

The Discipline of Marriage – Ian Bullock

Hughes feels there are essential characteristics to a healthy Christian marriage. Interestingly out of the nine that he lists, the proportion that aspects of love to the others is 1:3, this is probably about the right balance within the relationship. Of course it can be argued biblically that all nine are ultimately based on the foundation of love. A successful relationship has its origin and its longevity dependent on it, lets remind ourselves of that principle.

‘Mona Lisa smile’ ~ one of the opening scenes in the film.

The prestigious all female Wellesley College.

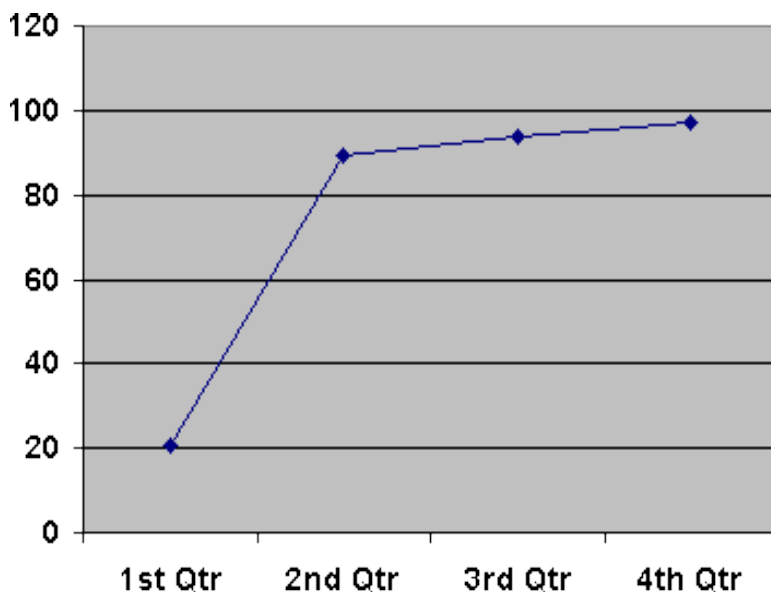
“Who knocks at the door of learning?”

“I am every woman”

“What do you seek?”

“To awaken my spirit through hard work and dedicate my life to knowledge”

The discipline of Christian marriage is exactly this. A discovery of raised self awareness and commitment to learn, learn more and then learn again. This is true in my own experience across 25 years of relationship, approaching 19 years of this in marriage. In appreciating the range of these essential characteristics and how they applied to every day living, the distribution curve in terms of my learning was like this, with a very steep learning curve occurring from day 1, and a commitment to continue to learn continuously.



Characteristics of a disciplined marriage:

- **Sacrificial giving love**
- **Sanctifying love**
- **Self love**
- **Commitment**
- **Chastity (Fidelity)**
- **Communication**
- **Elevation**
- **Deference**
- **Romance**

Lets talk about the first three...the small subject of LOVE which is absolute foundational base for strong marriages, Godly experience and constant challenge!

Foundational truths upon which the house/home is built.

‘How do we love our wives as Christ loved the Church?’ (Ephesians 5 v25) ~ through our willingness to be sacrificial in our commitment to them. Literal translation of this verse is immense, something that none of us can do lightly, and something which teaches us through life about our saviours love for the Church, such is the analogy that God through His inspired word gives us about marriage.

Death.....marital love is like death, it wants all of us (Mike Mason, The Mystery of Marriage) The application of this is scary, but beautiful in itself...because it is about dying to self. Failure to do so and there in itself lies the problem in all relationships...self centred interest that eats away at the first flush of love, like a cancerous growth is starts small but without knowing it, becomes all consuming and then terminal.

In fact this characteristic is the basis of health in relationships that are Christ like – ‘all that I am, all that I have’, promises made by all of us who are married. It takes a strong and not weak man to die, without thought for himself.

‘On Christmas morning, she will be happier with a Hoover’ 1954 advert....I’m pretty sure that what Julie both wants and needs is for me to live the reality of Ephesians 5.

Following sacrificial love is the commitment to each other. Remember scripture says that ‘two are better than one’, and ‘for this purpose a man will leave his home’...what purpose...to be changed and to change through that Christ like commitment to each other. Ephesians is pretty clear in establishing our responsibilities within marriage, key to this is the role of sanctifying love, that love which points beyond ourselves and onto Jesus. A recognition that it’s beginning is with Him, it is produced by the new man, a desire to glorify God and not himself. Are our wives more like Jesus because of or despite living with us. This is a constant challenge to the male ego, but again is so much part of laying this strong foundation to the marriage that assures it’s health, prosperity and longevity. Single men, you should be looking for partners who will commit to this aspect of marriage, the strengthening of faith and love for our saviour.

This is followed by self love, an even more challenging aspect to the fundamental nature of love and its impact on strong marriages. This is not some narcissistic call, some pursuit of vanity that consumes and eventually kills the soul, but a commitment to understand the concept of care for your wife, the concept of one flesh, the concept

of ensuring that our commitment goes beyond playing the new man who is in touch with his feminine side. It is a commitment to understand as Hughes says the range of experience in our wives....which he identifies as physical, emotional and social.

Physical...becoming like each other, seeing beyond the superficial. Read the example of the young couple.....

Emotional.....the differences that we feel are so often the butt of our humour, rather than the focus of our firm endeavour. To experience fully the complimentary natures of both man and woman in this respect is the living reality of such verses as “two are better than one”.

