

KEEPING THE FAITH IN MARRIAGE



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How to Love God First in Your Marriage

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How to Love God First in Your Marriage

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INTRODUCTION

You don't have to love Jesus to want to make your marriage work. Even if you don't love Jesus, He also wants your marriage to work. So you've got that in common.

Whether you've been going to church your whole life, or are just trying to figure out this God thing, there are a few lessons and principles that each of us can carry into our marriages.

After all, God created marriage uniquely for us.

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3 Ways to Prioritize God in Your Marriage

By Jonathan Cliff



For me to sincerely love my wife with the best kind of love, I've got to totally love my heavenly Father first.

"When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, His answer was to love God with all you are and to love others as well as you love yourself. Loving God in your individual life greatly impacts your married life."
—*Married People: How your Church Can Build Marriages that Last*

I'm married and I love Jesus. I also love this truth from the book from Ted Lowe and Doug Fields.

It's not something I've always understood, and it's not something I've done perfectly in 16 years of marriage. It is, however, something

I've come to see as completely and fully true.

For me to sincerely love my wife with the best kind of love, I've got to totally love my heavenly Father first. Here are some of the ways I think you too could take steps to Love God First:

1. Understand What God Thinks of You

To truly understand God, it's important that we can correctly answer the question, "What does God think of me?"

If your answer is "disappointed, angry, or ashamed" then think again. This wrong thinking will bleed over into your other relationships, most directly your marriage relationship.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells us the Parable of the Prodigal Son as a perfect example of how our Father God responds to our own sin and mistakes.

We actually don't get what we deserve, and instead receive a love from God that surpasses anything we could earn. Love God First, means understanding how much God Loves You.

2. Reflect a Deepening Relationship With God in Your Schedule

My family knows that when I head out to the porch with my journal, Bible, and a cup of coffee, I'm doing more than drinking coffee on the porch. If you want a relationship with Christ that is a priority, then you've got to actually put Him first.

If you're a morning person, then when you seek God will probably be in the morning. Maybe you have a clearer head at night; then the evening becomes the time you learn by reading God's Word.

The time of day isn't as significant as making time for the study. If I want my wife and family to know where my priorities lie, then they need to see that it's actually a priority with my time.

3. Talk Openly About What God is Doing in Your Life

My relationship with Jesus, and my love for Him naturally leads into a deeper relationship with my wife. It happens because this relationship with God always gives me things to talk with my wife about.

I get to speak of the story God is weaving in my times with Him. I get to tell of the work God is doing in my life. And I get to tell of the areas God is changing in my life.

If you ever struggle to talk to the one you've chosen to love the rest of your life, then just share what God is showing you. It's the private conversations your spouse will appreciate the most.

What are some ways that you love God first?

How Does My Time With God Impact My Marriage?

By Debbie Woodall



Spending time with God is the most significant contributor to the intimacy we share in our marriage.

How does your time with God impact your marriage? That's easy! Spending time with God is the most significant contributor to the intimacy we share in our marriage.

1. Time With God Gives a Wider Perspective

When I don't see the forest, the trees definitely get in the way. What are some of the trees?

I've been guilty of coveting my neighbor's house for one. I remember a time when moving to a bigger house was all I thought about. Sadly, the house I was living in was the answer to the previous obsession I had to get out of renting.

When I don't take time to talk to the Lord, my perceived have-nots really bother me. This attitude—no matter how I try to disguise it—eventually gets around to my husband's attention.

But, when I allow God, to speak to me, I have greater love for my husband, less anxiety about our future, and I'm easier to live with!

2. When I Make Space For God, I'm Less Needy On My Husband

It's not hard for me to find legitimate reasons to complain, feel afraid, be insecure, and hopeless. My needy mode is unattractive and makes me unfairly demanding on my husband. He isn't perfect, but he is wonderful!

In contrast, when I cry out to God during hard times of worry and or depression, it's less threatening for me to take them to my husband.

