

I'm excited to embark on a new series with you, *Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice*.

If someone you know is struggling in their marriage, please forward this to them. Many of these lessons will be available on the website before they arrive in your in-box, so if you would like to work ahead, look for the lessons at www.hopeintheLord.org.

In Him who strengthens and provides strength,
Jennifer

My six-year-old is a bull-dozer in bed. On the nights he finds his way into our bed, my husband and I (without really waking up) erect a pillow wall to protect us from his bull-dozing. Eventually one of us will send him back to his bed, but the pillow wall between us will remain.

Married life is teeming with bull-dozers: disciplining kids, dealing with in-laws, facing economic hardships, recovering from rejection (real or perceived), pushing through unmet expectations, and battling through disagreements. Just as my husband and I build up walls to stave off the bull-dozer in our bed, often without even realizing it, couples make choices every day that build up walls in their marriage. In an effort to protect themselves from the challenges that push at them and wear them down, they build a wall that separates them from each other. And, just like our pillow wall remains after our son is back in his own bed, the walls in our marriage also remain after the challenges are gone. Over time they grow thicker and taller.

Do you have any of these walls in your marriage? You can't see them, but they might as well be 2 foot thick and 10 feet tall for the way they separate you from your spouse. Have you ever caught yourself muttering something bad to or about your beloved under your breath? Do you feel like everything he does is wrong or not good enough? Are you easily angered with him? Do you ever think life would be easier if he wasn't around? Do you find yourself continually dissatisfied with your marriage? If so, you have walls.

What you may not realize, though, is that YOU are the builder of these walls.

I know what you're thinking, and yes, your husband may not be the greatest. Yes, he could probably help out more around the house. Yes, I agree, he could be more patient with your kids. And, yes, absolutely, I know he just doesn't understand you the way you want him to. Yes, I even know that he has broken your heart and let you down at times, maybe even most of the time. But, no, you can't blame the walls that surround you on him.

Your happiness and satisfaction with your marriage is determined by YOU. It is a matter of choice. In fact, most of life has very little to do with what happens to us and very much to do with how we react to what happens to us. As Charles Swindoll said, "I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it."

Much of your marriage is the result of how you act and react. Every choice you make has an impact: it either strengthens your marriage, or it strengthens your walls.

If you have walls in your marriage, you are not alone. I've built more than a few walls in my own marriage and when I speak on this topic everyone agrees that they have laid at least a few bricks in their marriage. The good news is that these walls are not indestructible, no matter how thick and tall they may be. You have the opportunity to destroy every single wall you have built. Journey with us and God will provide you every tool you need to build your marriage and not your wall.

It won't happen in a day. It will take time and effort on your part. But, the panoramic view you will have when the walls are gone will be more than worth it!!

For those of you in deep pain in your marriage: First, your husband should never physically harm you or your children or verbally abuse you or your children. If he does, please call **1-800-799-SAFE** or visit www.ndvh.org. For those of you who are not abused but in a loveless marriage, my heart goes out to you. Please continue to pray for God's guidance and continue through this study. We can't change our husbands, but we can allow God to change us and pray for Him to bring our husband to new life.

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Prayer that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

Heavenly Father, You are the God of marriage and of promises kept. You, Lord, allowed my husband and I to be joined and to become one. You and You alone know the depths of hurt and sin in my marriage. You alone know my thoughts and words. You know my heart. Lord, search my heart and make it pure. Find the hard and places and bring light to them. Break the chains of bitterness, anger, selfishness, coldness, and pride that bind my heart and keep it from true love. Give me the strength to take this journey with You, Lord. Jesus, heal me and heal my marriage. Stitch my broken, hurt, and wandering heart back together with your truth. Show me Your way, Lord.

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Truth that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

Pray for God's wisdom and then begin.

1. Identify the issues that cause you to build walls in your marriage, those things that cause you to pull away from or be angry or frustrated with your husband, the things that cause you to resent him or think life would be better without him, the things that you see as wrong in him, the things that lead you to be dissatisfied.
- 2a. Pick the 5 biggest issues from your list above.
b. For each issue write out your typical reaction (thoughts and actions/words).
c. Spend some time thinking about your typical response. How might this reaction build a wall between you and your spouse?
- 3a. For each of the 5 issues, give 3 other optional reactions (including thoughts and actions/words) that would not build a wall in your marriage.
b. Who chooses which reaction you'll use?
c. Why do you think you're making the choices that build walls rather than the choices that build marriages?
3. Use this opportunity to get it all out on the table with God. Talk to Him out loud or in writing. Don't hold back; He already knows your pains and frustrations in your marriage. He knows your thoughts and your heart. Pour it all out to Him now, in complete honesty. Take it to Him because He is the only one who can help you. When you have exhausted your tears and pain and vented your frustrations and discontentment, continue with the next question. This may take more than one sitting.
4. God is known as Jehovah-Rophe, the God who heals (Exodus 15:26). "Rophe," as used in the Bible, means to repair, to restore, and to heal. The original word is a mending by stitching that thoroughly makes something whole. Picture your marriage as a garment. What state of disrepair is it in? Is it a little tattered and ragged on the edges, or is it shredded and full of gaping holes?
5. Picture the Lord taking your tattered or shredded garment into His hands and mending it back together using the finest stitching, putting beautiful new material in the gaping holes and creating a delicate embroidery to heal the ragged edges. Imagine how He might work; see His love and concentration, His patience in the delicate details. Can you see in His posture that, even though the garment needs much repair, He will not grow weary of doing the work needed to make it whole and beautiful again (OR for the first time)? How does this picture of the Lord mending, repairing, restoring your tattered marriage affect you?

Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice #1

6. Will you ask the Lord right now to heal your marriage? Will you apologize to Him for your wrong choices and actions? Will you turn your heart over to Him to be healed and made new through His love? Will you surrender to His stitching and let Him work His beautiful, glorious pattern in your marriage? Will you turn it over to Him and trust Him?

Go to the Lord now and do this in written prayer, or speak it aloud.

7. Will you commit to sticking this out and not snatching the garment of your marriage back from Jesus' hands before He has finished His good, beautiful and glorious work in your marriage?



Action that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

1. What one new and better reaction will you choose to use this week in your marriage?
2. How will you change your schedule to create a daily quiet time to talk with God and read His Word?
If you're not sure what to do with this time, start out by talking to Him about your marriage. Ask Him daily to show you how you can make a difference in your marriage. Ask Him to give you the faith to trust Him. Open your Bible to Psalms or Proverbs and see what there is. Or, open your Bible to Matthew and start reading through the New Testament.



I never said this was going to be easy. I only said it would be worth it.

Hang in there. I can't wait for you to see the glorious garment of marriage that God has planned for you!

In Him who restores and repairs,
Jennifer