

"Marriage: A Crucible For..."
Proverbs 15:1-6 and Ephesians 5:21-27

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Mark Dunn

While working as an apprentice pattern-maker, I was not only introduced to that craft but to metalurgy and the pouring of sand castings. One problem is the impurities in the metal. Risers are cut in the molds to trap the impurities. But without the extreme heat applied to the crucible that contains the metal, the impurities cannot be separated.

The metallurgist's crucible is an image of marriage grounded in reality. When heat is applied, a relationship is refined. Isaiah used this image to describe God purifying the people of Israel. "Behold, I refined you.....in the furnace of affliction."(48:10) The family therapist Carl Whitaker said that "the most important function of marriage is to increase stress and anxiety in a person's life." "All's fair in love and war, and marriage is both."(p.254) My wife Diana and myself have been married for 23 years, and believe me, it has been a crucible of both "love and war." Lederer and Jackson, in their book, *Mirages of Marriage*, said "Marriage is like taking an airplane to Florida for a relaxing vacation in January, and when you get off the plane you find you're in the Swiss Alps."(p.39)

Most marriages at one time or the other, descend into a kind of hell, and hopefully later, experience resurrection and growth. There are times when you are in the flower shop of love and other times when it is as uncomfortable as picking cotton in Georgia in the heat of summer. There are times when you could eat each other up and other times when you wish you had.

I. THE MARRIAGE CRUCIBLE OF HELL

Marriage, like life, is a continuous process, involving constant growth and metamorphosis. As we grow older and the external pressures come, the marriage changes from the heat of an unstable and unsatisfactory relationship to one which is stable, loving and Christlike, and satisfying.

A. According to the authors of the book *Mirages of Marriage*, couples who are in an unstable and unsatisfying stage are "Weary-Wranglers." This is a couple whose relationship is like two gunfighters shooting at each other on the streets of Dodge City. They are like two totalitarian governments struggling for control. This couple has turned up the heat of disappointment and anger. Self-evaluation is absent and blaming is the mood of each day. It has never crossed their minds that "a soft answer turns away wrath."(15:1) In our third year of marriage, Diana and I lived outside a little town called "Meansville, Ga." The name characterized our relationship at that time. We had what Philip Chard called "Me-it is."

Dr. Robert Moore, in a class on personality disorders, said a person who is narcissistic will marry one who is dependent. Then he presented a scenario of the relationships progress. After graduating from college the submissive wife helps put him through medical school, law school or seminary. After school, the

unempathetic husband pours himself into his career and she quits work to raise the family. She lives out Paul's statement that "wives should be subject to their husbands." Ten or fifteen years go by and the dependent wife is feeling less and less like a real person. She is tired all the time. So she, too, seeks therapy and begins to feel better about herself. She gets in touch with her warrior shadow which she had been holding down and becomes more assertive.

But what is the result of the new life in her psyche? Civil war breaks out. Next thing we notice she is telling him to sleep in the garage. When Dr. Moore finished the illustration, the clergy person sitting next to me admitted to being narcissistic and egotistical, let out a groan and put his head on the desk. He confessed to me later that the professor had just explained every step in his marriage. At that time he was sleeping in a fourth bedroom. Without transformation on his part, a reuniting of the relationship would be like a horse returning to a burning barn.

B. The couple in the second method of functioning in this crucible of marriage has turned the heat down low. Their relationship is stable but emotionally unsatisfactory. Their relationship has become hard and brittle like bad iron castings. As long as there is no outside stress, the marriage can stay in tact, but if stress comes, it can break.

1) They are the "Gruesome Twosomes."(p.153) They live by the philosophy that "people in glass houses shouldn't throw bricks." This couple practices avoidance at all costs. In order to assure themselves that they have a happy marriage, they have to tell suspicious friends "how happy they are." They tell each other how happy they are, never sharing their disappointments or their frustrations. But it leaks out in other ways. The husband would rather be over at a friend's house watching the Brewers play. The wife would rather go to worship alone.

