch the sun slowly set across the waters. It is to stand on a cool, cloudless, moonless night and gaze at the stars of the Milky Way. During such moments, God seems very near.

In the story of Paradise, God then asks the man to “till the soil” (Genesis 2:15). In other words, God asks man to work. Since this is before temptation

and sin, which is mentioned in the following chapter, humanity's call to work is not to be seen as a punishment for sin nor as part of the fallen world. Rather, humanity is given the dignity to work as a sign of its cooperation with God in the work of creation. Yes, as much as I hate to admit it, there is incredible joy when—after days of pounding my head against the computer screen—it all comes together, the clouds part, there is light, and I remember to plug in my computer! It is the thrill of little victories!

Nonetheless, it is precisely at this moment that God grieves “that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). In other words, God wants even more for you. The beauty of creation and the thrill of little victories at work aren't enough. Your heart was created for more. It was created for love, which means it was created for communion with another person. Therefore, God creates woman from the heart of man, which is symbolized by the rib enclosing the heart. He brings woman to the man and we hear

“This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh (Genesis 2:23–24).

These verses have been incredibly important in Judeo-Christian history. They give to us the final vision of humanity in Paradise before the introduction of evil. It is a vision of a man and a woman in a union so intimate that they are one. Furthermore, this union is so profound that it brings the couple out of themselves and opens them to an encounter with God.¹⁸ This is the dignity of the human heart. It was created for a union so profound that it transcends the limits of this material world.

Unfortunately, this incredibly beautiful vision does not long endure. In the following chapter of Genesis, humanity encounters evil. Immediately after this encounter, we see the first disruption of the union of man and woman: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves clothes” (Genesis 3:7). Obviously, this is very symbolic language and volumes have been written about this moment. Let us simply note that in the previous

chapter Adam and Eve lived in such intimate union that they were “naked and unashamed,” and now they have introduced something in the middle of their union that separates them from each other—fig leaves. The union of man and woman has experienced difficulties ever since.

Tasting the Choice Wine

The Good News is that Christ came to restore to humanity that which was lost in the Garden of Eden. This is why he answered the question regarding divorce by referring to humanity in its innocence:

Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one?” (Matthew 19:4–5).

Christ wishes to give couples the superabundant joy that was experienced by man and woman in Paradise.

This is manifest in Christ’s first public miracle. Jesus was invited to a wedding feast along with his apostles. His mother is also there and she notices that they have run out of wine. So she says to Jesus: “They have no wine” (John 2:3).

Jesus responds by asking the waiters to fill six jars¹⁹ with water and to take a sample to the steward of the feast. When the steward tastes the water turned into wine, he is amazed—so amazed that he runs to the bridegroom and tells him that he is doing everything all wrong: “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:10).

Let’s put this miracle in perspective. The bridegroom and bride ordered what they thought was enough wine for the party. But, it’s not. It has been a really great party and the guests seem to be lingering. Jesus responds by transforming the water in “six stone jars . . . each holding twenty to thirty gallons” (John 2:6) into the choicest of wines. That’s approximately 150 gallons of wine. Considering that the entire town is believed to have had about 600 total inhabitants (men, women, and children) at the time of Christ,²⁰

150 gallons of additional wine is truly superabundant. God does not relate to us at the level of sufficiency. He relates to us at the level of superabundance.

It is interesting to note that the account of Christ's first public miracle ends with, "His disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). Transforming 150 gallons of water into the choicest of wines is certainly impressive. But, let's go a little further. In Scripture, "wine gladdens the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15). If the couple has no wine, then they have no joy in their heart.²¹ That's the issue! Outside of Paradise, where humanity is subjected to temp-tation and sin, husband and wife experience struggle. This is the experience underlying the skepticism of modern culture. This is the experience of Christ's own apostles. But Christ has an answer: He gives the couple super-abundant, choice wine—which is to say that Christ renews in the heart of the couple superabundant joy. Perhaps this is the greater miracle.

Jesus Christ wants you and your spouse to personally experience this miracle. He wants you to experience superabundant joy. He wants you to taste the choice wine. That's what these 7 Steps are all about. If you faith-fully live them, they will truly transform your life. If you have a good marriage, they can make it great. If you have a great marriage, they can help you have a foretaste of Paradise. If you are in a very difficult situation, they can provide a pathway to a better future. Indeed, if faithfully lived, these steps can transform the almost certainty of divorce into a strong possibility of true happiness. Furthermore, the ability to live these steps is totally within your control. They don't depend on someone or something else. A happier, more superabundant future is within your grasp.

We have an incredible journey before us. It is a journey that will allow us to depart from the skepticism born of wounded hearts to cross the thresh-old of hope. It is a hope that believes authentic love truly exists, and that it is within our grasp. Let us begin our journey.

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