

Alliance University

Reflection Paper

5 Profound Points

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Our text, *A Lasting Promise: The Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (Stanley et al., 2014), differs from our other text, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts* (Parrott & Parrott, 2006), in two profound ways. First, it is intended for all couples, and much of the writing is addressed to people who have been married for a while, where “*Saving...*” is addressed primarily to couples during their engagement. And second, it is intended to be a more thorough instructional guide, where “*Saving...*” according to the hardcover under the book’s jacket, was originally intended to be a pithy devotional. Both books provide valuable instruction and were well worth their price and the time to read. My reflection will be on the former, for no other reason than it gripped me more, as I will be discussing. The biggest challenge of this assignment is not choosing five profound points, nor writing about them in five pages; rather, it is to limit my choice to five points, and to limit my explanation to five pages.

The first profound point I’d like to focus on came toward the end of the first chapter. The actual statement pointed out how the Christian community seems to believe that being a good Christian will cause a person to intuitively understand what to do and how to do it for your marriage to succeed (Parrott & Parrott, 2006). It has been my own experience that, while no one articulates this presumption, not only is this true, it is equally true that the Christian community presumes that being devout (or simply reciting the sinner’s prayer) somehow endows believers with an intuitive instinct toward the first and second greatest commandments. Forgive me if this sounds surly, that is not at all my intent. In 1976 I was a 15-year-old teenager working at a Bible conference. Sitting in chapel one evening (required for all staff) I was bored, so I began to read the Bible, opening to 1 Cor. 13. Though I didn’t know it at the time, it was then that I began a sincere effort to understand the biblical concept of love, which was fueled in 1981, when my parents were divorced. For decades I have studied every reference to love in the Bible. Over the

years I have been shocked at how this “greatest commandment” is misrepresented (if represented at all) in our theological dictionaries, commentaries, reference texts and Sunday Sermons. Then I came upon Leon Morris’ book, “*Testaments of Love: A Study of Love In The Bible,*” and the introduction of this well-respected scholar’s book spoke at length about the same phenomenon I experienced. In short, all too often we either assume we understand love, or we teach it in ways that are either shallow, inadequate, or incorrect. To read this sentiment so early in the text more than caught my attention, as I so rarely here it voiced. In my personal application, getting this MFT degree is one step closer to my own greater understanding, and toward my own passion to help the greater community (Christian and non-Christian) understand and embrace the principles for more successful relationships.

The second profound point I’d like to highlight is really an alternative and embellishment to the author’s point on invalidation, or what they refer to as “painful put-downs” (Parrott & Parrott, 2006, pp. 22-23). All too often I hear spouses not only put each other down but do so regardless of the presence or absence of their spouse. It’s painful to hear, and to watch. The author’s point is to make it safe to connect and be vulnerable. And it’s a great point, but why stop there? Long ago I saw a video of a Gary Smalley lecture. While he was talking, he passed around an old violin. It was broken, strings were hanging off. It was nothing special to look at. People were passing it one-to-another without giving it much thought, while he lectured. At some point he asked where it was in the audience and asked the person who had it to read the name inside the violin. The holder tilted it to the light, looked in the holes, squinted, and then said, “Stratovarius,” which produced an audible gasp from the audience. Smalley then went on to discuss the year (late 1600’s) and value (millions of dollars) of the violin. He then drew attention to the gasp and pointed out how carefully people handled it once they found out what it

was. From that point forward he taught on the value of treating our spouse with the same sense of value and honor. My wife and I have taken that very seriously, and we can both honestly attest that most of our opportunities to represent Christ comes through the way we talk about each other (“You talk about your spouse that way?”). We hear it all the time. In our 31+ years married we have found that not only do put-downs create deep wounds and build thick walls, but that validation (even celebration) is a lot more fun and reaps great rewards. Not only do I intend to keep living this truth, I look forward to helping others experience the same victory (and fun).

