

Marriage...It's A Covenant Thing!

By Cindy Rushton



Ever wondered just what is this marriage thing all about? Does it seem like marriage is just the "thing" to do? Have you ever sat back, looked at your spouse and thought, "Hey...why did we do this? What IS the point?"

Well, honestly, I have to tell you that from the time I was a little, bitty girl I have always had one desire, one real passion. You have guessed it! I wanted to be married to my knight-in-shining armor! I wanted to wear the flowing white lace dress...look into the sunset to see him riding on a white horse to grab me up and whisk me into the sunset...and live happily ever after with my white picket fence around my little sweet cottage (I am not into damp castles!) surrounded by tulips! Oh, and did I find my knight! Well, State Trooper! Hehe!

So, what happened as I found my man? Boy met girl. Girl found her prince (riding around the mall with his top down on his little cute convertible MG IN DECEMBER). We rode off into the cold December air. Then, life happened!

Where are you? What is your story? Think back to the days before you found your sweetheart. What was it like? What was your first thought? Did you have ANY idea that your romance would take all of the twists and turns that it has undergone through the years?

I am sitting here typing this article as we celebrate our Sixteenth Wedding Anniversary. Actually, yesterday was the big day, but we have decided to milk this celebration for a few more days (maybe the whole year!). When asked by my dearest darling WHAT I would just LOVE to do for my special day, I knew immediately! Go away...get a hotel room (around a coffee shop!)...and read...and write...and smooch! Hehe! (That is part of the anniversary thing!) So, as I sit here in my dream life, the children watching the history channel, Harold immersed in an *Aero-Trader Magazine*, my heart is full as I think back over the last 16 years and dream about the next 116 years.

We began this marriage thing much like so many of you. We think it is safe to assume that all along the way we have made the very same mistakes that many of you have made alongside of us in your own marriages. We never wanted hard times, disagreements, differences and we don't think that any couple ever wants those chapters in their love stories. In fact, we think that all newlyweds have a tendency to begin this adventure with rose-colored-glasses snugly in tact. When the tough times hit, we were shocked, unprepared, and even disillusioned; most of us are. I think this began with us back at the beginning...

My Story...

I have to tell you that MY story began way back eons ago. Well, as long as I can remember I have loved love! My earliest memories relate to dreaming about love! As a little girl, I remember our long trips to Texas to see my Grandparents. Now, this was BEFORE car seat-belt laws (An important fact since I am now married to the greatest State Trooper in Alabama. YES! I am partial! But, also, he would even give me a ticket now if he found something illegal!)... I remember sitting on my knees in the seat, looking out the back window at the BIG TEXAS skies, dreaming about what MY husband would be like one day! I have always been "in love" with love and the whole idea of romance.

As I began dating (more on that in a minute!), I remember time and time again that those I dated simply did not match up to MY girlhood dreams! (Just for their side, I am POSITIVE that I did not match up to theirs either!) I was not being an unpleasant idealist, but they just did not match up!

I remember going to my pastor in desperation as a 17-year-old over the fact that I was about in despair looking high and low for my prince to come! (Can you just imagine how he must have laughed??) I poured out my heart about my desire to be a godly wife and mother, and about my disappointment in the options out

there. I remember his exhortation as if it were yesterday. He exhorted me to be faithful to God and that I could REST knowing that God had a very good plan for me. He challenged me to wait patiently because although he (Harold) may not come across my path that day or the next or even the next week or next month...that he COULD come across my path any day or week or month... AND HE DID!

Oh! Beloved! I was so in need of him! My whole life was so empty and lonely without him. The moment my eyes met his—I KNEW! Each moment I was with him, I KNEW again and again! I was finally complete! The rest is history...our history. Our very own love story.

So, exactly what was the problem? As I look back over my teen years, I lost my focus. I was so pre-occupied with trying to make sure that God did not forget to help me find a husband OR to make sure that I gave Him all the "help" I could in the process! (EEK! There is NOTHING, I do repeat NOTHING, worse than Cindy Rushton trying to give God a hand! No comments please!) In the meantime, I lost a lot of good time that I could have been actually accomplishing something worthwhile, but I only played the game that is "expected" to be common with teens.

