

Marriage Myths

Not too long ago I ran across a headline that captured my attention—“Love is a flimsy foundation for marriage new study says.” The article went on to make the startling claim that those who marry for love were 150% more likely to get divorced. Ouch! That’s just what you want to hear on Valentine’s Day, isn’t it?

But as I dug deeper into the article I found that those who did the study, the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, were working with a completely different definition of love than I have. They were talking about romantic, love at first sight, makes your heart all a-flutter, melt in your socks, we’re soulmates meant for each other definition of love.

This wrong definition of love is part of the problem. Our culture is trying to build marriage and relationships on several flimsy foundations. We are beginning a new series this week called *Love for a Lifetime*. We are going to look at God’s original design for marriage. When all else fails, read the manual. The problem is that there are so many myths and lies about marriage that we have received from our culture. We have brought in these myths into our marriages to the point where the overall condition of Christian marriages is sometimes indistinguishable from marriage in the world. We need to clear the ground of all this clutter so that we have the room to build our relationships on a solid foundation.

So this morning I just want to talk about some widely held marriage myths. Some of this you may already know. Some of it may come as a surprise. But listen carefully. We need to identify the lies we believe, because Satan, the father of lies, will use those untruths to wreak havoc in our heart and in our homes. If we try to build marriages based on these lies we will not have a love that lasts a lifetime.

I. Romance

The first marriage myth is the romance myth. This myth tells us that the foundation for a lifelong love is how the other person makes us feel. We just need to find the right person who can make us feel the right way for the rest of our lives. The problem is that it’s not true. It doesn’t work. There isn’t a single human being on this planet who is capable of making your palms sweat and your heart palpitate for the rest of your life. I’m doing good if I can make my wife feel like that once a week. No matter how intense, no matter how passionate, the fire of romance is never permanent. It’s a simple biological reality of creation. It’s based on emotions and chemical reactions that come and go and change with time.

If the glue that holds you together is how another person makes you feel, that glue will not last. The problem is that movie after movie, romance novel after romance novel, every other song you hear on the radio is selling us the lie, that romance is the glue that holds two people together.

Hollywood and Harlequin have unleashed untold relationship hell on countless couples. Why would we think they know anything about true love and successful marriage? Have you looked at any of their relationships? How many relationships do the average actor, director, or romance author go through in their career?

- Meg Ryan 4
- Julia Roberts 7
- Drew Barrymore 14
- Tom Cruise 8
- Leonardo DiCaprio 14
- Danielle Steele 5

Sadly, two thirds of the population believe that an intense and passionate romantic connection is the foundation of marriage. Don't get me wrong. Romance is great and sexual attraction is a wonderful thing. Some of us need to do a better job of injecting some romance into our marriages.

God is not against romance. Just read the Song of Solomon. I think Christian marriages can be the most romantic. Don't forget sex was God's idea. He made it up. Yay, God! But it is not the foundation of a love that lasts for a lifetime. Romance might be the icing on the cake, but it isn't the flour and eggs that make the batter.

II. The Soulmate Myth

A related myth is the soulmate myth. This is the idea that to find a happily ever after, you must find "the one." Out there in the vast sea of humanity there is one person meant for you, and you are meant for them, and to find marital bliss you must find each other. The flipside of the soulmate myth is that if your marriage is struggling or unhappy or filled with conflict, then they must not be the one.

We as Christians have real problems with this, because in the church, we Christianize this whole thing by saying that there is one woman or one man out there that God has in mind for me. Christian Mingle promises to help you find your soulmate. How many times does the Christian single hear, "God has someone just for you." The Bible doesn't tell us this, but so many of us believe it. As many as 90% of Christian young people believe this myth. Not only that, but we expect God is going to show us who that one is? The idea is if we are spiritually mature enough, and seek the Lord diligently through prayer and are sensitive to His leading that he will guide us to the one. The soulmate myth is unreasonable, it is impractical, and it is unbiblical.

Do you realize how self-oriented it is to believe that of all the billions of people on this planet, that God created one of them just for you? That you can only be happy if you find that one? Think about it, if God was going to guide us to our divine soulmate, the person custom made to make us happy, then why does scripture go to the trouble of telling us what kind of person to marry, to not be unequally yoked, of what kind of husbands and wives we ought to be, how we should treat our spouses, and to use wisdom in our decision making. Why would any of that be necessary, if God was just going to show us

the person, who just by existing and being with us would make us happy? I could fill a whole sermon with stories of couples who got married 100% convinced that God wanted them together, of how it was so clear they should be married, and five years later they were divorced.

If you think that finding the perfect man or perfect woman will make you happy and fill all the emptiness in your life, you are in for a lifetime of disappointment. What do you do when you find the one and they dump you? What happens if your one doesn't understand God's will and marries someone else? Both your soulmate and that someone else are doomed to lives of misery, because they missed God's will, and it leads to a domino effect that never ends. Are you then doomed to a lifetime of unhappiness because of their mistake? We need to realize how ridiculous is to expect another human being to deliver what no human being is capable of giving you. That's a huge responsibility to lay on someone's shoulders— their purpose in life is to make you happy? How wrong it is of us to expect from another person what only God can deliver.

