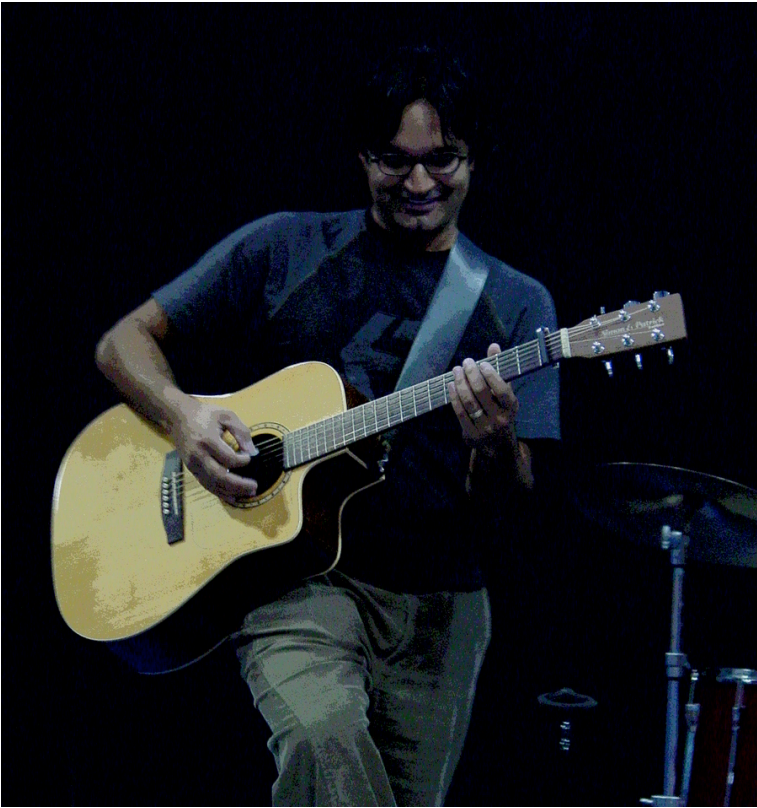


Why Marriage Is Not About Feeling Happy  
Personal Reflections and Thoughts

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## About Vijay



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Vijay has written many worship songs which are available online at [www.doxaband.com](http://www.doxaband.com). Vijay's passions include his young and growing family, his work with the youth of the Fraser valley, and a strong desire to share the Gospel of Christ.

## Prelude

Divorce has become a routine business in North American society. Apparently over 50% of marriages will end in divorce. Recently I met some people who are experiencing divorce through their children's broken marriages. Although this time has been difficult for the parents to endure, they have managed to find ways to rationalize their children's choices: "He changed...", "They moved in different directions", "They weren't in love anymore", and the well-used justification for divorce, "They weren't happy any more". Is marriage really about being happy? About feeling happy? Or is it about something much bigger than personal happiness?

## The Foundation

A few years ago my wife and I built our first house together. It was an exciting few months starting with excavation, the footings and forms being built, and the concrete being poured. Although we were most interested and excited when the framing and drywall were completed, the initial stages were arguably the most important. Without the proper foundation, the

structural soundness of our home would have been compromised with each succeeding stage exaggerating the earlier mistakes. To prevent this problem we worked very hard to ensure that the foundation was square and solid.

The comparison to marriage is obvious. The foundation of a marriage including the courting and dating, engagement, and the critical first year of marriage are precursors to what will come. We can erroneously assume that marriage will simply become better and better without the proper care given to the early stages. As in the early stages of a building project, the early decisions will affect greatly the future results.

I would argue that dating and family histories also play a major role in helping to establish the foundation of a marriage. For example, a person who has spent the precious years before marriage in numerous intimate relationships has developed what may be a destructive pattern. Deep-felt intimacy, both physical and emotional, followed by retreat when things aren't working out can train the individual to give all to another

and then run from the relationship when things become difficult. What will happen when certain elements of the marriage relationship become difficult?

Family history is also helping to build the marriage foundation through the values held, and passed on, by your parents, grandparents, and other relatives. For example, if there is a tolerance for divorce, the marriage foundation has been cracked. If there is an acceptance of anger and violence, another crack is added. If there is a history of infidelity and a rationalization of that behavior – another crack!

On the other hand, the marriage foundation can be strengthened if no excuses are given or tolerated for marriage failures in the family line. The following attitude is problematic: "I'm against divorce, but it had to happen because..." The best attitude will include: "I promised 'til death do us part', and I will work hard to maintain that standard under any and all circumstances!"

A wise man will build his house on a solid foundation. Build your marriage on the same.

### The Commitment

It feels so good to love someone. It feels even better to be loved by someone. The initial stages of my wife's and my relationship were romantic, passion-filled, energized, and absolutely magical. As we entered the married life, some of the pure passion began to dissipate as the understanding of love as commitment came to the forefront. Sarah and I talked about the commitment we were making at length once we were engaged. What would happen when we didn't 'feel' like loving each other? Was this even possible when we were so passionate about being together at that moment in time? My parents had been married for over 40 years, Sarah's for over 25 years, and Sarah's grandparents for over 50. Yes, we had the models in front of us, but the discussion still needed to take place.

