

BY GOD'S GRACE, RENEW YOUR MARRIAGE BY FOCUSING ON WHAT IS LOVELY!

^{ESV} Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Retreat Purpose: Ask God to occupy you with joy in your marriage as you take time to rest and reflect on his gift of your spouse to you (context of Sabbath & festival rest & joyful worship)

^{ESV} Ecclesiastes 5:20 For he will not much remember the days of his life because *God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.*

^{ESV} Ecclesiastes 9:7 Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹ *Enjoy life with the wife whom you love*, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

Enjoy companionship, sexual pleasures, satisfying each other's desires.

I. Focusing on what Needs to Change: Problems in Marriage Attitudes (like Philippian church attitudes)

Competitive, Proud, Selfish Interest

^{ESV} Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

^{ESV} Philippians 2:20 For I have no one like [Timothy], who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For *they all seek their own interests*, not those of Jesus Christ.

Relationship indicators: How do these sins show up in the way you relate to each other?

Critical
Contemptuous
Defensive
Self-Pity
Stonewalling
Angry outbursts
Ignoring spouse's attempts to interact
Neglecting spouse's legitimate desires
Other negative relationship patterns?

REFLECTION: Questions for Discussion with your Spouse

1. Do you see any of these negative attitudes in your relationship in the past month?
2. Do you see any of these things in yourself? Share with your spouse where you think you have failed in any of these ways.
3. Ask your spouse to note one major issue or problem that they would like to see changed related to these sins above. Listen quietly without interrupting or getting angry and just try to understand the problem. If you are speaking about the problem of your spouse, speak with gentleness and phrase your words in a way that notes specific examples without over-generalizing.
4. Do you have hope that your spouse's problems can change? What has been your general attitude in facing his/her historical problems? How have you tried to resolve or change him/her in the past?
5. How do you think Paul responds to these kinds of attitude problems in the church? How could these problems be corrected without making the situation worse?

II. Focusing on the Work God Can Do in ME

A. Glory in the Gospel of Grace

ESV Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brothers, *rejoice in the Lord*. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. . . .³ For we are the circumcision, *who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh*—

ESV Philippians 3:7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of **the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, *in order that I may gain Christ*⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, *the righteousness from God that depends on faith*—¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

ESV Philippians 3:19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with *minds set on earthly things*.²⁰ But *our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior*, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

B. Display Gospel Contentment when focused on your own situation in the marriage (need a balance of personal contentment, and a desire to patiently seek Christ-like change in spouse)

Philippians 4:11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be *content* whatever the circumstances. **4:12** I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being *content* in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **4:13** I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

My translation Phil 4:13: *I am strong enough for all these situations through the One who empowers me.*

In every day language, you are not seeking to meet your own needs by helping people change, but want others to mature for their sake & God's glory. You will be content when people meet your needs or when they do not. Look at Paul's experience and you can see why he is content. Look at the stark contrasts he uses to illustrate his contentment:

1:7 for whether I am in chains **or** defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

IN PRISON OR FREE

1:18 whether from false motives **or** true, Christ is preached. **FALSE MOTIVES OR TRUE**

1:20 Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life **or** by death. **LIFE OR DEATH**

1:27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you **or** only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel

WITH YOU OR AWAY FROM YOU

4:12 whether well fed **or** hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **FULL OR HUNGRY**

Can you say YOU ARE CONTENT WHETHER

IN PRISON OR FREE? (a spouse stuck in Taiwan or free in your own country?)

FULL OR HUNGRY?? (DIETING/FASTING OR EATING Thanksgiving dinner?)

FACING LIFE OR DEATH? (if I live, Christ is glorified through me. If I die Christ is glorified by bringing me to be with him & I am glorified with Christ)

YOUR SPOUSE HAS FALSE MOTIVES OR TRUE?

YOU ARE WITH YOUR GOOD SPOUSE OR ALONE?

WHEN YOUR SPOUSE MEETS YOUR NEEDS OR WHEN HE/SHE DOESN'T???????? (for Paul, whether they gave an offering to support him or not)

I am strong enough for *all these situations*. Paul means the situations of **plenty** and the situations of **deprivation and lack**. Paul needs the strength of Christ (=the imparted character of the Spirit of Christ) for both situations.

Definition of contentment: By relying on the self-sufficient God who imparts his contented nature to me in the Gospel, I can *accept both*

pleasurable circumstances (comfort, good health, freedom, adequate resources, abundant resources, having my needs met, legitimate goals met) *and*

difficult circumstances (suffering or death, lack of resources, not enough, not having my basic needs met, physical limitations, job limitations, legitimate goals not met)

while consistently showing the fruits of the Spirit in relationship to others (love, gentleness, joy, peace, self-control, kindness).

