

Is Your Marriage at Risk?

Headline:

Is your marriage at risk? Do you know the warning signs, the key life changes that stress marriages, what can you do to assess and address your risk.

Objective:

Divorce is a reality for many couples that forever change the lives of the husband, wife, children and all the extended family and friends. Catholics are not immune to this, and divorce also creates an issue of being able to fully take part in all parts of the Catholic faith.

We have interviewed 4 Father's Team men (all Catholic) who have either gone through, or are going through divorce now to get some idea of what were some of the potential issues, what the men wished they could have done differently, and what they would like to have heard 2-3 years before the divorce (from a Father's Team Meeting) that would have helped them do more to preserve the marriage. Some of the men realize that it was really the right thing for the couple to separate, and some thought they (and their spouse) could have done more to keep the marriage together.

However, some of the things that we as a Father's Team should discuss in this topic are:

1. Communication – what kind of discussions are you having at home?
 - A. Are your conversations only about discussing logistics of kid sports and 'what goes on the shopping list'?
 - B. Instead, can you name your wives 3 best friends and confidants?
 - C. Do you know the dreams and aspirations of your wife?
 - D. Are you telling your female co-workers more about your life than your wife?
2. How did your marriage start?
 - A. Some of the men realized (too late) that 'maybe' their wives got married for the wrong reason.
 - B. Some women are running 'away' from a situation (i.e. home life) and not running 'toward' something (you). Realistically, it is too late for all of us to revisit this – but again getting back to communication – do you know enough the history of your marriage – have you talked about it?
 - C. This is also a great topic to be talking to our kids who are considering marriage – can you coach your kids to really understand these dynamics?
3. Life Stage impact on our marriage – are you paying attention?
 - A. Some of the men interviewed started having issues – or were told their wives wanted a divorce – when the youngest child was going off to school full time.
 - B. When the youngest is 7 years old, the couples were married from 15-20 years and all of a sudden the wife's primary role as 'mom' was diminished – at the same time that the man is 'hitting his stride' from a career standpoint.
 - C. Have you talked about 'her' role when the heavy lifting of child care slows down?
 - D. Are you hitting your stride in your career, with lots of late nights, lots of travel, promotions, and business dinners? Are you missing a critical life stage opportunity to talk?

These questions should be a topic for the men of the Father's Team, and we should all examine the health of our marriage.

Some of the other ideas volunteered by the men (besides the topics above) were:

1. Do you talk enough about meaningful things?
2. Do you pray together?
3. If you are having issues – have you addressed? Did you consider a priest, our deacons, marriage counseling?
4. There are techniques that can be used to change the negative dynamics into positive communication – would you be interested in learning new techniques (one of our Father's may be teaching this).

5. One of the men said in hindsight he would have – cuddled more, talked more about his day and asked her about hers, really kiss her every day, more time with her and less with kids, ask for more feedback, learn to dance, tell her I am proud of her, smile more and savor her eyes.

Song Suggestion: Christ Be Our Light

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Ephesians 5:25-28

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Ephesians 5:31

“For this reason, a man shall leave (his) father and (his) mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

Catechism 1642

Christ is the source of this grace. "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony." Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb: How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.

Catechism 2385

Divorce is immoral also because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society.

Saint: St Joseph – From Venerable Fulton Sheen, from “The World’s First Love”: Mary and Joseph brought to their espousals not only their vows of virginity but also two hearts with greater torrents of love than had ever before coursed through human breasts. No husband and wife ever loved one another so much as Joseph and Mary. Their marriage was not like that of others, because the right to the body was surrendered; in normal marriages, unity in the flesh is the symbol of its consummation, and the ecstasy that accompanies a consummation is only a foretaste of the joy that comes to the soul when it attains union with God through grace...But in the case of Mary and Joseph, there was no need of the symbol of the unity of the flesh, since they already possessed the Divinity...in the beautiful language of Leo XIII: “The consummation of their love was in Jesus.”

Vignette: I have been there done that! Lost my marriage. Got a divorce. Not pretty. A lot of suffering for my wife, my children and me. I tried everything. Counseling. Confession. Pleading. Advice. What I didn’t do was go to God and ask Him what to do. I knew it was going downhill. I knew we were in trouble. But I didn’t consider the outcome. The damage. The hurt. If your marriage is in trouble, I beg you to go spend time with Jesus. I beg your wife to spend time with you and Jesus. I can tell you this, doing those verses going through a

divorce is a lot easier and much more fulfilling. Put your life on the line for your wife and your family. Fight for your marriage men!

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

1. Are you willing to have a serious conversation with your wife about marriage? Are YOU?
2. How often do you examine your own behavior in your marriage before blaming your spouse? Look in the mirror MEN!
3. How would you rate your ability to communicate with your spouse? How could you improve this? Don't tell God you want to improve unless you mean it. Otherwise, don't call yourself a Christian.

Resources:

1. <https://helpourmarriage.org/>
2. The Four Stages of Marriage: <https://retrouvaille.info/4-stages-of-marriage-2/>

The Seven Warning Signs of a Sick Marriage

By Norman Bales

1. When courtesies are abandoned.
2. When couples begin to think in terms of "I" instead of "We."
3. When they stop complimenting each other.
4. When stubborn silence replaced common-sense communication.
5. When they stop praying together.
6. When they fail to sense and meet the needs of each other.
7. When they fail to express love.

The FIVE "D"'s

DESIRE – Recognize a need for change

DIALOGUE – Share Feelings

DISCUSS – Express thoughts, ideas, opinions, attitudes

DECIDE – Compromise, Decide to Love

DO – Action to create change

The 5 "D's" are encompassed in the relationship of a healthy communicating couple. If any of them are missing, then growth, intimacy and change will be stifled. Let's start with the 2nd D – DIALOGUE. We can DIALOGUE every day and feel close to each other, but if we don't take time to DISCUSS our issues, and the thoughts, desires and needs we have concerning them, then we won't make any movement from what we learned about each other in the DIALOGUE.

If we DIALOGUE and DISCUSS regularly, but don't make any DECISIONS about our issues, then we just go around in circles. If we DIALOGUE on feelings, DISCUSS our issues, and make DECISIONS, but don't follow through with our actions, never doing anything about the issues, then we will frustrate the relationship and ourselves.

And now for the last D which must be listed first. Without the DESIRE to do the other four, we go nowhere.

DESIRE is the motivator that makes our communication happen and compels us to move toward change. When trying to resolve conflict or solve a problem, the 5 "D's" are imperative to follow.

Step it up!

This week would be a good time to start:

1. A serious discussion with your wife
2. An examination of your own behaviors

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