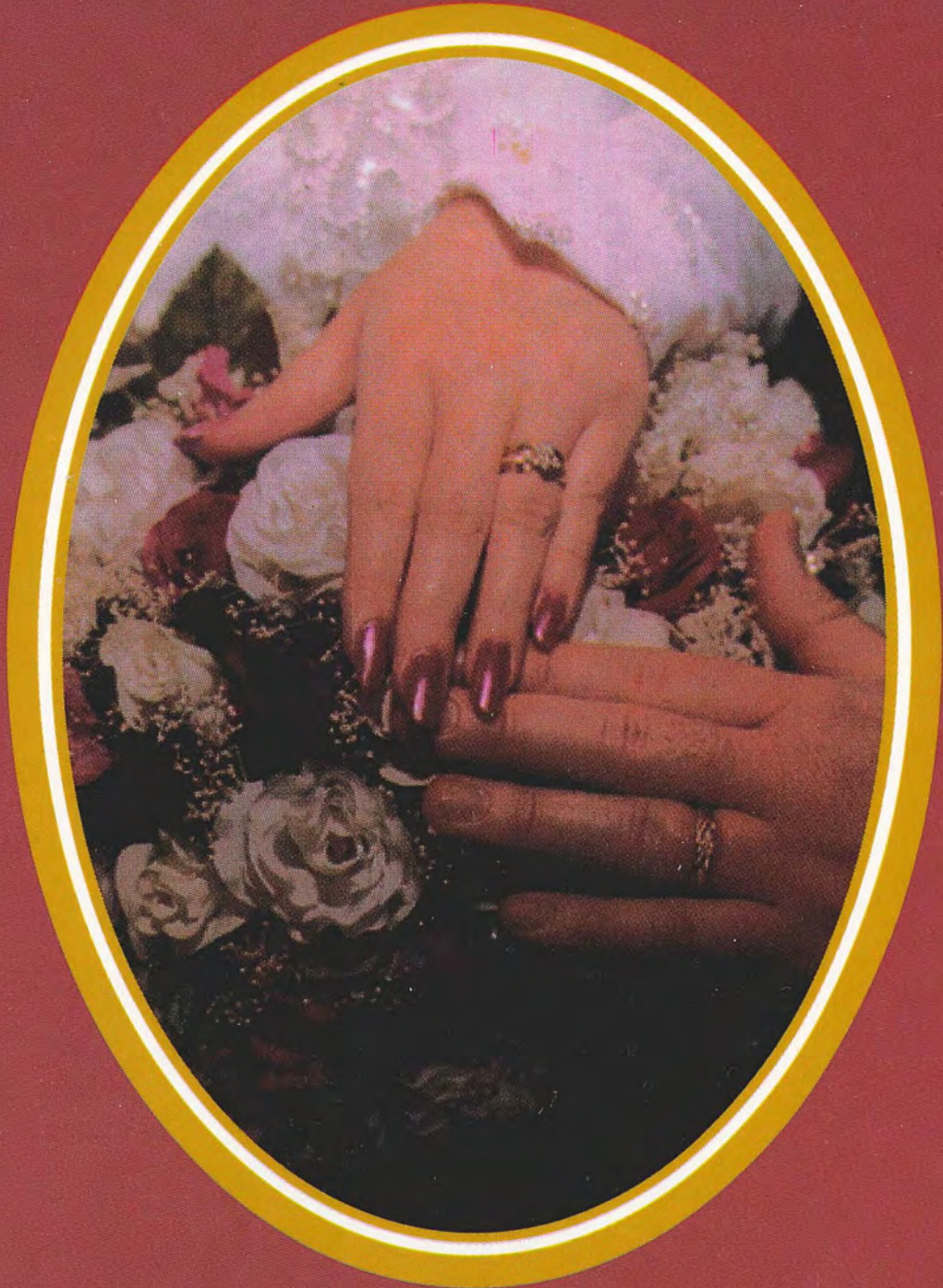


*“With This Ring
I Thee Wed”*



MACK LYON

SEARCH PROGRAMS

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Topics subject to change without notice

JUNE 05 – CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR CHOICE OF MARRIAGE!

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"CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR CHOICE OF MARRIAGE!"

Gen. 2:18

In his popular book, The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators, published just this year, former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett says, "The rate at which people are getting married is more than 25% lower than in 1960." The question that jumps to our minds when we read that is, does this mean more people are choosing not to marry or are they choosing other lifestyles than the traditional marriage of man and woman? In 1992 Russell Chandler, awardwinning writer for The Los Angeles Times, wrote a very popular book titled Racing Toward 2001, in which he says, "In 1960 married couples (with or without children) made up threefourths of U. S. households. Twenty years later that had dropped to 60 percent and by the turn of the millennium it is projected to decline to 53 percent." He said, "that while `nonfamily' households accounted for 15 percent of all households in 1960, they will reach almost 30 percent by 2001." Just double percentagewise. Then, he added, "Today, more than 2.9 million households are composed of unmarried couples, an increase of 80 percent over that of 1980." So then, what's happening is not rejection, but a redefinition of "family" so as to eliminate marriage.

