THE ABC'S OF A HAPPY MARRIAGE

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INTRODUCTION

God is triune as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and all that he has created takes after his nature, which is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. For example,

Time is past, present and future.

Matter is animal, mineral and vegetable.

Space is above, level and below, or heaven, earth and hell.

Highest virtues are faith, hope and love.

A complete family is father, mother and child.

Three is the number of completeness, and so I have divided this book into three sections with each section divided into three chapters. It does not, in fact, cover all that can be covered for happiness in a marriage, but it does cover the most basic factors. Any couple who will live in applying the truths involved in this triune plan for a happy marriage, will be happy.

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A 1. ACCEPTANCE OF GOD'S PLAN

"According to annual surveys conducted across the United States, "Most people say that having a good marriage is one of the most important goals in life, and no other variable is more predictive of the health, happiness, and general well-being of adults than whether or not they are in satisfactory marriages" (Glenn, 1996, p. 15). Currently, approximately 45 percent of all first-time marriages end in divorce, yet about 60 percent of those who divorce remarry. These statistics confirm that people have a tremendous need to love and to be loved. Every human being was formed by the Creator with a deep need and longing to

be in relationship—first with God and then with another human being. We can clearly see in the Bible that love and relationships are central to God's plan for humankind. God wants to restore oneness between us and Him, and the relationship which most closely reflects our relationship with Him is the marital relationship."

ADAM AND EVE

God was the first Adam splitter. The result was Eve exploded on the scene and woman has ever since been having explosive effects on man. Marriage is the result of the worlds first surgery. God was the first surgeon and Adam the first patient, and Eve the first thing to ever be removed by surgery. The whole thing was quite an operation. The doctor actually provided his patient with a nurse out of his own body, for he created Eve to be his helper. So the Garden of Eden was the first surgical ward where all human relationships began. The point of all surgery is to put something in or take something out that makes for better health, and Eve was just the medicine Adam needed. The first purpose of marriage is completeness. Adam needed Eve to be complete and whole. Marriage is not the only way today to solve the need for companionship and completeness, for today we have the choice of friends and family, and even fellow workers, that can meet our needs for relating. But marriage is still the primary means by which we meet this need, for it is the relationship with the deepest intimacy.

If we accept God's purpose for providing a mate for

Adam, then we are committing ourselves to be the intimate companion of the one we marry. We are to become one in flesh and spirit, and we are to leave our family and those we have been dependant upon up until this point in our lives and be fully committed to our mate as the primary person in our lives.

Genesis 2:24 says right after Eve was presented to Adam, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." We see two principles of marriage in this text-the principle of separation and the principle of sex. In other words, the plan of God for marriage was that it was to be the primary relationship of life. The man was to leave his dependance upon his parents, and become dependant instead upon his mate as his primary source of help in life. They are to be united in every way and especially a sexual way, and become one flesh. Leaving the dependence upon the parents means that the wife becomes the priority and the primary person that the man has to please. If there is a conflict and a man has to choose between pleasing his parents or his wife, he is obligated to choose to please his wife, and if the parents do not understand, they need to be shown that it is God's will. This, of course, is based on the assumption that the wife does not demand something that is itself out of the will of God.

ONENESS IS GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

Marriage was God's plan from the beginning, and in Gen. 2:24 we read again, "For this reason a man will leave

his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." The KJV had it, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." I like this, for it makes a perfect two point outline of leaving and cleaving, and these are the two key points in God's plan for marriage. We know this is important to God for He has it repeated in His Word more than any other statement concerning marriage. We find it here in Genesis and in 4 places in the New Testament.

Matt. 19:5-6, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

Mark 10:7-9, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

I Cor. 6:16, "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

Eph. 5:31, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

Oneness is important to God. It is a part of his very nature. Jesus said it several times in John that "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30). The unity of the trinity is basic Christian theology, for there is only one God in three Persons. Oneness characterizes God, and he wants this to be true of all who unite in marriage. He expects that they will be one, and this means there is to be no conflict trying to decide which one is the one. Both are one, and this unity is the key to being in God's will and enjoying the best that marriage can be. Most all of the problems of marriage arise out of the loss of oneness. It has a parallel in our nation. We are one nation under God. We are many in one, and when the 13 colonies became one nation it was the beginning of the most powerful nation on earth. It is our unity that makes us strong. The Civil War was fought to preserve that unity, for if we had divided and lost that oneness we would never become what we have become. There is power in unity, and God expects married couples to have this unity and oneness in order to experience victory over all of the forces that seek to divide them.

Oneness is often lost because mates, and especially the husband, refuse to obey the plan of God and leave their dependance upon their parents and give their mate priority. Florence and Fred Littouer have done extensive study of this issue and in their book After Every Wedding Comes A Marriage they give many examples of how not leaving leads to the destruction of their marriage. Let me share a few so you get the point, that if you are not ready to cut the apron strings, you are not ready for marriage. You are not ready

to accept the plan of God for a healthy and happy relationship with a marriage partner.

"Martin said, "Mama never approved of my wife. She told me right from the start, 'that girl is not good enough for you-she's trash.' I bucked her for a few years and then she began to point out flaws in Mitzi and I listened. Nothing Mitzi did was as good as mother did it. One day mother said, 'Why don't you move back home and let me give you the treatment you deserve?' I left Mitzi for mama and I'm so ashamed!"

From Helen: "He can't even take an hour off to take me to the doctor, and he's missed all the children's graduations, but if his mother calls he drops everything and runs."

JoAnne sobs, "I just found out that his will is made out to his mother. He says she'll dole it out as I need it and manage my life much better than I could. I can't believe it!"

Christine, "I don't even know if we have any insurance. When I ask him, he says not to worry-his father knows where the papers are. What kind of marriage is that?"

Bob, "Her family has loads of money and she doesn't dare cross them up or she'll lose her inheritance. We have to take our vacations with them and live next door. They really control our lives."

Satan's most powerful weapons are used to divide people from God and from one another. Love is the great power of uniting God and man, and man with man, and mates with one another. Love makes oneness real. But there are many emotions and attitudes that fight against love and divide us from God and one another. Paul says in I Cor. 13 that love is patient and kind, but we all know how easy it is to become impatient and unkind even with people we love, and so the battle is always on to maintain the oneness of love. He says that love does not envy or boast, and it is not proud or rude or self seeking, and it is not easily angered. But all of these things are a daily risk for every couple in marriage, and so you can see that the battle for oneness is not one that is ever finished. That is why you have heard it many times that it takes work to make a marriage work. It is work because it takes endless effort to overcome all of these things that pull us apart and destroy our oneness. It is easy to say love is the answer, but it is much harder to conquer all of these enemies of love that seek to divide us constantly. Just being in love will not guarantee that you will always be loving, and not be under the influence and even control of one of these love dividers. Your goal of a happy marriage depends on your fighting together to ever maintain this oneness that brought you together to get married in the first place.

Rabbi Noah Weinberg writing from the Jewish perspective says, "In the Torah, the expression used to describe intimacy is "yadah," which means "to know." ("And Adam knew his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and had a child." - Genesis 4:1) Yadah denotes that

intimacy is not just a physical act, but is a full emotional union between two people. Judaism defines marriage as "finding your other half." Through marriage, two people become bound together into a single entity, bringing completeness to each other. The longing for intimacy is really an expression of the longing to be joined together with our "other half." Through the relationship, we express this oneness." He goes on to say, "When a man and woman make a marital commitment, they form a deep spiritual bond. They give to each other, and are committed for a lifetime. Intimacy binds husband and wife together, because it teaches us to focus beyond ourselves. Outside of marriage, intimacy is ultimately frustrating because oneness can never be fully achieved. This is obvious in regard to a short-term encounter. But even in a long-term setting: Without the commitment of marriage, you always keep open the option of leaving the relationship. As a result, the degree of connectedness reaches a barrier. Eventually, frustration sets in, and the relationship erodes at its foundation."

Because Judaism is based on God's revelation in the Old Testament it has many of the same convictions about marriage as Christianity. They have an even deeper understanding of the romantic love involved in the Song of Songs than do many Christians. Rabbi Weinberg writes, "Judaism says that intimacy is one of the holiest acts we can perform. In fact, the Hebrew word for the marriage ceremony, "kiddushin," comes from the word "kadosh," holy. Judaism says that the greatest physical pleasure is that which is done for a spiritual reason. That's why on Shabbat,

the holiest day of the week, when you are able to get closest to attaining your longing, the Sages specifically enjoin couples to be together. It is important to see how this longing for closeness is driving you. It is very deep. It will give your marriage meaning.

"Song of Songs," written by King Solomon, is a love song between a man and a woman. Yet the Talmud calls it the "Holy of Holies" -- the most sacred biblical text. Why? Because intimacy is really an expression of our deep desire for the ultimate unity: to connect with God. The verse, "I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me" (Song of Songs 6:3), refers symbolically to the longing for oneness with God. Bring spiritual awareness into your marriage. The secret to a really a powerful marriage is to walk with God in the middle. Being kind to your spouse is a way of being like God, who created us to give us pleasure. Tapping into this mind set will give your marriage more meaning and ultimately, more pleasure." Most Christian commentators on the Song today would say amen to these words. I have conducted a year long marriage enrichment seminar just on this marvelous book alone, for it is truly the greatest marriage manual for a happy marriage that exists on this planet. It is God's marriage manual, and you can find no greater author than Him. It is poetry exalting oneness with our Lord and our lover. Some poet wrote,

Love is the offering of Oneness,
the maintenance of Oneness,
and the work of creating Oneness.
True love is an epic romance
with Oneness,

with love and with life itself.

Someone gave this analogy to show how it is wise to think of ourselves as one, for it is to love yourself to love your wife as yourself: "Let us say husband and wife are as one body with the husband representing the right side and the wife the left. When you look at marriage in this way, it is foolish to think or speak badly of the other side. To make the other side as happy as possible by exerting yourself through your utmost sincerity is the only way to make yourself happy. If you criticize or mistreat your other side, you are lowering the value of the unit of which you yourself represent a half." The goals of many seminars is to help couples achieve oneness on all levels, and this is the online of one such seminar."

One In Spirit (Attitude Adjustment)
One In Mind (Psychological Adjustment)
One In Soul (Spiritual Adjustment)
One In Body (Sexual Adjustment)
One In Essence (Maturing Oneness)
One Forever (Enduring Oneness)

In the effort to become one, however, it is important to remember this does not destroy our individuality. We never lose ourselves in this oneness, just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit remain individuals with their own personalities

even while they are completely one. The churchis also one body, but it is made up of a diversity of members who have a variety of functions, but they are all interdependent. Oneness does not destroy their individuality. It is like a basketball team with each member of the team contributing to get the ball in the hoop to win. Married couples are a team working together for common goals with a oneness in their loyalty to what they understand to be the will of God. They are characterized by the term teamwork.

Jeanette and Robert Lauer studied 300 couples who had been married 15 years or longer, and they discovered that these happily married couples used the word we often in describing their married life.

"We agree on aims and goals."
"We laugh together."
"We agree on a philosophy of life."
"We share outside hobbies and interests."
"We agree about our sex life."
"We have a stimulating exchange of ideas."
"We agree on how and how often to show affection."
"We try to share everything."

A number of studies conclude that happy marriages- "..have a sense of belonging with each other -- a sense of `we." They strive to share as much of life together as possible, for they are more than mates. They are lovers, companions, partners and best friends, and this makes for we-ness and oneness in most all areas of life. To do this

they need to obey the leaving and cleaving command of God in Genesis. They have to be united against all other voices that pull them in different directions. They need to cleave to each other and not let anything or anyone come between them. Because they leave and cleave they are able to weave a we-ness and oneness in their relationship that is not easily torn.

Many of the marriage conferences and books on marriage stress the importance of growing in oneness, for the Bible makes it clear that this is the plan of God, and we cannot have God's best without it. They also make it clear that coming to a oneness with God is a key factor in developing a oneness with your mate. Some amazing things have happened to many very bad marriages when they get their focus on oneness. Joe Beam has written much on this theme because he has seen the power of it to restore broken relationships. He shares this story as an example:

"A couple of years ago, I briskly entered an auditorium filled to standing-room-only by thousands of people impatiently waiting for the speaker to arrive. That's why I moved briskly: I was the tardy speaker. A hurting couple had commandeered me in the parking lot and wouldn't release me until I heard their hurt and told them where to find the cure. Now, making my way down the overcrowded side aisle, mumbling apologies to the people I was stepping on and tripping over, I found myself suddenly brought up short by a giant of a man standing determinedly in my way.

"You Joe Beam?" he arched his eyebrow and bored his eyes

into me as he asked, making me a little unsure of whether I wanted to identify myself.

“Ahhh, yeah, ummm, I’m Joe Beam.”

“My name’s Brad, and this is Thelma,” he said as he magically produced a bashfully smiling, petite lady from behind him. “We were married for twelve years before we split up. When I left, I couldn’t remember ever loving her and just wanted to be free of her, her family, and anything else that had to

do with her. You felt the same way about me, didn’t you, honey?” She smiled broadly in reply.

“Well, anyway, our preacher wouldn’t give up on us. Kept telling us that God could fix this if we’d let Him, but that just sounded like preacher talk to me, you know? Finally, just to get him off my back, I agreed to go through your His Needs, Her Needs course at church. Thelma had already said she’d go.”

At that point, he got misty-eyed and hugged her tight against him. “Man, did I ever see the power of God! He worked on me for those eight weeks, bringing me closer to Him. And when that happened, something changed in the way I thought about Thelma. I don’t even know that I can explain it except to say that I don’t think I would ever have come to love her if I hadn’t first learned something about loving God.

“Thelma and I struggled through the tough parts of that course as we did all the things you told us to do on the tapes and in the handbook. We worked hard, not because we

wanted to, but because we got to liking the folks in our group and didn't want to let 'em down, and because I was beginning to grow in God like never before. I don't know that I can tell you the exact moment it happened, but one day I realized that I loved this woman. And I found out that she never stopped loving me.

"I just want to make sure you tell these people that God can do anything with a marriage, no matter how bad it is. If He can turn me around and give me love and a great marriage with my wife, He can do it for anybody. If you just do what God tells you to do, you get what God promises. You tell 'em that for Brad and Thelma."

I did tell them, and now I'm telling you: God can do anything in your marriage — no matter what it's like right now. If you love each other now, He can show you how to love with deeper levels of intimacy. If you don't love each other, He can create love in your relationship in ways that defy comprehension. Just as He created our world from absolutely nothing, He can create deep, abiding, intimate love in your heart even if none lives there now.

He is Creator.

He can do it.

Trust Him.

But remember, if you want deeper, more fulfilling intimacy with your mate, you must first develop deeper, more fulfilling intimacy with God.

Dennis Rainey, author of many books on marriage says, "No matter how far a couple has traveled down the road to isolation, they can still start on a road that leads to 'Oneness Marriage.'" He goes on to say,

"A Oneness Marriage is a husband and wife who are crafting intimacy, trust, and understanding with one another. It's a couple who is chiseling out a common direction, common purpose, and common plan for their lives. A Oneness Marriage demands a lifetime process of relying on God and forging an enduring relationship according to His design. It's more than a mere mingling of two humans-it's a tender merger of body, soul, and spirit."

To achieve this goal it is important again to stress the need to leave the past dependency on parents. The Radio Bible Class booklet, When the Flame Flickers says, "The Hebrew term translated "leave" is a strong one that is often translated "forsake" elsewhere. While the rest of Scripture makes it clear that this doesn't mean that a couple is to cut off all contact and communication with one's family. It does indicate, however, that a clear separation from parental priorities, traditions, and influence is necessary if a couple is to bond together in their own home. The man is directed to initiate the separation. He must abandon the nurturing parent-child relationship to prepare for the nurturing husband-wife relationship. By detaching from his parents, he frees himself to form a new alliance with his bride. This willful shift in core loyalties is necessary for the bride as well.

There must never be a loyalty to anyone else, whether parent or child, friend or family, that is greater than the loyalty to one's spouse. "The failure to shift loyalty from parents to spouse is a central issue in almost all marital conflict."Every couple must hammer out their own values, traditions, and priorities that will define their home without allowing parental intrusion or interference. Once separation from parents is initiated, a couple can begin building a new bond together."

The idea of one flesh obviously means sexual intercourse, and this is a special oneness that is essential to a happy marriage, but often people forget that the physical will be far more enjoyable with one with whom there is spiritual, and emotional oneness. Sexual oneness is a true celebration when it is done with one you are one with in many others realms of life. Paul says you can become one with a prostitute also, but this is not true oneness, for you do not share a total life together. Sexual oneness is only at its best when it is a part of a greater whole in oneness. "Oneness is the joyful sense of connection that a husband and wife experience as a result of their exclusive and unparalleled devotion to each other."

ENEMIES OF ONENESS

If we truly accept God's plan to be one, we will strive to avoid all that divides us and pulls us apart. We will, when we

fail to support this oneness, quickly confess our folly and be reconciled. In other words we will be ever watchful against all things which pull at this oneness and put pressure on it. Modern studies have shown us the primary foes against the oneness of marriage, and we need to be ever aware ,if one of these enemies of our happiness is raising its ugly head, to slay the dragon before its fire erupts and destroys any part of our oneness. Scott Stanley has written the book A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage. These issues are dealt with at length in this book, but we will give the gist of the four key causes why Christian marriage fail. These four things have been extensively researched by the study of actual couples. These are the key enemies of oneness, and we need to be aware of them and ready to eliminate them when they appear in our marriage.

1. Escalation

1 Peter 3:9 says, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult." But this is exactly what happens with escalation. Each negative comment increases the level of anger and frustration, and soon a small disagreement blows up into a major fight. Escalation is the inability to call it quits and end a conflict. It happens with people and nations. War can be heck on any level, but when escalation takes over and each side demands revenge for the last attack on them, then war is hell. That is what a couple bring into their relationship when they do not know how to forgive an evil or insult. If you have to get even, then you are driving a wedge between you and your mate. You are creating a crack in

your oneness, and with enough of these escalations you can break it in pieces. People think they can shout and say mean things to their mate and then kiss and make up, but they forget Proverbs 12:18 which says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword." You can make up, but you leave scars by your bitter words. You need to deal with anger in more rational way, or you will do damage that will eventually erode your oneness. Your tongue will be a key tool to build love and oneness, or it will be a weapon by which you tear it down. "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26).

2. Invalidation

"Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other." Those mates who have a tendency to attack each others character are primary candidates for divorce. Nobody can stand it very long to go on loving someone who thinks they are of little worth. Attack and put down a mate's self esteem and you are on your way to divorce court. When you declare your mate's feelings and ideas as stupid and worthless, you spit in your own face, for you hurt the oneness that can give you joy and pleasure. When you say any aspect of your mates being is invalid you are in a non-love mode, and it will destroy rather than build.

"The antidote to invalidation is validation. Couples must work at validating and accepting the feelings of their spouse.

That does not mean you have to agree with your spouse on the issue at hand, but it does mean that you listen to and respect the other person's perspective. Providing care, concern, and comfort will build intimacy. Invalidating fears and feelings will build barriers in a marriage. Discipline yourself to encourage your spouse without invalidating his or her feelings."

Sue Bohlin give us some other examples:

Rolling the eyes at something a spouse says

Ignoring the spouse when they're talking

A dismissing or contemptuous tone of voice in saying things like "I don't think so" or "You're wrong" or "Like you would know anything about that!" (Note: those very words can be used in affectionate banter when said with a smile and in the context of a spouse's strengths.)

Any form of sarcasm

Making plans without consulting the spouse (which would affect the spouse)

Ridiculing a spouse's dreams and hopes, even in jest

Continually rejecting a spouse's romantic or sexual overtures

Choosing to spend time chatting with internet friends (especially of the opposite sex) over being with one's spouse

Not acknowledging the heart issues behind the words that a spouse shares

Not looking at a spouse when they're talking

Being critical of or ridiculing a spouse in public, even in jest

In a dispute or disagreement that involves the children, ganging up with them against the spouse

Saying things like "Oh, your mother is just being wierd (stupid, illogical, emotional, etc.) again" or "Don't listen to your father, he doesn't know what he's talking about" to one's kids

3. Negative interpretations

"Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case." "Such behavior can be a very destructive pattern in a relationship, and quickly erode intimacy and oneness in a marriage. A wife may believe that her husband does not like her parents. As a result, she may attack him anytime he is not overly enthusiastic about visiting them. He may be concerned with the financial cost of going home for Christmas or about whether he has enough vacation time. She, in turn, considers his behavior as disliking her parents.

When a relationship becomes more distressed, the negative interpretations mount and help create an environment of hopelessness. The attacked partner gives up trying to make himself or herself clear and becomes demoralized.

Another kind of negative interpretation is mind reading. "Mind reading occurs when you assume you know what

your partner is thinking or why he or she did something." Nearly everyone is guilty of mind reading at some time or other. And when you mind read positively, it does not tend to do much harm. But when you mind read on the negative side, it can spell trouble for a marriage.

Paul warned against attempting to judge the thoughts and motives of others (1 Cor. 4:5). And Jesus asked, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Luke 6:41).

Negative interpretations are hard to detect and counteract. Research shows that in distressed marriages there is a tendency for partners to discount the positive things they see, attributing them to causes such as chance rather than to positive characteristics of the partner. That is why negative interpretations do not change easily.

The key to battling negative interpretations is to reconsider what you think about your partner's motives. Perhaps your partner is more positive than you think. This is not some unrealistic "positive thinking" program, but a realistic assessment of negative assumptions you may be bringing to the marriage.

4. Withdrawal and Avoidance

“Escalation, invalidation, and negative interpretations are three of the four negative risk factors identified by researchers at the University of Denver. The last of these has two descriptors: withdrawal and avoidance. These are two different manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening.

"Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as 'turning off' or 'shutting down' during an argument. The withdrawer often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a partner's suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intention of following through."

"Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain discussions, with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place. A person prone to avoidance would prefer that the topic not come up and, if it does, may manifest the signs of withdrawal just described."

In a typical marriage, one partner is the pursuer and the other is the withdrawer. Studies show that it is usually the man who wants to avoid these discussions and is more likely in the withdrawing role. However, sometimes the roles reverse. But, for the sake of this discussion, we will assume that the husband is the one who withdraws.

Why does he withdraw? Because he does not feel emotionally safe to stay in the argument. Sometimes he may even be afraid that if he stays in the discussion or argument that he might turn violent, so he retreats.

When the husband withdraws, the wife feels shut out and believes that he does not care about the marriage. In other words, lack of talking equals lack of caring. But that is often a negative interpretation about the withdrawer.

He, on the other hand, may believe that his wife gets upset too much of the time, nagging and picking fights. This is also a negative interpretation because most pursuers really want to stay connected and resolve the issue he does not want to talk about.

Couples who want to have a good marriage must learn to stay engaged. Paul said, writing to the church in Ephesus, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph. 4:25-27).

Although the immediate context in this passage is anger, the broader principle is the importance of not allowing avoidance to become a corrosive pattern in your marriage. Couples should build oneness and intimacy by speaking openly and honestly about important issues in their marriage.

Conclusion:

Each of these four risk factors (escalation, invalidation, negative interpretations, and withdrawal and avoidance) can build barriers in a marriage leading ultimately to loneliness

and isolation. The research shows that couples that want a good marriage need to eliminate these risk factors from their marriage, or else the negative factors will overwhelm the positive aspects of the marriage. It is never too late to put your marriage back on track.

For further study on this topic, I would once again recommend that you purchase the book A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage. This book is widely available and is a good source for help in establishing and maintaining the oneness that God desires for every marriage.

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THE GOAL OF ONENESS IS INTIMACY

The Bible makes it clear that God is an intimate personality. He is three Persons in one Godhead, and all three are as one in thought and action. There is never conflict or disagreement, but perfect harmony. The Bible also makes it clear that this is the goal God has for His people, that they be one, and not divided. The Gospel broke down all walls that separate the peoples of the world, and it made possible the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ, which is the church. Paul in Rom. 12 stresses how this body with all of its parts with different functions is to be one in perfect harmony. All the New Testament letters stress over and over that we are to love one another, to care for one

another, to serve one another, to be kind to one another, to bear one another's burdens, to fellowship with one another, to forgive one another, and on and on with continuous stress on unity and intimacy as the ultimate ideal.

This ideal of intimacy in God, and in the church is carried over to be the ideal as well in the marriage bond. In other words, the Bible makes it clear that intimacy is the ideal goal toward which every relationship must move if it is to be the best that it can be. From the beginning the twofold steps of marriage are leave, and cleave. A couple leave their dependence upon their parents, and they cleave in dependence upon one another. They leave the old relationship of intimacy and cleave to a new one, which they are to make the most intimate relationship they have in life. All of this means that the primary goal of marriage is to develop intimacy. Intimacy is what makes marriage all it was meant to be.

Dr. Ruben writes, "...the single most important characteristic of a deep relationship is a shared personal history. The partners history together, whatever its length, is of prime importance to them. Shared history has little value to people who are involved only superficially.....Reverence for these parts of their life's experience that they shared--problems, frustrations, tragedies, accomplishments, change, growth, hurts, joys, exchanges with other people--is crucial in deep relationships."

Dr. John Trimble in Hard To Achieve wrote, "My hypothesis is that not many people experience intimacy although most people profess that they would like to. Not every person is even capable of achieving intimacy as discussed in Chapter 3. Apparently, from observing the behavior of people, most couples are not willing to set aside the necessary time and to invest sufficient energy to improve their capacity for intimacy or to work on intimacy with their partner. As a result, few couple achieve much intimacy often. That has to be my conclusion. I find no writers who disagree with what I am saying here, although they do not state the case as pointedly as I do."

Sharing in depth seems especially difficult for some people who have been brought up in families where they keep everything to themselves. Some men seem to feel that the telling of personal thoughts and feelings is a sign of weakness or a threat to their manhood. Even to say, "I love you" is to confess the need of another person, which some, in their fear of becoming dependent, find difficult to do. The fear of intimacy is often based on poor self-esteem. A person feels that to know them intimately is to cease to like them, for they feel ashamed of who they are deep inside. They feel unlovely, and so they do not want to share that, and bring out all of the negatives they feel inside them. What they do not realize is that these negatives inside influence their external behavior in negative ways. If they would share and get these feelings out in the open, they could get them modified and even eliminated. God knows the worst about us, and yet He still loves us. If we let our mate know us more

deeply we will learn that they too love us in spite of our defects, and will, like God, help us to overcome the defects.

You cannot anchor a ship with a string, for it demands a rope and a rope is a strong thick cord made by twisting smaller cords together. A rope does not just happen, it has to be made. So the rope that holds a couple together has to be made by weaving together many smaller experiences of intimacy. Couples need to review their life every so often. They need to think back on the events that brought them together, and which led to their enjoyment of one another to the point that they wanted to marry each other. They need to focus on the fun times they had together on vacations, and on times with their children that were precious. Look at reruns of your old video you took when the children were young. Weave your own rope with the many little things that made your relationship one of pleasure and joy.

Falling in love is exciting, but staying in love is even more exciting. Falling in love is like the 4th of July, but staying in love is like patriotism. It is not just an event, but a value that covers all events. We can have a terrible 4th of July, and yet still love our country. You can have a flop of a Valentine's Day, and have all work out for the worst, but a day, or an event, does not define romance and love. It is the over all long range process that matters. Falling in love is not something you plan ahead of time, but staying in love is a choice and a challenge that you commit yourself to by investing time, money, and labor. This is what intimacy is

all about.

When you marry, you choose to value intimacy over variety. You choose to specialize, and instead of knowing a lot of the opposite sex in general, you strive to know a lot about one of the opposite sex in particular. The single person is a general practitioner, but the married person is a specialist in love. J. Allen Petersen wrote, "There is no love in marriage; love is in people, and people put it into marriage. There is no romance in marriage; people have to infuse it into their marriages." The point is, couples need to work at intimacy. It does not just happen. Intimacy means being fully at home with someone. It is where I am free to be completely myself without fear of rejection. It is fear of rejection that causes us to hide from another. When I am loved without fear I do not fear to love others. It frees me from the need of paying attention to myself and worrying about whether I am lovable.

The number one problem brought into this world by the fall is "The intimacy crisis." Man has an inability to be close to God, his mate, others, and even himself. The ultimate failure of intimacy is hell, which is total aloneness, with no relationships whatever. The ultimate goal of salvation is eternal oneness with God and all others. The great universal battle of light and darkness, good and evil, love and hate is the battle for intimacy. In short, the goal of life is to develop greater intimacy. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." That is the ultimate intimacy.

Ed Wheat in Secret Choices writes, "Medical doctors have found that an intimate relationship between a husband and wife can determine how well that couple masters the crisis of life. A high degree of intimacy can also provide shelter and relief from the ordinary tensions of life. Life becomes richer and more colorful when shared with an intimate partner; it offers love and laughter, pleasure and stability. In fact, we believe the secret of staying in love for any married couple can be summed up in this one potent word: Intimacy."

Steven A, Hammon wrote, "God created us, I believe, with a deep, instinctive need for intimacy.....Reports from concentration and prisoner-of-war camps indicate that people who had had meaningful relationships with even one other person stood a far better chance of survival than those who shut others out."

Dr. C. Edward Crowther writes, "About ten years ago I conducted a study of people who were dying in hospices and orthodox hospitals in the U.S. and England.....I talked at length to each of the almost two hundred people in my statistical population sample. They were open and kind with me, and I was very grateful for their time. When I asked each person individually what mattered most in life, around ninety percent answered intimate relationships." He goes on, "In my practice of psychotherapy, I see many, many people every year. Most have symptoms of anxiety or depression, or they are beset with behavioral disorders such

as over indulgence in drugs, alcohol, food, or work. Increasingly I'm finding the absence of intimacy is the common denominator in the analysis and treatment of people with these and many other symptoms."

Zig Zigler tells of the Indian who discovered oil in Oklahoma, and went from poverty to great riches. Everyday he went to town in his new Cadillac. He was the safest driver in that whole area, because he had his Cadillac pulled by two horses. He hated machines, and so he never learned to start it. He used it like a carriage. This seems very weird to us, but there are parallels in our lives. Many never learn to use their VCR or their computer. We are often content with the external value of machines, but never care to get into the inner workings of them. This is true of marriage also. We pay a lot of attention to the externals of the wedding and the home, but very little to the intimacy of the mates.

