

“Work at It!”

Genesis 24:1-9; 63-67

Intro. – What is the top response given to pollsters when average Americans are asked what they want out of life? The top response is – “To have a happy marriage.”

Robert Browning the poet understood this sentiment as reflected in the following words he penned:

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, “A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!”

It is my personal conviction that every man and woman getting married wants to believe *the best is yet to be*. But in order for those words to become reality, husbands and wives must say *grow old along with me*. Do you want to grow old with your husband/wife? Do you really want to have a happy marriage?

Contrary to what most think, “best wishes” and “good luck” have nothing to do with a happy/healthy marriage. A good marriage is the result of one thing – hard work. Make no mistake about it – marital happiness is a matter of choice. It results when a husband and wife apply the principles revealed in God’s Word. Marriage was never intended to be an easy proposition or something that just happens. At some point, in every marriage reality sets in and the honeymoon is over, then what?! God makes clear – each of us must work at it!

Purpose: to better realize the necessity of working at marriage

Too many today think of work as part of the curse; instead, work is a blessing. This is none truer than when it comes to each of our marriages. Unless there is a willingness on both parties involved to work at making marriage what God intended it to be, there will be no wedded bliss.

I Consider a Marriage Made in HEAVEN

A. Look at This “Love Story”

1. In a time when men/women married very young, Isaac had already passed his 40th birthday before meeting his future wife. Why? Isaac lived in a pagan land where there were few potential candidates to be his wife.
2. After Isaac’s mother, Sarah died, Abraham took charge and commissioned a trusted servant to find Isaac a wife: Genesis 24:3-4 “*And I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac.*”
3. The faithful servant set out to find a bride for Isaac. He went to extraordinary lengths, obeying Abraham’s instructions to the letter. He encountered a charming, beautiful shepherdess. After becoming acquainted with her, he had no doubt that God had chosen her to be Isaac’s wife.
4. As romantic as this account is, it is more about of a man of God waiting on God to work things out
 - a. Isaac had faith believing God would bring right person, at right place at just right moment.
 - b. he and his family had prayed about this need and had refused to compromise... X honored!

B. Not Unlike Every Marriage

1. Considering how this marriage began, it would appear impossible that it would be anything but perfect; yet, problems arose and eventually multiplied
2. After years of marriage and several kids (according to Genesis 27), jealousy, favoritism, tension, and anger had made their way into Isaac’s family.
3. This marriage made in heaven illustrates what every married couple need to remember – marriages with the best beginnings *WILL* have their challenges – “A marriage may be made in heaven but the maintenance must be done on earth.”

Even a marriage “made in heaven” took a lot of hard work – don’t think for a moment yours any different!

II Consider a Marriage in STAGES

- how do you keep a fire going? You work at it – feed it, tend it, encourage it. Neglect it, and it will soon burn itself out. May not be the most attractive illustration, but, gets the point across – 3 key stages:
 - A. The Honeymoon Stage
 - 1. This is the stage where your husband/wife can do nothing wrong and you simply can't get enough of each other... You're married to the perfect mate.
 - 2. Song of Solomon offers the most loving imagery in all of Scripture. It describes perfectly what goes on between a husband and a wife during the honeymoon stage = each focuses on the other!
 - 3. Idealism dominates the honeymoon stage. Both seem blinded to any flaws/defects in the other. Song of S 4:7 *"You are all together beautiful, my darling, and there is no blemish in you."*
 - 4. This stage doesn't last however. 2nd stage of marriage comes exactly when reality hits.
 - B. The Party's Over Stage
 - 1. This is the stage where husband/wife begin to see one another's flaws and imperfections.
 - 2. If you've been married for any time, you've been here. Even Solomon, hot-blooded writer of Song of S reached this stage. The same man who wrote of his young wife's perfection later wrote in Proverbs 27:15-16 *"A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike. He who would restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand."*
 - note: not all marital unhappiness can be blamed on a nagging/contemptuous wife... men we do more than our share of stirring this pot ...
 - 3. At this stage, couples must make a decision – at least 3 options lay open to husband/wife:
 - a. adopt attitude of gloom, despair and resignation – live under same roof but that's about all...
 - b. 2nd – opt for divorce – since party is over they choose to bail out...
 - c. 3rd – choose not just stay together but to do whatever it takes to make happy/healthy marriage
 - C. The Best is Yet to Be Stage
 - this love is "mature" and anything *but* blind... this love can endure anythingAny husband/wife can happily look at their spouse and say: "I am so happy we can grow old together!" as long as these stages of marriage are understood in light of Scripture.

III Consider a Marriage MATURING

- A. God's Definition of Mature Love
 - 1 Corinthians 13 certainly defines mature love unlike any other source:
 - 1. Mature love is:
 - *patient. kind. joyful with the truth, trusting. full of hope. enduring*
 - 2. Mature love is not:
 - *jealous, boastful, arrogant. self-seeking. angry. looking for payback*
 - 3. Most of all – *love never fails*. I'll be there to support my spouse.Use this as a personal checklist to see if you truly are maturing in your love for your spouse...
- B. Working Toward Mature Love
 - 1. Speak Kindly – far too often words flow from our mouths with little thought... hurtful things...
 - a. James 3:9-10 *"With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren these things ought not to be this way."*
 - b. some couples fall into the bad habit of belittling one another in public. They cut one another down firing off one-liners about each other that would make Don Rickles look amateur...
 - c. best way to bury a marriage is for husband/wife keep digging at one another; instead, need to speak kindly always to and about our mates...

2. Confess Openly – Illus. – 1970 movie *Love Story* had famous line cropped up on bumper stickers, news columns, and worst of all became the conventional wisdom of youth in love: *Love means never having to say you are sorry.*
 - a. that statement is utterly false – love means having to say you’re sorry quite often...
 - b. mature love drives husband to seek forgiveness of his wife every time realizes he’s hurt her...
 - c. James 5:16 *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”*
 - d. only good results when we humble ourselves and confess to God and each other specific sins.
3. Change self, not your mate – BIG problems arise when you believe it is your mission in life to change the one you married.
 - a. must stop trying to shame and manipulate our mates into being what we want them to be
 - b. James 4:3 *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*
 - c. you are responsible for changing one person – YOU (only because God enables us to do so) – accept your mate unconditionally and let God work on any necessary changes.

Conclusion: Years ago Dorothy Payne married a guy she called Jimmy. He called her Dolly. Dolly was 20 yrs. younger than Jimmy. She loved dressing in loud clothing and at social occasions, Dolly would grab center stage. She was the life of the party... but Jimmy, took life seriously. His thoughtful/scholarly approach made him a classic introvert. Even in his dress he dressed like a mortician, the exact opposite of his wife. Yet, in their marriage, neither Dolly or Jimmy tried to change the other. He added gravity to her outgoing personality, while she brought a sense of fun to his overly serious nature. When once asked about a decision her husband had made, Dolly simply said, *“I would hope my husband is always right, but right or wrong, he’s my husband.”* Because they didn’t try to change each other they enjoyed a wonderful marriage. Dolly often expressed how blessed she was to be married to her Jimmy and he often said how blessed he was to be married to his Dolly. Jimmy was better known as James Madison, 4th President of the U.S.

Here’s the point. Consider the marriage made in heaven... Consider the stages of marriage... Consider the a marriage maturing... One thing always stands out -- For your marriage to be the kind of marriage God intends for you to have, you and your spouse are going to have to WORK AT IT!!