

Yes, Actually, Marriage Did Solve My Loneliness

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. [1 Samuel 1:17-18]

Since I was a week away from my 36th birthday when I got married, I frequently read and received advice about singleness and how to deal with it. People told me not to expect marriage to solve issues I had, about everything from lust to loneliness. It is fair to say that marriage has not solved many of my problems but instead has, as you may expect, taught me how selfish and proud I can be.

Yet I cannot deny that as badly as I struggled emotionally with loneliness the last few years before marriage, that this particular struggle was completely eradicated.

The issues I had didn't happen in a vacuum. It wasn't like I began to consciously think that because I was in my mid-30s that I should be married already. Or that this led me to feel discouraged. Until I was 32, in fact, I was quite content being single and felt no pressure within or from without from people that loved me to get married. Yet I eventually began to experience trials in this area that were beyond my control and at times I did not respond well. And slowly but surely I began to suffer significantly enough with depression and anxiety that for a short time I was actually on a medication called Lexapro. These experiences were the foundation for a theology I've developed on waiting on God, [and how brutally truthful I am willing to be about it.](#)

But marriage changed all of this. My feelings were revolutionized. I have no longer struggled with depression or anxiety even a little bit. To me, it was like the moment in *Return of the King* when Gollum and the One Ring fall into fires of the volcano in Mount Doom. The first time I read those books, it felt like nearly the whole story was consumed in darkness until that moment and then light flooded the pages. The long dark night was finally over. That is what marriage has been like to me. Loneliness was a villain that has been destroyed forever.

There is much about marriage that I love and much that brings joy. And I cannot deny that because I was older when I got married and because I fell so deeply into an abyss before Kayla, that I value the companionship the most. I love it that I have someone to come home to at night. I love it that my wife knows all of my inside jokes and quotes and says them before I can when she knows I'm about to. I love that someone is there to take care of me when I'm sick, and honestly I love even more that I get to take care of someone when they are sick. I love it that when I preach, there is someone I can find in the audience that I can make eye contact with that understands and loves me like no other and makes me feel calm.

For those who have been victims in marriage—be it abuse or abandonment or something similar—or who are still waiting on it, it is not my aim to discourage. We at REO have written to those circumstances many times. I also do not want to disingenuously paint a picture of what marriage is like. It can be frustrating at times. It can expose the deepest flaws of your soul that you do not want to know about or confront. But if the two people are quick to forgive, as we both have been so far, then the conflict can produce deeper intimacy. And it can be completely overwhelmed most of the time by the joys of companionship.

But the main reason I am writing this is that when people write things like “Don't expect marriage to solve [fill in the

blank with whatever],” that often they are correct. But sometimes I do believe we make blanket statements in Christianity that can have exceptions. Yes, I believe my identity should be in Christ and not primarily in my marriage. Yes, I believe that Paul taught we can be content no matter the circumstances. But then I read the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel and how raw and passionate her grief was while childless, and how the news of having a child transformed her emotional state. And I wonder if sometimes God didn’t give us the narrative in the Bible to remind us that the more doctrinal sections have exceptions at times. Real life is not always so black and white. I don’t know if I could have been content the last few years of my life before marriage. But I know I’m content now that I am married.

Absolute truth is real. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means I do not have to stay dead after I die. Sex outside of marriage is immoral. Those are absolute. Yet in our social media world of articles that begin with things like “5 reasons you should...” and “Don’t expect this to happen when you ...” I advocate for more nuanced advice. Oftentimes I have read articles and discovered they are based on preferences and experiences and some Bible verses that may or may not be absolute in their applications. I am not telling you that marriage solves loneliness. It may not for you. It did for me. And based on Hannah’s story and God himself declaring it is not good for man to be alone (save the exceptions given by Jesus in places like Matthew 19:12) and other Scriptures, I have zero issue testifying to it.

But as always, REO opens the floor to our readers for discussion and comments. Please feel free to do so below.

I Don't Know Your Face

I don't know your face.
I know the shape of it. The curves, the lines, the beautiful contours.
I know the idea of it.
But I don't know your face.
It is hidden to me.
Not always.
Not forever.
Just today. Right now. In this moment of strife.

