

The Wedded Life

by J.R. Miller

A happy and successful marriage is built on a foundation of love, commitment, patience, courtesy, and kindness, and requires the presence of Christ and His blessing every day.

Scripture: Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 5:25

Topics: "Marriage", "Divine Purpose of Family"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the sacredness and divine purpose of marriage and the home, asserting that they are foundational to human life and happiness. He highlights that while marriage is intended to bring joy and fulfillment, it requires loving patience, courtesy, and unity of interest to thrive. Miller warns against the dangers of misunderstanding and pride, urging couples to maintain open communication and seek forgiveness promptly. He concludes by stressing the necessity of Christ's presence in the marriage, as His guidance and blessing are essential for a truly happy and harmonious wedded life.

Transcript

Homes are the divinely ordained fountains of life. It is not by accident, that people live in families, rather than solitarily. The human race began in a family, and Eden was a home. The divine blessing has ever rested upon nations and communities, just in the measure in which they have adhered to these original institutions and have kept marriage and the home pure and holy; and blight and curse have come just in the measure in which they have departed from these divine models, dishonoring marriage and tearing down the sacred walls of home.

Behind of the home lies marriage. The wedding day throws its shadow far down the future; it may be, ought to be, a shadow of healing and blessing. In a tale of medieval English life a maiden goes before the bridal party on their way to the church, strewing flowers in their path. This was meant to signify that their wedded life should be one of joy and prosperity. Almost universally, wedding ceremonies and festivities have some feature of similar significance, implying that the occasion is one of gladness. In some countries flowers are worn as bridal wreaths. In some they are woven into garlands for the waist, the tying of the ends being a part of the ritual. In others they are carried in the hand or worn in the hair or on the bosom. Music comes in, also, always joyous music, implying that the ceremony is one of peculiar gladness. In some places, too, wedding bells are rung, their peals being merry and gladsome.

All these and similar bridal customs indicate that the world regards the wedding as the crowning day of life, and marriage as an event of the highest felicity, an occasion for the most enthusiastic congratulations.

Yet not always are these happy prophecies fulfilled. Sometimes the flowers wither and the music grows discordant and the wedding peals die away into only a memory of gladness. It ought not to be so. It is not so when the marriage has been true, and when the wedded life is ruled by love. Then the bridal wreath remains fresh and fragrant until it is laid upon the coffin, by the loving hands of the one who survives to close the eyes of the other; and the wedding music and the peals of the bells continue to echo in tones of gladness and peace until hushed in sobbings of sorrow when the singers sing in dirges and the bells toll out the number of the finished years.

Marriage is intended to bring joy. The married life is meant to be the happiest, fullest, purest, richest life. It is God's own ideal of completeness. It was when he saw that it was not good for man to be alone, that woman was made and brought to him to supply what was lacking. The divine intention, therefore, is that marriage shall yield happiness, and that it shall add to the fullness of the life of both husband and wife; that neither shall lose--but that both shall gain. If in any case it fails to be a blessing and to yield joy, and a richer, fuller life--the fault cannot be with the institution itself--but with those who under its shadow fail to fulfill its conditions.

The causes of failure may lie previous to the marriage altar, for many are united in matrimony, who never should have entered upon such a union. Or they may lie in the life after marriage, for many who might attain to the very highest happiness in wedded life, fail to do so because they have not learned the secret of living happily together. To guard against the former mistake--the sacred character and the solemn responsibilities of marriage should be well understood and thoughtfully considered by all who would enter upon it. Marriage is a divine ordinance. It was part of God's original intention when he made man. It is not a mere human arrangement, something that sprang up in the race, as a convenience along the history of the ages. It was not devised by any earthly lawgiver. It is not a custom into which men fell into, the early days. The stamp of divine intention and ordination is upon it.

As a relationship it is the closest and most sacred on earth. The relation of parent and child is very close. Children are taught in all the Scriptures--to honor their parents, to revere them, to cleave to them, to brighten and bless their lives in every possible way. Yet the marriage relation is put above the filial, for a man is to leave his father and his mother, give up his old home with all its sacred ties and memories, and cleave to his wife. After marriage a husband's first and highest duties are to his wife--and a wife's to her husband. The two are to live for each other. Life is to be lost for life. Every other interest is thenceforward secondary to the home interest.

