

03. How to W.I.N. at Marriage Workshop

“Nostalgia”

(8/19/23)

This will be the last session in our—“*How to W.I.N. at Marriage Workshop.*”

(Talk about the “N” in the W.I.N. acronym and how I almost abandoned the whole thing when I couldn’t think of something that started with an “N” that fit into the context of marriage—and then it came to me...!)

The “N” in the W.I.N. acronym stands for—‘**Nostalgia.**’

Now, at first, I thought, “*That can’t be from the Lord—what does nostalgia have to do with a marriage workshop?*” But then it hit me, and I realized that that word was absolutely from the Lord because it fit perfectly into the context of our marriage workshop!

The dictionary defines ‘*nostalgia*’ as: “*a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for some past period...; a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.*”

And how I came to the realization that the word nostalgia was from the Lord was that I remembered that Jesus used the idea of nostalgia when He spoke to His bride living in the city of Ephesus—

Revelation 2:1–3 (NLT)

¹ “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands: ² “I know all the things you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don’t tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. ³ You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

So far so good, it sounds like this was the *perfect* church (or so it seemed)—but remember that Jesus is looking into the heart in these letters—He is not concerned with superficialities.

And the same is true with husbands and wives in marriage—Jesus sees what’s going on in their hearts and behind the closed doors of their homes—just like He did with the Ephesian Christians.

It reminds me of a lot of marriages that look good from the outside (couples that put up a good façade)—and as such, their marriages appear to be strong and healthy.

But then one day, seemingly out of nowhere, they file for divorce leaving their family and friends dumbfounded and saying, “*What happened?! They seemed so happy!*”

Well, I believe that part of what happened was they failed to maintain the vitality of their marriage thru nostalgia—and it led to the slow erosion and death of their relationship with each other.

In other words, they forgot the past and that destroyed the present.

Whether we’re talking about the history of a nation, or the history of your relationship with each other in marriage—nostalgia is very important!

If you want to keep your marriage fresh and vibrant you must do your best to constantly *remember* what brought you together in the first place—and keep working on and maintaining those things that caused you to fall in love with each other so that they never die.

And that is why God gave Israel *memorials* (Passover, Tabernacles, and places like when the children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land...) so that they would remember their past history with Him and all the things He had done for them in the past which created thanksgiving, appreciation, and faith in their hearts towards Him in the present!

However, this was something Israel failed to maintain in their relationship with the LORD—they stopped observing those memorials and their relationship with Him began to grow formal and distant.

Ladies, do you remember when you were in middle school (junior high) or maybe even high school how you wrote the name of your boyfriend (or someone you dreamed of being your boyfriend) on your notebooks, your hands, your arms—and pretty much any makeshift canvas you had access to!

Well, that was in fact, how the children of Israel acted when they first fell in love with the LORD (Yahweh) and were on their honeymoon after God brought the nation out of Egypt into the wilderness and married them there at the base of Mt. Sinai.

The LORD makes a point to mention it—that during their time in the wilderness how they wrote His name on the flaps of their tents and on their horses' bridles.

Israel's relationship with Him was beautiful initially—but after a while they got *used* to God and began to take Him for granted, and as such—their love for Him cooled and their passion faded.

God laments this when He says to them thru the prophet Jeremiah—

Jeremiah 2:2, 5 (NLT2)

² “Go and shout this message to Jerusalem. This is what the LORD says: “I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me and followed me even through the barren wilderness... ⁵ This is what the LORD says: “What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves...”

This cooling off of love and passion for God was not limited to Israel in the Old Testament.

It is very much a reality with regard to our relationship with Jesus in New Testament times—including today.

The Lord laments this very thing in His letter to the church of Ephesus—

Revelation 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴ ...I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

The idea here is that Jesus is heartbroken that they no longer had that passionate love for Him they once had—what some have called, ‘*honeymoon love.*’

And the same is true in many marriages—couples begin to take each other for granted and their love for one another begins to cool and their passion begins to fade—and as such their relationship grows formal and distant.

