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Secrets of the Arrows, the Vending Machine, and the Pages: Thriving

If your spirit is a plant, how are you doing? Are you wilting or flourishing? Are you dying inside, or are you blossoming?

Believe this: you can thrive! Take hope! Our culture says that you must get the circumstances right in your life in order to be happy. But circumstances do not determine your level of thriving. You do!



This is bad news for people who want to remain in victim mentality or who like playing the blame game. But this is great news if you want to thrive. Thriving does not come from trying to control your circumstances. Thriving comes from submitting to God.

According to Psalm 46, thriving is two things. First of all, thriving is a sheltering issue.

Imagine two plants in the same area. Imagine that a brutal wind and a fierce hailstorm tear through this area. One plant is uprooted and torn to pieces. The other plant, however, remains firmly in the ground and loses not even a little leaf. How could this be? This could happen if one of those plants were in a sturdy greenhouse, fully sheltered from the rough, destroying elements raging all around it.



Psalm 46 says that God is our refuge. In verses 4 and 11, God says that He is our fortress. Because of that, we don't fear.

"God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging."

We are sheltered in Christ. We are hidden in Him.¹ He takes our hits.

Secondly, thriving is an internal issue.

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

God is within her, she will not fall;

God will help her at break of day.” (Psalm 46:4-5)

The city of God was Jerusalem, but Jerusalem did not have a river. Jerusalem’s enemies had rivers flowing through their capital cities: Nineveh, Babylon, Thebes, and Damascus all had physical rivers within them. In the city of God, however, there was a spiritual river, “the continual outpouring of the sustaining and refreshing blessings of God.”²



What is the significance of “break of day”? That was the time when ancient armies would launch their battle attacks against cities such as Jerusalem. God was specifically promising to be strength—to be *ezer*—when the enemy attacked. God helps us at battle time!

In ancient times, God brought His Presence in a special way to the temple in Jerusalem. Where is the temple of God today? What is “the holy place where the Most High dwells”? It is you! You are the temple, the holy place where God Almighty lives.

“She will not fall.” Why? She will not fall because God is within her. God says that you will not fall under the enemy’s attack because God is within you!

¹See Colossians 3:3.

² NIV Study Bible footnote

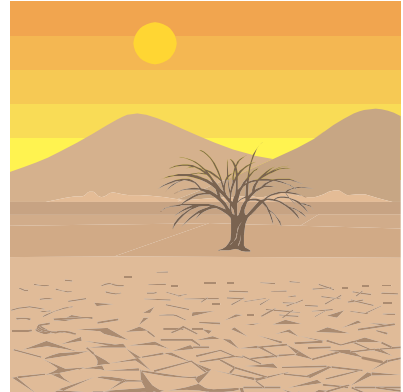
Here is God's promise to you from Isaiah 58:11:

"The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail."

Where are we well-watered? In the sun-scorched land!

"And the Lord shall guide you continually and satisfy you in drought and in dry places and make strong your bones. And you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters fail not." (Isaiah 58:11, Amplified)

Where are we satisfied and like a watered garden? In drought and in dry places!



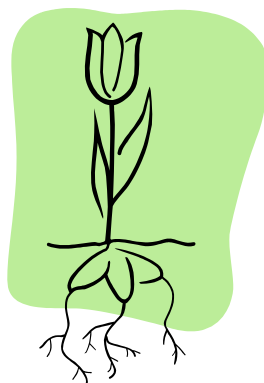
"Your lives will begin to glow in the darkness;
your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight.
I will always show you where to go.
I'll give you a full life in the emptiest of places—
firm muscles, strong bones.
You'll be like a well-watered garden,
a gurgling spring that never runs dry." (Isaiah 58:11, The Message)

Where do we glow? We are radiant in the darkness!
Where are we bathed in sunlight? In the shadows of our lives!
Where do we have a full life? In the emptiest of places!
Here is where we are like gurgling springs that never run dry.

We are like plants in a sun-scorched land, whose roots provide internal nourishment. These roots are stabilized and nourished in the soil of God's lavish love for us (1 John 3:1).



Difficult circumstances in our lives threaten to wither us.



God's lavish love stabilizes us as we are rooted in Him.



The Holy Spirit nourishes and refreshes us as we drink Him in.

Ephesians 3:17 says that we are rooted in His love.

But these roots also reach down to the fresh, flowing waters of the Holy Spirit, like an underground aquifer. As we yield to Him, we drink continually of the Holy Spirit.

In John 7:38, Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." Verse 39 explains that Jesus was referring to the Spirit of God.

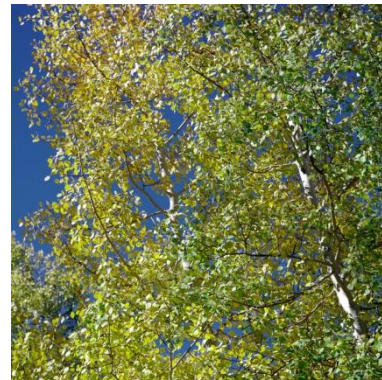
The Amplified Bible quotes Jesus as saying, "He who believes in Me [who cleaves to and trusts in and relies on Me] as the Scripture has said, from his innermost being shall flow [continuously] springs and rivers of living water."

Here is Jeremiah 17:8 in The Message:

“But blessed is the man who trusts me, God,
the woman who sticks with God.
They're like trees replanted in Eden,
putting down roots near the rivers—
Never a worry through the hottest of summers,
never dropping a leaf,
Serene and calm through droughts,
bearing fresh fruit every season.”

The NLT puts it this way:

“They are like trees planted along a riverbank,
with roots that reach deep into the water.
Such trees are not bothered by the heat
or worried by long months of drought.
Their leaves stay green,
and they never stop producing fruit.”



Who are these green trees? We are!

Circumstances, husbands, and marriages do not determine our level of thriving, for we are sheltered in Christ, and we are sustained by an internal source.

Thriving requires transformation. “Do not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2) We are changed when we replace the lies in our thinking and start believing truth instead. Here are three radical truths which will transform us if we let our minds be renewed by them.

1. You can be grateful for “pushed buttons.”

We like to blame other people for causing our anger or irritation. But they haven’t caused it; they have simply revealed it. When someone pushes our buttons, it reveals to us what is already on the inside of us.



