

# *For Better . . . For Worse*

## The Reality Factor

February 5, 2012

HDBC

### **Play Video - 1-Dick Van Dyke Marriage**

**This year Jan and I will celebrate 35 year of marriage.** I can honestly say it has been a great 35 years. I cannot imagine what my life would be like without her. She is not only my wife, but also my best friend. I'd rather be with her than with anyone else in the world.

**I'm so glad God came up with the idea of marriage.** What a neat thing, that among the billions on the planet, He would bring a man and a woman together in a special bond of love that will bless them for the rest of their lives. Not only have Jan and I received this great blessing, but God will also do the same for our children. And there children. And so on.

**Marriage is a fantastic institution.** But it is one that requires knowledge, effort and commitment. There are a lot of marriages that don't produce the kind of joy and satisfaction that Jan and I enjoy. Some married couples live in misery with each other. Others are torn about by divorce. Each divorce leaves a trail of tears and scars.

**Because I know that there are incredible forces at work pulling husbands and wives apart,** I want to do what I can to help counteract those forces. As hard as Satan wants to break up marriages, I want to help heal marriages. He wants to weaken the marriage relationship. I want to strengthen it.

**I don't want to see any of the couples in our church get divorced.** Period. Not only that, but I want to help all of the marriages in our church to get better. **Do you think your marriage can get better?** Don't answer that out loud. Your spouse might not understand. But I think most would admit that they can do a better job of being husband or wife.

To that end that I am starting a new series of messages.

I want to help married couples, and soon to be married couples gain some insight into some of the key factors that can lead to marriage to being better rather than worse.

This morning we will look at what I'm calling the ***Reality Factor***.

**Imagine it's your wedding day.** You are so excited. The day you have waited for.

The wedding is beautiful. You take your new bride off to the honeymoon. The next morning you wake up and look over at her beautiful face only to discover that woman lying beside you is not the one you intended to marry. By some strange twist of fate, you've married the wrong person.

**As strange as that sounds, it actually happened to a guy in the Bible.** His name is Jacob. I want to read a part of his story. Jacob has done some bad things. Deceived his brother out of his birthright and his blessing. Now he has to run for his life. In his travels he came upon a group of people to whom he was distantly related. Fell in love with a young lady named Rachel. In fact, he was so in love with her that he agreed to work for her daddy for seven years in order to gain her hand in marriage. That's love!!

**After the seven years it was time for the wedding.** Well, listen to the story.

### **Genesis 29:21-30**

**Wow. What a shock. What a disappointment.** What a problem. Would you agree with me that there was a huge gap between his expectation of marriage and the reality of marriage. **I want to say to you that this happens over and over again in America.** Not that people wake up the morning after their wedding to discover that they have married their fiancé's sister. But at some point in the marriage they wake up to discover that their expectation of marriage, their fantasy of what it would be like is a long way from the reality.

**At that point** they are experiencing what I call the ***Reality Factor***.

**It happens to all who marry.** There is absolutely no way that a person's pre-wedding fantasy of what married life will be like can perfectly match the reality of that life. For some, the gap between fantasy and reality is greater than for others. **The important thing is what the couple does once that discovery is made.**

**In Jacob's case he took an option that I don't recommend.** A week later he simply added the sister whom he really wanted to marry. So, he was suddenly the husband of two wives. That's not what I recommend.

**Some couples take equally drastic steps.** Rather than simply adding a spouse to the one they have, they discard the original and go get another.

Sometimes marriages start out as ideal, then they become an ordeal, and then they begin to look for a new deal. (Adrian Rogers)

**I don't want you to look for a new deal.** I want you to understand the Reality Factor

and know how to deal with it in a positive way. Three things to consider:

## 1. **The Fantasy**

Every person brings to the wedding a certain set of expectations. A fantasy about what marriage life is going to be like. You've dated the person for some time. Experienced all kind of things together. But there are still some elements of the relationship that remain a mystery until you are married. Though you have been with each other in some pretty "real" situations, you cannot fully know the reality of what it will be like to live with your spouse.

**And so, you imagine.** You fantasize about how wonderful it will be. When you think about being married to that person your heart rate goes up, your palms get sweaty, you tingle with anticipation. You imagine a wonderful honeymoon that will really never end for you. You think of every great love song written and just know that they were all written with the two of you in mind.

*Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me – Mel Carter*

*At Last – Etta James*

That 70's classic, *We've Only Just Begun – Carpenters*

So, what are some of the elements of the pre-wedding fantasy?

### A. **Romance will be Automatic, Never-ending, and Perfect**

I've chosen those three words carefully. The fantasy says romance will be **automatic**. No need to work at it, think about it or make an attempt to maintain it. Each morning when you wake up and look at your spouse you will just ooze with feelings of romance that will last into the night.

