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Love Your Husband, Love Yourself
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Chapter 20

Stay the Course

*“...forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 3:13-14*

I will never forget my first talent show. The entire fifth grade class was abuzz with excitement, for we had been invited to join the sixth graders in demonstrating our unique skills and abilities before the entire school. What a privilege. What an opportunity. How thrilling it would be to take center stage.

I had a nice singing voice even then, so my parents, my teachers, my friends all encouraged me to sing a solo for the program. But in my mind, singing was too common, too boring. I didn't even consider singing a talent. *Anyone* could sing. Almost everyone *would* sing. *I* wanted to do something that would stand out, something unexpected, something exotic.

So rather than stick with singing, which was something I was good at and felt comfortable doing, I chose to do something I had absolutely no talent for and looked like a bull in a china closet even attempting: *Gymnastics*.

I had actually taken gymnastics a semester or two, at least long enough to be in the Spring Recital. I was the girl performing the routine on the sidelines. My coach singled me out to be a “line leader”, so the rest of the class could watch me—*me!*—and thereby

stay together. Although it would be several years before I realized it, this was in reality a shameless ploy for getting the tall clumsy redhead out of the lineup, so her awkward performance wouldn't mar the effect of an entire class of pixies cart-wheeling, somersaulting, and pirouetting in perfect unison.

Needless to say, my tumbling routine at the talent show was a miserable failure. I fell into a row of folding chairs and made a terrible racket. The emcee closed the curtains on me early, before I could break something. Inwardly, I chaffed. If only I'd had more time, better lighting, a fancier costume, stronger muscles, a better coach... then I could have been star of the show.

But God had given me neither the talent nor the body for gymnastics. What He *had* given me was a talent for music and a beautiful voice. If I had been smart, I would have taken that and run with it.

Bloom Where You're Planted

Many wives waste a lot of precious time wishing their circumstances were different, wishing their husband was different. If only my husband were more loving, more patient, more understanding, more driven, more successful, a stronger spiritual leader.... *then* I could be happy, *then* I could be a good wife, *then* I would obey God, *then* I would be the perfect Proverbs 31 lady.

If you find yourself in a difficult marriage, do whatever *you* can do to make it better. "Why doesn't [my] husband have to do his part first?" you may ask. Why? Elizabeth Handford answers, "Because you are the one burdened for a Christian home. Having a home where Christ is the head is cheap enough at whatever price you have to

pay! Think how long the rewards of a good Christian home will last. Then ask yourself if it is worth the trifling mortifications of obedience. Of course it is! All valuable things cost something. Certainly you will have to pay a price.”¹

If you find yourself weary of trying, drained of hope, devoid of desire to even attempt to make things work, take courage! “[God’s] grace is sufficient for you, for [His] strength is made perfect in weakness” (Cor 12:9 NKJV). “Divorce is not the answer,” writes Tim Coody. “Prayer, fasting, and a desperate cry to God for the desire to keep the covenant we no longer want to keep, to love the person we no longer want to love, that is the answer. Rather than run we begin to fight, not against our mate but against the forces trying to destroy our marriage. Our self-centeredness would be a good place to have the first battle...”²

You need to wake up and smell the coffee: God didn’t give you some other husband. God didn’t give you some other marriage. He gave you the one you have—and He expects you to run with that. He wants you to bloom where you’re planted. Don’t waste valuable time longing for your husband to be something he’s not. Love him for who he is right now, not who you thought he was when you married him, not who you wish he would become. And dedicate yourself to supporting and encouraging him in any way you can.

God chose you specially. He equipped you with unique talents, gifts, and abilities which perfectly complement your husband. You should be using those gifts to serve, to minister, to encourage, to help him in every way possible. “[T]here have been great men of God used in spite of the woman they married,” writes Elizabeth Handford,

...but how many men have been encouraged and strengthened by the hands of a good woman and inspired to do great service for the Lord far beyond what they

could have done alone! When a man says, upon receiving an honor, “I could not have done it without the help of my wife,” you can believe it is nearly always the honest truth.... A good woman who marries a good man can multiply his service to God a thousandfold. And that’s a privilege beyond all speaking!³

It should be our personal goal as wives to work alongside our husband toward *his* personal goals, to give our all in helping him achieve whatever God has put it in his heart to do. ‘Tis a high purpose and a noble calling to be a man’s help meet. History is replete with examples of men whose wives understood this. As I write this, I am browsing a bookcase in our library which is full of biographies of such men—men like John Adams, Jonathan Edwards, Jim Elliot, and Charles Spurgeon, to name just a few. These men all had wives who shared their vision and dedicated themselves to doing whatever was necessary to help their husbands reach their goals.

