

It's a rare treat to take a Bible study under the tutelage of the author. I was afforded such a treat this spring in a women's study called, *Enhancing Your Marriage*, by Judy Rossi. I experienced and observed the resurrection of marriages. When the study was over, Judy agreed to an interview so that I can share just a glimpse of the wealth I learned.

Abby Kelly: If you could choose one truth to impart to your own daughter, on the night before her wedding—what would it be?

Judy Rossi: *"It would be this: Don't let the stuff of marriage change how you accept, respect and appreciate your man as a man now. Continue to be thankful for his God-given, hormone-influenced/driven differences and traits, to see him as your balance not as your opposite."*

What are some early "symptoms" that a couple is in trouble?

I think one of the earliest and most telling symptoms is dishonesty—hiding who we really are and what we really need from our spouses. Not being honest with our mate about ourselves, an issue, an offense, or a concern sets us up for disillusionment about our mates because they didn't meet our preconceived expectations. Men are not mind readers. Therefore, unaddressed and unresolved problem areas build. They close our spirits and harden our hearts toward our spouse.

Truth without grace is cruel. Grace without truth is license. Jesus always had both in operation. A great reminder: the tougher the message, the gentler the delivery."

Is there a "vaccination" against some of the most common marital troubles?

Naturally I believe that we must first have a relationship with Jesus Christ. That said, God can work wonders in a marriage even if our spouse hasn't yet come to Christ. Second, as stated earlier, understanding that God designed the institution of marriage to reflect our relationship with the heavenly Bridegroom (Ephesians 5:22-33), our marriages will become God's workshop—the place where He will make us more like Jesus. The good, the bad and the downright ugly will typically show themselves within the marriage relationship. And God will meet us there. He will use the best and the worst circumstances of our marriages to mature us spiritually (Romans 8:28-29). He will not waste anything that could turn us from self-centered to Christ-centered."

What does it mean to leave one's family?

That Adam and Eve had no human mother and father to leave is profound. Their primary relationship was to be with God first, who commanded them to make each other their primary earthly relationship. It's no different today.

But "leaving" is only one third of God's command for the married couple. If one won't leave, then there is no cleaving. And if there's no cleaving, then there is no becoming one. The commitment to the relationship is incomplete unless each spouse chooses to leave former relationships, clings to the other and becomes one. That's where the protection lies."

What if we had sex before we got married? Are we doomed to suffer for it in our marriage?

If I may speak personally here, guilt from premarital sexual sin affected me for years. It was hidden in the depths of my soul, and I knew I wouldn't be free to truly enjoy my husband sexually until I permitted God's forgiveness to pour all over me, cleanse me, wash my past away and make me "holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22, NIV). Slowly afterward I began to see the sexual "us" in a totally different light—God's light—beautifully intentional, holy and free to enjoy."

Are there times when counseling is necessary? Can't we just fix it on our own?

Sometimes we just get "stuck"—stuck in our thought life, stuck in our attitudes, stuck in our emotions, and stuck in our behaviors. We might even be contemplating the "D"-word, because we truly don't know how to tackle the problems in our marriage. And some may have a spouse unwilling to tackle the problems in their marriage. That's when we can use a biblically-grounded mentor or a biblical counselor who can show us how to respond to our circumstances and/or to our spouse in a way that honors God and effectively addresses the issues."

Is it ever hopeless? Is there ever an offense worthy of leaving and walking away from the marriage?

Today's culture would declare that any prolonged unhappiness constitutes a walkable offense. But God wouldn't agree. And even though Jesus states adultery as the only walkable offense, He doesn't even make that a mandate. He knows how God can work in the hearts and minds of each couple, to bring them to forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration—the very message of the Cross.

Logically and biblically speaking, we don't serve a God of hopelessness; therefore, nothing is hopeless. However, that doesn't mean that sometimes we may not feel as if things are hopeless. This is a time when we need to reground our perspective—not about marriage, but about God. Because He is sovereign, I believe that nothing happens to me that doesn't pass before Him first."

How can we build intimacy if one spouse is deployed or for some other reason we are geographically separated?

Honestly, you're either building intimacy or tearing it down every day. I would say that the most effective way to hold a husband fast to us during separation is to respect him as a man, as a husband, as a lover, leader, protector and provider. When he knows that he's appreciated for all that he does, when he doesn't feel like "just a paycheck", his heart is sold out to the one who appreciates him. And God wants that one to be his wife!"