Intimacy can be difficult to capture. It is like the formations in the clouds. You see the dog, but by the time you get someone's attention to look, it has faded. They are constantly shifting and hard to capture. So it is with intimacy. Now you have it, and now you don't. Intimacy is based on self-disclosure. That is why it is often easier to talk to a stranger than to your mate. After a few years in marriage, mates often feel there is nothing left to share. To counteract this, mates must be sharing new feelings, new

convictions, and up to the minute perspectives on many aspects of life.

Howard and Charlotte Clinebell in their book, The Intimate Marriage say, "Intimacy is not so much a matter of what or how much is shared as it is the degree of mutual need-satisfaction within the relationship." Mates need to feed each others body, mind, and spirit. The food that nourishes all three is the honest sharing of your own inner being. Wives tend to need this more than husbands. Men like intimacy but women love it and this is a major difference in the sexes. Women are more personal and that is why they do not enjoy sports as much. They see it as hard to develop a close relationship in the ring or on the football field. Men tend to think of intimacy as sex, but wives tend to think of it as all the talking and affection that prepares them to enjoy sex. The wise couple seeks to meet each other's need for intimacy, and because this can mean two different things, each has to try and think like the other, and not just focus on what intimacy is to them. Switching roles can help make you more conscious of the other's perspective, and it can add some spice to your love life.

It is possible to develop the paralysis of analysis, and study problems until you are sick of the whole thing and give up in total frustration. You might love the game of ping pong, but be driven batty by a lecture on the aerodynamics of the balls and the components that go into making the table. You may love watching television, but be bored out of

your mind by a technical study of how it works. The point is, you can get sick and tired of studying all the authorities telling you how to make your marriage better.

Their lists of things to do for this problem and that one can get to be overwhelming, and you get frustrated and give up, for it seems so hopeless. The poem of Walt Whitman about listening to the astronomers is appropriate here. He says he listened to all their proofs and figures, and looked at all their charts and diagrams until he became sick and tired of them. He got up and wandered out into the night-air and looked up in silence at the stars. The bottom line is, there are positive and beautiful experiences in life that we need to just go to directly and enjoy. We do not need to understand all the technical facts about the experience or why, when, where, or how. We just need the experience. So in marriage, you do not need to know everything about love to experience it. Sometimes you just need to go ahead and enjoy the experience of love with each other and not try to figure out how to capture it in an intellectual formula. We need to just use common sense and do what is obvious. The poet said,

Amid the cares of married life,
In spite of toil and business
strife,
If you value your sweet wife,
Tell her so!

Prove to her you don't forget
The bond to which your seal is set;
She's of life's sweet the sweetest yet--
Tell her so!
Don't act as if she'd passed her prime,
As though to please her was a crime--
If e'er you loved her, now's the time:
Tell her so!
Never let her heart grow cold--
Richer beauties will unfold;
She is worth her weight in gold:
Tell her so!
--Author unknown

In our culture the focus is on success as the source of happiness, but in ancient Israel the focus was on relationship for happiness. In Deut. 24:5 we read, "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." He was to have one solid year free of all responsibility but that of

making his wife happy. This pattern once established would be a part of their lives forever. The point is, God's will is that the focus of marriage be, not the nation, not the community, not the economy, but each other. Get that right and then incorporate the other aspects of life. We go the other way, and try and get all else right, and then focus on the relationship. It is because we tend to put everything ahead of romance and intimacy that we have such a high divorce rate.

Both mates contribute to the loss of romance and intimacy. But the husband, as leader of the house, bears the responsibility to restore the romantic relationship. He is to begin to treat his wife with the attention she needs to get motivated to please him. He is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. Jesus was the initiator, not the church. We love Him because He first loved us. Husbands leading the way is the biggest need in our culture.

J.A. Fritz goes so far as to say, "You can search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and you will find no statement where God has commanded or demanded that a woman love her husband with an agape love. It's always turned around-"Husbands, love your wives." A woman is like a pump that must be primed. If the water of love is put into her she will automatically respond with love, she does not have to be commanded to do so. This is innate in the feminine structure."

In general, romance is more important to women than men. Studies show that the absence of romance is high on the list as a source of depression in women. Men rate it near last place. Why should this be? Men derive self-esteem from being respected in their place of work. Their success in the world makes them feel good about themselves. Women, however, feel worthy when they are loved. The female has a far deeper need for feeling loved, and needs the reassurance of romance. Her self-esteem depends upon it more than does a mans. He finds it hard to grasp why it is such a big deal to her.

One man said, "I just don't understand my wife. She has everything she could possibly want. She has a dish washer and a new dryer, and we live in a nice neighborhood. I don't drink or beat the kids or kick the dog. I've been faithful since the day we've been married. But she's miserable and I can't figure out why!" When the counselor heard this he wrote, "His love-starved wife would have traded the dishwasher, the dryer and the dog for a single expression of genuine tenderness from her unromantic husband. Appliances do not build self-esteem; being somebody's sweetheart most certainly does." Millions of wives way amen to that. Husbands, listen and learn.

Finally, studies show that being at ease and not up tight is the key to romance. When people are filled with anxiety it kills the spirit of love. The experts say relax and enjoy, for if you don't relax, and instead are full of doubts and fears, you

will guarantee yourself a negative experience. We are not just talking about sex here, but about a total relationship. The mate that feels confident and good about themselves will make their partner feel the same, and this is romantic. The key to intimacy is to just be a caring person toward your mate. It is not some elaborate scheme to win their affection. This can be fun on occasion, but true intimacy is found in the everyday caring about the other, and doing the little things that help them feel better about themselves and their life. It is giving the little pleasures that are another piece of the twine that makes the rope that holds them together bigger and stronger. Intimacy is God's goal in all relationships, and this needs to be something we specialize in as we relate to our mate daily.

INTIMACY THOUGHTS AND QUOTES

Bruce Larson says sex is not the means to union, but a way of expressing it. Those who expect to find oneness in sex will be disappointed. Sex is an expression of a oneness already felt. Love, then, is the key to sex and not vice versa.

Way back in 1970 Alvin Toffler in his book Future Shock said we are forming a moduler society where people are like components we plug in or take out to meet our needs. We do not get personally involved in many peoples lives that serve us. I do not care who waits on me at the grocery store. If

they replace these people I may not ever notice. I have almost no degree of intimacy with these people even though they meet a need I have. They are interchangeable and disposable like parts of a machine. This happens even in marriage where mates just use each other to meet needs but do not develop intimacy. We fear intimacy for if we open up that can be information that can be used to hurt us.

Mariyn Monroe playing Roslyn in the Misfits says of her cold husband she is going to divorce, "He wasn't there. I mean, you could touch him but he wasn't there." Closeness in itself does not produce intimacy. A pile of football players is close but there is no intimacy. There is a craving for intimacy, but there is also a cost, and because of that cost there is a great deal of escape from intimacy. Promiscuous sex is an escape from intimacy, but appears to be an addition to intimacy. But what people are trying to do is to get intimacy without paying the price. They want a quick fix and sex seems like the way to get it. But it is an unwillingness to pay the cost of developing a close relationship with another person. Sex without love is bargain basement intimacy. Simon and Garfunkel sang to the youth of the 60's, "If I never loved, I never would have cried... I touch no one and no one touches me..I am a rock, I am an island...And a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries." The message is don't fall in love and get involved with people in depth, for it is costly and it can hurt. The way to be free is to escape intimacy.

Webster has these definitions:

1. Marked by very close association, contact or familiarity.

2. Marked by a warm friendship developing through long association.

3. Of a very personal or private nature.

Intimacy is very subjective and for some it means sharing your ideas of what kind of car you like, and for others it is sharing how you feel about nudity in the kitchen. If you need to talk about the price of corn in Kansas, then one who has that same interest will provide you with intimacy. Intimacy happens to us when we feel a sense of affirmation in a relationship. When others share their weaknesses with us we feel a sense of intimacy, but when they hide behind a shield of superiority intimacy is impossible.

Daniel Wilknis said, "The anxiety of nonbelonging is perhaps the deepest of all known anxieties." Anyone who makes us feel we belong produces intimacy.

Intimacy is when people love each other in spite of all their defects and imperfections. Infatuation is when you only love the ideal. In courtship we present a highly edited version of ourselves. We cover the blemishes and hide the defects, but all is revealed in marriage, and this is when real intimacy begins.

Lowell & Carol Erdahl in Be Good To Each Other wrote, "A wife once told of her problem in marriage. She first bragged about her husband. He was an excellent provider and was faithful and kind. He was good with the children and she had no doubt of his love. "There is just one little thing, "she said, "he doesn't talk to me." Subsequent conversation is revealed that wasn't literally true. He did talk about some things. He said, "Please pass the potatoes,"and "What movie would you like to see tonight?" He talked about painting the house and going to the ball game but he did not share what was in his deepest heart. He didn't confide his personal thoughts or feelings. As the months and years passed, she began to feel as if she were living with a stranger.

Yet whatever our patterns of past isolation may be, something in us yearns for a relationship in which we can be open and honest with each other. While inhibitions keep us from sharing freely, yearnings for intimacy invite us t risk saying something that will help break the defensive wall that keeps us a lonely stranger separated from the one we love.

There are ways in which these defenses can be broken. The woman who complained that "he doesn't talk to me" told her husband of her anguish and was surprised that he was open to visiting with a third person, in whose presence they were able to make a new beginning in their relationship. She learned that there were some ways in which she contributed to her husband's silence and others by which she

made it easier for him to be more open. We sometimes encourage and enable the very behavior and attitudes in each other which we most dislike. We may, for example, complain of the slient partner and yet so ridicule his or her feeble attempts at sharing that he or she is put down into retreating to a safer solitude. Or, while complaining of too much nagging and bickering, we do all sorts of things that continue to provoke it.

Dr. C. Edward Crowtuer wrote, "The more intimate I get with you, the more vulnerable I become. The more you get to know me, the more I am likely to lose you because to know me is not to love me.

If you know me less well, you might love me more.

If you know me too intimately, you will realize how inadequate I am, how fearful I am, how lonely I am, how worthless I am, how unlovable I am, how lonely I am, and what a loser I feel that I really am. I am not worthy to be loved by anybody, especially someone as marvelous as you.

CONCLUSION

If you expect to have a happy marriage then you begin by accepting the plan of God for marriage. You accept his will that the two become one. You accept that oneness is a goal that you strive for constantly, and do all that you can to avoid a division in your relationship. You work at maintaining an intimacy that keeps you close to one another

at all times. Acceptance of this plan of God is the foundation of your life together.

A. 2. ACCEPTANCE OF YOUR SELF

Conflict is a part of life and a part of marriage, and if we have a low sense of self love and self esteem we will be devastated by conflict. We need to be strong in our positive self image to avoid being crushed by those who love us, for they can often say things that hurt. But they need not be as painful if we have a healthy self acceptance. We see it demonstrated in the book of Job with a heated conflict he is having with his friends. They are aggravating and provoking him, and he is coming back with answers that reveal, that as miserable as he is, he has not lost his sense of self-esteem. He hates what has happened to him, and he loathes his sickness, and his sores, yet he has such a high view of himself that he refuses to submit to the pressure of his friends.

You might say this is a sign of his pride and stubbornness to keep up this role of self-assertion. This could be a sign that Job was a sinful man after all, but not so! The fact is, it is his high sense of self-esteem, and his determined self-assertion that made him the man God had such confidence in. A man with weak self-esteem would never have been allowed by God to go through such a test. One of the values of this book is that it makes us aware of the importance of

self-esteem. None can live as God intended without self-esteem.

Job is dogmatic in his self-defense. He will never, as long as he lives, and has a breathe, deny his integrity. There is no compromise here. Job knows he is not a wicked sinner being punished. It is injustice, and he will never give in to this injustice, and bow before it. You can call Job one of the most stubborn men who ever lived, or you can call him one who knew the great value of self-esteem. What we see here in chapter 27 runs all through the book.

10:7 Job says to God you know I am not guilty.

12:3 Job says to his friends I am not inferior to you.

12:4 Job says I am righteous and blameless.

13:18 Job says I know I will be vindicated.

16:27 Job says my prayer is pure.

Many would look at all of these self-evaluations, and conclude with Job's friends, he is proud, conceited, and just to stubborn and self-centered to admit when he is wrong. Job's attitude toward himself forces us to wrestle with one of life's major issues, the issue of self-esteem. This is a complex issue because the whole world is in on it. The public is exposed to many books on self-assertion and self-esteem. The cult of self worship is one of the largest, and is a natural fruit of the growth of humanism in our culture.

This can lead to the Christian becoming confused, for it often seems like the world is saying the same thing as the church, and yet there are radical differences. The church has been telling youth for decades to develop self-esteem. They are taught slogans in Youth For Christ and Young Life that say they are made by God as one of a kind, and of infinite value, and God never makes junk. Dr. James Dobson is telling Christian parents that developing a high sense of self-esteem is the key to their healthy future, and Christian maturity. But along with this stream of influence there is another stream of tradition that is quite pessimistic about the self.

Christians through the ages have felt that it is a logical step from the Biblical commands to deny yourself, take no thought for yourself, and die to self, to conclude that we should be hating ourselves. This leads to all kinds of neurotic Christians who encourage others to wipe their feet on them, because they act like a dirty rug. That is an appropriate level for one who feels unworthy to rise above the worm. There favorite song is, "Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I." There favorite text are the words of John the Baptist, "I am not worthy to stoop and untie His sandals." Or Paul's words, "I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle. And, "I am the chief of sinners." Like a magnet they attract all of the negatives of Scripture that make them have a low level of self-esteem.

They never seem to notice the balance of Scripture, and listen to Jesus when he said that John was the greatest born of woman under the Old Testament system. They do not quote Paul's other words when he says he is not inferior to any of the apostles, and I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. They do not revel in Paul's self-assertion, when he stood up to his powerful foes and said you can't do this to a Roman citizen. I demand my rights. And Paul got them because he had a high sense of self-esteem, and was worthy of all the rights of a citizen of Rome.

The Christian who thrives on low self-esteem tends to look at Jesus only as the Lamb who opened not His mouth, as he was led to the slaughter. They do not like to focus on His defiance of the injustice of the Jewish authorities, and of his self-assertion that led him to break their laws to meet human need. It is obvious there is a need for balance in this whole area of self-esteem. We are dealing with a paradox, and must see that self-esteem is both good and bad, for it can be a vice as well as a virtue. The difference is in how you see the self which you esteem.

If, like the humanist, you worship the creature rather than the Creator, and make the self the highest end, then self-esteem becomes a curse. It makes people think they can run roughshod over everybody else, for all that matters is that they get their own way. Paul warns about the danger of thinking more highly of yourself than you ought. But with self in the proper place as a child and servant of God, self-

esteem becomes one of the greatest values of life. As a sinner you know you are unworthy of God's grace, but you are so grateful for His love and forgiveness, that you are proud to be a part of His family. Your sin and weakness keeps you humble, but God's grace and love keeps you proud, and so there is balance. Your self-esteem is not an exaltation of your fallen nature, but of your redeemed nature, and, therefore, it is a part of your praise to God.

When you love God with your whole being, you are not loving God with junk, but with the finest redeemed jewels that exist. When you present your body a living sacrifice to God, you are not offering Him trash, but one of the finest treasures you possess. When you understand that the self in Christian self-esteem is the Christ-centered, Christ loving, Christ obeying self, then you avoid all of the nonsense of the two extremes of humanistic pride and Christian asceticism. In other words, it is just as sinful and foolish to try and put down the redeemed self as it is to exalt the unredeemed self. Christians who glory in inferiority pervert the Christian faith.

It is true that riches do not save, but neither does poverty. It is true that fame does not save, but neither does obscurity. We are not saved by health, but neither are we saved by sickness. Power does not save, nor does weakness. Beauty will not get you into heaven, but neither will homeliness. The point is, it is folly to think that the opposite of what does not please God, must please God. Sophistication will not

sanctify you before God, but does it follow that being unkempt will? Just because your knowledge will not impress God, does not mean that your ignorance will impress Him. Christians who are deceived by shallow thinking try to fight the sin of pride by loathing the self, and thereby please God. But nobody but the devil and his demons are pleased with a rejection of one of God's greatest creations, made in His own image. Therefore, we all need to learn from Job how to have a sense of self-esteem when everybody who should love you, does not.

Let's look at how Job's friends were constantly attacking his self-esteem.

1. They called him names. Two of them called him an old windbag.

2. They constantly imply he is a rotten sinner.

3. They throw the blame for all his suffering right in his face.

4. Zopher goes so far as to say in 11:6 that Job deserves worse than what he is getting.

5. The imply that he is a stupid idiot who has learned nothing from history, and is quite inferior to them, because they have, and are thus wiser.

Most men would be pushed so low by these attacks they would have to reach up to touch bottom. Not Job! He knew the principle that none can make you inferior without your consent, and he never gave it. It was still a sin for his friends

to try and rob him of his self-esteem, but he would not allow them to succeed. One of the great sins of man is his inability to love his neighbor as himself. It is the second greatest command of God, and the second hardest thing for man to do. The fall made men want to put others down that they might be raised up. This was the sin of Satan. He wanted to put God down that he might be exalted. All sin is a desire to exalt the self at the expense of others. It is the exact opposite of the attitude of John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Selfishness is based on a feeling of low self-worth. People feel they are not worthy of love and respect just for who they are. They feel they have to get worth by making someone else less than they are. The selfish person is not that way because they have too high a view of themselves, but almost always it is because they have too low a view of their self-worth. True self-love and self-esteem say, "I have value in myself, and do not need to be compared to someone else for self-worth." A person who loves themselves will not need to put others down, but will respect others, even if they are different, for he will recognize their worth, even as they recognize their own worth.

A song goes like this: "I'm proud to be me, but I also see, you're just as proud to be you." The person with self-esteem can enjoy the worth of others, for he is not fighting them for the sake of gaining his own self-worth. The self-centered person is competing with others for worth. He is not happy

with himself because it is a bore to be always fighting for recognition and worth. It gets tiresome to be always thinking of yourself. The poet put it-

Oh, let me think of bug or beef;
Of Bismark or the Caspian Sea,
Of anything to get relief
From that confounded nuisance, me!

Oh, let me think of Joan of Arc;
Of Truffles, queens and kitchen maids,
Of George the Fifth and Central Park,
Of cheese and Labor Day parades.

Grant me O Lord, no neater rhyme.
For use nor usufruct of pelf,
But just a thought from time to time
Of something other than myself!

The person with self-esteem does not need to always be thinking of himself, for he know he is of worth whether anyone is thinking of him or not. It is only those who have low self-esteem who must be ever in the limelight, and who need constant reassurance of their worth. The friends of Job are always bragging about their wisdom, knowledge, and righteousness, as they put Job down. They sound like they

have it all together, and have a high view of themselves, but it is not so. It is low self-esteem that puts others down. It is low self-esteem that cannot bear to be wrong. These friends of Job are just like the Christians who cannot face the humiliation of being wrong, and so rather than admit error, they leave a church and go elsewhere, or they leave a marriage and go elsewhere.

It is the person with a high and healthy self-esteem who does not fear that his mistake will crush him. He knows he is fallible, and he knows he can be forgiven, so he says I over-reacted, or I misjudged, or I sinned, please forgive me. He is forgiven, and gets back on the right track. Those with low self-esteem are always on the defensive, protecting their ego, and they find pleasure in attacking the life and ideas of other people, just like Job's friends.

If you tend to specialize in being down on yourself, you lack self-esteem, and you are your own worse enemy. A girl was asked, "Why don't you ever get into the discussion?" She said, "I think its better if I am the only one who knows how dumb I am." This reveals a severe case of low self-esteem. Self-esteem is based on the awareness that life is a partnership. God made us, but we play a major role in what we become. God made Eden, but He put a man there to keep it up. Adam helped to keep Eden the beautiful garden that it was. God gives man a major role to play in producing fruit in His own garden. Without God I could do nothing. I cannot make a seed, and I cannot make a seed grow to

produce plants. Only God can do that. But when God does His part, I can be a partner and do things that make a difference. I can weed and cultivate. I can fertilize and water, and the result is I can feel proud of the end product, because I help God produce delicious fruit.

That is what self-esteem is all about. It is an awareness that I can do nothing without Christ, but with Him I can do much that will be a blessing to myself and others. A little girl was asked, "Who made you?" "God made part of me," she responded. "Part of you- what do you mean?" She said, "He made me real little and I just growed the rest myself." God, of course, is also in on the growing process, but He allows us a major role, just as He does in our garden. We have, not only a right, but an obligation to be proud of what we have done together-God and I.

The Weaver in England prayed a proper prayer when he prayed, "O God, help me always to keep a good opinion of myself." Job did not always have a good opinion of his friends, and for good reason. He did not always have a good opinion of God either, and this was because of his ignorance of what was going on. His negative views of God were partially justifiable, but the thing we see all through the book is this: Job never lost his good opinion of himself. He knew he was a sinner, but he knew also that he loved God and man, and did all he could to show that love. He did not deserve to suffer as he did. His high self-esteem kept him afloat in the flood he endured.

This study of the self esteem of Job is of value for all relationships, and especially marriage. Self-acceptance becomes the basis for acceptance of others. If you reject your own worth you will reject those who threaten what little you have. First accept your own limitations. You are not all you could be. If someone says you are not 6ft. 5in. you are not offended for you can accept the fact you are not that tall. But there are hundreds of other things you are not and you need to be equally accepting of their reality.

Some wise author wrote, "Surrender to reality, and the surest way to drown if you are in trouble is to thrash about desperately trying not to drown. You maximize your chances of survival by not fighting but by relaxing and surrendering to the water, letting it float you on the top. You surrender to let a weak form of a disease be injected into you, and by this vaccination you defeat the disease. Wining is not always gained by fighting, but often by surrender. You surrender to the reality that it is okay to be you with all your defects. This surrender will protect you from the hero-zero split. If I am not the best, the greatest, the number one, then I am nothing-a total failure. Self love means the ability to accept yourself as imperfect yet valuable."

"We do have help from psychologist Albert Ellis and his colleagues "rational-emotive therapists" who teach us so

clearly and simply that if someone else calls us inadequate, our hurt and anger are based on our own confirming thought; within ourselves, we are saying, "Yes, I am inadequate." One must learn how to say inside, "I don't need to think of myself as inadequate or unlovable just because the other regards me so." This seemingly simple tour de force is enormously important!"

In other words, if your self-esteem is so low that you let the criticism of others, and their put downs of you, lead you to lose your joy in who you are, you are at the mercy of everyone's negative spirit. This is especially so of your mate. Mates have a tendency to let their negative feelings be expressed in the home and with their partner because they cannot express them toward their boss or others who are the cause of the negative feelings. If you do not recognize this and you take everything personal that comes out negative, you will suffer a lot of unnecessary pain, and even get depressed when there is no valid reason for it. A low self-esteem will lead you to feel unloved when there is no intention of your mate to convey such a thing at all. Your self-love must be strong enough to realize that you are worthy of your mates love even when criticism may be valid.

A strong self-love will be able to recognize that a negative mood and negative words from a mate are often the releasing of negative emotions that are generated by their frustrations with others and situations. Self-love will enable you to let them release those emotions without reacting back

with your own negative emotions. You perform a service for your mate in letting them ventilate and get restored to peace. Your acceptance of them and loving concern, even though they may be acting very unloving, will enable them to regain balance in their emotions. This will lead them to appreciate you and love you all the more, and you will avoid the fight that a negative response would lead to. You need a strong self-love to take a negative mood from your mate and not react negatively by taking it personal. Many feel that self-love is not a virtue but a sort of pride that is to be rejected. This is not so, for the second great commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself, and you cannot love your neighbor if you do not love yourself.

Laura Huxley in You Are Not The Target writes much about the need to be aware that many a negative bullet coming out of your mate is for the sake of release of frustration, and is not necessarily aimed at you. If you can realize this you have the opportunity to be an aid in their regaining balance by not responding with bullets of your own, which at that point will make them the target. She writes,"At one time or another the more fortunate among us make three startling discoveries. Discovery number one: Each one of us has, in varying degree, the power to make others to feel better or worse. Discovery number two: Making others feel better is much more fun than making them feel worse. Discovery number three: Making others feel better generally makes us feel better." You can do this by not taking things personal that are really expressions of frustrations at others or circumstances. It takes a strong

sense of your own self worth to do this.

This means there really is no conflict between self-love and other love, for loving others is a form of self-love in that we love ourselves better and feel better about ourselves when we love others and make them feel better about themselves. Yet, the world is filled with love starved people, and she writes, "Disguised in a thousand forms, hidden under an infinite variety of masks, love starvation is even more rampant than food starvation. It invades all classes of peoples. It occurs in all climates, on every social and economic level. It seems to occur in all forms of life. Love starvation wears the stony face of the disciplinarian or speaks in the hysterical voice of the zealot. It puts on the unctuous manner of the hypocrite or the ruthlessness of the ambitious power-seeker. Love starvation may camouflage itself in physical and mental ills, in delinquency, sometimes in death. In a family, love starvation begets love starvation in one generation after another until a rebel in that family breaks the malevolent chain. If you find yourself in such a family, BE THAT REBEL!"

The worldly perspective says you are not of much value if you are not rich and successful, and on top of that, handsome or beautiful. We all tend to believe this to some degree and so struggle with self-esteem. Christians are no different, but they can be if they realize who they are in Christ. They are in a class of people of the highest class, for they are redeemed children of God, purchased with the

highest price ever paid to redeem anything or anyone. They are joint heirs with Christ of riches beyond the wildest imagination, and they possess eternal life. To look down on yourself as a child of God is to reject the truth that Jesus came into the world to give you life abundant, making you a being whom the angels of heaven envy. You have every reason to feel self worth, and you need to heed the words of the poet who wrote,

(The only person on earth you need to be accepted by is yourself.)
When you get what you want in the struggle for the self,
And the world makes you king and queen for the day,
Just go to a mirror and look at yourself,
And see what that person has to say!
For it isn't your father, mother, friend or host,
Whose judgement upon you must pass;
The person whose verdict counts the most,
Is the one staring from the glass.
Some may think you are a wonderful chum,
And call you as radiant as the sun;
But if the person in the mirror says you're dumb,
And you can't look him in the eye - you're done.
He is the one to please, never mind the rest,
For he will be with you until the end,
And you will have passed your most difficult test
If the person in the mirror becomes your friend.
You may fool the whole world along the years,
And get pats on your back as the ages you pass,
But your final reward will be sorrow and tears,

If you've cheated the person in the glass.
Author unknown

A good self image enables us to be more than one character. Someone wrote, "The healthy, happy human being wears many masks." We change how we see ourselves depending on the people we are in relation to and our motives. This is not inconsistent or deceptive or two faced, but is the reality of being multifaceted creatures. Walt Whitman wrote, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large. I contain multitudes."

So if I am with intellectuals I will talk and think like one as best I can. If I am with funny people I will be a comedian. I will be many people for many occasions. If I do not change to fit the situation I will be locked into a very limited self-image that will stifle my relationships. Marriage can become boring because people limit their self-image and lock themself into a static place with no change to be different and express themselves in new and exciting ways.

Variety is the spice of life, and marriage needs spice, and so it is important for mates to change their mask often enough to keep interest going. Do not just stay in one image all the time, for it gets boring. Accept the reality that you are capable of being more than just a single image. You are made in the image of God, and are capable of being at least a trinity of personalities. Hugh Prather spoke wisdom when he said, "Some people are going to like me and some people

aren't, so I might as well be me. Then at least I will know that the people who like me, like me." True, but do not limit your me to just what you like, for you also have the capacity to be a you that a variety of people will like. Paul said he became all things to all men that he might win the more. In other words he became the kind of person who could adapt to the environment to appeal to those he was in contact with at the moment. A wise mate will adapt and show a self that is of interest to the partner even if it is not the primary self with which they feel comfortable. Put on the mask and be what your mate needs at the moment.

Acceptance does not mean that you like everything about yourself or your mate. Few, if any, mates like everything about themselves or each other. But it means that you accept the less than ideal and focus your attention on those things that you do like and work at making them dominant so that you have much to like and enjoy.

So many come into a marriage with the idea that their mate will overcome their lack of self love, but this is a mistake. It is the responsibility of each mate to develop their self love. They help each other by their loving words of praise and encouragement, but even these will not be enough if you have not developed a personal sense of self-esteem.

Someone has written this advice on improving your self love. "I have made the analogy that, if you keep giving to others without giving to yourself, it is like pouring water

from a vessel. If you pour and pour without ever refilling it, eventually, it will run dry. So, if we are like that vessel, how do we refill, recharge, re-energize, and replenish ourselves, so that we will have energy and love to give to others and to the world? The answer is: by loving and giving to ourselves, first."

There are many ways to do this, and one of the key ways is to keep yourself in good health. You are always more loving to others when you feel good. Sick people are not fun. So do all the things necessary to stay well, for when you take care of your health you are a more loving person. Everybody you know benefits by you feeling good. You are a better mate, parent, and friend when you are in good health. Do not give all of your energy to others and exhaust yourself all the time so you do not have the energy for your own enjoyment. Even Jesus got away from the crowd to enjoy a quiet time with his disciples, or a fun time at a wedding or banquet. All of life does not need to be in self-sacrifice. Some of it needs to be in self-satisfaction. If you do not get it, you will just become a pain to others in the end. It is healthy and happy people who are a blessing to others, and so it is not selfish to spend time doing just what you like and enjoy.

I like the way someone put it, "So, go ahead. Love yourself. Be good to yourself. Treat yourself well. Replenish yourself. You will discover that, the more you love yourself, the more you will be able to give love to others - and the more others will want to be around you and give back to you. This is a win-win situation. Loving yourself will

ultimately benefit the lives of others you encounter, as well as your own life."

