

Marriage 101 10-4-15

Dear Lord, we know that in Your wisdom You have ways to meet all of our needs. Forgive us when we fail to see Your hand of goodness in the details of our lives. Come by Your Spirit and bless this time that we may hear You. A.

Volumes have been written on the subject of marriage. All aspects of married life have been thoroughly analyzed – there’s plenty of advice out there on everything from how to communicate to how to have a better sex life to how to raise children. The books have been helpful – we needed them because men & women are soooo different. *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus* is one title. I’ve never read the book, but it sounds like it may be an accurate account. We are so different, yet God says man & wife shall become one flesh? At one time or another most of us have probably looked at our marriage & wondered, “Is this what I signed up for?” We probably all entered marriage w/big dreams – little girls loved the fairy tales of meeting Prince Charming, riding off into the sunset, & living happily ever after. I think we all enter into marriage hopeful of happiness. Maybe our parents weren’t happy; some of our neighbors may have looked happy. Regardless, we were going to be happy because we were in love – a love like none other.

However, everyone doesn’t fall into that category. Ann didn’t particularly love John – she married him to get out of her dysfunctional home where her alcoholic father

was terribly verbally abusive. Well, w/in 2 weeks, John had her down on the floor w/a knife to her throat saying “See what I could do?” 3 kids later, while separated, John tried to burn the house down. John & Ann reconciled, but after 2 more kids, tons of counseling, domestic abuse seminars, they divorced. John had become a Christian, but he soon used the scriptures as a weapon – “you are to obey, submit, etc.” The sad thing is that John’s father was physically abusive to his mother. Once John stepped in to defend his mom & that was the end of any relationship w/ his dad. John’s younger brother could go into town w/dad – but not John. John was so deeply wounded no amount of Godly counsel could sink in. John jumped off the Lake St. bridge.

I could spend the morning telling unsuccessful marriages stories – 2 more. Donna was married 3 X’s, divorced twice – to 3 different alcoholics. Does it surprise you that her dad was an alcoholic? Last one, Katie wanted her marriage to work. There was no way. Too much abuse, alcohol, & infidelity. After much prayer, she filed for divorce. It was a tough thing for her to do – she agonized over it. It was not what she wanted. She later learned that the exact day she filed, her husband’s girlfriend’s baby was born. Confirmation! Some time later she said, “it wasn’t **that** bad living w/her ex.” I said, “Katie, he had a gun to your head!” “Oh, **that** was only once,” she said. “It only takes once!”

So why the sad stories? And if there is so much written about marriage, why not just send you to the library? Why preach about it? There’re several reasons. First,

whenever the divorce texts come up, I feel compelled to tell you that my seminary professor said, “if you divorce & remarry, it is adultery” could so very easily be translated “if you divorce TO remarry, it is adultery.” Now that makes sense, doesn’t it? If you divorce because you want to marry someone else, you are legalizing adultery. It looks good on paper. God has always made provision for divorce – back to Moses’ day. It was because of man’s hardness of heart! God hates divorce, but so does everyone I know who has been thru one – except for one. I only know of one case where someone divorced TO remarry. All divorces are sad, but that one was really grievous. I can still hear her sing- song-y voice, “I like Gary, but I just don’t love him.” How could she? She was on to Bob! God hates divorce & so does Ann, Donna, and Katie. 20 years later Katie met a man on-line. His wife had died two years b/4 that & he was in the midst of raising 3 teen-age daughters. What a blessing Katie was & is to those girls. She did not divorce TO remarry; she divorced & 20 years later remarried. And I believe she married w/God’s blessing.

Most of us were so young when we made those decisions to marry. We were all looking for something – happiness? Ann wanted a better life. Both she & John were deeply wounded. Ann still hears her father’s voice in her head, “You will never amount to anything!” Do you think Donna was in some way trying to get her father’s love? But, hey! Ed & I had Psychology 101! We took a pre-marriage class! We weren’t going to be anything like our parents. When we think back on how insecure,

defensive, idealistic, emotionally unhealthy we were/and in some cases still are, we know the fact we are still married 51 years later is truly a miracle from God. But it has not been easy – it has taken work, hard work!

