



A Progressive Marriage

How is your marriage progressing?

This simple question is a way of focusing our attention on right-thinking about progress and the Christian life. I posed the question to myself – I have been married now for 40 years. My first thought was, “What would ‘progress’ in a marriage mean?” Do I love my wife more, or any less? What would more love look like?

The truth of marriage is that progress is not the right measuring stick. The word “progress” originally referred to travel on a journey. Progress means to travel further. Thus the “Pilgrim’s Progress” really only means “the Pilgrim’s Journey.” If marriage is a journey, it is mostly measured by finishing the course. In that sense, 40 years is a *lot* of progress, and I pray the journey has only just begun.

The image of progress permeates our culture. It’s not an ancient idea, indeed, it is pretty much synonymous with modernity. It is probably one of the three most dominant ideas in our culture. So how is it that we are able to bear being married without “making progress?”

We bear being married because it is satisfying, in one manner or another. My parents were married for over 60 years in a relationship that was probably as satisfying to both as being themselves was to each. That is to say, the problems I observed them endure, were primarily the problems inherent to being themselves and would have been problems no matter how they lived nor with whom they lived.

My father engaged his working life in the same manner as his marriage. One year was perhaps different from another, as every day is from another. But when he retired, it was from the same work (auto mechanic) that he had done for his entire adult life.

For most of human history, it would seem, we lived without progress. There was little difference between the flint spear-point of 100,000 B.C. and 10,000 B.C. People lived and died, enjoyed good days and endured the bad. Of course, somewhere along the line, human beings made certain discoveries that brought greater wealth and improved technology. It has allowed us to succeed as a population and fill the world.

But, like marriage, the *living* of human life has not and does not change. The illusion of progress arises by the things we choose to measure. If acquiring wealth is progress, then it is obvious that some make progress. But one can still only *live* with wealth. And, like marriage, that living can only be done a moment at a time. The same can be said with regard to technology.

My small point here is that life itself is like a marriage. It is not something that can be described by the idea of progress. Life is “a progress,” a journey. But the end of the journey is as inevitable as ever and differs in no way from that of the meanest of cavemen.

I suppose the right question is “how is your life?” To know the true measures with which to answer that question is to know how to live.