



MARRIAGE: BEYOND LOVE AND COMPANIONSHIP

A Divine Mechanism for Personal and Spiritual Growth

Marriage as a “People-Growing Machine” by God's Design

Marriage is commonly understood as the union of two individuals for companionship and to experience love. However, beyond companionship and love, God intends marriage to serve a higher purpose: to refine us in His image (Gen 1:26). God’s design for marriage is that it function as a “people-growing machine,” nurturing personal and spiritual growth for both partners. It does this within the framework of a loving and committed relationship as the ultimate expression of the couple’s faith. However, the machine doesn’t work as intended unless we are willing to engage it fully as an opportunity for change. Let’s examine how, in our marriage, we can engage God’s people-growing machine to bring about our refinement and ultimate transformation.

IN THE BEGINNING

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” - Gen 2:18

As the Lord laid the foundations for creation, he determined that relationship would be key to our refinement and ultimate transformation. Essentially, if humans were to be made in His image by learning to love the way He does, they would need someone to love. Thus, He conceived Adam and Eve as the first married couple and outlined what would be required for the relationship to work. The end goal for marriage, He determined, is to become “one flesh.” A spiritual state of oneness despite being physically two, achieved by being “naked” or authentically vulnerable with no shame between them, by trusting in love without fear (1 Jn 4:18).

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. - Gen 2:24

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. - Gen 2:25

LOVING GOD BY LOVING OUR SPOUSE

‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor (others) as yourself.’ - Matt 22:37-39

But if we say we love God and don't love each other, we are liars. We cannot see God. So how can we love God, if we don't love the people we can see? - 1 John 4:20 (CEV)

To engage God’s people-growing machine, we must demonstrate our love for God by loving our spouse. We do this by obediently following His commands to love (2 Jn 1:6). In doing so, our marriage becomes the visible manifestation or a symbol of our love for God. And in return for our obedience, our character is refined by the

transformative power of God's love. This is how we are made in God's image (Gen 1:26), which results in the flourishing of our marriage and consequently "a happy marriage."

LOVING OUR SPOUSE WITH GOD'S LOVE

For our marriage to flourish, it is essential that the love we offer to our spouse reflects God's Love. This divine love differs significantly from the worldly version of love that's most commonly practiced in marriages today. It is important to understand that worldly love does not align with the love Jesus defined (Lk 6:32-36). Worldly love is typically self-interested, focusing primarily on what one receives rather than what one gives, and, according to Jesus, it is not love at all. With worldly love, our obedience is directed only towards ourselves and our agenda.

In contrast, God's Love is selfless, emphasizing giving without expecting anything in return, as an expression of obedience to God. While worldly love tends to encourage selfishness, God's Love challenges us to recognize the sin of selfishness. This loving conviction is the primary purpose of God's Love, as it leads to our redemption and ultimate transformation as we are made in God's image.

HOW TO PRACTICE GOD'S LOVE IN OUR MARRIAGE:

"If you love me, you will obey my commands." - Jesus (John 14:15)

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. - 2 John 1:6

Because loving our spouse with God's Love requires us to deny our selfish self, our motivation to do so must ultimately come from someone or something greater than ourselves. That someone or something is our Creator. As it is written, "We love each other because he loved us first" (1 John 4:19). This profound truth is mirrored in the love we are called to show our spouse, serving as a daily reminder of the divine love that guides us. The act of denying our selfishness is what Jesus described as "taking up your cross" (Matt 16:24). Crosses are for crucifying, and the act of denying your selfish self, crucifies or "puts to death" your old selfish self as you are transformed. Here are some ways to "take up your cross" both individually and as a couple.

A) INDIVIDUALLY

Loving God by loving our spouse requires:

- Self-control: Making the effort to deny self-interested and unloving behaviors.
- Selfless Giving: Prioritizing giving over getting, fostering empathy and humility.
- Confession: A willingness to humbly own your share (potentially more).
- Repentance: A consistent and reliable commitment to changing our behavior.
- Forgiveness: For our spouse and ourselves, as the ultimate act of obedience and a sign of our faith

B) AS A COUPLE

Together, couples demonstrate their love for God by:

- Speaking Truth in Love (Eph 4:15): Honest expression is essential to a working marriage, spoken gently within the safety of a commitment to the relationship.
- Practice Empathic Listening coupled with Validation: Actively listen to and validate each other's thoughts and feelings to strengthen your emotional connection through empathy.