*I said words that were beneath me. Words that made less of you. Painful words.
Words ill-fitting and ugly. Unworthy words.
I said them. I meant them. I hate them. I hate myself for saying them.*

You are no angel.
Your imperfections are beautiful and heartbreaking.
You are mine. I am yours. We take turns hurting, biting, maiming.
That is not who you are. It is not who I am.
It is who we are together.
Not always.
Not forever.
Just today. Right now. In this moment of rancor.

You said injurious words. You raged and quaked and yelled.

*Your words have broken my heart. They made me feel small.
Insignificant. Impotent.
You said them. You meant them. You hate them. You hate
yourself for saying them.*

I love the all of you that I know.
Some parts are hidden. I have kept things hidden as well.
We share those hesitantly. With fear and trembling.
We hold back. It protects us from shame. From rejection. From
loneliness.
Together, we reject that shame. We know this.
Always.
Forever.
Today. Right now. In this moment of healing.

*We made promises before. Promises for then and forever.
We are one. Bodies, spirit, hearts. Knitted together by holy
words. A holy vow.
We said them. We meant them. We love them. We love each other
for saying them.*

Five Great TV Couples

To celebrate Valentine's Day (a little early) we decided to shine the spotlight on a few of our favorite TV couples. However, we wanted our list to be a little different than a "best of." It would be easy to write about some of the most

well-known and loved couples in television history. Couples like the Huxtables from *The Cosby Show*. Or Ricky and Lucy from *I love Lucy*. Instead of that, we chose to focus on a few lesser known examples of good, strong, admirable TV marriages. We hope you enjoy our list and we hope you will add your two cents in the comment section below.



Wash and Zoe – Firefly

I'm not sure that there has ever been a TV couple so opposite that still completely adored each other. Zoe, the ultra-fit gun-toting, silent warrior woman and Wash a jovial, fun-loving, happy-go-lucky pilot. And yet their marriage is perfection nearly all of the time. If you have watched the show *Firefly* at all, you will know the very real passionate love that existed between the two. While they are fully committed to the crew—and Zoe is more loyal to the captain than anyone—it is still all about their marriage to them. Through all the intense activity they manage to maintain their little cocoon of eternal love and bliss. Their relationship didn't start out that way, though. Not surprisingly, Wash's manner rubbed Zoe the wrong way when they first meet in "Out of Gas." During that encounter, she quickly determined she didn't like him. How things changed. Most reading this have also seen *Serenity*, the *Firefly* movie that is a sequel to its

epic one-season run. However, some readers may have inexplicably opted out. If that is the case, I will not spoil the specifics about how their life of bliss is finally torn about. But their love goes on and lives forever in our hearts through repeated viewings of the show. – Ben Plunkett



Eric and Tami Taylor – Friday Night Lights

Perhaps the best thing I can say about Eric and Tami Taylor is that they feel real. *Friday Night Lights* excelled at many things: It told poignant stories. It thrilled audiences. It created believable and fully realized characters. Yet the thing that brought many of us back was the Taylors. Coach Eric Taylor, a Texas high school football coach, poured his life into his team, his players, and his family. He was continuously required to make sacrifices with his time and energy. The great thing about it all was that he made those sacrifices *with* his wife Tami. They talked. They argued. They fought. But through it all, they loved each other. They compromised for each other. They took turns putting the other first so they could reach for their dreams. They did this all with genuine affection for one another, displaying love and respect all along the way. The Taylors built a family that reached well beyond the walls of their homes. They acted as parents to every player that came through the Dillon Panther

program. This is all accomplished without grandiose plot lines or over-the-top dramatic conflicts. It is grounded and real. If that is not a beautiful and relatable picture of marriage, I don't know what is. – Phill Lytle



Uncle Phil and Aunt Viv – The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

The Fresh Prince of Bel Air was a fascinating show when it aired and has only become more so since it ended. Will Smith is the loud but lovable, the cocky but contentious star. How this show completely altered his career by vaulting him into acting, without any formal training, is a true American success story. But for his real life named role to work, his aunt and uncle had to be good people. They had to have a strong marriage. Because they took him in, adding his troubled and working-class background to their upper-class family. And I loved watching them make sacrifices to accommodate Will, yet become crucial de facto parents who stood their ground to raise him right, which is no doubt difficult when you're talking about a teenager. Their best scenes as a couple were during more serious episodes, as when Will and Carlton get unfairly arrested and they have to go to the police station to defend them. Uncle Phil and Aunt Viv were incredible in those moments and could bring the laughter, tears and applause at the same time. A switch in actress halfway through the series

for Aunt Viv changed her demeanor some but it didn't detract from this model marriage. – Gowdy Cannon



