

today's
christian
woman

LOVE GOD. LIVE FEARLESS.

How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Discovering
contentment that's
deeper than heartache





How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Discovering contentment that's deeper than heartache

Click on an article you'd like to read:

3 INTRODUCTION

Unhappily Ever After?

By Kelli B. Trujillo

6 LEADER'S GUIDE

How to use "How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage" for a group study

7 FIND JOY (EVEN IN A PAINFUL MARRIAGE)

Begin by asking the right question.

By Leslie Vernick

14 WHAT'S WRONG WITH HAPPINESS

When marriage fails to satisfy, check your expectations.

By Gary Kinnaman with Annette LaPlaca

19 BUSTING THE MYTHS OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Unrealistic expectations can lead to heartache and dissatisfaction.

By Judy Bodmer

26 WHEN MARRIAGE GETS TOUGH

Heartache and hurt can yield good fruit in our lives.

By Dawn Yrene

35 THE HARDEST THING I'VE EVER DONE

Moving from a marriage fantasy to a realistic hope

By Sherry Van Zante

40 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books, articles, and Bible studies to help you further



Introduction

Unhappily Ever After?

By Kelli B. Trujillo

I want to be happy!

Depending on your point of view, this statement could be interpreted many different ways.

Perhaps it's the red-faced demand shouted by a crying two-year-old in the midst of a temper tantrum. She simply wants what she wants and will throw a fit 'til she's satisfied.

Maybe it's the warm glow in the heart of a bride, excited and hopeful about her new life. She's finally beginning her happily-ever-after.

Perhaps it's the inner longing driving an already debt-laden person to shop for more, for what's new, for whatever is the latest focus of her desire.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage Unhappily Ever After?

Or maybe it's the heart cry of a wife curled up in her closet, crying and isolated by feelings of profound disappointment in her husband who has let her down again and again.

Isn't it okay to desire happiness? Isn't it especially okay to want a happy marriage? And isn't it simply normal to be profoundly hurt when a marriage turns out to be significantly less-than-happy?

Yes, yes, and yes . . . *sort of*.

Some Christian speakers and authors look down their noses at "happiness." *It is just a feeling after all*, they reason, *and we're not supposed to be driven by feelings or tossed about by emotion. If we really trusted God, unhappiness wouldn't faze us.* I strongly disagree with this approach. Happiness is a feeling . . . just like the rest of our God-given feelings. God created us with emotions! Feeling them—and desiring to feel more of the good ones—is a natural and, I would argue, God-given desire.

And yes, it is okay and in fact good to desire happiness in marriage. God created marriage and declared his creation of the first husband and wife to be "very good!" (**Genesis 1:31**). The danger comes in, however, when we think constant happiness is guaranteed (which it isn't) or that marriage will provide the deepest happiness our soul could desire (which it won't). When we start thinking of happiness and romantic love this way, we're buying into a form of idolatry . . . and that's when things can get really dicey.

And certainly it is normal and simply human to experience hurt, anger, frustration, or disappointment when one's marriage is unhappy. The reality is that there *are* situations in which a person is married to someone who is simply quite immature or very selfish or just plain unkind. The depth of pain and even spiritual confusion that can result ought not be understated—marriage troubles of this sort can be devastating.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage Unhappily Ever After?

But even in that sort of reality, is God's desire for women in difficult marriages to lead devastated lives? To be demolished by life's pain? To be flattened by disappointment? To become hopeless or angry or bitter or spiteful or despondent or calloused or vengeful or hardened? Certainly not.

Even *in* a difficult, painful marriage a Christian woman can make choices that help her find a sense of happiness in God, healing in Christian community, fulfillment in work and ministry, and even *hope* for growth, love, and joy in her marriage.

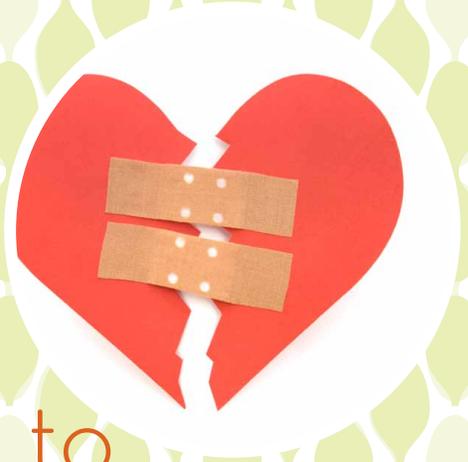
These aren't easy matters, but the articles in this TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN download will help you deal honestly with the hurts, frustrations, and disappointments in your marriage as you consider how God's Word can guide your mindset and response to hardships. You'll find wisdom and insight from women who've journeyed through profound unhappiness to eventually find renewed love and intimacy in their marriage. You'll discover guidance from counselors who've seen couples make a change for the better. And you'll encounter inspiring principles to help you turn things around in your own spiritual life even if things feel hopeless in your marriage.

As you read these articles and consider the Reflect questions, our hope is that you'll find comfort in God's loving presence. He is faithful to you—and he is at work in your life—even when life just plain hurts. Through his power, he can help you live as the Christian woman you desire to be . . . and he might just transform your marriage in the process.

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Managing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads
Christianity Today



Leader's Guide

How to use "How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage" for a group study

Many of the Reflect questions in this download are very personal in nature and may not be appropriate for group discussion. If you are using this download for a group study, consider identifying just one or two Reflect questions from each article to discuss; encourage women to think about the remaining questions on their own at home. If you'd like, challenge women to use the questions to prompt personal journaling.

"How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage" can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.
4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
6. End the session in prayer.

Seek Help!

This TCW download will equip you to improve your marriage and your inner contentment as you deal with relationship difficulties like communication struggles, emotional distance, bitterness, and conflict. However, if you are in a more serious situation involving adultery, depression, pornography, or verbal or physical abuse, we urge you to seek help. Turn to a pastor, counselor, or trusted Christian friend who can stand by you as you navigate through the difficult situation you are facing.



Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

Begin by asking the right question.

By Leslie Vernick

After two failed marriages, Janice decided to try one more time for the relationship she dreamed of. Yet, just one year later, her marriage to Hank was crumbling. Defeated and confused, Janice cried out to God for some answers. "In that moment," she says, "I began to realize that there is no perpetual honeymoon to any marriage. Sometimes it's just plain hard work. It was then and there that God told me I could not depend on my husband to make me happy, I would only find my true happiness in God."



