

Jerk!

Eric Freel

“Jerk!” and out the door she went.

Shockingly I had just been called a jerk by my new bride. This was the young and beautiful woman I had dated for only a month before knowing I wanted her as my wife. So it would look respectable, four more months passed before I asked for her hand in marriage. Three short months later we were hitched and living in honeymoon bliss. Then came the fateful moment; “Jerk!” Reality was slapping me in the face as the car door shut with a little more purpose, energy, and noise than necessary. Who would have thought a car door could be used as such an effective instrument of communication? But the message was loud and clear: in the mind of my bride I was a jerk.

No doubt she was right in her evaluation. Her powers of discernment, especially in judging character, have always been superior to mine. Whatever it was that I had said or done to deserve the appellation of jerk was undoubtedly worthy of the label, no doubt about that, but it was still a shock. Like most young men entering into the holy covenant of marriage with a woman they are madly in love with, I thought our adventure as husband and wife would be lived in the land of marital ecstasy, free from trouble and strife, especially since our bond was firmly rooted in the principles of Scripture and aimed at glorifying God. Surely this was a shield able to ward off all challengers of perpetual bliss. I was wrong. Only a month into our marriage a volcanic eruption had unsettled things. For the next day or so we gave each other the cold shoulder and silent treatment. My actions were prompted by her verbalizing the fact I was a jerk, and her silence was borne out of the reality of my “jerkness.”

Here is a key lesson for young married folk who may be of the naive attitude that no problem will ever enter their marriage and disrupt their pristine existence as man and wife. Troubles will come! Of that you can be certain. The wise man Job said, “Man is a few days and full of trouble.” Unfortunately this can be true of marriages as well. The troubles entering marriage will be as varied as the colors of Joseph’s multicolored coat and as numerous as the snakes protruding from Medusa’s head. There is certainty that trouble will come, it is inevitable, and it is the real world. Wisdom recognizes this reality and makes suitable preparation.

What is the suitable preparation wisdom makes for a good marriage? Let’s consider a few basic elements. A good starting place is the nature of man. Here we are faced with a great conflict of philosophies. The humanistic philosophy that dominates the United States in our day teaches man is basically good. The Christian perspective, solidly rooted in Scripture, teaches man is a fallen creature and is depraved in every part of his being. Specifically his mind, affections, will, conscience and even his physical body have been negatively affected by sin. One of the devastating practical effects of this corrupt nature is the extreme **self-centeredness** of the average person. This self-centeredness is evidenced many ways. Just a few days ago I read a motivation piece in a local paper telling the readers above all things we “must be true to ourselves.” Now let’s apply this to marriage. A self-centered man and a self-centered woman agree to marry and live together under one roof, with one table, one bed and each has an attitude of being true to himself or herself. It does not take much creative thought to know what will happen in this marriage. When two self-centered people marry, something has to give – or should we say someone has to give? Actually both have to give! Here is one of the marvelous things about a good marriage: it will teach each spouse exactly how selfish they are and then to give up some of that selfishness. The selfishness has to go. Maintaining the selfish attitude is a sure way to get oneself labeled a jerk.

Love is another essential element of marital preparation taught by wisdom. Here again we run into a serious conflict of ideas. The philosophy of much modern music promotes the errant idea that love equals sex. Though this has sold many CDs, it is a formula for disaster. There is no doubt sexual intimacy plays an important part of the marriage bond, but that is not all there is to love. Another errant philosophy of love boils it down to a feeling. This is as dangerous as the first error, for as soon as feeling changes, which happens often and at times quickly, love is seemingly lost. Feelings are a vital part but they are not the sum and substance of a lasting love.

True love has identifiable characteristics. Four of these are: understanding, commitment, sacrifice, and service. First, love seeks to understand the other person. Several years ago, while a sixth grade teacher, I was quite condemning of a family who dropped their children off at school very early and picked them up very late. “What parents these must be!” “Why would they have children if they don’t want them around!” Then, as Providence would have it, I taught their oldest child and became good friends with the parents. They spoke of how heart-wrenching it was to drop their children in such a way – it was tearing them up – but through a bad business deal they were forced to do so. Finding out the real situation was a severe rebuke to me. So in marriage, we need to live in an understanding way with our spouses.

One more aspect of understanding must be stressed. Understanding your spouse is an avenue to greater delight and pleasure. As with the Living and True God, the God of Biblical revelation, so with our spouses; the more one gets to know God, the greater delight and pleasure one finds in the Almighty. Thus the more a man gets to know his wife, the greater will be his delight in her. The more a bride gets to know her husband the greater delight she will have in him. Getting to know each other is a lifetime commitment.

Commitment is the second characteristic of love that needs to be stressed. Love is a commitment! This is the very idea of a marriage covenant. The covenant is a formal agreement made in the presence of God that says the two parties being joined in marriage are committed to one another. It is this commitment that will carry the marriage through the “jerk” stages that are bound to come. Feelings will fall far short at times, many times, but the commitment to love one’s spouse will carry the marriage through hard times and make it stronger. It will produce a great love and a greater delight.

The third ingredient wisdom brings to a marriage is **sacrifice**. Marriage demands sacrifice! Each person entering into marriage must know of a certainty he or she will have to sacrifice much in order for the marriage to work. Without sacrifice turmoil, tension and turbulence will characterize the relationship, and very little marital bliss will be experienced.

The final ingredient identifiable in true love is **service**. Marriage is a call to serve. Husbands are called to serve their wives, and wives are called to serve their husbands. This is a root part of the word love. The great obstacle to serving is the selfishness mentioned above. The person too selfish to serve his spouse is a fool working to destroy the one relationship that should serve as the greatest source of delight on earth.

Marriage, as created by God, serves mankind as the institution able to provide an extreme amount of joy, pleasure and delight. But to attain to this high ideal and experience the joy of marriage the principles established to govern it must be embraced and employed. This may take a lot of work, but it is work well worth doing!