

## **Wisdom from the Word**

### **Biblical Insights for a Christ-filled Marriage**

The Bible is a collection of books written over a period of 1500 years more than 2000 years ago. I don't claim to exhaust its insights in an hour. I would like to call your attention to certain fundamental thoughts and reflections that can help us to build Christ-filled marriages. Such unions will also be emotionally intelligent.

#### **OLD TESTAMENT**

##### **1. *Marriage is a partnership between two equals.***

Genesis 1:27; Genesis 2:18; Genesis 2:20-22

- Marriage is not a power struggle; it is not jockeying for power. One does not lord it over the other.
- Such a view has certain implications:
  - The relationship is based on a fundamental, mutual respect. Without respect there is no love.
  - You must allow your spouse a certain amount of relative autonomy. After the wedding the partners do not lose their individuality completely.
  - You need to determine your respective roles within the marriage. In traditional marriages, these roles were very well set within a particular culture and now it is no longer true.
  - Always remember that you are on the same team.

##### **2. *Nurture your fondness and admiration for your spouse.***

Genesis 2:22-23

- This basic sense of admiration and fondness for the other is the real secret of keeping your romance alive. Healthy couples have this trait in abundance while unhealthy couples cannot see the good in the other. This is John Gottman's second secret of making your marriage work.
- The example of the elderly man whose wife had died – "She is as beautiful today..."
- It is not that you can totally ignore your spouse's faults and foibles. In a good marriage you choose not to focus on the defects and harp on them.
- The story of the woman who always criticized her husband.

##### **3. *A marriage without God will become a marriage without harmony.***

Genesis 3:8-13; Tobit 8:4-8

- Too many people think that they can build a healthy and happy marriage without God or faith. That is not true.

- Some of the most necessary ingredients for a healthy marriage do not come to us naturally. They come to us from a spirit of faith or spirituality: selflessness, humility and forgiveness.
- I don't claim that someone will turn into a great spouse just because they go to church. I do claim that if someone is part of a faith tradition and then practices that faith, then he/she will be a better person and a better spouse.

#### **4. *Romantic love is foolish love.***

Genesis 29:15-28

- I do tell my couples: "You cannot have a successful marriage unless you are ready to love foolishly."
- We are too reasonable in all other areas of our lives.
- What is the dominant paradigm in American culture? It is shopping. We are always looking to see if we get the best value for the money.
- In two areas you cannot afford to be an astute shopper: faith and romance.
- You cannot do comparative shopping; you must let yourself go.
- You have to get out of your system the fifty-fifty understanding of marriage.

#### **5. *Marriage is a sacred union.***

Ezekiel 16:14-19; Ezekiel 16:32-33; Hosea 2:14-20

- The great prophets (Hosea, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah) compare God's love for His people to the love a husband has for his wife. If marriage itself were not a sacred reality, the prophets would not have used it as an image of God's covenant.
- Anything sacred is set apart for God. No one has control over it. Only God can call the shots.
- I encourage couples to keep narrating their own story. The best marriages seem to emerge from most unlikely stories. God has a hand. It is as if an invisible hand brought the two together. You make your vows not just to each other but to God. He brought you together; only He can take you out.
- The sense of the sacred union gives the couple the necessary motivation for perseverance. Nothing great is produced in a short period of time.

#### **6. *Even your physical desire for your spouse, your passion, is a gift from the Lord.***

Song of Songs 4:1-7; Song of Songs 4:10-16

- Contrary to what stand-up comedians seem to imply, the Catholic Church does not have hang-ups about sex. She has hang-ups only about the content of sex.
- Within the committed relationship called marriage, sexual intimacy is the most apt, and the most beautiful channel to express closeness and love.
- Remember that men and women have very different takes on sexuality.
- Never use sex as a bribe or as a punishment.

## NEW TESTAMENT

### 1. *In calling you to be spouses, the Lord is calling you to be parents.*

Genesis 1:28; John 15:16

- In the Catholic understanding of marriage, children form an integral part. We cannot have a valid marriage if a couple deliberately excludes children.
- Too many people nowadays want to plan everything about having children. We need to be open to God's gift even as we plan.

### 2. *In your loving, your ultimate model and criterion is the way the Lord Himself loves us.*

John 15:12

- There is no other word in the English language that is more misunderstood, misrepresented and misinterpreted than the word "love." Each one defines it as they please.
- For us disciples, it is the Master who defines it for us.
- What are the characteristics of such love? It is expressive, accepting, faithful, life-giving and forgiving.

### 3. *Pauline idea of love includes the following: forgiving, patient, kind, and persevering.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

- Marriage should always be hopeful. I tell couples to develop a positive attitude towards marriage in general and towards their own marriage in particular.
- Love must be kind. Unfortunately we are more kind to strangers than to our own spouses.
- Love also must persevere. I come across many couples that come for help. I can't help them because one has already given up.

### 4. *We cannot have Christ-like love without sacrifice.*

John 15:13; John 12:24-25

- There is always a bit of dying for marital love to grow. The mere adjustment that two people must effect calls for a lot of dying. In this culture we become independent from the time we are children. We have our own space. Not to allow another person to enter into our space is very difficult.
- Without sacrifice there is no love. Sacrifice is giving up something legitimately mine so that my spouse may have it. There is no logic or reason.
- "When the authentic well-being of another takes precedence over your own, then the state of love exists."

**5. *In the spirit of Christ, learn to forgive one another and put on love, the bond of perfection.***

Colossians 3:12-14

- As a young seminarian I saw a movie, “Love Story.” The billboards announced: “Love means never having to say you’re sorry!” Nothing is further from the truth.
- In marriage, you will have to say sorry many, many times. We need to forgive.
- Our only motivation is the Lord – “Forgive us our trespasses...”
- We find it hard to forgive because we are proud.
- Second, we focus on the hurt and not on the person.
- The story of George and his sports car.

**6. *As disciples, the attitude of both husband and wife should be one of gentleness, humility and self-sacrifice. Spouses must treat each other the way Christ treats the Church, and marriage is a figure of the holy relationship between Christ and the Church.***

Ephesians 5:21-33

- Gentleness goes a long way in preserving the quality of a marriage. What makes or breaks a marriage is the way the couple confronts conflict. John Gottman points out that “gentle start-ups” do not produce bad feelings in a relationship. Sweetness gets better results than aggressiveness.
- If there is one thing that causes more harm in marriage than anything else, it is pride. Without a healthy dose of humility, lots of relationships run aground.
- Every couple must realize that they celebrated their sacrament and good marriages attempt to live that sacrament in their everyday life. How do you do that? In some sense your spouse must become Christ to you.
- Living the sacrament day to day constitutes the spirituality of marriage.

Fr. Britto M. Berchmans  
St. Paul of the Cross Parish  
320 S. Washington Street  
Park Ridge, IL 60068  
manotrese@hotmail.com