



# Holy Marriages and Healthy Families

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Primary Source: Dr. James Dobson, *Five Essentials for Lifelong Intimacy* (Multnomah, 2005).

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# The Realities

Matrimony offers the possibility for the most fulfilling of all human-to-human relationships.

It offers the possibility of being loved unconditionally decade after decade by someone who has vowed to be there with you through the good and the bad, for better or for worse.

It offers the possibility for two people becoming “One Flesh,” blending their lives together and being more complete, healthy and whole than either of their lives separately could be.



## But few couples achieve this...

This course looks at why this is and the essentials for achieving the ideals for marriage listed above.

FACT: 50% of all marriages end in divorce after an average longevity of only 8 years.

For those living together before marriage, the statistics are even worse.

- This may seem strange since it is logical to think that to live with someone will help one to get to know the other person. Why not ‘know’ him or her in the biblical sense; after all, is it not part of assessing compatibility? There are, however, sociological and psychological reasons that none-the-less drive these statistics.
  - The psychological process known as **marital bonding** is placed at jeopardy by choosing to have sex prior to marriage [Not in every case, but in statistically a significant number of cases]. Marital bonding is what deliberate, step-by-step courtship is all about. Some psychologists identify 12 steps leading to life-long intimacy [to be taken in order and over time], the last four of which in the Christian tradition are limited to Holy Matrimony.

## Marriage is God’s Idea

God created human sexuality. God also created the institution of marriage in which sexuality is to find its expression. God also created the “bonding process” [courtship] as part of our emotional and psychological process that leads to life-long intimacy in marriages. This is why God has scripturally mandated that sexual expression be limited to the institution of marriage.

- But courtship and marriage in our culture are at a severe disadvantage because:
  - Biblical norms and boundaries are discounted and even dismissed.
  - Our culture of individualism accepts and even encourages pre-marital sex in the name of freedom and fulfillment.
  - Sexual taboos are no longer in place, and the reasons they have existed over the span of human history has been largely lost.
  - We have taught ourselves to seek immediate gratification rather than a relationship that will stand the test of time.

- Many people getting married lack healthy role models for marriage. Many have seen only conflict and disillusionment in marriages around them.

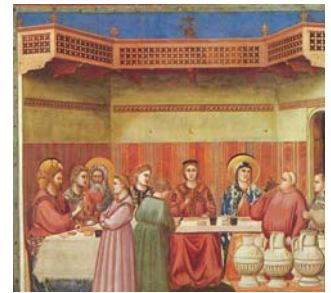
*When you were young, what was your general opinion of marriage? What is your current perception of marriage and what role models for marriage do you have?*

### **Why traditional marriage matters:**

- God obviously created marriage to protect the wonderful gift of sexuality that He has given us. God also established boundaries and taboos around human sexuality for our own good.
- The purpose of marriage is stated in the marriage liturgy: *The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. (BCP-423)*
- Families, by God's design, are the building blocks of society- Healthy families build healthy societies. Historical correlations have been made between the strength of the family and the strength of the culture. Dr. Carl Zimmerman, Harvard sociologist, tabulated characteristics of societies that are unhealthy and in decline. Those characteristics are:
  - The ascendancy of causeless, casual, no-fault divorce.
  - Loss of the meaning of the marriage ceremony and covenant.
  - The rise of *companionate* marriage [marriages without life-long expectations].
  - The break-down of inhibitions concerning adultery, promiscuity, and sexual perversions like pornography and incest.

### **Christian marriages are to be different.**

- The current crisis in the institution of marriage calls for us to draw a sharp distinction between secular and sacred marriages... between civil marriages and sacramental marriages.
- God always works with a remnant, which is the Church.
- The Institution of Marriage, even Christian marriage, is in crisis as evidenced by the high divorce rate and the high percentage of marriages considered "unhappy."
  - However: our cultural failure to live up to God's ideal for marriage does not lessen God's call to His Church to teach the divine ideals for marriage and the holy basics of achieving life-long intimacy.



### **The characteristics of true intimacy in marriage:**

- A mystical bond of deep friendship.
- Understanding of one's partner.
- Healthy and uninhibited communications.
- Kept promises... promises to be there in sickness and in health, richer or poorer, forsaking all others until separated by death.
- The Biblical reality of two living lives as 'One flesh.'
- Unconditional love.

### **The truth about your marriage:**

It can be life-long, fulfilling, blessed and holy, even in a culture awash in dysfunctional marriages. The most essential ingredient is creating **life-long intimacy**. Roughly only two out of ten marriages achieve this. Life-long intimacy is therefore the topic of the rest of this course. These discussions are based largely on Dr. James Dobson's book, *Five Essentials for Lifelong Intimacy*.

# Essential #1- A Christ-Centered Home

➤ This spiritual dimension in marriage offers an enormous advantage to achieving lifelong intimacy.

- Without the redeeming power of Christ we cannot adequately deal with moral and relational shortcomings in our lives or in our marriages.
- It is foolish in our human condition of self-centeredness, selfishness and sinfulness to expect an intimate marriage without relying on God's help.