In the May/June 1992 issue of Psychology Today, Dr. William H. Doherty wrote that many people nowadays feel the "traditional family structures are no longer appropriate to the modern age, and that these structures were too maledominated and conformityoriented." There you have part of the problem, at least; the desire and demand of a generation for greater personal liberation or freedom from traditional forms and from such values as commitment and responsibility.

Doherty defined some of those "family types and forms" that are offered under the new definition of family (what Chandler referred to as "nonfamily households" as being "nevermarried mothers, singleparent families, stepfamilies, cohabiting couples and lesbian families," (and I don't know why, since he mentioned lesbian families, he didn't also mention homosexual families).

He stated the case as being the need for a "larger menu of family arrangements to choose from" than the traditional marriage of a man and a woman. He said, "If the chief value of the Institutional Family" was RESPONSIBILITY, the chief value of the Psychological Family was SATISFACTION." Here again we see the demand for personal pleasure and selfgratification completely divorced from any and all responsibility, as we're seeing it in all our social relationships. The idea gives legitimacy to every and all kinds of deviant family forms, lifestyles and behavior.

Admittedly, the traditional or conventional family (what I prefer to call the biblical family, the marriage of one man and one woman for life) has suffered severely from this kind of thinking for a generation, but not all the news is bad.

Syndicated newspaper columnist Thomas Sowell recently had an article titled It's Time for a Rematch With Murphy (Daily Oklahoman, May 5, 1994) in which he noted that "According to Census data, [only] 11 percent of all adults who had ever been married were currently divorced as of 1992. . . Most of those who were never married are under the age of 25. Among people in their midforties to midfifties, those who are married outnumber the nevermarried by more than 15 to 1." According to Sowell's column, "The Census found that married couples outnumbered unmarried couples by about 43 million to 3 million." So, in spite of the assaults on it, marriage is still doing very well. And for a number of reasons, you who have chosen marriage over some of these other "domestic partner" relationships, are to be congratulated for the wisdom of your choice.

FIRST, because of the sanctity of marriage. The traditional family is not entirely traditional.

Marriage didn't evolve from a pagan ritual of some primitive tribe. Nor was it the invention of some prehistoric chauvinistic king whose idea it was to bring women into subjection. It isn't the result of a study done by some government agency or bureau at some point in ancient history. It wasn't conceived in a general council of church leaders sometime in medieval history. In short, Biblical marriage is not the result of changing sociological needs and political expediences. It originated with God. The Bible takes us farther back in history than any other document all the way back to "the beginning." In fact, when God created the heaven and the earth and everything which in them is, immediately following the story of creation in Genesis chapter one, is the story of the first marriage in chapter two. We read it awhile ago, remember? When God had made the woman, He brought her to the man and they were joined together married. Jesus referred to that in Matthew 19:45. He said, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?." And He added to that, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." You see, God joins the man and the woman together in biblical marriage.

Please notice, too, it was male and female that God created (no third gender). And it was male and female that He joined together in marriage (not male to male or female to female). By ordaining marriage for the man and the woman, God gave human life a dignity he gave to no other of His creation. He didn't honor animal life with marriage. So, you who have chosen marriage, have chosen the right and responsible way for human beings, the Lord's way. You are to be commended and congratulated!

SECONDLY, because God had some very good and clearly defined reasons for ordaining marriage of the man and the woman. His first reason is found in the story of the first marriage in Genesis 2:18. It is for the happiness of the man and the woman. "The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him," or "I will make a suitable helper for him."

Family has historically been mankind's greatest source of happiness. In spite of the sanctity of marriage, there's never been a "perfect one," if by that we mean one in which there was never a disagreement or conflict or perhaps at worst, some emotional, mental, or maybe some physical abuse. Nevertheless, the family as God designed it (the married man and woman, with or without children) remains the greatest source of happiness for the human race. I believe it might have been early in 1990 there appeared an Associated Press story in many of the nation's newspapers which reported the findings of Dr. Albert Solnit of the Child Study Center at Yale University. It said, "People cherish the family and they cherish it because of their own experience even when their experience has been less than perfect." That pretty well says it. We'll have more to say about marital happiness in another message in this series.

Another purpose God had in ordaining marriage was for the birth and rearing of children. Modern science and medicine has made it possible for a woman to give birth to a baby and not ever have known or seen its father. Unwed motherhood has been glamorized in recent years. You remember the flap over Murphy Brown don't you, and the ridicule Vice President Dan Quayle took over his stand for the two parent family? Well, we all knew he was right all along, didn't we?