The most important quality in marriage (& in life) is honesty. One can deal w/most anything if people are being straight about it. When trust is broken, it takes a long time for trust to be restored. If you have to hide it, you already know it's wrong. Beth Moore said, "No secrets. I'm not talking about a surprise birthday party or present – you know what I am talking about." Emotional affairs can be as devastating as any other affair. The best defense for such things is open & honest communication based on love & trust. It is so important to recognize & admit our true feelings. It tells us what is going on inside of us. When we share that w/another, we quit isolating ourselves. We become known. Not alone! We connect w/another human being. It's not easy We feel vulnerable. If I tell you something hurt me, now you know how to hurt me. That can be scary – who likes to be hurt? But sharing feelings w/a person we can trust most always has the opposite effect – they empathize, not criticize. It may keep us from acting out in some very detrimental way.

Here's the way Gary Thomas puts it in his book "Sacred Marriage." To spiritually benefit from marriage (or any relationship), we have to be honest. We have to look at our disappointments, own up to our ugly attitudes, & confront our selfishness." He asks, "What if God didn't design marriage to be 'easier'? What if God had an end in

mind that went beyond our happiness, our comfort, & our desire to be infatuated & happy as if the world were a perfect place? *What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?*”

Hmmm, good question – or not so good. If we got married to live happily ever after & if that’s not what’s happening, do you think God has something else in mind? The purpose of Gary Thomas’ book is “how can we discover in the challenges of marriage the opportunities to learn more about God, grow in our understanding of Him, and learn to love Him more?” There is no doubt that marriage (and life) has its challenges. Ed & I have certainly seen the best & the worst of each other. We have had serious challenges – ones that bring you to your knees – knowing if God doesn’t help you, you are doomed. If we just casually knew each other – at work or something, we could avoid confronting hurts. But because we live together, we have to deal w/things that often reveal character issues that are not nice.

At times Ed has been my project – I was going to get him all healed up. It does not work that way. We have to be willing to face our own stuff. We are all more selfish & care more about our own comfort than we’d like to admit. The Word says women are to submit to their husbands – but not be doormats. We are to be active b/4 the Lord, seeking wisdom, willing to obey. We have to tell our husbands how we feel. Just the other day I said to Ed, “Do you know how I feel when you say something like that?” His said, “Not unless you tell me.” I’d prayed & thought I was to tell him how I felt,

but when he answered like he did, I knew it was the thing to do. Then I quit stewing about it.

Men are to love their wives like Christ loves the church & gave Himself up for her. That's a tough order. But really it is the way of all the baptized. We live out our baptism as we die daily to our own selfishness & choose instead to be led by the Holy Spirit. The truth is all relationships test us – some people just know how to push our buttons. The level of relationship we have w/others is determined by how honest we are, how willing we are to share what's truly going on inside of us – requisite in marriage; a choice in friendships.

The thing we probably forget is Satan does NOT want Christian marriages or friendships or churches to survive. We often think the other person is our problem. That's not it. Satan can get into our thinking w/o us hardly realizing it. He magnifies the other person's faults. He gets us thinking unkind, untrue thoughts... "If he/she really loved me, he/she would... If he/she really loved me, he/she'd never... He never... She always...." thoughts that kill relationships! We hardly believe that it is truly Satan or his cohorts who prowl about seeking whom they can devour. It's true that many Christians doubt the presence & power of evil in our world today. I have to be reminded often of who the enemy really is. Reading Ephesians 6 can help – put on the whole armor of God to fight the enemy.

The good news is God is on our side. God helps those who cry out to Him. When we tell Satan to get out of here in Jesus' Name, Satan HAS to flee – no options! He has to go because God's Word says he must & Jesus has defeated Him. James 4:7&8 says Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Nothing keeps us trapped more than guilt & shame. As we confess our sin & receive forgiveness, all the nasty stuff goes – & it is nasty but it does go. We're baptized – we are washed. The shed blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. As we are forgiven, we forgive our spouses and others. When we walk in the freedom of forgiveness, then there is unity & what God has promised comes to pass – the two shall become one. Amen.