

Reflection Paper:

“Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts” by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott

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MFT 509

Professor Park

January 31, 2023

As someone who is preparing herself for marriage, this course has been very insightful for my own personal life in addition to the knowledge I have acquired for my future professional life as a Marriage and Family Therapist. Both required readings were enriching however, “Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts” by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott had many useful tactics that has opened my eyes to the wonder that is marriage and how we as pre-marital facilitators and as married individuals can maintain healthy relationships. There are five “Profound Points” that I would like to discuss in my paper found in the text. The first is the myth that I believe many TV shows and fairytales has taught us growing up, which is the myth that “my spouse will make me whole”. I will also discuss the points of the different love styles in relationships, the topic of living together, the rules for successful communication and the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse”. These five points have challenged me to not only create a better relationship with my own significant other but to also advise all couples that marriage can be a beautiful thing if we learn to understand one another.

The idea that we need another person to “complete” ourselves is a subtle ideology that has been placed in our minds since infancy. Many have come to believe that there is only one person right out there for them and the spouse or significant other they have chosen was merely the wrong person and the right person is actually still out there. This can be detrimental to all individuals trying to create a stable relationship, as it places the blame for their unhappiness on the other person and requires no effort or personal responsibility. There is a quote by John Fisher in the text that states, “The success of a marriage comes not in finding the “right” person, but in the ability of both partners to adjust to the real person they inevitably realize they married,” (Page 33). I used to

believe in this myth growing up but as I grew in my relationship with God, I've come to realize how far from the truth this notion really is. It is very helpful to have this belief in your personal life because you start to take ownership of your relationships and realize that the health of the relationship is up to you. When I started focusing less on finding the right person and more on becoming the right person, it allowed me to see that after choosing a partner, the love you cultivate is a choice.

When a person believes in this myth and that their spouse is meant to complete them, it creates an "enmeshed" relationship, which is just a fancy way of describing co-dependent partners who struggle with low self-esteem and an inferiority complex. When the opposite happens, the relationship is described as disengaged, as both individuals in the relationship are so independent that they do not need each other for anything. I enjoyed how the book explained the different relationship types such as the "A-frame, H-frame and M-frame". The A-frame is the dependent relationship with low self-esteem, the H-frame is the independent relationship with self-sufficiency and the M-frame is described as the healthy, interdependent relationship where the partners are committed to help each other grow. I feel that these examples are excellent visual representations of relationships that are useful in professional settings to explain to couples what the differences are and how their relationship currently is. I will definitely use this tool in my therapy counseling sessions with couples.

Another point discussed in the reading that has impacted me personally and professionally is the idea of how there exists different love styles. Within the love triangle that was created by Robert Sternberg, exists 3 sides, passion, commitment and intimacy, that depending on the size of each, create different love styles. Romantic love is

the combination of passion and intimacy but lacks commitment. This kind of love is very popular as it is based merely on physical attraction however; it is not effective for long-term relationships due to no commitment. Foolish love has passion and commitment but there is no intimacy. Commitment is created based on passion alone but there is no real deep connection. Companionable love has intimacy and commitment but no passion. This kind of love describes a friendship and the text states that many marriages evolve into companionable love as passion fades over time. Lastly, consummate love is a combination of all three sides, passion, commitment and intimacy and is a goal for every marriage.

What I found interesting about these different love styles is that a relationship is never stuck in only one type of style. The text explains that in marriage over time, love styles evolve and at times our passion, commitment and/or intimacy may be stronger than the other. This was an important concept for me to grasp. Immediately when I read this, I wanted all the details on how to achieve that perfect, consummate marriage at all times. What were the secrets to maintain that kind of stable love? Well, my heart was eased when I discovered that long-term relationships evolve and that is normalcy. It is still a goal to achieve consummate love at all times but there will be moments when I love my partner as my companion and that is normal. I believe this kind of reassurance is important to share with young couples as their emotions are heighten with passion and intimacy with the prospect of long term commitment. By establishing to young couples that love evolving over time is normal creates a safe space for couples to not feel that they need to experience consumable love at all times. It should be our goal to maintain all three sides at a healthy balance but that is not always possible and it is ok that is isn't.