When you push the button on a vending machine, and a candy bar comes out, you didn't create that candy bar—you simply brought out what was already in that machine. If there were no candy bars in the machine, no amount of pushing or banging would cause one to appear! You can bring out only what is already on the inside.

In the same way, others cannot create our anger or impatience. They can bring out only what is already inside us. So . . . when people push our buttons, and junk comes out, we can actually be grateful to them for revealing this to us so that we can get rid of it!³

And the way to get rid of revealed junk in our hearts is—not to conform to the patterns of the world—but to repent! We tend to think that what others are doing to us is what is harming us. But what destroys us is not what others do to us. What poisons us is not the unkindness or even the blatant evil of others. What poisons us and destroys us is our own hearts reacting to others with bitterness and resentment.

We want to focus on what our own hearts are doing, and repent of the sin that we find there. Others did not cause that sin; they merely revealed it for us.

2. Another transforming truth is this: you have an unfailing Need-Meeter.

2 Peter 1:3 says that "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him." Ephesians 1:3 says that we are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Philippians 4:19 says that "God will meet all your needs."

Do you remember the secret of the umbrellas? You have an absolutely unfailing Need-meeter. It is not your husband; it is the Lord. God can use your husband . . . or not. Your welfare and well-being are not in jeopardy; you are in God's unfailing hands of care. Rest in those loving hands.



³ See Mark 7:14, 20-23.

Psalm 23 says that if God is your Shepherd, you have everything you need! Is that really true? Do you have everything you need? Don't we have neediness in our lives? How can we say that we have everything we need?

Here is the amazing truth: if I am living a yielded life, then *the neediness I have in my life is exactly what I need!* If we are submitted believers, then even our neediness is just what we need!

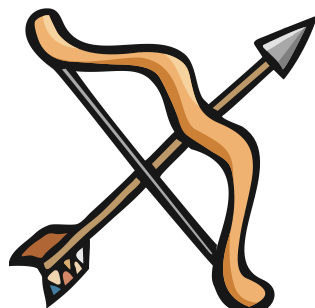
I am not saying, "You deserved this tragedy in your life." I am not saying, "You brought this on yourself." But I am saying that even pain and difficulty enter your life to serve you and to provide what you need in order to be more fully blessed.

This is why James dared to say that we should "count it all joy" when we suffer. Our God-ordained suffering brings us into greater happiness.

When Mary came to Jesus's tomb, she cried, "Oh, no!" But knowing that the empty tomb indicated a glorious resurrection, we want to say to her, "Oh, yes!" If we are submitted believers, then everything in our lives can be received with "Oh, yes!" because we know that God is working, controlling, and using all things for wonderful purposes.

Indeed, if you are walking in yielded obedience to the Spirit of God, then you have everything you need.

Be assured that if you needed something, you would have received it. I sometimes remind myself, "If being more beautiful or having a few different body parts would have blessed me, then God would have been the first to want to give those things." If having more money would have truly blessed any of us, then God would have given us that. We could never bless ourselves better than the lavishly generous, perfectly loving heart of God does.



People sometimes send sharp arrows into our lives, arrows which can strike us and cause us pain. Although an arrow can hurt when it hits us, it cannot poison us or harm us at all because the shaft of the arrow is empty.

Always, always, always, it is empty!

You decide how it is filled. *You can hand every painful arrow and circumstance in your life to God, and God promises to fill every one entirely with blessing.*

However, if you do not give an arrow to God, then it can function in your life as curse and as harm. You will suffer from the poison of resentment and bitterness and unforgiveness. But you filled the arrow with curse yourself.



Deuteronomy 23:5 says that the LORD our God turns curses into blessings for us because He loves us!

Genesis 50:20 says that what the enemy intends for harm, God intends for good. The enemy can send an arrow with evil intent, but God fills it with blessing.

Romans 8:28 says that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and who have been called according to His purposes. Every single arrow can be filled with God's blessing.

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God has good plans for us, plans full of hope; and Job 42:2 tells us that not one of these good plans can be thwarted!



We need not fear or resent any arrow that comes into our lives. We need only to keep giving every arrow to God so that He can fill it with blessing.

3. Here is the third transforming truth: you can live completely in blessing.

Let me ask you this: what are some of God's best blessings to you?

Let me suggest another one that you may not have realized. Recognizing this blessing in your life is so powerful that, if you have not realized this before, your entire life could change from this point on.

One of the greatest blessings in your life may be the faults or even the very wickedness of your husband. All of your husband's faults and all of his sins—little and big—all of these things can come into your life as blessings to you!

His faults do not threaten your well-being;
his mistakes do not hinder God's good plans for you;
his sins do not thwart God's perfect purposes for you.

We often believe the lie that someone else is ruining our day or our lives. But if we are living in obedience to God, then other people cannot mess things up for us. If we are yielding our spirits to the Spirit of God, then even the evil of other people operates in our lives as blessing.

The little things in your husband that bother you, such as being late or being messy, and the big things in your husband's life that are painful to you, such as addictions to alcohol or pornography—all of these things can come into your life as blessing.



This does not mean that you do not take action to minister to your husband according to his needs and according to the wisdom that God gives you; but it does mean that you do not resent these things, that you are not bitter, and that you are not fearful.

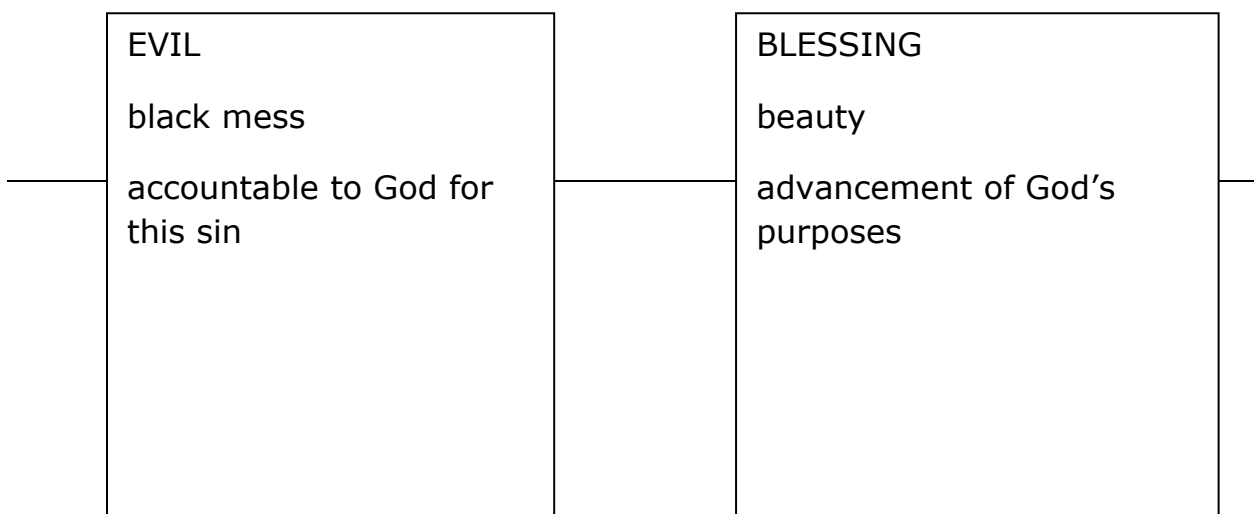
Knowing that God turns the curses of others into blessings for you means that you are able to fully embrace what God is doing in your life. All of your husband's faults can be used by God to bless you.

