



Themes That Make Marriage Richer

*Be the presence of Christ for your partner
by helping these happen*

Grace

To be human is to need grace. And, to be married is to sign on as roommates for life! That means there are roles to negotiate, standards of upkeep to decide and plenty of opportunities to disappoint each other. Remember that college roomie who got under your skin in a million different ways? We all need the gentle accountability of one who has been invited into a deeper intimacy in our lives. Forgiveness—and a next chance—are practices that not all couples share. Some people define the “grace” as being un-merited good fortune. Others would suggest that grace speaks of us receiving something we didn’t deserve. Sometimes, grace may mean that we actually get an outcome that we didn’t earn. At other times, it means we may get patience or less penalty than we truly earned. For whatever reason, not all spouses grant their partners grace even though this is part of the marriage covenant. The developmental task for marriage is to bank up trust and good will so that our partners are motivated to continue extending that good grace when we most need it. Married interaction has an underlying risk/reward scenario that plays out as we relate. To some extent, we “earn” our spouse’s gift of grace. At other times, a healthy relationship displays flexibility and nurture that can only be described as an unmerited gift. Give grace, get grace.

Balance

“Balance” doesn’t get much play among biblical scholars. In fact, “balance” wouldn’t make anybody’s top-ten list of theological themes. Read your scriptures again, though. See the wisdom literature such as Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. In the New Testament, pay attention to Jesus’ teachings in the gospels. Watch how He dealt with people. Listen to His guidance of individuals and groups toward health. In the middle of it all is balance. So, the challenge is this: how can you serve as an accountability partner for your spouse? In what ways will each of you guide the other toward the health and truth that is so often found in some sense of balance? These issues often involve *schedules, work, health, relationships, recreation and romance*. While this list is not exhaustive, it may sound exhausting! The key is in realizing that this is not likely to be a constant duty. A degree of healthy partnership is simply in serving as a gauge for each other when life patterns its way into excess. Talk it over. Will you give each other a sense of permission to sound the alarm when you see a need for adjustment? If so, then you may have a great helper with achieving healthy balance in your lives.

Commitment

An old college friend had been dating his girlfriend for years. He asked a trusted mentor, “How will I ever know if she’s the One?” The answer was a surprise. The wise response went like this: “You’re not looking for the One who’ll always look like she does now. Nor are you looking for the one you’ll never have a disagreement with. You’re looking for the one you can commit to.” While commitment isn’t the only ingredient in a healthy relationship, it is the substance that binds a relationship together. We all want commitment from our friends and family members. In a marriage, commitment is what motivates you to work toward healthier

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outcomes. Commitment is the factor that causes you to do the hard work of conflict resolution and that spurs you on to keep up the surprises that nurture romance. Sometimes, a relationship deteriorates to the point that commitment may be the only thread left hanging. How have you shown your partner lately that you're in for the long run?

Presence

Marriage can be one of the loneliest places on earth. Ask the wife whose husband is a high-powered executive but has ceded over house and kids for her to run alone. Or, ask the husband who wishes his wife would tell him she loves him once in a while at least. Marriage is about two people pledging to be available to one another. This means having regular conversation, and at a level deeper than "Did you stop and get the milk like I asked you?" Active listening conveys connection and a sense of care. This can't be e-mailed or text messaged in. Presence is about knowing when to listen and when to offer help. Presence requires a feel about when the newspaper needs to be put down and the internet connection shut down so that two partners truly have one another! We all need connection. By being an active presence for your spouse, you help to feed their soul. You help God to keep their spirit alive and well. Find ways that are relevant to your partner so that you can practice a kind of presence that counts!

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