Skipping to chapter four, the third profound point that jumped out at me from this book points out how a couple’s future can be predicted by how they handle conflict in the present. Have you ever met someone for the first time; and, as you talk, either you or they say, “What, you too?” and your pace and volume of conversation increase as you discover a mutual fascination, value, or interest? This is the sense I have with this point, as with so many other points in this book. During my studies of love in the Bible one of the more fascinating discoveries (that was so glaring I was shocked I had to discover it by myself) was on this point. It started in 1 Cor. 13, where the list describing agape love begins by saying that love takes a long time to get angry. Interesting. Of all the attributes Paul could have used to describe love, his primary defining distinction was in antithesis to anger. Where there is agape, there will be a temptation to be angry. Where there is anger, there is an opportunity to express agape. I chewed on that a lot. Later I realized that this is the only attribute of love Paul repeats. We’re used to hearing something like “*is not easily provoked*,” where the Greek essentially conveys “doesn’t even move toward being sharp.” This caused me to leave my love study and spend many-many hours studying every reference to anger in the Bible. My conclusions, while simple, require too much space to explain here, save to say that this point in our text is spot-on. It’s a thrill to hear

others make the observation (and from research); and, again, not only am I refining my own understanding and application of this point, I look forward to helping others embrace the wisdom of it. How to deal with conflict is far more important than we give it credit for.

Skipping over so many profound points, chapter nine discusses what I will claim as profound point number 4, expectations. This is very related to the previous point, as our conflicts frequently arise from opposing, or disappointed, paradigms. So very often I have experienced or witnessed such painful stress due to something as simple as expectations, that a little self-awareness and preemptive communication could have avoided. The authors point out four keys to avoiding conflicts due to expectations through being aware of what we expect, evaluating if what we expect is reasonable, making sure others are aware of what we expect, and keeping our hearts and minds attuned to the Lord's opinion in the matter (Parrott & Parrott, 2006, p. 158). In fact, the authors make the wonderful point of reminding us that the Lord has expectations too, and he's been very straightforward about them. I found their handling of this chapter so practical and straightforward that I had to text my recently married daughter some of the points. The challenge here, besides humble honesty, is to determine what it is that we consider normal, that someone else may not consider normal. How could I possibly know what is abnormal to someone else that is perfectly normal to me? This past Christmas we flew our son and his girlfriend from England to the USA to share Christmas with us. It was her first time with us. She is not a Christian, and she is a vegan. No, let me say that correctly, she's a VEGAN. Coming home from the airport, despite her rough cough, she refused a cough drop because it is made from animal products – honey (if it's even real honey). It didn't matter that bees weren't killed to make it, she explained that it is human extortion over animals (is a bee technically an animal?). Then she, and my son, refused to eat any meals with us because we eat animal

products, and they find that morally reprehensible. Of the many shocking disappointments and later confrontations we had from them, clearly their expectations were not in line with ours; and, clearly we had not expressed our expectations (hopes) for our holiday together. So this point was profoundly poignant. It is as important for me to understand, embrace and increase my proficiency in this, as it is for me to help others do the same. The ratio of simplicity to the complexity of conflict if we do not recognize and address it up front makes it glaringly and profoundly important to grasp.

And, finally, the fifth profound point I would like to highlight (related to the previous point and my lifelong pursuit of understanding love) is in chapter 14, commitment. The authors make the interesting distinction between constraint and dedication, where constraint is a function of obligations and complications, and dedication is driven by one's desire (Parrott & Parrott, 2006). My wife (who is a doctor) just told me about one of her patients who confessed that she gets drunk to allow her much older (and wealthy) husband have sex with her. This is a constraint, as she doesn't want to lose her lifestyle. But my wife's father gladly took care of my mother-in-law (who had Alzheimer's for the last 20 years before she died). That's dedication. Deuteronomy 7 tells us that the Lord chose Israel not because they were great and mighty (pointing out they were insignificant and unimpressive) but because he chose them. And where other religions of the day had people making vows to their gods, the God of the Israel made a covenant to Israel not based on their character but based on His character. This final profound point emphasizes that it is our commitment, based not on obligation but choice, that is the foundation for a strong marriage. That the creator and sustainer of the universe says, "I love you not because of who you are, but because of who I am" is a paradox that becomes our greatest hope. I need to live that. And people need to know that.

References

Stanley, S., Trathen, D., McCain, S., & B Milton Bryan. (2014). *A lasting promise : a Christian guide to fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.