



Marriage Enrichment

God's Promise for Marriage

(Family Ministries)

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I Hope You Dance

By

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I hope you never lose your sense of wonder
You get your fill to eat, but always keep that hunger
May you never take one single breath for granted
God forbid love ever leave you empty handed
I hope you still feel small when you stand by the ocean
Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens
Promise me you'll give faith a fighting chance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

I hope you dance

I hope you dance

I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance
Never settle for the path of least resistance
Living might mean taking chances but they're worth taking
Lovin' might be a mistake but it's worth making
Don't let some hell bent heart leave you bitter
When you come close to selling out - reconsider
Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

I hope you dance

(Time is a real and constant motion always, rolling us along)

I hope you dance

(Tell me who wants to look back on their youth and wonder)

I hope you dance

(Where those years have gone)

I hope you dance

I hope you still feel small When you stand by the ocean
Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens
Promise me you'll give faith a fighting chance
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance

Dance!

(Time is a real and constant motion always, rolling us along)

I hope you dance

(Tell me who wants to look back on their youth and wonder)

I hope you dance

(Where those years have gone)

I hope you dance

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PREFACE

Before I was married in 1976 we went to pre-marital counseling with the President of the Christian College we were attending. We had three or four very good general sessions, which consisted mostly of spiritual ideas of marriage, honeymoon issues and what to do when we fight. We had a Christian wedding and we committed to having a Christian marriage and family. We were married for almost fifteen years and had three beautiful children. We went through Bible College and Seminary and our first church together. Then, it was over. I am sorry to say that I learned in a very personal and very clear manner the difference between a bad marriage and a strong, healthy marriage.

We did not believe in divorce. We were raised in a denomination that taught that divorce was almost the second unpardonable sin. We believed that too. When we changed denominations to a more Reformed theology, we were still taught the horrors and evils of divorce. We believed that also. Because of these beliefs our marriage lasted longer than it would have naturally. Our marriage ended in every real way after eight years and yet we struggled to make it work for another seven years. It was beyond our belief that two Christians, with solid theology, serving in the Lord's service fulltime could end up in divorce. It was completely unacceptable. Yet, there we were – divorced.

It is very clear to me exactly when and why my marriage started to go wrong. And it is very clear to me that I did not know what to do to make it work or how to save it. I tried very hard to save my marriage and make it wonderful, but all the very hard work I was doing was not the right work. I was trying to build a skyscraper with a spatula. I did not understand what I needed to do and I did not know what tools I needed and so ultimately I did everything wrong. The worst part is, I never knew what was needed to have a good and healthy and exciting marriage to begin with. No matter how good my intentions were if I did everything wrong it was still not going to work.

After two years the Lord graciously gave me a loving and beautiful wife. Our dating life consisted of dealing with all the issues that caused my divorce so that it could never be repeated. We prayed, we studied, we went to counseling, we went to conferences, and we read books and conducted marriage Bible studies with others. All of these things helped us tremendously and our marriage today is blessed by these activities. However, the most important thing that the Lord showed me that I was able to bring to my new marriage was to trust in Him completely.

You see, I realized after my divorce and a time of counseling and healing, that while I was a Christian, I had put my faith for marriage and life in the truth of my reformed faith, in the success of my church ministry, in God's blessings through calling my children to saving faith. These were all wonderful things, but they are the actions God takes, they are not God. I was trusting in my theology for a happy and successful life, but I was not trusting in and putting all my faith in Jesus Himself. I realized that to have a successful marriage I must love Jesus more every day and get closer to Him every day. Everything else is wonderful, but He alone makes the difference.

So this book is written to help you to understand what the foundation of a good marriage is. I believe that you will be surprised by what is in this book. It is not new information but information that is vital to a happy marriage. Much of this information we do not connect to our marriages. Many of these teachings we never work on. My view of marriage and the work it takes to have a successful one based on the promises of God is not commonly accepted. Yet I believe it is a matter of taking spiritual truths that we already know and applying them to our marriages as well as to the other parts of our lives.

You will have to build your marriage. It will be unique to you. There will be no other relationship like it in the history of the world. But you will need this foundation, which is the same foundation for every marriage if it is to be the glorious and joyful experience that God intended!

Introduction

Course Description

This course is part of the Family Ministries course of study and provides the fundamentals in understanding marriage and how – through teaching and pastoral counseling – to teach others how to make their marriages what God intended them to be so that they can enjoy their marriages to the fullest in this life. And in so doing glorify God and enjoy Him to the fullest.

The course is not auto-didactic. Nor is it principally academic in nature. A mature teacher must be prepared to play the role of mentor to his students, rather than a mere instructor.

The number of students in the class should be small, to allow for the interchange necessary in the mentoring process. Eight to twelve students are the ideal number. The course should be as practical as possible, dealing with real life situations and problems that the leader will encounter personally and in the context of his ministry.

Finally, the teacher must keep in mind at all times, that this class is *training* in marriage enrichment, not just a teaching *about* marriage enrichment. The goal is for the student to experience a better marriage personally as a result of an increased knowledge of marriage enrichment as well as learning how to teach it to others.

Purpose of the Course

1. To establish in the mind of the student the Biblical concept and definition of a successful, fulfilling, joyous, life long marriage that brings glory to God and allows the couple to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
2. To help the student develop a full understanding of God's plan revealed in His word, for marriage.
3. Identify and practice the skills, gifts and talents for the enriching of their own marriages.
4. Gain the skills to teach and counsel others to enrich their marriages.

Summary of course content.

This course will give the student the tools for a successful and long term marriage based on the principle of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. It will provide the student with the tools necessary to lead others to happy marriages through Christ.

Course materials.

Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. Downers Grove, Ill.; Intervarsity Pres., 2005.

Tim & Beverly LaHaye. *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty of Sexual Love*. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Press, 1998.

Michael Saunders. *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promises for Marriage*. Miami, Florida; M.I.N.T.S., 2006.

Gary Smalley. *Making Love Last Forever*. Dallas, TX.; Word Publishing, 1996.

Greg Smalley & Robert Paul. *The DNA of Relationships for Couples*. Carol Stream, IL; Tyndale House, 2006

Ed Wheat & Gloria Oaks Perkins. *Love Life For Every Married Couple*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Press, 1997

H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key to Your Marriage*. Ventura, California: Regal Press, 2000.

Objectives of the course.

- 1- Participation in classroom discussion
 - 2- Comprehension of course materials
 - 3- Familiarization with course bibliography
 - 4- Development of ministry skills in Marriage Enrichment Education
 - 5- Retention of course materials and application to real ministry
 - 6- Application of course materials to their own marriage
- These objectives will be evaluated in four ways (See evaluation of the course).*

Structure of the course.

How the course will be conducted.

1. For students studying at a distance and not attending course lectures:
 - a. The student will contact the MINTS Academic Dean in order to register for the course and be assigned a supervising professor.
 - b. The student will identify his or her mentor, who will locally oversee the course. The mentor will verify that all of the lessons have been read and homework completed. Note: The supervising professor of MINTS must approve the mentor.
 - c. The student will download the course syllabus and begin studies.
 - d. The mentor will send the lesson completion chart, the exam completion chart and the case study to the supervising professor.
 - e. The supervising professor will review and record the grades, ensure that they are registered with the MINTS Registrar and that the final grade is sent to the student and mentor.
2. For students studying at a distance who attend course lectures:
 - a. MINTS will provide an orientation to the course (by invitation by a professor).
 - b. The student will attend 15 hours of lectures.
 - c. The student will complete the lesson assignments and give them to the professor, who also serves as the mentor.
 - d. The supervising MINTS professor will review the student's work (attendance, lesson completion and case study grade) and have the final grade

- registered with the MINTS Registrar. The Registrar will send the group leader the student's final grade.
- e. The student will read 500 pages from the course Bibliography.

Lesson Development.

Lesson 1 - What is Marriage?

Homework:

1. Read chapter one and two of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Choose your case study couple and set up a 7-week program of counseling.
3. Read - *Making Love Last Forever* by Dr. Gary Smalley

Lesson 2 - What is Marriage Enrichment?

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your first marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit an initial proposal for a Couple's Marriage Enrichment Weekend Retreat for your church.

Homework:

1. Read chapter three of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *Love Life For Every Married Couple* by Dr. Ed Wheat
3. Prepare a study guide for the Couples Retreat.

Lesson 3 - Why Do We Need to Practice Marriage Enrichment?

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your second marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit a study guide for the Couples Retreat.

Homework:

1. Read chapter four of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *The DNA of Relationships for Couples* by Dr. Greg Smalley
3. Create a schedule for the Couples Retreat.

Lesson 4 – Marriage Enrichment Begins With Safety

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your third marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit a schedule for the Couples Retreat.

Homework:

1. Read chapter five of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *The Languages of Love*
3. Prepare a report showing your language of love and your spouses language of love and what difference this makes in the way you treat each other

Lesson 5 - Marriage Enrichment is Serving Our Spouses.

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your fourth marriage enrichment counseling session.

2. Turn in a report showing your language of love and your spouses language of love and what difference this makes in the way you treat each other

Homework:

1. Read chapter Six of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *The Intimate Mystery* by Dan Allender
3. Prepare a list of 13 dates that you and your spouse can realistically (financially, child care, travel, work concerns, etc.) go on for the next quarter.

Lesson 6 - Marriage Enrichment is Becoming One With Your Spouse.

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your fifth marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit a list of 13 dates that you and your spouse can realistically (financially, child care, travel, work concerns, etc.) go on for the next quarter.

Homework:

1. Read chapter seven of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *Communication, Key to Your Marriage* by Norman Wright
3. Research and recommend a Christian Divorce Prevention Program with an explanation of the program and why you believe you can use this program in your ministry or church.

Lesson 7 - Communication is the Secret to Marriage Enrichment.

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your sixth marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit your Christian Divorce Prevention Program

Homework:

1. Read chapter eight of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty of Sexual Love* by Tim Lahaye
3. Turn in a list of 10 Christian Internet websites dealing specifically with sexual issues in Christian Marriage with a brief description of each.

Lesson 8- The Act of Marriage is Marriage Enrichment.

Due This Week:

1. Turn in report of your seventh marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Prepare a list of 10 Christian Internet websites dealing specifically with sexual issues in Christian Marriage with a brief description of each.

Course Requirements

1. Attend 15 hours of class and participate in the discussion time.
2. Pass a short quiz at the end of each class (for credit students only).
3. Complete reading and writing assignments required between classes.
4. Complete one case study during the term.
5. Become familiar with readings related to the course theme(s).
6. Pass the final comprehensive exam (for credit students only).
7. Read 500 pages from the course Bibliography.

Grading Basics

1. Student participation: One point may be given (15%) for each class hour attended.
2. Quizzes: One point (8%) for each class quiz passed.
3. Student homework: Two points may be given (15%) for each homework assignment for the 8 lessons.
4. Student readings: Bachelor level students will read 300 extra pages and write a 3-page book report. Master level students will read 500 pages and write a 5-page book report. Doctoral level students will read 5000 pages and present an annotated bibliography (20%).
5. Student case study: The writer of the course will assign a case study, which puts knowledge into action (17%).
6. Student exam: The student will demonstrate his/her understanding of the main concepts and content of the course materials (25%).

Course Objective

This course will enhance the marriage of the student and teach them valuable tools to enhance the marriages of the people in their congregations and ministries. It will also be useful for them in marriage counseling settings.

The student will be able to conclude this course with several very useful plans and tools for ministry in Marriage Enrichment through Pastoral ministry and Christian counseling.

Chapter One

What is Marriage?

'When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.... When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.' – C.S. Lewis

Marriage is a Divine Institution

Genesis 2:18-23

¹⁸ *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* ¹⁹ *Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.* ²⁰ *So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.* ²¹ *So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.* ²² *Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

²³ *The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, for she was taken out of man.'"(1).*

God Himself Originated Marriage

God created marriage before the fall into sin and it was good. He created it in a sinless world, with sinless people, as a sinless institution. He created it for His glory and for our good. He created it to be wonderful and fulfilling and joyous and passionate and with every other blessing for a happy life in relationship with another. Because of this wonderful part of creation, marriage was and is the context for living out the fullness of God's goodness (2).

There was only one thing that was not good in the perfect Garden of Eden as God created it. It was the only thing that God declared to be "not good". Genesis 2:18 says that God Himself declared that it was not good for man to be alone, and in Genesis 2:20-22 God made Eve because there was no suitable helper for Adam. Now Adam had God – what else could he possibly need? Surely Adam was not alone if he had the Lord. Surely God was Adam's perfect helper! But God created Adam with a need for another human to complete him. This was God's plan. And it was God's plan to build society on married couples and not on individuals. Adam needed Eve, and society needs couples that have become one in marriage. It is an exciting scene to imagine as God conducts the first wedding ceremony and gives away the bride - ²² *Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

God created man to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever" (3). God is so awesomely wonderful and glorious that He decided to create humans so that they could enjoy Him and His love and grace for them. In other words, God created us to find pleasure and joy in Him and in His mighty creative works. But showing Adam the glorious creation was not enough enjoyment to satisfy God's plan. Revealing to Adam the other living creatures was not enough. The last item on God's list to give man the ability to enjoy Him fully was the creation of marriage and the oneness it brings between two people. Marriage then was created by God, it was created perfect, it was created to bless two people and complete them, it was created for man's pleasure and fulfillment, it was created to cause man to enjoy God to the fullest and it was good.

God created marriage as the way in which men and women could most fully enjoy His glory. Marriage is the closest picture of what it means to have a personal, intimate, trusting relationship with the Lord. All throughout the Scriptures God arranges and uses marriages to give us a visual demonstration of what relationship with Him is like – both in good times and in bad times. We see this in the book Song of Solomon that speaks about the intimacies of marriage

and allegorically about God and His people. We also see this in Ephesians 5:31-32 where marriage is clearly described as a picture of the relationship between Christ and His church - *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."* *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* The joys of marriage are meant to reflect the glory of God, who created marriage and us, and the glory of His church.

It is interesting that many researchers report that most married men who lose their spouse to divorce or death will re-marry again fairly quickly. There are two basic reasons among many others. First, men function better when they are married than when they are single. Men who have never been married would disagree with this for the most part, however, it is *very* unusual for a man who was married once to remain unmarried for the rest of his life. This is even true of quite elderly men. Men 65 years old and older were more likely to remarry than men 20 to 24 years old (4). Every church I have ever served has had men who lived in nursing homes, in advanced age, who got married to a woman their own age. Happily married men, desire to be married – even if the marriage ultimately ended in divorce. This obviously means the marriage was not happy at the end, but there was a time when the marriage was happy and men wish to repeat that happiness.

Secondly, men that have been happily married, when their wife dies, begin looking for another happy marriage very quickly after their current marriage ends. Children and extended family frequently see this as a betrayal of the first spouse, but it is actually a compliment to them. It is a testimony to the husband's love and appreciation for the previous spouse and relationship and a desire to repeat that blessed experience.

Fully enjoying God's glory through marriage is also why living together, divorce, pre-marital sex, adultery, pornography, etc. are all wrong in addition to the harm they bring to the individuals involved. They take the picture of a beautiful relationship with Christ, which reflects His glory and makes that picture ugly and broken. It gives a picture to the world of a relationship with God that is false and evil.

Interestingly enough, God affirmed and sanctified marriage again after the fall. Even though marriage was no longer perfect and those who enter into this relationship were no longer sinless, the Lord God made clear that marriage was still His plan for mankind and that He would build society upon this primary relationship. This is the second act of grace that God gives His people after the fall. In the first act of grace the Lord gives the promise of salvation through the Messiah and in the second He does not take away the marriage relationship as part of the punishment for sin, as well He could have. Rather he affirmed it. Before the fall He tells us - ²⁴*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh".* After the fall into sin - because people were now unable to perfectly enjoy this marriage relationship, God says - ¹⁶*To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."* And here in the punishment decree of God on Adam and Eve is the first usage of the word "husband" and it's the Lord who uses it. The concept of husbands and wives comes from the Lord as He confirms the continuation of marriage.

After the fall God says that marriage will no longer be easy and perfect. We will have to work at it. Because of sin we will quickly lose our desire to work at it. But marriage still exists, it is still part of God's plan and it is still the basic unit of society. To help us in the work of marriage therefore, God instilled in us a deep desire and longing for our spouses, and this gives us the impetus to persevere in our marriages, in spite of sin. God established marriage as the foundation of society and He intended for it to continue till the end of time.

The idea of working in and on our relationships seems at best foreign to us and at worst it seems odious. There is a young couple where I work who are dating. They are having some relationship problems and they came to talk to me about them. I spoke with him alone and told him that relationships take work. His response was “I am not ready for that idea!” The problem is that if relationships take work then all our romanticized ideas of love, romance, sex, passion and marriage lose their spontaneity. And romance without spontaneity and unplanned emotional responses seems to make the relationship too matter-of-fact. I pray the rest of this book will show all of these ideas to be untrue. What we must understand is that while marriage takes work and planning and decision-making, it brings many rewards and blessings - the greatest of which is a closer and more fulfilling walk with Jesus Christ.

Additionally, God also affirmed that marriage would have to be redeemed by the Messiah, just as men and women would have to be. After God gave Adam and Eve their punishments, and after He promised redemption through the Messiah in Genesis 3:15, He then made for them garments of skin. Here He is visually demonstrating that because of sin a sacrifice will be needed. Here God sacrificed innocent animals to clothe the guilt and shame that Adam and Eve were feeling in their bodies because of their disobedience and betrayal. So also, the innocent Lamb of God would be slain as a sacrifice to clothe us in His righteousness to cover and overcome the guilt and shame that we experience before our Holy Lord. God’s re-affirmation of marriage after the fall included the first sacrifice for sin. This is how important the Lord God feels marriage is (5).

Finally, when God created the marriage relationship of Adam & Eve, He intended it to be the pattern for all marriages for all time (v. 24). ²⁴ *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh.* After the Covenant of works ended, God instituted the Covenant of Grace, based on the work of the coming Messiah, alone, as the basis for our salvation and relationship with Him. One result of this institution is the continuation of marriage as a blessing for His people. Proverbs 2:17 says, ¹² *Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,* ¹⁶ *It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words,* ¹⁷ *who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.* ¹⁸ *For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead.* Malachi 2:14 says, ¹⁴ *You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.* “Covenant” is the term God uses to describe the marriage relationship.

God Himself Provided the Rules for Marriage

Marriage is to be between one man and one woman. There are no other relationships spoken of or even hinted of in Scripture. At no time did God ever change this pattern or definition. The only definition of marriage that exists is “one man and one woman united together as one entity”. All other ideas concerning relationships of any kind cannot be defined as marriage. Anything added to this definition of marriage or taken away from this definition causes the Covenant of Marriage to cease to exist as defined by God – not that the marriage ends but it is no longer what God designed. Matthew 19:5, 6 repeats this statement when it says - ⁵ *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?* ⁶ *So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."*

This is such an important Scriptural teaching that it is imperative that we do not make a belief about marriage based on what is not said. Homosexuality is clearly condemned by the Bible. We are agreed on that. However, a female friend of mine stated that there is no verse in the Bible that says that you cannot have more than one wife at a time. This is true in a sense. Perhaps there is no verse that uses these exact words, but every principle of marriage in the Scriptures is designed for and aimed at a marriage in which there are only two people – a man and a woman. And in fact, every account we have of men with multiple wives in Scripture shows

that these men also had many spiritual and emotional struggles and great moral failures in their lives. Nowhere is polygamy taught as an acceptable version of marriage. Even the New Testament Pharisees, in their attempts to trap Jesus base their trap on being married to one person at a time. Because something is not said in a verse does not mean we can build a belief, a teaching or a lifestyle on what is not said in that verse. This is true for this subject but also for any other idea of a marriage relationship that we would like to have. Anything added to this definition of marriage or taken away from this definition causes the Covenant of Marriage to cease to exist as defined by God.

Years ago TV Evangelist Pat Robertson ran for the Presidency of the United States. He ran a very fair and godly campaign. However, when asked why his wife was pregnant when they got married, he made a big mistake. Instead of confessing that this was sin and he was sorry and had repented, he started talking about being betrothed like Mary and Joseph. Before the legal wedding ceremony they were already married in the eyes of God. This was nonsense and the whole world knew it. Now Rev. Robertson is not an evil man for making this sad mistake and it says nothing about his genuine relationship with Christ. However, it did give arguments to young people who decided that they would like to be “betrothed” as well and get an early start on the sexual aspect of marriage. This is something that Youth Pastors had to deal with when this first happened. When we twist the Scriptures we can make marriage be whatever we want it to be. However, the only true and successful marriage is the one that is what God commands it to be!

Marriage, according to God’s definition, is a covenant freely entered into by a man and a woman by which they commit themselves to each other before God, with all its rights, privileges and responsibilities. Marriage gives rights and privileges but it also comes with required responsibilities, duties and faithfulness. More will be explained later in this chapter.

God considers marriage to be permanent. This is almost a foreign concept to our culture and society today, but this is exactly what God planned and created – a permanent relationship between a man and a woman. The idea of divorce, separation or some other arrangement was never part of God’s plan and is still not part of the plan. These are words we should never even have in our vocabulary when it comes to our marriages (6). Matthew 19:1-5 (quoting Genesis 2:24-25) *When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?"*

God Has Given His Reasons for Marriage

Genesis 2:18 says - ¹⁸ *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* Adam had a need that he did not even know he had. How could he? He had nothing to compare it to. Nothing had ever been taken away from him, so he was not missing anything. But as we saw earlier in the Genesis 2, it was God’s plan for Adam to need another human to complete him and share his life with him. This was the only way that Adam would be able to fully enjoy God as God desired for him to do. God created Adam to have a desire to share in the glory of God with another person. Adam’s enjoyment of God would be at its fullest when he was sharing his joy and his life, with another person.

So in Genesis 2:19-20 - God makes Adam aware of his need. ¹⁹ *Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.* ²⁰ *So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.* Through watching the parade of animals and naming them all, Adam became aware that there was no other creature like him. He became

aware that none of the animals were like him or could communicate with him or could share anything with him. He realized that he was alone. It was at that time that God puts him to sleep, created Eve and joins them in marriage (vs. 21-23). God created marriage to fulfill and complete man. God created marriage so that a woman could fill the part of a man's makeup that He, the Lord, had intentionally left empty.

The second reason God has for marriage is for sexual intimacy - ²⁴ *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.* To leave means to sever the primary relationship that a man and woman have with their parents. "Leave" means to leave your past and give yourself 100% to your spouse. It does not mean that you forsake your family and friends, or that you cease to love them. You willingly make these relationships into a secondary place in your life. Willingly making them less important than your spouse and your marriage. You deliberately bring their influences and claims on your life to an end. It means making sure that your spouse is primary in your heart, your decisions and your life (7).

These principles also apply to our children and extended families and sometimes these can be even harder to place into a secondary role. This situation happened to me. We had only had each other for two years when I re-married and the children were in their early teens. There has been some anger, jealousy and resentment towards my wife (their step-mother) from my biological children. The children believed that she should be second to them in all family matters. It hurt me a great deal to see them be hurt and struggling with this issue and I did not handle everything properly. But I shared God's word and God's principle for marriage with them and showed them that God required me to love my wife more than anyone else, including my children. In fact the greatest blessing I could give to my children would be to demonstrate a godly marriage before them. I had already demonstrated a broken and dead marriage, here was an opportunity for them to see a solid, happy and Christ centered marriage. How? By loving my wife above all others, just as God desired and commanded me to do. And in so doing enjoy God more fully through the experience.

To cleave means to totally adhere to your spouse. "Cleave" means to live to love and serve your spouse only. It means you have bonded yourselves together in such a way that to separate would destroy part of you that could not be repaired. The illustration is like two pieces of paper being super glued together. While they are together the papers are stronger than when they were apart. However, if you try to separate them, the papers are torn and cannot be as they were before they were glued together. This is one of the evils of TV and Hollywood divorce. The picture that divorce is just part of life and that there are no serious consequences or scars, is just not true. To cleave means to become and to be only one entity. To cleave means to give all your love and service to your spouse. To cleave means to find joy and true love in loving your spouse, no matter what you receive from your spouse in return.

To become one flesh means sexual union. I Corinthians 7:1-5 tells us that sexual intimacy is to be free, frequent, & fascinating but only within the context of marriage (8). ¹*Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry.* ²*But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.* ³*The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.* ⁴*The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.* ⁵*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.*

Hebrews 13:4 reminds us that the marriage bed is to be undefiled ⁴*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.* And of course, the Song of Solomon is the greatest and most beautifully detailed illustration of romance, marital passion and sexual intimacy in all of scripture and it is

presented as wonderful, exciting, overwhelming and fabulous. It is presented as being pleasing to God – as part of the enjoyment He wants us to find in His goodness and grace and glory.

The third reason God gives for marriage is the procreation of Godly children Genesis 1:28 says ²⁸ *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* Some have spoken of this, as God's gracious privilege in allowing us to co-create a soul and on some level this is true. We are at least the instruments that God uses to create. However, I am a little uncomfortable with this thought in that, while we may be involved biologically in creating a physical body, only the sovereign and divine God gives life, creates a soul and determines its quality and length. I know this may be a distinctive of theological semantics but God did not create "bodies" to rule over creation – He created hearts and minds intended to rule over creation through His worship and through the fulfilling of our purpose on earth – to enjoy Him forever. However, in God's special plan, we do play a role in His creating of a people for Himself.

The Nature of Man and the Nature of Marriage

Romans 6:1-10

¹*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ²By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

⁵*If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. ⁶For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.*

⁸*Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.*

I Corinthians 13:14-18

⁴*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.*

The Nature of Man

Man was made in the image of God. Man fell into sin and is sinful in all his parts. Man's relationship with the Father was completely severed. Therefore, while man may have some will, desires or longings to do good, he does not have any ability to do so. This means that marriage cannot be anything that God has created and planned for it to be, when fallen man enters into it. In order to have a "God planned, God designed, Christ centered" marriage, as defined earlier, the man, the woman and the marriage must be redeemed through faith in Christ alone.

Now there is a "general or common grace" which simply means that our loving and grace-filled Heavenly Father gives good gifts even to those who have no redemptive relationship to Him. There are those who do not know Christ as their Savior and yet who are good and loving people and who have long-term, successful marriages. This is because mankind has been made in the image of God and in His awesome generosity He allows those who do not love Him to experience joy in this life, as do His own children. In other words – marriage is for everyone. God wants people to be married even if they do not love Him. So unbelievers who marry are still doing a good thing and are part of God's plan.

However, these good parts of this earthly life are all the joy that unbelievers will have because for the rest of eternity, they will be totally separated from the Father and the pain of this separation will be all consuming. Though marriage in this life for unbelieving man can be good, the people involved have no access to the resources marriage requires in order to be happy. There is no ultimate cure for the selfishness we inflict on each other without a relationship with Christ and there is no permanent release for the hurt and pain we cause each other without His unconditional love washing over our lives and hearts. Ecclesiastes 9:9 says - *Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun— all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.* Man, woman and marriage all need a Redeemer. That Redeemer can only be the Lord Jesus Christ, the very Son of God.

The Nature of Christian Man

A Christian man, woman and marriage are all sinful. A man and woman who have put their faith in Christ alone for salvation are people who have had the power of sin broken in their lives but are still sinners “saved by grace”. Sin has not been eradicated from their lives or marriage and oftentimes they are controlled by sin, full of selfishness and more interested in having their own needs met, than serving their spouses.

The point is that for a Christian, all of life and marriage is not about the people involved or their desires. It is completely about one’s relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. And because He is in their hearts and marriage they have the joyous freedom to forgive and be forgiven, to struggle against their selfish nature and to see progress every day, to fight against sin and through the infilling power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, have victory over sin. They have the desire to love their spouses unconditionally as their Savior loves them unconditionally and they have the ability to live in grace through Jesus by His Holy Spirit! God’s people have access to the resources of God that marriage requires in order to be happy, fulfilling and permanent in tough times and good.

The Nature of Marriage

Marriage is an ongoing, intimate relationship. It is the most demanding “me-you” relationship there is (9). To succeed it must also be the most unselfish relationship that you can ever experience. This relationship can only be entered into by two people who do so willingly, who do so with a unified purpose, who do so with a desire for happiness and success in their relationship and who do so with the central goal of serving their spouse and working diligently for their happiness.

In other words it requires people who want to be in the relationship with each other exclusively and unselfishly. It requires people who agree that the relationship is worth dedicating their lives too and sacrificing their own desires for. It requires people who are willing to do whatever it takes to make the relationship a success. Otherwise, marriage will be a struggle.

People can have affairs or just live together, but marriage takes commitment of purpose. Anything else is just irresponsible fooling around. Marriage requires unity. The majority of marriages of people who have first lived together end in divorce because the motive for the relationship was a selfish desire for each person’s own personal happiness and freedom. The marriage is then entered into with that same selfishness. The marriage usually has little chance of success – yet by God’s redeeming grace and sovereignty there can be and are exceptions.