It may be God's best blessing when men do not meet their wives' needs.

If a man sins, he stands guilty before God and must give an account for that sin. But that very same act of sin, as it enters the sanctified life of a yielded, obedient believer, functions as blessing and not as curse.

Here is one more “secret” that can help us to thrive. Imagine that everyone’s life is like a book; imagine that everything in our lives is recorded on the pages of our books. Here is the “secret of the pages”: the very same situation can come onto the page of someone else’s life as sin while it comes onto my page as blessing.

If a man is unkind to his wife, his cruelty comes onto his page as something evil for which he will answer to God. However, this same mistreatment can come onto his wife’s page as something very different. As she yields the situation and herself to God, God brings blessing and the advancement of His purposes through that very thing which operated as evil on her husband’s page.



For example, when Joseph was thrown into a pit, this situation was sin in the lives of his brothers; but in Joseph’s life, it was progress towards the palace. When Joseph was then thrown into jail, Potiphar’s wife stood accountable before God for her evil; but in Joseph’s life, this was moving him toward the fulfillment of his dreams.

Judas’ betrayal of Christ was evil on his page. But in Christ’s life, it was the advancement of God’s purposes.

Regardless of how awful the sin of others may be on their pages, when those situations come into our lives, they can function as blessing on our pages.

Secrets of Baking the Cookies and the Clasped Hands: Prayer

1 John 5:14-15 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him."

When I heard this verse as a child, I was pretty excited about it. Have you ever been excited about it? I was excited about this incredible promise from God. I believed it, and I fully expected that I would have what I asked of God.

My first piano recital was going to be on Friday. This was a big event for me; but my dad had gone on a trip to Port-au-Prince and wouldn't be back until late on Saturday. But on the basis of this promise in the Bible, I prayed that my dad would come back early and be at my recital. I was sure that somehow he would be there. I told my mom that Dad would be there. I was so unshakably confident that she thought that I must have heard something that she hadn't. Well, Friday night came; but my dad didn't. Completely apart from my disappointment that my dad wasn't there for my recital, there was my true bewilderment over this promise from God. I didn't understand what had happened.



I think a lot of people are in that same situation with their prayers. We sometimes feel confused; sometimes we think that we must be doing something wrong. Then someone points out to us the clause that says, "according to His will." Now we may feel very disappointed, as if someone had just punctured that promise from God, letting out all the wonderful excitement of it, and deflating it down to something rather meaningless. "Oh, well," we think, "if God is going to do only what He already wants to do, then what is the point of praying? It doesn't really matter. My prayers don't really make a difference."



Or we might say this, "Oh, I see. God will give us what we want only if it is what He already wants. It's not really such a great promise, after all."

Oh, but it is! It is even better than I thought it was!

Satan is such a liar. Remember, lying is his only weapon against us. The battle is a battle for truth. He is not only a liar, but he is a clever liar and a cruel liar.

If God gave us everything we asked for, in the way and at the time we asked for it, we'd all be dead. Have you ever noticed what preschoolers ask for? They are passionate in longing for what would kill them! No loving parent would give them everything they asked for; only an abusive parent would do that.

God's heart for us really is one that says, "I am entirely responsive to your heart. I delight in giving you the desires of your heart. Pour out your heart to me, and I will satisfy the longings of your heart. I will love you in the way I answer you: I will protect you from yourself; I will satisfy you in ways that do not harm you but which only bless you instead."

The "according to His will" clause is not something that hinders us at all! It is something that protects us and which promises to serve us better than we could serve ourselves. "According to His will" means that we are being protected by the wisdom and goodness and generosity of God, which far exceeds our own wisdom and goodness and generosity. "According to His will" is not something that limits us; it is God saying, "Ask whatever you want, and then let Me take it several notches higher."

When we pray "according to His will," what are we saying? What is His will? His will is perfect! It is full of wisdom and full of blessing. When we hear that God will answer us "according to His will," we can cheer, "Yes! He is not only going to respond to my heart, but He is going to weed out my foolishness and my ignorance, and pour in His wisdom. He is going to protect me from myself, and He is going to bless me with Himself." Now that is an awesome promise!

Trusting the perfect goodness of God is a great place to start in our prayers for our marriages. We can go further, however, in exploring what it means to pray "according to His will."

Imagine this: Let's say that on a quiet Saturday afternoon, I decide that I would enjoy baking cookies with my daughter Grace. I decide this because I want to spend time with Grace. Now baking cookies *with her* will make a much bigger mess and will take much longer than if I simply bake the cookies by myself. However, I want to bake cookies with her just because I love being with her, because I know she will enjoy it, and because we will both laugh and have a grand time together.



When I ask Grace if she would like to bake cookies with me, it is a little bit like God inviting us to join Him in the work that He is doing. He is not dependent on us—He could do it without us more quickly and more neatly—but He simply delights in working *with us*. Praying is joining with God in work, but it is especially joining Him in relationship.



If Grace's will to bake cookies lines up with my will to bake cookies, then pour some milk because here come fresh cookies! And if your will lines up with God's will, then it's a done deal!

What if I invite Grace to bake cookies with me, but she declines? I may decide that I am not going to bake cookies after all. Without someone to join me, I may not do what I could have done. In the same way, our prayers can determine whether or not something happens. Our failure to pray—that is, our declining to join God in doing something—can result in God not acting as He might have otherwise. When no one wants to join in baking the cookies, there may be no cookies. This means that our prayers matter! They do make a difference.

