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I DO

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“I Do”. Lots of us have uttered those words in public, before friends and family, in a park or a house or church or function centre as we boldly took the courageous decision to join ourselves to our partner in a pretty special way. We got married.

Some of us have stayed married to our partner from the beginning and some of us have found that really hard or even impossible. The stats over the last 25 years, and our own experience of friends and family tell us that we are not too good at this whole marriage thing. The divorce rate in Australia is nearly 1 in every 2 marriages!

Even though most of us know that marriage and de facto relationships are a bit of a challenge for people, quite a lot of us Aussies are not giving up on marriage, by any means. The research also suggests that we try relationships and marriage again and even again.

So, even though we're having a bit of trouble navigating the relationship journey, it seems that most people still value this idea of marriage. People seem to still see marriage and relationships as being about finding long-term happiness with one other person – a person to share all of life with; a person to trust, a person with whom we can share intimacy and take on whatever life throws in our way.

A writer once said, “Marriage is like twirling a baton or eating with chopsticks. It looks easy until you try it”. My particular experience and approach to this thing called marriage and our trouble with it comes from the male side. Knowing lots of blokes and being one of them, I reckon that many blokes find this marriage thing pretty challenging at times. Because it stretches us a bit, we seem to put off doing stuff that keeps our relationship with our partner alive and growing.

Somehow we forget that those unannounced gifts of flowers or a ticket to a show and dinner together are still important to keep our relationship with our partner fun, fulfilling and future proof. In the busyness of career, business, fitness, achieving goals and figuring out our own stuff as blokes, we seem to forget that all of this can be shared with our partner, rather than kept a secret.

Marriage is not like our work where we can control how much we put into it and see a direct tangible result of work completed. For blokes this is a bit tricky because we like to see results from the work we put in! We like to get things done! Our relationship with our partner can feel “vague”, and it has this emotional component that doesn't get much airplay in the shed or the sporting field or the workplace.

Lots of us blokes don't like emotion – or at least not if it's shown anywhere except around sport!

The other thing is that sometimes when we try and do the right thing and put some much needed time and effort into our relationship with our partner, it can backfire....

A man at work decided to show his partner how much he loved her, and before going home, showered, shaved, put on some choice cologne, bought her a bouquet of flowers. He went to the front door and knocked. His partner answered the door and exclaimed, "Oh no! This has been a terrible day! First I had to take Billy to the emergency room and get stitches in his leg, then your mother called and said she's coming for 2 weeks, then the washing machine broke, and now this! You come home drunk!

Whatever marriage can be and whatever the state of play is with your partner at the moment, it's clear that the key to an alive relationship, or even the beginning of recovering something of what you had in that park, or church or function centre, is open and honest communication. It's never too late and it doesn't matter how old your relationship is.

For us blokes that means actually saying stuff! It means speaking up and listening to our partner speak up. It feels weird but if we want that illusive thing called happiness we need to start to speak up.

Speaking up also means actually making space to listen to our partners. That might be hard because things might not be going so well or there is just so much to do in every other part of our lives, including spending time with the kids, and trying to be a "family man" or "ultimate man".

But the reality is that if we want a relationship with our partner that is fulfilling and one that fires us up to be the best we can be, then we need to make the time, make the place and make the effort to listen. We need to make the space and time to speak up and listen to our partner speaking up about what is going on with everything – work, sport, kids, plans for the future, goals, finance, extended family – and everything else that touches our everyday lives.

I'm guessing that this is the same for women too. It's not all one way and blokes are not the only people who need to learn how to speak up and share their lives with their partner.

Maybe this little poem by Ogden Nash sums up where and how to talk a lot more to each other...

"To keep your marriage brimming
With love in the loving cup
Whenever you're wrong, admit it
Whenever you're right, hush up!"

One thing is for sure, God is the creator of marriage and is the giver of all good gifts, including that special someone with whom you can really be yourself. He created us the way we are and the longing to share our lives with that one chosen, special someone is all part of his grace and care for us.

God has spoken up loud and clear in the life, teaching, dying and rising again of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God himself and he actually calls us his bride. He is the one who lays down his life for his bride so that we may live in peace with God and with each other, especially with that one special person.

So, speak up, listen up. Give space and time and effort to your partner. As we do this we will enjoy that great gift of living our lives with another person who knows us, trusts us and brings us the very joy of God.

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