

TERESA BRUNSTING

AS FOR ME AND MY MARRIAGE

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Marriage isn't a Fairytale. It's a Covenant

Most of us don't stand at the altar hoping for an average marriage.

We imagine romance, laughter, raising children, growing old together, and living happily ever after. No bride walks down the aisle hoping for misunderstandings, financial stress, illness, difficult seasons, or heartbreak.

Yet somewhere between "I do" and decades later, we discover something important:

Marriage isn't a fairy tale. It's a covenant.

This summer, while attending a wedding, I found myself thinking back to my own wedding day. I remembered standing beside Doug and saying the familiar vows: *in sickness and in health, for better or for worse*. I meant those words, but I couldn't possibly understand them yet.

After more than thirty years of marriage, I do.

We have experienced wonderful seasons, but we have also walked through illness, parenting challenges, disappointment, broken trust, and times when staying connected required far more than romantic feelings.



Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV) says, *"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."* I used to think a strong Christian marriage meant two people who loved each other and loved God. I still believe that. But now I understand how important that third strand becomes when our strength runs thin.

Wedding-day bliss fades. Feelings change. Life happens.

Covenant says, "We're still here. God is still here. Let's keep going."

In my memoir, *Finding Normal in Bipolar*, I write about one of the most painful seasons of our marriage. My husband's affair left me grieving what felt like the death of the marriage I thought I had. There was no funeral and no casserole arrived at the door, but the grief was real.

Our separation affected more than the two of us. Our children were watching.

My son later remembered the arguments and anxiety of the season. That was difficult for me to hear, but it taught me something I will never forget: our children experience the storms in our marriages too, even when we think we're protecting them from the rain.

Thankfully, that wasn't the only thing they saw.

They also saw prayer when we didn't have answers. They saw forgiveness that took time. They saw two imperfect people choose to rebuild.

Our children didn't need parents with a fairy-tale marriage. They needed to see that brokenness didn't have to be the final chapter. That may be one of the greatest legacies a marriage can leave.

Deuteronomy 6: 6-7 tells us to teach God's truth to our children as we go about everyday life. I believe much of that teaching happens without words. Our children watch how we speak to each other, how we handle disappointment, how we apologize, and whether our faith becomes real when life gets hard.

Over the years, another word has become important to me: contentment. Contentment used to sound a little like complacency to me or simply accepting things as they are. I've learned that biblical contentment is something very different.

Paul wrote, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances," (Philippians 4:11 NIV). I love that he said learned.

Contentment doesn't always come naturally. It certainly didn't for me. It doesn't mean pretending everything is fine or accepting what is harmful. Sometimes marriage requires difficult conversations, counseling, boundaries, or asking for help.

Contentment means I can be grateful for what is good while still working on what needs to change.

One of my favorite hymns is, "It Is Well with My Soul." Those words have taken on a deeper meaning as I've grown older. The hymn doesn't say everything in life is well. It says something much more personal. It is well with my soul.

Marriage requires that kind of inner resolve. There will be times when communication isn't well. Finances aren't well. Emotions aren't well, and circumstances aren't well. But God can still be well with my soul.

First Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV) tells us to *"rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances."* Gratitude doesn't erase what is difficult; it reminds us that difficulty isn't the whole story.

After all these years, I think some of the best marriage advice is also the simplest. Choose gratitude. Choose grace. Choose contentment.



THREE DAILY CHOICES

FOR A LASTING MARRIAGE:



Choose Gratitude

Notice what your spouse does right more often than what they do wrong.



Choose Grace

Forgive freely because every marriage needs mercy.



Choose Contentment

Stop chasing a perfect marriage and appreciate the one God is faithfully shaping.

And remember you're on the same team. The healthiest marriages stop asking, "Who's doing more?" and begin asking, "How can I help us win today?"

Looking back, I don't remember every vacation, anniversary, or perfectly planned date night. I remember the moments when we chose to stay when leaving would have been easier. I remember prayers when we didn't have answers. I remember forgiveness that didn't come easily but eventually brought freedom.

Most of all, I remember discovering that love isn't measured by how magical the wedding day was but by how faithfully two people keep choosing each other afterward.

Marriage was never meant to be a fairy tale.

It was meant to reflect the faithful love of Christ: patient, enduring, forgiving, and full of grace. And that kind of love doesn't only strengthen a marriage. It leaves a legacy that lasts long after we're gone.


COLOSSIANS 3:13 (NLT) SAYS:
"Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."

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Teresa Brunsting writes, speaks, and coaches to encourage women in the everyday places where life is real, faith matters, and hope makes a difference.

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