However, even if Grace doesn't want to bake cookies, I very well may decide to bake them on my own. If I have obligated myself to provide cookies for someone, then I will make those cookies whether or not Grace joins me. In the same way, God very well may act on His own whether or not His children join Him in that work. He sometimes chooses to act by "His own arm" (Isaiah 59:16). But when that happens, God's people have missed out on the experience of "baking cookies" with God. When we don't pray about something, even if God works in that situation, then we have missed an opportunity to be with God, to enjoy Him, to grow closer to Him, and to appreciate the results in a more personal, satisfying way.

And here's the fourth scenario that could take place: perhaps I am not even thinking about cookies, but Grace comes to me and asks if I will bake cookies with her. I am delighted! Simply because she wants to do this thing which I know would be a good experience for her—simply because it is the desire of her heart, I say, "Yes." This is what God does for us over and over again as we come to Him with our requests.

I suspect that this may be part of what happened at Jesus's very first miracle, which took place at the wedding in Cana. Do you remember Jesus telling His mother that His time had not yet come? Yet He went on to perform an awesome miracle. Many times God works as He does simply because we ask Him, this One who has a soft place in His heart for us. This means that our prayers matter! They do make a difference.

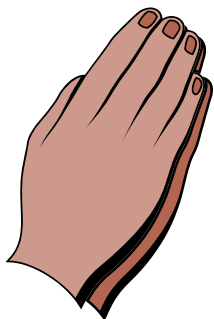
If I don't pray for my marriage, God may not intervene. If I don't pray, God may not act. But if we will pray for our marriages, God will meet us there, He will work in our marriages, and above all, something powerful and precious will happen in our relationship with Him. Prayer is about the cookies, yes; but it is especially about relationship.

You remember from Ephesians 5 that God says that a husband and wife will become one. Paul calls this is "a profound mystery," but then he says that he is referring to Christ and His bride. The profound mystery of prayer is related to the profound mystery of marriage. The great power, intimacy, and bonding of marriage is in oneness. The great power of prayer is in oneness. *The secret of prayer is oneness.*

We can read over and over again that we should pray "according to His will," and we can miss it completely. Is God just trying to get what He wants? Is He just saying that what He wants is what we are going to get? When God tells us to pray "according to His will," what is He seeking?

He is seeking unity with us. This is something awesome. This is deeply profound; this is sacred.

God longs for your heart and His heart to come together. When that happens, there is a unity that releases incredible power. There is a union that creates new things.



How do we come into unity with God? I think of it like the classic praying hands. My left hand matches up perfectly with my right hand. This happens spiritually when my heart lines up with God's heart. I come to Him, saying not just, "Here is what is on my heart," but also and even especially, "What is on Your heart today, God?" Through the Scriptures, I learn what is on God's heart; I learn His desires, and I learn His burdens. Then my heart can line up with His like two hands held together.

And then I can experience a kind of oneness with God as I remain in Him. Like two matched hands that move into clasped hands, my spirit can move deeper into God, and He can move deeper into my spirit. Just as the fingers of the left hand intertwine with the fingers of the right so that the left hand is in the right, and the right hand is now in the left, so we can abide in Christ, and He can abide in us.



When Jesus spoke with His disciples just before His death, His theme was unity. He spoke about His unity with the Father and about His unity with the Spirit. He spoke about His unity with believers and about unity among believers. In John chapters 14, 15, and 16, He made six incredible promises of answered prayer. In those same chapters, He also made six references to our unity with Him, saying that He would be in us and that we would be in Him. Unity is the secret to answered prayer. Not because God is being stubborn about getting His way, but because the whole heart of God for His people is unity with them.

Prayer is not just about stuff getting done; it is also about hearts becoming one.

Not only is prayer our great defense against every kind of harm, but it is also our great means of securing every kind of blessing. A powerful way to pray for our marriages is to use the Scriptures to shape our prayers. Through the Scriptures, we are blessed to hear God's tender and passionate heart for our marriages; we are privileged to carry God's burden for our husbands as our burden; and through the instruction of the Scriptures, we are brought into oneness with God's Spirit, which is the secret of answered prayer.



The Scriptures help me understand God's heart so that I can line up with Him in my desires and so that I can experience unity with Him; as a result, God's power is released to act.

The Scriptures are not, of course, magical words. Prayer is not about having the right words; it is about having the right heart. It is about being drawn into God's heart.

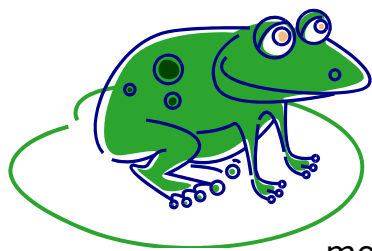
Secrets of the Prince and the Frog: Suffering

I grew up in the church, as many of you did. In fact, I grew up on a mission field, and I heard many "testimonies" as people told their stories. I learned that people can go through a lot of suffering but that God is okay with that because these people then become more like Jesus. I learned that suffering makes you strong.

And I thought, *God, just leave me weak. That will be okay because You'll take care of me.* I really had no ambitions to suffer gloriously and grandly. Being strong was just not that important to me. And really, what was the point of being strong? It seemed to me that the whole point of being strong was merely being able to survive the even bigger storms and even more painful problems that God would send you next.

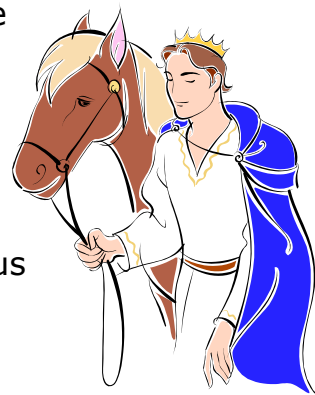
So I thought, *Lord, You can leave me in the "just as I am" program. That will be fine with me.*

But I do not think that way at all anymore. I am not saying that I volunteer for pain for the sake of pain; God does not ask us to do that. But I certainly do not want to be on the "just as I am" plan! What I want is the "princess and the frog" deal.

