

Types of Marriages

There are many different ways of classifying marriages. One way is to look at the maturity level of the marriage. I have found it helpful to classify marriages as one of three different types.

The first type of marriage is the mature marriage. The mature marriage is a marriage where both individuals are mature and neither is significantly more or less mature than the other. For this to occur usually both individuals had to be raised in homes with two mature parents that allowed for and encouraged maturity. This seems to occur in less than twenty-five per cent of marriages. These marriages can have problems but the problems are usually not the result of something the couple has done but something done to the individuals or couple. It is usually an external rather than an internal crisis. External crises are ones from outside the control of the marriage such as job loss due to the closing of a plant or factory, a house fire, or even a disease or handicap child. None of these things are within the couple's control.

The second type of marriage is the parental marriage. Parental marriages fall into two classifications--more mature parental marriages and less mature parental marriages. In the more mature parental marriage one spouse is mature and significantly more mature than the other. In the less mature parental marriage one spouse is more mature than the other but is not mature. The mature parental marriage usually produces crises at two points in time. At the fifteenth year of the relationship including the dating time the spouse that was being parented wants to leave home and frequently will experience problems for a couple of years. The second crisis usually comes around the twenty-first year including the dating time when the spouse who was doing the parenting is tired of the additional responsibility and wants the parented spouse to grow up and take responsibility. Again this marriage usually experiences trouble for a couple of years. The less mature parental marriages usually don't make it past nine or twelve years including the dating time. Approximately fifty percent of all marriages fall into one of these two parental marriage categories.

The third type of marriage is the immature marriage. Here neither individual is either mature or significantly more mature than the other. As long as there are no crises in the marriage these couples function normally. When crises come they do not have the maturity to survive. Approximately eighty percent of these marriages go into crisis by the seventh year of the relationship and unless one or both of the spouses begin to mature the marriage usually doesn't survive. If both mature a mature marriage is possible. If one matures and the other doesn't then a parental marriage results with potential problems in later years due to the parental marriage issues.

Examples

Sally and Bob had been married twenty-five years. They both came from good homes. Sally had worked while Bob finished college and then while Bob started his job Sally raised the kids with Bob and then went to technical training while the kids were in school. Everything was fine until Bob lost his job due to the company laying-off executives because of an economic downturn. Bob had been trying to find work without much success and was now becoming discouraged. Sally was concerned about Bob and therefore suggested they seek counseling to see what could be done.

This is an example of a mature marriage. Any marriage can have problems and any individual can become discouraged or even depressed. This couple is staying together and working together to try to find a solution. Neither Bob nor Sally created this problem. It was not the result of anything they could have done or not done. They have a problem but are working as a couple to solve it. They need help because it is more than they can deal with at this time as a couple.

Jim and Sandy had been married twenty-one years. Jim had always taken care of everything. If there was a problem in the home or at work, it was his responsibility to deal with it. Sandy was a good wife and mother. She believed that Jim loved her and that all was right with the world. They had dated about eighteen months prior to getting married. With the onset of children, he felt more and more like her father and less and less like her lover. Frequently he felt that all the burdens of the family were his to bear. Although they had two children, he often felt like he was the father to three—including Sandy. Imagine Sandy's surprise when she found out that Jim had been having an affair with a woman at work. Initially, Jim didn't want to break off the affair. He was tired of being a parent, but he did care about Sandy. Eventually he terminated the affair and decided to work on his marriage.

Paul and Barbara had been married thirteen years. They had dated for two years prior to marriage. Although the first few years were rough, once they were established they felt things had gotten better especially when Barbara had gotten her promotion at work. Gradually Barbara found the skills she learned at work were applicable in the home and decided to run the home in the same way. Paul, never one to assert himself, eventually let Barbara manage everything. Around the fifteenth year of the relationship Paul met

someone at the Y where he worked out and began an innocent conversation. Since they shared a mutual interest in working out and since he saw her every time he went to the Y it was only natural that Paul would begin to confide more and more in his new friend. One day he realized it was a lot easier to talk to and be with the woman from the Y than Barbara.

