



Marriage as a House

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There are few things in this world that are expected to last a lifetime. This is especially true of most things that we acquire throughout our lives. For example, we are born into families and born with most of our faculties, and it could be logical to expect things like parental relationships or organ functioning to be long-lasting absent of any major variables, such as tragedy taking parents early or disease taking away organ functioning. Think about similar things that we gain along the way, like childhood friendships or athleticism. Some people are lucky to maintain friendships from childhood to adulthood, but it is common to lose friends as interests, values, and locations change or develop over time. Also, while there are examples of athletes who defy the rules of nature and compete at high levels beyond their prime years, it is understood that this is rare and that those rare athletes will succumb to the limitations of their age.

Fewer are the material things that we acquire in life and expect to last forever. Consider the common experience of buying/selling or leasing/trading cars. Cars are some of the most complexly built items that we purchase and yet it is accepted that they have a shelf life. 10 years would be a long time to be in possession of one primary vehicle and much like the examples of parental relationships and organ functions, there are variables to this example, such as the longevity of collector cars. Still, 10 years does not equate to most life spans.

Expectations

Houses and marriages are two things that often resonate differently with people and the expectation, different from cars or childhood friendships, is that they last. Some of the most careful purchases that occur are in homebuying. Buyers work with realtors who are experts in homebuying. Buyers spend handsomely on inspections, appraisals, insurances, and more before ever spending a night in the home that they desire. Homeowners can spend endlessly on home repairs, maintenance, and improvements. Even those homeowners who decide to sell their homes for one reason or another often hope that the home will be a great investment for the new buyers. Bottom line is that homeowners expect their houses to last a lifetime.

The quality of care that goes into home buying and continues throughout homeownership provide an interesting way of conceptualizing marriage. Based on my personal experiences within my marriage, my larger cultural/familial/religious experiences with others who are married, and experiences working with married couples in therapy, I believe that people who take the leap into marriage generally do so carefully and with the intent for marriage to last. Once again, there are numerous variables to consider and no two married people think or function identically. Still, I am willing to stake a belief in the notion that people generally enter the institution of marriage carefully, and that much like houses people expect marriage to last.

Foundations

Rather than lasting a lifetime as a treasure, a house would be untenable if built on a faulty foundation. So too is the fate of a marriage built on a faulty foundation. I recall helping to build a small school in Nicaragua and laying the cinder block foundation. The foreman persistently hounded me in Spanish and gestured. It was difficult to communicate since I am not a Spanish-speaker, but I got a clear message from the foreman, which was to keep the blocks level. I remember his focus on precision and emphasis on me using the proper tools to measure how level the foundation was moment to moment. This memory directs my thinking to many marriages because while I believe that people often take care in choosing their mate, I wonder if there is someone persisting that they work precisely by incorporating appropriate tools for foundation building in relationships.

The persistent voice could be that of a parent, friend, pastor, or mentor. Those persistent voices could emphasize the incorporation of tools, such as family values, religious teachings, or even experiential advice in order to establish a firm foundation in relationships. Any or all of those tools could assist individuals in establishing foundational principals that work as tools to measure the quality of the relationship against. However, for the sake of this article, let's conceptualize counseling as a foundation building tool.

Regardless of the duration or stage of the marriage relationship, marriage counseling can be instrumental in moving conversations beneath the surface and to important layers that create honest dialogue, which can strengthen the relationship. Consider two people in marriage who communicate very differently and no matter how hard they try on their own, they never reach satisfying patterns of communication. The individuals that make up this couple may indeed be trying earnestly and working carefully but doing so without the right tools. Just like laying cinder blocks without measuring against an established level line will more likely than not lead to a faulty foundation, so too will working in circles on struggles without help likely lead to frustrating foundation building efforts in relationships.

Strategically Durable and Functional

Houses have tons of features that make the house functional and long-lasting. For example, windows allow light to enter the home and also prevent bugs and unwanted weather conditions from impacting the interior of the home. The facing of homes, whether vinyl or brick, can provide curb appeal and also serves to protect structural pieces of the home like the wood

framing. The list goes on and each component of the house potentially provides parallels to marriage.

Take the visible appeal of the home's exterior and how it both showcases and protects the home. I would argue that men and women can use their appeal to showcase and protect. Stick with me through any notion that referencing perceived beauty is shallow. Picture a man delivering a toast at his first-born's wedding and acknowledging his beautiful wife of many years. Still shallow? I would say that this is a form of showcasing and very much an enjoyable aspect of marriage, so long as beauty is honored relatively and the mention of a spouse's appearance is contextually respectful. Deeper still is the ability of that wife's beauty to protect within the context of marriage. Stick with me again as I point to a man who is broken at the loss of a loved one and finds solace in his wife's gaze.

I acknowledge that I wrote this portion of the article from a male-focused lens and I stand by it as it acknowledges a frequent participant in marriage, male, and his needs. This same analogy may be relatable to females, but for some it may not resonate. Let me take a chance with those who still find the focus on outer beauty to be irrelevant or shallow by shifting the focus of the exterior from the visible context to the structural context. Maybe for you it is not the look of the bricks that matter, but the strength that blocks out the wind, rain, and snow. This approach to comparing marriage to house might speak to the ability of man to take the brunt of the world outside of the home at times. I must acknowledge a world where men and women often work equally outside of the home and scenarios where men are caretakers at home and women work. Allow this analogy to speak to very specific times. Maybe man showcases his strength during the wife's pregnancy, or her recovery from illness. At one point or another a man may shield his wife from the challenges of the world and the wife may feel a sense of security in those moments.

Rather than detailing every possible analogy for every relational dynamic, my hope is that the existing analogies provide helpful examples for ways that you might explore your unique relationship. The purpose is to discover the purposeful aspects of individuals in relationships that are often hidden as a result of pain, dysfunction, loss of purpose, or any other factor that obstructs individuals from finding purpose and satisfaction in relationship. I believe that a man who knows that he can protect his wife and that she values it will find satisfaction. I also believe that a woman who knows that she provides comfort to her husband with her eyes will also find satisfaction in the relationship. Men and women are in no way reduced to these roles exclusively. Instead, these roles highlight certain attributes that in tandem with many others build a beautiful person who contributes to a marriage relationship that lasts, much like the many components of a house are built into a beautiful home that lasts a lifetime.

Marriage Counseling

Marriage counseling can be a place to explore abstract ideas, like comparing marriage to a house, in order to make deeper meaning out of expectations of the relationship, beliefs in gender roles, and experiences with disappointments among other things. By no means are my analogies the only way to conceptualize a marriage. This is simply an example of the type of abstract thinking that we may engage in together as we explore the layers of your experiences.

I love analogies as they can be enjoyable to create and they often offer nonlinear ways to think about issues. I firmly believe that marriage counseling can be enjoyable on some levels as we simultaneously do the intensive work toward healing. Consider that our lives play out like a long story and that marriage counseling offers opportunities to step out of sequence of the events that take place in our stories and to make sense of what has happened so far. The opportunities to stop, reflect, and discover may be instrumental in building a marriage that lasts. I hope that you will take a chance and explore your marriage relationship with a caring counseling professional near you.

Warmly,

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