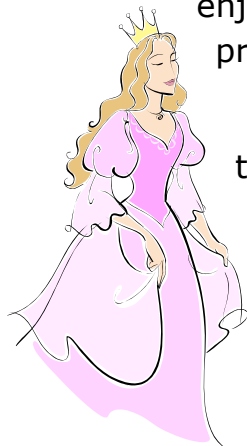
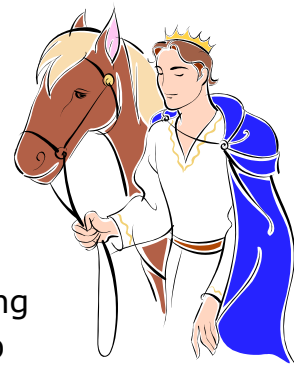


You know the story.... Once upon a time, a beautiful princess played with a golden ball at the royal pond in front of the castle. There she met an ugly frog. Eventually, the princess kissed the frog, and the frog turned into a handsome prince. Now we need to modify the story a bit to make this work for us: let's call it "the *prince* and the frog" because we are the frog, and the Lord Jesus is the Prince.

We have a relationship with Christ, but as frogs, we are extremely limited in that relationship. We can bump up against the golden ball and roll it back and forth with the Prince, but that's about the extent of it. The Prince can pat us on the head, but that's about it. There is just not much interaction possible between a frog and a prince.



But ... what if the frog becomes a princess; what could happen if the frog became human, like the prince? This can now become a whole new type of relationship. The two people can now experience deep friendship; they can enjoy rich intimacy: the prince can now marry the princess and, of course, live happily ever after.



This is what God offers to us now, if we are willing to change from a frog to a princess. You can keep playing ball with God, if you want; you can be content to be God's frog, if you want.

But maybe you don't. I know I don't!

I don't want to be a frog anymore. I want to be "of like kind" with the Prince so that I can know Him in a greater way. I want to be shaped as a princess so that I can more fully experience the Prince. I want arms that can embrace Him. I want eyes that can look into His eyes. I want a language that can speak with His heart. I want to know Him, not like a frog knows the prince, but like a princess knows her prince.

The shape of a frog is "the pattern of this world." Romans 12:2 tells us not to conform to the pattern of this world if we want to be princesses. Instead, we are to be "transformed"—transformed into ones who are of like kind with God. We are not *becoming* God, but we are becoming like Him.

1 John 3:2 says that "we shall be like Him." The Greek word here for *like* is *ho'-moi-os*, meaning "similar," "resembling," or "corresponding to."⁴ It comes from a root word, *homu*, meaning "together." As the Holy Spirit shapes us to resemble and correspond to God, we are able to experience a greater "togetherness" with God.

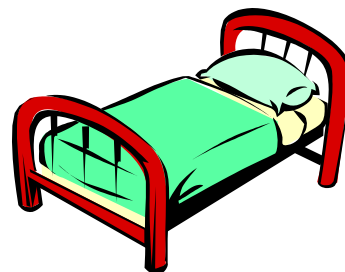
How does God perform this metamorphosis from frog to princess? A primary tool is marriage.

When we recognize how God is using our marriages to shape us for Himself, we can actually welcome this transforming process in our lives —instead of retreating, panicking, attacking, manipulating, or giving up. As we yield to what God is doing in the unseen realm of our spirits, we can relax in the physical realm of our marriages.

⁴ <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3664&t=KJV>. Accessed 16 May 2011.

The goal of “Radiance” is your health and thriving. Even though it is wonderful to learn new marriage skills and gain new insights into marriage, if you just study marriage skills per se, it is like getting new sheets for your bed when your mattress is broken.

If there are metal springs poking out of your mattress, and it’s lumpy, and there are bed bugs crawling around in the mattress, then pretty new sheets are not what you most need. You want to take care of the mattress first; that is much more significant than the color of the sheets.



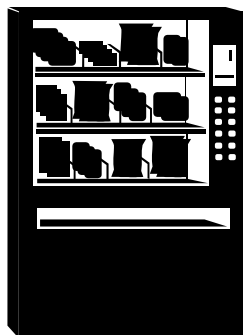
When it comes to thriving in marriage, my heart is like the mattress. Getting my heart right is the main thing.

We learned from the secret of the vending machine that the vile stuff that is choking us—that is, the bitterness and the resentment—comes from our own hearts. Those are mattress issues.

We learned from the secret of the arrows that the poison, or curse, in our lives is always something that we ourselves have put there. Curse in our lives comes from our own hearts.

So, having recognized this, what do we do now?

1. **Repent!** We have to change our minds about wanting to stay frogs. As it turns out, being a frog means more than just missing out on being a princess. To be a frog is to be seriously sick. Spiritual frogs are riddled with disease and painful ulcers. Do we really want to stay here?



2. Unplug the vending machine. Just having someone push your buttons until all of the bad junk runs out will not work. That is because the supply of junk is endless.

We have to disconnect. Romans 6:11 tells us to “reckon ourselves” dead to our sin natures. The sin nature has not gone away, and it is not dead; *we are dead to it*.



Think about when you are out shopping, or are somewhere in a crowd, and various cell phones are ringing every little bit. You hear those phones, but if it isn't your phone ringing, you don't respond. You ignore the ringing. You are dead to it. But when *your* phone rings, you respond; you are alive to it.

When our sin nature calls to us, we don't respond. It is no longer our master, and so we don't answer to it anymore. Our response is such that we may as well be dead.

This means that when self-pity calls, we don't answer. When someone "pushes our buttons," nothing happens. In the frog analogy, this means that when the flies of bitterness whizz by, we are no longer interested. Flies are something we shoo away now, not something we eat. We repent of sin instead of stewing in it.

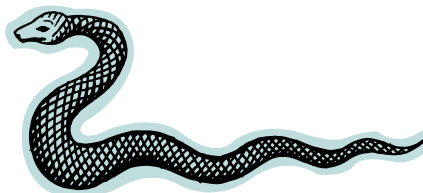


3. Right now, our sin nature is in a coffin. Someday it will be completely gone, but right now it is there in the coffin—condemned, but still kicking. Like a huge snake with its head cut off, the tail is still powerful for awhile and very dangerous.

We put the coffin lid down on that still-kicking serpent of our sin nature when we lay down our self-will.

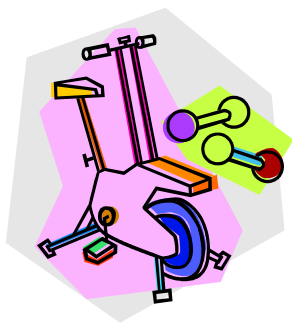
This is the key!

