

allow criticism of Rose by Traci, he listens and becomes increasingly dissatisfied and Traci seems so much more understanding of him and his feelings – ! Or it may be one of Rose’s friends or fellow workers if she also has a job, who encourages her fault-finding attitude toward Mike and you have the very true to life background of the foundation for a divorce.

Maybe the problem is drink, and maybe the wife has a sweet Christian disposition, but the husband begins stopping by with the “boys” for a “quick one at the corner bar” after work. Just a little hint of selfishness on his part. For a while it is nothing to worry about, she thinks, but as bills begin to put him under pressure, he turns more heavily to drink as a way to get his mind off his problems and then comes the evening when he comes staggering in at 1 A.M. and drags the little wife out of bed and proceeds to beat her with his leather belt. This marriage is in bad trouble now. The best solution would be if the husband would only turn his problems over to Jesus Christ and learn to cast all his cares on Him, knowing that Christ cares for him (*1 Peter 5:7*). He would soon find relief from his anxieties. No more would he need to use alcohol as a crutch and let it compound his problems, for he could lean on Jesus’ arm!

Perhaps it is the wife who is in love with the bottle. Though she knows full well what excessive drinking can do, she goes ahead, selfishly risking her home, her health, her children (whether born yet or not). After a time, she becomes hopelessly addicted, and will stop at nothing to gratify her baser desires. Hospitals and various other programs like AA are only partial answers. They work to dry out the body and give the mind reasons to “stay on the wagon” of sobriety, but they cannot give a new nature! Only Jesus Christ can do that. He can break the shackles of alcohol or drugs, but most important of all, He can free her from self!

Everyone knows someone who fits into one of the above situations. Think carefully. Is there any possible way the blame can be placed anywhere but at the feet of selfishness, self-indulgence or Satan? Jealousy falls within the realm of selfish pride. So when you say someone’s marriage ended because of jealousy, what you are really saying is that one of the marriage partners was so selfish of every second of the spouse’s time, energy or affection that it caused a quarrel or many quarrels. If both partners are willing to see only their own side, before long they will become increasingly bitter until divorce seems the only way out of the situation.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY DO MARRIAGES END?

ONCE UPON A TIME, long, long ago, every young girl dreamed of finding her very own “prince charming, getting married, and living happily ever after.”

Today, even in church circles, many young ladies are looking at careers and single living and (heaven forbid) some are even thinking about having children out of wedlock, or having abortions to kill babies they don’t want to have, because they so distrust men that they do not want to have to share their lives or homes with one. And men, too, seem to distrust women as tricky, selfish and “moneygrabbers.”

This is truly unfortunate, since God created woman to love, cherish and share life with a mate, and a man is really incomplete without a good, loving wife. Furthermore, very few people of either sex are willing to live without any sexual relationships at all – even those who are afraid of making any commitments.

In this day when the dreaded disease of AIDS (*Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*) has become so widespread and even nearly epidemic, to say nothing of the other sexually transmitted diseases, the lack of commitment to one life partner and taking part in sexual activity outside of marriage all too often becomes a fatal mistake.

Our moral climate has become one of, “If it feels good, do it.” Religious moral laws are considered “fuddy-duddy,” and just the narrow minded moralities of religious fanatics. Many young couples talk openly about living together without marriage and “open marriage” in which either or both partners are openly and flagrantly unfaithful have become all too common.

So, in the late 1980’s, has marriage lost its magic?

For all too many, who have entered marriage with mistaken ideas or been born into broken homes or homes with such a viewpoint, it has. But for those who choose their mates wisely, carefully and prayerfully, it is still the most enjoyable, rewarding and exhilarating way of life imaginable. For them, the “Magic Called Marriage” is still a beautiful reality -- a dream come true!

But what is the *real* reason for the failure of many marriages? One person will blame it on his (or her) in-laws, another will insist that it is because of the lack of money, still another will say it was because of the infidelity of the mate, and someone else will insist that fate just played him (or her) a raw hand. On the surface, all of

these do seem to be good, valid reasons, but there is one underlying cause behind all of these surface symptoms...

