



What Will You Gain From Building a Marital Hedge?

Building and protecting a strong relationship may sound a bit like getting a root canal. But is it really?

by Erin Prater

When I was a kid, I hated brushing my teeth. I had to be forced into it. Let's just say this: It's a good thing your first set of teeth are naturally replaceable.

These days, I love dental hygiene. I clip coupons for the latest toothpaste flavors. I floss regularly, and am carefully researching water picks before I "take the plunge." And when the timer goes off on my spinning toothbrush, I'm still brushing. Time flies when you're having fun!

I guess a love for dental hygiene (like coffee, sushi and many other things in life) is an acquired taste. Maybe I was burned (or numbed) one too many times by cavity fillings. Maybe the freedom to do whatever I wanted, including eating mounds of Twinkies and going to bed without brushing my teeth, wasn't so fun (or freeing) after all.

When it comes to building and hedging a strong, God-honoring marriage, some are ready, eager and willing to do whatever it takes. Others, though married, highly value their "freedom" and are more hesitant. In fact, building marital hedges may sound just about as fun as getting a cavity filled, undergoing a colonoscopy or trying on your "skinny jeans" after porking out at an all-you-can-eat buffet.

But it's Christ's desire that husbands love their wives "just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her," and that wives "submit to their husbands as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22-25). Verse 21 tells us to, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." And Galatians 5:13 says, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." Clearly, we're free in Christ, but we must use that freedom to love others (especially our spouses) "as ourselves" (Galatians 5:14).

The rewards of hedging your marriage (though it may require a "sacrifice of freedom" in the eyes of the world) are great. What do you gain by building marital hedges?

Your own fenced-in playground to share with your best friend. Yes, you're pledging to steer clear of the seemingly-fun temptations of the world, but what you're gaining is so much more thrilling, long-lasting, pure and wonderful! You're building your own fenced-in, private playground where you and your spouse can rip off your masks, share your most intimate secrets, act like goofs and enjoy uninhibited sexual pleasure.

Unconditional love and forgiveness. Perhaps you've heard the saying, "If you want to become more like Jesus, get married." It's true: Marriage will require you to love and forgive unconditionally, even when your other half has hurt you deeply. Consequently, married love should mirror Christ's love for His church closer than any other earthly form of love. While it may occasionally hurt to give this kind of love and forgiveness to your spouse, think of how wonderful it is to be on the receiving end.

Freedom from "what-ifs" and wonderings. By setting healthy boundaries for your marriage and maintaining an open and honest relationship with your spouse, you have no need to wonder what your spouse has been up to or what he is hiding. Most importantly, you know your marriage is in God's hands.

So labor together. Go shopping for some nice-looking shrubs. Have a fight with the hose while planting them *closely*. Then stand back and admire what God has done. And if the grass starts to look greener on the other side, start watering your own hedge.