James 4:7 tells us not only to resist Satan so that he will flee, but it tells *how* us to resist Satan so that he will flee: we resist Satan by surrendering to God. Resisting Satan without surrendering to God is powerless.



In our marriages, God gives us the opportunity over and over again to lay down our self-will. Doing this, more than anything else, is what shapes us for His embrace. We allow ourselves to be shaped for His embrace by continually laying down our self-wills, and submitting to God's will.

This is a battle of the mind because whether or not we lay down our self-will depends on what we believe. We lay down our self-will when we believe the truth of Romans 12:2 that God's will is good, pleasing, and perfect.



It is this laying down of our wills that transforms us.
 We lay it down; we lay it down; we lay it down.
 This is like a spiritual exercise that changes us.
 It shapes us so that we can experience Him;
 it shapes us so that we can experience greater joy.

To lay down our self-will is to suffer. It was the continual laying down of His self-will that caused the suffering of Jesus. Although He had no sin nature, He did have a self-will. But not once did He allow that self-will to stand up; He kept it submitted to the will of God His Father.

The Scriptures teach that Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8). I think that that suffering was the continual laying down of His self-will. Through progressively stronger temptations, He kept His own self-will submitted:

1. When He was a little boy, and his mother said, "No more cookies, Jesus," He kept His own self-will down.
2. When He was a teenager, and Joseph said, "Say good-bye to your friends now, Jesus, and come in to help me finish making this table," He kept His own self-will down.
3. When He was an adult, and God the Father said, "Bear the sins of the world, Jesus," He kept His own self-will down.⁵

Yielding to God's will can feel as if something is being torn from us. Something *is* being torn from us: our own brokenness and decay.

Giving is our healing. Giving to our husbands; giving to our marriages; giving ourselves to the will of God—this is giving that heals us.

⁵ Being willing to choose separation from God the Father was the hardest thing that Jesus had to do. That which was hardest for Jesus is something that God never asks us to do, and yet it is something which we choose easily and repeatedly: every time we sin, we are choosing separation from God.



Put your arms up in front of you like a wall. This is your self-will. We think we are protecting ourselves. But in reality, when we let our self-will stand up, we are walling ourselves in, creating a dungeon that will become our tomb.

The enemy has lied to us. We think we need to keep our self-will up. It is Satan's cruelest of cruel lies to believe that submitting to the will of God will be our loss.

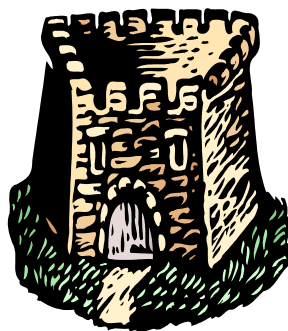
All of the awesome goodness of God is on the other side of our raised-up self-will. When we lay our self-will down, our will lines up with His will. When we lay our self-will down, we gain unity with God's will, and the incredible loving kindness of God, like glorious sunlight, can fill our spirits. We can now live in all that awesome goodness that we had been walling out.



When we lower our self-will, we are letting down the walls of our dungeon, like lowering a drawbridge. Now light can rush in! Now we are free!

Now, with our self-will down, we see that our Prince is walking toward us on that lowered drawbridge with strength in His arms and with love in His eyes.

Secrets of the Dungeon: Spiritual Strongholds



In the world of spiritual battle, strongholds are the military bases of operation and defense.

For believers, the Lord is our stronghold; He is our fortress of protection and security; He is our refuge; He is our defender. When the Lord is our stronghold, we live sheltered, and we live free within that shelter.

But the enemy can also build massive strongholds in our lives. When we have enemy strongholds, we live as captives. Satanic strongholds are not shelters; they are dungeons. We are not free; we are in bondage. These strongholds give the enemy an opening into our spirits; these give him a way to harm us.

Who allows the building of these enemy bases in our lives? We do!

Whenever we choose to believe a lie, we allow the enemy to build a base of operation on our territory. This can become an enemy stronghold, blocking the full operation of God's love so that God's healing and God's power are hindered in our spirits.

We live in a culture that says what we believe doesn't matter much. But the truth is this: the *only* thing that matters is what we believe. That is the whole battle! And the fact is, we rarely even realize what our spirits are believing. We are very aware of what we are feeling in our body and in our emotions. We know when we're hungry. We know when we are angry. We know when we feel hurt. And we react.

But we never stop to look at what we are believing in our spirits. We haven't learned to think deeply or clearly about our spirits. And so we continue to suffer spiritual defeat, we fail to become radiant, and we do not thrive because we are oblivious of what is going on in our own spirits.

Satan has only one weapon against you. The only thing he can do to harm you is to tempt you to believe a lie. Whatever that takes, he'll try. But he is going after only one thing: for you to believe a lie about who God is.

The measure of your spiritual health and joy and friendship with God is the measure of truth in your spirit—truth that you have chosen to believe. The measure of your spiritual disease and brokenness and darkness is the measure of deception in your spirit--lies that you have chosen to believe. Romans 1:25: says, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie."

John 8:44 says that Satan is the father of lies. The only thing he cares about is this: what will tempt you to believe a lie about who God is.

The circumstances in your life absolutely do not matter in themselves; they have significance only as they influence you to believe a lie about God or to believe the truth about God. What will cause you to doubt the goodness of God? What will cause you to doubt the power of God? What will cause you to doubt the authority of God? What will cause you to doubt the wisdom of God?

Russell Moore, author of Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ, says that everyone is always being tempted. "There's no one who is not being tempted. The only question is, 'How are you being tempted?'"⁶

Even if you have studied this topic of strongholds before, it is always good to come back to it because Satan has no other strategy against us. We are to be aware of his schemes, and we are to remain alert.

How strong are satanic strongholds? They can be incredibly strong.

As Christians, we can be sometimes very troubled by these areas of sin in our lives. So we attack the stronghold. We try to stop sinning! We wrestle with our emotions. We wrestle with our bodies. We wrestle with our behavior. We wrestle and wrestle; we struggle and struggle.

⁶ Towers. April 11, 2011. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Louisville, KY. page 8.



But often, we are very ineffective in our attacks against the strongholds in our lives. It is as if we were attacking a fort with a fork!

You can spend a lifetime attacking these powerful strongholds and never do more than scratch the walls. It can be exhausting and discouraging.



But look at the enemy stronghold. What is its base? It is built on sand! Lies are spiritual sand.

