



# The Family Friend

A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.

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## Marriage: Crucible Where Character is Formed

This is the century that is testing marriage and family life. The sexual revolution has persuaded every one that personal satisfaction and fulfillment are dependent on great sex. People of all ages are claiming as their birthright the right to be happy, no matter what the cost. The rate of social and economic change has so accelerated that commitment is disappearing from the catalog of desired character traits.

With the continuous reports of infidelity by husbands and wives and with divorce rates that indicate that marriage is going out of style, I vacillate between anger and despair over the plight of families. I sometimes wonder what we have done to create this climate where people are not willing to pay the price for a relationship that can last. Often I long for the days when divorce was non-existent in the church.

Struggling with the problem as it strikes so many people I know and love, I have determined that I must become an active advocate of marriage so that we can save it. I believe

that we all must become aggressive in telling each other and especially the younger generation that a good marriage is not only God's way, but it is worth the price because of all that it brings us.

**"The first hundred years are the hardest."** Many years ago I laughed at that old saying. Now I have been married long enough to know that the saying is doubtless true, even though I don't expect to live long enough to find out. Perhaps we have not been willing to tell ourselves and the next generation that marriage is hard work and has to go on as long as the relationship is alive and working. A good relationship takes time, patience, and all the other resources of character we can muster.

**"Marriage is the crucible where character is formed."** Those are the words of J.P. Sanders who taught the marriage class I took as a senior in college. I knew just enough about the word crucible to understand that it implied heat, transformation, and usually worth. The phrase sounded good, but the experiences that tested and changed my wife and

me involved a lot more pain and discomfort that we could have anticipated. We must pass the word that marriage includes pain, abundant pain, but that it also brings gain in character and happiness.

**"Marriage is an emotional and psychological endurance test for a man and a woman."** I do not remember where I first learned that description of marriage, but it is logged away in my memory. I always liked the sound of the phrase because I am a great believer in emotions and the power of man's psychological nature. Marriage, however, made more demands on my emotions than I ever expected. It seems that for the past 38 years I have been rushing through time on an emotional roller coaster. Joyce and I have had to hold on as psychological waves wept over us in the form of our own life stages and the emotional developments of children, close friends and grandchildren.

So far I'm not sounding much like an advocate of marriage, but my method is that of a good friend who regularly encourages people to go white-water rafting in the Rockies. He begins by telling all the dangers, all the work, all the inconvenience. When a listener asks, "Why would anyone want to do

that?" he promptly launches into a recital on the sights, the feel, and the exhilaration of the trip. So here is the payoff.

**"Marriage is the source of lasting personal identity."** As creatures always searching for identity and a better understanding of what makes us work, the prospect of having a catalyst to hasten the process of knowing ourselves is significant.

A commitment to a relationship which we expect to last as long as our lives forces us to face up to who we are, what is important to us, where we are going, and what we are really like. I cannot possibly tell anyone all about a shared life and identity, but I know it brings more joy, satisfaction, and meaning than I could have ever anticipated.

**"Marriage empowers us to sustain the highest quality of life."** Those are the sentiments, if not the exact words, of one of my best friends a day or two after the death of his wife. Most people have the feeling after 20 or so years of marriage that they married above themselves. Husbands and wives have the special opportunity to spark the best qualities in the character of a mate. When a spouse "speaks the truth in love," the message is powerful in bringing transformation and growth. When two people have worked together, cried together, prayed together, laughed together, worshipped together, and even fought together, they find power in their relationship. They discover a unity that brings out

the best colors of their lives. They discover a harmony that adds music to their lives and their communication. They discover strength to keep working to make their lives better. They discover a spring of water that flows continuously and waters their whole existence.

I am a great believer in marriage. I want to be a powerful advocate of the benefits that come to people who make the commitment and develop the staying power to make marriage the source of lasting joy and excitement. I want to say that the price is high, but the rewards are great. The sacrifices come from the heart, but the results are more valuable than gold.

—Bailey McBride,  
Christian Chronicle,  
June, 1994

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## **Book Review: The Marriage Benefit The Surprising Rewards of Staying Together**

By Mark O'Connell, PhD

Mark O'Connell is a clinical instructor of psychology at Harvard Medical School and Cambridge Hospital. He has over twenty-five years of practical experience in counseling individuals and couples. O'Connell is convinced that marriage, specifically long-term ("until death do us part") marriage is good for a person. He argues that the changes necessary for continuing a marriage make us better persons: *"at their best our intimate relationships are life-enhancing crucibles in which we*

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*can learn to trade in our at times adolescent self-centeredness for more real and enduring values."* (p.12)

Those values are: Knowing ourselves; Keeping our memories alive; Aging creatively; Being more generous; Accepting ourselves; Continued growth; Finding freedom through our limitations; Deeper love; and Reaping the rewards of our emotional investments. (p.12)

O'Connell believes these values can be achieved by both partners making eight resolutions (on page 18); the first four being what he calls **"shared necessities"** and the second four being **"shared choices."**

The rest of the book is divided according to these eight resolutions and it discusses their demonstration in the lives of people he has counseled.

The focus of the book, especially the main point of it, is good. One caution, however: in sharing the stories of past counselees, O'Connell quotes their sometimes vulgar language.

Though you may not agree with all his methodology, or conclusions, I believe you will be encouraged by the fact that present-day research confirms the validity of Genesis 2:24, "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

*Reviewed by Lance Cordle*