

Reflection Paper
Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts

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MFT 509 Pre-Marital Counseling

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January 28, 2023

In the list of life's biggest commitments or decisions we make, the real meaning of marriage seems to be an afterthought. Every ounce of energy and financial resources are allocated to the "big day" but very little, if any, is spent with what really matters. "Are we getting married for the right reasons" or are we just buying into the myths of marriage, like many before us have? We have discussed in class the average cost of a wedding and how little, if any importance, is given to pre-marital counseling. I first heard of pre-marital counseling at 44 years of age and 10 years of marriage. Are we really tackling marriage with the respect and effort that it deserves? Are we equipped with all the tools necessary to navigate marriage and the ups and downs that we are sure to face? The truth is that I found myself in many of the situations described by Drs, Les and Leslie Parrott and I wish I had a lot more tools in my tool box other than a pair of pliers, to pull out all the unwanted drama and a hammer, to smash any chance of hope. I almost forgot, I also had that box, where we stash all our feelings and send it to neverland. Needless to say that it didn't work. You really do need the right tool for the job!

The myths of marriage are very much real. We are fed with so many promises of happiness that we don't question anything. At least I didn't! Actually we do tell ourselves that "we expect exactly the same thing from marriage"(pg20). The reality is, we can't possibly expect the exact same thing from marriage. First, it is biologically impossible and second, marriage is formed by the union of two different people. As described in the book "'I do" brings with it a host of conscious and unconscious expectations that aren't always fulfilled". I remember going home

after my wedding and thinking “what now”? The party was over and I was clueless about what life after marriage was going to be like. I did bring a bag full of expectations and another one full of nothing. I didn’t know how to cook, I didn’t know I was expected to cook. There were a lot of “I don’t know”! In the efforts of making my marriage work, I did what I believed to be important. I learned to cook, I learned to cut the lawn, fix the house, do laundry, etc...But I never learned how to talk about my feelings or to communicate in an effective way. There was no fighting in my marriage and I perceived that as being a good thing. The lack of communication caused my ex husband and I to drift apart. We were two strangers living amicably under the same roof.

I found myself at 25 married to a man that I didn’t know anything about. I knew nothing about his culture, spiritual beliefs or even life goals. I totally bought into the myths of marriage and I didn’t feel prepared for it but I was taught that love conquers all. I dove into marriage head first, and guess what? All the “bad things in my life didn't disappear”. They were amplified

I guess it doesn’t come as a surprise that despite all my efforts, and I admit, they were the wrong ones; after 3 years of dating and 10 years of marriage my husband at the time decided to call it quits. The myths of marriage made me look for ways to improve our relationship but I was totally equipped and unaware of how to make a marriage work? I just believed it was forever and happiness would just follow us wherever we were. Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott published this book in 2006, where was I?

While I can’t predict that the teachings of this book would have saved my first marriage, I can say that my second marriage is very different. I used my first experience to really work on the issues that became important and relevant to me. Communication was a big one. To learn how to effectively communicate with my partner was one of the best things we did! In the book the

authors called it “say what you mean and understand what you hear”(87). I learned early on that sometimes we don’t get our message across, and sometimes we don’t understand the message. I started to ask my husband to tell me what he heard, and many times it was not what I intended to say. I looked for better ways to explain my thoughts and started to ask him what he meant by that? While I had used many conflict resolution strategies before and our ability to communicate had greatly improved, there was one topic that my husband and I just couldn’t see eye to eye. How to discipline our children was a hot topic, and I have to say that the opportunity presented itself right after I read “how to fight a good fight”(133), actually the next day! I was relieved after reading the chapter, not only because we never used the dirty tactics of fighting, especially, “the four horsemen of the Apocalypse”(138), but now I was equipped with the right tool and It worked! I had a situation with my son, and once again my husband got into the middle of it, and totally took over the situation leaving me frustrated and furious. I waited until I was in a better state of mind. I gave myself a time out, and used the “I” statements instead of “you”, and I was so much more effective in getting my message across. I said:“I feel undermined and runned over when you get into the middle of the situation. I know that I have a hard time disciplining our children and that you are much better than me in that matter; however I feel loved and heard when you wait for me to be finished and call me privately and say that our son totally played me.” We agreed to have a key word for future situations and I felt loved and he felt heard. For the first time we were able to have a conversation without one of us leaving totally frustrated and unheard! Understanding how to get the right message across is one of the most valuable lessons I have learned. I believe that this knowledge will be a must have tool for my future clients not only in conflict resolution but also in simple day to day communication.

“Forgiveness lies at the heart of marriage”(164). This really struck a chord on me. While my relationship with my husband is full of forgiveness and acceptance, I was very frozen by the little things people around me complained about. While I was capable of understanding that all these little things piled on top of each other became very heavy and that they turned into resentment and blame, I just couldn’t put my finger on why? Why did the little things become such a point of conflict? It was never about the little things! It was about blaming the partner for not being the person they wanted them to be! Frustration and lack of satisfaction ran the condemnation, resentment and blame game. The book talks about how spouses are not capable of forgiving on a grand scale, only God can do that. By holding all the disappointments against a spouse’s character we are trying to take on a role that was never intended for us. I have always preached acceptance but there is so much more to it, forgiveness really “tends the soul of your marriage”(166). Many couples after decades of marriage, now facing retirement and a lack of distraction in their lives, don't know how their marriages became so superficial and volatile. The lack of spiritual intimacy and closeness with God is translated into falling out of love or not having much in common. I really don’t know if I can say in better words, but the transformation that a couple undergoes after surrendering to God and service is really a transcendental experience. It was very evident to me after my divorce that not sharing the same faith was a deal breaker. I attended church by myself, prayed by myself and never gave much thought about how we would raise our kids. Second time around, I knew the importance of sharing a faith and worshiping together. I have experienced first hand what God can do for a marriage and the empowerment that it brings to a family. While true service is not the one done with self interest in mind, the rewards of it are over abundant. In my journey as a wife, I found that the tools that we gain from learning how to communicate, getting our message across, listening and

understanding what has been said, fighting a good fight and above all forgiveness and caring for the soul are tools that can be used in any relationship; mother to son, husband to wife, friend to friend or even strangers. God has paved a path of kindness and reconciliation but our imperfect beings are better off with such tools to take along the journey. My personal life definitely is! I feel so much more confident now to help couples to enter marriage with a little more understanding to what it is to be married and married couples to see eye to eye and allow love to flow through them.

References

Parrot, L & Parrot, L (2006) *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. Zoran