➤ Christian values lend stability and harmony to marriages... They are a shield against the vast array of personal and relational dysfunctions that come against marriages. The classic Christian virtues that need to be evident in marriage are obedience to the Divine, fidelity, trust and, of course, the fruits of a life formed and led by the Holy Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23]:

Love  
Joy  
Peace  
Patience  
Kindness  
Goodness  
Faithfulness  
Gentleness  
Self-control



➤ Praying together...

- Intimacy with God leads to intimacy with one another.
- Prayer needs to be part of the fabric of married life. Ask your spouse every day, "How may I pray for you today?"

➤ A shared faith brings a shared purpose in life.

- Together serving God and others transcends the fragile nature of life and of marriage.
- Married or single, at the end of the race, we want to be able to say what St. Paul says in 2 Tim 4:6-8... *"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

# Essential #2- Lifelong Commitment

## Total Commitment

- Total commitment is a biblically mandated component of marriage. It is not marriage without it.
- Draw the image in your mind of two people in the midst of a raging storm who are totally committed to the other's well-being and survival...
  - They brace one another against the storm, steady one another, hang on to each other, support one another, and encourage one another. They provide the other with the strength and courage to face the next day when the other can't provide that strength and courage for themselves.
    - That is commitment... That is what a marriage is supposed to look like when the inevitable storms of life come.

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"Do you, Jason, take Karyn to have and to hold, to E-mail and fax, to page and beep, until death do you part?"

- *What is the commitment reflected in the marriage vows?* BCP-423,424
- Matt 19:4-6 reveals that commitment in marriage is a commitment to at least to four things:
  - *"Haven't you read," Jesus replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*
  - What we hear in Jesus' word's concerning marriage is that it includes commitment to...
    - **Severance**  
Leaving old commitments behind or at least subordinating them.
    - **Unity**  
Molding your lives together as one with common interests and goals.
    - **Intimacy**  
Merging of heart, soul and spirit...two becoming one flesh.
    - **Permanence**  
Knowing that you are in this for the long haul and that nothing short of death will be allowed to separate you.

*What are some of the former commitments, interest and life foci that we are called to leave behind when we enter the marriage vows? Draw from your experience. What did you give up or are giving up for the sake of your marriage?*

## Important

Understand the nature of your commitment to the other before entering marriage, such as:

- Commitment to fidelity, trust, longevity, sacrificial love...

- Commitment to child rearing. For instance, if a couple has three children three years apart, they will spend the next 26 years raising them. That commitment!

- Commitment to meeting the expectations of the other.
  - *What expectations do you have for your marriage?*
  - *Have the two of you adequately communicated those expectations?*
  - *Are they practical and attainable? Can you meet them?*
  - *Can your fiancée / spouse meet your expectations?*
  - *What happens when expectations are not met?*

### **Commitment versus feelings and emotions.**

Feelings and emotions are too fleeting to hold a relationship together in tough times.

- Relationships solely based on feelings are necessarily transitory.
- One of the **signs of emotional and spiritual maturity** is the ability to overrule feelings and govern one's behavior on reason, obedience to God, unconditional love and commitment to one's spouse.

### **Divorce is the breakdown of commitment.**

- Divorce has become the fashionable and culturally acceptable solution to marital conflict.
- **Marriage Killers** are those things that dissolve those once sacred commitments made on one's wedding day. They are...
  - Overwork and exhaustion.
  - Selfishness.
  - Financial stress and differing spending habits.
  - Lack of autonomy from the broader family, particularly parents and/or step-children.
  - Unrealistic expectations for the marriage and of the spouse. For instance, the expectation that there would be no conflict and romantic love would always dominate the relationship... hugely unrealistic!
  - Not allowing the partner space to be who he or she is.
  - Substance abuse.
  - Sexual frustration or un-fulfillment leading to infidelity.
  - Not investing time and commitment in the marriage.
- One way to avoid divorce is to apply Philippians 2:3-4 to a marriage...
  - *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*



Successful marriages don't  
work on automatic pilot

# Essential #3 - Trust, Respect, Fidelity

## Trust

- Relationships dominated by fear, lack of trust and insecurity will never flourish.... What will?
  - Marriages based on trust, respect and fidelity.
  - Marriages in which the partners always act with honesty and integrity.
  - Marriages in which the spouse knows that he or she has been entrusted with another's heart and therefore makes it a priority to guard it carefully over all things.
  - Marriages in which trust is not only built by words, but also by actions.
- Building trust and a history of trustworthiness with a spouse involves...
  - Placing boundaries around your behavior.
  - Knowing what's appropriate and acceptable to one's spouse.
  - Valuing your own integrity as a Godly virtue.
  - Understanding the nature of temptation and the art of avoiding it.

## Adultery- the ultimate breach of trust...

How does God feel about adultery?