Unity requires unconditional love and genuine unselfishness. You cannot be one with someone you have no connection with on a deeper level. Unity requires a single goal for two people and the motivation behind that goal is the deeper connection the two people have together. In marriage unconditional love is the deeper connection that motivates unity and seeks the single goal of a wonderful, passionate marriage between the two people for the glory of God and for enjoyment in God. As sinful humans we are not capable of this, but because of the Holy Spirit

living in us we are able to desire to give this love to our spouse and we are given the ability to give this love partially and to see it grow over the years of our marriage. Growth in this kind of love can only come through Christ and as we grow in Christ and His love we overcome that part of ourselves that is most destructive to a happy and healthy marriage – selfishness.

The marriage relationship is so close and intimate that selfishness cannot be tolerated if the relationship is going to work. When people are worrying over and fighting for their own rights and the meeting of their own needs and desires they will not be spending time serving and ministering to their spouses. The more selfishness there is in a marriage the less pleasure and enjoyment there will be. Selfishness will destroy our marriages and it will not help our needs to be met. Therefore selfishness in marriage cannot be tolerated!

Another reason why selfishness cannot be tolerated is because everything about one person affects the other. Many times one spouse has said to the other – “If you are having a problem get help. Everything is fine for me!” Usually the spouse making the statement is the problem. However it is a fallacy to believe that a marriage partner can have a problem of any kind, in any area of life and not affect the other spouse. Any little thing that comes between a man and his wife is capable of wrenching them apart, and if that is not the case, then it can only be due to the growth of callousness in them (10).

Literally everything about one spouse affects the other for good or bad even if the problems are at work or some other place or activity that your spouse is not involved in directly. If something affects you it will affect your spouse. So when you are practicing selfishness you are hurting your spouse because it is the opposite of what they need and want from you.

But why would you enter into marriage without the desire of unity? Without a common purpose? Why would you enter into a relationship without the desire for unconditional love to be given and received? Why would you enter into marriage being selfish? Why would you enter into a wonderful relationship with no belief in the value of your spouse? We don't of course. What we do not do is guard our hearts. We enter into marriage thinking of how much joy and pleasure and happiness we will be receiving for the rest of our lives. In so doing, we enter into marriage very naive, because marriage will not provide these things for us – only Christ can give us these things.

We enter into marriage believing it is all about us and meeting our needs. We enter into marriage not realizing that to achieve joy, pleasure and happiness – we must do the unselfish work of serving our spouse. We don't begin our marriages thinking of our spouses as treasures given to us by God. We do not think of them as a great and wonderful gift presented to us by God Himself and because we do not, it is easy for us to think about ourselves only and what we deserve to receive from our spouses. We will talk about this more in later chapters, but until we place higher value on our spouses than we do on ourselves, selfishness will always be a major problem in our marriages. Marriage is first about Jesus Christ our God and second about our spouse and third about us. As we will repeat many times in this book we must love God above all else and love our neighbors as ourselves and our spouse is our closest neighbor. To have successful marriages, we must fully understand how God has designed marriage to be.

The Nature of People Is Not Changed At Their Wedding Ceremony

Genesis 3:16-19

¹⁶ *To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”*

¹⁷ *To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

It is vitally important for us to understand that on the day that we stand up in a ceremony and say “I do” we will be and will remain the exact same people that we were before. There will be many changes that the Holy Spirit will work in us throughout our lives, but we must not confuse these kinds of changes with what we hope we can make our spouses become once we are married and have them all to ourselves. We need to understand that God does not promise that marriage will make our spouses better or that they will become what we want them to be; that all their bad habits will go away; that they will love us in the way we want to be loved. These things are not part of marriage. When you get married, your spouse will always be what he or she was at that moment unless the Holy Spirit intervenes. So you cannot look back down the years and feel as though you were somehow cheated or deceived. Those feelings only mean that you deceived yourself at the time of your wedding.

I knew two couples that were dating. In one, the woman tried to change the man’s appearance. She bought him new clothes, gave him a new hairstyle, pierced his ear, etc. She molded him into the public perception that she wanted him to have when he was with her. The other couple was the same in reverse. The man wanted his girl friend to wear a different style of clothing and even told her what style of clothing to wear. Now this does not seem very serious and in fact the “changers” would say they were being kind and helpful to their dates. However, this is in reality a not so subtle sign of one person trying to change the other. And if you try to change your spouse on one level you will do it on another. I spoke to these friends and showed them what they were doing. They disagreed until I asked them “don’t you love this person enough to accept them just they way they are? Maybe this is a sign you are with the wrong person.” Neither agreed and maybe I was wrong in their cases but the principle is true. We must expect our spouse to be who they are on our wedding day forever and we do not have the right to try and change them. Do we love them as they are? If not we should not marry them.

There is nothing unfair about this. We do not have the right to make our spouses become something they are not and probably never were. Why enter into the marriage relationship with someone that you are essentially dissatisfied with and will have to spend years making them change to become what you want? The truth is if we were able to change our spouses and make them into what we want, they would become unacceptable to us. How can I be emotionally attached to someone who has the same personality as me? Two identical people do not make the one whole that God planned. It takes two personalities with all their differences coming together in Christ to complete each other and make the whole. How can I trust that my spouse would ever be honest with me, if she would change to become whatever I want her to be?

However, this does not mean that we do not have to work at our marriages. We have to work very hard at creating unity and love in our marriages. Part of the punishment for sin is that we will have to work for the good things in life. Eve had to work in pain to bear children, Adam had to work and toil in hard labor to provide for him and his family. The blessings of a happy marriage will also require work, pain and hard labor. But God decreed that children are to be a blessing. Working for those we love is a blessing and our marriages are a blessing. In other words, all the hard work is worth it! We will have to work hard in this life to acquire those things worth having but the blessings of these gifts from God will far outweigh the work required to receive them.

It is interesting to note that in our society today we do not value highly those things that cost us nothing. In a sense, the more we work on our marriages, the more enriched and joyous they will become. The more we work at becoming one with our spouses, the more clearly we see and understand the glory of God. The more we work at serving our spouses the more precious our spouses seem to us. The more we work at falling deeper in love with our spouses all through life, the more we understand the great love that our Heavenly Father has given to us.

Chapter One Questions

- 1- There are only two things that exist in the world today that were created by God before the fall of man into sin – what are they?
- 2- Why was marriage so important? Why did God create it before sin came into the world? Why does God consider marriage so vital?
- 3- What does marriage truly accomplish?
- 4- How does marriage bring the fullest enjoyment of God and life?
- 5- How can two sinful humans make a marriage relationship anything other than sinful? What has to happen in order to make marriage work?
- 6- What was the second act of grace that God gave to Adam and Eve at the Fall?
- 7- What is the other reason for God’s creation of marriage?
- 8- What does “leave and cleave” mean?
- 9- What is the nature of marriage?
- 10- What is the main characteristic of people that cannot be tolerated in a happy marriage? What is the marriage tie that motivates unity in marriage?
- 11- What two things did God decree to Adam and Eve after the fall concerning what will cause a marriage to work in the fullest sense?

Chapter One Footnotes

- 1 – Bible: *Holy Bible, New International Version*.
- 2- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. p. 22.
- 3- Banner of Truth Trust. *The Shorter Catechism*, p. 1.
- 4- U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics of the United States, annual; and National Vital Statistics Reports (NVSr) (formerly Monthly Vital Statistics Report); and unpublished data.
- 5- Chuck Holliday. *Sonship Conference Manual*, p. 3.
- 6- H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key To Your Marriage*. p. 43.
- 8- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. p. 4.
- 9- Jay Adams. *Christian Living in the Home*. p. 5.
- 10- *Ibid.* p. 5.
- 11- Mike Mason. *The Mystery of Marriage*. p. 113.

Chapter Two

What is Marriage Enrichment?

'When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now.... When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.' - English apologist C.S. Lewis in a letter - 1952

Marriage Enrichment is Living for Christ in Your Marriage

Marriage Enrichment, like all of life, is about the Lord Jesus Christ and is for the glory of God. Marriage, as we have seen, exists so that man can most fully glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Marriage Enrichment then, is practiced to make our marriages successful and is done for the glory of the Lord and for our good.

Having a good and healthy marriage brings glory to God and reveals Him to the world (1). Therefore we commit ourselves to enriching our marriages throughout all of life in order for the Lord to accomplish His purposes in our society and in our lives for His glory and our good. Ultimately God does marriage enrichment through us and so it is important to remember that the bigger your view of God is the bigger your view of marriage will be. The bigger your view of God is the more you will enjoy the work of marriage enrichment.

Jesus sets us free to enjoy our work in marriage. This is because of God's grace. God enables us to have wonderful marriages for His glory and honor. This is called "glorifying God and enjoying Him forever." Living the Christian life and participating in spiritual warfare includes creating, working for and fighting for a Christ-centered, permanent and passionately happy marriage.

Marriage Enrichment is About Serving Your Spouse

When asked by Jesus to summarize the law, an expert in the law said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.*" *You have answered correctly,*" Jesus said, "*Do this and you will live.*" (Luke 10:27). The New Testament speaks of a Rabbi named Hillel. One of the Jewish legends concerning Hillel is that he was once asked to explain all the information that we now call the Pentateuch, the 600 laws of the Scriptures in the length of time that a man can stand on one leg. Hillel said, "*That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary*" (2).

Following this example let me summarize what Marriage Enrichment is and what this book is about. ***Marriage Enrichment is opening your spouse's spirit to God and to you*** (3). Everything else in this book is commentary.

Since I am more verbose than the Lord Jesus or the Rabbi Hillel, let me add to my summary the fact that opening your spouse's spirit is done by 1) *you* experiencing personal growth in your relationship with the Lord Jesus, 2) *you* experiencing personal growth in a lifestyle of God's grace, 3) *your* desire to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, 4) *your* attitude of total honor of and for your spouse (including unconditional love and pre-forgiveness), and 5) *your* good communication with your spouse. Every part of marriage is affected by and made successful through these five aspects of ***opening your spouse's spirit***. And the key to understanding is that successful marriage enrichment is based on *your* doing what *you* need to do and *not making* your spouse do anything. If both spouses have this attitude of unselfishly serving each other through marriage enrichment, all the goals of God for your marriage will be accomplished! You will glorify God and enjoy Him fully and forever!

Marriage Enrichment Is An Attitude Of Total Commitment

While Marriage Enrichment is indeed a way of life, it is essentially an attitude. It is an attitude of total commitment. It is a commitment that says – we will never get divorced, we will never have a bad or even a cold marriage. Why? Because I am committed to you and I am committed to doing whatever it takes to have a good marriage with you. When things go wrong, when crisis happens, when times are tough, when the marriage starts to go sour, I am totally committed to doing whatever it takes to fix whatever is wrong so that our marriage will remain solid, become happy and exciting again and last forever!

This kind of commitment provides safety and security to the marriage and opens your spouse's spirit. This is the attitude of Marriage Enrichment. No matter what state your marriage is in today, if you have this attitude, if you have made this commitment, then your marriage can be enriched and made whole and well and happy, either for the first time or once again, through Jesus Christ.

You cannot practice Marriage Enrichment occasionally. You can't just work on your marriage sometimes. You can't be committed only when it's convenient. You can't start doing marriage enrichment only when your marriage gets tough. It is an attitude of intense and unwavering commitment based on your joyous and sincere promise to God and your spouse to never quit, never give up, never leave. Marriage Enrichment is a full time, 24-7 commitment. It is not both partners giving 50% and meeting each other half way. Rather it is both spouses giving 100% and going all the way regardless of what their spouse is able to do and give (4).

The Total Commitment of Marriage is Unconditional Love

In addition, this attitude of total commitment is based on unconditional love. This commitment has no conditions on it. Marriage is a commitment that is not based on how your spouse performs or how much or how little they may deserve to receive from you. In fact it is not based on anything to do with your spouse at all. It is based on your attitude and your decision to be in love with your spouse. This is a commitment that brings safety and security to your spouse and opens their spirit because there is never any doubt that the relationship will last forever.

I was at church with some friends and one young woman was talking about the work that she and her husband have had to do over the years to make the marriage work. Just sort of in passing in her story she said "...after all, we decided when we got married that only death would end the marriage so we have to do what it takes by..." This is exactly the total commitment of unconditional love that must be made to have the attitude of marriage enrichment.

How Can We Keep This Commitment?

When I was in seminary my Pastor told me about a wedding he once performed. He was in the waiting room with the groom ready to go into the sanctuary. The bride however was in his secretary's office on the phone with a friend who could not attend the ceremony. With the church secretary sitting right there, the soon to be bride said, "I am hopeful everything will work out. But if it doesn't I will just get a divorce and try again with someone else."

Another sad example is the lack of marriage commitment that is generally found among our movie stars, politicians, other highly public figures and even among many of our religious leaders. Good, happy, strong marriages always take the back seat to sex techniques in our magazines and financial security in our books and our own personal happiness in our movies. The idea of working on a relationship until it is good seems to be a foreign concept.

As Christians, we know better. We know that we, like everyone else, have no chance of making our marriages work unless Jesus Christ is in the middle of them. We are not better than anyone else. We are not smarter or more faithful or less likely to be tempted or less desiring of

happy, stress free lives. We are just as quick to fall into lust and sexual sins and just as quick to pull the trigger on a divorce as anyone else.

What makes us different and able to keep our marriages enriched has nothing to do with us at all. Marriage enrichment and the ability to make this unselfish commitment of unconditional love have to do with Jesus Christ and with Him alone. The fact that He lives within us makes all His promises possible in our lives and for our marriages. Just as in our salvation and in our sanctification Jesus Himself does all the work in our marriages so that we can *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.”* He does through us what it takes to have a happy and solid marriage.

God Has Equipped Us To Keep This Commitment

The good news is that God has equipped us to be able to make and keep this kind of commitment. He has given us His Word to guide and instruct us, and His Holy Spirit to fill us and enable us, and His unconditional love, forgiveness and grace to motivate us. We are able to make this kind of total commitment because both men and women are gifted by God to do it.

Women are equipped by God to deeply desire a solid, romantic, safe and permanent relationship and they are gifted to know what one is. Men are equipped and gifted to actually do the work involved to create this kind of Christ-centered, glorious relationship (5). However, God also planned for men and women to partner together to make this relationship happen. How? Women, who know what this kind of relationship is, need to share this understanding of a wonderful marriage with their husbands. And men are to then create this kind of relationship based on the plan their wives reveal to them through the Holy Spirit. They make this relationship together. A woman’s strength is to know what the relationship should be. A man’s strength is to be able to create this relationship by conquering and over coming all barriers to it.

Marriage Enrichment is Being A Team To Create A Joyous Marriage

There is a wonderful commercial on TV. A young, pretty woman is in a shoe store. She selects three pairs of shoes that are very similar (black dress heels) but are noticeably different (heels are shaped differently; one has small dots on it, etc.). She then shows all three of the shoes to her boyfriend at once and asks him which one he likes the best. When the camera shows us what he is seeing, all three shoes look identical to him in every way. Then we flash back to his face and his has an expression of panic because he knows that 1) he does not see any differences, 2) he doesn’t care what her shoes look like and 3) whatever he says will be wrong. He is being asked to give an opinion about something that he has no opinion on whatsoever.

Men and women can look at the same thing – such as their marriage – and see that one thing completely and absolutely differently. That is why it takes both of them to make the marriage enriched and permanent. The woman knows in her spirit what will make a good marriage and the man can make it happen (6). One is not dumb or the other more superior. Rather they are gifted by God in different areas. They are a loving couple, a team, who together will make a great marriage. But they have to understand the fact that they will approach everything differently. They have to understand that they must help and support each other. They must have the attitude of total commitment to each other so that they can be one, so that they can work together and create together and so that they can trust each other, and have this successful, loving relationship. They must desire to use their gifts to open their spouse’s spirit to God and to each other.

Marriage Enrichment Is About Your Personal Relationship With Jesus

This is a truth in every aspect of our lives. If God does not exist why care about anything except our own personal safety and happiness? And in that context a good marriage is to be

desired only because it makes us happy. A difficult marriage is to be jettisoned as quickly as possible to move on for greater happiness.

However, if the Lord Jesus Christ is real and alive and if He loves me and lives in my heart then the happiness I long for in my marriage and the rest of life can only come through Him. C.S. Lewis said *“I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me”* (7). In other words God's plan for my happiness and my marriage is already in place. My prayers help me to see His plan and be able to rejoice in it. So when I struggle at work or fight with my neighbor or lose a loved one to death or deal with a troubled child or go through a crisis or have a marriage that is dull and lifeless, I need to pray. I need to go to Jesus and say “Lord open my eyes to see Your plan for me right now, in the midst of this situation, and show me how to have Your peace, the leading of Your Holy Spirit and Your joy and the wisdom to follow You.

For the Christian, all of life and any happiness in it is based on the person of Jesus Christ. I am listening to the Gaither Homecoming Singers in the background and they are singing a song about Jesus that goes *“It's not about what you've done; it's about who you are. If you had never done any miracles you would still be God”* (8). This is the truth of our lives. All of life for the Christian is about Jesus. Not about what He has done in history or in our lives, but about who He is. He is the one who loves us unconditionally and He is the one who makes us right with the Heavenly Father. Everything in life, for the Christian, begins with Jesus, including our marriages and marriage enrichment. We base all our decisions on Him and His will for us as we understand it, and on the direction we receive from the Scriptures and on the guidance from His Holy Spirit that He has placed in our hearts.

We must seek His will and plan and guidance in all things in our lives, big and small, important and trivial, fun or hard. We look to Jesus first and foremost in all our decision-making. This must be especially true in our marriage because marriage enrichment begins with our own personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The first and single most important work we do in keeping our marriages alive and well and healthy and happy and permanent is the work we do in growing in the depth of our relationship to our Savior Jesus. So the first step in making your marriage great is to ask yourself, “How close am I to Jesus?” For the Christian this is the foundation for all marriage enrichment.

At the second church I served, Covenant Presbyterian in Hammond, Indiana, I had the privilege of attending the 50th wedding anniversary of one of the previous pastors, Rev. John Eastwood, who had served that church for 50 years. The testimony of his wife to her husband's spiritual faithfulness was astounding. She said on their wedding night she had gotten into bed and he came around knelt down by her side of the bed. Then he prayed for her and their marriage and their future together in the service of the Lord. Then she said “And he has done that every single night of our entire marriage.” Incredible! Every night for 50 years this man knelt by his wife's bedside and prayed! Is it any wonder we were celebrating 50 years of marriage with them? God used this man in great ways in the pastoral ministry as well. He served as a Chaplain in the Navy in WWII, he served his first church for 5 years, he served Covenant church for 50 years and while I was serving at Covenant, at 88 years of age he planted a brand new church. At this writing he and his wife still live in their own home, he is still driving and he is still doing ministry. For Pastor Eastwood, Jesus came first. His marriage is about Jesus. His family is about Jesus. His ministry is about Jesus. His life is about Jesus. I would give anything to say this was how I had lived my life, but I cannot. However, I can live my life this way from today forward. And I can begin this lifestyle of “Jesus living” with my marriage.

How Do We Grow In Our Relationship With Jesus?

The first prayer to ask after you wedding ceremony is “Lord, please keep me close to you so I can have a great marriage!” And when we are first married and marital bliss is the norm of

the day we need to pray “Lord, help me to get closer to you!” And when things get hard in life – as they most certainly will – the prayer is “Lord help me to get closer to you!” It is easy for us to run to the Lord in times of trouble and we should. He is there for us and gives us His love and strength and help. But it is much harder to run to the Lord when things are good. Its not that it’s hard to do, rather it’s hard for us to remember to do it. As a result there are times when we are growing in our faith and our closeness with Christ and times when we are not. So a crucial aspect of marriage enrichment is to be working as diligently as possible to be growing in our faith as constantly and consistently as possible.

How do we do that? How do we consistently grow in our relationship to Jesus? This is not a secret but it is a discipline. That is why so many Christian writers entitle their books “The Spiritual Disciplines” or some variation of it. These are habits we must create and practice in order to grow in our faith. The Scriptures tells us what these disciplines are:

Love the Lord - " *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*"; and, *Love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Luke 10:28)

Study the Scriptures – “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*” (I Timothy 3:15, 16)

Pray without Ceasing – “*Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* (I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

Confess our Sins – to God - “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (I John 1:9) **and to one another** - “*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* (James 5:16)

Worship together – “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. do not forsake gathering together* (Hebrews 10:25)

Participate in the Sacraments – “*And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*” (I Corinthians 11:24-26)

Love one another – “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* (John 13:34)

Love and Serve our Families - *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 2:10), You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13), “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:25-28) and more.*

Marriage Enrichment Is Learning To Live In God’s Grace

The second aspect of creating and keeping a solid and successful marriage is for you to be experiencing personal growth in a lifestyle of God’s grace. In order for us to understand

marriage enrichment we must first understand grace. In order to understand grace, we need to understand ourselves and our relationship to the Heavenly Father.

I John 1

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete. ⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

What is our relationship with our Heavenly Father? What is the lifestyle of grace? It is knowing with complete confidence that all our sins are forgiven. Knowing that we have a right relationship with our Heavenly Father that will never change. That our God is not waiting for us to mess up so He can strike us down but rather that He is rejoicing in us and over us every day. He is never disappointed in us. He is never angry with us. We have 100% of His love every moment of our existence. He is always in love with us.

The lifestyle of grace is one in which we work diligently to live lives that please Jesus Christ. Not because we have to. Not because we will lose our salvation if we do not. Not because we will be punished if we do not. All punishment of God's children for sin was put on Christ on the cross – so there is no punishment left to give us. No, the only reason for living the Christian life, the only reason to labor diligently in marriage enrichment, the only motivation for living a life pleasing to Jesus is to demonstrate to Him that we are madly and desperately in love with Him and we want Him to know it and we want everyone who knows us to know it! The lifestyle of grace is a lifestyle of unreserved love for Jesus Christ.

The lifestyle of grace is a lifestyle of responsible freedom. We are free to rejoice in our completed salvation. We are free to live in the total forgiveness of our sins. We are free to enjoy the unconditional love of our Savior Jesus. We are free from all guilt, from all shame, from all punishment. We are free to release all the baggage of life that we bring to our marriages. We are free to begin life anew when we marry and break any cycles of pain that may have been in the homes we are leaving.

We are free to love others, to forgive others, to leave others alone and let them be free. We are free to stop demanding our own way. We are free to refuse other people's behavior and attitudes as the source of our happiness. We are free to have no need to criticize others – especially our spouses. We are free not to attack others or to complain against others. We are free to enjoy our relationship with Jesus and we are free to leave everyone else alone – including our spouses. We are free to let them enjoy their relationship with Jesus, even if it manifests itself in ways that are different from us.

We are free to enjoy our marriages to the fullest possible extent. We are free to allow our spouses to be who they are without desiring them to become what we want them to be. We are free to be passionately in love with our spouses without shame over our past sins. We are free to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We are free to love and serve our spouses. We are free to find our total fulfillment in Jesus so that when our spouse fails to fulfill us we are not only still fulfilled but are free to continue to love our spouses in their failure.

A lifestyle of grace is one in which we are free to tell people about the love of Jesus. We are free to not condemn people who are in sin. We are free to not scare people out of hell but rather to love them into the kingdom. A lifestyle of grace allows us to live in the freedom of Jesus Christ and that allows us to give this same grace to others – especially our spouse - every day.

Living In Grace Is Being Right With Our Heavenly Father

Our Heavenly Father has always had only one plan for those who knew Him through Jesus - "A Right and Holy Relationship with Him." We do not have to struggle with false modesty. We are indeed, guilty sinners who should have shame, guilt, low self-esteem and a poor self-image. The sad thing is that we do not realize that – in the words of Sonship – we are *so much worse* than we think we are! If we knew how bad we really were as compared to how our Lord created us, we would curl up in a ball and die of shame. To complicate the matter, we are also seriously unaware that the grace and love of Jesus Christ is *so much greater* than we can ever possibly imagine. And the tragedy is that we do not clearly comprehend how much this love and grace has done for us and how completely our sins have been forgiven (9).

The Lord declares that we are His “beloved”. What this means is that Jesus - the Son of Man - The Ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven - the Messiah loves you! The Heavenly Father sings in delight over you and He wants to remind you that the Christian Life is a *joy filled life!* When you feel that your life and your marriage are burdens, when you come to feel that ache in your spirit that says your marriage is nothing more than a fact of life for you, - then you have lost, or at least forgotten, the true meaning and effects of grace. The Christian life is a life of unconditional love. Because we are precious and valuable to the Father, because we have been given a new name by Jesus, and because we can live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit, we are able to live this life of love. We need to remember once again the great, great love of our God, our Savior and our friend, our beloved Lord Jesus!

How glorious! What a concept! He loves us! He loves us when we’re good. He loves us even when we’re bad. He loves us when we worship. He loves us even when we sin. This is what grace is. That’s what unconditional love is. It’s love that has no conditions. It’s love that has no strings attached. It’s love that has no performance standards. This is a love that all of us are hungry for and that our world is desperate for and that can only be found in one place – the Lord Jesus Christ! As Christians, if we are ever going to have joy filled lives and marriages, must understand and accept this truth. We must receive it into our hearts and we must rejoice in it every day. And marriage enrichment means that as you live in this grace you help your spouse to live in it also.

We serve a God who is in control. We serve a God who loves us unconditionally. We serve a God who does not do things the way the world does or the way we expect Him to. He is not over come by our sins and weaknesses nor is He willing to submit himself to our desires for Him and His work. Rather, He gives us His grace and tells us that He loves us and tells us to trust Him and to accept His love and to give His unconditional love to our spouses.

The Gospel of the Unconditional Love of Jesus our dear Lord is the only way in which we will ever be able to have joy filled, Christian lives and enriched marriages. God has always only had one plan and that was to have a right relationship with Him through Jesus Christ His son. God has always had only one way in which Jesus could make that right relationship happen and that was through the all encompassing forgiveness gained for us by Jesus on the cross.

God has always only had one way in which he desired for us to live in our lives and marriages and that was in the lifestyle of grace and not a lifestyle of law and legalism. And God has always only had one source of power - Unconditional love in which we would be able to live in the lifestyle of grace. And altogether when we accept God's one and only plan we are able to

live and experience *joy filled lives and marriages*. We must be growing in God's grace every day.

Conclusion

Marriage Enrichment is done by constantly growing in your relationship with Jesus all your life, by living in grace all your life, and learning what work needs to be done in order to keep your marriage alive and fresh. It is also a life long study to learn how to keep marriage joyous as we change and our spouse changes over the years. However, all of this should be the work and study of your favorite subject and everything you learn and practice will bring reward upon reward. So much so that our hearts sing as each day brings another opportunity to enjoy the gift of love we have to give to our spouse, the gift of love in opening the spirit of our spouse, the gift of love we receive from our spouse and the greater enjoyment of our God.

Does this sound too good to be true? Something we never can truly experience? Something you read in a book by people who live sheltered lives? You are right. Everything in this chapter is truth that we cannot experience...apart from Jesus Christ. God promises happy marriages for us, but only He can make them that way. He does not only promise long marriages. He does not promise marriages that last, but in which the people are emotionally divorced. He promises marriages full of joy and love and companionship and sex and passion and tenderness and glory and much more – but they are only available through Him and in Him and for His glory. Marriage does not change us but Jesus, through the Holy Spirit sanctifies us in marriage. When our hearts and our marriages are centered on Christ alone, we are able to glorify God through the enjoyment of His unconditional love and grace. This is Marriage Enrichment!

Chapter Two Questions

- 1- What is Marriage Enrichment about?
- 2- What is the summery of Marriage Enrichment?
- 3- What is Marriage Enrichment essentially?
- 4- What is the total commitment of marriage?
- 5- What makes us able to keep our marriages enriched?
- 6- How Has God Equipped a woman To Keep This Commitment?
- 7- How has God equipped a man to keep this commitment?
- 8- How Do We Grow In Our Relationship With Jesus?
- 9- To understand marriage enrichment what must we first understand?
- 10- When our hearts and our marriages are centered on Christ alone, we are able to do what?

Chapter Two Footnotes

- 1- Kevin & Karen Miller. – *More Than You and Me*, p. 14.
- 2- Rabbi Hillel. *Babylonian Talmud*, tractate Shabbat 31a.
- 3- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships*. Video Tape #3.
- 4- Jay Adams. *Christian Living in the Home*. p. 51.
- 5- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships*. Video Tape #3.
- 6- *Ibid*.
- 7- C.S. Lewis. *Shadowlands*. DVD, 1993.
- 8- The Gaithers Homecoming Friends. *Whispering Hope*. Video Tape.
- 9- Chuck Holliday. *Sonship Manual*. P.4.

