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What Were You Expecting? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage

I just finished reading an advance copy of Paul David Tripp's forthcoming book entitled *What Did You Expect?: Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*. Unlike many other marriage books, this one looks at marriage as an act of worship and explores how our vertical relationships with God impacts our horizontal relationships with each other. Tripp both opens and closes the book with a discussion of worship; and in between he explores six commitments:

We will give ourselves to a regular lifestyle of confession and forgiveness

We will make growth and change our daily agenda

We will work together to build a sturdy bond of trust

We will commit to building a relationship of love

We will deal with our differences with appreciation and grace

We will work to protect our marriage

Tripp explains in the preface:

...a marriage of love, unity, and understanding is not rooted in romance; it is rooted in worship. Now, you may be able to read all the words, but you still might not understand the depth of the insight of this principle.

What does it mean to say that a marriage is "*rooted in worship*?" The word *worship* is a tricky word. When the average person hears the word *worship* he thinks of a gathering, of hymns, an offering, and a sermon. But there is a biblical truth embedded in this word that is vital to understand if you are ever going to figure out why you struggle in your marriage and how those struggles will ever get solved. *Worship* is first your identity before it is ever your activity. You *are* a worshiper, so everything you think, desire, choose, do, or say is shaped by worship. There is simply no more profound insight into the reason people do the things they do than this, and once you get hold of it, it opens doors of understanding and change that were never before opened to you...the most general and fundamental reason for doing what you do is worship.

Tripp goes on to enunciate and lay a biblical foundation, describing in more detail what this looks like and how it flows "out of three ways that you must worship God." This discussion alone is worth the price of the book.

The middle section contains extensive anecdotal illustrations from Tripp's vast experience in counseling and pastoring. He offers biblically based support for common problems experienced in marriage, many of which are rooted in an act of self-worship. Just one of many examples is Tripp's discussion of "faux love" in which he delves into the reality that most people who get married don't know what love really is. Writes Tripp:

Yes, it is scary but true that people do get into serious relationships and even marriage based on physical attraction. You are drawn to someone because of her beauty...you may think you love this person, but you don't really. What you love is her physical beauty. What you think is love is self-love in the mask of true love. You want to be with her not because you love her, but because you love yourself and you want to decorate your life with her physical beauty. Now, I know this sounds harsh, but I think many couples have fallen into this trap.

In the final chapter--appropriately entitled *Worship, Work, and Grace*, Tripp ties it all up again under the banner of worship, another chapter that is worth the price of the book:

Worship is much, much more than a set of feelings and a theological outline. Worship is a lifestyle. It is a way of thinking about and responding to everything that is in your life. Worship is believing that God exists, that he is with you in your marriage, and that what he calls you do do is worth doing. Worship and work go hand-in-hand.

The content of this book is instructive not just for those who have been married for an extended period of time. Although the book isn't written for the high school students, collegians and twentysomethings, those in that age group can potentially avoid a tremendous amount of heartache, disappointment, and discouragement if they will take the time to read and digest the hundreds of lessons learned in this book. I'm convinced that many people who opt for divorce do so because they were never taught what love really is, and instead chose to live by their emotions and feelings.

This is an excellent book that should be required reading for anyone considering marriage, struggling in marriage, or hopes to be married one

day. No one should get married without reading this introduction to the real world of romance and marriage. It's that valuable.

Disclosure: The reviewer was provided with a complimentary advance copy by the publisher, Crossway.