

Kingdom Living Today

Illustrating the WAY of God's Kingdom for a Modern World

42. Marriage Should Be Honored By All

“AT THE BEGINNING OF CREATION I MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE.
FOR THIS REASON A MAN WILL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND
BE UNITED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH.
SO THEY ARE NO LONGER TWO, BUT ONE.
THEREFORE WHAT I HAVE JOINED TOGETHER, LET NO ONE SEPARATE.”

The two couples, one older and the other in their 40's, faced each other on comfortable loveseats in José and Sharee's brightly lit family room. After the four of them had prayed Chris blurted, “Tracy and I left a little miffed after we met with you both last week, José.” Glancing sideways at Tracy, who'd put some space between them, he added, “We thought you'd listen to our gripes about each other that we've harbored throughout our marriage.”

Tracy finished for him. “But instead you gave us homework, like we were kids.”

“And did you complete what we asked you to do?” José asked politely. When they both nodded he went on, “After 20 years of marriage, what *you two* see wrong in each other and what *our Lord* sees and desires for your marriage have nothing in common. So I ask you both, whom would you want me to pay more attention to?”

“To the Lord, of course,” they murmured without much conviction.

“Listen,” Sharee broke in firmly. “When your *love for Jesus* matters more to you than focusing on how you hurt each other, then your marriage will be on the right path.”(1Corinthians 13:1-7) She eyeballed them both. “I realize that neither of you have much hope this can ever happen. But are you both willing to continue following our direction for the next few weeks just as you vowed to do during our first meeting?”

After a brief hesitation both agreed. Tracy added, “It's not so much for Chris that I'm willing, but when you showed us the statistics about what happens to the children of divorce, I felt our marriage is worth fighting for! I don't want to handicap our kids with the curse of divorce.” Chris's look affirmed her.

José asked them to open the *Demolishing Your Strongholds* survey he'd asked them both to fill in last week. After he and Sharee had scrutinized the responses he asked, “Did you renounce these demonic strongholds together in the Name of Jesus as we asked you to?”

“It took us a few days before we had the courage to go through our strongholds together,” Chris confessed. “And even another day before we could renounce them together,” Tracy added.

“Then you're both free of these?” José pursued, making sure they both responded they were. He then began to discuss the symptoms of the strongholds the couple had in common, starting with the stronghold of Deceit. Chris had indicated a high number for “rationalization”, while Tracy scored high on “delusions.” José pointed out, “Each of the symptoms is a demonically-induced *rut of attitude and behavior* that you need to fill in by the Spirit of Christ in you and with the help of others. If your marriage is going to be saved, you two have to help each other.” Wavering just a lit-

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tle, they both agreed.

José focused on Chris. “Tell me about the rationalization in your life.”

The younger man responded quickly, eager to be free from this lifelong darkness. “I’ve always been able to talk myself out of taking responsibility and get people to agree with my reasoning.^(1Corinthians 3:18,19) And I tend to shrug off problems and even treat serious ones superficially. I guess I’d call myself ‘aloof.’”

Turning to Tracy, Sharee asked, “What do you think about what Chris just said?”

Sensing how earnest her husband was to come clean, she answered, “That describes him. And, if I could add, he often makes excuses to justify his sinful behavior.” She was actually surprised that Chris didn’t argue with her or try to defend himself. Instead, he acknowledged Tracy’s insight almost gratefully.^(Proverbs 27:9)

“And you, Tracy,” José inquired, “tell us how you see delusion in your life.”

Having previously reflected on this, she responded with certainty. “My Mom divorced my father when I was little. After she married my stepfather when I was 12, I began to watch a lot of ‘chick flicks’ and read romance novels. So when I got married, I’d already developed what I can see now were a lot of *false expectations* about what I thought marriage should be.” She shook her head sadly. “For the past 20 years I’ve lived deluded that things should be the way I’d envisioned them.” She broke into tears. Chris, moved by her confession, reached over to take her hand.

Sharee asked softly, “Chris, is there anything you can add?”

“Tracy’s spent so many years comparing herself to other women and always ending up feeling like she falls short,” he replied with frustration. “As much as I try to affirm her, it seems like my words fall on deaf ears. And, sometimes she plagues herself with the notion that the ‘grass is greener’ somewhere else—like God has short-changed her so she isn’t grateful to God for what we do have.”

“He’s right!” Tracy sobbed. “I brought a lot of baggage into our marriage from things my mother would tell me: ‘Tracy, you’re putting on weight.’ ‘Tracy, I see a zit on your face.’ If there was something wrong with me she’d always point it out. That’s why I find it hard to accept when people say anything nice to me now.”

Sharee looked kindly at the couple. “How are you both feeling right now?”

Squeezing one another’s hands they answered, “Hopeful that we can change...”

“Over the next week I want the two of you to go through the rest of your symptoms together and help ‘fill in the ruts’,^(2Corinthians 10:4,5) José smiled. “If you run into any problems, call us right away. Don’t hesitate! Is that okay with you both?”

Still holding hands, Chris and Tracy nodded appreciatively.

Their elder/shepherd wasn’t through. “I also want you to give to each of your parents a copy of the *Demolishing Your Strongholds* survey you filled in along with the *Gospel of the Covenant* article and the statistics on children of divorce I gave you last week. Next time, Sharee and I would like to meet with both you *and* your folks after they’ve gone through the materials.”

“Why get *them* involved?” they both asked incredulously.

José responded adamantly. “Your marriage didn’t get to the difficult condition it is today without the influence of your folks in your past. We need to get your parents on board if you really want help for you and your children.”

