

The Building of a Marriage

by Richard Plachè

“The happily married couple seems to be an oddity!” So spoke a recognized authority on marriage problems. What has gone wrong with marriages today? Why is the oldest and most enduring of all institutions crumbling before our eyes? Why is happiness so rare, while unhappiness soars to epidemic proportions?

It takes more than a ground-breaking ceremony to construct a building, and it takes more than a wedding ceremony to build a marriage. Like any building project, successful marriages don’t just happen. They require proper planning and work— plenty of it—over a long period of time.

Much faulty construction has gone into most of our marriages. When this begins to take its toll, people usually react in one of two ways. They either give up entirely on their marriage, allowing it to fall into disrepair and eventual collapse, or they decide to get busy and work to make their marriage a success.

A lot can be accomplished through diligent efforts to repair or remodel a relationship. Many marriages headed for a divorce court can be salvaged. Attending marital seminars or clinics, or reading books on the subject of marriage, enables many couples to improve their relationship.

Without proper instruction, any couple’s chances of a successful marriage are very slim. But even if they are provided with accurate blueprints, correct guidelines and reliable information, many will not be able to make their marriage work.

Does God have a blueprint for a successful marriage? Does He have a means whereby both the newly-wedded couple, and the marriage that is beyond hope of repair, can find happiness?

Most people who lose their marriages do so through separation or divorce. After striving to preserve the marriage for a period of time, they finally give up trying to make it work. They let it die.

There is another way to “lose” your marriage. Jesus Christ revealed an amazing key to survival, and to real Life, when He said *“For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”* This is the very opposite of the basic law of self-preservation which governs everything that we do naturally. Yet this is the only way to find out who we really are in God’s perfect scheme of things. We must be willing to lose our *false* identity—our independent, separate identity, which the Bible calls the “old man”—in order to discover our *true* identity—our unique, personalized, individualized identity in union with Christ, the “new man.”

The same is true of marriage. To really find our marriage, we must be willing to lay it on the altar of sacrifice. We must die to our grasping, selfish, self-centered, manipulative marriage, our marriage of mutual self-exploitation, which has been the product of our human ideas, plans and efforts; that marriage in which the “old man” was involved.

We die to this marriage by finally giving up trying to make it work. We are forced to face the ugly fact that we don’t have what it takes. All our striving has been an exercise in futility. We have failed.

It is only in the desperation of our need that we finally come to the end of ourselves and cry out to God for help. We give up on ourselves. But at the same time, we give it all over

to the Christ who lives within us. We no longer want marriage our way, we now want it His way. Then and only, then are we free to “find” our marriage and to experience God’s best for us.

Only when we have come to the end of self-effort and are fully persuaded that “*except the Lord shall build the house, they labor in vain that build it,*” do we discover what marriage was really meant to be.

Once we have reached this point of desperation, have become willing to die to our marriage, and have totally surrendered to God’s miraculous, creative, redemptive workmanship in us—for the biblical surrender and “yielding” is not *we trying* to be yielded, but complete *capitulation* from self-effort, whereby we give up on ourselves—what then?

What is our role and responsibility? How do we fit into the picture? What part, if any, do we play in the rebuilding of our marriage?

Jesus said that He could of Himself do nothing, but “*the Father abiding in Me does His works*” (John 14:10). He is our example—we are to live in the same manner that He lived. This does not mean that we try to copy His outer works; it is to imitate the same mechanism by which He lived, which was to recognize that He was a vessel to contain and express the Father’s life. So we are vessels to contain Christ’s life. We are to know that we are indwelt by Him, as He knew He was indwelt by the Father.

Does this mean that we simply sit back and do nothing, since “*He does the works*”? Do we merely wait around for something to “happen”? Since it is God who builds marriages, does this mean that we are only spectators at the construction site? Do we assume an inert, passive posture? Do we simply get out of God’s way and watch Him work?

God’s work isn’t something which He does apart or separate from us, so that we merely observe in some detached way. His work takes place within us and through us. We are His work and workmanship. And we are not just something which God works upon, like a hunk of inanimate, mindless building material. There is personal interaction in the construction project. We are “*co-laborers together with God*” (1 Cor. 3:9). We are *actively*, not passively, involved.

