

Did You Have a Weak Valentines?

✖ This past weekend the nation celebrated an interesting cultural event—Valentine’s Day. A new movie by the same name grossed 52.4 million dollars in just three days and topped the nation’s box office sales this weekend. The storyline of the movie is interesting. It spins a star-studded yarn concerning the romantic escapes of an incredibly diverse group of fictional Los Angeles residents from a wide range of backgrounds, ages and circumstances.

It intrigued me that so many of our national luminaries could collaborate on such an expansive project. After watching the commercials and trailers, I am personally going to make a point of watching this entertainment phenomenon. Further I am convinced that the film reflects a cultural hunger. The theme of the movie taps into the fascination of people of all ages finding and maintaining true love. All of us want to find a soul mate. We are wired that way.

To prove my point, let me point out that we expect \$15 billion in retail sales in the U.S. from just one day. This is hardly an insignificant sum in a sluggish economy. I was also pleasantly surprised to learn that married people historically spend the majority of this money on their spouses and in their circle of friends and children. With about 190 million greeting cards being sent out, this day may have been an unofficial stimulus package. With these statistics in mind, Valentine’s Day is both a romantic observance and a celebration of marriage.

Another important introduction was made last week—National Marriage Week was launched in the U.S. from Feb. 7 through Feb. 14. Thousands of churches preached messages about the wonder of marriage on one of the two Sundays along with

conducting specific campaigns to promote marriage. Individual people from every conceivable walk of life also committed to celebrate with their spouse during this week.

National Marriage Week began in the U.K. in 1996, spreading to The Czech Republic, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Northern Ireland and Australia. It was adopted in the U.S. in 2002 but last year something historic happened to this movement. Businessman and strategic planner Chuck Stetson assumed the leadership of the group, giving the week a new focus, a shot of publicity and national inter-denominational participation. Stetson appeared on Fox News and other national venues giving the movement its first blast of popular, national attention.

In my local church we performed a recommitment service for married couples complete with the pageantry and receptions typically associated with wedding ceremonies. Our people dressed however they liked from gym shoes and sweats to Armani suits and ties; the range of attire was staggering. What a day!

Why celebrate marriage for an entire week? The answer is simple. Not only can the week be entertaining, marriage is positive and healthy for our culture. All of us intuitively understand that marriage is a better relational foundation for raising children – increasing their academic achievement, behavior, emotional well-being and sense of destiny. From the National Marriage Week Web site let me quote just two additional reasons why it's better to be married. They are:

- 1.) A growing body of research suggests not being married can be hazardous to your health. Compared to married people, non-married ...have higher rates of mortality: about 50 percent higher among women and 250 percent higher among men. Unmarried (including divorced, widowed, and single) people are far more likely to die from all leading causes of death

2.) Marriage is better for survival. Of men who are alive at age forty-eight, almost nine out of ten married men would still be alive at age sixty-five compared to just six out of every ten never-married men. For married women, nine out of ten alive at age forty-eight would make it to sixty-five as compared to about eight out of ten never-married or divorced women

Celebrating Valentine's Day and observing a National Marriage Week are definitely important, yet Christians and churches need to promote marriage consistently more than ever before. The ability to sustain a successful marriage is often caught rather than taught. Churches have not been highly successful in making marriage attractive to the people they serve. Not enough churches put a high priority on building successful marriages. As divorce rates have grown in the church, so has the sensitivity about offending those who are divorced. If marriage and family are to rebound successfully, the church must be unafraid to promote it. It's obvious that the church needs a renewed vision of the priority of marriage and family inside her four walls. Reversing America's family decline can start with each person transforming his/her personal life. Christians everywhere can become living billboards advertising the institution of healthy marriage.

Pastors should be empowered to preach on marriage as God designed it to be, and churches must pursue practical steps to help married couples succeed. Pastors should require premarital counseling that includes some objective evaluation tools to identify potential problem areas in a pending marriage.

Simply training our own children and grandchildren about marriage is an act of winning the war in our own families. Deciding not to get a divorce is an act of victory. Counseling our married couples who are struggling is an act of victory. Leading those couples outside the church to Christ and offering them personal mentorship is an act of victory. We can

win the battle for marriage and family, if we begin at home.

It's time to make Valentine's Day a national celebration of marriage and a time for everyone to recommit to making their own marriage happy and powerful.

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