

## Building a Good Marriage

*This study puts an emphasis on Christ's love for us as the source of strength in our marriage.*

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. Psalm 127:1-2

God chose the precious gift of marriage to reflect the intimate love He has for us, but like His perfect creation, it is marred by sin. Rather than a reflection of God's perfect love for His Bride (the church), we often times struggle in our marriages. The pressures of life pull at marriage partners and the demands family life can compound problems even more. So how do you build a marriage that can stand strong against the raging storms that come with a vengeance? It's like building a house. It's a long, complicated project that demands time, energy and resources if you want it to be built well. And it's done best when we listen to the Lord's encouragement to strengthen our marriages and be on guard against the attacks of Satan and our sinful flesh.

When you enter a beautiful, well-built home, you know that the builder used quality materials and utilized quality workmanship. The trim fits perfectly, the windows aren't drafty, and the drawers glide smoothly. The foundation feels secure and the rafters are solid. The builder selected high grade lumber and took his time to build it right. So, what does the Lord use in building marriages? Quality materials and quality workmanship.

**Part 1 ~ Quality materials.** Did you laugh? Are you thinking about your husband and chuckling at the thought of describing him as "quality material"? You don't have to be married very long to realize that your husband is far from perfect. But did you think about yourself? Are you "quality material"? No, you aren't great stuff all the time either. It isn't any wonder that there are frustrated people in marriages – because we're all sinful, selfish people by nature. We often get stuck seeing each other with our tainted, human eyes. We see each other's sins and failures. We see the ugliness and flaws in one another; and if you keep that focus, you won't have a strong marriage because your building materials are sub-standard.

So what's the solution? Different materials? No, our hope for a good marriage isn't found in finding the perfect man, or trying harder to be the perfect wife by keeping an immaculate house, pursuing a perfect body shape or maintaining countless commitments at church. Hope is found in the perfect Savior that died for our sins. He is the one that has made us "quality material." His precious blood was shed to cover your flaws, and your husband's. His righteous life will stand strong in your stead, and with His eyes, we can see one another as He see us, redeemed children of God. When you look at your husband, see him as Christ does, precious, purposeful and perfect! And when you look in the mirror, you should see the same thing, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3)! Equipped with God's view of our husbands and ourselves we are reminded of and encouraged by His marvelous grace! Treat each other accordingly, with kindness and love; speak to one another with that focus in mind, with gentleness and respect. Forgive each other and be patient with one another because you are handling priceless building materials! As you're working to build your marriage, appreciate the value of what you're working with, remembering that "you were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

You don't trash a beautiful, well-built home; you take care of it and appreciate it. You invest in the upkeep and make the sacrifices to keep it strong because you value it and know it will appreciate over time. How much more can that be true of your marriage! Because Christ loved us first, we love and forgive one another. Because Christ made us holy and beautiful, we can respond in love toward Him and one another. Because we depend on the righteousness He won for us, we can also see our husbands as redeemed and precious! Keeping that view of your spouse will go a long way in building a great marriage.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, You have redeemed me and made me Your precious daughter. Thank you for your gifts of grace, forgiveness and perfect love. Allow me to bask in those gifts and let them permeate every part of my life. Strengthen me through Your Word to be the wife you desire me to be, that I could honor you in my life and marriage. Strengthen our marriage to be a reflection of Your perfect love - the radiance of grace and commitment that you have shown to us. Give me Your eyes to see others as precious souls for which you died; and give me Your heart to love in response to the intimate love you have poured out on me. Forgive me when I fail Lord. In my stumbling and sin call me to account and drive me to the cross. Find me there, comfort me with your salvation and guide me on the path of righteousness so that everything I do brings glory to Your name and light to a dark world. You are my Savior and my God, whom I love and proclaim. Amen.*

**Part 2 ~ Quality workmanship.** Quality workmanship takes hard work, knowledge, and high standards. But who has extra energy, or time to develop better interpersonal skills? And who needs another reminder of the law's demand for perfection? Take heart! God doesn't give you the gift of marriage (complete with quality materials!) and then leave you to do it on your own. He is here to strengthen and guide you as you labor to build a strong marriage!

Where do you find the energy to work at your marriage? "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10)! That **doesn't** mean you are an inexhaustible bundle of energy. It means you are motivated and encouraged by God's love! It means Christ is the foundation of your life, and the source of all you do. It means that when you're not motivated by the progress you see in your marriage, you keep at it, "as if you were serving the Lord" (Eph. 6:7) because you are! When you are overwhelmed and frustrated with your marriage, you run into the arms of your Savior and remember that He is the only one who can ever love you perfectly (Jeremiah 31:3). When you feel like you just can't do it alone, He reminds you that you are not alone (Matthew 28:20). When you just don't feel like doing it at all, He reminds you of His sacrificial love which restores the joy of your salvation (Psalm 51:12). The joy of marriage and the love of a husband are incredible blessings, but they are not your source of strength; they bring wonderful delight, but they are not the fountain of life. Christ is. By seeking God first, in His Word, you will be better equipped to love your husband with renewed strength and wisdom.