Leslie Karen Lobell, M.A. has written an article called Self-Love: Is It Selfish? She deals with an issues most people struggle with as she writes:

> **"The song "Greatest Love of All," written by Michael Masser and Linda Creed (performed by Whitney Houston) contains the following lyrics: "I found the greatest love of all/Inside of me/ ... Learning to love yourself/It is the greatest love of all." There are many types of love that we have for the people in our lives: love for a romantic partner or spouse, for our family, for our children, for our friends, for humanity, in general, and for ourselves. Which of these is most important? Which should be our first priority? Is self-love the "Greatest Love of All"? Or is it selfish and self-indulgent?"**

As Christians we could never say that self-love is the greatest love of all, but she goes on to say pretty much the same thing we have been saying, and it is valid for the believer to practice loving themselves. If God loves us so much he was willing to give his son to die for us, then we have an obligation to love ourselves. That makes loving God the greatest love of all, but self-love is also vital. She writes, "In my counseling practice, I encounter a lot of people who believe that to love yourself, or to give to yourself, is a "bad" thing. They see this as "selfish" or "self-centered." When people have a low sense of self-love they become so many

things God does not want people to become. Low self-esteem leads to all sorts of abnormal behavior that is destructive. She writes again, "Learning to love yourself may be the greatest love you ever experience and achieve. Self-love is not "selfish" or bad. When you love yourself, you will feel good about yourself, and you will feel better about the world. This will make it easier for you to give love to others. Especially if you are a parent or any type of caregiver, you must not forget to take time out to care for yourself. When you take time to re-energize, you will have more energy both for yourself and to share with the people you love and those in your care. The person who feels self-love is generally happier and much more pleasant to be around than the person who lacks self-love and self-esteem. Embodying self-love is the greatest example we can set for our children, for our loved ones, for our friends, and for all those we encounter in our lives."

Larry James has written some interesting advice on self-love. He writes-

"What are the benefits of working on YOU? **The reward for working on you is - you feel good about who you are! You really love you! Not the self-centered love that distracts you from being loving to others, but a genuine love of self; the kind of love you can share with others.**

Loving you for who you are causes you to begin to feel like a whole person. At that time you may be ready for another relationship. Unless you wait for this magic moment, you

may always continue to be disappointed with the relationships that show up in your life. Remember, like attracts like. Opposites do not attract. That is a myth!

If you cannot handle the most important relationship in your life - the one you have with yourself - then you will never be able to truly relate to the ambience of the coming together of two people. We spent so much of our time being concerned about the relationship we are in with someone else, that we forget about ourselves. This could be called "losing yourself in the relationship."

So. . . we must never stray from the path of self-discovery! We must always know where we stand with ourselves. The only way you can do this is to be attentive to, and intentional about having the best relationship with yourself that is humanly possible. This means you must always work on YOU first. When you are ready. . . a relationship with someone else will be there; you will find each other."

QUOTES ON SELF

I read an article that said the way to achieve inner peace is to finish things I had started. Today I finished two bags of potato chips, a chocolate pie, bottle of wine and a small box of chocolate candy. I feel better already.

The relationships we have with the world are largely

determined by the relationships we have with ourselves.... Greg Anderson

The bad man is continually at war with, and in opposition to, himself. -- Aristotle

Finding oneself was a misnomer; a self is not found but made. --Jacques Barzun, _From Dawn to Decadence_

Self esteem is the reputation we acquire with ourselves. -- Nathaniel Branden

An individual's self-concept is the core of his personality. It affects every aspect of human behavior: the ability to learn, the capacity to grow and change . . . . A strong, positive self-image is the best possible preparation for success in life. - Joyce Brothers(1928-____)

Most people with low self-esteem have earned it. -George Carlin

There are three things extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know one's self
Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

Be yourself, who else is better qualified? -- Frank J. Giblin

You've no idea what a poor opinion I have of myself -- and how little I deserve it.-- William Gilbert (1836-1911)

For a man to achieve all that is demanded of him he must regard himself as greater than he is. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Self-respect is the fruit of discipline; the sense of dignity grows with the ability to say no to oneself.- Abraham J.

Heschel

The capacity for getting along with our neighbor depends to a large extent on the capacity for getting along with ourselves. The self-respecting individual will try to be as tolerant of his neighbor's shortcomings as he is of his own. -- Eric Hoffer

That kind of life is most happy which affords us most opportunities of gaining our own self-esteem... Samuel Johnson

The only conquests that are permanent and leave no regrets are our conquests over ourselves.--- Napoleon

It may be called the Master Passion, the hunger for self-approval.-- Mark Twain

When people do not respect us we are sharply offended; yet in his private heart no man much respects himself. -- Mark Twain

There is much truth in this last quote, and it is because we all know how far short we fall from the ideal. But, nevertheless, we are accepted by God in Christ as children of God, and we must accept ourselves as of great worth to be the best we can be as believers and as mates.

A 3. ACCEPTANCE OF YOUR MATE.

Acceptance is the key to a mature marriage. As soon as a couple ceases to try to change their mate, and accept them as they are, they begin to enjoy their marriage. Someone wrote,

If I quit hoping he'll show up with flowers, and
He quits hoping I'll squeeze him an orange, and
I quit shaving my legs with his razor, and
He quits wiping his feet with my face towel, and
We avoid discussions like,
Is he really smarter than I am, or simply more glib,
Maybe we'll make it.....

If I quit looking to prove that he's hostile, and
He quits looking for dust on the tables, and
I quit inviting Louise with the giggle, and
He quits inviting Jerome with the complex, and
We avoid discussions like,
Suppose I died, which one of our friends would he marry,
Maybe we'll make it.....

If I quit clearing the plates while he's eating, and
He quits clearing his throat while I'm speaking, and
I quit implying I could have done better, and
He quits implying he wishes I had, and
We avoid discussions like,
Does his mother really love him, or is she simply one of those over-possessive, devouring women who can't let go,
Maybe we'll make it.

Emerson wrote, "Never try to make another individual into a copy of yourself, for God knows, and you should too, that one person like you is all the world can stand." The inability of mates to accept each other for what they are is a primary cause for why people who love each other to stop doing so. They fell in love with a certain person, and were fascinated by their differences. But as they live together they want them to stop being so different and begin to conform to what they expect them to be. In other words, we all like to play dolls with real people, especially our mates, and we like to dress them the way we want. We want them to be somebody else than the one we married. That which made them unique and interesting to us is no longer cute, and so we want to make alterations. We want to shape and mold them into someone better, for we can now see how flawed they are.

It is not that this is not a noble goal, for all of us can use some getting better. It is just that we do not want our mate to be the one making the alterations. We see their flaws also, and we are not convinced their image of what we ought to be is better than what we are now. We also feel that if we were as good as they wanted us to be, we would probably not have anything to do with them. And so what mates really need is to be loved for who they are, as they are. That is why you married them, for you loved them as they are. When you seem to no longer love them as they are, but want to change them, it seems like the opposite of love, and is a form of rejection.

Nobody likes rejection, and especially from a mate, and so the striving to change a partner is seen as negative and not loving at all. So how do you ever get any improvement if you never strive for change? The answer is acceptance. Acceptance provides an atmosphere for change. We see it in God's relationship to man. In grace God offers man eternal life when they put their trust in Jesus as their Savior. God accepts the worst of sinners who will come to Him. He takes them into His family, and they are to be welcomed into the church. This loving acceptance makes them feel secure and a part of the family. As they live in that environment they see they are immature and far from what a believer ought to be, and so they begin to grow. They seek to cut out of their lives those things that are clearly not God's will. They seek to add to their lives that which makes them more like Christ. Much change takes place, and great improvement, but it all begins with acceptance as they are.

This is the process that has happened to millions, and is going on all over the world today. How many do you think would come into the kingdom of God if the plan was to nag the sinner to change and be different? What if every church had a sign out front with all that was expected before you could enter and be accepted? What if it had, not only the ten commandments, but you must stop cussing; stop all bad habits; start reading your Bible, start speaking kindly to those who hate you; start giving regular to the church, and on and on it could go listing all the things that need to change to be a mature Christian? You know there would be few to none who would enter such a church. This is

rejection. The Gospel is acceptance, and it says whosoever will may come.

Now apply this same principle to marriage. The mate who accepts the one they married as they are is being loving with the same kind of love God has. It is agape love, and it loves people where they are, and does not demand anything else to be accepted. When mates do this for one another it provides an atmosphere where change is desired, for you want to grow more worthy of such love. That is how the sinner feels. He wants to change and be more pleasing to God, just because of being accepted when he was so unworthy. A mate who is accepted for who they are will want to become more pleasing to the one who has so accepted them, that is, if they keep doing so, and do not revert to the method of seeking change by shame and rejection. As soon as rejection enters the relationship you become enemies, and no longer partners seeking to please each other.

Someone said, "God loves us and accepts us just as we are, but he loves us too much to leave us that way." Here is the paradox of acceptance with a desire to change. That is the paradox every marriage must struggle with also. Without acceptance their can be no happiness, but without change their can be no growth. So acceptance does not mean no desire for change. It just means that growth must come by freedom of choice, and not by pressure and coercion. God does not force us to change, but leaves us free to do so, and encourages us to do so. Mates need to let each other be free to change, but not be forever harping on it. It is human

nature to resist change that is imposed on us, and that is why mates seldom succeed in changing each other. Change has to come as a free will choice.

The most common way to deal with differences is to try and change your mate so they are like you. The list of people who have succeeded with this approach can be filed under your finger nail without pain. It just doesn't work. It does lead to changes, however, but they are for the worse. Anne Kristin Carroll in Together Forever, says that in her counseling eighty percent of the affairs that destroy marriages happen because of a non-accepting spirit. The most common response of men who have affairs is this: "Anne, it wasn't so much that I didn't love my wife, but there was never any peace at home. She was always pushing, always trying to change me, put me into a mold. I didn't intend to get involved in an affair, it just happened. You see, the woman I'm involved with makes no demands, she takes me like I am, and although I know it's wrong, I feel free for the first time in years, I feel accepted...." Most wives say the same in an affair.

So the bottom line is that acceptance is crucial for any long lasting relationship. The reason that the same people who get a divorce after a few years can have friends for decades, is because they have learned to accept their friends, even though there may be all kinds of things about them and their behavior that they do not like. But they could not accept their mate's unlikable behavior. The price for non-acceptance is non-acceptance in return. You reject me, and I

will reject you. Couples who do this are playing the game called who is winning this marriage. The problem with this game is that nobody wins, but both lose the game and they lose each other.

Michael Emmons said in Accepting Each Other, "In their pursuit of fast change, many partners resort to force. In an attempt to get the other person to "shape up," they employ condemnation and even physical force. But the fact is that individuals who use coercive actions to try to get their partners to change are fighting a losing battle. The result is invariably that the other partner rebels, directly or indirectly, in effect responding in just the opposite way to what the first partner had hoped. Harshness will inadvertently create a result you are not seeking. Aggression beget aggression--or withdrawal."

The Gospel in business and real estate is location, location, location. The Gospel in marriage is acceptance, acceptance, acceptance. Marabel Morgan wrote, "The second, you suspect your husband won't ever break out of his rut, face that fact and accept it." Newspaper columnist Sydney J. Harris said, "The most difficult and most essential task in marriage is learning which defects must be ignored and accepted in the other partner. Most unhappy marriages are created by trying to change what cannot be changed."

Since it is true that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, it is inevitable that two people who marry will

discover the defects in one another. In fact, they will be aware of defects that nobody else in the world will know about. This led one wit to define marriage as, "That device of society designed to make trouble between two people who would otherwise get along very well." The trouble comes with the desire to change those defects into perfection. Screaming and arguing have been popular methods to achieve this noble goal, but the success rate is less than impressive. The list of people who successfully scold their mate into perfection is about as long as the list of practical uses of a man's nipples.

If you accept your mate, you do not expect them to always conform to your way of thinking. You accept their differences and give them the freedom to express those differences. If two people only agree because one feels bound to do so, that is a form of bondage, and will lead to resentment. Love is to liberate and not imprison another person. Do not be like the wife who said, "I want him to have his opinions-I just don't want to hear them." This is rejection and not acceptance. The golden rule of marriage is "Do unto one another as you would a month before you married." That is when you were so accepting of each other.

Acceptance, says Andre Bustanoby, does not mean you never question the other persons behavior, opinions, or ideas. Acceptance means you do not question the other person's worth as a person and as a partner. Bustanoby was a dogmatic person who judged people all the time as being wrong because they were not like him. He could not accept

people until he came across I Pet. 2:17 where it says we are to honor all men. The Greek word is timao, which means "To recognize the worth of." He learned that Christians are not expected to approve or like everything about everybody, but they are expected to recognize the worth of everybody, and honor them for that worth. All are made in the image of God and are potential children of God, made worthy of receiving eternal life as a free gift because of the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

When Jesus ate with Publicans and sinners, the Pharisees blasted him for accepting such people. They refused to do so, and felt superior to Jesus. Jesus did not accept their sin, but he accepted them as people of worth, and many were saved because of His acceptance. Acceptance is just another word for love, and it has the power to change people. People tend to change in response to those that give them feelings of self-worth.

Becoming a mate is a great deal like becoming a missionary. You head for a new land with people far different from you, but you are excited for you want to teach them and help them experience the full blessing of knowing God through the Savior Jesus Christ. But after you live with them for awhile you find they are in many ways depraved. They do not see evil as you do. They have customs and habits that are repulsive. Now you are at a cross-roads. You either come to a point where you cannot stand how different they are and head back home to familiar territory, and many do this, or you accept these people with all that you do not

like about them, because you love them as they are. Your acceptance of them will be the only way you will ever be able to influence them to be more than they are. Do you see the parallel of marriage and missions? Without acceptance you lose before you even begin.

Marriages go through the same stages. We have to come to the point where we realize we are not perfect and we need to accept each other with all of our defects. If you expect your marriage to be perfect you have taken the first step toward despair and divorce. People only feel free to change in an atmosphere where they are accepted as they are. One has to feel security to change and be different. Under threat and rejection we tend to harden in our present state. Acceptance leads us to desire to climb to a higher level.

Someone said, "At best a relationship should feel like home. It should be a place where you feel let in without fanfare or having to be something you are not. A relationship should always be your place. It is where you are accepted when you are not your best, when you have anxious days, when you feel you sound crazy, when you fail as well as when you succeed. Being accepted doesn't mean that your shortcomings are condoned. It means, rather, that you are not being rejected because parts of you are un-acceptable. And just as you want to be accepted, so you must accept your partner. Acceptance is not a compromise. What you accept, you must accept completely. You cannot permit what you do not accept to diminish your love. It is this gift of acceptance that allows us to love each other perfectly in spite

of our imperfections."

This is basic to any happy relationship. If you do not accept a person for who they are, but only for what you hope they will be, you do not really love them, but you love your image of what they could be. They are not now acceptable to you, and so they are not loved for who they are, but only for their potential, which you hope to make actual. You love what you think you can make of them, and so you are really just in love with your own sense of creativity. Acceptance means you love a person for who and what they are in the present. Do not let this be your idea of marriage, "Marriage gives a husband a chance to find out what kind of a man his wife would have preferred." Instead, let your attitude be that of the one who said,

Some pray to marry the man they love,
My prayer will somewhat vary;
I humbly pray to heaven above
That I love the man I marry. Rose Stokes

The most loving attitude you can have toward a mate is that of acceptance. This is loving your mate as Christ loves His bride. He does not like her defects and conduct that is not fitting for her as His bride, but He accepts her, and will never leave nor forsake her. His goal is to make her the happiest bride possible for time and eternity. When two people have this as their goal, they will have a marriage that will be secure, and, though not always smooth, will be always moving forward to better things ahead.

Acceptance of your limitations is a key to mental health. People crack up because they can not live up to unrealistic expectations. Marriages break up for the same reason. People expect the ideal, and in a fallen world this is putting too much pressure on marriage. Every marriage counselor who has written a book will tell you it is unrealistic to expect to avoid conflict and problems. It is wiser to expect them as normal. So your mate is neurotic and immature-what's new? This is only a problem if you take everything seriously. If you accept these defects and do not tell yourself this is horrible, you can take your focus off of these negatives, and focus on the positives for which you married them. This acceptance can motivate them to change the negatives to be more acceptable.

You accept yourself, even though you know your weaknesses and inadequacies. You forgive yourself and seek only to please yourself. You love yourself, because you give yourself full acceptance. You are to love your mate as you love yourself, and this means full acceptance of them as they are. Mates doing this for each other helps them to a higher level of self-acceptance, which means more freedom to grow and become the more we are all capable of becoming.

Acceptance begins in courtship, and it is very important that a couple be very honest with each other in this period of their lives, for you need to know each other as you really are if acceptance is to be a foundation for your marriage. You need to give each other a valid picture and not a distorted one or you make acceptance so much more difficult, for you

then make it such a great challenge within marriage. You should know what you have to learn to accept before you have to accept it. Acceptance is not real unless it is based on openness and honesty. Some seek to be accepted by means of deceit and what they have is not real acceptance at all. They go to church with a woman before marriage, but have no intention of doing so after they are married. She never smokes in courtship, but after marriage it comes out that she is a chain smoker. She talks of economy before the wedding, but after she reveals she has extravagant tastes. He pretends to have only a moderate interest in hunting before, but after he reveals he is an absolute fanatic. This sort of dishonesty is unethical and puts a heavy burden on your mate to accept you. You should be honest before marriage so there is acceptance of who you really are and not acceptance of an illusion.

Acceptance is a life time responsibility and not just for the early years of marriage. At any time of life the lack of acceptance will bring an end to a happy marriage. Mates need to be admired by their partner. This is especially so with men. If a wife spends a lot of time trying to change him he will feel rejected and lose his affection for her. Acceptance leads to affection. Lack of acceptance leads of loss of affection. One of histories great marriages was destroyed in this way. Tolstoi was one of the greatest novelists of all time. His War and Peace and Anna Karenina are considered literary masterpieces. He was a man of great wealth and fame and had a blissfully happy marriage. But then he read the teachings of Jesus and felt the need to not

be so materialistic. He gave up his wealth and even the publishing rights to his books. His wife could not accept this change of life-style. She spent years trying to change him. She screamed and threw fits of hysteria and even threatened to kill herself if he did not change. He came to the point that he could no longer stand the sight of her. He wrote beautiful love passages about her earlier in their marriage, but his dying request was that she not be permitted to come into his presence. This is the level of tragedy that can happen when a mate is not accepted for who they are or who they have become.

A sales manger said to a salesman, "It is not what the customer comes in for that counts, it what he goes out with." People come into marriage with a lot of expectations and maybe you can't meet them. But you have other values and qualities that are good. You need to sell yourself to your mate, and you can do this if you are sold on the product. One of the keys to acceptance is to reject unrealistic expectations. Females are often shocked at the sexual energy of their husbands because they have a false and unrealistic understanding of sex. Christian girls especially think that Christian boys will not be extremely sexy. John W. Drakeford says there are many unrealistic expectations that people have coming into marriage. He gives some examples:

+"I always thought wives got up early to prepare breakfast for their husbands."

+"I always thought my husband would never look at

another woman."

+"I always thought our marriage would be like a perpetual honeymoon."

A little ditty goes, "All things I thought I knew but now confess--the more I know I know, I know I know the less." We must always remain open to new information about our mate. But meanwhile we must accept them on the level that we do know them. The only alternative to acceptance is rejection, and rejection is the greatest enemy of love. Acceptance is the expression of love, and rejection is the exclusion of love. Rejection is the greatest enemy of a happy marriage. Consider what had been written on the subject.

Jack R. Taylor writes, "In years of counseling, I have noted that in virtually every case where a couple has reached a time when coping seems impossible without help, one of the top contenders of enemy number one is rejection. It can be passed from generation to generation without deliberate planning, and it can grow in the passing. Rejection is the number-one culprit in divorces and is at the root of all the world's evils. It was rejection in the heart of Lucifer (Satan) which compelled him to seek to lift himself above the stars of God. It was his rejection of divine authority which caused God to reject him and eject him from heaven's hosts. Filled with bitterness and rejection he roams the earth, seeking to inject the poisonous venom of rejection in every human vein. Rejection, perhaps more than hate, is the opposite of love.

In virtually every marriage ceremony are contained the words. "Do you take this woman?" This implies the matter

of receiving of the mate with no condition attached. I have yet to counsel a couple whose marriage was in trouble in which rejection was not involved. Every marriage is characterized either by rejection or reception. Where the former reigns, there is divisions, chaos, tension, and bondage. Where the latter rules, there is freedom, joy, fulfilment, and liberation. It is so in a home, in a business, as well as in the church."

The highest level of happiness will be in those marriages where there is a mutual acceptance of who each other really is, so that each can be who they really are and not be playing games where they suppress and hide who they really are. Peter Hector sums it up, "If you're in this kind of relationship, you can drop your mask and don't have to play games. You can relax because you have accepted who you are and you know that your partner loves you the way you are. Imagine, your mate knows all of you, your strengths, your weaknesses, your fears and shortcomings, how you look when you are at your worst, and how you behave when you are in your worst mood. Your partner knows you and says, "I see you; I know everything about you, I love you just the way you are." Yes, this is what true intimacy and romantic love is all about."

ACCEPTANCE BY GOD IS THE GOSPEL

Luke 18:9-14 Morris L. Venden writes, "Justification is mankind being put right with God because of what Jesus

has done- Rom. 3:24." "And the publican was accepted. He went down to his house justified. Acceptance is the key word in the entire beautiful theme of justification. Jesus always accepted those who came to Him. We are accepted just as we are-in fact that is the only way we can come. We cannot change ourselves in order to come. This is true everyday, not only at the beginning of the Christian life. Jesus always accepts us just as we are. He said it in John 6:37: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." He said it in John 12:47: "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." He said in John 8:11 to the woman they dragged into his presence: "Neither do I condemn thee." Even the Jewish leaders recognized this truth, although they didn't appreciate it, when they said, "This man receiveth sinners." Luke 15:2. Jesus said it in John 5:24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that hearth my word, and believeth on him who sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

ACCEPT THE FACT THAT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE DIFFERENCES

"Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole against a wide sky." ~ Rainer Maria Rilke

KAY COLES JAMES, who is a part of the Bush administration, has written What I Wish I'd Known Before I Got Married. Here is one of the things she wished:

"I wish I had known very early in my marriage that there are some things about Charles that are never going to change. Of course, marriage is about compromising and coming together, and each of you will indeed change to accommodate the other. But there will be many things about your man that will never change.

And I do not care how big or how small it might be, it will be something that really annoys you! For example, Charles is never, ever going to turn that showerhead off so that when is step into the shower, the water doesn't come right down on my head. If you really want to get a black woman angry, mess with her hair! I have tried reasoning, threatening, begging, crying-you name it. He is never going to change!"

She goes on to tell of her praying for him to change and reading many books and listening to tapes, but she realizes it never going to happen. She was annoyed even at God for not answering her prayers, but she came to the conclusion that God was using her husband for His purposes. Instead of going through all that for years, start your marriage right off with an acceptance of the fact that some things about your mate will never change. They are a part of who they are, and of how God made them. It is part of the package and you have to take the bad with the good. You do it all the

time when you buy music. Some of the song on the C D are of little value, and may even be worthless to you, but you buy it for the songs that you just love. You take the bad with the good and just accept the reality that you are not going to get a dozen great hits on every C D that you buy. And so it is with the mate you love.

People fall into different categories as personality types, and it is important that we understand this and recognize that this means that mates will always be different, not just because they are male and female, but because of their different personality types. Florence and Fred Littouer have done extensive study of these types and in their book After Every Wedding Comes A Marriage they have the following quotes that deal with acceptance.

"As we study Scripture we see the personality traits of the men whom God used-Melancholy Moses, Phlegmatic Abraham, Choleric Paul, and Sanguine Peter. Each was different, but each was mightily used of God. And so it is today: God uses men and women of all these personalities to accomplish His word according to His plan.

Once we examine ourselves and stop trying to shape up others, we open our hearts to change. When we realize that others can be different and yet not be wrong, our relationships improve. God created all of us to be unique."

"Many of you men allow more time for choosing a new car than you spent in selecting your wife. At the dealership you make sure the seats are properly contoured, the steering works the way you want it to, and the wheels are just the right kind. But when you choose a bride you soon see that her seat is overstuffed, she refuses to be steered in any direction, and her wheels seem to be going around in circles.

If your life long dream is to own a long black Cadillac, you don't run out and buy a chubby little red Volkswagen and then take it home and bang it, stretch it, repaint it, and try to make it into a long, sleek, black Cadillac. Yet that is what many of you did in choosing a wife. You wanted a long black Cadillac, but instead you married a chubby little red Volkswagen, and you spent the last 20 years trying to beat it, pull it, and remake it into a black Cadillac."

Unfortunately, we just can't remake each other; we must accept each other as we are and not try to construct a new image of what the perfect mate should be."

"Accepting each other as we are is the hardest principle to learn in marriage. We can always see how better our partner would be if only he or she would follow our well-meaning and constructive suggestions. Yet each of us chafes under constant criticism, and we either march defiantly off in the opposite direction or else build a wall around our selves and refuse to budge."

CONCLUSION

You are accepted by God in Christ even though you do not deserve to be a child of God and have the gift of eternal life. It is by God's grace that you are saved and not by any merit in you. This is the kind of grace that we need to have in relationship to our mate. They are not perfect in any way, and they do not deserve a love that is unconditional and sacrificial, but that is what God expects you to give, for you are making a commitment to accept them just as you have been accepted.

B. 1. BE FRIENDS

It is a major mistake to think that each stage of a developing relationship eliminates the stage before it. Someone said the three stages of the male-female relationship is friendship, courtship and battleship. This is often the case, but the fact is, friendship is never to be left behind as a couple moves to the deeper level of being lovers and mates. Friendship is not just a foundation for those in an immature relationship. Friendship is a vital part of the highest relationship we can have-the relationship with God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is known as the greatest Friend, for he was even the friend of the worst sinners of his time. He said to his disciples, "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:14). Friendship is never to fade out of the picture of any lasting relationship, and especially the relationship of mates. They are to be perpetual friends if they expect to have a truly happy marriage.

This means that a couple needs to develop a friendship base before they begin to build a lovers base. Those who enter quickly into a sexual relationship often build their marriage on the foundation of pleasure alone. This can be a strong foundation for awhile, but it tends to weaken as time goes on. A couple needs a longer lasting foundation that does not weaken and that foundation is friendship.

“Friendship,” says John Gottman, “is at the core of a strong marriage.” Friendship between couples means they "know each other intimately" and "are well versed in each other's likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes and dreams," Gottman says in his book The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work (published by Crown). “Based on twenty-five years of research, The Seven Principles also says couples in good marriages "have an abiding regard for each other," express this esteem in many ways large and small, respect each other, and enjoy one another's company. Gottman has also found that the quality of a married couple's friendship is the most important predictor of satisfaction with sex, romance, and passion.”

Megan Northrup continues her reporting about the findings of Gottman: “Gottman believes the principles that make a marriage work are "surprisingly simple." Happily married couples aren't smarter or more beautiful than others, and they don't live in castles in the clouds where there's no conflict or negative feelings. They've simply learned to let their positive feelings about each other override their negative ones. They understand, honor, and respect each other. They know each other deeply and enjoy

being together. They do little things every day to stay connected and to show each other they care. In short, they are friends. As simple as it sounds, happy marriages are based on a foundation of friendship." Gilbran wrote a poem supporting this for one kind of people, but the facts show that it is true for all kinds of people and not just the intellectuals. He wrote,

"Among intellect people
The surest basis for marriage
Is friendship,
The sharing of real interests,
The ability to fight out
Ideas together
And understand each other's
Thoughts
And dreams.

Eros love is sexual love, and this, as we point out later is a vital part of our marriage relationship, but it is not the whole of our relationship if we have an ideal marriage. We need more than the passions of sex, for they are a small part of the daily relationship. We need something that is with us all the time, and that something is friendship. It is sharing all of life and not just the sexual side of it. Friends want to enjoy many things together and not limit themselves to one area. You do have friends who just have one thing in common

with you, but they cannot be your best friend. Your best friend is one with whom you share many interests and with whom you want to do many things. This should be your mate. If your marriage is built on just your common interest in sex, you are just a friend and lover, but you are not a best friend, and the goal of marriage is to make sure that your mate is your best friend. They should be the one with whom you have the most interests and the most activities that give you pleasure. A friend is one who can know the worst about you and still accept you and love you. Roy Croft has put it in words often quoted in weddings. He wrote,

"I love you, not for what you are, but what I am, when I am with you. I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but what you are making of me. I love you for the part of me that you bring out.

I love you for putting your hand into my heaped up heart and passing over all the frivolous and weak things that you cannot help seeing there, and drawing out into the light all the beautiful and radiant things that no one else has looked quite far enough to find.

I love you for ignoring the possibilities of the fool in me, and for laying hold of the possibilities of good in me. I love you for closing your eyes to the discords in me, and adding to the music in me by listening to me...You have done it without a touch, without a sign. You have done it by being yourself.

I love you for helping me to make of the timber of my life, not a tavern, but a temple, and out of the works of my every day, not a reproach, but a song. You have done it by being yourself. Perhaps that is what being a friend means, after all."

Let me remind you again that the Bible supports the putting friendship love on the highest level. The Greek word in the New Testament for friendship love is Phileo, and it is the word used for the love God has for in Son in John 5:20. It is the word used for God's love of his people in John 16:27. It is used of the love Jesus had for his disciples in John 13:23, and it is used of the love of the disciples for Jesus in John 21:17. It is also used of the love of a wife for her husband in Titus 2:3-4. Do not underestimate the power of friendship love, for it is love on the highest level. Eros is sexual love and it is focused on a single aspect of life, but Phileo is multi-faceted, and leads to the enjoyment together of a broad range of experiences. This kind of togetherness is a form of intimacy that does enhance the sex life, but it is an end in itself. It is foreplay at its best, but it is just the enjoyment of each other's company with no other motive than that of friendship.

Becoming lovers is the frosting on the cake, but it can be a very sweet cake even if there is no frosting. Phileo tends to be very strong in courtship. Two work at being boy and girl friend, and look for every way possible to have fun and enjoyable experiences. After marriage they often focus on

eros, or sexual pleasure, and let phileo lie dormant. If we will take it out of the closet, dust it off, and put it back into operation, we will enrich our marriage tremendously. Friends have fun together. It may be by talking, by playing sports, or games, or by doing things together and going places together. Be a friend to your mate and you will add joy to your marriage.

What is the key that unlocks that closet to set phileo free? SHARING! You do what started romance in the first place. You share your life and your interest, and you spend time together in talk and play. The essence of romance is in the two T's, talk and time. People fall in love by means of these two T's. You talk and you spend time together. Put any person in your life where you spend a lot of time with them, and do a lot of talking with them, and they will become a friend. That is how friends are made-talk and time, or communication and companionship. Remove these two ingredients and friendship fades.

Steve and Annie Chapman in Married Lovers Married Friends wrote, "People get married because they love each other. But I believe they stay married because they like each other. And because I believe this, I'm a great crusader for falling in like, and staying in like with your spouse.

