

Marriages That Last

This past week I flew into Winston-Salem, North Carolina. An older preacher picked me up, Dr. Gene Blackburn. We had been in some of the same conferences over thirty years earlier and it was good to renew our friendship. As we traveled to my lodging for the conference in which I am speaking, he said, "You know, Preacher, my wife of fifty-three years passed away six months ago." I extended my sympathy and that's all it took...he began to talk about the great love of his life. Believe me, it was not hard to give this brother my ear; I enjoy an old fashioned love story. Frankly, I like it best from Christians. Hollywood and Broadway don't get it. The closest a lost actor can come to true love is through pretending. Well, Gene Blackburn did not have to pretend; his and his wife Evelyn's was the real deal.

Gene told me how the custom for all their life was to arise at 6:00, put on the coffee, take their Bibles down, read, comment on the Scriptures and discuss things they needed to do in the day and then they prayed and had breakfast. He explained how in their last years they had matching recliners. This is where they had devotions, talked and prayed. As he talked of her, he became more animated and cheerful. Just mentioning her name, bringing her into the conversation was like bringing her to life for him. It was a most touching scene. He would occasionally interrupt his train of thought and say, "Am I talking too much?" I assured him that he was not. There was nothing on the radio or anywhere else that could possibly be more interesting.

He talked of their children, their grandchildren and always came back to Evelyn. When she entered his thoughts and speech there was softness, a kindness that enveloped him. I could see where this gentle woman had been a help "meet" or suitable for Gene. The woman is given as a gift from God to a man to balance him, make him more social, more kind, and may I say, more human.

When Gene told me of the last day his Evelyn had on earth, I felt like we had entered into a holy place. They awakened and got up as usual. But on this day she insisted that she wanted to cook his breakfast. He tried to argue her out of it, but just couldn't do it. She had her mind made up. So although terribly inconvenienced, this lady of grace navigated her way through the preparation process of a very nice breakfast. Soon after breakfast she expressed discomfort. She asked him to help her move. As he was helping lift her by locking his arms under her arms and around her back, her eyes locked in on his and she said, "I love you, honey." Then she leaned her head against his chest and died.

Our conversation was a good reminder to all of us, that what we have in a love relationship cannot be bought, bargained for or substituted for anything in this world and even other spiritual activity. Paul said, "...*though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing*" (I Corinthians 13:2). Great loves have common traits. These traits are indigenous to lasting marriages. What are the traits of marriages that last?

I. Marriages that last have a by-product of respectful kindness.

Husbands and wives who get along royally with each other speak well to each other face-to-face and behind their backs. James said, "*If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well*" (James 2:8). I remember pastoring a young couple who when they were together in any venue, she constantly vilified and insulted the man. Sadly, that marriage did not last. If we are to love our neighbor with royal love, how much more should our love to our wife be considered royal?

Evangelist Fred Brown, like Gene, was in love with his wife of over half a century. Someone asked him once a few years after his wife had died, "Have you ever considered re-marrying?" He answered, "When you have been married to the queen all your life, how can you settle for a chambermaid?" The sense of a royal relationship lends itself to respect and kindness. "*Charity (love) suffereth long, and is kind...*" (I Corinthians 13:4).

II. Marriages that last are the results of invested time.

Gene was explaining the vehicle we were traveling in was larger than he needed now, but this had been secured so as to accommodate his wife and her wheel chair. He was illustrating that love... "*Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity (love) never faileth...*" (I Corinthians 13:7, 8a). People who love each other are not looking for a way to get out of each other's company, they are looking for ways to be together and stay together.

Jesus said, "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). Life is made of years, months, days, hours and minutes. When we give our time to our spouse we are laying our life down for him or her, for life is made up of time. You may give your spouse many types of gifts; none are more precious than the gift of time because you are in essence giving them you. If you are married, there is no one, other than our Lord, you should want to be with more than your spouse. In life our work schedules and child rearing must be spent with others. Our children are different in that they are an extension of each parent. Even though they are given a high priority, they should still never come between husband and wife. It takes time with each other to make a marriage last.

It takes time to make a marriage last,
It takes time to forgive a hurtful act,
It takes time to let the past be past.
For marriage is a covenantal pact.

So master your day and night time
Give much of it to the one you love
Time invested like meter to rhyme
It makes a marriage like to that above.

III. Marriages that last do not consider divorce as an option.

I have said it for years and I believe it now more than ever: if divorce is considered as an option, no marriage is safe. Let it be ruled out now and forever. It is Scriptural! "*Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" (Matthew 19:6). If we take these words of our Lord seriously, then we must say, from this point onward, I am not alone. I am not alone in what I do, where I go, how I am entertained, what I do for vocation, what I do for leisure, or where I go to church. When we are married we "*are no more twain*" (two), *but one flesh...*" but one. It is so much more than the picture or our state that joins a couple together, it is God. Even as God brought Eve to Adam and they were joined in His perfect will, so also is your marriage. A marriage is a healthy marriage that sees their union as all part of the plan and purpose of God. If you believe and teach that your marriage was ordained by God and keep reminding each other and indoctrinating your kids to this truth, divorce cannot be considered an option.

- Pastor Pope -

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