

Reflection Paper Premarital Counseling

Terri Zungre

Premarital Counseling

Professor Parks

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My husband Barry and I have been married forty-three years. Time, in and of itself, does not make the work of marriage any easier. In fact, the longer you are married the more vigilant each partner should be to not take the other for granted. My daughter as a dancer, teaches her students that a return to the fundamentals is always beneficial to enhance your performance. Sometimes it is necessary to re-work your basic technique for balance. Marriage is the same I feel. A return to the common courtesies and caring that you offer to acquaintances should be extended to our spouses. Being sensitive and tenderhearted towards one another is just as important now as it was in our first year of marriage. My husband and I agree it is essential to be reminded of the foundations that go into a healthy marriage. For this reflection I have chosen five points that spoke to me while reading the assigned texts.

The first point was the myth about expectations in Les and Leslie Perry's book that says: "We Expect Exactly the Same Things from Marriage." Expectations when not met in the way a person thinks they should be met can leave a person or couple disillusioned. Before my husband Barry and I married, we had spoken of our dream of going to the mission field. Honestly looking back, it was probably more my dream than Barry's. After three years of marriage, I became worried that we may never go. Barry had taken a job in sales that he was excelling in, but I felt I was only biding my time till we could go for our YWAM training. I wanted to be living in Amsterdam where we felt God was leading us. I was not as supportive of my husband's sales success as a should have been. I was definitely living in the future not in the present or encouraging him with his successes. Barry after achieving a lead sales rep agreed to go to Ywam, and then on to Amsterdam. One of my mismatched expectations was that we would be doing evangelism together. We started working with the Chinese Overseas Mission in

the red-light district. I had a dream one night where God said Barry's position was going to be changed. I told Barry about the dream that morning, and that day our director asked him to be the accountant for the mission organization. My husband's background and degree were in accounting and they desperately needed him in that role. Barry's expectation was to do evangelism not leave a business position in the states to do another on the mission field. So as a result, Barry worked two jobs, nine to five as an accountant, and did his work with the Chinese church at night visiting Chinese restaurants. I was left with a three-year-old son and newborn daughter alone all day long in a small apartment without family or a car. God did use the loneliness to draw me to himself. Another unconscious role expectation was that in my Family of Origin (FOO), my father was able to fix anything whether in the home, or with our cars. Barry grew up without a father, as a result, he never learned how to fix things. I assumed he would just know some of these fix-it jobs. Apartments in Amsterdam came with bare wires hanging from the ceiling, and the installation of light fixtures were the tenant's responsibility. Barry was shocked more than once trying to install appliances and light fixtures. I would never trade the time spent in Amsterdam, the things I learned, and the experiences I enjoyed. However, we had to re-evaluate our expectations of what missionary life really entailed. I learned when we are in agreement, are in it together, we can readjust our expectations and our life.

My second point is from the book, *The Lasting Promise*, and has to do with the Power of the Negative. It was my belief that as long as you were making deposits of love, caring, and fun, in your marriage bank account you could handle the withdrawal of an escalating fight. What I had forgotten is that for every five good things you put in the marriage bank it takes only one bad thing to deplete it. Words have power. Negative words have negative power. We can tear

down with our tongue or build up with our tongue. Our escalation ladder went something like this: We would argue and then, sometimes, I would end up crying and running into the bedroom. Barry is such a good arguer that he could have been a litigating attorney in another life. My son told us he can remember as a teenager hearing us fight with me ending the fight by saying loudly through tears, "Well you won the argument but you lost me!" Another expectation different from my father is that Barry would get really angry at my tears instead of being moved to compassion. A side note is that it took us years to figure out that Barry's mother manipulated with her tears, so my tears were a trigger. Even knowing this and that I am not manipulating, sometimes my tears still can trigger his emotions. I felt strongly challenged to de-escalate before it reaches the danger level. The down-side of the nature of our housing situation is that we are privy to one another's fights. Recently, my son said to me, "Mom you keep saying your marriage is volatile, and I have observed you and Dad, heard your fights for two years, and I don't think you are. You two really don't yell very much". Jonathan's perspective is making me re-evaluate my marriage, and look at it with fresh eyes. I do think in the past we were more volatile. Maybe when we fight it upsets me so much on the inside that it raises my blood pressure, and I stuff my emotions more. Sometimes, like the example the book gave, I am just agreeing quickly to avoid the escalation. Maybe our volatile marriage has morphed into something else. Possible we have implemented some de-escalation techniques. My son said we use humor a lot, so maybe we are in a healthier place. I am definitely going through a marriage identity crisis. I don't want to just assume my marriage is a certain way based on the past. Lastly, I liked the book's usage of Ecclesiastes 10:1. My grandmother used to always use the saying that's, "A fly in the ointment!" Webster's dictionary defined it as, "A

minor irritation that spoils the success or enjoyment of something.” I don’t want to give power to a small negative to spoil my marriage. I need to be reminded of this truth.

My third point is the way the Lasting Promise author cleverly described the amygdala of the brain as Amy, and the frontal lobe as Flo. As a registered nurse I had to study all the workings of the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, but a picture is worth a thousand words. I love pictures for the mind to help you remember specifics. The amygdala hijack is like Sandra Bullock driving the bus without breaks, in the movie Speed. Trying to control a moving bus without brakes is how I felt when I went through menopause. Amy was definitely in control on the menopausal-runaway bus, and I was the passenger. It was a difficult time in our marriage, because I had a roller coaster of emotions. The nice Terri that I was familiar with became testier. I decided to go on Estrogen to help, and it had an amazing calming effect. The Frontal Lobe or Flo is the reasoning, rational, and planning part of the brain. The book brought out the fact, when Flo is on overload from the stress of back-to-back numerous decisions, it makes temptations harder to fight. Flo reaches a limit. This explains why Barry after a hard, long day at work doesn’t want to talk about problems. His eyes glaze over as I’m asking him something, and he says, “Sorry Hon, but I am all out of words.” Mental energy depleted is real. Barry needs time to unwind his mind at night, and do something relaxing.

Prayer for your spouse has to be mentioned as my fourth point, because I like how the authors emphasized that you need to ask God in prayer to change you not your spouse. We have prayed together throughout the years for our kids. When they started to lose interest in the things of the church as teenagers, God gave us a strategy to get involved in mission’s trips to reconnect them to the Lord. I felt so close and spiritually connected with my husband during

those times. We knew God was in it, and it was a wonderful time of growth for us as a family, and the youth in our church. Recently I have been looking at Barry while he is sleeping, and thinking I need to pray more just for him. Specifically, how can I help him in this time in his life. I have been so caught up in my new challenge of going back to school that I haven't thought about how the decision is affecting his life. What sacrifices he is making of time with me while I pursue this dream.

Point five has to do with "hidden issues of the soul". The book, *A Lasting Promise*, explained that hidden issues involve fear, and that like the fig leaves we cover over issues and hide. A person may not be aware that they have fear or are hiding. One scripture reference in the book pertaining to this blew my mind. Although I've read it a million times, it was like I was reading it for the first time: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you: never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) In the past, I have quoted that verse only with the second part. I had never connected the love of money and being content, to a fear, of being left alone or abandoned. Over the past couple years (pandemic and on), I have had more of a problem with spending. I asked myself if the loss of my father last year, loss of high school friends, loss of friends from church, and fear of aloneness play a part in this at all? I am praying asking God to open me up (soul-wise), and to give me and my therapist fresh insight. The book, *A Lasting Promise*, brought out the point that Jesus had no hidden issues, because he was secure in his Father's love, his purpose, and his identity.

References

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