

Marriage Enrichment – Making a Good Marriage Better

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Scripture: Matthew 19:4-6 (NIV)

⁴ ‘Haven't you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,’

⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’”

Introduction

According to Eric (age 6) “Marriage is when you get to keep your girl and don't have to give her back to her parents!” Eric is right in that marriage is permanent and a new family unit comes to be with the blessing of God.

The other day I was wondering why couples are quick to ask God to bless their marriage, but slow – if at all – to ask God to bless their divorce?

The unfortunate truth is that people normally call for help when their marriage is already in trouble and they have tried “DIY help.” With this in mind, perhaps the time is ripe to revisit some parts of the marriage ceremony – excluding, at this stage, the marriage vows. But before we go here, know that in a Godly marriage there are some foundational principles that we must always keep in mind:

1. God instituted marriage.
2. God brings a husband and wife together.
3. God determines the essence of marriage.
4. God determines a husband and wife’s responsibility toward Him as well as to one another.
5. God keeps a husband and wife together.
6. God has not given anyone a mandate to operate marriage outside of his unchanging biblical instructions.

Revisiting the Call Toward Marriage Vows

“We will always remain obedient and faithful to You. We will read Your Word, meditate on it, structure our lives, accordingly, pray together and serve You together.”

This commitment is made after the minister has covered the institution, essence and mutual responsibilities of marriage, but before the minister further develops the call toward the actual marriage vows.

It is my experience that couples, new and seasoned, draw often their marriage vows into the sunlight and fondly reflect over them. However, the call to marriage is sometimes overlooked, which is, in a sense, rather sad. Having said this, there are strong reasons for the placement of this call toward marriage in the marriage ceremony:

1. Firstly, the marriage vows themselves flow from this biblically grounded commitment to God.

There is simply no way, other than in the love and strength of God, that a couple can commit to an unknown future with one another and keep their marriage vows.

2. Secondly, what the Bible has to say about marriage, which is always God centred and God honouring, is brought together in this commitment to God.

Obedience and faithfulness to God. Reading God’s Word and then meditating on His Word. Structuring lives according to His Word. Praying (communicating with God) and serving Him ... all of this, together.

3. Thirdly, some really healthy Christian spiritual disciplines are found here.

Husbands and wives, you are each going to grow spirituality and as a person. Both of you are also going to grow toward one another and your relationship will become more and more God honouring and centred.

4. Lastly, we appreciate – anew – that God alone is the source of a healthy and happy marriage.

Let’s recall the couple's commitment to God, *“We always remain obedient and faithful to You. We will read Your Word, meditate on it, organize our lives, accordingly, pray together and serve You together.”* What is standing out for you?

- Obedience to God?
- Faithfulness to God?
- Reading the Bible?
- Growing in His Word?
- Structuring your life according to His Word?
- Praying together?
- Serving Him together?

Your answer is an answer that is between you and God who knows your heart.

However, let's take things a step further. Which of the above have you neglected to do or can do more of or do better and what are you going to do about it? When?

It is never too late to rediscover and put into practice what we have just discussed. No situation is beyond the love and grace of God.

Introduction to the Marriage Bond

After developing the call toward marriage vows, the minister guides the couple into their vows with this introduction, *“Do you accept everything the Lord teaches us in His Word about Marriage? Is it your sincere intention to structure your marriage accordingly? And do you desire to be married with the blessing of the Lord?”*

This is a big “yes or no” moment. The very next thing to happen in the ceremony are the vows themselves and almost always, couples excitedly reply “yes.” Let's see what is really being asked here:

Do you accept everything the Lord teaches us in His Word about Marriage?

I want to emphasize “everything.” This is an all or nothing commitment. The option is not there to select a couple of teachings and pass over the rest. “Everything” means all that the Bible has to say about marriage.

Standing out is that it is the Lord who teaches about marriage in His Word. Immediately, we have to decide what to do with extra-biblical or post-modern/post-foundational teachings about marriage, where they contradict or move away from sound biblical teachings because some of them challenge the unchanging truth about Godly marriage.

The moment you open the door to, for example, post-modernism teachings on marriage, then the statement “*everything the Lord teaches us in His Word*” becomes is overturned because the Lord is no longer the ONLY solid, unchanging foundation to biblical marriage.

Is it your sincere intention to structure your marriage accordingly?

Again, so many answer “yes” to this as well, yet never push through and structure their marriage according to the Word. Things stay at an intention. Intentions are not going to do your marriage any favours.

People also intend winning the Lotto or intend painting the house. Intentions are not going to cut it. Christ-centred, Holy Spirit-empowered, Father-glorifying action is called for, without delay.

And do you desire to be married with the blessing of the Lord?

What blessing from God do you expect? How long do you expect His blessing on your marriage to last, given that marriage, is permanent?

25 years along the line, what are you expecting God to still bless; is your Godly marriage still where it needs to be?

What about adultery, porn, alcoholism, drugs etc. ... all of them destructive to marriage ... what must God bless? Repent! No situation is beyond the love and grace of God.

God’s blessings and God’ designs run hand in hand. A biblical design for marriage is a blessed marriage because the goodness and favour of God are always present. This is the blessed state of a biblical marriage.

Logically, if you do not accept everything that the Bible says about marriage and if your intentions never translate into action, then we also need to re-open the chapter about God blessing your marriage.

Let me once again put the introduction toward the marriage bond to you, again, the answer is between you and God.

- Do you STILL accept everything the Lord teaches us in His Word about Marriage?
- Is it STILL your sincere intention to structure your marriage accordingly?
- And do you STILL desire to continue with your marriage with the blessing of the Lord?

Conclusion

With Godly design and Godly blessing running hand-in-hand, we are reminded of why Jesus has to be at the centre of our marriage. We are fully dependent on the love of God, God's grace, God's mercy, God's forgiveness and God's instructions for marriage. On our own, we cannot make a marriage work as God designed marriage to be.

We are sinners in need of God's love, mercy and grace in every area of our life, including marriage.

I have long maintained that only one thing can go wrong in a marriage: the couple or one half of the whole takes his/her eyes off of God. What follows are merely symptoms.

May God bless and strengthen your marriage. Live it to His glory!

Amen.