



Things I NEVER Tell My Nearly Weds!

Because these would scare them way too much...

We are perfectly capable of falling in love with someone we have no business marrying
We've all watched romantic comedies where, in the end, all works out well. Problem is, in real life none of us has a Hollywood scriptwriter manipulating our relationship. Bad-boys are called "bad-boys" for a reason. Turns out, "strong-silent" types really are silent. If she's a witch now, there's a chance she'll be a witch later. But often, the differences aren't that stark. You have widely divergent values and beliefs. You want different things out of life. You come from vastly different family backgrounds. But you LOVE each other. So you marry. Sometimes, all the love in the world isn't enough to bridge the expanse between two people who started out that far apart.

Contrary to what we feel, our love alone will NOT see us through life

Related to the previous item, marriage is work. I'm not talking about unhealthy relationships needing work. The best of all matches still involve two independent adults. There is much that needs to be attended to. Popular today is the mystical notion that, "If we have to work that hard at it, then it must not be right." I would turn that around and say that if you don't work at your marriage then sooner-or-later it won't be right. People also try to say that God will not give you more than you can carry. Seems, though, that LIFE surely will give you more than you can carry. Love and commitment are the glue, but the work and negotiation by two partners is what makes a marriage happen. Life intervenes. We change. Families grow. Love must be there, but there must be more!

Not every divorce can be explained away by saying that two wrong people married each other

I know what I said above. We CAN choose to marry a personality type incompatible with our own. But many divorces happen even when the right two people have found each other. For myriad reasons, they begin to break agreements, do damage with competitive urges or lose interest in the relationship. Romance often is devalued, and soon two strangers are occupying the same household. Even the memory of a once-strong love fades. Marriage is work, but it is noble work. Once a couple gets tired enough of each other that they no longer want to do that work, the marriage is in trouble. Often one re-awakens enough to care, but finds their partner is too far-gone to save the marriage.

Eventually, people who once loved each other madly can quit caring enough to try

We're all familiar with the story where two flaming lovers become mortal enemies and eventually divorce. What is far more common, though, is that divorces result from a much slower process. That process involves a slow relational distancing. We often refer to that as "drifting apart." By allowing life, work and even children to take precedence, some partners lose their will. This is all too preventable! Problem is, most folks decide they don't have the time or energy to nurture what once came so easily. Maybe the toughest life-development task for married people is navigating the turn from recreation (dating) to responsibility (married life, household, family, jobs). Somewhere in all that, couples lose touch with each other. Others lose their

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marriages in the “power struggle” coined by practitioners of *Imago Therapy*. That is, they wake up to some mature realities about each other and begin to conflict at those points. In any event, slow damage can be done.

The person you’re marrying won’t be the person you wake up next to 25 years from now — not by a long shot

To be fair to myself, I actually DO tell them this, but with a little different approach. If we married when fairly young, we really didn’t know ourselves. Much less could we know deeply who that person next to us was becoming. Life takes you places you can’t foresee. You win victories and you suffer losses. Each of these shapes and re-shapes you. Among the adult developmental tasks is coming to grips with who you are and who you are not. There is celebration and grief in these processes. We must do the same with regard to our spouses. Things that were once important about the other are less important, and things we once did not know about each other will rise dramatically in importance.

Your families of origin have far more powerful hold on you than you want to admit.

Much of how you function in a marriage relationship, as well as who you were attracted to, is informed by your parents. Probably more than you want to realize when you are marrying. While I do spend an entire session on families (and families of origin), my pre-maritals will be years discovering what they need to understand about this influence. Their roles, biases, habits, assumptions and more are shaped from home. Are you eternally locked in to these roles? Of course not, but even the conscious choices we make to “rebel” against our family’s ways are shaped by our past. As a young married, your spouse asks, “Why does your family...?” And you reply, “Well, I never even thought to ask why we...” Yeah, that’d be the kind of thing I’m talking about. It’s not too late to interview yourself about your family of origin and its ways! What it was, and what it wasn’t.

A healthy marriage is as much miracle as it is hard work

When we get married, we choose our mate as best we know how. Prayerfully, we do this well. When we do, we’re off to a better start (obviously) than those who choose poorly. Hopefully, with good pre-marital counseling and healthy emotional intelligence, both partners work at the marriage. But beyond that hard work, a mature chemistry has to develop and negotiations have to be held sacred by both. As you both change with time, you work at your partnership and your renegotiate. But the longer I am married—and the more couples I work with—the more mystery there is to why some marriages work healthfully and why others don’t.

Similarly, there are some factors that are simply beyond your control

This is different from the statement on “mystery” you read just now. There are practicalities here. You cannot love for both of you; you can only love for yourself. You cannot be happy for both of you, you can only be happy for yourself. You cannot have integrity for both of you. You cannot be satisfied or interested for both of you; these are functions that each of you will have to nurture individually and then together.

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