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CHAPTER 1

Modern Day World

Our world today presents life differently than ever before. We can no longer look at our parents' and their parents' relationships as the sole example of how to be married. No generation before us lived with the Internet, cell service, and all their benefits and complications: instant communication with anyone, anywhere, anytime and photos and videos on your smart phone that can be emailed to anyone. Dating websites allow us instantly to view and communicate with people around the globe. I can go on and on, but you get the point — instantly. No one before us dealt with instant access to everything and the expectation and demand for instant gratification. No complete generation lived with the distractions we've created for ourselves, all in the interest of progress. Never before have we had the availability of thousands of eligible people to date, who are neatly segregated by age, interests, education, religion, wealth, and so forth. Shopping for mates instantly at our fingertips, without leaving the comfort of our own homes for only a small monthly fee, are you kidding me?

And don't forget the websites promoting infidelity. Those do exist, and as abhorrent as they are, there are no laws against them — yet. What do those websites tell us consciously or subconsciously about marriage? How can more and easier communication be-

tween random people have anything but a negative effect on marriages? There are published studies on the connection between the Internet and divorce, but the results are inconclusive. I think proof of the long-term detrimental effect of the Internet on marriage is inevitable.

So how do those of us with expectations of marriage for life deal with the modern world and all its complications? Even if we aren't married but want to live with a partner indefinitely, we must still understand the dynamics applicable to marriage and how to avoid distractions. The alternative to living together is living alone, going from one partner to the next in endless succession until we find compatibility or until we are too old, unattractive, or bitter to attract a mate. The goal for most of us is to hang on to our chosen one and be happy at the same time; at least, it is for those of you taking time to read this book. By the way, thank you for reading this.

With high break up rates and the opportunities of this modern world making it difficult for couples to stay together, we must incorporate new habits and skills into our lives to adjust to the times. Remember, those living in biblical times never dealt with the Internet, smart phones, and satellite television.

What do we do about the difficulty of staying together, or more importantly, can we do anything about it? Of course, we can; but to fix the problem, we must understand the problem. Drastic times call for drastic measures, and these are drastic times for the institution of marriage. It's not a popular topic of conversation because it's not "sexy." We like to make jokes about it, and the cure is not simply swallowing a pill and walking three miles a day. More people care more about weight loss than spouse loss. The stores are full of weight loss products; billions of dollars are spent and made on weight loss cures and education, but little to none on the problem of spouse loss.

Where is the conversation in the media about driving down the divorce rate, the perils of divorce, being kinder and more loving to your spouse, and how to improve our marriages? Do you hear the same sucking sound I hear in that regard? Who among us is raising millions or billions of dollars for research to find a divorce cure? Isn't divorce a disease that afflicts millions of people? Divorce negatively affects more people than cancer, yet no one seems to care. Is that because divorce doesn't kill, but cancer and heart disease do? If you've ever been divorced, you know it's a killer. An old divorce joke sums up that sentiment nicely: the good thing about divorce is — it doesn't kill you; the bad thing about divorce is — it doesn't kill you.

Life has changed, marriage is changing, and if you think I'm wrong, you haven't been paying attention. If we're to have any hope of the marriage tradition surviving, we need to figure out the new rules. We can no longer just "hope" to stay married and keep doing "marriage as usual," because folks, marriage as we once knew it isn't working. From what I see, marriage rates are down, and the divorce rate is holding steady. Eventually, if those trends continue, we'll be a world of single people. Is that progress? I can't answer that question for you, but for me it's not. It saddens me to think of my children being unmarried, or raising their children as single parents, or working all their lives as they grow old, single, and perhaps alone.

That scenario is very sad, but it's a very real possibility in our children's lifetimes. So, you ask, what do we do about it? What we do is we figure out how to be married in today's world during our lifetimes, then pass those skills to our children, a goal we can reach, so pay attention! Educating ourselves is the first step toward reaching the goal of staying married for life. Congratulations, you are now engaging in the first step because believe me, what you are about to read is a very *real* education!

CHAPTER

Who Loses the Most?



Marriage is a gamble. Each time people say, “I do,” they have a 50/50 chance of “winning,” which I define as lifetime marriage. Pretty steep odds, but we accept them regularly in marriage. Would we accept those odds in any other area of our lives? If your car started only half the time, or your tires blew out every other day, would you own that car? What if the medicine you gave your children was effective only one out of two times? The next time you board an American Airlines flight, suppose Captain Mike welcomes you aboard and announces that we have a 50/50 chance of crashing today. He further tells you there’s been no maintenance on that aircraft in years. What do you immediately do?