Sharee added to her husband’s counsel. “We need to introduce your parents to

the reality of demonic strongholds, and make known the covenant goals you're trying to incorporate into your marriage. Once they read the statistics on the children of divorce and see the strongholds they've passed along to you and their grandchildren, they'll want us all to get together, I assure you!"

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Two weeks later guests once more sat in José and Sharee's family room. After pouring coffee for everyone Sharee sat next to her husband. Across from each other sat two gray-haired couples: Chris's parents, Ned and Claire, and John and Phyllis, Tracy's parents. Chris and Tracy flanked their hosts. Their nervousness was readily apparent, so José started by putting them all at ease.

"I take it you all know that Chris and Tracy have been considering ending their marriage?" he asked. They all nodded. "We're not here to find fault or to establish blame, but rather to help identify whatever may be hindering them from experiencing the fullness of the love of Jesus in their marriage." The parents relaxed a little at that.

Sharee interjected, "As you can see by the materials Chris and Tracy gave you, divorce is an awful curse on children — possibly for several generations."

Phyllis responded, "The material you asked us to read sure got our attention! Having been divorced and remarried myself, I know I've passed along a mess to Tracy."

Sharee reassured her. "When a generation fails to demolish their demonic strongholds, it leaves problems for the next generation. José and I are still cleaning things up from our past ignorance, since we only learned these truths six years ago!"

"So you two have children?" Claire asked with interest.

"Four kids and eleven grandchildren," José beamed. "As Sharee and I made the Hebraic foundations a way of life, we learned that the fruit of any generation is seen in the *grandchildren* it produces.^(Proverbs 17:6) For their sake we vowed to do whatever was necessary so that they'd grow up loving our Lord Jesus and desiring to serve Him. Some good changes have happened, but it's still a work in progress."

"Do you mind if we ask what you did to change?" Ned broke in.

"Just what we've done for you!" Sharee smiled. "We gave our kids the same materials we gave you, including *Demolishing Your Strongholds*. José and I identified our strongholds so that our children could see what got past us to them and to our grandchildren.^(Psalms 32:5) Besides giving our kids the materials, we asked the people in our fellowship family to pray and fast for them until our Lord broke through."

Craig asked a bit dubiously, "Did everyone get onboard?"

"Not at first," José replied with a grin. "It began with our youngest son, Ramon, and his wife Elesa. They were at the same place Chris and Tracy find themselves. Today they're active in our fellowship family, and he and Elesa conduct *Demolishing Strongholds* seminars in Spanish throughout this area."

Sharee could see hope filling everyone in the room. She then asked each of the older parents, "Why are you still married?" As each pondered the question for a moment, Claire confidently blurted, "Because I gave my word 45 years ago!"

"As noble as that sounds," José replied, "does it meet the glorious intent and purpose our Lord has for your marriage after all these years?"

Claire grabbed her husband's hand and looked deeply into his eyes. "Now that

we've read the *Gospel of the Covenant* I'd have to answer an emphatic 'NO!'" Ned took up her drift. "We do need help. After we read that God wanted our marriage to represent our relationship with Him, we both became convicted how we'd failed to prepare our kids for marriage."

"I've been Tracy's stepdad since she was 12," John noted as he looked with love at her. "It hasn't always been easy for her and me, but I was proud when she asked me to walk her down the aisle at her wedding. And I want to do whatever I can to help her and Chris stay together." He paused to look at Phyllis. "And, I want *our* marriage to shine with the love of Jesus!" "Me too!" his wife rejoined with tears.

José and Sharee were overjoyed. "We'll be glad to work with you in establishing the Hebraic foundations in your marriage and families. But first, you older couples need to get free of strongholds and begin to fill in your old ruts of behavior and attitudes with ways that please our Father."

"How will we know when we're truly free and the ruts have been filled in?" asked Phyllis pointedly.

Sharee responded, "When your heart is filled with the mercy of Jesus toward other people, especially those who've hurt you.^(1Peter 4:8) When you're free, you find it easy to forgive because you have the deepest appreciation of what you've been forgiven of by our Father through the blood of Jesus."

"You'll KNOW you're free," José added, "because the love of Jesus will rule you and empower your attitude and actions toward others."^(2Corinthians 3:16-18) Optimism filled the room as José assigned "homework" for each of the couples. As the evening began to wrap up, Ned asked, "José, could Claire and I could join your fellowship family?" "Us too!" chimed John and Phyllis earnestly.

José answered warmly, "Let's work toward that goal. We'll need several more meetings together, and each of you will need to embrace our Father's Covenant in Jesus before you become part of our fellowship family." José then led them in prayer. When everyone had left, the elder shepherd and his wife sat back delighted in how exceedingly abundantly our Lord had answered their prayers.^(Ephesians 3:20)

FYI: Quick Resolutions That Are Key To Ending Marital Conflicts

(courtesy of authors Ron Blue and Jeremy White)

1. Stick to the problems at hand. Don't bring up past issues or accuse your spouse of "always" or "never" behaving a certain way.
2. Don't think about "*my way*" or "*your way*." Work toward a solution that represents "*our way*."
3. Identify the core issue. Get to the heart of the problem, not just the symptoms.
4. Don't be a mind reader. Don't try to interpret your spouse's thoughts or motives; instead, ask direct questions.
5. If you haven't reached a consensus by bedtime, agree to resume the discussion the next day. Bitterness can take root in your marriage if you leave things unresolved.
6. No matter how strongly you disagree, attacking your spouse's personality or character is never acceptable.
7. Remember, your relationship with your spouse is far more important than winning or being "right."
8. Remember that love keeps no record of wrongs. Be quick to forgive, quick to admit your own mistakes, and quick to move on from the conflict.