Jack and Mary had been married for ten years. He had taken over the family business after they had been married a year or two. Up to that point in time, they seemed to have a good marriage. When he went into the family business he encountered many problems and seemed to regress in maturation. He went from making mutual decisions with Mary to allowing Mary to run the home and raise the children mainly by herself. Mary didn't want this. She wanted a husband by her side that would pull his own weight. When Jack's business began to fail Mary decided to bail. She had had enough.

The above three examples are all examples of parental marriage. The first one represents problems at the twenty-first year of the relationship. The second one represents problems at the fifteenth year of the relationship. However, these are both mature parental marriages. The third example is an example where Mary was more mature than Jack but not significantly more mature in order to sustain a longer-term parental marriage. This is an example of an immature parental marriage.

Dave and Maggie were in love. Everything was right with the world. He was her shining knight and she was his princess. It was a fairy tale. After a year of marriage they both woke up. It was a nightmare. He wasn't what she thought he was and she wasn't what he thought she was. Neither had been taught how to handle finances or make decisions. When trouble came neither had same sex role models to draw from or to turn to. Eventually the weight of marital responsibility was too great. By the fourth year of marriage, which meant for this couple they had been together five years, they were done.

This is an example of an immature marriage. Here neither is mature or significantly more mature than the other.

It is possible to start with an immature marriage and as crises come begin a maturation process. Dave and Maggie could have matured to a parental marriage or a mature marriage depending whether or not both or one of them matured through their crises.

Types of Maturity

We have been discussing maturity, but what does that mean? There are different ingredients to maturity. We can see how physically mature a person is by just looking at them. But how do we determine emotional and spiritual maturity? Sometimes we can determine mental maturity through language development or intelligence. What about experiential maturity or the ability to relate maturely to someone? Each of these brings to maturity a different ingredient. Taken together they can give us an indication of the maturation of an individual or a marriage.

Maturity Scales

Rate yourself on the following scales. One is the least mature and ten is the most mature.

Physical Maturity: the ability to sense and meet my spouse's physical needs. Dealing with my spouse's need for touch and affection as well as sex and physical intimacy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Mental Maturity: the ability to intellectually know and exchange information with my spouse--the ability to talk intelligently and have an intelligent conversation on significant topics.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Emotional Maturity: the ability to understand my spouse's feelings and emotions and read their non-verbal communications and moods and communicate sensitively.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Experiential Maturity: the ability to share and communicate with my spouse through mutual experiences or wisdom that comes from enough individual experiences sometimes known as common sense.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Spiritual Maturity: the ability to communicate with my spouse through godly wisdom acquired through and under the influence of the Holy Spirit through spiritual disciplines of prayer, scripture, meditation, and fellowship.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Relational Maturity: the ability to obtain and sustain a mature relationship with my spouse regardless of the types of stresses or crises the marriage

encounters putting the other above areas of maturity to use within the marriage.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My highest level of maturity is (circle one) physical, mental, emotional, experiential, spiritual, or relational.

My lowest level of maturity is (circle one) physical, mental, emotional, experiential, spiritual, or relational.

My spouse rated his/her highest level of maturity as (circle one) physical, mental, emotional, experiential, spiritual, or relational.

My spouse rated his/her lowest level of maturity as (circle one) physical, mental, emotional, experiential, spiritual, or relational.

Our Marriage

As I think of our marriage and reflect back on the descriptions of the types of marriages as well as how my spouse and I have rated our different types of maturity I would say our marriage is: (circle one)

Mature: we both rate ourselves as mature and equally mature.

Parental: one of us rates themselves as significantly more mature.

Immature: we both rate ourselves as immature.

Regardless of how you rated your marriage, we can all have mature marriages and still have areas of immaturity. The rating just helps us to better understand where we need to work and what changes we need to make. You do not have to agree with your spouse at this point, but it is important to at least try to understand their perspective. Understanding leads to change.

Pray with your spouse after completing this assignment and see what deeper understanding and wisdom you may gain from your discussion. How would you like your marriage to improve and mature?