In an article in the April 1993 issue of The Atlantic Monthly magazine, titled "Dan Quayle Was Right," Barbara Dafoe Whitehead argues that "The socialscience evidence is in: though it may benefit the adults involved, the dissolution of intact twoparent families is harmful to large numbers of children." She also says, "The social arrangement that has proved most successful in ensuring the physical survival and promoting the social development of the child is the family unit of the biological

mother and father" (page 48).

Even the liberal (and I use that word respectfully) the Honorable Senator from New York, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, is preaching everywhere that the solution to two of the major problems of youth today, crime and poverty, ". . . is to see that children are born into intact families and stay that way" (Meet The Press, 9/19/93). Just from the pragmatic point of view, the Lord's Way is best. We're slow to learn that, and we seem to have to learn it the hard way, but it is. So, you who have chosen to marry are to be congratulated on your wisdom.

THIRDLY, God ordained marriage to prevent sexual immorality. The Holy Spirit says in Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (NASV). In another place He says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill (render) his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self control" (I Cor. 7:15 NASV).

A Donahue/Opra/Murphy Brown dominated society has thumbed its nose at those precepts and promoted fornication and adultery in every form, so that now we are reaping the bitter fruits of AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases in epidemic proportions, as well as widespread and uncontrolled teenaged pregnancies and a lot of other associated problems. More than 30% of the children born in the United States this year will be born out of wedlock and another one and one half million unwanted pregnancies will be aborted. Can we survive it all? God never intended for men and women to copulate freely like animals. Marriage is His way for the human family. You are to be commended for your wisdom in exercising that choice.

LASTLY, God intended for the family to be the cornerstone of society. He enjoined it upon the parents to teach character to their children, not only for their own good, but for the national welfare in subsequent generations. Immediately after delivering the Ten Commandments to Israel Moses said, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:67). The same charge is given to Christian parents in Ephesians 6:4 and elsewhere.

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, in the Atlantic Monthly article I mentioned awhile ago, argues that "family diversity in the form of increasing numbers of singleparent and stepparent families does not strengthen the social fabric but, rather, dramatically weakens and undermines society." Ours has had about all the weakening and undermining it can stand and survive. Yes, you're to be congratulated on the wisdom of your choice to marry. It is the Lord's way and you'll be blessed by it.

God is so good to us. He loves us so much, because we are His offspring. He made us in His own image, just a little lower than Himself. He crowned us with glory and honor. He gave us dominion over all the works of His hands. He hallowed our sexual relationships with marriage of man and woman and blessed that union with children. Our Creator knew better than all of us together the principles and relationships that would provide the greatest measure of happiness during our earthly sojourn.

We can show our love for Him by following His plan. Many of the personal and social problems we're experiencing nowadays are not Godsent, but manmade, as we turn away Him and rebel against His proven way. The greatest assurance we have for happiness is His way of life. Congratulations! to

you who have chosen Marriage instead of some of the synthetic family forms of an unbelieving world.

I hope you're a Christian. If you're not, I'd be guilty of gross negligence if I didn't take a moment here to encourage you even insist that you become such this very day. If you'd like to live in a Christian family, you'll have to be a Christian yourself. Perhaps others in your family will follow your lead. Confess your faith in the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, repent or change your lifestyle from sin to righteousness, and put Christ on in baptism at once. Delay could be disastrous for you in this life and in the life to come. I hope I may hear from you this week, just as we hear from others, that you've become a Christian. I'd like to invite you to worship with a church of Christ here in your area this week.

"SOME THINGS YOU WILL WANT TO TAKE TO YOUR WEDDING"

Someone has observed, "Americans are wild about weddings." I guess so. It's been estimated that we spend an average of \$13,000 per wedding. Other estimates run as high as \$18,000 on advisors, counsellors, invitations, flowers, gowns, tuxedos, pictures, music, receptions, honeymoons and the many, many other details that go to make a beautiful wedding. It isn't all vanity, though. Much of it can be justified as an accent on the seriousness and solemnity of the event that joins a man and a woman together for life. A wedding should be a very memorable, joyful and beautiful occasion, but it should be a very solemn and sacred event, too. Second only to the moment a person is "married" to Jesus Christ in baptism for the forgiveness of sins, a person's wedding day is the greatest day of his or her life. And a lot of effort should be expended to make it so.

There's an old saying or superstition we hear at about all weddings usually mentioned lightly something about what the bride should be sure to take to her wedding. How does it go, "something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue?" Anyway, there are some very important things neither the bride or the groom will want to forget or neglect. We'll mention a few.

FIRST, you'll want to take God to your wedding. When I was a teenager someone impressed me with a thought that's stayed with me all the days of my life and the nights, too. He said, "Don't ever go anywhere you can't ask God to go along, and don't ever do anything you can't ask God to be a partner in." It's kind of a corny bit of advice, but I'm sure following that simple little rule has kept me out of some situations I would've seriously regretted ever after. Surely, no one who really believes in Him would consider entering a marriage in which God could not be a part.

