

30 bloggers share their hearts

31 Days to a Better Marriage | Spring 2015 Series

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| Dedication: | |
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| This book is dedicated to wives, women who are engaged, and women who desire to be married who crave a satisfying, godly marriage. It doesn't happen overnight, but it is possible to have a fulfilling marriage with Jesus at the center. I'm praying for each one of you who picks up this book to have a more intimate experience in your relationship with Christ that will translate into a marriage that reflects the love of our Savior. | |
| Xoxo, | |

Carlie K.

Curator, <u>31 Days to a Better Marriage</u>



Massage YOUR WAY TO A Better Marriage



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"If you want to add some romance - and relaxation - to your marriage, try Melt! Great, easy-to-follow tips that will leave you putty in each other's hands." Sheila Gregoire Wray, To Love Honor & Vacuum

"I love Melt! It's clean and beautifully shot with no nudity or awkward moments.

As Sheila, Heidi and so many other bloggers keep reiterating, pampering your spouse with great back rubs is essential for a happy marriage."

Carlie Kercheval, Today's Frugal Mom & 31 Days to a Better Marriage

Simple instructions for a beautiful massage, at home. Find out more at couplesmassagecourses.com



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riends, I am so excited to announce that I am going to be speaking at the <u>Wisdom for Wives Online Conference</u> in May 2015! This new conference is going to be packed with powerful sessions by 11 anointed women who will be delivering God's truth within the lens of biblical marriage.

A little encouragement from the conference website:

For most married couples, falling in love and saying "I do" was the easy part. Yet, living our happily ever after is the part that takes a whole lot of biblical wisdom and intentionality.

Every marriage goes through seasons. Some seasons are exhilarating and effortless, while other seasons can be faced with serious heartache, disappointment, and downright despair. No matter what season you're living in, the Wisdom for Wives Conference is designed to encourage, equip, affirm, and inspire you in your role as a wife so you can have the type of marriage that God intended.

I invite you and your family/friends to join us for this life-changing event. I'm excited and humbled to be a vessel to encourage wives to continue to strive for all God has for them in their marriage!

>>>Early Bird Discount<<<

If you register by May 5, you will get \$10 off of your registration bringing it down to just \$29.97 plus you will receive some amazing bonus material that will bless your marriage! I truly believe that this small investment is worth it's weight in gold!

To learn more about the conference and secure your spot, <u>CLICK HERE</u>.

See you there!

Carlie K.

Introduction

Tremember when God told me that I was going to be married. It was one of the scariest days of my life. While many women rejoice when God blesses them with a spouse – I was terrified. Terrified that I wouldn't become the wife that God wanted me to be. Terrified that I would mess everything up and hurt my husband or myself. Terrified that I would fail, and I wasn't sure if I was willing to put myself in a position to experience any of it. And besides, if marriage was anything like I had seen modeled in my home, I wanted nothing to do with it.

But God knows. He knows the desires we have deep down in our hearts hidden behind years of suppressed feelings from past hurt, failure, and rejection. He knows. He also knows just what we need in order to gain access to those inner most places of vulnerability. The paces that we need to go in order to access our true hopes, dreams, and God-given desires.

And then He did it. Our merciful and all-knowing God came into my heart and performed surgery on it. You know - the only heart surgery that is guaranteed to work – the kind that only the Holy Spirit can perform and He doesn't need any help. It was with God's healing hand, unfailing grace, and forgiving heart that I was able to have special insight into God's design for marriage and see just how He designed me to fit right into it. He showed me how much I truly desired to be married, even if I couldn't see it.

And here I am, 15-years into a marriage that I couldn't have concocted, even in my wildest dreams. I have never been in a relationship so tender, trusting, challenging, exciting, and fulfilling as the one I have with my husband. And while it takes two to make a strong marriage covenant, it starts with ourselves. It is imperative that you and I make sure that we are doing our very best to make our marriage relationships all they were created to be.

I must confess that my marriage started off with two people who were already in love with Jesus, so as a result were able to love one another with the love of Christ. While many of you who will pick up this book didn't start off your *happily ever after* this way, I believe that as long as both you and your husband are willing, God can make your marriage beautiful. And so I'm praying that for you.

I pray that the 31 topical chapters birthed out of real-life experiences will bless you, your marriage, and the heart of Jesus. Let's determine together that we are going to be more like Jesus as we walk out the blessing of marriage. Let's encourage one another in our journey rather than tear one another down. God cares about every detail in our lives – let us model this same care and concern for our own marriages and the marriages of those around us. Let's agree to become more like Him so the world can see that good, fulfilling, and faithful marriages really do exist!

Xoxo,

Carlie Kercheval

ManagingYourBlessings.com

FulfillingYourVows.com

THE HEART OF YOUR HOME: A TREASURE WORTH BUILDING

Kaylene Yoder | <u>Kaylene Yoder.com</u>

ften heard when speaking of a wife's role, Proverbs 14:1 simply states, "A wise woman builds her house, but with her hands the foolish one tears hers down." The verses following that verse are largely unsung, but what we find there are practical instructions for building a better home. We know the woman of the home is also the heart of the home. May you be encouraged to become a better heart for your home, a treasure truly worth building upon.

Proverbs 14:2: "He whose walk is upright fears the Lord, but he whose ways are devious despises him."

A wise woman seeks to be in right standing with the Lord so that she may stand pure and faultless in the eyes of God and man. She knows and seeks to function in God's design for her role in the marriage. Her obedience to Him shows she reveres Him and trusts His will.

Proverbs 14:3: "...the lips of the wise protect them."

A wise woman knows that her words are either a blessing or a curse to those around her and to herself. Quietly and patiently extending grace when we'd rather give our husbands 40 lashes with our words, takes a great amount of self-control and wisdom. But there are times when our words are wrong, no matter how right we are.

"She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue." (Pr. 31:26)

"He who holds his tongue is wise." (Pr. 10:19)

Proverbs 14:4: "...from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest."

No, a wife doesn't have to work like an ox. However, "she sets about her work vigorously, her arms are strong for her tasks." (Pr.31:17) She is physically able to accomplish her duties. Each one has different giftings and capabilities. Do yours well.

The thing about oxen is they aren't fast and they can't do it all. But they are steady and deliberate. Be deliberate like an ox, dedicated to your work. "Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor." (Pr. 12:24)

Proverbs 14:5: "A truthful witness does not deceive".

Deception. Intentional misguiding. A wife should never stoop to it, yet so often we deceive our husbands with well-planted words or questions, trying to manipulate him into something we want rather than being honest and straight-forward about the matter. Maybe you don't lie. But what are your motives? Don't indulge in deceptive manipulation.

Proverbs 14:6: "...knowledge comes easily to the discerning."

Proverbs 14:7: "Stay away from a foolish [wo]man, for you will not find knowledge on his[her] lips."

As a woman seeking the Lord's way, our relationships with other women must be healthy for our marriage. Proverbs 13:20 reminds us that "He who walks with wise, grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." If our ongoing conversation with a friend revolves around the latest failure or imperfection that human husbands tend to display, then, dear wives, we'd be wise to reevaluate said friendship.

Sometimes we have to ask ourselves hard questions. The hard question here is, "Is this friendship building my home well?" A friend who is truly a friend will respect your marriage and the privacy needed to keep it healthy.

Proverbs 14:8: "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways,"

A prudent woman is a woman who thinks. She has a plan. She uses her time and resources wisely. She "watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness." (Pr. 31:27)

A home driven by a purposeful, prudent woman will be a peaceful, loving oasis for all who enter. They will be able to let their guard down and relax from all the craziness life can throw at them. A husband needs that.

Proverbs 14:9: "...goodwill is found among the upright."

Being good to the man you love shouldn't be hard, right? Having a heart that seeks to bless him means one that genuinely tries to "do him good and not evil all the days of her life." (Pr. 31:12) Through her good deeds, her husband's heart can then learn to safely trust in her.

Romans 12:10 holds the admonition, "Honor one another above yourselves." First Thessalonians 4:29 tells us to "encourage one another and build each other up." Dear wives, let's wisely consider the fact that our husbands are one of those "one anothers." Let's do his heart good.

Proverbs 14:10: "Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy."

Are we a joy to the hearts of our husbands? Do we make him glad to come home? "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones." (Pr. 12:4) Let's be a crowning to our husbands, a perfecting piece of God's great plan for marriage.

Proverbs 14:11 is much like verse one. "The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish." (Proverbs 14:11)

As upright, God fearing women we set our hope and trust in Him. We build our homes not so much by our abilities as we do our attitudes. Each woman has the ability to set the atmosphere of her home by her demeanor. We can either set a cold, sullen, critical atmosphere, or we can set a safe, loving, accepting atmosphere where hearts can thrive.

From personal experience, my home flourished more after I chose to seek the Lord's guidance and direction, laying down myself, diving into His Word seeking an eternal perspective. What did I gain? A new heart. With the

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growth of that new heart grew a better home. And in that better home dwells a man whose heart can safely trust in his wife more and more each day.

Let's build our treasures well, dear one.

YOUR MARRIAGE OR YOUR KIDS: WHICH SHOULD BE YOUR PRIORITY?

Misty Leask | MistyLeask.com

The tasks of the day must be finished, housework and schoolwork need to be completed, baths and storytime must be done before you can even think about having a conversation without being interrupted or watch a movie that doesn't include superheros or singing princesses. Often, by the time the day's tasks are done, sleep is the only thing on your mind, and your alone time is simply crawling into bed together exhausted.

Yet, is this the picture of marriage that we want to show our kids? Did God really design our marriage relationship to be second in importance after our relationships with our children?

In the Bible we see that God did not design our marriage relationship to be less important after we have children.

IN EPHESIANS 5 WE SEE WHAT GOD'S DESIGN IS FOR MARRIAGE -

- Submission
- Leading
- Love
- Reverance

IN EPHESIANS 6 GOD GIVES DIRECTION TO CHILDREN AND TO PARENTS –

CHILDREN ARE TO

- Obey
- Honor

PARENTS ARE TO

- Provoke not
- Raise children in the Lord

Our children are gifts and a responsibility that God has given us, so we must ensure that we are being the parents God calls us to be, but we must be diligent and ensure that our marriage is the priority it should be according to God's design.

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The directions from the Lord to us as parents is that we are to train our children and raise them spiritually. The instruction for our marriages is to draw us near to each other...to become one flesh.

How can we become one flesh if we place our relationships with our children in priority?

Our marriage relationship is to be likened to Jesus' relationship with the church as Ephesians 5:22-25 & 32 states.

Ephesians 5:22-25 & 32

While our marriages will never be perfect without spot, wrinkle, or blemish, we must ensure that our marriage is a priority to us just as we are a priority to Christ.

The beautiful relationship that we as the church have with Christ is available to us in our marriage if we follow God's design and instructions.

If your marriage relationship is struggling or if you've had your priorities mixed up, take some time to seek the Lord's specific direction for you and start following the basic instructions He's given you in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 7.

Don't be discouraged if your marriage relationship is not where you'd like it to be. A relationship goes through ups and downs in life; it's the growing together through these times that begins to create a marriage as designed by God.

HOW DO YOU ENSURE YOUR MARRIAGE IS YOUR PRIORITY?

WHAT MAKES IT HARD FOR YOU TO KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE THE PRIORITY THAT IT MUST BE?

THE UNITING POWER OF A COMMON ENEMY

Ashleigh Slater | Ashleigh Slater.com

wouldn't label myself a die-hard J.J. Abrams fan. I won't watch something simply because his name is attached as a producer. That said, I have been known to be addicted to his shows more than once. Lost, for example. Alias, too. And, my latest Netflix-binging indulgence, Fringe.

Question: What do all of these shows have in common? Other than time manipulation, atypical pregnancies, and unpredictable storylines?

Answer: Individuals who, under normal circumstances, would never naturally band together, but they do. All in the name of defeating a common enemy. (I'd give you specific examples, but no one likes a spoiler.)

This idea of unlikely allies isn't just a J.J. Abrams concept, though. It's happened in history, too.

Let's rewind back to the 1850s. England and France. These two countries had been enemies for hundreds of years. Yet a shared desire to stop Russia from overtaking the Ottoman Turks and expanding its geographical reach further south resulted in an unlikely union between the two nations. Not only did it mark France's King Louis-Philippe as the first monarch to visit English royalty since 1356, but it also ended with the Russians' plans thwarted. All you history buffs out there may recognize this as an ever-short-summary of the Crimean War.

So what do 21st-century television and 19th-century world history have to do with you and your marriage? Or me and mine?

I think there's an important lesson we can learn from these two examples. It's this: Common enemies have a way of uniting people.

Sure, most marriages (particularly in Western countries) are the voluntary joining of two people who love each other and enter it eagerly. But sometimes I think we forget that as husbands and wives we're on the same team. We're fighting the same battles. Too often, we allow our challenges and struggles to become a "me vs. you" battle rather than an "us vs. the problem" alliance. We too easily allow each other to become the enemy, when in reality we're teammates.

My husband Ted and I haven't had to face off against enemies like "the Others" in Lost or a large invading country like Russia. But, as I share in my book, Team Us: Marriage Together, we have encountered our own share of enemies. And I bet you have too.

Maybe, like us, it's debt.

Or health issues.

Perhaps it's the loss of a job.

Maybe it's even an individual or organization that may not be an "enemy" in the full sense of the word, but with whom you're experiencing some sort of conflict or issue. For example, last summer Ted and I had a rental car agent attempt to pit us against each other over a bill.

Whatever your common enemy may be, make a conscious and determined choice to identify it and band together to face it.

If it's debt, sit down and figure out how you can work side-by-side to pay it off. Make a plan together. Then figure out ways you can keep each other accountable in a supportive, not accusatory, manner. Remind each other often, "It's us vs. the debt!"

Face health issues hand-in-hand. Rather than allowing the stress of doctor visits, difficult diagnoses, and medical bills to leave you irritated with one another, determine to walk through it as a united team. Encourage and affirm often. The sickness and the stress are the "enemies," not your spouse.

Be purposeful not to let a job loss divide you. Dream and pray together about what the future holds, excited that no matter what happens you're in it together. View it as a shared adventure, complete with the ups and downs and detours. Commiserate at times, sure, but together.

And instead of letting an outside person or organization leave you drawing lines in the sand and choosing sides, resolve to approach the situation as teammates. Work shoulder-to-shoulder to address and work through the conflict or issue.

Above all, remember that there's an enemy far worse than debt and health issues and job loss (as hard as they are) who seeks to destroy our souls and our marriages. Paul speaks of this in his letter to the Ephesians. He writes:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (6:12)

This ancient enemy wants our marriages to be a constant "me vs. you" battle. He'd find pleasure in watching us, just like that first infamous couple in the garden at our history's beginning, choose to blame and to point fingers and to divide.

Let's not play his game. Instead, as couples, let's unite. After all, who knows, maybe that's one reason God created him. Not to tear us apart, but to bring us together against a common enemy.

If long-standing enemies can come together, whether the fictional onscreen creations of J.J. Abrams or real-life European countries, then surely we can.

TO THE WIFE WHO WANTS TO STAY

Rebekah Hallberg | RebekahMHallberg.com

T've been that wife. When all came crashing down, I promised myself that I would not make any swift decisions, but that I would seek God's voice above my own heart. I didn't realize the arena I was about to enter. You see, the world said, "Go, you can leave." But I was the wife who wanted to stay.

I don't know your situation and I don't know your support system, but if you're trying to do something that goes against the norm, I can bet that there aren't too many lining up to understand or encourage you. So I wanted to write to you, to the wife who wants to stay.

My marriage took quite a hit not too long ago. I'm positive that the enemy knew full well what he was doing. I could almost guarantee you that in the graveyard of failed marriages, there was a hole already dug for my marriage to be buried. When you took a long, hard look at the facts as the world sees them, my marriage was as good as dead. Failed. Should not be resuscitated.

What would I do? What would be the outcome? How could I go on?

Those aren't easy questions, and I had no answers.

But I determined to be intentional in listening for God. The truth is, I was too devastated to do much else but shut out the world and talk with God.

Here are just a few things I've learned in my journey (which is not over yet), that will hopefully help and encourage you as you strive to stay in a marriage when you could leave.

PLEASE NOTE – I SUPPORT WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ON BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE. I DON'T FEEL THAT WE SHOULD BE DITCHING OUR RELATIONSHIPS JUST BECAUSE WE DON'T WANT TO WORK OUT THE ISSUES WITH OUR SPOUSE.

THAT BEING SAID, I DO KNOW THERE ARE THOSE TIMES WHEN IT IS PHYSICALLY UNSAFE TO REMAIN WHERE YOU ARE. I FULLY SUPPORT GETTING THE HELP YOU NEED TO REMOVE YOURSELF FROM A DANGEROUS AND VIOLENT SITUATION.

1. Get Ready for Battle.

That one struggle that's causing you to consider walking out? It's not going to magically go away overnight. I wish I could tell you that it would.

This is a war – a very real war – for your soul, for your spouse, for your family. The enemy knows what he's doing, and when he can't take you out in round one, you can believe he will come at you again from a different direction, and with a harder punch. Ephesians 6:10-17 gives us such full detail on the armor of God because we will get attacked from many different directions.

But then, we read this encouragement from II Corinthians 4:8-9:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Spend your down time getting close to Jesus. Hide yourself under His wings and immerse yourself in His Word.

2. Expect the Unexpected.

I can't promise you that it will be smooth sailing. You might be surprised at the person or people who choose not to walk this journey with you. You'll want to cling tightly to them, but hold even more tightly to Jesus. And while you may have friends walk out, you're going to be so surprised at the places where Jesus meets you and makes Himself real to you! Keep watch – He won't leave you on your own.

Also, come close for this one, you're going to have good days. Yes, you will. Don't be startled by them. Enjoy them! Cherish them as a respite from the battle you're fighting.

3. Trust God.

You're going to find the encouragement you need at just the right time. There were days when I would be longing for another woman's perspective – someone who walked this road. God was gracious to put a couple of blog posts right in my path, from women who could have walked out on their marriages. I don't know their full stories, just that they walked a similar road and survived.

Whatever struggles arise as you try to stand your ground, please know that God is going to take care of you. I can't promise you that life will be easy-going, but I know that God will take care of you.

4. You're Going to Make It.

Sister, I don't know when your struggle will end, but I know that you're going to make it. God is faithful to take care of you, to hold and heal your heart. Follow Him – stay close to Him and let Him work things out around you.

This thing you're doing, trying to stay in a relationship when you could leave, it's a big thing. It's a life-changing thing. But also, it's a life-giving thing. If God is asking you to stay, He is going to work it out for your good. He is going to use your strength and perseverance to restore what the enemy tried to kill.

The enemy came knocking, but there is nothing and no one that can stand up to God.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. - Romans 8:38,39

To the wife who wants to stay, I am walking with you. By God's grace and in His strength, we can make it. And we aren't just going to survive, we're going to thrive!

A TALE OF TWO MARRIAGES: 4 REASONS WHY A WIFE SHOULD SPEAK WELL OF HER HUSBAND

Katie | Embracing a Simpler Life

TWO HUSBANDS.

Both love their wives and their families. Both work hard to provide. Both have dreams, goals, and interests. Both have sincere intentions. Both have shortcomings.

TWO WIVES.

One takes care to speak highly of her husband to her friends, children, and neighbors. She highlights all he does for her and their family, along with every good thing she sees in him. She's thankful for him and quick to let others know it. A word of praise is always on her tongue.

The other is given to complaining about her husband. She doesn't mind airing his shortcomings in exchange for the sympathy from her listeners. She feels entitled to her dissatisfaction, and gets her satisfaction from sharing it with her friends or neighbors, including, at times, their own children.

Which woman is a treasure to her husband?

Which husband feels more respected over time?

Which marriage is likely to thrive?

Which husband will be more motivated to be the best he can be?

Which wife is happier?

And there you have the simple tale of two very different marriages.

Notice, the only thing different in the scenario above is the words of the wife to others (not to her husband directly). Yet what a difference it surely makes!

Our words carry catastrophic weight in our marriages. Even those words that aren't heard by our spouse at all. Why is that?

4 REASONS WIVES SHOULD SPEAK HIGHLY OF THEIR HUSBANDS

1. OUR WORDS WILL INFLUENCE OUR HEARTS

I know from personal experience that the more I complain about something, the more mired I get in it's yuckiness. Things become a bigger and bigger "issue" in my own mind as I dwell on and revisit them.

We must take control of our thoughts and "let it go." Taking control of our thoughts starts by taking control of our words.

Yes, our own words wield significant power over us. We need to pay attention to that.

"But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them." Matthew 15:18

If this is not the marriage you want, then make a conscious effort to STOP bashing your husband to your girlfriends and others. Take the matter to God and then, as He directs you, take it to your husband. For many of us, that's all we really need to do. No more.

For more encouragement, check out 7 Biblical Tips for Resolving Conflict in Marriage.

2. TO HONOR OUR HUSBANDS

You are a trusted pair of eyes into your husband's most private life. If you don't speak well of him, how can other respect him? We dishonor and discredit our husbands when ill words and "poor me's" are what readily flow from our mouths.

Remember the Proverbs 31 woman?

Proverbs 31:10-12, 23

A wife of noble character who can find?

She is worth far more than rubies.

Her husband has full confidence in her

and lacks nothing of value.

She brings him good, not harm,

all the days of her life...

Her husband is respected at the city gate,

where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

Is there any doubt that she speaks highly of her man? He has full confidence in her. She brings him good, not harm. He's respected at the city gate.

What a blessing she is to him! You can be that to your husband. How lucky he would count himself if you repeatedly and graciously forgave and overlooked his offenses against you. What a ruby you would be in his life.

Proverbs 17:9 "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends."

3. TO BLESS OUR CHILDREN

You do know your children are watching you at all times, right? They hear you, even if you're not talking to them directly. They feel the impact your words have as others develop a negative impression of your marriage and lose respect for their dad.

I am so thankful for my own mom's example in this. I have never... not once... heard her speak a word against my dad. I know this was a conscious decision, because we all get frustrated at times, and she never wavered in it. She is quick to praise him, and always has been.

You know what? I learned that from her. I'm not as perfect perhaps, but my instinct is life-giving praises, not life-sucking grumbles. I'm blessed by her influence because it allows my own marriage to thrive.

Proverbs 14:1 "The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down."

4. TO OBEY AND PLEASE GOD

Do you realize that God loves this man more than you do?

And do you realize the great extent of your own shortcomings before God? Yet He offers you and me grace. We honor Him when we do the same for others. And who gives us more opportunities to show grace than our husbands?

In fact, in light of our own standing before God, this offering of grace is the absolute least we can and should do.

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:29-32

For more encouragement, check out A Call to Selfless Serving in Marriage: Keeping an Eye on Eternity.

Let me challenge you to make a change THIS WEEK. Tie a string around your finger and resolve to intentionally speak well of your husband for the next seven days, not in flattery, but sincerely, focusing on his strengths and choosing to swallow the rest.

PROTECTING YOUR MILITARY MARRIAGE

Carlie Kercheval | Managing Your Blessings.com

haven't always been a military spouse. As a matter of fact, my husband and I were actually married before he felt compelled to join the military, so I know that a lot of the information in this article will also have some application in non-military marriages. However, for the purpose of this article, I am going to be addressing military spouses, as there are some struggles unique to our situations that I feel God calling me to speak encouragement into.

As military spouses, there are certain things we must protect our marriages from as we walk a different path than most. I pray that these tips below can help encourage a military spouse out there who feels like her marriage is slowly falling apart. There is hope!

3 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR MILITARY MARRIAGE

1. MEDITATE ON THE WORD

My husband joined the military after the tragic events of 9/11. It was a hard decision to make as we had just graduated from our undergraduate studies at the university where we met, bought our first home, and even had our first baby. It wasn't long after he joined that he was on the ground in Iraq, fighting for our country.

I learned right away that all the fear, stress, and temptation to have anxiety as I waited 12 long months for him to return could only be addressed one way: I had to find Scriptures in the Bible and meditate on them day and night. I prayed and read my Bible for a few days until God gave me the Scriptures that I needed. And I can tell you after 5+ years of combat deployment separations: God's Word is true.

Not only did the Scriptures bring me peace, they also provided protection (over my husband as well as the children and I) and joy in the process of waiting. Was it easy? No. Did I always feel like reading the Word and meditating on it's truth? No. But I did it anyway. I encourage your now, dear sister, to put all of your feelings aside and begin to locate Scriptures in God's Word that will bring you peace in the process of waiting.

2. SPEAK LIFE INTO YOUR MARRIAGE

Like many other military members who serve in combat, my husband has suffered from PTSD. While his experience is much more mild than most (which I know is ONLY because of God), he still struggles with things that the average person doesn't even consider. As you can imagine, this has been something that we've had to intentionally work through together over time.

If I had only spoken words pertaining to what my eyes were seeing, I would have hurt my husband even more than he was already hurting. I am thankful to God that I was able to continue to speak His life-giving words and I saw the blessing unfold in my marriage. Speaking life can be done through prayer, confession, and simply pleasant and encouraging conversation.

Ladies, if you are experiencing a hardship because of PTSD, please be sure that if your soldier hasn't already reached out for help, that you encourage him to do so. Without my husband humbling himself, he would have never sought help. Pray that your husband will submit to God and humble himself to seek the help he needs. Be there for your husband. Remind him that the PTSD he is experiencing as a result of combat is not his fault. Remind him of what a wonderful man he is and how much you love and cherish him.

Through a lot of hard work and dedication, if you are both willing, you can get through this! I am speaking as one who is on the "other side" of it. And God didn't disappoint. Keep speaking life over your soldier and your marriage. Don't give up. God will always honor His Word.

3. BE HONEST WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

I'm sure many of you have heard the phrase: Honesty is the best policy. And it really is. Being honest with one another is a key component to keeping your military marriage strong. It is good to be honest about the good and the bad. If you are hurting because your soldier is always gone (training, deployments, TDY, etc), then let him know. If you are inspired by his hard work ethic, let him know. It is of equal importance to be honest about the good and the bad of your relationship.

But the most important thing throughout the communication process of honesty is making sure that you deliver the message in love. If you are unkind in the way you speak to your husband, he will likely become offended and shut you out. This doesn't help anyone. So I encourage you to approach the throne of Grace before talking to your husband about sensitive issues and allow God to season your words with salt. This will allow your husband time to process what you have told him and is more likely result in peaceful communication between the two of you.

If you take away anything from this article, dear sister, I pray that you take away the hope that God has equipped you with the ability, through Him, to protect and fight for your military marriage. Although we go through some things that 99% of the nation will never understand, there is a way to stay united and in love through the process. I am praying for each of you and thank you and your families from the very depths of my heart for your service to our great nation. I love you and am praying for you!

If you are in need of some resources for help dealing with PTSD try the following:

Make the Connection

National Center for PTSD

PTSD Treatment Help for Military Families

xoxo,

Carlie Kercheval

HOW TO BE A SERVING WIFE

Sarah Titus | Saving Money Never Goes Out of Style

I'll be completely honest...you don't have the best marriage you could have, if you are not actively serving your husband. I know that goes against the culture, our friends, and even our own flesh, but it is absolutely true. Many people get married and they think about all the ways that marriage and a new husband can benefit them. Am I right?

We think: I won't have to be alone. I'll have someone there to fill my needs. Someone to hold me when I cry, someone to be there to encourage me, someone to shower me with their love, someone to sacrifice for me, someone to help me get through hard times.

Our culture has become so me-centered. It's not just our kids who say, "Gimme, gimme, gimme, me, me, me," all day long. It's us, too. But as a godly wife, we must put away our own desires for the needs of another. You already understand that when it comes to kids...

Your 6-month-old baby is lying there crying. What do you do? Most likely, you're going to pick her up. You hold her, feed her, comfort her; you tend to her needs. It doesn't matter that you haven't showered in two days or slept since she was born. :) All that matters is that you meet that need. It's your inborn desire. You hop to it without even thinking twice!

HOW TO BE A SERVING WIFE

I want to introduce you to the idea that your husband is very much the same way. No, I'm not saying he's a crying baby. What I AM SAYING is that he has needs, too. As a wife, do we hop to our feet to meet them without thinking twice? Or do we have this attitude that he can figure it out himself since he's a big boy—he should be taking care of ME?

That kind of attitude will never lead to a godly marriage.

My husband took off. After 14 years of marriage, one day he asked me to give up God or basically he was gone. Still yet, I said, "NO! I won't give up God for you or anyone else." And I didn't. I can't tell you that we had a godly marriage, but I CAN tell you that I was a godly wife. I CAN say that he had no complaints in me as a wife even to this day. That he can't say I didn't serve him day and night, think of his needs before my own, suffer and sacrifice for him on a daily basis.

You see, in being married to an utterly depraved sinner, he was very good at baiting me. Oh, he loved it. He loved to get my goat and tried daily to make me fall. But the thing is, the more he did it, the more I relied on God and the more Christ-like I became. I learned how to put someone else ahead of myself, even if I was mad at them. Even though his spirit fought mine day and night relentlessly. It was my job to serve him. If you want to know the truth, 2 1/2 years later, the thing I miss most about being married, is the opportunity to serve another person in the context of marriage.

I learned that it doesn't matter what my husband does or doesn't do, I have to be strong; I have to be a godly woman. He has to answer to God for his own actions. I can't let his actions sway mine, because I stand before God for my own. I can't use him as an excuse to sin, as an excuse to not be a godly woman. Before God, I stand or fall for my own actions. I doubt God is going to take the excuse, "It's all HIS fault!" Right? We are accountable for our own actions. I can't get caught up in what my husband is doing or not doing. I can't wait for him to come around, wait for him to want Christ, wait for him to want ME. God calls women to serve their families, plain and simple, and that is what we must do.

Being married isn't about us. THIS LIFE...isn't about US. This life, our lives are about Christ. Pointing others to Him. What better way can you be a light on a hill shining brightly, than to serve someone who doesn't deserve it?!?! And trust me, none of us do deserve it.

The more you serve your husband, the more you will see their rough sides soften. The more you will genuinely see them start to think about YOU. Even the most callous person can see you genuinely wanting to serve them and more often then not, they will start to serve you back. But even if they never do, you know you stand before God as a godly wife, serving all those you meet.