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

Even as Christians, many of us have grown up with unrealistic expectations of marriage. Hollywood and Harlequin have taught us that we must find our perfect match—our soul mates—to be happy. When difficulties occur in our marriage, we may wonder, like Janice did, whether we have found the right person or may even think we have made a terrible mistake. After twenty-six years of marriage and over two decades of counseling couples, I have learned that God created marriage to mature us and for us to enjoy, but it was never intended to fulfill us or make us happy.

Marriage is God's great idea, but in every marriage there are seasons of difficulty and times of dryness where one or both partners may feel dissatisfied with the marital relationship. As we work to improve our marriage, sometimes our efforts don't produce the changes we want. During these times, the question we need to ask ourselves is not, "Should I leave my spouse so I can find another person who will make me happy?" but rather, "Can I learn to find contentment and joy while in the midst of an unhappy marriage? And if so, how?"

Change your focus.

Everyone I know wants to feel good inside, but few know the secret to lasting happiness or even what happiness is. Is happiness a feeling of emotional ecstasy? Intense pleasure with life's circumstances? An internal state of well-being or contentment? Happiness can comprise all of these things.

Several years ago my husband surprised me with a beautiful pearl necklace I had admired. I felt really happy—for about three days—until I began longing for some earrings to go with it. We all search for something to fulfill us and make us happy, whether it is people, objects, or positions of status. When we get what we desire, we feel a certain emotion we call happiness. This feeling, however, is always short-lived and,



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

like Solomon with his 700 wives and me with my pearl necklace, we begin longing for the next thing we desire that will bring us more satisfaction.

While on a trip to Walt Disney World, I was struck by the number of cranky youngsters and frustrated parents. My children, like many others, were caught up in the excitement and wanted everything they saw. They felt elated whenever they got what they wanted but their happiness didn't last. When the next thing they desired was denied, the thrill they felt just minutes before quickly deteriorated and they became miserable.

Soon after my Disney experience, I traveled overseas to do some speaking and teaching in the Philippines. I observed barefoot children merrily swinging on old tires, living in houses constructed from cardboard boxes. These children didn't need lots of stuff to make them happy. Though maybe just for the moment, they were enjoying what they had.

Many of us feel dissatisfied in life because we are not content with what God has given us. We want more. How does this apply to our marriage?

Jesus tells us that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (**Matthew 6:21**). If our treasure, or deepest desire, is in having a great marriage or a fat bank account or certain other things we deem essential to our well-being, then we will feel unhappy when we don't get what we want. For whatever has our heart, has us.

No one is more concerned with our happiness than Jesus is. He just tells us about a different way of obtaining it than the world does. He tells us that happiness is never found by pursuing happiness or pleasure or people, but only found by pursuing him. He says, "Blessed [or happy] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (**Matthew 5:6, NIV**). Too many of us hunger and thirst after happiness (or a good marriage or a big house), instead of hungering and



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

thirsting after God. We forget that Jesus is the only one who can deeply satisfy our soul. Everyone desires unending love (**Proverbs 19:22, NIV**); it's just that we will never receive that kind of love continually from our spouses.

Created in his image, God designed us to experience happiness when something brings us great delight. For example, God is delighted when we find our greatest pleasure in him. But often we think it is not God that brings us our greatest joy but what he gives us. We desire his gifts but we don't realize that our greatest gift is God himself. Oswald Chambers explains: "The great enemy of the life of faith in God is not sin, but the good which is not good enough. The good is always the enemy of the best." We want and pursue good things, but often neglect the best thing. The psalmist reminds us where lasting happiness is found. He writes, "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11, NIV). God's love is the only love that never fails.

Guard your heart.

To find any joy in an unhappy or difficult marriage, we must learn to guard our hearts (**Proverbs 4:23**). Many individuals who struggle in marriage get very good at guarding their hearts, but the walls they build to protect themselves are against their spouses instead of against their real enemy. In the midst of an unhappy marriage, our spouse may feel like the enemy, but God tells us that our real enemy is Satan and the Bible warns us that he is out to devour us (**1 Peter 5:8**).

Satan's goal has always been to get us to question God's goodness and to doubt that what God says is true. Jesus tells us that Satan is a liar (**John 8:44**) and his strategy is to take something that seems true and twist it ever so slightly. In a difficult marriage, Satan may whisper lies like, "Why should you be the only one trying in the marriage? It's not fair. Find someone



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

else who will make you happy." Or, "Don't forgive, he doesn't deserve it. You're entitled to feel this way after what he did to you." Or, "He will never be the person you want. You made a terrible mistake marrying him and God doesn't want you to spend the rest of your life unhappily married to this person."

Satan wants us to believe that God is not good and that he does not know what's in our best interest. Remember, he is not interested in our well-being or happiness. He wants to destroy us and our families.

Guarding my heart not only requires me to be aware of Satan's schemes, but to draw close to God and listen to truth. Don't let Satan deceive you into believing that any lasting happiness can be found apart from God.

Live for the eternal.

In the midst of hardship, our natural response is to look for the nearest exit. That's true of difficult marriages as well. Whether we exit in big ways like divorce or adultery or in small ways by shutting down and withdrawing emotionally, we want out. Yet the Bible tells us in **James 1:2-4** that it is in the midst of difficulties that we have the opportunity to develop one of the most important disciplines we need to live life well—perseverance. Without this quality we will tend to live for what brings us relief or pleasure in the short-run.

I love to eat, especially sweets. I love tasting warm, gooey chocolate in my mouth, and I could be happy eating chocolate for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Yet when I over-indulge, I'm plagued with other emotions like guilt and regret. I'm angry that I've sabotaged the bigger goal I have of gaining self-control and maintaining good eating habits. I've also discovered that when I succeed in saying no to the chocolate temptation, I actually feel happier with myself.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

We only understand what makes us truly happy when we have a long-term perspective on life. Living for the moment can fool us into thinking that temporal pleasures bring happiness. The writer of Proverbs warns us, "At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, 'How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!'" (Proverbs 5:11–12). Many have discovered only too late, that what brought joy in the moment caused hardship and grief in the long run.

The apostle Paul reminds us that only when he kept the eternal lens fixed tightly to his spiritual eyes was he kept from utter despair in times of great difficulty (**2 Corinthians 4:16–18**). Looking at the big picture gives us perspective in the moment and helps us see that God is good and is doing something good in us, even in the midst of a difficult marriage (**Romans 8:28–29**).

