



2024 | Week 35

# This is Married Life

**Blog Contributors:**

**Rey & Annie Abarca**

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*We may have various outlooks and expectations before we declare the phrase, "I do." However, when we confront the reality of the challenges and pains of marriage, along with the trials of life, we might find ourselves asking, "Is there really a reward in this? If so, is the reward worth the risk?"*

*This week, we'll reflect on how the realities of life and marriage have impacted us. Is there truly great "gain" that comes from a little "pain"? What does true life really mean? Furthermore, what does it mean to have a true marriage?*

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## DAY 1

Last week's topic presented a valuable opportunity to review wedding vows. In those 5-day posts, we encouraged many to reflect on this on a personal level and took a glimpse at how vows have evolved in modern wedding ceremonies. We also considered the potential impact of today's persistently high divorce rates. It's a sad and surprising discovery that studies show Protestants, a religious group that should be more aware and committed to these vows, have the highest divorce rates in the U.S. today [1]. While this data can sound discouraging, our prayer in shedding light on these facts is to raise awareness. We hope that many married couples (or individuals) claiming to be Christ followers

will turn this awareness into intentional action because we have a living hope—Jesus Christ.

This week's discussion serves as an extension of our previous topic due to its profound relevance. We pray that this conversation sparks interest and provides valuable learning opportunities for us all. May it further extend our awareness of the fact that we need a Savior and that we should live by this truth.

The main point we'll tackle this week is the reality of pain and challenges in life and marriage. How do these experiences impact our perceptions of life and our commitment to marital relationships? Just like many, we have our own fair share of painful and challenging experiences from a young age. We didn't grow up in a very comfortable environment, and we witnessed how life's struggles affected the marital relationships around us. Although we remain hopeful of having our own family, we can't deny that observing the painful and challenging relationships of others, particularly our parents, has impacted us in some way.

Indeed, we won't be fully aware of how pain affects us unless we take the time to pause and assess ourselves. Let's also acknowledge that by nature, we humans tend to be prideful, defensive, and often deny these effects. If we continue to move forward without giving much attention to these "effects," we will find ourselves repeating behaviors that lead to conflicts and further consequences.

When we explore studies on how people today view a "fulfilling life," we anticipate rationales that project a controlled risk of experiencing pain or challenging situations. However, we were surprised to find how these ideas play out in today's beliefs and faith standings.

The PEW Research Center's report, "Public Has Mixed Views on the Modern American Family," includes a survey asking Americans how important various factors are in living a fulfilling life today. This survey considers religious groups, and we did not expect to see a unified result among them.

Sadly, the top five reasons reveal that "Being Married" ranks last—even among Protestants. The top reason, "Having a job or career they enjoy," illustrates a

disconnection in defining what "life" truly means, particularly for us Protestants who believe that true life is found in Jesus Christ. This survey results somehow substantiate and connect strongly with another study showing that the divorce rate is highest among this group, which we discussed in last week's topic.

*PEW Survey: Top 5 Factors to a Fulfilling Life [2]*

1. *Having a job or career they enjoy*
2. *Having close friends*
3. *Having children*
4. *Having a lot of money*
5. *Being married*

It is certainly disheartening. Yet our prayer is for us—especially those committed to being followers of Christ—to bring this burden to the feet of Christ. Our desire to live under God's authority requires more attention and intentionality now than ever. This alarming situation is not just for us today but also a cry for help for future generations.

Keep Journeying with Christ!

Your Fellow Couple,

**Rey & Annie**

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## DAY 2

Yesterday, we had a good glimpse into how many people today view a "fulfilling life." According to PEW Research, many in the USA identified these five important factors for a fulfilling life (ranked): (1) Having a job or career they enjoy, (2) Having close friends, (3) Having children, (4) Having a lot of money, and (5) Being married. The surprising aspect is the unified results among religious groups, particularly Protestants. While we want to approach understanding for every individual participating in this survey, we cannot deny the high possibility that these perspectives stem from reformed views shaped by experienced or observed "pain."

We, too, have our stake in discovering the effects of accumulated painful and challenging experiences. We

didn't realize how those past experiences molded our behavior and perspectives, especially regarding life and marriage. Little did we know that we were also putting ourselves into circumstances where we thought we were managing risks and controlling situations to protect ourselves from future pain. We may have remained hopeful in life and in having our own family. Yet, that hope was anchored in control rather than in the living One who is the true provider of it—Jesus Christ.

In our upcoming book, we share some of our painful experiences from growing up. We also discuss how we found ourselves on edge, losing control of our once "managed, fulfilled life." At that point, we became equally committed to renewing our faith in God by accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. Our hopelessness, which stemmed from losing control, led us to Christ for help and deliverance. We hold on to the truth that Christ is the real source of true life and true marriage.