2) Some couples in a stable and unsatisfactory relationship become "Paranoid Predators."(p.157) They avoid dealing with their pain by turning their guns on some outside enemy. We have two warriors against the world. These may join some anti-communist group, anti-capitalist group, anti-abortion group, or any kind of anti-group. This is done to divert attention away from the emotional dissatisfaction they are experiencing. Thus, many people involved in public protest do so because their marriage is in the crucible of hell.

The person who loses his spouse while in this avoidance pattern may have difficulty resolving his grief because he hasn't dealt with the pain in his marriage. There are two losses; grieving over the loss of the dream of an ideal relationship, as well as the loss of the person.

II. CRUCIBLE FOR RESURRECTION AND GROWTH

We turn now to a way of functioning in this crucible of marriage which has potential for growth. The heat is at a more manageable level so that impurities in the relationship can be dealt with in creative ways.

A. The first is the unstable but satisfactory relationship. The authors of the *"Mirages of Marriage"* call this method of relating, the "Spare-time Battlers." (p.135) This marriage involves persons who generally find fulfillment in their relationship. Although they love each other and are usually comfortable together, periodic episodes of instability occur when stress comes due to outside circumstances. On occasion there is immature bargaining when the wife buys a new dress; the husband buys himself a new set of golf clubs to balance individual spending. But they recognize each other's strengths and are deeply romantic at times. Probably, most of our marriages function at this level. We are in "hell some days, in heaven other days, and just plain married most days." (p.136)

I have a suspicion that most marriages start out as part-time battles. Before you marry, you notice some behavior you would like to change in your mate. Of course you don't begin to make those changes during the honeymoon; you wait until the next week after you return. So, for several days you have been very nice to each other, but that doesn't last. After we returned from our honeymoon, my wife Diana, on one occasion prepared that southern delicacy "fried chicken" for lunch. But upon tasting it I noticed the chicken wasn't done around the bone. This is when I made my first complaint. She looked hurt and rejected. So, trying to ease the situation, I suggested that she ask my mother "how to fry chicken?" To this day, I don't understand why she locked herself in the bathroom. Most of us continue to function as part-time battlers.

B. The last crucible for marriage functioning is both stable and satisfactory. This is still not the Garden of Eden or "happily ever after." But such a harmonious relationship is rarely achieved. When it does, it is a couple who has been married some "30 or more years," or "who has remarried late in life some years after being widowed" (p.130). We will notice certain ingredients in the crucible of their marriage.

1) First, they will have similar backgrounds and similar values. They will seek to find things they have in common. Lederer and Jackson recalled a couple who had been married 43 years who appeared to be "born for each other." They discovered that "both were second-generation Armenians whose fathers had been doctors and whose mothers had been nurses." Following this same pattern, the husband was a doctor and the wife a nurse. They were totally collaborative. Each loved and was loved. (p.132)

2) Second, each person has the freedom to be himself and develop his own identity as an individual created in the image of God. The couple's relationship isn't built on a hierarchical structure. Both have equal authority and one vote in regard to important decisions. There is the absence of totalitarianism. In other words, there is limited government, not big government. So many times I observe persons with strong limited government views, but who function like a democrat in their marriage relationship; always creating a new policy. Carl Jung said the shadow in all of us will leak out.

3) Third, there is mutual submission and sacrifice. Now I know these may be dirty words to us. We are taught to be tough competitors rather than sacrifice.

I read for our hearing a moment ago that troublesome passage of St. Paul's which calls for "wives to be subject to your husbands." But what most male chauvinists don't notice is that Paul also told husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." Have you husbands noticed how Christ loved the church? He served them. They didn't serve him. He washed their feet. Husbands, how many times have you washed your wife's feet? He cooked and served them breakfast by the sea. How many wives have had breakfast in bed prepared by the husband? He gave the church his mind and heart. At the very last he gave them his body. Real love means we are to humble ourselves occasionally that the other may be lifted up.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is a crucible where relationships and individuals may be refined. In order to grow, the impurities have to be extracted and love and respect retained. To do this, we turn down the temperature of rage and anger and turn up the heat of love.

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