We don’t accept 50/50 odds in any areas of our lives except marriage, and we accept those odds because when we marry, we are in love and don’t consider that the failure option applies to us. Or if we have been divorced previously, we believe we learned from the past, or only our ex was to blame. Regardless, we are full of hope for a better outcome with the next hand we are dealt. We are forever hopeful, and ignorance is bliss. We subconsciously believe “what we don’t know won’t hurt us,” yet that’s exactly what kills us. What “you don’t know you don’t know” costs you big every time.

Without any question, other than the death of a child, divorce is the single most emotionally and financially destructive event that can occur in our lives. Maybe the untimely death of a spouse is worse, but a death usually occurs without blame, and life insurance may actually be a financial benefit to the surviving family. There is usually no financial benefit in divorce.

I've seen the effects of divorce on men and women for decades, and the one thing I've observed consistently is that women suffer most as a result of marriage failure. Many women never fully recover from divorce; their lives are forever changed and not for the better. Rebuilding their shattered lives with a diminished time span, fewer skills than they once had, and few financial resources is extremely challenging even for the strongest of individuals. Add to the mix the stress of being single parents and you create a scenario that forces many women into their next relationships for all the wrong reasons, making yet more bad choices.

I know men suffer, and many men never fully recover from divorce either, yet I haven't seen the pain in men nearly as much as I have seen it in women. Perhaps men hide it better, or the fact that, in general, men recover financially from divorce much more quickly than women reduces men's overall suffering. Access to money eases the pain of divorce tremendously, at least in terms of the physical adjustment to the division of a family. Starting your life over emotionally is usually difficult for everyone.

Very few divorced people truly understand what went wrong in their marriages, and I believe that's because we really don't understand how to be married. Think about it. If you don't understand how to do something correctly, how do you know what you did wrong when you fail? How do you know how to be married for a lifetime when you've never been married for a lifetime? How can you know how to do anything complex when you've never

studied it, never practiced it, and never actually successfully done it for any significant period of time? A very substantial number of married couples become divorced after significantly long marriages, but being married for many years doesn't mean they are successful at it. Marriages aren't great for years and years and then suddenly fail miserably at the very end; marriages deteriorate for a very long time until they finally break which proves we aren't doing marriage correctly all along the way.

A 50% failure rate: is the divorce rate really such a mystery?

CHAPTER

What Is Marriage Really About?



Marriage – it’s a great institution, but who wants to be institutionalized? That’s an old joke of course, but within every joke is a grain of truth. How many marriage jokes are out there, and why are there so many? How many lawyer jokes are out there; I think I’ve heard them all (or all I want to hear). Most are funny, but who writes those things anyway? Who writes marriage jokes: people who are married or divorced? Surely not people who never married.

Didn’t we all enter marriage with the same intentions, to be married forever? Who of us said, “I think I’ll get married, raise kids, then divorce my spouse after twenty-five years”? Why can some people be married for life with seemingly little effort, but others should never have married in the first place?

Marriage is about love, kindness, respect, and generosity, all of which perhaps mean nothing more than giving of yourself, your time, and lots of effort to the relationship. Being married is also a legal contract. Legally speaking, you are either married or you’re not; there’s no in-between. If you’re married, even by common law, you must divorce or die to terminate it. Having a legal marriage contract, however, doesn’t automatically guarantee you a good marriage. We can be married and have no relationship, or

we can be married and have a great, loving relationship; there's a huge difference between the two. The marriages I see in my office all became simply legal contracts. Good marriages never see the inside of my law office.

Whether to have a good marriage or simply to be legally married and live your life as you individually choose is up to you. If you have a good marriage, both spouses are loving, kind, respectful, caring, and generous with each other. If you aren't experiencing all those things, I suggest you evaluate your behavior and figure out how to transform your legal relationship into a good marriage.