- Engage in Selfless Giving: Giving without expecting anything in return is the self-sacrificial love that marriage demands and God commands.

3 DIVINE PRINCIPLES FOR A WORKING MARRIAGE

A) OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

According to scripture, “evil” refers to any thought or action that goes against the ultimate goal of being made in God’s image. It is the sin of selfishness. The Bible advises us to “not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Applying this divine principle is crucial for the success of our marriage. In the context of marriage, this means choosing to respond to offensive behaviors and conflicts with love, patience, compassion, forgiveness, and most critically, truth. By doing so, we can transform unloving behaviors into opportunities for growth. When we respond in this way, love brings conviction, which encourages change through confession and repentance.

B) EMBRACE THE GOLDEN RULE

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matt 7:12). This principle emphasizes treating others the way we wish to be treated. It helps eliminate power struggles in our relationships, especially with our spouse. Holding on to the mindset of “I won’t love until I’m loved” or “I won’t give unless I receive something in return” creates conflict and is symptomatic of a power struggle. By practicing the golden rule, we foster healthier and more loving relationships as we deny ourselves and take up our cross.

C) BE HUMBLE

Our humility forms the foundation of our love for God and, in turn, of our relationship with Him. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) beautifully illustrates the source of our humility. It stems from the courage to recognize how we've squandered our God-given "inheritance" as His children, opting for "pigs' food" instead of the true "bread of life" (John 6:35). When we "come to ourselves," we are ready to see our Father as He truly is, by realizing that we have taken His love for granted. By acknowledging the grace He offers us, despite our undeserving nature, we come to appreciate His love more fully. As a result of this humble realization, our hearts are transformed into those of willing servants, content to serve our Master. In turn, our Father celebrates our return and change of heart, receiving us back not as servants but as His beloved children.

OVERCOMING OUR CHILDHOOD WOUNDING

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. - 1 John 4:18

Imperfect people practice imperfect love, and imperfect love inevitably wounds (John 4:18). Emotional wounds from childhood are the underlying cause of conflict in our marriage, preventing us from growing. “Conflict is growth trying to happen.” God designed marriage to provide us with the opportunity for healing our childhood wounds. Critical to our growth is letting go of the imperfect love of our parents as a need for their approval and instead embracing the perfect love of our One True Father in Heaven. The path to healing involves practicing perfect love as selfless giving, humbly acknowledging our wounds, and dedicating ourselves to confession and repentance to pursue change.

LOVE AND FAITH ARE ACTIONS

But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve.”- Jeremiah 17:10

God designed marriage to be the physical representation of our love for God and of the strength of our faith. This is done primarily through our actions. For God, actions speak louder than words. In this regard, Jesus was the first action hero. He displayed His love for His Father with an extraordinary faith by loving God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk 12:30). For your marriage to work in the manner you desire, you must love your spouse by loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and nothing less. You do this by taking action, and there is no more important action than “denying yourself as you take up your cross.” In our marriages, we are given the opportunity to deny our selfish selves dozens of times each day. But we must be willing to take up our cross. When we are willing, everything good we desire will follow as we are refined in God’s image.

SELF-FORGIVENESS IS THE KEY

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. - John 8:11

Our Father’s desire is for His children to grow and flourish as a result of being refined in His image. But key to our growth is the humility to see the truth about ourselves. Our humility depends on our belief that we are lovable, even though we make mistakes, and that our sins are forgivable. The single most challenging act of faith is to love ourselves by forgiving ourselves. God’s not interested in our condemnation; instead, He desires our redemption most. This happens by seeing the truth about ourselves and making a dedicated effort to change. And this is how we are made in God’s image by loving ourselves in the way He loves us - with truth and grace.

HOPE FOR OUR MARRIAGE

We worship a God of grace, and grace offers second chances. It is for this reason that we can have hope for our marriage. But we must believe in God’s love by practicing it toward our spouse and ourselves, so that our hope is in our faith as acts of love. In essence, marriage, as God designed it, is not just a union but a divine mechanism for personal and spiritual growth, resulting in our refinement and ultimate transformation through love and obedience to God by loving our spouse. It is by our belief in our Creator and His design that we have hope.