The soulmate myth also fools us into thinking that marriage should be easy with that person. If I find my soulmate, we'll make each other happy, so we won't have all these challenges and difficulties. When the inevitable difficulties arise, instead of working hard to overcome them, they are overwhelmed with disillusionment.

Now, I don't have time to go into the full deal about God's will and understanding God's will. That's a whole sermon series right there. It is true there are a couple of times God plays matchmaker in the Bible, but nowhere does the Bible teach that He will play matchmaker for all of us, or that He created one person just for you. Now, if God tells you He wants you to marry someone in particular, then by all means marry that person, but don't expect that to make you happy. Just ask Hosea how that worked out for him. There's is nothing in the Bible to indicate that God's going to guide you to a soulmate He created just for you.

Instead, you need to focus on two things: First, instead of looking for the right PERSON, look for the right KIND of person. Know ahead time what qualities, attributes, background, values, and beliefs would make for a quality spouse, and then look for people who have those things. Second, focus on BEING the right kind of person. So many believers agonize over finding a godly husband or a godly wife, but the never stop to think if they are the kind of person a godly man or woman would be attracted to. If you want to find the right kind of person, be the right kind of person they would be attracted to. If you do those two things, nearly any Christian man and Christian woman, if they are committed to living out biblical principles in their relationship, can have a great, fulfilling, intimate, and passionate marriage.

There are many women I could have married and have been within God's will. There are a lot of other men Teresa could have married and had happy, fulfilling marriage. But the moment we stood before God and each other and made those sacred vows, we became the one for each other. If you're married, then the one for you is the one you said "I do" to.

III. 50/50 Myth

Another flimsy foundation for marriage in our culture is 50/50 myth. I've heard this idea from so many couples over the years that've come through my office for premarital counseling. We're going to have a 50/50 marriage, they say. We're going to split everything evenly. Work, parenting, chores, everything is split 50/50. I look them in the eye and tell them that if they keep that attitude, they are doomed to failure.

The 50/50 myth sounds great...in theory. However, in practice, it never works, because each spouse has their own definition of what 50% is. My idea of what my wife's share of the load is not the same as her idea. Then, what happens, when each spouse doesn't feel like the other is carrying their fair share of the load, they think, "Well, I'll show them. I'll pull back just a little bit." Soon 50/50 becomes 40/40, and then 30/30, and then divorce court. 50/50 never works. It takes 100/100, a complete and total commitment from each side. The biblical idea behind this is agape love, that commitment of an unconditional love.

IV. Compatibility

A fourth flimsy foundation for lifelong love is the idea of compatibility. This has really grown in popularity in recent years because of online dating and websites that have been pushing the idea that lifelong love is based on the right chemistry. They claim to even be able to scientifically gauge dimensions of compatibility.

I recently read about one couple who took their test and scored 99%. They enthusiastically got married and were divorced in 3 years. Ironically, they both went back to the dating website, and it still showed they were 99% compatible. I guess that 1% makes a lot of difference. Just because two people share similar personalities and common interests does not insure a successful relationship. When you compare this to cultures that have arranged marriages, sometimes between total strangers, and they have a far greater success rate, something should tell us that something isn't adding up.

There are a number of reasons compatibility does not guarantee success. For one thing, people change. Interests change, personalities develop. How you score on a test at 25 could be very different at 40.

Another factor is the reality that opposites attract, and for good reason. Weaknesses need strengths. Marriages need differences to work. It's like Sylvester Stallone's character in Rocky says to Adrian. "I got gaps. You got gaps. Together, we got no gaps."

Compatibility doesn't necessarily create closeness. It can also create competition, comparison and boredom. I remember the one year I roomed with my best friend in college. We were best buds. We were compatible. We had the same interests. We enjoyed doing everything together, but after 1 semester of living in the same place we were ready to kill each other. We did fantastic when we were in rooms next to each other, but not the same room. Ironically, the roommate that I got along with the best, was a kid from the inner city with whom I had nothing in common with except for our love for Jesus Christ.

Sure, there are some things you need in common, such as your faith. Scripture tells us not to be unequally yoked. You need to discuss your views of money, parenting, where you're willing to live, and where you'd never move, and how close you need to live to your parents or how far you want to get away. You have to communicate to find common ground on a whole host of differences. And compatibility tests might show you where you're going to have friction and issues, but they will never lead you to a marriage without those things.

V. Cohabitation Myth

Another myth that is believed by the vast majority of young adults today, including many Christians, but is an absolute lie from the pit of hell is the cohabitation myth. This is the idea that living together before marriage is a good way to ensure a successful marriage, or at least prevent a bad one. As many as 70% of couples live together before tying the knot.