Chapter Three

Why Do We Need To Practice Marriage Enrichment?

Because of Our Marriage Practices and Attitudes Today

When God created marriage in the Garden of Eden before sin came into the world, He created it to glorify Himself and be a means that man would use to enable to him to enjoy God fully forever. Marriage is the relationship that most mirrors the Garden of Eden and reflects our desire for true and lasting intimacy (1). Marriage is a blessing to people because it brings them closer to God and brings them pleasure and joy. Marriage is a blessing to society because it is the foundation upon which all the values and morals that are necessary for a healthy society find their institution and meaning.

Marriages do not grow because we stay in them a long time. Growth is intentional and demanding. Marriage enrichment takes time, energy and work. Growth only happens because it is desired (2). Marriage enrichment therefore, means to take your marriage and to intentionally enrich it, that is, to make it better, to make it all it can be and ought to be. Whenever our marriages are not bringing glory to God they need to be enriched. Whenever our marriages do not cause us to enjoy God fully they need to be enriched. Whenever our marriages do not cause us to grow in our faith, they need to be enriched. Whenever our marriages do not bring us pleasure and joy, they need to be enriched. Our marriages do not need to be ended or destroyed over these things, but rather they need to be repaired or “enriched” to make them once again what God intended for them to be. Because married people are sinners and, because marriage is in the context of a sinful world today, it needs to be enriched all the time. Marriage enrichment is something we must work at every day of our lives until Jesus returns, because our marriages fail in their purpose, abilities, joys and passions unless we do.

God restored our relationship with Him so that it would be joyful, full of praise, and with a glorious purpose. He also created and redeemed our marriages to be joyful, full of praise, and with a glorious purpose. It is to be full of happiness and joy. It is to be wonderful and if it is boring and routine then we are in sin. We need to be consistently practicing marriage enrichment because it is the work we do of putting happiness, pleasure and joy into our marriages.

It is the norm of our culture today that marriage is not permanent, that it is not necessary, that, even though it has some good points and meets some needs, marriage is optional and primarily a way for each of us to have our own needs met. Over 50 % of all marriages end in divorce. Most Americans are married more than once. 60% of all second marriages end in divorce. Marriage is no longer considered sacred or important in our culture today. Marriage today exists only for the purpose of bringing happiness to the individual and can be ended when there is no happiness for at least one of the individuals involved. Marriage is not two people becoming one; rather it is two individuals using each other to be happy. It is a temporary option only.

We need to practice marriage enrichment because of...

The Humanization of Marriage

Another way of saying this is that our culture and society have “humanized” marriage. By that I mean that our culture has reduced marriage from a holy gift of God to us to the menial tool for human happiness. To illustrate what I mean let me use the Da Vinci Code phenomena.

The Da Vinci Code has creatively, and in a popular way, opened the door for people to question the existence of God and the truth of the Scriptures. According to George Barna the Christian pollster, *“the Da Vinci Code has been read “cover to cover” by roughly 45 million adults in the U.S. – that’s one out of every five adults (20%). That makes it the most widely read book with a spiritual theme, other than the Bible, to have penetrated American homes”*(3).

He goes on to say that over 2 million people have said that this book has changed their religious beliefs and that *“any book that alters one or more theological views among two million people is not to be dismissed lightly. That’s more people than will change any of their beliefs as a result of exposure to the teaching offered at all of the nation’s Christian churches combined during a typical week.* He also stated that studies have shown that movies have greater “stickiness” with information than do print materials, making the movie even more influential than the book in terms of long-term impact on people’s spiritual development.

The Da Vinci Code is a book of compete fiction about Jesus Christ based on scurrilous research at best and yet it has changed the theological views of over 2 million people. Our culture, through its media in all areas, has made it socially acceptable to give credibility to the research of this book. *This was not intended to elevate the Davinci Code to the level of the holy, but rather to lower the Holy Scriptures to nothing more than human history.* In fact, the predominate message was that the Scriptures as historical writings were at worst inaccurate and at best open to historical interpretation and re-writing. So whether Jesus was God or whether he was married with children or anything else you say about Jesus, it must all be taken with equal possibility for truth.

It becomes more and more a part of our culture’s collective conscious and belief system that God and the things of God are not truth nor are they relevant to our lives today. We not only eliminate God but all His teachings. This includes those teachings which concern the sanctity of marriage, the worth and value of marriage, marriage as the foundational base of society and the belief that true happiness is found in a long term, monogamous, deeply intimate relationship.

As society rejects God it rejects His teaching for true and lasting happiness in this life. It becomes acceptable to question the truth of the existence of God and the value of Christianity, the church and her teachings. It has become acceptable to declare marriage to be an invention of man. Thus, man can also change it or cast it off as it suits his desires.

We also need to practice marriage enrichment today because of...

Society's Attack On Marriage

On the popular NCIS TV program one leading character declares that the idea of "death do us part" was an invention of cavemen who only lived 25 or 30 years and so marriage only lasted 4 to 6 years any way. This discourse had nothing to do with the show. Why was it there? Who knows, but these statements, with no context in the show, are made in almost every aspect of our societies' media. It is indoctrination.

The humanization of marriage has destroyed marriage as the foundational building block of society as God created it to be (Chapter 1). The individual, not the couple, is now the basic unit of society and marriage has been replaced with the "right to happiness" of the individual, however the individual may define it, as the goal of society. Society is now focused on the individual and his rights and desires alone.

G.K. Chesterton said "*We do not censor the media, the media censors us. It does not allow the good to be seen but only its view of what is bad in life. Why? Because the bad is unusual and therefore to be reported. No newspaper reports on the number of good and happy marriages or how many men did not cheat on their wives*"(4).

Our society seeks to censor our desire and need to make a commitment of unconditional love because it is not based on our own personal happiness and therefore is essentially unfair. Our society tells us that, we not only *cannot* make such a commitment as marriage requires, based on unconditional love, but that we *should not* make such an unfair, restrictive commitment.

Our society today is telling us that what we have called marriage, as defined by God, is a false and even harmful belief. If there is a God He would never want people to be unhappy. Therefore, marriage must be however we define it that will bring the greatest happiness to the people involved. In other words, marriage is two people using each other to find personal happiness. If it does not succeed, the person is free to move on to someone else. This search for happiness does not have to include marriage at all. Two people can use each other whether they are married or not.

In my days as a hippie in New England we thought it was anti-establishment to live together so we did it. Not that I did personally, but I would have if the opportunity had presented itself, because we wanted to be as different from our parents and their morals and values as possible. We were wrong and immature and very misinformed as the AIDS epidemic has proven, but even in our rebellion we still acknowledged a right and moral way to live. We even acknowledged a true God - we just didn't like Him and all the rules our parents told us He insisted on in order to be loved by Him.

But who would have thought that the Congress of the United States would consider legislation to define what marriage is? Who would have ever thought that California and Massachusetts would break the Federal Law and allow gay people to marry – only to have those marriages revoked? Congressional legislation on marriage definitions was requested this week. It has already appeared before the Supreme Court of the nation. It is staggering to believe that in our world and culture today, marriage is simply an option. What is marriage? Who can be married? Who defines what marriage

is? Things we have taken for granted since Adam and Eve has become so controversial that political governments – not God and His church – are being asked to define and decide the issues. This means that no matter what the outcome of the political decision, it will be different than what God intended. At the very least, it is now politically correct to question marriage - God's foundation for society – even for those who profess to believe in God.

In addition to the attack on marriage by the gay community, the economics of marriage have been a destructive force. Until recently married couples paid more taxes than single people. It was called by the public as the marriage penalty tax. Why were we to be punished financially for getting married? Much legislative work has occurred on this and changes have been made in recent years.

Additionally, with divorce so prevalent, people are finding themselves in financial turmoil. Many couples are discovering that it is more cost effective and financially profitable to simply live together than to get married in America today. One couple I know lost their jobs and were literally unable to feed their children. The husband “deserted” his wife and moved out of the home making her immediately eligible for welfare, food stamps and help with medical insurance for the children. Several couples I know personally could not pay their bills if they got married even with their combined salaries. In order not to lose child support and alimony payments these couples chose to live together instead of marrying.

Even our immigration laws work against marriage. I have a friend who was willing to pay \$2000.00 to a man she barely knew to marry her so she could stay in the United States. She had lived here for 15 years, raised her children, worked, paid taxes, hired a lawyer and tried to immigrate. At the end of 15 years her request was denied and she was to be deported.

On the other hand, with the current immigration climate of fear of terrorism and fear of job loss by citizens, people are being deported or denied legal status. Soon they will be forced to leave the country leaving behind spouses married here and children born here. No matter what the reasons or the intent; our country is involved in the destruction of marriage and the family. *This is why we need Marriage Enrichment today!*

We also need to practice marriage enrichment today because of...

The Church's Silence On Marriage

The Christian bookstores of today are filled to overflowing with books, videos and teaching materials on marriage and love and romance. There are a large number of speakers who will come and present marriage conferences. So many, in fact, that there is actually competition among them. There are so many Christian Marriage Counselors in Orlando, Florida alone that the average cost of Christian counseling is \$90.00 an hour and new Christian counselors simply cannot make it on their own – they must join with existing counseling ministries. In other words, resources of all kinds for enriching Christian marriages are available to all of us but most of them are outside the church!

The question is – why are there so many resources? Why aren't these resources available in our churches? It is because Christian marriages are in just as much trouble as

non-Christian marriages and we don't know what to do about it. It is because the church is not doing a good job of addressing the needs of our marriages today. In every church I have served I conducted regular classes, Bible Studies and home fellowship groups on marriage enrichment and the classes were always full. Christians want their marriages to work. They are hungry to know God's plan for marriage and are willing to do the work it takes to have a good marriage but their churches are not addressing the issue. Why? Because we just assume that Christian people who know Christ personally automatically know how to have a successful Christian marriage and the truth is we simply do not.

Is this because churches do not care? No, but it is a symptom of what is killing the church today. According to George Barna, 70 churches a week close in America because they become so small in membership that they cannot afford to stay open. Since 9/11 in America all charitable giving, either to church or any other charitable organization, has dropped off so significantly that many are closing and many are struggling to stay alive. They are addressing the immediate needs of their people. They have to choose where to spend their resources. They just can't teach everything. They choose not to give their resources to those areas of life that they believe their people have under control or at least know what to do about.

Sadly, the church still believes that if two Christians get married and seek to have a Christ-centered marriage then the marriage will just work. This is the equivalent of saying that love will solve all problems. It is simply not true. We tease newlyweds who think that "love conquers all", that being in love will automatically meet every need. Yet we seem to always be surprised at Christian marriages in trouble. We act as though we truly believe that Christians should automatically know how to do this. It just isn't true!

Stephen Spielberg has started the Shoah Foundation, which is designed to get the life stories of all the holocaust victims before they pass away and their stories are lost. Those who remain are only numbered in the thousands now and soon they will all be gone. Tom Brokaw and others have done the same thing for WWII Veterans who are dying at over 1,000 per day. Why do they care so much about these people? Because these people are the last generation of those who shaped our society and with their passing we are losing most of what we have always believed and done and acted on in the western world. The church is also seeking to do this. The church spends the vast majority of her time teaching the one truth of Christ in a style that shaped our nation 50 or 100 years ago. Yet in all three examples the time has passed. The world is different, it has changed, it will never be the same again and we cannot change that. We must bring the Christian faith to today's world in a relevant way without compromising the message of the good news of saving faith in Christ alone.

The answer is not to regress to the past, but to take God's truth into the world of today. The generation of young people in the world today is over 73 million, the largest generation in history. It is also the most spiritual generation in history. It is hungry to know and believe in the supernatural. It is totally convinced that there is more to their lives than just this physical world. Yet this generation is only 3% Christian (5). It is searching for God but does not believe that the church or Christians or Christianity can show them the one true God. There is a generation of people who do not believe that Christianity can show them the answer to life.

The church believes that people know how to have happy marriages. Yet 50% of all Christian marriages end in divorce (6). Our grandparents knew about and believed in marriage. So much so that no matter what the state of their marriages were they stayed together. However, a large majority of our baby boomer parents were divorced. Most of our children do not know anyone whose parents are not divorced. The church is against divorce as it should be and yet 50% of our population is divorced. What should the church do – accept divorce as an inevitable fact of life? No! The church must teach how to have successful marriages! Being a Christian is not the only information we need in order to have happy and permanent marriages! *This is why we need Marriage Enrichment today!*

We also need to practice marriage enrichment today because of...

Our Own Selfishness

Many years ago, between churches, I worked the night shift at Disney World. After discovering I was a minister my co-workers began to come to me for marriage advice. Their stories were so sad. “How do I deal with my wife?” “My wife is always mad because I drink too much”; “My wife knows I have cheated on her several times. What can I do?” “My wife is mad at me because all I do since getting out of jail is party or fight.” “What can I do?” It is no surprise how these relationships turned out.

These were people who desired what they wanted. Their desires were the most important. They wanted happiness, not marriage or relationships, but only happiness. If the marriage could give them happiness ok, but if not – then move on or cheat or do whatever. These were what I call commitment free relationships. Many people today prefer these. That way if the relationship doesn’t work out they were already prepared, ready and able to move on.

Like God Himself, marriage comes with a built in abhorrence of self-centeredness, which is selfishness (7). The marriage relationship is so close and intimate that selfishness cannot be tolerated if the relationship is going to work. And yet most of us enter into marriage thinking only about what we are going to get out of it; our own happiness, our own desires, our own fulfillment. We enter into marriage believing that this person we are marrying is our soul mate, the one who knows us best, the one who will love us forever – no matter what we do, our best friend. All of these beliefs and many others are totally false. They are based on a brief courtship in which both people show the person they wish to be to the other. We do not know who we really are until years after we have been married. It is no wonder that the divorce rate is so high. Our spouse, our marriage, our whatever can never make us happy or fulfill us, and they can never meet all our needs or desires. And in fact – they were never intended to and are not supposed to!! By the time we find this out we believe our only option is divorce.

Yes we make an effort. We tell our spouse everything they are doing wrong. We try to show them how to meet our needs. We try to tell them what they could do to make us happy. But it never seems to work. Some try longer and harder than others, but usually it ends up in the same place. They may even go to some sort of counseling. Ultimately though, couples end up divorcing. If they are Christians they go to their pastor to explain how their marriage cannot possibly work and to get his blessing on their divorce. I do not know how many times I have told couples that I will not bless their

divorce but will work with them to restore their marriage. Not one couple has ever taken me up on my offer.

Does this mean that we are to enter into marriage with no concern or care for our needs and desires and fulfillment? Absolutely! That is exactly what we are supposed to do! Our spouses and our marriages do not have the ability to meet our needs and fulfill our desires – even if they desperately want to. Only Jesus Christ Himself can do that. Marriage is the tool that God uses to complete us and to fulfill us, but He alone is the one who can make it happen.

To enter into marriage successfully, you must enter into it in the same way that you enter into salvation. You come to Jesus because you are in love with Him and you want to serve Him all the days of your life. You come into marriage because you have chosen to be in love with your spouse and you want to serve them all the days of your life. Marriage is a relationship that you enter into in order that you can have the joy and privilege and fulfillment of serving one very special person for the rest of your life. When both people enter into marriage with that same desire, the marriage will be a success. *This is why we need Marriage Enrichment today.*

We also need to practice marriage enrichment today because of...

Our Fears in Life

The largest segment of society who gets tattooed is between 20 and 35. Obviously others get them but the majority of people who get them are in this age bracket. The number one reason why people in this group say they get a tattoo is because it is the only thing in their lives that is permanent. How sad! By age 35 the majority of the people in our nation have learned that nothing lasts – including their relationships. How tragic that the only thing they can know for sure will always be with them is their tattoo. Their god will not be with them, their families will not be with them, their spouses will not be with them, nothing will last forever. We see our fear in the thinking of our world today – nothing lasts.

We see fear in the fact that we are a disposable society including people. We see this in the Foster Care system of our nation and the many children in the system who are lost, abused, and even killed (According to WZ88 Christian Radio Station in Orlando, Florida there are over 49,000 children lost or missing in the State of Florida alone!). We see this in the ever-growing numbers of fatherless homes, single parent homes, and grandparent led homes. We see this in the growing problems of the homeless in our country. We see this in the fact that tens of thousands of children in America today are going without food and how thousands are dying of starvation. We see this in the terrorism of today that says people are totally disposable if it will gain some political or religious purpose. Nothing has value – not even us.

Our marriages are also disposable. In fact many couples begin the divorce process even before the marriage begins. They do this by believing that a marriage is forever but also that it is highly disposable like a car or diaper (7). One couple was on the verge of divorce and they were having a good old screaming match at each other. Finally the woman said “Divorce me if you want to. I will just find another man, marry him and get him to support me.” Her husband was disposable. Her need was to be supported by someone. Which husband who did it was not important. Another couple

had serious problems. The woman was controlling, distant and cold. The husband wanted more warmth and lots more sexual relations but he didn't put in the time to create a loving relationship. She gained control of all the children and shut him out. He found sex outside his marriage and left the family. As long as she had the children, her husband was disposable. As long as he got his sexual needs met, his wife was disposable. Perhaps these are dramatic illustrations that most people do not experience, but we are taught that the marriage relationship is a disposable part of life because our spouses are disposable or at least interchangeable.

We even see our fear in the church, which excludes so many people. Some do it intentionally like the Baptist church in New Hampshire whose pastor wore a revolver in the pulpit and declared that they should go to the Indian reservation and kill all the Native Americans there. Some do it in ignorance like the church in Florida that told the youth pastor not to reach out to the Haitian community because they did not want the Haitians teens at their church because they were too unruly. And there are some churches who do it completely unintentionally by giving the impression to attendees that there is a certain dress code or life style or behavior that is correct and acceptable and anyone not doing this is unacceptable. The message we give is that no one is ever good enough for God or His church or His people.

We even see our fears in the way we think about ourselves. In seminary I went to a mental institution for training in the way to pastor those with mental problems. There was a patient who was a pastor there and they would not give him a Bible. We asked the chaplain about this and he told us that all the man would ever read were the passages on judgment and condemnation and never on forgiveness or salvation and would so depress himself that he became suicidal. He made the Bible function to his own desires! But we all do this in some ways as Christians.

We can put on a facade of health and happiness to everyone except God and ourselves. The two of us are the only ones who know the true state of our heart. Most of us are only too aware of our own sinfulness, weaknesses and failures. Because we are aware of them we live in fear. Even the truth of God's unconditional love, overwhelming grace and total forgiveness does not always take away our fears. I suspect until we are in heaven with Him we will always struggle with fear. I believe that God has forgiven all my sins. I believe that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." But what do I tell myself when I am going through a crisis? What if I am not really in Christ Jesus but have just fooled myself into thinking this? A part of living in a sinful world includes being fearful. If we cannot find a real fear, we will invent one.

If I know what I truly am, then what if my spouse finds out? How can they love me when they know how weak I am, when they discover what a mess I am, when they discover how I have betrayed them in thought, word and deed? How can my marriage survive? Why would they ever stay with me? And we live in fear of losing everything. *This is why we need Marriage Enrichment today!*

Questions for Chapter Three

- 1- God created and redeemed our marriages to be what?
- 2- According to the way our culture practices marriage, why does marriage exist?
- 3- What is the humanization of marriage?
- 4- What is societies attack on marriage?
- 5- Who does society say is the building block of society?
- 6- Why are there so many marriage resources for Christians outside the church today?
- 7- Why are our churches essentially silent on marriage?
- 8- How does our own selfishness hurt our marriages?
- 9- How can our spouse make us happy in our marriage?
- 10- How do our fears affect our marriages?

Footnotes for Chapter Three

- 1- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. p. 17.
- 2- *Ibid.* p. 13.
- 3- George Barna, The Barna Group (Internet). *DaVinci Code Confirms Rather Than Changes People's Religious Views*.
- 4- EWTN (TV). *G.K. Chesterton, Apostle of Common Sense*. 2006.
- 5- Charles Dunahoo, Director, PCA Christian Education Committee. Sermon at 1998 General Assembly.
- 6- Divorce Magazine.com (Internet). *US Divorce Statistics*.
- 7- Mike Mason. *The Mystery of Marriage*. p. 53.

Chapter Four

Marriage Enrichment Begins with Safety

The heart is the epicenter of life and relationships. When the heart feels safe it opens. When the heart feels threatened or afraid it closes. Safety and fear each set into motion chain reactions that lead to different destinations when it comes to marriage. The sense of safety will determine the heart of a couple's marriage. When people feel safe they are naturally inclined to open their hearts and spirits. Intimacy occurs effortlessly and naturally when hearts and spirits open to one another (1).

We have already seen that Marriage Enrichment is an attitude of total commitment. It is an attitude of commitment that says – we will never get divorced, we will never have a bad or even a cold marriage. Why? Because I am committed to you and I am committed to doing whatever it takes to have a good marriage with you. I am totally committed to doing whatever it takes to fix whatever is wrong so that our marriage will remain solid, be happy and exciting again and last forever! This kind of commitment provides safety and security to the marriage. This is a crucial and vital component to a happy and successful marriage.

In addition to this kind of safety however, we must also add the personal “heart safety” of our spouses. This is not just a safe marriage in terms of our attitude of total commitment. But also safe in the sense of our marriage being a place where we can expose our innermost being and that this inner being will be treated with tenderness, love and respect. Agreement with our thoughts, feelings, and statements is not necessary but freedom to open our hearts to one another without suffering a loss of love, respect or value is vital to a happy marriage.

We need to make our marriages the safest place in our lives. This needs to be a place where we protect the hearts of our spouses and where we are totally convinced that our hearts will also be protected. So how do we create a safe marriage and how do we turn an unsafe marriage into a safe one?

Step One Toward a Safe Marriage: *Being Enabled*

The first step is when each person is enabled to become the person God created him or her to be. This happens when we take responsibility for our own behavior and well being. Proverbs 4:23 says, “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*” If we let our emotions and feelings and behavior – essentially our well being – be based on what others say and do toward us then we have become controlled by them. Whatever they want from us is what we give. Whatever they tell us we are, we become. However they want us to behave, we will. We do not really do these things in our hearts of course. In fact we hide our true selves from them out of fear. This is very destructive to us and to our marriages. So it is very important that we understand that we must take charge of our own well being, our own mental, emotional, and spiritual and physical health. It is our job to guard our own hearts, not to give away that responsibility to someone else – not even our spouses.

Personal responsibility occurs when we focus on ourselves and understand what we are supposed to be. If we focus on our spouse and what they are supposed to be and spending our efforts trying to get them to change, we lose our focus and ability to become what God wants us to be. But if we leave our spouse alone and work on ourselves, we will quickly learn the things in our lives and hearts that we can actually control and, if necessary, change or improve.

A good example of this is from Dr. Jay Adams on problem solving in a marriage. He says that most of us have fights and quarrels in our marriage because we are not focusing on the correct thing. When we have a problem we most frequently fight with each other. Dr. Adams says that if we can both take our focus off each other and learn to focus on, attack, and solve the problem together, then we are always at war with our problems and never at war with each other. In other words if we work on the problem – which we can control – and not work on each other – which we cannot control – we will always be a team. Our marriage will be a partnership and they will be safe. It will be the two of us, as a team, against the world and whatever it throws at us (2).

Step Two Toward a Safe Marriage: *Doing the Work*

The first step is to acknowledge and accept the responsibility of caring for ourselves. The second step is to actually do the work of caring for ourselves (3). Caring for ourselves means being filled with God's love and provisions in all aspects of our being. To do the work of caring for ourselves we must ask the Lord to show us ourselves. Why? First, because this is the prayer that God almost always answers for us. Secondly, His answer is so wonderful! "Let me tell you how God answers that prayer," says Steve Brown. "He shows you how much you are loved. He shows you His love – a love that is absolute, unconditional, and without any requirement that you do anything to justify that love. After that - and only after that - does God show you the stuff you need to know about who you really are. You can handle any truth when you know you are loved and valued"(4). By the way, so can your spouse!

As mentioned above, caring for ourselves means being filled with God's love and provisions in all aspects of our being. It means that we stop looking to our spouse to fulfill us. That is God's job and no matter how much our spouse may want to or try to, they just simply cannot satisfy us. No matter how much we may want them to – they cannot. When we look to our spouses to satisfy us, we place a burden on them and on our relationship that they cannot bear. We set them up to fail.

Caring for ourselves allow us to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever". Caring for ourselves comes from loving the Lord with our whole being. This allows us to be filled with His love and grace at all times and to be able to love our spouse from the abundance of God's love within us. Since God is the source of love we must be filled with His love over and over again. If we have His love but do not give it to anyone, it will dry up in our hearts. If we give His love to others but we do not receive any love in return we become empty. Therefore it is important to take care of ourselves by turning to God and constantly being refilled with His love. This way our heart stays full. We always have love – God's love – to give. Taking care of ourselves is healthy for us. Giving love to our spouse is good for us and for them. So taking care of ourselves is very good for our

marriages. Because this makes us spiritually healthy we are more able to provide a safe place for spouses to flourish.

A healthy, long-term marriage is one in which both partners are looking to God to be the fulfillment of their lives. Then they actually get fulfilled and then share their blessings with each other and through their marriage to the rest of the world. This cycle can only take place when we are taking responsibility to care for our own hearts and then doing the work it takes to open our hearts to receive from God, His love. Then we can respond to the needs and desires of our spouse.

Let me warn you that as Christians we have the tendency to think that living this way is very selfish. That looking after ourselves is just self-centeredness. But in fact it is just the opposite. The more of God's love you have the more you have to give away. The more you give away, the more you are serving God and your spouse. Jesus says in John 10:10 "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*" He wants us to be able to give out of our abundance and not from a love that is getting smaller and smaller all the time.

Years ago our oldest son was in some trouble and we were very heartsick. My wife and I met with our good friend Kenny Crosswhite and he told us the illustration of the bucket, which, at that time, we had never heard before. Basically the bucket is our lives and the water in it is God's love. As we live our lives, we pour out some of God's love to others. But also, because of the cares and trials of life, our bucket gets holes in it and love drains out. Some of these holes can be repaired and some cannot. So the only way to keep our life full of God's love is to be putting love into our lives faster than it is pouring or draining out of us. The only way we will have enough love to give to others, especially our spouses is if the spigot of God's love is open all the way and pouring directly into our bucket. Then, no matter how many holes life puts in us or how much love we give away, we are always full of His love and always able to give it away. This is how we are able to give out of our abundance and not from a love that is getting smaller all the time.

Step Three Toward a Safe Marriage: *Ministering to Our Spouse's Feelings*

When we take care of our well being and are filled with God's love we are able to then minister to our spouses in the most effective way. When we look to God for our fulfillment then we do not expect our spouses to fulfill us and we can instead minister to our spouses with our whole hearts. We can seek to understand, encourage and assist our spouse in managing their needs by caring deeply about their feelings as they seek to become the person God created them to be.

The key here is to genuinely care about the feelings of our spouse. The way we practice this is through emotional communication. What Dr. Smalley calls "Heart Talk". The best communication takes place when both people believe that they are being understood and that their feelings matter. When we are caring about our spouse's feelings it is another way of saying we care about their heart – their well being.

Frequently our communication gets bogged down in details, on the issue of who is right or wrong, whose fault something is or the story of what really happened. When we

focus on these kinds of things we are distracted from true communication. Instead of serving the heart of our spouse, we are trying to win the discussion. And when strong emotions are involved we often become defensive and we act as though we were enemies instead of spouses. As Dr. Adams said above, we must attack the problem or issue and not each other. The best way to do this is to make sure the feelings of your spouse really matter to you. Then whether or not you agree with your spouse or not, the way they feel is a fact and the truth of their feelings is important to you. Therefore, you handle those feelings with God's love and acceptance.

In emotional conversation the goal is the same as the description: to fully understand one another on an emotional level. Once we believe that our feelings are not only understood but that they matter, we then have a desire to cooperate in the conversation and become more relaxed. Then we become more likely to care about the feelings of our spouse and seek to minister to their needs. *Healthy relationships work at building a foundation of trust so each person has room to be who they are and feel how they feel. They know fundamentally that they will be respected, understood and cared for. They are confident that they will not be steamrolled, judged or rejected* (5).

Step Four Toward a Safe Marriage: *Ministering to Our Marriages*

When we look to God alone to fulfill us and we are filled with his love then we are constantly striving to be the best that we can be, we are striving to assist our spouses to become all that God created them to be and we are doing everything within our power to make our marriage partnership successful.

It is really important to remember that as a partnership there is no such thing as a win-lose outcome. Married partners either both win or both lose in any given situation. When we take adversarial positions against each other we find ourselves locked in a power struggle. Being in a power struggle as adversaries sets up a hopeless situation. When we understand this it will be unacceptable for either partner to leave the conversation feeling as though they have lost, because if one loses, the partnership loses.

