



Say Something Nice

by C. E. Chaffin

Dearest beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and in the presence of this company to join together this man and this woman in the blessed institution of marriage....”

These words, or words like them, have opened the marriage ceremony for countless couples over many generations. It is a sacred moment when two people who had been strangers to each other meet, become friends, realize a strong attraction for each other and decide to marry.

Then wedding bells ring. Wedding bells announce that one heart and one life joins with another to form a single unit. They are intended to transmute dreams into reality, hopes into fulfillment and blueprints into homes with children playing in the front yard.

But, eventually, the sound of wedding bells fades away. A different kind of reality sets in. And, somehow, this reality is not always like the dream. Hope for the future needs more than vows to become a lasting thing, just as it takes more than blueprints and a finished house to make a home.

What is it that keeps the memories of one’s wedding day fresh through the years? What makes a house a home? What keeps two hearts beating as one after the wedding bells?

The Care and Feeding of Marriage

There is an element missing in many marriages. Some are confused, not knowing why or even how their hopes for marital bliss have been so bitterly blasted into pieces. Divorce has assumed massive proportions. As one country minister recently said, “Most of us look at marriage as if it were a belt that we can buckle or unbuckle when we like.”

Is there an answer to the world’s marital woes? I believe there is. At least I believe that any person who sincerely wants to discover the building blocks of a happy and lasting marriage may do so. The God who originated the institution tells us how to hold it together. “Except the

Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1, NKJV).

A happy and lasting marriage should have a central core of *love*. That sums it all up. But, we hear the word so often that we should take it apart and examine it to see what it is and how it works.

For example, *love* might be defined as a fundamental kindness for the participants. It is unselfish attention—the kind of attention that came so naturally during the days of courtship. It is believing in your companion, trusting and supporting. It is words of appreciation rather than criticism. It is the

expression of that appreciation. The four words, “I’m proud of you” or “I’m glad to have you with me,” will do wonders for a companion. If you don’t believe it, try it!

There’s an old verse that goes:

“Nag people and they sag,

Believe in people and they bloom.”

We are told, “Love is forbearing and

kind. Love knows no jealousy. Love does not

brag; is not conceited. She

is not unmannerly, nor selfish, nor irritable, nor mindful of wrongs. She does not rejoice in injustice, but joyfully sides with the truth. She can overlook faults. She

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is full of trust, full of hope, full of endurance” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Weymouth’s translation).

Why is it we have kind words for others during the work day, but when we come home for the evening we seem to let ourselves down? We often get off work, go home and come through our front door in a state of depression. Because our families are the only ones we face as we begin to wind down, we dump on them.

Little Kindnesses = Happiness

Some years ago a couple were about to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary. The local newspaper, always on the lookout for good human interest stories, sent out a reporter to do an interview. The husband was at home and let the reporter in.

After they took chairs at the kitchen table, the reporter asked, “What is your recipe for a long, happy marriage?”

“Well, I’ll tell you, young feller,” the old gentleman said. “You see, I was an orphan, and I always had to work hard for my board and keep. So, I never was able to have much to do with girls until I was grown and out on my own. I finally dated a little. But my wife, Mary, was the first young woman I ever took a real interest in. I guess she liked me too, because I wound up proposing to her. Well, I was scared stiff, but after the wedding Mary’s dad took me aside and handed me a little package. ‘Here’s all you’ll ever need to know to make your marriage happy,’ he said. And this is what he gave me....”

He reached into his pocket, extracted a large gold watch, opened it and handed it to the reporter. There, engraved across the back of the cover, where he could see it every time he checked the time, were these words, “Say something nice to Mary.”

You might think that formula is too simple to work. But, it did work. It still does. Just remember

that great happiness is made up of little kindnesses. And little kindnesses amount to a great amount of happiness.

A ruined marriage does not have to spring from some kind of dramatic upheaval. There may be no unfaithfulness, no desertion, no wife beating...it might be caused by nothing more than a slow accumulation of dissatisfaction, a gradual trail of misunderstandings and irritations and missed opportunities to express the love that should exist between husband and wife.

“I love you.” In a moment of tension and misunderstanding, these can be hard words to utter. And, sometimes we should admit, “I was wrong.” There are times when a hurt cannot be healed without those words. Unselfish love, with Christ in the home, brings the potential of a lasting marriage.

On the other hand it is possible for an individual to be so selfish, so unattentive, so unloving, so downright cold to his or her mate that these unfeeling actions send a message to the other marriage partner that love has been lost and exchanged for dislike, or even hatred. Without effort expended, a marriage begins to cool off and soon a wedge can be driven between the husband and wife.

But, divorce should not be seen as a handy back door out of an unpleasant situation. For a divorce, however legitimate, not only seriously scars your own life, but it gradually undermines the lives of any children the couple may have.

Divorce cannot heal the deep wounds caused by an unfruitful marriage. No legal counsel or material device, however brilliant, can really heal.

Only unselfish love can transform two human beings into a home. Happiness in marriage and in life itself can be ours—if we want it. □

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