

Scripture: Proverbs 3:13-18

Memory verse: Proverbs 18:22 *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.*

Most fairy tales end with the sentence, “And they lived happily ever after.” That is a nice story line, but reality doesn’t always work out that way. Statistics tell us that 35% of marriages end in divorce.

That number is actually down from a 50% divorce rate in the 1960’s & 1970’s. Unfortunately, that improving rate is not because we are getting better at marriage. It is the result of a number of factors:

- More couples are choosing to live together without the commitment of marriage.
- Fewer women feel a need to have a man to fulfill their life.
- Many couples are waiting till later in life to get married, thus improving their chances of choosing & being the right person as they mature.
- There is a greater acceptance of single-parent households.

The reality is that getting married or just living together does not guarantee a fairy tale ending. Many couples don’t divorce but neither are they happy in their marriage. No couple gets married wanting to end up divorced or to be miserable! How can you make sure that you are not a statistic? What steps can you take to help bring a happy ending to your story?

The most interesting statistic regarding divorce is that the more educated you are the less likely you will be to get a divorce. I don’t think this means that you have to go out and get a college degree to stay married, but you do need to keep learning how to have a good marriage. Take classes on marriage whenever you can. Read (or listen to) at least two or three books on marriage or the family a year together or separately. Study and memorize passages in the Bible about marriage. Become an expert on marriage, especially your marriage! This is one class where doing your homework can be fun!

Meditation for the day: The best way to live “Happily Ever After” in marriage is to do your best to make your spouse happy.

Assignment: Choose a book to read (or listen to) together or choose two separate books to read with a highlighter and pen and exchange them after reading them.

Just for Fun: Each of you find a fun or challenging quote on marriage. Print it out and post it somewhere in your house.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-33

Memory Verse: Proverbs 5:18 Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth.

One of the main reasons given for divorce is, *"She (he) doesn't make me happy any more."* Most of us get married because we want someone to make us happy. The greater goal is to do all I can to make my spouse happy. I want my wife to be happy she is married to me no matter what happens in our lives.

Happiness is overrated! God cares less about us being happy and more about having joy in our lives. The word happy is used 30 times in the Bible, but joy is mentioned 462 times! Happiness is based upon what happens to us and the problem is that life does happen. Ecclesiastes 9:11 *"I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all."* When life happens we can find joy in God and in one another even if there is no joy in our circumstances.

Proverbs 5:18 tells us to *"Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth."* I am not young anymore and neither is my wife, but we have learned how to rejoice together even when we are not happy or when life happens to us. Be thankful for the happy times in life, they are few and far between. Rejoice that God has given you someone to love and that they have committed themselves to love you no matter what happens. Learn to share the joys of marriage together and you will find that you are happier in your marriage.

Meditation for the day: What have you done to bring joy into your marriage? What can you do that will make your spouse happy today?

Assignment: Make a list of five things that you do that makes your spouse happy and three things that make them unhappy. Review the list with your spouse and talk about how you can do better.

Just for Fun: Remember back to your early years together. What were some of the happiest times you had together? Why did they make you happy and can you recreate what happened?

Scripture: Acts 26:1-3

Memory Verse: Proverbs 11:27 He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour: but he that seeketh mischief, it shall come unto him.

I listened to her sad story. It is one that I have heard before. Sometimes from the wife and other times from the husband. Her husband was leaving her. He said he was done and there was no chance for reconciliation. No, it was not for another woman. He loved his wife. He always had and he still does. He has just come to the point where he believes that he can never please her; never make her happy.

The sad truth is he was probably right. Nothing he did was good enough. She was a perfectionist. If it wasn't what she wanted, when she wanted, and how she wanted then she didn't want it. She was also very insecure and would read ulterior motives into everything he said or did. He quit saying anything and he stopped doing anything for her and that made her unhappy. If he tried, she wasn't happy. If he didn't try, she wasn't happy. No wonder he decided the only thing that would make him happy was to leave her!

He told me he was tired of trying to make her happy and he knew he never would, so why try anymore. He was done and he hoped she would find someone who would make her happy. Unfortunately she could not understand what the problem was and he did leave her. Neither one of them are happy today.

