

It is not a lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages- Friedrich Nietzsche

I wanted to try an experiment. My whole life had been centered around working, sex, and marriage. It is what people do. Men and women pursue careers through this thing called work. Inside that, we notice people of the opposite sex. It's was the same in high school. We work at math and writing, yet surrounding us were girls and boys. At work and in school plays out a question: what was more important, the work or play?

The answer to the question is play of course. Who loves work more than play? A famous song by the group Loverboy says "everybody is working for the weekend." The goal on my weekend was to have the girl. It seemed like a rat race. Around and around we go working and chasing. I had pursued this merry-go-round all my life. What if I was wrong? My experiment was to buck the trend. I needed to quit the rat race.

This experiment consisted of me figuring myself out. A few books I had read implied that I should know me first. That meant I needed to study the man in the mirror. With that said, I did two things to change my direction. First is that I refused to work more than was required. It seems odd to turn down money and overtime. I needed money to date. I needed money to live. It became either time at work or time with me. I chose me.

The second was that I refused to date for a period of time. I needed to stop and smell the roses. Slow down and find myself first. I am a married type of guy. I love women. Who knows why? To be the best mate I needed to become a good mate. Believe it or not, the best mate is a happy one. Were trained to believe that the happy one should be the other. You know the drill. Shower the wife with gifts. Stand by your man. Yet, if the "me" gets ignored, then the trouble begins. We all need a happy "me."

I will admit that relationships are engrained in me. My mother had encouraged me years ago to give a gift to a little girl when I was about six or seven. Why encourage a young boy to look at girls? It is what parents have always done. They find a mate and then look for a mate for their children. The problem is that I began looking where my mother was pointing. I was not looking at me or school. Instead, I was focused on relationships and the long pursuit of marriage. I should have been developing me first, not my ideal marriage.

Marriage at seven years old? No, but yes. We are trained to look. At school, all the trainees tell each other to look. In the class room our eyes wander. At lunch, after school, and on the weekend, we hunt through our friends for the one to marry. Maybe we don't find them for years, but were trained to look. The trouble begins with what we're looking for. If I know me then I know what to look for. The best mate should be what's best for you. Yet, were trained to look first and work on ourselves a distant 20th.

My mom said "isn't she pretty?" My dad though that girl was good looking. Marry for the wrong reasons and divorce happens. Luckily, were trained to get back on that horse. There are dating bars and singles websites. I knew a church that had a great singles club. They stated that it was not about hooking up but growing up in God. One person told me they don't go anymore because there was not much there. Not much what? Pretty, attractive, successful, and functioning marriage prospects. Were always looking for the perfect. Yet, we rarely try and be the perfect. Why? It's because mom and dad trained us that way.

To top that, the leaders of the singles group were married. So, what? The reason they were married is because all the single people who ran the club eventually hooked up with someone. The married couple were two of those people. I ended up dating a girl from my singles club. The

club died soon after because of two things. One is that I became divided over dating and the club. Secondly, all the single girls felt betrayed by me for picking someone who was not them. While being single I should have been working on me. A singles group is not the best place to do that.

Is it our nature to look? Some would say that this is all bunk. We're not free to look for a mate. Were schooled to look. Trained to look. Social activist cry out "life is more than just looking for someone to shack up with." They are right. Yet, these same people claim we are animals. True or not most people believe we are. Some of those people also claim we should not act like animals. Many animal species pursue a mate. The vast majority of humans want a mate too. It's the bear necessities of life.

I have discovered much about myself. The pursuit of "me" was quirky, fun, and interesting. I figured out what kind of person I am and who is right for me. Then I realized that other people are trying to find themselves too. They want good relationships. It's what many people do. People in school are looking. In a bar their chasing. At church they are glancing? It's not a societal mind twist. People want relationships with people.

So, you don't like men. Why not abstain from relationships? No, many women decide they are lesbians or a-sexual. Some guys hate rejection from girls. They realize they are gay. Sexual orientation does not limit the relationship drive. They decide who they are and begin looking for a relationship. Is being gay or a-sexual mean the absence of relationships. Hell, no!

Maybe one guy decided to be a priest. How often have they fallen into sexual trouble? I know a priest that hid his relationship with a woman for over 40 years. They lived a life of cloak and deception by hiding it the whole time. It's an amazing story. We are driven to have relationships. No matter if you're on a personal revelation or a celibate trek as a priest. People

are looking for people to be in relationships with. Sometimes it involves hiding it, chasing it, or looking for it. It's so engrained within us that in other moments were driven to go deeper. Driven to move from friendship into a marriage.

