

How To Be Joyfully Married!

There have been two different authors that have written different books, yet had the same title. I was present in the audience when one of the authors presented the name of his book and it evoked immediate laughter. The name of his book is, *How To Be Happy Though Married*. The reason we laugh is because it is too common to be otherwise. This is a shame. God never intended marriage to be unhappy. God brought marriage into the world to make mankind complete. After Adam had seen all the animals and in great excitement named them all, no doubt at this moment of time, man realized there was a match for all the animals, but not for him. A perceived sadness, perhaps the first time a cloud ever settled over Eden was when God saw the loneliness of man and declared, "*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him*" (Genesis 2:18). This is the first time in the Bible that God said something was not good! So, we plainly see that God did not intend marriage to be anything but happy. "*Marriage is honourable in all...*" (Hebrews 13:4). Although it is a little thing, it should be noted, the very semantics we use speaks of the emphasis we place on marriage. You see, we often use the word happy to express that part of our life that is pleasant and good, yet think of what we really say when we say, I want to be happy. Happy is at the root of the word "happening." It is as if to say, it takes a lot of favorable happenings to make one happy. In the secular dictionary the word happy is defined: favored by circumstances; lucky; fortunate. This, of course, is from the archaic word "hap." We treat happiness as a commodity that is from the very meaning something we are lucky to have, something that circumstantially takes us by surprise. Joy, even by the dictionary is a very glad feeling, great delight and one of the synonyms for joy is "satisfaction." This satisfaction is something only God can give. Three times the word "joyfully" occurs in the English Bible and it is used in reference to marriage: "*Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun*" (Ecclesiastes 9:9). God says to live joyfully with your wife. He further states, "That is thy portion in this life." In Hebrew the word for portion can also be translated "award." God declares that he will award us with something only He can give: joy! The world can give us happenings that temporarily give elation, but what He can give us is perpetual joy. Allow me in the next few minutes to give you seven ways to benefit from God's joyful marriage:

1. Marry with the blessing of God.

Seek God's face and will in the matter of whom you should marry. Look for the inward beauty. And do all your courtship/dating with the blessing of your parents. If someone is reading this who already is married and you might be wondering if you married outside of the will of God, remember when you said, "I do" at the altar that became God's will for your life. If you acted ahead of him, seek His forgiveness and ask Him to impart a blessing to you. "*The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it*" (Proverbs 10:22).

2. Love Unconditionally.

Sometimes we bring some baggage into our marriages that ought not to be there. For many reasons, some people just cannot accept the fact that someone else will love them for who they really are. So, some will try to put on airs and be someone they are really not. Without transparency in marriage, it is doomed. On the other hand, some will try to be more difficult than they really are, thinking if they see my "bad" side, they will stop loving me. So, they concentrate on getting the bad side out in the open to the heartbreak of the adoring spouse. Loving unconditionally is loving your married partner for better or for worse. Yes, it involves loving them through the bad side, but it also means that if you love unconditionally, you will constantly lift up your best side for the extreme benefit of the object of your affection who should be your wife or husband. Be real, be thoughtful, and marry with permanency in mind. Remember, if divorce is considered an option, no marriage is safe! "*They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so*" (Matthew 19:7,8).

3. Leave and Cleave.

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). It is sometimes a balancing act to bring the good of your involvement with your parents into your marriage while at the same time provide the privacy of your unique union. In this, God will give you wisdom. It does need to be understood, there must be the perseverance of your union that is separate from your former union to your parents as their child. I joke around with my married daughters and say, "Are you still Daddy's little girl?" They answer with their little girl voice and say, "Yes, sir". We understand this is a joke. The truth is when she married the man to whom she is married, she is no longer Daddy's little girl. I hate saying this, but it is the truth! Get over it, boys, and accept it. By the way, the same goes for "Mama's boys." I know it's a sacred cow, but go ahead and kill it and enjoy the steak! Grow up, boys and girls!

4. Let the children be connectors, not dividers

The greatest thing a man can do for his kids is to love their mom! Under no circumstances should a parent align themselves in an evil conspiracy against their mate. Children will know who will let them get away with disobedience. It is the responsibility of the couple to stay united. It is the Devil's work to divide. Just an important word of advice, lean toward the strict. If a spouse believes an activity to be wrong or wrongly influenced, play it safe, and listen to the spouse who is uncomfortable in those matters. It could be God is giving them an alarm for a reason. *"And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand"* (Mark 3:25).

5. Keep spirituality a constant and united goal.

I have heard parents say regretfully they wish they had kept their kids in church while growing up. I have never heard of any parents regretting taking their kids to church. One man told me he was on "drugs" growing up. He said, "I was drug to church every time the doors were open, I was drug to school, and I was drug to work hard." Now he was in the business of "drugging" his kids as well. Church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer time should have high emphasis in every Christian home. *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33). *"...that in all things he might have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:18).

6. Work hard at your calling.

There is a verse that is very dear to me, it is Psalm 37:4, *"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart."* I have seen the cases where we have a tendency to take our grief out on those we love the best. The root cause of much of our grief is we are trying to do something God has not gifted us to do. When we do the pleasure of God in His design for our life, there is a flow, not a force. You might say, there is something else I have a desire to do, but I cannot make money doing it. Really? Have you even launched out on faith to do it? Here is a promise you might claim: *"A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men"* (Proverbs 18:16). Don't punish your family because you are out of sorts with your calling. Do what God has called you do. Preacher, president, real estate, garbage collector, teacher, oil field, computer technology, or homemaker (my favorite term for housewife). Success is finding the will of God for your life and doing it!

7. Play together.

It is true, the family that prays together, stays together and also, the family that plays together, stays together. Too often our idea of play is golf with our cronies, shopping with your girlfriends, or any activity involving others beside your family. Do things that you can do as a family. Take your vacation time together, not away from each other. It will take some patience to play games that you are superior to your children at playing, but for theirs and your sake, do it anyway. When my son Jonathan and I played tennis in his youth, I remember spending most of the time chasing the ball over the fence. I remember explaining to Sean the complicated moves of chess. By the way, the last time Jonathan and I played tennis, I was soundly defeated. This past Christmas, Sean beat me, best out of three in chess. And

frankly, I'm scared to play Heather in Scrabble or Juliana in Monopoly. So for you big babies that don't want to play with your kids, just give them time and they will be able to give you competition, but remember the reason you play together is to be together. It will do you good to quit being so competitive and relax. Let us follow the example of Jesus: *"And he took them (the children) up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them"* (Mark 10:16).

- Pastor Pope -

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