

**Bound to
Appreciate**



Marriage

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As a society, we love weddings. We spend millions of dollars each year making formal declarations of our love. We long for our “soul mate” or “that one person” who is going to make us happy. We usually enter marriage with high expectations for a long and joyous relationship.

Yet others have seen that marriage can be a place of great sadness, pain, and disappointment. Some young people are afraid to get married since most of the marriages they’ve seen in their families, or their friends’ families, have ended bitterly.

There are reasons to be concerned. In 1910, 10 percent of marriages ended in divorce. By 1948, 25 percent of all marriages ended in divorce. Today, 60 percent of marriages will end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 2002). That figure does not even take into account the number of common-law relationships that will dissolve.

God is love. He created marriage to be a wonderful, loving relationship. My purpose in writing this booklet was to help couples achieve what God intended for their marriages.

While I will look at what God intended for marriage and what He created marriage to symbolize, I hope the information will not be so much technical as it is practical. There will be questions for married couples and those of you considering marriage. Hopefully, this booklet will seem less preachy and more as a guide for you to experience a fuller, happier relationship.

I will examine several myths that have been accepted as truths and expose them for what they are—destructive rationalizations. Couples experiencing difficulties should see that there is another option between the painful status quo and divorce. Many see the chance of an improved marriage as slim, and they dismiss it as a possibility. However, we hope that you will see a redeemed, happy marriage as a real option for two Christian people.

I also hope that those thinking of marriage, or those who have been recently married, will examine what marriage should truly be. Ideally, the newly married couple will take the time to make their marriage as beautiful as their wedding day. Most importantly, we hope that they fully understand what they are committing to and the beauty of that commitment.

Unfortunately, a book cannot provide all the counselling a couple may need, but a solid biblical foundation will enhance any counselling that is conducted.

“Rejoice with the wife of your youth...and always be enraptured with her love” (Proverbs 5:18–19, NKJV).

May God bless you in your pursuit to be a better husband or wife.

Communication

By far, the most-cited reason for marital difficulties is a lack of communication. This is often not the primary problem but is usually a result of other issues. Unfortunately, without effective communication those other issues can never improve.

It's easy to examine how we humans react by looking at our relationship with God. Usually people have fewer communications with God (prayer) when we are absorbed in our own pursuits or when we know we have done wrong. Nothing more quickly reduces our prayer time than guilt. It is a natural, carnal reaction to justify our actions so that we wilfully deceive ourselves. However, the only way to improve that situation is to be open and honest with your Heavenly Father.

Likewise, when we have children, we want what is best for them. We know they need our help the most when they have made a mistake. Unfortunately, the most common reaction is to hide our mistakes from our parents. It is probably because when we were young, our parents pointed our mistakes out to us and then punished us. However, as our children get older, we parents need to move away from judge and jury, and into the role of counsellor. This does not mean we should accept the sins or mistakes of our grown children, but that we help them best deal with their mistakes. Most children, even when fully grown, assume the worst will happen if they tell their parents; and instead of receiving help, they will get a lecture on "How could you be that stupid?" We should help our children learn from their mistakes and encourage them so the mistakes won't happen again.

Being self-absorbed in our pursuits is a perilous adventure, just as forgetting our Creator is a dangerous position to take to the grave. When you have a true belief in God and Jesus, His Son, you must act according to that belief in your daily and weekly activities. Likewise, in a marriage, your spouse should be the closest person to you in an intellectual, emotional, and physical sense. Neglecting this person would reduce your ability to share your joys and sorrows. It also tells them they're valued only when you don't have something better to do. This is hardly the sentiment most people wish to express to their spouse, or to God. But does your spouse have reason to think that is how you feel?

Even when we do try to communicate, we often fail to speak openly and honestly. We send coded messages. It's like the time when a husband comes home to find his wife talking to the living room window. "The neighbours are going out to dinner," she says. The husband could respond, "That's nice. What's for supper?"—then enjoy whatever he throws into the microwave. He may answer, "Would you like to go out dear?" She responds, "It doesn't matter to me." He quickly considers what to say next, for the wrong answer is going to cost him peace of mind. Why? "It doesn't matter" is often used when it does matter.

Stories like this about wives are nothing new and they are usually accompanied with: “Why don’t they just say what they mean?” One way for a husband to know what his wife wants is to listen more closely and more often. A “Yes dear” while flipping through the channels on the television doesn’t count.

Husbands-to-be usually spend large quantities of time, energy, and money to win their bride. Both parties spend considerable time making sure everything looks just right—the clothes are stylish, the hair is just so, and the make-up or car is perfect. When we eat, our manners are usually at their best. Most importantly, we pay a great deal of attention to one another in giving the right gifts, going to the right places, and finding out all we can about this gentleman or lady with whom we are falling in love. We often expect married life will improve our quality time together.

After marriage we may find out our partner is less than perfect from time to time. Most people don’t have their “going-out face” on first thing in the morning or when they are sick. The bloom may have left the rose. Worse yet, once they have married their wonderful bride, most men feel they can now focus all their attention on other important life issues, such as their careers. They leave their beautiful bride—the one they worked so hard to get—to look after their children, dishes, and dirty underwear. Ladies, is the gentleman you’re dating the man you want to clean up after? This is not a sound position for the man to take if he wants his wife to bloom into the most beautiful rose ever.

A French man once likened a relationship with a woman to a gentle flower that needed to be cared for, protected, nourished, and kept warm so that the relationship would grow into a beautiful garden for all to enjoy. The time spent watering and pulling weeds out of your most important physical garden—your marriage—is one of the most valuable investments you can make. Let’s look at the example of Christ and the church, in which Christ desires and works to present to Himself a glorious church. As Ephesians 5:27 says, “so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.” This splendour refers to the heart of the church, or the inner beauty. Our focus should be on bringing out the inward beauty of our spouse. The outward beauty is temporary for all of us and is rather insignificant. The inward beauty is permanent and quite special.

I have often enjoyed the older people who attend church regularly. Many of them feel less than useful in helping the church. They make comments like, “I don’t have the strength, the finances or even the memory I once did.” However, someone who has genuinely tried to show the fruit of God throughout his or her life provides a congregation with the most wonderful gift. The beauty the person shines forth is infectious and intoxicating to those who would just take a few seconds to observe it. Yes, the person may be tired and old physically but inwardly glowing of God’s love, which motivates a very useful example of kindness, gentleness, patience, goodness, and love for the younger ones to follow. These older people are terribly missed when they are not there.

On the other hand, seeing an older person who is bitter and mad at the world is an ugly sight. Most people can't get away from such a person fast enough. When you get to know the character of anyone, then you really decide whether or not he or she is truly beautiful to you.

So, how are we going to bring out the best in each other? An old communication test for couples is for each person to do the following: Write down ten items that you think your spouse would like for you to do for him/her. The answers should be concrete specifics, not ephemeral ideals like "love me more." Once the lists are completed, compare them. You may find you have some areas to talk about.

Now try to be more specific and write five things that your spouse would like for a gift. What five things would you like? Are the lists close? Are you paying attention to each other? Do you think your spouse wants what you want, or do you know his/her needs and desires?

Having a great marriage takes time, energy and work—but what a great way to spend your time and energy, and what a load of fun work can be! The best way to prepare to be a great parent is to begin by having a great marriage. You will see as you go through this booklet how the relationship between spouses can be a powerful influence, whether good or bad, on the children. When both of you work to be great spouses, you will have a wonderful relationship, and the whole family will benefit.

The worst way to attempt to improve your communication in a relationship is to say, "You never talk," or, "It's your fault we never talk anymore." The "it's not my fault" mentality that has swept across the Western world is destructive, and it is not following sound biblical principles. The Bible tells us to examine ourselves and to concentrate on doing good. It also shows us that being honest with ourselves is indeed a truth that will set us free, for it allows us to confess our sins, to take steps to correct the wrong, and to change so that we can do good.

Let's look at a few verses that admonish us to examine ourselves. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work" (Galatians 6:2–4). Verse 16 of that chapter says, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). "Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble" (Proverbs 3:34).

There is almost always something you can do to improve the communication in your marriage if you set your mind to it. What does she like to talk about? What is his best outside interest? Start there and express how nice it is to just sit and talk sometimes. Not everyone has the same level of need for attention. (Personal background is a large factor here and each spouse usually comes from a different background.) But everyone needs to feel loved and appreciated. Everyone needs to feel some control in his or her life. Everyone needs to be able to appreciate him or herself. Each of us needs these things to various degrees. Get to know what and how much your spouse needs, and work to meet those needs. Change the "it's not my fault" and "I can't improve our relationship" to "I will do..." and "I can do..."