Marriage is interesting. Is it a human thing? We have taken the pursuit of sex and procreation and given it something else to ponder. Do we need a mom and a dad? Do we need sex, babies, and love? People are passionate about relationships. We are emotional creatures. Humans do some things that the animal world does not. We cry, marry, kill for fun, and have sex for pleasure. Animals are focused. They pursue what comes naturally regardless of the cause and effect: a mate. So, do humans. Marriage is a human chapter within relationships.

Let's add another human trait, to decide whether or not to have sex. I have often wondered if we categorize people upon contact. Are you a friend, enemy, sexual, mate, and just "no." I read this book where the guy told his dates that he was not looking for a short-term relationship? Marriage was his goal. Some of the girls thought that was weird and creepy talking about marriage right off the top. His point was to filter out the waste of time dating. He felt it was a waste of time to screw around with those he did not want to marry. He wanted a mate. A marriage relationship.

In that book, he was rejected at one point, and found himself sitting in his closet at work crying. What I noticed is where he was. At work, should be about work. How did a worker end up crying over a girl in a work-related closet? It's because we are always on the prowl. Work is as good a place as any to find a mate. We do love work. I bet we love to play more.

Humans love the mating playground. We know the drill. I tried to leave dating and marriage in the closet. Fate knows humans too. There was a community event that I was running. All day

long I did my job, buried in the work. At various times during that day, a few ladies had directed this girl towards me. I had horse blinders on. At the end of the day, this girl got my attention. We talked for a bit and as she departed from me, I noticed her butt. Nice butt! After that, the work became secondary. Seven months later we married. The more things change the more they stay the same.

Humans can say they like being single. We can say we love working. In a split second, the thing we were trained to do takes over. Nothing else matters. Kids grow up, usually, in a family. They are encouraged to make friends. All of it is a funnel towards marriage. To be fair, it's not just marriage. Dating, living together, and co-habituating is all part of it. Not everyone marries, but most of us do pursue some form of relationship.

Sometimes those relationships move from dating to marriage. A marriage ceremony is not mentioned in the Old testament. A priest standing up at the alter is not Biblical. Sometimes the Bible mentions the act of sex as being together. Adam is implied to marry Eve by entering her. Human history has taken sex, procreation, and living together one step further. God said they shall leave their mother and father and become one. We have called that marriage for a very long time. Call it what you want, it's still the pursuit of a mate.

If it's going to be marriage, then it's going to be a vow. If they make it a vow then it should be serious. I believe that the difference between shacking up and marriage is the vow. Some people live together for a very long time. Eventually they decide to marry. Sometimes they divorce soon after. Is it marriage or the vow that killed it? I know a guy who says he won't marry because it causes trouble. I say the vow causes trouble. Is your mate precious enough to make a vow? Are you honorable enough to keep it?

Tradition also says that we honor marriage with some sort of token like a ring. I suppose it could be anything. The token needs to be visible and bought for a price. In the Bible it was a nose ring. It's for life too. With all the divorce out there "for life" seems a very long time. Rings can be tossed or sold. Can a vow be tossed? We are encouraged to date. Encouraged to marry. Are we encouraged to make a vow? We are encouraged to chase the mate. Yet, I'm not so sure were trained to keep a vow.

Where did tradition come from? I think it's assumed actions. God said that two shall become one. In the honor of devotion, commitment, and stable environment for children, we marry for life. The vow is to work together. At one point we were friends, and then we became a team in marriage. If it's beyond friends then it's beyond many things. I said before that we are trained to do relationships in a family. We work that out in our friendships. Finally, we use that training ground in the ultimate friendship called a marriage. Why does it go badly so often? It's because we assume too much, not treating the vow as it was intended.

People seem to treat a marriage like it's their long-lost family. At first, it's wonderful. There are hugs, time spent, and new memories are made. Then we stop visiting. When marriage stops being friends and becomes family, were in trouble. How easy is it to be angry at a brother or mother? Me included; I know so many people who are at odds with a family member. Do we really care that much about blood? When a friend becomes a spouse, they become more than a family member. There is a difference.

In family, we treat it as a right to be angry. Were family, you have no right to treat me that way. So, we distance ourselves. Even in surface relationships, we can always find another friend. Then we make a vow towards a special friend. Yes, they become our new family. yet,

there's a vow that should make the relationship special and different. Then our default usually kicks in. People get angry and ignore their newly formed family. A marriage partner is not blood. They should be your best friend more than just a family member. When we lose sight of that fact, trouble begins. Imagine taking a vow to honor your best friend for life. That seems way more powerful than honoring family. the mindset needs to be best friend before family.

