

Advice to Newlyweds and Reminders to Mature Marriages

A few years ago Enrique Reyes and I sat outside IHop and, after a clear presentation of the Gospel, he gave his heart to Christ. I remember it like it was yesterday -- beaming with joy after having found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He had found a hunger fulfilled that would never have been satisfied inside that restaurant. He was soon baptized and how thrilling it was to see him grow in grace. A few years ago his business took him up to the Dallas area. While there he experienced a stellar growth in grace. It was not long until the Lord brought a young lady into his life and through the years of courtship he would call and ask pertinent questions of his old pastor. He wrote me recently asking me what advice or wisdom I would give him, as he was now ten days away from being married. As I thought and prayed about it, I have chosen to write his answer down for not only him, but also others who may be contemplating holy matrimony.

I. Consecrate and Dedicate

Keep Jesus first. The Bible says, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33). As Evangelical Christians, we do not divide the spiritual from the secular. We do not get "hocus pocus" and spooky about the meeting place of our worship, nor the ordinances observed. We believe in reverently behaving ourselves in the place of worship, even as the Bible says, *"...that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"* (1 Timothy 3:15). More importantly, we believe the body of the Christian uniquely has been claimed by our Lord unto Himself. We are His by creation and we declare His complete ownership of ourselves when we commit to Christ through the new birth. And now we agree with God who says, *"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? Fore are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's"* (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

As Peter looked down the corridor of time and seeing the end approaching, he asked this question, *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"* (II Peter 3:11). In perspective of the first and greatest commandment given by the Lord Jesus in His earthly ministry, how can we do less than give Him our best? *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment"* (Mark 12:30). As evangelical Bible

believers, we live in the realm of eternity. We ask ourselves what profits us for not only time but eternity. Here is a given: Jesus Christ is to be honored first in our life. There is no way a Christian can love his or her spouse the way he or she should be loved if we do not order the long range and short range goals in light of what Jesus wants out of our lives.

In loving Jesus with all our hearts, we are activating the agape love of God. Our spouse needs so much more than what we can give in friendship or erotic love. She or he needs to be loved with the love of God. When we are right with God we begin to overflow with God's (agape) love. God had this in mind when He says, *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it"* (Ephesians 5:25). *"For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord..."* (1 Peter 3: 5, 6a). These commands require the supernatural. In essence God says, Husbands, love your wife the same exact way I love my bride! Wives, in the same way you allow me to be Lord in your life, let your husband be lord to you. We are not making a stretch when we say this kind of love is miraculous in character.

So as we give ourselves in consecration and dedication to our Lord Jesus Christ, He enables us to reach out with His power to those with whom we have chosen to spend the rest our life. The beginning to the end of every possible problem that may arise in marriages comes when we decide to put Jesus first in our personal life.

II. Leave and Cleave

The Lord Jesus, quoting from the original command in marriage from Genesis 2:24, said, *"And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?"* (Matthew 19:5). The traditional marriage ceremony perfectly illustrates this when the father brings the bride down the aisle to "give her away." Think slowly and deliberately about that word "give." She is no longer under her father's authority and responsibility. "Her": she is a unique individual who now finds her identity coupled and linked with a new federal head of the house, who is now the man to whom the father brings down the aisle in formal presentation. "Away" means she doesn't come back home, even if the union ever becomes uncomfortable. She is a member of a new entity and she does not return home. When she becomes one flesh with her husband, she is at home from that point onwards!

There can never be proper cleaving without proper leaving. So as the husband and wife cleave, the bond is only secure if the couple leave their homes in which they were

reared. It is well to understand that they share everything from the bed to the bank account. Any reserved area in their lives for themselves or their parents apart from their spouse is unwise; they are now one, therefore they must adjust accordingly. Oneness becomes a reality when we leave and cleave.

III. Apologize and Harmonize

No one is right all the time. When you have offended or wronged your spouse, don't sulk, pout or wait for them to take the initiative. Be the first to say, "I'm sorry." Love *"...seeketh not her own..."* (I Corinthians 13:5). Don't let pride keep you from a peaceful, blessed marriage.

Most often opposites do attract. When we are dealing with two unique personalities, we shall naturally deal with two different ways of looking at things and handling things. Find the harmony. Harmony is beautiful music, but it is not identical sounds; in many ways it is opposite to the other. When practiced together, it sounds great. One counters, compliments, enhances and blesses the sound of the other. I have heard many singers that when they solo sound good, but when they harmonize with someone else they sound great. *"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). In the first book of the Bible, God says man is made to harmonize, not solo. So instead of looking for ways to have your way, look for ways to get along with one another. When we do wrong, apologize. Decide to make your marriage a concert presentation of harmonious praise to God.

Next week we would like to continue these thoughts with three more points: IV. Forgive and Forget, V. Live to Give and VI. Plan for Permanency.

We are praying much for our up-coming couples' retreat, Safe in God's Harbor. We believe this will be the best one ever!
-Pastor Pope-