Remember you can't change someone who doesn't want to change. But you can help create the right environment for change. You can change your reactions and behaviour and how you feel about yourself in dealing with things. But this all takes listening and thoughtful consideration of your significant other. In doing so, you best help yourself.

Unfortunately, we are being accustomed to think that everyone should be perfect at all times. We see this every time we drive our car. Taking a second to look for a street sign, providing courtesy to a pedestrian or simply finding a way to turn around, can bring upon you the wrath of other drivers. The world is impatient with minute imperfections. The irony is that not one of us is perfect all the time. We certainly can never measure up to everyone else's idea of how we should behave in any given situation. When you make a minor mistake or become a minor nuisance to another, how would you want them to respond? I think you would want them to be patient, kind, considerate, merciful and gentle.

I love a line in a popular Alan Jackson song that says, "I even asked God and He said to tell you / Please be patient with me / I'm a work in progress." I couldn't help but consider how appropriate those words are while we're driving, because when the less-than-perfect driver cuts you off, how are you going to respond? Unfortunately there are times when our response may not have been so great. It is then I recall the line, "It's important when you're arguing with an idiot to make sure he isn't too!" (Author unknown.)

How easy it is in marriage to begin a slow, ugly circle of returning ridicule for ridicule, insult for insult, pain for pain—to slowly tear each other down. Yet on your wedding day, you promised to build each other up. Take the high road and work to be like Jesus. Seek to build up your spouse and all those who are around you, and remember they're not perfect yet. Matthew 5:39–44 admonishes us, "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." These verses are difficult to follow because the natural human reaction is to return evil for evil, beginning a downward spiral.

These verses are not about allowing oneself to be abused. These verses follow the Old Testament law that says when another treats you wrongly, you shall not act with vengeance, or return the wrong, but behave as a loving Christian. Vengeance belongs to God and—ideally—his ministers, which are the law: the police and the judges. Judges are supposed to provide vengeance for society, but unfortunately this practice is little understood by social liberals and the supposedly well educated. Your actions and words must always follow the example of Christ. Just because the other party does not receive just recompense does not mean you are allowed to do evil. This practice should also be obvious in your marriage and with those closest to you. You are to be a positive influence, a light to the world, productive in whatever you set your hand to. The verses in Matthew also are not there to teach you to be a victim. You may

need to remove yourself from abuse but you don't need to commit adultery to get back at your spouse. You have much more integrity than that and you are a real prince or princess, a child of the King.

Another biblical example says that at times it is better for us to suffer the wrong and work towards peace. First Corinthians 6:7–8 tells us, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers.”

No matter where you look, God wants you to be a positive influence with your communication with fellow man. The most important place to conduct this positive communication is in your marriage, and it will grow outward from there.

An interesting book on how to respond to accusations and turn the other cheek is called *Anyway*. It is about a set of paradoxical commandments. They are paradoxical because the response is different than what our normal carnal nature would do. The response is in line with what God expects in His commandments. This book can be found in most bookstores at time of printing and will likely be available in Christian bookstores for quite a few years. One example is: “When doing good some may claim you have ulterior motives. Do Good Anyway.”

Communication and Physical Intimacy

When you watch television or walk through a mall, sexually suggestive material is all around you. Even though sex is so pervasive in our society, many people have difficulty discussing the subject of physical intimacy with their spouse. That is likely why physical intimacy is often listed as one of the major problem areas in a relationship.

Physical intimacy is usually the easiest of the three to occur in a relationship. Unfortunately, the term “making love” is used in today's society to describe a physical action that could be over in a couple of minutes with no love involved at all. Many people are so busy trying to keep up with the world that physical intimacy becomes neglected. Couples should try to regularly schedule some time for this in their busy lives. (Discussion should occur on what reasonably constitutes “regularly” for you and your spouse.)

A husband may find that the best physical intimacy occurs when he begins the day telling his wife he loves her and seeks to find ways to show it during the day. Perhaps a call just to say how much you appreciate her. Some inexpensive carnations (it's not the price that matters) can also add to the atmosphere, but taking the time to write just a few words on a card as to why you love her helps to make you more attentive to what she needs.

“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” (1 Corinthians 7:4).

Love should not be a task. It should be a way to express how much you want to be at one with your spouse. The focus in these verses is not that you should be able to demand sex of the other, but rather the opposite is clearly stated. You are supposed to be concerned with meeting the expectations of the opposite sex out of love—each being concerned with meeting the other’s desires and needs.

Despite the fragile nature of man’s ego with respect to this subject, most men want to make their wives happy. But they are not always confident in knowing what to do to make that happen. Judging from the huge selection of women’s magazines at the grocery store checkout, the man needs to first recognize his wife usually needs to feel loved emotionally first. The man’s needs are often more easily met.

A simple little test to assist in communication in this field is to list five things you think your spouse appreciates; then list five things you like and five things you do not like. Be specific and don’t use words like feel “loved,” because what does that term mean to you? What actions would help you feel “loved” or “appreciated”? In addition, the King James Version of the Bible often describes this contact as “knowing” your spouse. Setting aside some time (four hours maybe) early in a marriage (not before marriage) to explore physical intimacy without intercourse occurring may help to create a positive environment for communication in this subject. Remember you’re not doing anyone a favor by not telling your spouse what is not comfortable for you.

Talk and learn to enjoy and appreciate one another by spending the time to make love by creating an emotional and intellectual intimacy that leads naturally into a physical intimacy.

Discussion Items:

1. How well do you know your spouse today?
2. What gifts would your spouse like to receive? Give?
3. What can you do or say to encourage your spouse to achieve his/her goals?
4. What doesn’t your spouse need to hear from you?
5. When your spouse makes a mistake, should you return in kind?
6. Did you try the tests suggested?
7. Do you communicate what you like and don’t like with your spouse?

Cherish your time together! Show each other that you cherish your time together. The Song of Songs by Solomon also has expressions of love, so that couples see the kind of intimacy/appreciation that can be achieved. This is the kind of intimacy God desires for marriage.

General Problems in Marriage

A co-worker's wife recently phoned him about a problem with his car. He is the type of guy that loves to take care of his vehicles, and his wife expects that he will do just that.

One day, she called him and said, "The car won't go."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"The car won't go."

He said, "You mean it won't move down the street?"

"Yeah, it won't go."

"Will it start?"

"No, it won't go."

"When you turn the key does it start?"

"No, it won't go."

"Does it turn over or try to start?"

"I told you already—IT WON'T GO!"

"The starter must not be working."

You can probably imagine the frustration that each was feeling as the conversation progressed. Despite quality care that goes into a vehicle, there are times when the repairs may be outside your ability, so you seek a qualified mechanic. The same is true with people. The problems discussed here may be helpful, but you may find your problem needs further expertise and talent to diagnose and correct. If so, please seek the help sooner rather than later. (It is also up to you to always consider the value of others' constructive criticism. It may be they don't see the whole picture or they have their own problems that have coloured their viewpoint on life.) Generally, professional counsellors can help.

In-Laws

Mothers-in-law have been a vast source for jokes in our society. Some of this humour is problematic because it portrays a lack of honour for parents and can be a terrible example for our children and grandchildren. In-laws can be a great source of guidance, assistance, and a strong support mechanism for your marriage. They can also be a source of problems, if you allow them.

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). We love to watch animal documentaries in our house. We've noticed that animals quickly realize that their offspring must grow up, leave the nest or den, and become a parent themselves.

Many parents hope their children stay at home until they have created a sound financial footing for themselves. They may have to pay a minor boarding fee when they have finished school. We all hope our children will consider us to be good counsellors when they make their life decisions: choosing a career; finding a mate; buying a home; and general financial planning.

If you want your children to desire your counselling, you had better put in the time and energy now in talking with them about life. You should also work at being a great example of a husband, a parent, and a Christian. The greatest gifts you can provide your children are skills in how to treat people beginning with your relationship with your spouse.

However, when it is time for my children to be married, I hope we will gladly help them look for a suitable place to live. We may prefer they live close by so we can enjoy their company and have many opportunities to spend time with any grandchildren we may be blessed with. We should also prefer that they not live in our house, even though our children should be our dearest possessions.

When two people begin to live as husband and wife, they face a host of hurdles to overcome. Firstly, each of them has spent the last few months or years selling themselves as the ideal mate, but we quickly find our mates are not perfect and may have annoying habits. However, they will also be learning a lot more about each other, and together they will be finding ways to best create a loving home, which is the ideal environment for raising children. Living with in-laws may add the confusion of who is the man of the house; or, who should you assist first, your mother or your wife. These are burdens the young couple does not need. If a couple can leave father and mother to begin their life together, they should.