What would be a better plan of offense? Destroy the base. The place of vulnerability in a satanic stronghold is its foundation of sand.

Instead of chipping in vain at the stronghold walls, we can target a massive flood of water against this stronghold. A spiritual tsunami of truth will collapse the entire structure. We don't attack the stronghold itself at all; but when we eliminate the base, the entire structure collapses.

Water in Scriptures is a symbol of judgment, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, and a symbol of the Word of God. It is the water of truth which destroys enemy strongholds.



The blood of Jesus atones for the guilt of our sins. But it is the water of the Word which washes away the practice of our sins. Think about the design of the Old Testament tabernacle or temple. First there is the altar of atonement—this is the place of justification, the place of blood; this represents the work of Christ completed at the cross. But then there is the laver—this is the place of sanctification, the place of water; this represents the ongoing work of the Spirit through the truth of God's Word.

The blood changes our spiritual position, but the water changes our spiritual practices. The blood changes where we live, but the water changes the way we live. The blood frees us from our slave-driver, but the water frees us from our chains.



Neil Anderson says in The Bondage Breaker: "You don't have to outshout [Satan] or outmuscle him to be free of his influence. You just have to outtruth him."⁷

2 Corinthians 10:5 says, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." We destroy a stronghold of deception with a mighty deluge of truth.

This means that when we are fighting a sinful habit or thought pattern or addiction, instead of wrestling it, we want to identify the lie that it is based on. Once we identify the lie, we can replace it with a heavy bombardment of truth. The stronghold will collapse.

For an example, let's look at the stronghold of bitterness. What lie is the base for this stronghold? The base lie for bitterness may be this: "someone has harmed me; someone has ruined things for me." After we identify that as the foundational deception, we can release these tidal waves of demolishing truth:

- Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (NIV)
- Deuteronomy 23:5: "the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing to you, because the Lord your God loves you." (NIV)
- Genesis 50:20: Others "intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good." (NLT)
- Job 42:2: "Job answered GOD: 'I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans.'" (MSG)
"I know that You can do all things, and that no thought or purpose of Yours can be restrained or thwarted." (Amplified)
- Isaiah 14: 24, 27: "The LORD Almighty has sworn, 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand.'" (NIV)

Trying to make ourselves just stop being bitter or being angry can be useless. But flooding our spirits with truth will set us free!

How do you flood a lie with truth? Read truth; listen to truth; meditate on truth; surround yourself with visible reminders of truth; pray continually.

⁷ Harvest House Publishers. 1990.

We can quit attacking the fort, and instead release a flood of water against the base. Truth wins! As surely as light overcomes darkness, truth wins. As surely as water washes away sand, truth wins!

Stronghold: worry/fear

Sand (Lie): "God won't take care of me."

Water (Truth): Philippians 4:19; 2 Peter 1:3; 2 Corinthians 9:8;
Psalm 23:1; James 1:17; Psalm 84:11

Stronghold: guilt

Lie: "God won't forgive me."

Truth: 1 John 1:9

Stronghold: despair

Lie: "God is failing me. All is lost."

Truth: 2 Corinthians 4:17

The enemy will use your marriage to present lies to you. The enemy will use what your husband is doing or not doing and what he is saying or not saying to tempt you to believe a lie. He can use a husband who is adoring or a husband who is harsh. A demanding husband, or a neglecting one. A busy one or a lazy one. A wealthy husband or one who is perpetually broke. A passive husband or a controlling husband. The point is not what your husband does; the point is what you believe.

So . . . the problem in my life is not my husband. The problem lies in my reaction to him. And the core problem, the one triggering my reaction to my husband, is the lie that I am believing. *There* is my problem!

If we look just at two passages in Scripture--the tempting of Eve and the tempting of Christ--we can discover the tactics that Satan uses. And if we will listen to what we are really saying to ourselves in our spirits, we will hear these same lies, and we will learn what we are really choosing to believe:

- *I don't think God really said that. I don't think He really meant that. I don't think He meant that the way it sounds.*
- *I don't think He really even cares about that. It's okay; He's not going to do anything.*
- *God is holding out on me. He is keeping something good from me.*



- *I can make my own happiness. I know better than God does what will make me happy.*
- *I can meet my own needs. I need to meet my own needs!*
- *I can know better than God does in this situation.*
- *I can control this.*
- *I can get what I want and keep God happy, too.*

We all have standing before us the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To take its fruit is to declare oneself to be god.

Continually, I stand at that tree all day long. Continually, I must answer the question, "Who knows best what is good for me, and what is evil for me?" If I do not realize that this is what is going on, I just hurry on and say to myself, "Listen, at least for right now, I know what is good."



If I believe that, then I am taking hold of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Whenever I do that, I am choosing to be god. If I reject the LORD as my God, then what is left? Nothing--nothing that is good because all the good stuff is with God. Without the LORD God, there is no light. There is no life. There is only darkness and death. Every time I choose myself as god, I choose for myself loss and the stench of decay in my spirit. Every time.

I am not talking about whether or not I want Jesus to forgive me of my sins and to take me to heaven someday. I am talking about right now, in this moment: whom am I choosing to be god?

Will I forgive my husband? No, I will not. It isn't right. (I will be god.)

Will I honor this man? No, not right now. (I will be god.)

Will I serve this man? No. I just can't do it. (I will be god.)

Will I submit to my husband? No. That would be wrong. (I will be god.)


Will I give grace to this man; will I humble myself before this man? No.

That is not good for me. That is evil for me. (I will be god.)

We don't hear ourselves saying that, but we could if we would listen to what we are believing in our own spirits.

The Lies of Bitterness


The following chart shows some of the lies that make up the foundation of the stronghold of bitterness. It also lists the truth that is able to demolish the stronghold.


