

The Number One Issue That Divides Couples

Every engaged couple hopes to build a lasting and satisfying marriage, but it doesn't happen automatically. In his interactive premarital study, *Tying the Knot*, author and counselor Rob Green explores how key issues such as conflict, communication, finances and intimacy are successfully navigated in a Christ-centered marriage. Green seeks to help a new generation of newlyweds build their marriage on the lasting foundation of God's grace.

Q: Many brides and grooms spend more time planning their wedding day than planning for their marriage. What marriage plans should an engaged couple make before their big day?

In many ways, that is what this whole book is about. I tell couples as sweetly as I can that I care a little bit about the three hours surrounding their ceremony and reception, but I care a lot about the 50-plus years they will have after those three hours. I understand there are many tasks involved in preparing for the wedding day (not to mention the financial commitments), but when the party is over, two people must learn to love and live with one another.

Time spent together on improving their personal relationship with Christ will pay huge dividends after the wedding and help them love one another.

Please don't hear me say I don't care about the "big day." It is a big day, and I want them to enjoy every minute of it. I just want them to spend as much time thinking about their walk with Jesus as they do which invitations to choose, which dress to buy and what type of food will be served at the reception.

Q: In your counseling experience, what is the No. 1 issue that trips up young couples? How do you address it in *Tying the Knot*?

I have had the privilege to teach an adult Bible fellowship class of young couples (married for five years or fewer) for 10 years and have seen all sorts of challenges. Some struggle with sexual things, whether it be intimacy with one another or with issues such as pornography. I have seen some struggle with problem-solving while others have struggled financially. While there is not one single issue that occurs more than others, the root of those issues is that one or both do not live for Christ as they should. When that happens, they become very susceptible to all sorts of issues. That is why throughout the book, in relationship to all topics, I write about putting Jesus at the center.

Q: Why do you write so candidly about intimacy? That is a subject most people do not like to discuss.

I used to be the same way. I was afraid to speak about intimacy. However, I have found a large number of couples struggle with intimacy during their honeymoon. Despite our society worshipping at the altar of sex, not everyone has bought into that thinking. So for one person, or maybe both, there is a little fear about how the sex part of their relationship will go. It is important for them to understand sex is not about performance but about relationship. Why did God say all sex was wrong outside of marriage if it were not first a relationship issue? If sex was exclusively for pleasure, then God could have opened the floodgates on sex.

This is a very simple and yet profound point in Scripture. Sex is wonderful in the right context. Couples will be on a journey together. It might be that the couple will never look better than on their honeymoon, but it will not be the time for their best sex. That comes as the relationship develops

and matures.

Q: What was the biggest lesson you and your wife learned during the early years of your relationship?

As with any couple, in our early years of marriage we experienced some unexpected things no one could have prepared us for. These were things we simply had to live through. What helped us was remembering our lives were first dedicated to God. Stephanie could not be my hero and nor could I be hers. God designed us to be husband and wife, not each other's saviors. Stephanie could never be all I needed nor could I be all she needed. Instead, we both understood what we needed is what the Lord provided. As long as I thought that way, I could freely give, love and serve.

In some moments, I did not believe Jesus was all I needed, so I demanded love and service from her. When that happened, it would result in conflict. The more we saw Christ at the center of our life, the less we relied on our spouse to be our savior, and the more we were able to love, give and serve each other.

Q: A lot of young people are cynical about marriage. What would you say to convince them it is still one of God's greatest institutions?

Some young people are cynical about a lot of things, not just marriage. I believe cynicism, in part, is driven by the lack of great role models. Who wants a marriage if your parents had a lousy one or you were carted back and forth trying to figure out how to make dad happy at his house and mom happy at hers? The media are full of stories featuring marriages coming to an end.

My response is first, "I get it. I completely understand why you would not want marriage." But I also believe there are two

more important mitigating factors.

First, we cannot “do what we do” simply by watching others. The Word of God provides the standard. The more we focus on Scripture, the more we will be convinced marriage is an institution designed by God to bring Him glory and to give us blessing.

Second, just because you have seen some bad examples does not mean they are the only examples. There are people around us who are enjoying marital bliss. The news and tabloids do not talk about them, but they are there. They are trophies of God’s grace. They have learned to love Jesus first and thus are fully prepared to love their spouse.

Q: How is your chapter on finances different than the classic financial counsel?

I am interested in couples pleasing God with their money, not just working out a system where income is more than expenses. Some of the classic rules like “do not spend more than 28 percent of your income on housing” are not important to me because they are not based in Scripture. The Bible addresses issues of the heart.

It also is concerning to me that some couples have accumulated a lot of debt, which can be crippling. While the decisions that put them into debt may have been made before I speak with the couple, we can at least begin to discuss a strategy to get out of debt.

Q: Why do some couples struggle with problem-solving?

There is a natural tendency in all our hearts to want to blame others for conflict. We believe conflict would never have happened if “the other person had not done _____.” This kind of thinking never leads to problem-solving; it just

creates more problems. Jesus taught we have to consider our own part (Matt. 7:3) before we think about the part others might play.

Some couples ignore conflict because they are in love! While there is something healthy about that, there is also something very dangerous. It is healthy because we do not have to make a big deal about every little detail. At the same time, it is dangerous because we do not want to develop the habit of ignoring problems. So helping couples learn to solve problems really helps them avoid bitterness.

Q: You cover eight key topics, including love, conflict, expectations, communication, finances and intimacy in *Tying the Knot*, but if you had to give just one piece of advice to engaged couples, what would it be?

I had the privilege of doing a Ph.D. in New Testament under a man named Dr. Rod Decker. He was a true scholar and a very kind man. He wrote a paper about the time Jesus was questioned by the Sadducees regarding marriage. Their point was to prove that the belief in the resurrection was silly. They said a woman married a man who died. His brother fulfilled his obligation to marry this woman, and he died. And so the story goes that the same woman married all seven of the brothers before she died. They ask Jesus who will be her husband in the resurrection? Jesus said marriage is not part of resurrection life.

As I reflected on my mentor's paper it dawned on me—marriage is for now. Marriage is a blessing God gave us to navigate through this sin-cursed world together. We may not know what is in store for our lives, but marriage is a part of God's care. He gave us marriage to make the challenging life on earth better while we wait for the coming of Jesus where our concern will be more about him than it will be about us.

So what would I tell them is, “Enjoy every minute of your marriage. God gave it to you as a blessing for the here and now. Every minute you spend feuding is a minute of blessing you are missing.”

Learn more about *Tying the Knot* and Rob Green at .