Then the marriage relation is indissoluble. The two become in the fullest, truest sense one. Each is incomplete before; marriage is the uniting of two halves, in one complete whole. It is the knitting together of two lives in a union so close and real, that they are no more two, but one; so close that nothing but death or the one crime of infidelity to the marriage bond itself, can disunite them. Marriage, therefore, is not a contract which can be annulled at the will of one or both of the parties. It may be discovered after the marriage has been formed, that the parties are ill-mated; one may find in the other traits or habits unsuspected before, which seem to render happiness in union impossible; the husband may be cruel and abusive--or the wife ill-tempered, extravagant, or a burden. Yet the Scriptures are very explicit in their teachings--that the tie once formed is indissoluble. There is one crime, said the pure and holy Jesus, which, committed by either, leaves the guilty one as dead, the other free. But besides this, the teaching of Christ recognizes no other lawful sundering of the marriage tie.

When two people stand at the marriage altar and with clasped hands promise before God and in the presence of human witnesses to take each other as wife and as husband, to keep and to cherish each the other--only death can unclasp their hands. Each takes into sacred keeping, the happiness and the highest good of the other to the end of life.

In view of the sacredness and indissolubleness of this relation, and the many tender and far-reaching interests that inhere in it--it is but the simplest commonplace to say, that the greatest care should be taken before marriage--to make sure that the union will be a true one, that the two lives will sweetly blend together, and that each will be able to make the other at least measurably happy. Yet obvious as is the fact, none the less is it profoundly important that it should be heeded. If there were more wise and honest forethought with regard to marriage, there would be less afterthought of regret and lamentation.

Marriage is not the panacea for all life's ills. It does not of itself, lead invariably and necessarily to all that is noble and beautiful in life. While its possibilities of happiness and blessing are so great--its possibilities of failure must not be ignored. Only a true and wise, only the truest and wisest, wedded life will realize the blessings of the ideal marriage relation.

The first lesson to be learned and practiced is loving patience. It requires some time to bring any two lives into perfect unison, so that they shall blend in every chord and tone. No matter how intimate the relations may have been before, neither knows much of the real life of the other, until they meet with every separating wall and every thinnest veil removed.

Brides and bridegrooms see each other's face often enough before marriage--but it is doubtful whether as a rule they really know much of each other's inner life. Even without any intention to hide their true selves or to appear veiled, it is only after marriage that their acquaintanceship becomes complete. There are graces of character and disposition that are then discovered for the first time; and there are also faults, peculiarities of habit, of taste, of temper, never suspected before, which then disclose themselves.

Now the perils of wedded life are met. Some are disappointed and discouraged by the discovery of these points of uncongeniality, these possibilities of discord, concluding at once that their marriage was a mistake and must necessarily be a failure. Their beautiful dream is shattered, and they make no effort to build it again. But really all that is needed is wise and loving patience. There is no reason for discouragement, much less for despair. It is entirely possible, notwithstanding the discovery of these points of friction and uncongeniality, to realize the highest ideal of wedded life. It is like the meeting of two rivers. At first there is confusion, excitement, commotion, and apparent conflict and strife as the two flow together; and it seems as if they never would blend and commingle; but in a little time they unite in one broad peaceful stream, rolling in majesty and strength, without a trace of strife. So when two independent lives, with diverse habits, tastes and peculiarities first meet to be united in one--there is embarrassment, there is perplexity, there is seeming conflict, there is the dashing of life against life at many points. Sometimes it may seem as if they never could blend in one--and as if the conflict must go on hopelessly forever; but with loving patience the two will in due time coalesce and unite in one life--nobler, stronger, fuller, deeper, richer--and move on in calmness and peace.

Perfect harmony cannot be forced in a day, cannot indeed be forced at all--but must come through gentleness and perhaps only after many days. There must be mutual adaptation, and time must be allowed for this. The present duty is unselfish love. Each must forget self--in devotion to the other. Each must blame self--and not the other, when anything goes wrong. There must be the largest and gentlest

forbearance. Impatience may wreck all. A sharp word may retard the process of soul-blending, for months. There must be the determination on the part of both to make the marriage happy and to conquer everything which lies in the way. Then the very differences between the two lives will become their closest points of union. When they have passed through the process of blending, though it may for the time be painful and perilous--the result will be a wedded life of deep peace, quiet joy and inseparable affection.

