



Why Didn't Someone Tell Me?

By Dr. Gary Chapman, Chapter 23 from his book *Covenant Marriage**

It was Saturday afternoon in Tucson. My seminar was over. Couples were beginning to disperse from the auditorium where we had been meeting when Andrew walked up to me, tears running down his face, and said, "Why didn't someone tell me all of this years ago? I have learned more about marriage in the last few hours than I have learned in a lifetime. If I had known all of this, my marriage would have been very different."

I learned later in our conversation that Andrew's wife, Lynn, had walked out three weeks earlier, telling him that she "no longer wanted to be married." Andrew attended the seminar frantically seeking to discover where he had failed. "I'm not sure my wife will give me another chance," he said. "I wish I had known all of this from the beginning."

Tragically, there are thousands of Andrews and Lynns in the contemporary Christian community. Some have attended churches for years. Except for an occasional sermon on marriage, they have received little help in building a Christian marriage. They have never been confronted with the biblical concepts of covenant marriage, and they have not tools with which to build wholesome communication and intimacy. In a practical sense, they are no better equipped than their secular peers. Does this explain why the divorce rate inside the church parallels the divorce rate in secular culture?

What is ironic is that Andrew and Lynn live in a generation that has produced more Christian books on marriage and more marriage enrichment materials than previous generations. The problem is not lack of resources by lack of exposure. Andrew later admitted that before attending my marriage seminar, he had never read a book on marriage, never worked through any marriage enrichment materials, never attended a marriage enrichment retreat, never talked to a Christian counselor, and never discussed his marriage with his pastor. "I thought our marriage was fine," he said. "Until she walked out the door, I never knew she was unhappy."

Those of us who are professional and lay leaders in the church may seek to allay our guilt by assuming that Andrew was simply a naïve husband who should have been more sensitive to his wife's needs. I am not diminishing Andrew's responsibility; however, I was not able to place all the blame at Andrew's feet when I realized that he was an active member of a Christian church for twenty years.

Recently, I met with 200 pastors from many denominations. At the end of my presentation on marriage enrichment in the church, I asked, "How

many of you have a staff couple or lay couple who have been assigned the specific responsibility of marriage enrichment in your church?" Five hands out of 200 were raised. That means that in 195 churches out of 200, no one had even been assigned the responsibility for marriage enrichment. Until this reality changes, the number of Andrews and Lynns in our congregations will continue to proliferate.

If the church is going to make a difference in contemporary culture, there is no better place to start than in calling the church to rediscover the biblical mandate of covenant marriage. My academic background is anthropology, the study of cultures. No culture has ever survived the breakdown of marriage and family. Western culture will not be an exception. If the trends of the past twenty years continue, Western civilization will self-destruct. The family is the basic unit of social stability. When the family structure loses its grip on society, the society itself becomes unstable.

I am deeply convinced that the only hope for changing current trends lies with the Christian church. My vision is that every local church in every denomination will have regular, ongoing marriage enrichment events provided for its congregation. Once Christian marriages begin to take seriously the biblical pattern for marriage, it will become exceedingly attractive to the non-Christian world.

A few years ago when Dr. Ross Campbell and I wrote the book *Parenting Your Adult Child*, we discovered that 87 percent of single adults between the ages of twenty and thirty said, "I want to have one marriage that will last for a lifetime." They have seen their parents divorce; they have felt the pain of abandonment. That is not what they desire to replicate. Of course, they have no idea as to how they can reach the aspiration of a lifelong marriage relationship. Man by nature is self-centered, and the desire for a lifelong marriage usually focuses on the individual's realization that that is best for him or her. However, such self-centered thinking is not what produces lifelong marriages.

The Christian church has not only the model of covenant marriage but both the clear instruction from God on how to have such a marriage as well as the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to love unconditionally and to give our lives in service to another. These are the essential ingredients for a covenant marriage.

If you are a member of a Christian church, pastor, or layperson, I urge you to pray that God will raise up one couple in your church who will have vision and passion for directing marriage enrichment in

your church. If your church already has a couple who have accepted the responsibility for marriage enrichment, pray that God will give them wisdom to plan and execute marriage enrichment events that will change the lives of the couples in your church. This is the place to start.

Marriage enrichment events need not be elaborate or expensive. It can be as simple as bringing together two or three couples who commit themselves to read and discuss a book on Christian marriage and afterward encourage each other in implementing its principles.

Any couple who has a growing marriage can lead others to the same. You need not have a perfect marriage in order to be a marriage enrichment leader. We are all in process. The more we learn, the more we can share with others. Starting where you are, you can enrich your own marriage and be God's instrument for helping others.

At my marriage seminars I encourage couples to take two steps guaranteed to give them a growing marriage. *First*, attend a marriage enrichment event once a year. This may be a weekend marriage seminar or conference. It may be an eight-week class in your local church. *Secondly*, share one book on marriage every year. Earlier in this book, we talked about how to share a book: read one chapter per week and share with each other one thing you learned about yourself in the chapter. It is an easy way to stimulate communication and enhance marital growth. If you are a pastor or lay leader, let me encourage you to do

these two things to enrich your own marriage and better prepare you to minister to others.

If you are a pastor, let me also encourage you not to attempt doing all of the marriage enrichment in your church. Pray that God will raise up a lay couple who will take that responsibility. Lead the church to put monies in the budget to send this couple to marriage enrichment seminars and conferences where they can sharpen their skills in leading marriage enrichment. Also, include monies in the budget to help defray the cost of counseling. When couples in your fellowship reach a crisis in their marriage relationship, often couples do not get the help that is available because they feel that they cannot afford the cost. The church should remove this barrier. It is an excellent investment of church finances. Every marriage saved affects hundreds of other couples.

Pastors and lay leaders who refuse to accept the current divorce trends as inevitable but seek to initiate practical ways of training Christian couples in the skills necessary to maintain a covenant marriage can make a lasting difference not only in Western culture but around the world. The success of Christian marriages will greatly impact the kingdom of God not only in this generation but for generations to come.

Chapman, Gary. ***Covenant Marriage***. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group. 2003

* Used by permission, all rights reserved