

Title: Holy Wife, Happy Life
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Texts: Matthew 5:31-32, Ephesians 5:25-33
Curtis Froisland

Holy Wife, Happy Life

[Proposition: The key to happiness in marriage is holiness, therefore we should make holiness our priority.]

Introduction:

There's some folk wisdom in the phrase "Happy Wife, Happy Life" isn't there? If we mean it sincerely and not manipulatively, and we remember that it applies not only to husbands but to wives—it generally points us in the right direction. If you love your spouse and think of their needs, it will go better for you.

And yet, we want to push beyond folk wisdom, to God's wisdom. We want to exhibit in our marriages the deeper righteousness Jesus has been showing us through the Sermon on the Mount (SOM).

Last week we saw the permanence of marriage and God's purpose for marriage, this week we are seeking to align our lives with that purpose—getting our priorities right in marriage. So...

You have heard it said, "Happy Wife, Happy Life"

But I say to you, "Holy Wife, Happy Life."

We will only experience the flourishing, the Blessedness, the type of happiness Jesus speaks of in the beatitudes if we pursue mutual holiness—if we are seeking to become more and more like him. The key to happiness is holiness.

As we look at these Scriptures together which are linked by the theme of marriage but also their common use of the OT, we'll see that the number one priority in marriage is to become more like Jesus, to pursue holiness. And the second is like it, to help your spouse pursue holiness as well.

I. The way to flourish in your marriage is to become more and more like Jesus, so that has to be your first priority.

Paul says in v. 25 that husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her in order to present her to himself in holiness and splendor. Then in verse 28:

28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

He who loves his wife (that is, loves her with the kind of love Christ has for the church) loves himself (it is good for him). In other words, there is this mutually reinforcing relationship:

- As I become more like Christ, I love my wife like Christ

- As my wife receives Christ like love she becomes more like Christ, and loves me more like Christ
- And that is good for me, because it leads to flourishing, happiness.

Now Paul speaks specifically to husbands, but he would certainly say that wives must think in this same way as well. All Christians are to encourage one another in holiness, this principle applies to wives as much as husbands. Holiness leads to happiness.

Afterall,

The SOM teaches us that the good life we really want only comes through becoming like Christ.

As we have seen in the SOM, Jesus casts a vision for human flourishing, for the good life. He invites us to participate in that flourishing by making us a people with hearts aflame with faith which overflow into lives shaped by his values. Whole and holy, the same people inside and out.

But in the beatitudes and the examples of deeper righteousness, Jesus constantly cuts across our expectations of how to participate in the good life.

Illustration:

In the Pixar movie *Cars* (or as Judah calls it “Vroom vrooms”), the young hot shot racecar Lightning McQueen learns from a grizzled old racer Doc Hudson that on a dirt track you have to turn right to go left. It makes no sense to him—in fact he spins out and flies off the track as he moves from disbelief to actually learning what it means—until it finally clicks.

The picture Jesus paints is counterintuitive to our instinct about how to have a good life. But he speaks not only as the prophet like Moses, but as God who spoke at Sinai and his vision and mine don’t line up. This is humbling isn’t it? It requires the admission that I don’t have all the answers, that I don’t know what’s right—that to me, in the day to day, it isn’t always obvious that the way into the good life isn’t my way. Humility is good for me, it requires dependence on God.

There’s a Christian marriage book called *When Sinners Say ‘I Do.’* It’s kind of a funny title that captures something important about you and your spouse. But, imagine if each of us were humble enough to look at our marriages and say “I’m a sinner. I don’t know what’s right. I’m the problem. I’ve got baggage, I’ve got hurts, I’ve got unfair expectations and personality quirks.”

That sort of humility ought to make us better listeners, better partners. The recognition that I’m a sinner makes me more aware of how often I’m wrong and how often I have wronged my wife.

It takes humility to believe that the way to flourish in your marriage is to become more and more like Jesus, but that has to be your first priority.

Now then, what does this passage teach us specifically about what means to be more like Jesus:

II. Becoming like Jesus means growing in sacrificial love for your spouse.

Paul says this explicitly in our passage from Ephesians 5:25-28:

A. Becoming like Jesus means loving your spouse by being committed to their good.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26 that he might sanctify her**, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, **that she might be holy and without blemish.** **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Jesus loves the church by being committed to our good, and isn't this the center of Jesus's teaching as well: love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus did not die for us because of the emotional chemistry he felt—but because he truly loves us, he is absolutely committed to our good.

Jesus gave himself in love for the church for this purpose (v. 26) that he might sanctify and cleanse her, and (v. 27) that she might be holy and without blemish. The goal of love is the good of the beloved. What we most need is cleansing, holiness, and so Jesus loves us and gives himself to that end.

Now, we are to love in such a way as to seek the good and help produce holiness in our spouse. The power of Jesus's transforming love is transmitted through our love to our spouse.

But I think it doesn't always click with us that our spouse is our neighbor. We may look at out at the world and see all the places we need to serve and love others, but sometimes it's easy to forget that we are called to love and serve the people closest to us beginning most of all with our spouse.

