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It's All About Perspective

Susan E. Murray
Andrews University

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FAMILY TIES

It's All About Perspective

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

Some years ago, Christian writer and counselor H. Norman Wright and a colleague pastor, Wes Roberts, shared a list of ten negative reasons why couples marry, which can be found in the book, *Before You Say I Do*. I believe the reasons still hold true today. If you are considering marriage, you may want to stop right now and write out your own list. Then compare your list with the following negative reasons:

- To spite your parents
- Because marriage will make you feel worthwhile and will give meaning to your life
- To be a therapist or counselor in order to fix your fiancé (To try to fix or change your fiancé)
- The fear that you might never be married
- The fear of independence or thinking you need to be with someone to feel safe and/or fulfilled
- To ease the pain of having broken up with someone else
- Being worried over what will happen to your fiancé if you break up, even though you know this marriage should not occur
- To escape an unhappy home
- Because your fiancé is pregnant
- Because you have been involved sexually

Experts list five healthy reasons why couples marry:

- Companionship
- To work together and fulfill your own and each other's needs
- To fulfill sexual needs in the way God intends
- Love and commitment
- Because you are convinced that it is God's will for you to marry this person

Marriage readiness also involves personal growth in what Scripture labels as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23), being appropriately adaptable and flexible, having the ability to empathize, being able to work through problems, being able to give and receive love, being emotionally stable, having more than a few things in common, having effective communication skills, and having similar family backgrounds.

Even with all these positives in place, couples usually dis-

cover some level of incompatibility. Why? Because we come from different gene pools, were reared by different parents, come from differing cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, and are different genders. Confronting and processing incompatibilities lovingly and not turning them into battlegrounds are essential.

In George Knight's book, *Walking with Ellen White*, he shares insights into the marriage of James and Ellen White. Because the couple lived and worked together, and because both were driven by a belief they must accomplish what God called them to do, they did not have an easy marriage. James "firmly believed that his wife's messages came from God," but her "straight words" about some of his choices and actions, including his working too much, were hard for him to accept. He confided in one of his sons about how difficult Ellen was to live with.



After James suffered a series of strokes, between 1865 and 1881, he became subject to mood swings and suspicions, causing him to respond quite defensively. At about the same time, Ellen shared with a friend how difficult James was to live with. Sometime later she wrote from California to James, "Forgive me and I will be cautious not to start any subject to annoy and distress you. ... Wherein I have done this, I am sorry." James countered with an apology of his own.

Whatever the tensions, incompatibilities and frustrations of their marriage may have been, their love and commitment were real. After James died in 1881, Ellen reportedly missed him very much. Twenty-five years after James died, Ellen described him as "the best man that ever trod shoe leather."

Susan Murray is a professor emerita of behavioral sciences at Andrews University, and she is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.