Plain and simple, my life was not preparation for marriage. It was practice for divorce. I learned how to begin and end any relationship without it touching my heart. I learned nothing about God's plan for the godly marriage (which could have made Harold's life a bit easier in those early years!). Instead, I was pre-occupied with my looks...my schedule...and who the lucky guy would be who would be my prince charming!

Don't be smug here! There is a part of all of us that wants to step in and DO something, just anything to make things happen. At the minimum, we at least want to give a little help! This begins when we are first realizing that "need" for our spouse and does not end at the altar. I don't know about you, but I have been very guilty of "helping" God in many detrimental areas of my marriage from convicting Harold of his sins (REALLY! I knew them all instantly and never forgot them!) to trying to control all areas of life to make our marriage work (Did I mention ALL areas??). There is nothing more than exhausting and frustrating. Of course, this is not God's plan for marriage before or after we say "I do." He wants for us to rest, wait upon Him, and trust Him for His perfect plan. However, what is our tendency? We want to "work" and help him. This is not the only area of life we try to give Him a helping hand. For example, we want to **work** for our salvation, instead of accepting the free gift of salvation that results from God's covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. God's covenant was His commitment to do all necessary to make salvation available and a FINISHED, completed gift. He does not need for us to do ANYTHING. It is all done, finished, completed and ready for us to access as a free gift!

Marriage is the same way. It is a Covenant thing too! We want to shop around and comparison shop for the perfect guy, who holds the perfect life with the cute cottage and white picket fence so we can live happily ever after. Marriage sets in, we get to know **more** about our spouse than we cared to know, and as the differences mount, the irreconcilable differences become more than we can handle, divorce court statistic we become. Oh, there are many that will not go to the divorce courts...they just live boringly, empty ever after!

God has a completely different plan. His plan is for a one woman/one man

relationship. One woman in covenant with one man for life. A woman designed as the other half, the completer for her man. One man designed as the other half, the completer for his woman. Each bringing their strengths into the relationship to join as two puzzle pieces in those weak areas for the other. Each remaining separate entities but joining together as one to expand one another in preparation for God's high calling for them. Each being that satisfaction for those needs that cannot be met anywhere else. Leaving our parents, our homes, our past lives...joining together like glue, cement...becoming one entity indissoluble this side of death. One flesh, passionate for one another for life. More on that in a bit...first, let's go back to Genesis!

It All Began in The Garden...

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam, gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife:

*and they shall be one flesh.
And they were both naked, the
man and his wife, and were not
ashamed."*

Genesis 2: 18-25

I told you earlier that I would come back to share about "dating" and subsequently God's awesome plan for marriage. Let's look at what we can glean from this passage about the bringing together of a covenant marriage...

- ♥ **Adam had NOTHING to do with it! Eve had nothing to do with it!** Yep! You read right! There was no shopping around. No comparison shopping to find the best deal. No trying out a few models to see which would work best. God gave them a free gift. Talk about an awesome gift!
- ♥ **Adam SLEPT while God created and prepared Eve perfectly for him!** Asleep...totally resting with God. There was no insomnia...no fretting...no "helping" God! Can you imagine the trust that Adam had in God? He did not give God a list of eligibles to choose from. He did not set out to find someone in panic that God did not have a plan for Him or as if God would not do it. He laid back, went to sleep, and trusted God with the results. And, God was faithful!
- ♥ **God did it! He did it ALL!** Not only did God provide. He provided ALL that Adam needed! He KNEW exactly what Adam would need and He provided MORE than Adam could have ever wanted. In fact, in the next verse (23), Adam declared the perfection in God's provision. He declared that God's gift was SO HIM that

she was the **"bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man."** She was a part of him. The part that had been missing. He had rested, slept, while God did it...while God did ALL necessary to prepare and bring his wife, his helper, to him!

