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Marriage Partnership

The Secret to Contentment

When Joyce Meyer took a risk to love and be loved, she discovered something deeper than happiness.

By Corrie Cutrer

Forty years ago Joyce felt trapped at the bottom of a dark, deep pit of despair. Walking away with her baby son and only what she could carry, she'd just divorced her husband of five years who'd cheated on, manipulated, and abandoned her. Prior to her marriage, she'd grown up in a home where for 18 years her father sexually abused her and routinely beat her mother. With no place to go, the broken home of her childhood was the only place she now had to turn.

Yet in the months following her divorce, God led Joyce to meet a gentle man named David Meyer, a Christian who'd been specifically praying for God to send him a wife. At first Joyce was harsh and sarcastic toward him, not willing to trust any man. But Dave was patient and Joyce eventually agreed to go out with him. Five dates later, Dave asked Joyce to marry him.

"For my part, I certainly did not know what love was, and was not eager to get involved with another man," Joyce recounts in her book [Beauty for Ashes](#) (Warner). "However, since things were getting even worse at home, and since I was living in total panic all the time, I decided that anything would be better than what I was going through at the moment."

Joyce's marriage to Dave didn't solve all her problems, though. She'd become a believer as a child, and with Dave's prompting began attending church. Yet she still struggled with anger, fear, and discontentment that stemmed from her painful past.

"I was making the frustrating, tragic mistake of trying to find the kingdom of God—righteousness, peace, and joy—in things and other people," Joyce writes. "What I did not realize is, as Paul points out, the kingdom is within us: Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). My joy had to be found in him."

Slowly, God began to restore Joyce. He also began to show her how her own painful story could help others. Today, she heads Joyce Meyer Ministries, speaks to millions

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worldwide through her television, radio, and conference outlets, and has authored 75 books.

Marriage Partnership spoke with Joyce about how she's found joy in her life and in her marriage to Dave, and how other married couples can experience lasting joy as well.

After such a rocky first marriage, how were you able to find joy in your relationship with Dave?

Joyce: In order for you to have joy in your marriage, you must first have joy within. In my case, because I was sexually abused by my father, I had a shame-based nature. I grew up with a record playing in my head that continuously asked, *What's wrong with me?*

When you get married you're supposed to love each other. Scripture teaches to love your neighbor as yourself. But if a person never accepts God's love and learns how to accept herself, then she doesn't really have anything to give away. It's the same with joy in marriage. I can't have joy in my relationship with Dave if I don't have joy within myself. One of the greatest things that helped my marriage was learning how to accept, love, and be content with myself.

How did you do that?

Through studying Scripture and realizing that I've been made right with God through the blood of Christ. Years ago, even though I was already a Christian, I still often felt as though something was wrong with me. Many people with whom I speak today feel the same way. They're trying to be like someone else; they're comparing or competing. They're always taking inventory of what they've done wrong. And yet the Bible tells us that when we make mistakes, if we admit them and repent, then we're totally forgiven. God remembers our sin no more. And we have right-standing with him.

God also showed me that I'm responsible for my personal joy, and that my joy has to be in him—not in people or in circumstances. Satan can play around with our circumstances. So if I'm waiting for my circumstances to give me continual joy then I'm going to be in a difficult condition, because nobody ever knows on a given day what's going to happen.

Also, people are always going to disappoint us from time to time simply because they're people. It helped my marriage when I stopped expecting my husband to be perfect. So often we pick our spouse apart and try to change him rather than enjoy him. I don't think we can enjoy our marriage if we don't learn how really to enjoy our spouse. That doesn't mean that your spouse is perfect and doesn't need to change. But it's not our job to change people. It's our job to pray for them and it's God's job to change them.

Many spouses expect their partner to be a source of joy for them.

When Dave and I first got married, I was a mess. I didn't know what love was. I was selfish, self-centered, controlling, angry, and filled with shame. I was always looking for Dave to make me happy, and when he didn't, I'd often become angry. But the thing I noticed about Dave was that no matter what I did, he wouldn't let me steal his joy. He

was solid and stable, one of the hallmarks of a mature Christian. I learned a lot from his example.

So often we get things backward. Jesus taught we should do unto others as we'd have them do unto us. If we'd take this principle and put it into practice, then we'd experience more joy in marriage. Most of us get up everyday hoping somebody else will make us happy, rather than looking for ways we can make someone else happy.

Jesus teaches our joy is found in giving our life away. When we try on our own to make our life good, we thwart God's power. I believe firmly that what you make happen for someone else God will make happen for you. Even if you're married to a first-class jerk. If you live your life trying to be a blessing to others, God will bring you joy?if not from your spouse, from other relationships. Or he'll impart it to you himself. A lot of people say, "I'm in this marriage and I believe God wants me to stick it out. But I'm just miserable." Yet I believe that if God asks us to do something, he gives us the grace to do it. So if God is asking a person to stay in a difficult marriage, he's not asking them to stay and be miserable. He'll give that person what they need to make it.

What distinguishes joy from happiness?

Happiness is based on what's happening in your life. It's an emotion. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), therefore it's dependent on the Spirit and not on our circumstances. It's planted in us as a seed when we accept Christ. Then it has to be grown. I began to realize this at one point in my life as I faced hardships. I could be facing a real problem, and as long as I was thinking or talking about that problem I'd feel upset. Yet if I could get my mind on something else, or even just throw myself into a task around the house, without purposing myself to do it, I'd find myself humming a song, at peace. I thought, *This is coming out of my spirit*. This is the joy that's in me. In Romans 15:13 the apostle Paul tells us joy and peace are released through believing. So if we're trusting and believing God during a problem, we're going to have joy. Even though the circumstance hasn't changed, to us it's as if it has, because we're trusting God to change it.

How can we experience more joy every day with our spouse?

I experienced more joy in my marriage when I began to recognize my unrealistic expectations about Dave. Women in particular desire and expect their husbands to read their minds. We expect men to notice when we're a little down, perhaps, and desire comfort. Yet men don't notice it at all. They're just not wired like women. We can walk around mad and hurt all day because our spouse didn't give us what we expected when really they didn't know we needed something or expected it in the first place. Recently I told Dave, "It would be nice if you'd buy me a present once in a while." And he replied, "What's the point? You're not going to like it, and you'll take it back anyway." We've had to learn that even if I have to take it all back, I still need him to go get it. He does that now, but we've been married almost 40 years and it took him 37 years to realize it!

The other thing that was a huge help for me was understanding that Dave and I have different temperaments. I've got a strong, take-charge, "type-A" personality, and Dave is

laidback. His main need in life is peace, where mine is accomplishment. When I realized God created him this way, I stopped judging him, trying to change him and expecting him to be more like me. I learned that a lot of life is about adapting. In Romans 12:16 Paul tells us we're to strive to have peace, and that we're to adapt ourselves to people. That verse became life-changing to me because previously I didn't want to adapt to anybody. I wanted everyone to adapt to me. And when I started adapting, my peace level changed and my joy increased.

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Spring 2006, Vol. 23, No. 1, Page 40