MARRIAGE: Y'all Ain't Ready For This!

As a therapist, I have the honor of working with many couples who are either contemplating marriage, have recently married or who have been married for several years. Couples come to counseling with a desire to address many varied issues ranging from a lack of effective communication all the way down to infidelity.

As a person who is passionate about marriage, there is nothing more heartbreaking than sitting with and experiencing the struggle in the counseling room with a couple who is contemplating divorce/separation because they believe that there is no other way out of their painful situation. In every case, I truly believe that the couple loves one another deeply and the personality traits that made them compatible when they met are still present underneath it all, however, the "rough patch" has turned into a "great divide".

When I think about all of the couples that I have worked with from the premarital stage to the "we don't think that this is working" stage, I often wonder what happened? What went wrong? When did it go wrong? How long has it been wrong? My work as a therapist has given me unique insight into the journey of being head over heels in love to losing faith that the marriage will work.

Although I have **MANY** more years of experience to obtain to hone my craft as a therapist, this is what I have learned so far...

1. During the courting/dating phase, many couples ignore the red flags that are right before them. For example, signs of anger or violence, having a history of infidelity/promiscuity, a lack of respect to those they claim to love, poor money management skills and no desire to learn, no spiritual foundation, unresolved family of origin issues, trouble keeping promises, no plan for their life, etc.

If these or any other deal breakers present themselves during your courtship, you may want to reconsider marriage until these very serious issues have been addressed or corrected. Once you marry, the issues do not disappear nor do they get better automatically, they become magnified and will permeate every area of your relationship. People do not change just because they say "I do". That person was there all along.

2. Once a couple marries and problems arise, they appear to seek help for their problems later rather than sooner. It is much easier to implement change while the relationship is good versus when the relationship has seriously deteriorated. When your feelings have been hurt repeatedly or you feel disrespected, ASAP is the time to address the issues. As two people settle into the "becoming one" process, there is a guarantee that we will bump into each other emotionally/mentally, step on one another's toes and make some "getting to know you" mistakes with our spouse. As soon as you recognize that you and your partner are unable to resolve problems to the reasonable satisfaction of both parties, it is wise to seek a third party immediately. Otherwise, you continue to inflict damage on the relationship **and** the heart of your spouse which will soon become calloused and impenetrable to any attempts at reconciliation.

3. This last observation may sound harsh but in the majority of break-ups, the biggest issue is simple. **People are selfish**! I am not speaking of the selfishness that says, "I don't want to get up and get you something to drink" or "I don't feel like stopping by the grocery store on my way home from work". I am speaking of the selfishness that says secretly, I married you to **be** served by you, not **to** serve you. The unspoken selfishness that says, "as soon as you make me angry or stop making me happy, I'm leaving". The selfishness that implies, "if we are going to fix our problems, you have to change first and then I will think about it".

To achieve true success in marriage, you must change your thinking about what makes marriage work. Successful marriages require that each partner put themselves second. It requires that **you** take the highroad and be the first to implement positive change in your relationship regardless of how your spouse is acting. It requires that you rely on God and not your flesh to be the man or woman who will put in the work and the time to create a successful, joyful, until death marriage. Successful marriages have two partners who strive to out-serve one another. There are no words to describe the joy that is experienced when two people give-in and surrender to the deeper things of marriage and more importantly, surrender to God's will for your marriage and seek His help to do so. The divorce rate is high not because a marriage "didn't work", the divorce rate is high because spouses do not work selflessly at being married.

To begin the process of establishing a healthy foundation for your marriage, consider the passage below and compare how you show love to your spouse to this tried and true method of loving others. How do you measure up?

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NLT)**
Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.