Lies → Bitterness	Truth → Thriving and Radiance!
<p>1. I am harmed. (Someone is messing things up for me. Someone is ruining my life.)</p>	<p>1. I can be completely blessed! (This is the secret of the arrow and the secret of the pages.)</p>
<p>2. I must punish. (It's only right!)</p> 	<p>2. I must forgive! Just as someone might give me money to give to someone else, God has given me forgiveness to give to others. Just as I don't have the right to keep money that belongs to someone else, so I do not have the right to keep forgiveness that belongs to someone else.</p> <p>I have received the grace to forgive. When God gives us grace, He includes the grace that we need to give others. His grace to us covers our sins and also the sins against us. (See the parable of the debtors in Matthew 18.)</p> <p>Paul told Philemon, "If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON'T MENTION THAT YOU OWE ME YOUR VERY SOUL!"⁸</p> <p>Jesus says this to us, too. God will pay</p>


⁸ Philemon verses 18-19 (NLT)

	<p>us: respect, dignity, love. He will give us more than we can even absorb.</p> <p>Do we want someone to suffer? Someone did suffer. Christ did. He paid for <i>that offense against you</i> at the cross. Do we want to say, "You owe me" to Christ?</p>
<p>3. I must bear my suffering. (Justice demands it! It is only natural!)</p> <p>(I must feel the pain of this injury—stew in it—nurse it.)</p> <p>Stephen Crane: In the desert I saw a creature, naked, bestial, Who, squatting upon the ground, Held his heart in his hands, And ate of it. I said, "Is it good, friend?" "It is bitter--bitter," he answered; "But I like it Because it is bitter, And because it is my heart."⁹</p>	<p>3. I have a burden-bearer.</p> <p>We grow up in Christ in these stages:</p> <p>a. I understand that Christ comes and helps me when I get hurt.</p> <p>b. I understand that Christ stands before me and takes my hits. (Saul learned this on Damascus Road.)</p> <p>c. This is a massive war launched by the evil one in furious hatred of God Almighty. These arrows that are hitting me actually have His Name on them. We stand almost as spectators. (I see those ugly words someone hurled in my direction, but I realize that he is fighting God, not me.)</p> <p>d. I start approaching the battle in an entirely different way. I no longer walk around with my hands in defensive mode, trying not to get hurt. I don't think that way anymore. I say, "Lord, I will join You in Your sufferings. I will be double-yoked with You because I love You."</p>

⁹ <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/175754>. Accessed 6-22-11.

	<p>I begin to share in His afflictions, which are redemptive. When I am yoked with Christ, suffering is redemptive: it brings people to God, and it brings God's people deeper into Him.</p> <p>Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." Although atonement was completed at the cross, the suffering that it takes to redeem people fully is not completed. That is, there is still suffering needed in order to bring people to salvation and to ever-greater sanctification.</p> <p>In this fourth stage, we start living Philemon 18-19 in relationship to others. We are willing to suffer so that others can be free.</p>
<p>4. I have the right to judge.</p> 	<p>4. I do not have the right to judge. (Judging is claiming to know the motives of someone else's heart.)</p> <p>Sin is against God only (Psalm 51) because the laws we break are His laws.</p> <p>My husband's sin enters my life neutrally. Even though there may be sin on his page, that situation can function on my page as blessing.</p> <p>I do not have the knowledge that God has. When I want to judge, God asks me, "Do you know how he is wired, what chemicals and hormones he has</p>

	<p>going through his body, how he was treated as a child, how his parents spoke to him, what his understanding is, what has shaped his thinking, and what is causing him shame? Do you know how he has experienced rejection, how he has been hurt, how he has suffered disappointment, how his dreams have been shattered, what his fears are, and how he has been betrayed? Do you know?"</p> <p>I stand humbled and silenced. Like Job, I say, "I am unworthy. How can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth." (Job 40:4) "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand." (Job 42:3)</p>
<p>5. I want to judge.</p> 	<p>5. I do not want to judge! It brings judgment on me instead of mercy.</p> <p>The standard I use becomes the standard for me. (See Matthew 7:2.)</p> <p>We find the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Gehazi was bitter against "Naaman, that Aramean." Gehazi chose the Old Covenant standard of payment. When he demanded payment, then payment was demanded of him. The clothes and the leprosy go together! If I choose the clothes, then I am choosing the leprosy, too.</p> <p>The Judge and the Savior are one. When I bump the Judge off His throne, I am also bumping off the One who forgives me!</p>

<p>6. He is getting away with it!</p>	<p>6. He is getting away with nothing. God sees. God knows. God takes our pain very seriously. God promises justice.</p>
<p>7. He hurt me! I am entitled to pity.</p>	<p>7. Often, that yelping is my pride. I repent. Adopt this policy for your life: zero tolerance for self-pity.</p>
<p>8. If I forgive, I will lose. (Forgiving will hurt me; it will cost me; it will lessen me.)</p>	<p>8. Forgiving is my healing. Forgiving shapes me for His embrace. Forgiving prospers me.</p>  <p>We think we struggle to forgive because of the greatness of the offense against us. That is not why we struggle to forgive. We struggle to forgive because of our own sinfulness. Forgiving is hard for us because our hearts are hard. The very act of forgiving softens our hearts.</p>

Forget It!

1. *Forget your marriage. Focus on your man.*

It is trying to achieve a certain kind of marriage that is making us crazy. This is misplaced energy; we are actually off-target when we are focused on the marriage itself.

We do not take our marriages with us to heaven. We take people with us to heaven. We have been called to love a man, not to create a particular kind of marriage. Focus on loving your man, serving him according to his needs as God directs. This will bless the marriage, of course; but it is a snare to us when we turn our eyes from our man to our marriage.

We thrive when we let go of the marriage, and focus on the man. He is the real treasure.

2. *Forget your marriage. Focus on your ministry as a wife.*

When we stand before God, we will not be held responsible for the condition of our marriages. We are responsible for our wife-ing.

We torment ourselves with continually measuring our marriages against our version of the ideal marriage. Live free from that! Instead of evaluating our marriages, we want to evaluate ourselves as wives. We ask God for insight into the needs of our husbands, and we ask God to enable us to minister to those needs according to His wisdom and purposes.

Forget ...

3. criticism, grumbling, whining
(poisonous snake venom)
4. protecting your heart with
dysfunctional coping strategies¹⁰
(fighting; taking revenge; denying;
escaping; becoming apathetic or
numb; sharing your pain with others)

Focus on ...

- gratitude
- staying sheltered in Christ;
keeping your heart open and
healthy

¹⁰ See Thriving Despite a Difficult Marriage by Misja and Misja. NavPress. 2009.

Forget ...

5. changing your spouse
6. your expectations of marriage
(that is, your requirements for happiness)
7. judging (claiming to know the motives of someone else's heart)
8. fighting your spouse

Focus on...

acceptance—which means embracing a lifestyle of repentance and ongoing forgiveness

high expectations of God—absolute confidence in His power and goodness!

examining my own heart

fighting for him

Don't let go of your commitment to your marriage—it is priceless!