If the newlyweds cannot live alone, they need to create a separation in the home as best they are able. This situation can also occur when people choose to marry before they have opportunity to establish themselves by finishing school and beginning a career.

Difficult times may occur for young couples and assistance may be needed, but this should be a rarity not a common occurrence. Parents can frustrate their child's ability to grow up by making their children dependent upon them. Aid at times is one thing, but dependence is quite another. Children must learn to make it on their own and to be content with what they have until they are able to have more. In a society where everyone expects to have it all now and pay later, we should be an anomaly. This anomaly should create the best life in the long run for the children.

God taught Israel how important the first year of marriage is by exempting young married men from military service. Deuteronomy 24:5 states, "If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married." They need to spend time to build a healthy relationship by communicating and learning about one another. They also need to begin to have an adult relationship with their parents. This is much easier when you are not dependent on your parents.

Children generally learn to appreciate their parents more when they are on their own. They are also more likely to ask them for advice on a realm of issues. They may even come to the realization that Dad and Mom really did know a lot about things. Parents love them, look out for them by gently guiding and assisting them. Sometimes the best help is just to tell them, "I

have every confidence that you two can work it out on your own. Just discuss it a little more, work at it, and I'm sure you'll be all right.”

Solving Difficulties Together

One difficulty that usually arises quickly in a marriage is that the husband and the wife do not always think in the same manner. They have different backgrounds and often grew up in a different environment. The way a husband and his friends would have dealt with a problem with the car—like the oil light coming on—may be totally different than the way his wife would think, because she may have had no interest in how cars work. She just assumed she would continue to drive it until her husband could take it to the mechanic. (This situation could be reversed as many men know little about cars, but we need to realize that we all handle problems a little differently.) We need to be patient with one another and explain why some issues are more important to one or the other. This requires thoughtful and considerate discussion—the type of discussion that rarely occurs the moment you find out your partner just seized the car's engine. Deal with the immediate concern of a ride home and discuss what you perceive the problem to be when you are able to do so in a considerate manner.

Discussing problems is something most of us would rather avoid, like the plague. We would sooner pretend there isn't a problem. (“Maybe the oil light will go out by itself if I just drive a little longer.”) We sometimes worry about how we may be blamed for the problem. This concern helps us ignore it until the problem explodes. Then we can no longer pretend it doesn't exist. With some things it may be better to suffer a wrong and move on in building your relationship but if the problem continues you just can't pretend it doesn't exist. Communication is going to have to occur. The earlier communication occurs, the better and the least damaging the problem will be.

Some couples may realize that problems exist in general but “we have never had any.” Their problem is usually pride. To admit to a problem is often to admit we personally may have failed. Many times, when couples need marriage counselling, one of them, usually the more stubborn, will refuse to attend. “It's my spouse's problem, not mine.” If it was your spouse's problem it is still your marriage's problem. You may need to be a part of the solution because you want what's best for your spouse. You may also need to learn a little humility.

Another way a Christian can fail to deal with a problem and yet convince himself he is strong spiritually is to just “Praise the Lord.” God does promise “He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). His Word also says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (James 1:2). Through trials, we can build character and faith. However, this practice of “Praise the Lord” can also be used as a subtle way to keep us from dealing with our problems. A better way is to “Praise the Lord” and then get busy dealing with our problems. After all God doesn't need to do for us what we can do for ourselves.

The opposite of ignoring problems is someone who deals with each problem with hysteria; exaggerating them beyond rational thought. Exaggerating problems can also be a subtle way of not dealing with them because they are just too big for you to handle.

In order for problems to be solved, they must be accurately identified. This requires an honest self-evaluation. We humans have an amazing ability to deceive ourselves, but the truth that often sets us free is the truth we see when we shed the “it’s not my fault-itis.” We need to honestly reflect upon our own actions and motives.

If you are incapable of determining the problem then it is imperative that you cooperate with a counsellor that can do so for you. Some worldly counsellors may tell you that you shouldn’t feel guilty for breaking God’s laws, but consider your guilt by measuring yourself against the word of God not by what a counsellor says. Also remember that Jesus and your church are not there to heap guilt upon your shoulders but to help you realize your sins so that you can repent/change and have your sins – and therefore the burden of your guilt—removed from you.

Once you have determined the problem you must solve it. It is not difficult to solve problems—everyone has an answer it seems—but it may be difficult to solve a problem properly. It also may take time. The scripture does say Christians are not to be anxious about tomorrow. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34). However this does not mean we are never to consider tomorrow. In fact, Proverbs 13:22 states, “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children.” Intelligent problem solving requires thinking about how the future will be affected by a present solution.

Examining solutions requires careful and considerate communication. As long as the communication revolves around who caused the problem (your defense), or how mad you are that this problem happened, then a solution is not possible. This is why a counsellor often listens to each person privately first. It sometimes provides the best opportunity to get past what happened so that a good solution may be found.

A problem must be faced, discussed and a solution agreed upon that considers the future. The solution must also be acted upon. This process may not be perfect but it does promise a high rate of success.

Sometimes you may think your problem is unique and unsolvable. For a single person to decide to walk on the moon and do everything necessary to make it happen alone would be an impossible problem. Your problem is not likely unique. Someone has probably experienced a similar situation in the past. Solomon wrote, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Generally the problems we face have been faced by countless others before us. Just because you think your problem is unsolvable don’t give up too quickly. At least give yourself the benefit of consulting experts before you conclude that your situation, question or problem is beyond hope.

Raising Children

Child rearing can often be a source of disagreement between a couple. One large area of disagreement is in discipline. If you are interested in more information on parenting please read our booklet, [Christian Principles on Parenting](#).

Most people realize they should not argue in front of the children. Another item to keep in mind is the way your actions affect the relationship between your children and their mother or father. Are your actions helping to build that relationship or tear it down? As you can see, much of being a Christian revolves around considering others above yourself.

The best gifts parents can give their children are to have a loving relationship themselves, and to spend time with their children. For example, playing games with children can be used to teach them how to deal with disappointment, how to win without cheating and how to lose graciously. Fun comes from enjoying the time together not in winning or losing. The more time you spend with your children teaching them these life skills and responsibility, the more it provides them with great ability to succeed in life.

Attending church every week should also go a long way to helping them grow and succeed. But attendance shouldn't be docile, for children should be encouraged to grow in song, understanding and service. The older they get, the more responsibility they should be expected to exercise. Teens shouldn't be "a lost generation" but a group of people preparing to take full responsibility as adults and servants in the church tomorrow. I am thankful that most of our children pick up a hymnal during services and automatically sing out the songs as if they know them well. The words in many of these songs teach wonderful lessons to encourage and assist all of us. Children who attend church regularly are also far more likely to be considerate, kind and helpful in their neighbourhoods.

As our children grow, we must slowly move away from judge and towards counsellor. When they leave home, they should have already been prepared to make the right decisions because they've been taught why or why not, not because Mom or Dad said so. If Mom or Dad's demands are all they know, they are likely to rebel and seek to learn things on their own. When you examine the first-year university student, you will often see the incredible lack of understanding that many young adults display in their first year away from home. They assume that uninhibited behaviour is more mature. I Timothy 4:1-2 says, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron."

Children who haven't worked to form their own beliefs before university will often accept their teachers' beliefs as their own. They will rationalize wrong behaviour as normal, think it is okay to try anything and tend to believe we can create a utopia on earth through social programs and political correctness. In order to prevent this from happening, parents will need to communicate, agree and act in unison. Parents need to find ways to move from just judge to

counsellor to help their children form a solid belief system before they leave home. Utopia will only be created on earth through Christ. Government-sponsored social programs often move society farther away from utopia rather than closer to it.

Financial Agreements

The biggest area of arguments I have witnessed revolves around finances, the lack thereof or where they are being spent.

Unfortunately, many people can experience financial difficulties from loss of employment, substance abuse addictions, gambling, impulsive buying sprees, bad investments, marriage breakdowns and medical problems, just to name a few.

With abuse addictions (gambling and some impulsive buying addictions) the financial problem is usually corrected when the addiction is dealt with. These addictions often require outside assistance. Don't hesitate to acknowledge your problem as early as possible, for a quicker diagnosis means less pain down the road.

With medical problems and marriage breakdowns, some things are beyond your control. Strive to be healthy and loving spouse. Despite your best efforts problems may occur. When you find you are unable to deal with your finances and feel enslaved by your creditors, it may be necessary to seek outside help.

The church may not be able to meet your financial needs even though we will usually be compassionate about your circumstances. A number of local organizations are designed to help people through temporary problems, the food bank being the most well known. The local church should do their best to know what assistance is available in the community and to help those in need find assistance. The local church may assist these organizations at times. However, unlike the supposed great social thinkers of our time, the church does not believe we will create utopia on earth. Yes, Jesus did reach out with compassion towards very many people, but He corrected the source of their problem. Most of our social problems deal with the effect, not the root of the problem. Jesus also provided us the law that requires all people be responsible and hard working.

Many financial problems stem from a lack of budgeting. Banks and finance companies love to make merchandise of such people. They partner with companies who use slogans such as "No Payment, No Interest for Two Years." Ultimately, they turn people into slaves through high interest credit cards and loans. Don't succumb to them. Take control of what you have and what you can do. For young people the answer is simple: No Money, No Buy! Appreciate what you have until you can afford to pay with cash.

When you sit down and discuss how much you have, what you need to spend to live and what you want to save for, there is a lot less room for argument. Don't put unusual income into

the budget like tips, bonuses, overtime or tax refunds. When these benefits come then you are able to give yourself a reward for working harder. More importantly, you will be able to improve your financial situation. If they don't occur and you were counting on them, then your budget begins to fail, so please don't count these things as regular income when budgeting. Both partners must be involved in creating a budget for it to work properly and to reduce the potential for future needless arguments. Information often removes the malice and accusations that can come from ignorance.

There are many good books that deal with ways to save money, how not to waste money, smart shopping practices and how to budget. Remarkably many people forget that when you eat a healthy diet and get regular exercise you often spend less money. Why? Because you end up with a better focus on life and are less likely to go on junk food binges and waste your life in front of a TV set. The quick answer in finding financial health is to put away one hour a day in savings, don't eat out (bet you just found your one hour of savings), and change a monthly mortgage to a bi-weekly one.

Being poor can be great for a relationship. Since you don't have to focus on things, fixing up the cottage, boat, etc., you can spend more time walking, talking and playing together. Poor people can be happy if they are content and working together to help one another. Paul said, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12–13). Happiness is a state of mind, not a number on a balance sheet.

When someone decides to tithe, this often forces him or her to budget, which is a good thing. However, never give with the expectation that you can claim your rewards for your tithing from God (New Age concept). Give out of thanks and appreciation for what God has already given you. If possible, make giving a family act of appreciation of God's blessings.

Dealing with Frustration and Anger

Many of us have never learned how to deal with frustration and anger. Most problems mentioned so far could have been avoided. When someone makes a mistake and problems result—depending on the depth of the problem—the solution may take months or years to achieve. This can be very frustrating for a spouse and even for the one who caused the problem.

Please remember we are all a work in progress. Realize your mistakes and work to correct them. Take pride in what you are accomplishing rather than becoming bitter by playing the "what if we were perfect" game. You shouldn't live life in the past. You can learn from the past, but you have to live in the present while looking forward to the future. Yours can be the greatest future of all—being with God in his Holy City without any more sorrow or tears, only joy. (Write for your free copy of our booklets, [How You Can Be An Overcomer](#) and [Man's Awesome Destiny](#).)

I remember a story where a husband and wife, early in their marriage, argued until the stuffed animals were flying. They were thankful they were considerate enough to throw stuffed animals rather than pots and pans. After a short break, they both expressed the belief that divorce is not an option—so how were they going to make things work? Talking about the future helps put the past in the past and helps you to focus on doing the right thing.

Paul wrote in Philippians 4:4–13, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

It’s easy to be focused on the negatives around us, including your spouse’s negatives, but God didn’t call us to be pessimists, sucking the life out of everyone around us – especially our spouse. God called us to be a light to the world. We are supposed to be tender-hearted, gentle and acting to do good. If your focus is always on the negative you will be bitter. If you are thankful for the good that God has shown you and what He has given you, you will be a wonderful blessing to others.

In the world there is much rage: road rage, plane rage, gang violence, family abuse. But we’re not supposed to be the one raging. We are called to be patient, and despite what others do we are to do what is right. One reason for Paul to be at peace, even though he suffered much ill in his life, might be because his happiness was contingent upon what he did, not who applauded. Many people look constantly for praise from others. This is nice for the moment but does not provide true happiness. Happiness comes from knowing you have done what is right. When you are angry, is it really because someone is doing you wrong? Does someone in the car ahead of you hesitate to see if this is the right street cause you anger? Maybe this is an opportunity to show patience and consideration.

When you see someone taking advantage of another, or harming someone who is unable to defend himself, then it is time to be angry and to possibly speak up. But when that time has passed and there is no benefit for your anger, it must be released. Prayer (talking with God) and talking with a close friend usually helps to release that anger. In order for it to be fully gone, you must focus on doing something positive. Surprisingly, when we seek to be a blessing to

others we are a blessing to ourselves. One of the reasons God requires us to attend church is to give us an opportunity to serve others by being encouraging, helpful and kind. In being the right person in serving others we find a blessing left behind for ourselves—a wonderful blessing of peace!

In marriage, we often will meet each other with the worst of our day but sometimes maybe we could pray first, leave the worst in the world, and then think about coming home with the best we have to offer. Kind words and expressions of how much we are thankful for them. In so doing we will find a blessing, too—a happier, more peaceful marriage.

May God bless you in your pursuit of doing good.

Discussion Items:

1. How are you solving problems in your relationship?
2. Are you ashamed to deal with them?
3. Are your solutions to get you through the day or for the long term?
4. How well do you handle your finances? Did you create a budget together? Do you agree on what you're saving for?
5. Do you think about how to show your spouse you cherish them?
6. What is the best gift you can give your children?
7. Are your in-laws negatively or positively affecting your marriage? How?

Marriage—What God Intended

We have already seen that God intended people to get married if they desired to have physical relations, but what kind of intimacy does God intend marriage to represent?

A simple, straightforward answer to that question can be found in Jesus' answer to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:3: "The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?'" The Pharisees were trying to trick him to choose between two religious schools of thought based on Moses' allowance for divorce. His answer showed how foolish it was to consider the law of Moses only when considering the subject. "And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female,"' and said, "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'" (verses 4–6). The answer to what God intended is evident in creation; one man and one woman would come together in union.

But the Pharisees still wanted him to choose between the two schools of thought; divorce for sexual immorality only or divorce for any reason. They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery” (verses 7–9). His answer showed that God hated divorce and that it was only because of sin that divorce should occur and if they separated for any other reason everyone should still consider them bound together.

His answer was rather a conservative one compared to the norm in His day. His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry” (verse 10). They were shocked that a man’s wife was to remain his only wife for the rest of his life. Many people today seem to act in this manner.

With the creation account we also see that the man and woman were to be fruitful and multiply. Jesus refers to this creation as God’s intent—homosexuality is not only condemned in the law but is obviously not what God intended when he ordained marriage at Creation.

The reference to “flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone” with Adam and Eve is also symbolic of Jesus and the Church (see Ephesians 5). The members of the Church are told that they have no part of Him unless they eat his flesh and drink His blood in a symbolic manner. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him’” (John 6:53–56).

First Corinthians 15 refers to the first man as Adam and the last Adam as Jesus. The physical creation was to be symbolic of the later spiritual creation. Again in Ephesians 5, the Word of God describes marriage as representative of a tremendous relationship that portrays God’s intent for Mankind—to become part of the Family of God. A family where recognition of who is in charge—is secondary to the attitude of seeking to be a blessing to one another and therefore being fruitful and multiplying. While it is true that you must accept Jesus in order to be a part of body, it is also true that the church is supposed to be the organism that nurtures the child.

What happens if we forget our bond of marriage and go about looking at other idols of flesh, money and pride? The Old Testament (Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8) tells us that God will divorce us. Yet He constantly says repent, for why would you perish; why would you remove yourself from God? “Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Likewise, in our personal marriage relationship, we are to uphold the high standard that is represented between Jesus and the church. Why would you make a mockery of your promise before God and a mockery of what God intended in marriage by purposely neglecting your vows and acting unfaithfully towards your spouse?

Discussion Items:

1. What does marriage symbolize?
2. When did God first show his intent with marriage?
3. Does the creation account allow for homosexual unions?

Divorce—Facts and Myths

Jesus, while explaining the intent of marriage, provided a clear reason why divorce was permissible—sexual immorality. This wasn't meant to be a conclusive list; it was meant to focus people on God's intent or desire for them, rather than searching for legalistic loopholes. It also doesn't mean you have to divorce your spouse if they committed adultery. You may be able to redeem your marriage. Another reason for divorce mentioned in the New Testament is found in 1 Corinthians 7:15: "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace." Obviously from the context, it assumes divorce, not separation. However, someone who has a spouse and abandons them should not be in a hurry to get married again. Rather, they should wait to see if their spouse reconsiders what they had committed to or if they have gone to pursue other flesh. Once that has happened, the door for reconciliation has closed. Therefore we can see two reasons the Bible allows for divorce: sexual immorality and abandonment. Another case could be made for physical abuse based on how God dealt with physical abuse breaking the bonds with slaves in His law.

However, throughout Canada and the United States, churches and clergy are not only condoning divorce for a vast number of other reasons, they actually have encouraged people to ignore their vows altogether, based on certain myths. This ought to not be so and is a flagrant corruption of the sanctity of marriage. People should reconsider what Jesus said and seek obedience rather than treason. Yes, we should support victims of abuse. However, the one who committed adultery is not the one we are to empathize with; we are to empathize with the victim.

But let's examine some of those myths so that you and your loved ones never become susceptible to them.

MYTH 1: It is better to divorce than to remain in a loveless marriage.

This myth presupposes that the marriage will always be loveless. How do you know that? Sometimes, after some painful months and years, we believe we have only one choice between the painful status quo and divorce. We all deserve love. God is love, so He must want us to be loved. This is how divorce is rationalized. After many loveless months, we may even lead ourselves into believing we never loved our spouse, but this would be self-deceit.

Let's read a little more in 1 Corinthians 7:11: "But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife." God's intention was that a couple could separate but not divorce, if there was a problem. If they burned with passion it was necessary for the couple to come together again. In time, this separation could lead to remembering the good qualities of your spouse and not continuing the circle of anger and mean spiritedness. The times together would become more like dating because you would be on your best behaviour. It is likely that a separation of this manner would lead you to remember that yes, you did love your spouse at one time. How will you know? You will remember what you did, your past actions.

Biblical love is not Hollywood love, but a love shown in action. Let's look at the fruits of God's Spirit. How do you know someone is gentle, kind, longsuffering, joyful and patient? By how they act. Therefore, how can love be gone in a marriage unless you've chosen to let it go? What are you going to do to show love to your spouse? If you both act, the feeling of love or—more importantly—of being loved, returns. The option of a redeemed loving marriage is a real option!

What about the children? How many children have wanted their parents to grow up and act lovingly towards each other rather than give up and divorce? What would they say was better? This myth of divorce being better than a seemingly loveless marriage is just that—a myth.

MYTH 2: Everyone is entitled to one mistake.

So if I haven't made my mistake yet, can I go and murder you? After all, I am allowed one mistake. Why stop at one mistake? After all God says you should forgive a multitude of times in Matthew 18:22. God is willing to forgive us our sins, but it would be an incredible abuse of forgiveness to think that we can go sin because God is merciful. Romans 6:15 tells us, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" When we play games with God, God turns away from us.

This myth is sometimes coupled with thoughts like: "God wants me to be happy," or, "You owe it to yourself," or "If I am unhappy in my marriage, God would want me to divorce and find someone I would be happy with." The answer to this is the same as in the loveless

marriage. Since when did the vows contain the line, “as long as you make me happy”? God wants us to put our responsibilities/commitments before our desires, or pursuit of pleasure.

Recently I heard a wife say she needed some distance from her husband to find herself. She had problems growing up and had convinced herself that she made a bad decision in choosing her spouse. Wouldn't it be nice if you made a bad financial decision and the bank let you out of your commitment because it was too hard rather than making you face your responsibility? Maybe it wasn't the best decision she could have made—so what? Your marriage vows don't state, “or until I find out I could have done better.” Many women would love to be married to a faithful man who was committed to cherishing her all the days of his life. Unlike many counsellors who would tell her “they understand” and help her work through her grief of a failed marriage, I chose to help her find herself quickly. I pointed out to her that she was his wife, she had two wonderful children, and she should act like someone who had such responsibilities. Acting responsibly is not just for old people. The young are not free to be irresponsible. She isn't entitled to one mistake in picking a spouse. She is expected to act responsibly before God. She didn't need me to empathize with her. Sin is supposed to cause estrangement. Empathy is for the victim. I would help her tremendously to re-dedicate herself to her marriage if and when she repents of her course of action, not before.

MYTH 3: God led me to divorce.

I know this must sound crazy to many people. But after reading about this a number of times and hearing it in real life a few times, I have come to see it is a very real situation.

It usually goes like this: A person is not happy in their relationship for whatever reason. They alienate themselves from their spouse and begin a long period of praying about their relationship. Since their relationship never gets better, the spouse becomes frustrated with waiting and begins to ask frequently if they are going to get a divorce. The answer to their prayers must be to divorce their spouse. I have also heard a variation where someone else was praying for a relative's marriage with great passion for a number of months. Since God never acted and the couple ended up in divorce, then this must have been what God intended.

Why is it God has to answer a prayer miraculously on a subject when you already know the answer? God hates divorce and he hates sin. He doesn't want you to pray and fast for an obvious problem. He wants you to ACT in a manner befitting a child of God—a child, by the way, who made a promise to God and a promise to his spouse before God.

God is not involved in leading people to sin. “God led me to divorce” is the great evil of failing to accept responsibility for your own actions. Divorce is something you or your spouse chose to do. A happy marriage is where God wanted to lead you, but one or both of you decided to do your own thing along the way. God never leads people to disobey His commandments.

MYTH 4: A divorced person can never remarry!

This myth takes a couple of biblical verses out of context.

Let's look at the verses in question in Matthew 19. Jesus was speaking to a crowd that believed it was acceptable to divorce for any reason. In modern times, we call it "no-fault divorce". His answer was that except for adultery, you should not divorce. (This means if you divorce because of adultery, the sin was not yours; it was your spouse who broke the bond.) The inclusion of anyone who marries a divorcée also commits adultery, deals with the attitude of "now we have gotten divorced we are free." God is accepting the divorce only if the bond was broken by unfaithfulness, so stay monogamous and get back together. If you are on the outside, treat the separated couple as if they are still bound so that they may get back together. Never knowingly date someone who was married unless that marriage has ended and the other party has moved on.

Now if you choose to divorce your spouse because they are regularly committing adultery no one is supposed to think less of you. You are not supposed to be in an abusive relationship. An abusive relationship does not glorify marriage; it makes a mockery of it. God accepts divorce in those circumstances. He never wants those circumstances to occur but if you were the victim, you are just that, a victim. We are supposed to help and support victims, not drive them away with a guilty conscience.

The sinning spouse will already have hammered them with: "Why aren't you forgiving?" or "It's your fault," or "If you only would have...." Nothing you did gave your spouse a reason to commit adultery or beat you. Absolutely nothing you did gave them that right. Each and every one of us could point to something our spouse does that we may not enjoy or appreciate, but that does not give us the right to act unfaithfully. Even if they act unfaithfully, we must not become as they are, but be an example in deed and action. Yes, it hurts when you have been treated in such a disloyal manner, but have the confidence of knowing you have tried to act with integrity, loyalty and faithfulness. Being divorced in these circumstances means you are not bound and therefore free to marry another. You have done nothing wrong.

However, IF the offender acknowledges that they need to earn your trust and respect, you may decide to take the time to have them work through their problem and earn your trust. (Forgiveness on your part is expected but forgiveness does not mean fully trusting.) This takes time, a humble attitude on behalf of the offender and sometimes outside counselling—especially if anger, drug abuse, gang problems, etc. are included. If they expect you to just forget and think everything is to be normal, then you are very likely to have ongoing problems. Children of abused spouses generally grow up thinking abuse is normal. Be an example and encourage the right behaviour from everyone.

Forgiveness, mercy and redemption are ideals. A divorced victim shouldn't be made to feel ashamed in church. They should be loved and helped with their grief. Guilty spouses should be the ones discouraged from raising their heads in church and should feel ashamed.

What about when the guilty party repents? When they acknowledge their sins by their actions and seek to do the right thing in their life from that moment on, the repentance should bear some notable fruit. If this fruit is present they should be allowed back into fellowship. The sin should be ignored, as we cannot undo most of our past; we can only change the future. We need to then encourage them to continue to bear good fruit.

I bet some reading this part are thinking, “But doesn’t the Bible say in 1 Corinthians 7:39, ‘A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes?’” Yes, it does, but it also says in verses 27 and 28, “Are you bound [married] to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed [divorced].” His main point was to cherish and hold marriage in high regard. “Are you loosed [divorced] from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you [the divorced person] do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin [single person] marries, she has not sinned.”

The church should work to strengthen marriages not assist in tearing them down. In the church people should hold dear to heart the line, “What God has joined together, let not man separate!”

Discussion Items:

1. Is divorce always the lesser of two evils?
2. When our desires conflict with our vows what should we do?
3. Does God ever lead us to sin?
4. When you no longer feel you’re in love, can love ever be restored in such a loveless marriage?
5. Should the church make victims in divorce feel guilty?
6. Is everyone allowed one mistake when considering divorce?
7. What is the difference between godly love and Hollywood love?

The Roles God Instituted for Marriage

“So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:20–

24). Unfortunately, our fleshly nature often keeps us from being as one by seeking our own will. Ultimately, as mentioned before, these verses are supposed to be representative of a greater relationship between Jesus and the Israel of God.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:22–33).

The marriage relationship is supposed to represent the relationship between Christ and the Church. To make a mockery of marriage is to make a mockery of what God ordained. Man and woman coming together in marriage is the relationship that is allowed to be fruitful.

Despite homosexuality being prevalent in a minority of people throughout history, ALL biblical writers, over thousands of years, addressed marriage as being between a man and woman. Homosexual unions do not qualify and make a mockery of the Word of God. “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due” (Romans 1:27). In the beginning God created men and women so that they fit properly. The backside was obviously not designed for such an activity. That is why homosexuals are numerous times more likely to have medical problems and have a much shorter life span.

Some will immediately call me “Bigot” when reading this. I can assure you if you are offended by my position, I am equally offended by yours. I choose to talk about the facts. Bigot used to be a term that was appropriately used to describe someone who was against somebody for who they were, a black person for instance, not who they chose to be. (Whom you have sex with is either a choice or it’s rape.) Now with political correctness, bigotry is used to describe someone who doesn’t agree with your behavioural choices. I guess I may someday also be called a bigot because I disagree with someone committing adultery or stealing.

The concept of being fruitful is left for man and woman in marriage whether speaking physically or spiritually. The traditional family, where both spouses fulfill their roles, is undeniably the best environment for raising children. The same is true with the church.

Unfortunately, many people take the verses in Ephesians 5 out of context and think men should rule their wives like servants. That is hardly how Jesus served the church. Or, as the chapter starts in Ephesians, “Let us all be imitators of God.” Yet because marriage does symbolize God’s desire for mankind, men are placed in authority. The correct viewpoint of authority is for those in authority to consider themselves servants, not to be served.

Some use Eve’s mistake as the reason why men began to rule over women but they would be incorrect. The New Testament writers state that it is through creation that we see God's example of authority in the relationship. It is obvious from Ephesians that God intended that both parties treat each other with the utmost concern and love for the other, knowing that together they can accomplish the most wonderful things of all. That ideal should be pursued in marriage even though, at times, we are less than perfect.

The final decision is the husband’s. His decision in a matter should always be based on what is best for his family, his marriage and his wife, rather than what is best for himself. That is the example Jesus left us in His dealings with the church. Women are to follow these decisions unless they conflict with what they believe God requires. This could include regular attendance at the same church. If there is a conflict between God’s will and her husband’s, then she must put God’s desires over her husband’s. Having said all that, how many decisions really come up that shouldn't be discussed and agreed upon by both parties? The answer should be extremely few.

Now with respect to what functions each of the partners perform Proverbs 31 shows a women who takes care of her children and works hard to provide for them. Both the wife and the husband should be setting an example in service to one another and for the family as a whole.

Your parents often influence the functions you choose to take care of in your marriage. A husband will often assume his wife will do what his mother did for his father. The wife often assumes her husband will do what her father did for the family. In other cases our opinion of what functions we should fulfill could be based on outside role models. I hope that if TV has influenced your understanding of your role, the influence was from 7th Heaven rather than The Simpsons. Whatever has affected your viewpoint, it is best to communicate that with your spouse rather than assume they are being negligent or uncaring.

The biggest influence on the development of the wife as a person after marriage is usually the husband, and likewise the husband’s development is often most influenced by his wife. Therefore if someone complains that their spouse has turned into a monster in the years since they were married, one might ask: “How do you think you contributed to that?” Quite often the wife or husband we have is the one we created or allowed to be. If you take this approach you accept some responsibility to improve your relationship through your actions instead of “it’s not my fault.” (Note this is not always the case but it is worth considering.)

Jesus set us the example that we should want to be presented with a glorious wife. We men ought not to neglect our wives after marriage, but seek ways to show them we cherish them and

encourage the best from them. One way to encourage the best in others is to seek the best from within oneself. Be responsible, considerate, tender-hearted and hardworking. Set a positive example as a husband, father, friend and neighbour—and as a Christian and a spiritual leader.

Unfortunately the man sometimes neglects his role as leader and does the least he has to in looking after his family. Thus he sets a bad example and neglects his role as a spiritual leader. In these cases the woman often, out of necessity, takes over the leadership. She should search for ways to encourage her husband to set the example, not discourage him. She should also never seek to usurp his authority for who would think it is okay for the church to tell Jesus what to do? Which is probably why the term respect is used. Are your words and actions showing respect or a lack thereof? The church is to follow Christ, and the man is to follow the example of Jesus and set the example in his home as a Christian, a loving husband and father, and as a good neighbour. When a man serves and appreciates his family, it is easy for his spouse and family to respect him.

The reverse is also true when a wife sets a great example. It is easy for her to be respected and loved. Men should always remember to be gentle and considerate with their wives. Are your words and deeds helping her to feel loved or making her feel unappreciated?

Keeping in mind what God intended marriage to symbolize, we should always hold marriage in high esteem and do our best to magnify that relationship, rather than to minimize it with divorce, bitterness or neglect.

Discussion Items:

1. What roles do you fulfill in the home?
2. What roles did your parents fulfill?
3. Does subordination mean inferior?
4. When can a woman disobey her husband?
5. What does it mean for a man to give himself to his wife?
6. What does it mean to cherish your spouse?

Marriage Relationships in the Church

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Corinthians 7:1–5). It is okay to remain unmarried. “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality [so that fornication does not abound], let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.” This passage does not deal with whom you should marry so I will speak more about that later.

“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.” This is a beautiful saying that should apply to the whole relationship. With this statement you are not to consider physical intimacy as a means to take care of your desires, but to give yourself fully to meeting your spouse’s desires. This attitude should apply to the relationship in general so that you give yourself to meet the needs of the other. This should never be taken to an extreme where you let yourself be abused to meet the needs of your spouse. God desires everyone to act in a loving manner and as much as it depends on you, do so.

“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” If your needs are being met at home it is much easier to not be tempted by others. Be concerned for the well-being of each other and in love enjoy your physical intimacy.

Continuing on in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11, “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.” The married in this case was those couples in the church who were married. Since they are both striving to do God’s will, they should be able to work out difficulties and hold marriage as an ideal. If they have a problem and separate, they are not to look elsewhere, but be reconciled.

“But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?” (1 Corinthians 7:12–16). This is the case of those who were married and then became part of the church; unfortunately their spouses have not yet become part of the church.

Many churches have wrongfully taken verses that say do not be unequally yoked (2 Corinthians 6:14) and have applied it to this group and have caused needless divorces all to the supposed glory of God. What they have actually succeeded in doing was to glorify divorce instead of holding marriage in high esteem.

If the couple is still at peace and striving to do good for each other, then the best way to show they value marriage and what it represents is to be the ideal husband or wife. Who knows if your faith and actions, which should be representative of the fruit of God’s Spirit, will eventually win over your spouse? One thing is for sure—nagging won’t do it. However, your children will know how important family and marriage is to you. To walk away from a marriage because your spouse didn’t see what you did, will—at the same time—teach your

children you don't value marriage, responsibility or commitment. They are unlikely to look to you for real moral guidance.

Verses 27–28 say, “Are you bound [married] to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed [divorced]. Are you loosed [divorced] from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you [the divorced person] do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.” If your spouse does leave because of your faith, there is not much you can do. Let them leave and pursue peace. Continue to show you value responsibility, commitment and marriage. You may have great heartache when they leave but you have said you will put your faith in God before father, mother, husband, wife, preacher, friend and child. Remember if you continue to do what is right, peace and contentment will come. You are free to marry again in this case but there should be a time to heal and careful consideration should be made over whom you would marry.

While you are married, you must always seek to be a great wife or husband. That is what God expects from you.

Discussion Items:

1. Married people in the Church should stay married until when?
2. If a wife becomes a believer and her spouse does not, should they divorce? Or should they strive to be the best spouse/parent they can be?
3. If your spouse leaves you, gets a no-fault divorce, and pursues other flesh are you still bound or loosed?
4. If your spouse leaves you should you rush to get a divorce or make it known you are willing to be reconciled together?

Whom Should I Marry? How Will I Know Whom to Marry?

First Corinthians 7:39 states: “A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives [if he divorces you and marries another he is not your husband]; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.” That is the important consideration. Does the one you are getting to know believe in God, not with just words, but do they back it up by what they do?

How important is it that they believe? Am I sure he or she will let me follow my beliefs without any difficulty? Let's see what Nehemiah said, “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin” (Nehemiah 13:26). A different culture, a tradition opposed to or in conflict with God's will is a

constant source of contention in a relationship and a difficult environment for raising children. If a couple does not expect to be part of the same church as a family, I will not marry them. The whole family could appreciate cultural traditions with respect to food and clothes. However, when it involves traditions revolving around religious worship before God, the two must be at one.

Many young people believe great pleasure is to be found in immoral or illegal actions. As a Christian grows up they should learn that God's laws weren't created to stop you from finding happiness but to help you have more joy in your life. Momentary pleasures often lead us away from true happiness. Ask any alcoholic if the momentary pleasure led to greater happiness in their life.

When a young lady asks a pastor to marry her and the love of her life, she expects to hear a welcoming response. However, a pastor knows that someone with a great faith marrying someone without that faith will have difficulties. That woman at times will have to choose between two very different ways of life—her husband's and her God's. Despite what she believes will be her life, she will end up having many difficult decisions. Our requirement is to not marry a believer with an unbeliever. When we say "no," they may go down the street to another church or to the justice of the peace and get married. We are not accountable for their actions. We are accountable for our own actions before God. Our desire is not to bring difficulty or sadness to their lives, but to assist them and to encourage them so that they do not make their lives sadder and more difficult. Please consider why.

In our society, we strive to be free of restrictions, find ways to bend or get around rules. However, when a marriage breaks down it is not because of God's rules, but because one or both of the parties have broken God's commandments. He gave them to us as a loving Father for our good. Please carefully consider whom you are marrying with respect to God's commands, and do not marry an unbeliever.

Additionally, when dating, you may come across men who seem to be genuinely interested in you. They are incredibly flattering and pay attention with great detail to your likes and desires. However, these men will often fall into two various different categories.

The first category is what our society often glorifies—the womanizer. He will be very slick, very caring and attentive, as long as he gets what he wants. When all his smoothness does not pay off, you will likely get to see the ugly inside of this person. His beauty is shallow and he will take great care to show you a good outside. This is not how a true believer should be and it really doesn't matter if they attend your church or not.

The second guy is the one genuinely concerned about you. When he doesn't get his way he may discuss it with you but he will be concerned about your well-being and peace of mind. This guy's beauty will really come from the inside regardless of the outside package. This is how a true believer should be.

The problem is it may take time to get to know which guy you are around. However, that is the whole point of dating—to get to know the character and personality of the other person. It is absolutely not the opportunity to get to know the other person physically.

The same is true nowadays of many women. There are many warnings to men not to be fooled by the outside package of a woman. “My son, pay attention to my wisdom; Lend your ear to my understanding, That you may preserve discretion, And your lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, And her mouth is smoother than oil; But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, Her steps lay hold of hell. Lest you ponder her path of life; Her ways are unstable; You do not know them. Therefore hear me now, my children, And do not depart from the words of my mouth. Remove your way far from her, And do not go near the door of her house, Lest you give your honour to others, And your years to the cruel one; Lest aliens be filled with your wealth, And your labours go to the house of a foreigner; And you mourn at last, When your flesh and your body are consumed” (Proverbs 5:1–11).

You need to get to know someone well and not just trust that because they have attended the same church, they are believers. You may find believers when you aren’t looking, and in unusual places, but generally the church is the safest place. A believer has faith in God and believes God will reward them for their expressions (works) of faith, whether good or bad (Hebrews 11:6). This doesn't mean you can't explore friendships with people to see if they have considered God and His purpose for mankind. Maybe you will find a believer because they are sparked by your faith in God to explore their condition before God.

For young adults and older teens, consider the opinions of your parents carefully. They usually will be looking out for your best interests and will be looking to the character of the person and not the outward package. Christian parents should be a great resource to you in dating but they may be wrong. If you disagree on the character of the individual you wish to date then don't huff away in disappointment. Rather, agree to dates in a family environment, like playing games, so that your parents may get to know the other person better. Maybe they will be proven wrong or maybe in time you will understand their apprehension. Communicating constructively always helps. If over time your parents still have the same concerns it would be wise to heed them.

Christian parents should always have their children's best interests at heart. Once, however, I heard of a man who so loved having his daughter at home that he worked at discouraging her from dating even when she was in her twenties. He appeared to have his best interests at heart rather than his daughter's and was acting selfishly because he didn't want to be alone. I understand the fear of being alone but did he mind if his daughter ended up alone? Fortunately I have not met many Christian parents who were like this gentleman. I also doubt that his daughter would have let him be lonely if she did get married. She was a very responsible and caring individual.

Remember the purpose of dating is to get to know one another in an intellectual and emotional manner, not a physical one. What are their beliefs and habits? What do they use as a guide in making decisions in their life? How do they respond in adversity? Do they have a bad case of “it’s not my fault-itis” or do they examine themselves, seek to do good, and seek to repair mistakes by at first realizing them?

The notion of having one “soul mate” is a ridiculous myth. If someone made a lifelong commitment with you to act kind, gentle, patient, longsuffering, with joy and loyalty, those actions would lead you to a wonderful feeling of love—true love—for they would show a genuine concern for you. That person could indeed be a “soul mate.”

The intimacy that comes from seeking to show respect and care for one another should also lead to greater intimacy of becoming one as God intended. The best way, which is why it is God’s way, is to find a believer, for they will know that is what they are to do, and together you will have a great opportunity to create godly offspring. Be fruitful and multiply, and enjoy all your days with the wife of your youth.

Discussion Items:

1. Should a believer marry an unbeliever?
2. Are God’s laws designed to stop us from finding happiness?
3. Are God’s laws foolish and oppressive?
4. Will you know you’ve found your mate the first time you look in their eyes?

Sex in Marriage—What is Permitted?

We can see from creation that man and woman were to come together to be fruitful and multiply. Sex with animals, close kin, homosexual acts, fornication and adultery are all prohibited as it clearly states in Leviticus 18 and many other places throughout the Bible. Leviticus 18 also was not just direction for a certain people in a certain time. God states these sexual sins were the reason He destroyed the nations that were in the land of Canaan before Israel. Jesus simply points to Creation to quickly straighten out God’s desire for marriage and when two should come together and be one. Apart from those things that are prohibited, the Bible provides a lot of freedom in this matter.

Some may consider various sex manuals as educational but Christians should be cautious and careful in weighing such material. Some books are meant to excite rather than educate. Others are more medical. Others strive to be educational in more modern terms. Most will portray biblical followers in a poor manner and use society normality to define what is acceptable. In short, if most people are doing it then it is good and normal. For instance, our society regularly practices premarital sex and says it is perfectly normal and acceptable. A former U.S. president

has made this situation worse by creating a generation of people who feel as long as they don't have intercourse it's not really having sex and they can do anything. When a group of people consider an act normal, then it is natural and it is to a person's own whim if they choose to do it.

For Christians these worldly standards are problematic. Firstly, what is considered "normal" is often an expression of human corruption. Secondly, we are called to come out of this world to be a light that transforms the world. If there is no God then all things are permitted; but if there is a God (and we believe there is), then all things are not permitted. Also not permitted is selfishness. Remember, the man is not to consider his needs but his wife's, and the wife is to consider her husband's needs.

Unfortunately, it has become necessary in our society to state that the woman was created to be penetrated by man (natural use) and not other devices. The backside was not designed by God to be penetrated by anything (unnatural use). These are simple medical facts and to ignore them is incredibly foolish.

In addition, many get the viewpoint of making love as being dirty and not good behavior. Yes it does describe the need for the couple and whatever sheets touched them to be cleaned afterwards in Leviticus. However, we also would want the sheets to be changed with clean sheets before staying in a motel for health purposes. Bodily fluids, whether blood, urine or semen, contain great potential for health concerns if not dealt with properly. But the act of coming together as one is supposed to be an act of beauty that God created to build strong ties in a relationship and also to pass on the most precious gift of all—new life.

There is no law that says knowing your spouse must be boring or always the same. There is a law that says it must be with the same person. Variety and sensible exploration can be enjoyable. According to some surveys, it would seem that men would prefer more variety than women. The only way to find out what's right for your marriage is to talk with your spouse and enjoy your time together.

