

"FINDING HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE"

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the trend in the Protestant Church has been to enlarge upon the celebration of Mother's Day, and to observe this second Sunday in the month of May as the "Festival of the Christian Home". And so today, in many of the churches across our land, particular emphasis is being placed upon the home and the family. It is altogether fitting for us to consider the marriage relationship, for certainly it is basic to a strong and meaningful home life. It is basic to the future of our country.

Moving picture engineers once classified the following as the ten most dramatic sounds in the movies: (1) a baby's first cry, (2) the blast of a siren, (3) the thunder of breakers on rocks, (4) the roar of a forest fire, (5) a fog horn (6) the slow drip of water, (7) the galloping of a herd of horses (8) the sound of a distant train whistle (9) the howling of a dog, (10) the wedding march. Of all of these sounds, the experts claim that tests show that one sound causes more emotional response and upheaval than any other. The sound more apt to arouse sadness, envy, regret, sorrow, tears and joy is the sound of the wedding march.

And this is not difficult to understand. No other institution has a more personal and far reaching effect on our lives than the institution of marriage. Marriage should be "holy wedlock" rather than a matter of "unholy deadlock". To make it so we must discover and magnify the Christian foundations for married happiness.

(Pause)

The factor that is most troublesome, that is more disruptive in marriage than any other, and that runs through all other is selfishness - plain and fancy selfishness. Joseph Fort Newton put it this way: "If more people could get a divorce from themselves, they might live happily with someone else". Therefore, this morning, let us center our thinking around the basic Christian idea of mutuality or togetherness as we examine and explore six factors of married happiness.

MUTUAL APPRECIATION

First, mutual appreciation. William James was one of the most noted philosophers and psychologists in the world. One time after he had written what proved to be an important work on psychology, he had a long and serious illness. During that time a friend sent him a potted azalea with a personal note of appreciation. In replying to the gift and the friendly note the great psychologist said that he was reminded that he had made a serious omission in writing his book. "He had discovered to his chagrin that he had omitted from his text-book the deepest quality of human nature - namely, the craving to be appreciated."

Too often in marriage we look for profound psychological principles and major differences in philosophies of life as the chief causes of unhappiness. In actual fact, however, the simple and everyday lack of appreciation lies at the root of much friction in marriage, especially in the early stages.

No one should expect marriage to be an endless courtship or honeymoon. But if it is to be happy and harmonious, it must be

tended and cared for by continuing expressions of appreciation on both sides. No other things can do so much in melting differences and counteracting defects as simple acts and words of understanding, courtesy and praise. Nothing is more deadly to married happiness than for mates to take each other for granted. To criticize each other even with good intentions is poor business. Marriage is no reform school. Husbands and wives who continually are pointing out each other's faults in private or public with the hope of perfecting the rough articles are heading for trouble. We must always point up each other's good qualities with appreciation and compliments. We must never forget the magic of thoughtful attentions. We all crave to be appreciated. Let no husband or wife ever forget that if happiness in marriage is to be achieved.

MUTUAL FORBEARANCE

The second factor I would put before you is mutual forbearance. Kepler, the famous astronomer, made a failure of his first marriage. On studying the matter over he decided that he should not marry according to emotional feeling, but according to scientific analysis. So he made a list of all the women he considered eligible. And then he wrote down beside their names all of the good qualities each possessed on one side and all of the bad qualities on the other side. He then chose the lady with the most good qualities and the fewest bad ones. But in spite of all his care, Kepler's second marriage was a worse failure than his first. The scientist gave it up as a bad job, and declared that the whole problem was beyond solution.

The trouble with Kepler and with a lot of husbands and wives is an unwillingness to put up with the give and take that is required in marriage because of the frailty of the two people involved. "For better or worse" may sound easy at the altar. However, it becomes in the daily round a matter of putting up with and living with the "for worse". And this takes a lot of patience and understanding, of overlooking and forgiving on both sides. There will be differences, conflicts and irritations. These blight and destroy, however, only when they are exaggerated and remain unadjusted in the spirit of generous forgiveness and good humor.

Unless there is a mutual forbearance, there is likely to be tyranny. The story is told of a lady who asked her husband why there was no lodge meeting that night. He replied, "It had to be postponed. The Grand, All Powerful, Invincible, Supreme, Omnipotent Sovereign got beat up by his wife". No matter how important we are outside the home, we have no right to play the part of the bully within. The tyrannical wife or husband who requires all concessions to be made in their favor, who are dictatorial, arbitrary, intolerant, can make of marriage a hellish experience. God grant to us the grace to see marriage not as a 50 - 50 proposition, but rather as a 90 - 90 proposition....each one going more than half way. And God grant us the grace to deal with our differences in the spirit of consideration - to be big enough to forgive and to be forgiven.

MUTUAL FIDELITY

The third factor I would put before you is mutual fidelity. And I think there needs to be some plain speaking at this point. Under the combination of influences of certain schools of psychiatry, progressive education, Hollywood movies, Playboy magazine, the Christian concept of marriage

is under heavy attack. Furthermore the cynical confusion in morals reflected in contemporary degenerate novels and plays ignores the Christian ideals of sexual chastity and fidelity. Far too many moderns succumb to the false philosophy that the repression of sex desire is mid-Victorian and unhealthy. They laugh at the idea that restraint in sex relationships before marriage is desirable. They say that the stigma of adultery is an old-fashioned superstition. They regard love as a grand passion to be indulged with little regard for conventions of law or moral principle. Such viewpoints are debasing and degrading to human life and character. They are contrary to Christian principles of love and marriage. They undermine character, destroy homes, and bring heartsickness and moral decay that always comes when the sacredness of love is betrayed by lust.