Contentment will make you gentle (Phil 4:5), joyful in all situations (Phil 4:4), focused on doing what you need to do before God to serve your spouse with Christ's affections (Phil 2:5-8, 20-22; 1:8)

REFLECTION: Questions for Discussion with your Spouse

1. What type of situation are you facing right now? Are you "IN NEED" or "IN PLENTY"? List similar situations in your life. Write down some of your pleasurable circumstances and your difficult circumstances in marriage.
2. What do you really want? What are the strongest desires you have felt in the past week? Where do you see this thinking: If only _____, then I would be happy and satisfied! Were your daily desires missing the point of the Christian life, which is knowing Christ, a desire to know him better and be with him? Repent of desires for things that cannot truly satisfy your soul.
3. IS IT OUTSIDE MY CONTROL? Change what can be changed, what Christ tells you to change. Submit to God with a contented heart for the rest of the situations that are outside your control. Ask God to help you face all these different types of situations with contentment.
- 4.. Can you see any ways in which the Gospel has been advanced by your having plenty or having need (Phil 1:12-13)? Do you pray more when you are in need (Phil 1:19)?
5. Do you get crabby at your spouse when you give you the freedom to do what you want, or he/she doesn't serve you the way you want?
6. What have you complained about recently? Repent. (Phil 2:14)
7. Do you lack the gentleness that says to others in your family, "I'm content"? (Phil 4:5)
8. "A contented person cannot be tempted! He/she has all he/she needs." Reflect on this statement. Does it describe your daily Christian experience? Are you easily tempted to sin?
9. Pray and ask God to help you apply these principles to your life and your marriage.

IV. Focusing on God's Work in Your Spouse: Moving from Partial Joy to Complete Joy

(need a balance of personal contentment, and a desire to patiently seek Christ-like change in spouse)

A. Peace: Though Anxious for Changes in the direction of Christ-likeness, pray with peace because God Will Work. Your sovereign powerful God is working to change your spouse for his glory on his time-table.

^{ESV} **Philippians 2:12** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for *it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* ^{ESV} **Philippians 1:6** And I am sure of this, that *he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* ^{ESV} **Philippians 1:9** And it is **my prayer** that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. ^{ESV} **Philippians 4:6** **do not be anxious about anything,** but in everything **by prayer** and supplication with thanksgiving **let your requests be made known to God.** ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

B. With an attitude of partial joy now, appeal to your spouse to change as a way to *complete* your joy 1:4; 2:2

Follow Paul's example in joyfully loving the Philippian Christians as the pattern for assisting in your spouse's change process. Paul's joy was focused, solid and God-confident, *but partial* as he sought their deeper Christian maturity:

^{ESV} **Philippians 1:3** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all **making my prayer with joy,** ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I **am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion** at the day of Jesus Christ. ^{ESV} **Philippians 2:2** **complete my joy** by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ^{ESV} **Philippians 4:8** Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, **whatever is lovely,** whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.**

C. Appeal to God's comforts, joys and rewards as motive for spouse to change

^{ESV} Philippians 2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,

Philippians 2:5-8 Because the humble servant glorifies God, even to the point of suffering to serve, he is rewarded with exaltation (in Jesus' case, to the highest place). We shall be rewarded for our humble service to our spouse as a way to glorify God. (See Col 3:23-25)

^{ESV} Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ **who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body,** by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Goal is not changing your spouse for your own benefit (for Paul, whether they gave an offering to support him or not), **NOT "I hope you change faster so you will give more offerings to meet my needs" but fellowship—sharing in the harvest of the Gospel together—for their benefit and reward before God.**

^{ESV} Philippians 4:17 Not that I seek the gift, but *I seek the fruit that increases to your credit.*

REFLECTION: Questions for Discussion with your Spouse

1. What are the substantive issues of your marriage that need to change?
2. Ask your spouse: If you could change three things about me, what would you change?
3. Are you patiently waiting in the gap between change begun, but not completed?
4. **Attitude check:** Even though issues in your marriage need improvement, do you *have partial joy seeking complete joy*, without holding on to negativity, bitterness, complaining until you see the changes you desire?
5. Do you seek change in your spouse because of the benefits it will bring you, or because it will benefit your spouse and glorify God?
6. Pray with partial joy now for the changes in your spouse that will glorify God and benefit him/her. (Phil 1:9-11; 4:17)