I can be more transparent and honest with him because I've prayed first and understand that he isn't my only source for solution. It also brings our worlds together.

I remind myself, "my husband is the most perfect imperfect man I know." I give him room to be fallible and affirm to him that I love him anyway.

3. Time With God Gives Us Better Conversations

It's so rewarding when we use the times together to discuss things we've been learning from the Lord. Our quiet time styles are very different, but the results are usually stimulating and provide energetic dialogue.

We end up talking about things that matter to us, often expanding our viewpoints beyond the current circumstances. It makes praying together easy and very natural.

Most of the time we feel so drawn to each other that all we want to do is connect!

How does your marriage benefit from spending time with God?

3 Reasons You Avoid Church and Why to Go Anyway

By Ryan Frederick



There's a clear distinction between what/who the Church is in the Bible when compared to what modern-day believers call church.

Life is busy, and sometimes church attendance is placed on the chopping block.

I'd like to clarify what church is, and explain why it's a vital part of your married life.

What is it? Church vs. church

There's the church. Then, there's the Church.

There's a clear distinction between what/who the Church is in the Bible when compared to what modern-day believers call church. Of course, we must be on the same page about what church is.

The Church (Universal)

The New Testament Church is the cumulative body of Christ-followers; those who believe in Jesus, trust him, and are his disciples. (Note: universal shouldn't be confused with universalism, which is an entirely different world view).

One author gives a good definition: the word church in the New Testament comes from the Greek term *ekklesia*, meaning "an assembly" and "to call out" or "called out ones."

In summary, the New Testament church is a body of believers who have been called out from the world by God to live as his people under the authority of Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 1:22-23).

The (uppercase) Church is unencumbered by walls, physically or legally. If you follow Jesus, you are part of the Church.

Church (Local)

Church is also the word we use to describe a specific assembly of believers, usually with a legal status (i.e. a non-profit entity), a leadership structure, doctrinal statements, and gatherings.

The local church is a time and place where believers experience community, celebrate sacraments (like communion), worship together, and learn about God.

Local churches are catalysts for change in their communities—both in the hearts of participants and outside of the church walls.

Canon Ernest Southcott, states: “The holiest moment of the church service is the moment when God’s people—strengthened by preaching and sacrament—go out of the church door into the world to be the church. We don’t go to church; we are the church.”

Now that we’re on the same page, let’s talk about common reasons you may have for avoiding church. I also hope to outline reasons to go anyway.

1. Past Hurts

Our deepest wounds are from Christians. Selena and I have church scars. I’m sure most others do as well. People aren’t perfect, and expecting otherwise is absurd.

The best way to heal from deep wounds is to connect with genuine believers of the true gospel and disciples of Christ.

Keep mining for relationships, pray through your hurt, and give your hurt to Jesus. God will use your pain for His glory; in His timing, by His grace.

I know it takes time, and some pains don’t heal quickly. Over the long run, don’t let past hurts keep you and your husband/wife from being a part of a local church community.

2. I Don’t Need It

This feeling is more common among men than women (based on conversations I’ve had) and from what I can gather, it stems from two reasons.

- **Pride:** the person thinks they have everything figured out, and
- **Shallowness:** the church or person haven’t explored the depths and nuances of who God is and how wonderful He is.

There’s that P word again—pride. There’s an old saying that the more you know the more you realize you don’t know.

If this statement is true, it leads us to some funny conclusions about pride, i.e. people with this type of pride are less intelligent.

Church is about community and gaining instruction in the things of God (theology literally means “the study of God”). If you’re in a theologically and relationally shallow church, you should probably find another one.

Selena and I left a church a while back because we hit a ceiling in our depth of relationships and knowledge. It was great for a season, but we had to move on so we could grow.

As the leader of our household, I felt God holding me accountable for our situation, and he wasn’t pleased with our fruit (He showed me lots of reasons why, all valid).

