

Couples Connection

By: Dan Nelson

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

Last weekend was filled with excitement for me, not just because we concluded a successful and adventurous Vacation Bible School and set out to build and ride a float for our annual community Independence Day parade, but it also became centered on celebrating marriage. My Saturday began with a double-session on pre-marriage, and finished with a vow renewal ceremony. What a fitting way to kick off our season of "Couples Connection" ministry.

Whenever I sit with a couple that is engaged, the enthusiasm and passion, seems almost palpable: the two can't wait to jump in and get the party started. And just like me before Shelley & I got married, most just figure that the counseling hours are merely an unnecessary prerequisite mandated by the pastor, but the real sustaining force in their relationship will be their unbridled love for one another. I remember holding Shelley's hand as we crossed the church parking lot in Ventura on our way to our first appointment. Honestly, I think I was more worried about surviving the one-on-one with the minister than looking for an opportunity to absorb. But now, so many years later, I realize that we knew almost nothing about marriage at that time and had everything to learn. Today, I try to build the concept of counseling into every marriage interaction. Practically, that means that I ask couples preparing for marriage to agree with me that seeking input into their relationship dynamic won't stop after the wedding.

It seems that there is a tragic stigma in our society that recognizes pre-marriage sessions as par for the course, but once the bride and groom have said "I do", somehow there is a negative image the comes to mind when one says "You should do marriage counseling." This cultural calamity is the culprit for many shattered goals. Partners begin together with aspirations of a lifetime of bliss. Nobody intends to compromise passion for practicality, love for lucre, dreams for disaster; but it happens all too often. I was extending a personal invitation to our Thursday "Couples Connection" which starts next week, but someone frankly retorted abdicating romance to newlyweds, as though it was too late for them. But I refuse to accept that for anybody's marriage, if they are willing to let God's Spirit get into the center of it.

I am constantly surprised by the confusions about Christ and the Bible among

people. One of these involves love and marriage. There is a misconception that worship of God and fervent intimacy with one's spouse are mutually exclusive: as though one can look to the Holy Scriptures for spiritual guidance yet needs to go elsewhere for advice on matters of relationships. But that is the furthest thing from the truth. God originated marriage, emotions, and sex, and has all the best ideas to fulfill your life and remove the emptiness that wants to set in when His truths are avoided.

After investing a few hours into this beautiful young pair preparing for marriage, I left them to join an even more amazing twosome; these precious partners were celebrating 25 years of Christian marriage, through all the ups and downs that were originally described in their vows, and were standing before me and their guests, in gown and suit, renewing commitment to one another. Watching their children beam with joyous confidence as they witnessed how it is done, it almost seemed that the planets were all in a line. And when it was time to celebrate, I couldn't think of a better reason to cut loose and dance; when God's Word gets into the middle of a marriage.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Mid-Week Study:
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