
Finding Your Way During Rocky Times

By Jim Reingrover

“Because marriage, more than any other relationship,
reflects God’s involvement with us and bears
more potential to draw our hearts to heaven,
it can more readily give us a taste of hell.”
– Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III

The scene is a familiar one. Facilities have been reserved, delicious foods prepared, tuxedos rented, a cake erected, flowers delivered, the photographer is present and the guests are seated. The processional music begins and the beautifully adorned participants gracefully take their rehearsed positions. A nervous young man waits with great anticipation for the first glimpse of the radiant woman who is only moments away from becoming his life partner. Inexpressible joy is felt as their eyes meet. The moment is perfect. Few things in life are both extremely sobering and joyous at the same time, but this is one of them. Solemn vows are repeated and promises of commitment are exchanged. The preacher declares the couple to be an inseparable union, and introduces them as husband and wife to an applauding audience. Two young people, so very much in love, have just enjoyed a milestone event in their lives. That’s what a wedding is – *an event*. Marriage is an entirely different performance. The essence of marriage is to endeavor on a journey of perseverance. From this day forward their dreams and aspirations will be challenged by many “rocky times.” Unimaginable adversities will rise up bringing with them temptations to discard the commitments and to abandon the promises vowed this day.

Come this August, Vicki and I will be married 41 years (a short time compared to many), and we both can attest to the power of “rocky times” to challenge one’s character. But even more so, we have come to know the power of endurance.

Solomon instructs that for “*everything there is a season,*” (Ecclesiastes 3:1ff). For sure, marriage affords a host of very enriching and blessed moments, but equally as certain, life presents some pretty uncomfortable seasons that must be weathered. Several are the marriages that have had to endure disappointing years of failed attempts to become parents (remember Abraham and Sarah? – Genesis 15-16). Countless are the parents whose child(ren) have left the Lord, been immoral, addicted to drugs or alcohol, arrested, or in some other manner became a “grief of mind” (remember Eli and his sons – 1 Samuel 2; and Esau? – Genesis 26:34-35). What marriage relationship has not been confronted with the consequences of poor decisions made by one or both spouses (remember Eve? – Genesis 3; Lot and his wife? – Genesis 19; Isaac and Rebekah? – Genesis 27; and Ananias and Sapphira? – Acts 5). And many are the marriages that have known the despair of battling some heart-wrenching health issues like cancer, Alzheimer’s, alcoholism, etc. – sometimes the sufferer having to tough it out without the spiritual support of a believing spouse (remember Mrs. Job? – Job 2:9). Is there any adversity that can challenge the fortitude of a marriage more than infidelity (remember Hosea? – Hosea 1-3)? Perhaps you are

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currently trying to live through, one of these heartbreaking seasons of life. How will you find your way through such rocky times?

I like what Gary Thomas writes in his book, *Sacred Marriage*, where he draws a comparison between God's sacred relationship with Israel to that of a marriage relationship. He writes:

“This relationship between God and His people was anything but easy. There were periods of great joy and celebration (witness the love affair of God and His people when Solomon dedicated the temple); seasons of frustration and anger (when God allowed foreign tyrants to conquer); times of infidelity and apostasy (when Israel chased after other gods); and excruciating seasons of silence (including a four-hundred-year stretch between the Old and New Testaments). Now, take these examples and break them down, thinking of them in a smaller context. There were times of great joy and celebration, frustration and anger, infidelity and apostasy, and excruciating seasons of silence. Sound like any relationship you know? Your own marriage for example?”

The one factor that held God and Israel together throughout all of their rocky times was perseverance. When Israel's unfaithfulness and idolatrous betrayal grieved the Lord, He *did* temporarily withdraw Himself for a time, yet His overall commitment to them did not waver. We need to learn from this that perseverance in our marriage, through good times and bad, helps us to develop the character of God Himself.

“Perseverance” was a popular subject in the teaching sessions of our Lord. He spoke to His disciples of the exceedingly great value of persistence in prayer (cf. Luke 11:5-8, 9-13). He lauded perseverance in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-5) and connected true faith to this concept of persistency in prayer (vs. 1,8). In His parable of the soils, Jesus explained that some people will believe the gospel for a while, but when trials or other external concerns get their attention, they will quit. However, His praise is for “*the ones who, having heard the word with an honest and good heart, hold on to it and **by enduring**, bear fruit*” (Luke 8:15, CSV).

It is easy to quit. We live in a world of quitters. People quit when the going gets tough. They quit their jobs, their marriages, their families. Even Christians frequently quit one local church and move on to another at the slightest irritation. The Bible even tells us that some will quit their faith in the Lord (1 Timothy 4:1). Jesus says, however, that endurance is the answer, not quitting!

In Romans 2 (though not in the context of marriage) the Holy Spirit reveals an invaluable concept that we can apply to the rocky times in marriage by emphasizing perseverance. He states eternal life is promised “*to those who **by patient continuance** in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*” (vv. 7-9). The message

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is that God requires a persistent commitment to doing right even when we are being pulled in the opposite direction. “Patient continuance in doing good” means that we are committed to a persistent surrender to God’s righteous ways. The fact is, marriage requires more than a one-time promise to be faithful. It demands perseverance in righteousness.

What is it that gives the Christian power to persist in doing good? Romans 2:7 tells us that it lies in the fact that we “seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” Perseverance has no power without maintaining a hope of eternal life. Endurance is based on the idea that there is another life so glorious, and so filled with honor, that it is worth making whatever sacrifices we have to now in order to experience it. Without staying focused upon eternal life, our marriage commitment will sadly be reduced to a shameful collection of self-seeking unrighteousness. Many divorces are the result of a spouse choosing to throw away an eternity of glory and honor for relief from some temporary rocky period in the relationship - and it’s a terrible exchange!

Struggle makes us stronger and helps to build and deepen the Christian’s faith and perseverance. The Lord has promised this is true - in James 1:2-4. *“Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing”* (CSV). The Christian must have absolute faith in God’s word, and trust in Him providentially working us through the adversities in our lives. Such will produce endurance to guide our way through the rocky times of marriage.