



31
days to a better
MARRIAGE

written by

30 Different Writers

managingyourblessings.com

31 Days to a Better Marriage
Fall 2014 Series

ManagingYourBlessings.com

31 Days to a Better Marriage | Fall 2014 Series

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INTRODUCTION

Friends, I am so excited to share with you this amazing eBook containing the posts written during the “31 Days to a Better Marriage” series (fall 2014)! This series was started last year by my dear friend (and former Managing Your Blessings contributor) Jolene Engle and was an amazing success. I was honored to be a contributor to the first series and share my story: [5 Ways to Stay Connected With Your Spouse Even When You're Apart](#).

This series has 30 amazing women in the line-up that are going to share their heart about Christian marriage. I know without a shadow of doubt that you will be blessed and encouraged by the 30 different voices of this series. I am praying that God will speak to the hearts of many about the beautiful covenant of marriage bringing a message of love, hope, grace, healing, forgiveness, peace, and joy in Christian marriage!

You can expect to see articles focusing on:

- being married to an unbeliever
- sexual intimacy in marriage
- lessons learned through a divorce
- staying strong through a miscarriage
- how to make it through chronic illness
- respecting your spouse
- the impact pornography has on a marriage
- the importance of doing devotionals with your spouse
- seeking help in marriage
- the impact of adultery in marriage
- forgiveness in marriage
- you can achieve true happiness in marriage
- and much more!

Make sure you don't miss a post in the upcoming Spring 2015 series by [subscribing to Managing Your Blessings](#) via email. I can assure you, you won't want to miss the upcoming series in March 2015!

Be sure to follow [The Ultimate Christian Marriage Board](#) and [Fulfilling Your Vows](#) on Pinterest for lots of great content! And we'd love you to [join our growing Facebook community](#) as well! Are you on [Twitter](#)? We'd love to [connect over there as well](#). Join the conversation with the hash tag #31DaystoABetterMarriage!

Don't forget to download your [FREE gorgeously designed printable marriage scriptures](#) and [downloadable prayer](#)!

Until next time,

xoxo, Carlie K.

Founder, [Managing Your Blessings](#)

DAY 1: 5 TIPS TO HELP MARRIED COUPLES NAVIGATE THROUGH MISCARRIAGE

Carlie Kercheval | ManagingYourBlessings.com

As 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 than 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 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 ManagingYourBlessings.com)

DAY 2: 3 THINGS YOUR HUSBAND FEELS ABOUT SEX – THAT YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW OR BELIEVE

J. Parker | [Hot, Holy & Humorous](#)

Having blogged for four years on Christian sex in marriage, I've logged over 6,800 comments. Although my main audience is wives, many men provide feedback. Again and again, husbands have touched on three themes... which surprised me.

I wasn't surprised by what men describe about sex, but rather the intensity of their feelings as expressed in many heartfelt words and stories. So here are three things your husband likely feels about sex, that you might not know or believe.

1. Sex is irrevocably entangled with his feelings of love.

It's been expressed as "To men, intimacy equals sex," or "Women have sex when they feel loved; men feel loved when they have sex," or "Sex is an emotional need for him." But however you want to state it, the reality exists that for most husbands, feelings of love are irrevocably tangled up in the sexual act. For a husband, making love is a primary way to feel, foster, and express love with his wife.

Look at some ways the Bible describes sexual intimacy for a husband:

"A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love." (Proverbs 5:19)

"How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume more than any spice!" (Song of Songs 4:10)

"I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me." (Song of Songs 7:10)

For him, sex is an intoxicating, delightful experience that rests in his desire for you, not just sex. His covenant love is not restricted to the marriage bed, but it is irretrievably wrapped up in that intimate act.

2. One of his greatest desires is to satisfy you sexually.

Some claim men are only focused on their sexual desires—getting physical release and living out fantasies. Yet, husbands repeatedly express how desperately they want their wives to enjoy sex. They don't want her to merely show up, but to [thoroughly delight in the experience](#). Most husbands will hold off their own pleasure, perform a lot of the "work," respond to feedback, and try various approaches until she is fulfilled. A husband's satisfaction, and even identity, is wrapped up in his ability to send his wife into ecstasy.

One particularly interesting command from the Old Testament is: "If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married." (Deuteronomy 24:5) "Bring happiness" has also been translated "cheer up" or "gladden." This command emphasized the importance of a husband settling into marital union and assuring

his wife of their intimacy, including sexual intimacy. The husband is essentially charged with making sure she's happy...even in the bedroom.

No Bible verse prioritizes a husband's sexual pleasure above the wife's. 1 Corinthians says wives are entitled to sexual intimacy: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband." (7:3) Although the sequence may be unintentional, the wife's pleasure is mentioned first, not as an afterthought. The wife's satisfaction is a priority, one your husband likely has as well.

3. He thinks your body is beautiful.

Whether you're a twenty-year-old supermodel or a sixty-something grandmother, he likes your body. We often perceive our bodies as less than—less than the magazine cover model, less than we want or used to be, less than we think he should desire. But most hubbies are thrilled about their wives' feminine curves, softer skin, and exciting private areas. They wish their wives would believe their reassuring words...and let them delight in that beauty.

In the Song of Songs 1:5-7, the wife expresses self-doubt about her beauty, but the husband repeatedly reassures her how "beautiful" she is (1:15, 4:1, 5:9, 7:1, 7:6 and more). He describes three times within eight chapters what's so amazing about her God-given body (4:1-16; 6:4-10, 4:1-9).

Yet many wives resist sharing their bodies freely with their husbands. Consider this instruction to a bride from Psalm 45, a royal wedding song: "Let the king be enthralled by your beauty." (45:11) When your husband says you're beautiful, choose to believe he's telling the truth...and let him be enthralled.

Of course, there are exceptions to each of these. Some wives have husbands who are critical of their appearance or uninterested in sex altogether. If that's you, [I'm so sorry](#). But God can work in your marriage and sexual intimacy, too.

Still, these three are common themes from husbands. So ask whether your husband feels this way, whether you believe it, and what you can do to pursue godly sexual intimacy in your marriage.

DAY 3: 5 HABITS TO MAKE MARRIAGE A PRIORITY

Jolene Engle | ChristianWifeUniversity.com

Sometimes life just gets plain busy, doesn't it?

Raising kids.

Keeping a home.

Outside ministry involvement.

The to-do lists seem never ending and the responsibilities we carry as women can be quite overwhelming.

Throughout the many years of my marriage comprised of raising and training my children, [living through health and financial storms](#), and being involved in ministry, I've needed to learn how to prioritize my number one earthly relationship — my marriage.

1. STAY CONNECTED TO THE ONE WHO CREATED MARRIAGE.

I have to make sure my relationship with the Lord is thriving. Staying connected and close to Christ nourishes me spiritually, and when I'm thriving in a spiritual sense, all of my other relationships will benefit as a result of this pursuit. I fight hard and I become intentional about protecting this relationship at all costs. Ultimately, the more time I spend with Jesus the more I'll reflect Him in my marriage.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. John 15:4 (NLT)

2. HAVE THE WORD OF GOD AS YOUR GUIDE FOR LIFE.

When I was a new bride I so desperately wanted to follow the Lord in my marriage. Therefore, I needed to follow a Biblical compass: the Bible. I quickly learned that within the book of Titus, chapter 2:3-5, [there was a blueprint written out just for me \(and you\) in how to do this](#).

These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands. Then they will not bring shame on the word of God. (NLT)

I chose to follow what the Word of God said even though there were statements and concepts in these verses that are very contrary to the ways of this world. But I didn't really care what the world had to say since I lived those lies for the first 26 years of my life. I was now a new creation in Christ, a born-again believer, and I was going to follow the Bible if it was going to cost me my life!

Since Titus 2:3 mentioned loving your husband before loving your children, right there was an indicator to me that my marital relationship should not be placed on the back burner of my life when my kids entered into the world.

When I became a mom, I soon realized how easily the role of motherhood could consume my every waking (and sometimes sleeping!) moment. I was intentional about not letting my mothering take the place of my marriage, which is not a simple task! But keeping the right, Biblical perspective always helps me to refocus and to make changes to my daily routines.

3. STUDY HIM.

I've studied that man of mine for over 16 years now because I want to know what makes him tick. What's his passion? What's his love language? What are his spiritual gifts? What irks him? What makes him feel most respected and loved by me? These things haven't been hard to learn, but they have taken my time and focus. Once I know the answers to these questions, I just try to pursue them, cultivate them, or encourage them in my husband.

4. INTENTIONALLY DATE HIM.

Just because our honeymoon period has ended, this doesn't mean I need to stop dating my guy. Over the years we've had dates ranging from the normal dinner and a movie, to the stay-at-home dates (especially when we had no babysitter), to the dessert dates, to the dates of the two of us just going on an errand. Sometimes we had money to spend on a date and sometimes we didn't. No matter our financial situation, we sought to spend time with one another, regardless of our circumstances.

5. SAY NO TO TOO MANY THINGS.

I find myself saying no to others quite often. It's not because I want to be mean to them. It's just that if I say yes to others, I'm also saying no to something else, which is usually my husband or my family. Saying yes to too many requests will most likely cause me to be outside of the will of God because my life will not be in the proper, Biblical order. Ultimately, I've learned not to feel guilty over saying no because I know my reasoning for saying it is so my marriage will be a priority.

The reason for making marriage a priority is so the Word of God is not brought to shame. (See Titus 2:5.)

How do you make your marriage a priority?

Live a poured out life for Christ,

Jolene Engle

DAY 4: 9 WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR MARRIAGE PROMISE

Naomi | WhatJoyIsMine.net

There are so many temptations in this world of ours that could tear apart a marriage promise. We have to be careful and mindful of those temptations, which could be anything from books we read to friendships we form. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” That’s God speaking. He holds the marriage promise in high regard. Once made, we should be working to protect our marriage promise and keep it honorable and undefiled.

Let’s look at 9 ways we can encourage this in our own marriage:

1. Be Word-Filled.

Read the Bible individually and together. Know what the Lord expects of you and your spouse to keep your marriage strong. Make Him the glue that binds you as “one flesh.” (Genesis 2:24)

2. Be Mindful.

What do we read, watch, and listen to? Does it encourage a godly relationship with our spouse? Or does it fill our mind with wrong and unbiblical expectations and ideas of love? It’s so easy to be convinced to view our marriages through the world’s eyes and not God’s. We must be mindful of those ideas and turn from them.

3. Be Prayerful.

Keep every part of your marriage in prayer. We need to be [praying for our spouse](#) and praying together with our spouse. This brings God into the picture and makes us accountable before Him to guard our marriage promise.

4. Be Romantic.

[Love on your spouse](#). We should be intentional in how we show our love to our spouse. Going on dates, preparing favorite foods, writing love notes, giving flowers and chocolate, etc., are great ways to be romantic. Really enjoy one another on purpose.

5. Be Present.

It’s not hard for two people to be in the same house and yet not be present. We ought to be more engaged with our spouse daily through conversations and being a good listener. Talk with one another about your day, share feelings, hold hands, hug one another and smile at each other. Let the other know how glad you are that they’re there with you.

6. Be Forgiving.

This is so important. Marriages aren’t problem-free; however, they are capable of healing. Ephesians 4:32 reminds us to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” The

more quickly we handle those hurts and practice forgiveness, the faster the restoration takes place. Bitterness and resentment will destroy a marriage. Along this line, aim to not go to bed angry.

“Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”
(Ephesians 4:26, 27)

7. Be Expectant.

Life will have trials to walk through and they will test our marriage. Just make a note that difficulties are a part of living in a fallen world. Suffering will come in small and big forms, yet how we live through them makes all the difference. Concerning our marriage relationship, we need to draw close to the one we love, not exclude them. “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 10:9) I think this verse could also say let no situation separate what God has joined together. Decide to work through all trials that come your way — together!

8. Be Church-Going.

Worship together! Attending church with like-minded Christians who also value the marriage promise will definitely spur us on to do the same. There is much encouragement to be found in the church and in being with other couples who are working to protect their marriage promise unto the glory of God and their good.

9. Be Smart.

Do not take your marriage for granted. Be careful not to assume everything is going well and forgo loving on your spouse intentionally. We can get comfortable and forget to be purposeful in loving our spouse. It is so important that we are striving daily to tend to our union in all the ways we can with tender loving care and that we are protecting our marriage promise.

“So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” (Malachi 2:16)

The marriage promise is so worth protecting and it takes hard work and commitment. Still, the effort made will pay off as we grow old with the one given to us by God, knowing we held true to our marriage covenant by God’s grace and our desire to do so.

“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:18)

DAY 5: YES, HE'S MY BEST FRIEND

Ralene Burke | RaleneBurke.com

Eleven years ago, I walked down the aisle and said “I do” to my best friend. And it was that solid foundation of friendship and love that would get us through the next decade together. When something good happens, my husband is the first person I want to tell. Alternatively, when something bad happens, he’s the person whose shoulder I want to cry on—whose arms I want wrapped around me.

