
Expectations of Marriage

by: Ronald L. Dart

My wife, Allie, and I were in Palm Springs a few years ago, celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary. That's right, five O, 50, and it seems like we just got married, not that long ago. Time really flies when you're having fun.

We happened to notice the March edition of the 'Ladies Home Journal.' There was an article on the cover titled, "Marriages that Last, Is Yours One?" by Lisa Benenson. Now that was an irresistible article under the circumstances. Our marriage seemed to be like one of those that sure enough lasted and we trusted that it would keep on lasting.

And now since we are authorities on a marriage that had lasted, we thought it might be interesting to compare notes with what Lisa had written in her article.

Cost of an Average Wedding

There were some surprises for me. One of them was the cost of the average wedding these days. Are you ready for this? The average wedding in the United States today costs \$22,360. It took my breath away. I got the feeling that a lot of young people sitting out there listening to me when I told them this, didn't think it was all that surprising, but it sure was to me.

That seems to me like a lot of money to pay for something that only has a 50-50 chance of making it. Would you pay \$22,360 for a car that only had a 50-50 chance of lasting? Would you pay \$22,360 for a car and then not change the oil? You know a lot of people seem to think that marriage requires no preventive maintenance and there is nothing that you have to do. You get married and after that, well everything just sort of takes care of itself. I have news for you, it doesn't.

People are making a \$22,000 investment in something, that they know going in, may not last, and in most cases, they don't even expect it to last.

Allie and I were talking about this and we figured up the cost of our wedding. Now it was a formal wedding. It was in a church, there was a reception at her parents' home. She wore her sister's gorgeous wedding dress with a train and everything behind it and I wore my navy dress blues. We figure our wedding cost somewhere between \$350 and \$500. Now, 50 years later, we consider that was pretty good investment, but our wedding was expensive compared to her mothers.

Allie's mother, Molly, was one of 15 children. I got this story from one of Molly's sisters. Molly, Allie's mother, and three of her sisters were on their way to Sunday School on Sunday morning. Molly was 15 years old and she was the oldest. As they walked along the country road toward church, along came Jim with a two-horse carriage. Molly told her sisters, "Now you can go on to Sunday School or go home. I am going with Jim." So, she got in the carriage. Jim drove her to the Shiloh Baptist Church and they got married and left on their honeymoon and their parents didn't even know they were gone. They had a long and successful marriage with five sons and five daughters. I married one of the daughters.

Now, 50 years later, couples in the United States spend 50 billion dollars a year on weddings and 25 billion of that is a bad investment. Do you realize there are one million children in this country who see their parents split up every year? One million children see their parents, people whom they love, and who they thought loved each other, now turned against one another and split up.

10 Million Couples Shacked Up

The "Ladies Home Journal" article had some information that was sobering to say the least. For one thing, there are now nearly 10 million couples shacked up in this country. For many of them it is a kind of a trial arrangement. Let's move in together and let's see how it works, let's see if we are really fit for each other. Fully 75% of them intend to get married someday. They will try it out and see if it works.

You would think then, that since they tried this out ahead of time, that now they would know more about how they will live together in the house, you would think that more of these marriages would work, wouldn't you? Not so! Couples who live together before marriage have a 46% higher divorce rate than those who don't.

So, think about this ladies, girls, when this fellow is trying to talk you into trying it out, in moving in together for a while, that your odds of having a successful marriage are 46% worse than a couple who never lived together before they get married.

We Want a Spouse who will Make Us Happy

Along with a lot of sobering statistics the "Journal" had a couple of important insights. We are no longer, it seems in this country content with a reliable partner. We want a spouse who will make us happy. Now I want you to think about that. We want a spouse who will make us happy. Don't we realize that there is no one in the world who can do that for another person. No one can make someone else happy. Happiness is something that arises out of our own hearts, and the way we deal with the life as life has dealt to us. You can have a partner who is as dependable as sunrise, who will be there for you, come hell or high water, but if this partner can't make you happy, you will leave him and split up the family and the children. If you think not, people are doing it every day.

This helped me to understand why it is, that the divorce rate just keeps on going up. People are entering marriage, expecting something that no partner can possibly provide. Happiness is a will,

it comes and goes with the circumstances and it has more to do with what is inside of you, than it does with what your partner does or doesn't do.

