

Let Your Marriage Draw You Closer to God

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Your marriage isn't just about happiness, and it's not just about you and your spouse. It's much more than that. Ultimately, your marriage is a tool God wants to use to draw you closer to Him. Whether or not your marriage makes you happy, it can make you holy. And it can bring glory to the source of all love - God Himself.

Here are some ways you can let your marriage draw you closer to God:

- **Acknowledge hard realities.** Realize that you and your spouse don't live in an idealized romantic world, but in a fallen, broken one. Be honest about the disappointments and selfishness that exist in your marriage. Don't be afraid to discover what your marriage reveals about your own attitudes and behavior. Seek to understand yourself and the ways you need to grow as you confront this information in your marriage.
- **Understand that marriage is all about learning to love.** Remember that marriage isn't eternal; it's merely an earthly relationship in which two people can learn how to love. Know that, while your marriage is temporary, your relationship with God is eternal. Strive to grow all you can through your marriage so you'll be able to love God more deeply. Realize that you can't truly love God unless you also love other people. Accept your spouse and practice acting in love toward him or her, no matter what.
- **Let marriage teach you about God's relationship to His people.** Know that God loves us intimately and wants us to relate to Him out of love rather than fear. Understand that marriage is a picture of the commitment Christ has for His church. Realize that God wants you to pursue Him with passion, just as He pursues you. Know that God wants you to proclaim and model His ministry of reconciliation in your marriage by staying committed, forgiving each other, and loving each other selflessly and sacrificially.
- **Learn to respect others through your marriage.** Have contempt for contempt. Decide that you will honor your spouse because God wants you to do so - despite his or her flaws. Understand that all people are fallen, and if you can't respect your current spouse, you won't be able to respect any spouse. Seek to understand the challenges your spouse faces. Ask God to give you empathy for your spouse and compassion for his or her weaknesses.
- **Use your marriage to build your prayer life.** Let the intimacy you develop in your marriage relationship enrich the intimacy you share with God through prayer. As you overcome dissension and come together sexually, you acquire skills for building unity. Use those skills to deepen your prayer connection with God.
- **Let your marriage help cleanse you.** Allow your marriage to hold up a mirror of your sin to view. Let your marriage show you the unhealthy attitudes and character flaws that God wants to heal in you. Ask God to help you use this knowledge to become more

humble and willing to grow. Confess and repent of the sins God shows you, trusting that He will help you grow.

- **Respect your marriage's sacred history.** Realize that you and your spouse have a shared history of life spent together that is highly valuable. Understand that the spiritual meaning of your marriage is found in maintaining that history together. Ask God to help you persevere in your marriage so you can remain faithful. Rather than questioning your choice of a spouse, learn how to live with your choice. Realize that there very well may be better times ahead for your marriage if you stick with it.

- **Embrace your marriage's difficulties in order to build character.** Don't run from your troubles. Instead, face them, trusting that they will make you a stronger person. Understand that, although you cannot control your circumstances or the way your spouse behaves, you can control how you respond. Determine to grow from your struggles. Ask yourself, "What am I learning?," "How is this causing me to grow?," and "What is this doing for me from an eternal perspective?."

- **Let your marriage teach you how to forgive.** Recognize that conflict is an opportunity for spiritual growth. So don't run from it. Rely on the Holy Spirit's help to work through conflict and help you and your spouse forgive each other. Remember that God has forgiven you and wants you to learn how to forgive others so you can truly love.

- **Build a servant's heart through your marriage.** Realize that, in God's eyes, there is nothing more significant than servanthood. Don't worry about judging whether or not you think your spouse deserves to be served. Decide to serve him or her no matter what, because God calls you to and God is worthy of your obedience. Don't assume that your time and energy is more important than your spouse's. Be proactive about serving him or her. Seek to give more than you take, lessen your demands and express more appreciation toward your spouse, and be more sensitive to your spouse's demands.

- **Let your sex life grow your character.** Understand that you and your spouse share more than just a temporary, earthly relationship as lovers. Remember that you also share an eternal relationship as brother and sister in Christ. Never reduce sex to simply a physical experience; keep in mind that the Holy Spirit lives inside both of your bodies. Be gentle and kind to each other, accepting each other's bodies and best efforts to stay healthy and fit. Be willing to give your best to each other as a gift. Pursue a passionate sex life, knowing that if you come alive with passion in one area of your life, that passion will carry over into other areas. Realize that if you become more passionate about your spouse, you can become more passionate about God.

- **Let your marriage make you more aware of God's presence.** As you build your communication skills in marriage, let your experiences focus you out of yourself. When you struggle with marital dissatisfaction, let that remind you of why you need God. When you look at your spouse, learn to see someone made in God's image. Embrace opportunities to create with your spouse - children, shared projects, etc. - and relish God's creative energy flowing through you as you do.

• **Build your spiritual purpose through your marriage.** Look beyond each other toward God, asking Him to unite you to pursue a common vision in your lives. Evaluate what's truly important, and be willing to sacrifice selfish ambitions so both of you can achieve the greater good. Accept the two central missions of becoming the people God created you each to be, and doing the work He has given you to do.

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