“It is better to live on the corner of a roof than with a quarrelsome wife” ~ Proverbs

“A nagging wife is like a dripping tap” ~ Proverbs

The social application...a Mrs Doubtfire experience is ever there was one. It can be achieved in creating understanding and partnership, but so often there is ignorance of this area of life, a burying of the head in the sand and complete acceptance that this is a no go area, a no need to go area, a what is the point area, an acceptance that like to emotional comparisons and contrasts that indeed women are from Venus and men from Mars! Actually, both are from Eden, and one created from the other in the image of God. (Read Hughes from p40/41 here).

Love is a relatively simple word, it is so often poorly compared to other emotions in life such as lust, affection, companionship etc...but remains the root and heart of strong marriages. It is like an iceberg, with little visible above the surface and so much under the surface, if only we take time to look and to develop both understanding and appreciation.

The second grouping of three is what I call the bricks and mortar of the relationship, which shapes the marriage and creates identity.

Bricks and mortar (The three C's)

Commitment, Chastity (fidelity) and Communication

If the dimensions of love are the foundation for marriage, the characteristics that promote a healthy relationship are all about daily maintenance. Strong foundations have failed to maintain structures that have been badly constructed. Commitment, chastity and communication are all actively maintaining the marriage.

Commitment is not a passive experience, it is not about blowing hot and cold but about ‘putting on love’ (Colossians 3v14) and determining that nothing will distract or cause you to deviate from loving your wife. Commitment is an absolute resolve that matures through the living experience of declared vows. ‘In sickness and health, for richer for poorer until death us part’. Where is the opt out? I cannot see anything about fickle humanity or sickly love.

Infidelity is the greatest threat to the sanctity of marriage. It is the opposite of commitment, as in it there is no thought for your partner. ‘Loving your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’ is about joyful commitment, not about begrudging sacrifice.

Recognition of the danger that lack of commitment brings in the form of infidelity.

Ephesians 5 v1-3; Colossians 3 v5-14; James 4 v7-8; Galatians 5 v19.

If commitment is an essential building brick, fidelity is the mortar that binds it together. There is great reward in absolute commitment, our eyes, language, schedule and passion must declare.. ‘I am yours, will always be yours, am privileged to be yours’. It is an aspect to our relationship which needs constant attention, not that I feel unable to be faithful, but I recognise the importance of resting in God to produce the fruit of faithfulness in me. (Example of Andrew and Jane, lessons learnt and injustices!) We must not lose

the learning from others that we are aware of in this context, asking God to determine our absolute commitment in vow declaration.

Seven months after Procter in the Crucible has had an affair, he illustrates what happens to the bond of trust between husband and wife: 'I have gone tiptoe since she has gone, I have not moved from here to there without I think to please you, but still an everlasting funeral marches round your heart'...Mrs Procter in response to Procter's protestations that every time he comes into the house he feels judged is 'I do not judge you, the magistrate of your heart judges you!'

Communication is an area that men in general need to work hard at. Commonly in surveys it is this aspect of relationships that women state is the single factor that needs to change most. To engage and to listen, to take time to notice non verbal behaviour and to recognise that communication from a crude model is about transmission and reception. Hughes (p41 quoting Patterson).

For Julie, I know this is an area of great frustration at times, I move along the continuum of performance from excellence to needing special measures! It is about commitment, and recognition that to under value its importance weakens the structure of marriage. I am a recipient of information given to me in a loving way, that I often subconsciously choose to delete it and send it to the recycle bin of my hard drive...I must decide that I have no spare capacity and it is to the constant frustration of my wife. I teach effective communication skills, believe myself to good at it. Failure to listen gives the message that I am not interested, it is not important enough to deserve my attention, I (we) must be better at listening and placing value on communication.

'I'm not telling you again' cuts through the apathy, and I am reminded of my constant failing in this area.

If the three C's are the bricks and mortar that builds the structure of marriage, the final three characteristics are the soft and hard furnishings that create identity and allow you to live within the structure. **Elevation, Deference and Romance** are all maintenance characteristics. They are the characteristics that make marriage at a very practical level day by day, and they are all about practicing sacrificial commitment and creating time to ensure that the relationship reaches its potential. A commitment to recognising the unique contribution that our wives bring to the marriage is essential, and for us to even think that we do is more important creates the beginnings of cracks in the structure. We should take every opportunity to elevate our wives. Page 42, Churchill section. Deference once again establishes the importance of careful maintenance in the relationship. I share the next section for all aspiring golfers, p42 again!

Lastly but certainly not least is the fun aspect of the relationship, **creating time** for romance, time to talk and time to simply be is crucial in the maintaining of strong relationships. Story about the farmer and his wife in the Midwest, lifted out of their home by a tornado...wife starts to cry, the husband scolds her and tells her it is no time to cry, she replies that she is cannot help it and she is crying tears of happiness as it is the first time they have been out together for 20 years! When was the last time you did something spontaneous, something which is completely shaped the needs of your wife with no hidden agenda's? Flowers, a little note, a trip out, a warm bath and candlelight etc....we need to feel the importance of working at it. 'Act like men, be strong. Let all you do be done in love' 1 Corinthians 16, v13 & 14.

Let's work at the foundation, structure and maintenance work of marriage, in being Godly and realising our role before God.