How can you deepen your knowledge and insight as you build a strong marriage? God's Word is always the start, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10). With His wisdom, you can be sensitive to your husband's need for respect, and work to honestly and openly express respect for him publically and privately. Not because he has earned or deserves it, but because God tenderly speaks to your heart that it is what he needs; because God asks you to respect your husband as an expression of your love for Him. With the strength from His Word you will be able to forgive seventy times seven, even when you've really, **really** been hurt. You forgive because you know how freely and completely Christ forgave you, not because your husband finally apologized. You will also be able to apologize and admit your faults without excuses and justification because you are no longer a slave to sin. With His love, you'll be motivated to do the little things: a kind word, a supportive smile, or a re-heated dinner plate after a late meeting, even if he forgets to say, "Thanks." You love because Christ loved you first, not because your husband is always lovable.

Finally, what are the high standards to keep in mind? "*Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*" (Leviticus 11:44). God's standards are unattainably high! So why is it that we sometimes feel the need to make the standard even higher? We often times feel (or internally create) pressure to be a perfect wife with a perfect marriage! Marriage can begin to feel like one more unattainable standard to pursue rather than the encouragement it is meant to be. Marriage can seem like a burden instead of a blessing. When you're discouraged and feel like you aren't the perfectly happy wife, you need to look at your Savior. You need to remember that everything you are supposed to be as a wife, a mother, a church member, a housekeeper, cook, and chauffer has been fulfilled by our perfectly obedient Savior. He lived

a perfect life on your behalf. And after He lived a perfect, obedient life, He gave it up to pay for your failures. Remember the suffering He bore to give you His righteousness. You are free from the yoke of slavery and the burden of sin, free from the law and all life's demands. Let your heart and mind rest on the laurels of your Savior and release you from the pressure to do and be more than you ever could. He invites you, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). He says it; we need to take Him at His Word and believe it.

Marriage isn't easy but it is a gift from the Lord and He will bless it. It is worth every ounce of effort you put into it, especially when Satan and your sinful flesh are working to tear it apart. Cherish the priceless materials He's given you to build it strong. Depend on His powerful Word to energize and teach you, and always, most importantly, let it bring you to the loving arms of your Savior for forgiveness and His perfect love.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are my joy and greatest delight. Help me to always treasure the precious relationship we share. Remind me of its cost, Lord – the priceless blood of Your Son – and keep me humble and thankful for Your grace. But let that beautiful message also draw me to you and motivate me in all I do. Let Your salvation be my true source of joy and strength as I live for you. Encourage me to be a loving wife even when I don't want to. Give me a longing for Your Word that I can be found daily seeking You in Scripture. Daily, Lord! Don't let me become complacent or forgetful but put the desire in my heart to be at Your feet learning and growing in the knowledge of grace and wisdom. Teach me Father! Open my eyes to the insights and riches of your Word, to understand how to be a wife that honors You. And when I am reminded of all you want me to be, don't let me suffer long in the discouragement of my sinful flesh. By Your soothing Word show me how it is finished, calm my burdened heart with the unchanging truth of Your vicarious atonement. My heart is Yours Jesus, not because I give it to you but because You have purchased it. What grace and mercy I have! Accept my love in grateful thanks. Amen.*

### Digging Deeper – Part 1

1. The grind of daily life sometimes wears down our appreciation for God's "quality materials." Realistically, we do see each other's failures, and need encouragement not to become annoyed or irritated with one another. What passages might help us in this battle? Read 2 Corinthians 10:5b and Matthew 7:3-5.

2. Are you feeling the pressure of needing to try harder, do more, or the need to be something you can't be (like perfect?). If you and Jesus went for a walk, what would He say to you? Read Luke 10:41-42 and Galatians 3:2-5.
3. **1 Samuel 16:7** says, "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." How can your eyes see what God sees? See 2 Corinthians 3:8, Romans 12:2 and Romans 10:17.

### Digging Deeper – part 2

1. How's your energy level? Do you feel like you just can't keep up? Being in the Word of God isn't like a "5 hour" energy drink. It's more like that stream of living water that slowly but regularly feeds the nearby tree, deepening its roots and producing fruit in season. How are your roots? Are you in season or out of season (remember God made both!)? Read Psalm 1.
2. Are you feeling like a slave to sin, unable to overcome the frustrations and shortcomings of yourself and others? Do you feel like you know what you should do, but you just can't? Read Romans 6:6-14 and 1 John 1:9.
3. God created women with a deep need for love, and then told husbands to "love your wives as Christ loved the Church." As women, love is the most important need we have in our marriage, but sometimes we mistakenly think that our husbands have the exact same needs. While husbands need love too, God created them with a deep need for respect, and then told wives, "respect your husbands." How can you show respect for your husband at home and in public? What is your plan when it is hard? Who can you talk to about it and how can you approach the subject? Ask your husband if he feels like you respect him. Remember, just because you respect him, doesn't mean he sees it – just like he may love you, but you don't always feel it. Talk with him and identify 3 specific ways that he would like to see you show respect (you may already be doing it). If you want to be loved, show him respect (neither should be earned or conditional) – you go first. Read Ephesians 5:33.

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