In a marriage, that special friend becomes your new family. He or she is your spouse. It's still a friendship that you chose. It's different than blood. Yet, people are people. We are creatures of habit. Fight or flight. Far too often, in a marriage, we forget that were at odds with our best friend. We begin to treat them as personal attacks just like in a family. I suppose they lose their special friend status in our hearts. People made marriage a tradition for a reason. It's a chance to grow together with your best friend. Since most of us have so few friends, marriage should be considered special, precious, and rare. Unfortunately, we have been trained to take things personally like in a family.

There is a reason that Jesus talked at length about anger. He said in Matthew 5 to leave the tribute at the altar and go make amends with the person you are having trouble with. It's interesting that the tribute goes to an altar. There are biblical reasons for this. Yet, we marry at an altar too. We exchange gifts at the altar. People make their vow there. You can't treat your marriage partner like your family and surface friends. Why? It's because of the vow at an altar.

What is a vow to you? Is it really that frivolous? We don't generally sleep with our friends. If sex is for pleasure only then what is a wife? What is a baby? I said in the Family chapter that I had a vision of what family should look like. Many families don't work out that way. We do abandon friends and family. It's not nice but friends are not blood. They are

replaceable. I wish that was not true. Family is blood but not that replaceable. That's frustrating some times. Yet, we are willing to cut them out of our lives. The last person you should want to abandon is your best friend. Your spouse in a marriage.

This is the ultimate relationship on earth. Jesus talked about his relationship with us being like a marriage. It's intimate (not sex), honest, friendship, and a vow. I wonder if Jesus was the first a-sexual person? All through this book I have tried to break apart relationships. Why are they so messy? With marriage you might need to ask yourself some hard questions. Why is your spouse not your best friend? Maybe, you picked the wrong spouse. Possibly, you married for the wrong reasons. A good relationship is built on more than just sex.

You don't marry to enjoy a spouse only when you want to. They are not in the closet waiting for you to come home. Our job, as a spouse, is to go beyond friendship and into a marriage. You have made a vow to treat your spouse better than surface friends and family. The institution of marriage has become a swamp. It's become a *what have you done for me lately thing*. It's my way or the highway. Amazingly, even your friends and family don't get to endure that kind of crap from you. Marriage becomes a swamp when we stop loving ourselves and start blaming our best friend.

Stop loving ourselves? Didn't you just say to focus on your mate? A marriage vow is to them. What we also need is a healthy "me" vow. I vow to work my mind; take care of my health; and be the best "me" I can. So, to be a good friend. Be a great spouse. It's all about working on you with one hand and helping those you love with the other hand. A healthy marriage begins with you.

Marriage is the ultimate expressing of family and friends. We take the best of both worlds and share it with another. Sex is necessary but it's a bonus. A bonus for being good to you and your spouse. Two bodies come together in sexual union. The glue is love. The Bible talks at length about loving God. Honoring your wife. Treat your body as a holy temple. All those things combined should inspire us to begin a new family. We sometimes call that a marriage.

I could have talked about marriage as it is. Instead, I have wanted to look under the hood of a marriage. Ask the hard questions like "why marry?" "Why fight and cause dissention in a marriage relationship?" In many ways we have treated marriage all wrong. It's not to gain rights over another person. They are not our slave or servant. They are not family. He or she are not just a friend. A marriage partner goes far deeper than that.

I'm sorry but marriage only has a fighting chance if "you" are in right standing. Who are you in the mirror? Making the best version of "you" first is the perfect way to have a successful marriage. The saying "a happy wife is a happy life" is a lie. Why is she happy? Did you give her everything she wanted? Is she happy inside? Far too many marriages crumble. Why? It's because the "you or them" is not doing as well as they should be inside.

Moving from family into the dating world is unfair. We date most of the time without knowing ourselves and what to look for. It looks like a seemingly natural progression into marriage. That's what tradition says we should do. Yet, dating should be a natural bridge. Consider it natural selection. Weeding out what's not right for you. That is not how we roll in dating. It's more like an ice-cream shop. What flavor looks yummy.

What we should be doing first is creating a yummy "you." To have good relationships, we need to see ourselves in the mirror as a good choice. In a date, we take all we have learned in

family and friendships and look for it. Do you see the best friendship in the person across from you? Would they make a great family? I think we can only see a potential partner in marriage when we can see ourselves clearly. The natural bridge is knowing who I am and knowing what I love. Take that knowledge and look for it while you date. In the long run that will give marriage a good chance to succeed. It's time to look at ourselves and visit the relationship you have with "you."