

MID-LIFE MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT PART 1  
By Pastor Glenn Pease

INTRODUCTION

In every field of knowledge and skill men are constantly being upgraded. New ideas discoveries and technologies make the old obsolete. Marriage is a great field where knowledge and skill are needed to make it function well. People would not dream of starting a business, or a school with as little preparation as they have to begin marriage. They would not buy a suit or dress without examining it in the daylight, but they do not hesitate to take a mate by moonlight. They spend hours talking and preparing for the wedding, which only last a short time, and do little preparation for the marriage which is to last a life time. There is much truth to the statement, "People wouldn't get divorced for trivial reasons if they didn't get married for trivial reasons."

A 90 year old wife on her anniversary said, "People don't work at being married these days. They don't realize that love is a chore as well as a charm....Back in 1878, when I got married, women were more sensible. We tied our wedding knots with steel then. If a girl found her husband puzzling, she worked until she solved him. She didn't shop around for another man, like they do now." Henry Ford was asked by a newspaper man as to the secret to his success in marriage. He said, "The formula is the same as the one used to make a successful car, stick to one model!"

Morris Mandel in, How To Married And Happy writes, "Unfortunately, couples who face marriage problems only rarely seek qualified help. Instead, they rush with their complaints to friends, neighbors and relatives--people who are completely unequipped to handle the situation. They are either blinded by the blood of the relationship, or give advice based upon their own inadequacies, frustrations and disappointments.'

Mandel says there is too little a grasp of what mature married love is. He writes, "It is based on two people knowing each other, accepting each others strengths and weaknesses, making compromises, giving and receiving, sharing joys and sorrows, and having the willingness to work toward the goal of good relationships in home and family. It implies accepting each as we really are...."

LESSON 1

Phyllis Diller has written a book on how to look and stay young. Her first chapter is on the joys of aging, and how to avoid them. She gives some basic advice on life such as, mud wrestling is messier than stamp collecting, and young is better than old. Albert Schweitzer was a great humanitarian, but could he get a date on New Year's Eve? She goes over great with senior citizens. They throw polident and Wendell Wilkie buttons at her, and slap their social security cards together in applause. She writes, "Your body is a temple, and you take care of it or your husband will worship somewhere else." She says, "If you are what you eat, I am leftovers." Her husbands bought her plastic flowers and she got artificial hay fever. She was so fat she had more chins than a Chinese phone book.

INTRODUCTION

To get acquainted husbands will share how you met, and wives will share how you proposed.

Marriage is like a car and needs to be tuned up every once in awhile to operate at its highest efficiency. Marriage enrichment helps tune up your marriage and get it running on all cylinders again. In each session we hope to do three things.

1. Inspiration--what does God say.
2. Instruction--what do men say.
3. Interaction--what do you say.

Col. 3:12-19. We see that all human relationships involve the negative and the positive. You have to take both, for there is only one kind of person. People can be divided into lost sinners or saved sinners but all are sinners, and thus there is inevitable need for forgiveness, for conflict is inevitable. By implication the toughest thing for a wife is to be submissive, and for the husband it is to be loving and not harsh.

Play ten minutes of Charlie Shedd--ten ways to treat a woman in public and discuss. ( Some of these resources you may not be able to find, and so substitute some other issue for discussion.)

Problems are not the problem. Everybody has problems. It is part of the game of life, and if you play you have problems. But how you deal with them is the key issue. There are bad ways, good ways and better ways to deal with life's problems, and the whole idea of marriage enrichment is to help couples find the better ways. I had a boss once who got angry and kicked the machine that wasn't working right. He broke his toe and for weeks he had to work in a cast and hobble around the plant. It was not an impressive way to deal with a problem.

WHAT IS MIDDLE AGE? 40-60

1. Ogden Nash--"Middle age is when you've met so many people that every new person you meet reminds you of someone else."
2. It is when you don't have to have fun to enjoy yourself.
3. It is that time of life when everything begins to wear out, fall out, or spread out.
4. It is that time of life where you need to not fight it, but face it gracefully and adapt.

Bernie Newgarten writes, "Imagine for a moment that all of human life is one huge circus under an enormous tent. Imagine all the behavioral scientists (psychologists, sociologists, etc.) are the observers of the show. If you can imagine this, you will notice something strange. Those observers are concentrated in two places. A large crowd of them is gathered at the entrance, observing childhood and adolescence. A somewhat smaller crowd is gathered at the exit observing aging, senility and dying. but both groups have been missing the main show...that is, what's going on in the three-ring circus that we call adulthood."

It is harder and harder to impress those who know us well. Our wives and children know our act by heart. This is why the middle age people live in two different worlds. The charming and enthusiastic world of the outsider, and the all too often dull routine of the home life. The act is still fresh and new outside of the home, and so there is joy and fun in going on with the play, but at home the clapping has ceased and the curtain has come down.