***"...I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."\* (John 10:10b)***

Even after such acceptance and allowing ourselves to be "transformed," Christ did not let us move forward without addressing our lack of awareness regarding those "reformed perspectives and behaviors." Little did we know that acceptance was just the beginning of a healing process—one that includes the revelation of how broken and damaged our hearts truly are. It wasn't an easy revelation, and in each moment that He shines a light on this, we hold tighter to Him. It is during those times that we learn how to truly depend on Him.

If you're like us and think that Christianity offers immediate resolution to painful situations through deliverance as we expect, that's not how it works. Indeed, Christ is our source of true life, but He does not define "abundant" in that verse as merely "doing good" or always being in comfortable and favored circumstances. "Abundant" means finding contentment and fulfillment because of His presence in our lives, even amid the painful challenges surrounding us. As C.S. Lewis pointed out in his book, "The Problem with Pain," we struggle because we're not fully aware that there's a pain issue, and we often don't understand how to navigate it while being anchored in Christ.

*"Christianity is not a system into which we have to fit the awkward fact of pain; it is itself one of the awkward facts that must be fitted into any system we create. In a sense, it creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think is a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving."\* (C.S. Lewis, "The Problem of Pain")*

We can only navigate pain, and keep forward to a "true life" and "true marriage," if such a journey is consistently making a choice that our contentment and fulfillment is in Christ Jesus.

Keep Journeying with Christ!

Your Fellow Couple,

**Rey & Annie**

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## DAY 3 | For Husbands

We may not be aware of how much impact unresolved pain has had on our hearts, influencing our minds and actions—pain that accumulates unprocessed over life's circumstances. Because we're not fully aware of this reality, we often develop anesthetizing behaviors instead of intentionally processing our feelings, unconsciously extending this impact to our marriages—affecting our spouses.

In our (upcoming) book, "Couple's Journey: Restore, Relearn, Rejoice," I discuss how my awareness of well-being was intertwined with the painful experiences caused by my father. It wasn't just the abuse; I also witnessed the effects of his wrongdoing on my mother. So, when they decided to separate, I found the courage to live despite my very young age. Although support was available, I felt a deep sense of aloneness in my heart. Such experiences did not completely extinguish my hope of having a family of my own, but the unprocessed pain led me to unhealthy habits and behaviors, resulting in two failed marriages.

It was only God who revealed how broken and damaged my heart was. Facing this truth was not easy (especially for a military man like me), but it was a significant turning point to recognize that I needed a Savior and living hope—Jesus Christ. Indeed, only God knows what lies at the core of our hearts, and He is the only One with the power to direct them.

***"The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes. Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts." (Proverbs 21:1-2)***

Although I achieved a genuine realization of my need for healing, I am still unaware of how much healing I actually need. My lack of awareness regarding how pain shaped my behavior and perspectives has led me to a journey of discovering, seeking God's truth, being challenged in my responses to those truths, and relying closely on His guidance for moment-to-moment choices and deliverance.

When Annie and I noticed how many of our conflicts persisted despite our attempts and commitment to putting God at the center of our marriage, our moral blindness led us on a further painful journey. Little did I know that to fully embrace God's transformation, I needed healing. This healing did not begin until I recognized how damaged I truly was.

I am a man of few words, and addressing matters (especially family concerns) was not something I experienced with my parents. I grew up witnessing frustrations and fights. My responses to life's challenges and disappointments often began with justifications that evolved into selfishness, which further distanced me from facing my pain. When Annie and I found ourselves in conflict, our attempts to discuss issues often led to spoken words that caused more pain and prevented us from reaching an understanding.

We didn't recognize this pattern until we became intentional about surrendering ourselves to God. My role as a husband is to love my wife just as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). We are instructed to live with our wives in an understanding way and to show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life so that our prayers will not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7). The Biblical

way to treat my wife and fulfill my role is far from what I've observed in this world. The love and understanding I need to share can only be experienced through Christ and His grace.

Thank God for such grace! It becomes my driving force to face the truth about my own brokenness and brings encouragement as I consciously choose to focus on Christ. I still face temptations and sometimes find myself triggered or in conflict with Annie, but this time we both know that we must anchor our responses in Christ. It's not easy, and it's a continuous process of restoration and relearning. I'm grateful to be journeying through this new life under His transforming hand, hand-in-hand with my wife, Annie. We are constantly thankful to God for how He has turned our marriage into a discipleship journey.

So, is it worth it for me to continue to have hope in this life despite the pain brought on by challenges? Yes! Every brokenness we face in this imperfect world is an opportunity to learn and live according to God's attributes. It's not about chasing the "perfect picture life" that is commonly promoted on social media today. Ultimately, it's about continuously experiencing God's presence in the adventurous life He has gifted us.