Second, some believe it will be **never-ending**. One perpetual romance. Through all the mundane things that you have to do in life there will always be that sizzle, that sparkle, that tingle of romance.

Finally, that it will be **perfect**. He will do all the right things at the right times. She will say all the perfect things to remind you of how much she loves you.

He will bring you flowers at just the right times.

She will wear the right night gown at just the right times.

The romance of marriage including the act of physical intimacy will be perfect not only from the first night of the honeymoon, but throughout the course of the marriage.

Your husband or wife is going to meet all of your needs perfectly. Physical, emotional, relational needs. He or she will be there to see that your every need

is fulfilled.

**B. The Budget will Always Balance**

There will be no money worries. One of the things that I talk with couples about in pre-marital counseling sessions is budgeting. In fact I require that they work out a budget for the first year of their marriage.

Nobody goes into a marriage thinking, "boy I'm sure we are going to have some serious financial problems." There is absolutely no way until you are married and on your own, that you can really know what it is like to be financially stressed.

One study indicated that young married adults typically spend 8% more than they make.

**C. The Kids will Have Straight Teeth and Be Potty-trained in Two Weeks**

Vision that the kids will be perfect.

Never vomit on the new couch or poop 30 seconds after you change diapers.

Never tell the family secrets to the daycare teacher when they are 4.

Never stay out past curfew when they get to be teenager.

**D. The Roof will Never Leak**

There will be no major catastrophes. The little house you buy will be just what you think it is, with no hidden surprises. Spiders that are invading everyone else's houses will somehow decide to stay away from yours.

Life will rock along just as planned.

**E. My Spouse will Never Gain Weight, Get Wrinkles, or Grow Old**

These are all fantasies.

**2. The Reality**

The reality is quite different from the fantasy.

Marriage is when you agree to spend the rest of your life sleeping in a room that's too warm, beside someone who's sleeping in a room that's too cold.

In reality . . .

**A. Romance Must Be Developed and Maintained**

Romance can be nearly perfect, and never-ending. But it will not be automatic. It will have to be maintained. It can easily get lost in the weariness of getting through the week. It can easily be pushed to a back burner. Unfortunately, once it has been there a while, the flame can begin to cool down.

**B. The Budget will Seldom be Balanced**

There will be more surprises than you can imagine. You will seldom be able to build in enough extra for emergencies. Car will break down. Overnight stay in a hospital. A/C needing to be replaced. All budget busters.

**C. The Kids will Not be Perfect**

If the teeth are straight, the potty-training will almost certainly be a nightmare. If the potty-training goes well, look out for first grade. Children are wonderful, but they are not perfect. They are human beings in developing bodies, with developing brains. Brains that are not always used to their potential.

**D. Catastrophes and Tragedies will Happen**

Life will throw some pretty unsettling situations at you. Loss of job. Major illness. Death in the family. All of these can create stress on your marriage.

**E. Your Spouse's Appearance will Change**

Enough said about that.

One wife shared the following . . . Soon after our last child left for college, my husband was resting next to me on the couch with his head in my lap. I carefully removed his glasses. "You know, honey," I said sweetly, "without your glasses you look like the same handsome young man I married." "Honey," he replied with a grin, "without my glasses, you still look pretty good too!"

So, what happens when reality drowns out fantasy? Some want to make radical changes.

The speaker at a woman's club was lecturing on marriage and asked the audience how many wanted to "mother" our husbands. One member in the back row raised her hand.

"You want to mother your husband?" the speaker asked.

"Mother?" the woman echoed. "I thought you said smother."

**3. The Key Principle**

I want to make a statement that is at least partially based on a statement by Gary Smalley in his book, Making Love Last Forever.

*The wider the gap between what we expect and the reality of what we experience, the greater the stress on a marriage and the greater the potential for a broken marriage.*

If there is a great gap, then the possibility for disillusionment, discouragement and frustration is great. If the gap is small, then the possibility for those things is small.

So, what is the solution? The make the gap smaller. How do we do that?

**Three ways to make a gap smaller.** Move side A toward side B. Move side B toward side A. Move both A and B toward each other. The third is the best option.

**A. Adjust Your Fantasy**

Take a look at your expectations? Are they realistic? If not, work on making some adjustments. Recognize that there are some things outside of your control.

**B. Adjust Your Reality**

If there are expectations that you have, that can be reached, work to do so.

The wife of a Baptist minister share that she had seen many marriage licenses. On one, after the blank for number of marriages, the groom had answered: "First." The bride had entered the word: "Last."