

Newsletter Article

Back To Marriage Basics

Spring is a great time of year; at least it should be. It begins a new cycle of growing lawns, blossoming plants, and blooming trees. Golf courses beckon, outdoor sports and hobbies are coming to fruition, and kids are restless to gain the freedom of summer vacation. Oh, by the way, weddings are taking place at a rapid pace.

Over the past 30 years, I have not only officiated at a lot of weddings, but have done a lot of marriage and family counseling. Weddings that started with so much hope and promise have somehow turned into a pile of rubble along life's highway.

When couples and families come in to see me they often feel like they would at the bedside of a dying relative - helpless, hopeless, and fearful. Sometimes they feel like their marriage is dead and nothing can revive it. As I look back over a lot of marriages, I find some basic issues that are at the root of a lot of problems. They include:

1. Unhealthy beginnings: Although couples may survive many years of marriage, they have had a bad beginning. Some bad beginnings are:

a. Marrying to get away from home - where home feels very frustrating or destructive. Many young people feel that marriage is a ticket out of the house and that they will do better on their own. They often find themselves creating the same environment they are running from.

b. Marrying out of obligation. Many couples had unprotected sex prior to marriage, gotten pregnant, and married because of the baby. Too many couples have had the responsibilities of parenthood before they could establish themselves as a married couple. They find themselves unable to focus on each other, or running away from responsibilities, and end up angry because of needs not getting met and feeling guilty about their situation.

c. Re-marrying too soon. Many couples, often with children, marry too soon after a divorce thinking they are marrying someone just the opposite of their former spouse. When they do, they often find their new spouse to be the other extreme and that they are not happy with that one either. Another issue is that problems from the first marriage try to get worked out in the second.

2. Unresolved traumas: Individuals come into marriage broken in some way. Some enter more broken than others. Childhood physical, emotional, and sexual abuse is all too common. Many come from families with some sort of history of an addiction or mental illness. With so many divorces, individuals enter marriage broken from the effects of those divorces. Others come into marriage where someone in the family was a victim of a crime. Still others have faced natural disasters or the effects of a war or other dangerous circumstances.

3. Expectation of dream fulfillment: Most individuals enter marriage with the hope and desire that long held dreams will come through with the help of a partner. These dreams can be anything from educational and financial goals to home, children, and family fulfillment. So often

these dreams are not shared adequately or supported by the partner and when the dreams fail, so often does the marriage.

4. Unfulfilled needs: Most of us want to believe we marry because we are in love with the other. That may be true to an extent, but we generally marry because we believe the other person will meet most of our basic needs in the way we expect. Needs like safety and security, inclusion, power and control, and intimacy are needs for people that are like water and air. They are not luxuries like diamonds and expensive cars. When these needs go unmet, they will get met from someone or something else. Most communication problems arise when needs go unmet and one partner feels the other doesn't care or understand.

Marriage is difficult at best, but it can also be very rewarding and fulfilling. It is important that we realize marriage is not the place to get ourselves fixed. It is the place to share our life with someone we deeply care for, love, and respect. When problems threaten to tear the marriage apart, it pays to seek help and get down to the root of the problem. It may not be simple, but it may save a lot more years from grief and sadness.