The conventional wisdom says that this is a way to take the relationship for a test drive to see how they like it. As one young lady putting off marriage told me, "I would never buy a pair of shoes without trying them on first." To her, the wisdom of it seemed obvious, but so much of it was based on all of these other myths we've talked about, "How do you know if they're the one? How do you know if you're compatible? How do you know if it will work out?"

And the benefits seem obvious as well. We can share the bills, we can share the chores, I won't have to cook for one and have a bunch of leftovers, and of course there's the easy access to sex. Why wouldn't you live together first?

First of all, reality is beginning to crash the party. Couples that live together first don't have more successful marriages. The statistics on this are startling. The divorce rate for marriages that begin as cohabitation is 50% higher than those who don't live together first. If you live together first, your

chance of divorce skyrockets. This doesn't even take into account that 60% of couples who move in together never even make to marriage. Cohabiting couples have about an 80% failure rate. Living together has the opposite effect on a marriage that you think it does.

There's good reason for this. By their very nature, cohabitation unions are intrinsically selfish in nature. Living together is a pretend marriage seeking the rewards and benefits of real marriage without the commitment and protection of real marriage. A couple decides they want to play house because they want joys of assured sexual relations, intimate companionship, shared financial resources, and the mutual sharing of obligations and tasks, without the security of a vow, without the full assurance of exclusivity, without the promise of complete devotion. They are in essence saying we want the rewards without the responsibility. So by design, cohabitation is more about what each partner can get out of it, not what they are willing to put into it.

Danny Murphy illustrates this in a very funny way. He wrote some cohabitation vows.

I, John, take you, Mary, to be my cohabitant, to have sex with and to share bills with. I'll be around while things are good but I probably won't be if things get tough. If you should get a cold, I'll run to the drugstore for some medicine. If you get sick to the point where you can no longer meet my needs, then I'll have to move on. Forsaking many others I will be more or less faithful to you for as long as it feels good to me. If we should break up, it doesn't mean this wasn't special for me. I commit to live with you for as long as this works out.

Living together also fails because it steals the magic. When a couple lives together before marriage, and have already tasted the fruits and rewards of marriage, what is left to discover in marriage. Imagine a child who sneaks into his parent's closet a month before Christmas and discovers all of his presents. When Christmas morning finally comes there is no magic, no wonder, no surprise. Living together first robs the marriage of the initial wonder that would otherwise help to seal the relationship.

Living together begins the relationship with low commitment expectations, rewards without the responsibilities, and an intrinsic selfishness. Once those patterns are deeply established in a relationship, it is hard to change them. Couples who live together often have ideas like "This is my money, that bill is your responsibility, I can leave any time I want." Those attitudes don't just disappear on wedding day once they are deeply engrained.

And none of this takes into consideration the fact that living together so often brings children into the picture. We now have a whole generation of kids growing up without both of their birth parents, and it is having catastrophic consequences in our society. The bursting prison populations, the problems in schools, sliding test scores, the cycle of poverty so many can't escape can be tied directly to the lack of both a loving mom and dad in the home.

Marriage is so much more than just a piece of paper. Marriage done right and on the right foundation binds a man and woman together at the deepest physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual level. It is a total commitment. It is an all-in devotion that sets that relationship apart from all others and protects it with all it has. Living together only steals from a marriage the security and protection it needs most to survive.

VI. Abandon Marriage

One last flimsy foundation that is growing in popularity in our culture is giving up on marriage altogether, which increasing numbers of young people are doing. After seeing their parents and even their grandparents go through multiple failed marriages, living in miserable lives, many in generation Y have abandoned the idea of marriage. They see lifelong happy marriage as the myth, and believe they'll be much happier in the long run, if they just skip it. A PEW research center study found that 4 of every 10 Americans believe marriage is obsolete. We have made such a mess of things that the real thing is seen as an unobtainable fantasy. This is one of the important things about raising your children in church. They can see firsthand couples who have been married 30, 40, 50, and 60 years.

CONCLUSION

These marriage myths are just some of the poor foundations that are wrecking homes today. Next week, we will look at God's foundation for marriage. We find this foundation in Genesis 2. It is given by God himself in the Garden of Eden, but let me set that up and wrap up this morning by taking you to Genesis 1.

In Genesis 1, we get the account of the days of creation. As it goes through the days of creation, sometimes God seems to pause from His work and looks at everything He has made and says what? *"It was good."* (third day (vs. 10,12), fourth day (vs. 18), fifth day (vs. 21), sixth day before Adam and Eve (vs. 25)). It's kind of like what we do when we're working on a big project and you hit a big milestone, you stop, look everything over and say, "Wow, it's really coming together. It starting to look like something."

Then comes the creation of humanity. Genesis 1:27 says, *"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* God places Adam and Eve in the garden. He blesses them. He calls them to be fruitful and multiply. After giving them their charge, verse 31 says, *"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."* Creation was good. Everything God made was good. But creation with man and woman, with Adam and Eve together. Creation with marriage was very good. It was very good then, and it can still be a very good thing.