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## Equal Mates for 50 Years

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## Equal Mates for 50 Years

A recent study done on 35 couples married for 50 years shows that the happy marriages evidenced greater mutuality and sharing of decision-making powers than the unhappy marriages.

Last April the *Chicago Tribune* reported on this study performed by two psychology professors, Dr. Judy Todd and Dr. Ariella Friedman. The researchers interviewed each spouse individually and confidentially, and were surprised to find that about 60 percent were unhappy in their marriages.

"That the majority of the couples lived together for 50 years was not so much an expression of their happiness as an expression of the times," Dr. Todd said. "They didn't believe in divorce. It was not an option to them. They grew up in a very traditional, conservative time with very traditional ways."

The *Tribune* report continues, "The unhappy couples showed very little intimacy in their marriages. They kept their feelings from one another and didn't risk major conflicts. The men made all the important decisions as to where to live, how to work, and how to spend the money; the women stayed home and took care of their homes and families."

But the 14 happy couples attributed their well-being to their greater mutuality and sharing of decision-making powers. Observes Dr. Todd, "The women believed they had equal power, and sometimes even more power to make decisions that affected the daily course of

their lives. Many of these women would also help out with their husbands' work or in family businesses.

"The men in these happy marriages felt they had an equal say, but they also knew when to be quiet or keep their mouths shut. They weren't overbearing or dictatorial.

"The happy men were more concerned about the marital relationship. They would make the effort to help out with the housework, and they shared childrearing responsibilities. The happier men would talk about their children with pride.

"These happy men also did something that most men in the old days weren't trained to do. They were more interested in being intimate, in talking and expressing their feelings. They were more likely to just go up and give their wives a hug, buy her presents, take her out, or just take over the care of the children for awhile."

The *Tribune* also quoted two experienced family counselors who view this study as important in revealing the secret of a happy marriage.

"It shows that if men treat women as equal and share the decision-making powers in a marriage, they will be greatly rewarded in happiness and in satisfaction by knowing that they have a true partner with whom they can share both the problems and joys of daily life," said Dr. Raymond Chaitin, a psychiatrist who does family marital counseling in California.

Dr. Sam Janus, a marital counse-

lor at New York Medical College, agrees: "It is important to share the decision-making responsibilities in a marriage. There are tangible benefits to the marriage that come from sharing these responsibilities. Each

partner gains respect for the other as they discuss and then implement the decisions they must make. Each recognizes the competence of the other, and this adds to their marriage."

### *Why Sarah?*

Many new readers ask us, "Why Sarah? Didn't she call Abraham lord and obey him always? What's a feminist magazine like yours doing with a name like that?" Likely, many more of you are thinking the same thing.

The name *Daughters of Sarah* emphasizes the distinctiveness of biblical feminism from a secular feminism which is not rooted in the Bible. Biblical feminism has not discarded a so-called patriarchal Bible or even sought to excise those parts which do not seem to fit with modern day feminism.

Instead, biblical feminism has challenged traditional thinking and glib interpretations of God's revelation which was written originally for people of other ages and cultures. It has tried to put on new glasses and look a little deeper.

In a 1977 article, Virginia Mollenkott has written, "The title *Daughters of Sarah* is typical of the methods of biblical feminism. Whereas traditionalists think of Sarah only as the woman who 'obeyed Abraham, calling him lord' (I Peter 3:6), evangelical feminists have looked into the life of Sarah more fully and become aware that Sarah was a powerful partner to Abraham; that in Gen. 21:12 God told Abraham to obey his wife concerning the expulsion of Ishmael ('whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you'), and that she was a woman for whom God 'made laughter' (Gen. 21:6-7). Biblical feminists are pleased to think of themselves as her daughters. While we would not argue on the basis of Gen. 21:12 that Christian husbands ought always to obey their wives, we do not accept traditionalist arguments on the basis of I Peter 3:6 that Christian wives ought always to obey their husbands. The context of I Peter 3:6 is the mutual submission of all Christians to teach others according to Christ's example (I Peter 2:21, 3:7-9) and I Peter 3:1-6 is specifically addressed to newly converted wives whose husbands were as yet unconverted and accustomed to the patriarchal customs of the first century.

"Thus, instead of snorting at the very mention of Sarah and regarding her story as oppressive, evangelical feminists honor her as one of our foremothers."

Put another way, Sarah represents the human side of us. She was not perfect and neither are we. She lost patience with God and used her own useless methods to produce the son of promise. How typical of us. She gave in to jealousy and finally had to cast out the objects of her envious longing. How wrong this was we do not really know; in any case her warts are not erased from the ancient tale, and hundreds of years later, she is cited as a woman of faith, whom we are to emulate.

God used this very human woman to bless the nations. Hopefully, God can use us as her daughters to spread the good news about women (and men) to our world today.