My husband knows all my secrets. He’s seen me first thing in the morning, without any make-up and without my hair fixed. He sticks around during “that time” of the month and even sometimes brings home chocolate! Not only that, but we like to DO things together. We share similar tastes in TV shows and books, and we like playing games together.

Hmm . . . crying shoulder, sharing secrets, spending time, and sticking after seeing me at my worst. Yep. Sounds like a best friend to me. But what makes a good best friend?

Here’s my list of the top 5 attributes:

1. A best friend is compassionate and supportive.

My husband and I have seen each other through plenty of ups and downs. We know how to show each other love and support. I listen to his problems, and he listens to mine. We try to share kind words or a simple show of affection to encourage one another.

2. A best friend is loyal.

It is so tempting sometimes to lament to all our friends or family when our spouse is getting on our nerves or doing something that we don’t agree with. To the outside world, though, we should be talking our spouses up! And this goes both ways. We need to work our issues out between each other and God.

This is not to say that, in times of need, we can’t go to a trusted friend to discuss a certain situation. However, there is a difference between “How do I help my husband cope with losing his job?” and “My husband is so lazy! All he does is sit around the house all day, playing those stupid video games!” See the difference?

3. A best friend is honest.

My husband and I don’t always tell each other what the other wants to hear. We try to tell the truth in love that the other needs to hear. If I am focusing too much on work, and not enough on homeschool and the house, my husband tells me. Likewise, if my husband is coming home too many nights and not doing the dishes like he says he will, I throw out a sarcastic remark to gently remind him.

4. A best friend can make you laugh.

I seriously believe that the couple that laughs together, stays together. Many of us, whether we realize it or not, fell in love with our spouses partially because they made us laugh. It's a unique bond between 2 people to be able to make each other laugh or smile.

It's important to remember to have fun, to be silly, and to enjoy each other's company. Laughter is a great stress reliever, a good tension breaker, and a mild aphrodisiac. (Yes, I said that.) Laughter can break down barriers and halt arguments. It also burns more calories.

5. A best friend strives to keep the lines of communication open.

I see this all the time—couples who do not know how to communicate. A few years ago, my husband and I went through a period where it seemed all we did was fight. Every little remark turned into an explosion. Every misinterpreted body movement or voice tone kicked off another argument. We just weren't communicating well.

Communication does not always come naturally. It's something that we have to work on constantly. It's actively listening, asking questions, and not jumping to conclusions. It's giving the other person the benefit of the doubt, letting them be innocent until proven guilty. It's being purposeful in what you say and how you say it, striving for clarity and love.

A best friend is compassionate and supportive, loyal, honest, funny, and a good communicator. And we should treat our spouses as such. When your spouse is also your best friend, it makes all the difference in the world. Yes, a marriage is a different type of relationship, as it should be. But a good marriage is built on a solid foundation of friendship (and the Lord, of course).

The question is, then, is your spouse your best friend? Are you his?

DAY 6: WAIT ON THE LORD

Misty Leask | MistyLeask.com

Waiting is not something that comes easily for me. My life is a true testimony of a woman who doesn't like to wait and who has countless times taken life into her own hands because of an inability to wait. Patience was certainly not a virtue that I possessed very often. Yet, I'm here today to encourage you to learn to wait...to cultivate patience in your life...to specifically wait on the Lord in regard to your marriage.

Having been married twice, there are many lessons I've learned through struggles and difficulties I've faced. Yet, one thing remains constant through them all...I tried all too often to handle things myself and do things my way because I couldn't wait on the Lord. (Who knew how long He might take?!)

My past choices led me down paths in my marriages that I never dreamed I'd face. As a little girl, [relational abuse](#), pornography, and adultery are not part of the marriage you dream about. Looking back over the many flawed decisions I made that brought me to those situations (and more), I now can see that I failed to wait on the Lord. Sure, I took time to pray and I even sought counsel at times, but I didn't stop to be quiet and wait for Him and His direction.

It wasn't until I was the recipient of marital pain in marriage #2 that I was ready and willing to truly wait on the Lord. God had brought me to a place where I knew that I couldn't fix my marriage alone, that leaving the marriage wasn't His will, and that only God had the answers and directions that could save my marriage.

I spent several weeks away from my husband and children. Aside from work, I spent my time alone in prayer, God's Word, counseling, and reading Christian marriage books. It took God bringing me here, through the darkest personal pain I'd ever faced, but I was finally waiting on the Lord.

During this difficult time I was blessed to have a wonderful mentor; she was a light that God sent to me in the midst of darkness. She consistently pointed me to God and His Word for guidance, strength, and the love that I so desperately needed. Through His Word I was able to receive the direction I needed for marriage's most difficult situations. I found reverence and submission to be very hard topics to understand and put into action. Yet, by following God's Word and the counsel I received from my mentor, I was able to see that even if my husband wasn't doing what he was supposed to as a husband, I still needed to honor the Lord's plan for me. My husband's actions weren't my responsibility; I was responsible for only myself. God would take care of him.

By God's grace, my marriage was restored and over the next four years, God has performed a miracle in my marriage. What began nine years ago as a couple living two separate lives in one house has now blossomed into a [beautifully messy love](#) between a husband and wife who've become best friends.

Those four years of growth were some of the hardest I've faced, but it is by God's grace and love alone that I was able to wait on Him to perform a miracle in my marriage.

I've learned that while I truly desire a marriage as God designed, it isn't by my hand or in my time that it will come about. Instead, I must wait on the Lord to continue to mold and make me the help meet He wants me to be.

As I allow Him to change me and trust that He is changing my husband, too, I am able to live life fulfilled in Him and walk each day with my best friend by my side.

There may be struggles up ahead, but knowing the mountains we've overcome by God's grace, I know that as long as I wait on the Lord, trust in His timing, and follow the directions in His Word (no matter how hard they may seem or be) that we can face any obstacle that may lie ahead.

Please note that if you or your children are in danger that you need to seek help, this is not the type of marriage I'm discussing in this article regarding waiting on the Lord. If you are in need of help in regards to domestic violence (relational abuse) please call The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

DAY 7: IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH: KEEPING YOUR MARRIAGE STRONG WHEN A CHRONIC ILLNESS HAPPENS

Rosann Cunningham | RosannCunningham.com

“In sickness and in health.”

My husband and I lived those vows before we ever got engaged.

In fact, we'd only been dating about six months when I rushed him to the emergency room because he couldn't breathe. Two weeks of living in the ICU, a frightening cardiomyopathy diagnosis, and a new reality that he would need a heart transplant was not how either of us had imagined the next season of our relationship would look.

Thankfully, my husband never needed that heart transplant. He was determined from the beginning he was going to overcome the odds and he strongly believed God had already healed him. It took time, but eventually the test results proved he had recovered to nearly perfect health. How did he cope in the meantime? He kept living, stayed busy, took his medication, and never worried about tomorrow. How did I cope? I worried. Every single day.

Fifteen years later, it's my turn to face health problems. The diagnosis was hypothyroidism, then changed soon after to thyroiditis. If you've ever had thyroid problems or know someone who has, you know it's sort of a silent illness that brews on the inside while you look totally (almost) normal on the outside. For most people, thyroid problems are chronic – something you have to deal with for the rest of your life.

Thankfully, that hasn't been the case for me. Mine is temporary, but in the meantime I've been one hot, hormonal fluctuating mess. How have I coped? I've worried and obsessed over it every single day. How has my husband coped? He keeps living, stays busy, encourages me when I'm down, and never worries about tomorrow.

You and your spouse are different. You probably cope with life's ups and downs differently. But one thing is for certain: If you haven't already, at some point in your marriage one of you will face illness. Perhaps it won't be anything severe, but it might have enough personal debilitating impact to cause distress. How the two of you cope through it will make a world of difference in the strength of your marriage.

Here are some things I've learned as my husband and I have worked through our seasons of illness.

Take your health seriously, but don't obsess about it.

Research the health problem on your own so you have an understanding of what to expect and how to overcome it, or how to reduce symptoms. Once you've gathered adequate information, put it into action accordingly, and then move forward with life. Take any prescribed medication as instructed, and follow up with your doctor when you're supposed to.

Your spouse will appreciate that you're taking your health seriously, but they will get frustrated if you allow it to become an obsession. It should not be the center of every conversation. It should not consume your every thought.

Pray with your spouse about your health.

Definitely take time together to seek God in prayer over your situation. There is no health problem too big for God to handle. Praying over it doesn't necessarily mean He'll miraculously take it away from you, although He might! But He will give you peace of mind, ease your symptoms, and comfort you as you head into this new chapter of life.

Plan fun dates with your spouse.

You and your spouse need to have quality time together doing things that help life feel fun and normal again. Whether it's dinner and a movie, or an afternoon of playing games at the dining room table, do something you both enjoy, preferably something that keeps you busy, engaged with each other in conversation, or laughing.

Do your best to keep the passion burning in the bedroom.

If you're able to have sex, you should try to make it happen on a regular basis. Your spouse understands you're sick, but they have needs, too. They love being with you, touching you, feeling you! Physical intimacy is vital to keeping a strong marital bond. Plus it's good for you! Not only does it feel great, but sex is very helpful and healing to the body as it releases stress, relieves pain, and helps keep hormones regulated.

Be patient and offer grace.

Your spouse may not understand what you're going through. They aren't inside your body or your mind to truly grasp how you're feeling, or even how you're coping. But they do love you and they certainly want you to be healthy. Their heart is in the right place. So if your spouse seems pushy about a particular health detail or even disinterested, just know this is hard for them, too, and they are doing the best they can to cope and support you through it.

Have you had to live out those "In sickness and in health" wedding vows yet? What advice would you share that helped you and your spouse cope?

DAY 8: KEEPING SECRETS IN A MARRIAGE IS HARD

Annette | InAllYouDo.net

He walks in the door. Brow furrowed from a long day at work. The weight of the world on his shoulders. His face carrying the agony and pain of a secret. A secret he cannot tell me. A burden he must bear – alone.

Have you ever kept a secret from your spouse? I'm not talking about a birthday or anniversary surprise secret; I mean a secret you were asked to keep.

But...

Secrets can put a wedge between you and your spouse.

Secrets can damage the trust system in your marriage.

It is true that secrets can drive a wedge and erect walls in a marriage, which is precisely why it's been difficult for me since we began our first full-time ministry. So, what do you do when it's your husband's "job" to keep secrets? Lots of prayer and trust. My husband is a minister and is included in private counseling sessions or conversations that I'm not privy to. In fact, most of the time I know very little of what happens at the church – unless it's announced in the bulletin or from the pulpit.

Before this ministry, we never had secrets – I mean never. We have always been open and honest with each other in our personal struggles as well as struggles we had in our marriage or with each other. So when we entered this new journey of full-time ministry, I was not fully prepared for all the secrets that would change our marriage and relationship. After 10 years of marriage, I suddenly felt very distant from him.

Most days he comes home fine and ready to be Daddy to our kids. But there are days I can tell something is bothering him. Sometimes he can talk about it and sometimes he can't. Those days are the hardest for me, even though I'm sure it's nothing like the burden he's carrying. I try not to let it affect me, but I feel disconnected from him. I feel helpless. I just want to take the weight and burden from him and at least even it out and share the load. Sometimes that happens as he works through whatever it was, but other times there's nothing I can do.

The past year and a half in our ministry journey has been one of the most difficult times in our marriage. Not only is the schedule different than what he was used to (graveyard shift at a convenience store [as we waited on the Lord's timing](#)), but our family dynamic changed. I now have a husband who cannot tell me most of what happens in his day. That is difficult. Going from hearing stories of customers he spoke to and conversations he had with the delivery guys about Christ to an almost "secretive" day was difficult. Not that I'm a gossip or even share what he tells me, but the fact that I can not share the load is hard for me.

As a Christian, I have always taken Galatians 6:2 to heart. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (ESV) As a wife, I felt that part of my calling was to help carry the burden and load of my husband. But I soon realized that role also changed. Although I'm called to bear the burdens of my brothers and sisters in Christ, there are times I can't, especially not alone. Over the course of the last year and a half, I have learned several important things as the dynamic of our relationship has changed.

1. HE is able to carry the load.

As much as I want to help shoulder the burdens for our family, I cannot help shoulder the burdens my husband faces as a minister. As a mother, I always want to “fix” things and help make them right. But as the wife of a minister, I am not able to “fix” things. I had to realize that only HE can help my husband carry those burdens. And HE is more than sufficient to carry the load.

2. Pray for my husband.

While I have always prayed for my husband, it has become increasingly more important these past 18 months. When he can't talk to me about the weight on his shoulders from his day, all I can do is pray for him. I immediately begin to pray for the Lord to take the burden from him, but if He can't, that He will give him peace, guidance, and wisdom to bear the load.

So while I don't condone keeping secrets in your marriage, there are times and situations that make it necessary. And in those situations, I go to my knees. The past year and a half in our ministry journey has been one of the most difficult times in our marriage – but also the most rewarding.

