

Characteristics of a Successful Marriage

At our annual couple's retreat needs were met, rest was secured and marriages were ministered to. As we contemplate marriage, allow me to list three characteristics of a successful marriage. A successful marriage is:

1. Broken

Usually the word "broken" bears an unpleasant connotation. In the miracle of the loaves and fishes, we find these words, "*And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves...*" (Mark 6:41). Like the miracle meal, those whom God blesses are those He also breaks. The man or woman who demand their way become the most incompatible people to live with. It is not the one who is looking out for "number one" who become the ideal marriage partners. It is the one who is broken of self-adoration and who fulfils Romans 12:10: "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*" The Bible also says, "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*" (Philippians 2: 3,4).

As in broken limbs, it is at the broken spot that arms or legs actually become stronger. The broken person recognizes the fault in himself before he tries to correct his spouse. The broken and healed spouse has great grace to give because they have been recipients of great grace. It is difficult to give something you have not received.

2. Bonded

What holds marriages together? It goes beyond personality, beyond mutual likes and dislikes. The different Greek words for love are "*phileo*": "brotherly love"; "*storge*": parental or required family love; "*eros*": sexual love; and the word which was virtually unknown until the writing of the New Testament, "*agape*": God's love. This is not the brotherly or friend affection. This is not the "I'll do this for you, you do this for me" return of favor for favor. This is not the loving you because you're my child or my parent. This is not the attitude, "Hey we have to, it is born in us to respond in this fashion." It is not the erotic, got to get rather than wait to give. The highest form of love is "agape." This is the love that cannot wait to give. It doesn't take. This is the sacrificial love. This is the love that took Jesus to the cross. This is the love you choose to have. This is the love that keeps marriages together.

The Bible declares agape is the bond of perfectness. "*And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*" (Colossians 3:14). The word "bond" is from the Greek word: "" which means a uniting principle, a joint tie, i.e. ligament, (figuratively) uniting principle. Our English word "bond" is from the Latin word, *ligamentum* 'bond,' *ligare* 'to bind.' The ligaments are tough, flexible fibrous connective tissues connecting two bones to form a joint. It is also a membranous fold that supports an organ and keeps it in position. This is truly revelatory of God's love in the life of two people who share this God-given greatest of gifts, i.e. love (I Corinthians 13:13). This is what brings "the two who become one" concept into reality! It makes us bone of each other's bone, flesh of each other's flesh. Not to be too gross, but it "keeps the guts" of our marriages intact. Is it any wonder why we would say a man who walks out on his marriage is a "gutless wonder"? Is this why we say a woman who leaves her husband has no heart? They have lost the ligamentation of marriage, the agape that is "the bond of perfectness". Please note, we may not be perfect, but a God-given love expressed in marriage is one of the few things in life that can be just "perfect", for this is the description God uses.

3. Blessed

“The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (Proverbs 10:22). To live with the blessing of the Lord, neutralizes the effect of living in this fallen world under the curse of God. In a real sense although we will not fully appreciate the blessing of the lifting of the curse of the fall until Heaven, the closest we get to Heaven on earth is found in the Christian home. God says you will be rich in the things that really matter and there will be no bad side effects. It is the best “win/win” situation we will find in this earthly pilgrimage.

A natural question should be forming in your hearts as we write these words. You should be asking what brings the blessing of the Lord? Although lengthy, let me give you the answer straight from the heart of God: *“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish”* (Psalm 1:1-6). These words are so easily understood, they require little or no commentary to understand. Suffice it to say, when a man or woman’s way pleases the Lord, or in other words, are in sync with His ways, the blessing of the Lord ensues and rests upon this person. Therefore, when we love one another with God’s love, with the mind and heart of God, in the way of God, we are blessed and so are our marriages.

- Pastor Pope -

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