

Pastor's Corner- Corner – 7-7-2018
Making Marriage Work

Several years ago I came across a book titled, “The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work” by Dr. John Gottman. I was so impressed with the content and practical nature of the book that I started using it as a basis for my pre-marriage counseling and also as a way to tune up my own marriage. I recognize that not everyone reading this Pastor's Corner is married and so you might think that a book on marriage is irrelevant to you, but I encourage you to keep reading anyway. Most of these principles translate to other relationships and not just marriage.

The premise behind the book is based on Dr. Gottman's observations in his “Love Lab.” This lab is really an apartment where he and his team would sequester a couple for a weekend and observe every interaction between them. The researchers wanted to try and see if they could discern specific behaviors or patterns that marked the difference between good, healthy marriages, and ones that were headed towards divorce. I don't know how long they ran this experiment or how many times it was repeated, but Dr. Gottman claims he can predict whether a couple will get divorced or stay together with a greater than 90% accuracy simply by watching them interact for about 5 minutes.

The “Love Lab” didn't just help the researchers discover predictors for divorce, it also helped them discover several principles that were present in healthy marriages that served as an inoculation against relationship implosion. Over the next few weeks I would like to share some of these principles here in the Pastor's Corner.

I want to save the specifics for future posts, but the main thrust of the book is that the principles behind healthy marriages are surprisingly simple. As Dr. Gottman notes, “happily married couples aren't smarter, richer, or more psychologically astute than others. But in their day-to-day lives, they have hit upon a dynamic that keeps their negative thoughts and feelings about each other (which all couples have) from overwhelming their positive ones.” I think this is a key point because no marriage is perfect and you can always find something to critique about your spouse. But as long as you have more positive feelings than negative ones, the marriage can remain strong. But when the balance shifts, and the negative outweighs the positive, then couples start looking for a way out. The seven principles for making marriage work are therefore those things which help a couple maximize the positives and minimize the negatives.

Another way to look at it is that happy marriages are based on a deep friendship that allow you to overlook flaws and quirks. In these healthy relationships there is mutual respect and a genuine enjoyment of each other's company. In other words you like hanging out together and you appreciate what the other person brings to the table. I can definitely see this in my own marriage and can affirm that even though Amy and I have our occasional

“heated discussion” we both agree that there's nobody we would rather spend time with than each other.

We'll explore the principles of healthy marriages in more detail in the weeks to come, but for now I would encourage each of us to work on that friendship. If you don't know how to do that, go back in time and do some of the things you did when you first fell in love with your spouse. In the book of Revelation the church of Ephesus is critiqued for losing their first love. Jesus counsels them to “go back and do the things you did at first.” You can begin to rekindle love, respect, and friendship with your spouse by doing those things that brought you together in the first place.

I think God wants us to have strong and happy marriages. There is no greater blessing in this world than having someone you can depend on through thick and thin, someone who always has your back, and who will be your partner “till death do you part.” A happy marriage takes work, but in the end, it's well worth the effort.

Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler