

Making the Best of an Ugly Wife

Jim Elliff

James Fraser of the Scottish Highlands (1700-1769) was known for his ugly wife. I don't know what she looked like physically, but as far as demeanor, she was as ugly a woman as could possibly be found. I hope her behavior changed *after* their marriage began. Regardless, he was stuck with her for life.

Fraser was a beloved pastor, an author of a couple of useful books, and a battered husband. It is unclear how the Presbyterians of that day could allow a man with a disobedient wife to pastor. Nonetheless, his labors in Alness were appreciated by all but her.

It is said that she never provided him a sit-down meal at their home. Everyone in his parish knew this. He would have starved to death if the church members had not left him pouches of food by the fence post when he passed by on his pastoral errands.



When he returned home at night, he was not able to be in the same room with his wife because he would get a tongue-lashing, so he went to his study. But his wife controlled the coal bin and the oil for the lamp, allowing him no fire to warm himself or oil to light his lamp. If he sat still in the dark, he would nearly freeze. Because of this, he walked back and forth from one end of his study to the other, in the dark, with his hands in front of him. After he died they examined his study and found indentations in the plaster where his hands hit the wall on his nightly beat.

Once, when the local Presbyterian pastors were gathered, a toast was offered for the wives of the pastors. The man offering the toast turned to Fraser and said, probably with a knowing smile, "You'll want to offer a toast to your wife as well, James?"

"So I will and so I should," said Fraser. "For my wife has been better to me than all of yours put together!"

"How so?" they asked, with their mouths agape.

"My wife has driven me to my knees seven times a day, and that is more than any of your wives have done for you!"

Ugly Turns Beautiful

Here is a man who made the best of an ugly wife. And we can learn from him, without having to be married to a spouse like her. There is benefit in every difficulty you've been given in life.

► First, we can learn to bear up when the difficulties are bearing down.

Fraser's constant dependence on God was legendary. He preached Christ by his tolerance in a difficult situation.

► Second, we can learn to rejoice when our situation is not joyful.

It is hard to believe that James Fraser could be happy with such a wife. Having written a book on sanctification perhaps helped him. He saw that problems such as he encountered actually have a purifying affect. His ugly wife made him a more beautiful Christian.

► Third, we can learn to speak about the kindness of God even when being treated unkindly.

Fraser was not afraid to let his fellow pastors know the truth: God was kind to him. No doubt James often thought through the benefits of God's divine hand on him. It was not mean of God, but kind, to bring him closer to God through prayer because of the ugliness of his wife.

I doubt if your spouse is as ugly as Fraser's, but when problems come from within the family they can be some of the most grievous. Regardless of the source of your problem, do you have a Fraser-like response?

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
James 1:2-4

Note: I received help for this article from *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* by James Kennedy, Christian Focus Publications, 1983.

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