- ♥ **Adam had no complaints with God's choice!** Now mind you, Eve was a WOMAN. Do not think that she and Adam were anything special. Men and women are created with differences. Not to give them a nice reason for divorce court, but so they may come together blending their strengths and weaknesses into a complete entity, one flesh. As we travel with our ministry, I would say that the primary complaint that is expressed about discontentment and conflict in marriage results from simple male and female differences. I have seen it in my own marriage. When we "expect" one another to do things or see things the way we would do or see them, inevitably there is conflict. We each have strengths and we each have weaknesses. Usually, my greatest strengths are Harold's greatest weaknesses, talk about aggravating, especially when it is SO easy for ME! Well, it is aggravating until I realize that his greatest strengths are in the areas of my most blaring weaknesses. We have differences, but those differences are designed to interlock with one another for the glory of God. Adam saw this woman as his Completer, all that was lacking. There were no complaints with what God provided because he KNEW it was all that he needed!
- ♥ **Adam and Eve had NO regrets plaguing their marriage or marriage bed!** Now...think of the beauty here! The standards in our society are down, down low, down so low that very few experience God's best. Although this may be very, very difficult, I want for you to really look at what God did here. Our society rationalizes and ignores the plan God has designed for bringing couples together. Now, I have to preface this by saying that the moment my eyes met Harold's WAS NOT as he and I awoke in the midst of the Garden of Eden. I had stood a guy up for a date, then went out to "cruise" around town, there he was! Oh, there he was out "cruisin" around town with a car full of teenagers. We were BOTH on the prowl! Neither of us wanted to miss the other, so we both tried for years to find each other...just IN CASE God was asleep and expecting us to help ourselves!

Contrast this with what we are seeing in our children as they willingly embrace this passage. Our son actually brought it to our attention that Adam was **asleep** while God prepared his wife. There were no regrets because the relationship was totally pure and each of them totally trusted God. There were no regrets because their hearts were completely in tact, in contrast to the bits that are commonly torn off bit by bit by pre-marital and extra-marital relationships. Adam and Eve were able to give one another their WHOLE heart, with no regrets.

Inevitably someone out there is thinking, *"But Cindy, there was only ONE option! There were no other men and women!"* This is where I want to take you back to my testimony, there was only ONE option...no other men could satisfy me...Harold was created

with a plan that was thought up from the very foundation of the world, by our Covenant God to be MY man. Ask him, his testimony is the same. He looked high and low. He was met by the same awesome truth, there was only ONE option, no other women could satisfy! In the meantime, we both had regrets! There is a better plan! Sleep...trust God...watch for His provision! It will bring true satisfaction with no regrets!

- ♥ **God's best was perfect, absolutely perfect!** Is this not completely awesome? God DOES have something to say about marriage and our marriage partner. He has a perfect plan. His plan is not dependent upon us, well, except that we do have a choice of whether we listen, sleep, and embrace his perfect plan!
- ♥ **The covenant of marriage is forever, unbreakable.** Even in the following chapters when Adam and Eve make very poor choices resulting in much conflict in their marriage, their marriage was not dissolvable. One other aspect of a covenant is that as flesh was cut or broke, the blood sealed the covenant. The shedding of blood was symbolic in meaning, "*If I do not keep my word, may the same thing happen to me as has happened to this animal.*" Hummm, what does that mean? Well, what happened to the animal? It had to die...it was cut into...burned up...lost its life...sounds like a few dissolved marriages, huh?

The only Biblical parting of the way after the covenant of marriage is through death. In original manuscripts, the only cause for divorcement was if it was found upon the marriage union that the partner was guilty of fornication. Modern translations have sadly changed the word from "fornication" to "immorality," which leaves us with a watered down excuse for divorce. Even the common belief that adultery is a valid reason for dissolving the union between man and wife is not completely correct. According to the Law in Scripture, the man and woman caught in adultery were to be put to DEATH...hummm...till death do us part??? The offended spouse in Scripture was offered one more solution, forgiveness, but never the option of divorce.

I believe that this is crucial for us to understand to the depths of our soul. Our society has rationalized sin. There is no dissolving of a union once two become one. This is the danger of pre-marital and extra-marital sex. The heart, soul, and body become intertwined. Covenant begins, This is where it gets simply awesome!

First, *marriage is God's plan.* If you go back again to Genesis, God had a plan in motion. He wanted for marriage to serve man and woman as a means toward intimacy, friendship, companionship, and mutual ministry together. I love that He said, "***It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.***" It is NOT GOD for us to be alone. Our enemy knows this and wages war on our relationships. He hits us hard with anything that can breed isolation, resentment, bitterness, anger, jealousy, and strife. Only as we embrace the preciousness of our relationship, looking for ways to minister to one another and nurture our marriage relationship, will we truly experience the fullness of God's plan.