Jesus, King of King and Lord of Lords, washed His followers' feet. He set the example then, and you can set the example to all you know now.

Will you serve your husband? Will you consider his needs from a different perspective? Will you commit to meeting his needs above your own? Will you ask God to make you into the woman that He has called you to be?

I stand here waiting for the opportunity that I could serve in such a way that you can TODAY...will you take that opportunity to grow and be more Christ-like?

MOVING TOWARD DEEPER CONNECTION

Sharon Mavis | WholeHeartedMarriageOnline.com

o couple is as happy as a bride and groom on their wedding day. True or false? On our wedding day, Rick and I thought we were the ideal couple: close, crazy (about each other), and connected. However, at year 35 of our own marriage, we made a huge stride toward even deeper connection. The result? Our marriage is now better than it has ever been. Ever.

Don't misunderstand me; we had a good marriage in the first 35 years. My husband was a pastor. We had two great kids together. We met in a Christian group in college and attended seminary together. We had lots of adventures: pastoring, church planting, and owning a Christian bookstore.

I could go on.

But at year 35, we experienced a radical shift. It came as a surprise. God sneaked in and changed me. When I changed, the dance of our marriage changed. Then Rick changed. Then our ministry changed. And it was all good.

The shift started in 2008 when we were invited as a pastoral couple to investigate a ministry with roots in healing for sexual abuse. As I listened to the presentation, I sensed God telling me to participate even though sexual abuse was not part of my history. I signed up.

In my group, I unpacked my childhood story and saw how I had been affected by it. In my family of origin I had learned to keep the peace at the cost of speaking the truth in love. I learned that my peace-keeping silence was my way of protecting myself from being hurt, rather than trusting God to protect me. My peace-at-any-price style had shaped our marriage, not in a healthy way.

There it was: the bald truth. I was in my 50s and needed to grow up!

I signed up again.

In the next sessions, I went deeper into how I needed to confront my husband where he needed to be confronted. I started to risk more confrontation, loving confrontation. The dance steps of our marriage started to change.

My husband followed by also participating in a group. He, too, was unaware of how much his family of origin had affected how he did life now. He saw his unhealthy way of relating to me, that he had to be right and in control, and he was broken-hearted. He moved toward me in repentance. Not only did our dance change, but we also started playing different music!

Others saw the change in us, the redemption.

So why, after years of pastoral ministry, three seminary-level master's degrees between us, and access to every possible Christian book, did such a huge shift occur?

In these groups, we looked at our own childhood stories without minimizing or dismissing their impact on us. We saw the connection between our stories and how we show up now with each other in our marriage. We recognized our own brokenness. We gave each other grace for being broken people.

Did we love each other before the shift?

Were we committed to each other before the shift?

Had we grown together through the years? Silly question. Of course.

Had we gone through hard times, the painful University of Growth? We had advanced degrees from that school.

The Shift brought us to deeper connection, exactly what we long for in marriage: physical, spiritual, and emotional connection.

We saw clearly that we needed to relinquish self-protective patterns and let God do the protecting. Therefore, it was a time of deep spiritual growth; it meant turning from the sin of taking God's role in our relationships to letting Him do His redeeming work.

Do you see any of the following dis-connecting issues in your own marriage?

- Defensiveness
- Control
- Self-contempt, other-centered contempt
- Shame
- Wearing masks, hiding
- Stonewalling, silence
- People-pleasing
- Having to be right
- Being out of touch with emotions
- Not using one's voice

Is this an exhaustive list of everyone's dysfunctions? No, this is a partial list of Mavis dysfunctions!

God delights in redemption, however, and this is truly beautiful. He took our dysfunctional history, redeemed it, and gave us opportunities to use it in profound ways in ministry.

Those who led us into redemption modeled vulnerability and we have followed in their steps. I write vulnerably about marriage in emails available at http://wholeheartedmarriageonline.com/free/. Rick and I share vulnerably at

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marriage seminars. After one session, a participant said, "If the pastor is that messed up, there is no hope for the rest of us!"

Truthfully, the pastor is healthier than he has ever been in his relationships, including our marriage. He was simply being authentic. And truthfully, there is hope ... for all of us!

Embrace change. Seek out help. Find freedom. Change the dance.

Back to the opening question: Is it true that no couple is happier than the bride and groom on their wedding day? Or perhaps, rephrase the question: As happy as a bride and groom are on their wedding day, what do they have to look forward to in terms of more intimacy and a growing connection?

The answer is more, always more!

God can bring change at all stages of a marriage, even after 35 years. Growth can happen in year 5, 15, 35, and 55. That is truly something we as married couples can look forward to.

More joy is available – just around the bend!

EVEN WHEN LIFE GETS HARD, R-E-S-P-E-C-T YOUR SPOUSE

Rosann Cunningham | Rosann Cunningham.com

et's face it, every couple is going to face hard times in their life together. How we choose to cope through those hard times will greatly impact the strength of our marriage and the bond we have with our spouse. My husband and I have endured many seasons of hardship throughout our 16 years together — long term unemployment, chronic illness, and a legal scare that shook us to the core, just to name a few. Occasionally, we'll reflect back upon those hard times and discuss what we thought we did right for our marriage when the tension in the air was thick.

Without hesitation, we both always mention the word respect. Here's the R-E-S-P-E-C-T formula that has worked very well for us.

R - REACT WITH LOVE

No matter what the issue that we're discussing or how stressed we feel, we always make it a point to react with love.

When the company my husband worked for finally shut down and he was laid off, he knew the next best option for our family at that point and time was to move across country. This would mean asking me to leave the state I'd spent 18 years of my life in and relocate 2200 miles away from my parents and my brothers.

I could have reacted with harsh words, a fight, or ultimatums. I didn't. I chose to show respect to my husband and the difficult decision he was making. I trusted that he had our best interest at heart and as the leader of our home had spent time seeking God in prayer.

I wholeheartedly supported and embraced the move and continued treating him with love throughout our transition.

E - EMPLOY YOUR FAITH

No matter how strong we are in our faith, hard times weaken us spiritually because of the very destructive nature of fear.

My husband and I have had to be intentional about employing our faith time and time again to be sure we weren't allowing fear to destroy our marriage. When our financial circumstances were at their worst during a 3-year season of unemployment, fear was right there looming.

We kicked fear to the curb by making sure we were regularly attending church together, praying together, reading God's Word, and encouraging each other with His promises. I even started attending a Bible study women's group at our church, which grew my faith by leaps and bounds.

Because our faith was solid, fear was not in the way of our ability to show respect toward each other.

S - STRENGTHEN YOUR BOND

Spending quality time together having fun, being intimate, and engaging in conversation went a long way in strengthening our relationship and love for one another.

We were so intentional about this during the storms of life that we even scheduled time together to connect each day after our kids were tucked in for the night. This special time together was always free from the disruptions of technology.

It was time we used however we felt we needed to as a couple. Sometimes we just talked. Other times we'd get intimate. On Saturday nights we'd agree to a glass of wine and stream a movie from Netflix neither of us had seen.

When our marital bond is strong, respect flows much more naturally.

P - PRAY TOGETHER AND FOR EACH OTHER

There's such power in prayer! My husband and I have faced some scary situations so beyond our control we could do nothing else but pray — and trust God would come through for us.

Whenever we were feeling weak (and we did feel weak a lot during these hard seasons), we'd grab hands and pray together. We prayed for each other, too.

During my husband's unemployment, I prayed about the different aspects of his journey that troubled him most, as well as for the future job I knew God had planned for him. I didn't stop there, though. I recognized some negative feelings building up in my heart and so I prayed for God to remove my unhealthy thoughts and replace them with loving ones.

E - EMPTY THOSE HARD FEELINGS

It's so unhealthy to hold our feelings in, but sometimes letting them out can be destructive. So the key here was finding healthy and productive ways to talk about how we were feeling. This is, in part, why I started blogging.

Clearing the negative thoughts and emotions goes a long way in taming our tongue when we're around our spouse. Talking to a trusted friend or a pastor is great. Journaling is another awesome way to release those feelings.

We did talk to each other, too, but we were sure to choose our words carefully and with love.

C - CONSIDER YOUR SPOUSE'S NEEDS AND DESIRES

Everyone copes with stress and hardship differently. My husband is very quiet and doesn't talk much about the situation unless he has a plan to overcome it. If he's not talking, he doesn't want me prodding him with questions he doesn't have the answers to. His desire is to get physically intimate instead.

When I'm stressed out, I need to talk. Getting intimate isn't on my list of desires during hard times. I can't even get in the mood with all that negativity going on in my head. The control freak in me can't relax unless I know there's a plan we can start working on to resolve the problem we're facing.

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My husband and I have learned these different needs and desires over the years and we've also learned how to compromise so we both get what we need.

T - TRUST YOUR SPOUSE

This speaks more to the wife trusting the leadership of her husband when life feels like it's falling apart. It's easy to trust your spouse when things are going well. It's a lot harder to do when you're facing a giant obstacle.

With more than a decade of life-altering crises, I learned early on in our relationship the importance of trusting my husband. His faith in God is rock solid and I know he would never jump without first getting God's approval.

It may look like the choices being made are foolish, but with God on our side, anything is possible.

Are you in a difficult season of life that's causing tension in your marriage? Which aspect of the R-E-S-P-E-C-T formula do you think would be most helpful in your situation?

11 WAYS YOU CAN SAVE YOUR PASTOR'S MARRIAGE

Annette | In All You Do

never really gave much thought to the marriage of my own pastor, at least not until I was married to one. My husband and I have been married 12 years, but only in the past two years did we begin full-time ministry work. And I was surprised at the toll it took on our marriage. I mean, we have been through several job losses, baby losses, and money struggles that no young married couple should face. So why was this so hard?

After being in full-time ministry for a while, I am convinced there are ways a church can and should love on their pastor and his family. In the same way, I am convinced there are some ways that a church can break a pastor. And the fastest way is through his marriage. If his marriage fails, he will fail. So here are 11 ways you can save your pastor's marriage.

PRAY!! – Yes, this needs to be mentioned. Don't just pray for him to speak God's Word boldly, but pray for his marriage.

Love him – Love him not just as your pastor, but as a person. Get to know him — his likes and dislikes. He is a real person with real feelings and real hobbies outside the church.

Love his family – When you love his wife and children, he will THRIVE!! When at church functions, most of the time the pastor's wife is flying solo because he has other responsibilities. Help his wife out, love on his children, and he will be free to concentrate on his ministry and the members of the church more fully.

Invite them over – Nothing makes you feel more lonely than when no one in the church wants to invite you over to their home. Now, I know we have 4 children and that can be overwhelming for some people, especially if their home isn't "child proof," but that doesn't mean we can't meet up at a park where the kids can play and run. Most likely your pastor is not near his own family, so they don't have "big family Sunday dinners" to attend. And since they work on the weekends, they don't have weekends off to visit their family. But it doesn't have to be Sunday. Invite them over for a fun game night or just a time to hang out and talk. I would also encourage elders to invite the pastors over as well, since they know the goings on of the church and can be a support and encouragement to each other outside the board room. This will show your pastor you believe in him for more than just the work he does at the church.

Encourage him – This one is two-fold. While many pastors get their fair share of complaints, they need to hear the positives as well. Did their message challenge you? Did the Lord speak to you during the message? "Nice job" is good to hear, but since the message is not about your pastor and his ability to "wow" you, let him know when God is moving in your life. When he knows the Lord is working among His people, your pastor will be refreshed, encouraged, and free to truly minister to his church. And trust me…this does affect them at home. The second part of this is to encourage him to take time off to replenish his soul. When his soul is weary and burdened for the church, he needs time away from the office and people to listen to God. To reconnect with his Creator. Allow him that time.

Marriage retreats – Encourage your minister and his wife to attend marriage retreats. Whether specifically for pastors or not, they need to be able to reconnect as a married couple and with other married couples!! Bonus points if you pay for them to attend! And on that note...I move on to the next point.

Offer to babysit – I cannot stress this one enough! If your pastor lives far from family, they will likely have little support in a new community. If they are new to the community, they will not have access to sitters — at least not until they get to know people. Offer to watch their kids so they can have a much-needed night out and time to reconnect with each other. Pastor's are not "in it for the money," believe me. So many of them may not have the money to pay a sitter and go out for a nice dinner. We know families are busy and life is crazy for most people, so we will not seek out people to watch our kids if we can't afford a sitter — so offer. Please.

Respect his time – Yes, he is your pastor. Yes, he is the one you probably want to speak with when you have an issue. However, please understand that he has a family and they need time together, too. While they don't mind attending events on occasion, it is difficult to have family time if they are expected to attend games, award ceremonies, or birthday parties every night of the week. Respect his office hours or make an appointment to speak with him outside those hours. Avoid calling him at all hours of the evening and night, unless it is an emergency — then by all means...CALL!! When you call him at home, try to keep your conversations short and concise. If you need more time, he will be happy to make an appointment with you — just ask!

Accountability – Accountability is so important in the pastoral role. They see so many people in their office for counseling sessions that it is important to give them accountability. Years ago before we were ever married, my husband and I decided on "rules" when he became a pastor somewhere. We talked about how men should never be seen alone with a woman other than their wife. We talked about how he would never take the female babysitter home by himself. Counseling sessions can be iffy, but it is important to make sure the pastor is not put in a compromising position. That is not good for him or the counseled. I recommend making appointments when someone else can be present at the church, so no questions are raised and there are witnesses. I've seen too many pastors hurt by false accusations to let this one slide. And on the flip side, I've seen too many fall prey to their own temptations when left alone.

Don't treat his wife like she's on staff – Unless you hire his wife as a paid staff member, do not treat her as such. Do not assume she knows the ins and outs of his ministry, because most likely she doesn't. Allow her to use her talents in the area God leads her. Now, I have helped out in many areas of service and have enjoyed each of them for a short time. But when I was allowed to serve where God led me, I was blessed beyond measure. Please don't take that blessing away from her just because she's the pastor's wife.

Allow him to be honest – Your pastor is human. He will fail and he will be tempted, so allow him to be honest about those temptations. He will have real struggles, both personally and spiritually. Allow him to share his struggles without repercussion that his job will be in jeopardy (barring an ethical or moral sin). It is important that he knows he can be honest with the elders of the church in confidence. And if needed, he can seek counseling.

What are some ways you have encouraged and built up your pastor's marriage?

FOUR WAYS TO ABSORB GOD'S TRUTH ABOUT SEX IN MARRIAGE

Chris Taylor | The Forgiven Wife

One of my signature Bible verses is Psalm 51:10:

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

That verse beautifully expresses the work God did in me during a time of transformation in my marriage.

I had spent nearly two decades depriving our marriage of healthy sexual intimacy. For my husband (like for most men), sexual intimacy is the primary means of emotional bonding. When I realized that my avoidance and control of sex had hurt my husband's heart, I was broken.

At the moment of realizing what I had done and how much I'd hurt our marriage, I invited God into the process. With God's help, my efforts resulted in a total transformation of my heart, my Christian walk, and my relationship with my husband.

One of the biggest challenges I faced in this process was learning—and believing—God's truth about sex.

Sexual intimacy is such a powerful thing in marriage. It should be no surprise that it's where Satan chooses to attack us by feeding us lies and making us doubt.