DAY 9: CHORES, RESENTMENT, AND BEING A HAPPY WIFE

Christy Fitzwater | ChristyFitzwater.com

First there was the list – not on the fun notepad that my mom bought me from T.J. Maxx – but a list I was constructing on my mental wall. Instead of To Do it was in bold across the top I WISH HE WOULD DO.

Like go to the dump with some scrap wood.

And weed-eat beside the storage building.

And hang up the bicycles.

And more. Like 17 things more.

Then there was the fact that he had NOT done all of them, and couldn't he see that those things needed done? And how much their undoneness was making me crazy?

Next came resentment, which showed itself in the form of biting questions I would never, ever say out loud. Really, is it so hard for you to do those little things? Are you so blind? Do you not care enough about me to get this stuff done?

Resentment. It feels a lot like anger except quietly too polite to voice itself.

Resentment. It coerces a woman to ignore anything good, any contribution made, any other worthy endeavors by the man. See only what he hasn't accomplished, it says.

In the middle of my broiling thoughts came a book, [Telling Yourself the Truth](#), by Backus and Chapian. On the bottom of one page was a story about a woman who had been resentful toward her husband. The authors, who are professionals in the mental health field, helped this woman overcome that resentment.

It was on those pages that [I learned to tell myself the truth](#) in my own situation.

Truth: My husband has not done the chores I think he should do. I don't know when or if he will do them.

Truth: When I am resentful, it is by my own choice. He did not ask me to be resentful, and he is not trying to make me resentful by not completing said chores.

Truth: He is miserable and feels like a failure when I am resentful, because what I don't say with my mouth I say a-plenty with body language.

Truth: I can choose not to be resentful by thinking better thoughts.

Truth: I am actually perfectly capable of doing most of the chores on the list.

Truth: I made the list. I can change the list. There is not a law that the chores have to be his, except the law that I wrote myself.

So, I mentally erased a chunk of those chores off of his list and transferred them to mine.

I spent a bit of time each day tackling some of the work. I was surprised that, with a little determination, I was able to do most of my regular chores and get some of those other tasks scratched off the list as well.

As I worked, I lectured myself that I not only had the ability to do the tasks but the ability to do them with a happy heart.

At some point, in the middle of working, I remembered Eve.

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18 NASB)

A helper.

(Did God know women would have children to care for and a household to run when he said that?)

For so many years I had been thinking, He should be helping me! He should be helping me! He should be helping me!

But that's not what God had in mind when he created me. So I changed my mantra to, What could I do to help him? What could I do to help him? What could I do to help him?

I started to have a happy, feel-like-whistling attitude while I worked. My husband got out there not long after I did and knocked out a big chunk of chores, but I was a more cheerful wife long before he got there.

I'm sorry it's taken me so long to get to this stuff, he said.

It's okay, I said. And my body language agreed, It really is okay.

Let me leave you with this thought regarding undone chores and resentment, and you see if it doesn't change things a whole lot at your house like it has at mine:

Truth: It is a woman's God-given job to aid her husband.

A wonderfully heroic task when done with pleasure, eh?

DAY 10: 11 WAYS TO MAKE COUPLES DEVOTIONS A HABIT

Alicia Kazsuk | VibrantHomeschooling.com

I reached across the bed and squeezed my husband's hand.

"We'll get through this, babe," he said. "Let's pray and ask God for help."

Looking back, I honestly don't remember what was troubling me that early morning. I just remember that I'd come into the bedroom a few minutes before with tears on my cheeks and a heart full of frustration and anger... and I'd been so relieved to see my husband waiting for me in our bed, ready to meet me for our morning devotion time.

In that moment (and on almost a daily basis), I find myself grateful that my husband and I make morning Bible time a priority—despite his demanding travel schedule and my very full life as a homeschooling mom of four.

It hasn't always been this way, however. In fact, for most of our 13 years of marriage, our times together in the Word have been sporadic and, honestly, lacking depth.

Of course we'd heard about the benefits of habitually reading the Word together. But we had no idea where to start. And we certainly had no clue how to make it a regular part of our routine (we'd tried and failed repeatedly).

After a while I think we just gave up trying, believing that a regular devotional time together was a "someday" item: you know, someday when the kids were gone and we "weren't so busy."

We surmised that morning devotionals were for those old married couples that woke up to an empty, quiet house each morning. Couples who went longer than 5 minutes before having to settle a dispute, change a diaper, answer a business phone call, grab someone a drink, or drive someone else to basketball practice.

Was it possible for every couple to have this regular time of spiritual intimacy—even those wading through the exhilarating-but-exhausting parenting and career-building years?

[After enduring some difficult trials](#), we finally saw that a daily devotional time together wasn't a luxury item but a critical investment in ourselves, in our marriage, and in our walk with God. And as our kids got older (and parenting got trickier) we saw an even greater need for daily prayer and centering around God's Word.

That's when we finally concluded that yes, God intends for every marriage in every stage to enjoy this kind of spiritual intimacy.

In fact, we realized that those caught up in the demands of parenting and career needed this soul-enriching couple time perhaps most of all.

However, the million-dollar question remained: How in the world could a busy couple like us stretch their already packed schedules to cultivate the habit of couples devotions?

Here's the (rather unglamorous) truth we discovered: Couples have to truly want this practice and that means they need to fight (on a daily basis) to keep it a priority.

I'm guessing that's not news to you. At least it wasn't to us.

However, we noticed that our Bible time together became habitual (and powerful) when we finally said—with humble, teachable hearts—“Jesus, we know you want us to be spending time with you together on a daily basis. Show us how to do this within our crazy life.”

This meant that we didn't commit ourselves to following a strict regimen. Or to never missing a day. Or to doing it only at a specific time of day. We've kept it open and yet still kept it a priority, continually asking God for wisdom on how to make each day work.

So what I'm about to share with you aren't fixed rules and regulations. They're not “musts” or “shoulds.”

They are simply guidelines my husband and I have learned on our way to building this important habit. We pray that these ideas might make regular devotional times a reality for you and your spouse, too.

Forgive Yourself and/or Your Spouse.

Maybe your Bible times together have been hit-or-miss...or simply non-existent. If either of these is true, there may be all kinds of guilt and shame built up around this issue. Talk openly with each other, and pledge to start together from a new fresh place.

Let the Evidence Spur You On.

Some statistics report that couples that regularly pray and do devotionals together have a [one in 10,000 chance in divorcing](#), as compared to the normal divorce rate which is at least one in two. That's staggering! In addition, God's Word confirms the incredible benefits of simply coming together to call on Him (Isaiah 30:15-22, James 5:16, Ecc. 4:9-12).

Make a Plan, and Make It Happen.

What are some typical open times in the day for both of you? You may need to get up earlier. Your spouse may need to rearrange part of his/her day. You may have to say no to something else. The goal here is not to create the perfect timeslot, but to keep things loose around certain “opportunity points” of a given day. With that in mind...

Consider the Morning.

We love the morning time because the house is quiet (usually) and it's wonderful to connect spiritually before starting our individual daily commitments. We may need to get up early, but time is more open and we find that Bible time together actually gets done.

Come Up with a General Routine or Action Plan for This Season.

Sometimes we've read a chapter of Proverbs each day and then prayed. Other times [we've gone through a devotional](#) and then looked up additional verses. There's no right or wrong answers here as long as God's Word and prayer play a major part of the time.

Shut the Door.

This is a practical—but helpful—one. Our kids know that we aren't to be disturbed when the door is shut. This also models for our kids that time together in the Word is a private and important part of marriage. But more importantly, closing the door keeps us focused on each other and on God during this time.

Be Realistic.

Maybe it's an especially tough season and three days a week is all you can commit to as a couple right now. Great! Three days a week is better than no days a week. Just make it happen.

Be Flexible with the “When” and “How.”

Our schedules are continually in flux (especially if he's traveling) and we're in constant communication about how to make our devotional times work for the week. For example, my husband had a very early flight yesterday morning and was traveling all day so we didn't have our devotions until 9:30 last night (and I read the devotional to him over the phone while we both looked up Bible verses and then prayed). We just make it work for each other.

Be Full of Grace.

Despite your planning and best efforts, there will be days that devotions just won't happen. We get sick. Emergencies happen. Or we just plain forget (oops!). The point is, if you skip a day (or two, or five), forgive yourselves and re-start the habit.

Keep Going and Trust the Bigger Picture.

Not every devotional time may be filled with incredible insights and amazing growth. However, we must trust the unseen work! Amazing bonds are being built between you and your spouse. God's Word is filling your hearts and changing you little by little into His likeness. Believe that good things are still happening—even on the days that seem mediocre.

Commit to a Month.

Try it for 30 days and experience the benefits firsthand. Once my husband and I had enjoyed a regular devotional time together we were that much more compelled to keep up the habit. It became less of a chore and more of a delight.

How have couples devotions changed your marriage? What tips have you discovered for making them a regular part of your family's routine?

DAY 11: THE SECRET SIN OF PORNOGRAPHY

Sarah | [Saving Money Never Goes Out of Style](#)

There are many sins which we commit daily that we cannot hide. A mom is frustrated and loses her temper at the grocery store, a man lies to his boss in order to avoid getting reprimanded . . . but I am convinced that the SECRET SINS of our lives do far more damage than the known ones.

My husband was into pornography since he was a little boy. While we were dating, he had a pin-up calendar and pasted a picture of my head onto their bodies. When I saw it, I thought it was really strange. You know how serial killers leave notes and they paste the magazine letters to make a note? That's what it reminded me of. It weirded me out, and running through my mind was the idea that my body wasn't good enough. Why keep the calendar at all? Why not throw it away?

In all fairness, I didn't know he was entangled in porn until our second year of marriage. I was cleaning the house and went to put aluminum foil over a vent to save our family money. Inside the vents, I found a video. I thought that was strange, so I watched what was on it. I was beyond disgusted; let's just leave it at that. I dug for more and found more. I looked through all the vents and found a good HUNDRED different videos.

It was at that time that I knew, but I went on believing that love conquers all. When he arrived home, I confronted him and he denied it, of course. "They belonged to a previous owner," he claimed. But later that week while changing the sheets on our bed, I found a paper stuck between the mattresses.

It was a bill, but it was not my bill, nor my husband's. It was my mom's! Close to \$2,000 was charged up on a credit card in her name, and I immediately asked her about it.

"Mom," I said, "why would your credit card bill be under MY mattress?" It brings me to tears to tell you this, but she said, "That's not my bill. I've never seen it before in my life."

And that was the day that I was officially married to a criminal. He had stolen her SSN and opened up a credit card in her name to afford his porn addiction. He spent a little over \$500 on all those pornography videos; the rest he charged up to the max.

For fourteen years I dealt with his porn habit, always seeing pictures pop up when I was surfing the web because of what HE was doing when I wasn't home. He hated that I was a SAHM and that was why: less opportunity for him to sin.

Before our divorce was final, he had 6 known affairs and a baby on the way with a woman whom he was no longer with.

IF YOU SHOULD FIND YOURSELF IN A SIMILAR SITUATION, MY HEART GOES OUT TO YOU. HERE ARE 7 TIPS TO HELP:

1) A PERSON HAS TO WANT TO STOP SINNING.

They can say they want to, but unless they really do, there will be no change in behavior.

2) A PERSON APART FROM CHRIST HAS A VERY HARD TIME STOPPING SINNING.

Victory in Christ is not theirs. They are controlled by their sin. Christians are in Christ and Christ defeated sin on the cross. A Christian has the power of Christ to stop sinning inside of them. A person apart from Christ does not have that power. Though it is not impossible, it is much harder.

3) YOU CANNOT CHANGE HIM.

You can try until you're blue in the face, but you cannot change his heart. Only God can. Therefore, your best weapon against the lure of pornography is prayer, asking the One that CAN change your spouse.

4) HOLD EACH OTHER ACCOUNTABLE.

Work on an extremely difficult sin with him. His may be pornography, but maybe there's something that you can be accountable to him that you'd like to change in yourself.

5) PRAY TOGETHER AND DO NOT WITHHOLD INTIMACY FROM HIM.

The more you are bonded emotionally, through prayer and intimacy, the more you fight the lure of pornography.

6) GET COUNSELING.

I don't care how awesome your marriage is, if your spouse is entangled in sin, you need counseling. It is VERY hard to fight that particular sin. You need help; your spouse needs help. Don't think you can handle it on your own. Do NOT keep it secret. Remember, the secret sins are far more devastating. Keep them in the light. The light diminishes the dark!

7) THE REAL BATTLE IS THE BATTLE OF THE MIND.

Lastly, you need to know that while a man is entangled in pornography, the real sin is the battle of the mind. You see, the brain cannot tell the whether his act with a TV screen is the same or different than a real woman. Each and every time he commits this sinful act, it sears his conscience. Over time, as in my case and many others, it's SO easily justified for the real thing because the mind is already used to it. I am not saying that every man caught in pornography has a physical affair, but that the stats are MUCH, MUCH higher!

