

# Married Life Can Be A Real Gem

This year, my wife Deni and I are celebrating our 30th Wedding Anniversary. It's a milestone we both cherish. As you know, there are gems and precious metals associated with certain wedding anniversaries. The 25th Wedding Anniversary is referred to as the "Silver Anniversary" and the 50th Wedding Anniversary is referred to the "Golden Anniversary." There is also a gem associated with the 30th Wedding Anniversary. Most websites I have visited declare that gem to be either the pearl (traditional) or the diamond (modern). I prefer the traditional gem, the pearl. I had an epiphany when I thought of the pearl in the context of marriage. I want to share it with you.

The pearl is unique in the world of gems. It is not found embedded in rock. A pearl is made by a living creature who calls the ocean home. It takes time for the pearl to be formed. It is made of layer upon layer of nacre, a gelatinous substance secreted by an oyster that hardens. At the center of the pearl is an irritant that the nacre surrounds. The oyster adds nacre in small increments, day after day and year after year, until a beautiful pearl emerges.

I came to see my marriage in the pearl. Like a pearl, marriage has a core. At the core of a marriage are the vows exchanged by the bride and the groom. Deni and I made these vows to one another. I said: "I take you to be my wife." She said: "I take you to be my husband." We both said: "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as we both shall live, and I pledge you my faithfulness."

The Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible teach that when these vows are repeated before God, the Lord blesses those vows and binds the couple together in a process which begins then and there, and continues as long as both live. Jesus said: "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mark 10:6-9)

From the moment God joined us together, we began to build a life together. In every day, every week, every month and every year that followed our wedding day, the vows we exchanged took on flesh and shape. First we built a nest together, a place we called home. The location and shape of our nest changed over the years. Our nest became home for a new life, our son. We are both people who live to work. Deni worked as a speech therapist for our entire 30 years together. I worked as a lawyer for more than 13 of those years and now serve as a pastor. We both served the Lord during our life together. Deni has always been involved in music and worship in the Church. I served in a leadership role of some kind in the church during our married life. For 30 years we have experienced good times, the "for better." We had successes and experienced personal and professional growth. We sowed seeds which grew and we enjoyed a harvest. We also experienced bad times, the "for worse." We experienced failures and losses. We had enjoyed good health; however, sickness entered into the picture. There were times of plenty and times we had less. Just like the layers of nacre produced by an oyster wrap around the piece of rock or sand to form a pearl, our years together, their successes, failures, wealth, poverty, sickness, and health, formed layers around our vows and created something wonderful.

God designed married life to be a real gem, a pearl that can get better and more beautiful with each year. Sadly the reality is that, because of life's challenges and the fault of the husband and the wife, that gem can lose its shine. At times that pearl of great worth is found in danger of destruction because the vows at the center are broken, or the couple simply drifts apart and falls out of love.

From time to time, Deni and I faced challenges that came from within us and from outside of us; challenges that tested us as a couple. However God always came to the rescue. Faith and love always were, still are, and will continue to be, the bonding agents that hold Deni and I together through the ebb and the flow of married life. Faith in and love for God, and faith in and love for one another. When we were tested, when life's storms hit us and challenged our family, what kept us together was our belief that it was our destiny to be together. We were convinced that God had brought us together and had placed the love we have for one another within us. We believed and trusted that if we held onto God and one another, we could get through the storm that had come into our lives. This faith and trust got us through many a storm.

When our vows were tested from within, when one of us sinned against and wounded the other, God provided for the sin that tore at the bonds that bound us together. God gave us Jesus, His Son. Jesus paid for our sins when He suffered and died on the cross. God gave us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. When we hurt one another, the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of the offender so that the sin was exposed. Through the Holy Spirit, we believed that Jesus died on the cross for the sin that challenged our marriage. The Holy Spirit used Christ's sacrifice to move the offender to contrition, confession and repentance. The Holy Spirit then moved the offender to ask for forgiveness from God, and then the wounded party, for the sins committed. The same Spirit used Christ's sacrifice to move the one offended to say "I forgive you", and then soothe the wounded heart. The Spirit continued to work to heal and strengthen our bonds of faith and love in God and one another.

As I look back over the thirty years we have been together, I see that God had taken our "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health," and made a pearl out of them. This is how God works in our world. He takes the good and the bad and makes something beautiful out of it. In the end, these challenges strengthened the bond of love between us and made our faith, and trust in one another, grow. We came to understand the Apostle Paul's words: "... We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

God has opened my eyes so that I can see my dear wife as my pearl of great worth. He has added so many wonderful layers to the bride of my youth. He made her a competent professional woman who loves those she serves in the community as a speech therapist and in the Church. He made her a loving, caring and nurturing mother to our son. She loved, cared for and supported my dear mother as she left this life for eternity. She loves and cares for our extended families in a way I never could. I thank God for Deni and our thirty years together.

If you are married, I hope and pray that God will open your eyes to the pearls He has given you: your spouse and your marriage together. I pray that God will add layer upon layer to your lives

together and will continue to make your marriage a pearl of great value.

If your marriage is troubled, if vows were broken or are in danger of being broken, don't despair: there is hope. Have faith that God can forgive, heal, and restore. God is waiting, at a Church near you. He wants to reach out to you. He wants you to reach out to Him.

If you are single, I pray that God will bring you and your pearl together and give you the eyes to recognize your future spouse-to-be.

If you have lost your pearl, remember these words: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). You will be together again.

To God be the glory!

Pastor Ed Skutshek