

A Better Marriage

By: Sally Hohnberger

“Lord I want a better marriage! I have a good marriage by the world’s judgment but I want a better one.” Strong emotions on the subject of desiring my spouse to be priest of our home, not me, was the reason for my unrest and out cry, years ago.

The Lord encouraged me with this text, “**I will** instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eyes.” Ps 32:8. I sensed this thought in my conscience was from God. Will I act on God’s suggestion or just continue to go my own way?

I chose to put this emotionally charged desire in God’s hands, for I couldn’t change my husband. I had to trust God could change his heart, and take this burden from me. Rest came to my soul to my surprise. Friends, while my emotions indicated they were in unrest I chose thusly, “Lord, I know you can change my emotions and show me what you’d have me to do. Help me be aware and sensitive to the influence of your Holy Spirit directing me. Whatever it takes Lord, I am truly willing to cooperate with You, to obey your will, that I may have a better marriage.”

Well it wasn’t very long and my chance came. God is a faithful Teacher. I was reading John 17 at the time, trying to apply this text to me personally. When I came to verse 19, I asked God, “What does **‘for their sakes I sanctify myself** practically mean to me today?”

“For your sake Sally, I gave you an example of dying to self. I chose to do My Father’s will, against the fleshly nature to do otherwise. As I overcame, in My Father’s power not My own, so may you. It’s the best way I can help you and it is the best

way you can help your spouse, your marriage or anyone else to make any real lasting changes in their lives. Let Me have your heart fully.”

I pondered, “What can God do with a heart fully surrendered to Him? Anything, everything! If I let God change my thoughts, my words, and my deeds how am I helping my husband change?”

“When a spouse or anyone sees you change in your weak areas, your wrong reactions or habits, they can be encouraged that they too can be changed by coming to Me. Many do not change because they don’t know how. Many haven’t found the way that works consistently. Many can be benefited by just seeing someone live that life of grace truly in Me. Many will just observe, desire, and imitate what they see. You are helping your spouse by letting Me change you.”

“So I must decide to follow You and not wait for my spouse to join me in this commitment.”

“Not until you fulfill and do your part, can I can fulfill Mine! Without your cooperation of obeying Me, you are left in your sins and old ways and that doesn’t help your spouse. I will teach you, if you let Me. You can best help your husband, by letting Me have control over your thoughts, feelings, words and deeds. It will require a discipline of choosing to surrender every moment of the day, if you want Me to work this redemption from sin’s power in you. When I have you, I’ll reach out to your spouse through you.”

Jesus did His Father’s will, and lived by His Father’s divine power, not His own, and it was in this surrendered, cooperative relationship He was enabled by His Father’s grace

to live above the pull of the fallen nature. Jesus was showing all of us the way to come out of self-serving. **Self-serving destroys marriages.**

By experience, I truly saw that the grace available in an abiding walk with Jesus could do nothing to redeem me from this fallen nature, **until** I was willing to die to self and live for Jesus. If I am willing to die to self that Jesus may live in me, I can have a better marriage. If I don't cooperate in dying to self, He can't change me or my marriage. God brought these thoughts to my heart, daily and moment by moment. God is calling for your heart as well.

"Lord I'm willing, show me what I must do with my bundle of choices today."

"The first change is you must stop dwelling on your husband's faults, mulling how awful they are, how awful he is, how much you want him to change and be priest. Instead put your spouse in My hands in a positive prayer life - not the negative one to which you are accustomed. Filter through Me before you speak. Be content to take worship. Be cheerful in this task, turn to Me to change those wrong thoughts and feelings and I will." I took His hand and began learning how to follow Him, how to die to self and live for God.

"Sally, remember you can't choose for your spouse to change but you have the power to choose to let Me change you. Cooperating to let Me change you will change your marriage, you'll see. Dwelling on what you can't change can only tempt you to despair. Rather dwell on what **you** should do **in Me**. In that way you recommend the religion of Christ as nothing else can."

"Lord that makes a lot of sense. Let me see; for my husband's sake I sanctify myself, for my boys sake I sanctify myself, for my extended family and friends I can best help them if I let You sanctify (make upright) my thoughts, words, and deeds. In this way I am recommending in the strongest way, that if Jesus can change me, He can change you too."

"Yes, Sally. You have it down clearly in theory, but now we need to help you gain some **experience**." The Lord spoke with much compassion, as He knew that knowing and doing are two very different schools and the latter is the greater test of the two.

These principles work not only for the wife but for the husband as well. "Whatsoever He sayeth unto you, do it" John 2:5. See if the Lord can make your marriage better.

The choices I had to make **against** my nature, my inclinations, my emotions were many in the next few months and went something as follows.