Yet, over many years of ministering to people, I think I've met some who did that. How can a believer possibly be joined for life to a person who, not only doesn't share that precious faith, but is actually an enemy to it? How can a child of God ask the Lord to bless his/her marriage to someone who'll, not only be no help at all, but will even be an hindrance to living the Christian life and reaching the heavenly home? The Holy Spirit says to Christians, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (II Cor. 6:14). While that isn't a reference exclusively to marriage, it certainly includes this most sacred and intimate of all relationships.

Maybe the person is acceptable, but the purpose of the marriage is such that anyone who knows God would know He'd want no part of it. People have been known to marry for all kinds of ungodly and unholy reasons, money or spite or sexual attraction or because all of their friends were getting married or oh well, I couldn't begin to think of all the unthinkable reasons people have had for marrying. But, the idea is, don't forsake God just to get married.

Next, but closely akin to taking God to your wedding: You will want to take your values, too. In his book, Racing Toward 2001, Russell Chandler says, "Family experts warn that value conflicts may be the fastest growing area of family concern" (page 90). There's a reason for that. It's because a large element of the American society is viciously engaged in normalizing what has always been considered deviant behavior, and detecting deviance in what was generally accepted as normal. Consequently, the difference between the normal and the deviant has rapidly eroded. There are no longer any whites and blacks; there are only grays. Character isn't important to a lot of people, but to others it still is. So, if you have values that are important to you, you need to know if they coincide with those of your intended bride or groom. The Bible says, "The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them" (Prov. 11:3).

Then, you'll want to be accompanied to your wedding by constancy of purpose. You may have heard me say it before, I believe it; it's been a big factor in my life: None of us came into this world because we chose or when we chose, but because God had need of us. In the end, the measure of a person's success will not be measured in the position he's attained or power or possessions, but how well he's fulfilled God's plan for his life. Every person is given the freedom of will, either to facilitate or frustrate God's purpose, and any of us can easily self destruct by marrying someone who has another purpose in life, or at best, who will be no help at all in achieving our own.

You've probably known someone who had noble dreams for his or her life who was defeated by marrying someone who didn't share those ambitions. Some unusually gifted young men I've known wanted to preach or be a missionary but married the wrong woman. Some very worthy women I've known have had their visions of being a missionary, or a career in medicine or education or a beautiful family blasted by their choice the men they married.

Oh yes, you'll certainly want to take your personal purity with you to the marriage altar. That goes for the men and as well as the women. Talk of chastity has been scorned for near half a century now, but thank God there's a new generation that's giving virginity respectability again. The movement's spreading very rapidly all across America. High school youth, both boys and girls, are openly making a vow to being virgins at the marriage altar. Many of these kids have seen the flaws and inconsistencies in the "safe sex" approach to the teenage problem. They're proving those people wrong who say kids can't say no to premarital sex, therefore the schools must educate them in "safe sex" and provide free condoms. These youth have not bought into that. As I said, they're proving such talk is utter foolishness, and they've taken the vow of chastity, not for political or health reasons, but because it's the Lord's way. It's surprising, but the liberal national news media are reporting on this "phenomenon" almost daily. God says, "Keep thyself pure" (I Tim. 5:22). And, these kids are resolved to walk in His way. They'll not regret it.

And certainly, you'll want to take a heart full of love to your wedding, because it takes a lot of loving to make a marriage work. Now, we're not talking about the kind of love you "make" or the kind you "fall into, or even the kind you just talk about. Oh, there's nothing wrong with "lovemaking" between the married man and woman. In fact, that's where it's supposed to be. It's legitimate and right and a wholesome thing in marriage. It's when it's done out of wedlock that "making love" becomes dirty and demeaning. Romantic love (sometimes called "falling in love") is great. There has to be a lot of that in a marriage, too. I suppose if given a chance to vote on it, more people would give romantic love the reason for their marriage than any other thing. But, it's good to remember any love you "fall" into, you can "fall" out of. (I read of a case of that in the Ann Landers column just today.) Have you ever heard anyone say, "We just don't love each other any more? If so, you know what I'm talking about. And it's good to tell your spouse you love her or him every day. But, the love the Lord teaches is a way of life that, in spite of all the mean things a person does to us, we always treat that person right, the way we like to be treated. That's what Jesus said love is. Read it yourself in Matthew 5:43-46.

