

Reflections on Marriage

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“Do you remember the 21st night of September?” Not only is that a lyric in Earth, Wind, and Fire’s song “September,” but it is the day my husband and I committed to one another in matrimony. I thought I knew what I was stepping into. Growing up in a two-parent household, I witnessed the practical roles of marriage. I attended a church that preached about God’s design for marriage. During communion, my elder asked, “Would I like to serve Mickey (my soon to be husband) the wine (white grape juice)?” *Serve him!*?! I became overwhelmed with emotion but held my composure. I realized that marriage would be a life of servitude, a sacrificial love. But never did it occur to me that the purpose of our union was to make us holy.

In *Sacred Marriage*, Gary Thomas (2015) proposes a challenging question: “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” (p. 11). My husband and I have been on relationship retreats and have attended marriage conferences. We understand that whatever God institutes, like marriage, is holy. We failed to consider that the design of marriage was intended to make us, Octavia and Mickey, holy. We know that God can use our marriage as an example of how Jesus loved the church and gave his life for her. However, this question prompted us to begin a new journey in discovering the purpose of marriage.

A friend once told me that my marriage would serve as a mirror, and it would reveal who you are. Thomas echoes the same sentiments by expanding on the sanctification of marriage in the chapter, “The Cleansing of Marriage.” I’m challenged to ask myself, can two imperfect people plus the pressured filled process of becoming one lead to a place of sacredness and sanctity? Although many times I believe the opposite was transpiring, we were being led to a place of holiness.

Thomas reminds us that marriage, being inherently difficult yet so wonderfully complex, can expose your sin, shift your worldview, and shape and refine your character. Here is a thought: “What if God didn’t design marriage to be ‘easier’?” (Thomas, 2015, p. 11). This notion challenges the unbiblical “happy wife/happy life” gospel. The author is pointing to a deeper comprehension of marriage. Our marital goals have shifted towards learning to love like God, receiving deeper levels of understanding, having more pronounced worship, and encountering a new sense of fellowship. Like Thomas, we now believe that “‘Sacred’ isn’t my brand; it’s my way of life.” (Thomas, 2015, p.13) Holy is what we are choosing to become.

Our premarital counselor would say often, “relationships naturally deteriorate.” It resonated with me when I read the following quote in chapter 10:

Christian marriage is also about learning to fall forward. Obstacles arise, anger flares up, and weariness dulls our feelings. When this happens, the spiritually immature respond by pulling back, becoming more distant from their spouse, or even seeking to start over with somebody more exciting. Yet maturity is reached by continuing to move forward past the pain and apathy. Falls are inevitable. We can’t always control whether or not we fall, but we can control the direction in which we fall- toward or away from our spouse. (Thomas, 2015, p. 146)

The greatest thing I have learned from this was the opposite of love is not hate, it is apathy. God forbid my husband and I would come to a place in our life that a lack of interest would cause us to suppress our passions or emotions and not practice intentionality.

We disliked that this experience left us feeling vulnerable, exposed, and challenged. We know that we are fallible beings and prone to disappoint one another, but no one wants to hear that they are flawed. We were both unable to hide behind our excuses, reject correction, and

reject scripture. For example, addressing the “male masquerade,” as the writer calls it, was a little stinging for my husband. In “Falling Forward,” Thomas mentions that men are typically less likely to communicate, see their independence as a sign of manhood, and think interdependence is a sign of weakness. It can be damaging to their spouse if they remain reclusive. Mickey is introverted, quiet, and uncommunicative. To know that he can potentially cause harm in our relationship is less than encouraging to hear. To be like Christ, he must begin to express his love.

James 3:2 (NLT) says, “Indeed we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.” The reality is that we are all infected with sin. We will disappoint our spouses time and time again. Thomas gave an unlikely encouraging word in “Holy Honor”:

You will never find a spouse who is not affected in some way by the reality of the fall... which means, if you can't respect this spouse because she is prone to certain weaknesses, you will never be able to respect any spouse. (Thomas, 2015, p. 67)

As harsh as this may come across, it logically resonates with us. What does this mean for us? It means that we are in this marriage for the long haul. We recognize this journey is a marathon and not a sprint. We believe that God is cultivating something greater than we can see. *Sacred Marriage* has helped my husband and me to re-envision the purpose of marriage and what it can truly be. “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

References

Thomas, G. (2000). *Sacred marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan