

Integrating Marriage as a Couple-The Journey

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Abstract

Marriage is a complicated topic because there is so much to cover. In John and Stasi Eldredge's *Love & War* (2009) and Mike Mason's *The Mystery of Marriage* (2005), one sees the journey and hardships that a married couple will experience. Each book presents their ideas of marriage in a different way; the Eldredge's (2009) with numerous examples within their personal lives and Mason's (2005) examples from a clinical perspective; although both firsthand. The Eldredge's (2009) use numerous examples within their marriages to explain to the reader what it will take to work through a difficult journey (marriage). The detailed stories and altered role playing throughout the book gives the reader a chance to see the story from both a male and female's side. Mason (2005), from a professional view, describes important sections in marriage that most couples fail to thrive in in their journey. Both books offer helpful information for a couple to follow so their journey, although difficult, will have a guide.

Keywords: Marriage, spouse, couple, journey.

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In John and Stasi Eldredge's book *Love & War* (2009), the journey of marriage is up close and personal as the couple reveals the personal struggles they have faced. What a tough battle these two have faced throughout the years of their marriage. The Eldredge's (2009) have really reached a level of differentiation and every reader should applaud them for sticking it out in the tough times. Even writing about it so that others may see that they are not the only ones that struggle in their marriage takes a lot of courage.

In chapter one, Stasi (2009) said, "The day was fresh but I was tired. Tired of trying. Tired of feeling like an utter disappointment to my husband who not that many months ago had pledged his heart to me for life (Eldredge & Eldredge, 2009, p. 10). This book is filled with numerous connections so that the reader can find where he or she stands in their own marriage. Stasi (2009) is obviously in a difficult time with her spouse just as many other couples are. All the time couples are asking the question of, "How did we wind up here?" when they hit a dead end in their journey (Eldredge & Eldredge, 2009, p. 10). It is very important that couples do not give up on each other in these difficult times. Stasi realized that this was not the case in John's (her husband) eyes. This is where the idea of differentiation becomes very important. Stasi (2009) was in a slump in her marriage and John didn't even notice her struggle. Although differentiation is an idea that will take years to master, the journey is half the battle. The other half is keeping your hearts dedicated to each other. If things were to continue on without any attention, questions such as, "*Are we doing something wrong? Did I marry the right person? Maybe it's just us*" set in causing chaos (Eldredge & Eldredge, 2009, p. 14). A marriage starting off like this, which happens quite often, needs to be addressed so that the problems may be resolved. A newlywed couple should not have to worry about

the decision they have made regarding their spouse but they also need to understand that their journey is going to be a challenge. Looking back on their struggles in this area, they will understand their faults and become stronger together.

The Eldredge's (2009) bring up many ideas about struggles in a marriage but not one is more important than that of a couple's relationship with God. If a couple does not equally share love for God, then the weight of the scale is bound to tip. This part of the journey is very important because God can be involved in everything in a marriage if invited. The Eldredge's (2009) asked some couples about prayer; "They looked sheepish. No one responded. They looked guilty, like the dog does when he comes back from a neighborhood romp...Rather *couples* don't pray much *together*" (Eldredge & Eldredge, 2009, p. 126). It is hard to believe that an average couple who attends church regularly does not pray together. Setting aside the time to pray and read Scripture together is a great idea. This will not only strengthen their personal relationship, it will also help their spiritual relationship. The biggest excuse is the lack of time; i.e. work, children, mow the lawn, or to tired. The list will always grow with excuses made by Satan. He is creating numerous things to distract couple's in their quiet times and if Satan is blocked out, their journey will become so much easier. To do this, it will take time, discipline, and the strength of each spouse to guide each other and keep accountable. It is important to know that this special time together will not only breed intimacy with God but between each other as well. The Eldredge's (2009) said, "Praying together is an intimate encounter; it will cultivate intimacy and companionship in your marriage-*We are in this together*" (Eldredge & Eldredge, 2009, p. 128). Prayer is a powerful thing and is a chance for a couple to unlock their hearts to each other as well as to God.