My penchant to promote "like" in marriage may never result in songs that make the Top 20, simply because it's so difficult to rhyme. Look at love. You can pair it up with sticky sentiments like "my turtle dove" and "the stars

above." Unfortunately, "like" rhymes only with expressions like "take a hike." Hardly the sentiments passionate ballads are made of.

But liking has a wonderful things going for it: Partners who like each other have a relationship founded on respect---respect for their mate and for themselves as well. When respect, and the "liking" it fosters, flourishes in a marriage, you can bet the relationship rests on very solid ground."

May you be able to say long after your wedding what Lois Wyse said in Love Poems for the Very Married:

Someone asked me to name the time
Our friendship stopped and love began.
Oh, my darling, that's the secret
Our friendship never stopped.

Love is a friendship that has caught fire.
It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving.
It is loyalty through good and bad.
It settles for less than perfection,
and makes allowances for human weakness.
Love is content with the present.
It hopes for the future and it doesn't brood over the past.
It's the day-in and day-out chronicle of irritations, problems, compromises, small disappointments, big victories,
and working toward common goals.

If you have love in your life,
it can make up for a great many things you lack.
If you don't have it, no matter what else there is,
it is not enough, so search for it, ask God for it, and share it!

One of the best testimonies I have read about the value of friendship in marriage is by Jay Cookingham. He wrote, "I am committed to be your friend encouraging, supporting, and staying close for the rest of our lives together."

The dictionary defines friend as like this: Friend (friend) noun.
1. A person whom one knows, likes and trusts.
2. A person with whom one is allied in a struggle or cause; comrade.
3. One who supports, sympathizes with, or patronizes a group.
4. An acquaintance.

Hopefully Webster won't mind but I would like to add one more to the list,
ready for this?

5. A fuel source.

Say what? You see, to me friendship is the fuel for the fire of one's love, the combustible agent that gives spark to ignite one's passion for covenant relationship. The best friend status I enjoy with my wife has been with us through some difficult times with many victorious results. It is has kept us close, enabled us to want to continue on, and given grace to help one understand the other.

Six years ago we went through probably the darkest time our marriage ever has faced. In April and September of 1996 my wife miscarried and we lost two babies. It was like someone took a sledgehammer to our hearts…everyday…for months. The emotional storm that followed ripped away perspective for a while but one of the strengths that helped us through it all was our friendship. When my bride encountered a cold snap of disappointment, I would throw a log of encouragement on the fire and stoke up her faith. When I was racked with feelings of loss my wife would place on a log of comfort and embers of relief would flame up. Our friendship, strengthen by the Father's hand, helped us to grieve and to heal. That is why I am committed to guard that friendship, to make sure that my wife understands and knows that she is my best friend. Friendship fuel keeps us going.

Along with the great love I feel towards my wife, I also like her, I like the person she is. When I convey this to her, along with my commitment of love, I am making a bonfire of trust piled high. This "bestfriendness", this fuel source, will help us finish our race together as man and wife and ignite the seeds of friendship in our children's lives. This is one fire you can stand close to for a long time to come."

"Friendship that flows from the heart cannot be frozen by adversity, as the water that flows from the spring cannot congeal in winter." James Fenimore Cooper

“What greater thing is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined together to strengthen each other in all labour, to minister to each other in all sorrow, to share with each other in all gladness, to be one with each other in the silent unspoken memories?”
George Eliot

I will close this section by sharing William Batson’s Six Habits of Best Friends. It will be obvious how valuable these six habits will be to any marriage.

1. Friends stay in touch with each other. Friendship implies a continuing relationship in which both parties involved make consistent efforts to maintain. To neglect these special efforts is to risk allowing the relationship to wither and possibly disappear entirely. We verbally communicate with each other in a way that says, "I am interested in you as a person." We ask about the day's events; inquire about what has been read; anything that transcends talk about career and parental roles. We let each other know where we are as a courtesy.

2. Friends share themselves and their experiences. Without this level of sharing you may have an acquaintance, but you do not have a friend. Sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences creates an openness that deepens the bond. Andre Maurois defined a happy marriage as "a long conversation that always seems too short." Spouses who have grown apart share only negative emotions and cynical or critical thoughts which focus only on problems and

frustrations.

3. Friends are supportive during troubles times. Friends must always be there for one another, not only during the good times, but also during times of emotional turmoil or personal crisis. To have such a friend in times of need is a wonderful source of strength. What helps me get through my troubled times is when Cindy gives me a hug and tells me she is confident that God will help us get through this.

4. Friends consistently affirm one another. Good friends communicate a very simple message: "I like you, and being with you makes me feel good." The base of such a relationship is a deep acceptance of one another along with encouragement as life circumstances evolve. Love and acceptance should never be conditional. Such a conditional acceptance drives a wedge in the relationship that tends to deepen with the years. We seek to communicate regularly in words and deeds, in small acts of kindness and loving words, the value we find in each other. On one of our wedding anniversaries, Cindy gave me a card with the following statement: "It's one thing to be in love. It's another to be good friends. And it's a wonderful thing to be madly in love with my best friend!" That's affirming!

5. Deep trust always exists between friends. As friendship deepens, a corresponding openness about experiences and feelings develops. The price of friendship is personal vulnerability - letting your spouse know about personal doubts & sensitivities. Such information must always be respected and the vulnerability must never be violated. To deepen our trust we seek to never use a personal sensitivity

to hurt each other when we are angry. We do not gossip about each other. It's a betrayal of marital trust.

6. Friends let go and have fun together. Good friendships do not focus exclusively on problems or emotionally intimate discussion. Time is spent just having fun together. Good friends can let go to enjoy good times spent together knowing that they are deeply accepted and that they will be there for one another when tough times come. As married life becomes busier, humor often fades, and no time remains for fun. Stressed and tired, couples feel overwhelmed with responsibilities. They forget how to relax and enjoy lighthearted times together. Fun is a powerful tool in relieving stress.

A special friendship is what a marriage relationship is all about. At its root, marriage is not sex, romance, emotional highs, or pleasure. All these are part of the total relationship, but the core of marriage is a partnership built on emotional closeness, acceptance of one another, and fulfilling companionship. You can strengthen your marriage friendship. It will take commitment, work, and time. Why just be married when you can be married to your best friend?

(William Batson is Director of Vision New England's Family Builders Ministries.)

B. 2. BE FUN

The primary reason that courtship, rather than marriage, is often a happier time for couples is because it is a time when couples have most fun. Fun is the name of the game, and they are constantly going on dates, for their whole relationship is a date. It is fun, and produces a sense of joy as a couple enjoy each others presence in having the best time of their lives. Marriage changes things because now you have responsibilities for establishing a home and a career and a family. This leads to limits on the time and money for fun. The result is that boredom can enter your lives, and boredom is one of your greatest foes. If you do not conquer this enemy of your marriage, you will be in trouble. This demands that you be a constantly creative couple that seeks ways to counteract this threat of boredom.

Sex is fun, but it cannot meet the full need you have for enjoying each others company. You need a variety of enjoyable things in your life to shut out boredom. Even the perfect setting of Eden was boring without companionship, and God said it was not good for man to be alone. Marriage is to provide escape from the boredom that comes with having everything without someone to share it with. This means that the popular defense of a neglecting man who says he provides for his wife and family by working hard and long hours is missing the point. Adam had everything a perfect world could offer. It was God's best even, but without companionship and someone to enjoy it with him he was not happy. All mates need more than having everything they need. They need a companion with whom they can have fun.

Someone wrote, "Like a plant needs water or a car needs an oil change, your marriage needs constant attention." This means that you need to keep the fun of dating in your marriage. You need time alone with each other to talk, and laugh, and learn more about each other, just as you did in courtship. Fun was fundamental as a foundation for developing your love for one another, and this foundation needs to be maintained to keep your marriage from crumbling. A wife would not dream of buying a plant and neglecting to water it, and a husband would not dream of neglecting to change the oil in his car. Your mate is just like the plant and the car, for they need attention and care in order to maintain their value. Neglect of giving pleasure to your mate will erode the love they have and their values as a mate. It is so easy to drift into a pattern of life where this neglect becomes a habit. It is so subtle that we do not realize it, but one day we wake up and realize we are bored with each other, and there is no one to blame but ourselves. Avoid boredom like the plague by making sure that fun is a regular part of your relationship.

Someone said, "The sea of matrimony is filled with people over bored." Judge John A. Sarbaro says that in his opinion boredom is one of the commonest of all causes for broken homes. You can only do anything you do for the first time once. This means the thrill and romance of first time experiences begin to fade rapidly and soon you are faced with the issue of monotony. Novelty and originality go fast. This is the obstacle that love between the sexes needs to overcome to have a long lasting relationship. The monotony

of monogamy is overcome by trying new things to keep romance alive. Variety is the spice of life. Studies show that almost every foolish and dangerous thing that people do can be directly related to their being bored with life. This includes ending a marriage.

It is not being petty or self-centered for your mate to want to have fun with you. I want to share a study I did years ago that makes it clear that God loves to have fun and he loves his people to have fun. I called it FUN IS FUNDAMENTAL based on ZECH. 8:1-19

Geography students after traveling around the world by books were asked to list what they considered the seven wonders of the world. It was a hard decision but such things as Egypts Great Pyramids, The Taj Mahal, The Grand Canyon, and The Great Wall of China, were getting a lot of votes.

The teacher noticed that one of her students, a quiet girl, had not entered into the discussion. " Are you having trouble," she asked, and the girl said, "I couldn't make up my mind because there are so many." "Well tell us what you have," the teacher urged. She stood to her feet and read from her paper-"I think the seven wonders of the world are to touch and to taste, to see and to hear, and then to run and to laugh and to love."

This little girl was tuned into a different channel and she was sharing wonders that are indeed greater marvels than any of the so-called 7 wonders of the world. None of them

would be anything without those gifts of God that enable us to wonder at them and enjoy them. She was listing wonders not limited to one place in the geography of the world, but to those wonders that God has given to those made in His image all over the world.

Her seven wonders are more wonderful because they are not just in one place, but in every place. I don't know what her teachers response was to her answer, but our text tells us that God's response is a hearty, heavenly amen!

This chapter of Zechariah is God's description of the ideal life for His people. It is a picture of just how good it can be when he blesses His people. We want to focus on just a few of the details.

Notice in verse 5, God says His ideal of the perfect city is one where the city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. Then in verse 19 He says the fasts will be changed to festivals and become glad and joyful occasions.

There is something about this chapter that gives you the sneaking suspicion that God loves fun, and He loves His people to have fun. This may seem a little too light hearted, but I intend to show that fun is fundamental to God's nature, and His plan for man.

This subject is so vast in Scripture that my hardest task was to figure out how to limit it. The entire message could be devoted to just quoting Bible verses on gladness, delight, joy, and feasting. I was so overwhelmed with the number of texts dealing with the feelings of having fun that I couldn't get a handle on it until I discovered the word play, which is a

synonym for fun. It is the Hebrew word for the children playing in the streets, and it is the ideal word for study because it is used only a few times in the Bible in referring to the feeling of playfulness. Let me share with you the context of these few verses on play.

God seems to be in a playful mood as He responds to Job, and asks Him all kinds of questions about His creation. In Job 40:20 God is speaking of one of His largest creatures, either the Hippopotamus or Elephant, and He says, "The hills bring him their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby." A few verses later God is really getting into the fun of making Job see his physical insignificance compared to His great creature called the leviathan, and in 41:5 He asked Job, "Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?" This same Hebrew word for play is used there for "make a pet of him." Jehovah is joking with Job just as we do when we see a creature like Godzilla, or some other monster, and say, " wouldn't he make a great pet?"

What we have here is God's acknowledgment that the playfulness we see in the animal kingdom is not an accident, nor is it a part of the fall. The playfulness of creatures that makes us enjoy the zoo, and nature films, and pets, is built into the animal kingdom by God. It is part of His plan that man should enjoy the playfulness of animals and have them as pets, and enter into the fun of play with them. We don't have time to persue this-we are just taking a peak. But this peak tells us why we enjoy our pets. It is because God made

them to be playful.

In Psalm 104:26 the psalmist is describing God's vast creation, and then He comes to the sea, teaming with creatures, and He says, "There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there." Frolic is the same Hebrew word for play. We went to Sea World in Florida and saw how man can build great buildings and bodies of water for the sea creatures to frolic in and give people enjoyable entertainment. The Bible says the oceans are God's playground for these same creatures. The only reason they can be trained to play games and do tricks for our entertainment is because God made them with this capacity to have fun and to play.

The Jewish rabinical tradition says that God made leviathan as a play thing. God delights in His creatures, and some of them may have no other purpose than to delight the creator. God has fun with His creation, and the reason we are to respect and to conserve it is because it is God's toybox with delights to give pleasure to God and man.

Even if we did not have verses to say so, it would be a logical supposition that if God enjoys the playfulness of the animal kingdom, He must also enjoy the playfulness of man. But we do have text that illustrate this reality. In Isa. 11 we get another of God's descriptions of an ideal earthly environment. Note how the child will be able to play with the animal kingdom, and not just our present day domestic pets, but the animals that now are dangerous. Verses 6-9

say, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

In other words, where God is fully known there is play without pain. It is all joy and pleasure, and all that God has made works together in harmony, and evil is absent completely. All of the childhood fantasies of playing with the animal kingdom, and leading them like a Tarzan will be fulfilled. These fantasies that led Walt Disney to produce his movies are not a part of the fall, but are a part of that playful image of God in which man was originally made. God anticipates this future ideal with the same pleasure you anticipate an adventure of fun with your children. You want your children to have fun, and God wants the same for His children.

Playfulness is a part of Godliness, but we seldom see the Biblical picture of it. Because we lack this Biblical foundation we sometimes feel guilty when we engage in play. This is not all bad, for we need to keep in mind we are dealing with a paradox. There is another side to play that is dangerous and destructive. Like any other value, when it becomes an idol, it becomes a curse. We need to keep a

balance so that we do not lose Gods best because we abuse playfulness. But on the other hand some Christians go the other way and quote Paul, "Set your affections on things above and not on the things of the earth", and use this as a basis for rejecting the enjoyment of earthly play. In reality, when we set our affection on things above, we see clearly the nature of God which enables us to wisely choose what is consistent with that nature.

When you set your affections on things above,
You will come to know
That he who is light and life and love
Also has affections for things below.

God delights in the same things we do-the playfulness of animals, the fun of children, and the festivities of adults. Celebrating is one of the ways that men praise God. In II Sam 6:5 the Hebrew word for play is again used. "David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tamborines, sistrums, and cymbals." The ark of God had been returned and they were celebrating. When the prodigal son returned there was also a celebration with song, dance, and feasting. Even the angels of heaven get into the mood and rejoice when the sinner repents.

The point is, there is fun in victory. There is the feeling we ought to celebrate and sing, and have pleasure when God blesses, and God delights in our feeling this way. Fun is a part of the total worship experience, and because this is so,

we need not fear that heaven will ever be boring, for with eternal worship there will also be eternal fun.

Prov. 8:30-31 is the last text on positive play that we want to look at. It is again in the context of God's creating the wonders of the world. Wisdom is present and wisdom says in the Hexapla translation of the O.T. "Then I was at His side as a small child; then I was all delight, daily playing before Him the whole time, playing on His earth, taking my delight in the children of men." The picture is one we too seldom consider. God had fun creating the world. The Son and the angels and wisdom all enjoyed it as well. It was like a great celebration-a day of play as all heaven entered into the delight of watching God set up the largest playground ever. It is the picture of children watching with delight as the circus is set up, and all the preparations are made for a great time of fun.

God did not lose his delight in play because of the fall. His goal is to overcome the effects of the fall and get back to a world of fun without sin. On the day of Pentecost Peter preached his great message that won 3,000 to Christ and he quoted David as referring to Christ and His resurrection. He says in verses 26-28, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy with your presence." The word for joy here is used only two times in all the N.T. It is the word from which we get our English word euphoria. It

covers all the emotions we refer to by gladness, cheerfulness, happiness, delight and joy.

This text tells us that God's plan was for Jesus to experience these emotions forever in His presence. Jesus knew how to enjoy life and to enjoy children playing. He could have pleasure at the parties he attended, and He could add to the delight of others as He did at the wedding of Cana. The only other place that same Greek work is used is in Acts 14. Paul and Barnabas healed a crippled man at Lystra. The people there thought for sure they were gods who had come down, and the priests of the temple of Zeus came to offer sacrifices to them.

Paul was shocked, and pleaded with them to see that they were only human too. Then he shared the good news of the living God who loved them and who had been blessing them in so many ways. In verse 17 he says God has not left himself without a witness-"He has shown kindness by giving rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." Joy is the same word used for the joy of Jesus. Keep in mind, these are pagan people, and Paul is saying their joy, or euphoria, has been the gift of God.

This text makes it clear that God made man the same way He made the creatures of the field and the sea. He made them with the capacity for fun and play so they could enjoy the good things of life. It is a universal feeling-this feeling of well-being called euphoria. It is God's gift to all men, and

this needs to be recognized, for Paul used it as a tool of evangelism. We do too, but we do not recognize the Biblical basis of what we are doing. All evangelism efforts use fun as fundamental.

I do not know of a camp ministry that would survive a season if it was not for fun. Take away swimming, boating, ball games, ping pong, bikes, and other sports; take away all the fun and see how people will stay away in droves. You couldn't pay kids to come to a camp where fun is not fundamental. Every youth group and organization in the world knows this. If there is no plan for fun you can forget planning anything else.

It is not just kids who need it, but adults do as well. The reason we enjoy musical groups is because it is fun. It is fun to be uplifted. It is fun to be aided in praising God. Music is a recognized form of play. The same word we have been studying for play in the Bible is most often used for playing instruments. Music is played and enjoying it is playing. That is why every great evangelist has music. It is fun to hear good music, and so the fun of music is a key element in attracting people to Christ.

If Christianity is not fun it is not pleasing to God nor man. We too often think fun and play is a secular side of life. It is good for a break until we get back to the important and serious stuff of life. This concept is too bad for it leads Christians to not take fun seriously. They do not see it as a vital part of their spirituality, and a key value for which they

can praise God. We need to see that fun is fundamental in all the relationships of life; with animals, friends, family groups of all kinds, and even God.

Why did Jesus say we must become as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven? We usually hear it is because the child is so innocent, and so full of simple faith. This is no doubt part of it, but what about a child's playfulness? That is what childhood is, the time of life when they learn to play. Did Jesus ever play? Francis Thompson asks,

Hadst thou ever any toys
Like us little girls and boys?
And didst thou play in heaven with all
The angels that were not too tall,
With stars for marbles. Did the things
Play can you see me? Though their wings?

We could quote hours of poetry dealing with the childhood of Jesus, but all we know for sure is that He was a growing boy who had fun. It is inconceivable that Jesus did not play and have fun as a child on earth. When He was left behind in the temple, Mary and Joseph assumed He was with some of their relatives, giving us the clear hint that Jesus must have often been off playing with other children. We are told today that how a child learns to play is vital to developing their identity. If they do not learn to enjoy play they will become too serious as adults. Some do skip childhood and never learn to play. This leads to an adult who does not know how to enjoy life.

On the other hand if they do nothing but play, and are never taught that life is more than a game, they tend to become irresponsible playboys or playgirls. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, but all play and no work makes him a jerk. Any psychiatrist will tell you that one of their most common clients is the person who has nothing to do but play. They lack the pleasure of work and achieving goals and they eventually become depressed for the lack of meaning in life. Play must always be balanced with a purpose pleasing to God or it becomes a burden rather than a blessing.

In the childhood of man when God put Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, there was balance. They had the delight of enjoying all the pleasures of play and eating, but God also gave them the work of keeping the garden. Extremes of being workaholics or playboys are both contrary to God's will. Work and play in balance is the key to a happy life. Dwight D. Eisenhower said to students at Columbia University, where he became president in 1948, "Have fun. I mean it. The day that goes by without your having had some fun-the day you don't enjoy life-is not only unnecessary but unchristian!"

In the light of our study, we can say his statement was Biblically accurate for the Bible clearly teaches that we can never be all that God made us to be without fun, for fun is fundamental. But keep in mind that it is fun to be a child of God. It is fun to be saved and to be forgiven. It is fun to be sanctified and growing in the knowledge of God. It is fun to

be in Christian service. There is joy in serving Jesus. Fun is a broad concept that takes in many aspects of life that are pleasing to God. God is a fun-loving God and we need to take fun seriously and make it a vital part of our Christian life, and be praising God for it continually, for fun is fundamental.

The above message makes it clear that fun is to be a part of all loving relationships, and this means that the marriage relationship should produce it even more than all others. Adam no doubt had fun with the animals, but he never really knew what fun was until God gave him Eve. We don't know what Adam's first words were when he saw this beautiful gift from God, but we would not be too far off if we suggested, "Let the fun begin." She added excitement to his life that nothing else could. It is one of the purposes of marriage that two people will add to the lives of each other a unique level of enjoyment. Pet rocks are experts at handling boredom, but mates are not good at it, and so they need entertainment to be happy. Sex was a major form of entertainment in the ancient world, and in spite of all the modern movies, television, video games, etc., it is still high on the list of fun things to do. This was God's plan, and Prov. 5:18-19 makes it clear. "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-may her breasts satisfy your always, may you ever be captivated by her love. But we can't be having sex all the time-(says the wife), and so there is a need for mates to be ever looking for new ways to enjoy things together. You try new things and seek variety so that life does not get into

a rut. You never stop courting, for that is where your fun began, and it should not end in marriage.

Most of us feel uncomfortable when we see love crazed teens kissing and hugging in public places. It is not something we would do now, even though we probably did when we were love crazed teens, for now is seems out of place. You just don't display affections like that in public. But it has been pointed out that this is part of the reason we become boring as mature mates. We lose something in becoming mature. Dr. Bruce Leckart in Up From Boredom Down From Fear, lists the characteristics of boredom. This is a fairly lengthy quote, but it carries such an impact on the point that I felt the need to share it.

1. Afraid of taking chances or making a mistake. We get more conservative as we mature and this is good but the negative side effect is we fear adventure and risk and so we choose safe ruts and lose romance.

2. Overly concerned with pleasing others, Sounds like a Chr. virtue but when it makes you a bore to your mate it is a vice.

3. Conforming. You do what you are supposed to do and that means you don't have too much fun. Fun is for kids not mature people.

4. Sensitive to Criticism-- The bore is so afraid to be criticized that they do nothing that is exciting for all excitement is open to criticism.

Boredom is the enemy of romance. It is in fact the enemy

of life. Bertrand Russell the philosopher said "Boredom is a vital problem for the moralist, since at least half of the sins of mankind are caused by the fear of it. King David's famous affair with Bathsheba happened when David was bored. II Sam. 11 tells us David no longer went out to war as he had all his life but stayed in Jerusalem. No longer was he the admired warrior. The text tells us he was restless and got out of bed and was walking on the palace roof when he spotted Bathsheba bathing. David had 8 wives at this time and so there was no lack of sex in his life. But there was a lack of excitement. He was bored and boredom is very fertile soil for the seed of sin to grow in. It is probably safe to say the majority of affairs happen because of boredom. People are looking for a kick-excitement to take them out of the rut they feel they are in.

Dr. Paul Tournier says boredom is one of the greatest enemies of marriage and as a Christian psychiatrist he knows. Men he says are more conscious of the sins that boredom leads to. They feel their lust for other women more. Whereas a wife may begin to interfere with her sons or daughter's marriage and not see it as sin but as love. Women are more subtle in the ways they let boredom lead them.

Boredom is the cause of much human folly. Elizabeth Elliot wrote, "In the book A Sort of Life, Graham Greene tells how he has struggled, ever since he was very young, to fend off boredom. He once had a dentist extract ("but with ether") a perfectly good tooth for no better reason than that

he was bored and this seemed like an interesting diversion. He tried several times to commit suicide and six times played Russian roulette, using a revolver with six chambers--a dangerous game, but not, heaven help us, boring."

Marriage was God's solution to the problem of boredom for Adam, and it is meant to be the number one eliminator of boredom in the lives of mates. Back in 1902 Nixon Waterman wrote

Life's jolly jag of joy
When a man's in love.
He's as happy and as coy
As a turtle-dove.

All the world is fair and nice
And as sweet as Paradise;
Everything's worth twice the price
When a man's in love.

Life's a big bouquet of bliss
When a man's in love.
Earth is yearning just to kiss
With the stars above.
Then her smile is all there is
In the world, excepting his;
Say! It's something great, gee whiz!
When a man's in love.

Life's a mellow mess of mirth

When a man's in love.
Heaven comes to dwell with earth,
Walking hand and glove.
Then all creatures, low and high,
Putting other duties by,
Just lay off to watch the guy
When a man's in love.

Teens do rare risky things in love to escape boredom. Romantic love makes you willing to take risks for the one you love. We are to love our wives as Christ loved the church. He took the biggest risk and died for her. I almost died for Lavonne. I had a date with her and even though a terrible winter storm came on I headed out of town to her place 20 miles away. It was the worst 20 miles of my life. I was in a skimpy school jacket. Cars were in the ditch and I helped push then out. When I got back on the road I Felt I was driving in corn fields. I Got there so late that she and her whole family were in bed. I parked in the driveway and decided I would spend the night in the car. Iprobably would have frozen to death had not her father got out of bed and come out and invited me in. Her parents no doubt thought their daughter is dating a guy where the elevator doesn't go to the top. It was a crazy thing to do, but it was motivated by love. It was so much fun to be with her that I would do anything not to miss a date with her. It is keeping that fun loving spirit alive that keeps our marriage one that can be called a happy marriage. Fun is one aspect of intimacy, for you always feel more intimate with the people you have fun with. When you stop having fun with someone they become

less and less a friend.

B. 3. BE FAITHFUL

The vow goes something like this, "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, I promise to be faithful to you forsaking all others until death do us part."

This has to do with keeping yourself unto her or him alone, and so being faithful in the area of sexual intimacy. We will look at this in detail, but we need to see that being faithful includes not giving up on our marriage, but persisting to keep doing what is necessary to keep the fires burning. If we never give up there is always a chance to revive the coals that seem to be cold and no longer producing any heat. Faithfulness is what prevents people throwing in the towel and walking away from their marriage. The pilot light will go out once in awhile on your furnace, but you do not go on living in a cold house. You get busy and get it relit and working again. You need to be faithful in always striving to relight the fires of romance in your marriage. It is when you let your relationship get cold that there is a temptation to find other relationships more warm and inviting. Affairs happen, not just with people who

are more beautiful and handsome, or intelligent, but with people who show some warmth. A husband or wife who is being treated coldly, and who is not being sexually satisfied, is open game for being enticed by another. It happens to the best and so it is folly to put on the back burner that which needs to be kept boiling in your marriage.

God knew it could happen to his people and that is why he gave the 7th commandment about not committing adultery. Let me share a message I gave on that commandment.

PRESERVATION OF MARRIAGE COMMANDED Based on Ex.20:14

Actor Eli Wallach figured that his son who was approaching his teens was sharp enough to grasp some basic facts of life. So he called him in, and gave him the time-honored story about the birds and the bees. When he was all finished the boy said,
"You know in a rudimentary fashion, the process you've described isn't too dissimilar to human reproduction."

Parents are often naive about the sex knowledge of their children. They pretend that in a nation where teenage girls get pregnant by the millions, and where sex promotion oozes out of every pore of society, and where its rays flood every realm of life with its omnipresent radiation, that they still walk in the dark concerning the mechanics of sex. It is time that we wake up to the fact that we have been living in the

midst of a sex revolution. Pitiram Sorokin, the great Harvard sociologist, says of this revolution: "It is changes the lives of men and women more radically than any other revolution of our time."

This revolution is just as serious as political and economic revolution, but it goes almost unnoticed because it is so private. Sorokin writes, "Devoid of noisy public explosion, its stormy scenes are confined to the privacy of the bedroom and involves only individuals. Unmarked by dramatic events on a large scale, it is free from civil war, class struggle, and blood shed. It has no revolutionary army to fight its enemies. It does not try to overthrow governments. It has no great leader; no hero plans it, and no politician directs it. Without plan or organization it is carried on by millions of individuals, each acting on his own."

Time does not permit the examination of all the evidence of the decay of the American culture. But let me give you one example. During the early period of Greek and Roman culture the figures of their deities and heroes, and especially of women, were completely draped from head to foot. In the decadent stages of their culture these same figures appeared nude, designed to stimulate the sex drive. The same pattern was followed in music, the stage, and literature, until sex dominated the culture, and brought them to ruin. It is the same old story over and over. Sex is a beautiful servant, but a beastly master. Yet in spite of all the history of man's folly and its consequences in relation to sex, the American people are traveling that same road. It is true, "All men ever learn

from history is that men never learn from history."

The seventh commandment is not just relevant; it is essential for the very survival for our culture. As important as it is, however, the church has not given it an adequate place in its teaching. D. L. Moody said, "I would to God I could pass over this commandment, but I feel the time has come to cry aloud and spare not." Most preachers feel like Moody, but the difference is most do pass over it. I read 36 different preachers, scholars, and professors, on this commandment. All but a handful beat around the bush and just preached a gentle sermon on marriage and family life. To deal with it realistically you must be frank almost to the point of embarrassment.

There are those who feel you should not preach on the seventh commandment at all for fear of giving people ideas. These objectors know the power of sex, and know that a sermon on adultery could tempt the listeners to the very act that is condemned. I have read sermons describing David's affair with Bathsheba, and wondered if the authors purpose was to stir up jealously in the reader that he was not David, rather than pity for David that he was a victim of uncontrolled sex.

The objectors have a point, but it is dulled by the fact that the Bible itself is not shy on the subject of sex. It is so frank and specific in parts that it stimulates the same emotions as a sex novel or seductive film. There is no point in trying to pretend sex is an incidental and insignificant

part of life. It is a major and powerful force in the life of every healthy human being. It is the area of the greatest temptation to sin. R. H. Charles writes, "Other sins, such as theft, arson, perjury, murder, make no appeal to the normal healthy mind. You may read countless tales of such crimes in the daily press and not be tempted in the lease to become a theft, or incendiary, a perjurer, or a murderer, because in healthy minds the desire to leading to such crimes are absent, and the tales of such crimes create only abhorrence. But it is otherwise in regard to the sins of the flesh. Every healthy human being is influenced, and rightly influenced, by the attraction of sex."