As a Christian, I have always known that waiting until marriage was what I chose and planned on doing however, that is not the case for all couples. The third point in the text of “Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts” by Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott that I found interesting was the section about couples that decide to live together. I have heard for many years, arguments from individuals who swear that living together in today’s age is normal and needed to determine compatibility. I’ve always felt that was wrong due to my own beliefs, however as a future therapist and now a pre-marital facilitator I started pondering about how to address this topic. The text gives light to this topic by addressing that research has proven that more couples that live together prior to marriage become dissatisfied with their marriages in the future and have a greater chance of divorce. The text states, “Women tend to see cohabiting as a step toward marriage, while some men see it as a way to stall marriage,” (page 53). With this in mind, the idea of living together means two different things for the opposite genders and therefore agreeing to such is misleading to both individuals. This is a topic that I found very important to discuss during pre-marital counseling and the book just shed more light to how crucial open communication is to discover each person’s expectations when it comes to commitment.

Communication was a large portion discussed within the book, as this is crucial for a healthy marriage. I found this chapter useful not only for romantic relationships but also for all types of relationships in general. Not only do men and women communicate differently but also all individuals experience life in different forms and have different ways of expressing that. The 6 basic skills given in chapter 4 are techniques that I believe all marriage and family therapists need to adopt into their sessions in order to help each person convey their message and feel heard. To be able to convey a message without

hurting the individual by using accusatory statements is very important and I have caught myself using this kind of language in arguments before. To use “I” statements instead of “you” statements helps you get across how you are feeling without making a personal attack to the person who made you feel that way. The second basic skill taught is the practice of active or reflective listening. Instead of giving solutions to the person speaking, it is important to really listen and validate the emotions and statements the person is expressing. Another skill given is to understand our differences as men and women. Men enjoy solving problems while women like to share feelings; therefore it is important to keep that in mind while having a conversation with the opposite sex. We are also taught to communicate efficiently by apologizing when necessary, getting offline and giving the other person our undivided attention and to communicate with others through our sense of touch. By using these skills, the book promises that you will learn to love your spouse better. I desire to grow in many of these skills to not only better my relationship with my fiancé but to also be able to talk firsthand to future couples of the power that these skills can have to better their marriage.

Lastly, the fifth “profound” point that the Parrott’s book taught me was the four ways we destroy our marriages which Dr. John Gottman described as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” The four dangers that we must be cautious of in our relationships are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. Criticism is harmful, especially when attacking someone’s personality over his or her behavior, as it feels like a personal attack rather than a complaint, which is when you wish the person’s behavior towards you were different. Contempt in a relationship is damaging as it is aimed to insult the other person and causes pain. Defensiveness is also detrimental as no

one takes responsibility for their part and instead plays the victim. The fourth danger, stonewalling is the use of the silent treatment. The individual in the relationship believes silence will make the situation better as nothing else has worked. This last danger usually marks the end of a relationship however. The idea spoken in the text is that all four of these dangers can appear even in happy relationships however, we as individuals and couples must work to not let any of these four dangers become a habit within the relationship.

All of the points listed previously are highlights of all of the skills and knowledge I have acquired after reading the Parrott's book. Communication is key for any relationship whether it is being aware of the dangers of contempt, defensiveness, criticism and stonewalling, or adapting the six skills for successful communication like using "I" statements instead of "you" statements. Counselors and couples need to understand the different styles of love taught in this book and how depending what your relationship looks like at the moment, will determine the health of it in the long run. If you have an A-frame, H-frame or M-frame relationship, it's important to bring awareness so the couple can either work on maintaining the healthy M-frame relationship or on how to make healthy changes in an A-frame or H-frame relationship. This book has given me tools to bring awareness to couples and help them in situations that I am not familiar like the topic of living together. Not only has the book helped me develop skills as a professional, personally, I desire to use all that I have learned to better my own future marriage.

## References

Parrott, L., & Parrott, L. (2015). *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask Before -- and After -- You Marry*. Zondervan.