Illustration:

In C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape coaches a junior demon to infect a man's relationship by keeping "his mind off the most elementary of duties by directing it to the most advanced and spiritual ones. Aggravate that most useful of human characteristics, the horror and neglect of the obvious." He continues, "I have had patients of my own so well in hand that they could be turned at a moment's notice from impassioned prayer for a wife's or son's 'soul' to beating or insulting the real wife or son without a qualm."¹

Do you treat or speak to your spouse in ways you never would speak to a Christian brother or sister, your boss, your neighbor? Have you repented of that?

¹ From C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, in Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 77.

Is your “love” for your spouse about how they make you feel, or is it your Christ-like commitment to their good?

Do you know what they feel and need, and have you been intentional about helping make that come to pass?

Loving your spouse means being committed to their good.

When you seek to love someone like that, it’s going to become costly. So we also notice that

B. Becoming like Jesus means loving your spouse sacrificially.

Look again at Ephesians 5:25:

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her,**

Jesus gave himself up by pouring out his life on the cross. He gave himself to redeem us, for our sins, to deliver us from the present evil age. Christ does not withhold his love until we are worthy or at least sorry, but he gives himself up for us. He gladly pays the heavy cost of our redemption—a torturous death on the cross bearing the evil of sin and absorbing the wrath of God—and he did not shrink, but gave himself up.

Why? Because he loves us, he is utterly committed to our good, even when we couldn’t see what we needed, and though we did not deserve his love. And because he knows that nothing in the world is so powerful and disarming as sacrificial love.

Illustration:

When my wife, Kelly, and I were first married we went from newlyweds to parents of two kids in less than two years. One of the difficulties was that Kelly was so far away from her family who were in California at the time, she naturally wanted to be with her mom and her siblings particularly as our family was growing. Meanwhile I was in my first year of seminary, and I was digging my heels in pretty hard about staying here in Florida to see that through.

One day I read, Ephesians 5:25: Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” And I didn’t just read it, but it landed on me. To love her like Christ loves me was going to mean sacrificial love, it was going to cost me something. So I began to try to think that way, and do that, and be open to leaving seminary and moving. Ironically, it was in committing myself to sacrificial love that Kelly and I were able to move forward together as a team—probably because she could see that I sincerely wanted to love her and serve her and not just get my way.

It’s not that easy but it is that simple. We are to be utterly committed to our spouse’s good. They are not an obstacle or pathway for you to get what you want or feel you need. Hear me, these

verses tell you it is supposed to cost you something to love your spouse. We are called to sacrificial love.

In fact,

C. Becoming like Jesus means loving your spouse sacrificially even when you feel like enemies.

Sacrificial love for enemies is at the center of the Gospel. It is implied in Ephesians 5 as we remember it was not because we were holy and beautiful that Christ died for us, but to make us so. Paul says it more explicitly in Romans 5:10:

10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Maybe you'd be too embarrassed to say it this way, but sometimes it can feel like we've become enemies. But Jesus loved us when we were enemies, later in the SOM we'll hear him:

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

So even when ego and pride rise up and lashing out, and your spouse feels like an enemy you and I are called to love.

Illustration:

In her book *The Liturgy of the Ordinary* Tish Warren reflects on how God is at work in one ordinary day of her life. She shares about how her husband stopped by midday to pick up something and they had a fight. It wasn't because of some marital crisis, but just the "bur-under-the-saddle" conflict of habitual resentment. They are talking about something casual, she frets aloud, he dismisses it. She says something sarcastic, and it escalates until one or both of them yell and leave the room.

She writes:

"So we play chicken. I sigh loudly. He gets on the computer. **We wait to see who will lay down their sword first. It takes a lot of bravery to lay down a sword—more bravery than either of us have at the moment. So we sit in stony silence."**

"After twenty minutes of playing chicken, we cave. I apologize, he does too. We forgive each other. Dropping my sword and walking into the next room to apologize felt like a kind of dying."²

² Tish Harrison Warren, *The Liturgy of the Ordinary*, 74-75, 85.

Becoming like Jesus means growing in sacrificial love for your spouse-especially when they feel like your enemy.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, with God's help we can live this. Look at these verses again and see all God has done to make it so. Christ loves us and gave himself for us (v. 25), he has sanctified us, cleansed us, washed us (v. 26), we are being made splendid and beautiful, without blemish (v. 27). These are all gifts he gives to us by faith.

And now, look at verse 30-33:

30 ...we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

When Paul says "the two shall become one flesh" he is quoting Gen 2:23, and he is saying that marriage – the two becoming one flesh – "refers to Christ and the church." Let that sink in, God in Christ came into the world to give himself for us on the cross, so he might become "one flesh" with us.

He is yoked to us, and we to him. He participates in our life, and we in his. He empowers us in our struggles here on earth, even as we are seated with him in the heavenly places. Therefore husbands love you wives, wives love your husbands, as Christ loves you.