What do I mean? Marriage is very, very precious. If we have lost that flame or never found it in the first place, it is probably because of the

fierce battle waging against the godly home. God wants for us to come to Him and allow Him to teach us how precious marriage is. God wants for us to come to Him to learn how to LOVE our spouse completely. He wants for us to bring all of our "hang-ups" and hang them up on the cross that His Son died upon for those very sins. Then, He wants for us to step up to the call as co-heirs. It is vital.

In this passage, there are several key phrases that hold the keys to a marriage by God's design.

- ♥ ***It is not good that the man should be alone.*** Marriage is God's special plan for bringing us companionship. God's perfect plan is for us to minister to one another through intimate and exclusive companionship.
- ♥ ***I will make him a help meet for him.*** Marriage is God's means for "completing" man (and woman). The Hebrew words "help meet" really expand God's plan for marriage. **Help** in its verb form means "*to aid or supply that which the individual cannot provide for himself... conveys the idea of aiding someone in need... to help, protect, or aid, succor or fence about...helper*" **Webster's 1828 Dictionary** defines **helper** as... "*one who helps (gives assistance, strength, promotes, delivers from difficulties or distress, advances a purpose, relieves, contributes strength or means,) aids or assists, furnishes or administers a remedy, one who supplies with anything wanted.*" **Meet** is from the Hebrew word meaning "*opposite... part opposite, counterpart, other side... according to opposite of him, meaning that she will complement and correspond*

to him, she is to be equal to and adequate for the man...means to surround (Goes along with Jeremiah 31:22...revolve around, surround or border about on every side), protect, to relieve, to bring deliverance, to join together, to encourage, to lend strength, to assist, to help in time of need, adapts to, to help out of prison." Isn't this cute? Sure excites me as I think of how perfect we are together. Just too cute!

- ♥ **Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother...** Marriage is where a man and woman "pick up the baton" to run life's race together. This requires leaving our childhood families, our identities before marriage, our dependence upon our parents, our independence (singleness) prior to marriage, our past—even with its accomplishments and failures (even SIN!), ...cutting the cord and joining to one another. This one key could revolutionize so many marriages. It could set them free to sizzle! It could bring the freedom that many marriages need in order to be all that God wants. However, this is often the hardest part of marriage for many. We, like Lot's wife, tend to walk away from the altar looking back. We walk away from the marriage altar without severing the ties to our past that bind and eventually choke out the abundant life God has in mind for our marriages. As a result, we are unable to fully cleave together and become one. Oh, that is the next point...

- ♥ **And shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh...** Read this

one thinking that this only meant cuddling up to make love? Whereas this is one part of marriage, there is an even greater meaning to this phrase too. The word **cleave** means "to cement, bond, glue, or cling." The phrase **become one flesh** means "to share all you are, to expand, to be known for, to be known as, to make more complete." Even the word **one** is neat in this context. It means "alike, comfortable, together, inseparable, united, stuck together." Want another key to marriage by God's design? This is crucial! Cleave and becoming one must begin immediately upon leaving. However, it does not happen fully at the altar...or on the honeymoon...or even after 25 years. In fact, there is a continual process that must be led by the Holy Spirit, surrendered to the Holy Spirit In Ephesians 5, we find that marriage is a call to be a "picture" of the relationship between Christ and the church. This is indeed the mystery that the Bible states it is. It is beyond words how a godly marriage "pictures" through-and-through the intimate relationship that we can have spiritually as we become one with Christ. God uses marriage as not only a "picture" of Christ and the Church, but also as a testimony of how HE desires to have intimacy with us. He is certainly not a distant God. He wants to be intimate with us—talking with us, spending time with us, courting us, building special memories, walking alongside of us through the good and bad, becoming one with us so HE and I (and you!) are expanded to become all that He has planned for us to become, on and on! When we see a great marriage, we see a "picture" of the intimacy that we can have in our spiritual lives with our Bridegroom. We see the satisfaction that is available through covenant. Too awesome!