DAY 12: EMBRACING THE SEASONS OF YOUR MARRIAGE

Sonya Schroeder | [Becoming A Strong Woman of God](#)

If I could go back to my 27-year-old self and share with her what I know now about embracing the seasons of marriage, I could have saved myself a lot of heartache. Not coming from a Christian home, I truly did not have all the tools I needed to have a successful marriage. All the women around me had skewed views from all their hurts. Getting a front row seat to what it looked like to embrace seasons of marriage seemed nearly impossible to me.

I can look back on 14 years of marriage at all the seasons we went through, and I can tell you without a doubt that through each season came amazing growth. We are not the same people we were when we said “I do.” Some seasons are hard and some are joyous. Embracing each season is the key to to having a better marriage than we did before.

We need to learn to embrace the seasons of our marriages. If we don't, our marriages will never become all God wants for us separately and together.

I have had to learn this all to well being a military wife for 12 years of my marriage.

Things happen quickly and without warning. Embracing the different seasons was not always easy for me. The closer I have gotten to Christ, the easier it has been to embrace the seasons. Life is full of unexpected changes; our only choice is how well we respond.

Responding well was always my weakness.

It was our first deployment and we had no idea what to expect. We had never been apart for more than 8 hours and that was because he was at work. He would be gone for 12 months and life as we knew it would change forever. This was the hardest season of our marriage to date and I will be honest, I did not think we were gonna make it. We put too much pressure on each other because of our fears. We did not speak to each other in love. We focused too much on one another and not the One who could mend it all.

We did not respond well to this season of our marriage.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

Looking back I can see how those moments prepared us for today. My husband is retired from the military and works as a contractor. He travels sometimes and has to work long hours. When those times hit I am more ready than I was then, even though they are still hard. We have learned to respond well, which not only draws us closer to Christ but to one another.

When a season comes that challenges you in every way, cling to Jesus.

Find ways to help each other during this time. Focus on drawing closer to Christ so that the enemy doesn't cling to that season. Find little moments to embrace and be intentional. Don't make it about you. Communicate often, speaking in love. Make each other feel loved no matter what challenges arise. Be understanding.

The enemy wants nothing more than to kill, steal, and destroy your marriage during the hard seasons.

I recommend the book [Starting Your Marriage Right: What You Need to Know in the Early Years to Make It Last a Lifetime](#), written by Dennis and Barbara Rainey.

Your turn to chime in.

What are some things you do in your marriage to embrace the seasons?

DAY 13: A WIFE DRIVEN TO DESPERATION

Faithful Feat

Many wives are dissatisfied, discouraged, angry, depressed, lost . . . searching, simply waiting out their existence. Misled and desperate.

Desperate for change, fulfillment, love . . . something.

So they turn to things. Another man. An addiction. A secret life. A pit.

A deep, dark, desperate pit.

Are you in that pit? All alone? Ready for change, but still going back to it because that's where you're safe? Because hoping for change is harder than pretending it can't happen? Because protecting your heart is less painful than opening it enough for healing to happen?

If that's you, would you lift your chin just high enough to see that Someone sees you? He sees you bawling your pillow sopping wet, sitting in the dark rocking back and forth, your body racked with sobs.

He sees you. He loves you. He wants to help.

Are you desperate enough to let Him? Are you desperate enough for change that you'd be willing to let Him heal you and change you?

Yes, CHANGE you. Because you are the only one you can change. You can't change anything about your husband. Not his attitude. Not his mind. Not his words. Not his actions. Nothing.

But God can.

But He wants you to be so desperate for a positive change in your marriage that you will accept His healing touch and allow your heart to be softened enough to minister unconditional love to your husband.

Unconditional love.

The same kind that was shown to you through Jesus.

Are you brave enough to try it?

If so, get on your knees.

Don't pray for your husband.

Pray for yourself.

Pray like you've never prayed before. Pray for a new heart. Pray for a new mind. Pray for a new attitude. Pray to be made like Jesus. Pray for a change. A change in you.

Then, put your faith to action.

Open that Bible and read everything you can about being a wife. Then do what it says.

1. Do not withhold yourself.

Yes, sex really is that important to your husband. In fact, not only is it driven by this God-given need, but it's also the greatest way a wife can minister to her man.

1 Corinthians 7:4-5 says, "The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband . . . Do not deprive each other . . . so that satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."

1 Corinthians 6:20 says you are to "honor God with your body."

To God, it is honorable for you to not deprive your husband. So, do you think your body is something so great that you should keep it from him? Or will you, standing in faith, use it to build him up according to his needs?

2. Speak kind words.

When he is rude, you can either retreat into your shell, where you can later brew on it and nurse your wound, or you can lash back. Do you think you could say "no" to both of those and do what God says? God says to be kind to those who hurt you.

Proverbs 15:1 ~ A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:18 ~ A hot tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Speaking kindly in the face of anger and accusations takes a lot of courage, patience, and faith. But remember, you prayed for changed heart, so you're already strong enough to stand in your faith and speak patiently in love.

3. Forgive your husband.

Your husband will never fulfill your needs and expectations. He can't. He's not God. Expecting him to live up to this impossible demand is frustrating for him and disappointing for you. Let him be human. When you're disappointed or hurt, run to Jesus. He will strengthen you, fulfill you, encourage you, and love on you.

He knows your pain because you've pained Him. Won't you forgive your husband as Jesus forgives you? Wholly and completely. Again and again.

Matthew 6:14 states, "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

These are hard things to do. But the same faith that you prayed with for a new heart, is the same faith that will grow up and mature in Christ if you act upon it.

So let your desperation for change in your marriage drive you to the cross. There, you can expect to be changed so much that your husband, too, will find a desperation for change. Minister to him gently and quietly, so that he may be won over by the purity and reverence of your respectable life. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

DAY 14: COMMITMENT IN MARRIAGE

Rebekah Hallberg | RebekahMHallberg.com

This past year has forced me to take a long, hard look at the idea of commitment in marriage. I've watched so many people struggle through relationship issues and then walk out on their spouse. What are we doing differently these days that is pulling us away from honoring our marital commitment? I've spent a lot of time talking with the Lord in hopes of improving my own marriage, and God has shown me two areas where I have been lacking.

Please know that my words are coming from a heart that is longing to better my own marriage and to encourage you in your marriage or relationship as well.

If you had to leave a bad situation, I fully support you and pray God's continued protection over you.

I don't know all the ins and outs of each of our relationships; these are just a few of my thoughts as I work on my own marriage.

CONVENIENCE

As I look at marriage — even my own — the first thing God showed me is that our relationships are [lacking a lot of staying power](#). God began showing me, in my own life, that I often rely on convenience much more than on hard work. There is a “drive-thru” for everything these days — food, medicine, banking. We have convenience stores and mini-marts for a quick one-stop.

But there is not a “convenience store” for marital issues.

We have to work to strengthen relationships. We have to put in the effort to see our marriage last. I think I get out of the habit of doing the hard work of relationships because I'm so accustomed to being able to find a quick fix for so many other problems.

Personally, God showed me that I was treating my marriage as a convenience — when it was convenient for me, I would put in the effort. When it was in my best interest, I would do the hard work.

But when it didn't benefit me, I was guilty so often of treating my marriage like another “drive-thru.” I would say hello, state my request (maybe it was help with laundry, groceries, or homework), and I'd be on my way. Too many times, I even forgot to say thank you.

So I began praying about how to move my marriage away from convenience and back to commitment.

COVENANT

For me, the answer has been to start to view my marriage as a [covenant again](#).

In my own life, I know the significance of a commitment. If I have committed to you — to help, to work together — I will follow through.

But in this “drive-thru” society, I started to take my eyes off of God, and focus on myself — making sure that I was honoring my commitments, even my marriage commitment. To me, though, the commitment took on the form of any other item on my to-do list:

Grocery shopping? Check.

Homework? Check.

Errands run? Check.

Remain committed to my marriage? Check.

My marriage became less about honoring God, and more about completing my to-do list, until God gently reminded me that the other things on my list are, in fact, commitments. My marriage, though, is a covenant. It's not just a commitment to, or with, another person. It's a vow that I made before God, and I wasn't giving Him the appropriate place in my marriage that I should have given Him.

As I began to refocus on the fact that my marriage is a covenant between God, my husband, and me, I started to treat it as such. I left the “drive-thru” lane, pulled out my Bible, and started to focus on the One I was neglecting the most.

I've started focusing on the covenant relationship, intentionally choosing to prioritize my relationship with God and to focus on the work of strengthening our relationship, rather than expecting a “drive-thru” quick fix. As I'm doing this, I have found such beauty in my time with the Lord and in conversation with my husband. An extra benefit has been the modeling of relationship-building for our children so that they learn that important things truly are worth our time and effort.

How do you remember to keep your marriage prioritized as a covenant and not just another commitment on your to-do list? I'd love to hear your thoughts as this is an ongoing process for me.

DAY 15: SEEKING ADVENTURE WITH YOUR SPOUSE

Amanda Farris | AmandaFarris.org

My [marriage is my favorite relationship here on earth](#). This is the man I've said "I do" to and plan to be with when we are an old-aged, gray-haired, front porch-sittin', great-grandkids-watchin', story-tellin', sweet old couple.

But to be able to do that, we must live a life together so that we can have stories to tell.

It doesn't matter if you have opposite interests; there is still room to seek adventures together. Even if your schedules are swamped, you don't have enough time to NOT seek adventures together.

Adventures tie your heart strings together.

Doing things together builds companionship.

Exploring life together makes memories.

Memories make stories.

Stories leave family legacies.

You know when you get a bunch of old high school buddies together after 30, 40, or 50 years, and all they have to talk about is old high school throwback stories? I don't want my marriage to be like that.

I want to have new stories to tell with each season of life.

These memory-making companionship activities don't have to be expensive or elaborate. They just have to be together.

It breaks my heart when I hear people say, "I just don't LOVE him/her anymore." "We've grown apart." "We have nothing in common."

All of those issues could have been fixed and prevented with intentionality.

Love is a choice. It takes effort. It takes sacrifice.

It is easy to grow apart when you aren't putting effort into growing together, which is why it is so important to us in our marriage to be intentional about seeking adventures together. I do things that I don't like to do — but he likes to do. He does things he doesn't like to do — but I like to do. We do things together for fun, laughter, and life experiences.

We are in the season of life and marriage of little children. They take a lot of time, mental effort, and energy. It is time and energy that we want to give to them and love giving to them. But we also know that someday they will grow up and leave our house and we will be left with each other.

We want to still like each other when that happens. We want to still know each other when that happens. We want to enjoy our “live-in” best friend and really make the relationship an enjoyable one.

We both know that will only happen if we continue to invest in each other no matter what season of life we are in.

SO HERE ARE 3 TIPS ON SEEKING ADVENTURES TOGETHER THAT WILL LEAD TO A BETTER MARRIAGE:

1. GO PLACES
2. DO THINGS
3. GET OUT OF ROUTINE

Have something to talk about, remember, and reflect on when you get to be that old-aged, gray-haired, front porch-sittin', great-grandkids-watchin', story-tellin', sweet old couple.

Here are some tips that we've come up with:

Plan and save for at least 3 outings a year. (This does not count dates — but that's a whole other article.) They don't have to be overnight — just something that is out of regular routine. Make a memory! Suggestions:

- Comedy shows (Tim Hawkins is HILARIOUS! Laughter is always good for relationships!)
- 1 weekend getaway per year. (You can do this for very little money!) We personally love hiking and outdoors type weekends.
- Sporting events
- Live shows/plays
- Anything you want!! Be creative.
- Do FREE things together just for fun!
- Hiking trails or walks
- Racquetball, frisbee, catch
- Build a project
- Do a home improvement project (together is the key!). We've had some of our most memorable adventures doing this. (Good and bad! lol)
- Board games
- Plan family fun days together that include the kids or friends. (Work together on the planning and implementing — that's the key!)

Please hear me when I say — the tying of hearts isn't in what you do but who you do it with.

Don't think that you have to afford great vacations, elaborate trips, and exotic excursions to seek adventures with your spouse. You just simply have to LIVE LIFE TOGETHER, not apart.

Life itself is an adventure and a gift.

Enjoy life and live life with the one you married, even in the day-to-day moments. They matter.

Talk to each other.

Laugh with each other.

Smile at each other.

Be together.

What will be your next adventure?

CHALLENGE FOR VIRTUAL BONUS POINTS: PLAN AN OUT-OF-THE-ORDINARY OUTING FOR YOU AND YOUR SPOUSE!

DAY 16: SO YOU MARRIED A DREAMER – 3 WAYS TO SHARE HIS DREAMS

Kate | OneFleshBlog.com

Let's face it, you married a man; therefore, you married a dreamer. You also married a man with natural instincts put there by God to provide and care for you, his wife. An instinct to provide combined with his desire to make a difference in this world, mixed with a call to serve God = dreamer.

Whether your husband wakes up each morning excited about what he does or not, he is still a dreamer. But you know what is even more important to him than his dreams? It is you, his wife, believing in his dreams. It's you listening, encouraging, and praying for your husband's dreams.