In order for us to be able to make sure that there are no losers in our partnership or in our conversations we must define what it means to win. Winning must be defined as *finding a solution that both parties feel good about*. It cannot be about getting our own way. This always leads to being adversaries and attacking each other instead of the subject. It does not matter what the solution is or who thought of it. It only matters that both partners feel good about the outcome chosen. Philippians 2:2-4 says "*then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*"

The vision for our marriages is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. *When we embrace the purpose of marriage as a means by which God can reflect His image there is so much hope beyond the daily grind* (6). This can only be done with the unity and partnership of the two people in the marriage. It is not our differences that cause us problems in marriage. Rather it is how we deal with those differences as partners. When we have taken care of ourselves, cared for our spouse's feelings, and win over all

differences together, the marriage is strengthened and enriched and joyous and full of God's love and grace.

Step Five Toward a Safe Marriage: *Respecting Boundaries*

By boundaries here we mean two things: 1) We need to receive respect from others and 2) we need to receive respect from ourselves. Here is what I mean. Others, specifically our spouses, should treat us as separate people with our own likes and dislikes, feelings, hopes and taste in things. Also, we need to feel strong enough to tell others, specifically our spouses, when they are making us feel as though we do not have these things when we are with them (7). We also need to be giving respect to our spouses and supporting them and cooperating with them as they seek to give themselves respect.

A marriage is made up of two individuals. These two individuals have to become a genuine team, a true partnership. This cannot happen if one or both of the spouses are trying to make the other just like them. It is worse trying to make the spouse do things the way that they want them to do them. The quickest way to close the spirit of your spouse is to make them believe, if only subconsciously, that there is something about their hopes and feelings and tastes that is somehow less than yours. That they should do things your way, that everyone would just be happier if they could just do things the way you do. Your spouse will begin to feel unhappy about themselves, about their marriage and about you.

You can disrespect your spouse in many ways but the two basic ways are by barging into their lives and "bowling them over" with the force and power of your words, in essence, forcing them to do what you want. Or you can also do this by manipulating the person through guilt or a reward system or by lowering his or her own self-esteem. These are horrible ways to treat your spouse and in fact these actions steal your spouse's dignity and their identity as a person. It will wound their spirit and rob a marriage of all its joy, passion and life.

Another way of stating that we need to respect our spouse's boundaries is by understanding that we need to allow our spouse to have the freedom to tell us how far we can go into their lives. *"It's basically a matter of asking permission before crossing someone else's boundaries (entering their heart space) and then being willing to accept the answer you're given, even if it's not the one you wanted. (This principle may seem obvious, but for many it is not practiced.)"* (8). The point is that you do not invade someone's space and then begin demanding something from him or her, no matter what the subject or issue is. Rather you must find a respectful way to deal with your issues as a couple.

Asking permission to cross into your spouses space or cross his or her boundaries is crucial in establishing safety trust and respect in the relationship. But so is being able to hear "no" or "not now" with grace and patience. In order to have this kind of respectful and loving building of marital safety we must respect ourselves enough not to assume the worst and get angry when we do not get our own way. When my wife says "I don't want to discuss this right now" I have to respect myself enough to be able to not take that answer as a sign of personal rejection and become hurt or angry. We need to be

able to see the conversation as a singular incident and not drag in excessive baggage from previous encounters (9).

A recent encounter my wife and I had recently went something like this. “Can I talk to you about something right now?” I asked.

“What do you want to talk about?” she asked. (It was at the end of the day after we had both come home from work and we were both tired. She wanted more information before she decided if she would give me permission to cross her boundaries, i.e. - enter her “heart space”. She needed to know if she was too tired to discuss whatever this was.)

“I want to talk about our nephew coming to live with us for a year. I need to call him and respond to his request.” I replied.

“No.” she said pleasantly, “I do not want to talk about this now.” (Essential, this *was* too big and important of an issue for her to discuss right now. She was too tired. This was not a simple issue for her or us. However, she was calm and pleasant and didn’t say no to the issue, just to the discussion’s timing – now was not a good time.)

Now I could have been upset that she would not allow me to discuss this with her. But as I started to feel frustrated I knew I was only feeling that way because I was also tired, not because she had rejected me. If I had forced the issue we would have had a big argument. She would have been upset with me for forcing her and I would know that whatever answers I received from her was just her giving me what I wanted. I have done this to her in the past and hurt her and our relationship. By God’s grace, as I am growing in my marriage, I am doing better at this. So I did not allow myself to make this into an issue. My response was “Ok. We’ll talk about it later when we are feeling more rested.” She was very appreciative and we went on to have dinner and a restful and pleasant evening together.

Because this was an important issue within a time frame, the issue needed to be resolved. Since I had respected her boundaries in the previous conversation with a loving result, and she had felt free to tell me “not now” and her response had been pleasant, I felt comfortable bringing up the subject again at a later time in the week. For the same reasons, she felt a willingness to discuss the subject with me and resolve the issue together. She felt respected and felt safe to tell me “no” as well as safe to work on the issue with me, knowing I would value and appreciate her feelings on the matter. Instead of this situation becoming a negative issue between us, it was simply a subject that we resolved peacefully and lovingly together.

Now on the other side of the coin are those who do not respect themselves. Another way of saying this is that these are the people who give in to everything. They must come to understand that love does not always give in to every request, especially to intimidation! You have the ability and the responsibility to say no to someone who is manipulating you (crossing your boundaries, invading your space) in any way.

Those of you on this side of the issue know that saying no will make waves and cause an unhappiness all its own. This is very uncomfortable and potentially unpleasant.

Yet if you do not say no and stand your ground, then your boundaries of respect will be violated. You may put up with this for a long time but you will resent it and that resentment will grow and fester until one day it explodes. This is what happens when you do not respect yourself and stand your ground. As you stand your ground do so in love and gentleness and tenderness and understanding – but remain firm. Speak with respect for your spouse and for your self - but remain firm. Be reasonable – but remain firm.

My wife is a very quiet and reserved person. I am loud and noisy and boisterous with tendencies toward exaggeration about everything. When we were dating I used to tease her for being so quiet because I was amazed that she wanted to be part of my very loud family. But by God's grace she did and we were married. At first I mistook quietness for compliance and frequently tried to get her to do what I wanted by powerfully overwhelming her. In the early days this often worked. But whenever it did, she was hurt that I did that to her, she was mad at herself for letting it happen, and the result was always that neither of us got what we wanted or were happy with the result.

Years ago we were at a Christian camp. It was the weekend between camps and it was two days for the camp counselors and their spouses. On that Sunday I had been asked to lead the Lord's Supper at the end of the service. That morning, at breakfast however, I forced her to discuss an issue concerning our daughter in front of several other counselors. She tried many ways to get me to stop and I ignored them all. Only when she left the room in tears did I realize how I had just violated all her boundaries and closed her spirit to me. She went for a walk and did not come back until after the worship service and after I had served communion. She was not going to take communion from me that morning and believe me, my hypocrisy, as a Christian was more powerfully revealed to me as I served the Lord's Supper that day.

I had to learn to make our marriage a safe place for her. I had to learn to honor her feelings and to respect her boundaries – her heart space. She had to learn to remain firm when I pushed and demanded. Over the years now she has learned to be vocal and I have learned to quiet down a bit (not much but some). More importantly, she has learned to be firm and insist that I respect her boundaries, while I have learned to not let things get to the place where she has to be firm. When I respect her boundaries the situation never becomes an incident. And guess what? As I have respected and honored her, she has given me that same respect and honor and our relationship has grown and flourished – Praise the Lord!

Conclusion

Making your marriage safe is the foundation you build on to enrich your marriage. Marriage enrichment takes a lot of work and effort and energy. You do all this work to get a positive response from your spouse toward God and toward you. But you will only get this response when your marriage is a place of safety, when it is a place of love, tenderness, and respect and not a battlefield. People who feel manipulated do not respond well to those who do this to them. But they flourish when they know that their thoughts, ideas, feelings, emotions and needs are respected and appreciated and treated with loving concern.

Questions for Chapter Four

- 1- What must be added to the concept of total marriage commitment to make the hearts of our spouse open up to us?
- 2- The first step toward a safe marriage is...
- 3- The second step toward a safe marriage is...
- 4- The third step toward a safe marriage is...
- 5- The fourth step toward a safe marriage is...
- 6- The definition of winning in a marital partnership conversation is...
- 7- The fifth step toward a safe marriage is...
- 8- Respecting each other's boundaries means two things. These are...
- 9- You can overcome your spouse's boundaries by...
- 10- People who struggle with receiving respect from themselves must come to understand that...

Footnotes for Chapter Four

- 1- Greg Smalley and Robert Paul. *The DNA of Relationships for Couples*. p.318.
- 2- Jay Adams. *Christian Living in the Home*. p. 34.
- 3- Greg Smalley and Robert Paul. *The DNA of Relationships for Couples*. p.322.
- 4- Steve Brown. *A Scandalous Freedom. The Radical Nature of the Gospel*. p. 104.
- 5- *Ibid.* p. 326.
- 6- *Ibid.* p. 328.
- 7- Gary Smalley. *Making Love Last Forever*. P.91
- 8- *Ibid.* p. 95
- 9- *Ibid.*

Chapter Five

Marriage Enrichment Is Serving Our Spouses

In order to desire to give ourselves for another and to serve them we must understand their value before God and therefore to us.

Genesis 2:21-22

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

I John 4:7-16

*⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love.** ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

¹³We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God Our Heavenly Father, Has Chosen Your Spouse for You

An important step in understanding and believing the value your spouse has, is to understand the sovereignty of God over us and the love of God for us. It is God Himself who has created our spouse for us and brought them to us in marriage, just as He created Eve for Adam and united them in marriage. Our Spouse is a special gift from God to us personally. They are a treasure to be cherished with the highest value. They are to be second in our lives to no one other than the Lord Jesus. They are a living example of God's grace to us and His joy in us.

If God is not the one who has planned our marriages and planned whom we will marry then marriage is just a "crap shoot". "Crap" is a dice game. A shooter is the person rolling the dice. "It's a crap shoot" is said, usually with a sense of mild scorn (if it's somebody else) or resignation (if it's yourself) about the chances of success of a given activity or venture. It says the end result is out of one's hands, that it's left up to chance, and that the odds are probably slightly against you (1).

This is the fallacy of the concept of "falling in love". Falling in love is a "crap shoot". While this is a romantic term that we all use, if we actually believe that love is what we "fall into" when we meet the person we are to marry we are in big trouble. Essentially we are saying that love is an emotional reaction that signals to us the person we are to marry. The problem is that our emotions change and when they do we "fall out of love" and take that as a signal that we are to leave the one we married. What we are saying when we accept these beliefs is that our emotional state determines our happiness in life. Since we all want to be happy we must do whatever makes us "feel" happy – get married or get divorced – whatever. Just feel happy.

Once again, Hollywood offers us the greatest example of this belief. In the news this very day is the story of two celebrities who are getting married. The man is getting married for

the third time. His second marriage was also to a celebrity. They were married for 10 years and had three children. When he was no longer happy (some say because she made more money than him) he divorced his wife, left his family and within months was involved with another celebrity. About a year later he left that celebrity for a much younger celebrity who the man was quite foolish over, going on TV and jumping on couches as an expression of his love for this young woman. The young celebrity quickly became pregnant. Now they are about to be married. These people are working on the assumption that happiness is determined by how they feel. This is not an isolated example. VH1 had a special on TV yesterday called the 101 Greatest Hollywood Breakups. This might have been called “S & G Today – The Whatever it Takes to Feel Happy Show” (2)!

Without a sovereign God, marriage is left up to us – sinful, weak, and lust filled people who are governed by our passions and by our reckless and indiscriminate quest for happiness. We do the best we can without any hope of success and without any guilt over failure. If we can just be happy! Sadly, we do not even know what will make us happy.

On the other hand – having a sovereign God who creates our spouses for us can be just as big a problem to us. A sovereign God means that He created our spouse with us in mind. He knew what we needed, what we wanted, what was best for us, and what would make us everything He wants us to be.

Ok that’s great. But that also means that I have to deal with my spouse as they are. That is, I have to deal with the fact that God has made them the way they are and that God has made them just for me. I have to deal with the fact that they are selfish and have a temper and don’t meet all my needs, that they do not love me the way I want to be loved. I have to deal with the fact that there are times when they are going to be unlovable and even unlikable people. I have to deal with the fact that their appearance is going to change and they are going to be sick. They are going to require things from me that I do not want to give them and need things from me that I do not want to do. And much, much more. Having a sovereign God pick my spouse for me means that I not only have to take what He gives me but I have to learn to like my spouse, love my spouse, work with my spouse, and serve my spouse. A sovereign God does not ask for my opinion, nor does He want my advice or input. He already knows what is really the best for me, what is good for me, what I need to be happy and whole and complete and He gives it to me.

So the *bad news* is that I cannot define what will make me happy because I am incapable of doing that. Nor can I tell God what I want and need because I do not really even know that, so He gives me what He wants to and what He knows is just right for me and I have to take it and receive it with joy and thanksgiving.

But the *great news* is that I cannot define what will make me happy because I am incapable of doing that. My Heavenly Father, who loves me and delights over me, does not leave this extremely important decision up to me. The God who gives me my spouse loves me with such unconditional love that the spouse He has given me was created by Him just for me! God loves me so much that He created a special person just for me. A person to be everything I could ever need, want or desire. A person that He has created to complete me and to fulfill me and to make me whole. A person who would allow me to glorify God and enjoy Him forever in the fullest possible way. My Heavenly Father knows what is best, what is good, what is needed for me and He has given it to me. He has not withheld this blessing from me but has given me this spouse because it brings Him glory and is for my good.

Therefore, since my loving Heavenly Father, my Savior Jesus Christ and my Comforter the Holy Spirit have provided me with my spouse in their great, great love for me, I must treasure my spouse to the highest possible extent and give them all my love forever! I must recognize that they are a gift from God Himself!

I also need to remember that I am a gift to my spouse. This means that I must constantly be evaluating my love for my spouse and asking “how can I live in such a way that my spouse knows that I am a gift to them from God? How can I be used of God to bless my spouse and help them to love and appreciate the Lord even more?” My spouse is a gift that I must delight in – how can I get my spouse to delight in me as a gift from God to them (3)?

Many wives complain that everything in their husband’s life is more important than they are. There is no time for the wife in the husband’s life. He is either at work or in front of the TV or working on the car or hunting or fishing or watching the game with the guys – but there is no room for her. Husbands complain that between work, household chores and the kids there is no room in the wife’s life for them. She is always tired and never interested in spending time with him. We all believe that we are last on our spouse’s list of priorities. That everything else comes before us! And our hearts are broken over this.

The way that I will get my spouse to delight in me as God’s gift to them is to HONOR my spouse and work to open their spirit. The key to understanding and accepting that God has created our spouse just for us and has created us just for our spouse and using that information to make better, stronger, happier, more passionate marriages, is to HONOR your spouse. Honor begins by you believing in your heart and proving with your words and actions that your spouse is number one in your heart and in your life. Honor is something that is lacking in our culture today. Honor means to attach great value or “awe” to a person. It means to be totally amazed and overwhelmed because this extremely special person has agreed to marry you. For some unknown reason, they have decided to be in love with you. The gloriousness of this joyous situation causes you to commit to making this person first in your life and serving them every day for the rest of your life! No one or no activity will ever come before your spouse in your heart or in your time or in your affections (4).

My father-in-law loves to fish. He retired after 30 years when he was 57 just so he could spend winters in Florida fishing and summers in Canada fishing. He invested money in a Winnebago, a big boat, fishing gear, travel money, a mobile home, etc. all to fulfill his dream of non-stop fishing. He has been doing this now for about 20 years. However, all of his plans revolved around his wife being with him. No matter how badly he wanted to fish or travel to a new fishing hole, if she didn’t go with him, he wouldn’t go. And he was never mad or upset about it. Fishing with his wife was the joy of his life. Fishing without her was pointless. He was happy where she was and nowhere else. He is always happy when he is with her. Other fishermen used to get ticked off at him because he would never go fishing with them. He either fished with her or stayed home. Being a tough outdoorsman he could not be sentimental in his responses and tell them how much he loved his wife. He may not have even known himself why he felt the way he did. But his answer always was the same. He said it when she was 18, he said it when she was 50, and he said it when she was in her 70s. He always said – “I want to fish with her because she is so much prettier than all of you.” She was always first in his life and he was happy about that. They both decided to love the other and they both felt loved by the other. He honors her. He feels in “awe” of her. He treasures her. Nothing is more important to him than her. This is factual love, full of emotion, but not based on emotion. This is what we all desire to have. So... what is love that honors and is filled with awe?

The Definition of Love

I John 4:16-21

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 5

¹Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ²This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

In light of the first section above, let me first say that love is not emotionless. It is filled to overflowing with emotions! Exciting, pleasurable, awesome, passionate emotions! However, all these fantastic emotions *flow from love* - they do not create love. This is *really* good news because it means that you can be in love in the fullest sense even when you do not always have the feelings and emotions that characterize love. There are those times when we are so filled with the emotions of love that we almost can't breathe. And there are those times when with no emotions at all, we have the deep security, peace, contentment and satisfaction of being deeply in love. Both when we are in the throws of passion, overwhelmed with emotions and sensory pleasure and when we are at work concentrating on things outside our marriage we can know we are fully and deeply in glorious love with our spouse!

How do we define this love that exists within us so gloriously at all times? I John 4:16 says: *God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.* For us then, the definition of love is whatever God is and whatever He commands us to be and do.

Some of the things God tells us about Himself and about what He wants us to do are: Deuteronomy 7:9 - *To know the Lord, He is faithful, He keeps His covenant of love;* Deuteronomy 10:12 - *Fear the LORD your God, To walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul;* 2 Chronicles 6:14 - *you (God) keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way.* I John 4:18-21 - *There is no fear in love. Whoever loves God must also love his brother.* And of course I Corinthians 13 - the Love Chapter of the New Testament ⁴*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails. ¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.* These are the characteristics of God and of love. In order to truly experience love and to truly love our spouses, we must be striving with all our might, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to make these characteristics of love actual realities in our hearts and minds and lives.

What all this implies is that love, far from being an emotion or feeling, is actually a conscious decision of our will. It is a conscious choice that we make. It is a decision to be like God in so far as living in love is concerned. It is a desire to receive and give love that reflects the Holy God who lives within us and is the very definition of true love.

Love then, is a mental permission that we give to our personalities to allow the emotions and feelings of the decision to be in love, to become part of our being and to characterize who we are and to shape our hearts and marriages. It is the decision, bathed in prayer and led by the Holy Spirit to allow our hearts to give themselves to another. It is the decision on any given day – when no emotions are present or even negative emotions are present to be in love with our spouse.

The ability to make these kinds of decisions over and over and over and over again, every day of our entire lives comes exclusively from our relationship to Jesus Christ. God is love and therefore to have love you must have God. Having God means receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior and being molded by His Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus. To have God in your heart is to be able to love and to live in love now and forever. The glory of God is seen in the glory of His love for us and through us to our spouse – the one that He has given us. Because Christ lives in our hearts we are able to have this kind of love and we are able to give it to our spouses. This is not an unattainable kind of love, but indeed, is available to every believer.

A dear friend of mine lost his wife to illness when he was in his 60s. A year or so later he was getting married to a widow in our church and he came to my office to tell me the news. I was happy for him but wanted him to be careful and so I asked him “do you think you are ready to get married so soon after the death of your wife of 40 years?” He proceeded to tell me of the nature of his wife’s illness, which had started many years earlier as deep, dark overwhelming depression. In truth over half their marriage had been lived in a state of dysfunction and separation – not living in different places – but unable to be one. How could he have stayed with her for so many years? Surely he could not have been happy in this situation. No, he wasn’t always happy, but he told me it was because he chose to love her every day. This was the promise he had made on his wedding day to God and to her and he kept his promise. He was not miserable in life either. God had given him the strength to keep being in love and to be happy in his life and ministry through Christ. He cared for her until she died and then the Lord blessed him with a new marital life. To this day he is very happy. The glory of God was seen in the glory of His love for my friend and through him to his dear wife – the wife that God had given him and in all her dysfunction – the wife that he had honored, treasured and served. Thankfully, God does not always put us in this kind of situation. But in every situation, Christ is the source of our happiness and the Holy Spirit provides us with God’s love to give to our spouses.

What About When Something Goes Wrong?

What about separations and divorces? What about those who stay together in loveless marriages – those who are essentially long term room mates as opposed to loving couples? What about those who are unable to cope with the long-term illness of a spouse? What about those who commit adultery or some other thing that ruins a marriage?

This book is about *marriage enrichment* so I am not going to spend time on these issues as these have to be dealt with when a couple is beyond trying to make their marriage more alive and made in the image of Christ. However, I do want to make three statements.

First, we cannot always understand why things happen to us in life or point to a specific reason for things. Christians commit adultery. They get divorced. They frequently get remarried, which in some Christian circles is just as bad as the divorce. They commit these and other sins. There are no easy answers for these things that are obvious tragedies any more than we can answer why war is part of God’s plan or why the horrors of abortion and child abuse are allowed to even exist. We just don’t know why.

Secondly, sin does not thwart God's perfect will for us, or for His people, or for this whole creation. These sins do not change God's plan for marriage and for the enrichment of His people. While God is grieved over our sins, they do not surprise him, nor do they cause His commands to be changed. The fact that Christians get divorced does not mean that God thinks that divorce is permissible now. It always has been and always will be, an evil thing in the eyes of God. The good news is that in God's mercy and grace, these sins cannot take away our salvation or His love from us. But there are always consequences in this life and in the lives of our loved ones for these marital disasters.

Finally, though things are always complicated and hard to fix, the root of all marriage problems is that we have chosen to stop loving our spouses or at least we have chosen to love them less. Hosea 4:1 says: *Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.*

Likewise, the heart of all restorative marriage counseling, though a great deal of work is necessary, is to find out when and why a person has chosen to stop loving their spouse. When that is discovered, the process of restoration can begin and the marriage can be saved by God's power and grace. Hosea 3:2 says: *The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."*

Zephaniah 3:17 says: *The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.*" Our heavenly Father loves and rejoices over us and He is willing to help us choose to be in love with our spouses. He is willing to help us choose to be in love *again* after we have chosen to stop being in love. Because He is love, He is willing to help us live in love, even when we mess up. He is willing to help us overcome the effects of the hurts, pains and things that we do to each other. Joel 2:13 says: *Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity, even calamities in our marriages.*

Treasuring Our Spouse

We have seen that an important step in treasuring our spouses is to "leave and cleave". We defined that as making all other human relationships take a secondary position in our lives and making the relationship with our spouse the primary one. The first step in treasuring our spouses is to love no one or thing more than we love them. The only exception is our love for Jesus Christ, which must be our foundational love, or we will be incapable of truly loving our spouses.

Another step in treasuring our spouse is to choose to be in love with them and to make that choice every day. But what causes us to want to make this decision? Let's face it – there are some very unusual couples out there. One spouse is gorgeous and is married to a troll – how was the gorgeous one ever attracted to the troll? One spouse is an intellectual and one is average – what do they talk about? One spouse comes from a large, noisy, active, sports loving family and one is the only child of a quiet, sedate, new age family. How can they stay together without one person totally losing their personality to the other? Billy Graham tells the story of a couple he met that were deeply and passionately in love with each other. He was a strong, virile, very handsome man. She was hugely obese. But the man introduced her with obvious pride, love and honor to Billy and all his associates and invited them all to stay in his home while they were in town.

The truth is that none of these things matter at all. At some point in our lives we see something in someone that we find deeply stirring in our hearts and souls. This is not lust because that is easily satisfied and then we move on to someone else. It is not love yet as no decisions have been made. It is simply something that makes us want more. And whatever that thing is, it leads to dating, courtship, engagement and finally to the decision to be in love and then marriage and life together. While all the externals are important, they ultimately make no difference when we are deciding to be in love with someone we hope we will spend the rest of our lives with. These are the things that God uses to bring us together – like He revealed to Adam his need for Eve by causing all the animals to parade before him. It was an means of God to cause Adam to be ready to receive Eve as his wife. So also, those things that initially attract us to each other are the means God uses to cause us to be ready to receive our spouses.

The important question is, “will this something that stirred my heart and soul be powerful enough to help me to continue to choose to be in love with this person for the rest of my life?” That answer is always no. Once Adam received Eve, he was not thinking about the animals and their names any more. That educational tool had served its purpose and was over. So it is for us. Dan Allender in his book *Intimate Allies* tells the story of a couple who thought their attraction to each other was enough. She had everything he wanted and was everything he wanted her to be. He adored her, put her on a pedestal and worshipped her and never thought she did anything wrong. At least for her, this should have been the perfect marriage. After some years however, the very thing that caused her to love him, became the reason why she choose to stop loving him (5). As hard as it is for us to imagine, it is really difficult to be thought of as perfect all the time because it is completely unrealistic and eventually your life becomes void of honesty, truth and genuine emotion.

It is a fact that most couples discover within a relatively short period of time that the very things that attracted them to each other, causes them stress, problems and a lack of love. So it is important to understand that to treasure your spouse you must have more than what initially attracted you to each other in order to desire to continue to choose to be in love. What is that something more?

Ultimately it is God who is love. The secret to treasuring your spouse is to treasure Jesus Christ. 1 John 4:12 says: *No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.* As you treasure Him and grow in love for Him you will be growing in your ability to love others in His love, specifically your spouse. You will be growing in your desire to represent Him through your marriage and you will grow in the joy and pleasure of His unconditional love that you want to extend to all areas of your life, especially your marriage. Jesus responded to the Pharisees in Matthew 22:37 when they asked which is the greatest commandment and said: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. 40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”* After our complete love for God, we are to love our neighbor. Who is our closest neighbor? Our spouse is our closest neighbor.

There are two keys to treasuring our spouse revealed here. First, when we love God with all our heart and soul and mind we will love our spouse. When we love with the

same love that Jesus loves us, we will be able to love our spouse. John 13:32 says: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." So we must be constantly growing in our love for our Lord and we must be growing in love to others, particularly our spouse, with the same love that Jesus has loved us, if we desire to have a living, joyful, loving marriage.

Secondly, we must love our spouse as much as we love ourselves. Ephesians 5:28-33 says: "*In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. **He who loves his wife loves himself.** After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also **must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**"* The truth emphasized here is one of priorities. We have the number one priority of ourselves. What we want and need is more important than anything else. Hence the happiness dilemma. Because we believe that we have "the right" to be happy, we have come to believe that God wants us to be happy. I believe this is true; however I also believe that we have defined happiness incorrectly. Therefore the kind of happiness that God wants us to have is not necessarily the kind of happiness we are looking for.

What we must learn is that God's priority for our life is not for us to have all our needs met by our spouses. Rather, his priority for us is to be like His beloved Son Jesus, who will meet all our needs. Jesus came to serve and to save His people. We are expected to be like Him and to work out our salvation through serving others ahead of ourselves, beginning first with our spouse. True and godly happiness comes from serving our spouse. Godly marriages come from loving our spouse more than we love ourselves. Romans 12:10 says: *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

To have a living, joyful, exciting, passionate marriage we must *treasure our spouse* above all else. We must understand that our Holy God created our spouse specifically for us, that they meet all of our needs because God created them for the purpose of doing that very thing. It is not their job to satisfy us, only Christ can do that.

We must see that our spouse is a blessed gift brought to us by our Heavenly Father to bring ultimate blessings and joy to our lives. We need to understand that loving our spouse begins with loving Jesus Christ first. We need to see that our spouse is to be our priority over ourselves and that when we love them with the love of Jesus we will serve them and find joy in our marriage.

The way we are to understand this gift of our spouse and to be able to cherish them as a treasure is by becoming one with our spouse. How do we become one with our spouse?

Questions for Chapter Five

- 1- What is the first step in valuing our spouse?
- 2- What is the place our spouse should have in our lives?
- 3- How will I get my spouse to delight in me as God's gift to them?
- 4- How can we do that?
- 5- What does it mean to honor my spouse?
- 6- What is love?
- 7- What is the first step in treasuring our spouses?
- 8- How important are the things that initially attract us to the person who will be our spouse in building our marriage relationship?
- 9- What is it that causes us to continue to make the decision to be in love with our spouse?
- 10- What is God's priority for our lives and how does that relate to our marriage?

Footnotes for Chapter Five

- 1- The Phrase Finder – Google.
- 2- In my sarcastic illustration “S & M” means Sodom and Gomorrah.
- 3- H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key To Your Marriage* p. 21.
- 4- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. p. 28.
- 5- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *Intimate Allies*. p. 3.

