

The Benefits (not Challenges) of Marriage (cont.)

This two-part series about marriage began with a list of the lessons that I have learned in my 37 years of marriage which my wife, Cyndi, and I recently celebrated.

In the first post, I detailed three lessons that are more traditional or secular in nature. I conclude now with the remaining 3, which are more internal and biblical.

First, let me recap and categorize the lessons for you:

External (Traditional)

- Companionship Offset Loneliness
- Provision (Security) and Support
- Sex for Intimacy and Procreation (and Avoiding Temptation)

Internal (Biblical)

- Character Refinement and Holiness
- Self-sacrifice / Servant Leadership
- Love and Respect

In my opinion, this second set contains the hardest lessons since they will reveal your inner weaknesses that need the

most work... at least those did for me!

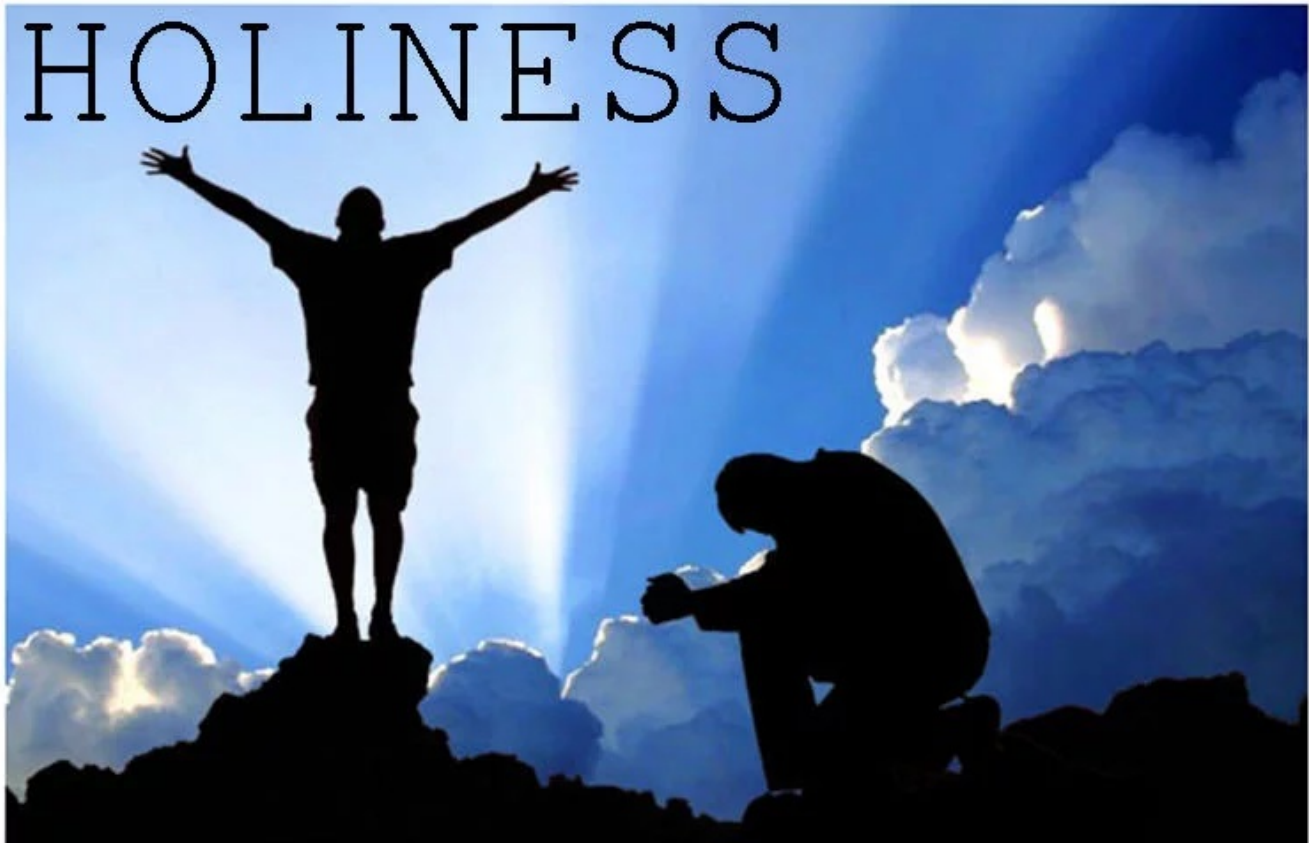
So let's go over the second set.

▪ **Character Refinement and Holiness**

Many men jokingly say that "they married up" to denote that they married a better person or increased their social status after the wedding. I kind of resent that phrase since it demeans the marriage.

That said, I do tell Cyndi that she "makes me a better man".

Throughout Scripture, we are challenged to take off our old self and put on the new man. This means we will allow God to continually refine our character and increase our holiness.



