


Marriage is for Grown Ups: How Your Relationship is Trying to Grow You Up and How to Step Beyond the Romantic Dream into a Grown-Up and Growing-Up Relationship (2018) by Noel Giblett. Noel Giblett Publishing. ISBN-13: 978-0648284307 (pbk).

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Reviewed by:

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This book comes out of 40 years of personal experience of marriage, together with 30 years of working in the field of marriage counselling. The author, Noel Giblett, provides his own definition of marriage: two consciously imperfect people who commit to living together in close proximity and taking the journey of love over the long term. Giblett is generous in his use of self as he offers insights gained over a long marriage. He candidly admits to having to “start over” several times during such a long relationship and the reader is likely to find such candour refreshing.

Giblett describes his lifetime interest in reading books on relationships, and his own book is littered with recommendations of those he has found most helpful in his personal journey. The two most influential authors on Giblett are introduced to the reader at the beginning: Richard Rohr and David Schnarch. He refers to the enormous contribution to the field of John Gottman and Sue Johnson, but ultimately does not draw significantly from their paradigms. It is undoubtedly the spiritual framework of Rohr and the ideas on differentiation of Schnarch that provide the fundamental context for the book.

This book is designed for those who want a committed partnership to last a lifetime and is aimed at clients of relationship counselling as well as those who never undertake that journey. It is not intended to be a new theory of relationships nor a book aimed at therapists, but rather a self-help book which is delivered in an easy-to-read and very accessible style and format. It is filled with anecdotes from clients, as well as the very personal experience of Giblett himself. It is enhanced by self-help questions and conversation starters for couples, as well as questions for personal reflection, which are offered as tools for those wanting to further practice the concepts enunciated.

The book has a religious flavour, although this is not specifically acknowledged. Giblett's favourite quote on love comes from Corinthians, and he refers to Adam and Eve to discuss the first partnership. He refers regularly to the idea of marriages needing to be

reborn, perhaps several times in a lifetime. He also repeats the idea that marriage needs to “work on us”—a rather neat, Zen-like idea which is promoted as partly mystery, surrender, and grace, as well as an antidote to too much trying to make things work. As the subtitle of the book says, “Marriage is trying to grow you up”.

Giblett asks at the opening: what is a happy marriage, or de-facto marriage? He is interested in what he sees as the fundamental questions of how we should view difficulties and differences and what we can do about them. In the spirit of *The Serenity Prayer* and Gottman’s *irreconcilable differences* he asks what to do about what we cannot change. The book is divided into five sections that are broadly about: perceptions and attitudes; having a map; various potential dilemmas, such as children, in-laws, money, and sex; the capacity to drive personal change; and, staying grounded through difficult times.

Through difficult times, Giblett advocates holding onto “the good bye kiss and the hello hug” (p. 50) and focusing on what you can do rather than what you cannot. Ultimately, the knowledge that “this too will pass” (p. 50) is proposed as the saving grace. This will assist Christians, but perhaps may not be all that helpful to couples in distress. That said, Giblett does recommend counselling where appropriate. Perhaps the author might have developed further the systemic idea of Sue Johnson: that the pattern couples get stuck in together with attachment needs drives their very real despair and reactivity. The pointing to separations and reunions as significant is useful and the reader could gain from a more detailed explanation of how this affects the nervous system and creates a feeling of safety. So too some understanding of the psychobiological approach of Stan Tatkin could assist in normalising some of the fundamental and common problems relationships experience. However, this book is aimed at “easy reading” and is attempting to put some very complex ideas into simple everyday language—a task at which Giblett succeeds. It is also, as previously stated, not aimed at the clinician.

“You can only start with what you’ve got,” Giblett argues, “but if you don’t build on that and skill up you’ll do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always got” (p. 56). The assumption that we all should “skill up” is proposed as central to making a marriage work and in this regard Giblett proposes many practical ideas, tips, and suggestions.

He discusses the “I do” and all the wedding-focused moments versus the challenge of switching from “me-thinking” to “we-thinking,” which he sees as predominantly a challenge for men more than women. The challenge for women, he believes, is more typically the loss of the dream (i.e., the discovery that the marriage isn’t going to fulfill your hopes and dreams), the challenge to hang on to a sufficient sense of self while all around “want a piece of you,” and the challenge of balancing up all that we-thinking with some me-thinking.

Giblett discusses problems with porn addiction and screens and says the online world is one of the biggest challenges we have ever faced in terms of fidelity, integrity, and honesty in relationships. His use of self is honest when he describes how he manages the dilemma of attraction and desire outside of marriage: “being a red-blooded man,

sometimes the feeling is so strong and so deep it is like falling in love. At other times I know it's just a passing infatuation" (p. 75). He discusses the differences between falling in love and loving long term. This is a useful distinction through which to view various dilemmas discussed and to deepen the reader's understanding. Love, lust, sex and passion are all discussed candidly, as is the recognition that such attraction, as well as addictions, can "knock us off balance" (p. 75) and "intoxicate us" (p. 72).

There is a section on communication that implores readers to get more skilled at expressing emotions and to learn the art of listening as well as having conversations in instalments. The method proposed reflects tenets of Imago Therapy, Gottman, and Johnson, all of which are beneficial. For many readers, the ideas proposed will be very helpful, yet this book is likely to provide little consolation for those with serious trauma histories, although such readers are hopefully likely to seek professional help as the author recommends.

A helpful metaphor for marriage is the three-legged stool. Giblett proposes that the three legs represent confluence, contact, and withdrawal. He says most of us are reluctant to embrace withdrawal as a valid part of marriage and that Western culture is permanently besotted with confluence but uncomfortable with contact and withdrawal. There is a discussion of intimacy in which the author concludes that it takes practice to learn how to be with yourself and your partner under all conditions, and that we should not panic when intimacy is not there.

Giblett points to ideas about intimacy throughout the book and one is lead to conclude that the conditions required in order for intimacy to be realised are deep acceptance, safety, security, calm, a state of rest, mutuality, and feeling comfortable in body and soul. And then "even when it comes together we can feel the transience of that bliss". (p. 144). Ultimately Giblett concludes, "It is mystery".

This book will be a valuable adjunct to the self-help books on relationships, while providing a launching pad for those wanting further reading. Giblett concludes that there is no recipe for marriage, and in normalising differences and difficulties, he helps us look for the opportunity to grow up, especially in the light of the complexity of marriage in the modern world.

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