This being the case, as we all recognize, we must follow the advice of McAfee who said, "One must plead for a pure heart even when there is danger that the very plea will stir up impure depths." Our primary concern is not to give a lecture on sex education, but to stress the Biblical attitude toward sex. The attitude we have and convey to others, especially to our children, is more important than biological information. Even the Kinsey report concluded that imparting all the facts about sex to people does not in itself determine how they will act in the use of sex. It says that attitude alone determines patterns of behavior. The parents, by their attitudes, are the real determiners of the sex behavior of their youth.

You may never sit down and explain sex to your child, but you are teaching attitudes all the time, and this is what is the determining factor. In his book, How To Tell Your

Child About Sex, Clyde M. Naramore, the well known Christians psychologist writes, "Parents often say to me Dr. Naramore do you know of a good book about sex education? Our boy (or girl) is nearly 13 and we want to tell him the facts of life. Questions like this would be humorous if they weren't so unfortunate. Evidently these parents do not realize that they have been giving their children sex education for years. The very fact that they have not talked with them tells these children that sex is something to avoid discussing. And of course, 13 years of age is much too late to begin. By then, some of the most important and most impressive years of life have already passed."

The implications of the seventh commandments would get us into all the realms of sex behavior, but for now we can only look at the primary purpose of the commandment. The positive principle underlying this negative forbidding of sex relations with any other person than your mate is, the preservation of marriage. Next to a man's life his most precious possession is his wife. To take either his life or his wife was punishable by death in the Old Testament. Israel could not survive, nor can any nation, where there is a lost of respect for life and marriage. Obedience to this commandment involves a development of the highest respect for marriage, and a deep sense of loyalty to one's mate. The marriage vows of forsaking all others, and keeping yourself unto him or her alone are not just thrown in to lengthen the service, they are the most solemn vows two people can make to each other.

Adultery is so evil, because it is a breaking of a major promise of life. When you get married you promise not to have sex with anyone else. You do not promise that you will never notice another man or woman. You do not promise you will not lust after another person. You do not even promise that you will not feel romantically attracted to another person. All of these things may happen in the course of life. If they did not, there would be no need for the promise. The promise that you make in marriage is that you will keep yourself just for each other so long as you both shall live. It is a commitment to devote all of your sexual energy to the loving of your mate. That is a marital right every partner has a right to expect. However sexual hunger is provoked, a mate is to release that energy only with their partner. That is God's plan and it is a beautiful plan.

Why then do so many chose to release their sex energy outside of marriage. Dr. Leon Saul in his book, Fidelity and infidelity, after a great deal of research, came to this conclusion: "....I do not think that a man or woman carries on an outside affair that pains his spouse and children, damages them, in some part destroys them, unless there is a powerful undercurrent of hostility against them, however conscious or unconscious this may be." In other words, the same emotion that makes the sixth commandment necessary is what makes the seventh necessary-hostility. It will make you kill your neighbor, or kill your marriage. Hostility toward your mate is what allows people to permit lust to get out of control. If you are not hostile toward your mate you will keep lust under control. People full of anger wish to

hurt someone, and they will be strongly tempted to hurt their mate by infidelity.

On the practical level this means that mates have an obligation to go all through life enriching their relationship. They need to learn how to communicate so that hostility is dealt with, and never permitted to go unresolved. Many studies reveal that middle age people become unfaithful because they feel a need to demonstrate that they are still attractive to the opposite sex. This hunger to be attractive would not get so out of hand if mates would build each other's self-esteem, and continue to be sexually romantic. A dull, boring, routine sex life is a sin, and a violation of the seventh commandment, because it produces the factors that lead to its violation. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and loving mates will so satisfy each other that there will be no reason to be tempted by adultery. What can Satan do if everything he has to offer you in sin, you already have within your marriage?

Paul gives Christians the key to reducing the risk of immoral sex in I Cor. 7. Paul's advice is for every mate to make sure that the sex drive of their partner is satisfied on a regular basis. This may vary greatly, but whenever the desire is present, it should be satisfied. This may call for learning a great deal about sex technique. Most all of the cases I know where a Christian mate becomes unfaithful, the basic cause is right here. They were not sexually satisfied, and it could have all been prevented by better understanding of the need and way to satisfy it. Adultery appeals to a

hunger, and there is little danger if that hunger is already met in marriage. Paul is saying that if you have rocks in your bed, you have rocks in your head, for you are giving Satan a foot in the door to destroy your marriage. Mates must give a lifetime of thought and action to keep the romance of sex a vital part of their relationship.

Marriage is similar to conversion in that, in conversion we make a commitment of our lives to one Lord, and in marriage we commit our lives to one mate. Sex and salvation are linked all through the Bible. God had His bride of Israel, and Christ has His bride, the church. Any disloyalty and idolatry in these relationships is called adultery. The marriage bond of two people is the very first human relationship. Adam was created first, and so the God man relationship was the first relationship with man. Then Eve was created, and the first fully human relationship was that of man and wife. Next to life itself, therefore, marriage is the most sacred possession we have.

God's first gift to Adam was life, and His second gift was a wife. It is not, cleanliness is next to godliness, but marriage is next to godliness. To treat it lightly, or to shatter it through an act of adultery is to be guilty of the worst of sins against God, man, and society. Adultery is wrong not because sex is wrong, but because sex outside of marriage shows a disrespect for the highest human bond. It murderers this highest relationship, and the murder of a marriage is just as serious as the murder of a person. This does not mean that adultery is the unforgivable sin, for Jesus

had compassion on the woman caught in the very act. He forgave her while condemning the men who wanted to see her punished. He knew the hearts of men, and knew that everyone of them had lust in their hearts. Jesus said that those without sin should cast the first stone, and they all left, for everyone of them was guilty.

We cannot have a stern inflexible attitude toward those guilty of this sin. Christians who are suffering because of a blunder in this area of life need to recognize that marriage is the basic value to be preserved, and if it can be, both partners are obligated to work for a healing of the shattered bond for all they are worth. I have talked with a number of people guilty of this sin, and not a one understands why they were so foolish. Everyone of them regrets it, and would give anything not to have fallen. Christ forgives, the mate forgives, but the hardest part of all is to forgive yourself. The scar remains, and can become a cause for conflict at any time. Nevertheless, the Christian attitude is to be one of striving for the preservation of marriage. There will be a Sahara desert period to go through, but the struggle will pay off, and with the attitude of high respect for marriage, the two can arrive again at the oasis of happiness. If the grace of Christ can heal the broken relationship of God and man, it can heal the next highest relationship also, that between husband and wife. One of the most important things you can do for the glory of God, for the strengthening of the church and nation, is to obey this seventh commandment for the preservation of marriage.

God is faithful to us and does not give up on us even when we fail him. He kept forgiving the people of Israel over and over again even though they were so unfaithful to him. In Deut. 7:9 we read, "Know therefore that the Lord you God is God; he is the faithful G od, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."And in the New Testament his faithfulness has not changed. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." It is that faithfulness of God that we are to have in our marriage. We are not to give up and forsake one we have promised to love for all our days, and we are not to give the love we promised to keep for them alone to another.

Charles Sell tells this story A man hated his wife so much he desperately wanted out of the marriage. He described the situation to the divorce lawyer. "Do you hate her that much?", the lawyer questioned. "Yes," the man confirmed his contempt. "Would she like a divorce?" asked the lawyer. "Yes, that would be no problem; she wants out, too," the wife hater said.

"Divorcing her now is not a very wise thing to do," the lawyer advised, conning his client. He then went on to explain his plan. If the man hated her so much, divorcing her would only make her happy. That was hardly a good way to get even. Going back home, he should do everything he could to make his wife love him. Be a perfect husband. "Then, after she is passionately in love with you, file for divorce." Venomous hatred seething in his innards, the

husband was ecstatic over this plan. He left the office with a cool determination to put it into effect immediately. This behavior made the wife so loving in return that they fell in love all over again and never gave divorce a thought. The point is, if we are faithful in being the kind of loving mate we promised to be, we will never dream of divorce, or any other kind of division in our relationship.

When we are faithful in meeting the sexual and emotional needs of each other we can have assurance that our mate will not consider having them met outside the marriage. This does not mean there will be no temptation, but the temptation will be easily resisted because they will know there is not need to go elsewhere, for all that can be desire will be met by their mate.

William Hyat points out that the one flesh idea includes more that just being one in sex. He writes, “This term, "one flesh," describes the biblical view of marriage. When we hear the words "one flesh," we may think of sexual intercourse. But that physical act does not make two people truly one in the biblical sense. Sex is meant to express a oneness that is already there as the result of a marital commitment. An emotional and spiritual oneness needs to be present. Mary Farrar says it well in her book, Choices: "We can measure our oneness by the loving commitment we have for each other--emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and physically. Loving commitment is the glue that cements us into 'one flesh.'" This is why sex outside of marriage or in violation of the marriage vow cannot truly be a "one flesh"

relationship.

So "one flesh" refers to a physical oneness. But it implies much more. It implies an emotional and spiritual oneness--a oneness of life purpose. One man and one woman as "one flesh," therefore, is the biblical view of marriage from the beginning, long before the giving of the Ten Commandments."

The stress he is making is one that needs to be recognized, for it is possible to never have sex outside of the marriage bond and yet still not be a faithful mate. Faithfulness must characterize the whole relationship for a truly happy marriage. Dennis Marquardt has some words of wisdom on this issue. He writes,

> **"One of the most important qualities in all healthy relationships is "faithfulness." In a culture that emphasizes success it is difficult for the importance of this quality to be fully appreciated. And yet, when we look at the life and teaching of Jesus we don't hear ANYTHING about success, Jesus didn't say, "Well done, you successful servant" He said, "Well done, you FAITHFUL servant."**
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> **Even parables that mention elements of success the emphasis is on faithfulness and not success - such as the parable of the talents and their investment by all but one wicked servant who never invested the one talent he was given. The focus of the parable was not the doubling of the investments by the others, but their faithfulness to invest.**
>
> **Yet, as Christians we live in a culture that values things**

like success and reputations … and faithfulness is hardly ever the focus!" He then shares these two illustrations:

> **"Mother Teresa of Calcutta once was asked, "How do you measure the success of your work?" She looked puzzled for a moment and then replied, "I don't remember that the Lord ever spoke of success. He spoke only of faithfulness in love. This is the only success that really counts."**

> **"We were at war with Vietnam. And there I was, at the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia. It was brutal. I can still hear the raspy voice of the sergeant: "We are here to save your lives. We're going to see to it that you overcome all your natural fears. We're going to show you just how much incredible stress the human mind and body can endure. And when we're finished with you, you will be the U.S. Army's best!" Then, before he dismissed the formation, he announced our first assignment. We'd steeled ourselves for something really tough--like running 10 miles in full battle gear or rappelling down a sheer cliff. Instead, he told us to--find a buddy. "Find yourself a Ranger buddy," he growled. "You will stick together. You will never leave each other. You will encourage each other, and, as necessary, you will carry each other." The marine motto is semper Fi, which is Latin for "Always Faithful."**

In war or peace you want a partner who will be, above all

things, faithful. He or she will be someone you can trust to be always looking out for your best interest. That is what love is. It is a choice to be always concerned for the best for the one that is loved. That is God's concern for his children, and it is to be our concern for our mate at all times. Two people faithful to this attitude are bound to experience a great deal of happiness in their relationship.

C. 1. COMMUNICATION

"Never close your lips to those to whom you have opened your heart." ~ Charles Dickens

God made it clear that the best state for a man is not to be alone, but to have a mate and partner for companionship. Adam has it all in terms of beauty, a job, and perfect environment, but he was not complete without a woman. He had fellowship with God even, but nothing could take the place of a woman. She was the crown of creation for man. Sex is a human need that is not met by the things of the spirit. F. W. Robertson said, "There are two rocks in this world of ours on which the soul must either anchor or be wrecked-the one is God, and the other is the opposite sex." God and man agree that it is better to have a fallen world with women than a perfect world without them. The first bachelor was not content with perfection. His first problem was solved with a wife. His second problem was his wife. Here was the first wedding and no wedding dress, but all were naked at this wedding and no shame. They had no knowledge of how sex could be used in

immoral ways and so there was no shame for all was pure in the sight of God and man.

Everyone needs help and that was why God made Adam a helper to complete life. Mates are to help make life easier for each other. Adam had a language and was to name all of the animals, but he had no one to talk to. Woman was made for man to have someone to communicate with. Having no one to talk to was an imperfection in the garden of Eden. We all need to communicate and marriage is to provide this. But unfortunately males and females have a difficult time continuing to communicate after they have been together for some time. They develop patterns that causes them to lose what they had when they first met and dated. Someone put it in these words which describes the majority of couples. " I believe a secret to the cure for divorce may be found in the idea of "talking with one another." Can you remember back to the time when you were dating? You couldn't wait to call your girlfriend or boyfriend, and when you saw them you wanted to stay, and stay, and then when you finally had to leave, you got back home and called them up and talked some more. When you got married, it seemed this method of behavior reached a climax, and communication began to end. We must open the lines of communication in our marriages. We must not take our spouse for granted, but take time to talk, and turn off the TV. An author stated, "Communication is to marriage as blood is to the body."

A major problem in marriage comes when mates do not communicate how they really feel. A man develops a fear that he might lose his job because of cutbacks and he does not share with his wife that he has this fear. He does not want to bother her and make her upset. He shows that he has a problem, however, by siting and staring as he broods about the possible negative future. He may be less attentive and less motivated for intimacy. His

emotional energy is being spent in worry instead. The result is that his wife is upset because he is not acting normal and she worries about why, and imagines things even worse than his losing his job as the cause of his change of behavior. The very thing he is trying to avoid is made worse by his lack of communication. He could share with his wife why he is worried and have relief, and she would have relief as well by knowing his problem, and together they could cope much better with their fears. This same problem arises for many different reasons. The wife can have a fear that her husbands association with another woman at work could lead to an affair. Instead of hiding this fear and letting it grow out of proportion to reality she needs to share her concern and get reassurance that her fears are groundless. The point is, all of our emotions that can lead to us having fears and worries that hinder our normal happiness need to be communicated so that they can be dealt with. Hiding any concern only lets it be in control, when sharing it can put you in control of the situation. Someone said it this way, "Communication means to overcome the desire to conceal feelings and thoughts and rise to the level of honestly about money, fears, wishes, motivations, sex feelings and responses, mistakes made, resentments and misunderstandings."

Why don't mates share all of their feelings? It is because of the fear of rejection. They fear their mate will say they are foolish and stupid for feeling that way. They fear they will be thought weak to have such feelings. Again, we are back to the vital importance of acceptance in marriage. We can only be honest with all of our feelings when we feel fully accepted. Mates need to understand that all feelings are legitimate. You cannot have wrong feelings. They may be unfounded and unnecessary, and they should be eliminated, but they are real at the time and need to be accepted as who you are at that moment. When all feelings are accepted, then one has

the security to try and sort out whether they are valid. Communication can only be completely honest when there is complete acceptance of each other. This will lead to freedom to be who you are with each other so that you can deal with reality and not be trying to cope with the hidden and unknown. It is not always pleasant to know how your mate really feels about things, but it is more healthy for your long term happiness.

A couple needs to learn to accept the fact that they will not always like the way the other feels, and this may even make them angry. It is okey to let your mate know you are angry, for suppressing it can only lead to resentment. Get it out as to how you really feel, even if you know your mate will hate that you feel that way. This is a part of intimacy, for you cannot be intimate if you do not know how a person really feels. When anger is out in the open it can be dealt with honestly. It is not a lack of love to be angry at one you love. We can even be angry at God because we do not understand Him and his mysterious ways. But Paul says, "Be angry and sin not." It is valid to be angry, but anger must always be under the control of love so that love masters the anger and lets it lead to communication that relieves it. Anger can be a method of getting the attention of a mate who will not recognize that they are behaving in a way that is hurting you. They need to hear your hurt in order to stop, and they often will apologize when they realize it, and so anger can lead to reconciliation. It is just a forceful type of communication that gets attention fast, and can resolve a problem fast. A person who loves us will not want to continue to hurt us when they understand what they are doing, and so anger can lead to healing of a relationship. Peter Hector writes, "So in a loving relationship, allow your partner the freedom to express anger. Don't argue or fight back, but listen attentively while he/she vents angry feelings. If you constantly ignore, make light of, or fail to acknowledge your partner's anger, he/she may

turn off and withdraw to himself/herself. This can begin a downward turn in your relationship."

The point is, anger and all other emotions, be they negative or positive, need to be communicated so that your mate has a realistic opportunity to respond in word and action to who you really are. When you hide the real you and how you really feel they cannot deal with reality, for they do not know what reality is. There has to be self-exposure for honest communication. This includes positive feelings as well, for how can a mate meet a need you have if they do not know what it is. If there is something that gives you pleasure and satisfaction you need to share it, for few mates have mental telepathy that is able to read your mind. Many mates feel that their partner should know what they like and what they want, but this is unrealistic expectation. It is like expecting to go to the grocery store and find a cart filled with all of the things that you want for the week. That is folly and impossible, for nobody knows just what you want to eat. People's taste change and their moods change, and so even someone who knows you well and knows your usual eating habits cannot predict what you will want for this week, or this day, or for the next meal. Only you know, and you have to communicate it. You have no right to expect your mate to know anything you want until you make it clear, and this means telling them enough times until they can repeat it back to you. Saying something once, or even just twice, is not communicating. You have not communicated until your mate can state back to you what you are conveying. It is folly to expect them to know without repeating yourself several times. Unrealistic expectations are a major cause for heartache in marriage.

Larry James writes, "Openness means being willing to communicate my deepest feelings. There can be no intimacy without conversation. The only way my love partner and I can truly communicate is to tell the truth. Truthful communication

moves love partners and creates a condition of unity, love and satisfaction. For intimacy to grow in a healthy love relationship there can be no withholding; feelings - both positive and negative - must be shared equally between love partners. The act of withholding the truth is always potentially a lie." One experienced counselor was asked: What is the most essential characteristic of a happy marriage? He replied, "After love, the ability to confide fully, freely, and frankly in each other. Look at the following example of the lack of honest communication, and make sure such folly does not enter your head.

Martial therapist Carlfred Broderick often tells his clients of an incident that occurred in the early days of his own marriage. Having come down with the flu, Broderick took to his bed and waited to be cared for by his bride. Specifically, he waited for her to bring him large glasses of orange juice--something that his mother had always done whenever he had been sick as a child. Now, though Broderick's wife paid attention to his needs in every other way, no juice was forthcoming. Eventually the therapist said, with what he thought was great tact, "Honey, I didn't realize there wasn't any orange juice in the house." Taking the hint, his wife brought him one small glass of juice. When hours passed without a refill, Broderick asked for more. And another small glassful appeared.

The same sequence of events continued for two more days until finally the therapist's wife said with some annoyance, "What is this with you and orange juice? Even when I get some for you it doesn't seem to satisfy you!" Having grown up believing that, no

matter what ails a person, one gets better in direct proportion to the amount of orange juice one is given, Borderick could not understand his wife's seeming lack of concern for his recovery. "I was so hurt," he recalls, "that if I hadn't felt so weak I would have left the house."

"Married couples play this game all the time and it leads marriage to become a contact sport with a lot of injuries." We assume too much in marriage. We assume that our mate thinks like us. We know if we were them we would, as a woman, cook just the right food and be more into sex. We know we would, as a man, be more affectionate and thoughtful. We all know what we want and expect our mate to know too, but this is not the way it works. Some suggest that role reversal can be the best way to communicate. You each pretend to be the other and share how you feel.

A common problem is what happens when couples go to be with one of their families. Men tend to ignore their wives and this can be a difficult and awkward time for the wife. Les and Leslie Parrott had this problem, and she tells of how she solved it. "In the past whenever we'd go to Les's house, he'd shift into pre-marriage mode and forget I was his wife. Rarely checking in with me, he'd visit his buddies or take off with his dad—leaving me to fend for myself. He didn't mean to do it, but it felt as if I was invisible, a mere tag-along. And it was terribly lonely. Finally, in private I asked Les if he realized what he was doing and, like your husband, he didn't. He was having a good time and assumed I was too. I was careful not to blame him or lash out because I felt wounded. But I did tell him how I was feeling and he began to see the situation from my perspective. This would have never happened if I'd accused him of deliberately ignoring me (that's guaranteed to put him on the defensive and solve nothing). But focusing on what was

going on inside me when he took off without my input or didn't include me in discussions helped him realize what he was doing. And I realized I couldn't take his behavior personally, as I was tempted to do."

She could have suppressed her frustration and become resentful, as many women do, but she brought it out into the open where it could be dealt with. There are many things that mates do that hurt the relationship, but they are not being mean and indifferent. They honestly just do not know that they are hurting their mate. Without open communication these things can never be resolved. Mates can only see your perspective when you show them what it is. If you don't show them, they can go on making you angry in complete innocence. Your lack of communication is more serious problem than their ignorance, for if they knew they would no longer be ignorant, and have the option of doing the loving thing to meet your need.

Dr. David Mace in Close Companions writes, "It is quite possible for two people to live together under the same roof, as husband and wife, for many years; to sit together at meals three times a day, to sleep in the same bed every night....and do this for a lifetime, and not really know each other as persons." The only way we can know anyone intimately is by communication and self-disclosure. Mates must learn to expose not just their bodies for physical intimacy, but their inner being for the other types of intimacy.

We need to keep in mind that it is not just the things that bother us that we need to share, for we sometimes also keep to ourselves some things we like, and by doing so lose what can be of value. Here is an example of not communicating a positive.
"After fifteen years of marriage, Vic and I had our pizza order down to a drill: half pepperoni with onions, half sausage with onions and bell pepper.

But for those years, I longed for the taste of anchovies—I grew up in an anchovy family. But from everyone else, I heard stories about how anchovies made people gag. So for 15 years I had deprived myself of anchovies for the good of my marriage.

One night, as my husband and I stood in line at the pizzeria, I looked past the order-taker and into the kitchen. The taste of anchovies began to beckon. Anchovy, anchovy, they called, as I conjured up the salty, meaty taste.

Maybe just this once, if the pizza man promised not to drip juice on the other half and if he made a big mark to show the pepperoni-anchovy boundary, I could get anchovies on my half. So I asked.

Vic's jaw dropped. "You like anchovies?" He almost shouted. "You mean all these years, I've been going without anchovies because I thought you didn't like them?"

That pizza was the best we had ever eaten—slathered with spiky, spiny, salty anchovies."

by Jane Tod Jimenez

Ed Wheat is a major Christian authority on marriage, and I want to share some of his wisdom here. He wrote, "An unknown sage once said, "Sometimes we wake up to the startling discovery that many of our most important relationships are suffering from verbal malnutrition." In no relationship are those words more true than in marriage. With good communication, a marriage grows---stronger, richer, more meaningful. When a couple as little or no communication, the marriage dies, much like a plant that gets no water.

He goes on, "Communication is one of the extraordinary delights of marriage, when it's working. Nothing, not even sexual fulfillment, will bring as much enriching intimacy into your relationship. But it's more than a luxurious pleasure. Call it the lifeline of a love-filled marriage--the means by which indispensable supplies are transported from husband to wife, and from wife to husband.

WHAT A GOOD LIFELINE SUPPLIES.

If you have good communication in your marriage, the lifeline will provide these supplies:

The knowledge and understanding of one another which you need for intimate closeness.

The interchange of information and ideas you need to work together as a husband-wife team.

The capability to work out your differences and resolve your conflicts.

The continuing "in touch" contact you must have to grow together in the same direction, and to be there to support each other during the changes and difficult times of life.

Obviously, couples trying to operate without these supplies will encounter major problems. In the troubled marriages we counsel, communication lines are almost always clogged or severed. In fact, researchers believe that ninety percent of all marriage counseling involves the attempt to restore communication, or to teach the couple to communicate effectively for the very first time."

Willard Harley is another outstanding authority on marriage. His book His Needs Her Needs is one of the best I have ever read. He wrote out of his own personal experience, "I can personally testify to how easily a couple can change and grow apart if they don't maintain good conversation. When we married, I had just graduated from college, and Joyce had just finished her second year. After just two months of married life Joyce decided not to finish college and took a full-time job as a secretary. We had our first child when I completed two years of graduate school, and Joyce became a full-time homemaker. At the end of three more years of graduate school, I had a Ph. D. and we had two children.

Joyce began to develop her interest and ability in music while my career led me into psychology. She became a gospel recording artist and sought-after speaker and vocalist. I taught psychology, conducted research, and developed a counseling practice.

Soon I saw that we had little to talk about anymore. When I tried to tell her about my work, she tuned in for all of ten seconds and then was gone. I listened for about the same amount of time.

When a husband and wife take part in conversation that really communicates this information about their needs, they will learn to become more compatible. They need to share their feelings and reactions. To start such a conversation, ask what your spouse thinks and feels. One evening you might use questions such as these: "What has made you feel good today? What has made you feel bad? Then let your spouse know what made you feel good today and what made you feel bad.

When you share this kind of information, you will better understand what's going on in your spouse's world and his or her reactions to situations that influence you both. If something I do affects my wife negatively, I need to know it so I can eliminate that behavior and do something pleasing for her instead. Conversely, if I'm doing something right, I need to know that, too, so I can continue or even increase that action. Couples can't work too hard or too long at this process, because even doing something with the best intentions can backfire, if you don't keep in touch this way."

WHY IS COMMUNICATION SUCH A PROBLEM?

It is a problem because we do not realize that we need words just as we need food to be healthy and happy. Someone put it, " Words are mind and soul food and they either nourish because they are healthy words, or they make you ill because they are toxic words. You can starve mentally and emotionally if you do not get an adequate intake of verbal food. No communication for the mind is like no calories for the body.

We get word hunger and crave meaningful conversation. This is especially true of a mother who spends all day with young children who have a limited vocabulary. It is verbal milk and cookies all day and she needs some adult communication." People are shocked that after years of marriage they have problems and they do not even recognize they have neglected their marriage and do not even communicate. John W. Drakeford writes, "Years of experience in a counseling center led me to conclude any type of family difficulty could be solved if the subjects learned to communicate with each other."
"What is a friend? A former stranger that you learned to communicate with. What is a lost friend? One you ceased to communicate with."

Jack Taylor in What Every Husband Should Know writes, "Nothing in our lives has yielded more dividends than the time we have deliberately set aside to communicate. The most valuable lesson I have discovered in many years is that a wife considers any communication better than no communication at all. Now that I think of it, I believe that Barbara and I learned this together. It mystified me that Barbara would seem to push for communication, even if she had to make me angry to do it. Then, when I would respond in anger at first, the whole spirit of our conversation would change. She seemed to delight in it. She would rather have me talking to her angrily than not talking to her at all!

Listen to one passive husband's plea. "Something must be done about women. My wife is always pushing my buttons, just to get a response. I don't think she cares about what kind of response she gets, just as long as I react. She pushed so hard the other day that I finally yelled at her and told her to lay off. She grinned as though I had given her a bouquet of flowers. She said, "Usually I get no feeling out of you. I'd rather you yelled at me than to have you just sit there."

Communication lies at the heart of a woman's needs. Through it most of her needs are met. She needs to be loved and have continued evidences that validate her feelings. The woman who does not communicate will suffer death in a part of her being where life's deepest responses are born.

These words can be posted on the door of any house whether it is the house of government or the house of business--but more especially over your dwelling and mine---COMMUNICATE OR DISINTEGRATE!"

Men and women are constructed so different, and it is hard for each to understand the others construction. They expect each other to be normal human beings, but never taking into consideration that what is normal for them is not normal for the opposite sex.

Rhonda Rhea writes, " I don't know about that whole Mars/Venus thing, but I think I can safely say men and women certainly operate on different hardware. We're wired differently. To me, it seems as if men are computers and women are, well, cell phones. The computer's communication is most often a one-way communiqué. Cell phones, on the other hand, require two-party participation. They're all about communication." Then she quotes Dr. James Dobson's book Love For A Lifetime, in which he says, "Research makes it clear that little girls are blessed with greater linguistic ability than little boys, and it remains a lifelong talent. Simply stated, she talks more than he." Dobson suggests that God may have given Mrs. Cell Phone 50,000 words per day while Mr. Computer may average 25,000. By the time he's walking up the driveway to his relaxing safe place, he's most likely used 98 percent of his daily word store—he's practically in "sleep mode" already—that mode that's used after the screen saver's been on for

a while. She, on the other hand, is ready to give him most of her 50,000—and she wants a similar number from him. But all she gets is a busy signal."

If a wife understands this, she will be patient with him and allow him some time to relax when he gets home and not have to deal with anything more for awhile. The timing of communication is as important as the content, for at the wrong time it just does not compute. Mates have to be selective as to timing and not pour out problems and needs for decision making at a time when this is adding a load just when the last straw may be all it takes to break the camels back and start a fight. Mates need preparation for communication. After some rest and a good meal a man is more likely to be able to deal with some issues that have been on the wife's mind for hours. It works the other way around too, for in the evening the wife may be exhausted after a hard day, and she needs rest and recuperation before she is ready for dealing with issues that are on the husband's mind. Each needs to be sensitive to the state of mind of the other for communication to be helpful.

Rhe writes again, "Let your computer be a computer. Lynn spent the first three years of her marriage trying to remake her husband, Doug. Doug resented her motherly corrections and they argued at almost every encounter. When they decided to talk to a counselor, Lynn was sure he could whip Doug into shape. Was she surprised when the counselor hinted that she was a big part of the problem! The counselor encouraged her to let her husband be himself. She had essentially been trying to make a computer into a cell phone." Again, we come back to the basic truth that we need to accept our mate, even though we wish God would have made them as intelligent and loving as we are. We need to remember that when choosing a mate they come with that sign you see on some cars in the lot, "As Is."

Rhe advises women to maintain close relationships with other women, for they will be glad to let her unload a good share of their 50,000 words. This relieves them and their husband, for the husband can never be a good listener when there is an overload to his system. Women help each other out a lot in this area, and so wives need to have female friends with whom they can share a woman's perspective. Some portion of this will inevitably be complaining to each other of how un-understanding their husbands are, but it should be kept to a minimum, for talking negatively about men only reinforces the natural resentment toward the stupidity of the male sex. You have enough of this already, so you do not need to refuel the tank. The ideal is to heed the advice of Paul in Col. 4:6: "Let your conversation be always full of grace."

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

The following paragraphs are my testimony about my not listening and some words of wisdom about its importance, which I have shared in marriage enrichment seminars.

