

Your Husband Can't Make You Happy

And that's the way God designed it.

[Sheila Wray Gregoire](#)

My husband and I have been married for 24 years—and happily married for 20. Those first few years were awful. Sex was awful. School was stressful. Money was tight.

Yet after years of tears and clenched fists and wondering, *Why doesn't he just get me?* I finally figured out an important truth: *My husband can't make me happy.* And I'm not sure God ever designed him to.

That's because happiness is based on circumstances. Yet circumstances are the one part of our lives over which we have virtually no control. Even if "the pursuit of happiness" gives the impression of lacing up those running shoes and training for a marathon, it's actually quite a passive endeavor. Since you can't control circumstances, pursuing happiness means constantly scanning your surroundings to see if they make you happy. And as soon as you start doing that, you'll find all the reasons why your circumstances don't measure up.

God never intended us to be passive. He made us to actively engage this world and to shine in it. So perhaps we need another route to happiness in marriage—one that is far more likely to get us to the finish line. And it starts not with fixing our husbands but with fixing our own hearts.

Pursue Joy

I think of happiness as quite distinct from joy or contentment. Joy looks upward, contentment looks inward, and happiness looks outward. Joy says, "[How great is our God!](#)" Contentment says, "[It is well with my soul.](#)" And happiness says, "[All things wise and wonderful](#), the Lord God made them all." But you can't appreciate what's outside of you until you're at peace with what's inside. And that requires focusing on God first.

Psalm 37:4 gives a similar roadmap: "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (ESV). This doesn't mean that when we delight ourselves in God he gives us everything we want; it means that when we delight ourselves in God, he actually *changes* what we want. Instead of saying, "I'll be happy as soon as my husband _____ (fill in the blank)," we start looking with gratitude at what God has done for us. That makes us see our husbands with different eyes too.

Take Responsibility for Your Own Happiness

Running after God first was a lesson that Julie, now 43, had to learn in her early days as a mom. She wasn't prepared for life with two active, health-challenged little boys who didn't sleep. She was desperate. But her husband was just as out of his element as she was!

In *Men Are Like Waffles, Women Are Like Spaghetti*, Bill and Pam Farrel explain that one of men's motivators is being able to fix things. But what if his wife has a problem he can't fix? Too often he'll retreat because no guy likes to feel inadequate.

As Julie's mood deteriorated, her husband did indeed pull back. One day Julie realized nothing was going to change until her attitude did.

She jumped on the Joy track and started looking for ways to bring God into her daily life. She began to conversationally pray "[without ceasing](#)." She turned to Scripture not to fix her problems but just to see Jesus. And she began to fill her life with things that refreshed her that she had let slip since she had become a mom.

She started going for bike rides again. She began to write. And these things helped bring that even keel she craved.

Most of all, she realized this: *My happiness is a gift I can give my husband.* When she pursued joy and found happiness, she handed him a gift because she was saying to him, “You don’t have to fix anything. You’re off the hook.” When we look to God first, we free our husbands to be who God made them to be, not who we want them to be. And that changes the whole dynamic in the relationship.

Deal with Sin

Julie learned that happiness was out of reach until she dealt with her own stuff. But happiness is out of reach until we deal with our marriage stuff too. Jesus wants to bring wholeness to our lives and our marriages, and that wholeness can only come when we deal with our issues honestly.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9, NIV). We’re to *make* peace, not just *keep* peace. And in our marriages, too many of us keep the peace. We’re so afraid of conflict that we try to keep issues from reaching the surface. Yet lack of conflict is not the same as real peace—where we’re united in thought and mind ([1 Corinthians 1:10](#)). Real peace only comes when we stop hiding from reality and we bring our mess to God—even if that means rocking the boat.

When Anna found pornography on her husband Paul’s computer on the night of their seventh anniversary, she could have ignored it. But she didn’t. She called her brother, and he came over and helped Anna talk with Paul. They arranged for Paul to find an accountability partner. And Paul, who had been struggling with a secret sin for almost two decades, was finally put on the road to healing. As he found freedom from porn, Anna finally found that thing that “she couldn’t put her finger on” that was missing from her marriage.

Our culture teaches that “love should last a lifetime” with relatively little effort on our part. If we have to work at it, then it’s not true love, right?

Yet Jesus gives us a different route to happiness. It’s not to aim for it; it’s to aim for *him* instead. That’s not passively waiting for someone to make our life better; it’s actively pursuing God’s best for us, for our husbands, and for our marriage. Even if it’s hard. And even if it rocks the boat.

I learned a long time ago that my husband can’t make me happy. But I have a very happy marriage. And so I’ll keep running after Jesus because that’s the only way I can really experience my husband’s love too.

Sheila Wray Gregoire’s latest book, [9 Thoughts That Can Change Your Marriage](#), challenges some of the Christian pat answers we often hear about marriage and points us to Jesus in the midst of our mess instead. A prolific author and speaker, she blogs at [ToLoveHonorAndVacuum.com](#).

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