

How a Righteous Life Makes a Better Marriage #4

Intro: Several years ago two University of Denver professors began a research study on why marriages fail and how to prevent it. The result was a program called PREP (Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program). It is touted as one of the most comprehensive and well-respected divorce-prevention/marriage-enhancing programs in the world. " The study cites four key reasons why marriages fail:

Escalation-- "escalation occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile."

Invalidation-- "Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other."

Negative interpretations-- "Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case."

Withdrawal and avoidance-- "manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening".

It is interesting, when we look at these reasons why marriages fail, that all of them are rooted in basic moral principles. That's why a marriage built upon the principles of Jesus' teaching can succeed. When we practice the righteousness of a true disciple, we will avoid many of the things that cause marriages to fail and put in their place the things that will make it succeed. Let's consider two final things that we can learn from the Sermon on the Mount.

Pray for your yourself, your marriage and your spouse

When we comes to the end of the Sermon on the Mount we become quite aware of the challenging demands of righteousness. Thus Jesus urges His disciples to pray in faith:

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. "Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone? "Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him! (Matthew 7:7-11)

We need to pray for ourselves!

How often do we ask God to change us and help us to become the better marriage partner?

How often do we ask God to help us grow in our areas of weakness and give us opportunities to demonstrate them!

We need to pray for our mates!

If there is something that needs changing in your mate, you can try to “gripe and complain” them into conformity, or you can simply turn it over to the Lord.

God is in the people-changing business. Pray to the Lord about your spouse.

Observe the Golden Rule in your marriage

“Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

This statement is still the most practical form of the second greatest commandment, “love your neighbor as yourself”. It calls upon us to treat our spouse like we would want to be treated. Observing the Golden Rule is simply an exercise in showing basic consideration of another person.

Observing the golden rule would prevent

Escalation—How would we like it if each disagreement become more negative, more violent, and more threatening? No one would want to be treated in that way! “However you want your spouse to treat you, so treat them!” Observing the golden rule would replace escalation with forgiveness.

Invalidation—No one likes a put down; no one likes for someone to invalidate the way they feel, even when they may not agree on the causes for the feelings. How would you like for your mate to put you down for the way you feel about something? Would you rather someone acknowledge your opinion or your feelings? “However you want your spouse to treat you, so treat them!” If we observed the golden rule, invalidation would turn into understanding.

Negative interpretations—What if someone puts the worst construction on your intentions? What if they decide what you intended even when you didn’t intend it? No one likes that.

“However you want your spouse to treat you, so treat them!” If we observed the golden rule, negative interpretations would be replaced by a love that puts the best construction on everything.

Withdrawal and avoidance—How would you like it, if your spouse sabotaged every attempt to bring harmony to your relationship either by withdrawal or by responding in an way that forced you to end the discussion? However you want your spouse to treat you, so treat them! If every person practiced the golden rule, withdrawal and avoidance would be replaced by cooperative discussion and change.

Observing the Golden Rule would also cause us to offer what every person needs:

Appreciation

Praise

Desire to please each other

Conclusion: Sometimes we look for deep and mysterious secrets to making life better, when the answer is right “under our nose”. Jesus’ teaching provides one of the best prescriptions for a happy marriage every proclaimed.

Will we build our marriages on rock or sand?