

MAKING IT IN MARRIAGE



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IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT

George Herbert Cummings



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MAKING IT IN MARRIAGE : IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT
by George Herbert Cummings

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Names and circumstances of people mentioned in this book
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*To
My Dear Grandchildren*

*David and his wife, Hannah
Christina and her husband, Cliff
Stephanie
Crystle
Gretchen*

*with a prayer
that their lives may be led
in ways of fulfillment and happiness.*

I would like to acknowledge my many parishioners and clients who, through my fifty years of pastoral ministry and counseling, have taught me more than books could ever teach me.

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There's Hope!

Throughout my years of marriage counseling, over and over I have heard the following expressed in various words: “We don’t love each other the way we did at first, and we don’t love each other the way a married couple should.”

The blaming and complaining in which many couples indulge covers a deeply felt poverty of love. The wife will describe in great detail everything her husband does wrong. The husband will respond with accounts of *her* many actions and habits that *he* doesn’t like. But the multitude of words only hides the lack of love in their hearts for each other. It is rightly said that love is a choice. If love doesn’t flourish, room is left for hatred and indifference to grow. And ridding your life of these emotions is exceedingly difficult.

But you don’t have to settle for a loveless marriage. You can have a good, love-filled marriage if you *do the right thing to each other consistently, every day, whether you feel like it or not.*

It works! The key is consistency. Each morning as you rise and face the new day, resolve to be the kind of person who will bring out the best in your spouse. Then make a sincere effort.

You may be bored with your marriage. You may be tired of the lack of intimacy and closeness. You may literally feel sick of the way things have been going for all too long. Let me tell you, there is a solution! And it’s not the one so many are advocating when they say, “You deserve better than what you have. If I were you, I wouldn’t put up with it any longer. Get rid of him/her, and find someone who will make you happy!”

Instead of a new marriage, what you need is a *renewed marriage!* And you can have it. With the hard work and effort outlined in this book, powerful changes can occur in your life! Better yet, if both husband and wife practice these concepts together, I guarantee success!

Chapter 1

Cause and Cure



MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIPS CAN bring the greatest happiness, satisfaction and personal fulfillment. Or they can bring the worst possible emotional pain and personal despair.

In my many years of working with couples as pastor and as counselor, I have observed two interesting groups. One group managed to overcome many difficulties and to enjoy an excellent and productive relationship. Things may have been extremely hard for them, especially in the beginning. But they managed to sail on through stormy seas. Their glass was always at least half full. By working through conflicts together, life became truly worth living.

The other group had smooth sailing at first: normal courtship, nice wedding, both families happy with the arrangement. But somewhere along the line, life became humdrum with very little in the way of excitement or joy. They just lived their lives away. Nothing got better, nothing got worse. Their glass remained half empty. Their grade for living was no better than c-minus. These couples often drifted apart.

I felt there must be some obvious reasons for these two groups. My observations led me to believe that these negative and positive approaches to wedded life start early and become deeply ingrained. Cause and effect go on working over the years. We need to find the reasons and do something about it.

Resentments and Conflicts

Entirely too many otherwise good marriages develop hurt feelings, resentments and conflicts. They may simply and tragically drift apart. A great mound of negative memories piles up between two people until husband and wife can no longer find a way around, under or over this emotional mountain.

You must discover and take responsibility for the reasons any distancing may be taking place in your relationship. This book will attempt to help you understand the dynamics and suggest ways to resolve your difficulties. I hope you will take the information you read here and run with it.

What Goes Wrong?

Do you know what has gone wrong with most troubled marriages? One or both spouses has begun the *process of de-valuing their mate*. That person you thought had such great value now gradually loses luster. You began marriage with high hopes; now things are dragging. Your dreams are beginning to turn into nightmares. You don't know who or what to blame. You may vacillate between blaming yourself and blaming the other person.

The de-valuing process may start with a real or imagined slight which grows into resentment. Mentally you dwell on how hurt you are, how disappointed, how grieved. These feelings may surface at tense moments. The other person involved may wonder at your behavior. They may want an explanation, which may elicit remarks such as, "I'm feeling stressed," or "I didn't really mean it that way."



Have you heard the concept of the “thin entering wedge”? Perhaps early on, even during the honeymoon, the wedge entered in between you and your spouse in the form of a doubt: “I wonder whether I should have married this person,” or “If only he/she wouldn’t act that way!” or “Maybe this wasn’t meant to be.”

As this effect deepens, negative thoughts spring to your mind. That idealistic feeling of being in love with a wonderful person begins to erode. You begin to emotionally distance yourself from that person. You dwell on all the negatives, all your differences, all the reasons things are going wrong. You can lose sight of the true essence of the person when you focus on habits and manners that irritate you.

Marriage is meant to bring people close. But the opposite is starting to happen. Talk about frustration ... depression ... anxiety. Here is a fertile field for growing negative reactions to life.

De-Valuing Another Human Being

What is your value as a person? Do you value your spouse for his ability to make money, or for her good looks or popularity? How do you rate yourself? Do you have a higher rating than she has? Does he have a higher rating than you have?

There is no way to legislate the value of a human being. A person, any person, created in the image of God, given their existence on this earth by Providence, has value. Their value is intrinsic. It does not come from what they accomplish in life. It does not derive from their personal financial worth, good looks, talents, abilities or education.

Your value was there when you were first conceived. It was there when you were born. It was there when you were in kindergarten. At every stage in life you had intrinsic value. Your knowledge grew; you developed abilities and skills. But your value remained the same.