It was hard, but we moved on. Now I couldn’t imagine our lives if we hadn’t made that decision.

Bottom line, if you’re a Jesus following Christian, you need a community of believers, seek one out and dive in.

3. Christians Are Hypocrites

True. But to be honest, you’re probably a hypocrite too (and so am I). We’re all hypocrites, sinners, and all around imperfect people.

The sooner you realize you’re not perfect, the sooner you’ll experience and extend grace toward others who aren’t perfect (just like you and me).

Similarly, Christians should display this same understanding by extending grace to you. Search for and find a body of believers you can connect with right where you’re at, individually and as a couple.

Next Steps

If you're unplugged from a body of believers, I encourage you to get plugged in somewhere quickly.

God doesn't want you to live away from other believers. His word makes that very clear. For that reason, I have to believe He will provide you with a group to connect with.

If that's you, here are four tangible steps to connecting with a church:

- **ASK:** ask your local friends where they attend church, or do an online search in your area.
- **GO:** you'll never know what it's like if you never go. Schedule the time and make the effort.
- **STAY:** if you find a good fit, keep going. Don't give up too quickly; relationships take time to develop.
- **MINISTER:** get involved as soon as you feel the Holy Spirit prompting you. It's vital to your marital health, but also to the health of the worldwide Church.

I hope this was helpful for those on the fence about making church attendance part of their marriage.

What keeps you and your spouse from attending a church?

Does God Really Love You?

By Joshua Straub



We live in a society today where many people claim that God loves them. But they don't act like it by the way they treat others.

A few years ago, I traveled to speak at a marriage conference in Texas. My wife, Christi, who was pregnant, was unable to travel with me. So she stayed home with our son, Landon.

He was at the age where he missed me when I was away. And I loved it. When I returned home from work, he greeted me with intensity so ferocious, that after picking him up, he bit me on the shoulder. He was still learning how to control his excitement.

Though the emotions of being away from my son were filled with both the angst of missing him while we're apart, and the joy upon

our reuniting, was Landon any less of a son to me relationally while I'm away? Not at all. He's still my son. I'm still his dad.

A Different Relationship

However, when I got home from that trip and walked through the door, our relationship was different.

As I turned the corner I saw a little boy just down the hall, squarely looking right at me. As his eyes locked onto mine, he bent over at the waist and knees, ever so slightly, like a bull ready to take charge.

As soon as he realized I was standing right before him, he put a smile on his face as wide as he could muster and came charging at me like Fred Flintstone revving his leg-propelled car.

As he got closer, I braced myself, picked that little boy up, threw him into the air, and brought him down into my arms squeezing him tightly, experiencing the joy of reunion.

As I held him in my arms he reached out and touched my face, as if to say, "Dad, it's really you. I've missed you." Though my relationship to Landon was relationally no different while I was away, when I got home—experientially—it was different.

Do We Experience God's Love

What's fascinating is that both Scripture and scientific research reveal that our ability to love others is proportionate to how well we experience the love of others, particularly God.

1 John 4:19 says, "We love because He first loved us." Does God really love you? No question. Do you truly experience it? That's the real question.

And how you answer it determines how well you love your spouse, your kids, and even your enemies. We only have a finite amount of love to give others until we're burned out.

More importantly, without experiencing the love of another, we never know what it means to give our love to another.

How This Relates to Marriage

Here's where it affects our marriage and our parenting. I believe it's the posture from which we love, not the techniques, that matters most in our marriage and raising our kids.

When Landon was an infant, I had the privilege of rocking him to sleep at night. I'd pray over him, for wisdom, strength, courage, and that he'd come to know Jesus at an early age. I also prayed for his wife, and his wife's family—that we will like them.

More importantly, I also pictured myself laying in the arms of my Father. Because as Landon is 100% dependent upon his mom and me for everything in his life, I'm experiencing that I'm 100% dependent upon my heavenly Father for everything in my life.