Hal and Lois – Malcolm in the Middle

The show is a bit preposterous. It is a loud, rough-around-the-edges sitcom following the lives of Malcolm, a boy genius, and his dysfunctional yet loving family. Lois is the overbearing, never wrong, say whatever is on her mind mother. Hal is the peculiar, probably crazy father. Their relationship doesn't always make sense. He is clueless at times, though rarely does the show fall into the overdone cliché of the "dumb dad." Lois is portrayed as possessing almost omniscient-like powers though the show doesn't hide from her flaws. Lois is the glue that holds the family together. She is the problem solver – the one that fixes things when the boys or Hal completely screw up. Hal's best character trait is that he loves Lois completely. He is devoted to her in ways that sometimes wanders into the uncomfortable. Yet that is one of the main reasons I am so drawn to it. It is rare that a husband is presented in such a love-struck manner – especially in a couple that has been together as long as Hal and Lois have when we first meet them. They are not perfect by any means, but their love is a passionate partnership and we could find much worse examples than them in popular culture. – Phill



Adam and Kristina Braverman – Parenthood

This show is such that my wife and I talked about the characters all the time as though they were real people. The title of the show tells you its main focus but for the Braverman clan, the ups and downs of marriage could not be separated out from child rearing. And one marriage rises above the rest for how exemplary it is, that of Adam and Kristina. Teenage rebellion, Aspergers, cancer, political campaigns, new babies...it didn't matter what you threw at them, they would use it to make their relationship stronger.

By no means were they perfect and I appreciate when TV has raw moments of conflict that do not get handled well at first because just as in real life, it makes reconciliation a beautiful thing. For Adam and Kirstina, this was exceptional TV. I could list dozens of my favorite moments of theirs but I'll limit it to two. One is at the end of Season 4 when Kristina is cancer free and they go to Hawaii, just the two of them with no kids. And the very last scene of the whole season is them running into the ocean together. So touching. It really was never just about parenthood. And second, when they discover that Hank, a more or less independently functioning

adult, may have Aspergers just like Max, their conversation about it is crazy funny. They go back and forth with Adam being completely upbeat about the possibility of Max being similar one day and Kristina being skeptical because Hank definitely has issues. At one point they have this exchange:

A: He has a daughter!

K: But she doesn't like him.

A: But she's real!

To know Adam and his facial expression and voice inflection is to love that counter-response. I miss the Bravermans. – Gowdy Cannon

I said “I Love You” Before the First Date (And Other Fun Facts About My Marriage)

As of May 30th, my wife Kayla and I have been married for two whole years! Look at the big brains on us! In lieu of a sappy Facebook post, I decided to share 24 of the most interesting facts about our marriage, one for each month we've been married...

In March 2014 Kayla was living in Nashville. I was living in Chicago. On March 25th, I asked her out, telling her I was coming to Nashville for Spring Break anyway (I wasn't). Our

first date was to be April 13th. In the meantime, we talked every day through texting, phone and Facetime. By the time April 13th rolled around I knew she was the one I wanted to marry. Before the date I met her on campus and we sat on a swing and I told her that I loved her. I'm sure people thought (and think) that this was crazy. But she didn't run away and she married me anyway.

While we dated and were engaged she lived in Tennessee and I in Chicago. She is from Sesser, IL and I am from Tookeedoo, South Carolina. There was a stretch of five weekends where we were together but in five different places. At one point during that stretch we walked into a Target and I thought, "I have no idea what city I am in right now."

Kayla and I were long distance from March 25, 2014 until May 7, 2015. In that time we traveled 40,000 miles to see each other via car, plane and train.

Within the span of 15 months in 2014 to 2015, Kayla finished getting licensed to teach in Tennessee, started dating me, performed several shows as Maria in a production of *The Sound of Music*, ran a half-marathon, graduated college in Nashville, got a teaching job in Hendersonville, moved to Hendersonville, started her first teaching job, got engaged to me, planned a wedding, applied and took new tests to be licensed to teach in Illinois, resigned her job in Hendersonville, got married in Sesser, moved to my small apartment in Chicago, joined a new church, moved into a bigger apartment with me in Chicago, got a teaching job in Chicago and started that job.

