

Holiness not Happiness

Do you remember when you first got married? You probably thought marriage was going to bring you happiness that simply wouldn't end. You had met the one single person in the world who fills your heart with joy. And then they started leaving the cap off the toothpaste, putting the toilet paper on the spindle backwards, leaving dishes around the house, complaining about your music being too loud, comparing your cooking to their mother's, comparing your house maintenance to their father's. Or perhaps it was worse; they started spending too much time at the office, complaining when you walked through the door, arguing with your every decision, criticizing your every move, taking frustrations out on you, being interested in you only for sex, controlling every aspect of your life, yelling at you when you didn't do what they wanted, blaming you for every problem.

To some degree or another, just about everyone who is married comes to a moment when they wonder why their marriage isn't all they expected. It promised only happiness, but also delivered grief. After all it hurts when the person you have committed yourself to and opened yourself up to is the same person who takes you for granted and mistreats you. Didn't the movies promise if you met the right prince or princess you would live happily ever after? What happened?

The problem here is misunderstanding the purpose of marriage. Certainly, when you work at your marriage, it will be a source of great happiness. But while Hollywood's goal for marriage may be happiness, God's goal for marriage is holiness.

Consider what Paul says in **Ephesians 5:22-33**. We know the code. Wives respect your husbands, submitting to them. Husbands love your wives as yourselves. But why? Because this is how Christ and the church are to behave. Your marriage is a microcosmic expression of Christ's relationship with us, His church. What is the purpose of Christ's relationship with the church? "So that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (**Ephesians 5:27**, ESV). Just as the relationship between Christ and the church is about holiness, so is the relationship between husbands and wives.

The real purpose in marriage is to help you become more like Jesus. I love what Gary Thomas said in "Sacred Marriage" when his brother asked him about marriage. He said, "If you want to be free to serve Jesus, there's no question—stay single... But if you want to be more like Jesus, I can't imagine any better thing to do than get married." I absolutely agree. Where else can we better learn to love someone who is completely different from us? Where else can we better learn to forgive someone who has hurt us? Where else can we better learn to sacrifice ourselves for someone who doesn't deserve it? Where else can we better learn to be like Jesus?

This week, don't be bitter if your marriage isn't fulfilling you with amazing happiness yet; take joy that it is challenging you to pursue holiness.

--Edwin L. Crozier