

7 Life-Changing Lessons You Can Learn From Your Marriage

Boy meets girl. Boy and girl fall in love, get married, have kids, and live happily ever after. The end.

Has that been your story? Is it ever anyone's story? I doubt it. Or if it is, it's only in Hallmark movies, romance novels and fairy tales. Perhaps the myth is so enduring because it's a desire God built into our human DNA. But God didn't give marriage to humans primarily as the means to happiness; instead, God uses marriage to change you. After marriage comes transformation.

Ouch! Couldn't He have found some easier way to do the job? Shouldn't I have been provided an 'informed consent' for this process? Couldn't He have used something temporary or intermittent instead of a 24/7 forever prison?

Marriage is not a prison, though it feels that way to some. There are happier marriages and less happy marriages. But for many, it's only the permanent and all-inclusive nature of marriage that pushes them to embrace God's transformation process. Even the painful end of a marriage is a call to transformation—unless you want to go around that same mountain again.

My husband and I were both mature believers when we married. We had each already experienced some lasting transformation in our own lives, which allowed our marriage to be very happy and functional. And yet marriage changed us both in some deep and important ways that we were very unlikely to have experienced otherwise. Some of those changes came through loving each other deeply, and other changes came because of friction and conflict.

God uses marriage to invite you into a deeper level of

transformation.

Lessons Marriage Teaches You

Marriage can be like jumping into the deep end of the pool without having any assurance you'll be able to swim. These lessons you may know intellectually, but outside of marriage it's comparatively easy to ignore their application. Here are some things marriage affords the opportunity to learn and practice.

Unselfishness. It's really not all about you! Marriage does not work until and unless you make it about meeting your spouse's needs. Your words and actions affect others—and that means your spouse.

Intimacy is vulnerable. Physical, emotional and spiritual intimacy only happens in response to letting down your own walls. You cannot force intimacy; you can only invite your spouse to come closer and do the same.

Communication takes work. Learning to listen, learning to communicate in ways your spouse can understand and receive, learning you're not always right—those skills take practice.

You're not enough. You are toast if you try to do this on your own. Two broken human beings will destroy each other if left to themselves. Only God's grace is strong enough to hold you together.

You are enough. With God's grace, you've got what it takes to go through more than you ever thought you could. You are lovable without the masks. You can do this.

You must change. Your marriage will blow up unless you agree to the transformation process. Who you are when you get married will have to change to make this marriage work.

Love is a commitment. Feelings come and go. Feelings are real, but form a fickle foundation for love. Only covenant-level

commitment, the same kind of love God has for you, is strong enough to sustain marriage through the seasons of life.

Some of these lessons are hard. Some of them may be especially difficult in your particular marriage. But marriage is where God can teach you these lessons if you embrace the process.

Accepting the Invitation

Transformation in marriage is not automatic. You can respond to the irritations and frustration by digging in, demanding your own way, becoming bitter, closing up into your own private shell and living in misery. You can put up with it for a while and then leave, certain your partner was the problem, and be surprised when your next relationship is no better.

OR, you can seek God's perspective on your marriage and what He wants to do in your own heart as a result. You can learn what it means to love and forgive an imperfect person, and to accept the imperfect love and forgiveness they offer in return. You can learn the hard lessons of communication, intimacy and perseverance. You can embrace the process of learning to love well.

Will that be enough? Will you end up happy? Will your marriage last? I don't know. The answer is uncertain only because in marriage your spouse gets a vote too, and you can't control their vote. But I do know it's the only possible way you can ever hope to experience what God intended marriage to be.

Even if your marriage ends, God can use the process to transform *you*. While ideally both you and your spouse are being transformed together, your transformation is not dependent on what your spouse does.

It's been said that marriage is not about happiness; it's about holiness. I believe that's true.

After marriage comes transformation. If you feel stuck in your

marriage, take the time to seek God's perspective on where He might be working to transform you right now.

Your Turn: *How has God used marriage to transform you already? What might He be wanting to change in you now? Leave a comment below.* {eo}

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