DERON SNYDER

Marriages deserve best effort, special attention

So Vanessa and I celebrated our 18th wedding anniversary in September, spent a wonderful weekend on Marco Island.

We walked on the beach, went to dinner, caught a movie, laid around, and simply enjoyed each other's company.

It was a lovely escapade, a romantic getaway reminiscent of our early years, before the novelty wore off, routine set in, and the girls arrived.

But we always presented ourselves as a picture of contentment, embodying the definition of a very happy couple.

Even when it wasn't always quite the case.

Unless folks tell you what they're going through on the inside, sharing what they're enduring in the privacy of their home, you never know.

They can walk past you, smile and say everything's fine, when all the while their life is actually a living hell.

DERON SNYDER
dsnyder@news-press.com

Thankfully, we spent less than a year in that place before fleeing it last summer.

Our beautiful anniversary trip materialized only after meeting with our pastor, then meeting with a counselor he recommended, and then our attendance at a rejuvenating marriage conference in Tampa.

In retrospect, we hit bottom after a slow, steady slide — not a sharp and sudden free fall — making for an inconspicuous descent.

It's not as if we didn't know the keys to a happy and successful marriage. We had practiced them for years without fail, agreeing that marriage took work, but not the sort of dreary, dreadful and grudging work of a job you hate.

In fact, we used to feel a wee bit guilty at times after learning of other folks' bad marital experiences. We'd hear tales of turmoil and strife between a husband and wife, or hear spouses' lament a poor relationship with their significant other, and we'd be less-than-eager to express our bliss.

It was our misguided attempt at empathy, an effort to steer folks away from bad feelings about their circumstances compared to our situation.

That was a mistake, not taking advantage of opportunities to perhaps encourage other married couples.

The second mistake was failing to preserve the characteristics and conditions that created our contentedness.

Now we endeavor to correct both errors, partially through words and deeds, and partially through our new book, "50 Ways to Put Christ in Your Marriage — And Live Happily Every Day."

We mean no offense to Muslims, Jews, atheists or agnostics. No offense to folks who are single, divorced, separated or gay.

We're Christians with nothing but agape love for each and every one, regardless of affiliation or orientation.

But we also believe that stronger marriages can go a long way toward building a stronger society. Stronger households can lead to stronger families. Stronger husbands and wives can lead to stronger sons and daughters.

It's nothing new, but it's true.

It sounds simple, but only because it's not complicated.

This is how Dr. Marianne de Deugd, director of Royal Palm Ministries, put it in an e-mail:

"If we all made our marriages a little better today (and there's always room for improvement), then there will be a ripple effect," she said. "Children grow up better able to deal with life; they'll make better grades. Health will improve, so there'll be less need for health care.

"There'll be less drug and alcohol abuse, less people depressed and anxious, and less people going to prison. All this would save all of us a lot of money and heartache.

"And the great thing about it is you don't have to wait for the people in Washington to get their act together; everyone can start with himself today."

There's actually some good news on the marriage front.

Divorce has been declining in the U.S. for the last 25 years, after peaking in 1981. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the divorce rate for the general population was 3.6 per 1,000 people in 2005; that's the lowest rate since 1970.

And while there's a common notion that one in two marriages ends in divorce, many experts feel it's really between 40 percent and 45 percent.

Staying together is the important first step; making it special is the second.

If "50 Ways" can help you or someone you know have a better union, Vanessa and I would love having more company.

— Deron Snyder's column appears on Saturdays. E-mail dsnyder@news-press.com or call 335-0358.