

"Writing the truth  
as I see it;  
trying not to  
offend  
those who will  
disagree."

# The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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## Has marriage outlived its usefulness

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A few weeks ago, I discussed cohabitation and the problems associated with it. Is marriage necessarily better? What if the problems associated with marriages are as bad as, or worse than, the problems associated with cohabitation? Maybe cohabitation is the lesser of two evils.

Is marriage just an archaic carryover from a time gone by, its tenants and vows outdated in our modern, enlightened, progressive world? Cohabiting is no longer discussed in whispers, apparently no longer shameful. So why marry?

The risk of divorce is so high that some people hire an attorney before they marry, creating the future divorce settlement, just in case. I must admit, the logic of this prelude to marriage escapes me. I cannot imagine sitting down with my wife and saying, "Honey, you know there is a good chance we will divorce and I want to make sure if I get tired of you and leave, I will get what I know I deserve." Does it make sense to start a marriage viewing your spouse as an adversary? I wonder what would happen if we worked as hard at maintaining the marriage as we do at planning the divorce.

Author Gary Zukav claims, "The archetype of marriage was designed to assist physical survival...The archetype of marriage is no longer functional." Is he right? Is that all marriage is? Others claim most of the marriages that do not end in divorce are "unfulfilled," the spouses just going through the motions of marriage, something fundamentally wrong with marriage. Are there problems with marriage or are there problems with the people who are in the marriage? As I reviewed the reasons people divorce, I was impressed that nearly all revolved around one word – the word "I." Interestingly, this was the same problem with cohabitation – it was all about "I."

Over the last half century, we have systematically dismantled the sanctity of marriage. We have maligned it, discredited it, and trivialized it. Why is it still alive, although a bit crippled? Why do we keep trying something we are told is broken and unnecessary? Maybe the progressives and the enlightened have misled us.

The reports on the death of marriage are overrated. There are staggering benefits to marriage. Rather than a meaningless piece of paper offering no value to the relationship, marriage profoundly changes the couple's goals, behaviors, and lives. And those changes are overwhelmingly positive.

Succinctly, marriage leads to more happiness, better health, more wealth, and a superior sexual relationship. Although men will understand all these benefits of marriage, truthfully we will only remember that last one. Further, at the risk of starting a run on marriage licenses, I must point out studies also show that married men have sex with twice the frequency of single men.

If marriage is nothing more than a piece of paper, cohabiting couples should fare as well as married couples in these various areas. But, in every category measured by Linda J. Waite, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago, those in a marriage fared better than those cohabitating or single. Married men and women live longer. Men and women in marriages are consistently happier with their lives than those cohabitating. Couples in marriages also view their relationship as more permanent, allowing them to work together financially, building wealth, and saving for the future. And what does marriage add to a couple's sexual relationship not found in other relationships? It turns out to be simple and old fashioned, not at all enlightened and progressive. They have "traditional attitudes toward sexual morality."

Even so, does not the high divorce rate contradict this data? Again, according to Linda Waite, only 10 percent of couples who felt their marriage was horrible divorced. Of the remainder who stayed in their unhappy marriage, five years later 87 percent said their marriages "were either pretty good or very good." Is the high divorce rate because "marriage" is a failure or is it because we again choose "I," and divorce before expending the energy trying to work through the "bad patch?" Surprising to me, Waite's research shows that "dramatic turnarounds are commonplace," the "typical" experience; not the aberrancy we might have expected. Certainly, there are marriages beyond repair, marriages that are physically dangerous and without hope, with divorce the only option and a necessity.

I had the misfortune of a failed marriage and now the good fortune of a wonderful marriage. I find none of this data surprising. Marriage offers a commitment not available in any other arrangement. It offers people a sense of well-being, a sense of meaning for their lives, contentment found in no other relationship. Marriage, far more than a piece of unnecessary paper, transforms the couple and is still the foundation of our society.

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