

God Squad Article for November, 2007
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I just heard on the radio about a couple celebrating their 79th wedding anniversary! He is 96 years old and she is 93 years old. We routinely celebrate wedding anniversaries at our senior club that are well past 60 years. Barring illness or accident, I see no reason why my wife and I won't make it to at least 50 unless she knows something I don't know... Unfortunately these high double digit dates seem remarkable instead of predictable. The sad thing is that while our average life expectancy continues to climb, the average life expectancy of marriages continues to drop. This was brought home to me one day as I opened the refrigerator door to find a split of Champaign given to me as a gift from a wedding I performed. The bottle was still bubbly when I opened it but the couple had already split!

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There are many reasons why wedded bliss is more ephemeral than eternal today. One healthy reason is that people are unwilling to remain married to a spouse who is an unrepentant addict or abuser. Another understandable one is that women who were financially chained to unfaithful husbands can take their own checking account and say "adios." Less valid reasons generally cluster around the thought that, "This doesn't appear to be working. Instead of facing the problems in our relationship or getting help its time to cut and run." In a culture where individual freedom is the highest value, the ties that bind are easily severed. This is just as true among Christians, who would seem to have more than just wedding vows to unite them, as it is among the rest.

But would a seven year contract for marriage with the option to renew make anything better? Would it make couples "gut it out" for at least seven years which would be something of a record for our day? I see no reason to expect such a contract to keep them together. Would it make anyone stop and get serious about their marriage on the 365th day of their 7th year? Hardly likely if the other days had already slid by without such thoughts. My biggest question would be about the children born during the first contract period. It is hard enough to be a part of a nasty divorce as a child. But at least the child can look back and say that his parents really couldn't get along. What if they peacefully decided not to renew their contract at the end of its expiration? Now we have a child who is merely an asset acquired along the way to other serial relationships. Kids take divorce hard-how would they take being part of a family that neglected to seek a contract extension?

It seems to me that the point of marriage is really and completely bound up in the words, "til death do us part." Rhoda and Joe from the television show "Rhoda" may have promised to stay married as "long as we love" but the couple that makes it to their 10th or 40th is the one that says, "as long as we live." These simple words simply eliminate the daily question asked by so many couples who probably would otherwise have a chance at

making it work, namely, “how much longer should we give this a go?” Not all marriages will last forever. But no marriages will last if either partner enters it with the idea that this is merely “round one.” Time gives us time to ride the roller coaster of marriage from lows to highs to plateaus to climbs. I never thought I could love my wife more than the first month of our life together. Until last month. Most of us reach a point in our marriages where we wonder. But that’s okay as long as we don’t wander.

So God is not trying to make us miserable by taking away our option for other options. God brings us together forever so that we can learn that while there are certainly other fish in the sea, love can only truly be known when it is given to one other and none other. It may not work and God grieves with us. But God forgives, heals, and refuses to change the rules that give us the hope that the next time can be forever. And in a day where there are precious few things to hold together a man and a woman, perhaps the only hope is that crazy, impossible, insane vow of eternal love. A vow that can only be kept with the help of the One who demands that we make it because He loves us that much.