Like many women, I often found it easier to believe the enemy's lies about sexual intimacy than to believe God's truth.

Truth: I am beautiful.

Lie: No, I'm not. Have you seen this stomach or the stretch marks?

Truth: My husband wants to have sex with me just as much for the "me" as for the sex.

Lie: He just wants a physical release.

Truth: I can change my attitude toward sexual intimacy.

Lie: It's just the way I am and I can't do anything about it.

Truth: My husband's sex drive and desire for adventure are God-given.

Lie: He's oversexed and possibly perverted.

Truth: Sex is an integral part of the marriage relationship.

Lie: Sex doesn't really matter that much.

Truth: Sex is for the husband, for the wife, and for the marriage.

Lie: Sex is mostly for men.

Truth: I have a sex drive, and it's different from my husband's.

Lie: Because I'm not always ready like my husband seems to be, I am not sexual and I don't have a sex drive.

Do you struggle to be sexual with your husband? Do any of these lies sound familiar? Are you uncomfortable with some of the truths on this list?

How do you fight these lies and begin to absorb God's truth about sex and sexuality?

How do you get rid of the lies? You push the lies out by replacing them with the truth.

Here are four things that can help you do just that:

Learn God's truth. There is a lot that we think we know about healthy sexuality in a Christian marriage—but is it true?

Read the Bible. In addition to Scripture that is clearly about marriage, there are also things to learn about generosity, ministering to others, and what it means to be a child of God in all ways.

Especially, read Song of Solomon. Maybe you think it's an allegory for the relationship between Christ and the church. Remember, though, that the only way we can truly understand the symbolism is if we also understand what the allegory means in its nitty-grittiest sense. The better the sexual intimacy is in my marriage, the more deeply I appreciate the intimacy with God that waits for me.

Read good resources on Christian sexuality. Look for resources that you know will challenge you. There are wonderful books and blogs written to help Christian wives grow in their sexuality.

Let other women walk alongside you. Ask experienced wives (with happy husbands!) to mentor you. Gather with other wives to go through a study about sex in Christian marriages. Email a woman blogger who writes about sexual intimacy.

Write it out. Write out God's truth as you learn.

Keep a journal where you record your journey of learning and change. Make note of what you learn. Write about your struggles. Record your milestones. It is wonderful to look back a year or two or ten later and be able to recognize how far you've come.

Make note of Bible passages that speak to you about your marriage. Write them on post-it notes and place them where you will see them throughout your day.

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Write each of God's truths about sexuality to counter the lies you have believed. Put them on index cards. Read some of them every day while you pray to understand and apply them.

Involve your husband. Let your husband be your biggest cheerleader.

Ask him to pray for you to learn (and love) God's truth about sex.

Invite him to go through a marriage study with you.

Choose to believe your husband. When he says you're beautiful, it's because in his eyes, you truly are. When he says that sex is about intimacy, not just about a physical release, it's because it's true. When he says that sex with you makes him feel loved like nothing else can, it's because it does.

One husband has helped his wife by writing out lies and truths for her to refer to when she is struggling: "I also wrote her a list of LIES and TRUTHS for when she begins to feel these things she can go right to it. I listed out the lies she keeps fighting and the truth about how I feel and how my actions line up with those truths."

Seek help. If you need it, get help. There is no need to walk this journey alone

Talk with your pastor or a professional counselor if you need guidance. Either on your own or with your husband, let someone help you.

If you are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse or rape, chances are pretty high that these experiences affect your marriage bed. Don't let the perpetrators keep control over your marriage; get help and work on your healing. Find a specialist who can walk you through the healing process. Your marriage is worth it. More importantly, so are you.

Are you ready to renew your mind, heart, and spirit and learn God's truth about sex and sexuality?

SANCTIFICATION THROUGH MARRIAGE

Teri Lynne Underwood | TeriLynneUnderwood.com

Cott and I had been married less than five years when I read Sacred Marriage for the first time. Our little girl was less than a year old and we had just moved nine hours away from our nearest family. To say it was hard would be the understatement of a lifetime. We had one car and lived {literally} on an island.

He had started serving in a small, country church in southeast Georgia and I was still trying to figure out what it meant to be a housewife and stay-at-home-mom. He was busy learning the names of our church members and building relationships with the students in his youth group. I was busy changing diapers and trying to figure out why everyone called those huge insects palmetto bugs instead of what they so obviously were—roaches.

And somehow, in the middle of all the transition and lack of sleep and missing familiar faces, I realized something important: Scott couldn't make me happy.

Oh, we were happy together and our marriage wasn't in trouble. But he just couldn't be the one who filled me up every day and met every need I had.

I felt tricked. I had somehow believed I could stop working and stay home and be a wife and a mom and everything would be perfect. Our life would be a picture of happy family bliss.

But it wasn't. I struggled. All the feelings and exhaustion and frustration were at the brink of boiling over.

Enter Sacred Marriage. By the third page of my reading, I was uncomfortable. God was getting into my business. He was showing me how much I had warped the idea of marriage into something for my ego instead of something for His glory. I had made Scott into the savior of my spit-up filled days and lost sight of my need for the Savior of my soul.

WHAT IF GOD DESIGNED MARRIAGE TO MAKE US HOLY MORE THAN TO MAKE US HAPPY?

The words echoed in my heart and mind for days. In fact, I couldn't get over them. I couldn't read any further. I set the book down and scoured the pages of Scripture looking at every marriage, every verse, every example I could find. I pored over the story of Ruth and Boaz, my favorite of all the Bible's love stories. I read and re-read the passages written by Paul about love and submission.

And finally, I read these verses:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." {Ephesians 5:31-32}

Marriage is a mystery, a profound and inexplicable thing. Two become one in body, mind, and spirit. But marriage has a greater purpose than we often realize: When we commit to one another, when we take the covenant

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of "one flesh" seriously and choose to stay even when leaving would be easier, then we become this gloriously incomplete but beautiful image of the way Christ loves the Church, His bride.

The sacrificial, generous, committed love between husband and wife points to the unending and unconditional love of Christ for the Church, of God for His people.

And when we catch a glimpse of that mystery and all its profound implications, we see the truth: Marriage isn't about making us happy. Marriage is, at its very best, a tool God uses to sanctify and purify us, to make us holy.

When it's hard, when you're tired, when he's stressed, when the children are crazy, when there are more bills than money, more demands than time, more laundry than you ever dreamed possible ... He is calling you to see Him more clearly, to know His provision and protection and grace and love.

And when it's good, when everything is going smoothly, when you have a good hair day, when your husband brings flowers for no reason, when your kids are playing together, when you look at this life the two of you have built with gratitude ... He is reminding you how gracious He is, to know His kindness and generosity and love.

Marriage is God's plan, His gift to us. And He will always use it to draw us closer to Him ... we just have to remember to pay attention.

How has God sanctified you through your marriage? In what ways have you learned marriage is a tool for holiness more than a means to happiness?

BE HIS EYES

KELA NELLUMS | Pursuing What Is Excellent

I'm very trusting, and you don't trust enough." That was a statement of fact from my husband. I don't easily trust people. It's not like I set out not to. It just takes me a moment to figure out if I want to invest in another person and to allow them to see into me.

Sometimes that "lack of trust" has worked in my favor for the benefit of our marriage. Some call it "women's intuition". I call it discernment.

"The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life." Proverbs 31:11-12 (NKJV)

"And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Genesis 2:18

We aren't to use this insight for gainful or selfish reasons, or as a reason to tell our husbands, "I told you so," but rather to be his other set of eyes and ears.

There have been times in my husband's business that he'd hire someone to work for him and I'd get a "something isn't right" in my spirit. Every red flag goes off in me and I usually can't pinpoint it immediately. I start to become like a mother hen gathering her chicks under-wing to brace for a storm.

In the meantime there are specific steps that I take to protect my husband and my family when I feel an employee is shady.

Bring my thoughts about a person to my husband.

Leave all decisions up to my husband regarding if he wants to keep them on or dismiss the person.

Pray for deeper understanding of the situation and that God Himself would reveal the person's heart or intent.

Guard my doors. Thankfully I have enough influence and my husband trusts me enough to honor my wishes to not let anyone into our home that I don't deem trustworthy.

Sometimes we find out exactly what I suspected; other times the person simply fades out of our lives. Either way, discernment from the Holy Spirit won out.

There have also been times that I've felt this way when it comes to other women being around my husband. Ladies, we know that the radar is really keen in this area!

I've never felt threatened or worried about my husband's loyalty and faithfulness, but I know how to read the body language and gestures of women.

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I apply the same steps as above, except the second one. It's immediately nipped!

Do you see in your marriage where you've experienced discernment, or "women's intuition"? Were you right or wrong? How have you helped your husband navigate it? Do you say, "I told you so," or rejoice together that an evil plan has been thwarted?

Whenever anyone new comes into your and your husband's life, ask God for eyes to see and ears to hear. Not for the purpose to be on a "witch hunt," but to be watchful and discerning.

Not everyone that comes into your life means harm, nor is everyone that comes into your life to develop ties with. Have a gentle and grace-filled spirit but also be in prayer.

MY SPOUSE IS NOT THE ENEMY

Alicia Kazsuk | VibrantHomeschooling.com

hings have been especially stressful around our home lately and, in many ways, our home feels like someone took a stack of cards and threw them in the air. My husband is tired from an unusually heavy travel schedule and added pressures at work. I am tired from big homeschooling changes, new commitments for our four children, and from just having to fill in the gaps when he is gone. Added sickness the past few weeks has not helped matters.

We don't expect this season of transition to last forever. But nevertheless, it is here and it has brought with it an added pressure on our typically easy marriage.

My husband and I have been short with each other. We have allowed the little annoyances of life to influence our attitudes and interactions. We aren't having any big "problems," per se, but the added stress has just built up and there have been some less than loving words said.

It has been breaking my heart (and my husband's). Mainly because we know that the real enemy here isn't each other—it's everything that we're enduring.

In those recent moments where I've had to repent for my words or actions (things that I am truly embarrassed and saddened that came out of my mouth), the Lord has impressed a phrase on my heart that is bringing conviction, clarity, and comfort:

My spouse is not the enemy.

My husband, the man with the big blue eyes and gentle, quiet spirit, is not who I need to be attacking right now.

My husband, the faithful provider of our home and my partner in parenting, is carrying an excessively large load right now and as a result is tired, lacking, and suffering just like I am.

My husband, the man who has been my closest confidente and dearest friend for over fifteen years, is reacting in an understandably human way to our circumstances. He needs my support and love.

The true enemy is our schedule. Our added stress. The sin we've exhibited in speaking to each other.

THE CLIMAX AND AWAKENING

Yesterday morning was kind of the climax of it all.

The night before we'd watched a very sweet romantic movie together. We'd both found the movie refreshing and enjoyable.

And yet, the movie alerted me to a longing that had been in my heart. Yes, it was a movie with idealized characters and situations, but I saw that the main characters had developed an easy, everyday-romance type of love. It was a demonstration of love that I'd seen us exhibit for years in our marriage, and now, I felt like was totally missing.

It broke my heart because I knew that we'd made choices to make it this way. True, some of those choices were outside of our control (work travel, ongoing regular doctors' appointments for one of our children), but others were not.

I saw how our everyday choices—especially the extra commitments we'd taken on—had cost us this special closeness.

The enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. And, in this way, we'd allowed him to do just that in our marriage.

Everyday, small, incremental choices to allow ourselves to be depleted had trickled down and reduced this level of intimacy.

CONFESSION AND COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Today, as I write this, I am praising God because I see Him lifting some of those commitments from our family. The travel schedule has lightened; the ongoing doctors' appointments have an end in sight.

Now, as we both seek to restore that which we'd allowed the enemy to steal, the question is: "What else do we need to give up? What other commitments, attitudes, and habits need to change?"

I am still seeking God on this. I know that I need to reformulate how we do things and what we will and won't commit ourselves to. And honestly, I'm saddened and afraid to ask what that might look like.

To start the process, the Lord is telling me that I need to ask for my husband's forgiveness in over-committing myself and allowing that to affect our marriage.

Because even though I know in my heart that my husband is not the enemy, I haven't necessarily been acting like that.

My prayer is that we can then, together, ask Jesus for ways to learn to restructure our daily interactions so that we build each other up.

Have you allowed your marriage to become less than its full potential, and have you perhaps—in daily interactions or in your thoughts—viewed your spouse as the enemy? I want to encourage you to seek God on this. Be honest and confess it to Him. Ask Him to show you the habits or commitments that need to change. Ask Him to give you opportunities to show unconditional love and to honor your husband so that your overall mindset can change.

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SURRENDERING YOUR DREAMS SO YOU CAN EMBRACE HIS

Elisa Pulliam | Elisa Pulliam.com

I 've always wondered why the seventh inning in baseball was designated as the time most fitting for a stretch, because I confess I'm usually ready by the third! I've also wondered how this need for a "stretch" plays out in marriage, finding it quite ironic that by year seven I was itching for more than a stretch. Although I vowed I would not repeat the cycle of divorce and was determined for my marriage covenant to last until death do us part, I was losing my desire to persevere. Marriage was harder than what I expected.

The days were long, the dollars were short, and the joy we once had in our time together was over-run by those "now you're an adult" responsibilities.

Time alone with my husband was hard to come by, and time uninterrupted was even more of a precious commodity. Gone were the days in which we could spontaneously head out on an adventure or plan a vacation without needing to book two hotel rooms just to fit our family.

This wasn't what I dreamed my life would look like.

Where were the romantic dates? How about the family vacations? What happened to the house with the white picket fence? Instead, I found myself moving from home to home, none of which we owned, while chasing down toddlers, keeping up with the laundry, and hoping that "one day" we'd have more money. My dreams of married life and motherhood vanished somewhere in the process of going from daughter to young woman to wife and mother.

Like a woman drowning in a sea of disappointment, I was desperately trying to rescue my own dreams. But it wasn't my dreams that needed rescuing — it was me!

Those dreams formed in my childhood were all about surviving. They were hopes sown in tears. They were imaginary pictures painted in my mind's eye of a perfect family in an invisible world. Those dreams weren't the ones God had for my life. His dreams were painted in full color by the blood of Jesus, securing my salvation and shifting my life mission onto building an eternity-bent legacy with my husband.

The life God was calling me to embrace included honoring my marriage covenant, sacrificially loving my husband, and purposefully investing into mothering our children well.

It was a mission set forth by kingdom vision, not earthly comforts or the fulfillment of childhood dreams.

God's plans for my life — for my marriage, in particular — are so much greater, richer, and more brilliant than any of my dreams. But in order to see them clearly, I have to give up the ones I cling to so desperately and risk the unknown blessings to behold — especially the blessings that look totally different than expected.

As my husband says, it's amazing that we agree on the main things — that the Word is truth and that Jesus is the Savior of this world — since we disagree on almost everything else. We are opposites in almost every way. I make

quick decision; he labors over them. I like shopping; he hates the mall. I love chocolate; he prefers nachos. To use Dave Ramsey's description of spenders and savers, I am the free spirit and he's the nerd.

Every single day of our marriage has been about laying down our desires, wants, and dreams for the sake of each other.

Ephesians 5:21 NIV: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

It's a daily submission, done out of reverence for Christ. Could there be anything harder to do? And yet, that is the very thing Christ has done for us as He submitted to the will of our Father in Heaven.