The Holy Spirit speaks of the characteristics of love in I Corinthians 13. There He says: (1) Love is patient or enduring and forgives seventy times seven times. Someone was overheard saying, "I'll never put up with what my mother did." Then maybe don't love enough to marry. (2) Love is kind. (3) Love is not jealous. Husbands and wives must be both trustful and trustworthy. Let me paraphrase a little proverb I saw recently: People of genius are admired; people of wealth are envied; people of power are feared; but only people of character are trusted. If you can't trust him or her out of your

sight, there's something wrong. (4) Love isn't boastful or arrogant. (5) Love never acts unbecomingly. (6) Love does not seek its own way. Counsellors tell us that selfishness is the root cause of nearly all divorces. What's good for the family must have priority over any one family member's rights. That's a far cry from the way some people have lived prior to marriage, but love, true love, changes that. (7) Love is not easily provoked. (8) Love does not keep account of wrongs suffered. Some people have memories like elephants when it comes to offenses. (9) Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but in truth. (10) Love covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (11) Love never fails. Others may walk away, abandon us but the loving and faithful spouse is always there. Oh well, there's enough here to fill a whole book, but you'll want to bring a heart full of that kind of love to your marriage.

You'll want to bring a strong commitment to your marriage vows. When God joins a man and a woman, they become one flesh inseparable for life. Jesus said, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." That's a lifetime commitment. The man and the woman, the bride and the groom, the husband and the wife, must share that commitment. After a few months of marriage some young men and women have been known to say, "Oh, I just decided I didn't want to be married." Well, after the marriage is a very poor time to decide that. You might very well have ruined another person's whole life? And yes, you are responsible. God will hold you accountable, too.

As most married folks will tell you, these are some of the things you'll want to take to your wedding, and they're of far more value than the flowers and all the trimmings that make a beautiful wedding. And, if you're already married, it isn't too late to develop some of them beginning right now. There's nothing that will enhance the beauty of your marriage as much as being a Christian. If you're not already a Christian, why not become one before you marry, then marry a Christian. Confess the Lord Jesus Christ and be immersed into Him at once today. We wish you a happy marriage.

Marriage is one of the greatest expressions of God's love any of us will ever experience, second only to that of salvation in Jesus Christ. There are only two places in the Bible which speak of anything that might be considered a wedding ceremony. One is in the book of Ruth and the other is in Ezekiel 16. And, neither of them is sufficiently described so as to become a pattern for a ceremony today. Obviously, then, every civilization or society has its customary marriage rites and ceremonies, and God has left us free to adapt to those customs. One thing is clear from reading the Bible; that more is involved in getting married than "sleeping together," or "living together." Civil laws in some states or countries recognize or treat the cohabiting couple as married others do only after a specified length of time. It's then called "common law marriage," but in the Bible there seems to be a certain time and a specific action of intent to be married.

Several years ago, H. Leo Boles, an outstanding gospel preacher of his day wrote in the Gospel Advocate magazine, "Marriage is an institution ordained of God for the honor and happiness of mankind, in which one man and one woman enter into a bodily and spiritual union, pledging each to the other's mutual love, honor, fidelity, sympathy, forbearance, and comradeship, such as should assure an unbroken continuance of their wedlock so long as both shall live." That's as good a description of the act of marriage as I have ever heard or read. A man and a woman are married when they have intentionally entered into that contract of companionship and made that commitment, and have consented before God that they should no longer be two but one for life. Of course, in modern

society there are the legal requirements which must be considered a license and all that.

"A HAPPY AND LASTING MARRIAGE"

Eph. 5:22, 23

As much as we'd prefer to do it, with there being one half as many divorces in America as there are marriages every year, it's very difficult to discuss the blessedness of marriage without alluding to the broken ones.

Psychologist Judith S. Wallerstein, coauthor of the book Second Chances: Men, Women and Children A Decade After Divorce, is quoted in the May 1989 issue of Psychology Today, as saying, "Nobody goes to a wedding today without somewhere in the back of their mind wondering how long the marriage is going to last." And in that same article Caryl S. Avery says, "clearly an anticipation of dissolution is not the best foundation on which to build a relationship that will be rich and meaningful." I think everyone would agree with that. So, today we're studying some ways we can make our marriages happy and lasting ones.

Almost any married person, or even a divorced one for that matter, could easily draw up a list of helps for a meaningful marriage. Any psychologist, marriage counsellor or minister could compile an almost endless list of that would enhance a marriage relationship, such as spending time together, being good listeners, working through conflicts, being less critical and more appreciative, communicating with one another, and a lot of things like that. And, they'd all be good, too. It would've been interesting and perhaps even amusing to have gotten a few helps from some couples who've been married fifty years or more. I remember one such fellow, being asked to what he attributed the success of their marriage, replied, "Lots of fresh air and sunshine." Well, that needed an explanation, so he said, "When my wife gets angry with me and begins shouting at me, I just get my hat and go for a walk and I've spent a lot of time outdoors." Smart man! His point was: don't both of you get angry at the same time. I could give you my "Ten Commandments For A Happy Marriage," (and I think that'd be one of them), still when we'd finished, we'd only have the counsel of men, good counsel, I'm sure.