In Mike Mason's book *The Mystery of Marriage* (2005), the idea of intimacy is very important when it comes to a marital journey. Mason (2005) goes well into depth when covering the

areas of intimacy in a couple's life. Mason says, "If marriage today is under greater stress, and if contemporary couples are facing an entirely new order of problems, and if there are more breakdowns and separations and divorces than ever before, it is largely because the demand for intimacy in marriage has never been so overwhelming" (Mason, 2005, p. 89). Just like Eldredge's (2009) example previously, there was a lack of intimacy in their relationship. Every human craves intimacy and truly cannot live without it.

Most people see intimacy as just a sexual act or something reserved for the bedroom but it is more than that. Just a simple conversation with a friend and connecting with them is being intimate. It is very important that couples realize where their intimacy levels are at so they may not only improve but take it to new level. Mason (2005) also says, "Conversely, if we cannot be faithful to a living person we can see and touch, how will we ever be faithful to an invisible God" (Mason, 2005, p. 92)? What a powerful question to ask the reader! God wants us to be intimate with him because he created us. Without an intimate connection with God we would be lost in this world just like how a couple would be lost in their marriage. Seek God not only by yourself but with your spouse so an intimate circle may be created with God and your hearts. Along with verbal intimacy within the marriage, sexual intimacy is equally important. For example, when a wife is sexually intimate with her husband, he can feel more confidence and stand taller. When a husband is sexually intimate to his wife, she can feel the security and closeness within her heart. Mason (2005) offers the solution to finding an intimate relationship; "The very heart of intimacy is reached when two people are neither afraid nor ashamed of being possessed by love, when in fact they give themselves freely to the pure joy and liberty of owning and being owned" (Mason, 2005, p. 98). Both verbal and sexual intimacy allows each person to open their hearts to the other, being owned in a sense. Intimacy can be found on numerous levels and the task of finding out what makes that connection is in the couple's journey.

Finding the connection between each other is actually more difficult than it sounds. It is because men and women were created differently. Men not only think differently than women but they also communicate in a different way. At a typical given moment, a man is either thinking about absolutely nothing, or about an action that occurred recently (a woman walking by, a sports play, etc.). For a woman, well, the list would fill the page with thoughts streaming through their heads. That being said, men are usually horrible at communicating since they say very little. The best way for a woman to communicate with a man is to be short and specific so that he catches the important details instead of the usual rambling. Communication and intimacy are both very important if a couple is to survive. These two relate and can be defined as oneness. Mason (2005) says, "Oneness gives the freedom to speak one's mind to the other about absolutely anything...Oneness inspires trust...Oneness anticipate the other's needs, and feels the other's hurts as one's own" (Mason, 2005, p. 202). These three definitions given by Mason (2005) offer an idea of what a couple needs to do in order to obtain oneness. This idea will greatly benefit the couple's journey. Each person in a marital relationship should be allowed to speak their mind to their spouse otherwise one is going to feel cut off. If a woman is unable to speak up about her sex life with her husband because she feels she will offend him, this is not the idea of oneness. If they were connected as one, then the woman should still take caution but also feel that she has a right to share her opinion. Second is the backbone of a relationship, trust. If a husband does not trust his wife, then they cannot obtain oneness; nothing should be hidden from one another. Secrets and lies destroy marriages, it is a terrible thing. When married, each person is to give their whole heart and nothing less to their spouse. Finally, by anticipating one's needs and understanding their feelings, things will go so much smoother. This statement relates to differentiation as one may step back and see the other's point of view so the discussion may be handled accordingly. Relating back to the sex discussion with the wife talking to

her husband about the problem is she has reached differentiation, she will be able to know the boundaries in the discussion so her husband is not hurt. This is very important because when boundaries are crossed, the armor, sword, and shield come out causing drama. This part of the journey may seem like it will instantly click, but really it is only something that can be gained through experience.

Marriage is quite a large topic to cover and full of wonders. Newlyweds have a journey ahead of them and with the help of John and Stasi Eldredge's book *Love & War* (2009) and Mike Mason's *The Mystery of Marriage* (2005), they will have some helpful guidelines. But a more important guide for their journey is Scripture. God is patiently waiting to be invited to a marriage. To fill their lives with fulfillment and surprise keeping them each on their toes for what lies ahead in their journey.

References

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