He's not calling us to do something He's not already done.

It's this sanctification process that has been the greatest push and pull on my dreams. I can't have what I want and still submit in the way God is calling me to do in my marriage. So is it any surprise that I was discontented and uncomfortable in my marriage after seven years of going at it? Is it any wonder I felt like I was "losing myself"?

Those early years together were marked by hard work and heart work. And yet, now, as we turn the bend toward year 19, I wouldn't have it any other way. What God accomplished in us through the most difficult of our married days laid a foundation for loving each other over the long haul. While we're still learning the art of submitting, we are all the more motivated to do so because we've experienced the blessing. As we've discovered how to love each other sacrificially, we've experienced a joy-filled unity of soul that is indeed priceless.

No, I don't own a home with a white-picket fence, but I'm learning with every passing day that it's much more delightful to live out the dreams God dreams for us than to continue dreaming up our own.

MAKING THE HARD CHOICE TO PROTECT MY MARRIAGE

Stacy Farrell | OnLovingJesus.com

"Sweetheart?"

"Yes?"

I don't really have to tell him about this. (Or do I?) This really isn't a problem. (Or is it?) What if he won't let me take this class? I really want to take this class! The August sun briefly blinded me as it bounced from a misaligned mirror on a car in front of us.

"How Values Are Communicated Through Literature" was the class, taught by a teacher I'd grown to esteem. It sounded fascinating. Maybe I was over-analyzing—making a big deal out of nothing.... Yet, I was acutely aware of a commitment I had made to Roger before we married.

I once asked what he needed from me most of all, and he had answered, "I need you to be open and honest with me."

"No problem," I replied quickly.

"It won't always be as easy as it sounds," he gently warned.

He was right. It wasn't. Today, it was hard.

OPEN & HONEST, EVEN WHEN IT'S HARD

Sweat from my bare legs dampened the cloth car seat. My heart battered my rib cage. Yet I resolved to be faithful to my commitment. I cleared my throat.

"I need your advice," I continued. "I don't think there's a problem, but I registered for a class, and now I'm wondering whether I should take it. The very thing that makes the class attractive also causes me to question it. That is, I will receive lots of one-on-one attention from the teacher."

Roger braked softly as the traffic light turned red. Protect your marriage

"I really like this teacher," I confessed wistfully. "I respect him. He challenges and inspires me to do my best. But I'm a little concerned because, well, I seem to be thinking about him an awful lot lately..."

A siren sounded in the distance.

"My response to him is strictly platonic, intellectual," I asserted. "But protecting our marriage is my first priority. Given the stakes, I don't want to take any chances. So I thought it would be good to ask for your opinion. What do you think I should do?"

LISTEN TO THREE VOICES

Roger paused thoughtfully before answering. "Well, I'd pay close attention to three 'voices': the 'voice' of my physical/emotional response, the 'voice' of my thoughts, and the 'voice' of the Holy Spirit."

Hmm. Evaluating my physical/emotional response to the teacher, I had to admit that when I talked with him my palms sweat and my pulse quickened. Probably not a good sign. (I'd say I failed the first test.)

Reviewing the content of my thoughts, the second "voice," I proudly acknowledged that my thoughts were chaste. But I was soon humbled as I remembered: "Pride comes before the fall." (Prov. 16:18)

Tuning in the third and final voice, with great sadness I realized that I had the undeniable impression the "voice" of the Spirit was warning me: "GET OUT!"

Two of three voices told me I was headed for trouble. What should I do?

MAKING MY DECISION

I am thankful that Roger does not try to control me. Throughout our marriage, he has steadily refused to make my decisions for me (even when I thought I wanted him to). Instead, he will offer his best counsel and leave my decisions to me. So, as I candidly described what I thought I'd heard each voice say, I knew I would remain free to take the class.

After talking with Roger, I thought about what I'd miss if I dropped the class. This instructor obviously had a passion for teaching, a passion for writing, and a passion for life. He had a extraordinary way of painlessly exposing my weaknesses and magnifying my strengths. I thrived under his tutelage.

During the previous semester, I'd gotten into a habit of staying after class to discuss my papers with him. On a few occasions, I'd called him at his home to ask specific questions about my assignments. I'd even interviewed him for my final class project. In the intimacy of the interview, I learned a great deal about his personal life. He struck me as a fascinating man, worthy of admiration.

No doubt, giving up the class would mean losing a great learning opportunity. But, then again, taking the class might teach me more than I wanted to know.

Although I was reluctant to admit it, I knew what I needed to do.

I withdrew from the class the following day, wondering what I would say to the teacher. It felt awkward, especially in light of how excited I'd been when he described the class over the telephone, and again when we had talked about it in great detail the day I had registered.

FIRST A STORM, THEN PEACE

Over the course of the next three days, I experienced an emotional chaos that took me by surprise. I felt depressed, irritated, rageful, weepy, and then, finally, peaceful.

In hindsight, I realize that I could've spared myself some of this anguish, and perhaps even been able to take the second class, had I earlier maintained instead of crossed certain boundaries:

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if I had avoided spending extended time alone with the teacher (whether in person or on the phone)

if I had kept our discussions centered on coursework

if I had sought out others to meet some of the needs I'd looked to this teacher to meet

To his credit, the teacher had referred me to several female teachers on staff at the college for additional mentoring. I should have pursued them.

But I didn't understand that at the time.

It's true that some attractions may be inevitable. Some relationships develop a dangerous chemistry through no fault of either party. If that occurs, what happens next is up to the integrity of the individuals involved.

Years later, I am grateful for my decision to drop the class. I did find other mentors and learned those things the course would have taught me. Today, I still have high regard for the teacher, but, thankfully, my highest regard is reserved for something I can't get anywhere else—the prevailing purity of my marriage.

The prevailing purity of my marriage...

(NOTE: This story was originally written in the first year of our marriage. We will soon celebrate our 23rd wedding anniversary.)

FIGHTING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE WHEN IT'S OVER

LaToya Edwards | LaToyaEdwards.net

Then my marriage first went on the rocks, several people in my life encouraged me to fight. They prayed with me, for me, and over my relationship. I was given meals, Scriptures, and books to help as I walked through that hard season of life. So I fought. I read the books, I prayed, I fasted, and I went to counseling.

Nothing changed.

I prayed some more, sought wise counsel, and tried to do all the things that I thought a good wife was supposed to do.

Nothing changed.

I remember sitting at home one night asking God why! I couldn't understand why my marriage was imploding. I couldn't understand why I was being encouraged to fight for something and someone that clearly didn't want to be with me. The journey had been long and difficult and I was exhausted. But God continued to tell me to fight.

So I dug deeper. I prayed more and I read every Scripture that I could find on marriage. I really had a hunger to know and understand God's design for a family and the way that a godly marriage was supposed to work. The more that I learned, the more that I wanted to learn.

I began to change. It was little things at first, like cooking enough dinner just in case my husband decided to join us for a meal. Then I started praying for him and our marriage in a way that I hadn't done before. Even when my husband left the home, I continued to fight like God told me to.

And then my divorce was final.

That was a hard day for me. The day before, my boys had asked to go to the beach. And on the way they asked if they could invite their father to come hang out. I agreed and we spent that last day together as a family. We were still broken and hurting. I knew that the next morning I would walk into a courthouse and be declared divorced. When I left the courthouse, I heard a small voice tell me: Keep fighting!

FIGHTING FOR YOUR MARRIAGE WHEN IT'S OVER

Over the years I was very puzzled by the admonition to keep fighting. It seemed silly to fight for something that was clearly over. How does someone fight for a marriage that ended, while working through the hurt and the pain of divorce?

KEEP YOUR EYES ON GOD

No matter what your circumstances look like, if you keep your eyes on the Lord He will take care of you. This was very difficult for me at times. I wanted to focus on my hurt and struggles and the pain that I saw my boys going

through. It seemed like I was justified in my anger and bitterness. When I learned to keep my eyes on God, I found that it was easier to forgive and it was easier to move forward in hope.

REMEMBER TO KEEP YOUR JOY

The key to getting through any difficult circumstance is remaining joyful. Often hard times rob of us our joy as well as our hope. Finding joy as a single mom really changed the way that I looked at my life and how I lived. Joy is not found in your pain or your brokenness. It's found in knowing that even in those hard and dark moments, God is there with us. He loves us, has a plan for us, and will use our pain to bring us closer to Him and to eventually be a blessing to others.

These two things were really key in helping me walk through the pain of divorce and single parenting. And in the end it was what helped me be ready when I met the man that would be my husband and father of my future children.

Yep, that voice that encouraged me to keep fighting for my marriage knew what was coming. He knew that one day on the other side of all that pain I would meet a man that truly loved me and would help to heal my wounded heart. That we would meet, start a relationship, get married, and start our family in the span of about 6 months.

I thought that God was calling me to fight for that first marriage that wouldn't be saved. Now I know that he was calling me to fight for the marriage that would take me by surprise a few years down the line.

HOW TO STAY MARRIED: 10 SECRETS TO A LIFELONG, SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Naomi | WhatJoyIsMine.net

Tith divorce a common tendency in our society today, a lifelong and successful marriage is looked upon as impossible. Truly, I believe it is a rarity. However, it is not impossible to achieve. Staying married "until death do us part" and making it successful is definitely doable even in our day and time. Let's look at 10 secrets to encourage this mission.

- 1. **Do things together.** Make the time to be together, to do things together. Whether it's something as simple as eating a favorite meal out, or more involved like a weekend getaway, make the time to embrace each other's company. Don't let yourselves get so busy you push this aside. And don't make plans with friends first over time with your spouse. Our marriage needs this together time to be prosperous.
- 2. **Compliment one another.** It should be a desire of our heart to build up our spouse and point out their good stuff. Tell them how good they are at something or how handsome/beautiful they are. We should be looking for opportunities to compliment them daily. How special we feel in their eyes when we hear them telling us how special we are to them.
- 3. Work out your disagreements. Do not sweep differences or concerns "under the rug," so to speak. Put them on the table and talk about all concerns. Working out the differences will avoid putting up walls and boundaries. Bring important issues to your spouse and discuss it in love.
- 4. **Prove your love.** It's important that we are verbally expressing our love to our spouse, but we also need to show it. This can be done through small gifts, cards, love letters, special activities, and so on. We need to be intentional here and demonstrate our love to our husband/wife. Even reaching for their hand to hold sends a sweet message of love to them.
- 5. **Pray for each other.** This one secret I can't stress enough. We need to be praying for our spouses daily and often. Not only do we need to be praying for them, but we need to be praying with them. Being an intercessor for our spouse is one of the best ways we can encourage a lifelong, successful marriage. And don't forget to make time to pray together. The more you do this, the more comfortable it becomes. Prayer also assists in making God the center of your marriage. After all, He is the glue that will keep you together through thick and thin. Keep Him there! "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12)
- 6. **Laugh together.** "Laughter is the best medicine," they say. Well, I agree. A sense of humor is a benefit to a happy marriage. Laughter supports emotional well-being and puts us in a good mood. How can you be mad or sad if you have a smile on your face? Laugh with your spouse often.
- 7. **Don't skip the intimacy.** God created us to desire our spouse. "And they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) Physical intimacy strengthens a union and unites us to our spouse as one. One before God just as He

designed it. This part of marriage offers reassurance that both spouses are still wanted and desired which encourages them to stay together. When intimacy is skipped, there is a void in the relationship, so make the time to be intimate with your spouse. Read 1 Corinthians 7:5.

- 8. Work hard at it. When the tough stuff comes along, we need to not let it trip up our marriage. It's a guarantee that trials will come, but it's how we deal with them that makes or breaks a marital relationship. It is essential that married people get through their tribulations together, as a team, as one. This only builds the marriage and makes it stronger. Share your heart, listen to your spouse, and pray through it together. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)
- 9. **Stand united.** It's hard to be united if we're on opposite sides. Standing united does not mean we agree on everything; however, it does mean we compromise and find common ground when we have different opinions or ideas than our spouse. Sometimes we will just have to agree to disagree for the better interest of our marriage. Find a way to live with your differences to bring about a united union. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)
- 10. **Say "I love you" every day.** Since we never know what our day will hold, we should never forget these three little words. Enough said.

These ten secrets can only encourage a strong, faithful, lifelong, and successful marriage unto the glory of God and for our good. There is joy in knowing you are intentionally working on staying married through all life's situations, whether happy or challenging.

"So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matthew 19:6)

5 THINGS TO DO TO BUILD TRUST IN YOUR MARRIAGE

Rachel Wojo | Rachel Wojo.com

rust is the foundation for any relationship, regardless of the individual dynamics. Perhaps you have a friend you have known since childhood and your experiences together have forged a strong trust relationship. Or maybe you entered into a work contract and, although the company is new to you, you trust their reputation to fulfill their side of the contract.

A cornerstone of trust can begin through many avenues of meeting and courting a spouse. While God unites marriages through various means and circumstances, once married, we can't expect our trust relationship to grow and thrive if we do nothing to foster that trust.

Whether you are newly married, married for a second time, or married for ten or more years, building and maintaining trust in your relationship is vital, especially when bumps pop up along the road of life.

In the first year my husband and I were married, we experienced far more than our share of those bumps. That first year, we blended our families, bought a house, I lost my mother to cancer, my uncle died, my husband's grandfather died, and my daughter was diagnosed with a terminal disease. All within the first 11 months of our marriage!

When my husband and I look back over that time period, now 15 years later, we feel so blessed that God gave us wisdom and strength to keep going. The trust we were building in our relationship held our marriage on the right foundation of total trust in God and His sovereignty. Today I wanted to share 5 things to do to build trust in your marriage. These points are ones we are thankful we executed when we look back at that first year of our marriage.

Maintain a personal relationship with God individually.

My husband and I were reading our Bibles and praying daily, each of us alone with God. I just don't know how we could have made it through if we weren't reading God's Word to nurture our spirits. Satan knows that planting seeds of doubt is effective to introducing sin; this habit of his dates back to Eve in the Garden of Eden. When Eve began to doubt God's Word, she opened the door to a world where trust is lacking. To combat the possibility of mistrust, walk closely with the Lord through personal quiet time.

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. James 4:8

Confide in one another and hold this confidence sacred.

Sharing your most personal feelings with someone means that you trust them not to break your heart. If feelings were items you could hold in your hand like your wedding ring, you would guard them with your life. Sometimes I think we forget that intangible gifts of marriage, like sharing our feelings, are more sacred even than the tangible gifts. My wedding ring is a symbol of love between my husband and me; I'm not going to share it with anyone else. Likewise, the words he confides in me should not be shared with others unless he gives his permission.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. Proverbs 11:13

Attend and serve in your local church faithfully.

My husband and I were both blessed to grow up with Christian parents who took us to church faithfully. Both of us knew the importance and value of hearing God's Word preached and serving in our local church. What we probably weren't wise enough to know during our first year of marriage was how much God would use this commitment to grow our relationship together and forge a strong trust between us. Listening to messages from God's Word, sitting side by side as a couple, gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to grow your marital trust.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 11:25

Keep all promises to the best of your ability, even the "little" ones.