Knowing that you can find some joy in the midst of an unhappy marriage will give you enough staying power to persevere until things change. You can experience a sense of well-being as you learn the secret of being content in whatever situation God allows in your life. When we take the high road in the midst of marital troubles, it leads to growth and spiritual maturity. In addition to that, our children will watch an example of what it means to walk with God and to trust him in all things. And while enjoying these blessings, you may discover that your marriage improves. However, the greatest joy in all of life will come when we hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And in the end, that is all that counts.

*Leslie Vernick is the director of Christ Centered Counseling for Individual and Families and the author of **How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong**. This article was first published in the Spring 2002 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.*



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Find Joy (Even in a Painful Marriage)

Reflect

- *Dig deep and be as honest with yourself as possible. What is it about your husband or your relationship that makes you feel unhappy? What patterns or conflicts in your marriage have disappointed you? What aspects of your husband's personality, habits, or communication patterns leave you hurt, angry, or frustrated?*
- *When marriage is painful, our tendency is to leave—perhaps to literally leave the marriage or, more commonly, to emotionally check out. Yet Leslie suggests that in times of marital difficulty—heartache, frustration, dissatisfaction, bitterness—we instead need to ask ourselves a pivotal question: "Can I learn to find contentment and joy while in the midst of an unhappy marriage? And if so, how?" What's your gut reaction to this question? Positive? Negative? Inspired? Frustrated? Why?*
- *Leslie reminds us to guard our hearts against the lies of the Enemy, especially when he is tempting us to question God's goodness and sovereign work in our lives or when he is tempting us to discard Scripture's teachings about practices like forgiveness, grace, and gratitude. Have you ever bought into these types of lies or dangerous ways of thinking regarding your marriage? If so, how did it affect your mindset? Your own spiritual life? Your relationship?*
- *Read **Matthew 5:6** and **6:21**. Leslie encourages us to change our focus; rather than primarily seeking satisfaction and happiness in a fulfilling, blissful marriage, we ought to seek God as our greatest treasure. What does it really mean to place your greatest emotional and spiritual hopes on God rather than your spouse? Dream for a moment: How could a more intense heart-focus on your relationship with God lead to greater happiness in your life?*



What's Wrong with Happiness

When marriage fails to satisfy, check your expectations.

By Gary Kinnaman with Annette LaPlaca

I once saw a cynical cartoon in which a man is down on bended knee, saying, "I love you, Cindy. Will you marry me for a year or two?" The joke has a sharp edge to it, of course, because it points to a frightening trend in our society. "Till death us do part" is being replaced by "as long as I'm happy."

I'd been counseling a couple for several months when the wife came to see me on her own one day. Although she'd been married for 25 years, she wanted out. Nothing I said could change her determination; she simply was no longer *happy* in her marriage. She and her husband divorced, and not long after that she turned up at church again—sitting in the pew with her ex-husband's brother.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

What's Wrong with Happiness

When she came to ask me to officiate at her second wedding, she wasn't too pleased to hear my refusal. She said, "But it says in the Bible that God wants me to be happy!"

Of course, she couldn't point to a specific chapter and verse. The Bible talks about joy and contentment, but it doesn't lift up happiness as an ultimate goal.

It's not that happiness is such a bad thing. Who doesn't like to feel happy? Isn't happiness a natural desire? The Declaration of Independence proclaims "the pursuit of happiness" as one of the great American ideals, and most of us busy ourselves in the relentless pursuit of happiness.

Happiness is what I'd call a "neutral" value. It's not good or evil, but it's a cultural value that can assault Christianity. The woman who deserted her husband assigned such a high priority to personal happiness that it overwhelmed the Christian, biblical value of marital commitment. She valued her own happiness more than she desired to obey God's commands.

For many Americans, the pursuit of self-fulfillment and personal happiness has become a religion. Even Christians have bought into this religion of self-actualization, pursuing God only because they see him as an agent for happiness. They want happiness, and they think they can use God to get it.

It's hard for us to fully understand what it cost the early believers to follow Christ. Many had to give up their family ties, their culture, and their entire way of life to become Christians. The New Testament never portrays a relationship with God as a path to an *easier* life. Instead, it was understood as a relationship that would give strength to sustain the believer through even the most difficult times. God's grace isn't there just to make us feel better about ourselves, but to give us power and courage to help us live for God, no matter what happens.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

What's Wrong with Happiness

Happiness or contentment?

In our society, we tend to make choices based on what will bring us the most happiness. But in the Bible, God's concept of happiness is much better defined by the word *contentment*. Remember Paul saying, in essence, "No matter what circumstances I find myself in, I've learned to be content" (Philippians 4:11)?

It's amazing how whiny we can be. Sometimes I think we're a nation of self-pitying snivelers. Circumstances get us down . . . way down. And "way down" is a place where Christians, at least, don't have to stay. So how did Paul learn to be content whatever the circumstances? He tapped into the power source: "I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). It's God who helps us choose love over personal happiness, fidelity over self-fulfillment, serving others over serving ourselves. It's God who provides contentment and even joy as we choose his way.

There are two secret weapons for being content when circumstances make us feel miserable. The first is to remember that God *is in control*. God has promised to do a "good work" in us, and to complete it (**Philippians 1:6**). When we're stuck in the muck of the moment, we need to keep our eyes on heaven; it puts things on earth into the correct perspective.

The second secret weapon is to *turn our obsession to satisfy ourselves into love for others*. Rather than focus on others, too many Christians have bought into the cultural value of individualism. We think personal independence is so great that we no longer recognize the beauty and blessing of a shared life with our spouse. But Christianity is concerned with *interdependence*. God doesn't tell us to live for our own convenience. One reason he puts us in marriages is to help us find real satisfaction and joy in serving others. Marriage is the



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

What's Wrong with Happiness

first place where we get to live out God's many commands for serving, accepting, encouraging, forgiving, and submitting to one another.

I read in an airline magazine about a London jeweler who actually designed a ring with a band that doesn't go all the way around the finger. The symbolic meaning of the incomplete circle is that there's always a way out "if you're not happy."

Marriage was never meant to be bent to our individual purposes. That's a shabby counterfeit of the real thing—the God-given opportunity to live out love and commitment to another flawed and sinful human being for a lifetime. When we weigh the options, we can trade the pursuit of short-lived personal happiness for the contentment that grows when we shape our relationship God's way.

Gary Kinnaman is a speaker, author, and former pastor. www.garykinnaman.com. This article was first published in the Fall 1999 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.

Reflect

○ *Consider Paul's comments about contentment in their fuller context of his concluding teachings to the Philippian Christians about a Christian's mindset and practices; read **Philippians 4:4–13**. Though Paul is not speaking specifically about marriage, what principles for your spiritual life and your marriage can you glean from 4:4–8? How could these attitudes and habits help you live in an attitude of contentment like Paul's (described in 4:11–13)?*



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

What's Wrong with Happiness

- *Gary says we can experience true joy as we grow to see marriage as an opportunity to grow in discipleship and service. Read **Philippians 2:1-4** and reflect on the last week or two. How could you have more fully embraced this mindset in your marriage? How might true humility and sincere service—even when your husband has hurt, wronged, or frustrated you—have changed specific situations or difficulties in your relationship?*
- *Gary reminds readers to center their contentment in the reality that God is in control—even during painful or discouraging times in your marriage. How can you more fully embrace the truth that God is at work in your life, in your husband's life, and in your marriage? How can this hope lead to positive changes in your outlook and interactions?*



Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

Unrealistic expectations can lead to heartache and dissatisfaction.

By Judy Bodmer

"Larry, we have to talk," I said as my husband prepared to go to work. Our argument from the night before still hung in the air. "There's something wrong with our marriage."

"Judy, I have to go," Larry said, clearly irritated.

"Don't you love me?" I asked.

"Sure I do. I have employees waiting to be let in."

"Larry, if you love me, why don't I feel it?" I needed him to put his arms around me and reassure me.

But he didn't. He just walked out the door.

What had happened to us? Two years before, when we'd committed our lives to Jesus Christ, Larry and I had been like newlyweds again. I was sure with God as our partner, our journey through life would be smooth.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

But it wasn't. Our first child, Matthew, who was born shortly after we became Christians, needed major surgery when he was six weeks old. A few months later, Larry lost his job. I thought about going to work, but then discovered I was pregnant again. I was scared and needed Larry to reassure me, but he couldn't because he was dealing with his own fears.

We started to fight, sometimes over the stupidest things, such as the way he read the newspaper or ate his cereal. I felt guilty for my angry outbursts. Christians didn't act that way, I reasoned. So in the name of peace, I swallowed my feelings and prayed God would make Larry more thoughtful, open, loving, and romantic. But with each passing year, our fights grew in frequency and intensity. We became like strangers sharing a house.

I slogged through two years hoping things would change for the better, but they didn't. Surely this wasn't what God wanted, yet I could see no hope of happiness with this man.

In the heat of one of our arguments I said "divorce." Larry hardly winced. Maybe it was the solution to our problems.

At the end of my rope, I confided in my sister Barbara how unhappy I was. She and her husband, Dave, arranged for us to attend a weekend marriage retreat. They took our kids and even paid the deposit. While both Larry and I knew it was a waste of time and money, we figured this would prove to everyone that we'd tried.

During that weekend, one of the speakers talked about his fear of being unable to live up to everyone's expectations. After that session, each couple had some time to communicate with each other their thoughts about what the speaker had said. In a rare moment of courage, Larry dropped his defenses and shared how he identified with the speaker and how hard it was to please me, his employees, his customers, his friends, and his family. He even told me about the pain of unmet expectations he carried from his childhood. As I listened to his openness, I could feel the



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

wall I'd built toward him over the years begin to come down. Through several tearful conversations that weekend, we were able to forgive each other for the pain and hurt we'd caused and start over.

We realized that we'd each, in some way, bought into the myth that our Christian marriage would be perfect—and then, when it *wasn't* we were both hurt. Though the "myths" we'd bought into about what made a real Christian marriage were well-meaning, *they were destroying our marriage*. These myths and idealized expectations were leading us into unnecessary feelings of disappointment and unhappiness. After that weekend, Larry and I spent several years blasting these six myths and uncovering the truth. Here's what we discovered.

Myth #1: If I spend daily time in prayer and Bible study, and if I attend church regularly, I'll have a happy marriage.

In church I'd often hear that if I'd spend time with God every morning and study the Bible, my life and marriage would go well. So I started a daily quiet time, began memorizing Scripture, and joined a women's Bible study. I believed these "religious" acts would help my marriage be all I wanted. But when nothing changed and, in fact, things seemed to get worse, not only did I become disillusioned with our marriage, I also began to question my relationship with God.

This is the truth: Every couple goes through tough times—even Christians. Jesus clearly states that "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows" (John 16:33). Does that mean it doesn't make any difference whether we read our Bibles and attend church? No. While God didn't take away those painful times, and he didn't always answer our prayers in the way we'd assumed, he used our trouble to focus and mature us through our prayers and Bible studies.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

Myth #2: Our marriage will be divorce-proof if we're both Christians.

This belief left us feeling ashamed when we stood at the brink of divorce. We didn't think anyone would understand, so we waited to go for help until it was almost too late.

The truth is: Being a Christian doesn't guarantee you won't get divorced. Larry and I believed that because we were Christ-followers we'd live a fairy-tale life. Christian therapist Roy Austin calls this "magical thinking" and believes many Christian couples struggle with it. He says, "'Magical thinking' leaves couples less prepared for the rigors of marriage." If Larry and I had understood this truth, we might have gone for help sooner. Today we are open and honest about our hard years when speaking to young married groups, which they've found both eye-opening and helpful. We just wish someone had told us this truth.

Myth #3: We need to keep our marital problems to ourselves.

When I joined a women's Bible study, everyone I met looked happy and put together. I knew no one would understand that Larry and I sometimes said ugly, hurtful things to each other, so I kept quiet about what was happening in our marriage.

But the truth is: God created us as social beings to live in community where we can help each other. That weekend retreat opened my eyes. It was a couple daring to be open with us about their problems that began the healing in us. In James it says we are to confess our sins to each other so that we can pray for each other and be healed (**5:16**). By keeping quiet, I hindered the healing that could have come from sharing with these other women who may have been just as afraid as I was to share what they were going through.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

Myth #4: Christian couples don't fight.

I thought "peace" meant no fighting and so I denied my negative feelings. I'd avoid conflict and let things build . . . until I exploded over something trivial.

Here's the truth: It's okay to fight. In the Bible it says, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26–27). At that weekend retreat, we were challenged to bring up whatever was bothering us within 24 hours or forget it. When I got home, I decided to try it. At breakfast Larry sat reading the paper, ignoring me. It bothered me that the paper seemed more important than I did. In the past I would've buried my anger, but instead I said, "I feel angry that you're reading the paper instead of talking to me." To my amazement, Larry put down the paper, apologized, and we had a nice conversation while we ate our cereal. I was pleased it worked so well. Of course, it didn't always work, but just saying the words, "I feel angry," helped defuse much of the feelings I'd been carrying around for so many years. It was like keeping the blackboard wiped clean. And then when we did argue, it was over one subject, not ten.