Another secret of happiness in married life is courtesy. By what law of nature or of life is it, that after the peals of the wedding bells have died away, and they have established themselves in their own home, so many husbands and wives drop the charming little amenities and refinements of manner toward each other, that so invariably and delightfully characterized their interaction before marriage? Is there no necessity for these civilities any longer? Are they so sure now of each other's love, that they do not need to give expression to it, either in affectionate word or act? Is wedded love such a strong, vigorous and self-sufficing plant that it never needs sunshine, rain or dew? Is politeness merely a manner that is necessary in interaction with the outside world, and not required when we are alone with those we love the best? Are home hearts so peculiarly constituted, that they are not pained or offended by things that would never be pardoned in us, if done in ordinary society? Are we under no obligations to be respectful and to pay homage to our dearest friends--while even to the rudest clown, or the greatest stranger, which we meet outside our own doors--we feel ourselves bound to show the most perfect civility?

On the contrary, there is no place in the world where the amenities of courtesy should be so carefully maintained, as in the home. There are no hearts which hunger so, for expressions of affection, as the hearts of which we are most sure. There is no love which so needs its daily bread--as the love that is strongest and holiest. There is no place where rudeness or incivility is so unpardonable, as inside our own doors and toward our best beloved! The tenderer the love and the truer--the more it craves the thousand little attentions and kindnesses which so satisfy the heart!

It is not costly presents at Christmas and on birthdays and anniversaries, that are needed; these are only mockeries--if the days between are empty of affectionate expressions. Jewelry and silks will never atone for the lack of warmth and tenderness. Between husband and wife there should be maintained, without break or pause--the most perfect courtesy, the gentlest attention, the most unselfish amiability, the utmost affectionateness!

Coleridge says, "The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions, the little soon-forgotten charities of a kiss or a smile, a kind look, a heartfelt compliment, and the countless infinitesimals of pleasurable thought and genial feeling." These may seem trifles, and the omission of them may be deemed unworthy of thought; but they are the daily bread of love, and hearts go hungry when they are omitted. It may be only carelessness at first in a busy husband or a weary wife--which fails in these small, sweet courtesies, and it may seem a little matter--but in the end the result may be a growing far apart of two lives which might have been forever very happy in each other--had their early love but been cherished and nourished.

Another important element in married life is unity of interest. There is danger that wedded lives drift apart, because their employments are nearly always different. The husband is absorbed in business, in his profession, in severe daily toil; the wife has her home duties, her social life, her friends and friendships, her children; and the two touch at no point. Unless care is taken, this separation of duties and engagements will lead to actual separation in heart and life. To prevent this, each should keep up a constant, loving interest in whatever the other does. The husband may listen every evening to the story of the home life of the day--its incidents, its pleasures, its perplexities, its trials, the children's sayings and

doings, what the neighbors who dropped in said, the bits of news that have been heard, and may enter with zest and sympathy into everything that is told to him. Nothing that concerns the wife of his heart, should be too small for even the gigantic intellect of the greatest of husbands.

In personal biography, few things are more charming and fascinating than the glimpses into the homes of some of the greatest men of earth, when we see them, having laid aside the cares and honors of the world, enter their own doors to romp with the children, to listen to their prattle, and to talk over with loving interest--all the events and incidents of the day's home-history.

In like manner, every wise and true-hearted wife, will desire to keep up an interest in all her husband's affairs. She will want to know of every burden, every struggle, every plan, every new ambition. She will wish to learn what undertaking has succeeded, and what has failed, and to keep herself thoroughly familiar and in full sympathy with all his daily, personal life.

No marriage is complete, which does not unite and blend the wedded lives at every point. This can be secured only by making every interest common to both. Let both hearts throb with the same joy--and share each pang of sorrow. Let the same burdens rest on the shoulders of both. Let the whole life be made common.