Chapter Six

Marriage Enrichment Is Becoming One With Your Spouse

The way you become one with your spouse is the same way that you become one with Christ – you receive them into your heart. You have made the decision to love them, you have made serving them your first priority in life and you have loved them with the love of Christ. Then you spend the rest of your life living out what it means to have an intimate, personal relationship that is vital to your health and well being as a person. In our spiritual lives we call this sanctification. We call this becoming one with Christ. We call this growing in Christ. In our marriages, we call this being completed as a person, not losing any of our own personality but combining what we are with the essence of another and in so doing becoming one completed person for the very first time.

1 Peter 1:22 says, *“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”* We become one spiritually by uniting our souls with Christ and with each other. We become one in heart by choosing to love one person above everyone else.

Hebrews 13:4 says *“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure.”* We become one physically through sexual intimacy.

Romans 13:8 says *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”* We become one mentally by tuning our thoughts and desires toward the same goals.

Galatians 5:13 says, *“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”* We become one emotionally by respecting and serving each other so that in times of anger, distress, crisis, sickness, fear or pain there is always safety and security in each other’s love.

John 13:35 says *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* We become one in life as we seek to demonstrate to the world the love of Jesus our Lord.

1 John 4:7 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* We become one by being born of God and by living in His love.

Communicating with Touch

In another chapter we will be dealing with communication and sex. But becoming one with our spouse is a combination of communication, attitude and physical contact, sometimes sexual, sometimes not. In fact becoming one with your spouse is all about communicating in a verbal way, with an understanding attitude, that is followed up by touch. This communication, attitude and touch will cause our marriages to thrive. This kind of communication is daily marriage enrichment.

What Makes Us Happy?

The beginning point of the anatomy of being one is for us to discover what our spouses need to be happy. As one Christian Comedian said “happy wife, happy life”(1)! This is important to husbands as well as wives of course but this kind of communication is crucial to your marriage. This is also an unwritten contract between you and your spouse. If you find out what your spouse needs to be happy and then you do not provide these things, you are destroying your marriage. If you do the work to find out what your spouse needs to be happy - you are communicating to your spouse that you intend to provide these things. So we need to find out what makes them happy and we need to find out what our spouse believes will make our marriage good and successful. Then we need to provide those things.

Context and Expectations

All of us have lived life within a context. We have been shaped by the events and circumstances of our lives. We have been deeply affected by the people in our lives. This means we come to the marriage with baggage. We come with particular expectations. We come with hurts and joys. We come with traditions and beliefs. It takes only months for us to have our expectations totally dashed by the reality of living with another person who does not have our same background or expectations. The hurt and insensitivity to this realization can be the death of the marriage before it even begins.

My Aunt was a strong Christian back in the early 1900s. She would never date a non-Christian man. Eventually she found a man who shared her beliefs. They dated for years, worshipped together, led youth groups together, shared the Gospel together and then they were married. On the way from the church to their hotel on the first night of their honeymoon the man pulled out a bottle of liquor and a carton of cigarettes from under the seat and told her he was not a Christian. Needless to say for her, the marriage was over before it began. But in that time you didn't get divorced so they stayed together and had a loveless marriage that never bore children. By God's grace the day came later in life when my uncle received Christ as his Savior and he was dramatically changed. God blessed their marriage and they ended their days in love with each other and the Lord.

Now this dramatic situation does not typically happen to most people, but in a less dramatic way it happens to all of us. I know two couples who are personal friends of mine. At the very beginning of their marriages their expectations were so dashed that they wanted out of the marriage immediately. One couple stayed together and worked through it, one did not. A little more dramatic than most of us experience, but we all have expectations. These expectations will be quickly dashed. How will we deal with these dashed expectations and save our marriages? We will do this by finding out what our spouses need to be happy and what they believe will make the marriage good. It would be better if this were done before marriage. Unfortunately this almost never happens.

Problem Solving and Facial Expressions

The good news is that men are very well equipped to find out what their wife needs to be happy and to provide this. They are left brained. They like to problem solve.

It gives them good self-esteem and confidence to be able to make their wives happy and to provide what their spouse desires. They are conquering a potential marriage problem and they are good at it. In fact with encouragement from their spouse and praise over any success a husband will work harder and harder to make his marriage awesome!

The average husband wants a good marriage but he needs to know how to make it happen. He needs to know what to provide to make his wife happy. He does not know this information and he will never know unless she tells him. This is important to understand because men will try to create a happy marriage without the proper info and they will get it wrong. When they do, if they are criticized or punished emotionally by their wives, they will quit trying.

What do we mean by emotionally punished? The average woman can make 250 different facial expressions that show disgust or anger or disappointment or bitterness or criticism. The average husband knows them all. When he sees them, without even knowing why, he knows his wife is displeased with him. Without understanding how or what he did wrong he will clearly know that he has failed again and before long his attitude will be – what’s the use? I just don’t know what she wants. I can’t seem to do anything right. I quit. He will become everything his wife has told him he already is by her facial expressions, body language and verbal attacks or criticisms. He will feel guilty and sad about this and his self-esteem will be lowered. But it will happen just the same.

Wives must understand that their husbands do not know the plan for a happy marriage. Wives need to understand that men do not know what will make their wives happy. Men do not know what is romantic or what women are looking for in a happy marriage. They must tell them. They must communicate. When men are hurt or angry over their failing they make them feel inadequate and failures. They close their spirits. It may seem obvious. They may not understand why men do not know this information. But men do not know – whether women like that or not. A woman’s gift from God is her innate knowledge to know what a good marriage is and what it will take for her to have one. She must tell her husband this information so that he can use his gifts from God to make it happen.

The University of California Los Angeles did a study on men and women in marriage and they discovered that husbands are almost completely intimidated by their wives and that they are usually very nervous around their wives. Why is this so? Because their wives are not communicating with them concerning what makes them happy in their marriage. Therefore, the husband has nothing on which to use his skills and abilities. He has nothing that he knows to work on to create or provide what the wife needs (2).

Men need meaningful communication to be able to understand what is needed for a good marriage. Men feel intimidated because he is not given what he needs to be able to do what he is equipped to do and so he feels like a failure and believes that she must feel he is a failure also. Yet his desire is to cause her to be passionately in love with him and proud of him. He doesn’t know what to do, he doesn’t see how he can win in the situation and it is terribly frustrating and discouraging.

One of the things I always teach in pre-marital counseling is to remember special dates – birthdays, anniversaries, etc. And when you remember these dates and give gifts make sure you give gifts that your spouse actually wants – not what you want. Men should not give their wives chainsaws for Christmas and women should not give their husbands a vacuum cleaner on their birthdays. But it is not the gift that makes the problem – it is our lack of knowledge of what our spouse desires that causes the problem. I know several women who want hunting rifles, fishing gear or camping equipment for gifts. It's not the gift, rather it's knowing what our spouses desire.

At times it's even how your spouse feels about how you acquired the gift to give them. One man gave his wife a beautiful and expensive set of china dishes. He was trying to be romantic. He picked out what he knew she liked, bought it, gift wrapped it and gave it to her. She immediately burst into tears of sadness. Why? Because to her the romance would have been deciding together to make this big purchase, going together to choose the set, to discuss which set to buy and to do it together. This was something that would affect their future and would be something they handed down to their children. To just be handed it was to her a cold decision that was meant to placate her but actually left her out of their future. Acquiring the gift without her ruined everything.

Every couple is different. There is no set formula. One wife lets her husband come home with a new car and is happy. One wife would kill her husband if he ever did that. We are all different. The principle is to find out what your spouse needs to be happy and to provide that. One husband goes off for frequent weekend hunting trips and his wife is okay with that. Another does the same thing and when he comes home his wife is gone because she felt abandoned. Find out what your spouse needs to be happy and provide that.

Wives also need to understand that men are very sensitive to praise. When wives praise their husbands it makes the husband desire to do more to win more praise and approval from their wives. Our self-image is bound up in our work so if you praise us when we work on our marriages will feel more confident and adequate and continue to work hard. Men are alert to dishonor, criticisms and things that make them feel inadequate. One key aspect in what causes a man to have an affair is not typically the physical appearance of another woman typically. It is rather he feels inadequate at home and finds another woman who gives him honor and makes him feel adequate. Men need their wives to make them happy by believing in them and to help them know what makes their wives happy (3).

Areas of Happiness

Interestingly, there will be four general areas in which whatever we say we need for happiness will fall into (4). The first is *security*. We all need to feel that our spouse is totally committed to us. This is why so many marriages of people who lived together before marriage fail. When you have lived with someone who could leave when ever they want to, ex-spouses report that they were never able to truly believe that the person wouldn't leave. Getting married, instead of proving commitment, only seemed like giving in to the partner who wanted more security. The one who asked for marriage was never confident that their spouse wouldn't leave. When you have demonstrated that you are unwilling to make a commitment, it is hard for anyone to believe you ever really

will. Any time we put conditions on our love, security or commitment we are in essence creating insecurity.

This insecurity can even lead to many other problems as well. Studies show that married couples have less depression and domestic violence and more happiness than cohabitating adults (5). Cohabitation, by contrast, does not offer the same health advantages as marriage. The authors state, "If marriage were just a piece of paper, then cohabitating couples who share a home and bed should behave just like married couples.... But research also shows that cohabitation itself is a different institution than marriage, with different expectations and effects on the individual. For both of these reasons, cohabitation does not confer the same kind of health benefits to either men or women as does marriage."

Measures of mental health and of happiness also demonstrate a sharp distinction between the married and cohabitating couples. According to Waite and Gallagher, the latest data show that 40% of married people say they are very happy with their life in general, compared with less than 25% of single or cohabitating individuals.

Married couples also experience significant monetary advantages over single individuals or cohabitating couples. Not only are married couples much more likely to save for the future, their view of their marriage as permanent allows them to "specialize" in ways cohabitators find risky. Current research also shows that married men earn 10-40% more income than single or cohabitating men. Since their wages rise faster after marriage, the wage premium is not just a case of wealthier men being more likely to marry.

In stark contrast to the commonly held view that marriage stifles sexual satisfaction, Gallagher and Waite also found that married couples report much greater sexual fulfillment than cohabitating or dating couples. Even more startling, given feminist view on sexual liberation, the authors found that "after researchers controlled for age, gender, and other demographic factors, the factor most strongly related to sexual satisfaction among married couples was not age or gender or work status but traditional attitudes toward sexual morality" (6).

Vows for Cohabitation

I, John take you, Mary, to be my cohabitant,
to have sex with and to share the bills with.

I'll be around while things are good, but I probably won't be if things get tough.

As the saying goes, when the going gets tough, seek greener pastures.

After all, the grass IS frequently greener on the other side of the fence.

If you should get a cold, I'll run to the drugstore for some medicine

– but if you get sick to the point where you take more than a day or two off from work,
don't count on me.

And, forsaking many others,

I will be more or less faithful to you for as long as it feels good to me.

If you should ever catch me sleeping around on you,

remember it doesn't necessarily mean that I no longer care for you.

I will probably still want to share bed and bills with you.

So help me...me (7)!

This is the same situation for those who leave their spouses for someone else. If you marry a person who left their spouse for you – you know for a fact they are willing to leave when they want to. Though we never believe it of ourselves, the truth is that this person is just as likely to leave us as they were to leave their first spouse. This is complete insecurity.

Yet we long for and must have security in order to be happy in our marriages. Security and commitment will be a big issue for us. Our spouses need to know that our attitude toward our marriage is: “whatever it takes I will do it because I will never quit on this relationship!”

The second category that most of our needs for happiness will fall into is *meaningful communication*. A woman needs this in order to be happy and to have a happy marriage. A man can decide to learn to do this, even if he does not enjoy this himself, at first, and can make it happen. When the positive results come forth he will work to make it happen more frequently and before long he will enjoy it himself.

What is meaningful communication? For wives it is sharing feelings, talking about the way things are around the house, talking about planning an event, holiday or vacation (this talking is almost more important for our wives than the event itself). It is an opportunity to share in her style freely. It is for her to be given the sense that she is a true partner in the relationship, that she makes a valuable contribution to the marriage and the home. That she has something important to say that her husband wants to hear. It is also the knowledge that no matter what she says to her husband he will respect her feelings, keep her heart safe and never mock or insult her, whether he agrees with what she says or not. She will be treasured and treated with respect and honor.

There was a good episode years ago, on the show “Coach”. There was a rich man married to a pretty but dumb blond. But this man loved her. He took her with him to business meetings and dinners and many places where he was conducting important business. Naturally she always said or did something stupid and all the comedy was around her. Her husband knew she was dumb but he loved her so much that he just worked around all her nonsense and made her feel that she was the most important thing in his life. The old Burns and Allen Comedy Show was also about a smart man married to a ditzy wife and they were both in love. Even though all the comedy was around all the nonsense Gracie did, the show always showed how much in love the couple was. In real life Gracie Allen was very intelligent. George Burns said the greatest day in his life was when he married Gracie and the worst day was when she died. He loved her for almost 100 years. These TV shows do state a good principle. Whatever your spouse is like, they should receive your unconditional love. Maybe they don’t get everything right or say everything correctly, but they are free to say whatever they want and know beyond doubt, that they will always have our total love and commitment. This is the foundation of meaningful communication.

Sadly many men treat their wives as employees rather than partners. Meaningful communication demonstrates to a woman the value that she has in her husband’s heart. She does not have to get everything perfect before her husband loves her, and values her

and appreciates her. She can be herself and she knows that because he demonstrates that through meaningful communication with her daily.

For husbands, meaningful communication is usually results oriented. It is sharing a goal or a plan of some kind to make a particular thing happen. Meaningful communication for a man has to actually accomplish something. That something can be romantic, working to make his wife happy, or something more mundane like the projects he needs to do around the house, but he needs it to accomplish something. Thankfully, these are not mutually exclusive needs and the needs of both spouses can be accomplished through shared and meaningful communication that both spouses work to accomplish as an act of service to the other.

The fact is a good marriage requires at least an hour a day of meaningful communication, not necessarily all in one sitting, but it needs the time. A good marriage requires regular, meaningful communication. A happy wife requires meaningful communication with the one she has committed her life to (8).

The third category that most of our comments on what it takes to make us happy fall into is *regular, romantic, emotional experiences*. Dr. Smalley provides us with some questions to ask at this point. Each of you ask your spouse: What is a romantic, emotional experience to you for us as a couple (each couple is different, obviously)? Each of you asks your spouse: On a scale of 0-10 what would be romantic to you as an individual? How can we combine these two things into one event for us as a couple? Then ask each other “What could I do to ruin the experience?” The intention is obviously not to do that thing. I know that my wife loves to go to the beach. We do not live near a beach so when we go it is a big deal. I love the beach but prefer the pool. So going to the beach could be a very romantic experience for us, unless I insist on only staying in the pool and not going to the ocean with her. If I do that, it will ruin the experience for her and there will be nothing romantic about it.

We need to plan these romantic times together. For some reason we have been indoctrinated to believe that the best romantic experiences are those that are unplanned and spontaneous. While it is true that sometimes these actually work and are wonderful experiences, it is also true that it is very hard to be spontaneous and successful at the same time in whatever event you have planned. Contrary to popular opinion, for married couples, well thought out and carefully planned romantic events – where all the details have been provided for, are much more fulfilling and romantic. What mother can enjoy a surprise romantic dinner in a fancy restaurant if she asks her husband whose watching the kids and he didn’t plan for that? What husband is excited over his wife popping into his office with a picnic basket for a surprise lunch in the park when he is swamped with work and deadlines? For most married couples spontaneity doesn’t happen very often. Unfortunately planned romantic times don’t happen very often either but that is something we can correct and that we must correct to be happily married. We must have regular, romantic, emotional experiences.

Finally there is the *physical need* that we all have in order to be happy. At this point we are still not talking about sex but rather about touch. It is a proven scientific and biological fact that babies who are never touched will die, even if provided with proper food, clothing, shelter and everything else they may need. The orphanages in Romania

are doing a study about the many orphaned children in their care. They are overflowing with orphans and it was discovered that the children in their care who are 12 and 13 years old are the physical size of 6 and 7 year olds. They also discovered that when one of these smaller children is adopted, within a very short time they become the size that is appropriate for their age. How could this be? What is the difference; loving touch. The children in state care had seen and experienced tragedy their whole lives and were never loved. Those who were adopted and loved flourished. Loving touch is vital for a healthy life for all humans. Loving touch is vital for a marriage and for marriage enrichment.

The main need a man has in his home is physical touch. Touch, for men, is a way of discerning what the attitudes of the people he is with are towards him. It prepares him to deal with the people who are with him at that time and in that place. There is a reason why men shake hands with the right hand. In Roman days, soldiers carried their weapons in their right hands and were trained to fight in a right-handed manner. This was also the age when Governments changed control through murder and assassinations. So when they greeted their Kings or Caesars or Commanding Officers they put their weapons in their left hand and extended their fighting hand, the right hand, to symbolize their peaceful intentions. Sometimes the hand was extended over their chest, sometimes it was raised as a salute, sometimes it was extended to be shaken – but it was a demonstration to those in the room that you were peaceful.

So it is today. In the business world, if you extend your hand to someone to be shaken it is a sign of peace, respect and friendship. If they do not take your hand or if they give you an inappropriate handshake you know right away there is a problem. This is also true in the sports world. You can make all the jokes you want to about the athletes patting each other on the bottom after various plays, but this is pure communication. A man can tell in an instant if the touch of another man on him is congratulation or a sexual pass.

So when a man comes into the house and his wife and children greet him with excitement and kisses and hugs he knows things are good at home. It is what he lives for all day. But when he comes home and his wife does not want to give him a kiss or a hug or even if the hugs and kisses are different from usual – he knows something is wrong. If the children do not want to hug him or be with him, there is a problem. It may not even be a problem about him but there is something wrong. Also a woman can tell by the way her husband greets her how he is feeling and how his day went without him ever speaking. Men communicate with touch in addition to words.

One newlywed husband came home everyday and found his wife wherever she was and kissed her hello before he took off his hat at the coat rack by the door. After a couple of months his mother came to visit them. When the young husband came home he walked past his mother, kissed his wife, went back to his mother and kissed her and then hung up his hat. He communicated with love and kisses and tenderness a very clear message to the members of his family.

It is true that men can communicate sexually with touch as well and both husbands and wives know when their touches and their spouses touches are sexual or not. Too much touching and the message changes from “how was your day” to “how about right now.” But again couples know when the messages change in their touch.

This touch is also vital to wives. Dr. Smalley in His communication tapes states that 80% of what wives report that they want and need from their husbands is non-sexual touch. Women love to be touched gently and held and embraced. They love to hold hands or to simply sit close to their husbands. They love the hello and goodbye hugs and kisses. It is a message to them that everything is ok in their relationship. Most women hug each other hello and goodbye, when men are shaking hands. It means the same thing. "I had a good visit with you. Everything between you and me is ok. I want to do this again sometime." Handshake or hug it means the same. It is reinforcing touch.

Between a husband and wife it is more. Because men are so sexual and so quickly turned on, a wife struggles with her need to be touched affectionately and yet not lead to sex. She needs affectionate touches all day long but does not want to have sex all day long. How can she receive those affectionate touches without teasing or leading her husband on? This difficulty has led many couples to fear affectionate touch so much that eventually touch comes to mean only one thing – sex. Otherwise no touching! This is bad for both people and for the marriage

When a husband touches his wife affectionately and keeps his sex drive in check, his wife will flourish. She will love his affection. She will respond with loving non-sexual touches of her own. She will appreciate that her husband has to struggle in his own heart not to turn this into something sexual and she will love him more for it. Will it make her want to have sex more frequently? Probably not, but when those sexual moments come she will come into his arms more lovingly and excitedly and joyfully than otherwise, because she will come to him knowing of his love and sacrifice for her. Most wives have no struggle giving themselves sexually to their husband who has put her and her needs first and has loved her in ways that called for him to sacrifice. The marriage will blossom. In fact, we are told that women need 8-12 meaningful, non-sexual, affectionate touches throughout a given day in order to be emotionally healthy (9).

It works the other way also. We can communicate with our spouse by lack of touch as well. When a husband goes to give his wife a hug and she backs away or turns away or even leaves the room a message has just been given and received and both know it. Something seriously wrong has just happened. If you normally kiss you wife goodbye in the morning and then one day you do not, you are sending a message. You may still be angry from last night's fight. You may have become distracted by an unpleasant chore facing you at work. You have sent a message that something is wrong. We need to understand that we need touch to have happy marriages and that we communicate the state of our hearts, lives and feelings for each other through touch (10).

Conclusion

So we spend our lives fleshing out what it means to have an intimate, personal relationship with our spouse that is vital to our health and well being as a person. We do this by becoming one with our spouse through communication, loving attitudes, and physical contact. Additionally, we must do the work of finding out what our spouses need to be happy and provide those things - security, meaningful communication, regular, romantic, emotional experiences and physical need.

Questions for Lesson Six

- 1- How do you become one with Christ and with your spouse?
- 2- What are some of the ways we become one?
- 3- Becoming one with our spouse is a combination of what?
- 4- What is the beginning point of the anatomy of being one?
- 5- How is this an unwritten contract?
- 6- How do our marriage expectations get us into trouble?
- 7- What is one of the important gifts that men bring to the marriage?
- 8- What does this gift do for the man?
- 9- What are the four areas of happiness?
- 10- How do women respond to touch?

Footnotes for Lesson Six

- 1- Gaither Homecoming Friends. *Toronto*. Video.
- 2- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships*. Tape 3.
- 3- *Ibid*.
- 4- *Ibid*.
- 5- Nina Chen, Ph.D. *Benefits of a Happy Marriage*. University of Missouri Extension Jackson County Blue Springs, Mo 08/29/05 – Internet.
- 6- *Ibid*.
- 7- Daniel Murphy. *The Door*. January/February 2000.
- 8- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships*. Tape 3.
- 9- *Ibid*.
- 10- I know that some men reading these paragraphs will object to what I have said. I would say however, that any man who disagrees either has a marriage in which good communication is taking place and so he feels secure in his good marriage, or he is in a rough marriage and either feels inadequate or is blaming his wife for always criticizing him and feels the problems in the marriage are his wife's fault. If you are not in one of these two categories and you still object to what I am saying all I can say is do some reading in the books in the bibliography at the end of this book.

Chapter Seven

Communication - The Secret of a Happy Marriage

A happy marriage is a long conversation that always seems too short. - Andre M. Aurois

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We ended chapter five by talking about becoming one and we asked, “How do we become one with our spouse? How does becoming one flesh work itself out practically in our lives?” The main item need for becoming one is good communication in our marriage relationship.

Ephesians 4:32

*32And become useful and helpful and kind to one another, tenderhearted (compassionate, understanding, loving-hearted), forgiving one another [readily and freely], as God in Christ forgave you (1).*

Colossians 3:12, 13

*12So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. 13Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you (2).*

### **Good communication is vital to your marriage**

It is the rarest of couples that engages in conversation and reflection and sets goals to grow and become one in their marriage. Sadly most people just let their marriages happen, hope they get along and completely ignore the necessity to grow as a person and as a couple for the enrichment of the marriage (3).

A man was dragged to marriage counseling by his wife of 20 years. He did not know why she wanted to go but finally gave in. The woman began the conversation with the counselor. “My husband doesn’t love me any more.” “Is that true,” the counselor asked? “No.” the man said irritably. “Well you never tell me you love me,” said the woman. “I told you I loved you when we got married and if I change my mind I will let you know!”

Communication is such a vital aspect of marriage that poor communication is the number three cause of divorce in America today. The good news is that communication is the number one marriage problem to fix if we are committed to doing it. So let’s look at enriching marriage communication.

Marriage is an intimate relationship. At first glance we understand that marriage is a physical intimacy in that we are so close geographically that we must be completely involved in another person’s life. We also understand that marriage is a sexual intimacy. There can be no true marriage without sexual intimacy, without the “knowing” of one another in the deepest, most personal way possible. We will discuss the sexual intimacy aspect of marriage in a later chapter. However what we must understand first is that there can be no physical or sexual intimacy without first experiencing emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy cannot occur until there is good communication. Intimacy is not

automatic. Communication is the vehicle for creating and maintaining intimacy and is the means by which we truly know another person (4).

### **Levels of Communication**

There are five levels of communication: 1- sharing of facts (very shallow intimacy – does not cause us to get to know each other), 2- sharing ideas and opinions of other people (more interesting but still reveals nothing of ourselves to anyone else), 3- sharing your own opinions and ideas (more vulnerability on your part but still not revealing who you truly are), 4- sharing your own personal beliefs, preferences, concerns and experiences (high level of intimacy and vulnerability), and 5- sharing your inner feelings, preferences, likes and dislikes (this is the highest level of intimacy – it reveals how these things affect you emotionally and inwardly). At level 5, communication has switched from talking with and from your mind to talking from your heart. Most of us only experience this level of communication with one person in our lives (5).

It is not until we reach level 5 communications that we begin to experience the depth of love and intimacy that causes our marriages to be awesome even through difficult times of life. I say *sadly* because most of us live on communication levels 1-3 in our marriages and when we get to level 4 we are sharing with the attitude of needing support and encouragement and acceptance of *our* beliefs from our spouse. We are not looking for “give and take” and sharing, we are rather saying “here is what I am – accept me as I am and love me no matter what”. It doesn’t have to be this way and this is certainly not true for everyone. But the majority of us are sharing at level 4 with our “right to happiness gene” fully functioning. But at level 5 there is honesty and openness and a trust of the one we are communicating with. There is the belief that whether we are agreed with or not we are loved and accepted. There is a sense of safety from this person whom we are willing to open up to at this level. This is the level of communication that builds emotional intimacy.

As I said, poor communication is one of the top 3 reasons people give for getting a divorce and yet is one of the easiest problems we can fix. We are losing our marriages over something that can be easily repaired by those who want to keep their marriages alive and fresh!

What are the keys to good communication? The first one is an obvious component of good communication that we totally miss because it is so extreme. We know it but we don’t know its depths. The first component of good and successful marital communication is for us...

### **To understand the differences between men and women**

God intends for a man and woman to be distinct. We either live with an awareness of, or draw forth the uniqueness of being a man or a woman, or we ignore and destroy the distinctiveness of Gender. We have a choice: we can either delight in diversity or destroy distinctions. Tragically, this can be done without any awareness of denying the distinctiveness of man and woman (6).

We must understand that men and women are very different from each other! Every single cell in a man's body is different from every single cell in a woman's body – blood, fluids, muscle, bone, everything. The way we use our brains is different. Our emotions are different. Almost everything about us is completely different.

We think that this is fairly obvious. We look different, we handle our emotions differently and we interact with people differently. We understand that we are different. However, none of us realize the true depth of those differences and because our communication is conducted in an improper manner and is unsuccessful we have difficulty seeing and understanding all our differences.

Many years ago I was teaching a Marriage Enrichment Sunday School class and when I got to this point one woman became very animated and upset and declared that I was saying men were better or superior to women. But that has nothing to do with anything. Having differences does not make one superior to another. In the eyes of our Heavenly Father we are all the same and equal. No one is superior, better, more favored, etc. However, the Lord did create us different from one another. Men and women are different in every way and if we refuse to acknowledge that, then our marriages will suffer. If we want joyous, passionate, successful marriages we will understand the differences and do the work it takes to deal with them so that marriage becomes the living blessing God created it to be; so that we can fulfill our purpose of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever.

These differences are not accidents or products of chance or evolution. Our precious Heavenly Father who loves us with complete abandon and unconditional love created these differences in us on purpose, for His glory and for our good. These differences are God's marvelous plan for us. These differences cause us to more ably accomplish God's plan for us and the society we live in. These differences are good and to be rejoiced in by us. These differences help our marriages achieve their highest level – when we understand them and work to incorporate them into our lives, hearts and marriages.

### **Physical Differences**

What are these differences? Sometime ago I heard Dr. James Dobson interview a Christian biologist on a radio program and together they laid out these differences very clearly. Many of his conclusions go hand in hand with Dr. Smalley's information in his marriage conferences and videos. First there are physical differences. At birth girls are stronger than boys. More male babies die in infancy than girl babies because girls are stronger at birth. Because of this birth strength, women are more resistant to disease and sickness, which protects their children and causes them to be more resilient also. A very sad but true fact is that women survive concentration camps, P.O.W. Camps, prison life (both as inmates and guards) and other horrible situations with greater success and numbers than men do. Women have an insulating layer of cells under their skin that causes them to be more beautiful than men. These cells are also the cause of a woman's weight gains and losses. These cells also give additional insulation to the body.

Men on the other hand, are stronger and have more stamina than women. Men have one and half gallons of blood in their bodies while a woman has four-fifths of a

gallon of blood in their bodies. 40% of a man's body is muscle while only 20% of a woman's body is muscle. Men have thicker skin, bigger bones and thicker skull bones than women. These attributes allow men be involved in heavy or long term labor to provide for and protect themselves and their families.

