

How to Have Joy in Your Marriage

by Bill & Bridget Dunk

Today's society would have you believe all you need to be happy is that new car – that new job – the latest and greatest gadget – even a new hair color has the promise of happiness in “television land.” But happiness is NOT what we need – it is temporary and fleeting. **What we need is joy!**

Joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness is a word that was added to the English language around the year 1300 AD. It comes from the Middle English word “hap” and from the earlier old Icelandic word “Happ.” “Hap” simply means “chance, luck, accident or fortune.” From “Hap” we get the words “happen” (circumstances that befall you), “hapless” (unlucky), and “happy” (fortunate or lucky). Happiness is gladness because some **outward circumstance** turned out in a way that **makes you feel good.**

When you pursue happiness, you are **pursuing perfect circumstances** – the perfect job, spouse, kids, car, etc. If all you seek in your marriage is happiness, you will be **disappointed**, because there are **no perfect spouses** out there. Not all circumstances you encounter in your marriage and with your spouse will make you feel good. Instead of merely looking for happiness, we need to **look for joy.**

What is joy, and **how do we find it** in our marriages? First, we must know where joy is NOT. It is NOT found in circumstances and NOT in a “perfect spouse.” Joy is very different

from happiness. **Joy is inward delight.** This inward delight remains **regardless** of the outward circumstances of your life and sometimes **in spite of** those circumstances.

So, if we are married to non-perfect spouses and joy isn't to be found in circumstances (the here-and-now), where **do** we find it? After all, no spouse can be a delight all the time!! Joy is only found in one place – in God's presence. The result of spending time in His presence is so that “. . . joy may be in you and that your Joy may be complete” (John 15:11). Hmmm...complete joy! Sound good?

The truth is, your relationship with your spouse is **directly related** to how much time you spend in God's presence! Do you want to improve your marriage? Then first start with **improving your relationship with the Lord.** If you wonder why your marriage has grown stale or lacks the luster it once had, you don't need to look any farther than the amount of dust collecting on your own Bible!

Your relationship with your spouse is directly related to how much time you spend with God.

Yes, we know, there are jobs to rush to, ballgames to attend, committee meetings to get to, and floors that need scrubbing. Yet, these are the very situations where you **can spend time** with the Lord in His presence. The first step is realizing that God isn't a separate

piece of our lives. He IS our lives! He is with us in each and every activity we do every day. So why not go ahead and meet Him where He is – right there with us in each activity.

There are four basic tests to apply to any activity to see if it would be a good one to combine with prayer. **First**, you must ask – is this a continuous, extended activity? To be effective in time with the Lord, you need more than a few minutes. **Second**, the activity needs to be rhythmic, mindless and free from strain. The activity must allow you to concentrate on something else. **Third**, the activity has to be done alone, or at least uninterrupted. **Fourth**, you will need the freedom to talk to the Lord *out loud*. All you need to do is combine your time with God with activities you were going to do anyway, and **you can be in the Lord's presence more and more** each day without adding one minute to your schedule.

Here are some activities you can combine with prayer:

- Exercise
- Commuting
- Housework
- Ironing
- Yard work
- Personal Hygiene Time
- Hobbies
- Meals eaten alone

This is not to say there isn't any work involved in combining spending time in God's presence and your daily activities. You do have to **take charge of your circumstances.** The goal is to

Joy (cont')

Take charge of your circumstances.

make it EASY to spend time in God's presence by combining it with these other activities. So you may have to:

- **Rearrange your housework**, so that you do all the laundry and vacuuming in one day.
- **Ask your spouse** to sometimes give you privacy during your shower and getting dressed time, so you can pray uninterrupted.
- **Buy a walkman**, so you can listen to music while you walk and pray.
- **Stay in one lane** on the interstate while you drive to work, so you can concentrate on praying out loud.

When combining activities, a few conventional ideas about prayer **have to be tossed out** the window. Such as, to pray, you must keep your eyes closed. Who said? Why not **pray with your eyes open**? True, closing your eyes shuts out distractions, but if you are exercising at 6 a.m., it's dark out anyway. Also, prayer can be just as effective while looking at the clothes you are ironing as

when your eyes are closed. Oh, and by the way, never...*never* close your eyes to pray while driving.

There is also no rule that prayer has to occur while being very *still*. The Word says to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), so to follow this command you would *have to* be doing many activities while praying!

Conversational Prayer: Pray with your eyes open

Another key aspect of having JOY in your marriage is **spending time in the presence of God TOGETHER**. Again, there are many EASY ways to do this by combining activities. All of the aforementioned tests apply – the activity has to be continuous, extended, rhythmic, mindless and free from strain, uninterrupted and provide the freedom to talk to the Lord out loud.

There are a couple of other tips for reading and praying together we'd like to mention here as well. Our favorite one is from Harold and Bette regarding conversational prayer. This is great because the "less windy" spouse doesn't have to fear falling asleep during prayer

time. When you pray together this way, it is more like a conversation. Each spouse prays 2-5 sentences and then passes the "baton" to the other – or to the Lord for Him to speak. **Praying is a conversation – not a monologue.**

Another way to spend time together in the Lord's presence is by **reading the Word together**. Our pastor has a fun formula for this. It takes about 30 minutes and he recommends this activity for married couples several times a week:

Spouse #1 reads 2 chapters of the New Testament out loud while lying on their stomach while spouse #2 gives them a massage. After 2 chapters, they switch. Spouse #2 reads 2 more chapters while receiving a massage. After one turn each, the couple can take a second turn each and talk about their day, talk about the Scriptures, or make love. Now, that's what we call a winning plan for Bible reading!

Simply put, the question comes down to this: Do you merely want happiness **or do you want real and lasting JOY** in your marriage? Then you must pursue JOY in your relationship with the Lord. This will automatically bring you **closer to Him and to your spouse**. Guaranteed!

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