We've established that building trust requires effort from both sides of any relationship. Keeping your promises to one another seems obvious, but again this area can be one that "sneaks" up on us. We look at our marriage vows that may have been quite broad and general in terms and think, "Yes, I'm keeping those." But we forget to bring home that gallon of milk that was requested. Now, I'm not saying a gallon of milk will break the relationship (see point 5), but I do believe that the more promises you uphold between one another as husband and wife, the closer your bond and the greater your trust in each other.

Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Proverbs 12:19

Forgive each other easily.

Mistakes are going to happen. People are people and they get tired. Most of us recognize fatigue can bring out the humanity in a relationship like nothing else can. Don't sweat the small stuff and make amends quickly. Although the events of that first year escorted stress into our marriage, we sincerely valued the everyday moment and saw no value in holding grudges. I'm thankful for that!

Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Colossians 3:13

Building trust requires being intentional. My personal experience is that God greatly used the above 5 points as ways to build trust in my marriage, and this beautiful foundation of trust served us well when times were tough. No matter where your marriage stands right now, my prayer is that the Lord will use these points as reminders to grow in love for each other and trust in each other.

NEVER SAY NEVER, AND THROW YOUR EXPECTATIONS OUT THE WINDOW

Wendy Woerner | Wendy Woerner.com

here are many things that I have come to realize over the years of my married life. My husband and I have seen God working throughout all of our years together, during the rocky years and in the best years. When we were in a stagnant place, He never left us. And when we have been growing by leaps and bounds, He has always been there. He has been the one constant and the One Who has kept us together when we otherwise may have given up. Today I would like to share with you just three things that He has taught me in my personal life and as a 100% partner in my marriage.

Communicate clearly. Recently, my husband and I watched a movie with our children in which a common phrase was "precision of language." Every person in the movie was required to express themselves in an exact way, no ambiguous statements allowed, and if they didn't, the previous phrase is the command they received.

I think marriage is a lot like that. We spend much of our time learning to communicate with one another, and often must restate what we said in order to be precise and get a clear meaning across. "Precision of language" is necessary. As a couple, if we work together, discuss the details of our days, try to understand our spouse and where he is coming from, then we soon find that our own version of "precision of language" is no longer needed. You will develop a better understanding of one another and your needs simply through talking on a more intimate level each day.

Never say never. As a society we use the word "never" with abandon. I know I grew up hearing it said about everything. We describe events or the shortcomings of people we know; we throw this word around in statements about our plans, saying we will "never visit that town again," or some such thing.

My husband and I have learned that to say "never" is simply to relegate ourselves to that eventuality, and we have cut it almost completely out of our vocabulary. My husband once said, before we had even married, that he would never go back to a certain county in Florida. Would you like to guess where we lived for 8 years out of our nearly 20 together?

It sounds silly, and it is....I mean, will God send us somewhere simply because we say we won't do it? I don't know. He might. But what really happens when we say "never" is that we take His plans and toss them aside. We place ourselves squarely in the driver's seat, which causes us to miss out on God's best. When we say "never" to describe something that we won't do or to express what someone has not done for us, we are limiting ourselves. We are limiting the blessings of God in our lives. We are limiting how other people can be used in our lives.

My husband and I joke about it together, because we ended up in that county that my husband said he would never visit again, but really we take it very seriously. God had planned for my husband's first job to start there. He had planned for us to attend a church where we could begin to understand what a true life lived out for Christ is, where we could be a part of serving others and learning to live life for someone other than ourselves. It's where

two of our children were born, many of our stronger friendships (which are ongoing today) were built, and where we laid down roots for 8 years.

God used that place, those people, to grow us, and if we had stuck to our "never" then we may be in a completely different place in our lives right now. We would not have received the many blessings he bestowed on us during our time lived in "that county."

Throw your expectations out the window. Our expectations must be realistic in marriage. Many of us come into our relationships with preconceived notions about how our lives will play out, and then we are extremely disappointed when things do not turn out the way we planned.

I am still learning how to approach my life with open hands and an open mind, fully surrendering my own plans and expectations to the One who sees my future. God is the only one who can plan with perfection how my days should be, with whom I will spend them, and where.

I don't mean to say that we cannot have an expectation for things to come, but rather that we should not be ruled by them. When we approach our days with a rigid plan in place, then we are bound to be disappointed and to create a bit of chaos as circumstances change and our plans are ripped from our grip.

I am not "there" yet. There are many days when I struggle to hold onto my own expectations, and when I am disappointed. I cause a stir, and only realize later that it was due to my own expectations of what things "should have" been like.

"Expectations will kill the joy in your marriage and in life."

Learning to lay down our expectations allows us to find joy in the little things. We won't be disappointed in ourselves, in others, or in our circumstances when we hold loosely to our "shoulds" to begin with.

We are all human. Romans 3:23 tells us "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." None are perfect. We cannot place the expectation of perfection on our husbands.

Instead, let God meet that expectation and practice forgiveness with your spouse as he seeks to follow God in all that he does. Do the same yourself. You'll both be on your way together to a better marriage and greater joy in your lives.

FINDING FREEDOM IN GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

Renée Gotcher | A New Chapter

rom the start, I knew my husband and I were made for each other: I was the Type A, strong-willed leader happy to drive, and he was the easy-going, fun-loving partner enjoying the ride. We were both familiar with the often-referenced Bible passages about the roles of husbands and wives — husbands lead, wives submit — but I figured that as long as we followed those guidelines for the "important" decisions, that was good enough. If we both stayed in our agreed-upon seats, we'd get along just fine... right?

However, something changed after we got married. Our personalities stayed the same, but bringing this role reversal into our marriage partnership created problems — many that didn't surface until years later. Although we still "got along" on the outside, discontent, division, and LOTS of stress remained buried on the inside.

FindingFreedomMarriageOne area in which we struggled to find our places was finances. As I rose through the ranks of my journalism job, carrying much of our financial burden at the time, I was overwhelmed by the added weight of balancing that career with motherhood once we started our family. My husband continued in a job he enjoyed, but I struggled to "make it work" as a full-time working mom. Plus we hoped to homeschool our girls at some point… how was that ever going to happen?

When I was laid off from that job and started an independent business to replace the income, I insisted on continuing to carry that responsibility — and didn't heed my husband's advice about important business decisions. I constantly battled with myself over how to make my family a priority and still have a successful business, but I was afraid to let go of the reins. Putting my own will ahead of my husband's (and the Holy Spirit's) warnings cost me in the end, financially and emotionally, when my business failed.

We were both in agreement about the work itself, so what wasn't working? As with most principles in God's Word, the Holy Spirit wants to reveal more to us than meets the eye. The "husbands lead, wives submit" verse isn't just about who brings home the bacon and who does the cooking: It's about reflecting God's image and His relationship with us through His design for our marriage.

What does that verse really mean?

Thanks to the message of a wise wife and mother who spoke to our homeschool support group recently, I got some clarification about what God's Word says regarding the purpose of marriage and our individual roles. Let's take a closer look at Ephesians 5:22-24:

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything."

The first thing we should recognize about this admonition from Paul is that wives are instructed to submit to their own husband — not men (it's not a gender issue!) — and this submission is described as "unto the Lord." When we

understand that God's purpose for all marriages is to reflect Jesus Christ to the world, we can see how submitting to our husband is the result of our submission to God. It's part of our transformation process as followers of Christ. It's not about who's getting their way, but about trusting that God wants to lead us through the roles He created for us to fill as husband and wife.

Ask yourself: Is our marriage me-centered or Christ-centered? Am I constantly asking God to change my husband to fit what I need, or am I living sacrificially and obediently to His Word and trusting God to lead my husband as he leads our family? It's not going to be easy. However, as we continue to seek the Lord to transform us, He will also give us the strength to do what He's calling us to do.

How can we be "free" if we submit?

As we well know, this idea of marital submission is completely contrary to the world's "I can do anything men can do better" self-centered worldview — which is why following God's design shines His light in the darkness. God's purpose for a wife's submission is not about who's more important or who should have which job, because the Bible makes it clear that we are both made in His image and we both have work to do for our family. It's about who bears the responsibility for leadership and sacrificial love — the husband for his wife and family, and Christ for His church (Eph. 5:25-29). Once we let go and let our husbands lead, we're free from a burden we weren't designed to carry.

We're also free to trust God to lead our husbands when we do submit. First Peter 3:1 says: "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the Word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives." I used to think that verse was just about wives with unsaved husbands. But when you think about it, we all struggle to obey the Word — even a believing husband. This verse tells us that your submission speaks louder than words and has more of an impact on your husband than anything you could say to correct him.

This also means God doesn't need us to instruct our husbands — that's the Holy Spirit's job. Do you really want to know what God's will is for your family? Ask your husband! God will direct your family through him, because he is designed to lead — no matter what his personality is like. Leadership is a responsibility, not a personality. And you can walk in freedom knowing that God assigned that very critical responsibility to your husband.

Wives, be free!

I learned a lot of these lessons the hard way, overburdened by weight I wasn't meant to carry for too many years. Meanwhile my husband struggled with keeping the peace between us while trying to lead when he could. However, I can honestly say that once I let go and he stepped up, I felt more liberated than when I was single. It defies logic, but God knew what He was doing when He designed us the way He did.

We also experience complete spiritual freedom when we submit our lives to Jesus Christ and He gives us His rest. That's why this marriage relationship is such an important reflection of our relationship with Him. In Ephesians 5, Paul continues to say: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." See — it's a mystery, but it's all part of God's plan for humanity. So let's also walk in His freedom as wives!

31 Days to a Better Marriage | Spring 2015 Series

Are you struggling to gain "freedom" in your marriage by being in control? How has society's message about women doing it all (and looking good in the process) affected you? What has God shown you about trusting Him to lead you in your role as a wife? How have you seen God lead your family through your husband?

ARE YOU IGNORING THE THORNS IN YOUR MARRIAGE?

Nan | Mom's the Word

Then I was a little girl I got a thorn in my ankle. It hurt so badly, but I was even more afraid of having it removed, so I ignored it and didn't tell anybody. You can imagine what happened after that. Yup. It got infected. Removing it was even MORE painful because of the infection.

Sometimes we are tempted to ignore the thorns in our marriage, but that is a mistake.

There are some minor things that we ignore in order to have a smoother marriage. We do so in love and let grace cover it as we choose to move forward.

But sometimes we don't move forward.

Sometimes we don't let go but we don't deal with the issue either. So we try to bury it. But the problem is that it won't be buried. It won't be ignored.

So the thorn keeps digging deeper and deeper into our heart flesh, causing bruising and bleeding and inflammation in our marriage. Still we try to ignore it, but soon it starts building up to a raging infection.

But it hurts too much to dig it out, so all we do is make half-hearted attempts to poke it and prod it and push it around in an attempt to make things more comfortable. We do our best to ignore it.

Then the infection takes over and suddenly not only do we have pain, we also have the potential for losing a very precious part of ourselves if it is left unchecked.

There are thorns in our marriages that we might try to ignore because we're afraid of the pain. But, if left to fester, these problems can cause a painful wound in our marriage. So it's important that we attack that thorn and dig it out before the poison sets in.

We should never try to tackle a thorn without careful preparation:

Prayerfully examine your own heart first.

Confess any wrong actions on your part.

Ask the Lord to guard your words and give you a loving heart as you seek His help to remove the thorn.

Pray for the right timing and your husband's heart response when you speak with him.

Just as with my foot, when we go in to take the thorn out, we do so carefully. If the thorn is in our foot, we don't cut into the head and work our way down to the foot.

We don't hack away at body parts here and there and touch areas that aren't affected; we keep our focus on the thorn.

In our marriages, it is important that we do the same. We address the problem at hand, and do not allow our emotions and hurt feelings to cloud the issue with things that really have no bearing on the situation.

We gently focus on the thorn and ONLY the thorn. We are not trying to open more wounds here.

Once the thorn is removed and cleaned out and the skin has sealed back up, we don't keep reopening the wound again and again just to reexamine everything.

We don't keep touching it to see if it STILL hurts.

We do the same within our marriage. When we forgive, we let go and move on. We throw the thorn away. We don't keep throwing it back in their face.

If we hold the thorn tightly in our hand it will make a hole in it. In the same way, it will make a hole in our heart and in our marriage if we hold on to the pain.

Remember, there is a difference between letting go and ignoring a problem. Sometimes we give one another grace and overlook something, just because it is not worth it. We choose to build our marriage instead of building our resentment, and so we choose to let it go. We choose to fall in love all over again.

Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. (Ephesians 4:2)

Letting go is not the same as ignoring a problem. When we continue to ignore a problem and try to bury it instead, it begins to fester.

If we let something fester in our marriage, it can cause a greater pain and just poison the relationship when we really should be healing it, fighting for it.

It's much better to have a little pain now than a lot of pain later.

Are you ignoring the thorns in your marriage? Are you holding on to them so tightly that the pain is overwhelming? Is the infection spreading and threatening your marriage?

You aren't alone. You have a Savior who loves you and knows a lot about thorns. He also knows a lot about healing. Let Him begin a healing in your heart and your marriage today!

7 WAYS TO EMBRACE AND ENJOY YOUR SEXUALITY

Gaye Groover Christmus | CalmHealthySexy.com

onest to goodness, sometimes it seems like sexuality is just too complicated. As married women, we're bombarded from every direction by conflicting messages and expectations –you're sexy, you're not sexy, sex is for you, sex is for your husband, married couples have the best sex, married couples have the worst sex. It's enough to leave a woman confused and dismayed. Add in the libido-suppressing effects of busyness, fatigue, and everyday stress, and it just seems easier to leave that whole "sexuality thing" for another day.

But even though the deck seems stacked against us, I want to encourage you not to give up and not to let go of pursuing sex and intimacy in your marriage. Embracing and enjoying your sexuality will seem challenging at times (it certainly does for me!), even overwhelming, but the effort you put into it will pay you back many times over. Here are 7 ways to get started:

- 1. Consider what the Bible says about sex in marriage and reject teachings that say otherwise. Song of Songs describes a beautiful, sensual relationship between a husband and a wife. It uses language that is clearly sexual and clearly reciprocal both of the lovers are giving and receiving, enjoying pleasure together. On the other hand, many women have learned, often from their church, that sex is bad. They've been told that it's an obligation, something they "owe" their husbands. If those kinds of messages have clouded your view of sex, begin turning away from them. Read the Song of Songs and immerse yourself in resources that encourage a positive view of sex and intimacy. And pray about it, asking God to help you enjoy this great gift He created.
- 2. **Recognize the way your body is made.** Our bodies were made to enjoy sex, but most married women can't wrap their minds around that truth. We're so busy feeling fat or saggy or inadequate that we can scarcely imagine feeling sexual. But think about it for a minute. Our breasts, whether we love them or hate them, are exquisitely sensitive. Our skin craves gentle and sensual touch. And our clitoris serves only one purpose creating a fabulous response that often leads to orgasm. So begin thinking about your body in terms of its sexual nature. Start small if the idea seems overwhelming, focusing on just one part of your body or one sensation.
- 3. **Take care of your body.** Many women are so busy caring for others that they neglect to care for their own bodies. And it's hard to feel sexy and confident in a body that's been neglected. So start taking care of your body! Feed it well, with healthy and whole food instead of processed and fast food. Get up and move every day; walk, bike, dance, hike, or play soccer with your kids anything that strengthens your body, burns calories, reduces stress, and makes you feel great. Get enough sleep 7 to 8 hours most nights. And do things that pamper your body stretch, enjoy the sun and fresh air, use lotions and oils that soothe your skin. And remember if you don't have time to take care of your body, you're too busy!
- 4. **Accept that sex is about you, too.** Don't believe the lie that sex is primarily about your husband, that it's something you "do for him." That way of thinking, which is sadly common in the church, distances you from your God-given sexuality, limits true intimacy in your marriage, and creates resentment. So begin taking

small steps to embrace your sexuality. Take time to identify things that make you feel sexy or sensual and begin pursuing those things. Begin thinking about, talking about, and doing things in bed that feel good to you. And take the initiative once in a while – be an active, not passive, participant in your own sex life.