Now we all recognize and admire the physical differences. We may even give intellectual assent to the fact that we are different. But the way we live and the way we treat each other demonstrates clearly that we are not aware of the differences between us. This is proven by the fact that many of our problems with marriage and communication stem from treating our spouse as though they were just like us. In other words a man communicates with his wife as though she were another man and a wife with her husband as though he were another woman. We do not clearly recognize that we are different and that we must be treated differently – especially in the area of communication.

### **Mental Differences**

Dr. Dobson taught that there are also very important mental differences. These are harder for us to understand because we cannot see them and do not always understand how they are work themselves out. Biologists tell us that when we are first conceived there are no differences between us and we all look female. But at some point in the first few weeks of the pregnancy the mother's body produces a chemical bath that washes over the baby. If the baby is a girl genetically – then this chemical bath has no effect and passes on through he mother's body. But if the baby is a boy genetically then this chemical bath totally alters the baby's brain and the boy becomes different in every way from a girl.

This affects us specifically in the area of communication because this chemical bath affects the way in which we think, which directly affects our communication skills and abilities. Because of this chemical bath men tend to think laterally – that is they use one side of the brain at a time. Women on the other hand have a greater ability to go back and forth between the hemispheres of the brain much more freely and easily and to use this ability consistently. In addition, 80% of men favor the left side of the brain (logic, problem solving, conquering, factual, lecturing, language, etc.). 80% of women favor the right side of the brain (empathy, arts, feelings, emotions, etc.). This does not mean that men never use the other side of our brains but simply that we are more comfortable using one side over the other. Biologists also tell us that all people only use 8% of our brains. But we can learn to increase that usage. These mental differences also do not mean that we cannot be trained to use our brains like our spouses do to improve our communication skills, to improve our relationships and to learn to understand how our spouse thinks and operates (7).

Essentially what this means then, is that boys and girls – men and women think differently than each other and thus communicate differently from each other. This is where we all get into difficulty because when men speak to their wives as though they were other men, all the women really hear are the parents on the Charlie Brown cartoons “Wah – wah, wah, wah, wah”. And when wives speak to their husbands as though they were other women the husbands respond with “What? What happened? What did I do now?” In other words when we communicate with each other the wrong way we may be speaking a common language but we are not having real communication.

## Communication Differences

Because of the physical and mental differences, we communicate differently. In a happy marriage, therefore, it is important for us to know these differences and to adapt our communication with our spouses to take these differences into account. How is our communication different?

According to Dr. Gary Smalley there are five basic differences between the communication patterns of men and women. Neither is good or bad or better than the other but they are very different. *First*, men want to discuss and express facts. Women want to discuss the facts and to express how they feel about the facts. Men speak about 12,000 words a day and typically stop talking in any conversation when they run out of facts. Women speak on average 25,000 words a day and fill their conversation with personal insights, intuitions and emotions about the subject being discussed.

*Secondly*, men use communication to solve problems and find solutions. Women desire to give sympathy and find reasons for things. Men seek to conquer the discussion or the subject. Women want to touch, explore and feel the subject under discussion.

*Thirdly*, men are objective. They have the ability to compartmentalize their lives. For a man, work and marriage and children and church and everything else are all separate parts of one life. They can think, speak of and work on these parts of life as though they were not related. They can adjust their thinking to focus on one part of life at a time. Women are more personal and “big picture” people. Their lives are a complete picture. They cannot separate their lives into sections. All parts are interconnected and women think of each part of their lives in the context of all the other parts of their lives. So for a woman, work, church, home, family are all the same thing – her life.

*Fourthly*, a woman cannot separate who she is from her surroundings. That is, a woman’s self image is found in her life and the way it functions in all its parts. A man finds his self-image in his work and how well he accomplishes it. A typical woman cannot enjoy an evening out if her house is a mess or if her children are sick or if she had an argument with a coworker. These things affect the way she views her own life and who she is. Her life has only one compartment and everything is in it. A man can fight with his boss and be very angry and then come home and play with his kids and be sweet to his wife. He is not less angry but it is in a different part of his mind and heart.

*Fifth*, men think and communicate in a general way while women communicate and think in a very detailed way. Men want to conquer the conversation and move on. Women want to express life in conversation. This is because a woman experiences life with her feelings and because she does, she can remember all the details. Thus she can communicate with feeling, information and details. Men frequently have periods of silence when they are together because there are no facts to discuss. When the subject is finished the men are done and they wait for the next subject. Men are more likely to give approximations and general facts to support their arguments because they do not want to take the time to express every detail they know about the subject. It does not mean that men are not detailed. They may have all the information in their minds but when talking it is as though they are speed-reading. They only discuss the highlights and get to the

point and make their case as fast as possible. Women know and share the details including colors, attitudes, feelings, smells, all their senses, etc. Because they “feel” the facts they remember all the details. And in conversation they want and need to share the details or the conversation isn’t worth having (8).

**With all these differences – how can we communicate well?  
What are the components of good communication?**

**Listening**

There are many ways to create great communication with our spouses, but let me mention three foundational components of good communication of them. The first is to be a **good listener** (9). James 1:19 says *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry* (10). Communication is two people speaking to one another and two people listening to one another. This is one of those times when the work of marriage we have mentioned several times come into play because to be a good listener requires you to stop what you are doing or focusing on and to intentionally direct your focus onto your spouse and what they are saying. You must make a decision that what your spouse wants to share with you is ultimately more valuable to you that whatever you are currently doing. It is more valuable because it is coming from the one you love most, because it will enable you to serve the one you love most and it will make your marriage happier and stronger in the long run.

It requires work for men because the majority of the time, as we listen to our wives, we want to solve their problems, resolve their conflicts and meet their needs. This is just the way men are wired. We want to conquer their problems. However, the vast majority of the time, our wives just want us to listen to them share what is on their hearts. They want us to listen, to understand and to empathize. Most of the time they do not want us to do anything. If they do want us to help with something, they will tell us. A woman needs to share. In the sharing, many of the things that distress her are resolved in her heart. The healing and soothing takes place in the sharing with an interested, loving partner who is safe to be vulnerable with. We as men must resist the impulse to resolve everything our wives share with us.

I am very blessed with a wife who seeks to improve our communication skills. After learning these facts about us, she helps me with our conversations. When she needs to talk to me she will frequently say “I do not want you to do anything or solve any problems but I want to share something with you.” At that point, I know to relax and listen and sympathize. I will frequently ask at the end of the conversation if there is anything she wants or needs me to do. So far, in the years since we have learned this information, she has always said no.

This listening also requires work for women because men do not want to share their feelings. Most men do not have a wide range of feelings with all kinds of shades and degrees. We are happy or angry, interested or bored, busy or free, mad or...not mad! So many men become discouraged when they try to share with their wives who keep asking questions of emotions and feelings. Women must allow their husbands to share what is on their hearts without trying to color what their husband is saying. Most men

want to share facts and resolve issues without emotions being attached to it necessarily. Women must let their husbands communicate with them sometimes without even trying to get more details or a fuller sense of the situation from him. Men just do not communicate that way for the most part. Women must resist the impulse to make their husbands be “touchy feely” in their conversations. Let them share with you without all the extras that you need and desire when you share with them.

Frequently women are frustrated that their husbands won’t talk about their daily work experience with them. The husband treats them as though they are not wise enough to understand their workplace situation. Mostly though, men know that to tell their wives about what is going on at work they have to become more detailed about aspects of their emotions and feelings, which they don’t want to talk about because they don’t really know what they are.

So good communication requires being a good listener and listening with understanding of the ways that your spouse communicates – not listening in the way that you like to communicate. Listen to your spouse with love and attentiveness but listen to them as they communicate like the person they are - a member of the *opposite sex* (11)!

### ***Speaking***

The second part of establishing good communication is to be a **clear speaker**. Speak to your spouse in a way that they can understand. Listening is receiving information and we need to receive information in a way that we can understand and so does our spouse. Speaking is sharing or giving information and we must share information in a way that our spouses can receive and understand.

The best example of this is Gary Chapman’s book on the *Five Languages of Love*. This book teaches that all of us have one of 5 basic love languages. My problem is that I want other people to express love to me in the way that I prefer to express love to others. But because we are using different love languages, if their love language is not the same as mine then I can tell them I love them all day long in my love language and they will not hear it. The principle is that we must speak to our spouses in a way that they will understand clearly what we mean. We must speak to our spouse in their language – male or female (12).

For example, frequent, non-sexual touch is a way of communicating. This affection is shown by simply being together, holding hands, talking a walk, having coffee on the porch. Acts of service is another way of communicating. This is shown in kind actions for your spouse. Doing their chores for them when they are tired, caring for them when they are sick, and being publicly proud and protective of them when in groups. If you want your spouse to hear your message that you love them, then you must know their language of love and speak to them in that language (13).

### **The context and setting**

A third aspect of communicating well with our spouses clearly is **shared experiences** (14). You can’t communicate with someone who isn’t there and so we must have shared experiences. That is – we must make sure we are spending time with our

spouses. Very often in our shared experiences there is a context, something happening around us in which our shared experience takes place and frequently that involves humor. Sometimes we sit around and remember funny experiences from the past and laugh about them together. Some times in the course of a shared experience, something funny happens and we laugh. Sometimes a third party makes us both laugh.

One night on a stressful business trip, my wife and I were exhausted and laying in bed watching TV in our motel. A comedian came on that was so funny we laughed until we couldn't breathe. 10 years later we remember that night as a wonderful shared experience in the context of stress and speak of that night often. When things get tense in our lives one of us will throw out a line from that comedian. The line by itself makes no sense, but we both instantly remember the context and we remember the joke and the setting and the time in life and we bond with each other again and laugh all over again.

Humor is not vital to a bonding experience but shared experiences are. Perhaps your shared experience has no humor in it; perhaps it is a crisis or a sorrowful time. But anything you go through together, as a team, as partners, as two people who love each other, will provide for you a context in which good communication can flourish. Security and support and emotional safety in a shared experience, in a setting that can be recalled are all aspects of communication that make us have the desire to communicate more frequently and easily and readily. We learn to trust our spouse emotionally through shared experiences and to enjoy communicating with them more.

### **Conclusion**

What do these kinds of things have to do with communication? These and many other ways set the scene for good communication – listening and speaking – and demonstrating to our spouse that we desire to be actively involved in communicating with them in a loving way. Do you want your spouse to hear what you are saying? First they have to want to hear you and then they have to listen to you and then you have to speak in their language. Each spouse comes to the marriage with their own language, their own way in which they communicate about their lives and the things that affect them and you have to speak and listen with understanding of how they hear and speak and in what context they will communicate the best.

## Chapter Seven Questions

- 1- Good communication creates \_\_\_\_\_ in marriage.
- 2- The 5 levels of communication are:
- 3- The communication level #4 is where our \_\_\_\_\_ gene is most fully engaged.
- 4- Men and women are completely different both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5- List three ways in which men and women are different physically.
- 6- How are men and women different mentally?
- 7- What are the 5 ways in which men and women communicate differently?
- 8- What are the three foundational components of good communication?
- 9- What work do men and women have to do to listen well?
- 10- What is the most significant point in speaking to your spouse?
- 11- What is the significance of context and setting in communication?

## Chapter Seven Footnotes

- 1- Amplified Version.
- 2- The Message.
- 3- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. p. 14.
- 4- H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key To Your Marriage*. p. 31.
- 5- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships* (Branson, Mo.; Today's Family, 1998), tape #3.
- 6- Dan Allender. *Intimate Allies*. p. 143.
- 7- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships* (Branson, Mo.; Today's Family, 1998), tape #1.
- 8- Ibid. Tape #2.
- 9- H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key To Your Marriage*. p. 51.
- 10- NIV.
- 11- Les & Leslie Parrott. *Love Talk* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan, 2004), p. 111.
- 12- Gary Chapman. *The Five Love Languages: How To Express Heartfelt Commitment To Your Mate*. p. 25.
- 13- H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key To Your Marriage*. pps. 51-53.
- 14- Everett L. Worthington, Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*. p. 164.

## *Chapter Eight*

# *The Act of Marriage*

*Contrary to popular belief sex is not a sin.  
Contrary to Hugh Hefner sex is not salvation either.  
Like nitroglycerin it can be used to either blow up bridges or heal hearts.  
Fredrick Buechner*

The act of marriage is the act of sex. It is the one activity that we are to participate in only with our spouses (1). Many aspects of marriage can be performed with other people – men and women. But the act of sex is to be between one man and one woman who are legally married only, for all their lives. Essentially when we say we are married, we are saying that we only have sex with one person. Marriage, of course is much more than sex. However, sex is the one act in marriage that we share with no one other than our spouses.

What is more, our sex lives in our marriages will determine the quality and success of our marriages. This is a very big statement which most of us do not easily believe. Can it possibly be that a Christ centered marriage would be successful or not based on our physical, sexual pleasures? Absolutely! Not believing this truth illustrates the fact that most us believe that sex is some sort of weakness. If it is not something wicked, then it is at best something God gave us in marriage to prevent us from doing wicked things outside of marriage. It is exactly because we do not believe this that so many Christian marriages end in divorce.

The truth of the matter is that most of us have received a very poor sexual education. Most of us were told the least amount of information about sex that our parents could get away with telling us. This in itself was our first signal that sex is either an uncomfortable subject or something bad. Sadly we have learned most of what we know about sex from our friends, schools, older kids, magazines and, in today's world, cartoons like Bevis and Butthead and South Park and the Simpsons. We have even received sex (and marriage) education from the movies, TV shows, magazines – including pornography – and the Internet. Our knowledge, our viewpoints and our beliefs are greatly influenced and incredibly twisted by our culture. We have learned about sex and marriage from man's point of view and now we need to learn about it from God's point of view (2).

We have also used sex to solve our problems; problems such as low self-esteem or shame issues or many other personality and mental struggles. Second, we often use sex as a dumping ground for unfinished business. Things such as relief from the frustrations of a bad day or using sex to make up after a hurtful fight. And also using sex as an activity to make up for what is lacking in other areas of our lives such as a lack of affection, etc. A good and healthy marital sex life does not include any of these thoughts and attitudes (3).

### **What is the definition of the act of marriage?**

The act of marriage is more than simply a statement of monogamy. Sex, the act of marriage, is meeting the needs of your spouse. This includes meeting the physical needs but it also includes the mental, emotional and spiritual needs as well. Sexual satisfaction is both a physical and emotional phenomenon. Satisfaction is directly related to the degree of harmony between our emotional and physical states at the time we have sex (4). In marriage, sex is the physical demonstration of the depth and quality and success of your marriage. Sex is for our pleasure, but it is also our marriage barometer. It will show us the condition of our marriage. How can this be? Are you saying that you cannot have a good marriage without a good sex life? Yes, that is absolutely what I am saying, although I define a good sex life as one that is fully

satisfying to both spouses. Couples are different and there is no one formula for a good sex life. But it must be fully satisfying to both spouses. One person cannot make a happy marriage and one person cannot have a happy marital sex life. If only one spouse is having a good sex life then your marriage is in trouble. A marriage with no sex life is doomed. But when the sex life is mutually satisfying the marriage is strong.

It is possible to have very good sexual *experiences* physically in a poor marriage or even without being married at all. This is because sex is basically a biological and physiological experience. Your body can respond and feel satisfaction and pleasure no matter what the circumstances are. However, you cannot have a good marriage without having good sexual experiences with your spouse. *This is because marriage is an essentially emotional experience centered on and powered by your mental decisions and choices to be committed for life to your spouse.* Thus sexual activity in marriage is not only physical, but is emotional, mental, and spiritual as well. Sexual activity in marriage has at its core the deepest meanings for love and trust and security and life long companionship. Sexual activity in marriage affects our self-esteem, our self-image, and our joy of life. It affects every part of us very personally. It is extremely significant to our well being in all our parts. Therefore, a happy marriage just cannot last without a happy sexual experience. Mutually satisfying sex is *the* act of marriage.

### **How do we have this wonderful act of marriage?**

As we have already seen men and women are different in every way, and they are also different when it comes to sex. Dr. Smalley says that men are like microwaves – they are always ready for sex. This begins with our attitudes toward sex. According to Dr. Smalley men have a sexual thought every 80 seconds. Men need no real stimulation to be ready for sex. They just always are. It is how we are wired (5). Sex consumes men. Women are like crock pots, he says. They slowly warm up to sexual interest. They need other things from their husbands in order to begin to be interested in having sex, things like safety and security, companionship and friendship, passion and romance. And most of all they need time. Men are like an on and off switch, women are like an airplane cockpit dashboard. Men can simply turn off and on, but a woman needs to experience a progression of steps to get her engines running.

This does not imply that wives are never spontaneous or adventurous in their sex lives and desires. Nor does it mean that husbands need to be planning for sex days in advance. But it does mean that a happy sex life takes work just like the other areas of marriage. A couple may have spontaneous, fun and pleasurable sexual experiences. But these will not be the norm. If this is discouraging to you then two truths are immediately evident – 1) you have bought into the lie of our culture that sex takes no work or skill, it is just like eating and that everyone enjoys it all the time and 2) you are probably not satisfied with your sex life.

### **What is sexual intimacy in marriage?**

In the context of everything that has gone before in this book we must ask ourselves – what is sexual intimacy? This is not a book on sexual techniques, or the biology of sex. It is rather on how to make your marriage wonderful and alive. A marriage that has these characteristics is also enjoying a sexual experience that is wonderful and alive. So what is it? What is sexual intimacy?

Sexual intimacy is what we have already said about life. God created sex in order for man to be able to fully “glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. Thus sex is for the glory of God and is for our good. As He is for all parts of our lives, Jesus is Lord of our sex life. By that I mean that Jesus wants us to enjoy a happy and satisfying sexual intimacy with our spouses because it is part of the happy marriages He wants us to have. And because of our great and

passionate love for Jesus Christ, we are able to have the great and passionate love for our spouses that creates great sex.

### **How do we accomplish this great sex life?**

As we saw in earlier chapters, we as Christians with Christian marriages are different from the world. The world has taken the beauty and joy of sex and made it debased and inconsequential. Everything in society is permeated with sex, from advertising to the social issues on the evening news. Sex is no longer special, private, personal, intimate or exclusive. It is no longer something to be treasured and delighted in, but simply another biological urge such as eating and sleeping and may be entered into whenever the desire arises. Sex has become common, accepted in any form and meaningless. And yet the Scriptures teach that sex is so powerful that it will either make your life happy or it will destroy your life, marriage and happiness. So who do we believe has the answer for great sex – our culture or our Lord?

As a movie buff I am always amazed at the contradictory message of sex in the movies. On the one hand we are shown that sex is inconsequential. No matter how many sexual partners you have had or how much sex you have had or how many relationships you have been involved in – it's all unimportant and you can still find happiness, romance and marriage. At the same time the movies are filled with people who are suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, murders and other sinister plots because of the sexual affairs of a particular partner or spouse. One show even had a bridegroom kill his fiancé the night before their wedding because she turned out not to be a virgin. We are told that there are no consequences to any sexual activity and at the exact same time we are told that happiness, marriage and even life itself can be terminated because of the inappropriate use of sex.

TV is the same way. Sex in the City and Seinfeld, two of the most popular shows in TV history, taught us every day (and still teach us in syndication) that sex is nothing and we should all have as much as we can with whomever we can. Shows like Everybody Loves Raymond, The King of Queens, Yes Dear and others teach us that sex in marriage is a disaster. It is used as a weapon, it is used to manipulate and it something to be fought over in every episode. Men are made to be weak, sex-obsessed creatures that spend their time being insensitive and begging for sex. Women are powerful and intelligent and will agree to have sex only when it suits their purposes, or to reward their husbands for good behavior in other areas of life. A Christ centered sex life is something that is entirely unknown in our society's media and culture.

Unfortunately it is also something that seems to be unknown in the church as well. When was the last time we heard a sermon of the joy of marital sex? When was the last time a church conducted classes on marital sexual intimacy? The fact that people ask these questions was unheard of 50 years ago, as it would just never happen. Today we can ask the questions but sex is still an issue that is totally uncomfortable for the church and its leaders to address. And yet we are forced to address the issues of the consequences of sex all the time in the church. Today the church is dealing with sexual promiscuity, people living together, pregnant teenagers, unwed mothers, rape & date rape, single parent homes, divorce, Aids and other STDs just as much as any of society's social services. The church does not seem to know how to teach and deal with the teaching of Scripture on happy, joyful, passionate sexual joys and pleasure even in marriage. I am not slamming the church. She is awakening to this issue and desires to be involved. But the best we have done so far is write books about the subject and not many of those. These are excellent books by the way but it will be some time before we can teach openly, freely and clearly on this issue. In the meantime – what makes great marital sex?

## **Great sex is about God**

Great marital sex is godly sex, Christ centered and Christ honoring sex. Are you serious? What is godly sex? That just sounds creepy. Is God in our sex life? Doesn't that make God sort of base and crass? How can we combine our spirituality with our sexuality? Doesn't this belief propagate the notion that sex is just a natural part of life, not to be denied in any form or fashion? Doesn't this support the belief that men can dominate women sexually because God ordains sex, as He does the headship over women of the man? No! Of course not! Absolutely not! The perversions of man through history, even religious men who twist the scriptures, do not change God or His creation's purpose – including His plan and purpose for sex. In the sexual moment a wife and husband enter the holy realm of indwelling, incarnation, flesh and spirit and the unity and diversity of the Godhead (6).

We combine our spirituality with our sexuality in the same way that the Bible does this. The Bible cares about marriage and sex. God has spoken of it in His word, many times. There are 49 verses of Scripture that speak of marriage. There are 56 verses concerning sex plus the whole book of the Song of Solomon (117 additional verses). There are 41 verses about brides and bridegrooms. There are 20 verses about weddings, there are 129 verses about husbands and there are 324 verses about wives. God speaks of marriage and sex 736 times and this does not include all the passages in Leviticus about who can be married or many of the passages of Christ and the church. God created sex. It is wonderful for us and pleasing to Him. Marital sexual relations please God.

God lives in our hearts when we know Jesus Christ as our Savior. We love Jesus so much that we want to serve Him as much as we can as a demonstration to Him and to everyone who knows us that we love Him. We serve Him by serving others, by keeping His commands and loving our neighbors. Our closest neighbor is our spouse. So our greatest desire is to serve our spouse and in so doing to serve God.

### **How do we have great sex in marriage?**

First we get closer to Jesus Christ every day, falling deeper in love with Him. Then we walk in the grace of God with our spouse daily. We give them unconditional love and forgiveness for all offenses. Then we make a commitment to be faithful to them and to be in love with them every day and we communicate that commitment through our words and actions clearly and in a way that they can understand. We treasure our spouses and honor them and show them how precious they are to us. All of these are the foundation of our sex life. At this point we are at square one sexually.

The next step is recognizing our differences as men and women sexually. The biggest complaint and most popular jokes concerning sex from men are that he never gets enough sex and from women is that all her husband ever wants to do is have sex, no matter what mood she is in or what is happening in their lives. One man asked his wife if she wanted to have sex after she just learned of a death in her family. She was horrified. After this reaction he felt very bad and stupid. But why would he do this? Why did he even ask? And why would she be horrified instead of just saying no? It's because of how we are created by God as men and women.

### **Men and Sex**

Men have a different attitude toward sex than women. One biography of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnez revealed his many affairs with stage girls. She was always upset and eventually divorced him. He never understood why she was upset because these women were not real women in his opinion; they were low class girls to be used to meet his needs. They did not mean anything to him. It was just a part of his work life.

This is a very bad story especially because it is true. However it illustrates the point that men can compartmentalize their lives. Men have a compartment for sex. Nothing has to go with it. In this case Desi was able to compartmentalize his work-mistresses from his home-wife. While all husbands are not having affairs they are separating the rest of life from their sexual desires. This is why they are capable of having a two-hour fight with their wife and then making sexual advances with the belief that she is really going to respond! In his mind the fight has nothing to do with their sex life. The death of a loved one has nothing to do with their sex life. Nothing has anything to do with their sex life. It has its own compartment.

Men are also sexually aroused visually. They have a sexual thought every 80 seconds because they see so much sexual input. There is so much sexual input and it is experienced so frequently, that most of it is subliminal, that is, most men do not even realize it is happening to them. They are not consciously aware of it. It happens, it happens all the time and they have incorporated it into their lives. Christian men fight with this all their lives and seek the cleansing of God's Holy Spirit to love their wives so that anyone else or any other sexual stimulation does not affect them. They grow stronger in this battle all through life, but it is a life long battle.

### **Women and Sex**

A woman's attitude toward sex is markedly different. She sees life as a whole. A wife's sex life is completely part of her heart, her makeup, and her personality. She would have absolutely no idea how to have a sexual experience – even of the most beautiful and romantic kind – outside of who she is as a woman, a wife and a Christian, outside of who she is as a person. Her sex life is an intricate part of all that she is. Therefore, before she can have a satisfying sexual experience, every part of her life must come into perspective. This does not mean she has to think about her whole life for hours before she can join her husband in bed. Like men, this is who she is and therefore it all happens in the blink of an eye. She will know at her husband's first sexual advance, if this is something she will be able to do that day; not deciding if she loves him or if he has pleased her enough for sex. But to search her heart and to know if all is right within herself and she can give herself joyfully to her husband sexually. If not, she can still choose to go through the biological motions but neither will be satisfied ultimately.

### **The mix between the two**

Men are stimulated by the senses. Visually as seen above, but also with touch, taste, smell and even actions. Most wives struggle with understanding how she can work all day and be sweaty and dressed in sweats or work clothes and have her husband come home and be immediately interested in sex. She needs a shower, she does not have her make up on, she is not dressed attractively and yet he wants her. She begins to think there is something wrong with him. If he wants her sexually when she is at her worst then he must be a deviant of some kind. Or he must have a guilty conscience about something. The truth is that sights and smells and body movements all arouse a man sexually. There is nothing wrong with him. He is not guilty of anything. He is aroused by his senses, which are being stimulated, by his wife. He wants her sexually when she is gorgeous and perfect, and he wants just as much when she is sweaty and tired. She stimulates him. In marriage, this is a very good thing. Men who are so stimulated by their wives are not looking elsewhere for sexual fulfillment. The good news for wives is the joy in knowing their husband desires them so very much.

On the other hand, a woman can frequently be attacked by her husband verbally and accused of not having a fun spirit, of not having any spontaneity and of being cold or frigid. She gets this attack because in her personality she is unable to stop everything she is doing to have sex. She is unable to jump into bed, as her husband wants, if she smells or is sweaty. She is unable to get her mind to understand why he feels the way he does. There seems to be something

wrong with this and she feels bad about herself when asked to be this way. She feels worse when her husband walks away angry saying ugly things about her.

A woman is person centered. She needs to be talked to, not just grabbed around the waist. She needs affection. She needs to hear her husband say, "I love you" and to express his feelings and even express his arousal toward her. She needs him to have an understanding attitude such as allowing her to finish her cleaning, or to take a shower and clean up and to join him in bed in a way that is exciting to her. All of these things are what stimulate and arouse a wife toward her husband sexually. One woman said her husband always aroused her when he would suggest they take a bath together. She needed to feel clean to enjoy sex. She did not feel comfortable with explicit sexual requests. So the thought of being naked and clean with her husband greatly excited her and after the bath they were able to enjoy each other physically and fully. The husband could say this was ridiculous and that his wife was unresponsive and avoiding his advances. Or he could understand his wife as the woman she was and have a happy and frequent sex life. This is what he did and he was a happy satisfied man. What husband complains about having a full, free, and frequent sex life just because it involves bath time foreplay first?

### **The Differences**

Men and women are different sexually in what their needs are. Women hate questions about where they are working because the assumption is always that women who are homemakers and stay at home moms do not really work. This is so offensive. Women need to be respected and appreciated for the work they do at home and in the raising of the children. They need to feel appreciated for making it possible for their husband to have his career. Women who work outside the home need to have their work experience validated by their husbands and appreciated for their part in the support and upkeep of the family. Their gifts and abilities and skills and experiences need to be valued by their husbands. Men can be careless about this and decide they work harder than their wives based only on the fact that their paycheck is bigger. Women need to be valued and appreciated.

Women also need to feel secure in their lives. They need to feel safe in their relationships. They need to experience unconditional love and forgiveness from their husbands at all times. Husbands who mock their wives, who always insult their wives or pick on them in front of others, can say they are teasing all they want to but they are hurting their wives and destroying their marriages. They are closing the spirit of their wives. What's more, their sex life will always be very poor because she cannot respond well to someone who is constantly hurting her.

