

Journal of a Christian Husband

Failed marriages in the Christian world are becoming widespread. Since we are representatives of our God in the midst of humanity, we are sadly letting Him down every time two of us get divorced. I have made my share of mistakes as a husband in my own marriage over the past 32 years. The goal of this article is to write about some of the things which have tested my marriage union, then focus on what I have done to help correct them. Through this process, I hope you will be encouraged to pay closer attention to your own marriage with a view to increasingly follow God's standards in your own life. After all, He is the Master Designer of happy relationships.

Most people are familiar with the physical attractions, companionship, and reproductive purpose associated with the connection between a husband and wife. So my primary emphasis shall not revolve around these things. What I will concentrate on are aspects of a marriage which form the foundation for creating and supporting a good relationship between couples. Specifically, I will zero in on truths from the Bible which have helped initiate change in my own life and had a positive impact on my marriage.

I knew my wife, Debi, almost two years before we got married. We really never had a significant argument during that time, which we now recognize was actually because we did not know one another very well. We were like most young Christian people who wed, having a desire to serve the Lord and thinking we loved one another very much. In truth, we were naïve about our own inexperience with love and unaware of the reasons why many marriages do not succeed. To illustrate the motivational desires associated with matrimony, one of my mentors, Ruel Glover, used to say, 'Marriage is the only institution people continue wanting to get into!' Also, he would say, 'When people get married, it is mostly because of that four letter word starting with "L" – *lust*.' To a great degree, these things are true. However, if a marital commitment is primarily based on feelings and emotions, it is headed for hard times.

It did not take long after we took our vows, I came to realize my wife was not perfect but had faults which I had not detected. This took me by complete surprise. Of course, she was also learning the same exact realities about me. However, at that point of time, I was primarily able to see her flaws and mostly incapable of seeing my own. These newly developed feelings triggered an end to our honeymoon. In those early years, I was teaching the Bible to others and I knew quite a bit about what God said in His Word pertaining to all men being sinners. But, my level of spiritual growth had not yet progressed enough for me to understand the full truth regarding sin in my own life. For that reason, my marriage

became harder than I conceived it could ever be. And, I quickly realized I needed help from outside of myself to get through this trial.

On a side note, when Debi was a new believer, Ruel became like a spiritual father to her and his family nurtured her under their loving wings. When I came into the picture as a potential spouse, he did what all good fathers do when their girl is contemplating marriage – he advised her concerning me. After Ruel had spent ample time getting to know me, he discouraged Debi from marrying me. For, he observed youthful pride controlling me which prompted him to warn her I would be very difficult to live with as a husband. Although he was right, she did not heed his counsel, for which I am thankful. At that time, I did not know about this guidance, and it was many years before my wife shared what Ruel had recommended to her.

In the midst of these circumstances and events, my pilgrimage began toward discovering the real dynamic of a marriage relationship: **Love is Learned**. Hollywood teaches us love is mainly about the physical and relational attractions between a man and a woman. In reality, much of what they communicate is based upon fairy tales and filled with *Fantasy*. When it comes to love, our society leaves out one of the most basic biblical truths – men and women have an evil, sinful side. This is why long standing marriages have become the exception rather than the rule in our country, with celebrities leading the way.

Tragically, too many of these secular philosophies regarding marriage have permeated our Christian society to the extent that divorce has become common place. Ultimately, I came to realize most failed marriages are caused by a lack of recognizing and/or applying the biblical principle that love is centered around the Person of God, for “God is love” (1 John 4:8). So, I embarked on my own journey to understand the One who exemplifies love. In connection with this I learned, if we are to “love one another”, I needed to personally integrate the reality: “Love is from God” (4:7). These concepts are foundational and sound rather simple. But, my comprehension of them had to increase and be put into action to grow spiritually.