Character Refinement leads to Holiness

The writer of the book of Proverbs, King Solomon states, *"An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels."* (Proverbs 31:10 NASB)

At times, your spouse will become the chisel that God uses to chip away those bad parts of your character.

Solomon gives us some more wisdom by stating, *"An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rotteness in his bones."* (Proverbs 12:4 NASB)

Any God-believing marriage embraces the biblical teaching that *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). It means neither of you are perfect and both in need of God's love.

Sure, your wife may tell you some hard truths at times. But most of the time, she is doing so to make you a better man. Any feelings of resentment you may have are actually showing your pride and selfishness, which are parts of your character that likely need refinement.

God is simply using her to increase your holiness.

▪ **Self-sacrifice / Servant Leadership**

It is during the difficult times in a marriage that a husband is called to display Christ-like love for his wife. This means he must put her needs first and his own needs last. Specifically, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” (Eph. 5:25).



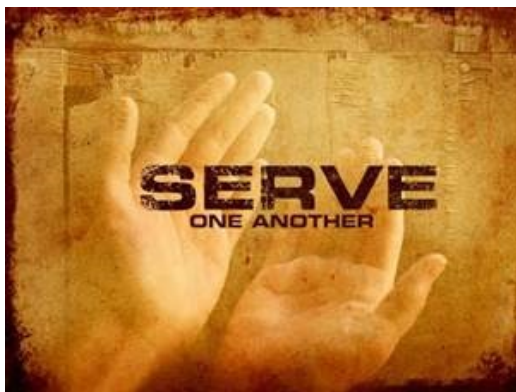
Traditionally, Ephesians 5:22-33 has been understood to teach that a husband should be the leader of his family and that a

wife should follow his leadership.

However, in my interpretation and as evidenced in our marriage, Paul's writing to "submit to one another in the fear of Christ" has led to a mutual obligation to serve each another and put one another's needs before our own. It's completely reciprocal.

This was a very hard lesson for me in the first few years of my marriage. I needed to learn how to set aside my selfish ways and put the needs of my wife and kids ahead of mine. I still fail at this often more often than I care to admit but it is a good practice, for sure.

Self-sacrifice in marriage also presents the husband with a unique opportunity to embrace the fullness of mutual submission, which is the heart of servant leadership.



"Submit to one another in the fear of Christ, wives, to your own husbands as to the Lord."

— *Ephesians 5:21-22*

Servant leadership is the perfect representation of Christ as a husband loving his bride.

In our marriage, Cyndi and I have discovered and shared the responsibility and leadership role in the areas of each of our strengths.

As we often quote the great theologian, Sylvester Stallone as Rocky Balboa, "She's got gaps, I've got gaps, together we fill gaps".

We have learned to fill in each other's gaps as a way of serving each other.

▪ **Love and Respect**

Culture often gets the purpose of marriage wrong. It teaches that marriage comes from love and that –as long as love is alive in the marriage, you will stay happy and can work through the difficult issues.

The problem is that this type of "cultural love" is based on feelings that come and go, whereas "biblical love" is about learning how to love, every day, no matter what life throws at the two you!



In Ephesians 5:33, the Apostle Paul finishes with the statement that a husband must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

The essence of this verse is that the husband must first love his wife to earn her respect. Read that again. He must FIRST love his wife.

Cyndi & I once led a study titled Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires; The Respect He Desperately Needs. Author Emerson Eggerich describes the secret to couples meeting each other's deepest needs—to stop the crazy cycle. Eggerich explains that without love, the wife reacts without respect, and without respect, a husband reacts without love, and thus, a painful, negative “crazy cycle” begins. This crazy cycle continues when we keep doing the same things over and over with the same ill effect.

The Bible calls men to lead in their marriage by stopping the crazy cycle first. When we take the initiative to stop the craziness, we show our wife that we love them unconditionally despite the current difficulty. The results may not be immediate, but showing her the love she desires often leads to her showing you the respect you need which then eases your

desire to show love again.

Once, I read that there are more verses in the Bible written to men about marriage than any to the wife. I guess that just means men have a harder time, remembering that love comes before respect.

Final Encouragement: Include God in Your Marriage!

Throughout these posts, the premise is that God is required in marriage to make it successful. Again, Solomon wrote this which states that a marriage with God at the center is potentially stronger than one without God.

*“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. **A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**”*

– Ecclesiastes 4:12

our 3 cords of marriage



I know that there are also many great marriages in the world among non-believers as well. However, my personal experience is that by including the teachings of Jesus in my marriage, we are able to fight off the brokenness that so many relationships encounter.

One of the wonderful things I experienced in my marriage is that Cyndi helps pick me up and find the good in almost every situation. In that way, she makes me a better man!

In conclusion, God desires a Christ-centered marriage to help redeem the world and heal any brokenness. He gave us a

companion to make us better men and to help keep us from the many temptations we encounter. All we need to do is make sure we include Him in our marriage to help it thrive!