His dreams might be happening now, or they might be happening somewhere down the road, or they may even end up fizzling out. No matter the distance, he wants you to be his biggest fan.

Dreams can be exhilarating and at the same time downright scary! So what is our part? What can we do for our husbands as they seek their dreams?

DON'T PANIC

So your hubby comes home one day and shares that he has a new dream. Perhaps it is changing jobs or following God to another state/country. Either way, don't panic!

For us wives, whom God wired differently, it is easy to see their sharing of dreams as — THIS IS HAPPENING. Ahhhh! It's so easy to want to head for the hills and point out every reason this particular dream simply will not work.

Slow down and remember that your husband just wants to share his goals and dreams with you. Some of them may work out and others will not. So stop, focus on him, and listen to what is on his heart. It is the first step in sharing his dreams.

ASK YOURSELF, "WHAT CAN I DO?"

Once a dream is moving forward and God is leading your husband, ask, "God what do you want from me as his wife in this dream? What can I do to help and bless him in this journey?"

Recently my husband felt God leading him to a new career and a new job. At first it was all a little unsettling because it meant moving multiple times and doing life very differently than we had in the past. There were months when we did not know where we would be and only trusted that God was calling us to something different.

My being supportive and helping in any way I could was important to me and to my hubby. He often thanked me for believing in him and what God was now calling him (us) to do. I knew God had us covered!

That was easy, but seeing the ups and downs of the process and how they affected my hubby was hard. So through the ups and downs of your husband's dreams, what can you do to love, respect, and support him?

BE HIS CHEERLEADER

Am I suggesting that you put on a tiny skirt and get some pom-poms? No, I'm not, but if he would enjoy that, then go for it! [The respect you show](#) your hubby and the way you listen to his dreams is important. You are the second most important influence on your hubby's life and dreams, second only to God's prompting. He wants to know that you are beside him, cheering him on, loving him in the high mountaintop moments and loving him in the deep dark valley moments.

In life, when following dreams, there will be both mountains and valleys. When a husband leads his family the way God is asking, the enemy is sure to follow trying to trip things up. Be your hubby's biggest fan and cheer him on.

Your hubby's dreams are a good thing! Will all of them happen? No, but you being there to believe in him will be amazing. Not only believe in him, but believe in and want his dreams as much as he does. It is an incredible way to bless your marriage, to love your husband, and to serve him.

NO MORE DREAMS?

Maybe your husband used to be a dreamer, but those ideas are long gone, or at least he's not telling you if they are still floating around in his head. How about [spending some time initiating](#) with your husband to reconnect and let him know that you want to hear what he is dreaming about?

I can think of times in our marriage when I did this well and other times when I did not. How have you seen evidence of sharing your husband's dreams and the blessings it brings?

DAY 17: WHAT DOES RESPECTING YOUR HUSBAND ACTUALLY MEAN?

Sunu Philip | ClothedInScarlet.org

However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. – Ephesians 5:33

Having grown up in a traditional south Indian household, I knew I was expected to respect my husband when I got married. And yet, a part of me didn't want to do it. I would respect my husband only when I felt he deserved it, or if he had done something nice for me. It was no wonder that our marriage was a struggle.

Being a teacher, I was critical of everything my husband did. He always fell short of my expectations. Whether it was the way he took care of our baby, the way he did the household chores, or the way he handled our finances, it was never good enough for me. I didn't trust him or respect the decisions he made.

Fast forward a few years, and I learned what it meant to respect my husband unconditionally. And let me tell you, it has completely transformed my married life. I started showing my husband unconditional respect, and he in turn started showing me unconditional love. The change did not happen overnight, of course; it was a gradual process. But it worked! Today I'd like to share with you some pointers on what respecting our husbands really means.

It should start from your heart.

Respecting your husband is a choice you have to make. You need to have the desire to respect and honor your husband from your heart. Ask yourself if you really have that desire. Do you really want to respect your husband?

It should be genuine.

Your respect needs to be genuine. If you fake it, you will not be able to sustain it for a prolonged period of time. Your husband will be able to see through your facade and identify your made-up respect. Make sure you genuinely respect your husband. If you do, you will be able to keep it going no matter how long it takes.

It should be expressed.

Your husband is not a mind reader. If you respect him, you need to let him know it as well. Say the words out loud; let your kids, your friends, and your extended family know how much you respect him.

It should be evident.

Not only should your respect be evident in your words, it needs to be expressed in your behavior, your tone, and your actions as well. A loud sigh, an exaggerated roll of the eyes, or a curt answer are all signs of disrespect. Make sure you curb your behavior and respect your husband through your words and actions.

It should be consistent.

It is one thing to respect your husband when everything is fine and dandy. But what happens when trials come? A sick child, a looming work deadline, or a layoff can easily trigger feelings of disrespect. But it is in those seasons of adversity that your husband needs your respect the most. I'm not talking about playing to your husband's ego here, but genuinely believing in him and supporting him no matter what.

I'm actually walking through a similar phase in this season of my life. My husband has been out of work for the past 7 months, and also went through a period of painful sickness in between. At those moments when he felt ashamed for being jobless, it was up to me to reassure him that I believed in him. It lifted up his spirit when I said aloud how much I appreciated him. This difficult period has brought us closer than the previous 10 years of our marriage. So now, I thank God for this difficult season because I think our marriage needed it.

I know that in most marriages, the wife's attitude can make or break the husband's determination. You need to believe that your husband always has your family's best interests at heart. And he needs you to stand by him to make it happen.

Unless you are living with an abusive husband, you have no excuse not to respect your husband. And when you keep showing him respect, you will get real love in return. Stand by your husband; let him know how much you appreciate what he's doing for the family. And over time, you will start seeing small changes that will make you fall in love with your husband all over again.

DAY 18: SEEKING HELP IN MARRIAGE

Sharla Kostelyk | [The Chaos and The Clutter](#)

2012 . . . we were battered and bruised, exhausted, every bit the picture of the walking wounded. Financial strain, the depletion of ourselves that came with parenting so many special-needs children, surviving crisis after crisis, always emerging a little more beaten down each time — it had taken a toll on our marriage. We were both hurting.

Around us, one marriage, then another, then another, and another and another began to fall like dominoes, including family and close friends. We heard from some that life was easier now that they were separated, and there were days when giving up looked almost tempting. Staying together felt like it would be an uphill climb, and we were both so tired that it was daunting.

We made the choice to fight for our marriage but we didn't have the skills to do it alone. We sought out a Christian marriage counselor and started attending weekly sessions. You may want to hear that it was instantly wonderful, but things actually got worse before they got better. In some of the sessions, we worked on uncovering old hurts or misunderstandings, and unearthing them was painful. We also had to change patterns in our marriage that had been long established, and change is hard. I would often leave the sessions feeling emotionally drained and discouraged, but I sensed that shifts were beginning to happen for both of us.

When we went into counseling, I thought that most of the changes needed would need to be from my husband; I was humbled to learn that much of the fault in our relationship was mine and that I would need to make changes as well. One of the hardest things for me was to become more vulnerable, to react with honesty about my underlying feelings instead of lashing out in anger. Often, feelings like rejection or hurt were being covered up with that anger and it felt more comfortable to express that than it did to be real.

I am so thankful that I have a husband who was willing to make changes. He was also willing to invest time into growing our relationship. For a while, he put his work on the back burner as we worked intensively on getting to know each other again. I know that not all men would be willing to do that, and I am grateful for the time and the effort he put in then and continues to put in now.

We went on dates at least weekly, and often they lasted all day. At one point, I made a list of 60 date ideas that would be more interactive than just dinner and a movie so that we could start having fun again. We had had several years of stress with a child with a severe health condition, two more children being added to our family through adoption, my parents divorcing, his dad getting diagnosed with cancer, and the special needs of our kids. We needed to infuse some laughter back into our lives.

I had also spent so many years putting the kids first that our marriage had fallen to the back burner. We needed time together and those dates, usually on the days that we had marriage counseling, became a critical part of our rebuilding.

We no longer go weekly for counseling. We were able to stretch it out to every second week at one point, and now we are going about every third week and it serves almost as maintenance. I think even healthy marriages can benefit from having a qualified third party help them to improve their relationship.

Marriage counseling may be able to help:

- improve your communication skills and give you the tools to be able to handle disagreements respectfully.
- recognize unhealthy patterns you may have developed and help you break those patterns and replace them with healthier ones.
- help you determine what is and isn't healthy if you didn't see a healthy marriage modeled in the home when you were growing up.
- get rid of built-up resentments.
- help each partner express themselves more clearly.
- address specific issues or concerns.
- help in an acute time of crisis.

For us, marriage counseling helped us to grow together instead of apart and brought our relationship to a much deeper level. It strengthened my commitment and gave us skills that we can draw from in hard times.

It is important to find the right counselor. It needs to be someone that you both feel comfortable with. You may need to try several professionals before you find the right fit. We went to a different counselor for one session years ago and it was a terrible experience. Ask friends, family, or your church for recommendations. That is how we were able to find our current counselor. I also recommend that you use a Christian counselor so that you can add prayer into your sessions and have Biblical wisdom poured into your marriage.

As a final note, if your partner is not willing to go for counseling, I recommend that you go on your own and continue to pray for a change in heart for him or her. You will be able to work on making the changes that you can make, improve your communication skills, and possibly even gain insight into your spouse. Allow God to do the rest.

DAY 19: FIRST STEPS IN BATTLING PORNOGRAPHY

Bonny Logsdon Burns | OysterBed7.com

15 years ago, our marriage changed forever. My Christian husband's secret was out. He was losing the battle with pornography and sexual compulsion.

By the blood of Christ, the sweat of heavy honest discussions, and tears of forgiveness, our marriage has thrived. How grateful I am God shows up in impossible situations.

You cannot fix your husband. Christ and your husband have to do that. However, if you have recently discovered your husband is struggling with pornography, I want to help you become a Jael, so you can sink a tent spike into the temple of pornography. I want to help you become a strong and defiant warrior for your marriage. Remember, your husband is not the enemy. Satan is.

In order to grow strong in the Lord against the schemes of the evil one, I'd like to give you permission to tend to yourself first.

Grieve.

You've lost trust. Some of what you thought was true about your marriage was wrong. Pray, pray, pray, and give the Lord time to work. Give yourself time to come to terms with the deception and the new reality.

Find a wife you can talk and pray with.

Let God lead you to a compassionate and wise Christian woman who has experienced this. Don't keep his secret for him, but it is important to share this information with discernment. Let her reassure you that nothing you did caused his porn use.

It's not uncommon for porn revelation to lead you to feeling unstable. Don't be afraid to seek professional help.

Understand YOUR value.

Yes, a porn-addicted husband has chosen to view millions of other naked female bodies. HIS actions do not diminish your worth. You are not defined by your husband. You are defined by Christ. Get into the Word and see what it says about YOU, a co-heir, a sister to Christ.

By understanding that I was God's masterpiece (Eph. 2:10), I grew in confidence that I was valuable because I was God's. I didn't have value because of my marriage, husband, children, job, volunteer work, beauty, or accomplishments.

God wrote me on the palm of his hand (Is. 49:16). What do we see when Jesus shows us his nail-scarred palms? We see the ultimate unconditional love. Knowing my value through the hands of Father and Son helped me deflect Satan's accusation that my husband's actions were a reflection of me.

Allow the excruciating pain in your heart to subside.

The romantic ideal you had of your husband has suffered traumatic injury. The length and severity of “porn grief” will be unique for each woman and marriage.

You may even need to have a short-term retreat away from your husband and family to study and meditate. Our spirits need quiet time so we can hear God.

Do not diminish your heart’s need to process the loss; however, don’t stay in that place. After a while, replace the thoughts that dwell on the “what-ifs” of his pornography use with noble and beautiful thoughts of how you are going to move forward.

Don’t read other people’s stories on the internet.

As I was trying to heal and rebuild, reading others’ porn revelation stories fueled my doubt. I already had enough doubt and mistrust. I needed to focus on stories of hope and redemption. You may need to stay away from sites and forums that focus on personal stories of pornography revelation for a season, while you work on deepening your personal Bible study and prayer life.

Avoid the desire to get yourself worked up again.

Learn the strategy of the evil one.

I realize if you have recently dealt with porn discovery, you feel like a gutted fish. The last thing you want to do is to understand his problem academically or psychologically.

Aside from prayer and God’s gentle care of your heart, understanding the psychological reasons your husband has ended up here will open the door for dialogue and healing. Knowledge is power.

When you are ready, read *Surfing for God* by Michael John Cusick. Unlike personal testimonies, this book is hope and redemption. It gives you insight into how an addict can overcome his addiction, and also explains the underlying cause of the addiction.

You’ll be able to see how Satan has used your husband’s past to keep him entrapped. A godly warrior knows the strategy of her enemy.

Knowing the reasons for his compulsion is not exoneration.

Jesus knew all about the lady at the well. She’d sinned sexually. He knew ALL her reasons and excuses. And I think because he knew all her reasons, he had great compassion for her. He didn’t shame her. He told her to go and sin no more. He gave her the grace and love shown in 1 Corinthians 13, but he told her don’t do it anymore!

