

Peter Evans shares his reflections on what makes for a good marriage



MARRIAGE AS A MEDIC

key points

- God ordained marriage as a good thing – bringing a man and a woman together to form a new unit or team. It thus reveals something of the nature of God and his relationship with his church.
- Because of this, our choice of marriage partner is very important, and not to be left just to feelings or circumstance.
- The author looks at the challenges and practical problems faced by married medics and at how we juggle career, church and marriage/family.

In my speech at our wedding in 1992, I quoted Wayne from the film *Wayne's World*, who made the observation to his friend Garth that 'Marriage is a punishment for shoplifting in some countries!'

I'm not sure what my new wife made of that, but I'm probably forgiven now. It does reveal something of the attitude that people have toward marriage though, and there are many more erudite expressions of this.

Chekov famously stated that 'if you are afraid of loneliness, don't marry', and, even more sadly, Woody Allen opined that 'Marriage is the death of hope!'

The statistics from this country demonstrate how this thinking has permeated our whole society – recent figures show 111,000 divorces per annum in the UK, and more and more people are choosing to see marriage as an outdated institution, cohabiting, or expecting to change 'partners' as their lives and circumstances change. At the same time most people long for the security of marriage and the failure of their own causes immense heartbreak and hurt.

So what is marriage? Who came up with the idea, and what can we do to make it work – and what about medics?

It is often said that the answer to any question in Sunday School or in a children's talk is either 'God' or 'Jesus' and in a way that's a profound comment on the answer to most questions about life. In the

case of marriage though, the answer to my first question *is* 'God'.

Marriage was designed and planned by God for his created people. He saw that it was not good for man to be alone and created a person the same but different to be with him. He then explained marriage. God had made a suitable helper for man, and we are told 'that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and they become one flesh'. This is the essence of marriage – a man and a woman leaving their parents to become a new unit – in the older language 'leaving and cleaving'.

Marriage is therefore a *creation* ordinance – that is, a mandate God gave in creation, to reveal something of what it means to be made in the image of God, and something of his glory. It is a decree (along with working, amongst others...) that was planned and ordained by God, right at the very beginning, for all people. It predates the fall and is therefore not just for Christians or for those who acknowledge God – it is an ordinance for all people.

God's plans and glory are demonstrated in marriage in many ways, and there are examples throughout Scripture of times when God used marriage in an extreme way to reveal himself and his purposes to his people (think for example of Hosea), or times when his people, through marriage, blew it – again, and again, with polygamy, adultery and intermarriage revealing some of the catastrophic outcomes of rebelling against God's will and desire.

Ultimately, marriage is also an amazing, beautiful

picture of the relationship between Christ and his bride – the church, the gathered people of God for whom he is coming and who should be excitedly, joyfully preparing for the great wedding day.

With marriage being such a precious gift and example from God, it is hardly surprising that many would try to undermine, devalue, change or attack it, and much has been written about this recently.

However, on a practical level, how do we as people – and as medics – work this out and benefit from marriage in more of the way God intended?

Well, first we must acknowledge that things go wrong. We live in a fallen world; we are all a wretched bunch, saved by grace but still with our sinful natures. For all sorts of reasons, marriage, if we are called to it at all, can go horribly awry. Many wonderful, God-loving, God-fearing people have been hurt and destroyed by marriages that have broken down. It is crucial that within the church the broken and the hurting find love, acceptance and restoration and are never made to feel less worthy or condemned – that is *not* God's way. One of my favourite Christian singers, Don Francisco talks about this in his live concert and observe that when we, the 'smug married' (a Bridget Jones quote, not Don!) judge people we become like the Pharisees. God is the God of grace, forgiveness and hope, and we need to demonstrate this in our churches.

Medics in particular face huge pressures – often described as being 'married to the job' – we often make no time for our spouses, and are constantly busy. We work closely with others – often doctors or nurses of the opposite sex who support us and understand, whereas when we arrive home exhausted we may find no understanding or sympathy. Parents may have opinions about what we do or don't do right, and things happen – children, exhaustion, bereavement, exhaustion, family illness – and oh yes, did I mention exhaustion?

So for those who are contemplating marriage, or who are married, here are a few key, practical ways to protect your marriage.

1. Be careful who you marry

People often tell you that you can see what your wife/husband will be like in 30 years by looking at their parents. It's not always a comforting thought! However, if you are contemplating marriage as a Christian, the spiritual parentage of your spouse is vitally important. Is your 'other' a Christian? The Bible is clear that believers are children of God. If you are a child of God, but the person you are involved with is not, then your parentage is incompatible. Biblically, there are only people who are co-heirs with Christ or people dead in their sins and transgressions. Now this is not always easy to see, especially when the non-Christian is utterly lovely, kind, generous and gracious, and all the Christians around you are frankly unpleasant. Nevertheless it is true, and the Bible explains that we shouldn't be yoked with unbelievers, simply because we have nothing in common where/when it matters.

2. Leave and cleave

Andrew Fergusson spoke on this at our wedding and we feel it should be a message for all marriages. You may come from a wonderful, amazing, remarkable home, where you tell mum everything and ask dad for advice about all your major life decisions (or vice versa), but when you marry a person, the one you discuss things with, decide things with and tell everything to is your spouse. You have left home, you are a new unit, and whilst you must care for your parents, you must be clear that you have left. You are a new body together.

3. Be more like Jesus

'If only...' I hear you say! But we should aim to be more like Jesus if we want his plan – our marriage – to work. What do I mean to be like Jesus in this context? Well develop a servant heart and mentality. Much has been written about passages such as the one in Ephesians on wives and husbands – but the bottom line is – be like Jesus in your marriage. Most of the time, in a non-abusive relationship, it doesn't ultimately matter who is right – what does matter is that we put the needs of our spouse above our own, and put our expectations under those of our spouse. Read Philippians chapter 2 and consider using the chapter as a marriage model, quite apart from anything else. And those temptations, that person at work? Run from them – recognise the risk, face up to it and get out of the situation.

4. Keep close to God

It sounds obvious, but the old analogy of the traffic cone is true – the further you go from God (the top of the cone) the further you go from each other (running round the circumference of the cone). Make church a priority, and missing (except clearly for reasons of work, illness etc) a 'never' event. Read God's word – it doesn't have to be together in a cosy Bible study for two – just read it! And pray. Work on your relationship with God. Much is made of 'date nights' and 'me time', the gym and holidays, and all these are fine and may or may not help you, but the fundamental core issue is keeping close to God and living in obedience to him.

I hope this helps. I now have the difficulty of showing this article to my wife of nearly 25 years. I fear she won't recognise me in much that I've written. But she loves me, and will forgive me and help me to grow. I can testify that having someone who knows all my faults and failings, but loves me unconditionally anyway is just incredible and gives great joy. And that's my wife as well as my Saviour!

Martin Luther said, 'There is no more lovely, friendly or charming relationship, communion or company, than a good marriage'.

I hope Wayne found that out!

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