

Principles of a happy marriage

Study 1, my Testimony

Mandy and I were married on the 5th of June 1976. It was during the time of the war in Rhodesia, and for the first six months of our marriage, I was in the army (compulsory call up) for six weeks at a time, with ten days' break in between. Not a great start, but we were in love, and we managed. Then we left for two years' training in Bible College – rather, I trained while she worked. I will forever be grateful to her for her sacrifice. After this we returned for 18 months to our mother church before we were given a post to take over an assembly of our own in Fort Victoria. By this time, we had only been married for about four years. We were young and green. This was to be our training ground in real life issues.

The elderly pastor and his wife who were there before us - dear folk whom we still respect very highly - were to move to another assembly. However, the assembly had been through some difficult times, and when we arrived, there were only 11 old age pensioners and one young person our age left in the assembly. (During the war years many people had emigrated.) The pastor and his wife were in a state of such deep clinical depression that they could not consider a move away, and I ended up with these two people coming into my home every day and just sitting in my lounge with an almost tangible cloud of gloom hanging over their heads. One can handle that kind of situation for a few days, but when day after day there is no let-up, it starts to affect you, too.

Remember, I was now in charge of the assembly, my home, and now this situation. I had to do something. But with my total lack of experience, I had no idea what to do. The situation started to affect my wife very seriously, and no matter what I said to her, I could not lift her up. I was on my own. She did not want to go to church; she did not want to hear about the Bible and the verses of encouragement which I continually wanted to quote to her; she did not want to see anybody at all. That's a tough one! I did not know what to do. After a few months of this, I was desperate, and one morning very early, during my devotions, I cried out to the Lord. *"Jesus, what do I do?"* I had the Bible open and I said to the Lord, *"I know there is an answer in Your Word. Please show it to me."*

A little seed had been planted in me by an American pastor, Jim Boswell, while I was at Bible College (thank you, Jim, wherever you might be in the world), and the Scripture came back to me that morning:

Eph 5:25 "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her;

5:26 "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

5:27 "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless.

5:28 "So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies ..."

The truth and significance of this powerful verse suddenly hit me. This is what the Lord showed me:

- 1. It is the husband's duty to first love his wife, whether this love is returned or not. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. I therefore should not seek to be loved as much as to love. It is Christ's love which brought about the change in us, and therefore as I love my wife, I have a right to pray for a change in her. Not criticise - just love. Not for one day or two or three, but constantly, no matter what the response from her.*
- 2. Christ sanctified and washed His Bride clean - how? "By the washing of water with the Word". His words of kindness and love cleanses us. His Word speaks so graciously to us, wooing us to enter into a relationship with Him. In the same way I should wash her clean with constant gentle, kind, and loving words.*
- 3. Christ presents His Bride to Himself in beauty and splendour. This was then also my responsibility - to have a vision for her - to see her in beauty, free from depression. There is coming a glorious day, folks, when each one of us will stand before that great and beautiful throne. And on that day, at my side, will stand my beautiful wife in splendour and glory. There I will present her before the Lord. "Here, Lord, is the partner You gave me. She has fulfilled her role magnificently, as a wife and a mother. Thank you, Lord, for entrusting into my care this most precious gift. She has no spot or wrinkle, for all have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, and I present her to You in all her glory."*

(Will your wife be dressed in rags or splendour on that day? That depends largely on how you treated her, sir.)

This is what the Lord showed me on that morning. Now it was testing time. For three months I did not tell her what the Lord had showed me. I just had to put the truth into practice. Any word from God will have its testing time - don't think for one moment that you will escape that testing time. I was tested severely. The elderly pastor and his wife still came every day. The doomsday feelings were still there. My wife still cried a lot. And I had no idea how long the testing period was to last. God gives us promises in His Word, but there is never a definite testing period given. My testing period was three months. Just having to love, being gentle and kind, taking the full responsibility of the church work and whatever other ministry had to be done - and not knowing how long this was to carry on for.

God is faithful. *He will never allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to carry.* When we are obedient to Him, He will ALWAYS do His part. The day came. No different from any other day really. My wife decided to bake a cake. As she was busy in the kitchen, God suddenly spoke to her in an audible voice. *"How long are you going to allow the devil to walk all over you?"* She spun around and saw no one. Then the Lord continued to speak to her in her spirit about some personal issues. I have never heard the Lord speak to me in an audible voice, and she has never heard it again, but on that day, God stepped in on my behalf and ministered miraculously to her.

Needless to say, her life changed around immediately. Just one word from God is all it takes! She went into the

neighbourhood and started a Sunday school to my surprise, and she has never looked back. God had intervened. I did my part faithfully, and He did His. Thus, I learned that if one partner does their part fully, despite the other partner lacking in some area, the first partner's faithfulness will cause God to step in on their behalf. Are you willing to be faithful through your testing time?

This has been my personal experience, and it is the understanding of these Scriptures which I believe to be the underlying factor in the success of my marriage through the years. I pray that the truth of it will enter deep into your spirit and bless you too. May I suggest that you take a few minutes to meditate on that Scripture. Get your Bible out and read it from there. Underline it. Learn it. It will bless your soul.

Again, I must emphasise that the success has nothing to do with my cleverness, good fortune, or any other factor. I am just a very ordinary person for whom Jesus died and without whom I would be utterly lost. God is the one who gave the principles in the first place, and any one of you have the same access to His blessing if you are obedient to Him.