- 5. Talking about sex is hard, isn't it? Maybe it's because we think it's not "ladylike" to communicate our sexual needs. Or we don't believe our needs are valid, or we think our husbands should "just know" exactly what we need. But we need to lay those thoughts aside, because they block honest communication and real intimacy. So start the conversation. Tell your husband that you want to embrace and enjoy your sexuality and improve sex and intimacy in your marriage. Share what you've been thinking and feeling, what you've learned, and what steps you're taking. Ask him to share what he's been thinking, too, and really listen to what he says. Then keep the conversation going. Getting things out in the open is great, but it's the just the beginning of finding solutions. So keep talking (even when it's hard!) and keep taking small steps that allow you to move forward.
- 6. Consider things that may be squashing your libido. If it seems like your libido has taken a permanent vacation, consider the things that might have run it off. Fatigue ranks high on that list for most women. Hormonal birth control can play a role, as can some medications (including antidepressants). Physical and emotional illnesses, high stress levels, and unresolved marriage issues can all squash a woman's interest in sex. And so can unrealistic expectations our culture tends to focus on male sexuality as the "model," so women often assume that something's wrong with them if their sexual response isn't identical to their husband's. If you're struggling to find your libido, Bonny's Oyster Bed is a great resource. (If you're dealing with significant problems that affect libido, sex, and intimacy, including prior sexual abuse and serious marriage problems, please seek professional help to address them.)
- 7. Make space in your life for sex and intimacy. Busyness is the enemy of the lover. If you're running from one commitment to another all day, every day you won't have time or energy to embrace and enjoy your sexuality. So determine to make it a priority by creating some space and margins around your life, in order to allow sex and intimacy to flourish. This may require making some hard decisions. It make require reining in your family's schedule, saying no, and letting go of some commitments. But it will be worth it, because it will allow you, your husband, and your marriage to flourish.

Have you embraced your sexuality? If not, or if you struggle with it, consider working on one or two of these areas. You and your marriage are worth it.

A LETTER TO THE YOUNG BRIDE

Amy Schuff | AmySchuff.com

Dear Young Bride,

Once upon a time, I was a young bride, too. Now, when I say young, I mean only a couple months into being 19 years old. I had never lived on my own, didn't have many bills to speak of, and had only fallen in love with one man...the one I was about to marry.

You can see why I get excited when I hear about young people getting married. And I don't mean 25- or 26-year-olds, because that is just not young. I'm talking about the 18- or 20-year-olds walking down the aisle with their best friend. A quick engagement and a young bride — that makes me smile.

I know this isn't the normal reaction of the world today. We are so bombarded by expectations that the thought of anyone being truly happy for someone to be married at 19 years old is unfathomable! But not here, not me.

I met my husband when I was 8 years old. I don't remember us meeting, but he says we did. It was at a sporting goods store, or somewhere else very boring. We met and fell in love that fateful day. Nope. Not at all. I was 8. I think I was wearing a fanny pack and still didn't have all my grownup teeth.

Fast forward many years later and we did fall in love, hard, and I became a 19-year-old bride walking down an aisle towards my 23-year-old best friend. He was so cute in his tuxedo and starkly gelled hair. We were sweet and awkward and so insanely in love.

I'm here to tell you, it works. Getting married young works. But there's a huge BUT and an even bigger IF. The reason our marriage was destined to succeed. even though we were almost children, was that we had the blessing of our parents, our friends and family, and most importantly, our Lord and Savior. The only must in marriage, when you're choosing who you will spend the rest of your life with, is that you are listening to the Lord's voice.

Of course we had people tell us it wouldn't work, that we would be divorced within the first year, that we would wake up and wonder what mistake we made. We even had deranged mothers say my groom was better suited for their daughter (heaven forbid, since I was such a horrible girl!). P.S. I was a homeschooled pastor's daughter...not horrible. But those people were not in our sphere of influence; they were not the ones whom we trusted to speak life into our lives.

We not only had our God, we also had the support of friends and family. We had our church and we were grounded in our faith. Young couples especially need guidance and support. They need to know their parents and their church have their back. The world will say they will fail, that they won't make it, but we can stand along with them and say if God is for them, then who can be against them? No one.

So young bride, with all your hopes, dreams and Pinterest boards, listen closely. I pray the blessing of Jesus on your life. I pray your marriage is full of love, understanding, and fun. I pray you can put aside any childish selfish ways and sink into the role of helpmate to your husband. I pray you beat the odds and always, always come back to

31 Days to a Better Marriage | Spring 2015 Series

Jesus as the center of your soul. I pray you listen to the important people in your life and hear what they are saying. I pray you keep your innocence close and save it for your husband. I pray he has done the same for you. And most of all, I pray a huge dose of peace, that when the world is doing whatever it takes to be against you, you'll hold close the Word of The Lord and enjoy one of the greatest gifts God can give — the gift of marriage.

Sincerely,

A fellow young bride (once upon a time!)

3 WAYS TO BE A HEALTHY AND WHOLE WOMAN

Rachel LifeOutsideTheShell.com

o you remember the days before you were married and before you had kids? I do. I remember the hours I would spend on hair and make-up, exercising, attending Bible studies, and having fun nights out with friends. It didn't take me long after I had my first baby to see that the days of spending hours on myself were over. I realize now that all those hours were a bit selfish and I really could have spent less time on myself and more on serving others.

If you are a mom and/or a wife, you know the physical, spiritual, and emotional demands those roles place on you, which is why it so crucial to make sure we continue to take care of ourselves. As we take the time to refuel ourselves it gives us more to pour out onto our spouse and family.

While I don't believe we need to begin spending hours on ourselves, I do believe we need to spend some time on ourselves to be the best mom and wife we can be. It is crucial to not go to the other extreme and spend NO time on ourselves. It is so tempting to put everyone before ourselves that we completely stop taking care of our own bodies.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" After I had my first baby I had a lot of weight to lose, which made me feel frumpy, grumpy, and let's just be honest...not too hot in the bedroom. You can only imagine what distance that brought into our marriage when I didn't want to embrace myself, let alone allow my husband to embrace me. It was in that moment that I had to make the decision to take care of myself again. To pick myself up, dust myself off, and set healthy habits for my mind, soul, body, and spirit. Here are some simple tips that are not new revelation but more of a "green light" for you to begin taking care of yourself again in that area:

Make time for the Word of God.

We all know we need to read the Word of God, but it can be so hard to follow through with that when you are juggling a million things at once. One thing that always held me back from spending time in God's Word was the belief that if I couldn't spend an hour a day reading the Bible, I was a loser and shouldn't try at all. I now realize that was the enemy getting me to believe lies. The truth is that God knows what season you are in. He knows when you are in a season where getting to read one Scripture would be a miracle.

Let me encourage you with this today: Ask God to show you pockets of time in your day that you can get in His Word. There was a season for me when I had nothing but toddlers and babies and the only moment I had was when they were all buckled in their car seats. So I began to listen to the Bible on CD (back when CDs were popular).:) God knows where you are and He will give you pockets of time to get in His Word.

Make time for your body.

This is a huge one for me because even though I have my bachelor's degree in exercise science, I didn't truly find fitness until I had kids. Because I had so much weight to lose I knew I needed to exercise and eat healthfully to

take my body back. This is another area that is so easy to dismiss if you are a busy mom and wife. I learned to work out smarter, not longer. Instead of spending 2 hours in the gym, I now spend 20-30 minutes at home and get even better results. I highly recommend TABATA and interval training. You can see some examples and learn a little more about them on my blog post "Fit Friday: Gut & Glutes Tabata".

When you take time to exercise you will lose weight, but more importantly your mood will lift because of the endorphins released, which makes you a happier wife and mom!

Make time for YOU.

This one is a little trickier and may not happen daily, but it should be something we strive to get in as often as possible. What do you love to do? Is it coffee with a friend, reading a good book, going for a walk, going to Target with no kids? Again, ask God to show you creative ways that you can still do those things from time to time. If a sitter is not an option, find a friend who would be willing to swap babysitting kids so you can each get refreshed and refueled to be the wife and mom God created you to be.

I always love to think about the Proverbs 31 wife of noble character:

She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.

What a great reminder that we are called to wake up FOR our family, not TO our family. When we wake up a few minutes earlier, or stay up later, I believe our entire family is blessed by intentional planning and preparing of our hearts and homes.

Ask God which of these areas you have been neglecting. He will show you how to bring life to those areas that may seem dead right now. As you take care of YOU, your marriage and family will be blessed!

BE THE ONE HE WANTS TO BE AROUND

Amanda Farris | Amanda Farris.org

fter we win our husbands over and the ring is put on our finger and the "I do's" are said — the wooing is not over. Marriage is fun, satisfying, and rewarding, but also work, sacrifice, and humbling. Can I get an amen? Our men in the beginning were smitten with us — twitterpated, you might call it.

But what happens as time passes, life goes on, routine settles in, and we get comfortable in our roles, schedules, and to-dos?

Often times the wooing has stopped and marriage has just become a partnership of working together, sharing responsibilities, and wading through life together.

But it can be so much more than that. It is still supposed to be fun.

But that means that we can't ever stop "marketing ourselves" to our men. Okay, that sounds really bad, but please hear me out on this.

It is our responsibility to be cheerful, kind, and gracious. We have to market ourselves to be enjoyable to be around.

Let's think about this for a minute. If you are grumpy, distant, and robotic, why would anyone want to spend time around you?

Now, I know husbands have their quirks and responsibilities as well. But let's only talk about us wives for a minute here. Let's talk about what is in our control.

Marketing ourselves as someone that our husbands want to be around is in our control.

- -A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. (Proverbs 15:13)
- -Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24)
- -Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

WE MUST BE CHEERFUL, FULL OF AFFIRMING WORDS, AND JOYFUL.

That sounds like someone I would want to be around. I'm sure my husband would rather be around a wife who is like that.

Please hear me, I'm not saying that as wives we have to be perfect all the time.

But I am saying that we have the responsibility to take control of our attitudes, actions, and overall aura to present ourselves as someone that our men WANT to be around.

Don't stop wooing your husband. EVER. Continue to be the gal that we wants to be around.

Not too long ago, I was pretty down. There were a lot of things that were causing me stress. I was overwhelmed, tired, and just plain grouchy. It was causing me to be snappy at everyone. I typically avoid people who are like that! But then I started thinking, why would anyone want to be around me if I act like that?

So then I knew it was time to put my big girl panties on and live as God has called me to live. Joyful. Cheerful. Kind. Gracious. Casting cares on HIM.

It IS POSSIBLE to do these things even when you are overwhelmed.

I want to be the wife that my husband wants to be around.

So when you are at home with your family, think about how you are presenting yourself. Are you presenting yourself as someone that a husband would want to be around?

Here are a few simple ways to do just that:

- **Smile!** I know it sounds so cliche. But really, it does WONDERS for the overall atmosphere in the home. Even if you are frustrated and overwhelmed SMILE! There is always something to be thankful for.
- **Tell a funny story.** Think of something from your day that was funny. Even if you can't think of something that is knee-slapping hilarious, share a perspective on something from your day that is lighthearted, quirky, funny, and will bring a laugh or a smile. It is NECESSARY to life!
- Save the unloading. I know that at the end of the day we probably have lots of "serious" and "business" things that we need to talk about with our man. BUT it can wait just a few minutes. When you first see each other in the afternoons, after you've both had a full busy day, take the time to practice #1 and #2. Smile and share a laugh!
- **Be lighthearted.** Y'all, life is hard and serious. Life is stressful and overwhelming. There is bad stuff all in the news. There is responsibility every way you turn. So make it a priority to be lighthearted and bring a breath of relief and fresh air to your home.
- **Be interesting.** Have something to share and talk about that is NOT business or kids. Read something interesting, share an original thought, share a perspective. Do something to be interesting. Don't read too much into this tip. Take it as very surface and not too deep. Just trying to make the point that we must always be building our relationship and continuing to learn and love each other as we age.
- Give him a joyful and affirming word every day, with a smile, laugh, and thought.

What would you add to this list? Do you "market" yourself to be someone he wants to be around? What can your husband do to make you want to be around him?

COMMUNICATING YOUR NEEDS TO YOUR HUSBAND WELL

Marlene Griffith | ADiligentHeart.com

ur words are a constant part of every day. Without them, it would be very difficult for us to fully express what's in our hearts and minds. But words can also be very dangerous, and if fueled blindly by out-of-check emotions, a huge conflict can be provoked.

So what happens when a conflict or concern begins to itch and we realize it's something that should be discussed?

1. Take some times to think and pray, especially if it's a particularly heavy topic. When we bring up difficult topics we need to go into them with a clear head. When we go into a conversation unprepared, we a prone to speaking out of hand.

"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." Proverbs 10:19

We can't do anything about our words once they are said. And often, they take over the conversation, laying the intended topic aside and creating a new problem all together.

In Proverbs 29 we learn that it's wise to know when to speak out and when not to.

"Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." Proverbs 29:20

Also, in Proverbs we learn about the Proverbs 31 woman. In verse 26 we read:

"She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." Proverbs 31:26

Regardless of the topic, take time to think it over and pray about it. Go over the conversation in your head a few times, and consider the words you'll choose.

2. Don't become a continual drip. No one responds well to someone who is always pecking at them with their words. If your spouse becomes victim to your nagging and continual drip, it's sure to cause major conflicts in your marriage. From the perspective of a wife, I do not want my husband to ever have any justified reason for seeing me as a nag. The typical response to this kind of person is to either push back or pull away.

"A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike..." Proverbs 27:15

Which brings me to my next point...

3. Don't bottle it up inside either. Often times we'll go the opposite extreme of the constant drip and bottle things up inside. It can be for various reasons: Maybe you've tried and failed at bringing this up or maybe you just don't know how to bring it up. Maybe you're worried that you'll become the nag or that you're already there.

Whatever the reason is, it's still not okay to bottle things up. Doing so will only result in a negative outcome. You'll become argumentative, irritable, and grumpy. Bottling things up inside does no one any good.

"It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman." Proverbs 21:19

Find a balance between the continual drip and the bottled-up personality. You don't want to nag, but you don't want to bottle it all up, either. Express your heart and thoughts to your husband, but do so respectfully. Talk to him as you would want him to talk to you with any problem he may want to talk about.

If you're struggling with something so much that you just can't bring yourself to talk about it, let him know that, too. Let him know you're praying about it and ask him to pray for you as you work through preparing to talking to him about it. There may be times when you can't even do that, but be sure that you're not taking it out on him unfairly in the meantime! Be patient with the Lord's timing and He'll provide you with the strength you need.

