

CARING FOR MARRIAGE NEWSLETTER



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Jump for Joy

Lori Odhner

Too bad this couple is so serious . . .

I went to their wedding and the minister talked about what a momentous step they were taking, and how they needed to understand the gravity of the situation. I bet they remembered this moment when he talked about big steps.

Then he smiled. Everyone who knows them at all has seen their playfulness.

The program they gave to everyone expressed it well.

“Fall in love. Stay in love.” Sounds like a good plan to me. Sure there are details to be worked out, but knowing the general direction is a terrific start.

Lots of folks packed into the church for this joyful event. Mind you they did have a wedding party of upwards of thirty five, so they knew at least that many would show up. But lots more did too, like me, who is only a cousin-in-law-once-removed.

Why do we go? There seem to be a myriad of reasons.

First of all it saves on postage when you can hand deliver the wedding gift, especially if you picked something heavy like a five-piece fireplace tool set, or granite bookends. And there is always a chance you might get into one of the slew of photographs snapped at the reception. That can make you famous on Facebook anyway, especially if you get tagged.

But I think the draw is deeper than that. Being near a couple who say their vows like they mean it can jump your own sluggish battery faster than a pair of red and black cables. And somehow our presence ignites them as well. I can't explain it, since the power goes both ways. I barely passed high school physics but wouldn't that make an engine blow up?

I get it that some people choose to slip out of the limelight and elope. But I am enormously grateful to couples who believe they have enough joy to share with four hundred people. ■



When there is love in a marriage, there is harmony in the home; when there is harmony in the home, there is contentment in the community; when there is contentment in the community, there is prosperity in the nation; when there is prosperity in the nation, there is peace in the world. — Chinese proverb



Catching Shadows

John Odhner

As a child I sometimes played shadow tag. A group of us would run around on a sunny day trying to step on each other's shadows. Whoever was "it" would gleefully stomp on the ground where a friend's shadow was falling, with a shout of "Now you're it!" We could never hold our companion's shadows down with our feet. They would slip away, taunting, "You didn't touch my shadow! See, it's over here!" Chasing shadows can be a lot of fun.

Shadows are so lifelike (they run and

PHOTO: CHARA ODHNER

dance) yet so unreal (they have no substance; they are made of nothing).

As an adult I sometimes find myself chasing shadows when I am looking for happiness. I see a beautiful figure leaping on the grass, but when I try to embrace it, my hands grasp at nothing and it slips away. So many experiences promise happiness. I imagine I would be happy if only the people around me were nice people. Or if I were just in a beautiful place, like Hawaii. Or maybe parties, food and entertainment will do it for me. Of course I would love to win the lottery! Do people become happy who pray a lot and think about God all the time? Or will visiting friends and family bring real happiness? What about finding the perfect partner, true love?

I have experienced some of those things. Too often when I am feeling anxious I try to assuage those feelings by eating. And it works! I really don't feel the sadness or resentment when I am spooning a quart of TJ's Coffee Bean Blast ice cream onto my tongue. The only problem is that the second I stop spooning, the taste and the pleasure slip away like a shadow from under my feet, or like the wisps of a half-forgotten dream. And the anxiety is still there just like it was before. Except that now I feel anxious *and* bloated. Bleaugh!

I have been in some beautiful places (though never to Hawaii) and I have found that environmental beauty does not cause happiness. When my family and I visited the Grand Canyon, my wife hardly saw it at all, because she happened to have appendicitis, and the outward beauty could not penetrate the inward physical pain. If I approach the world with emotional pain, the results are similar. A little grain of sand in my eye blots out the whole panorama, and likewise a little contempt for my neighbor makes the whole neighborhood seem repulsive.

Catching Shadows - *continued*

I have tried to find happiness through prayer and found that the Lord often seems to care more about long-term happiness than short-term happiness—that the path to happiness often involves compassion, and the path to compassion often involves suffering.

I even found my true love, the perfect partner, and the more I expect her to make me happy, the sooner my expectations will be disappointed, because she simply does not have the power to change my feelings.

So chasing happiness is like chasing shadows—they are very real, but even if you can catch up to them, there is no way that you can grab hold of them and keep them from slipping away.

Happiness is actually the shadow of love and service. Whenever we express our love by actually helping other people, happiness dances after like a shadow after a joyful child. If you take the hand of that joyful child, or scoop her up in your arms, you will have embraced her shadow as well, but if you drop the child to catch the shadow, both will soon be gone.

The work of showing compassion is much more tangible than happiness. It is something you can find and hold onto. When your aim is to lovingly serve other people, our arms, hands

and schedules are too filled with giving and serving to be able to grasp at shadows. Yet joy shadows every step and gesture of those caring actions.

