

Picture an elderly couple that has been married almost fifty years. They still hold hands in the grocery store. He brings her flowers from the garden, and she bakes his favorite chocolate chip cookies. They have children and several grandchildren. They often volunteer at youth centers or distribute food at the Salvation Army. They pray for the needs of people around the world and have traveled overseas to take care of orphans and rebuild schools. Other people admire their commitment and seek their counsel. They read the Scriptures daily and desire to be more like Jesus.

If you look back over their years together, it hasn't been easy. Their struggles have been hard but have brought them closer. They've endured job loss, sickness, death, and heartache. At some point they decided their marriage was something worth working for, and when trouble came, they worked even harder. They credit God for getting them through the hard times and thank Him for the good times, too.

I want that kind of marriage, but if I'm honest, I'm not always willing to work at it. It's too hard. I get caught up in all the "stuff" that's going on at the moment. I get overwhelmed with the additional stress and sometimes think it's not worth it. I feel broken when situations arise that are out of my control and yet affect me so deeply. But God is able to see the big picture when He looks at a marriage. He sees what it can be and doesn't focus on what it is. He is able to use tense, difficult moments to bring us one step closer to being like His Son.

If I know that God can do that, why do I resist the struggle? Struggle can be good – when we are moving toward something. As we challenge, confront, question, and hold each other accountable – in love – we move toward a common goal and grow in the process. Growth is hard, but it is good. And it is worth it in the end. I think it's one of the things needed to make my marriage great. The couple at the beginning of the story is a combination of many people I know. But their image gives me a hope of what I can become, with the help of God.

Questions to Consider:

The Greatest Commandment is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37, 39) Do I love God so much that I'm willing to allow Him to strengthen my marriage through struggle? Or do I love myself so much that I'm only focused on what I will get out of it?

Why do I seem to try to avoid the struggle? Why do I look at struggle as a bad thing?

To struggle "against" is to focus on what I get out of a situation. It usually results in a stalemate. To struggle "with" will take the relationship somewhere good and healthy. Do I struggle with or against?

Genesis 2:15-25 uses the phrase “helper suitable.” Brad defined “helper” (ezer) as “helper, aid, or strength.” He defined “suitable” (kenegdo) as “one who stands in front of or opposite of who challenges, confronts, questions, and holds accountable.” How is the picture of a couple facing each other and struggling toward something different than how you may have thought of being a “helper suitable?”

Close relationships can benefit from the idea of being a “helper suitable.” Do I have any personal relationships that mimic this Biblical idea? Are there any unhealthy relationships that need to move more toward this Biblical idea?

Regarding close, personal relationships: How can I challenge in love? How can I confront in love? How can I question in love? How can I hold someone accountable in love?

Additional Verses: Genesis 2:15-25, Matthew 22:37-39, Psalms 51, Ephesians 5:21-33, Song of Solomon, Proverbs

This week's memory verse: “And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.” Romans 12:1

Additional Marriage Resources:

www.songofsolomon.com

www.familylife.com

www.focusonthefamily.com

REMINDERS:

February 20, 2011 – 3rd: Culture... Date night @ 1MOSAIC. Tonight we work on the importance of bringing your world and your spouse's world together regularly for a 3rd world...known as 'date night'! NOT MARRIED...don't worry, you can join us for the movie or we'll have some other 3rd:culture options for ya. **THIS WILL RUN FROM 5-7pm @ SHU!** Child care provided.

February 27, 2011 – **The Gathering at SHU at 6pm.** Dan wraps up the series looking at our 'love affairs'. We are called to be in a love affair with God and our spouse, however we often have many other love affairs that trump & destroy the most important ones!

In March we will be talking about . . . **COMMUNITY!!!**