If you enter marriage with unrealistic expectations of life and what life is going to be, you haven't got a chance.

Well, happiness will be there at times and will be absent at other times, and sometimes, the circumstances of life, make what we think is happiness completely impossible. The article went on to say that, statistically, this is interesting, "Statistically, the most divorced proof marriages are those with a bread winning husband and a stay-at-home wife." Now I know that is not politically correct. But I'm not trying to be politically correct, I am just giving you the facts of the article. This is a fact. This is something that exists in the real world, statistically, the most divorce proof marriages are those with a bread winning husband and a stay-at-home wife, take it or leave it!

What this means is, you don't compete with one another. You are different, and you bring different things to the partnership. It is not that we marry people who are more like us. We marry people who fill us out. We marry people who provide things that we don't have. Both of us bring a separate set of skills to the marriage and between the two of us, we can create a partnership that is more than the sum of its parts.

How Do You Rate Your Marriage?

There was another set of statistics in the "Ladies Home Journal" and it spoke volumes. There was a large sample of couples who rated their marriage as 'very unhappy,' but stayed together anyway. Can you visualize this? A large sample of marriages, of couples, who rated their marriage as 'very unhappy,' not just unhappy, but 'very unhappy,' but they stayed together. Five years later, these people were polled again, now 80% of these couples rated their marriage as 'very happy.' Now what does this say to us? What it says to us is, that happiness comes, and happiness goes. And just because you are very unhappy today, doesn't mean it has to stay that way. Sometimes through counseling. Sometimes just toughing it out for a while, things can change.

My wife had a friend who told her about a phone call she got from her daughter. It seems the daughter had gotten married, moved away from home and was living in another state with her husband and she called her mother in absolute tears, married only months. What did she want? She wanted to leave her husband and come home, "Momma, I want to come home." Her mother asked, "Why? What do you want to come home for?" She said, "O Mama, I'm just not happy!" Her mother's response, "Well, baby, you just stick it out and you'll be happy later."

Times in our Lives

This brought home to me one of life's great principles. It applies as well to marriage as does any other parts of life, you will find it in a book of reflections by one of the wisest men who ever lived, and a man who knew a lot about failed marriages.

One of the most important things to learn about life and about marriage, incidentally, is it is not always the same. We go through different times and different circumstances in our lives and things change.

The wisest man who ever lived, his name was Solomon said this, in Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. {2} A time to be born, and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted, {3} A time to kill, and a time to heal, a time to break down, and a time to build up, {4} A time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."

This simple fact of life could probably save a lot of marriages, if people could just get their mind around it. There is a time to laugh. There is a time when you're going to be happy. There is a time to dance, but there's also a time to weep. There's also a time to mourn. There are also times that are hard times and there are times of struggles.

I remember when Allie and I got married, we lived in a little one room apartment, with a little kitchenette on the side and a shower and bathroom and boy that was it. It was poverty. It was simple. We didn't have much, but the happiness came from being together, but even that was not an all the time thing. There were times when we were happy. There were times when we were sad. There were times when things were working for us and their times when they were not. The problem is, you have to live through all of life's times. It is the burden that God has given the sons of men to be burdened with.

"There is a time," Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3 verse 5, "To castaway stones, and there is a time to gather stones together. There's a time to embrace and there's a time to refrain from embracing, {6} A time to get, and a time to lose. a time to keep, and a time to castaway. {7} There is a time to rend, and a time to sew, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak."

And here's another lesson for life and for marriage. Sometimes you are better off not saying anything. There are times when you must speak. These are little lessons and life is not always the same. Every circumstance cannot be handled the same way. We need to learn that we have to tough it out in the hard times. We have to learn that sometimes when our partner is hurting, we just have to keep quiet. We have to learn when we are hurting, sometimes we have to speak the truth.

Continuing in verse 8, "There's a time to love and a time to hate. There is a time of war, and a time of peace." Then he asked this question in verse 9, "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he labors? {10} I have seen the work which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. {11} He has made everything beautiful in His time."

Isn't that interesting. God has made everything beautiful, but not all the time. He has made everything beautiful in His time and He has set eternity in men's hearts so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end. We know it's there. There's a yearning inside of us toward God, but we cannot find out the end of it.

