

Can I Depend On You? You Promised...At Our Wedding

Facts and Fallacies of Intimacy: Part 5

By Dr. Kevin Downing

FALLACY:

My mate should always be there for me, to help me meet all my needs. That's why we got married – to be help-mates.

FACT:

You married a human being; these types are at times unpredictable and unhelpful. Yet, with the proper expectations your marriage can be a very enjoyable experience. Your mate can be a source of great strength, but never the source of your strength.

Recently I performed the wedding ceremony for my nephew and his young bride. It was in our backyard. As you might imagine, they were on a very thin budget. (But it was beautiful none the less!) My nephew was a Marine in Iraq and has struggled to recover after he was shot in Bagdad. I don't do a lot of weddings, but I was very happy to do this one. They wanted me to pretty much do all the talking during the ceremony including coming up with and reading the vows. I had several sample vows to work from. But, they all sounded lame. After all I've done 25 years of marriage counseling and been married about as long. Weak vows just won't do. So I added:

- ❖ Will you be patient and understanding with him, and do you promise to be kind and tenderhearted towards him?
 - Then I came up with:
- ❖ Do you promise to support her and encourage her in her life's endeavors, to forgive her shortcomings, and to hold her and comfort her when she is hurting?
 - It still wasn't enough, so I tacked on:
- ❖ And to selflessly work for her joy and happiness?

About that time I thought that I better stop. These were additions to a set of already lengthy vows. If I kept going I'd be having them vow to take out the trash. They wouldn't appreciate that. But, somehow I was hoping that more promises would help them have a better marriage. And I wanted the best for them in the worst way.

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Skid Row

I counseled a couple one time where the wife had nothing but criticism for her husband. He couldn't do anything right. Even his attempts to help her were shot down by her cascades of perfectionist condemnations. She felt that there was no way that she could depend on him.

But then I found out that she was part of an outreach team that regularly went down to skid row to minister to the down and out, the street people. I said to her, "So let me get this right, you unconditionally show the love of Christ to the drunk sitting on the curb who hasn't taken a bath in the last three months, let alone even worked a day. Then, you come home and are upset with your husband who has supported you for years and been faithful to you – and even comes to marriage counseling! How can that be?"

She didn't have much to say as she really hadn't thought about her marriage in this way before. Of course she had married her husband, not the alcoholic on skid row. Her expectations were bound to be different. Yet what she wanted from her husband seemed to be beyond what human limitations would allow. SO

How Much Can I Depend On My Mate?

You don't have to be married very long before you discover just how dependable your mate is and in what areas. Are they on time? Do they clean up after themselves? Are they great with kids, or with finances? How is their spiritual life? Do they have a secret addiction you didn't know about when you married? Do you worry about them being faithful to you or is that not even a concern? One thing is for sure and that is you married a human. And as much as your mate wants to be there for you and you for them – we all fall short.

Embracing the Good vs. Taking Our Mate For Granted

I find that in most marriages there are things that we do well for each other. In time we often fail to recognize these things. It may take a tragic loss to wake us up (let's hope not). It's easy to focus on the negative and miss the great parts of the person we married. In marriage counseling we often ask couples what attracted them to their mate when they first met. I am often surprised when I hear a warring couple stop their bickering, break into a smile and recall some fond recollections of first love.

My wife just loves a man that is great with his hands. One time, early in our marriage we were up in the mountains on a snowy day and we got a flat tire. I took out the jack and the spare and changed out the pancake tire right on the side of the road. That gave her some kind of a thrill – I've heard her remember my heroic act periodically through the years. But I also wonder – what about my Ph.D.? I worked a lot harder for my degree than taking a few minutes to change out a flat. What do I do with that? I try to change more tires!

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She doesn't need to understand the academic world I went through years ago – she wants my “hands on” right now in her world. No doubt I have not given her enough. It would be very easy for me to say, “I'm just not a guy who's good with my hands – that's not me – that's not who I am.” The truth is I can be pretty good with my hands – but, it's definitely not my first priority. When I make my wife's priority my priority it is a great thing for our marriage.

The Source

Leaning on God can close the gap in marriage. On one side of the chasm God gives us new strength to meet more closely the desires of our mate. On the other side God fills our needs and we become less needy and demanding of our mate. Without God our marriage can become an idolatrous thing if we expect from our mate what we can only get from God. Consider this Psalm of David:

1. Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.
2. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
3. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.
4. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.
5. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.
6. *“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”* PSALM 37

Your mate is not an ‘evil man’ that you are hoping will wither away and die soon. (If not – you better give us a call!) But, the short comings you and your mate possess will someday be done away with. Trusting, delighting and committing ourselves to God is a consuming thing – been there? It's so hard to be filled with bitterness and resentments when your delight and joy is in the Lord.

Is Your Mate Far From Perfect?

- ❖ Don't worry, fret or be filled with wrath - the Psalm says it will only lead to evil. Let God be God. His word is true
- ❖ Ask God to give you the peace that goes beyond your present circumstance - ask Him that you can see your current situation in the bigger picture – eternity
- ❖ Choose your battles wisely - some things are really worth making an issue of. Other things you need to let go. (Hint: often we have it completely turned around – that is, we are majoring in the minors

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and minoring in the majors. So, what are you fighting and what are you forgetting – perhaps they should be reversed!)

- ❖ Lean into your spiritual disciplines – where has God met you before, and where have you been refreshed? Go to that place again. It may be a place you retreat to, like the beach or the mountains. It may be a great passage of scripture that has spoken to you many times. Read and meditate on it – memorize it. It could be a great book or a quiet time of prayer
- ❖ Reach out for help what friend have you leaned on before – or who has offered or is available to you
- ❖ Remember Turning Point Counseling - we are ministering to you right now. Perhaps we can help you more through our Christian counseling services – we are here to help

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