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Reflection Paper

1. *Protection of Time*

*A Lasting Promise* addresses the misconception about friendship in marriage. It proposes that couples set aside time to be friends and have fun, and for the couple to share in a mutual conviction to develop their friendship (Stanley, 2014, p. 194). Both husband and wife bring idealistic expectations on what their marriage will look like. However, friendship makes marriage seem doable and less burdensome. Without meaning to, there is pressure to keep peace between husband and wife, where they never fight and always share affections for each other. This is an impossible standard to fulfill. Friendship in marriage is so powerful because while we can't always pick the people we're related to, we can choose the friends we want to do life with. We can choose the moments and experiences that become meaningful when shared with our chosen person.

For couples, the friendship analogy could remind them to acknowledge the team effort it takes to protect the livelihood and health of the couple. It may be easier to talk about problems and concerns because it gives people something to "work" on, but we miss the point of a relationship, which is connection. Marriage isn't a series of projects to troubleshoot. People tend to assume we know someone because of the duration of time that passed, but not because of the time spent enjoying each other's company, perspective, hopes, dreams, and shared interests. We often miss how people change, so setting aside time to pause and notice could create opportunities for couples to feel seen and appreciated by each other.

## 2. *Responsibility of Feelings*

In *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott encourage the couple's decision to be happy and make happiness a habit. While happiness is a present feeling, happiness can be seen as an option that a couple can choose together. The pursuit of happiness is a common experience familiar to most people, where we seek after things and events that could make us feel happy. Even in Scripture, when Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, it's not a passive, but an active command. It involves a person's choice to be joyful in light of God because He is near and we are not alone. Even for the nonbeliever, choosing happiness is an action that can be practiced to become part of a person's lifestyle. This (redefined) happiness is a call to build resilience in the face of life's troubles.

However, in relationships, couples may have difficulty choosing happiness, especially when our spouses do something we dislike (Parrott, 2015, 73). We feel justified in our anger or frustration, and in some ways, we feel entitled to a resolution to compensate for the wrong. We own our emotions, but our emotions also derail the potential for connection. Just as much as we entertain our negative feelings, we can also steward positive feelings and pay attention to what works in the relationship. Feelings take us to such a vulnerable place and it seems unsafe. But our emotions contribute to adding color to the human experience. Roller coasters look differently to people who feel fear, compared to people who feel excitement. Emotions add some extra flavor to experiences, so what kind of flavor do couples want to add to their relationship?

## 3. *Biological Significance of Touch*

*SYMBIS* suggests exploring the use of touch in the homes you grew up in because it influences how a person experiences touch as an adult (Parrott, 2015, 108). This portion made

me think about my own experience with touch growing up. My dad hit us at unexpected moments, while my mom withheld physical touch. My siblings and I used to joke about how we hate being touched. We used to think it was because our family didn't express love through touch, which is true, but I made the connection later that we might be unfamiliar with touch as an expression of love because we were hit randomly and disproportionately. We never knew what would set off our dad to explode in anger. As we got older, our mom shared her regrets about not hugging us as much when we were kids, and I found this conversation with her to be so restorative.

For couples, this area is important to explore because “the need for physical connection does not go away, and when we meet the need for our spouses, we can increase the health of our marriages” (Parrott, 2015, p. 107). There is a whole science and biological impact to touch that we forget about. Nonverbal communication has so much power in relaying important messages. At times, the messages are reinforced and clarified through nonverbal language. Just like how certain words mean differently to people, certain actions mean differently too. Family history informs and influences our receptiveness to things like touch as adults. While it may be a sensitive topic for some, exploring the use of touch in families could become restorative conversations for couples and clear up any prior misunderstanding. It's a practical aspect in marriage that seems simple, but is impactful because couples can see and feel the connection like physical evidence. When the significance of touch is clarified and seen as a necessity, touch can become one of the avenues to relay a deeper message of love and commitment between couples.

#### 4. *Necessity of Conflict for Emotional Intimacy*

Many people misunderstand the purpose of conflict, believing that fighting with your spouse is a sign of dysfunction. However, the authors reassure their readers that both happy and unhappy couples struggle with the same topics in marriage. Fighting is a good thing, perhaps a necessary thing in relationships. Conflicts cultivate emotional intimacy, and healthy relationships experience the opposite spectrums of feeling both love and hate, closeness and separation, and agreeing and disagreeing (Parrott, 2015, p. 142). It is natural to work through issues in relationships, and it can deepen the meaning of faithfulness and commitment for the couple. People tend to dread confrontation, but perhaps it's because many of us don't know how to fight healthily and end the fight well.

When feelings and emotions escalate, it becomes difficult to focus on the issues, which again supports the need to take responsibility for one's feelings in a relationship. Similar to a boxing match, people take hits, miss, and knock out in arguments. It feels unfair and divisive because one person wins, and the other loses. But I imagine that fighting can look more like two people going sailing. While one person steers, the other person can open up the sails, and the two can switch. When the boat hits a storm with turbulent waters, the two crewmates work together to navigate through the challenge. They might end up yelling at each other over the rain and wind, but they worked hard to communicate and get through what they could not control. In therapy, I wonder if it can help couples to write down their successful resolutions, and reflect on what aspects they consider to be successful. We can't control the issues and differences that come up in marriage, but we can work on how we perceive, confront, and resolve them.

##### *5. Faithfulness and Forgiveness*

Related to the previous point, forgiveness is the practical way to end fights well. Forgiveness might seem to move only in one direction, but it involves two people, one person who apologizes and the other who accepts the apology. However, forgiveness goes beyond just the apology. When Jesus died on the cross, He died to pay for the consequences of sin, but He also cleansed us to make us right with God. He gave us a clean slate. In marriage, there are so many opportunities to forgive and make things right. When we live with our spouses, we encounter the most vulnerable parts. People make mistakes, experience misunderstanding, and differ in needs and expectations. Sometimes, we miss the timing to address these things, and other times, things are lost in communication.

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott warn couples about unresolved issues, “Forgiveness lies at the heart of marriage... And if forgiveness is not given to cleanse the marriage soul, condemnation hovers over the relationship. Resentment piles on top of resentment until we blame our partners not just for their wrongdoing, but also for our failure to forgive them” (Parrott, 2015, p. 164). Forgiveness is hard because we have to sacrifice and release the “wrongdoing.” It feels like sacrificing something, as though there was an attachment to the pain we felt. Forgiveness reminds me of the healing process of physical wounds, with scabbing and layers of new skin that arise. For couples, I hope to encourage them that forgiveness is a necessary part of healing.