

I ran into a friend last week who was excited about this new marriage series. I mentioned that it's going to be challenging and make us take a hard look at who we are as wives. Her response? "Good, that's what we need!"

I pray that we will all attack these lessons with her attitude and commitment!

If someone you know is struggling in their marriage, please forward this to them. Other lessons are available on the website, www.hopeintheLord.org.

In the Lord who loves us,
Jennifer

I'm a Monday-morning dieter, starting each week with the declaration that I am going to eat healthier. But by midmorning the M&Ms are calling my name. By lunch, salad and water have lost the battle to nachos and Dr. Pepper. By Tuesday, I wonder why I ever planned to eat healthier in the first place.

I make these poor food choices because I never truly commit to eating healthier. I think it would be nice and beneficial, but I don't give myself over to it with a committed desire to succeed. If I did wholeheartedly commit, the M&Ms, Dr. Pepper and tortilla chips would be buried in the trash long before they could call my name.

And so it goes with our marriages. Before we can stop making choices that build walls and start making choices that build marriages, we have to commit to the most important choice: **we have to choose to be married**. We have to make a whole-hearted commitment to our marriage.

Every moment of every day, you need to make a conscious choice to be married. Not a choice to see how things work out, not a choice to see if you'll stay around, and not a choice to see who else is out there, but a choice to be married: a choice to honor the vows you made.

You will know you are truly committed when you throw out the junk: when you stop looking around to see what your other options are, when you stop daydreaming and fantasizing about others, when you turn your mind away from things (romance novels, soap operas, magazines, friends?) that paint an unrealistic picture of relationships and leave you disillusioned and dissatisfied in your marriage.

The struggle in making this commitment and throwing out the junk is that you have to put your marriage and its needs before yourself and your needs. If your primary goal each day is to do what is best for you, then you are not doing what is best for your marriage.

Our culture teaches us that "It's all about me," and that our 'needs' (which are really just wants) should come first. It leads us to believe that happiness comes from everything going our way and living our life purely for our enjoyment. If you have believed that, I imagine you can see it's not working so well for your marriage. It's probably lead you think you would be better off divorced since you're not fulfilled and getting everything you need?

Banish the word "divorce" from your vocabulary. Don't allow yourself to speak it or to think it. It may look like the path of light, happiness and freedom, but, in reality, it is a dark dungeon of despair for most of us.

I know that, for some of you, your marriage feels like a dungeon and your vows feel like chains. I know some of you live with great rejection and loneliness. I can not even begin to imagine your pain. Divorce may seem like the only release from your suffering. But rather than seeing the darkness of divorce as your escape route, I want you to look at a different path. I want you to hope for your marriage to become a source of light and joy.

Does it seem impossible? Have you given up on happiness and joy in your marriage? Do you think the only way your heart can soar again is outside of your marriage?

Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice #2

Nothing is impossible with Jesus. His power can overcome the lost hope in your marriage. His love is the one weapon you have against all those things that call you away from your commitment to your marriage. He is the One who can destroy the walls and build your marriage to the point that you overflow with love for each other.

What choice will you make for your marriage?

Will you, today and every day, choose to be married?

Will you make that commitment whole-heartedly?

Will you trust in Jesus to restore and grow your marriage?

I am praying that you will.

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.*

For those of you who are divorced: *Divorce is NOT an unforgivable sin! Divorce does not make you less in Jesus' eyes. Your Lord loves you. He knows the pain and hurt of your marriage and your divorce. He wants to comfort you and take away the pain, not chastise you. Let Him heal your heart and wash away your grief. If you are remarried, let Him be the guiding light of this marriage and commit whole-heartedly to this marriage, knowing your confessed sins are always forgiven and that Jesus is the Lord of your life.*

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Prayer that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

Lord, God, it seems that everything in me pulls me toward that which pleases me. I want to do what makes me feel good and I do not want to give up any of my wants. I am pulled to live my life for me and me alone, even if it is at the expense of my marriage. Father, I ask you to search my heart and trim away my selfishness and sin. Lord, hide from my eyes and banish from my thoughts the desires that set themselves up against my marriage. Open my eyes to the truth and let me see the ways I am not making the choice to be married.

Give me the faith to believe in your strength, power and love. Give me your strength to whole-heartedly commit to my marriage. Use your power to heal me. Pour your love on our marriage that we may love each other as you love us, Jesus. Thank you, Lord.

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Truth that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

Pray for God's wisdom and then begin.

This is not going to be easy, but I don't want you to get discouraged. As I work on this, my mind is filled with all the ways that I'm not so good at practicing what I preach. We won't be perfect, and we'll have days where we fail miserably in our marriages. But we move on and we keep trying, starting fresh each day and trusting God's unfailing mercy.

1. What changes did you make as a result of the last lesson? What were the results?

Download lessons at www.hopeintheLord.org.

2a. Describe thoughts and actions you have had that show you are not choosing to be married every moment of every day.

Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice #2

Be honest here. None of us are perfect. A wonderful woman who I use as a role model of being a Godly wife told me this week that after a recent fight with her husband she caught herself thinking that this would be easier without him. We are all human!

2b. Write or speak aloud a prayer, telling the Lord about these wrong thoughts and actions and asking for His forgiveness.

The beauty of what this woman told me was how her heart was grieved because she had those thoughts. She recognized that they were sinful and she confessed them to the Lord.

2c. Think about what you just did and examine your heart. Did you just go through the motions of asking for forgiveness, or are you truly sorry that you thought and did these things? If you're not truly sorry and are still justifying your actions in your mind, ask God to soften your heart and show you the truth. Go on with the lessons, but keep coming back to this each day until you truly are sorry in your heart. If you truly are sorry when you confess, you don't need to confess again, the Lord has forgiven your sins.

My friend also fought this battle, which compounded her grief over her sin. She said she wrestled with a hard heart for several days, wanting to hold on to these thoughts and not really confess them. She wanted to keep putting what looked better to her (anger) over what was better for her marriage (forgiveness).

3a. List the things outside of your marriage that lead you to be dissatisfied with your husband or your marriage.

b. Are these things truth? Why or why not? Pray for wisdom and search the scripture using a concordance or Bible web site.

c. What will you do this week to banish these things so that you can commit to your marriage?

4a. List the ways you put your needs above the needs of your marriage.

Going through each item on the list:

b. What effect does each choice have on your marriage?

c. Why are you making this choice?

d. Can you give up making this choice so that you put the needs of your marriage above the needs of yourself?

e. Make a new list of the choices you are going to give up. Tuck it away in your Bible or somewhere you'll see it each day. Review it each day, determining to choose your marriage over yourself. Ask God to help you each day.

5a. Read Lamentations 3:19-26 several times, praying it out loud to the Lord and meditating on it.

b. What is the author remembering?

c. What promises does this passage contain?

d. What hope does this give you for your marriage?

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Action that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

-- What actions will you take this week to show your commitment to your marriage?

-- What will you do daily to remind yourself of your commitment?

-- What specific choices will you make to put the needs of your marriage above the needs of yourself?

-- What do you need to change to ensure that you spend time in your Bible and in prayer every day?

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I never said this was going to be easy. I only said it would be worth it. Hang in there; His compassions and His love NEVER fail!

In Him,
Jennifer