Reading 1 Corinthians 13 for me was painful during our hard season. All I could focus on was how I’d been wronged. God showed me it wasn’t about me; it was about seeing the US in this story. There were ways where I’d wronged him, too. That’s when I knew my season of self-care had ended.

It was time to tend to the marriage and reclaim it for Christ.

DAY 20: 4 WAYS TO CULTIVATE A HABIT OF RESPECTING YOUR HUSBAND

Tehila | WomenAbiding.com

Respecting my husband was a concept that eluded me for many years at the beginning of our marriage. I always felt that it would be so much easier if the command given in Ephesians had been for wives to “love” their husbands. Loving him I could do quite easily, while respect seemed like such a vague concept that I struggled to grasp and understand, let alone put into practice.

Being respectful to your husband should become a habit, and as such it takes time and effort to perfect.

I would like to offer you a simple list of ABCs to help you on your journey.

ACCEPT HIS WORDS AS WISDOM

When your husband shares his opinion, accept his words as wisdom, even if his logic does leave something to be desired. Not many actions speak disrespect louder to a man than shooting down his ideas and thoughts in cold blood.

Coupled with refraining from putting him down when he does come out with strange thoughts, you can make “respect statements.” When your husband makes a notable, wise statement, validate him by saying, “Oh wow, honey. That is such a wise way to view the situation!” or “I never thought about that! What would I do without you?!”

BELIEVE THE BEST

We wives can be rather oversensitive and even suspicious at times. You may be surprised at how often your husband actually means well when he makes a suggestion or takes initiative, even when it may come out all wrong.

As you know, men and women are remarkably different. The man that God has granted you may not be as eloquent a speaker or as thoughtful in the same areas you are. This gives you the perfect opportunity to implement 1 Corinthians 13 – the “Love” chapter!

Embedded within this scripture passage is, “Love believes all things.” In other words, love believes the best about another person.

If, for example, your husband gives you a hand mixer for your anniversary, rather than a gorgeous pendant which you would have preferred, believe that he never meant to give you the message that you perpetually belong in the kitchen baking him cakes! He was thinking of what may be most practical to make your life easier – which is actually a very lovely gesture.

Believe the best each and every time your hubby says something to you, and especially when you may be tempted to get your feelings hurt. This will eliminate many unnecessary opportunities to harbor unforgiveness and bitterness, and will free you both up to enjoy a far more peaceful marriage.

CARE FOR HIS NEEDS

Not many women realize how respected it makes a man feel when we care for his basic needs. Whether you are cooking a meal for your man, packing him a lunch box for his workday, caring for the children, or keeping the pantry stocked with food, these all speak volumes to your husband. In his mind you are respecting him by keeping his life running smoothly while he does what God has ordained for him to do.

You may not feel as though he appreciates all you do, or he may not even realize how much you do, but this is what I call the “behind-the-scenes respect tactic.” Essentially, only God sees all that you do, and this is where you get those extra heavenly crowns for respecting your husband without realizing it.

DEFEND HIM BEFORE OTHERS

Not much speaks greater respect to your man than when you defend him and his principles before others. The opportunity will most likely present itself in your life most commonly with your children.

When one of the children speaks disrespectfully to your husband, a great way to prove your standard of respect is to jump in and lovingly explain that his father is a man worthy of much honor in the home, and such speech will not be tolerated. Or when a child disobeys her father, make sure to defend him, explaining that her dad is the head of the home and needs to be respected and obeyed. Of course this will be a more natural way of life to emulate if you, as their mother, exemplify a lifestyle of respect toward your husband. That is one of the best incentives I have found for pulling up my socks in this “respect” arena!

Respecting your husband, whether you believe he is worthy of it or not, is not a luxury or an option. It is a wise mandate from the Creator who knows what is best for you as a couple, and designed the instruction to bring Him greatest Glory!

DAY 21: DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE

Marlene Griffith | ADiligentHeart.com

When we first got married I had incredibly high expectations of what our relationship and marriage was going to look like. It wasn't too long after we said "I do" that I realized these were completely unrealistic and totally one sided. This ended up causing major issues within our marriage, and we slowly began to drift apart.

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" - James 4:1

Going through this rough season, what stood out the most was our differences. So in the midst of my idol (the unrealistic expectations) being hooked, I started to pick apart all of our differences, trying to justify myself.

It's amazing how God works. While my goal was to "prove a point," God's goal was to show me the beauty in these differences.

WORKING THROUGH DIFFERENCES IN MARRIAGE

1. Don't get lazy.

After "I Do," many couples tend to fall in a comfortable zone. I call it the lazy zone. It's in this phase that couples no longer make any effort to be romantic, they don't set aside time for date nights, and they no longer have deep conversations with each other. So make time for each of these things!

Our lives are super busy. My husband works crazy hours, and I work from home and homeschool our children. Let's just say that at the end of the day there isn't much energy left in either of us.

So what do we do? We take advantage of those quick 5-10 minutes we can steal away from the day. Coffee is usually involved, and lots of great conversation flows from this time together. We know these moments are rare, so we cherish them when they arise.

Once or twice a month we make it a point to have a date night at home. You can check this post out for some great at home date night ideas!

2. Let go of expectations.

Your expectations, hopes, desires, and dreams may not be the same as God has for your spouse (or you). Learn to let go of wanting to be in control, and let God lead the way. Be diligent in prayer and in His Word. What God has planned for you and your spouse will be so much better than anything you could come up with.

3. Be patient and humble.

It's human nature to be impatient. We grow impatient when we want things to go our way, or have an expectation of something. Then the pride kicks in when things don't pan out as we hoped they would. But when we replace this

with patience and humility, we don't seek after our personal satisfaction. Instead, we seek out what is best for the ones around us, and to glorify God in our walk.

4. Embrace the differences.

My husband and I have very different interests. To name a few:

I like to crochet – his hands are too big to hold a needle without smothering it.

He likes to modify and work on cars – I'm just happy I know how to put gas in our truck.

I like to paint (canvas) – the best he can do is draw a house with crayons.

My husband is a talker; he's long winded. I'm a 4-5 word sentence kind of person.

The very things that make us so different, the things that once were the supposed cause of our problems, are the things I love the most about us now! I like that we don't have all of the same interests, because we open new worlds up to each other. It's amazing how the Lord has used these very things to draw us closer to Him and to help us grow as individuals and as a couple.

We are two halves to one whole – each of us bringing incredible uniqueness to the table. And because we strive to live out our God-designed roles, to love each other more each day, and to serve one another daily, our two halves are able to melt and mold together beautifully.

Make an effort to embrace these differences in your spouse.

DAY 22: I COULD BE WRONG

KELA NELLUMS | [Pursuing What Is Excellent](#)

“Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty (snobbish, high-minded, exclusive), but readily adjust yourself to [people, things] and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits.” Romans 12:16 (Amplified Version)

One phrase that my husband has started saying before declaring a statement as fact is, “I could be wrong, but...” This means that he recognizes that there could be room for error.

I’ve thought about this as it relates to my relationship with him.

Who doesn’t like to be wrong? There are some that will argue their point into the ground and won’t admit afterward if they’re wrong.

I don’t want to have strife in my marriage. I don’t want to HAVE to be right.

Let’s break down Romans 12:16 as it relates to marriage:

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty (snobbish, high minded, exclusive). Harmony is a movement of complementing tones. This can’t happen when there is bitterness and discord. Having to be right causes dissension. “By pride comes nothing but strife.” Prov. 13:10a (NKJV). I can envision noses in the air, fingers wagging, and an ugly scowl on the face. Don’t be that way. It makes a person mean. If you know that you’re absolutely right, do you truly want to throw it in your beloved’s face? A great way to handle it is to wait until the moment passes and come back to it, or better yet...just let it go.

Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits. No one likes a know-it-all. Yep. I said it! But isn’t it true? Leave space for your spouse to have some input. Their opinion may actually be of great value and give wonderful insight. Practice yielding the floor. Respect and honor them enough to stop and carefully listen. “...in honor giving preference to one another.” Romans 12:10b (NKJV)

I used to struggle with admitting when I was wrong and apologizing when I insisted that I was right. I’ve learned to trust that my husband wouldn’t lord it over me when I submitted my haughtiness and turned over conceit.

I’m becoming okay with saying the same thing that my husband says, “I could be wrong, but...”

I love how the Bible is so practical in instructing our daily lives and our conduct in relationships. The commandment to love one another is pretty cut and dry. There are no back doors to that.

Christ takes it a step further than just saying to love each other. Philippians 2:1-4 beautifully expresses the need for pure motives and submission.

There is joy to be gained when harmony and humility are present. Don’t give that up so easily just for the sake of having to be right.

DAY 23: A TALE OF TWO MARRIAGES SABOTAGED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Renée Gotcher | [A New Chapter](#)

“Sam” and “Susan” were friends in high school who never dated. They had friends in common but hadn’t socialized in person for many years, until Facebook brought them back together as “friends” online. Both were having marriage problems and unwisely shared hints and sometimes details of these problems on their Facebook status updates — after all, virtual friends might have some good advice. Picking up on Susan’s hints of frustration, Sam started sharing details about his marriage challenges in personal messages to her, and she began to open up about her struggles.

It was innocent at first: Christian friends helping each other talk out issues. As they commiserated online, both feeling hurt by their partners and finding comfort in someone who understood their pain, they became close. Then they started to meet in person. Not long after, they began an affair.

Two marriages sabotaged by social media. Two families broken apart in a very real way by what started out as a virtual friendship. Two friends for whom I pray to find spiritual and marital restoration through the healing power of their Savior.

Social media adds a new twist to a very old story. Adultery is nothing new: It made the Ten Commandments list, penned by God himself (Exodus 20:14). So can we really blame Facebook for what happened between these two believers? If their marriages were already on the rocks, weren’t they just as likely to cheat with a “real life” acquaintance?

Actually, I don’t blame Facebook. And [I don’t really “blame” them](#) — though I do believe they are responsible for their disobedience and will live with the consequences of their sin. I do blame the enemy, who stalks us all like a roaring lion and did his best in this case to devour them (1 Peter 5:8). Here, the enemy used a new tool to fuel the discontent and amplify the same lies that lure us away from God, away from our marriage, and into the arms of another deceived and disobedient person.

That said, I do believe social media is further blurring the boundaries of friendship between married people of the opposite sex. What is considered “safe” banter online can quickly slide into murky waters when the communication becomes too personal. Likewise, airing your marriage grievances online opens a public Pandora’s box of comments, opinions, arguments, and division that is almost impossible to rein in once exposed.

How can we as believers wisely interact on social media without opening unwanted doors or falling into temptation ourselves? Here’s my personal list of social media do’s and don’ts for married couples:

Do: Accept “friendships” online wisely, taking pause to consider the purpose of the connection.

Do you really need to know what’s going on with that friend of the opposite sex on a regular basis if you have no current reason to interact with them? Can you “friend” both members of the couple, not just your friend of the opposite sex? If you don’t know the new spouse (say you’re old college pals), why not use the opportunity to get to know them? They could be great “couple” friends for many reasons.

Don't: Use a business connection as an excuse.

If you're worried about losing touch for potential business or career reasons, can you just ask that friend for a good email address to stay in touch instead of being connected on social media? If you have a Linked In account, can you connect there? Although Linked In is structured similarly to Facebook, people are sharing professional news and comments there, not personal problems and selfies on the beach.

Do: Keep your marriage discord off the public news feed.

In fact, I believe in keeping details of my marriage challenges confidential always — offline and online. My husband and I made an agreement early on in our marriage to keep our struggles between us and God, and to seek the counsel of a pastor or professional if need be. There's really no productive reason to involve others who aren't in a position to bring you closer to God and each other, and that's the goal.

Don't: Pry into the problems of other couples.

Maybe you have friends who unwisely choose to air their own dirty laundry on social media. Don't get caught up in the drama, don't take sides, and be careful about what you say in response. My "go to" comment is that I will most certainly pray for both parties to seek the Lord for wisdom and find strength and solutions in Him alone. Point them to their Savior and pray for repentance and reconciliation — that's what they really need.

Do: Share your log-in and password information with your spouse.

This sounds so simple, but I know very few friends who even think about having access to their spouse's accounts. Why? I think we're afraid that if we ask, it means we don't trust them. So do your spouse a favor: Offer it. If he or she doesn't offer it back in return, then you probably need to have a conversation about that.

Don't: Engage in private, personal conversation about your spouse or marriage with any friend of the opposite sex.

Really, why? There's NO good reason for this. If this friend contacts you personally to share marital problems or ask for advice, point them back to their pastor and leave it at that. Let them know that you AND your spouse will be praying for them. If you have any reason to question their sincerity, don't respond at all and disconnect the friendship.

Do you have any social media do's and don'ts of your own to add to this list? Are you ready to take a serious look at your social media connections, and protect your marriage by closing the virtual doors to these potential pitfalls? Did you learn any of these lessons the hard way? If so, what has God taught you that you can share with others?

DAY 24: THE TOP 4 NEEDS OF A MAN

Rachael | [Life Outside the Shell](#)

“Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.”

I never realized how true that quote was until I got married! My husband and I got married very young, while we were both still in college, and our first few years of marriage were very rocky. By the grace of God we were able to get plugged into a great church and great ministries that spoke truth over our marriage, and God began to work miracles within us.

In those days of our struggles in marriage, we went to a marriage seminar and I heard the pastor speak about the needs of a man (and a woman). It was like someone had turned a light bulb on over my head! I remember for days after wondering, “Why is this not being shared more regularly with other married couples?!” Understanding each other and our needs a little better was the first step in turning our stale marriage around, so I want to share them with you today.

Before I share what the top 4 needs of your man are, I have to ask you to pause and pray. Pray that the Holy Spirit will gently show you any of these areas you can improve upon and fun and exciting ways to do so.

I personally have to pray that God will soften my heart towards my husband and show me any area of resentment or bitterness toward him. It is so easy to look at our spouse and how they aren't meeting our needs that we just decide to not meet theirs either. We must humble ourselves before the Lord and commit to make the changes that only we can make. The Lord opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble! (James 4:6)

1. HONOR

The number one need of a man is honor. Wow, can this one be a tough one for us ladies. I could write an entire post on honor alone, but for now I will highlight a few ways we can show him honor. Think of someone you highly respect. If I were to be around someone I admire I would speak kindly to that person, tell them how much I admire them, and be their biggest fan. That is exactly what we need to do with our husband. It is crucial to allow him to fail, treat at a high position, and look at and speak positively of him. When we honor our husband, we are honoring God as well.

I understand some of us may have a spouse who doesn't deserve this type of respect or honor. Let's do it anyway. Something supernatural is released in our marriage when we do what God ask of us. Start small by allowing him to make a decision; then, regardless of how that decision turns out, love him and cheer him on.

2. SEX

It is no surprise that sex made it's way to the top 4 needs of a man (spoiler alert: it's not in women's top 4! :)). However, I was surprised to see that it was number 2 AFTER honor. We honor our husband when we recognize his need for sex and we strive to meet this need for him.

Many things in marriage can inhibit our ability to enjoy each other freely. The enemy knows what a huge need this is in marriage and he attacks it from the moment we are joined together as one. We must ask ourselves and

our spouse these questions regularly: What doors have I left open to the enemy in this area? Is there any baggage from my past that I brought into marriage? Is there anything I need to share with my spouse about my past that needs to be brought into the light? What makes you feel loved and connected to when we make love? How are we doing in this area?

I have heard it said that your sex life is the pulse of how your marriage is doing. If you feel dead in this area take some time to ask the Holy Spirit what may be robbing your marriage of the joy that God intended. Discuss privately with your spouse and seek professional counseling if need be.

3. FUN & COMPANIONSHIP

Now this is a need I can easily get behind! :) Men have always been adventure seekers. Whether they are outdoors hunting, playing a sport or a video game, or in the garage fixing something, they LOVE adventure! What makes a man even happier is when his woman joins in on that fun!

I believe the biggest hindrance to couples having fun together is the busyness of work, life, kids, etc. For me, it helped so much to recognize that it is a NEED of my husband (not just a want) to do fun things with me. So over the years we have been creative on what that looks like for us. When we were still in school, raising babies, and on a very tight budget, our fun looked more like a Redbox movie (yes, my husband considers watching a movie together an adventure!), playing basketball together, or going for a hike. Lately we have been able to do some more adventurous things together, like scuba diving in Hawaii (yes that is us in the picture on this post) and hanging out on the Sky Deck Ledge in the Willis Tower in Chicago.

What “fun” looks like for you and your spouse will probably be very different than for us, but just find what you love and make time to do it together!

4. DOMESTICATED HOME

Last but not least, a man loves a well-kept home. This is another need that, in the beginning, made me cringe. I hated housework of any kind. If you are like me and this area doesn't come naturally for you, I have two pieces of advice.

Pray. Sounds simple, I know, but as I have prayed over this area the Lord has given me joy in cooking, cleaning, and taking care of our home.

Ask your husband what is most important to him. When our kids were babies there was just no way I could keep up with cooking and cleaning everything. So I asked my husband what the 2 most important things were to him that I did daily. For him, he loved a bed that was made and dinner on the table. I recognize that not all women stay home, so please have this conversation with your husband about the most realistic way to have a domesticated home for your schedule. It won't look the same for every household, and that is okay.

I pray that this article was an encouragement to you and that you learned something new. If you want to know the top 4 needs of a woman follow me over at Life Outside the Shell for that soon-to-come article. :)

I would love to hear from you. Do you think this is your husband's top 4 needs? If not, which ones would you add in for him? This is a general guideline for most men, but as always we must be sure to ask the Holy Spirit to show us specifics for our own man! :)

DAY 25: 5 EASY WAYS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR SPOUSE WHEN LIFE IS CRAZY

Trisha Gilkerson | IntoxicatedOnLife.com

Life can be crazy. As a work-from-home, homeschooling mom of 4 little boys, I can truly understand this. As the kids begin to get a little older, it seems like the busyness just keeps increasing.

Basketball practice.

Piano lessons.

Art classes.

Homeschool group.

Friend's birthday parties.

Play dates.

Need I go on? You get the picture.

When is there time for my husband—my most important worldly relationship? It's essential that my kids see our relationship is a priority to us, that we love and enjoy each other.

5 EASY WAYS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR SPOUSE

It can be tricky to figure out where to fit this in, but it's not impossible. All we need is a little reminder about how EASY it really is to show our spouses that they're a priority. I'm here to offer you that reminder with some practical suggestions!

1. SURPRISE THEM WITH A NOTE.

Sometimes it's nice to know that our spouse is thinking of us, even when they aren't with us. An easy way to do that is to send them a text message or email, or leave a short note scrawled on a sticky paper they'll find on their steering wheel. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate. Just a short note from the heart.

2. GET THEM SOMETHING SMALL TO LET THEM KNOW YOU'RE THINKING OF THEM.

It always makes me smile when my husband walks in with flowers or comes in carrying my favorite green tea from the local coffee shop. These aren't things that I would take the time or money to run out and grab for myself, so it means a lot when he goes out of his way to buy these little things for me. It means a lot to know he knows me!

So, what is it your spouse likes? What is something they wouldn't buy for themselves (at least not regularly)?

3. PLAN TO STEAL BRIEF MOMENTS TOGETHER.

When you have kids, I know how crazy things can be. That is why you must “plan” to steal moments together. As much of a blessing and joy as kids are, life simply isn’t as care-free with all of the activities of parenthood.

Do all of your kids have soccer practice on the same evening? Maybe a mid-week church program they go to? Are you both up early in the morning for 15 minutes before the kids wake up? Maybe you can use the electronic babysitter (ie. TV) for a 30-minute show?

Whatever it might be, no matter how brief—10 minutes, 15 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour—plan to spend these brief moments focusing on each other. Talk. Touch. Share. Has it been so long since you’ve really talked with your spouse that you’re not feeling connected? Use a couple of these 50 questions for some good heart-to-heart time.

4. BRIGHTEN THEIR DAY WITH WORDS.

If you find you can’t even find 15 minutes together that you can schedule, you can at least find 1 or 2 minutes to pull them aside, tell them you love them, and tell them one or two things you appreciate about them. It’s not hard, but it takes thoughtfulness. They will appreciate hearing these words from you.

5. CONNECT WITH YOUR HANDS.

Think about when you were dating. You probably held hands a lot, put your hands around each other’s waists, touched each other’s faces, and ran your fingers through each other’s hair. The power of physical touch to connect you to your spouse is powerful.

When life gets busy, it’s easy to go days without connecting physically. (PS: It’s also important to spend plenty of time connecting physically even when you’re not in the bedroom.) Check yourself. Do some of those things you looked forward to with anticipation when you were dating, like putting your arm around your spouse. Don’t forget massage—it can be a great way to connect and make your spouse feel loved and pampered.

I challenge you to make it a priority to connect with your spouse each day this week using these techniques. You don’t have to use all of them in one day. Be intentional to nurture your relationship.

HOW DO YOU SHOW YOUR SPOUSE THEY’RE A PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE? HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE?

DAY 26: THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY DIVORCE

LaToya Edwards | LaToyaEdwards.net

When I got married I never imagined that I would find myself divorced with two boys to take care of on my own. I don't like to forgive. I can hold a grudge like my life depends on it. It was probably the hardest thing for me to do when my marriage fell apart and I went through my divorce.

I didn't want to forgive. I felt like I was justified in my anger and bitterness. He'd hurt me, left our boys without a father, and never apologized! He didn't deserve my forgiveness. and I wasn't going to offer it anytime soon.

I don't know where you are in your marriage. But I do know that forgiveness is something that we all struggle with. We are people that tend to focus on ourselves only, and that often causes us to hurt others. I learned the hard way that we have to forgive people, especially when they don't deserve it. It's exactly what God did for us when He sent Jesus to the cross.

There are some really big reasons that forgiveness is important:

Forgiveness is required for healing: The only way that I was able to fully heal from the pain of my divorce was to forgive my ex for all the hurt he caused me. This is important for any relationship. Anytime there is hurt you must forgive before you can start to heal and move forward.

Setting a godly example for your children: No matter what happened in my marriage, my ex is the father of my children. There's nothing I can do to change that. If my children are going to learn to respect and forgive their father for the hurt in their lives, I have to be the one to set the example.

Future relationships: I hope that one day I am able to marry a man that loves God, my children, and me. I realized that if I am ever going to have a successful marriage in the future, I have to work through forgiving the hurts from my first marriage. You don't want to bring a ton of baggage from one relationship to the next, and trust me, bitterness is quite heavy!

I know that it can be hard to forgive when someone hurts you, but do it anyway. Even if it's hard and messy, and you can't stand the sight of that person. You will be much better off in the end if you choose forgiveness. Every single time you think of something that hurt you, forgive. When you hold your crying child because a promise was broken, forgive.

Forgiveness is a choice. As long as you are focusing on the wrong that someone has done to you, there's no way to move forward or heal. You must make up your mind to forgive no matter what is going on. If that means that you have to forgive 200 times a day, then commit to that.

DAY 27: ON DAYS LIKE THIS

Melinda Martin | HymnArt.com

12:45 a.m. — Hubby enters the bedroom to come to bed. I was awake for some reason, although I had been asleep. I think I had gotten up to turn the lights off, because I had fallen asleep unintentionally. I watch him for a minute, fidgeting with items on his nightstand. His face is far from relaxed. His body is tense. His movements are not fluid.

Me: Are you okay?

Hubby: mumbles something I can't hear

Me: Are you okay?

Hubby: Anxious. I'm anxious.

Me: I know, sweetie. I'm sorry.

I nestle in next to him, trying to provide a comfort that only a loving spouse can. The warmth and heaviness of a loving spouse can do more than any words.

Why was he anxious? Because, for whatever reason, he has been chosen to be a chaplain at the executions in our state's prison system each month. It is never easy. The burden is always great. Yes, crimes are committed, and the due must be paid. But it is always hard for my husband and for the many others that are involved: The person that will be stepping into that eternal threshold today, the warden, the officers that have to physically place the offender in the chamber, the doctor that has to confirm the death, the families of both parties, and others that I don't even know about.

7:00 a.m. — He sits drinking coffee in the quiet of the kitchen, playing with Sweet Gigi's spirograph, letting his mind gather itself, designing multi-colored hypotrochoids, claiming a bit of peace before the day is officially begun.

This is my husband, and I love him so much.

These are not the days that I choose to talk about bills or water leaks or disobedient children. These are days where I choose to be silent, knowing that he is internally processing the day's events, wanting to keep me safe from any bad thing. He knows that my mind is prone to wander and assign faces and feelings and deep, deep emotion to an event that I wasn't even present for. But he looks out for me. He guards my mind, my heart. Ever the protector.

Which is why days like these devastate him. He can provide no physical protection for the day's events that must be played out. He is utterly powerless to stop them. He weeps for these lost men and women. He shows himself strong and loving to their families. He shows himself capable to the State.

What do I do for him in return?

This is an objective question. It's not a test. It's reflection time for me. Walk with me.

What do I do for him? Do I really do enough? Can a spouse ever really do enough on days like this? I feel so inadequate. He has watched someone cross over into eternity because of terrible crimes that they chose to commit. I have been in the comfort and peace of my home all day. There is no comparison. As the great poet Robert Frost penned in “Home Burial”:

The nearest friends can go
With anyone to death, comes so far short
They might as well not try to go at all.

He is never hungry when he comes home, so I don't prepare dinner. I do try to make sure that there is sweet tea for him to drink if he wants any. Sometimes.

There has never been a more loved superhero than this man is to our children. They wait impatiently for him to come home every day. Gigi demands a “fly hug” daily. This entails her launching off of the bed or couch and into his arms. He always catches her. There is no doubt in her mind.