I am 14 years older than Kayla. I am one of the youngest grandchildren on either side of my family. She is one of the oldest. As a result I have a first cousin that is 54 and she has a first cousin that is 8.

We got engaged on Saturday night, November 1, 2014. That night USC played Tennessee in football. Two of my brothers were at the game and could not hear me when I called to tell them I was engaged because the stadium is so loud. The Gamecocks blew a 14 point lead in the last few minutes and lost. (Not that I associate that game with my engagement or anything.)

After 3 years of being together my wife knows all the random phrases I will say out loud and she often will say them before me when she knows I am about to say them. For example, if someone mentions chicken wings, she knows I will say, "TOMMY LIKEY, TOMMY WANT WINGY" from the movie *Tommyboy*.

During our wedding and reception there were several subtle references to *Seinfeld* and *Harry Potter*. We did not want to distract from the reverence of the ceremony by making them overt but true fans knew them when they saw or heard them.

Kayla and I do not celebrate Valentine's Day but instead celebrate several of our anniversaries that are significant to us (the day we got engaged, first date, etc.). Included is March 6th because it was a date before we got together where I asked her a personal question over Facebook PM and her answer was so transparent and spiritually deep I said, "I have to ask her out." Only took me 19 days to do it.

In two years I probably have done the majority of the cooking but she has absolutely done the majority of the bug killing.

For her first birthday after we got together I gave my wife a Belle tiara and recreated the scene in *The Big Bang Theory* where Sheldon gives Amy a tiara to make up for being selfish.

I was so old when I got married that a man in my church, who had prayed for years for it to happen, gave Kayla a hug the first time he met her. I've never seen him hug anyone else in 15 years of knowing him.

During our first year of being married I was taking Kayla to school and a man with mental health problems jumped in our car when we stopped at a stop sign. He wanted me to take him somewhere but I could not understand him. I kept telling him to get out and that I'd call for help but he would not so he rode the rest of the way with us to school and then got out.

My favorite random moment from early in our marriage was on Good Friday in 2016 when we were at her parents' house. I was upstairs doing something unimportant and I could hear her downstairs playing the guitar and singing Good Friday and Easter hymns in English and Spanish.

I've never beaten my wife at *Scene It Seinfeld*. But she refuses to give me a rematch of the rematch of the rematch.

If it weren't for Facebook, I am positive Kayla and I never would have gotten together. And in the words of Kramer, "That'll make you think."

I have always hated wearing jeans but my wife wanted me to wear them so she bought me some to go out on nice dates. So I would wear jeans on the nice dates and then come home and put on some comfortable khaki pants.

After a few months of marriage I put on 40 pounds and the jeans didn't fit any more. We didn't buy any new ones.

I laugh boisterously and fall on the floor quite often but the only time I've seen my wife do it was during an episode of *Parks and Rec* where Christ Pratt as Andy Dwyer ad libs a line when Leslie is sick: "Leslie, I typed your symptoms into the thing up here, and it says you could have 'network connectivity problems'."

Marriage teaches you how self-centered you are for sure. If we are home and my wife says something from another room and I can't hear her, I get mad at her as if it is her fault. If I say something from another room and she doesn't hear me, I get mad at her as if it is her fault.

Probably the silliest fight we have had was recently when going to church and I asked if she wanted me to drop her off at the door or not, since it was a little cool outside. She said, "It's up to you," which means, "It doesn't matter". But I got mad and told her it was her decision and that I refused

to decide it. But I really said that mumbling under my breath. And she asked me to speak up and so I said it very sarcastically. We both entered the church quite mad. Thankfully my wife is abnormally gracious and apologized quickly, even though it was my fault.

Speaking of mumbling, my wife's first trip to South Carolina gave her the chance to hear the Cannon men speak in our own personal garbled vernacular that only we can comprehend. My own mother can't make it out but we understand each other just fine. If you have ever heard Jeff Foxworthy talk about words in the South, you have an idea of what it sounds like: "How's ya mama an em?" "Aight." Sometimes when my dad and brother Jeremy have a conversation I'll translate for Kayla.