A woman needs to feel needed. She needs to know that her husband would not be the man he is without her. In the comedy the Coneheads, the alien couple has this conversation. "What would you do if I died and you were alone? Would you find someone else to cone (have sex) with?" she asks. "I would close all entrances to our sleep chamber." He replied, "I would stay in bed and be miserable until all the fluids drained from my body and my life forces ended." She sighed with contentment and with a big smile went to sleep. We may never say these types of things – silly or otherwise - but if your wife does not feel that you desperately need her to make your life complete and happy she will always be worried and her self esteem will be very low. Instead of entering into a free and joyful sex life she will be spending her energies finding out how to be a better person and wife and how she can win her husband's approval. Or she will feel unneeded and leave him or at the least withdraw from him. The last thing she will be thinking about in either case is sex.

Also a woman needs to feel like she is in a solid and romantic relationship. Men feel like their marriage relationship is good if their family is properly provided for and they are having a

happy and consistent sex life with their wives. Wives are able to enjoy their sex life only if they believe their marital relationship is good. “Save my marriage sex” is a terrible effort to make a partner happy through sex. This is useless work and does not bring joy or pleasure. This is doing whatever my spouse wants. This is giving what I do not want to give to keep what I have already lost. And it never works. But “I am a happy person sex” is fun and energetic and joyful on every level because our hearts are singing the songs of love as our bodies join as one. When our relationship is solid and romantic a woman can give herself sexually with joy and passion and pleasure. Husbands, we must never lose the romance that we had when we pursuing our wives before marriage!

Men also need to experience respect but in a different way. A man’s identity is found in his work. His self-esteem is bound up in his accomplishments and success at work. He needs his wife to know that he is a hard worker and to appreciate him; to support him in his struggles at work, to stand by him through his failures and to rejoice in his successes. A successful man does not need a trophy wife on his arm at an awards ceremony. Rather he needs the wife who supported him and encouraged him and loved him and was with him in all things, by his side. Interestingly, most men do not have affairs with women who are better looking than their wives. Rather they have affairs with women who tell them they are wonderful. The male ego is a fragile thing and a wife who criticizes her husband will send him away from her – not always in an affair but certainly with a broken heart. Men need their wives to talk to them also, but men need their wives to speak to them with words of encouragement and appreciation for who they are and what they have accomplished. They need words of support and promises of commitment no matter what happens.

### **What is good sex?**

Physically men and women are different sexually as well. Things happen fairly fast for a man and fairly slow for a woman. Foreplay is the second biggest joke or complaint that people make about their sex lives. Women desire a great deal of foreplay when their sex lives are happy and satisfying. Men know that if there is too much foreplay the word “pre-mature” will come into the conversation. Men want to avoid this at all costs, including not working on satisfying their wives sexual needs. And yet men, as we saw in earlier chapters, are totally capable and equipped and emotionally bent towards problem solving. Here is a delightful problem that is pleasurable for them to resolve. Sex is work to do it right. It doesn’t just happen. But what work can make you happier than working to find out how to be a great lover!?

This is where good communication comes into play. You absolutely must tell your spouse what you like or do not like sexually. Help them. Tell them. Show them what to do. Your spouse does not know what is going to help you have a great sexual experience unless you tell them. This is one of the biggest problems that all couples have, especially Christians. We are so afraid of sinning sexually that in all areas of life we seek to avoid sexual sins of any kind and one of those sexual sins is to talk inappropriately or to joke about sex. After all every sexual joke we know is called a “dirty” joke. And our wedding night is the strangest night of our lives. We have been told all our lives to never be involved in any sexual activity of any kind and on our wedding night we can do everything and almost anything we want to with no spiritual problems or repercussions! In the course of a few hours everything we have spent a lifetime struggling against becomes instantly acceptable. No matter how well you are prepared for this dramatic and drastic change it is always a very strange night physically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally. So trying to talk about sex, sexual activities and what feels good to us sexually, even privately with our spouses, is incredible hard for us to do. And yet this kind of loving sexual communication is vital for an incredible sex life.

## **The Biggest Problem**

A husband will say, “I love you” to get sex and a wife will give sex in order to hear “I love you”. Sadly, husbands will use their relationship to get sex. Just as sadly women will use sex to get the relationship they want. Both of these are wrong and demonstrate that our marriage is failing to accomplish its joyous character that God created it to have. When we seek to manipulate each other to get what we want – whatever that is - we are demonstrating the breaking down of our marriages. It is an indication that we are using our spouse to meet our needs rather than seeking to serve our spouses by meeting their needs. Ultimate fulfillment in life and marriage comes, not when we get our spouses to do what we want, but when we see that our spouses are fulfilled and contented because we have met their needs. When spouses have this goal and pleasure, manipulation disappears and both are fulfilled and satisfied, sexually, relationally and in all other ways.

We are not perfect; therefore this ministry to our spouse takes a great deal of work every day. However, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to grow in this very special and happy work and see wonderful successes all the days of our lives. The joy of the Lord and our marriage will be ours in spite of all the ups and downs along the way.

### ***Conclusion***

The question is always do you want sex or do you want a fantastic marriage that includes fantastic sex. The latter takes love, information, communication, understanding, acceptance, work, sharing, and valuing your spouse and your marriage. It also takes your whole life. It is a work of joy and sexual fulfillment. It is worth everything.

Sex in marriage is the physical expression of what is true of a couple emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Sex does not make a good marriage but you cannot have a good marriage without good sex. God has given marriage and sex to you. Enjoy them and enjoy each other as you enjoy God and His love for you.

## Questions for Chapter Eight

- 1- What is the act of marriage?
- 2- What does the act of marriage show us?
- 3- Why is it impossible to have a good marriage without having good sexual experiences with your spouse?
- 4- What is at the core of sexual activity in marriage?
- 5- What is sexual intimacy?
- 6- How can we combine our spirituality with our sexuality?
- 7- How do men think of sex mentally?
- 8- How do women think about sex mentally?
- 9- What is good sex?
- 10- What is our biggest problem in marital sex?

## Footnotes – Chapter Eight

- 1- Tim & Beverly LaHaye. *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty of Sexual Love*. p. 1.
- 2- Rainey, Dennis. *Preparing for Marriage* p.213.
- 3- Frank Hajcak and Patricia Garwood. *Hidden Bedroom Partners*; p. 190.
- 4- *Ibid.* p. 194.
- 5- Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships*. Tape 3.
- 6- Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. p. 21.

## APPENDICES

### Medical Problems Stemming from Marital Stress

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Dec. 5 –

Even if spouses usually get along well, the stress caused by a half-hour argument can slow healing of a surgical wound by as much as a day, researchers here reported. If they are generally hostile, the delay in wound healing can be doubled, according to Ronald Glaser, Ph.D., and Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, Ph.D., both of Ohio State here. One implication of the finding, reported in the December issue of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, is that marital stress plays an important role in recovery from surgery, Dr. Kiecolt-Glaser said. "This shows why it is so important that people be psychologically prepared for their surgeries," she added.

Dr. Kiecolt-Glaser said the study, combined with previous work, suggests that "hospitals need to modify existing practices in ways that will reduce stress prior to surgery." Reducing pre-surgical stress, both researchers said, would lead to shorter hospital stays, lower medical bills, and a reduced risk of nosocomial infection.

With colleagues, the researcher recruited 42 married couples, who had been married on average for 12.5 years, and admitted them to Ohio State's general clinical research center for two 24-hour visits, separated by two months. At each visit, both members of the couple were subjected to eight small wounds, using a suction blister device. The epidermis roofing the blisters was removed and a plastic template with eight wells was taped over the wounds.

During the first visit, subjects were asked to complete questionnaires designed to gauge their level of stress. Then they were asked to engage in two 10-minute discussions intended to allow the researchers to assess their behavior when they were soliciting and offering social support.

The procedure was identical during the second visit, except that the 10-minute discussions were about areas of disagreement, Dr. Kiecolt-Glaser said - "something that inherently had an emotional element." Few of the interactions were classified as hostile, the researchers noted. Even during the conflict discussions, half of the couples had seven or fewer hostile behaviors on the Rapid Marital Interaction Coding System, which discriminates well between distressed and non-distressed couples.

However, couples whose hostility levels were above the median were classed as "high-hostile," with the remainder being "low-hostile." The researchers noted that their sample is probably slightly skewed away from truly dysfunctional relationships, because people in these marriages are less likely to volunteer together for scientific research.

The study found: On average, the high-hostile subjects took a day longer to heal than the low-hostile subjects after the social support visit (six days versus five) and at the conflict visit (seven days versus six), the researchers found.

Overall - if the nature of the visit was ignored -- the median time to healing was two days longer in the high-hostile behavior group. Independent of which group the couples were classed in, the time to healing following the conflict visit was six days, compared to five days after the social support visit.

The researchers also found differences in the production of three cytokines - interleukin (IL)-6, IL-1-beta, and tumor necrosis factor-alpha. Both groups had increases in circulating levels of plasma IL-6 and TNF-alpha after the conflict session compared to the social support session, the researcher found. However, the high-hostile couples had greater increases.

For example, low-hostile participants increased IL-6 production by about 65% to 70% over the 24 hours following either session, while IL-6 increases in high-hostile individuals jumped from 45% after the social session to 113% after the conflict session. "Frequent or persistent stress-related changes in plasma levels of these key cytokines have broad implications for health," the researchers argue, noting that elevated levels of proinflammatory cytokines are linked to a range of diseases, including cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, and type II diabetes.

The fact that even a short dispute in a laboratory setting can spark such changes in wound healing suggests that it is a "really sensitive process," Dr. Kiecolt-Glaser said.

Archives of General Psychiatry

### **Your Wife's Marriage Health Meter**

Here is a great marriage communication tip, also from Dr. Smalley. Because of the way women think they have a built in marriage health meter. If you want to know how your marriage is going and how to make it better ask your wife these three questions.

- 1- On a scale of 0-10 what kind of marriage do we want?
- 2- On a scale of 0-10 where is our marriage today (typically a man will say it is 2 points better than his wife will)
- 3- How can we take our marriage from where it is to a 10?

If you ignore this your wife will not share this information with you because she will not believe you are really interested or that you really care. If you take this seriously, you can always know what needs to be happening to improve your marriage.

Gary Smalley. *Keys to A Loving Marriage*. Video Series.

## Bibliography

Jay Adams. *Christian Living in the Home*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1984 - 143 pages.

Dr. Adams is a retired professor of counseling at Westminster Seminary. This book is a practical biblical teaching on Christ centered family living.

Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *Intimate Allies*. Wheaton, Ill.; Tyndale House Publishers, 1995 – 364 pages

This is a handbook of reversing the curse and brokenness of the fall concerning marriage. It shows us what marriage was intended to be in the heart of God.

Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. Downers Grove, Ill.; Intervarsity Pres., 2005 – 106 pages

This is an exposition on the “leave and cleave” marriage foundation in Genesis. It shows us that marriage is primarily about spiritual growth much more than simply personal happiness.

American Association of Christian Counselors. *Caring For People God's Way (External Certificate Program)*. 15 video training tapes and study/workbooks.

This continuing education training program which addresses many different issues in counseling including marriage, family, communication, finances and other marriage and family related materials. This is a continuing education program.

Dave and Claudia Arp. *Ten Dates For Mates*. Nashville, Tn.; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983 - 175 pages.

A book of ideas for directed, interesting, enjoyable, fun, passionate and significant dates for couples who have been married for some time focusing on communicating through every area of potential conflict in marriage.

William Bakus. *Telling the Truth to Troubled People, A Manual For Christian Counselors*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bethany House Publishers, 1985 - 256 pages.

A practical step-by-step Guide for Christian Counseling applying “misbelief therapy”.

Banner of Truth Trust. *The Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs*. Carlisle, Pa., Banner of Truth Trust, 32 pages.

“The most thoroughly thought-out statement ever penned of the elements of evangelical religion” B.B. Warfield.

David Boehi, Brent Nelson, Jeff Schulte & Lloyd Shadrach. *Preparing for Marriage*. Ventura, California; Gospel Light, 1997 – 251 pages.

A program manual for laying the foundation for a strong Biblical marriage through pre-marital counseling.

- Stephen Brown. *When Your Rope Breaks*. Nashville, Tn.; Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988 - 188 Pages  
 A Spirit filled look at what to do when tough things happen to us and to those whom we love.
- Bob Burns and Tom Whiteman. *The Fresh Start Divorce Recovery Workbook*. Nashville, Tn., Thomas Nelson, In., 1998 – 290 pages.  
 A step by step program for those who are divorced or separated. This is a total recovery program from a Christian perspective. I helped to teach this program at Granada Presbyterian Church.
- John Drescher. *For Bitter or For Better? Keys For A Great Marriage*. Worchester, Pa.: Gateway Films Vision Video and Leader's Guide, 1996 - 2-1 hour videos and 48 page Leader's Guide.  
 Pastoral advice and insights concerning marriage stressing how to understand and love each other as the persons God intended us to be.
- Lucile Duberman. *Marriage and Its Alternatives*. New York, New York; Praeger Publishers, 1974 - 238 pages  
 A textbook on the sociology of marriage and the family that focuses on the dynamic aspect of this institution in American society.
- Howard Eyrich. *A Pre-marital Counseling Manual*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1978 - 147 pages.  
 A Biblical, practical and stimulating manual on pre-marital counseling including tests, quizzes and homework assignments that aid the counselor in discovering problem areas and in facilitating solutions.
- Frank Hajcak and Patricia Garwood. *Hidden Bedroom Partners*; San Diego, Ca. Libra Publishers, Inc. 1987 - 224 pages.  
 Demonstrates how we can unlearn unhealthy sexual patterns in our marriages and recover basic sexual pleasure.
- Lynn Heitritter & Jeanette Vought. *Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bethany House Publishers, 1989 - 272 pages.  
 Discussion of a terrible and difficult issue covering diagnosis, treatment and prevention with spiritual considerations.
- Neil S. Jacobson and Alan S. Gurman. *Clinical Handbook of Marital Therapy*. New York, New York, Guilford Press, 1986. – 636 pages.  
 A handbook that presents a detailed presentation of the practice of marital therapy using 14 full length, detailed case studies.
- Richard H. Klemer. *Marriage and Family Relationships*. New York, New York; Harper and Row Publishers, 1970. - 340 pages  
 A study of relationships in marriage and the family with emphasis on social factors, adjustments, impediments and sexual factors.

- Tim & Beverly LaHaye. *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty of Sexual Love*. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Press, 1998 - 397 pages.  
This is a book bringing Christian insights into the sexual relationship of married couples whether they are newlyweds or over sixty. It is a spiritual look at the biology and psychology of sex for Christians.
- Tim & Beverly LaHaye. *The Act of Marriage After 40, Making Love for Life*. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Press, 2000 - 249 pages.  
This practical guidebook covers a broad range of important subjects and show couples who have been married for some time how to experience a more fulfilling and enjoyable sexual relationship.
- Mike Mason. *The Mystery of Marriage*. Sisters, Oregon, Multnomah Publishers, 2005. – 219 pages.  
This is a book that explores the mystical and holy nature of marriage with a depth that celebrates God's design for marriage and our participation in it.
- Christopher and Rachel McClusky. *When Two Become One*. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Revell Publishing, 2004 – 184 pages.  
A detailed resource book that helps couples to see and experience lovemaking with a deeper experience in all areas of marriage.
- Dean Merrill. *Clergy Couples in Crisis; Carol Stream, Il*. Word Book Publishers, 1985 - 216 pages.  
Documentaries of clergy couples marriages and commentary on these documentaries by noted pastoral counselors.
- Kevin and Karen Miller. *More Than You and Me*. Colorado Springs, Co., Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994 – 168 pages.  
A book showing us how our marriages affect others and how through the strength of our marriages we can touch and minister to others.
- Les & Leslie Parrott. *Love Talk*; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan, 2004 - 185 pages  
A book to help determine our personal communication styles and then using what we learn to communicate better with our spouses than we ever have before.
- Dennis Rainey. *Weekend To Remember Conference Manual*. Little Rock, Ak.; Family Life - 256 pages.  
These manual covered the three day seminar concerning treasuring your spouse and becoming one with them and addressing the issues that stop this from happening and how to resolve them. I have taught through this manual several times at Granada church.
- Dennis Rainey. *Weekend To Remember Conference*. Little Rock, Ak.; Family Life - 16 1 hour cassette Tapes.  
These tapes covered a three day seminar concerning treasuring your spouse and becoming one with them and addressing the issues that stop this from happening and how to resolve them. I have the tapes and attended the conference on two different occasions.

Dennis Rainey. *Building Your Marriage*. Ventura, California; Gospel Light, 1993 - 210 pages.

Part of the Family Life Homebuilders Couples Series teaching ways to receive and become one with your spouse.

Gary and Barbara Rosberg. *Improving Communication in Your Marriage*. Loveland, Co., Group Publishing, Inc., 2000 – 130 pages.

Part of the Family Life Homebuilders Couples Series teaching ways to improve relationships, resolve conflicts and increase spiritual intimacy as a couple.

Charlie Shedd. *Letters to Karen on Keeping Love in Marriage*. New York, New York, Avon Books, 1973 - 158 pages

Personal letters from Dr. Shedd to his daughter after her engagement offering practical advice on marriage problems and their resolutions.

Gary Smalley. *Keys To Loving Relationships*. Branson, Mo.; Today's Family, 1998 - 18 1 hour Video Tapes

18 video tapes that give practical insights and a greater understanding about the need for close intimate relationships. I have taught this tape series several times.

Gary Smalley. *Making Love Last Forever*. Dallas, Tx.; Word Publishing, 1996 - 279 pages.

This is a book of principles on how to love for life - how to fall in love with life and how to stay in love with your spouse.

Gary Smalley. *Focus On The Family Marriage Series*. Ventura, Ca., Gospel Light.

Each book is approximately 75 pages – 525 pages total.

This is a seven book series on all aspects of marriage. It also includes a manual and a video tape. It is intended to be used in small groups. I have taught through this series twice.

Stephen Ministries. *Stephen Ministries Leadership Training*. St. Louis, Mo.; Stephen Ministries, 2001. - 48 Hours of Lectures

Classes and lectures held over 8 days to train Pastors and Church leaders in how to develop a care giving, counseling ministry among the lay people of their church. The teachings include basic counseling and listening methods. I attended his conference and became a Stephen Leader in Orlando. I also introduced this program, taught the course and trained the Leaders and Stephen Ministers at Granada Presbyterian Church.

Stephen Ministries. *Stephen Ministries Leadership Training Manuals*. St. Louis, Mo.; Stephen Ministries, 2001. - 400 pages

These are 2 training manuals to teach Christians how to be compassionate, Christ centered caregivers to those who are hurting.

Lee and Leslie Strobel, *Surviving a Spiritual Mismatch in Marriage*; Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 2002 - 272 pages.

Insights into the thinking of non-Christian spouses and how to survive the inevitable conflict.

Ed Wheat & Gloria Oaks Perkins. *Love Life For Every Married Couple*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Press, 1984 - 345 pages

How to fall in love with your spouse, stay in love with your spouse and renew your love for your spouse when something goes wrong.

World Harvest Mission. *Sonship Conference Manual*. Jenkintown, Pa., World Harvest, 2005, 100 pages.

Manual used at the 2005 Sonship Conference in Orlando. Focus is on grace in your life and relationships.

Everett L. Worthington, Jr. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*. Downers Grove, Ill.; InterVarsity Press, 1999. – 284 pages.

This perspective on marriage counseling comes at the subject from a positive side and gives the couple the ability to see that change is possible and allow them to have a positive outlook on the future.

H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key To Your Marriage*. Ventura, California: Regal Press, 2000 - 257 pages.

How to communicate at new and deeper levels and how to understand your mate better.

H. Norman Wright. *How to Counsel a Couple in 6 Lessons or Less*. Ventura, California, Regal Press, 2002 - 164 pages.

This book helps Christian Counselors and Pastors to cover the important issues of pre-marital counseling in a briefer period of time.

H. Norman Wright. *Marital Counseling. A Biblical, Behavioral, Cognitive Approach*. San Francisco, California, Harper and Row Publishers, 1983. – 421 pages.

A comprehensive text for Christian marriage counselors concerning the problems and solutions to marriage problems and their treatment.

H. Norman Wright. *Seasons of a Marriage*. Ventura, Ca., Regal Books, 1982. – 165 pages.

This book identifies the three major reasons why marriages dissolve and attempts to prepare people for the changes they will encounter throughout their married lives.



# **Marriage Enrichment**

## **God's Promise for Marriage**

(Family Ministries)

Rev. G. Michael Saunders, Sr.

### **Teacher's Manual**

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## ***Course Description***

This course is part of the Family Ministries course of study and provides the fundamentals in understanding marriage and how – through teaching and pastoral counseling – to teach others how to make their marriages what God intended them to be so that they can enjoy their marriages to the fullest in this life. And in so doing glorify God and enjoy Him to the fullest.

The course is not auto-didactic. Nor is it principally academic in nature. A mature teacher must be prepared to play the role of mentor to his students, rather than a mere instructor.

The number of students in the class should be small, to allow for the interchange necessary in the mentoring process. Eight to twelve students are the ideal number. The course should be as practical as possible, dealing with real life situations and problems that the leader will encounter personally and in the context of his ministry.

Finally, the teacher must keep in mind at all times, that this class is *training* in marriage enrichment, not just a teaching *about* marriage enrichment. The goal is for the student to experience a better marriage personally as a result of an increased knowledge of marriage enrichment as well as learning how to teach it to others.

## ***Purpose of the Course***

1. To establish in the mind of the student the Biblical concept and definition of a successful, fulfilling, joyous, life long marriage that brings glory to God and allows the couple to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
2. To help the student develop a full understanding of God's plan revealed in His word, for marriage.
3. Identify and practice the skills, gifts and talents for the enriching of their own marriages.
4. Gain the skills to teach and counsel others to enrich their marriages.

## ***Summary of course content.***

This course will give the student the tools for a successful and long term marriage based on the principle of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. It will provide the student with the tools necessary to lead others to happy marriages through Christ.

## ***Course materials.***

Dan Allender & Tremper Longman III. *The Intimate Mystery*. Downers Grove, Ill.; Intervarsity Pres., 2005.

Tim & Beverly LaHaye. *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty of Sexual Love*. Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Press, 1998.

Michael Saunders. *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promises for Marriage*. Miami, Florida; M.I.N.T.S., 2006.

Gary Smalley. *Making Love Last Forever*. Dallas, TX.; Word Publishing, 1996.

Greg Smalley & Robert Paul. *The DNA of Relationships for Couples*. Carol Stream, IL; Tyndale House, 2006

Ed Wheat & Gloria Oaks Perkins. *Love Life For Every Married Couple*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Press, 1997

H. Norman Wright. *Communication, Key to Your Marriage*. Ventura, California: Regal Press, 2000.

***Objectives of the course.***

- 1- Student participation in classroom discussion
  - 2- Student comprehension of course materials
  - 3- Student familiarization with course bibliography
  - 4- Student development of ministry skills in Marriage Enrichment Education
  - 5- Student's retention of course materials and application to real ministry
  - 6- Student's application of course materials to their own marriage
- These objectives will be evaluated in four ways (See evaluation of the course).*

***Structure of the course.***

*How the course will be conducted.*

1. For students studying at a distance and not attending course lectures:
  - a. The student will contact the MINTS Academic Dean in order to sign up for the course and be designated a supervising professor.
  - b. The student will identify his or her mentor, who will locally oversee the course. The mentor will verify that all of the lessons have been read and homework completed. Note: The supervising professor of MINTS must approve the mentor.
  - c. The student will download the course syllabus and begin studies.
  - d. The mentor will send the lesson completion chart, the exam completion chart and the case study to the supervising professor.
  - e. The supervising professor will review and record the grades, ensure that they are registered with the MINTS Registrar and that the final grade is sent to the student and mentor.
2. For students studying at a distance who attend course lectures:
  - a. MINTS provides an orientation to the course (by invitation by a professor).
  - b. The student will attend 15 hours of lectures.
  - c. The student will complete the lesson assignments and give them to the professor, who also serves as the mentor.
  - d. The supervising MINTS professor will review the student's work (attendance, lesson completion and case study grade) and have the final grade registered with the MINTS Registrar. The Registrar will send the group leader the student's final grade.

## ***Lesson Development.***

### Lesson 1 - What is Marriage?

#### *Homework:*

1. Read chapter one and two of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Choose your case study couple and set up an 7-week program of counseling.
3. Read - *Making Love Last Forever* by Dr. Gary Smalley

### Lesson 2 - What is Marriage Enrichment?

#### *Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your first marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit an initial proposal for a Couple's Marriage Enrichment Weekend Retreat for your church.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read chapter three of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *Love Life For Every Married Couple* by Dr. Ed Wheat

### Lesson 3 - Why Do We Need to Practice Marriage Enrichment?

#### *Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your second marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit a study guide for the Couples Retreat.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read chapter four of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read – *The DNA of Relationships for Couples* by Dr. Greg Smalley

### Lesson 4 – Marriage Enrichment Begins With Safety

#### *Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your third marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit a study guide for the Couples Retreat.

#### *Homework:*

1. Read chapter five of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read – *The Languages of Love*

### Lesson 5 - Marriage Enrichment is Serving Our Spouses.

#### *Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your fourth marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Turn in a report showing your language of love and your spouses language of love and what difference this makes in the way you treat each other

#### *Homework:*

1. Read chapter Six of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *The Intimate Mystery* by Dan Allender

### Lesson 6 - Marriage Enrichment is Becoming One With Your Spouse.

*Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your fifth marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Submit a list of 13 dates that you and your spouse can realistically (financially, child care, travel, work concerns, etc.) go on for the next quarter.

*Homework:*

1. Read chapter seven of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *Communication, Key to Your Marriage* by Norman Wright

Lesson 7 - Communication is the Secret to Marriage Enrichment.

*Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your sixth marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Research and recommend a Christian Divorce Prevention Program with an explanation of the program and why you believe you can use this program in your ministry or church.

*Homework:*

1. Read chapter eight of *Marriage Enrichment: God's Loving Promise*.
2. Read - *The Act of Marriage, The Beauty of Sexual Love* by Tim Lahaye

Lesson 8- The Act of Marriage is Marriage Enrichment.

*Turn In This Week:*

1. Turn in report of your seventh marriage enrichment counseling session.
2. Turn in a list of 10 Christian Internet websites dealing specifically with sexual issues in Christian Marriage with a brief description of each.

***Requirements of the course***

1. The student will attend 15 hours of class and participate in the discussion time.
2. Pass a short quiz at the end of each class (for credit students only).
3. The student will complete reading and writing assignments required between classes.
4. The student will complete one case study during the term.
5. The students will become familiar with readings related to the course theme(s).
6. The student must pass the final comprehensive exam (for credit students only).

***Evaluation of the course***

1. Student participation: One point may be given (15%) for each class hour attended.
2. Quizzes: One point (8%) for each class quiz passed.
3. Student homework: Two points may be given (15%) for each homework assignment for the 8 lessons.
4. Student readings: Bachelor level students will read 300 extra pages and write a 3-page book report. Master level students will read 500 pages and write a 5-

page book report. Doctoral level students will read 5000 pages and present an annotated bibliography (20%).

5. Student case study: The writer of the course will assign a case study, which puts knowledge into action (17%).
6. Student exam: The student will demonstrate his/her understanding of the main concepts and content of the course materials (25%).

### ***Benefits of the course***

This course will enhance the marriage of the student and teach them valuable tools to enhance the marriages of the people in their congregations and ministries. It will also be useful for them in marriage counseling settings.

### ***Closing Remarks***

The student will be able to conclude this course with several very useful plans and tools for ministry in Marriage Enrichment through Pastoral ministry and Christian counseling.

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT - LESSON ONE

### What Is Marriage?

- Introduction:** God created Marriage to be the format through which man would glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Mankind and marriage must both be redeemed through Christ. Marriage is for the honor and glory of God and for the good of man. Christ will make your marriage successful.
- First Division:** Marriage is a Divine Institution. God originated marriage, He created the rules for marriage and He gives us His reasons for creating marriage.
- Second Division:** The Nature of Man and the Nature of Marriage. The nature of man and the nature of marriage must be redeemed by Jesus Christ.
- Conclusion:** Marriage Enrichment is learning what work needs to be done in order to keep your marriage alive and fresh. It is also a lifetime of study to learn how to keep marriage joyous as we change and our spouse changes over the years. However, it is also the study of your favorite subject and everything you learn and practice will bring reward upon reward.
- Lesson Summary:** 1- God Himself Originated Marriage. 2- God Himself Provided the Rules for Marriage. 3- God Has Given His Reasons for Marriage. 4- The Nature of Man. 5- The Nature of Christian Man. 6- The Nature of Marriage. 7- The Nature of People is not changed at Their Wedding Ceremony

#### Lesson Questions:

- 1- There are only two things that exist in the world today that were created by God before the fall of man into sin – what are they?
- 2- Why was marriage so vital? Why did God create it before sin came into the world?
- 3- What does marriage truly accomplish?
- 4- How does marriage bring the fullest enjoyment of God and life?
- 5- How are two sinful humans going to make a marriage relationship anything other than sinful? What has to happen in order to make marriage work?
- 6- What is the other reason for God's creation of marriage?
- 7- What does leave and cleave mean?
- 8- What is the nature of marriage?