***'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ' Ephesians 5:25***

'You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. ' 1 Peter 3:7

Keep journeying with Christ Jesus.

Your Fellow Husband,  
**Rey**

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## DAY 4 | For Wives

Rey raised an interesting question during our discussion of this week's topic. He asked, "Why don't many (or very few) intentionally discuss their heart (or heart's condition)?" I remember that this question came up in

our discussions while working on our book. Yet this time, it seems that Rey's question is not directly seeking a response; rather, it serves as a reminder of reality. It's like an indirect question: "Could you remind me again why many are still not openly discussing the heart's condition?"

The inevitable life challenges, particularly in the realm of marriage, truly affect how we process our emotions—the function of our hearts. If we're not careful in finding good references to process these emotions, we'll surely fall into Satan's temptation. Next thing we know, our perspectives and actions may respond in ways that are not pleasing to God—far from Christlikeness and the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Surely, we can identify numerous factors in observing others that could sustain this question. However, it's more appropriate to look at ourselves, as we surely have a stake in this "heart's condition." Our discussion concluded with two main factors: (1) we don't understand "heart" from a Biblical perspective, and (2) we're not aware of our own heart's condition. Our separation from God leads us to a wrong perception of the heart, far from how the Bible defines it, and we rest on thoughts that justify our satisfaction based on our perceptions—particularly the emotions it produces. This ignorance leads to moral blindness, which hinders us from being fully aware of the true condition of our hearts and how they respond to life's challenges and difficulties.

It wasn't too long ago that Rey and I went through a season of examining this matter more deeply. Not until God allowed us to endure a very difficult period did we become more conscious of the need to be intentional in checking our own heart's condition. Rey and I are not strangers to life's difficulties. We both have our own stakes in this reality, yet for a long time, we've been unconscious of how to rightfully process how these challenges have affected us—our hearts. Instead, we've been busy surviving, finding ways for temporary healing, and having enough courage to move forward.

When I saw Rey struggling with the weight of such pain and referring to God's righteousness, I found myself in a difficult condition as well. I felt discouraged that my role as his wife seemed ineffective, but God's grace and guidance through His Word led me to see this season as a

learning opportunity for deeper understanding. The battle that brought Rey so much pain, confusion, and anger was God's way of capturing my attention regarding how to love him and fulfill my design as his wife. Because this time, Rey is not just my husband and the father of our children; he is my fellow disciple—a fellow follower of Christ. This aspect adds more layers and depth to how we should view the reality of life's challenges.

As a part of God's family, we're commanded not just to love God but also to love others. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes it clear that a neighbor is anyone in our path who needs our help, whether we're capable of assisting or not (Luke 10:29-37). But what if such a "neighbor" is our fellow disciple?

In Thomas Tarrants' article, "Loving God and Neighbor," he raised a very good point that helped me understand this concern and how it led to a better "understanding." He noted:

"When our neighbor is a fellow disciple in the family of God, the standard rises to a higher level. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus said to His followers, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35). He went on to clarify the implications of this love: 'Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). Far from being an abstract concept or momentary sentiment, this moves us to concrete, practical love. This kind of love shapes understanding."

We (wives) tend to fall into Satan's temptation to demand understanding from our husbands, often citing 1 Peter 3:7, not realizing that in doing so, we're no longer anchored in the desire to obey God's commands. The focus and direction shift to our self—twisting God's words to sustain our selfish desires. To help us avoid this temptation, we may need a stronger reminder of our initial role as a "suitable helper (helpmate)" to our husbands.

So, on a practical note, instead of twisting Bible verses to demand "understanding," maybe it's time to assess whether our actions and methods of communication are

infused with God's grace. This will clearly demonstrate that we stand with our husbands in reaching understanding.

Grounding ourselves in God's design will help us truly walk hand-in-hand with our husbands, engage in conversations that lead to understanding, and always be ready to comfort them. It's not easy, as we surely face our own difficulties, but this God-given role is possible when we constantly remind ourselves of Christ's example and seek the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, keep journeying with Christ.

Your Fellow Wife,

**Annie**

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## DAY 5

We could have different reasons for finding a space of gratefulness in this life. However, these reasons may align with the boundaries we have established over time as we witness the realities of life and the challenges that come with it. Little did we know how much we were impacted by the pain from the challenges and brokenness we observed, as well as from our own experiences. Sadly, our moral blindness toward pain begins as we fail to acknowledge and understand that there's a "problem with pain." This blindness dangerously affects how we view relationships, particularly marriage.

This week, we took time to reflect on where we stand in terms of the "impact of pain." We pray that you had valuable reflections, as these could inform future changes you might want to consider.

