

"I Never Knew He Was Like *THAT!*"

Building Your Marriage--part 5

November 8, 2015

DAY 1: "Loving the stranger"

1. Nobody remains the same "person" all their lives. We are changed by a lot of people, events, and circumstances. Put a check next to any of the following that have changed you:

Your parents' divorce

Loss of a job / career

Adjusting from independence to interdependence in marriage

Financial stress

A broken relationship

Health challenges

Your children

Neglect

Loneliness

Starting out just seeing your spouse's strengths; now seeing your spouse's weaknesses.

Other: _____

2. Sometimes you wake up and wonder just who it is you married! The spouse you're married *to* may be quite different from the spouse you *married!* What is incumbent on any of us is to love the spouse we have!

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

²⁶ *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,*

²⁷ *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

3. If your real purpose in marriage was to find a "soul mate," defined as someone who would only love you as you are and not change you, then marriage will be quite discombobulating!

4. What doesn't dawn on you yet is that your spouse is undergoing the same challenge, loving you as the 'stranger.' As you each bring up each others' flaws you wonder if you made a tragic mistake in marrying this person.

5. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 2: Three vital tools: the power of truth, the power of love and the power of grace

Ephesians 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

1. If you understand marriage's central purpose as spiritual friendship, helping each other move toward Christ-likeness, then you will be less surprised by your spouse's weaknesses.

2. It is precisely here that marriage takes "work." It just doesn't happen. A marriage is something you build. Building a marriage requires a toolbox with three vital tools: (a) the power of truth, (b) the power of love, and (c) the power of grace.

3. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul tells us to "speak the truth in love." That is much more difficult than it sounds!

4. For some, the tendency is to do the first part of that verse with very little of the second part mixed in!

5. Have you ever had to relate to someone who felt it their "duty" to be "honest" with you about a lot of things? As hard as that is, this person is usually short on the "speaking ... *in love*" part. What effect does that have on you?

6. For others, they are long on the "speaking ... in love" but short on the "speaking *the truth*" part. They are afraid to say things where they may get criticized or told they are "just being selfish." They are nice people, relating in a loving way, but hold "the truth" about their spouse's weaknesses to themselves. It's not uncommon for this person to "hide" for a long time, and then erupt like a volcano when "they've had it!"

7. In your primary relationships, which of these do you tend toward?
 - a. "Speaking the truth" (but with not enough love)

 - b. "Speaking... in love" (but with not enough truth)

8. What changes would you have to make in order to balance these two things out?

DAY 3: The power of truth

1. In marriage, eventually the masks come off. There is no place to hide anymore.
2. What you can no longer hide are the parts of you that you "successfully" hid from everyone else in your life!!
3. Nobody "likes" to receive "constructive" criticism. (It's rarely "constructive" when it happens to you, but it's always "constructive" when you give it to another).
4. When your spouse speaks truth to you about a weakness in your life, you may be revolted, and utter, "I didn't sign up for this!" You may think you married the wrong person.
5. Here is the sobering reality. It's not your spouse who is revealing the sinful side of your heart. It's the daily-ness of someone having to live with you.
6. Marriage is a lot like a mirror. When you look into the mirror, the mirror does not lie. It simply reflects what it "sees." This is how marriage is.

Proverbs 9:8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. ⁹ Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning.

7. Though reproof is hard to hear it is necessary!
 - a. How does a wise man respond to "reproof"?
 - b. How does a wise man respond to "instruction"? (v. 9)
8. Instead of responding wisely, our "natural" tendency is to react negatively! What does Solomon say is our wrong way to respond? (v. 8)
9. What does he call the person who hates reproof? (v. 8)
10. How do you typically respond to "feedback" or reproof? How would you like to respond? Ask God to give you a heart that is wise!

DAY 4: "Speaking ... with love"--renewing the heart

1. As children and teens, we don't look to God for our real sense of value. Instead, we foolishly look to people for validation.

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD is safe.

2. Sometimes, adults and friends "validate" us, and sometimes they "imprint" images about ourselves that damage.

3. We constantly adjust the "persona" of who we present to the world in hopes of shutting off painful statements and instead receiving affirmative value statements.

4. One of the hidden "drivers" of getting married is finally finding someone who will validate and affirm the particular "persona" we present to the world. At our wedding, unknowingly, we're "signing them up" for a lifetime of validating our persona. This puts our spouse in an impossible situation--doing for us what only God can do--establishing our ultimate value.

5. A spouse's words need not be "life or death" statements to us. However, they do provide profound statements to us.

Proverbs 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

6. One of the reasons my spouse's words can be so profound is that they have come to know more of me than just the "persona" I present to the world--my strengths and positive attributes. They have also come to know the real me, the part we try to hide from everyone else.

7. When my spouse gives me a word of encouragement it can strike something deep in the heart, because my spouse also knows and understands my weaknesses and negative attributes.

Job 4:4 Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees.

8. Sometimes, instead of saying something positive, we say nothing. If you've been married over a year, your spouse knows you could have said something and didn't.

Proverbs 15:23 To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!

9. Too often, to say "nothing" is to say "something" to your spouse. This is the arena where love is something you build through your words and attitudes.

10. You have the "power of love" at your disposal. How can you use it better?

DAY 5: The power of grace.

1. Tool #1: **The power of truth** ("Speaking the truth")

When we sense the need to "speak the truth" to our spouse, it's very easy to come across as accusatory, demanding, angry, etc.

2. Tool #2: **The power of love** ("Speaking the truth *in love*")

When we "speak the truth *in love*" we have a far better chance of being heard, and prompting important conversations.

3. Tool #3: **The power of grace.**

4. Grace is the power to know what someone else has done against you, and not only forgive them but relate to them as if it never happened.

5. Where can we engender that kind of power and ability? We only learn the power of grace by experience, by tasting it ourselves.

6. This is where the power of the gospel has the opportunity to profoundly change how I relate to my spouse.

7. Jesus knows *everything* about me, not just my positive "persona(s)" that I present to the world, but also what I try to hide from the world, the real me.

8. As Jesus hung on the cross, he knew everything about me, and still said...

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

a. Perhaps you see the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross as little more than setting an example of love and forgiveness for us. Unfortunately, His example is something you'll only "admire" but not really *emulate*.

b. If however, you see the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross *for you*, fully knowing your sin and taking it upon Himself to remove from your presence, *that* becomes a game-changer!

He sees every dark nook and cranny of your heart, your pride, your past, and still loves you like *nobody* can! If you *experience grace*, you experience a very different kind of relationship that includes freedom and joy.

10. Have you experienced the grace of Jesus?

11. Can you envision reflecting that grace to your spouse?