Occasionally, my wife will tell her story of fitness and health by posting a picture with comments to social media after an insane 30-40 minute workout. Sometimes, if you look carefully in the background, I'll be on the couch eating a whole frozen pizza from Aldi.

I really do love my wife very much and I cannot get over how much better marriage is than I even dreamed. I am sure it will get harder (with kids, maybe?) but right now the great moments far surpass the frustrating ones.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, KAYLA!

The Astonishing Tales of Middle Of The Night Guy

"I never get enough sleep. I stay up late at night, because I'm Night Guy. Night Guy wants to stay up late. 'What about getting up after five hours sleep?' Oh, that's Morning Guy's problem. That's not my problem, I'm Night Guy. I stay up as late as I want. So you get up in the morning, the alarm [rings], you're exhausted, groggy... Oh, I hate that Night Guy! See, Night Guy always messes up Morning Guy. There's nothing Morning Guy can do."

(Jerry Seinfeld)

I really do want to love my wife. I struggle with selfishness as much as the next guy, but in my right mind I know that I need to serve her and put her first. I fail plenty, but most days I at least make an effort. I'll get her water when she's working out, go warm up the car when it's cold and rub her feet after a long day.

That's during the day. Basically, between 6 AM and midnight.

Something strange happens when we are in bed, though. Middle Of The Night Guy shows up.

Middle Of The Night Guy is not selfless. He does not serve. He doesn't think of others before himself. To be frank, Middle Of The Night Guy is a complete jerk.

Middle Of The Night Guy will throw elbows for bed space. Middle Of The Night Guy will take the covers without hesitation. One time Middle of the Night Guy repeatedly kicked

his wife for invading his side of the bed. (Middle Of The Night Guy's wife wants the record to show it was a small bed.)

Rest Of The Day Guy, who is in control of the things I talked about in the first paragraph, knows Middle Of The Night Guy exists. But he can't do much about him. Sometimes, he will ask his wife if she remembers what Middle Of The Night Guy did the night before. She always does.

Rest Of The Day Guy rejoices when he and his wife travel and they get a king bed. He sometimes will jump on it and roll around and enjoy all the space. Because he knows Middle of the Night Guy will come calling.

Rest of the Day Guy and Middle Of The Night Guy both do not like being touched. Their wife loves it. So Rest Of The Day Guy will sacrifice to make his wife happy. He will let her lean up against him while she works and hold her hand if she wants. Not Middle Of The Night Guy. If his wife tries to come cuddle at 3 AM, he will freak out, grimace, roll over until he is squeezed on the last 6 inches of space on the bed and make himself as thin as he can. The discomfort of this and risk of rolling off the bed are worth it to Middle Of The Night Guy. Touching is not an option. If his plan to not be touched is violated, the kicks and the shoves ensue. Don't touch Middle Of The Night Guy.

Rest Of The Day Guy hates that Middle Of The Night Guy is this way and he'd love to punch Middle Of The Night Guy in the face. But he better be careful; Middle of the Night Guy has more fighting experience.

The only way Rest Of The Day Guy has a chance is if he becomes Eating My Potbelly Cookie Guy. Then he will be ready to fight to the death.

Reflections on One Year of Marriage

I am not writing this to opine about how much I know about marriage. I'm not that foolish. I know that one year is a very limited amount of time to learn anything, especially a topic as complex and deep as the relationship God designed so that two people become one. This isn't instructive. I don't have any methods or steps or advice.

No, this is exactly what the title says it is. Just things I observed this year and have thought a lot about.

Before my wife and I got married on May 30 of last year, I definitely wanted advice. And we got a lot of good counsel from dozens of couples. Things that I think about often and have helped me practically. My brother Jeremy said I better be sure I was marrying someone who would fight for the marriage "no matter what". (I was.) Fellow REO contributor [Phill](#) told me to do the dishes without being asked. (I do.)

One of our best friend couples, Dustin and Sara, told us to "say 'I love you' every day" and to create inside jokes with each other. (We do.) Allen Pointer told me, "Do not underestimate the male tendency to go in his cave and disengage from his family." (Still working on this.) Over half the people we asked told me to worry less about solving Kayla's problems and more about listening to and affirming her. (Still working on this one, too.)