Myth #5: I need to pray for God to change my husband.

I spent much time in prayer begging God to change my husband. I knew we'd be happy if only Larry were different. But to my dismay, as much as I prayed, I didn't see any significant changes in him.

The truth is: God wants to change me first. My prayer life changed dramatically after I finally got the message of **Matthew 7:1–5**: I was a hypocrite, trying to take the speck out of my husband's eye, when all the time I had this log in my own eye. That log was so huge I couldn't see what I was doing to my husband. God revealed to me that my judgmental attitude drove Larry away and hurt him deeply, the exact opposite of what I



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

wanted. That day I prayed a new way. I prayed for God to reveal my sins. As he did, I asked him to forgive me and to help me change. Instead of shame, I felt clean and whole. Slowly, God peeled off layers of old, rotten thinking, and beliefs and bitterness that were destroying my marriage. I began to "see" my husband in a new light and told him of the positive things I saw in him. This encouraged Larry and helped him grow into a more godly husband. It also allowed me to accept some of his "faults" that I never thought I could.

Myth #6: My husband should be stronger in his faith than I am.

Early in our Christian walk, a woman told me that when her husband became a Christian he instantly became patient, loving, and romantic. I looked at Larry and wondered why his conversion hadn't made a bigger difference in our marriage. I decided it was because he wasn't spiritual enough, and so I began a mission of helping him grow in his faith. I gave him books, left him notes, and dragged him to all sorts of conferences and seminars.

But the truth is: We each grow toward Christ in our own way and time. I was critical of my husband's lack of spiritual leadership, which caused me to push and Larry to retreat. Finally, God convicted me that I wasn't responsible for Larry's spiritual life. It was hard, but I backed off. That's when Larry felt God calling him to get serious about his relationship with Christ and he grew in leaps and bounds. While it took time, now Larry's the strong leader and loving husband I've always wanted.

Larry and I survived those early years of mythical thinking. Now, after several decades of marriage, Larry makes my coffee every morning, prays with me, listens to my gripes, gives me encouragement in my struggles, and accepts all my quirky ways. It hasn't been the easy journey I thought it would be, but our love is richer for having struggled. I thank God every day for the reality of my marriage.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Busting the Myths of a Christian Marriage

*Judy Bodmer, author of **When Love Dies**, lives in Washington state. www.judybodmer.com. This article was first published in the Winter 2002 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.*

Reflect

- *Desiring happiness in marital love is a natural and God-given desire—but it can also become dangerous. What do you see as a healthy and normal degree of hope and expectation to place on a marriage? When can expectations of happiness actually threaten or hurt a marriage?*
- *Which of the six myths in this article stood out to you most? How have you experienced its danger in your own marriage or in your mindset toward your husband?*
- *Read **Matthew 7:1–5**. You may have very legitimate reasons to be hurt, angry, or disappointed in your husband. Yet Judy challenges us to realize that God wants our focus to be on ourselves and how we may need to change. How does this Scripture challenge you personally in the context of your marriage? Pause and consider habits, sins, actions, or thought-patterns God may be leading you to confess, repent of, and focus on changing.*



When Marriage Gets Tough

Heartache and hurt can yield good fruit in our lives.

By Dawn Yrene

“Divorce *isn't* the unforgivable sin,” a friend hinted, not so subtly, after hearing my remorse over marrying a man with whom I had so little in common. From our first meeting and throughout our dating, Kevin and I had been proof that opposites attract. He was the wild type—a tattooed, leather-clad biker whose first love had been his Harley until he'd met Christ six months before meeting me. To be honest, Christ and the Harley still vied for first place. His closet was filled with bike parts, and the motorcycle “herself” rested in the middle of his living room when not in use.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

I, on the other hand, was a straight-laced "good girl" who listened to Christian music, worked a Christian job, and spoke fluent Christianese. I had my own "idols," though, and at 26, marriage was one of them.

Kevin and I met at a Christian singles retreat. By the end of the retreat, I'd made a new friend—but assured myself that was all. We were just too different to be more.

Kevin talked little, but when he did, it was often about the Bible. He was refreshingly genuine.

We began to pray and attend Bible study together. After a few months, he proposed. Despite all the good memories we were making, we were also beginning to disagree often. I assured myself, however, that marriage would make us "one" on issues of childrearing, spending, and the many other annoying differences we faced.

As any married person could have told me, that was an erroneous assumption. Marriage only magnified our differences. We fought regularly, and our life together hurt. I felt very unhappy and soon began pondering my friend's advice. *After all, I reasoned, Christians aren't perfect. What if I married the wrong person? Why stay married if it's all about fighting? Why be so unhappy?*

In my questioning, a small inner voice reminded me what I'd prayed shortly before I met Kevin: "Lord, instead of looking for a man who fits my list of wants, give me a man who needs me as his helper, as Adam needed Eve." Despite our differences, Kevin needed a helper, and the helper God had selected was me. I, too, needed Kevin to balance me, challenge me, and encourage me to trust God. Through the painful trials of marriage, especially our frequent, severe arguments over spending, in-laws, disciplining our children, and even trivialities such as how much and which TV programs to watch, God was purifying me, teaching me to obey his desires even when it wasn't comfortable. He



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

was also rewarding me in quiet ways only I could see—a psalm that comforted me, a brilliant sunrise that reminded me of his greatness, a sermon that seemed tailored to my situation.

Nearly 13 years and 5 children later, I've found that my difficult marriage has blessed me with great happiness as well as the strength to endure great pain. Kevin and I are still very, very different. We need Christ to hold us together. But our roller coaster ride has shown me that, contrary to worldly opinions, there are good reasons to stay in a difficult marriage.

We all have prisons.

Whether it's a nagging temptation, a tormented past, sickness, poverty, loneliness, or a difficult marriage—we all have situations that at times make us feel trapped. The apostle Paul showed us how to cope with these feelings: writing from a jail cell he said, "I have learned how to be content with whatever I have" (Philippians 4:11). Paul's repeated trips to prison didn't prevent him from worshiping God. Being bound to an incompatible spouse doesn't have to stop us from thanking God while in our "prison" of a difficult marriage, experiencing peace, and receiving the good gifts God wants to give us daily. We have a choice: We can focus on God's blessings and lessons for us, or we can harbor anger, which eventually turns to hatred and bitterness. In 1 John, the apostle John says hatred, if left unchecked, will cause us to stumble (2:10) and keep us from loving God (4:20).

