



Early in our marriage, my husband Troy and I rented a home in southern Illinois for two years. We lived in a quaint country town surrounded by miles and miles of farmland as far as the eye could see. As an avid gardener, I was delightfully surprised to discover that our home had two apricot trees in the backyard, which by all outward appearances looked alive and healthy. We moved in during the fall season and by the following spring I was eager to see the buds forming on the trees. To my disappointment, I realized that only one tree had buds while the other tree appeared alive, but dormant. As summer approached, I was excited to harvest the sweet fruit from the single apricot tree that had bloomed so beautifully that spring. But although it had bloomed, to my dismay, no fruit grew on the tree that summer. It sparked my curiosity, so I did a little research.

I discovered that the one tree that appeared dormant was actually slowly dying. In order for the healthy tree to produce fruit, it required the other tree also to be alive and strong, otherwise cross-pollination would be unable to occur and, therefore, no fruit could be produced. The one apricot tree was able to stay alive and grow independently from the other, but in order to produce fruit it was dependent upon the healthy existence of apricot tree Number Two. They needed each other to do what God created them to do: grow apricots! How fascinating!

I decided to address the issues of the dying tree. I gave it fertilizer, watered it, and cleared away shrubs that were blocking sunlight from getting through to it. I nursed it back to life. The following spring, to my great joy, the once dying treeing was now blooming. In fact, both trees bloomed! As summer neared, fruit was growing on both trees. It was not a huge harvest, but enough fruit to show that there was potential for an even bigger harvest in years to come.

Marriage is like those two apricot trees. Husband and wife can co-exist and live life independently from one another, but in order for their marriage to be strong and produce happiness and Godly fruit, both souls must be alive in Christ. Christ needs to be the root of marriage. Just as I needed to water and fertilize the trees, so couples need to nourish their marriages. How can this be accomplished? Through an investment of time, sacrifice and prayer.

Inevitably, weeds will attempt to infringe upon your marriage. Do not allow them to take root! Weeds come in many different sizes and forms. They may be outside influences or sinful habits that pull you away from your marriage. For those married with children, it may be the temptation to put the children before your spouse. Sometimes differentiating between a weed and a flower can be confusing as weeds can appear attractive at times, but do not be deceived. It may seem like a good idea to go out once a week with your friends while your spouse stays home, but is your spouse okay with this? Are you investing as much time into your best friend (your spouse) as you are into your other friendships? Perhaps you spend a significant amount of time volunteering at church, your child's school, as a coach, etc. There is nothing wrong with these activities. In fact, in and of themselves, they are good deeds. Take inventory though; do they take away from building a solid marriage and family life? Sometimes it is just a matter of realigning your priorities in order to restore balance in your married life. It is a wise practice to periodically check the vitals of your marriage and make sure you are not draining the life out of it by external activities that appear good, but in all honesty are taking away from a greater good; a healthy vibrant marriage. If weeds are not tended to and are ultimately allowed to take root in your marriage, they can begin to squeeze out the good fruit and they have the potential to pull you and your marriage away from the faith you are grounded in; perhaps even uproot you.

There will be seasons in your marriage where one spouse may seem dormant. Love them back to life. True love requires sacrifice and a willingness at times to put the needs and desires of your beloved ahead of your own. Sacrifice means "to make holy." Is this not what we are called to in marriage? Holiness! Ultimately, we are to help our spouse get to Heaven.

A happy, fruitful, marriage requires work. Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, thus allowing sacramental grace to flow within the marriage covenant. Water and fertilize your marriage by opening yourself up to the sacramental grace you have at your disposal. Allow the grace of the sacrament to uproot the weeds and rely on this very grace to strengthen you during the challenging seasons of marriage. God calls us to be the best version of ourselves so that our sacramental union of marriage can reflect His love in the deepest way. He desires for us to experience the true joy that comes from bearing fruit in our marital union.

Tertullian expressed the beauty of a marriage rooted in Christ when he said, "How can I ever express the happiness of the marriage that is joined together by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels and ratified by the Father?.....How wonderful the bond between two believers, with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both brethren and both fellow servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact they are truly in one flesh, and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit" (as quoted by St. John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 13).

Stay close to Christ, the root and the source of your sacramental grace. Allow your

marriage to grow and be nurtured. As your marital love matures, the roots will grow deeper, the fruit will become more plentiful and attractive, and your union in Christ will be transformed as you live what you were created for as man and woman, husband and wife.