

CHAPTER 1

The Marital Adventure

MARRIAGE is a part of normal life. Life, fully lived, includes marriage. In dealing with marriage we are dealing with life, for marriage consists of the blending of the lives of two individuals.

Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships. It even takes precedence over the relationship between parent and child. This precedence was recognized at the time the institution of marriage was divinely ordained, for it is in this connection that the Scripture commands, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Genesis 2:24.

Marriage is so bound up with life that it becomes logically the most important and the most significant of all the human relationships, second only to the relation between the human being and the Deity.

The marriage relationship is so much a part of life that success in life often depends upon success in marriage. If marriage is successful, life is full and complete; if marriage fails, life is dwarfed and crippled.

Success and happiness in marriage do not come by happenstance. They do not depend on whether Cupid chooses to bestow a full measure of his approval at the time a couple falls in love. Too many young people look forward to marriage with innocent expectation, assuming that marriage will solve all problems and perplexities. Even though sweethearts are aware that marriages sometimes fail, the optimism of youth is so great that they harbor no other thought but that their marriage will be successful and that happiness forever after will naturally ensue.

Success and happiness in marriage depend on whether the sweethearts, the bride and groom, the husband and wife, give heed to the simple principles that ensure the realization of their fond expectations in this, the most intimate of human relationships. Marriage is what the marital partners make it. If they are listless and indifferent toward those factors that ensure success in marriage, their marriage will be a haphazard relationship with many ups and downs, and with growing uncertainty as to its outcome. But if each gives sincere attention to the factors which pertain to success in marriage, the relationship will be stable and will provide a wholesome and pleasant background for all of life's experiences.

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In order to ensure the rich experience which comes to those who are happily married, both husband and wife must be willing to pay the price. The price is high and the payments are perpetual, but the value of the product far exceeds the cost.

The price is not measured, as so many seem to think, in dollars and cents; nor does it consist of a fine house with elegant furnishings, or of a new car, or elaborate wardrobes. The luxuries of life may have bearing on the success and happiness of a marriage, but overconcern for the appurtenances often does more to handicap a home than to ensure its success.

The price of marital happiness consists of disciplines, attitudes, loyalties, and insights of such nature that husband and wife are able to blend their personalities harmoniously so that the bond of fellowship thus established transcends the consideration of natural differences and material possessions. It is perfectly feasible for a couple poor in this world's goods to enjoy a richness of experience which far exceeds anything that money can buy.

Marriage was ordained of God Himself in the Garden of Eden. It was divinely sanctioned and intended for the best interests and happiness of the human race. Sin has brought many perversions into the marriage relationship, but this has not changed the fact that marriage is divinely sanctioned and intended for man's happiest development. While on earth, Christ, in His teachings, included many references to the home and to marriage, and His sanction of the ordinance was further indicated by His hearty participation, as a guest, in performing His first miracle at the marriage feast in Cana.

Marriage, properly consummated and maintained, gives the best insight into the happiness and genuine pleasure that existed in the Garden of Eden before the introduction of sin and that is promised to those who will inherit the New Earth. Marriage can provide a "little bit of heaven" right here and now. However, this ideal can be reached only as husband and wife relate themselves to each other and to God in such a way that their home will be permeated with those Christian attributes which lie at the foundation of all true happiness.

In view of the divine origin of marriage, and in view of the fact that it partakes of life itself, the devil has directed his most potent and heinous strategy against this institution. Consequently, within the marriage bond are to be found the greatest possible contrasts between perfect happiness on one hand, and heart-rending disillusionment and anguish on the other.

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A study of marriage relations is justified, not only in the hope of helping to avoid the tragedies of marriage, but also as a means of ensuring a maximum realization of the good things this social institution has to offer. Many marriages are reasonably successful and bring considerable happiness. But by a more complete understanding of the factors involved in the marriage relationship, it would be possible for the partners in these moderately successful marriages to experience greater degrees of success and happiness. To whatever extent a given marriage falls short of the ultimate, to whatever extent it offers less than it is capable of offering, to that extent the husband and wife are responsible for sidestepping their privileges and obligations to each other, to the children who come into their home, to their community, and to their Creator.

In order to provide an intelligent approach to the subject, it is proper to consider the functions of marriage. One's first thought when asked, What is the function of marriage? is to answer, The function of marriage is to provide happiness. This is perfectly true. Happiness, however, is an elusive quality that is a byproduct of human experience. It cannot be generated by throwing a switch or opening a valve; nor can it result from a simple determination on the part of a husband and a wife to be happy regardless of what occurs. Happiness depends upon several factors, which may be considered to be the proper functions of marriage.