Without our active participation, there could be no work accomplished. God doesn’t work in a vacuum, in isolation from us. Though we can of our own selves do nothing of any lasting, spiritual worth, at the same time God will do nothing involving our lives without our direct, personal involvement. We are in a working relationship with Him. This is what union life is—two functioning as *one*.

This is the same kind of working relationship which Jesus had with His Father. He is the blueprint for how God builds. Here were two distinct personalities, the Father and the Son, working together in perfect spiritual unity. Whenever two work together in any common project, there must of necessity be one who takes the lead, while the other follows. The Father was the leader, and Christ was the willing follower. He chose to be indwelt by the Father.

Though one in nature, nevertheless “*the Head of Christ is God*” (1 Cor. 11:3). Jesus freely confessed, “*My Father is greater than I.*” He assumed a subordinate role. It was the Father who set the pace and made the final decisions. Jesus was the perfect follower. This was true not only of His relationship to the Father while He was incarnate in flesh, it will also be true when He has finally finished subduing all things. He will be subject to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Subordination is not, therefore, merely a temporary concession or necessity due to the flesh.

It is the leader who takes the initiative—originates and activates. There cannot be a leader without a follower. No head can function without a body. The decisions of the head must have a means of expression. So the follower plays a vital, active role, manifesting what the leader initiates.

To be a proper follower is to be constantly *available* to hear the voice of our leader, Jesus Christ, just as He was available to express the Father's inner commands. This means that we are *listening*. We are open, receptive, ready to move. A wise or understanding heart is a listening heart (1 Kings 3:9).

As we hear Christ's voice within, we are responsive, cooperative, and obedient in following His directions. When Jesus gave Peter permission to come to Him on the water, Peter instantly responded. He obeyed, taking affirmative action. He stepped out in faith and walked on the water. We too are to walk—not balk—by faith. It is no "piggie-back" ride.

The walk of faith, however, is just as impossible for us without the miraculous support of Christ as was Peter's walking on the water. We do not follow Christ in our own strength, but in His strength, which He imparts by *living in us*. But He doesn't do it *for* us. He does it *in us, as us*. We are participants in this miraculous, working relationship.

We are not robots. We hold the key to the door of our minds. Christ will not break it down. Instead, He is within us, patiently waiting for us to come to the end of our self-efforts, so that we will open the door by faith and trust Him to work in our marriage situations as us.

It is a mutual, loving, sharing relationship. We are the living, active, thinking containers of Christ's life. In this living relationship, His Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Rom. 8:16). Herein lies the secret of true sonship. God's life is expressed through us, His sons. But as long as we continue in self-effort, we can hinder God's working in our lives. Christ in us becomes of "no benefit" to us (Gal. 5:2). We are quenching the Spirit by trying to live the life ourselves.

The renewal of a marriage can only begin when one has the eyes to see his own desperate need, and the ears to hear the Master's voice within. God doesn't want us to wait for our spouse to change in order for our marriage to work. He wants first of all to work in us. And He does that when we see the spiritual bankruptcy of our self-efforts, and when we see that Christ in us is already our totally adequate supply.

If you have seen your inability to make your marriage work—if you know your own personal weakness and inadequacy—then "*boldly go before the throne of grace to find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb. 4:16). Confess that there is freely available *in Christ* more than enough to completely meet your need. This is the balance that God is looking for. Confessing need, without seeing Christ as total supply, is out of balance.

It is the *recognition* of need, and of the fact that Christ dwells in us in all of His fullness, that is the "good ground" in which the seed grows. We will experience that fullness to the degree that we know we are only containers, and recognize the enormity of our need and the unlimited supply that He is within us.

Then—be prepared! Watch God work in and through you in marvelous, mysterious and mighty ways. You will find yourself ushered into a period of divinely-motivated productivity and creativity. Be prepared for any and everything that Christ in you may choose. to give up, add, do or say. You will start doing things you've never done before in your marriage, and stop doing things you've always done.

When we surrender with no reservations or strings attached—when we come to a place of rest from our self-efforts, with a mind that is in readiness for Christ to act through us—

exciting and unexpected things begin to happen. We go forward in His strength, no longer our own. We speak His words, not our own. We do what pleases Him, not ourselves. And we find that this is the fulfillment of ourselves.

Christ in us will miraculously provide all that is needful to meet our every situation—personally and maritally. He will write His success story in our lives. Be prepared for anything He has in mind, as the “new you” and the “new two” are unveiled for all to see. This is how God builds a marriage.