9- What is the main characteristic of people that cannot be tolerated in a happy marriage? What is the marriage tie that motivates unity in marriage?

10- What two items did God decree to Adam and Eve after the fall concerning what will cause a marriage to work in the fullest sense?

Lesson Answers:

1- Nature and marriage.

2- It is the way in which we will accomplish the purpose for which He created us – to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

3- The blessing of two people and the completion of them, it brings them pleasure and fulfillment, it causes them to enjoy God to the fullest.

4- Marriage is the closest picture of what it means to have a personal, intimate, trusting relationship with the Lord Jesus.

5- A) The people and the marriage must be redeemed by Jesus Christ. Only His Holy Spirit living in us can help us overcome that part of ourselves that is most destructive to a happy and healthy marriage – selfishness. B) We must place higher value on our spouses than we do on ourselves, or selfishness will always be a major problem in our marriages.

6- It is the foundation upon which He has built all of society.

7- To make your relationship with your spouse primary and all other relationships secondary.

8- Sinful and in need of a Savior.

9- A) Selfishness. B) Unconditional love that comes from Christ through the Holy Spirit.

10- 1) Redemption through Christ and 2) Hard labor on the part of each spouse to serve the other.

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT – LESSON TWO

### What Is Marriage Enrichment?

- Introduction: Marriage Enrichment is opening your spouse's spirit to God and to you.
- First Division: Marriage Enrichment is living for Christ in your marriage. Marriage Enrichment, like all of life, is about the Lord Jesus Christ and is for the glory of God. Having a good and healthy marriage brings glory to God and reveals Him to the world. Therefore we commit ourselves to enriching our marriages throughout all of life in order for the Lord to accomplish His purposes in our society and in our lives for His glory and our good.
- Second Division: Marriage Enrichment is About Serving Your Spouse. Opening your spouse's spirit is done by 1) *you* experiencing personal growth in your relationship with the Lord Jesus, 2) *you* experiencing personal growth in a lifestyle of God's grace, 3) *your* desire to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, 4) *your* attitude of total honor of and for your spouse (including unconditional love and pre-forgiveness), and 5) *your* good communication with your spouses.
- Third Division: Marriage Enrichment is an attitude of total commitment. This kind of commitment provides safety and security to the marriage. The Total Commitment of Marriage is Unconditional Love. Marriage enrichment and the ability to make this unselfish commitment of unconditional love has to do with Jesus Christ and with Him alone. God has equipped us to keep this commitment.
- Fourth Division: Marriage Enrichment is being a team to create a joyous marriage. They must have the attitude of total commitment to each other so that they can truly be one, so that they can work together and create together and so that they can trust each other, and have a successful, loving relationship.
- Fifth Division: Marriage Enrichment is about your personal relationship with Jesus. If the Lord Jesus Christ is real and alive and if He loves me and lives in my heart then the happiness I long for in my marriage and the rest of life can come through Him. The first step in making your marriage great is to ask yourself, "How close am I to Jesus?" For the Christian this is the foundation for all marriage enrichment.
- Sixth Division: Marriage Enrichment is learning to live in God's grace. In order for us to understand marriage enrichment we must first understand grace. In order to understand grace, we need to understand ourselves and our relationship to the Heavenly Father. The lifestyle of grace is a lifestyle of unreserved love for Jesus Christ. The lifestyle of grace is a lifestyle of freedom. Living in grace is

being right with our Heavenly Father You see; the Lord declares that we are His “beloved”. Marriage enrichment means that as you live in this grace you help your spouse to live in it also. The Gospel of the Unconditional Love of Jesus our dear Lord is the only way in which we will ever be able to have joy filled, Christian lives and enriched marriages. We must be growing in God’s grace every day.

**Conclusion:** Marriage Enrichment is done by constantly growing in your relationship with Jesus all your life, by living in grace all your life, and learning what work needs to be done in order to keep your marriage alive and fresh. When our hearts and our marriages are centered on Christ alone, we are able to glorify God through the enjoyment of His unconditional love and grace. This is Marriage Enrichment!

**Lesson Summary:** 1- Marriage Enrichment is living for Christ in Your Marriage. 2- Marriage Enrichment is about serving your spouse. 3- Marriage Enrichment is an attitude of total commitment. 4- Marriage Enrichment is being a team to create a joyous marriage. 5- Marriage Enrichment is learning to live in God’s grace.

**Lesson Questions:**

- 1- What is Marriage Enrichment about?
- 2- What is the summary of Marriage Enrichment?
- 3- What is Marriage Enrichment essentially?
- 4- What is the total commitment of marriage?
- 5- What makes us able to keep our marriages enriched?
- 6- How Has God Equipped a woman To Keep This Commitment?
- 7- How has God equipped a man to keep this commitment?
- 8- How Do We Grow In Our Relationship With Jesus?
- 9- To understand marriage enrichment what must we first understand? In order to understand that, what do we need to understand.
- 10- When our hearts and our marriages are centered on Christ alone, we are able to do what?

**Lesson Answers:**

- 1- The Lord Jesus Christ and the glory of God.

- 2- Opening your spouse's spirit to God and to you.
- 3- An Attitude Of Total Commitment
- 4- Unconditional Love
- 5- The fact that Jesus lives within us, makes all His promises possible and true in our lives and for our marriages.
- 6- Women are equipped by God to deeply desire a solid, romantic, safe and permanent relationship and they are gifted to know what one is.
- 7- Men are equipped and gifted to actually do the work involved to create a Christ-centered, glorious relationship.
- 8- The Spiritual Disciplines
  - a- Love the Lord
  - b- Study the Scriptures
  - c- Pray without Ceasing
  - d- Confess our Sins
  - e- Worship together
  - f- Practice the Sacraments
  - g- Love one another
  - h- Love and Serve our Families
- 9- Grace. Ourselves and our relationship to the Heavenly Father.
- 10- Glorify God through the enjoyment of His unconditional love and grace.

**LESSON DEVELOPMENT – LESSON THREE**  
**Why Do We Need To Practice Marriage Enrichment?**

- Introduction: Because married people are sinners and because marriage is in the context of a sinful world today, it needs to be enriched all the time. It is the belief of our culture today that marriage is not permanent, that it is not necessary, that, even though it has some good points and meets some needs, marriage is optional and primarily a way for each of us to have our own needs met.
- First Division: As society rejects God it rejects His formula for true and lasting happiness in this life. As it becomes acceptable to question the truth of the existence of God and the value of Christianity, the church and her teachings, it has become acceptable to declare marriage to be an invention of man.
- Second Division: Our society seeks to censor our desire and need to make a commitment of unconditional love because it is not based on our own personal happiness and therefore is essentially unfair. Our society tells us that, we not only cannot make such a commitment marriage requires, based on unconditional love, but that we should not make such an unfair, restrictive commitment.
- Third Division: The church believes that people know how to have happy marriages. Yet 50% of all Christian marriages end in divorce. What should the church do – accept divorce as an inevitable fact of life? No! Teach us how to have successful marriages. Being a Christian is not the only information we need to have happy and permanent marriages!
- Fourth Division: The marriage relationship is so close and intimate that selfishness cannot be tolerated if the relationship is going to work. And yet most of us enter into marriage thinking only about what we are going to get out of it. Our own happiness. Our own desires. Our own fulfillment.
- Fifth Division: We can put on an image of health and happiness to everyone except God and ourselves. The two of us are the only ones who the true state of our heart. Most of us are only too aware of our own sinfulness, weaknesses and failures. Because we are aware of them we live in fear.
- Conclusion: We must practice Marriage Enrichment today!
- Lesson Summary: 1- The Humanization of marriage. 2- Societies attitude toward marriage. 3- The Church's silence on marriage. 4- Our own selfishness. 5- Our fears toward marriage.

### Questions for Chapter Three

- 1- God created and redeemed our marriages to be what?
- 2- According to the way our culture practices marriage, why does marriage exist?
- 3- What is the humanization of marriage?
- 4- What is societies attack on marriage?
- 5- Who does society say is the building block of society?
- 6- Why are there so many marriage resources for Christians outside the church today?
- 7- Why are our churches essentially silent on marriage?
- 8- How does our own selfishness hurt our marriages?
- 9- How can our spouse make us happy in our marriage?
- 10- How do our fears affect our marriages?

### Answers for Chapter Three:

1- Joyful, full of praise, and with a glorious purpose. It is to be full of happiness and joy. It is to be wonderful and if it is boring and routine then we are in sin. We need to be consistently practicing marriage enrichment because it is the happy work we do of putting happiness, pleasure and joy into our marriages and keeping it there. We also need marriage enrichment because of...

2- Marriage today exists only for the purpose of bringing happiness to the individual and can be ended when there is no happiness for at least one of the individuals involved.

3- The belief system that God and the things of God are not relevant to our lives today. We do away with God and with all His teachings. This includes those teachings which concern the sanctity of marriage, the worth and value of marriage, marriage as the foundational base of society and the belief that true happiness is found in a long term, monogamous, deeply intimate relationship.

4- That what we have called marriage, as defined by God, is a false and even harmful belief. If there is a God He would never want people to be unhappy. Therefore, marriage must be whatever we define it to be in today's modern and sophisticated world that will bring the greatest happiness to the people involved.

5- The individual, not the couple, is now the basic unit of society and marriage has been replaced with the "right to happiness" of the individual, however each individual defines it, as the goal of society. Society is now focused on the individual and his rights and desires alone.

6- It is because Christian marriages are in just as much trouble as non-Christian marriages and we don't know what to do about it. It is because the church is not doing a good job of addressing the needs of our marriages today.

7- Because we just assume that Christian people who know Christ personally automatically know how to have a successful, Christian marriage and the truth is we simply do not.

8- By entering into marriage thinking only about what we are going to get out of it. Our own happiness. Our own desires. Our own fulfillment. We have no desire to serve or meet the needs of our spouse. Our marriages are "me" centered. I judge the success of my marriage by how happy I am.

9- Our spouse, our marriage, our whatever can never make us happy or fulfill us. They can never meet all our needs or desires. And in fact – they were never intended to and are not supposed to!! By the time we find this out we believe our only option is divorce.

10- If I know what I truly am, then what if my spouse finds out? How can they love me when they know how weak I am? When they discover what a mess I am? When they discover how I have betrayed them in thought word and deed? How can my marriage survive? Why would they ever stay with me? And we live in fear of losing everything.

## **LESSON DEVELOPMENT - LESSON FOUR**

### **Marriage Enrichment Begins with Safety**

- Introduction:** We need to make our marriages the safest place in our lives. This needs to be a place where we protect the hearts of our spouses and where we are totally convinced that our hearts will also be protected.
- First Division:** Step One Toward a Safe Marriage: Being Enabled. The first step is when each person is enabled to become the person God created him or her to be. This happens when we take responsibility for our own behavior and well being.
- Second Division:** Step Two Toward a Safe Marriage: Doing the Work. The second step is to actually do the work of caring for ourselves. Caring for ourselves means being filled with God's love and provisions in all aspects of our being.
- Third Division:** Step Three Toward a Safe Marriage: Ministering to Our Spouse's Feelings. We can seek to understand, encourage and assist our spouse in managing their needs by caring deeply about their feelings as they seek to become the person God created them to be.
- Fourth Division:** Step Four Toward a Safe Marriage: Ministering to Our Marriages. When we look to God alone to fulfill us and we are filled with his love then we are constantly striving to be the best that we can be, we are striving to assist our spouses to become all that God created them to be and we are doing everything within our power to make our marriage partnership successful.
- Conclusion:** Making your marriage safe is the foundation you build on to enrich your marriage.
- Lesson Summary:** 1- We need to make our marriages a place of safety for our spouse. 2- We need to be enabled to be the people God created us to be. 3- We need to care for ourselves. 4- We need to minister to our spouse's feelings. 5- We need to minister to our marriages.

#### **Lesson Questions:**

- 1- What must be added to the concept of total marriage commitment to make the hearts of our spouse open up to us?
- 2- The first step toward a safe marriage is...
- 3- The second step toward a safe marriage is...
- 4- The third step toward a safe marriage is...

- 5- The fourth step toward a safe marriage is...
- 6- The definition of winning in a marital partnership conversation is...
- 7- The fifth step toward a safe marriage is...
- 8- Respecting each other's boundaries means two things. These are...
- 9- You can overcome your spouse's boundaries by...
- 10- People who struggle with receiving respect from themselves must come to understand that...

#### Answers for Chapter Four

- 1- Heart safety.
- 2- Taking responsibility for our own behavior and well being.
- 3- Actually doing the work of caring for ourselves.
- 4- Ministering to Our Spouse's Feelings.
- 5- Ministering to Our Marriages.
- 6- Finding a solution that both partners feel good about.
- 7- Respecting our Spouses Boundaries.
- 8- Receiving respect from others and receiving respect from ourselves.
- 9- Bowling them over" with the force and power and speed of your words, and by manipulating the person through guilt or a reward system or by lowering his or her own self-esteem.
- 10- Love does not always give in to every request, especially to intimidation!

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT – LESSON FIVE

### Marriage Enrichment Is Serving Our Spouses

- Introduction: In order to desire to give ourselves for another and to serve them we must understand their value before God and therefore to us. God's priority for us is to be like His beloved Son Jesus, which will meet all our needs. Jesus came to serve and to save His people. We are expected to be like Him and to work out our salvation through serving others ahead of ourselves, beginning first and foremost with our spouse. True and godly happiness comes from serving our spouse. Godly marriages come from loving our spouse more than we love ourselves.
- First Division: God our Heavenly Father, has chosen your spouse for you. Therefore, since my loving Heavenly Father, my Savior Jesus Christ and my Comforter the Holy Spirit have provided me with my spouse in their great, great love for me, I must treasure my spouse to the highest possible extent and give them all my love forever! I must recognize that they are a gift from God Himself, to me!
- Second Division: Love is a mental permission that we give to our personalities to allow the emotions and feelings of the decision to be in love, to become part of our being and to begin to characterize who we are and to begin to shape our hearts and marriages. It is the decision, bathed in prayer and led by the Holy Spirit to allow our hearts to give themselves to another. It is the decision on any given day – when no emotions are present or even when negative, angry emotions are present to continue to be in love with our spouse.
- Third Division: What about when something goes wrong?
- Fourth Division: The secret to treasuring your spouse is to treasure Jesus Christ. As you treasure Him and grow in love for Him you will be growing in your ability to love others in His love, specifically your spouse. You will be growing in your desire to represent Him through your marriage and you will grow in the joy and pleasure of His unconditional love that you want spread to all areas of your life especially your marriage.
- Conclusion: To have a living, joyful, exciting, passionate marriage we must *treasure our spouse* above all else. We must understand that our Holy God created our spouse specifically for us.
- Lesson Summary: 1- God our Heavenly Father has chosen your spouse for you. 2- The Definition of Love 3- What about when something goes wrong? 4- Treasuring our spouse.

### Lesson Questions for Chapter Five:

- 1- What is the first step in valuing our spouse?
- 2- What is the place our spouse should have in our lives? Why?
- 3- How will I get my spouse to delight in me as God's gift to them?
- 4- How can we do that?
- 5- What does it mean to honor my spouse?
- 6- What is love?
- 7- What is the first step in treasuring our spouses?
- 8- How important are the things that initially attract us to the person who will be our spouse in building our marriage relationship?
- 9- What is it that causes us to continue to make the decision to be in love with our spouse?
- 10- What is God's priority for our lives and how does that relate to our marriage?

### Lesson Answers for Chapter Five:

1- The first step in understanding and believing the value of your spouse is to understand the sovereignty of God over us and the love of God for us.

2- Our Spouse is a special gift from God to us personally. They are a treasure to be cherished with the highest value. They are to be second in our lives to no one other than the Lord Jesus.

They are a living example of God's grace to us and His joy in us.

3- By HONORING my spouse and working to open their spirit.

4- The key to understanding how to honor your spouse begins by you believing in your heart and proving with your words and actions that your spouse is number one in your heart and in your life.

5- Honor means to attach great value or "awe" to a person. To be totally amazed and overwhelmed that this extremely special person has agreed to marry you because – for some unknown reason – they have decided to be in love with you. And the gloriousness of this joyous situation causes you to commit to making this person first in your life and serving them every day for the rest of your life!

6- Love then, is a mental permission that we give to our personalities to allow the emotions and feelings of the decision to be in love, to become part of our being and to

begin to characterize who we are and to begin to shape our hearts and marriages. It is the decision, bathed in prayer and led by the Holy Spirit to allow our hearts to give themselves to another. It is the decision on any given day – when no emotions are present or even when negative, angry emotions are present to continue to be in love with our spouse.

7- The first step in treasuring our spouses is to love no one or no thing more than we love them. The only exception is our love for Jesus Christ which must be our foundational love or we will be incapable of truly loving our spouses.

8- None of these things matter at all. While all the externals are important, they ultimately make no difference when we are deciding to be in love with someone we hope we will spend the rest of our lives with. Those things that initially attract us to each other are the instruments God uses to cause us to be ready to receive our spouses.

9- Ultimately it is God who is love. The secret to treasuring your spouse is to treasure Jesus Christ. As you treasure Him and grow in love for Him you will be growing in your ability to love others in His love, specifically your spouse. After our complete love for God, we are to love our neighbor. Who is our closest neighbor? Our spouse is.

10- God's priority for us is to be like His beloved Son Jesus which will meet all our needs. Jesus came to serve and to save His people. We are expected to be like Him and to work out our salvation through serving others ahead of ourselves, beginning first and foremost with our spouse. True and godly happiness comes from serving our spouse. Godly marriages come from loving our spouse more than we love ourselves.

**LESSON DEVELOPMENT – LESSON SIX**  
**Marriage Enrichment Is Becoming One With Your Spouse**

- Introduction:** The way you become one with your spouse is the same way that you become one with Christ – you receive them into your heart. You have made the decision to love them, you have made serving them your first priority in life and you have loved them with the love of Christ. Then you spend the rest of your life fleshing out what it means to have an intimate, personal relationship that is vital to your health and well being as a person.
- First Division:** Becoming one with our spouse is a combination of communication, attitude and physical contact, sometimes sexual, sometimes not. Becoming one with your spouse is all about communicating in a verbal way, with an understanding attitude, that is followed up by touch.
- Second Division:** If you do the work to find out what your spouse needs to be happy - you are communicating to your spouse that you intend to provide these things. So we need to find out what makes them happy and we need to find out what our spouse believes will make our marriage good and successful. Then we need to provide those things.
- Third Division:** There are four general areas in which whatever we say we need for happiness will fall into - security, meaningful communication, regular, romantic, emotional experiences and physical need.
- Lesson Summary:** 1- Communicating with Touch or the Anatomy of Becoming One  
2- What Makes Us Happy? 3- Areas of Happiness

**Lesson Questions for Chapter Six**

- 1- How do you become one with Christ and with your spouse?
- 2- What are some of the ways we become one?
- 3- Becoming one with our spouse is a combination of what?
- 4- What is the beginning point of the anatomy of being one?
- 5- How is this an unwritten contract?
- 6- How do our marriage expectations get us into trouble?
- 7- What is one of the important gifts that men bring to the marriage?
- 8- What does this gift do for the man?
- 9- What are the four areas of happiness

10- How do women respond to touch?

### Lesson Answers for Chapter Six

1- You receive them into your heart.

2- a- by uniting our souls with Christ and with each other.

b- through sexual intimacy.

c- by tuning our thoughts and desires toward the same goals.

d- by respecting and serving each other.

e- by seeking to demonstrate to the world the love of Jesus our Lord.

f- by being born of God and by living in His love.

3- Communication, attitude and physical contact, sometimes sexual, sometimes not.

4- Discovering what our spouses need to be happy.

5- If you do the work to find out what your spouse needs to be happy - you are communicating to your spouse that you intend to provide these things.

6- We have been shaped by all the events and circumstances of our lives. We all come to the marriage with particular expectations. It only takes a few months for us to have our expectations totally dashed by the reality of living with another person who does not have our same past or expectation. The hurt and pain and insensitivity to this realization can be the death of the marriage before it even begins.

7- They are equipped to find out what their wife needs to be happy and to provide this.

8- It gives them good self-esteem and self-confidence to be able to make their wives happy and to provide what they know their spouse desires. They are conquering a potential marriage problem and they are good at it.

9- A- Security

B- Meaningful communication

C- Regular, romantic, emotional experiences

D- Physical touch

10- 80% of what wives report that what they want and need from their husbands is non-sexual touch. It is a message to them that everything is ok in their relationship. Most wives have no struggle giving themselves sexually to their husband who has put her and her needs first and has loved her in ways that called for him to sacrifice. Women need 8-12 meaningful, non-sexual, affectionate touches throughout a given day in order to be emotionally healthy. We communicate the state of our hearts, lives and feelings for each other through touch.

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT – LESSON SEVEN

### Communication - The Secret of a Happy Marriage

Introduction: There can be no physical or sexual intimacy without first experiencing emotional intimacy and emotional intimacy cannot happen until there is good communication. Intimacy is not automatic. Communication is the vehicle for creating and maintaining intimacy and it is the means by which we truly know another person.

First Division: Communication is such an extremely vital aspect of marriage that poor communication is the number three cause of divorce in America today. The good news is that communication is the number one easiest marriage problem to fix if we are committed to doing it. So let's look at enriching marriage communication.

Second Division: There are five levels of communication: 1- sharing of facts; 2- sharing ideas and opinions of other people; 3- sharing your own opinions and ideas; 4- sharing your own personal beliefs, preferences, concerns and experiences; 5- sharing your inner feelings, preferences, likes and dislikes.

Third Division: We must understand that men and women are **totally** different from each other! Every single cell in a man's body is different from every single cell in a woman's body – blood, fluids, muscle, bone, everything. The way we use our brains is different. Our emotions are different. Everything about us is completely different.

Fourth Division: According to Dr. Gary Smalley there are five basic differences between the communication patterns of men and women. Neither is good or bad or than the other but they are very different.

Conclusion: Do you want your spouse to hear what you are saying? First they have to want to hear you and then they have to listen to you and then you have to speak in their language.

Lesson Summary: 1- Good communication is vital to your marriage 2- Levels of Communication 3- The differences between men and women 4- What are the components of good communication?

#### Lesson Questions for Chapter Seven

1- Good communication creates \_\_\_\_\_ in marriage.

2- The 5 levels of communication are:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

e.

3- The communication level #4 is where our \_\_\_\_\_ gene is most fully engaged.

4- Men and women are completely different both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

5- List three ways in which men and women are different physically.

a.

b.

c.

6- How are men and women different mentally?

7- What are the 5 ways in which men and women communicate differently?

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

8- What are the three foundational components of good communication?

a.

b.

c.

9- What work do men and women have to do to listen well?

a.

b.

10- What is the most significant point in speaking to your spouse?

11- What is the significance of context and setting in communication?

## Chapter Seven Answers

1- Emotional intimacy

- 2-     a. Sharing facts  
       b. Sharing ideas and opinions of others  
       c. Sharing our own ideas and opinions  
       d. Sharing your own personal beliefs  
       e. Sharing your inner most feelings

3- Right to happiness.

4- Physically and mentally.

5-     a. Women are more resistant to disease

- b. Men have more stamina
- c. Men have thicker bones, which allow them to do heavy labor for extended periods

6- Men think laterally and women think bi-laterally. 80% of men use left side of brain almost exclusively; 80% of women use right side most frequently but also use left side

- 7-
- a. Men want to discuss and express facts. Women fill their conversation with personal insights, intuitions and emotions about the subject being discussed.
  - b. Men use communication to solve problems and find solutions. Women desire to give sympathy and find reasons for things.
  - c. Men are objective. They have the ability to compartmentalize their lives. Women are more personal and “big picture” people. Their lives are a complete picture. All parts are interconnected.
  - d. A woman cannot separate who she is from her surroundings. A man can compartmentalize his life and thing of the various parts separately.
  - e. Men think and communicate in a general way while women communicate and think in a very detailed way.

- 8-
- a. Being a good listener
  - b. Being a clear speaker
  - c. Having shared experiences as a basis for your communication

- 9-
- a. Men - resist the impulse to resolve everything our wives share with us.
  - b. Women - resist the impulse to make their husbands be “touchy feely” in their conversations.

10- The principle is that we must speak to our spouses in a way that they will understand clearly what we mean. We must speak to our spouse in their language – male or female.

11- Security and support and emotional safety in a shared experience, in a setting that can be recalled are all aspects of communication that make us have the desire to communicate more frequently and easily and readily.

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT – LESSON EIGHT

### The Act of Marriage

- Introduction:** The act of marriage is the act of sex. It is the one activity that we are to participate in only with our spouses. Every other aspect of marriage can be performed with other people – men and women. But the act of sex is to be between one man and one woman who are legally married only, for all their lives. What is more, our sex lives in our marriages will determine the quality and success of our marriages.
- First Division:** Sex, the act of marriage, is meeting the needs of your spouse. This includes meeting the physical needs but it also includes the mental, emotional and spiritual needs as well. You see, in marriage, sex is the physical demonstration of the depth and quality and success of your marriage. Sex is for our pleasure, but it is also our marriage barometer. It will show us the condition of our marriage.
- Second Division:** Sexual intimacy is what we have already said about life. God created sex in order for man to be able to fully “glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. Thus sex is for the glory of God and is for our good. Because of our great and passionate love for Jesus Christ, we are able to have the great and passionate love for our spouses that creates great sex.
- Third Division:** Great marital sex is godly sex, Christ centered and Christ honoring sex. How can we combine our spirituality with our sexuality? It is wonderful for us and pleasing to Him. Marital sexual relations please God.
- Fourth Division:** So how do we have great sex in marriage? First we get closer to Jesus Christ every day, falling deeper in love with Him. The next step is recognizing our differences as men and women sexually. Men have a compartment for sex. Nothing has to go with it. Men are also sexually aroused visually. Women see life as a whole. A wife’s sex life is completely part of her heart, her makeup, and her personality. Her sex life is an intricate part of all that she is. Additionally a woman is person centered and needs a relationship.
- Fifth Division:** What is good sex? Good communication. What is the biggest problem? Seeking to manipulate each other to get what we want.
- Conclusion:** Sex in marriage is the physical expression of what is true of a couple emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Sex does not make a good marriage but you cannot have a good marriage without good sex.

Lesson Summary: 1- What is the definition of the act of marriage? 2- What is sexual intimacy in marriage? 3- Great sex is about God. 4- How do we have great sex in marriage?

#### Questions for Chapter Eight

- 1- What is the act of marriage?
- 2- What does the act of marriage show us?
- 3- Why is it impossible to have a good marriage without having good sexual experiences with your spouse?
- 4- What is at the core of sexual activity in marriage?
- 5- What is sexual intimacy?
- 6- How can we combine our spirituality with our sexuality?
- 7- How do men think of sex mentally?
- 8- How do women think about sex?
- 9- What is good sex?
- 10- What is our biggest problem in marital sex?

#### Answers for Chapter Eight

- 1- The act of marriage is the act of mutually satisfying sex.
- 2- The condition of our marriage.
- 3- Because marriage is an essentially emotional experience centered on and powered by your mental decisions and choices to be committed for life to your spouse. Thus sexual activity in marriage is not only physical, but is emotional, mental, and spiritual as well.
- 4- Sexual activity in marriage has at its core the deepest meanings for love and trust and security and life long companionship. Sexual activity in marriage affects our self-esteem, our self-image, and our joy of life. It affects every part of us very personally. It is extremely significant to our well being in all our parts. Therefore, a happy marriage just cannot last without a happy sexual experience.
- 5- Sexual intimacy is for man to be able to fully “glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. Jesus wants us to enjoy a happy and satisfying sexual intimacy with our spouses because it is part of the happy marriages He wants us to have. And because of our great and passionate love for Jesus Christ, we are able to have the great and passionate love for our spouses that creates great sex.

6- In the same way that the Bible does this. The Bible cares about marriage and sex. God speaks of marriage and sex 736 times. God created sex. It is wonderful for us and pleasing to Him. Marital sexual relations please God.

7- Men have a compartment for sex. Nothing has to go with it. They can separate the rest of life from their sexual desires. In his mind nothing has to go with their sex life. It has its own compartment.

8- She sees life as a whole. A wife's sex life is completely part of her heart, her makeup, and her personality. Her sex life is an intricate part of all that she is.

9- Sex that includes good communication. You absolutely must tell your spouse what you like or do not like sexually. Help them. Tell them. Show them what to do. Your spouse does not know what is going to help you have a great sexual experience unless you tell them. This kind of loving sexual communication is vital for an incredible sex life.

10- Manipulating our spouse to give us either sex through our relationship or to give us the relationship we want through sex.