4. Know when timing is best. The worst thing you can do is bring up a huge issue right in the middle of another one. If your husband just had a terrible day at work and seems like he just needs to have a quiet night to himself to regroup, don't lay into him for not picking up his towel from the bathroom floor that morning. Timing can make the difference between having a constructive, positive, and fruitful dialogue or having a full-on blow-out argument.

Our spouse is the person we are going to wake up next to for the rest of our lives. It matters how we communicate with each other, and good communication and understanding breeds stronger connections in your relationship.

5 TIPS TO HELP MARRIED COUPLES NAVIGATE THROUGH MISCARRIAGE

Carlie Kercheval | Managing Your Blessings.com

s I was praying about how to open this year's 31 Days to a Better Marriage series, the Lord was very clear: share how you and your husband worked through your miscarriages. While this topic is one that I have only recently begun to open up about publicly, it still remains one of the most raw and painful wounds I've experienced in my life. The loss of a child is something that should not be hidden, but rather talked about as often as the parents are comfortable in sharing. While my first miscarriage occurred over a decade ago, I still long for my child every single day.

I pray that the words below can help speak life into hurting marriages that long for healing and closeness after the devastation of experiencing a miscarriage.

TALK ABOUT YOUR MISCARRIAGE OFTEN.

One of the parts of my first miscarriage that was really tough for my husband and me was the fact that it occurred just 7 days before his first year-long combat tour to Iraq. We realized rather quickly that even though we only had a solid week to spend together with predictable communication, we needed to talk about the loss of our baby. Not only did we need to talk about it for ourselves and for our marriage, but we needed to be strong and do it for our baby girl, who at the time was only 3.

And so we did.

We talked about it those 7 days. And it helped bring it out into the open. We talked about it over the course of that year through spotty communication via email and the occasional phone call. We've continued to talk about our losses and will do so until the day we depart this earth to be with the Lord. It's amazing the healing that can take place between you and your spouse when you are able to talk about delicate issues such as miscarriage together.

GIVE YOURSELF (AND YOUR SPOUSE) PERMISSION TO GRIEVE.

While this may seem like common sense, until you actually walk through something, you don't always know how you are going to react. For me, my natural tendency in difficult times is to just "get over it" and move on. It wasn't until my first miscarriage that I realized there was no way I could "get over it" and I needed to allow myself to feel the intense pain in my heart. It was through this scripture that God clearly spoke to me about the importance of the grieving process:

"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY WILL BE COMFORTED." MATTHEW 5:4

The night that God gave me this scripture I felt His peace surround me. I felt the security I needed in order to grieve. I understood that even though I am hurting now, that somehow, some way, God would comfort me through it. Once I gave myself permission to grieve I gained the clarity I needed to allow my husband to grieve, too. I also realized that we all grieve differently and was able to be a supportive wife to my husband as we both walked

through our first great loss together. Give yourself (and your spouse) permission to grieve. I promise you that if you allow Jesus access to your heart, He will comfort you.

PRAY ABOUT IT TOGETHER.

One thing we learned early in our marriage was the power of agreement in prayer. There is something so special about praying with the one you are in covenant with. My husband and I have been praying through our miscarriages together for over a decade now and it has helped us to not only get closer, but to be able to bear these devastating losses.

We have watched as the power of prayer has healed us beyond the "what ifs." We have watched as the power of prayer has not allowed us to play the "blame game" or any other divisive thinking that could have torn our marriage apart. We recognize that the role of prayer as we've navigated through our miscarriages has given us the freedom to walk in God's peace, even though we want nothing more than to hold our babies that we lost.

GIVE YOURSELF (AND YOUR SPOUSE) GRACE AS YOU HEAL.

My husband and I both found that we had to be graceful to ourselves and to one another over the years. The pain of miscarriage never leaves — but it does get better with time. By giving one another grace, we've been able to get over some hurdles in our grieving process that could have damaged our marriage.

If I am being honest, my husband showed me a lot more grace in the beginning then I showed him. I am so thankful he knew me well enough to know that I wasn't lashing out at him — but I was in pain. He loved me enough to give me grace in my time of need. I am so grateful for that. What my husband didn't know is that once I was further along in my healing process, I would have the strength to give him the grace he needed when he really had the time to think about the loss (as he was deployed immediately after and didn't have the ability to focus on anything but combat). But Jesus knew.

Give yourself grace and allow God to use your spouse to give you grace — and do your very best to show your spouse grace as they grieve as well. And in the midst of it you will experience a closeness with your spouse that is unimaginable.

IT'S OKAY TO SEEK OUTSIDE HELP TO MAKE SENSE OF YOUR FEELINGS.

It is not uncommon for your grief to make you feel out of control. If you or your spouse begin to feel this way, be sure to communicate it to one another. Please don't allow yourself to be consumed with your loss. Do yourself and your loved ones a favor — if you start to feel like the loss of your child is unbearable (or notice that your spouse feels this way), do not be afraid to seek outside help. There are many ways to seek help: pastoral counseling, licensed grief counselors, and support groups to name a few.

While we all experience the loss of a baby through miscarriage differently, one thing remains true for us all: We mourn the loss of our baby and need to heal.

Friends, I know that everyone has a unique experience when dealing with the loss of a baby through miscarriage, but I hope that this scripture will bring you some peace:

ISAIAH 43:2 "WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE WATERS, I WILL BE WITH YOU; AND WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE RIVERS, THEY WILL NOT SWEEP OVER

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YOU. WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH THE FIRE, YOU WILL NOT BE BURNED; THE FLAMES WILL NOT SET YOU ABLAZE."

Please know that you are not alone. I am praying for each one of you and your marriage as you learn to overcome the grief of a miscarriage with your spouse. Never forget that God is on your side and He will see you through.

I love each one of you to life,

Carlie (founder of Managing Your Blessings.com)

HOW TO START LOOKING FORWARD TO SEX (AND STOP SEEING IT AS A CHORE)

Sheila Wray Gregoire | To Love, Honor and Vacuum

It's late at night, and you're lying in bed wondering if your husband is asleep yet-and if he's expecting anything.

"I'm not even in the mood!" you think. "Why is there always all this pressure on me? He's probably expecting me to do something, but maybe he should have thought of that earlier, and actually talked to me today about stuff that mattered!"

And the more you think about it, the more ticked off you get.

And you know that your husband is likely lying there, rather disappointed and maybe a little ticked off, too. Why can't he just accept that you're tired and not expect something more?

Chances are most of us have had that inner conversation plenty of times in our marriage. (And if you haven't because your husband never wants sex, I've got a series for you, too!) Sex may have seemed like a beautiful promise at the wedding, but a few years—and sometimes several babies—later, and it just seems like a chore. And obligation sex is not sexy.

BUT HOW CAN YOU MAKE SEX SOMETHING YOU LOOK FORWARD TO-INSTEAD OF ONE MORE THING ON YOUR TO-DO LIST?

Maybe it's time to learn to think about it differently! After all, for women our sex drives are almost entirely in our heads. What we think about sex largely determines whether or not we get in the mood. If you think, "I wish he'd let me get some sleep!" you'll have a lousy time. But if you think, "I want to have fun tonight and feel close to my husband!" your body is far more likely to cooperate.

Getting in that right frame of mind, though, can be a challenge. But I think the key comes to understanding that sex is like a circle:

How sex is like a circle in our marriage: Want affection? Jumpstart the circle somewhere else!

UNDERSTANDING THE SEX CIRCLE

Let's say that you're not that interested in making love because your husband hasn't been very romantic or wanted to talk much lately. You feel disconnected, so how can you make love?

But here's the key:

Men make love to feel loved, whereas women need to feel love in order to make love (click to tweet!).

When I wrote The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex, I told a story that happened to us a few years ago. My husband and I were just overwhelmed with busy-ness. I was speaking a lot, and he was working a lot, and we weren't connecting. Two nights in a row we didn't make love because I was preoccupied. Then I was away speaking. When I came home it was the middle of the night and we didn't, either. The next night I was still tired, but neither of us slept well because both of us were feeling that something was wrong in our relationship. The next night we did.

And then he bought me flowers.

Sex flowers.

I interpreted it like this: "My husband wants sex too much, so he'll reward me when we make love, and punish me when we don't. He'll be distant when we don't make love deliberately so that I will start putting out." And I got really frustrated.

And then it hit me: Maybe the reason Keith bought me flowers was simply because he felt closer to me and lovey towards me. I thought what was going through his brain was this:

"I need to manipulate my wife into doing what I want."

What was really going through his head was this:

"I love my wife. I think I'll buy her flowers."

When we make love, we each produce oxytocin, "the bonding hormone." It makes you feel more connected towards each other. That's why after you make love men often want to cuddle and talk. And the next day you laugh more, and you flirt more, and you feel more comfortable with each other.

Here's where our circle comes in. If you want that comfortable feeling and that laughter, you can wait for your husband to produce it—or you can jumpstart the whole process by making love!

MAKING LOVE BENEFITS YOU, TOO

Wait a minute—am I making it sound like you only make love so that he will be nice to you? Not at all! That's an added benefit, and I think one that women need to understand more.

But that's not the only benefit.

We can get caught up in thinking that sex is just for him, but it's not! Sex helps you feel close and intimate in a way that nothing else does.

And sex can feel amazing for you, too. (If it doesn't yet, that's okay! Most couples take a few years for things to work like clockwork. Make it the most fun research project you do together.) It helps you to relax. It wards off illnesses. And it even helps you sleep better!

I used to say no when I was exhausted, knowing that I was disappointing him and disappointing myself. But I've realized that I sleep so much better after we make love, because I feel amazing and we feel intimate, which energizes me. So now when I'm tired, I turn to Keith and say, "Come put me to sleep, baby!"

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Ladies, here's my challenge to you: Instead of mulling it over and over, just jump him! Tell yourself, "I'm doing this because I want to feel great, because I want to feel close and intimate with my husband, and because I want to put a smile on his face. And I'm going to feel great!" Put your brain to work for you, and you will have fun!

CELEBRATING THE DIFFERENCES IN YOUR MARRIAGE

Sunu Philip | ClothedInScarlet.org

t had been a busy week, and I was so excited going in to the weekend. I was going to rest, take my mind off my business for a couple of days, and just have fun. And one way I planned to enjoy the weekend was by going out shopping!

Sadly, my husband does not share my love for shopping, and all he wanted to do was spend a quiet weekend at home.

Well, I don't blame him. I'm an extrovert by nature, and he's an introvert.

But I was still sulking about how my husband didn't want to go out shopping with me, when I came across this article by Michael Hyatt.

One passage of Scripture that God brought to my attention through this article was:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

I tried to ignore the nudging, but I had to admit God was trying to tell me something...

He had purposefully brought me and my husband together, knowing that our differences would enhance our lives.

What timely advice!

I have to admit, my husband and I are not alike. We have our differences.

I love to meet people and socialize — the one thing my husband tries to avoid.

I think and make decisions with my heart; he uses his head.

I can get a bit emotional at times; he is as stable as they come.

I can get overwhelmed with problems; he calmly finds solutions.

Yes, we did have our differences, but I also had a choice. I could choose to celebrate my husband's differences, rather than finding fault with him. I could enjoy him for who God created him to be.

In this season, as I set up a new business, my husband's differences are proving to be quite helpful to me. He's a strong pillar of strength, and makes up for so many of my weaknesses.

It used to be a struggle, but I'm slowly beginning to recognize that God purposely made my husband and me different so we'd make a great team together.

Are you and your husband different from each other? Start looking at those differences from a different perspective. You each have a different set of strengths and weaknesses. You make up for what the other is lacking.

When you work together as a team, you can be likened to a double-edged sword. The struggles you face in life are nothing in the face of your united front.

Here are a few things you can do today to celebrate the differences in your husband.

- Make a conscious decision to appreciate the ways he differs from you. The next time you find yourself wishing your husband would be more like you, stop yourself. Turn your thoughts around and start thinking about how that particular trait in your husband works to your benefit.
- Let him know you appreciate his differences. Sometimes, we can get into a fault-finding mode, where we only see the areas where our husbands fall short. Take some time to tell him what you appreciate about him, and how grateful you are that he has that particular quality.
- Thank God for your husband's different traits. It is God who brought you and your husband together for a purpose. Start thanking God for those little differences that would otherwise irk you.

Whenever you find yourself lamenting about how your husband is so different from you, make a purposeful decision to start celebrating those very same differences. It will bring about a shift in your perspective, and help you work together with your husband to be the power team that God created you to be.

PROTECTING YOUR MARRIAGE AGAINST AN AFFAIR

Melinda Martin | HymnArt.com

ven though my husband is perfect for me and he does complete me on so many levels, I do not believe that there is only one soul mate for each person. Learn how to protect your marriage against an affair. At 5'7" and 190 pounds, it surprises me that I can still turn heads. I carry myself with confidence, I'm a modest dresser, I am pretty in that natural fresh-faced way, and I'm cheerful. How many ladies do you see like that these days? Not many. And neither do the guys. I intrigue them.

I could easily become entangled in a relationship with someone who is not my husband. I know because it's happened before, years ago, when I was married to someone else.

I am a cheerful, joyful person. I touch people when I talk. I was raised to look people in the eye when I talk. That has been taken the wrong way more than once. And taken the right way more than once, too.

Your eyes are a window to your soul. We've all heard that. But have you heard this?

Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. – Luke 11:34

All affairs have one thing in common: eye contact that lasted one second too long. It's amazing really, this ability to communicate your desires in one glance.

You don't have to be in a bad marriage to have an affair. Always be on your guard to protect your marriage.

Here are just a few steps that I take to protect my marriage:

- Avoiding eye contact is the easiest and best thing I can do. It would just take one long stare in a really weak moment to throw my life off-kilter. Even though I would hopefully not follow through with it in the physical, we all know what a devil's playground our minds can be.
- I work from home, and I am alone for about 6 hours a day. Some of my clients are males, and I always find ways to fit my husband into the conversation.
- I recognize the need in me to be loved and wanted, and I communicate this to my husband.
- I look at the world around me, at the divorce rate, at the broken homes, and that pretty much jars me back into reality.
- My parents divorced after 20 years of marriage and 5 kids. I understand that no one is above falling.
- For our family, my husband will not work the night-shift, and we will not take jobs that require us to stay overnight or out of town.

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For those of you that follow me, you know how awesome my husband is. And I don't make this stuff up. The guy is wonderful to me and our children.

His wedding ring doesn't deter those women at his work. It's like a challenge to them. I don't lose sight of that fact. I protect our relationship the way that I expect him to.

I don't allow myself to be alone with a guy—in a car or in a room.

When my husband uses way too much cologne every morning, when he walks by me and pokes me in the ribs (even though I have expressed to him loudly on several occasions how much I hate that), when he wakes up late and makes us all late because he's a diva—when he does these things that irritate me to no end, I look down at my flip-flop clad feet, my pajama bottoms, my bra that is falling apart, and my baggy shirt, and I realize that I ain't perfect either.

At the end of the day, I can give you a million tips, but it all comes back around to this: You know the right thing to do. Just do it.

You made a vow. You probably have children. Quit perpetuating the cycle of broken families. And that starts with protecting your marriage.