

# Book Review of The Good Marriage

By Wallerstein, J. S. & Blakeslee, S. 1995, Houghton Mifflin:NY.

In 1995, Judith S. Wallerstein, Ph.D. a renowned therapist and family researcher published her book, The Good Marriage. It is reviewed here because it represents one of the few attempts social scientists have made to focus research on the things that make marriage work. Strong marriage literature represents one of the most neglected family research areas. This review summarizes the main points. Many who read this review have also wanted to read the entire book. It contains a rich condensation of numerous research principles and therapeutic intervention strategies. We recommend it to you.

## **Scope of Book:**

Wallerstein attempts to begin to fill the current void in the literature on Strong Marriages. Her book is intended to raise levels of awareness on the need for more research, to stimulate new research ideas, and to present qualitative research findings from her study. Wallerstein incorporates years of therapy experience with a command of the current literature on marriage and family experience. As the subtitle suggests, she is concerned with how and why love lasts. She selected 50 couples for her study. All were considered to have a happy marriage, had at least 1 child, and had been married at least 9 years. Throughout the book she uses interview data to illustrate critical points and to provide an insider's view into these successful marriages. The chapters are comprised of a discussion of 4 types of successful marriages and 9 tasks which couples must perform to establish a strong and happy relationship. These are presented below:

## **Four types of strong marriages**

**Romantic**=It has at its core a lasting, passionately sexual relationship. They often share a sense that they were destined to be together. Exciting, sensual memories of their first meeting and courtship retain a glow over the years and are a continuing part of the bond between them.

**Rescue**=Although every good marriage provides comfort and healing for past unhappiness, in a successful rescue marriage the partners' early experiences have been traumatic. They are the walking wounded as they begin their lives together. The healing that takes place during the course of the marriage is the central theme.

**Companionate**=The most common type marriage among younger couples. It also reflects numerous social changes over the last 30 years. At its core is friendship, equality, and the value system of the women's movement, with its corollary that the male role, too,

needs to change. It includes attempts to balance the demands of the workplace to those of the home and family.

**Traditional**= Has at its core, the clear division of roles and responsibilities. The woman takes care of the home and family while the man is the primary wage earner. Women in this marriage define their lives in chapters: the time before marriage and children, when children are young, and later chapters which may include a return to work or some new undertaking.

### **Wallerstein's Nine tasks of marriage**

1. To separate emotionally from the family of one's childhood so as to fully invest in the marriage while redefining the lines of connection with both families of origin.
2. To build togetherness by creating intimacy that supports it while carving out each partner's autonomy. Especially true during new years, midlife, and retirement.
3. To embrace the daunting roles of parents and to absorb the impact of her majesty the baby's dramatic entrance while protecting the couples' own privacy.
4. To confront and master the inevitable crises of life, maintaining the strength of the bond in the face of adversity.
5. To create a safe haven for the expression of differences, anger, and conflict.
6. To establish a rich and pleasurable sexual relationship and protect it from the incursions of the workplace and family obligations.
7. To use laughter and humor to keep things in perspective and to avoid boredom by sharing fun, interests, and friends.
8. To provide nurturance and comfort to each other, satisfying each partner's needs for dependency and offering continuing encouragement and support.
9. To keep alive the early romantic, idealized images of falling in love while facing the sober realities of the changes wrought by time.