

Today's lesson is one of my favorites. Not only does it strengthen our marriages, but it also helps with raising kids, work, and every other part of life. I pray that God speaks to you in this message from Him today.

If someone you know is struggling in their marriage, please forward this to them. Other lessons are available on the website, [www.hopeinthelord.org](http://www.hopeinthelord.org).

In the Lord who loves us,  
Jennifer

Are any of you surprised at how *difficult* it is to be married?

Back when I was enraptured with my fiancé, (who, by the way, I am still enraptured with), wise veterans of marriage tried to prepare me for this reality. But I persisted in my belief that somehow my marriage would be different than every other marriage. I was sure that Jim and I alone possessed the great love and the knowledge and skills needed for an easy marriage.

Hah! Was I ever wrong! The reality is that marriage is difficult. Anyone who has ever had a roommate knows how hard it can be to live with someone. Add the need to manage finances, raise kids, and plan a future together, and there is nothing easy about it.

What I have been wondering about lately is: Where did we ever get the idea that marriage was supposed to be easy? Where did we ever get the idea that *life* was supposed to be easy?

Most of my frustrations with kids, family, work, marriage, and life in general stem from this absurd notion that life is supposed to be easy. Then when it isn't easy, I not only get frustrated, but I also start thinking that something is 'wrong'. Yet the Bible doesn't tell us life will be easy. Jesus said we would have trouble in this world. And God often refers to *when* you struggle, not *if* you struggle.

Satan has thrown us the bait of 'life should be easy' and we have swallowed it hook, line and sinker. It is a lie. The truth is that raising kids is not easy. Our jobs are not easy. *Marriage is not easy*. And when we yearn for it to be easy, we end up frustrated, dissatisfied, and discouraged.

If we expect an easy marriage, when things get difficult we start thinking there is something wrong with our marriage. That our husband is a failure. That he isn't doing things right. That we're a failure. That we would be better off without each other. We start focusing on the things that are wrong in our marriage and soon that is all we can see. It consumes us and builds walls between us.

To build our marriage, we need to stop complaining about the difficulties in our marriage and start embracing them for what they really are: God's provision that often saves us from greater difficulties, an opportunity to see God work miracles, and a catalyst for growth in our marriage. One of my favorite things about our sovereign God is the reality that every single thing in my life comes to me filtered through His hands. Everything I encounter is sized and fit just for me. 'Good' or 'bad', He allows it to achieve His perfect plan in my life. No matter how bad it may look, it is not without purpose and merit. *[Don't skip the "truth" section below. It gives mind-blowing examples of how God has used difficult and impossible situations for the good of His people.]*

The struggles strengthen our marriage. They bond us together over common experiences. Not only that, they give us great memories. We went on a mini-vacation in January. The whole trip was wonderful, but the story most often repeated and enjoyed is that of me getting sick on the side of the road and in every gas station on the way home! When Jim and I recount our kids' young years we laugh hardest at the things that were the most frustrating at the time; the things that we thought we would never make it through.

## Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice #3

The struggles in our life tell our story. They give us character. They make us interesting. They bring us closer to the Lord. They increase our faith in Him. They show us that He can and will get us through the tough times, that He will never leave us nor forsake us. They build and strengthen our marriages.

Marriage was never meant to be easy and that is a good thing. We would miss so much if it was.

*Are you yearning for the easy road, or are you choosing to embrace and work through the struggles?*

Choose to stop thinking there is something 'wrong' when things get difficult. Choose instead to buckle your seatbelt and rely on the strength of God to work it out and grow your marriage through it. Remember, life is only about 10% what happens to you and 90% of what you do with it!

What choice will you make for your marriage?

Will you continue to yearn for the easy road in your marriage, or will you choose to embrace and work through the struggles?

Will you choose to dig deeper in the section below and see God's ability to work in the struggles?

Will you allow the difficulties in your marriage to strengthen walls or to strengthen your marriage?

Choose well.

**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](http://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.*

### Prayer that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

Heavenly Father, I praise you as the great and mighty God who sees everything and knows everything. Lord, your Word tells me that you work in all things for the good of those who love you. Give me a heart to love you deeply and help me to have faith in you and trust you, Lord. Help me to reject the lies of Satan that tell me life should be easy. Give me eyes to see that every struggle and difficulty in my marriage is an opportunity for growth and even joy. Lord, please give me the strength to fight for my marriage and give me hope for the glorious marriage that is possible through you. It is in the name of Jesus, who has overcome this world and its trouble, that I pray. Amen.

### Truth that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages

*Pray for God's wisdom and then begin.*

1. Look back at your last lesson. What changes did you make? What were the results? Where do you need to recommit to change? (You can download previous lessons at [www.hopeintheLord.org](http://www.hopeintheLord.org))

2. In this lesson we're going to take a deeper look at this statement: "We need to stop complaining about the difficulties in our marriage and start embracing them for what they really are: 1) God's provision that often saves us from greater difficulties, 2) an opportunity to see God work miracles, and 3) a catalyst for growth in our marriage."

