

STAYING OUT OF TROUBLE

1 Corinthians 7:28 (NIV) Yet those who marry will face many troubles in this life

TIM KELLER (The Meaning of Marriage, 21) – “Marriage is glorious but hard.”

Marriages are better served by staying out of trouble than getting out of trouble. But how do we do that?

We must begin by realizing that our marriages generally grow or deteriorate in the daily details of life. A good marriage requires hard work and faithfulness empowered by God’s grace. A couple will never drift into a happy, God-glorifying marriage; they will only approach that goal through a purposeful commitment.

PAUL TRIPP (What Did You Expect?, p 58) – “Things don’t go bad in a marriage in an instant. The character of a marriage is not formed in one grand moment. Things in a marriage go bad progressively. Things become sweet and beautiful progressively. The development and deepening of the love in a marriage happens by things that are done daily; this is also true with the sad deterioration of a marriage.”

I. RESIST SIN FAITHFULLY

JAY ADAMS - “The pressures of marriage...have a way of bringing out defects. You can’t place two sinners - even redeemed ones - under the same roof, at close range, day after day without such pressures. And they are often great enough to expose problems not previously apparent. No two sinners are fundamentally compatible.”

Many sins can impact a marriage but few will impact it more than **Selfishness and Pride** (and the related **Anger** which is the fruit of thwarted selfishness and pride).

A. The Problem of Selfishness

TIM KELLER (The Meaning of Marriage, 29) – “Marriage used to be about us, but now it’s about me.” (speaking of social trend)

TIM KELLER (The Meaning of Marriage, 56) – “Self-centeredness is a havoc-wreaking problem in many marriages, and it is the ever present enemy of every marriage...Therefore, when facing any problem in marriage, the first thing you look for at the base of it is, in some measure, self-centeredness and an unwillingness to serve or minister to the other.”

Marriage is an unnatural act for sinners. The basic nature of marriage is for two to become one. The basic nature of sinners is to go their own way – to be selfish.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way

Even for Christians this “own way” temptation continues. It is our natural bent that has to be overcome by the continual choice to resist selfishness. We can never afford to be neutral on this.

All of us have preferences or desires, and that’s not wrong. Where we get in trouble is where those normal things escalate from “I prefer” or “I would like” to “I deserve,” “I must have,” “I DEMAND!!!”

The more you are committed to being served the less you will serve and the more your marriage will suffer in almost every arena because the essence of being a husband is servant headship and the essence of being a wife is servant helping.

James 3:16, 4:1-2 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.... ^{4:1}What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ²You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

In other words, when you try to unite two people who are going their own way, you have a tremendous potential for problems.

JAY ADAMS - "Perhaps the central pattern in all marital problems is self-centeredness...That self-centeredness is destructive to marriage goes without saying. When two parties come together who want what they want and expect others to give it to them, you have all of the ingredients for trouble. The essence of married love, to which each party pledges himself or herself, is to put the other first. That is the opposite of self-centeredness...Because the vows and subsequent challenges of marriage so clearly demand a renunciation of self in order to put another human being first, marriage counters self-centeredness more than any other human institution. No wonder sinners have so much difficulty in marriage: Its very design - that of living for someone else to make him or her happy and meet his or her need for companionship - is contrary to sinful human nature."

But – **1 Corinthians 5:15** He died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

B. The Problem of Pride

What happens when one partner in a one-flesh relationship thinks he or she is more important than the other? What happens when a head doesn’t appreciate or think he needs a helper. What happens when a helper doesn’t appreciate or think she

needs a head? Disaster. Why does that happen? Pride. There is a direct correlation between pride and the ability to lead or help or to become increasingly one. To the degree that a wife is proud to that degree it is going to be difficult to lead her – because she thinks she knows better. To the degree that a husband is proud, to that degree it is going to be difficult to help him – because he doesn't think he needs help. To the degree that a person is proud, to that degree it will be difficult to become one with another.

Philippians 2:3-6 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

No couple thinks about rivalry or conceit at their wedding. They are focused on being in love and their life together. They think - "Love is not proud and we are soooo in love. I'm not going to look after my own interests at all – my life is now all about you sweetheart."

GORDON MACDONALD - "Pride is at the root of almost all marital conflict. Pride is the part of us that cannot face being wrong. Thus we will not accept criticism, easily evaluate facts which suggest that we hold the wrong opinion, or allow for the possibility that there simply may be times when our partner is right and we are dead wrong. As long as being the strongest, the best, and the 'rightest' is top priority, conflict will be destructive...What a burden is lifted when one no longer has to be right about everything."