Solomon said, in verse 12, "I know there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and do good in his life, {13} And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of his labor, it is a gift of God. {14} I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. You can't add anything to it and you can't take anything from it. God does it? Why? So, men should fear before Him. {15} That which has been, is now. That which is to be, has already been, And God requires of us an account of that which is passed."

You know there is not a thing in the world you're going through, that somebody else hasn't gone through before you. The same battles have been fought, the same struggles have been there.

Expectations of Marriage

Lisa listed in the "Ladies Home Journal" article four things we have a right to expect from marriage: One: a reliable partner. Two: a shared life. Three: love. Four: children.

A Reliable Partner and Love

Lisa Dennison opined that, "All happy couples need to have the sense that your partner will be there, working with you, no matter what."

This is a valuable piece of information when reflected on. I realized it had a lot to do with the success of our 50-year marriage. Back in the mid-50s, I had a diaphragmatic hernia. I was in the Navy at the time, and the Navy surgeons wanted to do surgery, at the San Diego Hospital, every Wednesday just to keep their hand in it. So, I was done that Wednesday. I had the surgery and it's a major surgery. It involves opening the rib cage, spreading the ribs, collapsing a lung, stitching up the diaphragm from the top and boy was I in bad shape when I came out of that. I had tubes coming out of me in every direction that you can imagine, I was miserable. I was uncomfortable, and they wouldn't give me morphine but every once in a while, to kill the pain.

Guess who was there all the time for me? My wife. She was there to hold my hand and rub my feet, to comfort me, to give me a little sip of ice or water, or something to keep my lips from getting to dry. She was there for me. It would have been awful to have been alone. It would've been awful to have nobody to care for me except navy nurses and hospital corpsmen. To have my wife and the tender loving care that she gave me at the time meant more than I could tell you.

I got a chance some years later to pay it back, my wife had thyroid cancer and had to have half of her thyroid removed. She had a bad reaction to the anesthetic and didn't come to, through the whole day. I sat in the hospital room and I rubbed her feet and I put ice chips in her mouth and I rubbed her forehead and tried my best to comfort her, and I stayed there, until finally, I was confident that she was confident that she had what it took to call the nurse with a little button by the bed and finally she sent me home, way late the next morning to get some sleep and both of us thought, how awful it would have been to have been alone, with no one that cares for you. No one who is really worried about you and you alone. Sometimes you have the feeling that in the hospital, that if you need to press that button, something may or may not happen. But when you have somebody in the room, who is bright, alert, interested and caring, they are going to see to it that you're taken care of, no matter what.

Will You Celebrate Your 50th. Anniversary?

Someone at our anniversary reception asked me, if I had any idea 50 years ago that we would come to this day, that we would still be married 50 years later, and I thought it was an odd question. I guess it's a generational thing in a way, because Allie and I never had any idea that we would not come to this day. We got married, expecting to be married for life. It never crossed our minds. The only question we had was whether we would live long enough. By living long enough we came to our 50th wedding anniversary.

Someone asked me what the secret was, and I said, "The secret is getting married young and staying married."

We give ourselves a lot of grief, when we get married, expecting the wrong things. Allie and I expected, that if we both lived long enough to celebrate our 65th wedding anniversary, like another couple we met recently did. Sixty-five years they had been together.

We thought quite a bit about our marriage and the reason why we were together. The reason why we thought we always would be. We had our expectations of marriage shaped by the Bible. That book of Ecclesiastes that I was just reading to you from, is surprisingly relevant to marriage. I guess it is not too surprising when you understand that it is about life.

Shared Life and Children

There is one little passage in Ecclesiastes, that more than any other, I think, points to the marriage, the value of marriage and the importance of hanging on.

In Ecclesiastes 4 and verse 9, Solomon has this to say, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor."

You know, it's a funny thing, but in the modern world, companies realize this, a married man working for them is more valuable than a single man, because even though it doesn't seem to directly affect his work, it does indirectly. The fact that he has support at home. Two are better than one because they are able to put their work together and accomplish more.

