

Five factors that work against marriage

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Thought: There is almost no unhappiness as intense as the unhappiness of a failing marriage. When a relationship that was meant for love and companionship becomes filled with conflict, bitterness and despair, it can make life seem painfully unbearable.

Consider five converging factors that work against marital stability and satisfaction:

1. Theological factor: Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to *his own way*..." The essence of our nature is that we tend toward selfishness. "When selfishness is considered as an undue preference of our interests, we have in selfishness the essence of all sin" (H. Thiessen)

"There are two kinds of people in the world, the givers and the takers. A marriage between two givers can be a beautiful thing. Friction is the order of the day, however, for a giver and a taker. But two takers can claw each other to pieces within a period of six weeks. In short, selfishness will devastate a marriage every time" (Dr. James Dobson). See: II Corinthians 5:15; Philippians 2:3-5

2. Cultural factor: The culture that surrounds us tends to reinforce our selfishness rather than confront it. Consider some of the dominant cultural values: We want maximum enjoyment for minimal effort. We say, "Service me well and quickly or I'll find someone who can take care of me on my terms." "I don't have to out up with difficulty and pain." According to cultural assumptions, Life is all about me and my felt needs. When we allow our lives to be influenced by these values, we encourage marital failure.

Remember: "...the ultimate secret of lifelong love and the stability of marriage is a by-product of *an iron-willed determination to make it work*" (Dr. James Dobson).

3. Social factor: Marriage involves the merging of two different people with different backgrounds into one new home. This is almost always a formula for problems. I call this the *18 year factor*. We have been profoundly shaped by the 18 years we spent in our homes. For some people this is negative because of their dysfunctional family situations. Since we bring all our baggage with us into marriage, it is wise to consider the ways you have been shaped by your home life. We often need the assistance of a wise counselor to help us anticipate the potential problems.

4. Practical factor: Lack of preparation is one of the key contributors to marital failure. I had to prepare more for my driver's license than my marriage license. There is something profoundly wrong with the lack of emphasis on preparation for marriage. Shockingly, more than two hundred thousand marriage each year end before their second anniversary. We must do more preventative work to stop this trend! Young people desiring to be married would be wise to seek pre-marital counseling. There are many good books on marriage preparation available. Consider: "The First Years of Forever" by Dr. Ed Wheat.

5. Ecclesiastical factor: The final cause worth considering is the decline of religious influence. To borrow Stephen Carter's words, "God has become a hobby" in the United States. Sunday is the all-American day of recreation—and in too many cases church attendance is a low priority. Even if people go to church, it appears to make little difference. This is because churches have surrendered their role in society as a voice of moral guidance. Church leaders must ask: "Does the church exist to accommodate the desires of religious consumers or to faithfully communicate God's Will from scripture?"

"In the current situation, the clergy have very largely lost their nerve and are often painfully perplexed about what they should do. As for the members of our churches, increasingly they do not even understand the problem. They have not heard Christian preaching about divorce and remarriage because their leaders consider the subject 'too hot to handle'." (Andrew Cornes).

An important opportunity exists for Churches to help young couples and families. For many years our church has offered an extensive course for those who are dating. We also have an established pre-marital team. In most cases, one pastor cannot carry the full weight of pre-marital preparation. We must regain the art of older couples mentoring younger ones. Encourage your Church to require thorough pre-marital counseling for those planning to marry. And be willing to be part of the team!

For a free *Marriage Resource Packet* www.songtime.com