



*There is no more lovely, friendly, and charming relationship than a good marriage. - Martin Luther*

*A bad marriage is worse than no marriage at all. – Neil Clark Warren (Psychologist and Theologian)*

In biblical times, marriage was very different than it is now. We even see dramatic differences between what we call the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the OT, marriages were, truly, just parents or servants delivering a woman to a man's family. In the NT, there are weddings that involved celebrations of whole communities. That said, throughout all of the biblical times and well beyond, parents decided who their children married. Love was incidental. Honor was of primary importance. Parents were *obligated* to arrange a marriage that would provide their daughters security. They sought wives for their sons that would bring honor (and babies) for the family.

There are churches today that counsel couples to have a biblical marriage. Some of them even intend that parents should decide who their daughters can marry. They preach/teach that men have the authority and need respect. That women are meant to take care of the family and need love. There are pastors that encourage women to remain with abusive husbands for a myriad of "biblical" reasons. I know there are pastors that would never go that far, but still strongly encourage couples to try and remain together well beyond what is good for either of them or their children.

Often this is well-meant advice. Divorce is a death – a death of a marriage. When children are involved, it makes it even harder. Pastors have a role to play in all deaths. One of the things we learn in Clinical Pastoral Education is that deaths can be either healthy or unhealthy. Both are painful, but only the latter are peaceful. This can be true for deaths of marriages too. In fact, we even have liturgies for a *divorce ceremony* to provide all members of the family closure. In any case, a pastor's job is to be a supportive presence – not a fixer.

That said, there are some tools that we can use to support couples in both their preparation for marriage and during the course of the marriage to enrich their relationship. Recently, I did an all-day seminar on effective tools to use for marriage counseling and premarital counseling. The program helps couples with communication, conflict resolution, and many other topics that affect marriage. While it can be used by professional therapists to help couples in crisis, for pastors and chaplains, it is a toolbox intended to support couples wanting to improve their relationships.

Regardless of what is going on in your lives or relationships – pain/joy, love/loss - please know that I am here to provide support. If things aren't going well, don't wait until a crisis to talk about it. You don't have to go through anything alone.

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