Verse 10, Solomon said, "For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falls and doesn't have another to help him up. {11} Again, if two lie together then they can get warm. But how can one be warm alone? {12} And if one prevails against a man, two can withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

People in the old world knew that better than we do. They understood the importance of having a family. The family that could stick together, the support that they could get from the children, when they grew up and the parents grew older. The strength of a family that stays together.

One man, you can prevail against him. Two are likely to withstand you, and three, four, five, a larger family has enormous strength.

Later in Ecclesiastes, Solomon will say this in chapter 5 verse 10, "He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loves abundance with increase, this also is vanity. {11} When goods increase, they are increased who eat them, and what good is it to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes."

I remember once, I was listening to Bill Cosby, a routine he had called, "200 mph." He had just bought himself a new Shelby Cobra. He said, he needed a car that went 200 miles an hour to get to work. It was amusing in a way, but it underlined the importance of what Solomon is saying here is that, what good is this to the owners of all these BMWs, Mercedes and fancy cars and huge houses, other than the beholding of them with their eyes?

I hearken back to when we lived in Corpus Christi in a small little garage apartment and rode the bus to work, rode the bus to church, rode the bus to wherever we were going to go. Then finally, I managed to get enough money together and sprung for a used Cushman Motor Scooter. I would get on this motor scooter; my wife would get on behind me and we would go to the places that we had to go. We could carry back as much groceries that we could carry. One night we went to the movies and we saw the movie: "Lily." We came back singing from the motor scooter at the top of our voices, "Hi Lily, Hi Lily, High Low," through the dark Corpus Christie night.

We were happy, and a BMW or a Mercedes-Benz would've added absolutely nothing to our happiness on that occasion.

Now you can learn these things by being told, as Solomon tells us in the book, or you to learn them the hard way over a lifetime. When you learn that the collection of goods and silver and houses and cars actually carry with it its own burden.

Solomon went on to say in verse 12, "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not allow him to sleep. {13} There is a sore evil I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their own hurt."

What value is it to collect a bunch of stuff together, if you lie awake at night worrying about what you are going to do with your abundance?

Marriage Squabbles Over Money

Now when it comes to marriage, and the happiness of a couple, you tend to have more fights over money, especially in the early years, than anything else.

Later I guess the children can come into the equation, but for us in the very earliest times, the arguments were over money and when you look back over time, at the size of the issues, the importance of the issues, how big of a deal the issues were, they really didn't matter very much in the overall scheme of things and looked at in a fifty-year perspective, you're arguing about nickels and dimes. You actually have the most precious thing you can have, one another.

Ecclesiastes 9 verse one, "For all this I consider it in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God, no man knows either love or

hatred by everything in front of him. {2} All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous, and the wicked, to the good and to the clean, to the unclean, to him that sacrifices, and to him that doesn't sacrifice."

Everybody is going to wind up the same. Dead!

Verse 4, "For to him that is joined to the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than the dead lion. {5} For the living know they shall die, but the dead don't know anything. {6} Their love, their hatred, their envy, is perished."

So, what do you do?

Live Joyfully with the Wife whom You Love

Continuing in Ecclesiastes 9 verse 7, "Go your way, eat your bread with joy, drink your wine with a merry heart, for God accepts your works. {8} Let your garments be always white, let your head lack no ointment." Then he says this, {9} "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vanity, which he has given you under the sun. {10} Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you are going."

You know, I had to think long and hard about that. There are so many things that we could give our lives to, so many rabbits that we could chase, so many different directions that we can go.

My family always had a saying about something that came up and was in the way, we would say, "Life's too short for that!" That information came, I think, from the pages of the Bible.

There is no knowledge, no device in the grave, where you're going, so you'd better do it now!

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Were you surprised by the amount of what the average cost of a wedding is?
2. What do you think is the cause of the fact that a lot of marriages do not last?
3. Do you find it interesting that people who shack up before marriage have a higher divorce rate?

4. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question: "How do you rate your marriage?"
5. Do you ever wonder if people would take their marriage vows seriously divorces would be fewer?
6. What are different about marriages today compared to marriages in Biblical times?
7. If you are married, what lessons have you learned along the way?
8. If you aren't married, what are your expectations of what a good marriage is like?
9. What have you noticed as a common characteristic in marriages that are strong?
10. What have you noticed as a common characteristic in marriages that seem weak?