Two more passages which have given me further insight concerning the love that centers on the personality of God are: First Corinthians 13:4-7 and Romans 12:9-21. The Corinthian passage is best known and widely accepted. For, it can be found hanging on a wall in millions of homes. The content of this Scripture should be studied and meditated upon by all believers so its principles may increasingly govern our lives. The passage from the Book of Romans is equally valuable in defining love. It has challenged me to evaluate my own actions with the ideals

God has provided for believers to live up to. Utilizing these and other teachings from the Word of God, I became more conscious of how to “love” my wife “as Christ loved the church” (Eph. 5:25). With a growing understanding of God’s type of love, I was better able to compare how my love measured up to His. This standard helped me identify how I could improve my actions to more effectively love my wife.

In addition, I had to learn more about my “old man”, my *Sin Nature*, and the need to get rid of it. Over time, I began to grasp what it meant to “put off” and “put to death” sinful actions related to my old nature and “to put on the new man, which is according to God” (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5). Gradually I came to recognize how God wanted me to replace my sinful acts of rebellion with His righteous character. This character consists of virtuous qualities, motives and attitudes which represent His eternal moral standards. In a similar context portraying the same idea, we are urged to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” so our personality can be transformed into the righteous image of our Savior (Rom. 13:14).

Another principle I remember which helped me develop a better relationship with my wife is found in Philippians 2:3. Here, Christians are urged to consider “one another as more important than” themselves. The Greek word translated “more important” (*υπερεχοντες*) comes from two words meaning to *hold above*. The meaning is: We are to *hold others above* ourselves; we are to consider them *superior to* ourselves. This verse helped me understand self-centeredness is not a quality which promotes good relationships. Quite the opposite, selfishness is a negative personality trait which drives people apart and is destructive to a marriage. So, I cannot grow together with my spouse if I expect her to conform to my wants and desires as the basis for getting along. On the other hand, this biblical concept assisted me in recognizing a marriage is on a firm foundation when both husbands and wives have the desire to submit themselves to one another (Eph. 5:21).

To the best of my recollection, about 10 years after we were married, I had one of the most significant breakthroughs which aided my personal relationship with my wife. I was reading Ephesians 5:28 where it says, “Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies, the one loving his own wife loves himself.” I had read this verse, been taught it and shared this passage with others dozens of times. What I realized in my mind and heart for the first time was: *I needed to consider my wife’s thoughts and feelings equal with what I personally thought and felt*. Even though, for the most part, I respected my wife’s opinions, I had to admit I did not give as much weight to her point of view as I did my own. This was the first day I acknowledged I did not love her as much as I loved myself.

Also, I could see this condescending attitude in quite a few Christian men who were married. It appeared this sentiment came from how many interpreted the scriptural teaching concerning a husband being the head of his own household. So, I began to question what *biblical headship* really was. I started to observe the predominant practice of headship many husbands demonstrated in their own marriages. And, I sought to understand what I needed to do to become a household head in a godly way. Eventually, I came to the conclusion some believers had partially distorted this biblical guideline away from the meaning God had intended. For, I witnessed several husbands apply this teaching in a manner which allowed them to have a strict and domineering relationship over their wives and family.

From studying the Scripture, it was evident there was far more to the marriage connection than the need for my wife to be subject to me. Also, I could see many aspects of the Christian life were complicated and could only be accomplished by following several biblical principles all at once. However, regarding the marriage relationship, I was perplexed about how husbands could be the “head of their own wives” and serve them at the same time. Yet, it was clear this was possible since these two concepts appeared together in the same passage (Eph. 5:21-22).

This seeming paradox started making sense when I began to relate with my wife more from the standpoint of understanding my God given responsibility to “please” her and seeking to practice this in my life (1 Cor. 7:33). Also, I began to increasingly attribute “value” to her as “a fellow-heir of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). The Greek word I have translated “value” (τιμην) is commonly rendered “honor” or “respect” in most Bible Versions. These two English words represent the outcome related to a person’s worth, but they miss the essence of what this word conveys – our wives are of *essential value*. Based on this *worth* we should respect and honor them. This truth prompted me to view my wife as a *worthy equal*, which, by the way, changed my whole perspective. The same word describing *the value* of a wife in this verse is also used to define the infinite “price” (τιμης), *worth*, or *value* God associates with the blood of our Savior which purchased us from our sin (1 Cor. 6:20).

