

The Horrible Reason Many Christians Get Married

People get married for all kinds of reasons. In our modern Western society. Perhaps the most frequent is a desire for happiness. We all recognize the fairy tale of two people falling in love, getting married and living “happily ever after.” But reality is often far different. How can you know if you’ll be happy? Why get married in the first place if marriage so often results in pain?

Marrying for happiness is a modern phenomenon. In most previous cultures other reasons were far more common. People married—and still do—for reasons of security, money, having children, having sex, publicity, convenience and others. And sadly, statistically those marriages ended in divorce less frequently than “happiness” marriages generally do today.

Don’t misunderstand me. Getting married for any of those other reasons does not necessarily lead to happiness. But getting married based on an emotion is certain to lead to disappointment.

Theologically, the basis for marriage is much deeper than happiness. Happiness is often a pleasant byproduct, but happiness makes a very poor reason for getting married. In many ways, the Western church has embraced many of society’s values surrounding marriage, and as a result, many sources show that marriages end nearly as frequently among believers as among non-believers. We legitimately decry the frequency of divorce, but we have done a poor job of helping people build marriage on the right things.

Why Not Happiness?

Emotions—including feelings of happiness and feelings of love—change quite randomly. Feelings, emotions are an

important part of life, but they present a terrible track record as a foundation for marriage. Feelings are a sandbar; a successful marriage must be built on a rock.

When you get married expecting your spouse to make you happy and they disappoint you, it's an easy step to believing your marriage is wrong. When you're not happy, you think the answer is divorce. But many divorced people will tell you they are no happier now than when they were married. However, there are certainly destructive marriages where divorce becomes necessary.

For the Christian who believes marriage is meant for keeps, basing marriage on anything that can so easily change is a setup for failure. Sex, physical appearance, money, happiness—none can be counted on to withstand the pressure life brings to marriage. There must be a better reason.

God's Reason for Marriage

This article is not meant as an in-depth Bible study on the theology of marriage. But these ideas come from the Bible. I did not grow up with a healthy picture or understanding of marriage, so when I was wrestling with whether or not to get married myself, I spent a lot of time thinking about, studying and praying through these Scriptures. There are many, but the primary foundational Scriptures these ideas come from include Genesis 1 and 2, Song of Solomon and Ephesians 5.

Getting married has many benefits. Research demonstrates that, in general, women who get and stay married are better off financially, men who get and stay married live longer and healthier lives, and children develop best in a stable home with parents married to each other. Health, wealth and happiness are statistically correlated with a successful marriage. As God said, "It's not good for [a human] to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). And not that single people cannot be healthy, wealthy and happy—as a widow this is again important

to me personally.

But in God's economy the reason to get married is deeper still.

Marriage Is about Learning to Love Well

God is love. We are created in God's image and are to become increasingly like Him. That means our highest calling is loving well, like God does. And marriage is the laboratory where that happens best.

Here are some characteristics of a healthy marriage that must happen in learning to love well.

- **Healthy Communication**

Loving well demands communication. You learn to listen to both your spouse's words and heart, to share out of your own heart vulnerably, to seek to understand. Communicating well demands you understand both yourself and the other. It stretches you.

- **Healthy Forgiveness**

Marriage is the union of two sinners. Forgiveness does not mean accepting bad behavior from your spouse. Forgiveness includes learning to set healthy boundaries when necessary. Relationship with another human demands forgiveness—letting it go. Isn't that a primary characteristic of God's relationship with us?

- **Handling Conflict**

If you and your spouse were identical, one of you would be unnecessary. Sometimes opposites really do attract. Learning to work through differences stretches you, matures you and makes you more useful in other areas of life.

- **It's Not All About Me**

True love is extravagantly generous. You learn to care more about someone else than you do yourself, focus more on their needs than on your own and submit your own behavior to change where needed for the benefit of the other.

- **Deep Intimacy**

Intimacy is a matter of physical oneness, emotional bonding, doing life together as friends and spiritual connection. As integrated human beings, we thrive when all the aspects of our being are seen and accepted by another. It's scary, transforming and the closest earthly thing we have to mirror our relationship with God. It's perhaps the most important characteristic of marriage that cannot be completely duplicated in any other relationship.

- **Becoming Your Best Self**

At its best, marriage is a place where each person is accepted completely for who they are. But it doesn't stop there. It's also a place where wounds can be healed, the best parts of both of you are developed and you together become an outward-looking unit, extending the kingdom of God where it's needed most. Marriage is a laboratory for change.

- **Mirrors Our Relationship With God**

God loves us well. As such He gives us His best, is committed to us forever, accepts us as we are and at the same time offers and requires our transformation. We do not play God to each other. But when two people love each other well, all those aspects of God's love for us are demonstrated and experienced.

What about Your Marriage?

Are you married now? Ask yourself who God is asking you to be in your marriage for this season? How can you learn to love well right now? How would you look at your spouse differently? How would you take care of yourself better so you had more to offer? How would your love grow?

Do you want to be married? Begin now learning these aspects of loving well to the degree you can. Become the kind of person your desired spouse would be drawn to. Grow up in whatever ways God is working on you right now. And as you connect with your intended someone, seek God's guidance in every aspect of your love.

Learning to love well is worth the struggle. May you know the life-changing satisfaction of loving well.

Your Turn: What has your marriage been based on? How can learning to love well change your relationship now? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

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