Commitment without the proper foundation is still a problem. One of my friends in college told me that she was going to marry her boyfriend

because they didn't feel that it was worth it to try to find someone else. They weren't truly happy together during their dating life, but they had been together for a few years. Although there were elements of commitment to their decision, they were lacking the foundation to build something that would last a lifetime and ultimately made a poor choice. They were divorced a few years later as the commitment proved to weaken.

From the moment of marriage, our commitment was tested in small and large ways, and we have learned to remain true to this one principal: Love is a decision, not a feeling. If love were only a feeling, our love for each other would rise and fall like the sun or moon in the sky. As a decision, love is something that is dependable, stable, and true.

### The Trials

When you bring two people together to share every element of life from sleeping, waking and getting ready, to cooking, eating, cleaning up or not cleaning up, to budgeting, buying or not buying and investing, to going to family

gatherings, entertaining, and choosing friends, to being in good moods or being grumpy, etc, one must expect that there will be moments of frustration possibly leading to longer moments of frustration, and God-forbid, full-blown anger (Yes, there is meant to be a tone of sarcasm in the previous sentence). One may ask, "Where can difficulties arise in marriage?", but I think the better question is, "Are there areas where difficulties can't arise?" My experience is that marriage can lead to challenges in every area. This doesn't mean that you need to have problems at every turn, but rather that you should be aware that this practice of bringing two kingdoms together to operate as one needs the proper level of care at every turn.

Let me illustrate: during our second week of marriage, Sarah was having a shower in our ensuite in the sparsely furnished apartment we called home. I thought it would be hilarious to take some ice-cold water and throw it over the curtain onto Sarah while she was enjoying the steamy shower. I was wrong. It wasn't funny – to her. In fact it was quite offensive to my wife of

about 2 weeks. As she finished up her shower, I took my guitar and retreated to the living room to play songs (and mope) on my own. Wisely, she left me alone and sat in the bedroom in her disgust, her feelings hurt because I was so insensitive and mine hurt because she took my joke so poorly. Although we laugh about this incident now, at the time it was anything but funny. There were more of these 'trials' to come, many more in fact, but what we continue to learn is the importance of perseverance; the Biblical idea that love will never fails.

### The Perseverance

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

The Biblical definition of love seems unattainable. Patient? No boasting... not even a

little? Humble all the time!? Doesn't remember the past wrongs and hurts caused by the other person (this stuff can make great ammunition for the future)? Always trusts, even when the other has recently let you down? Never fails? Before discouragement sets in, it is important to look at the Biblical solution for attaining this type of love.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

A tree with apples on it is quite certainly an apple tree! If you are filled with God's Spirit, you are able to be loving according to God's standard, gentle, peaceful, patient, etc. You will evidence good fruit or good behaviors showing that God is in you. If you try to make marriage-related decisions on your own strength and with your own wisdom, you are left with results that will be sub-par and at times downright disastrous. Doing things on my own strength and making decisions on how to act or react have led me into

trouble with my wife. However, when I look to the Lord first, I have found good behaviors and attitudes manifested in me: patience, love selflessness, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, etc.

Is it possible to persevere through the trials? - Probably not on your own strength. With God's help - definitely yes!

### The Rewards

Nature shows us the way. After every storm, there is another calm, clear, beautiful day. If you are caught in the storm, your wisest choice is to wait it out and let it pass. If you choose to fight the storm, you will lose. Marriage is no different. Will there be stormy times? Yes. Sometimes due to the dynamics between two unique individuals learning to work together, and other times because of the many variables in life that you can't control: a sick child, an automobile accident, a financial disaster, etc. It is through these times that you, as a couple will grow together the most. If you choose to stick it out together, you will find the sunshiny day at the end. If however, you choose to fight it out and

even abandonment, you will lose the joy of the sunny day when it comes, because you will be left alone with regret. If you don't believe me, you can ask any of the many people who have left one stormy situation to find themselves in another situation with storms of its own.

During our third year of marriage, Sarah and I found ourselves distracted by the various demands of life. We were building a house, having a baby, completing my master's degree, running a worship ministry, and switching careers (to mention a few). It was to be a year of many exciting changes, a hectic schedule, and brand new demands placed on each of us by our work and family. As we persevered through the challenges of that year, we now find ourselves two years later in a life together filled with much laughter, quiet evenings at home with our two children, valued times with parents, grandparents, and other family, and a rejuvenation of romance between the two of us.

Ultimately one of the biggest rewards at the end of the perseverance tunnel is to be able to stand up

to the next trial stronger and more determined to reach the next reward - together.

### Postlude

Marriage is wonderful. I wouldn't choose to do life any other way. I thank God every day for the captivating girl who stole my heart, soon to become my elegant bride, followed by my fun-loving wife, and now the amazingly beautiful woman who is the mother of my two children. We have enjoyed life together these five and half years, and found each day has proven to be a reward. Sarah is my best friend and trusted companion, a relationship which grows stronger each day, week, month and year. Over all I am thankful to God for His Spirit at work in both of us making us more like Him, and I am thankful for Jesus Christ who has made it possible for us to know our faithful God. The ultimate example of marriage is given to us through Christ himself.

### Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Marriage is about sacrifice... self-sacrifice. In the way that Jesus gave His life for the church, we are to give of ourselves to our spouses. I am only beginning to understand how best to serve my wife, but am excited to find the things that make her feel loved and special. I am not afraid of the trials that may come because I know that we will face them together to the glory of God.

Is marriage about feeling happy? I think marriage is so much more.