The times when I was so unhappy that I considered divorcing my husband, I knew I'd ultimately be exchanging one prison for another. Not only would I be separating my children from a parent they love—placing more pressure and guilt on me as a mother—but bitterness and unforgiveness could create its own kind of trap. As the old saying goes, "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage."



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

Difficulties make us better people.

We all hate suffering. But without it, who would we be? When Kevin and I married, I was a chronic people-pleaser. When my attempts to win Kevin's unceasing approval—by wearing my hair a certain way or apologizing every time I sensed he was angry—failed, my painful emotions turned me to God, who became my strength. I eventually learned to care more about God's opinion of me. I may not have learned that lesson otherwise. The more I sought God's approval during those dark days, the more Kevin softened toward me—and me toward him. We've both learned God can take a heart of stone and make it flesh (**Ezekiel 36:26**). Those years of suffering have made us more considerate parents, friends, and mates.

Difficulties strengthen our prayer lives.

The Bible makes it clear that God wants people to stay married. Yet he hasn't made marriage particularly easy. When our vows are tested with sickness, poverty, or tough times, it's only by crying out to God in our inadequacy that difficult marriages can change and grow. During our darkest moments, the psalms remind us God understands our situation and will help. In my marriage, the times forgiveness has been hardest have also been the times I've experienced God's rewards in the most amazing ways. Isaiah 64:4–5 says, "No eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right" (NIV).

My marriage is undeniably better when I pray for my spouse. With this incentive, I've learned to pray for everything: simple blessings for God's mercy and peace in our home; complicated requests, such as how to communicate in a way Kevin will understand; and even prayers I don't really want to pray—that I may recognize my sin, and that God will change me into the wife Kevin needs. When I pray honestly, I discover God's answers always lead toward hope and healing.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

Staying married teaches us how to forgive.

If there's one thing marriage has taught me, it's how to seek and grant forgiveness. Kevin, who'd suffered two divorces as an unbeliever, recently told me how freeing it is to be able to ask forgiveness and receive it. He said in his previous marriages, the word *forgiveness* was never mentioned. I've also learned firsthand the truth of Christ's words in Luke 7:47: "Her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (NIV).

I can choose to love my spouse out of love for Christ. Often it comes down to a simple choice: Will I hold on to bitterness, or will I love Jesus enough to put another's needs before my own—even if that person has wounded me to the core? Will I be kind to a spouse who doesn't return my kindness because the Lover of my soul asks me to, or will I bail out? If my spouse is a gift from God—a part of my walk with Christ—someone who can test my love for God on a regular basis, I will be able to forgive even when he seriously disappoints me. When I truly forgive Kevin for hurts he regrets causing, his love for me grows. In the same way, I love him more when he forgives me.

There's a way that seems right . . . but isn't.

A difficult marriage can seem like a mistake—but it may not be. Our spouse may be the best person to teach us to die to self as Christ commanded in **Mark 8:35**. Our needs and wants may differ sexually, communicatively—even our TV preferences can collide! In marriages where the list goes much further, from the simple differing preferences in food, holiday traditions, denominational affiliation, and cultural background, to the more complex differences of finances and spiritual life, divorce may seem like the right choice. But **Proverbs 14:12** says sometimes what seems right leads to death. Occasionally after a fight, I've thought, *I'll never allow him to hurt me like that*



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

again. I believed that turning off my feelings would protect me. Instead, closing myself from my husband hardens my heart and kills the inner beauty God is perfecting in me through pain. Our differences have caused many tears, especially in trying to rear emotionally healthy, happy children. But if we trust God, we can believe that divorce, while it may seem logical at times, would only destroy the good results God wants to produce in all of us.

Feelings that are absent now may not be in the future.

Some couples find bitterness and resentment have made it impossible to love each other. Yet for our miracle-working God, *nothing* is impossible (**Matthew 19:26**). Both Kevin and I have reached low points where it seemed we could never love each other again. Miraculously, we later found our union had become such a team, a friendship, and a wonderful romance, that we felt unworthy and amazed at God's ability to restore. Utter hatred can become passionate love when we submit those feelings to God and let obedience override the desire of the moment. When I was pregnant with our third child, Kevin seemed hopeless as he expressed how alienated he felt when I focused my attention on our two young children. His confession only added to my resentment that he wanted more of me instead of offering to change diapers. But my resentment faded several months later when birth complications nearly took my life. I could hear Kevin's heartfelt prayer for me to live as he held my hand. We both realized each day we had together was a precious opportunity to love.

My marriage shouldn't be my entire life.

God has other jobs, talents, and good works (**Ephesians 2:10**) planned for each of us. In a difficult marriage, God may bring relief through an outside occupation or a special calling. He may use our hurts to minister to others who suffer. Focusing



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

only on our marriage can cause us to miss out on the good God wants to do through and for us. My friend Sheryl is married to an unbeliever, but he isn't her "project." She loves him, but also loves teaching teenagers at her church. Because she can't enjoy prayer and Bible study with him, she appreciates her time with the teens all the more. In my case, writing has been an enjoyable outlet and ministry during the tough seasons of marriage. The other parts of our lives, outside of our marriage, can bring significant fulfillment, joy, and happiness as we seek to honor God, use our talents, and follow our God-given passions.

I can choose to see the good in my spouse.

In every situation or person, there are good and bad aspects on which we can focus. **First Thessalonians 5:18** challenges Christians to give thanks in all circumstances. When I wanted our yard fenced a few years ago, Kevin and I disagreed. He didn't feel we could afford it. I wanted protection for our kids. Finally, he put up a six-foot chain link fence, even though I told him I didn't like chain link. Years later, when I look at that fence, I can feel angry at his choice, or thank God that Kevin sacrificed time, sweat, and money to keep our kids safe. I can also remember that men and women often think they've communicated clearly when the opposite sex heard a completely different message. Maybe he didn't think chain link was that big a deal to me. Maybe it was on sale. Maybe he tuned out during that part of the conversation. When marriage is tough, there's still an opportunity to find my spouse's good qualities and thank God for them—despite the imperfections.

Help is available.