Shadows disappear, of course, when we are in darkness or night. Selfishness, anger, greed and lust create a darkness in which no real joy can be observed, but only the twisted pleasure of enjoying others' suffering. If you are being of service but not getting any joy out of it, perhaps you are not in the light. When we serve with a sense of martyrdom, or with resentment, or just for the reward, pay or recognition, just enough to get by, cutting corners and using half measures, we are too much in the dark to see a shadow or feel the joy of selfless compassion.

The teachings for the New Church tell us that to love is to feel the joy of another person as joy in oneself (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47). Since everyone in heaven is focused on other people's happiness, not their own, they share their joy with each other, and joy increases.



PHOTO: CHARA ODHNER

[Heavenly joy] is the pleasure of doing something that is of use to oneself and to others, and the pleasure in being useful takes its essence from love and its expression from wisdom. The pleasure in being useful, springing from love through wisdom, is the life and soul of all heavenly joys. (*Married Love* 5 [3])

“There is no goodwill apart from acts of goodwill. Goodwill is a matter of practice or service. Anyone who loves the neighbor as oneself feels no delight in goodwill except as a practice or service; so a life of goodwill is a life of useful services. All heaven has this kind of life, for the Lord’s realm, because it is the realm of mutual love, a realm of useful services. So every pleasure that comes out of goodwill has its delight from usefulness. The more important the service is, the greater the delight is. Therefore angels have happiness from the Lord according to the essential purpose and quality of their usefulness.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 997)

We often can’t become happy just by deciding to be happy, but regardless of whether we *feel* happy, regardless of whether our situation is ideal, regardless of what the people around us are like, we can make choices that bring happiness, even though aiming for happiness directly doesn’t work. We can choose not to do hurtful things that destroy others’ happiness. We can choose to listen to others and thoroughly hear their grief and joy before drawing attention to our own. We can choose to be devoted to compassionate service, in our work, at home, and in our community and volunteer work.



PHOTO: JENNY STEIN

Walk the path compassion and happiness will shadow every step. ■

from an avid reader of MARRIAGE MOATS

Lori, I wanted to thank you for Marriage Moats, as you have made a difference in my heart and in my relationships and in my life. I look forward to reading these in my email box. There are times that I am not able to keep up but I filter them in my mailbox and I go to the “love” category and read the ones I have not yet read to give me a little more needed sparkle to my day and my life, especially when I am filled with doubts about my current situation.

I do feel like you have supplied me with the glue to keep holding on to my husband of 13 years (together 17) and to remind me what marriage means, as I have felt like I don’t have support or a great model in my life to show me what it means. I am in need of a marriage mentor and so thankful that you can fill that role through an email. I can relate to so many of your stories and posts, that it really does lift me up and keep me going.

So I thank you for this as I just realized that you don’t see the impact that you make upon others lives. I am thankful that you have the strength and confidence to share so much of your love and compassion to others. I am also grateful to see what marriage looks like...as I’m not always sure what it should look like as it is harder than I ever imagined it would be.

For me parenting and homeschooling is a piece of cake, but marriage is the challenge. I like new adventures and excitement...and that is hard to stir up with someone you have been with so long...there is a lot for me to look at and sit with. And try to get a little bit more understanding of me, him and us. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are important and what you do and who you are truly makes a difference. – A

Alone Now

Lori Odhner

PHOTO BY ANDY SULLIVAN



My neighbor will die in a few days. His wife will never sit across the table from his smiling face again. The pain in the house is thick, yet somehow the tenderness is too. How is it that both feelings, which seem to be opponents in the war for our attention, can fill the space with no halves? How can any of the trail of people who come and go all day and into the night plunge out again into a world that pretends that who wins the Super Bowl even matters?

It is hard to do normal things when someone you love is leaving, or has already gone. I want to sit silently in a chair and listen to the rain, appropriately crying on our street. It rained the day of my mother's funeral too. I wonder if there are microscopic condolences sent in each drop from the sky, from the angels who defy my emptiness with their anticipation. Maybe if I gather the drops together into a pool big enough to cover me it will wash away the burning.

God tells me that He is preparing a place for this cherished person whom I already know and the angels are eagerly waiting to welcome. But I was not done loving these people. I do not want to give them up yet.

The problem with the rain now is that the earth is so saturated already it cannot soak up more water. That is not the rain's fault. I feel too saturated with sadness to absorb more, so I let it spill out onto the floor. Marriage brings with it the threat of loss. Our hearts are not made of velcro, easily attached and just as easily released. We stick more tightly than that, with a million tiny stitches from each shared moment and warm embrace. The music we shared, the foods we savored in each other's company, the small kindnesses given are the threads that bind us into one garment. To be ripped apart by death or separation is to feel torn, and watch our insides explode apart. But I don't see any other way. To not love is to miss being sewn together at all.

