

3 Ways to Change Your Heart for Your Marriage's Sake

I don't know if you're single, engaged, happily married, angrily married, somewhere in between, divorced or widowed. I don't know about the quality of your marriage.

Maybe you have grown in love and affection for your spouse and you would say that you love each other more than ever. Maybe the person you once adored has become an object of your irritation; the romantic spark died long ago, and you simply cohabitate with the person featured in your wedding album.

I don't know about your experience with marriage, but there is one thing I know: Regardless of who you are, where you live, or whom you're married to, your marriage has hope.

Your marriage has hope but not because of how compatible you and your spouse are. Your marriage has hope but not because of how much money you have. Your marriage has hope but not because of how often you go to church and read the Bible. Your marriage has hope because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul says, "For the love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge: that if one died for all, then all have died. And He died for all, that those who live should not from now on live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

I'm about to hurt your feelings, but it's crucial that you understand this: You are your biggest marriage problem. The previous Bible verse says you live for yourself. That's another way of saying you're selfish.

You bring that selfishness into your marriage; the Bible calls it sin. Your sin will erode and ultimately destroy your

marriage. You won't love your spouse; you'll love yourself. You won't desire what's best for your marriage; you'll desire what's most pleasurable for you in that moment.

Jesus refuses to tolerate sin in a marriage. But instead of lashing out in anger and punishing you, Jesus took the punishment you deserve and satisfied the just wrath of God. He now lives in your marriage by His Spirit and works every day to free you from selfishness.

Because Jesus died to free you from sin, your marriage has more hope than it ever had before. You are now freed to love your spouse sacrificially; you are now freed to say no to selfish desires; you are now freed to chase after God's will in your marriage.

This freedom was earned all at once on the cross, but your freedom won't be complete overnight. Change is rarely an event; change is almost always a process. You'll need to work at loving your spouse sacrificially. You'll need to work at saying no to selfish desires. You'll need to work at chasing after God's will in your marriage.

I encourage you to prepare your heart for these changes in three ways:

1. Prepare to fire your inner lawyer. When you recognize your selfishness, you'll be tempted to hire an inner lawyer who argues for your righteousness. Your lawyer will try to persuade you that your sin isn't as bad as that of others and your spouse is the ultimate problem. Fire this lawyer right now.

If you duck the conviction of the Holy Spirit and point the finger of blame to your spouse, you will slow the progress of change because you don't think you need to change.

Jesus died for each and every one of your sins. That means you don't have to be afraid of having that sin exposed. Put down

your defense and admit that you're as sinful as the Bible says.

2. Prepare to run to Jesus. When your sin has been exposed and your inner lawyer has been fired, there's only one thing to do: Run to Jesus. He has already forgiven all your sin, and He now walks with you every step of the way as you struggle with sin and search for freedom in this life. Only Jesus has the ability to change your heart and change your marriage.

When you're facing the reality of your selfishness and struggling in your marriage, cry out for help and run to Jesus. He wants nothing more than for His people to come running, broken and humble, for help.

3. Prepare to help others. God might place you next to someone who needs marriage help, and He might choose you to be that instrument of grace in their marriage. Have a soft and compassionate heart for those who are hurting. Be prepared to listen and to speak truth in love to those who need it. You don't need to be a professional counselor or a licensed pastor to minister to other Christians.

Editor's note: This article is an excerpt from 33 The Series, Volume 5: A Man and His Marriage. Visit .