

Making Marriage Last

OBJECTIVES OF LECTURE

- Provide students with a realistic viewpoint of marriage and long-term relationships.
- Discuss factors that contribute to divorce and steps they can take to increase the odds of achieving a long and healthy marriage.
- Be sure to inform the students of the psychological, economic and health benefits of marriage.

Most people know that since 1975, the divorce rate in America has consistently hovered around 50%. That means for every two couples who decide to marry, one of those couples will eventually divorce. Here are a few statistics that most people don't know.

Ask the students, “Do you think people getting married for the second time have higher or lower divorce rates?”

- The divorce rate for 2nd marriages is 60%.
- The divorce rate for 3rd marriages is 67%.

You might think that people would get better with practice, but research tells us that people continue to make the same mistakes (pick people for the wrong reasons, avoid addressing their own personal issues that contributed to the last divorce, continue to take marriage for granted...).

PREDICTING DIVORCE

Researchers have become very adept at predicting who will stay married and who will divorce. In fact, John Gottman has been able to predict with 90% accuracy the outcome of a marriage,

simply by observing how premarital couples communicate. David Olson can predict with 84% accuracy the outcome of a marriage, based on a survey called PREPARE, taken before the couple marries. **Put up the *Predicting Divorce* overhead.** Watch this short clip on predicting divorce: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xw9SE315GtA>

IT'S NOT JUST A FLIP OF A COIN

While the chances of remaining married are approximately 50% for first-time marriages, everyone does not have the same likelihood of divorcing – it's not as random as a flip of a coin. We all bring certain background factors, traits, skills and relationship dynamics to a marriage, which raise or lower the odds of staying married or ending up divorced. **Put up the *Predictors of Divorce and the Voice of Experience* overheads** to better understand what factors contribute to a marital outcome.

MOST DECIDE TO MARRY

Despite the high divorce rate in America, marriage is still very popular – roughly 83% of Americans eventually decide to marry (Pew Research Center, 2016). For those who choose wisely and stay the course, marriage has many psychological, health and economic benefits. We also know that children do much better when raised in households with married parents than in never-married or divorced homes. **Put up the *Benefits of Marriage* overhead** and discuss.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The Predictors of Divorce overhead provides some helpful hints to increase the odds of achieving a healthy, long term marriage. They include: 1) wait until your mid-twenties to marry, 2) don't get pregnant before you get married, 3) earn a college diploma and establish your career before marrying, 4) discuss your values and goals with the person you love and 5) improve your communication skills. We also need to be better "pickers." Far too many of us pick marital partners for the wrong reasons and disregard warning signs.

"Choose your life's mate carefully, from that one decision comes 90% of all misery or happiness."

- Life's Little Instruction Book (appears on overhead)

MARRIAGE IS HARD WORK

Ask the students:

- Who has a sibling? Are there times that you don't get along?
- Who gets into arguments with their parents?
- What about best friends? Do you ever go through difficult times with a best friend?
- What makes us think that being married to somebody will be any different?

We are all human and each of us brings our own unique personalities to marriage. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It just means we have to be realistic about marriage. Every meaningful relationship we have in our lives will have ups and downs. It is a myth that once people marry, they

will live "happily ever after." The marital vows we take remind us that every marriage goes through rough times, requiring hard work and persistence from both partners.

"I take you to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish in good times and in bad until death do us part."

One of the reasons marriages fail is because one person is willing to work and the other one isn't. For example, one person agrees to go to counseling and the other doesn't. Another reason marriages fail is people give up too early. They encounter a difficult period in their marriage and choose to get a divorce. They erroneously believe that they shouldn't experience such problems, and don't understand that other couples are having similar problems.

LOYALTY & COMMITMENT

Unless we are talking about extreme issues in marriage, the one quality that separates people who decide to divorce and those who decide to stay married is loyalty. Our marital vows do not say, "I take you until I'm relatively unhappy, until you make me mad, or until I find somebody better." Therefore, if we commit to a vow that says, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer," shouldn't we honor it? If we do not plan to honor that vow, should we really say it?