This fits into the "easier said than done" category. Nevertheless, if husbands and wives would discover (or better still be willing to ask their spouse) where they are tempted to be selfish and purpose to serve and discover where they are tempted to be proud and purpose to be humble MANY marriage problems would be avoided.

C. The Problem of Anger

Many discussion shift from the original problem and escalate because of anger. Discussions turn into arguments. Conversations into conflicts.

Ephesians 4:25-27 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

James 1:19-20 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.

1. Anger is a horribly destructive sin.

Proverbs 29:22 A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts...

2. Anger is controllable.

Colossians 3:8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Proverbs 29:11 A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Proverbs 17:27 Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

II. TALK STRATEGICALLY

A line from the movie Cool Hand Luke (1967) sums up a common marriage problem – “What we have here is failure to communicate.”

In many marriages communication is too little, too shallow and too unplanned.

PAUL TRIPP (What Did You Expect? p 161) – “I have been amazed over the years at how little consistent and honest communication goes on between married couples. I think there are many, many couples who simply do not talk. Sure, they discuss the schedule and logistics of their life together, but they do not talk with one another in a heart-disclosing, relationship-protecting way. Sinners living in silence do not produce unity, understanding and love.”

Communication has two purposes--to educate (transmit information – gain a greater understanding of your spouse at every level) and to unite (to get on the same page not just mentally but at a heart level - to build intimacy). Both of these are critical to becoming one flesh.

WAYNE MACK - "When people have communicated effectively, they are mutually strengthened, encouraged and enriched. That is the standard by which we must evaluate our marital and family communication. Does it foster harmony, unity and emotional closeness? Does it draw people together? Do we experience not just physical closeness but emotional closeness?"

A. Talking

What to talk about:

1. Business – getting on the same page.
2. Expectations – Unspoken and/or unreasonable expectations soon become unmet expectations which soon become the cause of much trouble in marriage.
3. Gratitude and Encouragement – is your spouse more aware of what you love and appreciate about him than what you would like to see changed. And are you making her aware of God's grace even in the areas where she needs to change.

RAY ORTLUND (Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel, 70) – "A wise husband cultivates his wife (*and vice versa*) by setting a high tone of praise and affirmation in their home – not neutral silence, certainly not insults, but bright, positive, life-giving praise."

4. Humble Correction – making time to regularly ask how you could be a better husband or wife or Christian or if there is anything you are doing that is bugging or offending your spouse. No one will be able to help you more.

TIM KELLER (The Meaning of Marriage, 140) – "Give your spouse the right to talk to you about what is wrong with you."

Wrong responses to your spouse's faults include: withdrawing and fighting and/or blaming. Instead of running away or attacking couples must learn to work together to graciously help one another to grow.

Ephesians 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

5. What God is doing in your life – biblical fellowship.

You are always growing and changing – will the NOW you be known?

B. Listening

WAYNE MACK - "To listen properly, a servant's attitude and posture is necessary. It requires us to put our whole inner and outer man at another person's disposal saying: 'Your interests, concerns, problems, successes, or failures are more important than mine. I will listen to whatever you have to say as long as it is biblically proper. I will allow you to express yourself fully. I yield myself to you. Let's focus on what is most important to you rather than on what is most important to me.'"

1. Attentive - truly interested (e.g. – not reading sports page or one eye on TV – touchdown!!!), strong non-verbal communication (don't fall asleep), not interrupting (a huge problem with many couples), discerning, etc.
2. Interactive - responding to what is being said, drawing out, reflecting, etc.
3. Understanding - men and women tend to communicate in different ways and care more about different things. Understanding this will help you to hear your spouse more effectively.

C. Talking and Listening During a Disagreement or Conflict

1. Speaking during disagreement/conflict

James 1:19-20 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.

Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

2. Listening during disagreement/conflict

Make understanding more important than being understood. This alone will make a dramatic difference in the way you discuss issues.

WINSTON SMITH (Marriage Matters, 108) – "Recognize that your understanding is always shaped and limited by your own perception. You never see everything; you only see what you see. You never hear everything; you only hear what you hear.

Proverbs 18:2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

Proverbs 18:13 If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

e.g. – finding yourself anxious to speak, formulating your arguments while the other person is speaking.

1. Understand the issues. Both material (substantive matters that need to be resolved) and personal (matters that have affected our hearts).

2. Understand what the person means. Avoid the destructive habit of arguing over words. (e.g. – you said, but I meant, why didn't you say...you can't remember to take out the trash but you can remember every word that was said?)

3. Avoid all courtroom scenarios.

4. Stay on the subject.

5. Make discovering where you were wrong more important than pointing out where your spouse was wrong. Be quick to repent and ask forgiveness.