But no matter how much advice you get, it's like a roller coaster in that you can read and hear about it, but nothing is like actually experiencing it. And surely every marriage is unique. There is no way any of our counselors could have

prepared us for everything. We've learned some things by living through them.

We discovered that **people can and do change**. The vicious stereotype from TV and other media ("Don't expect him to change after you're married") did not play out for us—either of us. I find no pride in this (or I shouldn't) because I've tried to change things about myself many times and failed.

But thanks to my wife's influence, I go to bed earlier. I wake up earlier. I have learned how to cook with a modicum of competency instead of sticking a frozen pizza in the oven or going to Wendy's all the time. I use our cutting board nearly every day for something. I don't think I owned a cutting board before marriage.

My wife changed knowing she would have to in order to be married to me, mostly because of where I live. She lives and serves with me at church in a predominantly Hispanic Chicago neighborhood and works in an African-American neighborhood.

That kind of intimate interaction with other cultures will change a person. It has been uncomfortable at times. But she walked into it willingly and she's grown a lot.

...because my wife had to adjust to a new city, a new church, a new job and two new cultures, she has had many rough days. And most times, I don't know what to do except cry with her

People often ask what has surprised me most. I'd have to say that **I'm most surprised by the amount of compassion and empathy I feel for Kayla**. I say that for a couple of reasons.

First, I don't feel compassion for many people. As a child my mom always told me I was tenderhearted toward suffering, even to animals and fictional pain when I'd read or watch TV.

But as an adult I've become jaded and don't feel for people often. Second, I assumed loving my wife would be either loving her romantically as in Song of Solomon or that I'd have

to choose to love her when there was no emotion, as in Ephesians 5 telling husbands to 'agape' their wives. And while those two things are true, this is different. It's more of a "mourn with those who mourn" type thing. I want to use the word "sympathy" but that almost sounds condescending. Yet it's anything but condescending. It's intimate.

To explain practically, because my wife had to adjust to a new city, a new church, a new job and two new cultures, she has had many rough days. And most times, I don't know what to do except cry with her. There are times when I'm in a bad mood and I am hardhearted at first. But nearly always the emotion comes sooner or later. It happens because I know her so well. I know what she's facing. I know how hard she works and how much injustice she deals with. And how life can break us down. I learned a long time ago that knowledge and exposure drive passion. I now know that they also drive compassion.

Sometimes she says things to me when I'm angry (like when I'm driving) that I interpret as snapping at me and very curt. And I get defensive. But as we've talked about it, I've learned that she is not snapping out of anger, but because my anger scares her due to many things she's been through.

Almost paradoxically, I have also learned that **I am very tempted to want to be vindictive with my wife.** And I don't mean in big ways because my wife is far too kind and sensitive to treat me badly. I'm talking about petty things. For example, my wife is a touching person. I am not. So sometimes to practice love I will randomly go up and do something physical to show affection. And one time I stepped on her foot. Another time her stomach was hurting. In these times, she winced and flinched and stepped away from me. My reaction? "How dare she? Why isn't she on her knees in gratitude, thanking me for being such a thoughtful husband?"

FINE. I'm never showing her random acts of affection AGAIN!" That isn't hyperbole.

A lot of this comes down to **living with understanding just as 1 Peter 3:7 says**. I've lost track of the number of times my brain filtered something my wife said or did as disrespect and my gut reaction was to get upset. Note that I said I 'filtered' it that way. My wife is the most gracious, humble person I've ever met, but sometimes due to my insecurities and faults I don't process her actions correctly. Sometimes she says things to me when I'm angry (like when I'm driving) that I interpret as snapping at me and very curt. And I get defensive. But as we've talked about it, I've learned that she is not snapping out of anger, but because my anger scares her due to many things she's been through. This revolutionized my filtering system.

More than anything, I have learned that marriage can be so, so good. I love it that I live with my best friend in the world. I have laughed more this year than any other year. I've cried more than any other year. And through it all I am more content than ever. The beast of longing and anxiety that occupied much of my time as a single man has been vanquished.

I'm sure it will get harder. I'm sure there are new things to learn and reflect on. But in the words of my pastor, David Potete, "Quitting is not an option." That's a piece of advice he didn't need to give me last year because he knew I knew it. I don't need more than a year of marriage to know it, because we love each other no matter what.