In another sense still, should their lives blend. They should read and study together, having the same line of thought, helping each other toward a higher mental culture. They should worship together, praying side by side, communing on the holiest themes of life and hope, and together carrying to God's feet the burdens of their hearts for their children and for every precious object. Why should they not talk together of their personal trials, their peculiar temptations, their infirmities, and help each other by sympathy, by brave word and by intercession, to be victorious in living? Thus they should live one life as it were, not two. Every plan and hope of each should embrace the other. The moment a man begins to leave his wife out of any part of his life--or that she has plans, hopes, pleasures, friendships or experiences from which she excludes him--there is peril in the home. They should have no secrets which they keep from each other. They should have no companions or friends--but those which they have in common. Thus their two lives should blend in one life--with no thought, no desire, no feeling, no joy or sorrow, no pleasure or pain, unshared.

Into the inner sanctuary of this wedded life no third party should ever be admitted. In its derivation the word "home" contains the idea of seclusion. It shuts its inhabitants away from all the other life of the world about them. I have read of a young wife who prepared one little room in her house into which none but herself and her husband were ever to enter. The incident is suggestive. Even in the sanctuary of the home life, there should be an inner Holy of holies, open only to husband and wife, into which no other eye ever shall peer, in which no other voice ever shall be heard to speak. No stranger should ever intermeddle with this holy life, no confidential friend should ever hear confidences from this inner sanctuary. No window or door should ever be opened into it, and no report should ever be carried out of what goes on within. The blended life they are living--should be between themselves and God only.

Another rule for wedded life is to watch against every smallest beginning of misunderstanding or alienation. In the wreck of many a home, there lingers still the memory of months or years of very tender wedded life. The fatal estrangement that tore the home asunder, and made scandal for the world--began in a little difference, which a wise, patient word might have healed. But the word was not spoken--an unwise, impatient word was spoken instead--and the trivial breach remained unclosed, and grew wider

until two hearts that had been knit together as one, were torn forever apart.

Rarely are estrangements the work of one day, or caused by one offense; they are developed over time. It is against the beginnings of alienations, therefore, that sacred watch must be kept. Has a hasty word been spoken? Instantly recall it and ask for forgiveness. Is there a misunderstanding? No matter whose the fault may be, do not allow it to remain one hour! Is the home life losing a little of its warmth? Ask not for the cause, nor where the blame lies--but hasten to get back the old fervor at any cost. Never allow a second word to be spoken in a quarrel. Never let the sun go down upon an angry thought or feeling, between two hearts that have been united as one.

Pride must have no place in wedded life. There must never be any calculation as to whose place it is to make the apology or to yield first to the other. True love seeks not its own; it delights in being foremost in forgiving and yielding. There is no lesson that husbands and wives need more to learn, than instantly and always to seek forgiveness of each other whenever they are conscious of having in any way caused pain or committed a wrong. The pride which will never say, "I did wrong; forgive me," is not ready for wedded life!

To crown all, the presence of Christ should be sought at the marriage festivity--and his blessing on every day of wedded life. A lady was printing on a blackboard a text for her little girl. The text was: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Just as she had finished it, the child entered the room and began to spell out the words. Presently she exclaimed, "Oh, mamma, you have left out Jesus!" True enough, she had left out the sacred name in transcribing the verse. It is a sad omission when, in setting up their home, any husband and wife leave out Jesus. No other omission they could possibly make, would cause so great a lack in the household. Without his presence to bless the marriage--the congratulations and good wishes of friends will be only empty words. Without his blessing on the wedded life day by day, even the fullest, richest tenderness of true affection, will fail to give all that is needed to satisfy hungry hearts. Without the divine blessing, all the beauty, the gladness, the treasure, which earth can give to a home will not bring peace that may not any moment be broken.

Surely too much is involved, too great responsibility, too many and too precious interests--to venture upon wedded life without Christ. The lessons are too hard to learn to be attempted without a divine Teacher. The burdens are too heavy to be borne without a mighty Helper. The perils of the way are too many to be passed through without an unerring Guide. The duties are too delicate, and the consequences of failure in them too far-reaching and too terrible, to be taken up without wisdom and help from above!

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