Studies show that couples who take positive steps toward resolving conflict, such as taking a "time out," have happier marriages. While Kevin and I found there were plenty of people



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

willing to counsel us during our challenging years, some gave more helpful advice than others. We're thankful that we sought professional Christian counseling where we learned how to listen, repeat, and understand each other. We also attended weekend marriage seminars, which helped us shed some of the masks we wore to hide our faults, fears, and feelings from each other.

Thankfully, Kevin's Harley no longer resides in the living room. He sold it a year after we married to pay for our daughter's birth. Now we have a pet rabbit and five rowdy children in its place. Lately he's been browsing the Internet for another motorcycle.

I don't know what I'd do if he brought it into our living room. But we've made it over enough hurdles with God's help that I hope we wouldn't let a little thing like a Harley in the living room get in the way of a happy marriage. With all our differences, we make too good a team. In fact, I've come to believe that, with God's help, differences and difficulties can be the recipe for a truly great marriage.

Dawn Yrene, a freelance author, lives in New Mexico. This article was first published in the Fall 2004 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.

Reflect

◦ *Dawn writes that painful emotions she experienced in her challenging marriage helped turn her toward greater intimacy with God. She also learned that those difficulties helped her put into practice Jesus' command to die to herself. Read **Mark 8:35**. How have heartaches and marriage challenges helped you grow closer to God? How have difficulties played a role in your own discipleship and growth in Christian character?*



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

When Marriage Gets Tough

- *Dawn emphasizes that feelings can change—emotions like love, romance, and closeness can be reborn. Be as honest as possible: How would you describe your current feelings for your husband and about your marriage? Do you believe God can work to change your feelings for each other? Explain.*
- *One source of happiness Dawn mentions is the fulfillment that comes from other pursuits outside of marriage: work, ministry, serving others, other relationships. What arena of your life (such as a hobby, talent, work, ministry opportunity, or friendship) has brought you a degree of satisfaction and happiness? How might you build a sense of inner confidence, happiness, and fulfillment by more intentionally serving God in that area?*



The Hardest Thing I've Ever Done

Moving from a marriage fantasy
to a realistic hope

By Sherry Van Zante

My husband photographs people for a living. In more than two decades of working with him, I've talked with hundreds of couples planning their weddings. Most people enter marriage with expectations, dreams, and a mixture of joy and fear of the unknown. I carried this to an extreme and entered marriage with a fantasy.

When I was 17, my best friend and I went to the mall to have a photograph taken with Santa Claus. He was an old man with a real beard and his own long white hair. We sat on his lap, a helper snapped the photograph, and my friend bounced up.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

The Hardest Thing I've Ever Done

Before I could bounce up, Santa asked, "What do you want for Christmas?"

I looked him square in the eye. "Peace, happiness, and contentment."

Yes, a tall order from a 17-year-old, but that was me, and it was Santa.

Ironically, I left that conversation with Santa, walked into a music store, and met the young man who would become my husband. The timing wasn't lost on me. From the start, I saw this man as a gift, and I went to the wedding altar one year and two months later, expecting the same three things from marriage: peace, happiness, and contentment. (That was, after all, the list I'd given Santa.)

Somehow, I thought making a life together would be easier than it turned out to be. From the start, Loyd and I struggled. We argued over the same things most couples argue over: money, housework, sex, in-laws, time, children, communication, intimacy. In the worst moments, we threatened to leave each other and talked about the possibility of divorce.

But one day I looked Loyd straight in the eye and said, "Are you ever really going to leave me?"

"No." His jaw was set.

"Well, I'm not going to leave you either, so how about we start trying to be nice to each other." Somehow we finally figured out (duh!) that being nice to each other would increase our happiness.

Wanting a happy marriage

Even with our new commitment to be nice, I continued to inwardly and outwardly grumble and complain. I blamed Loyd for my feelings—emotions I thought I couldn't control. I felt like he caused my feelings of jealousy. If he was attentive enough, if he ignored other girls enough, if he loved me enough, I'd feel



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

The Hardest Thing I've Ever Done

secure and the jealousy would evaporate. I also blamed him for my depression, my loneliness, my boredom. If he were more fun-loving, expressive, interesting, entertaining, then I'd be happy.

Our marriage was "functioning"—but that wasn't what I'd dreamed marriage would be. Yes, we were making a living, keeping a home, raising children, and going to church together. But as an old Hank Williams' song laments, I was "so lonesome I could die."

I began to think I'd married the wrong man. I longed for my "soul mate"—someone who'd fully understand me and fulfill my emotional needs! *What about me? What about my happiness?* echoed in my mind. I wasn't where I wanted to be. I wasn't loved like I wanted to be loved. I wasn't living the life I thought I'd be living.

Have you heard the saying that sympathy is never wasted except when you give it to yourself? Well, I've wasted a lot of sympathy on myself over the years. I was, as George Bernard Shaw wrote, a "selfish little clot of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world would not devote itself to making me happy."

In my fantasy I believed married life would be blissful. I began to realize that in reality, marriage has its moments of bliss but it also has its troubles. Reluctantly, I began to grapple with the truth that a good relationship requires work. I pointed this out to my husband who already seemed to know it. We both wanted a happy marriage, so together we set to work. We went to our pastor for counseling and started to make changes. We went on a marriage retreat. We read books and learned new attitudes, actions, and words to grow and nurture our feelings of love for each other. We knew that old, natural patterns will persist unless serious effort is made to change them, so we planned and worked hard to change things.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

The Hardest Thing I've Ever Done

Finding peace

Love is the most powerful force in the universe. It's the force that created everything, and it recreated our marriage. We chose to connect with each other by generously sharing our lives. We ate together. We embraced. Hugs and kisses said hello and good-bye. We shared the things we learned and experienced each day when we came back together. And when we really connected, we wondered together, and we sought wisdom. We offered our presence and full attention to the other, bathing each other in kindness, laughter, and touch that told us we were wanted and cherished. We worked to *really* see, acknowledge, and listen.

My old fantasy of marriage has turned into a realistic hope. My husband wasn't a gift from Santa, but he was a gift from God. And God keeps teaching us how to build a good love relationship. We've learned that we have to work at it, because love is something we *do*—not just a feeling we may or may not experience at a given time. Love means making sacrifices. It's listening when we want to talk. It's giving our time and energy to another. It's empathizing, appreciating, affirming. It's refusing to blame, refusing to accuse, and resisting feeling like a victim.