Our man-child rushes in with a hug of his own, seeking the love and affirmation that every 12-year-old boy longs for from his dad. He is never turned away.

I normally stand back and allow the children to soak up his love. I hug him from across the room with my eyes, with my concerned smile, wondering at how he fared in the battle against the raging demons today. They never sleep. Their walk is incessant and with purpose.

But I have preempted the children on days like this. They know what their father has had to open himself up to. They have been given the time for hugs and then they are to go to their rooms and let him finally become undone in the quiet comfort of my presence.

I don't necessarily clean the house. He is not interested in that so much. I don't primp and preen in front of the mirror. I am beautiful to him in all of my many states of crazed or combed hair.

In the dark, crazed hair is not a concern.

In the dark, I welcome him into my arms.

In the dark, I share that most intimate bond with my husband.

On days like this, it is not a physical need.

On days like this, it is the deepest of emotional bonding that is needed. My body is a safety net for him. I catch him when he is on the brink of falling. I restore him. I bring his mind back into focus.

On days like this, my love and my silence are what's needed most. Although my thoughts spin and collide, expand and contract, days like this are not when I need to satisfy that burning desire to talk, to ramble.

Days like this require me to put my husband's emotional needs first.

I know that my husband's job is not normal, but I want to encourage you to get to a place in your marriage where you can just be quiet. If you have children, teach them that sometimes Daddy needs to have time to adapt to coming home. Allow him time when he comes home to shed the worries of the day before you heap any more on him. Allow him to find in you what the world can't give him.

Be his safe place.

DAY 28: WHEN BEING SELFISH IN MARRIAGE IS A GOOD THING

Amy Schuff | AmySchuff.com

As I'm writing this article, sitting in Starbucks, drinking my Venti Americano and listening to awful jazz music playing overhead, I have officially been married 14 years, 2 months, 3 days, 2 hours and 42 minutes. I'm just a couple years away from having been married almost half my life. I certainly have loved my husband for more years than I haven't.

Don't get me wrong. I don't think that makes me an expert on marriage, but I sure do think it is a wonderful testimony to God's great grace and love. I'm committed, probably obsessed, with making my marriage succeed. Not a day goes by that I don't truly feel thankful for that man who stole my heart all those 14 years ago.

Very early on we learned the most important thing when it comes to keeping a marriage successful. We learned the one word that we must keep close to our hearts. If we abide by this rule, we will see love abound in spades for our whole lives. It didn't take long to learn, and I am so thankful we learned it early. I'm here to challenge you and your marriage with this one amazing concept. Are you ready for it? It truly is mind blowing...brace yourself...

Unselfishness.

I want you to read that word, say it aloud, and think on it. Unselfishness.

The definition of being selfish is: Lacking consideration for others; concerned chiefly with one's own personal profit or pleasure.

If that is selfishness...then unselfishness is this: Consumed with consideration for others, concerned chiefly with the personal profit or pleasure of others.

So in the context of marriage, an unselfish spouse is one that is consumed with consideration for her husband; she is concerned chiefly with his personal profit or pleasure.

Wow...say what?? Concerned with his personal profit and pleasure? What decade do we live in??

We live in the here and now, the decades where husbands and wives don't even look at each other, let alone concern themselves with the needs and wants of the other person.

A marriage thrives when both partners are moving in unselfishness, and when the balance is off, that is when dissension comes. But if we have two people, committed to Jesus Christ and each other, that is when compromise abounds and offenses don't become grudges.

Instead of being selfish toward our spouse, let's be selfish FOR our spouse.

1. Esteem your marriage above your parenthood.

This means put the kids to bed early and connect with each other while there are no distractions. Teach your children that while Mom and Dad are talking they must wait (even a 2 year old can learn this!). Shut the door to your room and make your bedroom a sanctuary. Remember, these children will move away and make their own families. So guard your time together to avoid having to “re-learn” each other when the children move out.

2. Allow your spouse to have regular times away for refreshing.

This doesn't mean you both have permission to skip out on your family, necessary chores, or doing life with each other. But instead, listen to the heart of your spouse and sense when they may need a quick time away. In an unselfish marriage this works both ways.

3. Get away with your spouse.

I promise you, there is someone close by who would love to take care of your children for a few days, overnight, or just a couple hours. Ask.

4. Rejoice in each other's accomplishments!

When one spouse succeeds, the other one does. Find reasons to “celebrate” any and all happy occasions. Spouses who celebrate together, thrive together.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 says (Message version):

“Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always “me first,”
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.”

God knew we would have rocky times, so He gave us those words of encouragement. Jesus is your #1 fan! He is cheering you on in your marriage and has sent the Holy Spirit to be your comforter. We can take notes from the most amazing act of unselfishness ever lived out...when God sent His only Son to die on the cross for our selfish selves.

DAY 29: A PRAYER FOR MARRIAGE

Carlie Kercheval | ManagingYourBlessings.com

The power of prayer is undeniable for those who have the faith to believe what they are asking God for. I am thankful to have learned the truth of Matthew 18:19 early on in my walk with Jesus:

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

My husband and I first met at a campus Bible study during our undergraduate studies in 1998. The first time we actually spoke to one another was during a prayer at the end of the Bible study. So our relationship was literally founded upon prayer, and prayer continues to be a major part of our marriage 14 years later. Prayer has been the glue that has held our marriage together through many ups and downs, and we are so grateful for this powerful tool that God has given us to use in spiritual warfare. It is my honor today to share a prayer for marriage with all of you. Please join me in praying for the holy covenant of marriage. Let's encourage one another to continue to pray for marriages every day!

A PRAYER FOR MARRIAGE

I come to you today on behalf of your holy institution of marriage, on behalf of all those who are currently married and will be married in the future. I pray right now, in the precious name of Jesus, that you will clothe your people who have taken your marriage covenant with our divine protection. Protection from harm. Protection from the evil one. Protection from the spirit of lust and greed. I pray, God, that you will give your people the strength to walk in your strength so their weakness can be made perfect. I pray for broken marriages, Lord, that your healing virtue would rest upon them and heal each spouse from the inside out. I pray for restoration in seemingly impossible marriage situations. I pray for divine protection of spouses who protect and serve our country in the various armed forces and civil servant position in our land. I pray for your conviction power and love to break down barriers in the hearts of those walking out your marriage covenant so that they can go deeper with you and their spouse. I pray for physical intimacy to be restored and renewed within Christian marriages so that desires will be met in the marriage bed, not outside of it. I pray for self-control for those married who lack it - particularly in the areas of substance abuse. I pray right now to claim victory for the Christian covenant of marriage - that your holy people will be restored to walk uprightly and to honor you and their marriage covenant on a daily basis. I pray for your people, Lord, that you will bless us with your humility, grace, love, and peace. We need you, Lord, show us how to love our spouse in the way you have intended.

If you are looking for some inspiration or help getting started praying for your marriage, I wrote the following prayer for you. If you have a heart to pray for marriages and aren't sure where to begin, I wrote the following prayer for you. If you are married or will be married, I wrote this prayer for you. You can download your free printable version of this prayer simply by clicking [here](#).

XOXO, CARLIE K.

DAY 30: BEING GROUNDED IN CHRIST FOR A STRONGER MARRIAGE

Crystal Brothers | ServingJoyfully.com

I believe there is only one secret to a fulfilling marriage, and it is the same as that of a fulfilling life: A FOUNDATION BUILT ON JESUS CHRIST.

A marriage doesn't have to be made up of the smartest, prettiest (or most handsome), or most talented people. There doesn't have to be a lot of money or material things.

The real secret to marriage is something that can't be bought. Something that can't be earned.

Grace.

Walking hand in hand with Jesus Christ and living a life filled with the Holy Spirit.

As I was praying about what to write for my marriage post, the Lord kept whispering this to my spirit—foundation, foundation, foundation. He led me specifically to the verses in Matthew 7:24-27:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

And I thought, “That's great, Lord, but it's not about marriage.”

But it is about marriage. Or at least, it applies to marriage.

Marriages that are built on beauty, finances, jobs, even common interests...they can all be like that house built on the sand. Because all that stuff just washes away. It fades; it changes. But a marriage that is truly built on Jesus Christ is going to stand the test of time. It will stand strong despite the storms that come.

Too many marriages these days fall with a great crash. And it is so heartbreaking.

But it doesn't have to be that way. I have seen marriages stand the test of time. I've seen them be joyful, even when they went through dire circumstances, even when they seemed to have nothing in common. It's not some [fairy tale idea of love or romance](#) that holds couples together through decades of marriage. It's the kind of love and commitment that we see in Jesus Christ and how He laid down His life for His bride (the church). It's a daily choice.

As I was thinking about this post, I was thinking about the kinds of things that are important in marriage. The Lord led me to a verse that sums up many of the things we need to be successful in our marriage relationships. Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control.

You might recognize these traits as being the fruits of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22-23. I've read this verse a hundred times. I've memorized it and thought about how it applies to my life. But it also applies to my marriage. As I went through that list thinking about marriage, it made so much sense. Every single one of those traits is absolutely vital to a thriving marriage.

And it comes from Him. We can put on a good show, but we can't truly possess these qualities for the long haul apart from Him. The closer we get to Jesus, the more time we spend in the presence of the Lord, the more we are filled with His Spirit. And then we can live out these things in our lives and in our marriages.

Yes, we should focus on being intentional in our marriages ([I wrote a book about it!](#)), go on dates, spend time together, etc. But the number one thing we can do for our marriages isn't even about marriage at all. It's the same thing that we can do for everything else in our lives—focus on Jesus. It seems so simple, but it's so true.

DAY 31: HOW TO PLAN A WEEKLY DATE NIGHT {AT HOME}

Megan S. | DevotionalFamily.com

It's the end of a long week (or perhaps the beginning of an even longer week ahead), the to-do lists are long, exhaustion is creeping in, and you can't remember the last time you and your spouse went out on a date. It weighs heavy on your heart and mind. There's a long list of reasons why dating your spouse feels so out of reach, but still... you allow yourself to daydream a bit of what it might be like to enjoy some one-on-one time with the one who holds your heart.

Maybe it's been so long since you dated your spouse that you can't even remember what that was like. Or could it be you've given up hope because it just never works out? It's easy to do, but so very destructive for a marriage.

What prevents you from having a special date night with your spouse?

Some may feel guilty or sad about leaving their babies, while others struggle to make the time because of kids' sports scheduling conflicts or work-related demands. Often, it's hard to find a sitter you can trust to watch your kids. And if you do, it's not always easy to afford to pay for one PLUS go out and enjoy a nice date. Sometimes being away from your kids, if you're not used to it, can cause worry, too.

For us, over the years, we've struggled with many of these reasons, and more. But whatever your reasons, know this...there is always hope. God's very best for us does include intentional, planned time alone with our spouses. We need this consistent time where we can reconnect with one another, rejuvenate together, recommit to each other, and rejoice over all God has done and will do in our lives. We need to dream and problem-solve together and remember our humble beginnings. And we need to fight for the marriages we have, because our enemy has an entirely different plan to divide, steal, and conquer those who have become complacent and passive in their vows.

So, let's think outside of the date-night box for a moment.

What if there was an easy way to have a well-thought-out and planned date with your other half, every single week? And what if you didn't need to worry about a sitter or a large outpouring of money? And if you could actually teach your children about the importance of parents spending time alone together in the process, would that sound doable? And might it even fill your heart up with some much-needed hope?

I know it did for us.

HOW TO PLAN WEEKLY DATE NIGHTS {AT HOME}

It's so simple. Pick one consistent night each week as "Mom and Dad's Date Night at Home." Making it a consistent night that you write on the calendar each week creates an expectation for the kids and accountability to stick to the plan for you.

Then, begin talking with your children about the importance of spending quality, focused, uninterrupted time together. Remind them that God created marriage and that in order to protect it and continue to grow in your relationship with one another, Mom and Dad need to actually spend time alone together. You can even take turns planning your special night and get the kids involved in the planning.

(Hint: Discussing your upcoming plans a few times throughout the week with your spouse through texts or phone conversations, etc., is a great way to build excitement and anticipation for the evening!)

Once you've decided on which night to plan your date for, be sure to do everything you can to get your kids to bed on time. We chose Sundays because then we can spend the whole day together as a family, staying active and enjoying the day. [Keeping this time focused on Family Faith-Building is top priority.](#)

And finally, we sit down for dinner together, but the two of us just eat a light snack to tide us over. We make sure our children are worn out by bedtime so they go to bed without issues, and once lights are out, Date Night begins. We remind our children of this and they've learned to really respect this time we plan for ourselves.

WHAT TO DO ON YOUR DATE AT HOME

The possibilities are endless! But here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Order take-out just as your kids are going to bed. Then one of you can run to get it while the other is settling the kids into bed.
- Talk about your dreams and set some realistic goals while sharing your favorite dessert together.
- After enjoying some uninterrupted conversation, snuggle up together for an already-decided-upon movie.

If you're needing some more creative ideas for your at home date nights, be sure to head over to our Family Resource Page over at DevotionalFamily.com.