There is fear and grief in all love...fear that it may perish and grief if it does. Conjugal Love 371



PHOTO BY CHARA ODHNER

“Alone Now” originally appeared as a *Marriage Moat*. Lori received several longer email responses:

* I feel the same way Lori. “Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.” (Shakespeare?). It’s even better to know the wait until we’re reunited is temporary. I remember how it felt when my husband died. It felt as if my heart had been torn out of me; the pain is still there but the love for him has increased significantly. My two daughters-in-law believe Grandpa is with their kids. I’m so grateful for that. -- JC

* Dear Lori, Your message today is bringing these thoughts to me...Like stepping stones to cross a hazardous rushing stream, or like the white pebbles Hansel and Gretel dropped so they could find their way home in the faint moonlight, my husband and I leave each other tokens of dear kind sweetness here and there throughout the day and year so we can find our way back to the tender moments during dark times. Examples:

His first words to me many mornings are: “I found her first!” (or a variation) as I reply “I’m so glad I *found* you!”

Then there is the breakfast message (every day I take one bite of the corner of his jam toast). He puzzles over this like a brand new discovery: “Hmmm... That’s funny, I’m sure I bought symmetrical bread *this* time, and yet, here’s this funny shape again!”

The good-bye moment when I say “I miss you enormously... I’ll blow you kisses...Come back soon...Be safe!”

The hello moment when we make eye contact and I exclaim with a tone that expresses relief after great longing, “My *Husband!*”

The supper-time moment when he very simply says, “Thank-you” to me for every-single-meal!!! And the bedtime moment when he says quietly, “Have a good sleep” (which, for me, is a high priority but a rare treat).

Like holding onto the banister while managing unfamiliar stairs, these predictable messages of blessing convey stability and commitment even though every other detail of the day might be fraying erosion or reoccurring endurance test or a maze of unanswered questions or piled up with unsolved problems or just plain-old-plain-old.

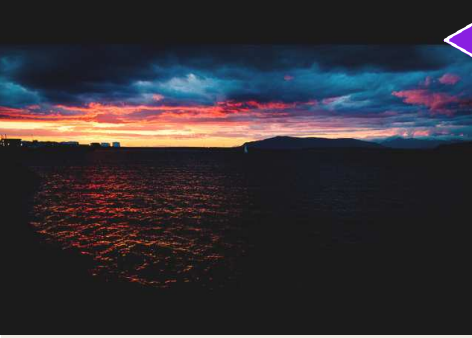
Time passes. Uncertainties linger. No one knows the outcome of today’s circumstances. Yet, these so-soft repeated tokens in the space and time between us, so small and so intangible, build, protect and endure like a solid foundation, shield and monument. -- ED

There is such pleasure in long-term marriage that I really would hate to be my age and not have had a long-term marriage. Remember, sustaining a pleasurable, long-term marriage takes effort, deliberateness and an intention to learn about one another. In other words, marriage is for grown-ups.

Cokie Roberts, From This Day Forward

Marriage Moats

PHOTOS BY JENNY STEIN, CHARA ODHNER,
RHYS ASPLUNDH AND ANDY SULLIVAN



Change

I had to make a new rule for me about a month ago. I'm not allowed to bring up events during an argument that are over a year old, because of what you are saying here. I use the past to try and prove my husband can not change...he has changed soooo much but when my feelings are hurt I refuse to admit it. It is so toxic to our marriage for me to rehash stuff that is 16 years

old and has no relevance to today. It has helped a lot. My hope is eventually I'm not allowed to bring up anything over a week old. People change and we have to stop making them pay for things they did before they chose to make better choices. I love reading your daily

Repetition

Well put as usual! In my experience, the small gestures of kindness and love that we kept up as habits even when we didn't feel like it, have welded us together in a surprising way. The 12-step slogan to "act as if" really has power. -- L



Always Watching

This reminds me of when my daughter was little and took a photo of me when I was scolding her (before church, no less!)...well, I didn't realize it until I developed the film - boy! that wasn't a pretty sight, I must admit. I still cringe at the thought. Children are definitely the Lord's little mirrors :-)- LM

Wasbands

Beautifully said. Thank you for sharing and caring. - LE

For daily marriage messages
go to caringformarriage.org.