Many years ago she was worried the house was on fire. I sat by the fireplace reading the paper wondering why her head was filled with such nonsense. "Of course you smell smoke." I said, "The fireplace has been burning all day." She quieted down for awhile, but soon she was back on her theme and said again, "I smell smoke." I ignored her as long as I could. But when I saw smoke coming up through the carpet, I thought maybe she has a point. I called the fire department, and a truck was there in minutes. Sure enough, the rafters were on fire under the fireplace, and our whole house would have burned had we left as we had planned.

A few weeks ago I was in charge of cooking a turkey on the grill. A rerun of a great tennis game was on TV, and I was glued to it. Lavonne began her worry wart fear that I was neglecting the

turkey. What a joke I thought. I have never burned anything on a grill, and the match wood soon be over. "Just a minute" I kept saying for about ten minutes. Finally it was over, and with no sense of urgency I walked out on the deck and opened the grill. I was in instant panic. The bottom of the turkey was on fire. The flames was fierce as the grease was feeding them. I couldn't believe it. I shut the lid and closed the vent, but still it burned. I turned off the electricity and pulled the plug, but it had no effect on the fire. Lavonne finally threw some baking powder on it and put it out. The entire bottom of the turkey was burned black but fortunately the rest was okay, and we fed ten people and had left overs. Another few minutes, however, and it would have been a total loss.

The point of all this is, by not listening to my wife's fears I almost lost a house and all our belongings, and a turkey a half hour before company arrived. Lavonne could probably call to mind a few other times in which I did not listen. In fact, I think the words "You never listen to me" are recorded several places in my brain. How many husbands have heard such words from the mouth of their mate? What about wives who have heard it from husbands? Even bad things can be funny things to remember long after they are past. Share with your mate the dumb things you have done because you didn't listen.

Dwight Harvey Small has some very important words to digest on this problem. He writes, "Disturbed communication indicates a pathological condition. A husband and wife relationship cannot survive without a minimum degree of communicative success. Not to communicate is to become alienated, to be unable to participate in another's life. Alienated people cannot listen to one another. The alienated cannot communicate; the non-communicating are alienated; it is a vicious circle. Given time, the accumulated frustration and resentment that accompanies poor communication will cause two married persons to quit listening to each other

altogether. Dialogue then ceases to exist, which is tantamount to emotional divorce. To shut off one's life and become inwardly inaccessible, to deprive a husband or wife of the means of communication, is to say, "I no longer care to participate in your life." And whenever one partner stops listening to the other, what is it but infidelity of a real sort? Reconciliation at that point demands a new and honest beginning in communication. Both partners must learn to listen all over again-or perhaps learn to listen for the very first time. The promising thing is that they can learn!" They can if they want to, but often people do not want to listen, or they just accept non-listening as a part of life.

Ric Masten wrote
i have just
wondered back
into our conversation
and find
that you
are still
rattling on
about something
or other
i think i must
have been gone
twenty minutes
and you
never missed me
now
this might say
something
about my acting ability
or it might say
something about
your sensitivity

one thing
troubles me tho
when it
is my turn
to rattle on
for twenty minutes
which i
have been known to do
have you
been missing too?

Let's recognize that even God has this problem with His people. They often will not listen to His word and have to suffer the consequences. Getting people to listen is a major problem of the entire universe, and God is working on it all the time. Many of the Proverbs deal with this issue. Here are just a couple of them:

Prov. 8:32-34 Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me...
Prov. 13:1 A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.
Prov. 15:31 He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.
Prov. 18:13 He who answers before listening-that is his folly and his shame.

There are many others, but these make it clear that good listening is a part of wisdom, and poor listening is a part of folly. Men are more likely to be the one who does not listen in a marriage. I am a one track-minded person, and if TV is on you only have a 50-50 chance of communicating with me. If it's the news, your chances are greatly diminished. If it's football, forget

it. Men can hear the sound of their mate talking, but not the message, unless the message is something they really don't want to hear.

For example, a wife was talking to her husband as he read the paper. She knew he was not listening, so she said, "I want you to know I've invited the president for dinner tomorrow." He said, "Yes dear." She said, "I think our daughter might be pregnant." He again responded, "Yes dear." She said, "I have a date with your boss tonight." He said, "Fine dear." She said, "Give me 60 dollars for a new dress." He responded, "What! Are you kidding-you don't need a new dress!" Selective listening is not all bad, for there is a lot of sound we don't need to interpret, but any sound from one we love should be processed.

Talking is not communication without listening. God has spoken to man, but they do not hear, and it is the same as if He had not spoken. That is why one of the most common sayings of Jesus was, "He who has ears to hear let him hear." A message has no value or power unless it is listened to with understanding. Not everyone can be a speaker, but everyone can be a listener, and by good listening make a major difference in life. Someone said, "God gave us two ears and one mouth which hints we are to listen twice as much as we talk."

H. Norman Wright wrote, "One of the difficulties in listening is that one partner tries to second guess the other. It is easy to think that you know what your partner is going to say, so you cut your partner off and finish the sentence or interrupt his idea with something that he or she doesn't mean at all. All to often a husband or wife blurts out an opinion that is miles from the wavelength that the other partner is on. This is what the writer of Proverbs had in mind when he said: What a shame--yes, how stupid--to decide before knowing the facts! (Pro. 18:13.)

A good listener will ask "Is this what you mean?" And then say what you think. They will either say that's it or you are on the wrong track. For example, a woman was asked, "Where did you get that huge diamond?" She responded, "From my late husband. He asked me to promise him I would use some of our money to buy a nice stone when he was gone." She was not hearing what he said, but what she wanted to hear. Communication did not take place because of poor listening. David W. Augsburger defines communication as "the meeting of meaning." He writes, "When your meaning meets my meaning across the bridge of words, tones, deeds, acts, when understanding occurs, then we have communicated. Communication, then, is the visual or vocal transmission of meanings from one to another.

Gary Smalley in Advice to Wives has some very practical words for wives on how to deal with the listening problem. He writes, "By now I hope I've made one point clear: most men do not understand women. Since you know your needs better than anyone else, you can be your husband's most effective teacher: He needs it: learn from you why it's important to listen to you and how to listen.

First, explain why it's important to you that he spend time listening with his undivided attention. (The woman called "virtuous (also, "excellent") in Proverbs 31:10 was so called because she had convictions and influence. Convictions bring influence. When you're sold on something, like the importance of a better relationship. It will show through your facial expressions.) Let him know that when he doesn't listen to you attentively, it makes you feel unimportant and unappreciated. Explain that this, in turn, decreases your desire to meet his needs. Make it clear, however, that the opposite is also true. When he constantly listens to you with attentiveness, you feel more important and have a much stronger desire to meet his needs with greater creativity. You may have to tell him these things repeatedly before they sink in. But each time the opportunity arises, you have another chance

to stimulate his curiosity.

In addition to explaining why you need his undivided attention, you must show him how to give it. Discuss the nonverbal means of communication with him. As he learns to understand your feelings by looking at your eyes and facial expressions, your communications and your relationship will deepen. Gently remind him that his partial listening doesn't do any good, that you don't want to compete with work, sports, and TV.

Be careful not to let your times of communication deteriorate into arguments. Use your sensitivity to learn how to side-step issues, words, or mannerisms that ignite an argument. Some women concede that the only way they get their husband's undivided attention is to start an argument. Unfortunately, that's not the type of undivided attention which builds a healthy relationship. Let your communication be as encouraging and delightful as possible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

The one area that mates need to specialize in is the area of expressing appreciation. We tend to take all acts of kindness and helpfulness for granted. Our mates do many things to benefit the both of us and the rest of the family. They need to know they are appreciated, for this makes all the effort worth it. A difficult job done without appreciation expressed is a burden, but when appreciation is expressed it become a blessing. We feel good about our service to our mate and family when we sense they feel good about it. But it is truly a thankless task if noone cares enough to thank us. We do not need to be thanked for everything we do, but we need to know we are appreciated, and so we need periodic expressions of that appreciation. This is an important part of our communication responsibility. A thankful mate will find that they

receive more expressions of appreciation in return, and so everyone benefits by communicating gratitude.

When you criticize us we get worse.
When you complement us, we get better.
When you try to change us, we won't budge.
When you accept us as we are, we try to improve.
When you don't help us, we're mad because you're sitting
When you're willing to assist, we insist that you sit down.
When you pick on the children, we think you hate us.
When you are positive and encouraging, we know you love us.
When you are too busy to listen, we nag and ramble.
When you set aside time to converse, we condense our comments.

Communication is a basic need to give a sense of security in marriage. Mates need to know they can count on each other to always be there, and this is what we communicate by our daily praise and thanksgiving for them. Dr. Morris Mandel, author of 13 books writes, "To love means to communicate to the other that you are for him, that you will never let him down when he needs you, that you will always be standing by with encouragement.

If I thought that a word of mine,
Perhaps unkind and untrue,
Would leave its trace on a loved one's face,
I'd never speak it, would you?"

God has told us something about the importance of words in the book of Proverbs. For example:

Prov. 18:21, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit." In other words, you will reap as you sow. If you use words to praise and built up, you will receive the

fruits of this in getting praise in return, but if you tear down with words you will be torn down as well.

Prov. 25:11, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." If you want to add beauty to your home that is like hanging beautiful pictures on your walls, add words of praise that built up the self-esteem of your mate. This verbal art will beautify your marriage in ways that can never be done with expensive pictures.

Somewhere I read the statement that love isn't love until it's given away. This makes sense, for hidden and unrevealed love is of little value. If God so loved the world, but never showed it and never gave his only begotten Son for our salvation, how would we know that God is love?
God speaks and reveals his being and his will because he loves us. Love has to communicate in order to be the positive value that it is.

Love desires to find out about other human beings. It is interested in the events of the day, the thoughts, desires, fears, even the angers or fantasies of others. If love is genuine, it cares; and caring nearly always involves listening. Louis Evely has stated this well in That Man Is You:

Love must express and communicate itself.....
That's its nature.....
When two people begin to love one another,
they start telling everything that's happened to them,
every detail of their daily life;
they reveal themselves to each other,
unbosom themselves and exchange confidences.....
God hasn't ceased being Revelation.....
any more than He's ceased being Love.
He enjoys expressing Himself.

Since He's Love, He must give Himself,
share his secrets.....
communicate with us....
and reveal himself to anyone who wants to listen.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE

Howard and Charlotte Clinebell in The Intimate Marriage write, "There are many ways to say I love you: A fond glance, a tender or playful touch in an appropriate spot, a thoughtful gift, choosing to sit close in a crowded room, and listening with genuine interest, a kiss on the back of the neck, a note, perhaps a private joke left where it will be found, a word of sympathy or support, a sly wink, preparing a favorite dish, a bowl of flowers carefully arranged, a phone call in the middle of the day, and even, perhaps, remembering to take out the trash are but a few. A part of the joy of marriage is this opportunity to develop and almost endless variety of transmission lines for the meanings that are important to each other."

Dr. John Gottman, author of The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work tells of how he studied couples who turned their marriages around, and he found that one of the keys was their body language. They would cuddle in the morning before they left for work, and these few minutes, even without saying a word, made them feel close to each other all day. They start the day feeling loved and it stays with them. Words can be said too, but it is the feeling that you want to capture, for it will stay with you. A

Chinese proverb says, "Married couples who love each other, tell each other a thousand things without talking." There are hugs, pats, caresses and kisses that can give our mate a feeling of being loved all day, but these should be in addition to words of love and not as substitutes only. Wives, especially need to hear and feel love from their husband, but unfortunately men often think their body language of seeking sex is enough, because that is enough to satisfy them. Do not say with Franklin Pierce Adams who wrote in 1960,

If, my dear, you seek to slumber,
Count of stars an endless number;
If you still continue wakeful,
Count the drops that make a lake full;
Then, if vigilance yet above you
Hovers, count the times I love you;
And if slumber still repel you
Count the times I do not tell you.

Holding hands is a form of non-verbal communication or body language. It bothered me for a long time to hold hands in public, but Lavonne liked it and so I have had to overcome my self-consciousness and do it, and now I enjoy it as much as her. We hold hands everywhere, but I was not into it when I was younger and would drop her hand in public and this was a form of rejection. We need to talk about what feels good to our mate and examine why we have strange feelings about it. Other man have shared that they do not like to hold hands in public and I have concluded that it is a macho thing. Men do not like to be connected with anything that is a sign of weakness and holding hands is apparently one of these things. Another one I still struggle with is holding my wife's purse while she goes in to try on a dress. I feel strange guarding a purse, and so there are things that are hard for men to do because it reflects on their macho image. Mates need to talk about these things and find ways to do what is pleasing to both.

What kind of body language actions does your mate appreciate, is to be the question you are asking and then seeking to implement. I have learned that I can just sit the purse on the floor and guard it. I don't have to hold it as if it was mine.

A wise husband will look beyond words for body language, for wives often say what you really need to hear without using words. Someone gave this example: "You can say to your wife, "Is it okay to postpone our dinner date? I want to help Harry get his car fixed for the race on Saturday." The wife may say, "I don't care--go ahead."
Those words convey one message, but the tears in her eyes are saying,"You
louse. You care more about Harry and that stupid race than you do about me."
What she said was not what she felt. That is why communication is such a
tricky and complex aspect of human relationships." You need to get the whole picture and not just the condensed version that comes through the mouth. Good communication calls for seeing the body language as well as hearing the verbal language.

Because couples come out of different backgrounds and with different patterns of behavior picked up in their families and culture, they need to share these things so they understand why they are different. When we do not know why our mate is different we struggle in ways that are not necessary. For example, " Body language varies according to custom and culture. In North America and Central and Western Europe the right distance to stand in a face to face encounter is arm's length. In Latin America and Mediterranean countries, the distance is much closer. So when people from these two places meet both try to take a position that feels right. The Latin moves up and the Northern moves back, for it is to close. The Latin feels to far away and moves up. Both

are trying to feel comfortable but neither can, for their comfort is found in different distances. You cannot please both, and so there is a need for compromise."

This type of thing happens in marriage all the time, and if it is not discussed it can lead to all kinds of negative feelings. A couple on their honeymoon had a fight because the wife began to talk to another couple in the hotel where they ate. He did not enter in to the conversation and got very moody. They were on two different wave links. She felt excited about relating to others as a married woman for the first time. He felt a honey-moon was a time to ignore the rest of the world and be exclusive. These opposite points of view led them to spoil their honeymoon. Mates need to be constantly explaining how they feel and why they do certain things so differently from each other, for only when they understand the motivation can they be accepting of what then makes sense.

Gerald Dabe gives these examples of how to send and receive messages:

METHODS OF SENDING	METHODS OF RECEIVING
1. Words	1. Hear
2. Expressions	2. See
3. Deeds	3. Feel
4. Actions	
5. Gestures	
6. Touch	
7. Silence	

It is important to find out which of these is most important to your mate. You might be saying I love you in the way you send a message, but if that is not what is received then you have not communicated your love. One woman said to the counselor,

"Teach him how to use words to tell me he loves me. He is great at fixing anything that breaks in the house. He says that's the way he expresses his love to me, but somehow repairing the leaking faucet just isn't the same as speaking words." Here is a wife who is not satisfied with his body language, and so he needs to stop being satisfied with this as a method of communicating his love, for she needs her way of hearing it and this means he needs to say it in words and not deeds only.

BAD COMMUNICATION ATTITUDES

In the book AFTER EVERY WEDDING COMES A MARRIAGE ByFlorence and Fred Littauer there is this list:

"Ask yourself these questions:

1. **Do I interrupt and finish sentences for others?**
2. **Do I drop into depression as a defense?**
3. **Do I get angry if people don't see things my way?**
4. **Do I pretend to agree just to shut them up, and resent it inside?**
5. **Do I make a joke out of serious subjects in order to avoid facing them?**
6. **Do I make fun of others and ridicule them in front of people?**
7. **Do I jump to my own offense before anyone can plead a case?**
8. **Do I clam up and refuse to talk when the subject gets too close?**

If you have answered yes to even a few of these, you have trouble communicating. You may be verbal and vivacious, but if

you use any of these blocks you are walling yourself away from a true exchange of ideas with those close to you. Sit down and discuss this problem with your mate. See which one of you uses which kind of block."

GOOD COMMUNICATION ATTITUDES

Here are some tips to help you and your spouse communicate.

C--Commit yourself to listening to your spouse every day.
O--Observe each other's unspoken needs.
M--Make regular appointments to spend time together and talk.
M--Mend you arguments before you go to bed.
U--Utilize the opportunities to let your actions speak louder than words.
N--Notice the positive things your spouse does, and say thanks.
I--Initiate conversation by asking feeling-oriented questions.
C--Care about your spouse's opinions, even if they differ from yours.
A--Admit to your spouse when you're wrong.
T--Touch each other when you listen or talk.
E--Expect the best of your spouse. ---Byron Emmort

COMMUNICATION COVENANT

Norman Wright, author of many books and articles on marriage has put together what he called the marriage covenant. It can help any couple develop a plan that will aid greatly in their communication.

1. "We will express our irritations with each other in a loving, specific and positive manner rather than holding them in or being negative in general.

I will: acknowledge that I have a problem rather than stating that you are "doing such and such": not procrastinate by waiting for the "right" time to express irritations: ask myself why I feel irritation over this problem.

2. We will not exaggerate or attack each other during a disagreement.

I will: stick with the specific issue; take several seconds to formulate my words so I can be accurate; consider the consequences of what I am about to say: not use words like "always," "all the time," everyone." etc.

3. We will attempt to control the emotional level and intensity of arguments and will take one-to ten-minute timeouts when we feel our anger getting out of control. During the timeouts we will in writing define the problem being discussed, the areas of agreement and disagreement and three alternate solutions. Then we will share what we have written.

I will: decide before I say something whether I would want this statement said of me in the same tone of voice.

4. We will not let the sun go down on our anger or run away from each other during an argument.

I will: remind myself that controlling my emotions will lead to a more speedy resolution of the problem.

5. We will both try hard not to interrupt the other when he/she is talking.

I will: consider information that will be lost by interrupting the other person; put into practice Proverbs 18:13 and James 1:19.

6. We will carefully listen to one another when we are talking, rather than using that time to think up our defenses.

I will: ask the other person to stop and repeat what was said if I find myself formulating my response while he/she is speaking; repeat back what I heard said if I have difficulty listening.

7. We will not bring up the other person's failures in the course of an argument.

I will: remind myself that a failure has been discussed and forgiven and thus should not be brought up again; remember that bringing up failures cripples a person from growing adn developing.

8. When something is important enough for one person to talk about, it is equally important for the other person.

I will: eliminate outside interferences such as the radio, television, books, etc. during a discussion; admit to the other person when I am having difficulty wanting to discuss a matter with him/her.

C. 2. CELEBRATION

God said in Gen. 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." Sex was God's plan to populate the whole planet he had created, and so procreation is a part of God's will for married couples. Having children naturally follows marriage, and the majority of couple do have children. This has led many to conclude that sex is for procreation and that is all, and sex for any other reason is out of God's will. Many of the early church fathers felt this way, and some modern Christians still do, but it will not be

supported by Scripture or by life. Romantic and sexual love is a major part of the joy of marriage and it is celebrated in the Song of Song. If this book of the Bible is studied in depth it becomes the greatest support for passionate sex on this planet. Hundreds of studies show that the average couple enjoy sex two or three times a week for many years and even after retirement and into old age. Lovemaking is obviously designed for two people to give each other pleasure and enjoyment for a lifetime.

Sex is not to be thought of as a duty, but as a delight. It is not an obligation, but an opportunity to celebrate your love. Sex is a banquet of pleasure, and it was not the devil who made our bodies to experience such sensations. It was God's plan, and when we enjoy truly good sex we cannot help but praise God for such a marvelous idea. Everything of value is also a danger, for it can be perverted, and sex is certainly no exception. But you do not give up enjoying what is good just because it can be made bad. Who gives up drinking wholesome milk just because milk can go sour and be putrid? Sex is probably the most misused and abused of all God's gifts to mankind, but God forbid that we cease to enjoy the gift in the way he meant it to be used and enjoyed. Some do not understand the importance of making sex a celebration, and the result is they deprive their relationship in marriage of one of the strongest glues that holds it together. Many just tolerate it rather than celebrate it, and this is a major mistake.

History abounds with Christian heresy about sex. One of the fathers of the church was Clement of Alexandria who commanded his people to have sex only at night and to make it passionless. He said, "He who too ardently loves his own wife is an adulterer." Talk about a wet blanket on the flame of romance. A number of such quotes could be given by those old saints who lived in a monastery or in seclusion. They could not enjoy sex and so they did not want others to do so. St. Augustine had a powerful impact on

Christian sexual history because of his very immoral behavior when he was young. He felt that sexual pleasure was out of place in the Christian life. The modern Catholic church now teaches that he was wrong to so think, for pleasure is something that God has built into our physiological makeup. It is the way God made us and wants us to be. Pleasure is a good thing. Martin Luther came to the conclusion that sex was good, and he helped a group of nuns to escape the convent and find husbands. He married one of them himself and wrote, "My wife is more precious to me that the Kingdom of France and all the treasures of Venice." The Reformation was not only a reform of theology, but of sexuality.

But history repeats itself and in the 1800's there is a return to the suppression of sexual pleasure. Wives were taught to be passive in lovemaking and not seek their own pleasure. Feeling desire was forbidden. Ladies undergarments were to be so folded that the crotch was never to be seen. Even the legs on tables were covered, and books by a female author were never to be placed alongside books by a male author. They just rained all over God's parade of sexual enjoyment. What a shock it would have been for them to read a report like the following that is a common sort of thing in our day. It is an announcement that sex will help your cold. "According to Bottom Line Personal, adrenaline released during sex narrows dilated blood vessels—the same effect produced by taking a decongestant. We're all fairly well acquainted with some of the great feelings that follow sex. Well, here are two more: you'll temporarily feel less congested and you'll have a sense that your cold is getting better. So turn off the TV, get out of that ratty old bathrobe and slip into something—ahem—more comfortable."

This roller coaster that keeps diving down and then rising to the heights has been going on all through history as man fumbles around trying to figure out how to get a grasp of this loose football

called sexuality. First the pessimists have it and then the optimists and it just keeps on being fumbled. Christians tend to just follow which contemporary team has the ball in their culture. They waver between condemnation and celebration of sex. This makes some sense in that it is a complex multi-faceted issue with both good and bad a reality. But when it comes to sex within marriage it is folly that believers go anywhere else but to the Word of God. This is our basis for celebrating sex in marriage.

One of the key areas of life where you need positive communication is in this area of sex. Mates need to know they are pleasing one another, and the only way they can know is by clear communication. Peter Hector writes, "In a group session, a woman explained her husband's lack of excitement during sex. "Yes, he goes through the motions, but I never see any sign of excitement on his face. He says he is satisfied, but I don't see any evidence that this is so. It frustrates me and makes me feel inadequate; I think I am not turning him on." This is a source of torment for people in relationships with partners who have learned to suppress their excitement." Do not let your mate get the feeling that you do not find them sexually exciting. Let them know just what you need to get excited, and then show them that you are. Celebrate your sex with them. Someone said, "Sex is the most fun you can have without laughing", but this is not so, for you can laugh and share the hilarity of the pleasure of sex with one another. Do not suppress the full enjoyment of each other, but blurt it out with laughter and a shout. Make it known that you celebrate your love in sexual embrace. You do not want to be discovered being silly and childish in public, but in the privacy of your own bedroom you should feel free to be so, for play is a basic part of sexuality. If its no fun, you are not doing it right.

We live in a day when there are more resources to help couples

celebrate their sexuality than ever in history. All of the advice and guidance you will ever need can be found in Christian sex manuals. They include " The Act of Marriage" by Tim and Beverly LaHaye, "Sacred Sex" by Tim Alan Gardner, "Intimate Issues" by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus, "The Sexual Man" and "Secrets of Eve" by Archibald D. Hart, "The Gift of Sex" by Joyce and Clifford L. Penner, and "Intended for Pleasure" by Ed Wheat. There are dozens of excellent books on sex by Christian authors that are designed to help Christians celebrate sex in their marriage. Much of what they write is no different than what you can read in secular sex guides, but they add the Biblical and spiritual that you will never find in the secular world's literature. For example, here is a bit of foreplay advice from Tim Alan Gardner in his book Sacred Sex:

"Men, if you want to do something that your wife will find sexy and sensual, try this simple act of foreplay: Pray with her. I don't mean saying grace before dinner, nor do I mean asking God to bless Grandma and Grandpa and your dog Skippy. I mean really pray with her..... Thank God for her beauty, her charm, her friendship, and faithfulness. And praise God for giving you the privilege of sharing in His beautiful gift of sexual intimacy with her."

Paul probably did not think of prayer as foreplay, but he did write about sex in I Cor. 7:5 and say, "Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." He does not say that the prayer you have before you come together again can be a sexual aid, but this does make sense, for anything that adds to a sense of intimacy adds to the pleasure of sex. Spiritual and sexual intimacy are related. Frequency of sex varies with couples, situation, health, and many variables, but Paul makes it clear that

sex is both a spiritual and physical obligation, and each mate is responsible for the meeting of the sexual needs of the other.

Here are a couple of authors who write about this relationship of the sexual and the sacred. Wade Clark Roof writes, "I began thinking about these questions long ago. Reading Freud in college piqued my interest, but it was during an interview I was conducting about 10 years ago that it really hit me: sex and the sacred could be closely bound together. The interview was with a 34-year-old woman, a moderate-minded Methodist in North Carolina, who in outward appearance gave no hint of having anything to say about sex--much less about sex and the sacred. She seemed traditional in every way, and I expected a routine interview about her religious life. The dialogue began as follows:

Q: Where do you experience the divine, the sacred, God--whatever name you prefer?

2. **A: My goodness. That's a big question.**

I figured I should ask her about her experiences at church. After all, she was a Methodist and living in the South, two attributes that would lead any sociologist of religion to predict institutional-based responses: God is encountered at church. Where else?

But when I asked her about this, what I got was a rather weak "Yes, I do sometimes experience God at church." Her answer did not resonate with the passion I expected. I also asked about the women's group, the Wednesday-night prayer service, and saying grace with her family at meals, to which she gave similar, but not very excited, answers. She was by no means anti-institutional in her views on religion, but it was clear, too, that the sacred for her was not contained within church walls.

In desperation, I said to her, "You tell me, is there any place you really experience God?"

"Yes," she replied in a matter-of-fact manner, "when I have an orgasm making love to my husband. I'm married to a wonderful man, and that's when I feel closest to God."

"I was caught off-guard by her answer, and consequently I failed to ask the follow-up questions I wish now I had. As so often happens in religious research, an interviewer can be blinded by his or her unfounded assumptions about people. In this case, I let my expectations about the piety of Southern women get in the way of asking her the more telling questions about her real-life religious experiences. Being a Southerner myself, I should have known better; there is an earthy, indeed even steamy, side of religious passion for Southerners that is never far removed from its public appearance."

"Not long after that interview, I came across Father Andrew M. Greeley's research on God-images and marital happiness, in which he speculates that divine intimacy and human intimacy might actually go together. Marital satisfaction is influenced by sexual satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction is influenced by warm religious imagery, and especially so for Catholics, Greeley had argued. The Roman Catholic Church did not buy his argument, but this Methodist woman in North Carolina gave personal testimony to its truthfulness.

To experience the love of God is to experience a sacred union that is at once both mysterious and intimate, and to know such intimacy, even in its limited, imperfect human form, is to know something of the divine possibility.

Greeley's research goes even further. He reports from his surveys that people who are sexually fulfilled in their marriages tend to have warm images of God (as mother, as lover, as spouse, as friend), as opposed to more judgmental and harsh images. The influences are reciprocal, he argues, with human intimacy a model for divine intimacy, and beliefs about the latter encouraging a

sacramental conception of human love. The two types of stories--about God and about human relationships--come together."

Dwight Harvey Small in his book Your Marriage Is God's Affair writes, "We reach the apex of God's sexual purpose for man when we understand the sexual act in marriage as celebration. Man is the only creature who celebrates. It is the highest expression of which he is capable, and to it he brings all his faculties-mind, emotions, and body. God summons man to celebrate life in its fullest. Such celebration is possible when there is a sense of wholeness about a person's life, wholeness in his relationship to God and to others with whom he shares a common life. Especially is this true in his relationship with a life partner." "When sexuality is properly incorporated into the whole of life and made expressive of its true ends, it is a dimension of our celebration of life in God."

Douglas E. Rosenau writes about the need to be playful in sex. He affirms also that all we have said before on a happy marriage applies to a great sex life. He write, "Fantastic lovemaking is based on being a fantastic person. Christlike traits and attitudes are what count. True sexiness and a tremendous sex life depend not only on a great marriage but also on being a mature, sexy person."

"So you want to be the world's greatest lover? Build into your mind and heart the following character traits possessed by all great lovers. These guidelines, gleaned from the Bible, will lead to great sex. Their effective use will show you how to truly arouse your mate's desire. Success is practically guaranteed, but it will take some real prioritizing and practice to incorporate them into your life.

"Playfulness is perhaps best described by the words excitement, curiosity, laughter, eagerness and spontaneity. Playfulness is the ability to be unpretentious and unashamed as you demand things with enthusiasm and childlikeness. In your child ego state, your needs are important and fun and you expect pleasure.

"You cannot work at creating better lovemaking—you and your mate have to play at it. This character trait can be practiced in other areas of your life and the lessons brought back into your sex life. Get silly; anticipate an event for a week or more; risk a new

behavior; laugh until you have tears in your eyes or roll on the floor; tickle and chase each other around the whole house; get wide-eyed with awe and wonder about something. You are becoming a great lover.

"The Bible says you are to love your neighbor or your mate just as you love yourself. Fun sex depends on a husband and wife who have learned to love themselves. This means you take care of your health and exercise your body to keep it in shape. You also need to work through to accepting and enjoying the body God gave you. Self-acceptance, self-esteem, and a good body image are healthy parts of sexiness and Christian self-love. Think of how difficult it is to sexually focus on your mate when you are embarrassed, inhibited, or self-conscious.

"Another important part of love is respecting and unconditionally accepting your mate. If you want to find and focus on flaws, you will put a damper on your partner's sexiness and the whole lovemaking process. You reap the benefit (or destructiveness if you stay obsessive) of nurturing and helping your lover revel in sexual appeal. Every time you affirm some particular aspect of masculinity or femininity that you admire and enjoy, you lovingly increase your mate's sex appeal. Unconditional love and acceptance and affirmation set the temperature for some fantastic sex."