In the first place, marriage is intended to provide security, both financial and emotional. Of the two types, emotional security is of greater importance to the integrity of the home. It is the natural craving for emotional security that impels young men and women toward marriage. Many a single person would prefer to avoid the obligations and responsibilities implied in marriage were it not for a realization of the need of emotional security that comes from being able to confide in a husband or a wife and expect this partner to be impartial and unprejudiced, as he or she shares the problems and anxieties of the moment. The competitions of life are too strong and the jealousies too caustic to make it feasible or desirable to face life alone. Marriage provides a complementary self which serves as an emotional counterbalance.

Marriage should also provide emotional and financial security for the children who come into a home. Security, in the broad sense, is the child's greatest need. When a child feels secure within his own home, his character and personality will develop symmetrically in spite of

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unfavorable external influences. But if he is deprived of that security, his development is in great danger of being warped and distorted. The high incidence of delinquency among children who come from divided homes is tangible evidence of this need of security.

Another connection in which marriage should provide security is with relation to the uncertainties of old age. Not only does the bond of marriage provide a sympathetic spouse in the event of "sickness, weal, or woe," but it also provides a family setting in which grown children properly assume the obligations which the Scriptures enjoin in the matter of caring for aged and feeble parents.

A second major function of marriage is to provide for the spiritual and cultural growth of all members of the family. The family is the structural unit of the community and of the nation. The spiritual and cultural tenor of the community is an average of that of its component families. Furthermore, the spiritual and cultural attainments of the individual members of a family are a reflection of the influences existing within the family circle. The molding influences for the better things of this life and for those qualities which will be perpetuated into eternity are all shaped by the combined efforts of husband and wife, father and mother.

A third major function of marriage is to generate and distribute those ideals of personal responsibility and participation which provide the backbone of our civilization. The first step in accomplishing this function is the establishment of absolute fidelity between husband and wife. When husband and wife are unquestionably true to each other, the influence of this healthy relationship not only permeates the home, providing a sense of security for each of its members, but radiates throughout the community and exerts a stabilizing influence within the entire circle of friends.

The veneration in which marriage is held in the home, the community, the church, the nation, is a reliable index of the moral quality of that home, community, church, or nation. When regard for the sanctity of marriage wanes, other standards and values suffer a parallel decline. Compromise, deception, or temporizing in matters pertaining to the sacredness of marriage tend to undermine the very foundations of society.

Marriage provides the setting for determining the attitudes and standards of the next generation. It is within the home that opportunities are afforded for incorporating the principles of true democracy and regard for the rights of others. Here respect for proper

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authority is either learned or disregarded. Here parents may demonstrate to their children the desirability and necessity of loyalty to the group and proper respect for law and order. And here also a respect for personal obligations is established. The basic responsibility for maintaining the standards and ideals of society rests, therefore, in the home and, thus, within the realm of marriage relations.

A fourth major function of marriage, which is purposely placed last in the present list, deals with the perpetuation of the race. Too often this function is given pre-eminence as the outstanding function of marriage. From a biological standpoint the function of bringing children into being is primary. From the standpoint of maintaining happiness within the home, however, this function is so intimately bound up with the other functions that it cannot properly be treated independently. Were the bearing of children to stand as the sole function of marriage, the marriage relation would fail miserably. On the other hand, a home without children is incomplete.

Returning to the concept that the over-all function of marriage is to produce happiness, it should be emphasized that happiness will appear as a byproduct when the other functions of marriage are properly carried out. The home in which emotional and financial security is offered, in which a background is had for spiritual and cultural growth, in which provision is made for character development of such a type as will stabilize society, the home in which children share with their parents the advantages the home has to offer - this home will automatically be a happy home, and husband and wife will have every reason to realize that their marriage has been a success.

The purpose of the present volume is to give consideration to the ways and means by which the functions of marriage may best be fulfilled. The order in which the discussion will progress has been determined more by the natural sequence of life than by the theoretical discussion of the functions of marriage as outlined above.

One of the factors that make marriage most interesting is that this relationship is never static. From youth to old age there is a progression of circumstances which challenges the adaptability and ingenuity of husband and wife at every turn. The problems incident to sending children to college are quite different from those of early married life. The adjustment to the birth of a first child is quite a different matter from the adjustment which becomes necessary when the last child leaves home. It is fortunate that life is lived in sequence, a day at a time. We will therefore follow the sequence, beginning with the choice of a

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marital partner and continuing on through the various phases of married life until we come to the period of mature years.