In *Let Me Be a Woman*, a book she wrote as a gift for her daughter who was on the threshold of marriage at the time, Elizabeth Elliot explains the benefits of living what she calls a “poured-out life”:

Here, I think, lies the answer to the barrenness of a single life, or of a life that might otherwise be selfish or lonely. It is the answer, I have found, to depression as well. You yourself will be given light in exchange for pouring yourself out, you yourself will get guidance, the satisfaction of your longings, and strength when you pour yourself out; when you make the satisfaction of somebody else’s desire your own concern.⁴

Give It Your All

A couple of years ago, our family took a tour of the East Coast. We traveled in excess of 2500 miles, and my husband brought along the unabridged audio version of

Thomas Friedman's 593-page book *The World Is Flat* for us to listen to on the road. The book was fascinating, but the part I liked best was his section on the United Parcel Service. I was surprised to learn that UPS does more than just deliver packages.

For instance, did you know that when your Toshiba laptop breaks down and you send it back to the company for repairs, it is actually UPS that fixes and returns it? ⁵ Or that when you order a Papa John's pizza, that it is UPS employees driving Papa John's supply trucks, daily delivering fresh ingredients to every store in the chain, who make your pizza even possible?⁶ UPS also manages UPS warehouses full of Nike shoes and Jockey underwear, so that if you order either on line, the order will be automatically routed to UPS, and the person pulling, inspecting, packaging, and delivering your merchandise to you will be UPS-employed.⁷

The descriptions of the increasingly diverse business services UPS now provides continue for ten full pages of Friedman's book. As I listened to him go on and on and on about all the wonderful things UPS does to help other businesses run more efficiently and successfully, I was simply amazed. Or perhaps a better word would be, *inspired*. I admired this company's adaptability. I marveled at its dedication. It seemed to me that no job was too humble for them to take on. *That is the kind of wife I want to be*, I thought again and again as I listened. *I want to make it my goal to help my husband reach his goals. I want to do everything he asks me to do to the best of my abilities.*

And, indeed, this is the example set for wives in Proverbs 31. It is the example I strive towards. If my husband needs me to put away his clothes, I fold them uniformly and place them neatly in the drawer so he can rotate them from front to back. If he wants me to teach our toddler to tie his shoes, I do it with patience and enthusiasm. If he tells

me to pare down our grocery bill, I clip coupons, comparison shop, and stock up when stuff's on sale. If he asks me to build a family website, I make it just as informative and fun and user-friendly as I possibly can.⁸ Whatever the task—making travel arrangements for a family vacation, replacing the button that fell off his shirt, sending his mother a birthday card, plunging a stopped-up toilet, drawing up house plans, fertilizing the lawn, dropping a package in the mail, organizing his office's Christmas party, dividing a bed of daylilies, teaching our fifteen-year old how to drive—whether it's hard or easy, whether it's big or small, whether I already know how to do it or not—if it's important to him, it's important to me, and I try to do it punctually and well. “The homeliest tasks get beautified if loving hands do them.”⁹ To me, loving service is what being a help meet is all about.

“Two are better than one,” we read in the book of Ecclesiastes, “because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart” (Eccl. 4:9-12).

This is what made the Romans such a formidable foe: they fought as one, not as individuals, as opposed to the British, who were individually much bigger and stronger, but fought every man for himself and were miserably defeated. A husband and wife can likewise be a formidable force, if they remain “united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (Phil. 2:2). They “have a good return for their labor,” because “advantage accrues from their efforts being conjoined. They afford one another help, protection, and society.”¹⁰

This is why the Talmud rightly says, “A man without a companion is like a left hand without the right.”¹¹ And what more worthy companion could a man hope for than a loving and dedicated wife? Reformation theologian Desiderius Erasmus elaborates:

The affection of a wife... is shattered by no change of fortune.... In times of prosperity, happiness is doubled; in adversity there will be someone to console and assist you, to show her devotion, to wish your misfortune hers. Do you think there is any pleasure to be compared with so close a union? If you are at home, she is there to dispel the tedium of solitude; if abroad, she can speed you on your way with a kiss, miss you when you are away, receive you gladly on your return. She is the sweetest companion of your youth, the welcome comfort of your old age. By nature any association is pleasant for man, seeing that nature begot him for kindness and friendship. Then how can this fail to be the most pleasant of all, in which there is nothing that is not shared?”¹²

Be Faithful in Little

Don't get discouraged if you aren't there yet. Even small changes can be steps in the right direction. Sometimes “it's actually the little things that count the most,” writes George Barna in *Revolutionary Parenting*. He was talking about child training, but the same truth applies to marriage building: “Rather than looking for the big bang that will revolutionize our world, true revolution will come from a series of significant micro-level changes. The little contributions add up to make a big difference.”¹³ Helen Keller echoes this sentiment when she confesses, “I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.”¹⁴

This is why it is so imperative that we be faithful in little, that we do not despise “the day of small things” (Zech 4:10). For God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and He uses the weak to confound the strong (see 1 Cor. 1:27). It is the way He has chosen to work throughout human history. God relies upon “the dedication of a remnant of people whose hearts [are] sold out to His purposes” and He uses them to transform society. “If you (and each Christian family) take small steps forward—as evidenced through the spiritual transformation in our [own homes and families]—then we will live to see a spiritual awakening unlike anything we have witnessed during our lifetime.”¹⁵

But we must all be willing to do our part. A wise man once observed, “Successful people do what unsuccessful people aren’t willing to do.”¹⁶ Are you willing to do whatever it takes to have a successful marriage and a peaceful home? Then follow Charles Spurgeon’s advice:

One good deed is more worth than a thousand brilliant theories. Let us not wait for large opportunities, or for a different kind of work, but do just the things we "find to do" day by day. We have no other time in which to live. The past is gone; the future has not arrived; we never shall have any time but time present. Then do not wait until your experience has ripened into maturity before you attempt to serve God. Endeavour now to bring forth fruit. Serve God now, but be careful as to the way in which you perform what you find to do--"*do it with thy might.*" Do it *promptly*; do not fritter away your life in thinking of what you intend to do to-morrow as if that could recompense for the idleness of to-day. No man ever served God by doing things to-morrow. If we honour Christ and are blessed, it is by the things which we do *to-day*. Whatever you do for Christ throw your whole soul into it. Do not give Christ a little slurred labour, done as a matter of course now and then; but when you do serve Him, do it with heart, and soul, and strength.¹⁷

We shouldn't expect God to do His part until we have first fulfilled our own. We must dip in the River Jordan before our health will be restored (2 Kings 5:14). We must fill the pots with water before it can be turned into wine (John 2:7-9). "Waiting around for God to act on the things you can't do when He has given you some things you *can* do is a little like asking Him to lower your cholesterol while continuing to eat fat-laden foods," notes Kathy Peel in *Desperate Households*. "He expects us to live wisely and change the things we can while at the same time praying about the things we can't."¹⁸

"Marriages don't stand still," Tommy Nelson reminds us, "they either get better or they get worse. Think back over the last weeks and months. In which direction is your marriage heading?"¹⁹ Make sure that even the smallest decisions you make today will nudge your marriage in the direction it needs to go.

Fix Your Eyes on the Prize

For as long as I can remember, my husband has wanted to run a marathon. Every January, he would go into training. He'd run three times a week, slowly increasing his distance, but every year it was the same: he'd build up to about ten miles, then quit. He'd quit not because he was tired or because he was injured or because he had changed his mind about this particular goal. No. He'd give up training, because those longer distances were just so time-consuming, and he felt bad about being separated from his family for those long hours when his schooling and work required him to be away so much of the day already.

Still, the dream wouldn't die. When he began training again in 2001 for perhaps the dozenth time, I suggested he might stick with it longer if the rest of us just joined him. That way, he wouldn't need to choose between working toward his goal and spending time with us—we'd all be together anyway.

Doug was gung ho for the idea. Never mind that I could scarcely trot ten yards without getting winded, my husband, eternal optimist that he is, insisted my past 14 years of childbearing counted as "surreptitious training" and put me in prime cardiovascular condition. He encouraged me to start out by running only between every other lamppost, and it took me an entire month to build up to a mile. The older kids would run or skate or ride their bikes ahead of us, and we'd all take turns pushing the babies in a jogging stroller.