(Photo Credit: [Rachael Kreid Photography.](#))

The Everyday, Easy-To-Overlook, Taken for Granted, Most Potentially Destructive Yet Potentially Life-Saving Part of My Marriage: My Mouth

TALK ISN'T CHEAP WHEN IT COSTS IN YOUR MARRIAGE

I haven't even been married even a year but long enough to notice some things about how time changes the relationship. I'm sure it changes *every* relationship in a similar way; I just have never noticed it quite so profoundly until this one. Perhaps because this one means the most. And the one thing that has changed the most quickly and obviously and yet the most subtly and gradually is how I speak to my wife.

All my life and at different ages I have heard people try to minimize how much words matter. From the elementary "sticks and stones" chant to the more adolescent "talk is cheap" to modern day social media memes that I often see communicating that actions are much more important than words. I get where this is coming from. But both the Bible and my reality have proven how I speak matters as much or more than anything else I do every day, especially with my wife.

IT HAPPENED SO QUICKLY YET SO GRADUALLY

When we first got together I was so intentional about how I spoke to her. I would quote Song of Solomon to her. I was never sarcastic with her in a crude way, especially in front of others. I often complimented her and kept my mouth shut, refraining from give a solution to her problems if I thought she needed to vent. But over time, I have let things go in this area. In front of her friends and family I have made

unkind sarcastic comments to her. I use the stereotypical tone when I talk to her. I go straight into problem solving mode often when she has an issue at work. I have gone long stretches without telling her she's beautiful. Losing control of my tongue with my wife is by far the biggest problem I have after just a few months of marriage.

Losing control of my tongue with my wife is by far the biggest problem I have after just a few months of marriage.

What kills me is that you hear this all the time in real life and on TV. Women often complain that men become more likely to take them for granted with time. And I've tried to avoid that and (by God's grace) succeeded in things like making regular date nights and doing the dishes. But this area is one where I am completely and unequivocally not doing as well as eight months ago. And in a lot of ways that affects everything else—even the good that I do.

ONE OF THE EASIEST TO UNDERSTAND CHAPTERS IN THE BIBLE

It's not just my experience that proves this, though. It's the Bible. In James 3, he makes three very simple points about the tongue. He says 1) the tongue controls everything else, like the rudder on a ship, 2) it cannot be dominated because it's too evil and potent, and 3) it's hypocritical to use the tongue for both blessing and cursing. In typical Bible fashion, it seems impossible to reconcile all of these ideas into practical reality. If I cannot tame the tongue, why is it so important to God that we control it? And why am I so guilty for using it incorrectly?

I think God, through James, is making it clear that it is a battle to use your words for good and that we cannot be complacent. He says the tongue is a world of unrighteousness, is filled with deadly poison and stains the whole body. Think about that for a second. Think about how crucial the tongue

is as the body's controlling part, combined with its nature. It's like the Joker of the human body: malevolent, bent on chaos, and capable of coercing the weaker to follow its lead. The default flow of human nature is away from God. The tongue is the leader and greatest weapon of our depravity. It trends away from blessing others with our words and towards insulting, false flattery, gossiping, talking instead of listening and countless other ways we misuse our mouth. Like fire it is deadly when not controlled vigilantly. It is that strong, that influential and that destructive. I'm confident that I could wash dishes every day for the rest of my life but if I don't use conversation for my wife's edification, then I'm missing what James is teaching. I concede that the memes are right—that if I say "I love you" but do not do practical action to show it then I am also wrong. But James doesn't say that the hands or the feet control and corrupt everything else. The tongue does.

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TRUTH IS APPLICATION AS WELL AS UNDERSTANDING

The rest of Scripture coincides with the importance of words. The biggest book of the Bible is a group songs, or words, to God. The only book dedicated entirely to marriage, the aforementioned Song of Songs, is primarily words the two lovers speak to each other. Paul says words are essential for both witnessing about and accepting Jesus. And Jesus preached that the mouth is a reflection of the heart and that we will be judged for every word we say.

