

The Journey – Part Two - Oath

by Lloyd Biddle

Welcome back! I'm glad you have returned to read more about the Journey of a Lifetime. Last month, we unpacked the first letter of the Journey acrostic from our marriage travel bags, the letter J for Joy. I shared that the Joy of the Lord is the strength of your marriage. This month, I will discuss the second letter in the Journey acrostic, O for Oath.

As a reminder, let's take a quick look at the acrostic to see what's left in our travel bags:

- **J – is for Joy**
- **O – is for Oath**
- **U – is for Understanding**
- **R – is for Refresh**
- **N – is for Needs**
- **E – is for Exalt**
- **Y – is for Yoked**

Oath – O is for Oath, the promise you made on your wedding day. Wife (Debbie) and I were married on May 27, 1989. In a little more than seven months, we will have been married twenty years. I remember that it was a beautiful day. From a weather perspective, for me, it was a perfect day. The temperature was about 75 degrees and there was a light breeze blowing. The sky was a perfect shade of blue and the sun shown brightly, but not so bright that you had to shield your eyes when looking up at the sky. We were married at the church Debbie grew up in as a child in Waukegan, IL, Trinity A.M.E. Church. Pastor George Moore and Debbie's childhood friend, Rev. Craig Conner performed the ceremony. As you probably know, Debbie loves music, so we had several friends play and sing some wonderful music selections like Jeremiah

Clarke's *Trumpet Voluntary*, Pachelbel's *Canon in D*, Felix Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, Chuck Girard's *Song for a Christian Wedding*, Luther Vandross' *So Amazing*, Stevie Wonder's *You and I*, and Albert Hay Mallotte's *The Lord's Prayer*. Our vows were very traditional. And at the point where the minister asked Debbie "to have and to hold", she cried. She says its because God had confirmed to her that indeed I was the right one for her to marry.

Now moving forward about 15 years, Debbie and I were co-leading a married couples ministry at our home church in Waukegan where we decided to have a marriage vow renewal ceremony for the 20+ couples that were active in the ministry. What began as a short and sweet acknowledgement before God quickly evolved into a full blown wedding ceremony with grooms and brides dressed in tuxedos and wedding gowns, fathers escorting their daughters down the aisle, sons as ring bearers, daughters as flower girls, sisters and friends as hostesses and ushers, a trumpeter, soloist and organist, a reception with wedding cakes for each couple and a church full of friends and relatives to share in this momentous occasion. It was wonderful and unlike anything I had ever witnessed, largely because many of the couples had not had a formal wedding in a church. So, they were thrilled to have the wedding day they'd always dreamed of; the opportunity to have their family and friends witness their oath to God to love, honor and cherish one another for better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health until death would part them.

Wifie and I also participated in the vow renewal ceremony and Jason and Jared served as our ring bearers. One special thing from that service where 14 couples renewed their vows, many with their children in the wedding party, is what my youngest son Jared said after the ceremony. As part of this service, each couple signed a marriage covenant agreeing to stay committed to God and each other. Then two witnesses signed the covenant. Our two sons, Jason and Jared, witnessed our covenant. Later on, reflecting on the day, my youngest son said to Debbie and me, "Do you remember the day that we got married?"

Brothers and sisters, the oaths, the very vows we take during the ceremony of holy matrimony are especially sacred. When we talk about and ponder the state of our marriages and the institution of marriage itself, we are treading on holy ground. In my case, not only I am I married to my wife and expected to have and to hold her until death due us part, my sons believe I have made the same promise to them as well.

I don't know about you, but I am going to be perfectly honest, I don't like to make promises. Even the slightest discussion about the need for me to make a promise to someone makes me nervous. And the biggest reason I don't like to make promises is that I am afraid that I won't be able to keep them. When it comes to the promise of marriage, this is where the Lord comes in to help.

a) God is the One Who Joins Us

Mark 10:5-10 states, "And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." God is the one who joins us together in a supernatural way where the hearts, minds, souls and bodies of married people have a spiritual connection. Now if we have trusted God to join us, then we can trust God to keep us together.

b) How God Keeps Us Together

I believe there are many things God has done to keep married people together, and one of the most fundamental of those is that he has given us marriage principles to live by. One of the most fundamental principles is found in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4.

Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

The principle is that your life is not your own. First we belong to God, and then we belong to each other. My marriage is a ministry where I serve the needs of my wife and she serves my needs. In this, I am talking about sexually, about finances, about parenting, about spiritual development, about everything. Selfish people don't make good marriage partners. If you want to make your marriage better, think about what you can do for your spouse to make their life better or easier, and immediately begin doing it. Stop worrying so much about their flaws and failures, and focus on what you can do to better serve them. Remember something Christian, even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. If we can't even give ourselves in service to our spouses whom we love and who love us, how in the world are we going to give ourselves to or serve anyone else? By serving each other selflessly at home, Debbie and I make things right and well between us. If we stop serving each other and start waiting for all our wants and needs to be perfectly met, we begin sowing seeds of discord in our marriage.

Next month, I'll unpack the third letter of the journey acrostic, **U** for **Understanding**.