- The Bible is uncompromising about sexual fidelity in marriage:
  - Ex 20:14... You shall not commit adultery. [The 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment].
  - Matt 5:27-29... Jesus says, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*
  - Matt 19:18... When asked by the rich young man what is required of him by God, Jesus mentions not committing adultery.
  - Eph 5:3... *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.*
  - Gal 5:19... Paul lists adultery first in his description of the sinful human nature.
  - Heb 13:4-5... *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*



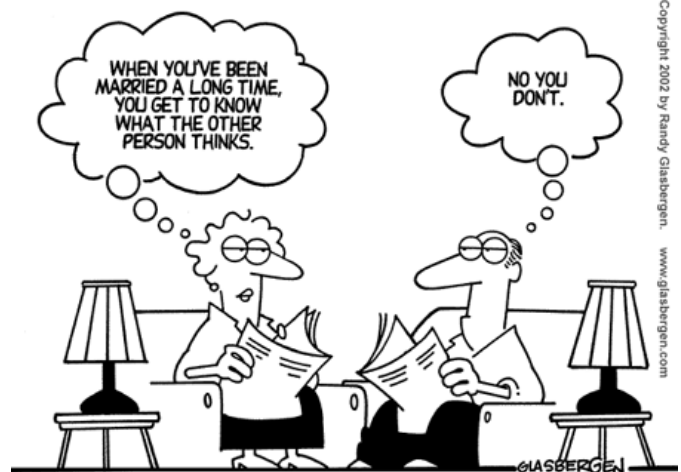
## Essential #4- Communications

Eph 4:25-32... *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. ...Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ...Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

### The Importance of Communications

When asked about the main problems in their marriages, 87% of those interviewed said communications.

- Some reasons why husbands and wives do not adequately communicate:
  - To avoid confrontation.
  - Take each other for granted.
  - Are consumed in their own interest.
  - Want to avoid being manipulated or talked into what they don't want to do.
  - Not willing to commit the time to talk.
  - Don't want to hurt the other with words.
  - Want to avoid being honest.
  - Don't know how to express their needs and expectations.



### Women are from Venus; Men are from Mars

- It is a basic fact that women verbalize their feelings more freely than men.
- Men want to talk of objective things such as facts and ideas. For women, real communication is about feelings.
- Some men may never be able to verbalize and share with their wife the way that most women desire. This needs to be acknowledged. If this seems to be the case, remember the first rule of good mental health... To accept what you are powerless to change.
- A healthy marriage is not a perfect marriage. It is a relationship with healthy perspectives and reasonable expectations. It is a marriage that accepts the irresolvable out of sacrificial love for the other.

James 1:19... *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ...*

# Essential #5- Understanding Love

## Love is the exercise of *Uncommon Grace*

- Marriage calls for the application of ‘uncommon grace.’
  - “Grace” means an unmerited yet freely given act of service and favor.
  - “Uncommon” suggest that it is rare and often not attained.
  - Grace that we exercise toward our spouse is a reflection of God’s grace shows upon of us.
  - Our grace toward each other can find its source in a grace-filled life in relationship with God.
- Grace is the oxygen on which marriages thrive.
- *What does ‘uncommon grace’ look like in marriages?*
  - Expressing anger appropriately and in a grace filled way.
  - Guarded speech that protects the other.
  - Sacrificially directing resources to meet your partner’s needs.
  - It is the exercise of God’s kind of unconditional love ... in Greek., “Agape”



## Agape love

- Agape love is the kind of love God has for us.
  - Unconditional and unmerited.
  - Based on the deliberate choice of the one who loves rather than the worthiness of the one who is being loved.
  - Agape is a choice... an act of the will, not an emotion or a feeling.
  - Agape love is described in 1 Cor 13:4-8...

<i>Love is patient</i>	<i>Love is kind.</i>
<i>It does not envy</i>	<i>It does not boast,</i>
<i>It is not proud</i>	<i>It is not rude,</i>
<i>It is not self-seeking</i>	<i>It is not easily angered,</i>
<i>It keeps no record of wrongs</i>	<i>Love does not delight in evil</i>
<i>But rejoices with the truth.</i>	<i>It always protects,</i>
<i>Always trusts</i>	<i>Always hopes,</i>
<i>Always perseveres</i>	<i>Love never fails.</i>
- Healthy marriages and healthy households require the cultivation of ‘Uncommon Grace’ and ‘Agape Love.’

# Healthy Households

## Healthy families are...

- A shelter in the storm.
- A perpetual place of truth.
- A place to learn life.
  - Learn to share, relate, and how treat other people
  - Learn right and wrong.
- A laboratory for building character.
- It is the birthplace of creativity.
- A museum of memories.

## What healthy families do ... What they look like:

- They are committed to one another
- Spend time together
- Communicate
- Turn inward in time of crisis
- Affirm and Encourage
- Share a spiritual commitment
- Trust
- Offer each other freedom to fail and a grace-filled environment to keep failures in perspective.



**Dysfunctional families blur these attributes of healthy families.**

## Finances:

- Simple... Healthy families
  - Give to one another
  - Give back to God.
  - Give to those in need

## Parenting:

- The healthy development of children is related to a warm, sustained, nurturing relationship of the child to both parents.