

Living the Mystery

Showing Christ's Love in Real Life

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Marriage is a special gift of God. In Genesis 2 God said: It's not good for Adam to be alone. God gave him a wife to help and support, to love him and do life with him. Proverbs 18:22, "*He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the LORD.*" Doesn't mean it's easy. Put two sinners together and it gets tricky. So easy for there to be conflict. But God doesn't leave us there. He gives us his Spirit so that we can do it well.

VISION

So how do we do marriage well? God wants you to make your wife radiant. Glowing. The way to do it is to be like Christ. Ephesians 5:25, "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.*"

You are not her Savior. You can't forgive her sins. But you can create the context in which she thrives. Christ makes his church radiant. He did it by laying down his life for us. It's as you lay down your life for your wife that she will become radiant. Shining eyes. I love the definition that Benjamin Zander gives. Success is not defined by how much you have acquired or accomplished. It's defined by how many people around you have shining eyes.

CHALLENGES

Over the past twenty-five years as a minister, I've talked to a lot of wives about their marriages. Not too many men. They are too proud to come for help. Now everyone is different. But there are a couple of things that keep coming back. She will tell me things like:

He doesn't understand me. He doesn't talk to me or want to know what I think.

He doesn't want to, or can't deal with emotions. He doesn't talk much about his own emotions, and when I share mine, he tells me not to be silly, to get over it, and not to make a big deal out of it. He makes me feel like I'm a drama queen and shuts me down.

He doesn't provide spiritual leadership for our family. I've asked a hundred times if we can talk about what we read together at the dinner table instead of just slamming the Bible shut. But it never happens. He doesn't pray with me at night.

He's not involved with the kids' lives. He doesn't really spend time with them or know what's going on in their lives. Sometimes he gets annoyed and yells at them. For the most part, he leaves the discipline to me.

He wants to have sex with me, but doesn't create the atmosphere for it. He's affectionate in the bedroom just before we go to bed. But if there is all this unresolved tension between us, and he isn't affectionate earlier in the day, I struggle to open up to him.

He works too much. He's often late for dinner, the meal is getting cold, the kids are getting cranky, and I'm getting stressed out.

He's always on his phone. After work, after dinner, he sits down in his chair and doesn't talk to me or the kids.

And then there are also some men who are godless and toxic. It's not just that there is a marriage problem. The husband is mean. He controls his wife. He secretly manipulates, mocks, blames, isolates and punishes her. He plays

mind games with her and makes her crazy in her head. Her eyes are hollowed out. She comes across as really needy. A basket case. He presents himself as a godly man to others. But in reality, he is a monster. This behaviour is abhorrent. It is the opposite of who Christ is and obliterates God's intentions for marriage. Such a man needs to be disciplined and excommunicated.

LIVING THE MYSTERY

That's how marriage often goes wrong. But how do we do it well? How do we live the mystery, so that our marriages become a reflection of Christ and his church? The answer is that we need to know Christ. We need to know how much he loves us, how much he has suffered and sacrificed for us. It's as you know him, that you become like him. 1 John 4:19 reminds us, *"We love because he first loved us."* Meditate on Colossians 1:15-23; Romans 8:28-39; Ephesians 1:1-15. God has done incredible things for you in Christ. You are a mess. But he chose you before the foundation of the world. He predestined you to be adopted as his son. He redeemed you from all your sins. He promised you eternal life. He gave you his Holy Spirit as a guarantee of that life. You belong to him. He cares about you deeply. He is willing to do anything for your good. The more you look at Christ, the more you will be transformed by him. You will become like him. You will live the mystery.

So, what does this love look like in real life? I could mention all sorts of things in passing. Spend time with your wife. Walk. Talk. Coffee. Be curious about her. Show her affection. Cherish her. Have fun. Laugh. Repent of your own sins: drunkenness, anger, porn. Feed your own relationship with God. Make sure it's a relationship based on love, not fear. But today, I want to reflect on three other things that will make a profound difference.

UNDERSTANDING

God knows us. Your wife needs to know that you know her, love her, care about her. A big part of that is giving her space to share her emotional life with you. She wants to talk about what she's feeling. As guys, we pretty much suck at that. We will listen to her. Maybe ask a few questions. But then our gut reaction is to try to fix her. She doesn't need fixing. She just needs to share. If you try to fix her, then she'll stop sharing with you. God gives us a different vision in 1 Peter 3:7, *"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way."* Ask her about her time with a friend or her conversation with one of the kids. And then process it with her: what did you think about that? How did that make you feel? Can you tell me a bit more about that? Where did it leave you? How are you feeling now? Pure gold. Then thank her for sharing and give her a hug. More gold. We're not always real good at gentle and tender. But that's the way to shining eyes. You know whenever I tell this to my pre-marriage couples, then the girl always gets this little smirk on her face and she looks over at her fiancé with this come hither look. Very cute. Proverbs 20:5, *"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."*

TRUST

God is trustworthy. He's always loving and faithful. He always speaks the truth, does the right thing. Leads to incredible trust. That's the vision. You are there for her. Every time. Beautiful marriages are not built on doing one big thing for her. Buying her a car. They are built on a lifetime of small words, small kindnesses, small acts of consideration.

John Gottman refers to these as "sliding door moments." Every day, you have countless moments where you can choose to connect or disconnect. You get home from work and she asks you how you are doing. You can either keep scrolling on your phone. Or you can put your phone down and give her your full attention. You notice that there is something stressing her out. Do you take the time to process it with her? Or do you pretend that you didn't notice? If you regularly attend, if you answer the call, it leads to trust, intimacy, and affection.

The opposite is also true. If you ignore the bid, then slowly over time the love, the care, the intimacy fades. Damages trust in a big way. Undermines your commitment to her. The killer of marriage is not the infidelity at the end. It's the thousands of closed doors that eventually lead you and your wife to drift and look elsewhere for love and support.

HUMILITY

Two parts. First, have the humility to listen to your wife. John Gottman says that the core reason 65% of marriages break down is because a wife doesn't have agency in her husband's life. You minimise her concerns. You think you know better. You completely disregard what she says. Two thirds of the time relationships break down because you are too proud to really listen to your wife.

Another thing: There is going to be conflict in your marriage. Just as Christ takes responsibility for fixing us, so you have to take responsibility for fixing your marriage. How? Ephesians 4:32 gives some good advice. *"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."* And Ephesians 4:2 tells what stands behind it. *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."* Humility is key. It's the defining feature of a Christian. It's the solution to conflict. Don't try to change your wife. Don't point out all her faults. Instead, be humble. Take the log out of your own eye, and be quick to admit where you've gone wrong. If you're right, keep your mouth shut. Have the grace to give her space to acknowledge her shortcomings. If you have humility, you are 90% of the way there in solving the issue.

CONCLUSION

Hard work, brothers. Can you do it? It's as you know Christ, love him and look to him that he will live in you and you will shine. You will love your wife as Christ loved you. He will also enable you to make your wife radiant. Shining eyes.