

Always & Forever

by Deborah A. Biddle

Always and Forever

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*Always and forever each moment with you
Is just like a dream to me that some how came true
And I know tomorrow will still be the same
'Cause we've got a life of love that won't ever change and*

*Every day love me your own special way
Melt all my heart away with a smile
Take time to tell me you really care
And we'll share tomorrow ... together
I'll always love you ... forever*

*There'll always be sunshine when I look at you
Something I can't explain just the things that you do
And if you get lonely, phone me and take
A second to give to me that magic you make and*

*Every day love me your own special way
Melt all my heart away with a smile
Take time to tell me you really care
And we'll share tomorrow ... together
I'll always love you ... forever*

Always... Forever... Unchanging... That's what we hope and pray for relative to the love we share with our spouses, especially in the beginning. But, what happens when the newness wears off? What occurs when you realize that he's a bit of a slob or that her cooking isn't as good as your mother's? What is it like for you when he stops being as thoughtful as he used to be or her reply is too sharp? After five years of marriage and two toddlers, what takes place when she's too tired for sex and he doesn't help enough with the housework or the children? How do you feel when her career is moving ahead faster than yours is? How do you react when he gets laid off his job? What is it like to realize that a little make-up is no longer an option for your now middle-aged wife or that a daily workout at the gym could do a world of good for your husband's love handles? What is it like when *you* change? When he or she changes? When your lives change?

As Christians, we are called, expected and commanded to change. In Matthew 3:2, John the Baptist calls sinners to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" In Colossians 3, Paul admonishes us to "put to death or put off" sinful behavior and to "put on" godliness. And, in Romans 12, Paul instructs, "be transformed by the renewing of your mind". The Bible is filled with exhortations to become new and to grow in godliness. As it particularly relates to marriage, we are also shift from two individuals in order to "become one flesh".

So, how does that work for two people who are growing and experiencing new things individually yet, called by God to oneness? And, what do we do when we realize that one or both of us is behaving or thinking vastly different from when we first married? What happens when we realize that the person lying next to us at night is no longer the same person we married five, ten or thirty years ago?

Like the in the song, *Always and Forever*, the beginnings of most of our marriages was “just like a dream that some how came true” and we do, on some level, believe that our “life of love won’t ever change”. Yet, sometimes, when you look at him the sun doesn’t always shine as brightly as it once did. Sometimes, her magic isn’t quite as wonderful as it used to be. And, sometimes, we wonder, “Is it me or is it my spouse?” Well the truth is ... it’s both of you. Change is inevitable. But, even while we are constantly growing and changing, prayerfully into the image of Christ, we can still have a life of love with our spouse that lasts forever. Everyday, we can grow more and deeper in love. Below are a few practical steps we can take to ensure that, with our spouse, we “share tomorrow forever”:

1. Remember, renew and keep the promises you’ve made to one another.

Maybe they were similar to the following vows:

Will you take Lloyd [to be] your wedded husband to live together according to God’s laws in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, respect and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep yourself faithful to him as long as you both shall live?

I will.

I, Deborah, take you, Lloyd, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death, according to God’s holy law; and thus I pledge you my faithfulness.

(African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal © 1998)

2. Set aside time to regularly pray together.

Praying together binds your hearts and minds spiritually.

“Again I say to you that if two or three of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

(Matthew 18:19-20)

3. Pray regularly for your spouse and your marriage.

Focusing on his/her needs and the needs of your marriage broadens your focus beyond yourself.

4. Study the Bible together.

Bible study will connect you together, foster deeper love and strengthen your marriage.

5. Worship together.

Attend church services together *and* let the way you live your lives together be worship to God, an encouragement to others and a witness to the lost.

6. Maintain unity through humility.

Therefore if *there is* any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let* nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

- Have shared activities and interests.

Regularly do at least one activity or hobby that you both enjoy in order to build fellowship and like-mindedness.

- Esteem your spouse more highly than yourself.

Be selfless ... at least sometimes.

- Support your spouse's individual pursuits and passions.

Help your spouse. Don't hinder him/her. Zig Ziglar says, "You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want." So, why not help your spouse.

7. Submit to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:19)

8. Follow the "More Excellent Way". Love.

And yet I show you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love. (1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13)