Matthew 7:3-5 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

III. ACT WISELY

A. Deal with Little Things

This does not mean deal with everything (**Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.), but with the things that bother you that you can't or don't feel it wise to overlook (**Ephesians 4:26** do not let the sun go down on your anger). You can't avoid conflict by avoiding talking about things you disagree about or subjects that are painful or potentially volatile. Problems don't just go away. Eventually you will grow progressively more unhappy, angry, bitter or resentful until some day it all blows up.

Also, you will have missed opportunities to grow up individually and as a couple, which is a primary purpose for God bringing trials and tests into your marriage.

An important part of this is recognizing that in marriage both spouses will change over the years. Marriage, children, career switches, aging all change us. The person you married will not be the same in the future. Growing together and staying together requires couples to adjust to these changes.

TIM KELLER (The Meaning of Marriage, 135) – “The in-love experience passes when the flaws in the other person come home to us. Things that seemed small and inconsequential now loom large. We begin to feel that we did not really know the person after all. And this presents us with the challenge of loving a person who, at the moment, seems in large part a stranger, not the person you remember marrying.

B. Pursue Spiritual Growth

It is not enough to want to grow closer together. You must want to grow closer together in God. As you both grow closer to Him, you will find yourselves growing closer to each other.

It is not enough that you want to grow in your love for each other but that you want to grow in your love for God. As you both grow in your love for God you will find yourselves growing more in love with each other.

JAY ADAMS – “Husbands and wives must grow as individuals in conformity to Christ in order to be compatible with each other.”

PAUL TRIPP (What Did You Expect, 121) – “The problem in our marriages is not first that we don’t love one another enough; no, the problem is that we don’t love God enough, and because we don’t love God enough, we don’t love one another as we should.”

WINSTON SMITH (Marriage Matters, 9) – “A lack of love should prompt us to not just look more closely at our marriage but at our relationship with God.”

C. Take Care of Your Responsibilities

How many troubles come because you don't mow the lawn, get ready on time, spend money wisely, lead your family, etc.? A lack of discipline in lifestyle will lead to many problems. Conversely, simple personal discipline - doing what you ought when you ought - will avoid many.

D. Don't Neglect Romance

Song of Solomon 5:16 This is my lover and this is my friend.

BOB KAUFMAN - "Romance is God's way for us to communicate to our spouse that they are an invaluable treasure in our lives worth pursuing, investing in, and delighting in."

NORMAN WRIGHT - romance is "The steady delight and genuine sparkle of two people who enjoy and nurture each other."

The routine of daily existence (business of life, curse of familiarity, tiredness) can tempt couples to neglect this important part of marriage.

Likewise marital troubles can slowly erode romance. Feelings die, expectations are dashed and hopes are deferred or abandoned. It is difficult to show your spouse that they are loved, honored, cherished and appreciated when they aren't.

Things like – conversation, expressions of physical affection not connected to sex, verbal expressions of appreciation, gifts, notes, dating, just having fun together – i.e. doing things that you enjoy.

E. Sex

The sexual relationship is not an afterthought but a vital part of married life.

DWIGHT SMALL - "Sexual intercourse is more than a physical act; it is a symbol of a spiritual relationship and the expression of the complete oneness of two persons in married love...It is the means by which they are confirmed and nourished in that union."

1. What hinders a fulfilling sexual relationship?

- Ignorance – including both a lack of information and misinformation.
- Selfishness – giving not getting must be the primary concern.
- Lack of Communication - Couples often have a hard time talking about such a sensitive and intimate subject. As a result they often don't know how to please their partner sexually. Your best teacher, if you will be humble enough to learn, is your spouse.

2. Biblical principles for sexual fulfillment in marriage.

- It is ordained by God – **Genesis 1:27**
- It is for procreation – **Genesis 1:28**

- It is for pleasure – **Proverbs 5:18-19**

In the **Song of Solomon** all of the senses are enjoyed as the lovers talk about their sexual experience - sight (**4:1-7, 5:10-16**), hearing (**2:10, 2:14**), smell (**1:3, 7:8**), taste (**4:11, 5:1**) and touch (**6:2-3, 8:3**).

- Is for expressing and building unity – **Genesis 2:24-25**
- Is regulated by God's commands - **1 Corinthians 7:1-5** gives three important principles for the sexual relationship within marriage - meeting your spouse's needs is your duty; husband and wife have equal authority in this area; any break in sexual activity should be mutually agreed upon, temporary, and only for a specific purpose.
- It is affected by all that goes on in your marriage.

DR. ED WHEAT (Intended for Pleasure) - "Everything that happens in marriage has its effect upon the lovemaking experience...It is your daily behavior toward each other that will measure the extent and depth of the pleasure you find in making love sexually."

AND FINALLY - Colossians 3:14 and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.