

## Marriage Enrichment Reflection Paper #1 Terri Zungre

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The book Sacred Marriage had a positive impact on my life and challenged me to evaluate my marriage looking at it with fresh eyes. Just as the Bible in 2Corinthians 13:5 challenges us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, I think it is important to look at our marriage and assess the health of our marriage. Gary Thomas described marriage as an avenue to create holiness in our life. Marriage is like a fundamental discipleship class that never ends. I say fundamental, although not easy, because Jesus simplified all the commandments in Mathew 22:36-40 into two principles: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" The book challenged me to ask hard questions of myself, and to gauge if I was maintaining a deep loving, self-sacrificing, and life-giving relationship with God and with my husband. I have mentioned the seven points from the book that spoke to me the most.

My first take away follows along the same thought, in that the book mentioned that your spouse is like a "God-Thermometer". Your marriage reflects your relationship with God. Marriage is dedicated Christianity. It is the crucible that makes us mature. We have to confront our selfishness, die to self, and become mature. Whenever we have a fight with our spouse, we have to ask who is going to be the mature one and apologize first. I think it should be easy, but when you think you right or justified it is one of the most difficult things in marriage.

My second take-away from the book is on servanthood in marriage. Gary Thomas brought out the point that the night before his crucifixion Jesus knew that His Father was going to bestow on Him all power and authority, but didn't use the power for his advantage, but humbled himself and served. And in Philippians 2:6&7 says, ". . . He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form as a servant. . . ." When my husband and I, on our honeymoon, did the symbolic foot-washing, I don't think we realized the degree to which that gesture would be tested. If Jesus was willing to serve, so should we. Another thing I realized is that my husband Love Language is Acts of Service. My husband, a very independent man, these past three weeks had a medical emergency where he was in terrible pain and had to remain in bed or on the recliner. I became his care-giver and was given the privilege of helping him with ADL's (activities of daily living), and bringing him home cooked meals on a tray. Strange how he was in a vulnerable and dependent state, but his love tank was filled and running over. He had a joke that he was going to start calling me Mother Teresa for serving him without complaining. This was a bad situation that God used for good in our marriage.

My third take-away is it is not what you get out of marriage, but what you become. The book called the process dying and rising. God works on your character and marriage is the tool he uses. Marriage is a revealer of the deep issues of the heart. Selfishness comes out, and you have a choice to die to self or remain selfish. If we choose to die to self then God can form Jesus in us. Luke 9:23 says, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily . . ." What better place to take up our cross daily than with your spouse in marriage.

Offering ourselves on the altar of self-sacrifice to love unconditionally. Even if it means dying to our dreams, and recognizing their dreams to let them fulfill their dreams.

My fourth point from the book is that a family that is joined in a mission strengthens the purpose that God brought you together. I believe this speaks of not becoming too inward focused, rather than outward focused. If the marriage is too inbred, like in the natural world, it becomes weak and genetic abnormalities occur. Healthy offspring spiritually or bearing fruit in our marriage has to include an outward focus. The Holy Spirit is a missionary spirit. A couple can function as a team to reach those God brings into our life. We can strengthen, and lift each other up when the other is down. Barry's giftings and mine complement each other, and we help in areas where the other is lacking.

My fifth point from the book is along the same lines in that a couple that is joined in purpose is like a funnel directing God's presence into our daily life. Every day, I want to invite God's presence in my life and in my marriage. Personally, I want to practice the presence of God in my life, and Barry said he has been praying for His presence. Like Moses in Exodus 33, if God's presence is not going to go with me, then I don't want to go. I desire God to go before me and direct me where he wants me to go. Otherwise, I am wasting my time, and the Lord's time. God's presence changes the atmosphere. Not only in dissension that arises between me and my husband, but when we as a team we come up against principalities and powers in high places. New York City needs the presence of God. The Lord gave us a promise through his Word in Ps 92 that we would bear fruit in our old age. By the grace of God if I live till, I am eighty, I have fifteen more years to bear fruit for His kingdom. My prayer for the end years of our marriage is that He would bless us with His presence, so we can be His light in dark places.

The sixth point is that communication is a discipline of love. In Hosea 14:2 God says, "Take words with you, and come back to the Lord. . ." If God who knows a word before is even on our tongue, asks us to take words with us He must want us to hear what we are saying and asking of God. Putting our thoughts into words helps us to understand ourselves, and what is going on in our heart. Communication is a gift we can give our spouse. We are not to use our speech to demean or belittle, but rather to encourage and build one another up. Personally, when Barry comes home after a long day, late at night, and I want to talk he will look at me with glazed eyes and say, "Sorry hon, I am all out of words." However, in the morning he is eager to share and talk. Personally, those face-to-face sharing times over coffee fills up my love tank.

My last take-away is that the absence of conflict means one person is always giving in, fearing the fall out of a disagreement, or they don't value the relationship enough to work through conflict. In marriage conflict is unavoidable. If we gloss over conflict, we are not being authentic. The book called it "polite pretending", and no spiritual growth comes from that. We have had our wrestling with God moments where while God is pulling out our hip from its socket, he is also pulling out areas of selfishness from our heart. If God won't let us side-step conflict with Him, we should not deny ourselves in marriage the spiritual growth that comes through conflict. In order to resolve conflict, the book mentions compromise as a solution. Possibly, my favorite idea from the book is that compromise is another way to say "I Love you." Compromise tells your partner you are more valuable to me than the issue. By compromising, we are dying to self or our desires, and preferring the other person. Conflict with the added dimension of compromise, allows for true spiritual growth and authenticity in marriage.