It is always a very sad thing to watch something as beautiful as marriage die a slow painful death.

And sometimes it isn’t because of any one thing but the slow growing apart of two people who, at some point—even though they’re still living together, for all intents and purposes have become strangers who no longer even know each other.

This story captures the essence of what I’m talking about:

“Their wedding picture mocked them from the mantle, these two whose minds no longer touched each other. They lived with such a heavy barricade between them that neither battering ram, nor words, nor artilleries of touch could break it down.

Somewhere between the oldest child’s first tooth and the youngest daughter’s graduation they lost each other. Throughout the years each slowly unraveled that tangled ball of string called ‘self’ and as they tugged at stubborn knots each hid their searching from the other.

Sometimes she cried at night and begged the whispering darkness to tell her who she was. He lay beside her snoring like a hibernating bear unaware of her winter.

Once after they had made love, he wanted to tell her how afraid he was of dying but fearing to show his naked soul he spoke only of her beauty.

She took a course in modern art trying to find herself in colors splashed upon a canvas, complaining to other women about men who are insensitive. He—well, he climbed into a tomb called the ‘office’, wrapped his mind in a shroud of papers and buried himself in customers.

Slowly the wall between them rose—cemented by the mortar of indifference. One day reaching out to touch each other they found a barrier they could not penetrate. Recoiling from the coldness of the stone each retreated from the stranger on the other side. For you see when love dies, it is not in a moment of angry battle; nor when fiery bodies lose their heat—but it lies exhausted, expiring at the bottom of a wall it can no longer scale.”

Now, with regard to ‘first-love’ or honeymoon love in marriage—

One pastor rightly brings some balance by saying—
“A couple that has been married for a long time doesn’t always have the same thrill of excitement they had when they first dated. That is to be expected and is fine—if that excitement has matured into a depth of love that makes it even better than the first love.”

And of course, the same is true in our relationship with Jesus—but that doesn’t mean we stop being in love with Him either! (Elaborate)

This in essence is what Jesus is doing with His Church (His Bride) in Ephesus—He is calling her (them) to remembrance of their past relationship with Him in the hopes it will create a spark and kindle a fire in their hearts for Him once again in the present.

He is telling them that they were still going through the *motions*—but had lost the *emotion* in their relationship with Him. (Explain)

Their church was a well-oiled machine—but God doesn’t want machines cranking out emotionless service—He wants a love relationship with His people.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is “*That you love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength*”—not that you serve the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Many marriages have degraded to a point where they are robotic, consisting of two people who are going through the motions where the marriage is still functioning, in some ways like a well-oiled machine—but which is void of passion and meaning.

And when love and appreciation for one another wains—bitter words often take their place.

Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

All of this is especially important in marriage and is one of the main reasons so many marriages are crumbling—it's as someone has said,

“Many marriages are like the mighty oaks which line the ridges of the Rockies—they withstand winter and summer storms year after year only to be brought down by an attack of little beetles.”

There are a lot of marriages that have survived a long time and have withstood many storms in life—only to be finally brought down by years of careless and unkind words.

Let me repeat that—many marriages have survived physical sickness, financial crisis and even marital unfaithfulness—and yet have finally been destroyed by the proverbial *“death of a thousand cuts.”*

So, let's all remember what God's word says on the subject—

Proverbs 12:18 (NLT2)

¹⁸ Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

Let's purpose in our hearts to use our tongues to honor God and build up others—and let's purpose to start in our homes with our spouses and our children.

But back to the Church of Ephesus—notice that Jesus doesn't say they lost their first love—He says they left their first love.

This was a conscious act of departing on their part that didn't take place all at once, but like the slow drifting off course of a ship at sea—it happened slowly over time.

In the NKJV, Revelation 2:4 reads—“*I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*”

However, in Weymouth’s N.T. translation of this passage, Revelation 2:4 reads—“*Yet I have this against you—that you no longer love Me as you did at first.*”

What is “*first love*”?—it is the passionate love for Jesus that you had for Him when you first met Him—the love that often characterizes the new believer.