If sex is just a duty and an obligation it is not what God intended. It has to be fun and a celebration of God's grace and goodness in giving us this gift of pleasure. Something is not right if you cannot thank and praise God for your sexuality. I know there are many Christians who still feel guilty because of their abuse of sex before they became Christians, and I know many have been taught to think of sex in a shameful way, but there is no excuse for letting these past experiences hindering your present celebration of sex. You have been forgiven of all past folly, and you have the Word of God to cleanse your mind of all false teaching of the past. It is a form of rebellion against God to let the past hold you captive and not surrender to the liberty that is yours in Christ. If you cannot celebrate sex in your marriage, get to a counselor as soon as possible.

Stephen Teel has written, "Man is the only created being on earth who celebrates. Genuine celebration occurs when we sense our own wholeness, our wholeness in our relationships both to God

and to our fellow man. We are called by God to celebrate life in its fullest - and especially in our marriages."

Dwight Small's book, Christian Celebrate Your Sexuality writes, "The human body and sexuality were designed by God and are therefore good. Still some Christians have a vague feeling that He doesn't approve of it. Such only robs one of intended joy. It would follow that "to honor and glorify God in one's body", would include among other things, one's sexuality. Sex as celebration in marriage is honoring God's good gifts and His gracious purposes

for us.

John Buckeridge, the editor of Christianity Renewal writes, "....you can read an extract from a chapter of Philip Yancey's excellent new book, which highlights the harmful and sometimes perverted stance the church has preached and taught on sex for most of the past 2,000 years. As a consequence non-Christians continue to regard the Christian God as an anti-sex spoilsport. Which as Yancey points out, is bizarre, since sex is God's invention. The fact that God chose not to make sexual intercourse a clinical, boring, matter of fact act, as exciting as clipping a toe nail… but instead created a spectacular, fun, scarily intimate and an oh-so-holy gift of loving - should be something the church celebrates and shouts from the rooftops."

Studies show that those who pay attention to the many modern writers giving Christian advice on sex have a better sex life than those who do not. Mark Oppenheimer, for example, quotes a survey that showed Conservative Protestant women achieved sexual satisfaction on a higher level than Mainline Protestants and Catholics, and far higher than those with no religious affiliation. This makes sense, for most of the literature on sex has been written by Conservative authors, and women are reading these authors. This also means that we know that when Christian people read about sex, and the importance of celebrating it, the greater will be their satisfaction. We need knowledge to do anything right, and this goes for sex as well. The fact is, Christians should be the best lovers in the world, for they should be able to celebrate it more freely than anyone, for they can thank God for the gift and be free to give and receive pleasure without inhibitions and shame. They alone can celebrate with full liberty in Christ. If you do not have this liberty you are depriving yourself of what God wants you to have.

Harold & Bette Gillogly write words of wisdom on the internet, and I have found nothing better than their insights, and so I share them with you. They say, "Throughout Scripture, there is a distinct current of celebration, especially as God reveals His intention in creating marriage. When God fashioned Eve and brought her to Adam, they celebrated (Gen. 2:22-25). When Ruth and Boaz were united, there was jubilation (Ruth 4:14). Solomon and Shulamith rejoiced their way through Song of Songs, from the first word in chapter one to the last word in chapter eight. Proverbs is full of exhortations to married couples to enjoy their relationship. Proverbs 5:18 is certainly direct: "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth." "Rejoice" means to reel as though intoxicated. No doubt about it! God's talking about celebration!

"To rejoice in your coupleness – to celebrate your oneness – these are words of action that demand choices. If the Holy Spirit lives inside you, you have the power to turn your marriage into jubilation. We're not saying that every minute of the day is going to be fun and games, but that even when reality hits you hard or tries to numb you with monotony, you can still rejoice in each other's love.

"Pleasure is an interesting word. Somehow it almost does not seem to fit within Christian values. It feels self-centered and sinful. The truth of the matter is that God gave us our sensuality to enjoy….I've known Christians to worry about the word erotic….One-flesh lovers are erotic in the best and strongest sense of the word."

--From A Celebration of Sex for Newlyweds, by Dr. Douglas E. Rosenau

Celebrating is seeing anew what you saw in your mate that led you to love them and want them forever to be with you. We celebrate the Lord's Supper in order to look again at the cross and all the Jesus endured for our salvation. We need continuous reminding in order to have our gratitude renewed. So it is in marriage. We need to look at what we have and consider what life would be without it. Shmuley Boteach has an interesting couple of illustrations of how the reality of the possibility of losing something or someone can make us come to treasure them anew. This is from a very secular perspective, but we can learn from the secular world. She writes-

"My friend Carol works in advertising. Last year she was experiencing the blahs in her job; she told me that she was so bored that she could hardly get up in the morning. She thought she needed to quit and start something new. However, because the job paid so well and offered excellent benefits, she endured the boredom for the compensation.

One day as she was making coffee, she heard from behind one of the dividers that her own secretary was making a bid for her job. Carol was flabbergasted. Alarm bells went off in her head, and she began to work much harder. "It wasn't just fear," she told me. "I genuinely rediscovered a passion for my work. The fact that the job could be taken away from me made it new to me all over again. When I came in the next morning, it was like coming in for the first time ever. I was exhilarated. And now, every time I start to get bored, I just remember that at any moment this job could be lost. And there it is-–brand new!"

The same is true of our marriages. I had known Jeffrey my entire life. One day he came to me to confess that he was having an affair. I asked him why he was doing this to his wife. "My wife simply

doesn't attract me anymore. She undresses, and I'm just not interested." I gave him the following advice. "Tonight, I want you to drive with your wife to the next town. Go into a bar, but enter separately. No one should know you're together. Let her sit by the bar and you just watch, like a fly on the wall." "Then what?" Jeffrey asked me. "You'll see," I replied.

It took some cajoling, but Jeffrey and his wife agreed to follow my advice. When they arrived at the club, Jeffrey's wife walked in alone and sat by the bar. Within moments, men started to circle her like bees swarming to honey. Jeffrey was instantly beside himself with jealousy. He finally grabbed his wife by the hand, took her straight home, and they made love with an intensity that they had not experienced since the early stages of their marriage."

This is not an experiment that I can recommend for Christians, but I think we can all get the point of the illustration. Most every mate has sex appeal to numerous others of the opposite sex. They see your mate as lovely and desirable, just as you did when you first met, or after you got to know them. Time, negative circumstance, and foolish choices can make your first love wear thin, and you lose the passion you once shared. That is why we need celebrations that take our memories back to better times. We celebrate anniversaries and reflect on all the memories we have created together. It is in celebration that we renew our love, and every sexual experience we have is to be a time of celebration of the gift that God gave us in bringing us together.

Judaism well understands the nature of passion and for this reason has instituted a period of sexual separation, called the Laws of Family Purity. There are several reasons for this custom, but the most important is to cultivate passion by separating a husband and wife for several days each month. They sleep in separate beds and generally refrain from any kind of physical contact. The hope

is that when they embrace after a period of separation, their flesh will be like new and the spark of their wedding night will continually be ignited. When we have everything whenever we want it, we lose interest fast, just as small children lose interest in toys. But any seasoned parent knows that the way to cultivate interest in old toys is to take them away for a while and then reintroduce them at the opportune moment. In this, adults are like children.

We must be constantly reminded of our blessings so that we never grow bored with them. As a marriage counselor, I have discovered that simply reminding a man how special his wife is or reminding a woman of how fortunate she was in her choice of husband is often enough to restore appreciation and passion. By pointing out the virtue of someone whom the spouse may have begun to take for granted, we cause the person to choose his or her participation in the relationship anew.

C. S. Lewis in Screwtape Letters has the devil saying, "It is God who made all the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy (God) has produced at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden." Because it is true that God is the author of all the pleasures, and that includes sexual pleasure, we need to make sure that we celebrate the pleasures of sex in our marriage on a regular basis.

I am closing this chapter with a study of Prov. 5:18-19, which says, "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in te wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love." The Message version has it, "Bless your fresh-flowing fountain! Enjoy

the wife you married as a young man! Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose-- don't ever quit taking delight in her body."

You will not find better or more erotic advice anywhere. This is God's Word to every married couple. If you read the whole chapter of Prov. 5 you will see that it is teaching that the cure for adultery and all the temptations of life to be sexually unfaithful in marriage is to have a marriage that is even more sexually enticing than anything the world can throw at you with prostitutes and other seducers. There is no need for any married person to be seduced by another outside the marriage if the marriage is meeting the needs for sexual satisfaction. This means that married sex cannot afford to become dull and no longer exciting. It is a believers responsibility to keep growing and learning ways to keep the fires of passion burning.

John Piper in his book Desiring God has a chapter in which he deals with these two verses, and he writes, "The reason there is so much misery in marriage is

not that husbands and wives seek there own pleasure, but that they

do not seek it in the pleasure of their spouses. The biblical mandate to

husbands and wives is to seek your own joy in the pleasure of your

spouse." That's just what v18-19 say.

They are a vivid picture of satisfaction and enjoyment. In fact just vivid

enough to make me blush.

May -maybe a bit too week.

You are more or less told here to enjoy your spouse.

That's both sides of the relationship.

· The friendship side & the fun that comes out of that.

· And the sex side, & the fun that comes out of that.

Seek pleasure by all means. Just look in the right place. The way we avoid affairs is to pour all our energies into the person we are married to.

To get as much pleasure from them as we can by seeking their pleasure as much as we can

& I don't mean go & buy a copy of the Karma Sutra!

I don't just mean sexual pleasure – although that's included.

I mean in everything.

This is taken up in S of S. There the Lover and beloved keep on singing of each other's beauty.

They show enjoyment and appreciation of the other. Again sometimes

to the point of making me blush.

And it's not as if they haven't ever noticed someone else.

It is now we have agreed we are going to be together, we will appreciate each other's bodies and personalities."

You might wonder what the fountain has to do with marriage. A writer from what is called the Dashhouse gives us excellent insight into why the wife is called a fountain. He writes, "Three years ago, I traveled to Israel. I had no idea before I went how much of Israel is dessert. I always thought of Israel as the land of milk and honey. It's also the land of dust and scorching heat. There were a lot of days that we drank a lot of water and ran back to our air-conditioned coach. You can imagine how valuable wells were thousands of years ago.

When this passage was written, a well was a family's most important possession. It was essential for life. It was a crime to steal

water from somebody else's well. Solomon uses the image of a well to picture a wife – one that would have been very appropriate in that culture. The Song of Songs 4:15 says, "You are a garden fountain, a well of living water, as refreshing as the streams from the Lebanon mountains." A good sexual relationship satisfies desires. That's why Solomon says, "Drink water from your own well—share your love only with your wife." Passion is good! The Bible talks about passion being something that satisfies desires, like a good cup of water satisfies thirst. It's something that's valuable; something that's to be celebrated.

This may or not be your reality, but it's the ideal. God wants your sexuality to be a source of blessing to you. He's given it as a gift for your pleasure and your enjoyment.

Solomon goes on in verses 18-19. "Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you." The idea of blessing is that it's something that God himself blesses for you. It's a God-given gift. I wonder if we've ever stopped to ask God's blessing on our sex lives. We should! Having it blessed means that God will make it fruitful – that it will be everything that God intended it to be. That's not a bad way to pray – that the sexual component of your relationship will be everything that God intends it to be.

One poll has shown that married Christian women enjoy a vibrant and vigorous sex life that registers higher levels of satisfaction than among non-Christians. That's what happens when God blesses our sex lives.

"Rejoice in the wife of your youth." There's something to be said about a relationship that has stood the test of time – one that has seen the ups and downs and the highs and the lows. When you've spent many years together, and you've experienced the joy and the contentment of a divinely blessed, monogamous relationship, from years ago until now – that's something to celebrate. Our culture celebrates youth. I believe the people who are enjoying the

strongest relationships aren't the young. They're those who have built a relationship over years that has stood the test of time.

These verses are sensual. They speak of the type of physical relationship that couples are to enjoy. Then, verse 19 concludes: "May you always be captivated by her love." The word for captivated comes from a word that means to swerve, to meander, to reel – almost like you're intoxicated. It's the stagger that expresses the ecstatic joy of a captivated lover. It means that you should be intoxicated with the love relationship that you have with your husband or wife. You can't read this passage without getting the very strong idea that this isn't a side issue in life. It's not something that's disconnected from who you are. Your passion is something to revel in. It's something that should satisfy and intoxicate you. It's a gift from God to be enjoyed.

Some theologians used to teach that the Holy Spirit leaves the room when a couple engages in sexual intercourse. One man, named Yves of Chartres counseled the godly to abstain from sexual intercourse on Thursdays to remember Christ's rapture, on Friday's in remembrance of his crucifixion, on Saturdays in honor of the Virgin Mary, on Sundays in commemoration of the Resurrection, and on Mondays out of respect for departed souls. We usually think of the Puritans as being uptight about sex, but they did a lot better than others have in church history. One Puritan encouraged sexual intercourse "to lighten and ease the cares and sadness of household affairs, or to endear each other."

Throughout history, the church hasn't always led the charge in celebrating sexuality as the Bible does. The Bible teaches that sex is a gift to be enjoyed, to be celebrated.

Two Ohio State University psychologists have concluded that sex is one of the most important of the fifteen universal fundamental behaviors that drive human behavior. They're right. God has made

us that way. Other studies have shown that sexual activity is good for you. One study has shown that men who had the most sex have a fifty percent lower mortality rate than those who don't. As somebody has said, "Would you expect that a gift from God would be other than good for us?" (Leonard Sweet)

Sanskrit-based languages have ninety-six words for love. Persian has eighty. Greek has three. English has one. It's time to develop a fuller understanding of love in which passion is part of the equation.

What God has created is part of all of us. We are all sexual beings. We have the privilege of enjoying something that's been designed by the one we serve – by God himself. We have the joy of celebrating one of his good gifts to us.

No matter who you are today, I'd challenge you to elevate your understanding of the sexual area of your life as a gift from God, given for intimacy and enjoyment. God could have chosen procreation to take place in any number of ways. He chose it in a way that would bring pleasure and intimacy to us. He's given us this as a gift to be celebrated and enjoyed.

One commentator sums up the teaching of these verses like this:

"Listen to Solomon!

1. Be blessed with her. That is, have a sense of gratitude for her. Be happy with her.(v.18)

2. Rejoice in her. Have a cheerful countenance that is free from care. Don't be looking around for someone better. The word was also used of a louder joy of merriment at feasts.(v.18) Rejoice in only her.

3. Be satisfied with her.(v.19) Satisfied means to "drink to the full

or be satisfied with drink. She is delicate and has the elegance and gracefulness of the deer. Persian and Arab poets wrote frequently of them in this context.

4. Get drunk with her love!!(v/19-20). Exhilarated is "intoxicated". Be enraptured with her sexually. Be seduced by her body. Seduce her not strangers. Grow, love, experience all that she is as a woman and your wife. The question in verse 20 that Solomon poses is rhetorical. The implication is that you are insane if you think that you can find any better sex in the breasts of a stranger. I think Solomon is saying, breasts are breasts; sex is sex. More breasts and more sex does not bring lasting happiness. But commitment to one person for life does!!! Hear this wise king!!"

Steve Zeisler comments, "What a beautiful expression of love! Some of the problems we experience today with adultery come because we are not developing such an intimate union with our spouse. If you are enraptured by the love of your wife, someone else's wife isn't going to be able to attract you nearly as strongly, "For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?" (Proverbs 5:20). Keep it at home where God intends for it to be.

"The main reason that both men and women have affairs is that trust and intimacy gets transferred from their spouse to someone else. It usually looks like this: either one or both partners are working really hard long hours, and when the get home exhausted at the end of the day, the relationship just gets whatever's left over: maybe their partner is short with them, they seem distant and remote, maybe still preoccupied with work. Then, because they are spending less and less time together- maybe you want to throw some young kids into the equation just put a little more pressure on things; then intimacy starts to break down. One or both partners begin to retreat into themselves. He doesn't understand me. She's

not interested in me. Boredom sets in.

“Then at work, there's that person who does seem to care. You have witty conversations. You are interested in the same things: at very least you have the largest part of your lives in common, that is, work. This guy really knows me, really understands. This woman really does value me, thinks I'm special, makes me feel good. You flirt a little. You find excuses to spend time together. Hey, what about a coffee? In most cases, long before they've hopped into bed, this kind of relational intimacy has been transferred from their spouse to someone else. This is the most common way that affairs begin.

“So to affair proof your marriage: fear God, build intimacy, and third, draw some boundaries. Set some standards together. Minimize the time you spend time alone with members of the opposite sex at work or in other settings. Groups are great, one-on-one puts you at risk. No flirting. Let me say that again: flirting is deadly. When you have to go away on business trips or to conferences, work out some boundaries there. Talk about this with your spouse or your mates.

“Once you've set these boundaries, stick to them. Make yourself accountable to your spouse (if you're married)and to someone else of the same sex as well (no matter whether you are married or not)Tell them what's going on, pray with them. Give them permission to question you about any aspect of your life. Once you've set these boundaries, stick to them.”

It is important to God how we use our bodies, for they are the tools by which we honor, worship and serve him, and the body is that part of us that God will raise and perfect to be a part of us for all eternity. The Bible does not denigrate the body as unimportant, but rather recognizes it's value as a vital part of our human self. We are not merely bodies, nor are we merely souls held captive

within a bodily cage. We are bodily souls and ensouled bodies. That's why what we do with our bodies, sexually and in other ways too, is very important. Paul writes this to the Corinthians:

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." 17 But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Cor 6:15-20)

We need to recognize that we can be enthused about each others bodies and still fail to build a solid and intimate marriage because we do not accept the full person of our mate. It is this full acceptance of them that we wrote of in another chapter that gives assurance of being truly loved. When this is not in the marriage we have stories like this as a result: Randy Croft tells it like this-

"Norma Jean Mortenson. Remember that name? Norma Jean's mother, Mrs. Gladys Baker, was periodically committed to a mental institution and Norma Jean spent much of her childhood in foster homes. In one of those foster homes, when she was eight years old, one of the boarders raped her and gave her a nickel.

He said, 'Here, Honey. Take this and don't ever tell anyone what I did to you.' When little Norma Jean went to her foster mother to tell her what had happened she was beaten badly. She was told, 'Our boarder pays good rent. Don't you ever say anything bad about him!' Norma Jean at the age of eight had learned what it was

to be used and given a nickel and beaten for trying to express the hurt that was in her. "Norma Jean turned into a very pretty young girl and people began to notice. Boys whistled at her and she began to enjoy that, but she always wished they would notice she was a person too--not just a body--or a pretty face--but a person.

Then Norma Jean went to Hollywood and took a new name--Marilyn Monroe and the publicity people told her, 'We are going to create a modern sex symbol out of you.' And this was her reaction, 'A symbol? Aren't symbols things people hit together?' They said, 'Honey, it doesn't matter, because we are going to make you the most smoldering sex symbol that ever hit the celluloid.'

"She was an overnight smash success, but she kept asking,

'Did you also notice I am a person? Would you please notice?'

Then she was cast in the dumb blonde roles. "Everyone hated Marilyn Monroe. Everyone did.

"She would keep her crews waiting two hours on the set. She was regarded as a selfish prima donna. What they didn't know was that she was in her dressing room vomiting because she was so terrified.

"She kept saying, 'Will someone please notice I am a person. Please.' They didn't notice. They wouldn't take her seriously. "She went through three marriages--always pleading, 'Take me seriously as a person.' Everyone kept saying, 'But you are a sex symbol. You can't be other than that.' "Marilyn kept saying 'I want to be a person. I want to be a serious actress.' "And so on that Saturday night, at the age of 35 when all beautiful women are supposed to be on the arm of a handsome escort, Marilyn Monroe took her own life. She killed herself. "When her maid found her body the next morning, she noticed the telephone was off the hook. It was

dangling there beside her.

Later investigation revealed that in the last moments of her life she had called a Hollywood actor and told him she had taken enough sleeping pills to kill herself. "He answered with the famous line of Rhett Butler, which I

now edit for church, 'Frankly, my dear, I don't care!' That was the last word she heard. She dropped the phone--left it dangling. "Claire Booth Luce in a very sensitive article asked, 'What really killed Marilyn Monroe, love goddess who never found any love?' She said she thought the dangling telephone was the symbol of Marilyn Monroe's whole life. She died because she never got through to anyone who understood."

We need to celebrate the body, however, and be ravished with each others bodies, for this is a basic Bible teaching, and a whole book could be written on the Song of Songs, where the love of each others bodies is exalted. Every couple has an obligation to read the Song of Songs together, for this is a vast study in love, sex and romance. It will answer most every question you have about sex and what is acceptable to God.

At one time, as we read in Gen. 24:62-67 a couple became married just by having sex with each other. Roddy Chestnut writes of this experience of Isaac and Rebekah, one of the great couples of the Old Testament-

a. No engagement ring. No premarital counseling. No Prepare/Enrich marriage inventory. No wedding ceremony.
b. Rebekah never got to read Anabel Morgan's The Total Woman and Isaac never read James Dobson's What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women.

c. Isaac simply took Rebekah into his tent and married her. They changed the name on their mailbox to Mr. & Mrs. Isaac and lived happily ever after!

The point is, you do not have to know everything about marriage to have a happy one. What you do need is a commitment to make each other happy by meeting each others needs, and when you do so your marriage will be a perpetual celebration. The book of Proverbs gives us much more than sex advice, and we need to be ever growing in our understanding of what makes a good husband and wife. Here are lists of some examples.

Some Qualities of a Godly Husband (references are in Proverbs)

4. A wise husband is kind and compassionate. (12:10)

A wise husband is honest. (29:24)

A wise husband is hard-working. (12:11; 27:23-27)

A wise husband is truthful. (12:17,19)

A wise husband exercises self-control. (12:15; 16:32)

A wise husband has a gentle tongue. (12:18; 15:1-2,4)

A wise husband is generous. (14:21; 28:27)

A wise husband is willing to be corrected (even by his wife) and listens to counsel. (12:15; 15:12,31-32; 28:13; 29:1)

A wise husband is a man of integrity. (11:3; 19:1; 20:7)

A wise husband is faithful and reliable. (17:17; 29:3; contrast 25:19; 31:3)

A wise husband is forgiving. (19:11)

A wise husband is humble. (15:25,33; 16:18-19; 18:12; 29:23)

A wise husband is not contentious, but a peacemaker. (17:1; 18:1,19)

A wise husband has control of his temper. (14:29; 16:32; 17:27; 29:11)

A wise husband is a man who avoids excesses. (20:1; 23:20-21,29-35; 31:3-9)

A wise husband can keep a confidence. (17:9; 26:20)

A wise husband fears God and is obedient to His Word. (13:13; 14:26; 16:20; 28:25)

A wise husband has a positive outlook on life. (15:15; 17:22; 18:14)

Some Qualities of a Godly Wife (references are in Proverbs)

A wise wife fears God and is obedient to His Word. (31:30)

A wise wife is hard-working. (31:18)

A wise wife is a diligent homemaker. (31:13,15)

A wise wife handles money well. (31:16,18)

A wise wife is a patient teacher. (31:26)

A wise wife controls her tongue. (31:26)

A wise wife respects her husband. (31:11-12)

A wise wife is generous. (31:20)

A wise wife is humble. (29:23)

A wise wife has insight and understanding. (19:14)

A wise wife is a great lover and yet sexually pure. (7:18-19, opposite)

A wise wife is a woman of integrity. (31:10)

A wise wife is not contentious, but a peacemaker. (21:9,19)

A wise wife is a trustworthy helper. (31:12)

A wise wife has a positive outlook on life. (15:15; 17:22; 19:13, opposite)

C. 3 COMMITMENT

“Marriage is the total commitment of the total person for the total life” (Norman Wright).

An unknown author has put together what is called the ten commitments of marriage, and they sum up much of what we have already considered. These posted on someplace in your home would be very beneficial as a constant reminder of what is involved in the commitment of marriage.

COMMITMENT #1

To Commit your marriage and your family to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many marriages begin with a vow to be under the authority of God, but then fail to follow the promises on this vow and others that the marriage vow ask. We are to make a decision and commit our family to God in a deep and meaningful way. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve, but for me and my house - we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15). Only by having Him as the head of both husband and wife will the marriage prosper.

COMMITMENT #2:

To grow in Christ for the Rest of My Life.

Not every Christian has decided to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 3:18). Instead, Christians often think that they have already arrived or that there is "nothing wrong with me." There is nothing wrong with a two year old acting like a two year old, but the child should eventually grow out of

that behavior. In the same way, none of us has matured enough that our present state should be classified "mature" we are only able to be "maturing." We must seek growth. We must seek to grow. The result of a lifetime commitment to growth in Christ is that we become more mature in every area of life.

In marriage, which demands increasing maturity in character, responsibility, and wisdom, non-growing Christians cannot make it. Their pride will not allow them to accept the learning, correction, rebukes, and questions that require them to humble themselves. Only an open and teachable person can develop the characteristics needed to make a good marriage partner.

COMMITMENT #3:

To stay committed to my marriage for life, and to work to solve all problems that arise.

This commitment provides the security of permanence and keeps us from running away from problems. Either we face up to them and solve them, or we live with them.

Christians and Christian leaders are part of the climbing divorce rate in our society, but God still requires faithfulness to our marriage vows (Malachi 2:14). He declares, "I Hate Divorce" (Verse 16).

Does this enslave me as a Christian? No! instead it give security in the midst of a world in which "you will have trouble," as Christ stated (John 16:33). And it means living in hope that no problem is too great to be solved.

God is working in marriage to fulfill His own desires as well as all married Christians. He is "seeking godly offspring" (Malachi 2:15) from our homes, and therefore He requires faithfulness in marriage.

COMMITMENT #4:

To be faithful to my mate in both mind and action.

Unfaithful actions can be headed off by commitment to think romantically ONLY about the husband or wife. (Matthew 5:28).

To decide, "My mate is the only one I will allow myself to think about in this way" will cut off a lot of problems before they begin. The result in marriage will be a greater level of mutual trust.

COMMITMENT #5:

To practice and allow to be practiced the "help meet" of Genesis.

Mankind has heaped years and years of garbage upon the alter of marriage by downgrading the role of the woman in marriage. Many women have allowed themselves to live under these conditions in the interest of peace, Mostly to no avail.

God created woman to complete man, which transmits the idea that man was lacking in some areas, and this lacking has existed since man began and continues today. Too many men refuse to accept this gift from God for completion and "macho" it out trying to be all capable and "support the little lady!" Well, God, in His wisdom set a wife on the life of a husband to allow them to be presented to Him as "One Flesh" and complete in their TOGETHERNESS!

This does not mean that a wife simply takes orders - it means that SOMETIMES she is the ONLY messenger God has to get through some thick skulls of some husbands. The wife must be able to deliver rebuke, reproof and exhortation in accordance with the leading of the Holy Spirit; However, it is IMPORTANT that the wife recognize that her responsibility ENDS when she delivers the message! God has ordained that the Husband be the head of the family - not the dictator - the HEAD "just as Christ is the head of the church" and with the same servant manner and sacrificial attitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ! When the husband has COMPLETELY lived up to the standards set by God, THEN he can dictate! Until then God has seen fit to have another person come along side and travel the road of life with him, and he had better listen to what she says. Most of the time she can be the KEY to success and failure to listen can result in failure.

The wife must realize that she is commanded to obey her husband. Not blindly, but in accordance with the Word of God. God has set up a plan for marriage and families and the plan works to the good of those who follow the precepts, and disaster results in straying from the plan. The wife should OFFER her advice and admonitions in LOVE and not in confrontation. Communicate to him in the same manner as God communicates to you, with overwhelming Love - AGAPE love! If the husband wants to do something you don't really care to do, and it is not against the laws of God, then God asks that you follow your husband. (I Corinthians 11:3)! If you follow his request just as you would follow the request of Jesus Christ, then you will be blessed in ways that you never thought possible. Trust in the Lord.

COMMITMENT #6:

To communicate-NO MATTER WHAT!

Most people learn not to reveal many of their thoughts and feelings because these are personal and so easily judged by others - "You shouldn't feel that way." This fear of judgement from others brings about an attitude of "I'll never mentions that again."

But just as nothing can separate us from the Love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39), so nothing should stop us from communicating in marriage; silence, tears, explosions of anger, defiance, defensiveness, the children, or lack of time.

This is a commitment to communicate not just facts and accomplishments, but feelings, thoughts, problems, and failures. Both the positive and the negatives in our lives need expression.

COMMITMENT #7:

To be a Servant

God created both men and women to be servants of God, of each other, and of their neighbors. The husband and wife are equal in dignity and worth, and work together as "joint heirs of the grace of life" (I Peter 3:7,RSV) to achieve common goals.

Yet each fulfills different roles. The husband takes responsibility as the leader in the marriage (I Corinthians 11:3), but his success begins and ends with a servant's attitude. A willingness to serve each other will bring about mutual dependence and appreciation.

COMMITMENT #8

To assume in everything that my mate's intentions are good.

We are told not to impute evil to God (James 1:13), and in marriage we are likewise to assume the best about our partner's intentions. Some of our mate's actions may not seem to be good, but we must believe that the intent was good.

Let us give our wife/husband the benefit of the doubt. He or she may be immature in some ways and may act out of jealousy or revenge-but even these are cries for help. By avoiding the accusations, each of us will have far less grounds for conflicts and hurt feelings.

COMMITMENT #9:

To forgive and forget the transgressions of our mates.

The hardest act for a human to do is admit to a wrong and ask forgiveness. To be met with a list of acts of contrition that must be followed before forgiveness is "granted" creates a schism in the very foundation of marriage. To compound this error by "dredging up past offenses" is a direct sin against the very Word of God when God tells us to keep "no record of wrongs" (I Corinthians 13:5). This sin is not reserved for any single partner - it is practiced by both. It is sin. It is to be confessed and repented and washed from us. Then the healing of God's power will be able to be received!

COMMITMENT #10:

LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

It may seem strange that I make this the last of the commitments, yet it has been the critical facet of each of the previous nine.

The "norm" heard in the divorce courts is "I just don't feel any love for ..... anymore!" The world teaching that Love is a feeling. The Bible tells us that Love is a verb - an ACTION.

