

Make Your Marriage a Priority—Not Just on Valentine's Day

Holidays, especially Christmas, Mother's Day and Valentine's Day, are the best days to people watch, even if you are not normally a person who enjoys it. It is easy to spot those scrambling through the card aisle looking for something that will at least pass the "good enough" test. Bouquets of flowers sell in all shapes and sizes, although at times it is easy to wonder if the largest bouquets are going to those who believe they need to make up for an earlier failure.

In her teens, my wife, Stephanie, worked at a department store during the holidays. Christmas Eve was one of her favorite days. Desperate men came to the store looking for anything to make their wife happy. These men would take any advice that sounded reasonable. Recently, I spoke with a business owner just before Christmas, and he was telling me all their sales stop before Christmas Eve. On Christmas Eve, the mantra goes something like, "We both know how this ends; I am not lowering my price, and you are not going home empty-handed." In all seriousness, holidays and special days are wonderful. They are opportunities to demonstrate love to your spouse. They deserve special attention.

However, it is possible for some marriages to function in such a way that the holidays are the only special days. On regular days, the husband/father feels like he does his best and it is not good enough. On regular days, the wife feels like she has to do all the work, and then her husband—who has not spoken to her for days—would like physical intimacy at the end of the evening.

Holidays and special days do not make up for all the regular

days that seem very different.

Thankfully the Bible, the Lord's Word, offers help for our hearts and minds which has lots of implications for how we function in our home.

Let's consider two passages that show the priority the Lord places on marriage.

"Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

In the creation account, God establishes marriage between a husband and wife. They form what the Bible calls a "one flesh" relationship. A marriage creates a union, and that union is now distinct from both their parents and their future children who may create their own unions someday. Thus, it is the primary relationship. While relationships with parents and with children are important, they remain secondary.

The Bible uses Genesis 2:24 in other times as well. Matthew uses Genesis as evidence for discouraging divorce in all except extreme cases. The apostle Paul uses the text in Ephesians when discussing the important roles of both a wife and a husband.

Therefore, not only does Genesis 2:24 teach the significance of marriage priority on its own, it is also used as evidence for the importance of continuously working to foster a healthy and god-honoring marriage.

Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves his wife behind, but leaves no children, that man must take the wife and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and when he died, he left no children. The second took her and died, leaving no children, and the third

likewise. The seven had her and left no children. Last of all, the woman died too. In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife."

Jesus answered them, "Do you not err, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? When they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. Now concerning the dead rising, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You therefore do greatly err."

A group of religious leaders challenge Jesus during His passion week. They want to discredit his teaching and show that He must be a fake. They make up a scenario where one woman marries all seven brothers of a different family. They ask, "In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?" (Mark 12:23a). Contextually, Mark 12 explains how the rising opposition to Jesus resulted in his crucifixion which in turn inaugurated his plans to build and establish his church.

However, at the very same time, Jesus' answer teaches us something about marriage. Jesus said that there is no marriage in heaven (see Mark 12:25). This reminds us of the importance of our marriage today. Our energy and focus in heaven will not be on one another. It will be invested in Christ. This point is one reason Paul was so clear that marriage results in us seeking to please our spouse (1 Cor. 7:32-34). Pleasing our spouse is a responsibility for those who are married.

Therefore, making your marriage special is a natural implication of the way God designed the world. A marriage allows us to celebrate victories and blessings with another person. It allows us to go through hardship with a caring companion.

Genesis 2:24 and Mark 12:18-27 remind us of the priority of marriage. Our marriage must be a priority every day, not just on special days of the year.

Practical Suggestions

Once we agree that our marriages should take priority, then we have to take practical steps to make that a reality. Since all of us are different, and we are in different life stages, it might be best to provide a few suggestions that can be used by everyone.

Suggestion No. 1: Arrange a dinner out for the purpose of discussing how your marriage could take one step of improvement.

Do not use this dinner to try to solve every problem you will ever have. Do not use this dinner to say how can we get our marriage from a 5 to a 10. Instead, talk about one or two ideas that you will do. Talk about improving your marriage from a 5 to a 5.1. Maybe it is more regular dates, maybe it is a specific time when the house closes for business (say 10 p.m.) so that there is still a little time to talk every day, or maybe it is arranging a family dinner once per week. Sometimes when we have these “improvement dinners” they become oppressive because we try to change too much too fast.

Suggestion No. 2: Arrange a time to discuss family priorities and how that might impact a few things

On occasion, it is good to remind your children that they are not the center of the universe. At your dinner you may have decided that your son playing baseball, taking karate lessons, having piano lessons and running track do not allow for proper family balance. Your son can decide, but something might have to go. These conversations not only prioritize the marriage, but also serve as training for their future.

Have a wonderful Valentine’s Day, but not to the exclusion of

all the other days.

Rob Green ., Ph.D., is the pastor of counseling and seminary ministries at Faith Church, Lafayette, Indiana. He chairs the M.A. in Biblical Counseling program and teaches Greek and New Testament to the Master of Divinity students. Rob wrote *Tying the Knot* and several minibooks on marriage and family issues. His latest release is *Tying Their Shoes*, written with his wife, Stephanie. They are the parents of three children.