One day I was ironing and irritated over some little thing my husband said. "Sally, you don't need to complain about him, and rehearse his faults this way, these thoughts destroy marriages, instead follow Me. In everything give thanks. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, a broken spirit drieth the bones." Prov 17:22. God reasoned with me in these thoughts. God led me step by step and I surrendered choice by choice against my feelings, and my thoughts, which were compelling me in the opposite direction. It was hard in the moment but what a joy when I sang the "happy song" and Jesus had transformed my disposition, my thoughts and even my feelings. Grace can work **only when and if** I cooperate.

Jim was a better husband in my eyes, my thoughts, yet he did not change. God changed me! When my husband came into the room it was possible and enjoyable with Jesus leading, to respond pleasantly. Love for him filled my heart where once was resentment, sadness and hurt.

God called me out of complaining into complementing my husband. "Tell him how much you appreciate his management of your finances." He did a good job here but at times I resented his saying "no" to my wants. This was a present point of contention. I chose, surrendered, followed Jesus and found divine thankfulness. "Tell him how thankful you are

for his watching the boys so you can have a tub bath." "Tell your spouse how sweet he is to tickle your arms a few moments while you are doing his typing." Expressions of gratitude and admiration of our spouse's attributes has a positive effect on our minds and dispositions as well as theirs. Kindness awakens kindness. Complaining is the path to the pit of despair. Rehearsing wrongs is the shovel deepening the pit of hopelessness. Everyday we should do something to please our spouse; do a favor, give a thank you or compliment, or help with **their** project. To die to self requires us to live for others daily.

God called me out of independence from Him. "Sally, in that argument self responded, you didn't filter through Me what you should say. The flesh led you and you obeyed. Choose Me and I'll lead you instead. Respond to My call to your heart. I'll direct you through these conflicts in a better manner and in time we can eliminate most of them. Take my hand and follow Me."

God always called for **my** surrender. "Oh Lord, all you ask is directly opposed to my nature, to my inclinations and habits. Cooperating in You sanctifying me is not an easy work, it takes effort to die to self!"

"Anything good takes effort. Sally, filter your thoughts through Me before you speak, I'll direct you aright to speak or

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not to speak. Don't correct your husband when he leads out in worship, you're hindering him, you don't understand his struggles. If you follow Me, I can redeem you from **self** ruling you. Leave him with Me. When he surrenders to Me I will make him the priest of your home." I tried God's way, died to self, filtered through Jesus what to say, surrendered to be led and did His will. My husband became priest of our home as a result. Letting God cleanse my heart, my words and my responses was the way to a better marriage. Do you long for a better marriage? Try God's way.

The grace of Christ working in me, changed my thoughts, feelings, and my responses. My thoughts and feelings greatly influenced my responses. For example, instead of thinking hopeless thoughts or getting angry, God led me to put my energies into crying out to and counseling with Jesus, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6 KJV. As I did my part, Jesus faithfully instructed me what to say or not to say in the moment and thus our marriage improved. My joy was not dependent upon my spouse changing any more. My joy was that God was working a change in me.

God asked me to confess my wrong, to apologize for my 5% wrong in an argument. I argued with God this was unfair, he needed to apologize to me! "Follow Me Sally. Trust this is in your best interest. It doesn't matter if it appears to give your spouse an advantage, all I ask of you is to follow Me, to give Me your heart." I did God's will and my husband drew closer to Jesus because I changed. As a result he apologized in time for his wrong, truly a miracle at that time. God knows what's best to get their heart. As I trusted to follow God, our marriage improved that day. I repeated this experience with greater confidence in Jesus each opportunity.

In the next few weeks, God taught me how to have real positive, **intercessory prayer** for my husband. This had a profound, powerful, and positive influence in our marriage. He suggested that I commit 15 minutes in prayer, daily for him. Jesus taught me how to pray for my husband as he can be in Jesus. It was quite a new exercise of my thinking. Instead of rehearsing his faults to God in prayer which awakened a "pity party," I saw him as he would be when he surrendered to God; I saw him leading out cheerfully in family worship. These thoughts engendered love, respect, and positive emotions towards my spouse. I went away from prayer hopeful, not heavier burdened as before.

In doing intercessory prayer my emotions were changed. Hope replaced despair, love replaced anger, and God led responses replaced humanistic responses. I became content

to lead out in worship, no longer resenting or longing for release from it. Many a miracle had God wrought out in me.

I became sensitive to my words and expressions. God led me to avoid saying "you always," "you never," and untrue or exaggerated illustrations of his wrongs. Self must die and I would choose to live for Jesus instead. I had to learn to condense my talk while my spouse had to learn to say more. Inclinations, habits, and cultivated tendencies did not need to be heeded in conflicts or disagreements, rather just obey the voice of God. Communing with God before my spouse was vitally important. This can make or break a marriage. The blessings of obedience to God was that our communications

improved drastically. Conflicts would arise at times, but I had God to lead me through them, eventually to a solution. A better marriage came in due time but **peace came in the moment of following Jesus**. There was a joy in having power to do the right over the wrong.