As I endeavored to *love my wife as myself* (Eph. 5:28), I started to consider her thoughts and feelings equal with my own. When I added the practice of *valuing her as a fellow heir of the grace of life* (1 Pet. 3:7), I had more success performing my responsibility as head of our household while maintaining harmony at the same time. In addition, by recognizing and accepting God’s design of a woman as “the weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7 – physically and emotionally), I began treating my wife with the associated delicacy she deserved. By applying all of these principles

together, I progressively credited my wife with the value God envisioned for her to bring to our union. Through this course of events, the wonderful balance He intends for Christian relationships began to emerge in our marriage as well. The outcome was that we were more gratified by and satisfied with one another (1 Cor. 7:33-34).

You might be wondering how the practical application of these biblical factors influenced our marriage relationship. When a difference of opinion arose between us, I would listen to Debi's thoughts on the matter. If at all possible, I endeavored to support her in following what she desired to do. This action demonstrated I was actually paying attention to her wishes which brought about a sense of greater happiness for her. Also, it increased her feelings of good will toward me. Then, unexpectedly, it created an atmosphere which made it easier for her to support me in my decisions. Now, she was sensing I truly loved her and began to trust I would implement our family choices in her best interest. Also, we found ourselves in situations far less often where there was a disagreement which required a decision. Both of us were pleased with these favorable results.

At our wedding, the Christian Brother mentioned earlier approached me in the reception line after the ceremony, looked me in the eyes and exhorted me to always remember, 'Respect is earned'. I have thought about this many times over the years and have even said this same thing to a few grooms. But at that time, I was already in a position of ministry and thought I was *worthy of respect* (1 Tim. 3:4). In reality, I could not see many of my own short comings. For, I had a long way to go before my wife could admire me based on my typical character. As she saw me mature, it helped encourage her to blossom into the "helper" God intended her to be (Gen. 2:18). However, it took me time to achieve the kind of character which earned "respect" and enabled me to understand "how to manage" my "own household" as well as be "concerned for the church of God" (1 Tim. 3:5).

These reflections form a pathway leading into the next principle I gleaned from Ephesians 5:28, which is, *I was supposed to be the standard of Christian character in our home*. You might say, 'how did you get this idea out of that verse?' Well, it says I am to love my wife as I love myself. Why would I love myself unless I had a high assessment of my own character? You will never know how deeply this thought challenged me. It directed my entire outlook away from concentrating on my wife's faults toward focusing on my own. So, I began to evaluate what kind of example I was to her, let alone to everyone else.

This self-examination prompted me to search for more Scriptures related to learning by following examples. In Philippians 3:17, believers are instructed to

become like Paul and other Christian leaders. For it says, “Become imitators of me, brethren, and observe those likewise walking according as you have us as an example.” This verse taught me we should pattern our lives after those who are good examples of our Christian faith. For, these leaders are demonstrating positive personality traits which are worthy to be imitated. Also, in First Thessalonians 5:12-13 and First Corinthians 16:15-18, believers are instructed to “know” those who are our leaders. This is because we can best determine how to acquire good character when we hear it explained by competent leaders and see it modeled in their lives.

Many people enter marriage thinking they will change the other person. We learn from the Word of God, the only way to cause change in someone else is by first modifying our own actions by the power of God’s Spirit. When our character is truly altered, our spouse will come under conviction to change when he/she observes the differences in the person he/she knows best. This motivation to change will not be initiated by us, but by the Holy Spirit persuading them based on the genuine transformation they see in our lives. In this way, they will not only know change is possible because they see the reality of it in their own spouse, but they will also feel divine pressure to modify their own character as the Spirit nudges their conscience. If either a husband or wife introduces this powerful practice into their marriage, it will repair a great deal of emotional damage. In addition, it will reduce criticism while stimulating peace through humble sensitivity.