But, I believe more than any or all of that, we need the counsel of God. God has a lot to say about marriage which needs to be heard above everything else. In counselling couples preparing to marry I often read them the 127th Psalm. It begins, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

Marriage is such a sacred union it's used many times in the Scriptures to describe that high and holy relationship between Christ and His church, as in the passage we read at the beginning of this program. And it seems to be the only analogy that's entirely adequate to describe that heavenly human relationship. Did you notice as I read, that these messages came through loud and clear? (1) The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. (2) As the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (3) Husbands are to love their wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. So ought men to love their own wives. (4) Husbands ought to nourish and cherish their wives just like Christ loves and cherishes the church. (5) Men ought to leave their fathers and mothers and cleave to their wives. And (6) Wives are to reverence or respect their husbands.

Say, that's one whole message in itself, isn't it? And a good one too. Just from the practical point of view, those are the principles that bond a man and a woman together so firmly they can happily weather the storms for a lifetime. I guess so; they're words from the divine Architect of marriage, Himself. To disregard them is to invite marital disaster. If you're not prepared to live by them, you're not ready for marriage. If the person you're about to marry won't subscribe to them,

danger lies ahead. As we noted earlier, the Bible says, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psa. 37:5). In Psalm 86:11 David prayed, "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." Then the first bit of biblical advice for brides and grooms, husbands and wives, is to "commit to marriage the Lord's way."

The second is a to commit yourselves to marriage for life." There was an article in the May 1989 Reader's Digest, which was a condensed version, of course, of a longer article by Diane Medved, a marriage counselor and psychologist, titled "The Case Against Divorce." In it she says, "The old wedding vows read 'for better for worse, till death us do part.' Today couples commonly intone 'through good times and bad, as long as our love shall last.' Until recently," she said, "I nodded at the 'improvement;' now I soberly acknowledge the wisdom of the past."

I'm impressed with the number of such people as this marriage counsellors and psychologists, whose work puts them in personal contact with troubled marriages who are coming around now to discerning and renouncing the flaws in the modern myths about trial and multiple marriages. They aren't working, my friend. They're proving to be disastrous to people as well as to our social order. And only those who will not see are so blind as to be unable to notice it.

Some people are confirmed quitters. They've never learned to work through a difficult problem or situation. When they were in school, they quit sports or band when they didn't get to play the position they wanted. They dropped out of school when they no longer liked it. They ran away from home when mom 's and pop's rules became unbearable. They quit going to church when the church didn't condone their deviant behavior. They go from job to job. When working hours or conditions aren't exactly to their liking, they quit. Some of them have been known to try to quit living (commit suicide) when life got difficult. And, they'll walk out on a marriage when a spouse doesn't measure up to their expectations. You can count on it. They'll just get a divorce and quit. The world is always against them, they seem never to get a fair shake, so they just quit.

Don't quit, my friend. Learn to work through the problem, talk it out, pray together, forgive and forget, seek a counselor, do some things and go some places together. Don't run from marriage to marriage. Grow up and settle down. And try real hard to make your marriage a happy and lasting one. You can do it and you'll be oh so glad you did!

We've talked about loving one another in another program, so we'll not repeat, except to say that happy marriages are built on a commitment love, honor and cherish so long as you both shall live. So, let your love for your spouse be sincere, not the bedroom kind of love though that's important to a marriage, but the kind that exhibits itself in patience and kindness and trust and unselfishness that never fails.

When asked about ending marriages Jesus said of the married man and woman, "They are no more two, but one flesh." Happy marriages are built on this commitment to oneness togetherness. That calls for a lot of selflessness. It takes a lot of real effort and understanding. It takes mature people. I was preaching at a place once and was invited by a lovely family of three, mommy, daddy and a preschool child, for the evening meal. Daddy was called to the telephone and Mommy was hurriedly trying to get the food on the table when the child decided he wanted Mommy to come play with him. Mommy couldn't come and play at just that moment; obviously she had done it many times before; it wasn't something she was refused to do, but she just couldn't do it right at that moment. Well, you guessed it; the child went into a rage that lasted for some time, actually.

Now, you can understand that and we can handle that it in a small child. His parents will teach him and he'll grow out of it, but what of a person who's old enough to get a marriage license who

behaves like that, who makes unreasonable demands on his or her spouse? People who enjoy their marriages have been able to make the change from a "single" lifestyle in which each one does pretty much as he pleases, to one where another person is intimately involved. There are two now who must become one. Happily married people have learned that after the wedding it's no longer "I" and "me" and "mine" and "I want" and "I wont," but "we" and "us" and "ours," and "We'd like" and "we'll consider it."

And there's no place where this oneness is more important than in religious faith. Despite the fact that many couples have agreed that a difference in religious faith won't be a problem in their marriage, it's a statistical fact that it's one of the leading causes of trouble after the wedding. You see, religious faith is not something that's easily stashed away in the attic or into the convenient corners of the back room, to be brought out and used on Easter and Christmas or Hanukkah. It's a determining factor in a lot of daytoday living. What your spouse believes will make a difference. It might determine such personal and important things as where you live, the kind of business or profession you follow, the way you conduct your business, what you do with your money, how you spend your leisure time, the kind of food you eat, how many children you have, or whether you have any and how you might prevent it, or whether you might abort an unwanted pregnancy, the kind of entertainment you enjoy, the friends you keep, where and how your children are educated, whether the wife might have a career, whether you or your spouse are able to pursue your life's dream and ambition to a successful reality, whether the marriage is permanent, and even where you will your spend eternity.