Speaking of covenant, we find in Malachi 2 why the marriage covenant is so important to God. The marriage covenant is a picture of God's work to make us one and to bring us a godly heritage through godly offspring. When we break our vows, we give the picture that there are limits to love...that there is no hope...that there are conditions to love and acceptance. None of these are a reflection of God and His divine love for us. We may get pre-occupied along the way, yet He is always there at any moment's need. We may have other "lovers" along the way, yet He chooses to take us back even before we completely give them up. We may sin to the point that we despair; yet His grace is never limited. He always gives us hope! We may want to come to Him perfect and "fixed" before we "meet" Him, but He comes to us beckoning us to come as we are, asking us to draw from the well of His unconditional, overflowing love and acceptance for us. When we break our vows, we give the world a different picture of relationships. However, when we keep our vows, we offer a true picture of God's plan for relationships. We begin the godly heritage that brings forth godly offspring and continues offering the world a message of God's plan to offer the ultimate soul satisfaction to each and every one of us.

Sure, there are many, many other passages about what marriage is all about. Study. Seek to learn about the abundance that can be yours in this covenant thing!

So, So Sweet...

As for the past 16 years of our marriage, we had no idea what God had in store for us. It is neat how God brought us together and has kept us together. Even though God had brought us to the point that (although wide awake, suffering from insomnia while waiting for God to bring Harold

across my path) He could bring Harold and I together, I really had no idea of the permanency or the awesomeness! I had no idea that we were walking in God's eternal plan for both of us. I had no idea it could be THIS GOOD!

Looking back and ahead on this anniversary weekend, the sweetness and the satisfaction that God has brought us through marriage has come as a gift from God. So many of our hard times have not been because marriage does not work. Rather, it has been as we have gotten in the way. There have been so many times that we (actually I-Cindy) have done marriage the HARD way, not doing and cherishing marriage as such a precious covenant thing!

We have had those struggles of leaving, cleaving, and becoming one. There is just so much involved (as you can see) in that process and so much to always maintain. We have struggled with the differences that make us perfect together, yet that are so hard to understand and accept in our day-to-day journey together! We have found how REAL

communication woes can be. (Still have not got that one down...glad we have another year to work on that! Ha!) We have both struggled with helping each other with our personal battles with our flesh and spirit AND with our personal battle with each other's flesh and spirit! WHEW! We have had the babies in bed with us (Now we tell them that we drool—teens do not like old people drool! It is not really a lie. I still drool over my prince!) and the demands of life that take our time away from our marriage and friendship. We have battled isolation, loneliness (I am a Trooper's wife!), anger, expectations, forgiveness, and even submission (Yep, guess who had a hard time with this one!). Struggles. Yes, we have had them. But, that is not all!

Marriage has brought us a fullness of becoming who we are meant to be. In our marriage, we have been blessed to learn the preciousness of intimacy between man and woman. We have been able to have the opportunity of building one another up, spurring one another on, pouring into one another. When times were the most trying, we have been able to see how God can give us a determination to

continue through the yucky stuff...a forgiveness for the most vile of offenses...a courage to keep on when we are the most exhausted and weary in this journey with each other. We have seen that God can take completely different people and make them daily "become" one.

So, what is this marriage thing? Is it what we expected? Heavens no! It is so much better! It is so worth it all! It is worth the good times and the bad. It is worth the joy and the grief. It has been worth plodding through those tough times. It has been worth every time we have stayed up all night working out our differences. When I look back, I admit that if I had known marriage was all of this, I would have been a scaredy cat--scared of the power of a godly marriage!! But, I also admit that when I look back, I would more than do this thing again. Marriage is priceless. Thank God marriage is forever. And, want to know something else? We are even more in love today, 16 years into this "Sweet" adventure than we were on that day this became a covenant thing!



Want More Teaching On Marriage?

We are proud to bring to you several tapes, tape sets, AND Cindy's Bible Study On Marriage. See the next page for details!

Also! Join with us in prayer for Cindy as she completes her newest book and Bible Study, ***A Crash Course For Those Whose Marriages Are Crashing OR A Lesson In Aerobatics For The Rest of Us.*** We know you will love it!