In our Scripture text today Paul tells the king that he "thinks himself happy". This is not about the power of positive thinking. This is about Paul choosing to be happy despite his circumstances. He was in jail, had been beaten, and was on trial for his life and yet he chose happiness!

I don't know the circumstances of your marriage. I do know that your spouse is not perfect, but neither are you. If you are waiting for perfection you will never be happy. Appreciate the effort that your spouse is making. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Look for the good instead of the bad and you will be surprised at how much happier you are.

Meditation for the day: Are you constantly looking for fault, finding the bad, and assuming the worst in others, especially your spouse and children?

Assignment: List five things that your spouse does that make you happy and how you can show your appreciation for them.

Just for fun: Your spouse sighs and whispers: "Do it again!" What created that response? Do it again!!!

Scripture: Romans 8:31-39

Memory verse: Psalm 106:1 Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is* good: for his mercy *endureth* for ever.

In 2015 the city of Paris had to remove 45 tons of locks from the Pont des Arts Bridge. These locks had been attached to the bridge by romantic couples as a symbol of their enduring love. The lovers would etch their initials into the lock, attach the lock to the rail, and then cast the key into the River Seine.

Although Paris is known as the City of Love, they had to remove the thousands of locks out of fear for the integrity of the bridge. The Pont des Arts Bridge was not physically capable of handling the extra weight of all of that love!

Some marriages are facing the same problem. Perhaps you are struggling with the weight of your relationship. The locks were meant to symbolize everlasting love, but human love does not always last. We struggle with all of the weights that come with every relationship and sometimes it just becomes too much for us to handle.

This is why we need to lock in the love of God into our lives and our marriage. He can handle the weight of all of our problems and all of the challenges that we face together as a couple. The real key to loving each other is locking in the love of God into our relationship. Almost every verse in the Bible that speaks about marriage includes a phrase like “in the Lord”, “of the Lord”, or “as the Lord”, because it is only through the power of His love that we can learn to love each other.

It is good to have symbols of our love like a lock on a bridge, but many of those locks represent couples who have long since broken up and gone their separate ways. If you want your love to last learn to love each other with the everlasting, enduring love of God.

Meditation for the day: Think about the sacrificial, giving, and serving love of Christ and how you can show that same kind of love towards your spouse.

Assignment: List three ways you can express your enduring love for your spouse and then look for opportunities to put them into practice.

Just for Fun: Buy an inexpensive lock. Etch your initials on the lock and decide on a place that you can put it to symbolize your enduring love. Keep the key in a special place as a reminder of that love.

Scripture: James 1:22-25

Memory verse: Proverbs 27:19 As in water face *answereth* to face, so the heart of man to man.

Every morning when I wake up I walk into our bathroom to get ready for the day. Even though I try to avoid it I see myself in the mirror in all of my “morning glory” and I know that there is a lot of work ahead before I am ready to be seen by the world. I take my shower, brush my teeth, and put on my deodorant. I can do all of that without looking into the mirror again. However, I need to get up close and personal if I am going to fix my hair (what little I have) and shave my morning stubble. Looking in the mirror is essential to preparing myself for the day ahead.

There are two other mirrors that I need to look into every day. The first is the mirror of God’s Word. That’s what James is describing in our text for the day. I need to look into the Bible to see what I really look like in the light of God’s glory and then I need to get up close and personal to take care of the things that God has shown me. This is why having daily devotions are so important. We need to comb our hair and shave every day. Ladies put on their make-up each day. We need to be in God’s Word every day as well

One other mirror that helps me prepare for my day is the reflection that I see in my wife’s face. When I look in her eyes does she see the reflection of God’s love shining back at her? Can she sense the depth of my joy in the Lord and being married to her? Does she see in your eyes how beautiful she is to you both inside and out? Does your husband perceive the deep respect that you have for Him as the God-appointed head of your home? Can he feel in your gaze your desire for him and his physical touch?

Mirrors are everywhere. The average person looks in a mirror eight times a day. That doesn’t count the many glances at our reflection in store windows and other places. How many times do you look deep into your spouses eyes to see what is being reflected back to you. Those can be the most revealing reflections of our true selves.

Meditation for the day: Does your life, especially your face reflect the love of God to those around you.

Assignment: Take a few moments every day to look into each other’s eyes and share your love for God and each other.

