



The Honeymoon is over and the
Marriage Begins

by Debbie Cox Schwalbe

Spring has sprung, thus officially opening the wedding season to all who plan to formally, legally, and spiritually begin a life together as man and wife.

In preparing for this month's article, I began a data search in hopes of finding clear and convincing evidence supporting my notion that couples who have Christ as the center of their marriages have a much higher success rate than couples who may or may not have such a foundation. After hours of futile searching, my frustration was validated when I learned, from a trusted source, available statistics comparing Christ centered marriages have nearly the same success rates as those who make decisions without consulting Jesus on how He would handle a problematic situation.

I did unearth tons of interesting, though perhaps not very useful, data regarding weddings, honeymoons, and marriage. The Knot (<http://www.theknot.com>) reports the two most popular months for weddings are June, with 10.8% taking place then and August with 10.2% of couples tying the knot during that month. (Just so you'll know, the least popular month for a wedding is January with only 4.7% of marriages occurring that month.)

I also discovered, according to Sound Vision, 2.3 million couples wed every year in the US which means there are nearly 6,200 weddings per day! Oh, yes, the average age of a bride in the US is 25.3 years while the average age of a groom is 26.9. My additional resources show 80% of weddings are performed in churches or synagogues and Las Vegas has an average of 114,000 weddings per year. Sadly, a full one-third of those getting married each year have been married before.

However, what appears to be missing in these statistics is the real truth behind what it takes to turn a successful

wedding into a healthy, sustainable marital relationship – the fabric woven by God in His infinite plan for marriage.

This month I wish to share with you valuable information regarding some of the things are necessary in order to establish and maintain a healthy marriage. I have gathered this information from three different venues: research, experiences in working with couples in the clinical setting, and from my personal life experiences.

One issue I often need to address is the misconception that the actual wedding, itself, will be a magical antidote for transforming existing relationship issues into non-issues. This fantasy is usually based on the desire to want our partner to be on the same page as us. Many of us tend to make choices based on what we want, or how we feel, rather than what we know. Furthermore, we often believe our partner will eventually “see our way of looking at things.” Guess again.

Many marital and relationship problems are the result of one partner not seeing or doing things from the perspective of the other person. Sometimes we fail to realize our spouse has their own way of thinking and their responses to issues or circumstances may be far different than ours. Unfortunately, significant pain often results from this inaccurate notion that things will either change or get better after the wedding. That is why premarital counseling is required by some clergy. It helps assure the pastor/clergy and the couple gain a sense of unity and “grounded-ness” in the relationship. There are some very reliable and valid instruments used for these sessions and I highly recommend it.

One issue I have see in premarital counseling, however, is that either one, or both, of the couple will tailor their responses to beliefs, attitudes, and values questions in

order to fit their respective partner's so they will feel better about proceeding to the wedding phase. We've all heard the term, "star crossed lovers." Perhaps this phenomenon falls into that category. The couple is so crazy in love, they don't realize building and sharing a life together is one of the most challenging things they will ever do.

Another essential ingredient is the need for shared values. So often, I see individuals come into counseling who are struggling with different value systems than their spouse. Their sense of family, how they spend (or save) their money, parenting, religion, communication styles, friends, how to spend their free time, and/or gender role attitudes vary greatly from the other. Does your soon-to-be spouse like to party more than you? Is their alcohol consumption even somewhat problematic? Does he/she flirt too much with others? Does he or she spend more money on things that you consider to be frivolous? Does only one of you attend church or do you attend different churches? Do you think someday your partner will change his/her mind on these subjects? How do you "fight fair" with one another?

When the inevitable argument occurs, does one (or both) storm out in a fit of temper? Or become verbally abusive, shut down preventing any further discussion? Does your spouse (or soon to be) expect you to do all those not so fun household obligations such as cooking, dishes, cleaning, laundry, cutting the grass? These are just a few

of the issues to think about when you ponder whether or not you share the same values.

When one half of the couple comes in it's usually a sign significant problems are present, and the person feels as if he/she is at a crossroads in the relationship. In many of the cases, by the time the problem is recognized as extreme, the other spouse has chosen to emotionally terminate from the relationship. Chances are other problems existed well before the ones that brought them into counseling and usually, the task for spouse who comes into my office is to learn how to adapt to the seemingly unchangeable issues.

Regardless of what marital statistics may show, it in my experience couples who have a fairly well-grounded faith in Christ will have a greater sense of realizing the need to work on the marriage, thus increasing their chances of healing. God is the ultimate Healer, and can transform a couple from considering divorce to healthy relationship.

God didn't create us to live in a state of chaos and unhealthy relationships. But because of sin, these things exist. But it is only through Him, and by Him, that true healing can occur. God's blessings to you.

Debbie Cox Schwalbe is a Family Therapist with Lutheran Child and Family Services. She accepts individuals, couples, and families. You can make an appointment by calling LCFS 1-800-252-2873.

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