Self

Interest

Nearest heart!

In other words, just plain old selfishness! Over simplification? Not at all! Consider this: Selfishness is at the bottom of it when either of the marriage partners takes to drinking or drug abuse to drown or get away from his or her problems or sorrows, or to get high. The same is obviously true of unfaithfulness. But why call it selfishness? Why not blame it on poverty or wealth or a triangle?

Because self interest is still the root cause of it all! The wife who insists on having her own way is just as guilty of selfishness as is her husband when he goes to the nearby tavern and gets dead drunk. The husband who goes “out with the boys” three nights a week leaving his wife to a solitary evening with the TV is certainly being a selfish oaf, but if all she is willing to do when he is home is talk about the afternoon bridge party or the new dress she has just got to get because Mabel got one, she is being just as selfish and, in fact, may well have driven him out of the house by her own unwillingness to do the things he likes – at least part of the time.

As to the matter of infidelity, regardless of which partner it is, self-gratification is the only possible explanation. There may be “extenuating circumstances” on the part of the offender, such as the poor lonely housewife mentioned in the last paragraph who might be easy prey to a salesman, repairman or postman, or the husband driven out of the house by the wife’s incessant chatter about things he is not interested in. But the fact still remains that the guilty party acted out of a desire for self-gratification or selfishness. If the wife (or husband) is always too tired or “has a headache” or is just simply unresponsive, that may be the foundation for unfaithfulness on the part of the other, but that lack of responsiveness, while clearly selfishness on the part of the unresponsive one, may well be caused by a demanding, selfish attitude on the other’s part.

“But you don’t know my mother-in-law,” you may reply. But if both the marriage partners are trying to please their spouse ahead of themselves, there is little that the most meddling of mothers-in-law can do to cause any serious fight between them. Since the husband is putting the things that please his wife ahead of the things that please him, his mother is kept informed that she must not cause the wife problems unless she wants to break the

harmony with him. And because pleasing her husband makes the wife happiest, she will allow no hurtful criticism of her husband from her mother on penalty of breaking the mother/daughter relationship.

The answer here is to communicate. Don’t allow embarrassment, pride, shame, guilt, or anything else keep you from first communicating your love for your spouse, and then communicate anything that is causing or could cause a problem between the two of you. whether it is his loud snoring, her always putting away the papers you needed to fill out and mail today so you can’t find them, a drug or alcohol or infidelity problem, or whatever. (It is not necessary to give nor to know all the “spicy” details of infidelity and I ***STRONGLY*** recommend against it. The fact that either partner has had sexual relations before marriage in this day of open promiscuity and premarital experimentation is important to communicate only to the degree that trust in the marriage can be strengthened or established. It is not necessary to tell with whom or how many persons or times, etc. NEVER, NEVER, NEVER compare your spouse with any previous “lover”. Even if it happens after marriage, it should be admitted to and repented of; forgiven and forgotten and neither partner should ever mention it again.)

Another reason marriages end is lack of consideration for each other. For example, the other day, I saw a young and obviously fairly newly married couple go into the grocery store together. Without giving thought, the young man whom I will call Mike pulled out a shopping cart directly across his wife’s path and she (I’ll call her Rose) had to stop quickly to avoid running into the cart or getting her toes run over. I don’t think he meant to be rude or inconsiderate, and Rose may not have even realized in her newly married state that Mike was inconsiderate, but after several years and some other person asking something like, “How do you put up with his rudeness?” she may begin to see all the times when he crossed ahead of her and made her stop to keep from bumping him, or repeat incidents of the grocery cart scene, or times that instead of holding the door for her as a gentleman, he has instead slammed the door in her face, may begin to eat away at her subconscious and she may begin to nag and fuss at him. Then he goes on the defensive and maybe counters with times she has been inconsiderate of him, and things begin to fall apart between them. He tells a female coworker we’ll call Traci who already has her eye on him and she begins helping him find fault with Rose. Instead of realizing he is being set up and refusing to

preservation of one's very life in the hostile environment of the world. When it causes problems is when your strong self-interest runs head-on into someone else's rights or path and creates jealousy, envy and hostility. Unfortunately, the one most often placed in the conflict situation is the one nearest to you and with whom you share home and other possessions and who makes demands upon you for time, money and affection.