As the old sayings go: *The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything, they just make the best of everything they have, and Contentment is not getting what we want, but being satisfied with what we have.* Some people might call this settling; I call it finding peace. And every facet of peace requires effort and diligence. This peace isn't only getting along, but it is also having sufficient potential to meet deep needs. In my 34-year-old marriage, I've found happiness, peace, and contentment; they just look different from what I expected. If I could tell those couples planning their weddings one thing, I'd smile and say, "Marriage is the hardest thing I've ever done. But it's also the best."



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

The Hardest Thing I've Ever Done

Sherry Van Zante and her husband Loyd live on the central coast of California. This article was first published by

Today'sChristianWoman.com in 2010.

Reflect

- *Sherry and her husband made a commitment to be "nice" to each other. This sounds simple (and maybe even cheesy), but it is certainly not as easy as it sounds—and it's a decision that can make a world of difference! Are you dedicated to being "nice" (kind, generous, courteous, sweet, empathetic, inviting, positive, cheerful, encouraging) to your husband? How could you grow in this area? (And, if you dare, honestly consider how he might answer this question about you!)*
- *Sherry made a decision to be at peace about her marriage; rather than viewing this as "settling," she chose to truly seek contentment with the husband and marriage she was in (rather than a fantasy she once wished for). What would it take for you to be at peace with your marriage and fully accept your husband as he is? How could other Christian friends or your church community help and support you in such a decision?*
- *In light of all you've read and considered in this TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN download, what are some specific changes you will seek to make in your attitude, mindset, or actions to find greater happiness and contentment in your marriage?*



Additional Resources

Books, articles, and Bible studies to help you further

Books

As for Me and My House by Walter Wangerin Jr. (Thomas Nelson, 2001). "What can I expect from my marriage?" Engaged, newlywed, and long-time married couples will find gentle and caring answers in Walter Wangerin's classic. Offering an intimate portrait of his own marriage, he suggests six tasks for crafting a lifetime relationship: truthfulness and dependability, sharing the challenges of survival, talking and listening, sexuality, healing not hurting, and volunteering and giving.

Healing the Hurt in Your Marriage by Dr. Gary and Barbara Rosburg (Focus on the Family, 2004). Habitual avoidance of conflict is the number one predictor of divorce. Do you avoid conflict resolution because you don't know how to deal with it effectively? *Healing the Hurt in Your Marriage* provides you with an excellent examination of conflict and a practical step-by-step process for resolving it in a healthy manner.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Additional Resources

How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong by Leslie Vernick (Random House, 2009). There are no perfect spouses or marriages but there is an unexpected blessing in an imperfect marriage. Right in the midst of a marital conflict you have the opportunity to become more like Christ by responding wisely when wronged and forgiving when angry or irritated. A good marriage is hard work but as you yield your life and will to God, your marriage will be an opportunity to become increasingly holy.

Sacred Marriage by Gary L. Thomas (Zondervan, 2002). What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy? Discover how the hardships of marriage can work to develop Christlike character—forgiveness, love, respect, perseverance—in each of you.

Thriving Despite a Difficult Marriage by Michael and Chuck Misja (NavPress, 2009). If your marriage is less than perfect and the "happily ever after" that was promised to you in childhood fairy tales is a distant dream, then *Thriving Despite a Difficult Marriage* will offer you hope. Christian psychologists, the Misja brothers, explain that faithfulness, not happiness, is God's desire for you. In your less than perfect marriage, you can still have meaning, purpose, endurance, and optimism.

When Love Dies: How to Save a Hopeless Marriage by Judy Bodmer (Thomas Nelson, 1999). Sitting in church pews every week are untold numbers of Christian women contemplating divorce. Some of them undoubtedly leave their husbands. Some of them will suffer in silence, pretending all is well. Judy Bodmer knows what they are feeling because she has been there herself. In *When Love Dies*, she shares from her own experience how forgiveness can turn a hopeless marriage around. *When Love Dies* is a women's guide to surviving a troubled marriage and ultimately to finding the love for which she's looking.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Additional Resources

Articles

“Beating the Bedroom Blues” by Cindy Sigler Dagnan, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

“Do You See Me?” by Debbie Jansen, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

“God’s Perfect Marriage Counseling” by Sherry Van Zante, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

“I Want to Be Happy” by Elaine Creasman, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

“The Secret Mind-blowing Actual Purpose of Marriage” by Mark E. Smith, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

“Suffering Together” by Jerusha Ann Clark, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

“Why Forgive?” by Neil T. Anderson, available from TodaysChristianWoman.com

Bible Studies

“Communication in Marriage”—a six-session Bible study examining biblical principles that can help you communicate more effectively and lovingly with your spouse, available from ChristianBibleStudies.com.



How to Be Happy in an Unhappy Marriage

Additional Resources

“Finding Joy in the Difficulty of Marriage”—a six-session Bible study from ChristianBibleStudies.com exploring how God can help you make it through the rough spots in marriage and find joy in your relationship.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this download are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, ©2007. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

VISIT THE NEW

The new **Today's Christian Woman** focuses on stories of real women putting God first in the grit of real life.

Be inspired by women living beyond themselves in their families, churches and communities. And share your story!

today's
**christian
woman**.COM

LOVE GOD. LIVE FEARLESS.

The screenshot shows the homepage of Today's Christian Woman. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'MAGAZINE | BLOGS | STORE | FOLLOW US:' and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. A search bar is present with a 'SEARCH' button and a 'or browse' link. Below the navigation, there are category tabs: 'faith', 'marriage+sex', 'parenting', and 'church+ministry'. The main content area features a large featured article titled 'Single Minded' by Lori Smith, with a sub-headline 'What I learned when I stopped focusing on getting married'. Below this, there are several smaller article tiles: 'A Hope for Broken Marriages' by Dawn Zemke, 'What I'm Learning' by Monica Stealy, 'No Apology' by Nancy Ortberg, and 'Surprise Your Spouse!' by Melodie Wright. There are also category-specific tiles for 'FAITH', 'MARRIAGE + SEX', 'PARENTING', and 'CHURCH + MINISTRY'. The footer of the screenshot includes a 'deeper faith' section with sub-points: 'Prayer', 'Bible Study', and 'Solitude'.

New Ways to Connect

Living Beyond:

Find encouragement and inspiration through stories of God using women who are living fearlessly for his kingdom.

What I'm Learning:

Share what God is teaching you in the good times and the hard times. Together we can guide one another through the seasons of life.

Deeper Faith:

Grow your most important relationship through spiritual practices.

**GO TO
TodaysChristian
Woman.com
NOW**