Just for fun: Spend five minutes sitting across from one another, cover your mouth and then try to guess the emotion your spouse is expressing just from their eyes.

Scripture: Malachi 2:13-16

Memory Verse: Romans 12:18

Shortly after we got married my wife and I had a fight. We had had arguments and disagreements before, but I think this was our first actual fight, and it was over burnt toast! I know it is hard to believe, but we did not get a toaster for a wedding gift. I wanted toast but she said she couldn't make it without a toaster. I said my mom did (something I have learned since that you don't say to your wife!). She used to cook toast over a burner on the stove, so Diane tried it.

She burnt the toast. It wasn't really that bad, but it was black around the edges so I told her I didn't want it. That was too much for this young bride. She went to all of the trouble to make it and we certainly couldn't afford to waste food. She was upset. I insisted I couldn't eat a burnt offering and she insisted that I was insensitive and uncaring. At that point I left for work and forgot all about the argument. She stayed home, eating the burnt toast, and continued the argument without me.

Since I wasn't there, she just filled in the blanks for me and I learned later that I didn't say very nice things! About halfway through the morning she decided that she had heard enough and that she would just leave me and get a divorce. Who would want to live with an insensitive brute like me anyway! A little later in the day God began to convict her and reminded her that divorce was not an option for a Christian. Later that afternoon, I came home from work oblivious of all the mean things I had said. When I walked in the door she immediately confronted me and said that "She had decided not to divorce me, she was going to stay with me and make me suffer!" I am glad that is one promise she hasn't kept!

The promise she has kept is to stay with me through better or worse. I was bad that day (I still don't eat burnt toast but I am nicer about it now) and I have been worse, but God does not give any "small print" exception clauses to the marriage vows. I am sure each of you have your own stories about your own fights. Our text today reminds us that God "hateth putting away" (divorce). Take the "D" word out of your vocabulary. Make a commitment to stay with each other and if you are going to stay with each other commit to making each other suffer!

Meditation: Are you 100% committed to your relationship with your spouse? Do your words and attitude show that commitment?

Assignment: Review your vows with your spouse. Talk about what they mean and renew your commitment to one another.

Just for fun: Get out your wedding pictures and choose one to post on social media or share with your friends.

Scripture: Genesis 2:18-25

Memory Verse: Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

I wonder what it must have been like for Adam to wake up and see Eve for the first time. I think that the reason he called her woman is because his first reaction was wow-man, she is beautiful. He had never seen anything like her before and there she stood before him in all of her naked glory. The Bible tells us that Adam & Eve did not realize that they were naked until after they fell into sin, but that doesn't mean he didn't notice her body and appreciate it.

One of the worst things about modern societies obsession with pornography is that we have taken away the secretness and sacredness of the marriage bed. There was a time that a man never saw a woman naked except for his wife or vice-versa. One of the special gifts of your honeymoon is seeing your spouse's naked body for the first time. Unfortunately, very few couples get to enjoy that blessing in its fullness today. Pornography and immorality have stolen away something beautiful and special from us.

The "secret places" (Jeremiah 49:10) of the body are not to be exposed in public, but are reserved for the sanctity of the marriage relationship alone. Proverbs 5:14-21 clearly teaches that a woman's breasts are for her husband's pleasure only and not to be "dispersed abroad" for every stranger to see. Exodus 28:2 & Isaiah 47:2-3 admonishes us that exposing the "thighs" & "loins" in public is a shame. Reserve and protect your body for your spouse's enjoyment alone.

It is important to protect your mind and heart in this area as well. Job said, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1) Looking at someone of the opposite sex is only stealing something special away from you. The more you indulge yourself, the less satisfied you will be. Make a covenant with your eyes to look only at your spouse and not another.

God never intended for a husband or wife to be ashamed of their nakedness in front of each other. Adam & Eve were perfect in their creation, but God has made you perfect for each other as well. Enjoy what God has created for you!

Meditation: Have you thanked God for creating your spouse for you to enjoy in every way?

Assignment: Talk about your bodies and what you enjoy about each other and why.

Just for fun: Give your spouse a personal tour of your body. Let them explore and ask questions.

Memory Verse: Proverbs 18:24 A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that* sticketh closer than a brother.

We had a couple leave the church because they didn't have any friends. It was "obvious" to them that Ohana was not a friendly church! That is not a complaint that we get too often so I tried to dig a little deeper. This couple showed up for services late and were the first ones out the door each Sunday. They never came to fellowships or activities & never went to the NEX food court after church, although they had been invited numerous times. At least two couples had invited them to come to their house and they had never invited anyone to their house. No wonder Ohana was so "unfriendly"!

Every couple needs friends, but to have friends you must show yourself friendly. I believe that one of the keys to a good marriage is to have good friends. This rarely happens on it's own naturally. Friendships have to be sought after, nurtured, and developed. There are three different words for friend in Proverbs 18:24:

"Friends" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "companion, associate, neighbor". The root word means "flock or herd". We might call it "your posse or your homies" in today's vernacular. This is the people that are around you and that you associate with. If you want friends you have to get out and around people. You cannot isolate yourself. If you want the right kind of friends then associate with the right kind of people.

"Friendly" means "spoiled, good for nothing". A lot of us have "Good for nothing friends", but that is not what this means. You should be friendly, expecting nothing in return. The unsaved can love someone if they know that they will get something in return. It takes a godly Christian to show love and friendship expecting nothing back. Read Luke 6:32-35.

The last term "friend" in Proverbs 18:24 means, "to have affection for someone" (Romans 12:9-10). This is when you care more about the other person than yourself (I Thessalonians 2:8). It is the kind of friendship that Jonathan had for David. He was willing to give up everything for David in order to strengthen him in the Lord. Friendship is about giving, not just taking.

Meditation: What does it take to be a true friend? How can you be a better friend individually and as a couple?

Assignment: Pick out three couples that you are going to make friends with. How can you reach out to them and get to know them? Start working at it this week.

Just for Fun: Set up a friend date. Have someone over, go out together, do something fun together with another couple.

Memory Verse: Song of Solomon 5:16 His mouth *is* most sweet: yea, he *is* altogether lovely. This *is* my beloved, and this *is* my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

In this passage Solomon's wife boasts about why her beloved is the best. In the following verses she describes him and extolls his physical attributes (Solomon does the same about her in chapter 7:1-8). It is always good for you to brag about your spouse both to them and about them. My wife has a list of positive characteristics about me posted on our bedroom mirror (75 at last count!)

Your husband may not have bushy, black hair anymore or have a belly like "bright ivory overlaid with sapphires", but there are still many endearing qualities that he has that you can praise. Make sure your spouse knows what you love about them. Take time to praise them publically & privately.

The most important statement she makes in this entire passage is that "this is my friend". Do you consider your spouse your best friend? As we learned in yesterday's devotion; friendship doesn't just happen, it must be cultivated. How can you cultivate a better friendship with your spouse? Here are some steps that you can take:

1. **Assign top priority to your friendship.** Nothing gets in the way of our doing what is most important to us. If you really want to be friends with your spouse, make time for it. It will be time well spent. One of the hindrances to spending time with your spouse may be your kids. They demand time, but remember that you were *husband and wife* before you were *dad and mom*. Make each other the priority of the family. Make time to be friends.
2. **Cultivate transparency in your relationship.** Honesty, with your self and each other, makes you a better friend. First, honor God who made you the person you are. Discover the freedom that comes with being who you are. Risk being your real self with your spouse and let them be their real selves without fear of judgment and rejection.
3. **Share interests.** Show an interest in what is important to your spouse. Listen to them when they talk about their day. Ask questions about how their projects at work or home are coming along. Learn what they enjoy, whether it is sports, shopping, a hobby, or an activity. Learn more about the topic and be willing to spend time with them when they are doing it even if it doesn't interest you in the same way.
4. **Laugh together:** When is the last time you had fun together. Couples who laugh together, stay together. Find things that you can do together that are fun. Get out of the house and enjoy yourselves. Cultivate relationships with people who know how to have fun. Live every moment! Laugh every day! Love beyond words!

Meditation: Meditate on what it is that makes your spouse special and what you love about him or her specifically.

Assignment: Make a list of your spouses positive qualities and post it somewhere as a reminder to you and encouragement to them.

Just for Fun: Using Song of Solomon 5 & 7 as a guide, describe your spouse with similar flowery words.