I would like to share one last point which has helped me greatly. It is found in the verse, “Love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8). This Scripture encourages me because it states there is an answer for the devastating effect of sin in our relationships. Since no human being has ever attained perfection on this earth except our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is also the very essence of God, we all continue to practice some sinful actions in our lives. Therefore, we need something which will counter this negative influence. Love is the answer, for it has a more positive effect on our interactions than the damaging consequences of sin. When my spouse knows I love her by the vast majority of my actions, she can more easily forgive me for my offenses which upset her. The same holds true for me in relation to her. Thank God for making His triumphant attribute of love available to us.

Often, in regard to love, I hear it said, ‘You should follow your heart’. We, as Christians, should know better than to be misled by this philosophy. For, Jeremiah writes, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (17:9). As Believers, we should always evaluate our feelings by the standards found in the Word of God since it gives us the ability to “judge between

the emotions and thoughts of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). With this moral barometer, we can know whether our heart is led by fleshly desires or real love. When we check our thoughts by biblical principles, we will receive proper direction to love our spouse in the way God intended. We must trust His guidelines, not ourselves, since the deceptive nature of sin continues to influence our opinions.

After a long and eventful road, Debi and I will both admit our relationship is far from perfect. We know it is a work in progress with each of us trying to do our part toward positive development in our day-to-day communications. We fall short of God’s best on a regular basis, yet our affections continue to grow for one another. This bond of friendship has been accomplished by applying the truths of Scripture to our lives with divine help from the Holy Spirit. Although we have not achieved complete obedience to God’s ideals, His philosophy of life has proven to transform our lives on countless occasions throughout the years.

Over time, as a couple, we have repeatedly experienced the Lord’s guarantee regarding the Christian life: Growth and change are not only possible, but they are a certainty when we seek to please Him in thought and action. It is particularly encouraging when we are able to look back and measure spiritual progress from the viewpoint of acknowledging past errors after we have achieved victory over them. For, once we have utilized His power to minimize or remove sin in our lives, we gain beneficial character changes which renovate our daily human relations. Now, as we continue life’s journey, our greatest joy is realized by cultivating our personal relationships with one another and the Lord while mutually supporting each other in ministry toward others.

In conclusion, lives of Believers should be directed by the truths God has given in the Bible. With this foundation, we are able to have a peaceful relationship with our partner. We will see God’s original purpose for which He created the woman come into fruition – to compliment the man (Gen. 2:18-24). Also, we can discover how to be truly satisfied with our spouse, eliminating the need to look elsewhere for fulfillment. These things are possible because the insights of our God deliver long term solutions and do not just patch things up with quick fixes. Keep in mind, He not only designed us, He also wrote the directions concerning how we best function.

However, if we allow sinful desires to reign in us, our marital interactions will deviate from what God intended for husbands and wives (Rom. 6:12). The result will be division. In this state, we will express frustration, bitterness and anger toward one another. These behaviors fuel an emotional state which causes divorce.

The Greek word translated “marriage” is “γάμος”. Transliterating this word into English, we get our word “game”. A game is generally defined as an active pursuit or an activity providing entertainment. Certainly, our marriage must not be viewed as a competition against our spouse with the goal of defeating them. Rather, it should be considered a lifelong commitment which can reach optimum potential and enjoyment when we use godly techniques to nurture it. For, marriages concentrating on biblical truths will consistently promote win-win results. May God help each of us treat the relationship with our wives as the *most serious game* which we will ever play. And, may we always source the Word of God as the *divine rules* specifically written to help us successfully perform in this endeavor. I ask you: Are you up for it? Got Game?

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Old Testament quotes are from the KJV.

New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.

(The content of this article was approved by my wife)