We are not called to "feel" love, we are COMMANDED to LOVE! We are to love our spouse, and sometimes we must love them in spite of our "feelings" and "please God and not man (ourselves)"(Acts 4:19). We must commit all the other nine commitments in our heart and attach this tenth one to every one of the other nine. Only by His power can we join the Lord when He told us to "be of good cheer for I have overcome the world" and we need so much to be overcomers. Allow the world and our own families see the Rock that our lives CAN be founded on. Let us enjoy the life "and life more abundantly" by following the plan that God laid out for us in His Word, The plan that many times counters our own plan because it requires the Lordship of Jesus Christ and not ourselves. It requires that a husband Serve his wife! It requires that we ALL have the servant nature that sees us washing feet in the spiritual manner that Jesus provided such a physical example of. Let us each ask our spouse the simple question that can very well blow our present "ship" out of the water of the world and settle us on a Rock, the Rock of Jesus Christ. That question is "What are your REAL needs and how do you think I could be more able to supply them?"

The reason these commitments are so important is because there are many factors that will come into any relationship of two imperfect beings that cause them to withdraw from intimacy where they will not always have pleasure in one another. When this happens those without commitment will think of divorce or abandonment, but those with commitment to the mate will recognize that this is a part of life in a fallen world, and they will stick to it and work out the problems however long and difficult it is. Commitment is what brings people through the tough times. It is true that many do not suffer the tragedies and heartaches that some do, but all marriages have times of distress where the commitment of each partner plays a role in keeping them faithful.

God had a terrible marriage in the Old Testament. The people he took for his bride were so unfaithful that it is embarrassing to read of it. The people of Israel went after other gods and entered into all the immorality of

their pagan worship. God was hurt by it all, of course, and in his anger he punished his wayward mate often. They suffered terribly for their folly, but they continued to be unfaithful. God, however, never lost his commitment to his earthly mate, the people of God. If you read the book of Hosea you will see just how faithful God was to his commitments even when they were not faithful at all. The prophet Hosea was to live a life with his wife that would illustrate the folly of Israel and the faithfulness of God. He was to marry a prostitute and be faithful to her even though she was constantly going off and getting pregnant by other men. It was an intolerable marriage that no one should have to endure. But God was illustrating that it was the very kind of marriage he had to endure with his people who went whoring after other gods.

God never gave up on his faithless bride. Instead, he says in Hosea 2:19-20,

19 I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.
20 I will betroth you in faithfulness,
and you will acknowledge the LORD.

God's love is amazing, for as bad as his wife was, he commits to her his all. He betroths her to himself forever. He pledges to her that he will be faithful to her no matter how unfaithful she is to him. It make me think of the country song I heard some time back that said, "I will love you forever if I want to." That is what God is saying to his wife Israel. She is not worthy of acceptance, or even of concern, but he will betroth her in faithfulness. He will say as the old marriage ritual says, "I plight thee my troth." People still say it, but I don't know if anyone bothers to find out what it means. It means that the mate is pledging his or her faithfulness, loyalty and honesty. It is a promise to be committed to the marriage no matter what comes. It is a commitment to stability and reliability. It is saying you can count on me.

This is the kind of marriage God wants for himself, and we can assume that this is what he expects for all of his people. The way to measure love is by commitment. We see God's love is beyond measure, for his commitment knows no limit. In II Tim. 2:13 we read, "..if we are faithless, he will

remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." It is just in God's nature to go on loving and being faithful no matter what. I don't think God is trying to teach us to go on loving a mate who becomes as totally evil as Israel did, but he is teaching us that it should be almost impossible for a mate to do anything that would cause us to forsake our marriage commitment. This kind of love is pictured in five verses of I Cor. 13:
4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
8 Love never fails.

Marriage is one of life's most important and challenging relationships, and it comes with some of the most major obligations of life. It calls for the same kind of dedication and commitment you expect in any important task and goal of life. When Dr. David Livingstone was working in Africa, a group of friends wrote him: "We would like to send other men to you. Have you found a good road into your area yet?" According to a member of his family, Dr. Livingstone sent this message in reply: "If you have men who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all." He wanted men who were committed to the task, and that meant men who were willing to reach the goal even if it was hard and often unpleasant. Marriage calls for this kind of commitment because it is filled with duties that are not pleasurable. There are endless chores in maintaining a home and a family, and it often gets messy. There is a reason why the marriage vows include "for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health." The negatives of life are just as real as the positives and all couples will have both. If you are not ready to put up with all the stuff that comes with marriage, then you are not truly committed, and you need to reconsider if you are ready to be a marriage partner. Without commitment no marriage can last.

You hear people saying all the time that marriage takes work, and that you have to work at it. It sounds like a job, and the fact is, it is a job to maintain a healthy and happy relationship withing the marriage bond. In courtship it is all fun and entertainment, and you do not have to put up with dirty diapers and broken appliances and the endless need to keep

things clean and in working order. Maintenance is a major aspect of the married life, and mates must be committed to the job of maintenance engineers if they expect to have an orderly and happy life together. What this means is that routine and monotony are a part of marriage. These were far from the minds of those in courtship, and so it can be a shock if they thought that marriage was just a continuation of the dating game. It can still be fun and games to some degree, but a major part of marriage is labor. In courtship the major thing is leisure, but in marriage the major thing is labor. There is always work to do, and both mates need to be committed to do their share of this work. And because so much of it is just plain physical work, there is a tendency to let the exciting pleasures of courtship fade into the background. Avoiding this calls for even more work in the realm of the psychological and spiritual, and so there is no end to the need to be committed to keeping your relationship positive and uplifting.

Bill and Pam Farrel in their book Men Are Like Waffles Women Are Like Spaghetti tell this story: "One woman came to me and said, "There is nothing here! No spark, or sizzle-nothing! I have no feelings. I want out of this marriage!"

I suggested that we pray and ask God to show one positive thing about her spouse. She went home and prayed some more. The next day she called me and said, "I thought of something."

"Good, what is it?" I asked hopefully.

"He's still here."

He's still here! I thought she was kidding, but I could tell from her tone that she completely serious.

"Okay, let's run with that. Let's brainstorm together ways you can tell him thanks for being here-but in a positive manner."

We made a list of several ways of positively say, "You're here!" And she went back home and began to use them. She would see her husband sitting in his recliner with the remote in hand watching sports. She would walk by and rub his shoulders and say, "Its nice to know you're around."

She would see him sitting and reading the paper, and walk by and say, "You know, I was thinking, its nice to know some things in life you can count on-like you being here."

She came up with so many ways to positively say, "You're here, bud," that one day he got up out of that old recliner! He came into the living room where she was having a quiet time, reading her Bible. He had never been interested in spiritual discussions before this, but he said, "Honey,

what are you reading?"

My Bible. I was having a problem at work and this passage in the Psalms is helping me."

"Why don't you read it to me?" She did and added an explanation of how it applied to her life.

"That's pretty neat," he replied with genuine enthusiasm in his voice.

The next Sunday a miracle happened. Instead of going to his favorite chair, he asked if he could go to church with her-and he has been going ever since. In addition, she now regularly tells me of his romantic gestures toward her.

She found the power of encouraging words by taking 100 percent of her energy and focusing on it one positive trait." Here was a woman who did not give up, even though it looked hopeless, and because of her commitment to find a way she found it. It took patience and perseverance, but she saved her marriage.

Someone came up with the idea of the marriage box, and I want to share it for it is teaching a major lesson all mates need to hear.

THE MARRIAGE BOX

Most people get married believing a myth; that marriage is a beautiful box full of all the things they have longed for: companionship, romance, sexual fulfillment, intimacy, friendship, laughter, financial security.

The truth is that marriage, at the start, is an empty box. You must put some things into it before you can take anything out of it.

There is no love in marriage; love is in people, and people put it into their marriage. There is no romance in marriage; people have to put it into their relationship.

A couple must discern what things work to improve their relationship and form
the habits of communicating, giving, sacrificing, sharing, loving, touching, serving, and praising. In other words, keeping the box full. If you take out more than you put in, the box will always be empty!

You hear people all the time who say they have fallen out of love and want to end their marriage. They have just lost their commitment to keep putting things in the marriage box. They are like people who stop putting money in their savings account and then wonder why they have no money for emergency situations. People get lazy and do not want to keep doing the things that led them to love their mate, and be loved by their mate, in the first place. This lack of commitment to maintain their love relationship is what kills the romance and eventually the love they once had. It is not a falling out of love at all. It is a neglecting love to the point that it withers like a plant that is never watered. No marriage can survive such neglect any more than a plant can survive without water. A relationship needs to be cared for and worked at, and when this commitment to do so fails, then the marriage will fail. Commitment is the key to survival, for as soon as that becomes weak and dies, the relationship will soon follow it to the grave.

The best of marriages can go through low times when the fire of passion may be so low that there is little heat in the bedroom, and their can be problems that bring on frustration and even depression. This is not a falling out of love. It is the natural cycle of good times and bad times that come to everyone. You just have to be committed to go on loving and meeting each others needs, and striving to rekindle the flame that led you to love each other in the first place. This kind of commitment will lead to a renewed fire of love that will wipe the bad times away and make you so grateful to each other for having the kind of love that can weather such a storm. If marriage did not have low times and hard times there would be no need for commitment. Anyone can manage to be gloriously happy without a great deal of difficulty when there is not a problem in their world. It is because you cannot always be happy in marriage that you need commitment to make it work. Mates need to recognize that it is alright and natural to be unhappy at times. Life is not always fair and it can be painful, but these negative times will always be temporary when you have two mates who are committed to the marriage.

Someone said, "I married you because I loved you; now I love you because I married you." This is the kind of commitment that makes marriage work, for it recognizes the reality of the truth that love is not just an emotion, but it is a choice. A committed person does not just love when it

feels good, but loves always, even when it feels terrible, because it is a choice they have made and they are committed to it. That is the God-like love we saw in the book of Hosea. Emotions can change with the weather and the seasons, but love is always the same, for it makes choices to do what one is committed to do. We do not always feel love for God, but when we are a committed follower of Christ we do his will and strive to please him regardless of how we feel. This same thing is to characterize our love for our mate. You do not say, "I don't feel like pleasing God today. I think I will break a few of the commandments." You stay loyal to your Christian convictions whether you feel like it or not, and so it is with your marriage vows. Commitments are choices, and you stick with them even when they are not easy or convenient.

Love with such commitment is what Mr. and Mrs. Strauss shared. Someone wrote this account of what happened. "Mrs. Isadore Strauss was one of the few first class women passengers to go down with the Titanic in 1912, and she drowned because she could not bear to leave her husband. They remained calm throughout the excitement of the sinking vessel. They both aided frightened women and children to find places aboard lifeboats. Finally, Mr. Strauss, who had repeatedly urged his wife to claim a spot safely aboard a lifeboat, forced her to enter one. She was seated but a moment, however, when she sprang up and climbed back on deck before he could stop her. There, she caught his arm, snuggling it familiarly against her side, and exclaimed, "We have been long together for a great many years. We are old now. Where you go, I will go." For them, true love was about commitment. And it was about faithfulness. And sacrifice. Not everyone finds such love in another person -- though it is a beautiful thing when it occurs."

I like the way Art Turock described the difference between interest and commitment. He wrote, "There's a difference between interest and commitment. When you are interested in doing something, you do it only when circumstances permit. When you're committed to something, you accept no excuses, only results." In other words, when you are truly committed you act and do what you are committed to. The fact is, any couple who is truly committed to keep their vows will have a happy marriage, for it will always be a loving marriage. It is only when commitment fails that a marriage will fail. This makes you wonder why anyone would fail to keep their commitments, for it is the key to their own

happiness. The answer is simply that commitment can be costly and we become too lazy to pay the cost of keeping our commitments. It can be very hard to keep doing year after year what it was pure pleasure to do when you were courting. If commitment was easy there would be nothing special about people who keep their promises. What costs you nothing, or little, is not precious.

Elisabeth Elliot has written about commitment phobia like this: "You are loved with an everlasting love." That's what the Bible says. "And underneath are the everlasting arms." My talk today is from my book Quest for Love, and this is a chapter called "Commitment Phobia." I've begun this chapter with Psalm 37:5-6, "Commit your way to the Lord. Trust in Him, and He will do this. He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun."

"A song Rod Stewart sang gives truthful expression to an attitude common to many today. "I don't want to challenge you, marry you or remember you. I just want to make love to you." That's putting it bluntly, isn't it? Love imposes obligations. Making love in the minds of such men and women is a form of recreation. A feeling that may last for a few minutes, even an hour, and nothing more is implied, although much more may be expected. It's a means of self-satisfaction. But to challenge you, to marry you or even to remember you? Ah, there's a catch-22, responsibility. At that, they break into a cold sweat.

"To commit oneself to marriage is to give oneself in trust, to put one's life at the disposal of another. It is, in fact, actually to forfeit rights and to consign oneself to the charge of another person. Commitment entails the acceptance of responsibility. It imposes a task and a trust. It's a promise to do something, a pledge to pursue a certain course. To love is to make a commitment. Merely to make love while refusing commitment is a purely selfish act, irresponsible and ultimately destructive."

Commitment in any area of life is costly. Dolly Parton, for example, was unable to receive her 1999 Grammy Award in person because she had other plans. What could be so important that she couldn't make it to the award's ceremony? She had promised a friend she would go to her shower and she wasn't about to break her word, not even for a Grammy. This is the kind of commitment a marriage demands. Dave Bootsma wrote, "Marriage requires commitment. There are times when it is like climbing a

mountain without anything to hold on to. It is tougher than we thought. Only our commitment to the one we vowed to love forever, and our dependency upon God's grace to help us with the climb, will keep us from falling or giving up. He goes on to tell about Marriage Mountain in British Columbia where it is a tradition for a man to climb a sheer rock face up 180 meters to reach his bride who waits at the top. This demonstrates his commitment to do whatever it takes to get her. That would be hard indeed, but the hardest part is keeping her once you climb the mountain, for that takes, not just temporary determination, but a life-long commitment to exert strong energy on her behalf. This is where most men fail. They are not committed to keep climbing whatever the cost. A truly serious commitment will keep you climbing all the way into eternity.

Nicholas Gordon wrote,

The vows I take will be forever:
I'll love you all my life.
There's no part way, no holding back
Once we are man and wife.

The choice is made, and now I swim
In a far different sea,
The shores of which are bright green hills
Raised up for you and me.

Our love is like a mountainside
Awash in lovely flowers:
It is our home, our solid rock,
Where all bright things are ours.

And though of need we often must
Spend our days apart,
Our love will always be with us,
Held within the heart.

I feel it now, so strong and free,
So part of every breath
That it must live--I swear it will!--

Even after death.

This issue of commitment and its importance in keeping a marriage alive and well over the years explains why marriage is far superior to living together as a way of happiness. Numerous studies show that couples who just live together and do not make the commitment to get married have a higher rate of divorce. A study released by the University of Florida showed that ex-convicts who got married were unlikely to commit other crimes and return to prison, but those who just lived with a woman were even more likely to go on committing crimes and be returned to prison. This seven year study showed that marriage leads to a life of stability and an honest way of making a living. Those who just live together lack the commitment to change their ways, and they go on living an erratic lifestyle. There is something about marriage that fights crime, and that something is commitment. When you marry someone you are committing yourself to be a responsible person to provide for and love your mate and family. When you are free from commitments you are free to follow your human nature and be foolish and irresponsible. Commitment is the key to the happy life on every level.

Why then are people so unwilling to make commitments in their marriage, which is the basic reason why divorce is so high in our nation? George Barna in The Frog in the Kettle gives this answer: "Commitment is viewed negatively because it limits our ability to feel independent and free, to experience new things, to change our minds on the spur of the moment and to focus on self-gratification rather than helping others. People willingly make commitments only when the expected outcome exceeds what they must sacrifice as a result of that commitment" In other words, men do not want to follow the teaching of Paul who wrote in Eph. 5:25. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.." The idea of giving something up and making a sacrifice for the one you profess to love is foreign to many, and the result is there is no commitment that will make the marriage last

When you have an egg for breakfast a hen is involved, but when you have bacon a pig is committed. Bacon comes with the sacrifice of a life. Many just want to be involved in marriage, but true committed love means sacrifice and not mere involvement. The inability to be Christ-like in marriage is the primary cause for the breakdown in marriage. That is why

the best guarantee of keeping your marriage happy and healthy for a lifetime is to be ever growing in Christlikeness. This means a commitment to be a growing Christian by persistent Bible study, prayer, worship and service. Christians who neglect these means of growing tend to be conformed to the world and have the same rate of marriage failure as those who are of the world. Accepting Jesus as Savior gets you into heaven, but commitment of your life to Jesus gets heaven into you, and this changes your earthly life tremendously. The same is true for marriage. Getting married is easy, but committing yourself to your marriage partner is a lifetime of sacrifice. The rewards, however, are so great that those who do it gladly pay the price. These are the people who enjoy old age together. This is the ideal that God intends for marriage partners. Robert Browning put it-

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

The fact is, marriage is one of the greatest challenges in life, and it often calls for the same kind of heroic sacrifice that war calls for. Some have even said that the three stages of the male- female relationship are friendship, courtship and battleship. Conflict is inevitable in marriage, for you have two people with radically different perspectives on so many issues of life. On top of this, the evil powers of the universe want marriages to fail, for just about every civilization that has fallen is due in large measure to the breakdown of marriage. Marriage is a major battle ground in the war between good and evil. The kingdom of God advances or retreats based on the success of marriage. We need to enter marriage with the same kind of commitment that men make to the marines. The following story illustrates what I mean.

“Three military recruiters showed up to address high school seniors. Each recruiter--representing the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps--was to have

fifteen minutes.

The Army and Navy recruiters got carried away, so when it came time for the Marine to speak, he had just two minutes. He walked up and stood utterly silent for a full sixty seconds, half of his time.

Then he said this: "I doubt whether there are two or three of you in this room who could even cut it in the Marine Corps. But I want to see those two or three immediately in the dining hall when we are dismissed." He turned smartly and sat down.

When he arrived in the dining hall, those students interested in the Marines were a mob.

The recruiter knew that commitment comes from appealing to the heroic dimension in every heart."

--W. Frank Harrington

All through history people have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country. The reason they are willing to do so is because they have made a commitment to their country. They have decided that their country and their people are to have their exclusive patriotic loyalty. No other nation is to be allowed to attack or injure their nation. They will die to defend her. This is the kind of love, devotion, loyalty and commitment that marriage demands. Marriage is to be exclusive, just as our faith is to be exclusively in One God. We are to have no other gods before Him. That is the number one commitment of life. Jesus is to be Lord, and we forsake all others who claim to be the way. He is the only Way, the Truth and the Life. He said we cannot serve two masters. When we trust Jesus as our Savior we are making an eternal commitment that can never waver or weaken. Our mate falls into this same category of exclusive commitment. When we understand this we eliminate and avoid most all of the problems that lead to a failed marriage. Just as it is not God's will for you to be a traitor to your country, or to be an apostate in forsaking your Lord, so it is not his will that you forsake the mate you promised to love until death parts you. All of these things happen because of the failure of commitment. Let me quote it again,"Marriage is the total commitment of the total person for the total life" (Norman Wright). You cannot promise the future will always be bright, but you can promise that you will be there

rain or shine.

I cannot promise you a life of sunshine;
I cannot promise riches, wealth, or gold;
I cannot promise you an easy pathway
That leads away from change or growing old.

But I can promise all my heart's devotion;
A smile to chase away your tears of sorrow;
A love that's ever true and ever growing;
A hand to hold in yours through each tomorrow.

Author Unknown

But people say they have fallen out of love. This makes love seem like a disease they have recovered from, or a chair they have fallen from because the legs broke off. Love is not just a feeling. Love is a choice, and if you remain faithful to the choice to love someone you can restore feelings. It is not falling out of love that kills a marriage but the falling out of commitment. It is choosing an easier way because the way of commitment is hard. When Jesus made following him hard by saying they must take up the cross and follow him, and by promising that people would hate them as they hated him, many fell away and departed from following him. They lost their commitment, and because of it they lost the best life had to offer. And it is the same in marriage. If you lose your commitment, you will lose the value that comes from working through hard times to victory, which puts love on an even higher level. People who stop the dance of marriage because their mate steps on their toes have the weakness of character that cannot make a life-long commitment.. They are saying I will be faithful to you until our passions weaken, and until we find something better. Such people are not prospects for marriage, for they cannot handle true commitment. They say "I do" but don't. They say "I will" but won't.

Edmund O'Neill , who was born in1929 wrote this on commitment:

Marriage is a commitment to life,
the best that two people can find and bring out in each other.

**It offers opportunities for sharing and growth
that no other relationship can equal.
It is a physical and an emotional joining that is promised for a lifetime.**

**Within the circle of its love,
marriage encompasses all of life's most important relationships.
A wife and a husband are each other's best friend,
confidant, lover, teacher, listener, and critic.
And there may come times when one partner is heartbroken or ailing,
and the love of the other may resemble
the tender caring of a parent or child.**

**Marriage deepens and enriches every facet of life.
Happiness is fuller, memories are fresher,
commitment is stronger, even anger is felt more strongly,
and passes away more quickly.**

**Marriage understands and forgives the mistakes life
is unable to avoid. It encourages and nurtures new life,
new experiences, new ways of expressing
a love that is deeper than life.**

**When two people pledge their love and care for each other in marriage,
they create a spirit unique unto themselves which binds them closer
than any spoken or written words.
Marriage is a promise, a potential made in the hearts of two people
who love each other and takes a lifetime to fulfill.**

Peter Hector tells us just what commitment means when it comes to marriage. He writes, "Your commitment to your mate is not your marriage license, your wedding ceremony, nor your living arrangements. When you commit, you are in fact agreeing to the following: "After serious consideration and with full responsibility and integrity, I am agreeing to share my life with my partner; to assist in his/her personal growth development and happiness wherever and whenever I can. I also agree to cherish and protect this union with my partner so it can forever flourish and always remains a happy one. I am agreeing to this because I want to, and for no other reason."

The bottom line is that you love your mate as you love your God, your Savior, your country, and your best friends, and that is with commitment. An unknown author wrote-

"Treat yourselves and each other with respect,
and remind yourselves often of what brought you together.
Give the highest priority to the tenderness,
gentleness and kindness that your connection deserves.
When frustration, difficulties and fear assail your relationship,
as they threaten all relationships at one time or another,
remember to focus on what is right between you,
not only the part which seems wrong.
In this way, you can ride out the storms
when clouds hide the face of the sun in your lives...
remembering that even if you lose sight of it for a moment,
the sun is still there.
And if each of you takes responsibility for the quality
of your life together,
it will be marked by abundance and delight.
For where two or three are gathered together in my name,
there am I in the midst of them."
Matthew 18:20

So much has been written about the value of commitment, and of how it is the key to happiness and success in marriage and every other area of life, but the question still remains-why is it so hard for people to make a commitment to marry? One of the best things I have read on the subject is by an author that is unknown to me, for I would gladly give credit to one with such wisdom. What they write takes us back to the issues of acceptance of yourself.

"If there's one word that strikes fear in some people's hearts, it is "commitment" You know the kind: they may love their partners very much, they may have no interest in being apart or being with anyone else, but the mere thought of "committing" to the relationship makes their blood run cold. They will put off marriage or even just an engagement for years, they will put up a valiant fight against pressure to settle down, and will offer myriad arguments as to why they can't promise anything. They often cite previous failed relationships, or the fact that their own parents' divorce

ruined marriage for them for life, or quote the now familiar "marriage is just a piece of paper" and "I like us just the way they are now." The excuses are as varied and individual as are the people who use them, but the one thing they all have in common is a profound, almost implacable, fear of commitment.

“Why is this? Why are some people so afraid of committing themselves to a relationship that they enjoy and a person who makes them happy? Is it, as most people believe, the sign of someone who can't be monogamous? Is it, as popular television tries to convince us, a sign that the person isn't really in love?

“I believe it is neither of these things. I believe the answer to this question lies not in what the commitment-phobe thinks about his partner, but rather what he thinks of himself. As much as you commit yourself to your husband or wife, it's important to remember that marriage is also a commitment to yourself.

“When you choose to marry, you are not only agreeing to take on a husband or wife, you are also agreeing to be a husband or wife. You are agreeing to marry and be married. You are saying to yourself that you are worthy of the love of another human being, that you are capable of sustaining a long term exclusive relationship, and that you are mature enough, thoughtful enough, confident enough, to become intimate partners with another human being through whatever storms you may face together.

“You are acknowledging that you are a serious, value-oriented person, committed to achieving the very best in life, and worthy of the rewards that come from that pursuit. You're acknowledging that at least one other person - if not more, once the children come - will be able to count on you. You acknowledge that you welcome the responsibility of contributing to a successful relationship, and that you have the self-esteem to expect them to contribute to it as well. You are saying you respect sex enough to honor it with the highest romantic value we have, that you think it's important and special enough to be granted official sanction and celebrated as a glorious expression of romantic love.

“You're making the ultimate commitment - you're committing yourself to the most important relationship of your life, with little or no guarantee that it will last, with no assurances that the person you love will continue to love

you, and with the certainty that if it does end, it will be a painful experience for you. But you're committing yourself to hope, to the belief that it will work, to the work it may require to make it work. You're committing yourself to the unapologetic pursuit of your highest value, come what may.

"This is no small task. It takes bravery, self-esteem, confidence in your own judgement, optimism and an indomitable spirit. Not everyone is up to it. Not everyone has the moral fortitude to jump feet first into marriage in spite of the natural doubts that surface from time to time. Some people are simply afraid. They don't know their own character well enough to make such promises to themselves.

"But instead of saying so, instead of understanding this selfish aspect of marriage, our culture turns instead to the "obvious" solution - It's not that I can't commit myself to marriage, it's that I can't commit to you. No one ever questions what personal commitment means to the individual - that it is far, far more difficult to live up to your own standards and expectations than what someone else may expect of you.

"We need to focus on ourselves more if we're ambivalent about marriage and commitment. We need to fully appreciate that marriage is the ultimate in selfishness, undertaken for our own well-being and happiness as much as that of our partner's. If we aren't ready for marriage, so be it. Perhaps in time we will be. But at the very least, if we introspect a little more before slamming that door, we'll know for certain whether we fear committing to marriage, or to ourselves."

Commitment involves the acceptance of the total package of marriage. It is the acceptance of all the ABC's of marriage that we have looked at in this study, plus many others that could be added. It is a leap of faith, for nobody can know in advance all the things that can happen to a married couple. So much of life is beyond our control, but commitment says you can count on me to be here with you whatever circumstances come our way. It is a choice to stick together through thick and thin. This idea of sticking together is one that is of interest to pursue, for Richard Pinelli has done a fascinating study that I want to share with you.

"Genesis 2:24. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and

shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

"Marriage requires a priority. This priority even overshadows the devotion to parents. In fact, if you remember the Torah taught a tremendously high level of respect toward the parents, but your commitment to your spouse is to exceed that level of devotion and respect to your parents because a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. It is a commitment to your spouse that excels the level of devotion and respect that you have toward your parents.

"It is what I describe as a high calling. It is what I describe as simply a major choice that you have to keep in the forefront of your mind if at all possible as a human being. This passage also portrays the picture of what I describe as permanence in marriage. For the Hebrew word that we talk about in the Old Testament as being joined is from the spelling d-a-b-a-q or d-e-b-e-q, which means to adhere. It means to cling; it means to cleave; it means to stick. It literally means to stick, and it's interesting to note that when you look at the concept about sticking you get the idea that it means to be joined together in a lasting bond. Even the Greek word in the New Testament used for joined k-o-l-l-a-o literally means to be glued together. It literally means to be glued together.

"Isn't it interesting that both the Old and the New Testament words for joined show that concept? The image by many of being joined is more of that today as being stuck, not sticking. I'm stuck with her. I'm stuck with this old goat. I'm stuck with this particular individual, rather than sticking. It is reflected in the text here and in the New Testament that it is the design by God that two individuals have a deeply entwining relationship that frees these individuals for intimacy between each other."

To be committed is to be stuck with the one you marry. This scares many people, for it is such a limitation on our freedom. It is the same limitation we enter into when we commit our lives to Christ. It is in accepting the limitations and in the giving up all others to worship and to love that we become committed believers and partners. True love is willing to give up all others and make this commitment, for it knows that love can conquer all that may come to put pressure on your relationship to Christ and your mate. Paul says in I Cor. 13:4 that love suffers long, and that means that it can put up with anything that comes and not give up. In

verse 7 he says love bears all things, and this just confirms it that true love can endure through all that life can throw at a couple. Love has staying power. A committed mate will give the partner such a sense of security, for they know they will always be there come what may. An unknown poet put it so beautifully-

Away from you there is no music,
There is no sunlight,
The world is gray.
Away from you the clocks are frozen,
And time's a traveller
Who's lost his way.
I'm half alive
Until the moment the door swings open
And you walk through,
Now my soul is afloat
On a wave of music
That I could feel such joy I never knew.
And so you see why I can never be away from you.

If in the morning when you awake,
If the sun does not appear, I will be here.
If in the dark we lose sight of love,
Hold my hand and have no fear, I will be here.
I will be here, When you feel like being quiet,
When you need to speak your mind I will listen.
Through the winning, losing, and trying we'll be together,
And I will be here.
If in the morning when you awake,
If the future is unclear,I will be here.
I will be here, And you can cry on my shoulder,
When the mirror tell us we're older.
I will hold you, to watch you grow in beauty,
And tell you all the things you are to me.
We'll be together and I will be here.
I will be true to the promises I've made,
To you and to the one who gave you to me.
I will be here.

Jesus said that believers would suffer much persecution in the world, but that he would be with them so that they could endure to the end and be saved. It takes staying power to be faithful to our Lord when life gets hard, and it takes that same power to stay faithful to our mate, but God's grace is sufficient in all cases with those who are committed to walk in obedience to his will. Jesus said the love of many will grow cold and they will turn back from him into the world. They wanted what he had to offer but they were not willing to commit to him regardless of the cost. They gave up the greatest gift of God and lost God's best because they could not make a commitment. This is the primary reason also for why there is so much divorce even among Christians. Commitment to Christ and commitment to marriage are very much a parallel in all ways, and that means that they go together. People who are committed to Christ, and who will live for him as Lord, are the people most likely to also commit themselves to their mates for life, and never forsake them. It also works the other way around. If a person is just a nominal Christian who does little to grow in Christ and is slipshod in their commitment to serve and bear witness to Christ, they are also likely to be uncommitted to their marriage, and so be unloving in many ways to their mates. If you want God's best in life and in marriage you must be committed.