

God's Design & Plan for Marriage

| Marriage Tips Series

■ by Doug VanTil, MSW, LCSW



I must admit that I write this article with fear and trepidation. As a Christian counselor/therapist who works with couples, I will say it can be exhilarating, challenging, rewarding, frustrating and humbling - oftentimes all at once. The good and bad news, and for sure the humbling part, is being married myself for 35 years. We therapists encounter many instances which cause us to ask ourselves, "Who am I to offer couples wisdom about marriage?"

The other day I was talking to a friend about the prospect of writing this "Marriage Tips" article. As I was commiserating about my lack of qualification, he suggested (while understanding the basis for my misgivings) that wisdom is wisdom, and I should feel alright about repeating wisdom from many experts that have come before. With those words of encouragement, here are some "there's nothing new under the sun" tips on marriage from a Christian marriage counselor.

- ◆ **The first tip** is for me: Try to practice what I preach.

- ◆ **The second tip** is to remind ourselves of God's purpose and His design for marriage. I'll borrow from author and marriage counselor Gary Thomas. In his book, *Sacred Marriage*, he proposes that God instituted marriage to move us as individuals and as a couple (becoming one) towards holiness and not necessarily happiness. Perhaps the challenges, conflicts, and the triumphs that come with marriage, are all for the purpose to refine us and make us more and more like Christ, towards the furtherance of His kingdom. Gary challenges us to spend less time on striving towards happiness and more time and effort toward purity and holiness as per God's plan for marriage and relationship.

- ◆ **The third tip** is to remember that God's design for marriage is for it to last, knowing full well that a marriage unit is comprised of two sinners who sin a lot.

- ◆ **The fourth tip** is to accept the biblical, but not so glamorous, concept that we are now stuck with each other (for better or worse, for richer or poorer, till death do us part).

- ◆ **The fifth tip** is to think about the idea that working toward a good marriage should be motivated and driven by a desire to be a good model for our children, grandchildren, friends, and other observers.

- ◆ **The sixth tip** is to remember that with our fallen human natures it is natural to have the temptation that the grass is greener somewhere else. If we acknowledge temptation we can better resist it.

- ◆ **The seventh tip** is that the process of becoming holy requires vigilance, hard work, endurance, and patience.

- ◆ **The last, but not least, tip** is to remind ourselves that in God's holy plan He designed sex as a priority for us to figure out, work on, and enjoy in the confines of marriage. As men and women each uniquely made with different perspectives and abilities it's incumbent upon us to enjoy the almost limitless possibilities.



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