Slowly, slowly, we made progress. We stayed faithful. We stuck with it. After six months of training, we packed up our *PowerBars* and headed to Austin for the Motorola Marathon. I don't imagine what Doug and I were doing could properly be called *running*—it was more of a 20-mile jog plus a 6-mile cool down—but we nevertheless managed to cross the finish line, hand-in-hand, *before* they stopped the clock!

I can assure you that the last few miles were by far the hardest. Our legs were shaky, our stomachs were empty, and our resolve was weakening by the minute. Had we spotted a taxi in that home stretch, we'd have been sorely tempted to hail it, but I'm glad now we didn't. Instead, we just kept putting one foot in front of the other until we completed the course. Now, for the rest of our lives, we can say, "We finished a marathon!" And nobody can take that away from us.

Marriage is not a hundred-yard dash. Marriage is not a relay. Marriage is a marathon if ever there were one. You may feel weary at times. You may encounter hurdles. You will definitely need to refuel at those water stations. But if you keep pressing forward and don't give up, I can promise you'll be glad you did. It will be worth all the toil and sweat and trouble, once you reach that finish line.

Wendy Shalit tells a very touching story about just such endurance in her book *Girls Gone Mild*. She writes:

I once traveled by car with some elderly friends going to a family event, and it was a very humbling experience. The wife was suffering from Alzheimer's, and every twenty seconds she would ask somewhat fearfully, "Where are we going?" After ten minutes of this, I am not proud to admit that I felt my own sanity slipping, and that I needed to get out of the car. (I didn't.) Yet her husband would always respond gently and cheerfully, as if for the first time: "We're going to a bris!"

Years later, I heard from my grandparents about this couple, and how the husband gallantly continued to care for his wife during her mental degeneration. By the time she died, she no longer recognized her husband of fifty years. But she did tell him, offhand, something very beautiful: "You know, I don't know who you are, but you're the best," she had said.

Most of us, I think, are looking for that kind of love. It's the love that brings out the best in us and in others; it's the ennobling love that persists even when the brain cells are long gone.²⁰

Will you rededicate yourself afresh to demonstrating such love and faithfulness to your husband? To love, to honor, and to cherish him until death do you part? To stick it out through thick and thin, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, as long as you both shall live?

It is significant, I think, that the first miracle Jesus performed publicly was turning water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana. Do you remember what was said by the head waiter when he tasted the results? He marveled to the bridegroom, “Most hosts serve the good wine first, then substitute wine of poorer quality once the guests have drunk their fill. But not you! No, you have saved the very best for last!” (John 2:9-10).

Precious sister, is your heart empty? Are you used up? Does your marriage taste like a piece of gum with all the flavor chewed out?²¹ Then turn it over to Jesus now. Do exactly as He bids. He is still in the business of performing miracles, and He can so transform your marriage that you will marvel, *Wow! He saved the very best for last!*

1. Handford, E. *Me? Obey Him?* p. 69.
2. Coody, T. *Meaningless Words*, p. 126.
3. Handford, E. *Me? Obey Him?* p. 58.
4. Elliot, E. *Let Me Be a Woman*, p. 47.
5. Friedman, T. *The World is Flat*, p. 168.
6. *Ibid*, p. 169.
7. *Ibid*.
8. You can check it out for yourself by visiting <http://www.flandersfamily.info>.
9. Louisa May Alcott, as quoted by Kathy Peel in *Desperate Households*, p. 8.
10. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database.
11. *Ibid*.
12. Erasmus, as quoted by Debbie Maken in *Getting Serious About Getting Married*, pp. 133-134.
13. Barna, G. *Revolutionary Parenting*, p. 153-154.
14. Barnes, B. *What Makes a Man Feel Loved*, p. 174.
15. George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, p. 153-154.
16. Barnes, B. *What Makes a Man Feel Loved*, p. 179.
17. Spurgeon's Daily Devotional, Nov 26, Ecc. 9:10. Bible Soft Software.
18. Peel, K. *Desperate Households*, p. 235.
19. Tommy Nelson, *Better Love Now*, p. 17.
20. Shalit, W. *Girls Gone Mild*, p. 278.
21. Nelson, T. *Better Love Now*, p. 168.