We cease to pretend not realizing that people tend to become what they pretend to be. It is really a benefit to us to go out and pretend to be happy, for this leads us to become happy. But at home we often become dull and boring because we cease to pretend.

We need to be actors on the stage of life. The real is not limited to what is. The real has potential that we miss because we do not pretend and create more reality. The middle aged person needs to get a renewed interest in fantasy and the wonderful world of make believe.

#### CONTRAST OF

##### Young couple

1. Idealistic
2. Tolerant of short comings
3. He encourages her independence
4. He tends to be discussion maker
5. They still court
6. She accepts role of homemaker
7. She is submissive
8. Attempt to please each other
9. More communication on plans

##### Mid-life couple

1. Realistic
2. Less tolerant of faults
3. He begins to resent her independence
4. He tends to abdicate leadership
5. They take each for granted
6. She begins to resent being tied to home
7. She resents his authority
8. Focus on pleasing self
9. Tendency to act independently

\* Do you agree or disagree that these fit Christian mates as well?

#### PROBLEMS OF MIDDLE AGE

1. A sense of finality. You will not get another chance to decide what to do in life.
2. Awareness of one's mortality. You might taste of death before you have tasted all of the life you hoped to taste.
3. Unfulfilled dreams and many questions. What have I done with my life? What are my greatest assets and how am I using them?
4. Worry about many things that can lead to health problems.
5. Fear that we are no longer needed.
6. Staleness and no romance or excitement.
7. Conflicts with your mate over directions to go and becoming more selfish.

#### BLESSINGS OF MIDDLE AGE.

1. Often the time of greatest financial security.
2. Freedom to be creative, and freedom from many obligations of child rearing, etc.
3. Time to make the future happen.
4. Motivated to help the younger generation by your wisdom learned in life.
5. Freedom to do your own thing and not try to keep up with the Jones.

#### MID-LIFE CRISIS

All ages of life have their crises, but in mid-life they can be more severe. Failure at a young age is not as big a deal, for you just move on in a

different direction, but now it is much harder to move on. A dead end job is more stressful for the choices are fewer. We become less flexible, and lust and extramarital affairs become a greater threat. Children are raised and divorce becomes more acceptable. Bad habits have become locked in and hard to change. Anger at life is more common. 31 middle-agers gave these responses as to what they suffered-

1. Anxiety
2. Frustration
3. Lack of direction and purpose
4. Isolation and a sense of being alone
5. Feelings of worthlessness
6. Feelings of being trapped
7. Declining sex drive but greater lust.
8. Fear over financial matters
9. Tiredness and worry about health
10. Feelings of getting a raw deal
11. Giving up and not having any goals
12. Depression and feeling empty
13. Boredom with what used to be exciting
14. Anger and bitterness

It is primarily a struggle for the meaning of life. Those who are successful and have met all of their goals begin to say, so what. Those not successful are saying, how will I ever be successful? Men are not sure they want to be what they are. He may feel his job has wasted his life. Like Solomon in Eccles. he is ever saying, "vanity of vanities--all is vanity." This questioning of values is a crisis because it can lead to radical decisions.

A man may run away and leave his family or get into an affair. He questions the validity of his decisions in the past, and exaggerates all of the negatives of his life. He becomes restless and no longer stable, and no longer secure. He wants to escape from obligations. He becomes very critical about the family, and the cost of things, and the way the house is run. He specializes in complaining and makes everyone feel down because he is so frustrated himself. He expects his children to be grown up and successfully independent, and not yet needing his help on everything.

Research shows that about 80% of American men suffer moderate to severe symptoms of mid-life crisis. Some studies show it to be near 100%. Marriage is tested by this crisis. Mates who have not learned how to confront each other tend to want to escape by divorce. Their sex life is dull and boring if they have not labored to keep it alive. They often cease to care about being attractive and seductive to each other. The highest divorce rate is in the first 5 years. The second is the mid-life era.

Women tend to hit the "last chance" urgency at about 35.

1. The average mother sends her last child off to school at 35.
2. The average working mother reenters the work world at 35.
3. The average run away wife is 35; she was married at 19 and had her first child at 11 months. They are usually well off financially, but they do not feel valued.
4. Kinsey's figures show that a wife is most likely to be unfaithful in her late 30's. Her thinking is: "This is my last chance to have a fling before I lose my looks."

PREVENTION

The goal of a couple is to be aware of the dangers of mid-life crisis and plan to offset them. The affair is prevented by developing a sex life that is one of growing excitement so that an affair is not alluring. There is a need to develop affection, caring, and sharing, and all of the things that lead to sex. Be determined to grow and not become stagnant. Don't make each other feel trapped. Be willing to make life style changes.

The good news is, it is a tumultuous but only temporary time of turbulence. The transition period lasts about 3 years.