When you entered into the “holy estate” of matrimony your

value and that of your spouse-to-be did not depend upon any of the outward trappings of life. Your value was that of persons God made, persons to whom God gave heart, soul, mind and strength for life and living. Your Creator saw to it that you two had what it takes to make a marriage work and do well together.

Later we will talk of how God made robins with the ability to nest. They are fully equipped to do the job of raising their young.

So are you. Your existence is far above that of robins. But the same Creator God gave you all you need—it's already built in. You just need to take responsibility for your actions and seek the constant help of your Creator in your daily life.

Something Missing?

Something vital is decidedly missing from your family and marriage if the Lord is excluded. He made us with the desire to marry and have a family. And hordes of humans have managed to make marriage work with just their natural giftedness, instincts, and knowledge. But there can be so much more to life!

Your creator God desires to be your personal Savior and Lord—Lord of your heart and Lord of your marriage. God loves you and He wants you to know Him. As you turn to Him, He will be your Helper, your Counselor, your Guide, your stability.

In this amoral age, it is easy to go off on your own, to do what you feel is best . . . and get lost! A hiker in wooded mountains who tries to find his way guided only by what he feels is the right direction, will likely be lost. Let yourself be guided by the absolutes of the Word of God.

Accept Change

We are not living in a static world that has reached perfection. We are not perfect. A married couple's life together is dynamic. Changes will constantly occur. Feelings will be ruffled. Differences



will arise. These should be talked over and thoroughly understood.

Get used to it! You are going to be putting up with each other for the long run. Make time together quality time. Treat each other with respect. Tolerate each other's dumb ways. Compliment and affirm each other's goodness and good behaviors. Practice being good natured. Practice self control. Try not to react without thinking when something he or she does or says doesn't set right with you. Calmly talk about how the situation looks to you, and how you are affected by it. End up with a hug.

Re-do the house, not your spouse! Take out your energies on chores, yard work, cooking projects, not on each other. If you allow too much nervous energy to build within you, it will eventually affect the way you treat each other. Release nervous energy. Empty the dishwasher. Tidy the family room. Walk the dog. Work out on that new exercise machine or at the gym. Go to the market for that special flavor of ice cream you both like.

Above All, Forgive

You must forgive yourself for being human and making dumb mistakes. Too many people foul up their relationships simply because they are too depressed to function well. A lot of their sadness and low spirits come from a sense of inferiority. They simply do not feel good about themselves. They may go through cycles, one day feeling almost too good about themselves, the next day sad and mad at themselves.

To truly accept yourself and consciously enter into the process of responsibly doing all you reasonably can to develop your people skills will put you on the right road. You can do better; you can improve—even small steps will give you a new, healthy sense of self.

Your marriage can be the arena for joy in successful living or an arena for combat. Your attitude can make all the difference in

the world. A lot will depend on how you view yourself. A lot will depend on your view of your spouse as well.

You will foul things up if you hold grudges. There will probably always be things in your spouse—actions, words or slights—that will bother you. But if you cannot forgive her or him for being human and making mistakes, you will poison your relationship. Nothing causes more heartache than an unforgiving spirit.

Say “I’m sorry”—and mean it. Truly own up to your carelessness, your stupidity, your hurtfulness and go with change. As long as you blame the other person for the tensions, nothing will improve. You must take your share of the blame, and perhaps a little extra. You must go at least half way to cross the gap between you.

The dynamics of your marriage can improve only as you face your own weaknesses and your own bad habits, addictions, and compulsions. Ask your mate to help you, be there for you, assist you when you struggle to change. Be positive and constructive in assisting each other.

Working your way through the difficult times can bring you great joy and satisfaction. Be persistent. Take the long road of responsibility for your own actions.

Working together for the good of each other (and for any children that are involved) is vital. Build trust accompanied by compassion, understanding, forgiveness and acceptance.

Great Rewards for Hanging In There

Personalities unfold steadily and continuously. You will be getting to know each other for the rest of your lives together. This represents the greatest reward and recompense of the beautiful, God-ordained state of marriage.

The unfolding and blossoming of your personalities will not take place under duress nor when you neglect or ignore each other. It will only take place in healthy interactions. Great rewards will



come to those who learn to really care for each other, treat each other rightly and give each other the security to be yourselves. You need to be totally unafraid to express yourselves fully, each letting the other person know everything there is to know about you.

You also need to grow and develop individually. According to our Creator's design, there is no end to what we can become. Your minds can expand. Your emotions can take on new dimensions. Your spirit can become stronger and wiser. You can truly blossom if you know someone in the world cares and appreciates you!

There is no situation on earth more suited to helping each other to get on with personal growth than marriage. In the arena of married life you can stimulate each other to become all God made you to be.

Chapter 2

Pursue Love



WHETHER YOU ARE ENGAGED to be married, newly-wed, or married with kids, remember this—marriage is the greatest arena in the world for practicing the Golden Rule: *Do for others* (in this case your spouse) *as you would have them do for you*¹... and the Second Greatest Commandment: *Love others at least as well as you love yourself*.²

Think of it now. Before marriage you learned to survive on your own. You learned to plan, to organize, to live daily as a single person. After the wedding, there were two of you planning, organizing and living your lives—in harmony, I hope. It is important that both of you—not just one of you—give input to the overall design of your lives. You need both sets of wisdom God has given to you as a couple.

At times all marriages have a bit of selfishness creep in. Perhaps one of you starts to feel unloved by the other. Don't go any further until you find out why.

¹Matt. 7:12, my translation

²Matt. 22:39, my translation