And in order for my family to learn that Jesus is the Hero of the story, they have to realize that my love comes from my experience of the Father's love for me.

I want my wife and son to know that my relationship with my heavenly Father is experiential. That it's different. It's more than mere words.

Show God's Love To Each Other

We live in a society today where many people claim that God loves them. But they don't act like it by the way they treat others.

Are we giving lip service to how much God loves us? Or are we locking eyes with Him, bending our knees before Him, taking charge, running into His arms, touching His face, and biting His shoulder, because we cannot contain our excitement?

Knowing that we love, because He first loved us.

5 Things God Wants You To Do Today

By Dave Willis



God cares about the details of your life more than you do.

As a pastor, one of the questions I hear most often is, "What is God's will for my life?"

When we ask that question, what we usually want to know is the Master Plan for what our careers, relationships, finances and major life decisions should be. God certainly cares about those details of your life and mine.

In fact, He cares about the details of your life even more than you do! His will for your life includes those big decisions. But He's also concerned with what you're doing every day.

As we follow His plan in our daily choices, those bigger decisions seem to come into a clearer focus.

For starters, let's commit to doing what we know God wants us to do today and everyday.

1. Be Thankful

It's nearly impossible to be thankful and stressed at the same time. The Bible has so much to say about choosing an attitude of gratitude even in life's toughest circumstances.

We always have reasons to be thankful. Instead of just telling God all that you need, start by thanking Him for all He's already done.

"Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

2. Do Something To Help Someone Else

We live in a selfish world and we all wrestle against our own selfish human nature, but God calls us to serve others as a way to help others and also break the grip of selfishness in our own lives.

God's will becomes clearer when we're serving like Jesus did. Greatness in God's eyes isn't about how many people serve you; it's about how you're serving other people.

But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different.

Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." —Matthew 20:25-29

3. Do The Right Thing, Not The Easy Thing

Each day, you'll be presented with opportunities that tempt you to compromise your character, but don't do it. Make every decision based on what's right; not on what's easy.

When you strive to honor God brings big blessings when we honor Him even in small choices. God is working through your struggles to develop strength within you.

No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. —Micah 6:8

4. Stop Worrying

When we worry, we create the illusion that our problems are bigger than our God. When we choose to trust God, even in the midst of challenging circumstances, God's peace rushes in and chases away the worry and anxiety.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:6-7

5. Be Yourself

You don't need to get caught in the comparison trap. You can learn from other people, but you don't need to compare your life to anyone else's.

Be the unique masterpiece God created you to be and allow His love and grace to transform you into the best version of yourself.

His Presence in the Midst of a Lonely Marriage

By Selena Frederick



Our definitions of loneliness look different but leave us feeling the same—alone, disengaged, frustrated and sometimes lost.

In marriage, we experience seasons of loneliness. Depending on the season of life you're in, our definitions of loneliness look different but leave us feeling the same—alone, disengaged, frustrated and sometimes lost.

A Few Ways I've Felt Lonely Recently

- **Kids:** It's so easy to fall into parental roles and ignore spousal roles. To simply go through your day doing everything for your kids is great, because they are a blessing. But it's an area I feel lonely, because Ryan and I can get task oriented.
- **Work:** Speaking of task oriented, with both of us being self-employed, everything rises and falls on us. Our time spent on career can often pull us away from our marriage. Any extended periods of time where career has been the focus often leaves both of us feeling alone and frustrated.
- **Fight:** After we have an argument, or are struggling for a period of time towards a resolution, we can feel alone.
- **Personal struggle:** We all have something we are dealing with in terms of ourselves (body image, social insecurities, etc.) Often, these can alienate us from our spouse which only increase our feelings of loneliness.

I think it's safe to say that none of us enjoy dealing with these feelings and seasons. My prayer is that this post will remind us all of His love, and presence no matter the level of loneliness we're facing.