Remember, in the conclusion of his masterful sermon on the mount (Matt. 7:21-27), Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. . .Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

The point is, my friend, be an obedient believer in Jesus Christ. Begin by becoming and being a Christian. Confess Jesus Christ, get your life in order by repentance, be baptized into Him, and make your home a Christian home. I sincerely pray you will. Nothing will ensure a happy and lasting marriage like following the Lord's teachings. Give it a try. Will you?

CONCLUSION

A well planned marriage is a lifetime reward. It isn't a matter of preventing divorce, but establishing a happy and lasting, fulfilling and rewarding relationship, the kind expressed in the little poem titled Together Still by Peggy Cameron King. "Let me hold your hand as we go downhill. / We've shared our strength and we share it still. / It hasn't been easy to make the climb. / But the way was eased by your hand in mine. / Like the lake, our life has had ripples too, / Ill health, and worries, and payments due, / With happy pauses along the way, / A graduation, a raise in pay. / At the foot of the slope, we will stop to rest, / Look back, if you wish; we've been truly blessed. / We've been spared the grief of being torn apart / By death, or divorce, or a broken heart. / The view ahead is one of the best, / Just a little bit farther/ and then we can rest. / We move more slowly, but together still, / Let me hold your hand as we go downhill."

"PROBLEMS WHEN A MARRIAGE BREAKS UP"

Matthew 19:39

Just from the practical point of view alone, divorce is not the panacea it's popularly thought to be. Very often it creates a whole new set of problems far greater than the troubled marriage a couple is trying to escape. Some psychologists and marriage counsellors who formerly recommended divorce as an option, now believe they rendered a disservice to the very people they were trying to help. (See The Trouble With Divorce, by Diane Medved, Reader's Digest, May 1989).

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead wrote in an article in the April 1993 The Atlantic Monthly that "Children in single parent families are six times as likely to be poor. . .are two to three times as likely to have emotional and behavioral problems. . .are more likely to drop out of school, to get pregnant as teenagers, to abuse drugs, and to be in trouble with the law." Syndicated columnist Mona Charen wrote awhile back that "Family dissolution is taking a terrible toll on children and thus on America." Among other things she said, "Eroding the two parent family has had painful and sometimes pathological effects on children. . .For most children, growing up with only one parent is economically, psychologically and emotionally harmful." Well, divorce is very often economically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually devastating to the divorced man and woman, too. We're concerning ourselves with the spiritual problems.

The passage which we have chosen for our text, Matthew 19:312) is the most exhaustive passage in all the scriptures on the subject. It is the definitive statement about divorce. Let's take a verse by verse look at it. Here some people asked Jesus the question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

Verse three says, "The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him." Now, the Pharisees were the strictest sect of the Jews in Jesus' day. They were sticklers for keeping the law. They believed in dotting all the "I's" and crossing all the "T's". But, in their attempt to be right, they often missed the weightier matters of the law such as judgement, mercy and faith" (Matt. 23:23). Jesus did not rebuke them for wanting to be doctrinally right. No, He did not do that. Rather He said to them, "These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:24). So, that is the people who came to Jesus with the question about divorce for every cause. We want to combine their desire to keep the commandments of God with the weightier matters which they neglected, judgment, mercy and faith.

Their question was this; "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" "And He answered and said unto them, have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, for this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh?"

Of course, they had read that. It was in their scriptures and they prided themselves in their knowledge of the scriptures. But, with that question, Jesus took them back to the beginning (Gen. 1:27; 2:24) and showed them that they had completely passed over God's original intent in marriage. God, He said, made us male and female. No, no it is not that woman was made by a bunch of chauvinistic men. Furthermore, God did not make us male, female, bisexual and homosexual. No, there are only two sexes of human beings (male and female) and God made us that way. Anything else is deviation and perversion!

With that in mind, Jesus then reminded His these people of God's original purpose in marriage. "For this cause," He said, "shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they twain (or two) shall be one flesh." Here it is: God's original intent was one man and one woman for

life. That is just the way it is, my friend, and to reinforce that, Jesus added His own words, "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." One man joined to one woman for life. That is God's plan. The Pharisees had gotten so entwined in the divorce issue, they had forgotten that. They needed to be reminded, and so do we.

Well, they said in verse seven, "Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?" What were they talking about? Undoubtedly they were referring to the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy 24:1 which says, "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her; then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house." That was the law of Moses, and they must have felt some smug satisfaction, as they thought Jesus had openly taken a stand contrary to the law of Moses.

