

:: marriage series ::

I Hope to Never See You in My Office

...about marital counseling

■ by Deborah Mitchell, MS, LMFT



I don't say this because I want time off, or because I'm tired of seeing couples, or because I don't believe in what I do. I say this because I DO believe in what I do. I cannot say often or loudly enough how much I believe in the importance of a good and Godly marriage.

Definitions

Good marriage: Ephesians 5:21-28 gives some "marriage rules" that many find hard to swallow. It speaks of a wife respecting her husband, and a husband unconditionally loving his wife and sacrificing himself for her... both putting the others' needs before their own (mutually submitting to each other). They are friends; a team that is encouraging each other to individually and relationally be all God created him/her to be. In this marriage, both partners know there is someone in the flesh that will watch out for them and even, (dare I say it?), call them out on issues that threaten to hold them back-- as we are to "speak the truth in love." (See 1 Corinthians 13 for directions). And despite a normal ebb and flow, a good marriage will also maintain some level of passion as an expression of that love.

Godly marriage: A Godly marriage is, as the book of Ecclesiastes puts it: "a cord of three strands that is not quickly broken." A good marriage binds two together; a Godly marriage adds the third. It is also a beautiful portrait of our relationship with Christ. If you continue reading beyond the "submission" and "sacrificial love" mentioned in Ephesians, Paul quotes the Old Testament: "As the Scriptures say, 'A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.'" Paul then adds: "This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one."

Finding it hard to swallow? A lot of people struggle with these definitions because they are hard to do. Shouldn't living with the one you love come naturally? There are many reasons why it doesn't...

A Few Common Reasons

Pride: The idea of submission can be painful—particularly in our culture. How can we balance having a good self-worth while positioning ourselves under someone else's authority? It is important that we see this as a "chain of command" and not as having less worth.

Fear: Living a good, Godly marriage gives your mate the opportunity to hurt you. What if you give 100%, expecting 100%, and really get 10% back? It is a possibility and this possibility has to be considered. What are you willing to do in obedience to Christ, even if your spouse makes a difference choice?

Busy-ness: In the parable of the sower, good seed fell in four different areas. One of those mentioned was the seed that fell among the weeds. Even though the seed was good and even though the plant flourished for a while, the weeds grew up and "choked out" what was once flourishing. When the disciples asked for the explanation, Christ described the weeds as the "cares of this world" or "the busy-ness of life." Although Christ was talking about the kingdom of God in the parable, this applies extremely well to the marital relationship. As responsibilities inside and outside the home increase, fatigue increases and communication/intimacy decreases.

So, I HOPE TO NEVER SEE YOU IN MY OFFICE because your marriage is so good and Godly that you don't need any help. But if you do, I hope you'll see that it's worth the work (and it IS work!) and see myself or one of any number of wonderful Christian marital counselors available to help you move in a positive direction. ■



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