But no, it wasn't selfishness, it was your mother-in-law's fussiness or quarrelsomeness that brought about your troubles, you insist. "My wife was sweet as can be until her mother came to live with us." So then the dear old lady found fault with everything. But really, wasn't there a tiny bit of truth to what she said? Surely there were a few things that were legitimate targets for her criticism. And if YOU hadn't lost your temper and angrily defended yourself and maybe said some mean or cutting remarks before you stopped to think, the argument that followed might not have! But your self-interest was too quick to allow any reflection on your character. Further, the old lady disliked seeing the way you carelessly or deliberately made extra work for her daughter by leaving your dirty socks on the floor by the bed and your dirty clothes flung over the nearby chair, which took less effort on your part (selfishly) and the heck with your wife.

Are you beginning to see the self-defeating results of a self-centered attitude? Can you think of one single reason or excuse you ever heard of for a marriage ending that did not have its root cause in the self-will of one or the other or usually both spouses?

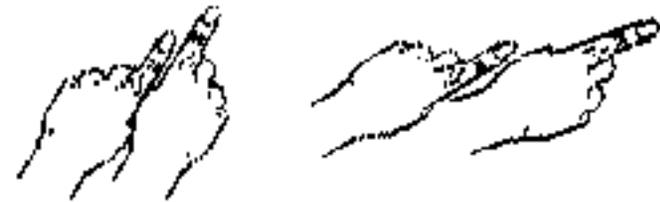
Or, if you're the wife, are you cooking good, tasty but well-balanced meals for the old grouch? Are you really carrying your share of the load by trying to stretch the budget and keep the financial picture from getting dark? Are you trying to avoid fighting fire with fire when he comes home from work all tired and grouchy? (Bear in mind that a grass or brush fire can be stopped by setting a back-fire, but both fires burn the grass or brush and do damage.)

In other words, to make a marriage work, each must selflessly give to and do for the other. This is the meaning of love. When you were courting and very much in love, didn't you give and give and do and do for the one you loved just to receive a warm smile or thank you, or maybe even a kiss – and the real return on your investment, the love and concern of the person you loved? Weren't you always trying to bring happiness to your lover? And in turn,

ILLUSTRATION OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF A MARRIAGE



When a couple establish the same goals in life, such as to serve and honor the Lord Jesus Christ, and each is happiest when pleasing the other one and seeing the sparkle of happiness in his or her eye, that couple will grow ever closer together through the years.



But when one spouse or the other begins to say, "I'm going to have my way and I don't care what you say," that marriage is starting to slide. No matter how far the other spouse is willing to bend and give in to the self-will of the first, it is just a matter of time until the yielding, submissive spouse can no longer reach the selfish one to please him or her, and the marriage will soon be "on the rocks."



If the second spouse begins to get the attitude that, "If you don't care about me or what I think, then I'm not going to try to please you or worry about what you think," that marriage is already splitting and doomed to disaster unless both partners see what is happening and begin to work each to please the other and reaffirm a united goal, preferably in service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tom has been married for six years to a lovely and youthful Cathy. They have had a few minor quarrels, but nothing serious. Lately, however, Cathy has been irritable for no apparent reason. Then it turns out that Tom hasn't been kissing her with quite the old fervor lately, and Cathy has begun to feel sorry for herself (a form of selfishness). This fact emerges at the breakfast table with: "Tom, I don't believe you still love me like you used to."

"Oh, Cathy, don't be silly! Of course I still love you. I'm just working too hard at the office right now with all the"

"That sounds phony as a three-dollar bill, but I guess that's the best you could do! You don't have another girl --" Cathy's voice rose sharply as a seed of jealousy straight from the pit was planted.

