

Meetup 2017: What Makes for a Happy and Healthy Marriage?

Lesson 6: What is the Meaning of Marriage?

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Daniel Gilbert: “It’s not marriage that makes you happy, it’s happy marriage that makes you happy.”

Is marriage just a piece of paper? Why do people still get married, when most couples are either miserable together or eventually get divorced? Why should people give up their freedom and get trapped in a marriage? Is it even possible for two people to stay together happily for 50 or 60 years?

Marriage is Good for You

Yet, despite the naysayers, science is still on the side of marriage. A lot of research has shown that marriage is good for our physical and mental health.

Research has indeed shown numerous marital benefits. For example, married people enjoy higher well-being and less stress than unmarried people (Coombs, 1991). Children with intact parents are better off than children in other family arrangements (Parke, 2003). Married people also live longer and enjoy better mental and physical health (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990). (Wong & Wong, in press)

We Need a More Realistic Look at Marriage

Basically, marriage is the union between two imperfect human beings. Therefore, no marriage is perfect, and it requires a great deal of hard work and adjustment to make it work. The process includes quarrels or fights, which even lead to better and more intimate marital relationships.

Video: [Couples who fight often are most likely stronger than couples who do not...](#)

A more realistic picture of marriage is that happiness always co-exists with daily stress and the dark side of human nature. A happy marriage depends to a large extent on our ability to manage our negative emotions and the inevitable problems in life. Another important point is that the primary function of marriage is not meeting personal needs for sex and romance, but for mutual caring and the responsibility of providing a safe and loving home for children—the future of humanity. Marriage also provides a school for us to learn and practice the agape, forgiveness, connectiveness, and self-transcendence needed for survival, personal growth, and flourishing—not just for ourselves, but also for others (Wong, 2016).

In a complex society, commitment is essential to protect marriage from the many negative forces assaulting this fundamental social institution (Keller, 2013). Recent research shows that a deeper level of commitment is a better predictor of lower divorce rates and fewer problems in marriage; Thomas Bradbury says,

As a relationship changes, however, shouldn't you say at some point something like, "I'm committed to this relationship, but it's not going very well—I need to have some resolve, make some sacrifices and take the steps I need to take to keep this relationship moving forward." (Wolpert, 2012)

Please complete the Healthy Marriage Checklist to see where you stand. I hope that you can review all the sessions covered in this series and practice some of the important lessons. Thank you for your participation; we look forward to seeing you all at the next series of Meaningful Living Meetups after the summer break.

References

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