Love Letters -- Beautiful rendering of a marriage story – KL

- My favorite teacher. I always made an appointment to see her when I was in BA. Thanks – ED
- Thanks for that today, Lori! (Did you realize when you chose to do that today that it was their daughter's birthday?) – JC
- I'll never forget her speaking of those letters to our group: that's an indelible memory. We wondered if she was leaving this world then! But No - we got to really feel that love between the 2 of them through all the years since he'd died and now she's left this world too. So lovely to picture them together again... and we miss her in our group – JC
- Dear Lori, ...and now she has gone to meet again her good, loving man. This brought tears to my eyes. As it happens, I'm about to clear out our loft space – I will keep any love letters I find; I know there are some up there. Thank you. -- DM



BOOK REVIEW

The Wednesday Letters

by Jason Wright

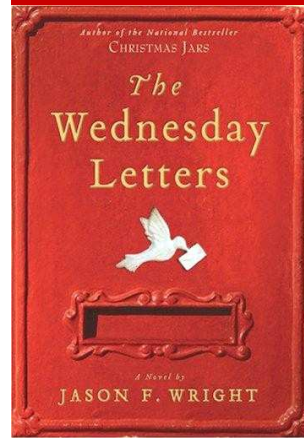
REVIEW BY LORI ODHNER

It is part of how we craft a life, to watch and listen to other people's lives. This novel is a good one to add to that album. The marriage between the main characters, which we only learn about through their children and friends, and the Wednesday letters, is one of deep commitment. We see the end at the very beginning, when they die in each other's arms, and know with certainty that they had an enduring relationship infused with trust. What we learn later is that that trust went through an intense test, bringing enormous self sacrifice.

I savored the wisdom of two parents trying to guide adult children, and the effect those parents had on their children even after their death. The author tells a story with people who are believable, loveable, forgivable. Those children change in the course of the book, and we are along for the journey. Their parents too changed dramatically over the course of a marriage, and we are indeed fortunate to have a bird's eye view.

In adding this tale to my heart's collection of stellar marriages, it brings my own struggles into a new light.

It even makes me consider writing John a few letters. ■



INTERNET RESOURCES

Lori says this is a good website.



Exciting News!!!

We just launched our revised web site today (Friday, Sept. 30th). We've added a number of new features like: marriage videos, additional BLOG opportunities and more ways for you to interact with us. We feel the new graphics and features will draw more new people to the web site and most importantly, they can learn about God's design for marriage. This is Marriage Missions International's 10th anniversary and Cindy & I are more excited than ever about the opportunities to Reveal the Heart of Christ to Marriages Throughout the World.

CLEAVING AND LEAVING - Marriage Message #167

Some spouses set themselves up to leave their marriages because they never properly "cleaved" to their spouse in the first place. The Bible says in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh."

The word, *cleave*, in the Hebrew language means to literally "stick like glue." It means to cling. Perhaps a modern-day illustration would be to take objects and super-glye or weld them together to become inseparably bonded together. That's what God wants us to do in the marriage relationship. He wants us to leave our father and mother. He wants us to forsake dependence on them, and He wants us to turn to our spouse and be committed to one another for a lifetime.

If you think of others who may benefit from these free weekly messages, encourage them to subscribe. They can go to our web site at marriagemissions.com.



We welcome your support for this newsletter. Thank you to the people who have sent donations! \$18 a year covers the printing and mailing costs. Some people have sent more and we are very grateful. Send it to The Bryn Athyn Church, Box 277, Bryn Athyn, Pa 19009 with caring for marriage in the memo line.

Grief

I will (not)

When the marriages
around me fall apart...

I will not.

I will not crumble
into a million pieces.

I will not fear.

I will not doubt.

I will not ask 'why'
in an effort to avoid my own demise.

I will not question everything.

I will not ask 'when is a marriage safe?'

I will not cry until my stomach hurts and my tears run dry.

I will not!

or perhaps I will (I do).

If you pull me aside and ask me in a space where there is room
for me to answer, I will tell you:

How confused I am.

How angry I am.

How sad I am.

How much I want to change things.

How my heart breaks for the children. For me.

How I think you should try to fix it.

When the marriages around me fall apart (and I remember that
the Lord is here, now):

I will pray.

I will dig my commitment heels in the ground.

I will listen with a certainty beyond my own...to your
pain...and yet maintain my belief in marriage.

I will keep showing up.

I will keep my promise.

I will fight clean.

I will not depart in body (or spirit).

I will deepen my resolve.

I will care for my children and march forward.

I will keep my hope and vision that two people can make a com-
mitment and keep it.

Will you?

— anonymous

COUPLES GALLERY

Chara & Scott
Daum



Erin & Nathan
Howard



Alan & Susan
Cowley



Rachel
& James
McAdam



Michele
& Nathan
Odhner
and
Mari &
Lael
Odhner