1) Embrace the struggle: it might be God's provision that saves us from greater difficulties.

\*What do these verses teach you about God's knowledge of your life?

Psalm 139:16

1 Corinthians 2:9

Romans 11:33

### *Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice #3*

There is so much about our lives that we don't know. We only see what does happen; we rarely see what *doesn't* happen. We don't know everything, but God does. Every day of our life was written in His book before even one of them came to be. Yet no mind can conceive what He has prepared for us; His paths and plans for us are beyond tracing out.

Read Exodus 13:17-18.

Sometimes what we see as the difficult road might actually be the easier road to travel. When Moses and the Israelites were escaping Egypt, the Bible tells us, "God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter."

I'll never forget my embarrassment when I convinced a friend to take my 'better' route (in an area where she lived!) only to find ourselves sitting in traffic. Though I knew the shorter route, she knew the area better and was aware of details I didn't know. That's how it is with God; He knows things we don't and His route is always the better choice.

Put yourself in the Israelite's sandals. If I was on foot, in the desert, fleeing from my enemies, and God took me the long route, I'm sure I would have been grumbling, "What is He doing? Why would He drag us on this hard, long journey when we could have taken the easy route?"

But what looked like the difficult route was actually the easier. In the next sentence we read, "For God said, 'If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.'" God knew what was in their hearts. He knew that the short, 'easy' way was not best for them. His plan, though unknown to them, was best for them. He knew things they didn't and He was saving them from the difficulties and death of war.

When we are in the long and difficult seasons of marriage, we need to hold in our complaints and trust God's plan and purpose. We don't know what we can't see. He might be saving us from a much greater pain and suffering. We can always trust His path; it is always, ultimately, the best for us.

#### **2) Embrace the struggle: it might be an opportunity to see God work a miracle.**

The truth is that sometimes God puts us in impossible situations that only He can save us from to show us His great love, power and glory; to show us that all things truly are possible with Him and that He is all we need.

Before we go on, I have to clarify two things: 1) sometimes God puts us in 'bad' situations, but I think we're more often there by our own bad choices, and 2) we are not supposed to put ourselves in impossible situations to see if God will save us!

Read Exodus 13:20-14:2

It's well-known that God parts the Red Sea for the Israelites to escape the Egyptians, but what we often miss in this story is Exodus 14:1, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp...by the sea.'"

That the Israelites were trapped next to the Red Sea with no way was not an accident. God led them there! Not only that, God Himself caused the Egyptians to pursue the Israelites. Read Exodus 14:3-9.

Why did God do this? Read Exodus 14:10-31.

To gain glory. For the Israelites to turn to Him for salvation. For God's people to learn that they do not need be afraid but only stand firm in the Lord and He will deliver them. For them to learn that the Lord will fight for them; they need only to be still. For them to see His mighty power. For them to know that He is all-sufficient for them.

If our marriage was always easy, there would be no need for us to turn to God and seek His help; there is no need for a miracle in the mundane. But when we struggle, and our hearts are hard and

### *Strengthening Your Marriage: It's all about Choice #3*

we are trapped in the hell of continual arguments, we can call out to the Lord. And He will save us. And we will see that the situation that looked impossible to us was wholly possible for God. He knew it all along. He just wanted us to learn it also.

#### **3) Embrace the struggle: it is a catalyst to grow and strengthen your marriage.**

Growth is often painful; it comes from difficult situations. But it has great rewards. I went to school with a boy who had to spend several weeks in bed because of the pain from a rapid growth spurt. When the pain was over, he had grown considerably and was now headed to a college basketball career.

An easy life doesn't give us much opportunity to grow and develop. James, Jesus' brother, said, "Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

That is what I want for my marriage and for my life, to be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Even if it is painful now, I know the beauty and glory revealed at the end of the struggle will be more than worth it. God has amazing plans for us and for our marriage, just as He had amazing plans for the Israelites.

3. What are the biggest difficulties/struggles in your marriage? List them.

4. Which ones do you yearn to escape? Star them.

5. For each item on your list, consider and write:

- a) What greater difficulty could this be saving you from?
- b) What is the impossibility? What miracle could God work here?
- c) In what way can this lead to growth in you, your spouse, or your marriage?

6. Write a prayer. Pray for the Lord to help you stop yearning for easy and start embracing the difficult. Thank God for these struggles and asking Him to make you a quick learner so that you can move past the struggles. Pray for miracles where they are needed and trust Him to work them.

.....

#### **Action that Destroys Walls and Builds Marriages**

- What struggle in your marriage will you choose to embrace?
- What 'wrongs' that have captivated your focus will you commit to let go of?
- What will you change to ensure that you spend time in your Bible and in prayer every day?

.....

**Easy is over-rated!** I want to grow, don't you?

In Him who holds our life in His hands,  
Jennifer