The intensity of the pointless argument grew and by the time Tom arrived at work, he was like an angry bear. Shirley, the secretary at the next desk saw his mood right away and began sympathizing with him. Taking his part, Shirley built up his feeling that Cathy had been unfair with him and when he arrived home that night and found Cathy still carrying her chip-on-the-shoulder attitude, his bitterness hardened into resolve. He'd show her!

The next day, Shirley again provided the comforting shoulder for him to put his head on and the ear to listen to his problems. Tom began to compare the sympathetic friend, Shirley, with his wife, Cathy. Why could Cathy not be as kind and sympathetic as Shirley? Tom selfishly wondered. (Shirley, a married woman herself, had a crush on Tom. She was fully aware of the role she was playing in breaking up Tom's marriage, but she wanted him for her playmate -- for her own self-interest!)

Sound like someone you know? There are two ways this story might end, but we'll deal with the alternate ending in Chapter Seven, page 51.

If Tom, Cathy and Shirley continue the way they are going now, there can be only one final ending -- a divorce or at least a separation for Tom and Cathy and an affair between Shirley and Tom. It is debatable whether Shirley would divorce her husband for Tom, since she is only looking out for herself. The only problem might arise if Shirley's husband found out about her affair. Otherwise, she has both a husband and a lover, each to shower her with affection and gifts!

Let's continue with HOW it happens. Cathy continues to be suspicious and nagging with Tom to the extent of insisting he must be having an affair with someone, and Tom, listening to the

suggestion of his own wife, begins making leading remarks to Shirley. This is exactly what Shirley has been waiting for. Since Shirley's husband is a travelling salesman, it is easy for them. Eventually, Cathy finds out and sues for divorce and the house and car. In the arguments arising from the divorce and settlement, Tom tells Cathy that she practically drove him to have an affair by her accusations and increasingly frigid conduct toward him as her suspicions grew. Cathy insisted she was right all along. A marriage has hit the rocks. Why? Who was to blame?

First, let's consider Cathy's attitude. Could she have gotten to thinking about herself and what was not as perfect as she would have liked it to be? I wonder if some of that might not have been triggered in the first place by back-fence gossip -- "My husband is still so much in love with me that he brings me a box of candy every week, and takes me out every Friday night for dinner and an outing," the neighbor might have bragged. Cathy realizes that Tom has not bought her candy since her last birthday and has taken her to dinner only once in the last year. 'He must not love me as much as he used to,' she thinks, so she begins to tally the score. An afternoon TV soap comes on with a husband cheating on his wife, and brings the suspicion that maybe that is why he doesn't love her as much any more. Now consider, what is the real base for this attitude? It can be nothing short of self-pity, another form of selfishness.

Nor can Tom be found blameless. If his first concern was making his wife, Cathy, happy, he'd surely have tried to do something like bring her gifts or take her out sometimes, and when she began to be unhappy, he should have sensed something was wrong. Then he should have made a sincere effort to discover what was bothering her and how best to restore her pleasure in their marriage. Once she revealed the problem, as we've suggested, at the breakfast table, instead of becoming defensive and edgy, Tom should have paused and taken stock, then moved with loving concern to demonstrate his true love and affection for Cathy. It was also a big mistake, but one many are guilty of, to tell Shirley. So both Cathy and Tom demonstrated forms of self-centeredness or selfishness.

Examples of all the various situations leading to divorces and broken homes would fill volumes, but in each and every case, a careful analysis will reveal that selfishness in one form or other is at the bottom of EVERY marital disaster! There is nothing abnormal or unique about selfishness, since everyone has a degree of selfishness from birth, and this must be so for even the

didn't knowing that the one you loved was happy make you happy?

That same thing will work whether you are courting in your teens or have been married ten, twenty, fifty or sixty-five years. Kindness begets kindness. Consideration begets consideration. Love begets love. But the reverse is also true, and selfishness tends to beget selfishness and meanness begets meanness.

Is your marriage "on the rocks"? Look for selfishness first in your own actions and attitudes and get rid of it. Then try to help your spouse see any selfish attitudes he or she may have – after they can see a difference in your own conduct. You will be a happier person, yourself, and, if both of you cooperate to eliminate selfishness, your marriage will surely be saved – and more than saved, a real delight!