It is the “*I can’t think of anyone else*” kind of fervent love that newlyweds have for each other—in a word it’s “*honeymoon*” love.

And while it is true that married love deepens and grows richer over time—it is also true that ideally it should never lose the passion of those “*honeymoon days.*”

The word “**Ephesus**” means ‘*darling*’ or ‘*desired one*’—they were still desired by the Lord, but He was no longer desired by them as at the beginning of their relationship with Him.

This also happened with Israel—a cooling of their love for the Lord that He laments thru the prophet Jeremiah—

“I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me and followed me even through the barren wilderness...” (Jeremiah 2:2 NLT)

The worst thing that can happen to any relationship, whether you’re talking about your relationship with God, or your spouse—is when you begin to take the other for granted.

The church at Ephesus fell into the trap of thinking that loveless service was enough to substitute for the passion they no longer had in their relationship with Jesus.

It would be like a wife who says to her husband, “ *I don’t love you anymore. I have no feelings for you at all, but I’ll stay married to you and clean the house, wash your clothes, cook your meals...* ”

I mean, what husband would be happy with a relationship like that?

I didn’t marry my wife so that I would have someone to cook my meals and clean my house—I can hire people to do those things for me.

I married Cyndi because I fell in love with her and she with me and now all the acts of service she does for me are special and beautiful because I know they are an expression of her love for me not a substitute for her love for me—but without the love they would be meaningless.

It’s obvious that Jesus feels that same way and wants more than service in our relationship with Him—He wants passion, fire—He wants honeymoon love!

Remember He is holding His church in His nail scarred hands which speaks of the ultimate act of selfless love—to lay down your life for the person you’re in love with.

What kind of love are you giving Him in return?

All Christians love Jesus but not all Christians are ‘in love’ with Jesus—and the same is true with many couples who have been married for a while—they love each other but I’m afraid some are no longer in love with each other.

And while loving each other and staying together is better than not loving each other and getting a divorce—it is an inferior relationship to being in love with each other. (I love my sister but I’m in love with my wife!)

“Okay, you’ve made your point. Is there any way to fix our marriage?”

In Jesus' letter to the church of Ephesus He goes on to tell them what they needed to do to get back to 'first love' or honeymoon love in their relationship with Him—and we can adapt Jesus' instructions and apply them to our marriages!

Revelation 2:5a (NKJV)

⁵"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works..."

“**First love**” can be restored if you follow the three instructions Jesus gave.

1. You must **remember** (that's where the '*nostalgia*' comes in)—you must remember the love you used to have for one another and what brought you together in the first place.

Remember why you fell in love with each other in those early days of your relationship—and pray that God would work in your hearts and cultivate a desire to regain that close relationship with each other once again.

2. You must **repent**—which means to turn around and forsake any relationship with anyone or anything that is competing in your hearts for the love that belongs to your spouse.

You've got to admit your marriage is going in the wrong direction—you're moving away from each other.

You've got to turn around and start moving back toward one another.

3. You must “*do the first works*”—or in other words, you must **repeat** the things you used to do with and for one another when you first fell in love.

“*Yes, but what does that really mean?*”

Well, what were the things you doing when you were first in love with Jesus?

- *“I was going to church on a regular basis”*—go again!
- *“I was getting up early for morning devotions”*—get up again!
- *“I sang praise to the Lord as I drove down the street”*—sing again!

Okay, now apply that logic to your marriage!

What were the things that you both did with each other when your relationship was new and vibrant?

I know you spent time together. You talked with each other for long periods of time. You probably had special things you liked to do with each other—do what you used to do with each other when you first fell in love.

Start spending time together! Start having a date night once a week.

Remember—Repent—Repeat is the key to restoring your relationship with Jesus and with your spouse.

It’s not too late to rekindle that honeymoon love!