We have observed the results of many people's perceptions today regarding what constitutes a fulfilling life. There's nothing inherently wrong with those five factors, but problems arise when we don't anchor them in God. These could be part of the blessings or stewardship that He entrusted to us, but removing God from the equation can turn these wonderful opportunities into idols. An additional layer of danger

manifests when we mix these priorities, allowing them to replace God at the top position and authority in our lives.

*According to PEW Research 2023, the percentages of people who say each of the following is extremely/very important for living a fulfilling life (with reference to religious groups in the US) are as follows:*

- *Having a job or career they enjoy*
- *Having close friends*
- *Having children*
- *Having a lot of money*
- *Being married*

We have found ourselves falling into the trap of these ranked factors, which we used to believe were important for a "fulfilling life." In fact, we've lived by this belief for a long time, and the danger lies in thinking we have God by our side. During this journey, we were unaware of how such perspectives affected our behavior and attitude until God softened our hearts as we reflected on the significance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Indeed, we can only find true life in Jesus Christ, and His intent for us to have an "abundant" life is to realize that this life is nothing without Him (John 10:10). All authority was given to Him by God the Father (Matthew 28:18), enabling us to obey God's commands anchored in grace, mercy, and love.

We cannot disregard the pain brought on by the imperfection of this world and a life that was once separated from God. We must recognize this reality and anchor our understanding in Christ. If we are failing to do so, we will continue moving forward with moral blindness, making repentance impossible. Whether this pain is experiential or observed in others, or even if you grew up blessed and did not experience much pain, there remains the reality of the "problem with pain."

We were lost too, and we experienced the consequences of initially avoiding this truth. In doing so, we led ourselves to pride. We were too prideful to recognize our damaged hearts, much less our genuine need for the Savior and the consistent choice of Jesus Christ. Don't allow this to cloud your navigation through pain and life with false modesty or religiosity. God desires our hearts. Surrendering our hearts involves recognizing that the human heart is (1) evil (Genesis 6:5, Genesis 8:21) and (2)

deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). This surely requires regular heart checks, dependence on Christ's example, and the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a continuous process!

If there's one thing we encourage many couples today to consider when navigating this "heart issue," we would recommend checking out these two books:

- "The Problem with Pain" by C.S. Lewis
- "The Emotionally Healthy Marriage: Growing Closer by Understanding Each Other" by Dr. David Stoop and Dr. Jan Stoop

The balance of theological insights from C.S. Lewis and the practical applications by Drs. Stoop has truly helped us gain understanding and change our course in navigating the problem with pain.

Keep journeying with Christ.

Your Fellow Couple,

***Rey & Annie***

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## NOTES

[1] PEW Research Center, Marital Status. PEW Research Center's Religion and Public Life Profile

[2] PEW Research Center. Survey of U.S. Adults Conducted April 10-16, 2023.





Let's embark on a comprehensive learning experience with this week's topic by following the **D.R.A.S.H. - 5 Steps of Learning Method!**

#### ***Step 1 | Discover the Truth***

- Read the following verses. What did you learn about Jesus Christ, true life, man's heart, understanding, and roles in marriage? John 10:10, Proverbs 21:1-2, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Peter 3:7.
- Check the other verses mentioned in the five posts and list your learnings for each verse.

#### ***Step 2 | Reflect and Meditate on the Truth***

- Based on this week's main discussion about the reality of pain from challenges in life and marriage, as well as the truths that resonated with you, what actions do you plan to take in the coming days? Set a meaningful goal that supports your spouse and strengthens your marital relationship.

#### ***Step 3 | Apply the Truth***

- What old habits or practices do you need to change as a result of your discoveries and understanding of this week's discussion? How do you plan to implement these changes?

#### ***Step 4 | Share***

- Using a storytelling concept, compose a short story about how you will share the truths you

discovered in this week's topic with your spouse or other married individuals journeying with you. You may want to consider a 1-minute or 5-minute storytelling technique.

You can use the following guiding questions in your composition:

1. What truths did you discover and reflect on in this week's topic?
2. How are these truths and reflections related to yourself and your current marital status?
3. What actions do you plan to take in the coming days that relate to this week's learning?

#### ***Step 5 | Help in Navigating the Truth***

- Besides your spouse, identify another person (or member/s of your small group) who will journey alongside you as you take intentional actions based on this week's learning. Consider what additional help you may need, such as further discussion or a regular prayer partner.

We pray that you encounter God through this week's topic. May His grace turn your learning experience into a transformative journey, leading to testimonies of breakthroughs that further strengthen your walk with Christ Jesus!

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## Let us know how this guide has helped you!

May this study tool be effective and helpful for every fellow seeker and believer who is intentionally journeying with Jesus Christ. We would be grateful to hear how this tool has significantly impacted your journey and your relationships with your spouse and others. Please share your feedback or experiences through this [link](#) (or scan QR Code)



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