But wait a minute. Let's read Jesus' response in verse eight; "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so." So Moses really did not give such a command, did he? It was merely a concession, not a command, and it was made due to the hardness of the hearts of the children of God in the Old Testament period. Jesus said that from the beginning God had never intended for a marriage to end in divorce. It was one man for one woman for life. And only due to the hardheartedness of His people He makes one concession. According to Deuteronomy 24:1 if a man found "uncleanness" in his wife, he could put her away, but he must give her a writing of divorcement. What was this "uncleanness" for which a man could divorce his wife? Well, that is where the controversy came in, and you remember we said a moment ago, that when we got to verse eight, we would understand the ensnaring nature of their question. Well here it is.

There were three prevailing interpretations of that "uncleanness". There was the very conservative school of Shammai, who taught that uncleanness was the sin of adultery. Therefore the only reason a man (under the law of Moses) could divorce his wife was adultery. The house of Shammai says, "A man must not divorce his wife unless he hath found her unfaithful."

Then, there was a second group, the school of Hillel who interpreted that word "uncleanness" in Deuteronomy 24:1 to mean "anything displeasing to the husband." From the Mishna, the first part of the Talmud, the Jewish civil and religious law, some of the grounds for divorce (according to the interpretation of the school of Hillel) were: (1) Violation of the law of Moses or Jewish custom, such as the woman causing her husband to eat food on which a tithe had not been paid. (2) In not setting apart the first dough. (3) Appearing in public with dishevelled hair. (4) Exposing her arms in public. (5) Conversing indiscriminately with men. (6) Speaking disrespectfully of her husband's parents in his presence (7) Brawling in the house, which is defined to mean speaking so loudly to her husband that her neighbors could hear her next door. (8) If she spoiled a dish for him.. All of these were grounds for a divorce according to Deuteronomy 24:1, according to the liberal school of Hillel.

The third school of thought was that of Akiba to whom that word "uncleanness" in Deuteronomy meant "If a man found another fairer than she, he could give his wife a bill of divorcement and marry the other."

From that you can see that by the time of Christ, the interpretation of the scripture regarding divorce was very loose and liberal. Consequently, the divine institution of marriage was held with disrespect, and even contempt. Even the Priests, the scribes and other religious leaders were making mockery of it, just as many do today. Some of them married with no intention of making it a lasting thing.

What did Jesus say about it? With which of these three schools of thought would Jesus side? Much to their surprise and chagrin, He did not join with any of them. He showed them that they had missed God's original intent, the sacred union of one man and one woman in marriage for life. From the beginning God had never intended it be any other way. They were embarrassed and discredited, not Jesus. It is one man and one woman for life. That was God's will for them, and, that is God's will for your marriage and mine, whether we are Christians or not. That does not have anything to do with it. Christ did not originate marriage; it existed from the beginning.

If you are following me, you are probably asking, "Then, is divorce a sin?" Whether divorce is sin in itself, or that which occasions the divorce is sinful, seems to be a mere technicality, doesn't it? Divorce for "any cause" is surely a transgression of the law of God which has regulated marriage from the beginning. And since sin is defined in I John 3:4 as transgression of the law, it can be reasonably deduced that it is sinful, wouldn't you say? But, it is not an "unpardonable sin," by any means. It is not something for which there is no forgiveness with God, and should not be so considered. We must guard against that kind of thinking either in regard to our own experience, or with the divorce of another.

Seventy to eighty percent of divorced people say they will marry again. In verse nine Jesus says, "And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."

This statement of the Savior is considered to be the most comprehensive, concise and authoritative statement on the subject of remarriage after divorce to be found anywhere. The people of Jesus' day had been marrying and divorcing and marrying again and divorcing again and marrying again so freely and recklessly that they had completely lost sight of the sanctity of marriage and were making a mockery of it. Divorce was as free and commonplace it is in our present day society.

Suddenly the loving Savior says, "I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." To the one simply stated original intent in marriage (one man and one woman for life), our Lord made one exception. Unless one divorces his or her companion for fornication (the word is from pornea, meaning any form of illicit sexual behavior), he is not at liberty to remarry. That settles it then. That stops all this business of marrying, divorcing, remarrying, divorcing and marrying again and it restores the sacredness and sanctity of the marriage vows. It did then and it does now almost 2,000 years later.

My friend, just as in everything else, the Lord's way is the surest way to marital happiness. Every married person, and every young person planning to be married someday, should adopt the one man and one woman for life principle. But, it seems that those who profess to be Christians, those who place their hope in Jesus Christ for eternal life, should be especially concerned about following the teachings of Christ in these things as in all others. There is no way we can flaunt God's way and find happiness. So, I urge you, first to become a Christian. As surely as you do, you will increase your probabilities for marital happiness and spiritual security. Put your faith in the Lord and in His way, turn to Him in repentance and be immersed into Him without delay. If we may assist you in learning more or in becoming a Christian, please let us hear from you at once.