The Christian church challenges the modern idea that glorifies promiscuity in the guise of liberalism. It challenges our marriage and divorce laws which often allow libertines to make of marriage little more than legalized prostitution. It challenges the prevalent idea that to resist an impulse of nature is harmful and evil.

The Christian religion looks upon the physical nature of life as God-given, beautiful and necessary. But unless its appetites are controlled and directed by the will of man in accordance with the moral laws of God, man can become bestial and animalistic, vulgar and vicious. Christian marriage is the sacred union of one man and one woman. And when either one tampers with that relationship there is heartache ahead.

MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Mutual responsibility is the fourth factor on this list of things that help create happiness in marriage. A minister was being interviewed on a television program recently. The master of ceremonies asked him which he preferred, officiating at a wedding or conducting a funeral. After a moment's reflection, he said, "Funeral....I know then that their troubles are over".

Unfortunately, marriage is often the beginning of trouble for some people. Some of them are incidental, some serious. [The glamour soon wears off. Unless there is something secure holding the marriage together, something more than the fairy-prince, dream-girl, soul-mate idea of perpetual thrills and pleasure, unhappiness is ahead.] Unforeseeable problems arise. Personalities change; husband and wife develop unevenly and by different patterns. Tensions arise and conflicts occur.

Such situations bring rocky, thorny, difficult experiences of adjustment and understanding. We need to know that behind all its thrilling glamour, marriage is a sacred, binding contract. It is a mature enterprise voluntarily entered into by two grown people. It can succeed only as it is managed intelligently by a mutual sense of responsibility. It involves joining hands, hearts and heads in a shared objective, that of enriched persons growing in a setting of peace and joy. And it is to this end that responsible persons in marriage move. They fulfill their share of the duties and work. They know better than to live beyond their means. They don't lose their heads in vain arguments. They find in tears and tensions a deepening of the bonds of love. Responsible married people beware of the

entanglements of outsiders, whether in-laws, wolves, or out-laws. The trouble with marriage is not the institution of marriage; it is the persons involved. And it may be necessary in some instances to seek outside help - the help of a counselor. And may I say this, in the relatively impersonal context of this congregation, the thing that distresses ministers and marriage counselors is that so many people wait far too long to seek this outside help. Why wait until you're deathly sick to try to find some healing. Why not try to find a cure for your troubles before they become major ones.

MUTUAL FAITH A fifth factor involved is faith in each other and faith in God. No marriage can be complete and happy if it is poisoned by suspicion or undermined by a purely secular view of life.

An old Vermont law says that a woman cannot walk down the street on Sunday unless her husband walks twenty paces behind her with a musket on his shoulder. The intent of that law was for protection. However, the spirit of it is often alive today in the constant suspicion of husband or wife that over-shadows the others like a cloud. Absolute and complete trust ~~must be earned and deserved, yes, but it~~ must be there if marriage is to be happy.

Roy Burkhardt of Columbus, Ohio, tells in one of his books of noticing at the close of a marriage service he performed an older couple in the back row kissing each other with obvious affection. He made it a point to meet them afterward. He learned that they were celebrating their fifty-second anniversary and were rejoicing in 52 years of married joy. Burkhardt says he was struck with a remark of the woman which seemed to be a key to their experience. She said, looking at her husband, "I trust him and God alike". It is that kind of trust, says Dr. Burkhardt, that keeps marriage Gothic, in its beauty, always pointing upward toward the unseen. The two go together. We come to trust each other in perfect serenity when we learn together to trust God.

Marriage, Christian marriage, is not only a contract: it is a spiritual relationship. When husband and wife share a vital and a meaningful faith and test their decisions and plans by the teachings of Christ, their marriage has deep, strong roots. When they incorporate the church into their program of living and engage in prayer or devotions in the home, they discover a divine blending of spirits. They are founding their marriage on sure foundations. It is the overwhelming recorded testimony of courts, marriage clinics and counselors that the homes that pray together stay together.

MUTUAL LOVE The final factor in all of this is mutual love. A wise man once said, "We talk of falling in love as if it were a blind, stumbling, - like falling into a mud puddle; no, we climb into love." Real love, love that goes far beyond physical infatuation and becomes boundless, sacrificial, holy love is love that we reach out after. Love worthy of the name is touched with divine beauty and tenderness. It grows and deepens, it is strong and re-

sourceful. It is thoughtful and trustful, pure and complete. When a marriage is based on love like that, it becomes a comradeship of kindred souls that grows and glows with ever increasing radiance through the years.

How do I love Thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, - I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

LET US PRAY:

That beautiful sonnet by Elizabeth Barrett Browning that we learned back in the days of our schooling has a much deeper meaning for us now than it did then.

God, Our Father, look in favor we beseech thee upon the homes of thy people. Defend them against all evil and supply all of their needs according to the riches of thy grace. Make them sanctuaries of purity and peace, love and joy. Bless all dear to us wherever they are, and grant that they and we may follow thee every step of our daily life. This we ask in the spirit of Jesus Christ. Amen