

# marriage



## When Being Right Rots the Relationship

**I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion: therefore I will wait for him.**

**Lamentations 3:19-24**

I collapsed onto the couch thinking, "What just happened?" Yesterday my husband and I were laughing together, our relationship light and fun. But tonight had spiraled into an ugly tennis match, with one petty exchange after another lobbed across the nets of driving skills, work schedules, and housekeeping responsibilities. How had we gone from snuggling on the sofa one day to hunkering in opposite corners of the house the next? After 32 years of marriage shouldn't we have figured this out? Yet we still fall into our sinful, reflexive responses. And each time the pain is fresh, raw, and dividing.

And I begin to ruminate. I turn comments over in my mind, re-think verbal exchanges, and over-analyze situations. I lay blame and nurse my wounds, stubbornly crafting a convincing mental list of why I'm right . . . and why he's wrong.

Jeremiah, the traditional author of Lamentations, understood pain, separation, and relational discord. His calls for repentance were roundly ignored. He was mocked, beaten, imprisoned, and rejected by neighbors and family for prophesying Jerusalem's destruction. If anybody had the right to compile a list of why he was right and others were seriously wrong, it was Jeremiah!

Yet Jeremiah knew he had a choice. When he *chose* to remember his "affliction and [his] wandering, the *bitterness* and the gall," his soul became "downcast within [him]." Focusing on his troubles didn't bring him peace. Ruminating injustice became a weight dragging his soul into depression.

**"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope . . . . I say to myself . . . ."**

Did you catch it? Jeremiah shows us there's a way to break the cycle of negative thinking, this cycle that pulls us down and away from love, restoration and hope. The first thing to do any time there's trouble in a relationship is to "call to mind" God and remember his goodness: "The LORD is my portion: therefore I will wait for him." List out the ways God loves you, from the unfathomable gift of forgiveness in Jesus right down to the extra pairs of underwear in your dresser drawer!

By doing that you'll stop the cycle of negative rumination. Then it's time to turn your thoughts to God's goodness in your marriage. "Call to mind" what's strong in your spouse instead of what's wrong. Is he a faithful provider? Does he play with the kids? Is he handy around the house? Can he change a diaper? Does he help the neighbors? Has he made you laugh? Does he worship with you? Focusing on your husband's strengths can help soften a defensive heart.

Initially, I sat on the couch that evening choosing to “remember” aspects of my husband’s character that I thought needed rehabbing . . . a choice that pulled me farther from him and his love. Worse still, it led me away from God’s love and his will for my marriage. But the Holy Spirit nudged me to a better choice. He turned my heart upward in prayer, peeling my fingers from my selfish need to be right, and focusing instead on how blessed I am by my husband.

We sat down the next day, apologizing and working through the issues of the night before. It won’t be the last time we mess up and have to do this dance again. But God is working in our hearts and our marriage, helping us remember his blessings, call to mind his compassion, and move us to sacrificially offer that compassion to each other . . . new every morning.

**Prayer:**

**Gracious God, you desire marriage to be a mirror of our relationship with you. Help me see you when I look at my husband, to remember he also has the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You desire us to care for others as you care for us. Help me focus on what’s strong instead of what’s wrong in all my relationships, living out the sacrificial love of my Savior with everyone in my life. Your faithfulness is great. I trust you to crush my selfish heart and renew my mind. In Christ’s saving name I pray. Amen.**

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*To Do: Right now, make a list of the qualities you love about your spouse. Why did I marry him? How does he support me? What is he good at? How does he serve others? Ask yourself regularly, “Do I want to be right, or do I want to be in a relationship with my husband?”*

*Pay Attention: What triggers your emotional responses? Take time to write out what is on your heart, praying God will reveal the backstory to your gut reactions. Ask the Holy Spirit for his peace and insight. Seek counsel from a trusted friend, your pastor, or a professional therapist. STOP the cycle of reaction, retreat, rumination, and retaliation.*

*Pray: Set a reminder on your phone to pray regularly for your husband. Consider using the WELS Women’s Ministry resource “Prayers to Bless Your Husband”. Ask a trusted friend to pray for you and your spouse. Seek Christian marriage counseling if needed.*