No Quick Fixes

Marriage is complicated primarily because we, as humans, are beautifully complex beings. We have been created intricately, and woven together perfectly by our all-knowing, deeply loving Creator.

I say all of that to hopefully alleviate the pressure, that comes from all different sources, to get over feeling alone. Too many times we underestimate the complexity of our hearts and the fact that feelings, like loneliness, are often a by-product of a heart issue that needs the touch of God's hands.

Even in the midst of trials, like feelings of being alone in our marriage, we need to rest in the fact that He never expects a quick fix to a complicated matter of the heart. He is always with us, loving us and sanctifying us.

His Presence

This may sound strange, but when you feel alone—you're not alone. First of all, we have all been there, and will probably pass through the valley of loneliness again.

Secondly, one of the lessons I've learned during those seasons is how real and true God's presence can be. His Word reminds us that he will never leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5).

I've also learned that maybe there is more to this situation than how I am feeling at the moment. When I take a step back and ask the Lord to open my eyes and my heart to what He's doing, I'm reminded that maybe He's trying to teach and transform my heart.

In His good, higher (Isaiah 55:9), loving, and gracious way, He often allows the fire to be turned up in our lives to show us more of who He is and to reset the focus back onto Him.

Asking the Right Questions

Many times, I've found myself asking questions like "How can I connect with Ryan more?" Or "When can we do a date night and get some good talk time in without the baby?" And, "What am I doing wrong? Am I doing anything right?"

Are these bad questions? No. Not by most standards. However, they often aren't the right questions for figuring out what is really going on.

Our feelings of loneliness tend to flow from deeper issues of the heart. When I start feeling lonely in my marriage, I ask myself these three questions:

1. Why do I feel alone in my marriage?

Where are these feelings coming from? I've learned that when I humbly and sincerely dig down into the why, God is faithful to show

me the real issue.

It's not always pretty, but that's OK. Because it's by God's grace and the leading of the Holy Spirit that allows us to go there and be reminded of His deep love for us.

It's important for us to experience the power of the Gospel washing over areas of our hearts that haven't been surrendered yet.

Especially the blind spots that can produce feelings of loneliness that might be a result of a deeper struggle/sin.

2. What does God's Word say?

After determining the heart issue (or even before), I can now look to God's Word and be reminded of His promises and the fact that His presence never leaves me.

There's nothing that can separate me from His love and that He is faithful and more than able to bring fulfillment and healing that is deeper than what I'm experiencing in this moment.

3. What do I pray for?

Lastly, I reach out to my community, of Godly women, and vulnerably ask for prayer.

I ask them to pray specifically for me, my feelings of loneliness and that God would continue to make His lesson for me clear, but also that He would be glorified in this struggle and that my victory would only be possible by Him and because of Him.

An easy prayer? No way; but worth it. His way is always worth it.

That said, when we remember who He is and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—we can know, and rest in the knowledge that He has already won this battle of loneliness.

We can remember the fact that He has overcome death and sin.

That this battle of feeling alone is a temporary furnace that might be a little uncomfortable for the moment.

But by God's grace and His faithfulness, will bring eternal and immeasurable healing and fulfillment to our hearts.

You are Never Alone

Please know that you are never alone. We are praying for you and battling with you. The Gospel is so much bigger, deeper and robust than we can ever comprehend which means that you are never alone, even in your loneliest moments, He is there.

He is omnipresent, meaning He is ever present. One last beautiful truth: His presence is not determined by our devotion to Him. He is present because He is; the great I am.

Where do you turn when you feel lonely?

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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DEBBIE WOODALL

Debbie Woodall met her husband, John, at Bible college. They married in 1975 and now have four married children and 12 grand children. Debbie works as a freelance artist and enjoys encouraging couples in their marriages and individual walks with God.

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Ryan and Selena Frederick blog at fiercemarriage.com, a place to help couples process through marriage's trials as well as celebrate its joys. You can follow them on Twitter at @FierceMarriage.

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