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You've probably heard that the divorce rate among those who're aligned with the visible church is at least as high as for those who claim no religious affiliation. You may also suspect that that's true. Why, then, should ANY couple marry? Isn't "marriage" just a piece of paper? Isn't it the leading cause of divorce?

**The marriage ceremony is a Rite of Passage.** That's a ritual event that documents a person's transition from one status to another. Rites of Passage explore and describe various notable milestones in an individual's life for any transition from one social status to another. Often, they are rituals marking the transition from childhood to full inclusion into a tribe or social group. Life's milestones include personal transitions from things like puberty, high school, college, death and marriage. For people of faith, ceremonies like Bar Mitzvah, baptism and confirmation are important rites. For anthropologists, Rites of Passage reveal the social hierarchies, values and beliefs that were/are important in specific cultures.

Rites of Passage have been practiced on our planet ever since the dawn of human history. Cultures throughout history have recognized, for example, that it takes a lot more than physical growth for boys to move from dependency mindsets of boyhood to the productivity mindsets of manhood. The resulting rites were designed to appropriately shift the male psyche for the ultimate benefit of a community. While such rites have remained somewhat consistent throughout time and culture they have *evolved* in most societies.

On at least one south Pacific island, the traditional rites have remained static for eons: Pentecost Island tribesmen are renowned for a Rite of Passage that is truly death defying. It's called land diving:

The young men of each village invest up to seven weeks to build their own respective 90-foot-tall wooden platforms on steep hillsides during early Summer. They climb to the top of those towers and jump! For "safety," they attach vines to their ankles. The vines must be long enough to make sure the hair of the young man jumping will actually touch the ground. Bungee cords are not allowed! (I'd want to grow some really, really long hair! You?) And

there's no "on-a-curve" grading, either! Older men determine whether a given dive is "pass" or "fail." A "pass" yields all the benefits and responsibilities of manhood within the island culture. Those who "pass" feel pretty good about themselves afterward—self-confidence.

But marking the transition to manhood is just one among hundreds of Rites of Passage that are somewhat common among global cultures. There are Rites of Passage that commemorate a sailor's first crossing of the Equator, too: Sailors who've crossed the Equator are nicknamed "Shellbacks." Sailors who haven't crossed the Equator are called "Slimy Pollywogs." Sea captains know that the Shellbacks have proven their ability to handle some of the roughest seas that exist on Earth. Better to recruit more Shellbacks, then, and fewer Slimy Pollywogs for a potentially difficult voyage.

Many Rites of Passage are documented on paper. That includes marriage certificates, school diplomas and other elaborate documents to confirm that a person has earned an advanced degree. Some certificates document the fact that a person has been inducted into a given hall of fame, etc. Scouting organizations commemorate various levels of achievement with merit badges and such. Is that all for naught?

I once read of an interview with a high rise steelworker. The interviewer asked, "What do you like about your job?" The steelworker replied, "At the end of every day, I get to look up and actually *see* what I've accomplished and feel proud." Having something to show for it, then, is one of the primary benefits of rites of passage.

Can you imagine setting multiple Olympic world records only to be told "Good job!" and receive nothing tangible to show for it? That's pretty much what Rites of Passage are all about...being able to see and reflect on the circumstances, times and places of "special" events and accomplishments.

Our Heavenly Father knows all that about our human nature, too. During Old Testament times, He often instructed the Hebrew people to stack **ROCKS**. Why? Beyond sacrifice and worship there were at least two other critical reasons:

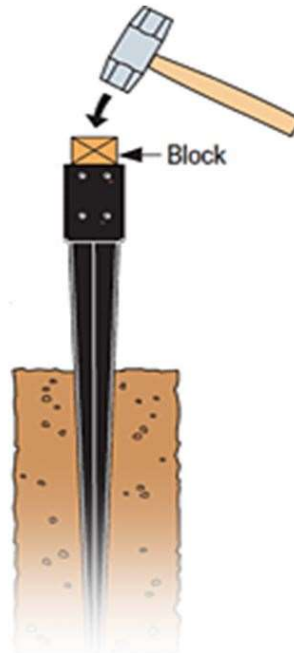
A. So they'd remember it—

Every time those who had benefited from a given miracle would walk near that stack of rocks, they'd be reminded, again, that God had done what only God could have done and that they had been the fortunate beneficiaries of it.

B. To make sure others would hear about God's trustworthiness—

Decades later when someone would ask, "Why is that stack of rocks over there?" they would inevitably hear the story of God's awesome compassion, power and faithfulness. The beneficiary of the eyewitness testimony was the person who heard it...No! Wait! The person who shared the story with another person who had demonstrated *ears-to-hear* about it might sometimes have enjoyed the greater benefit!

Yes, God knows Human Nature (i.e.: the Sin nature) better than we know it ourselves. He knows that memories of bad times linger forever in our minds and that the memories of good times fade quickly—unless there are visible "stacks of rocks" to make certain we don't forget. Will that work today?



I visualize rites of passage as wooden stakes driven into the ground. The pomp and circumstance of each truly special rite of passage has the effect of indelibly imprinting the memory of it on the hearts and minds of the participants and of the observers. In the case of marriage, God is also an observer.



Those who marry expecting it to thrive acknowledge that. They remind themselves of it often—especially during the inevitable trying times.

The marriage ceremony and the vows that accompany it comprise a critically important ritual event that marks the definitive transition of a couple from respective “me” mindsets to a collective “we” mindset and, of course, long term commitments. Together, that couple drives a figurative wooden stake into the ground which neither of them will EVER forget.

So who benefits? Each person in that marriage benefits. That married couple benefits collectively. Any children born to that couple benefit. The local community benefits. Society benefits. How? Well-founded marriages yield strong traditional family units. Less fortunate observers of strong family units can acquire an insatiable *aspiration* to strong family units for themselves.

As local communities become characterized by strong family units, those communities become stronger and more effective in their function. When more and more communities become stronger and more effective, the greater society can begin to show a healthy growth toward a solid foundation of responsible personal and collective functional integrity.



Perhaps you’re observing, now, the inevitable destruction of a subculture when greedy satanic forces enjoy enormous success in tearing down the notion of strong marriages, traditionally strong family units, strong communities and fully effective governments. Can the U.S.A. recover what it has clearly lost? Not this year or next year, but we can recover.

You can be an effective catalyst for that recovery! Whenever you are faced with the choice of establishing a strong marriage or...well, shacking up. Yes, I know that *shacking up* isn't a religiously correct term; but neither is the practice! Calling it something benign like "living together" or "having a roommate" or "a trial marriage" is scripturally disingenuous.



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