Memory Verse: Proverbs 31:28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.

Most women are not satisfied with their body. They either feel that they are too fat or too skinny. They see their breasts as too small or their tummy as too big. They wish they had different color hair or eyes, or a different shape of their mouth. There are multiple things that they would change about themselves if they could, and they do try through makeup, hairstyles, and clothes or jewelry.

Men don't always like the way they look but they just don't care about it as much as women do, at least not enough to do something about it. A woman looks in the mirror and sees her imperfections. A man looks in the mirror and sees the reflection of what he wants to be, not what he is. Different problems, but the same solution! Compliments!

One of the greatest beauty enhancers is confidence. A woman who is confident that she is loved and desired in her husband's eyes will be more beautiful. Your wife does not need you to tell her what is wrong with her; her mind criticizes her daily without any help from you. She needs you to tell her what satisfies you and what you like. You don't have to use flowery, poetic language like Solomon did with his wife in Song of Solomon, but you do need to follow his example of constant praise for his wife!

Ladies, criticizing your husbands weight, looks, or habits is not going to make him want to change and be better. Men do not respond well to criticism, but we are motivated by ego! Build him up, praise him for the things you like about him, encourage him when he takes positive steps. Talking about how strong he is and how you admire his muscles is going to motivate him more to work out than criticizing him will ever accomplish.

I Peter 4:8 says that love "shall cover the multitude of sins." The word cover means to "hide or to veil". Learn to focus on the good things about your spouse and cover over (don't focus on) the areas that fall short. Stop the criticism, both outright and not so subtle hints. Be vocal in your praise for your spouse. Be specific in telling them what you like. Don't just say, "I like your hair", be descriptive "Your hair is so smooth and silky" or "I love the feel of your hair in my fingers." For the ladies, squeeze his muscles and tell him how protected and safe you feel in his arms. Learn the principle of praise and it will transform your marriage!

By the way – Do not limit your praise to the physical qualities of your spouse. Praise her inner beauty as well. Talk about the qualities that draw you to them and what you admire about them.

Meditation: Spend the day thinking about the positive qualities of your spouse and determine how you can better communicate your praise to them.

Assignment: Continue to work on the list of your spouse's positive qualities and share them with your spouse.

Just for Fun: Read Song of Solomon chapter 7. Make up your own "flowery" compliments to each other.

Memory Verse: Ephesians 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Most men are not very good at memorizing Bible verses. This is unfortunate, because one of our best ways to defeat temptation is through memorizing the Word of God. Psalm 199:11 says “Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” There are however 3 or 4 verses that many Christian men have memorized. The first is John 3:16 just by the fact that we have heard it so often. The second is John 11:35 “Jesus wept.” because it is the shortest verse in the Bible. The third one is Ephesians 5:22 “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”

That is a good verse to memorize as long as you memorize verses 21 & 25 along with it, “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God... Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” It is clear in verses 22-24 that the man is the head of the home and the woman is to follow his leadership. It is just as clear that the husband is to submit to the needs of his wife and the wife of the husband.

The message of these verses is expanded upon in Philippians 2:1-4: “If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind. *Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Any couple who wants to enjoy a good marriage will do well to not only memorize these verses, but practice them. God’s focus is never on our personal needs, but on the needs of others. He doesn’t tell us what our spouse needs to do. He only tells us what we need to do. More women than men buy the book “What Wives Wish Their Husbands knew about Women” and more men than women buy the book “What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew About Men”. There is something wrong with that statistic!

Submission is, in its essence, giving up my rights for the needs of another. Biblical submission is not demanded, it is given. An ideal Christian marriage is where both partners are giving of themselves, submitting their rights, wants, and even needs to the benefit of their spouse and family. We need to reestablish the Biblical roles of leadership and submission in marriage. The best way to do that is by submitting one to another in the fear of God!

Meditation: What does it mean to submit to my spouse according to Ephesians 5:21? How do I do this “in the fear of God”?

Assignment: List five ways that you are going to submit yourself to your spouse. Don’t share the list with them just start doing it. See if they notice anything different.

Just for Fun: Take turns being your partner’s slave for the day. You have to do whatever they ask you to do for the entire day, serving them instead of being served. (Remember, a loving spouse would not abuse their authority even in fun!)