

## Marriage - It's personal

A little something about my marriage, about us, Tif and Todd James McLaughlin. Without a doubt we are here because of Christ. We got married and remain married because of his presence and reflection in our relationships way back when in the late 90's and now into our third decade. If you were to pivot through many perspectives of our relationship, you would see us much the same and remarkably different. This is the paradox that falls in line with *"this is a profound mystery"* Ephesians 5:32, as Paul's writings declaring unity in marriage meant to be understood as unity among Christ and the Church.

It has been an honor to know Christ's love for us. In an effort to respond to such grace given to us freely, we find our calling purposeful in pursuing a life and attitude of gratitude and humility. To be recognized and appointed Deacons of Married's Ministry is a further extension of Christ's love and the love of our Church. We are honored and humbled. We are truly grateful for our leaders and our body of believers. We pray and strive to serve you well.

A grand part of our household's mantra is "Don't do what is easy, do what is right." Tif canonized this saying on a pillow somewhere in the house. As I am often slow to comprehend many profound meanings, I have tended, likely by nature, to lean into the "Don't do what is easy" part. Yes, contrary to human nature as it may be, my family thinks I love to do hard things. With years of growth, I do understand this observation. My perspective on this behavior is as follows: As a boy, and now sometimes still, fear dominated my thinking and behavior. Failure was devastating; perfection only was acceptable. Why not engage in things that were difficult to begin with, things that few had perfected or achieve success in? There would also be few others to contend with in these roles. Fewer criticisms as well. I would turn my introverted and timid character into something I felt manageable. Confidence inevitably bloomed. Ah, as my small world expanded, I realized many others took on these roles that I had deemed hard. And in a good way, these hard tasks were shared, promoted growth and a healthy challenge. So it was that Christianity and marriage would be a part of my choices, "Don't do what is easy, do what is right." The message and meaning became connected.

What about this thing - deny yourself? Clearly it is a biblical command: Matthew 16:24 *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves."* Talk about doing what is not easy. It truly does not get any harder. I've practiced and even found contentment in doing what is not easy all the while being encouraged and motivated by doing what is right, yet still I am confronted by daily thoughts and feelings of frustration toward others and situational outcomes. This is happening in my household, with my wife, and among my church family. It becomes clear that withdrawal, apathy, and thoughtless, carnal reactions become the easy path. I do declare! I'm in a battle with myself. There it is; deny, resist, submit to the power greater than Todd. Submit to the great *"I AM."*

With that comes the conscious ability in heart and mind to *"value others above yourself"* (Philippians 2:3).

All this to get to a story. My wife speaks many languages, love languages that is. You know, the Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman. In fact she is very fluent and even proficient in several dialects pertaining to each. Me, not so much. It has taken me years to get the patterns of my grunting to form a coherent phrase. Through much time and patience my wife has equaled Jane Goodall's efforts to

befriend and adore the silverback gorillas of the Congo, Nobel Peace Prize worthy. Through maturity, it has become evident that quality time is my favored Love Language.

Tif has a birthday this month. It falls on September 25th. She loves to celebrate. Again, me not so much. In the early years of our marriage, I treated her day of celebration in a manner sufficient for my standard, near pulseless. Change was needed if I was to keep my dearest interest interested. What to do? A new concept, how about celebrating her birthday every day of the month of September. Overwhelming if you think in big extravaganzas each day. But how about the accumulated effect of "little things" each day. There is even plenty of grace in missing a day or two (just not the actual birthday date). Well this became a "thing" for us. Starting September 1st we begin the celebration. I am mindful of casting simple daily sentiments of love and services toward my beloved Tiful. Wow, did this work. It made amends for those early failures and it brings me great joy to share in her happiness. I am reminded of the animated annual Christmas season show Frosty The Snowman. Each season he would melt and come back to life following a snowfall. His first words were, "Happy Birthday!" in declaration of a new day. Our Bible teaches us this concept in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Philippians 4:4. Renewal, reconciliation and rejoicing are at our fingertips each and every day. We are loved unconditionally each day we arise. My joy has been realized in my spiritual relationship with Christ. And in his gift of my beautiful wife and vibrant marriage. *"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."* John 15:11.

Shalom

Todd McLaughlin