Marriage requires at least these four elements to endure the test of time:

1. The Marriage Mindset
2. Love and Respect
3. Effort
4. Commitment

The Marriage Mindset

When you decide to marry, you should understand you *must* give up part of yourself. I call this the "marriage mindset." Can you be married and continue to act single? Of course not, but you need to understand why rather than resent giving up certain things in your life. It's the idea that "we" is more important than "me." We marry for many reasons; one of the biggest is to avoid being just "me" in the world. We don't want to live our lives alone; at least, most of us don't. Most of us singles are constantly searching for the next "right" person. Whether we marry or not, once we become "we," life is a completely different game. Being single, "me" can do whatever "me" wants, but once committed to a relationship, "me" can no longer make certain decisions without consequences. "Me" may be in and out of relationships because

“me” may not like playing by traditional relationship rules. Perhaps “me” doesn’t like being limited to one partner, or maybe “me” is lazy (duh) and doesn’t want to do the hard work to become a better partner and better person. Some of us are selfish or just don’t want to commit to a relationship. If you know that about yourself, I say ‘thank you’ because you are saving the world from yet another statistic, and you’re saving someone very special from tremendous pain. However, once you become part of “we,” the rules change, and you had better know and play by them, or you will, in all likelihood, lose the marriage gamble.

Love and Respect

Love is a basic element of marriage in most cultures. Love often begins as the result of passion, which is always based upon feelings. Feelings can change over time as does love. For love to endure, it must mature. Maturity can take a very long time, and half of all marriages never reach maturity. Mature love is enduring love.

As in most other relationships, respect is an essential element of marriage. Respect is based upon behavior, not feelings. Your spouse can love but not respect you, or respect yet not love you. I think you can live longer with someone whom you respect but don’t love, than with someone whom you love but don’t respect. Losing respect for your spouse is likely the beginning of the end of your marriage, even if you still love him or her. I’ve heard many clients say they still love their spouses, but they just can’t be married to them any longer. That probably means they no longer respect them as husbands or wives.

Respect is gained or lost as the result of behavior. We generally respect people who work hard; we have little respect for laziness. Ergo, the harder you work on your marriage, and the more good choices you make in your life, the more respect your spouse

should have for you. When you consistently make bad choices, it's highly likely your spouse will lose respect for you.

Effort

Effort is the “work” which will be discussed in detail later. The effort can never stop because it's the food that feeds the marriage. Marriages are living entities and need nourishment. Stop feeding anything living, and it will deteriorate and die. Half or more of all marriages die. We don't feed our marriages, and they die. Feed them correctly, and they will thrive. We don't feed them because we think we don't need to. We think we can beat the odds and win without playing by the rules, but we are wrong.

Commitment

On our wedding day, we looked into our spouse's eyes and pledged a lifetime of commitment, to love and cherish each other, to care for each other when we are sick and old, to change each other's diapers and to hold each other's hands when Father Time or Alzheimer's has robbed us of our minds and ability to care for ourselves. Isn't that what marriage is about? Or is it just to love and cherish as long as money flows and the good times roll? Is it all about big houses, beautiful cars, the nicest clothes, expensive gifts, and the best vacations at the finest resorts? If that were the case, we would sign a contract, and when the money or the desire to supply it ends or the fun and laughter stop, then the legal relationship ends. Marriage, however, is bigger than simply being in it for the good times, or it's supposed to be anyway. What if we have to downsize and live in a small apartment due to bankruptcy or job loss? What if we have to live with in-laws, or one of us becomes very ill and is not as vital as before or perhaps disabled due to an accident? What then? Unfortunately, we can't predict how we would deal with any of those circumstances, but those issues do cause divorce; I've seen it happen many times.

Is our level of commitment predictable, or is it totally random? Is it strong when times are good, but weakens when times get tough? The answer is “it depends.” It depends how we feel about each other when the marriage is tested. We know feelings ebb and flow. If we are unhappy, our commitment level may be low, and when the bad times hit, it could get worse. If we love, cherish, respect, and adore each other, that bond may be virtually unbreakable, regardless of what may come. Unbreakable is what we envisioned when we married, but in about half of marriages, commitment breaks down somewhere along the way. Why?

How can we know in advance what will happen when commitment is tested? Because there’s no mechanical gauge, we can never know for sure what’s in our hearts. Most cases I handle involve one spouse deciding to divorce without the husband or wife knowing. Most people make the decision to divorce after secretly dwelling on it for years. What do we do about the lack of commitment that goes unspoken?

Commitment is much easier to maintain and is less random when you love and respect your spouse. When you add mature love to a high level of respect, the combination breeds commitment. Greatly diminish or eliminate one or the other of those two elements, and commitment is difficult to maintain.