When I would yield to and follow the flesh or my inclination the fruit was a lot of hurt and emotional heartache. Going my way is always a curse. I hurt, my husband hurt, and the abyss between us widened. Choosing to serve God and right, and dying to self are the best things we can do for our marriages.

Miracles were wrought in my husband as well. As I put my needs of a priest before Jesus, God laid the conviction upon my husband's heart,

and he became restless, irritable, and troubled. Not until my spouse decided to follow Jesus and do His will, did he find peace. He struggled with his struggles but at last surrendered to Jesus' call to his heart. Jesus empowered him to face thoughts and feelings of inadequacy. My husband took up his priestly duties to be priest and has never laid them down since. Jesus can change your marriage too! Are you willing to daily die to self?

Once I learned the power of intercessory prayer I took many problems to Jesus. I became very comfortable in placing my problems at the feet of Jesus and letting Him present these things to my spouse's heart. God did a much better job. I never liked conflicts anyway and this way I didn't have to face them any more! Or did I? About the time one is comfortable with a method God uses, He changes the program to keep us dependent on Him and not on a method. It was not the method that transformed our marriage but it was Christ directing the method. There is a time to be quiet and there is a time to speak, and to challenge.

I was sitting on the back porch enjoying the green of the grass, thinking it represents faith and all green things pointed up to God in heaven, the object of my faith. The blue of the

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sky represents obedience and obedience is possible when I connect with the Creator behind the blue of the sky. Just then a thought came into my mind. "Sally you need to tell your husband that he is wrong in this area of thinking." No, no no me Lord!! This isn't You is it?" Three times the Lord affirmed the same thought and I was convinced this was God asking me to confront him face to face; this would be a conflict, I was sure. My inclinations and emotions inclined me to avoid these issues. In a short time, I chose and leaned on Christ's strength, wisdom, and promise to lead me.

We went for a walk and I told my husband what was on my heart. My mind began to go blank like paper being eaten in a paper shredder. This meant I wouldn't be able to put any two thoughts together if I let go. It was a problem solving technique I had developed over the years and it spared me some hurt. God called to my heart, "Don't let go, die to self's way - choose! Take My hand. You need not loose your ability to think and speak." A struggle ensued over who would I obey? Who will be Lord in my life right now? I chose God and cried out for His help. I restated my thinking to him and he didn't agree with me. I did God's will and joy was in my heart. Not loosing control was a new experience for me. The next morning we talked and he was convinced during his time with God that morning that I was right in what I said. "Wow, Lord You're great!"

Following God called me to die to self by being quiet at times, not arguing or defending myself. Following God also called me to die to self by speaking and confronting with God directing my words and responses. This is truly letting God be Lord in my life.

This was the beginning of God teaching me **how to communicate** with my spouse when we don't see things the same. I needed the experience of God leading my mind and controlling my emotions that I was free to serve God, to do the right. This made my marriage better. God wanted to teach both my husband and me how to filter our thoughts through Him before we spoke to each other. In this way we could resolve any difficulty or misunderstandings in the marriage. It's great to resolve issues and be free to love one another freely.

We established daily swing time in order to allow for each other to share our concerns. This would eventually break down all the barriers in our marriage. One would air a concern about the other, and present a solution to the problem. I had to learn to be solution orientated. The other learned **to listen, to hear** the spouse's perspective honestly, and not pick on the words or illustrations but hear, I mean hear, what the other was trying to say. Self had to die in both of us to bring new life into our marriage. Changes were made on both sides. God became very real, truly a present help in trouble. God helped me express myself more concisely. God

helped my spouse express himself more fully. Each of us learned to express things delicately, honestly, and give space and time when that was necessary. All in all we learned the art of communication, led of God. Communing with God before communing with your spouse is an excellent discipline to a better marriage.

Jim summarizes our ground rules in communication on a cassette tape entitled, "Reasoning One With Another," in the series "Liberty One to Another." If you want more details on this area, write for the set.

Swing time was a difficult and emotional experience in the beginning while we were learning the art. But in due time, the rewards began to grow and blossom. It was well worth the effort to speak or be quiet, to express oneself honestly, to really listen, and to die to self. Today our marriage is far better, far higher than I ever dreamed or imagined possible. The freedom we experience between husband and wife is heaven born and lovely. This freedom to love and be loved is available to you, to anyone that seeks God and learns to cooperate.

Swing time isn't just expressing concerns, it is also a time for having fun. Expressing sweet little nothings, reminiscing, laying plans for vacation trips, laying plans for child training, planning family councils, or the how to's of helping a neighbor. All are good positive discussions that give balance to swing time.

A better marriage, better communication in the marriage, a sweeter atmosphere in the home is available to all who will seek God and let Him lead you and be your Lord in this life. What will you do? God awaits your cooperation to bestow this great transforming blessing of Christ, into your marriage.



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Empowered Living Ministries

9550 High Mesa Road, Olathe, CO 81425

970-615-0046

Email: office@EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org

Web: www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org