So if I can offer anything to married men this Valentine's Day is that by all means be romantic with your wife. Serve her in practical ways. But remember that the Bible can be counter-

intuitive. We think actions speak louder than words, but show me a man who uses his tongue well and I know you'll see a man who does well with the rest of his life. Because if you can control the Joker, you can handle his cronies. How we speak (and don't speak) to others is the litmus test for human behavior. The tongue is the control center. We talk often in the church about guarding our hearts and our minds. But we desperately need to guard our words as well. Especially to the one we committed to at an altar once upon a time – with words no less – to love unconditionally.

That Time I Almost Cheated On My Spouse

It seemed so innocent at first.

It was like a casual conversation over coffee with an old friend. It didn't mean anything. This relationship wouldn't go anywhere it shouldn't go.

But an innocent conversation leads to the *what-ifs* and the *if-onlys* and the *I-should've*s.

It was never really innocent if I'm honest with myself. Because a casual conversation with Discontentment is never okay.

When we invite Discontentment into our homes, we begin to plant seeds. And as we water these seeds with thoughts and fertilize the soil of our hearts with regret, the seeds can grow and spread and choke out the fruit of a solid marriage. Many divorce-ending marriages begin to crumble when the whore of Discontentment is not kicked out of our homes.

Paul teaches us that contentment is learned (Philippians 4:11—"Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.") *It doesn't come naturally.* Being content also takes strength. The often misapplied verse "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13) is Paul's commentary on contentment. Verse 12 of this same passage reads, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

Further, Paul reminds the Corinthians against falling into the same trap as their ancestors. He warns them (and us) not to "grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer" (I Corinthians 10:10). The Israelites were discontent with the provision of God, even longing to go back into the slavery of the Egyptians from which they were saved. Discontented grumbling destroys.

If true contentment is a learned strength, and if its opposite leads to destruction, then flirting with Discontentment can lead to the demise of our marriages. How do we avoid it?

First, call and recognize Discontentment for what it is: sin. Don't make it sexy or dress it up or label it as something else. It often comes in the disguise of "Happiness." It is not innocent. Don't entertain it in your thoughts. Kick it out of your head and heart like an unwanted, lazy parasite. Never let it feel welcomed even for a second. Discontentment is sin, so treat it as such. In contrast, Wisdom should be a regular guest. When Discontentment tells us our spouse isn't the right one for us, Wisdom shouts the truth of your covenantal vows. Wisdom reminds us of our daily need of the gospel, while Discontentment urges us toward self-righteous pride. The call of Discontentment tempts us to notice every flaw of our spouse. Wisdom reminds us "Why should any living mortal...offer complaint in view of his sins?" (Lamentations 3:39).

Second, be thankful. Discontentment has no room to reside in a house of thankfulness. Cultivate thankfulness in your homes. Staying thankful in all circumstances is an intentional choice. It's easy to forget God, the One who provides and loves when life is going as we plan. It's easy to forget that the God who provides and loves, is still good, even when tragedy strikes. Remembering who God was, is, and always will be helps us to stay thankful. Running to Him with questions (much like the psalmist does in 10:11, 22:1, 42:9b, and 44:24b, et al.) will still allow us to conclude that the "LORD hears the desire of the afflicted" (10:17). We can rest in Him because we can praise His name forever, and He rescues us because of His unfailing love (Psalm 42:11; 44:8; 44:26). Discontentment and Thankfulness will never be roommates.

Third, be on guard. Devoted, faithful spouses do not text exes or send them private messages through social media. They would not flirt or seduce another person. A spouse who wants a strong marriage would not have private meetings with a coworker. Just as we would have boundaries against such absurd actions, we must also guard against Discontentment in the same way. We must build boundaries of Truth around our marriages. Pick up the sword, and slay Discontentment immediately. Stay in the Word. If Discontentment shows up, ask yourself if you've been using the weapon regularly. As we are told in I Timothy 6:6, "Godliness with contentment is great gain." We cannot hope to have godly behavior if we don't read the Word and follow the Spirit's prompting and piercing. To keep our weapon sheathed is to invite Discontentment. The invitation will be accepted every single time we offer it.

No matter how crazy life gets or how much of a break from the day-to-day is needed, toying with Discontentment is dangerous. Annihilation is our battle strategy. But be warned—Discontentment can resurrect. When each battle is won, the war is not yet over until Discontentment, along with Death, is destroyed for all time.