Discussion Items:

1. What is considered sexually immoral biblically?
2. What else should always be considered in physical intimacy with your spouse?
3. Should we conform to the standards of this world?

The Marriage Ceremony and Covenant

Recently, I have seen some ridiculous video clips of marriages that occurred in crazy locations. For a while, it was fashionable for people to write their own vows. Yet many others complain that marriage is a waste of money and that a sheet of paper does nothing to make a relationship more meaningful. Unfortunately many people make their decisions in ignorance,

not stupidity, although a skydiving ceremony seems stupid. There is sound reasoning for the marriage ceremony and for making a formal covenant in front of witnesses.

We covenant or make agreements in a regular manner in our society. When we work for an employer we agree to provide certain work for specific remuneration. When we take out a loan or mortgage we make a covenant with the lender. When we take the witness stand we make a covenant to tell the truth. When politicians take office they make a covenant to perform their duties. The most important covenants we will make in our lives are with God and with our spouse. Since we recognize all these covenants made in society, the church also recognizes marriages conducted by judges.

When God made a covenant he swears by Himself since there is no higher authority; but we know He will keep His covenant, His commitment to us. The opposite is true of Satan. He is described as the father of liars in John 8.

When we make a serious covenant with others we often want witnesses to the agreement so that if the other person reneges on the deal, it is not just one person's word against the other's. This makes the agreement seem stronger. We understand this in every other aspect of life, so let's now consider the marriage ceremony and see how much value this covenant has.

Most marriage ceremonies follow a similar format. They begin with welcoming the witnesses to the joyous occasion. The witnesses most often are comprised of parents, siblings, relatives, friends, employers, coworkers and church members. Making a commitment to one another in front of all these people does make it more binding. If you should stumble, these witnesses are responsible to encourage you to keep your vows that they witnessed. Witnesses are just not there to be entertained. There is more at stake with this deal than just your word against mine.

The ceremony usually continues with a prayer asking God to also be a witness to this occasion. This increases the responsibility of the witnesses to remind the couple of their commitment. A lesson is often told about love and caring for one another, which will include scripture reading. Then there is a reminder that we are asking God to join the husband and wife and that as they say their vows they are making this promise to be faithful before God.

The Standard Covenant

I _____ promise to take you _____, to be my wife (or husband); and I promise and do covenant before God and these witnesses; to be your loving and faithful husband; for richer or poorer; in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health; as long as we both shall live.

The most important aspect of this covenant is to be faithful forever. That is why infidelity is such a major problem. It shows a complete disloyalty to the commitment that you have made to your spouse, and before family, friends and God.

The other conditions cover most of the ridiculous reasons people get divorced. Firstly, “for richer or poorer” takes care of the fact that your financial status should have nothing to do with your commitment to your marriage, and really should not affect how happy your marriage is. Secondly, “in joy or in sorrow” effectively deals with the comment that your spouse doesn’t bring you the joy you desire. Even if tragedy strikes the home and brings overwhelming grief, such as the loss of a child, that is not reason enough to walk out on the marriage. Thirdly, even though over time we may be ravaged with disease or the effects of age so that we no longer look like we did when we were twenty something, this is still not a reason for divorce. When your wife becomes 40, you’re not supposed to trade her in for two 20 year-olds. Likewise since many older women are now leaving their husbands, their responsibility does not end when the children grow up and leave the home. The promise was forever.

The vows do not take into consideration every possible situation but they do cover the spirit of every circumstance. The promise is of love and fidelity as long as you both shall live.

Unfortunately, many private vows do not meet the minimum intent so if you desire to make your own vows, consider what is found in the standard ones and incorporate them into yours, however you personalize them. Remember, the vow is not “as long as everything goes well” or “until something or someone better comes along.” They are not just a commitment of present love and fidelity, but of future love and fidelity. There is no annual review clause; only a permanent statement.

Following the vows is an exchange of rings. The rings should represent the fact that you are bound to another. Both of you belong to each other and are not available to anyone else. You are to act as a servant for the good of your marriage. The ring should also be a constant reminder of your vows to the world and to yourself. Now what God has joined together let no one separate.

Marriage is not a casual alliance for financial gain or children but a holy bond that should be permanently cemented by a commitment before God. Before you decide to get married is the time to ask, “Do I know this person enough and love them enough to publicly commit myself to them for the rest of my life?”

Discussion Items:

1. Why should covenants have witnesses?
2. What is a vow?
3. How long are marriage vows in effect?
4. Why does the church recognize civil marriages?
5. What two things should marriage vows contain as a minimum?

In Conclusion

Hopefully you have enjoyed talking with your spouse as you have gone through this book and considered ways to improve your marriage by seeking to be a better spouse. I also hope you will always realize the value of marriage and quickly ignore the myths of modern society in respect to accepting divorce.

All of us, including ministers, may have difficult times in our marriages. We are all still flesh and blood. There may be times where we are so tired, or busy, or both, and we become less considerate, grumpy and often selfish. There is something that can always lead you back to a satisfying, happy marriage. Tell each other how much you want to be a good husband or a good wife. Forget who started what and remember these two basic Christian characteristics—commitment and thankfulness, and I believe you will be well on your way to a happier, healthier marriage.

To truly understand commitment it is good to look at a powerful example. Jesus gave His body to beatings; He was spat upon and ridiculed, and died a humiliating death to show His love. Not just how much he cared for His Father only but also how much He loved you and I. How much are you willing to give in longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and love towards Him? You need to prove that by how you treat your spouse as well as other people.

You may say, “But you don’t know my circumstances.” You are correct, but if your spouse hasn’t acted in a completely disloyal manner to you then I do know your marriage can be better than it is.

However, without a full commitment by both parties to a covenant (deal), then eventually one party will find a point in time when they may be better off elsewhere. With a full commitment by both parties they can make it through the difficult times and learn how much greater love is than selfishness.

When it comes to baptism and making a covenant with God, He promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” In that promise He again provides us an example of love and godly commitment. He makes that promise knowing we aren’t perfect. We have quirks that may not be highly desirable but He knows if you are committed to the covenant you made, you will succeed. You may fall but you will never give up. You will try to be productive with all of your God-given talents, whatever they may be. You made the same promise to your spouse and he or she is counting on the fact that you meant what you said.

Commitment is a great characteristic in motivating people to act morally before God and man. However, commitment in and of itself can be cold and unloving; combine it with thankfulness or appreciation, and the rose of your relationship will begin to bloom.

We humans almost always learn to focus on our spouse's quirks that annoy us. An interesting phrase that once came across my desk was, "Everyone seems normal until you get to know them." It is a simple truth, for each of us has quirks that may be annoying to others. Each of us also expects others to have the same gifts that we have. But each of us is different.

When you were enraptured with your spouse you overlooked their quirks and focused on all the positive attributes they have. In doing so, you also tried to minimize your lesser qualities and maximize your better qualities. It is an ability you could still have if you want to.

This doesn't mean you have to be an optimist to the point of leaving reality behind so that you are insincere or that you refuse to talk about items that really bother you. It is, however, an expression of Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things."

Did you appreciate the meal that your spouse made for you? Do they know that? Did you appreciate the lawn being mowed or the kind words that were said? Does your spouse know that? Just because you expect that your spouse will be doing certain duties because you are doing other ones doesn't mean you shouldn't appreciate them fulfilling their responsibilities. If you aren't letting them know how much you appreciate their efforts and are leaving them to feel like their efforts are taken for granted, then you are being unwise. You are letting your rose fade and wither for lack of nutrients and love. While we men are usually considered the guilty ones in this area, if most women were honest they would also see they have room for improvement.

A recent study has showed how significant a battle we have in building our marriages by being appreciative and thankful. The study asked a substantial number of people: "If you had it to do over again would you marry the same person?" The resounding answer is "no" by an overwhelming majority of people. Now, how many of those people who answered "no" are showing their spouse on a daily basis that they cherished them? Sadly, we know the answer would be a small percentage acting or, feeling compelled to act out of responsibility or commitment. Many of those marriages are in trouble and not as happy as they should and could be.

Take the time to consider what you could do for your spouse today. What little actions, phone calls, kind words, would best show your love, your appreciation for her or him? Take the time to seek what is best for them, rather than spending your time watching television, and you will find a much greater, happier and fulfilling life.

Together you will live the loving relationship God intended.

May God bless you as you seek His will in your life!

Cherish every moment you have together, giving God thanks for one another!

“Rejoice with the wife of your youth...
and always be enraptured with her love” (Proverbs 5:18–19).

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