

Divorce Prevention:

*Practical Tips for Heading off Divorce,
Cohabitation, and One-Parent Homes*

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Author of

Covenant Marriage: God's Blueprint for Couples

Ten Commandments for Couples

Twice as Much Husband, Half as Much Money

Me, a Submissive Wife?

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World Evangelism Publications

Winona, Mississippi 38967

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*All Bible passages are from the New International Version,
unless otherwise indicated.*

Published by

World Evangelism Publications

P.O. Box 72

Winona, MS 38967

662-283-1192

WorldEvangelism.org

GospelGazette.com

Dedication

Divorce Prevention is dedicated to all couples everywhere who have remained happily married for decades. May their tribe increase greatly. I'm thinking especially of my own parents, C.H. and Nola Shipp, who went through many hardships, such as the 1930's Great Depression and their many years of starting and nourishing tiny mission churches. They remained true to each other for more than 50 years, no matter the pressures they faced in life.

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to family counselor Charlotte Burrough; Glover's son, Gerald (Jerry) Shipp, also a family counselor; and Randy Roper, family minister of the Edmond, Oklahoma, Church of Christ, for their input. We are grateful to Betty Choate, of World Evangelism Publications, for her patient work with us on this title. We are thankful to our wives Margie and Linda for their decades of love and moral support for our marriages.

—Dr. Glover Shipp and Dr. Alan Martin

Publisher's Statement

We live in a time when marriage, the home, and the family are being destroyed by cultural changes that are attempting to rewrite what is morally right and wrong. Looking back to past history, whenever this has happened it has resulted in the disintegration and eventual destruction of the people involved. Sometimes that destruction seemed to simply be the natural outcome of the disintegration of the home, which is the foundation on which secure societies are founded. At other times, we are told by inspiration that God brought about the annihilation of people given over to perversion and evil: the world's population in the days of Noah, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Amorites, and the Canaanites.

As no-fault divorce has become the rule in the secular world, it has also permeated the Lord's church. It is reported that the divorce rate is about the same in the church as in the world. Tragically, few strong lessons are taught today to equip Christians with the knowledge of what God says about the sanctity of marriage and about His rules regarding divorce and remarriage. Unless we, as Christians, educate ourselves on God's specific requirements concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage, we cannot turn this trend around. Such a book as **Divorce Prevention**, used personally and in Bible classes particularly among those approaching marriagable age and young married couples, can do much to stave off the thinking that "divorce is the solution to our marital problems". God says there is only one cause for divorce, acceptable to Him. Marriage is a covenant relationship, intended to be for life. Let us, as Christians, live by His laws, building strong families and helping to stabilize our nation. I commend the study to you.

Betty (Mrs. J.C.) Choate

Preface

Here is a poem I want all couples to read and especially those thinking about divorcing. It portrays the anguish felt by children in the midst of their parents' separation and impending divorce, and sets the tone for what follows in this book.

Mommy and Daddy, Kiss and Make Up

Glover Shipp

Mommy and Daddy, I love you so,
But why do you always fight?
Mommy and Daddy, be kind to me,
And please treat each other right.

Mommy and Daddy, what do you mean?
Divorce? It just breaks my heart!
Mommy and Daddy, what did I do?
Did I make you want to part?

Daddy, O Daddy, stay here with us.
Just tell me it isn't so.
Mommy, O Mommy, I want you both,
So why must Daddy go?

Mommy and Daddy, listen to me!
I want you to kiss and make up.
Mommy and Daddy, listen to me!
I want you to kiss and make up.

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Introduction

The home, the foundation of society

The home is the foundation of society. However, this foundation has developed some serious cracks and in some places, it has collapsed entirely. As we watch more and more cases of sexual license, infidelity, divorce, cohabitation and single parenthood, we can safely conclude that something is terribly wrong in our society.

Homes as God would have them are becoming something of a rarity. He has given us ample instructions on how to behave as humans and as mates in a marriage, and He still knows what is best for us. Our problem is that we ignore His **Instruction Manual**, so both we and the public in general suffer the consequences.

Help sought too late

Help is abundantly available for those with marriage woes and those who are divorced. Generally speaking, couples in trouble seek help — if at all — too late to salvage their marriage. Cures abound for near-fatal marital problems and some of them even work.

However, it is our contention in this book that *Divorce Prevention* are better than *pounds of cure*. Reinforcing marriage from even before the wedding vows and continuing through life is far better than the legal and emotional trauma that divorce brings, and the subsequent disruption in the lives of all involved.

Make marriage fireproof

Read this book with a serious determination to make your marriage “fireproof”, to make it strong and resilient, and to make it a lifelong commitment. Take to heart our warnings and suggestions. Your future will be rosier if you do so. No, this is not a treatise set in stone; it is not infallible. It doesn’t guarantee you happiness. If you take to heart what is being said, however, the insights may help you. Realize always, though, that you must do your part to make your marriage a success.

May God richly bless your life and marriage
— Dr. Glover Shipp and Dr. Alan Martin

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Chapter 1

DIVORCE Doesn't "Just Happen"



All of us have been touched in one way or another by the specter of divorce. It is a fact in our families, communities, states and throughout our nation. In fact, it is a worldwide epidemic. Akin to it is the multiplying cases of cohabitation, without benefit of a legitimizing marriage certificate, a relationship that is generally weak in commitment and short-lived. Also akin is the current high number of single-parent homes, which by nature limit parental modeling to one adult, with the father often absent from the equation.

"Divorce? Never. But murder often!" — British actress Sybil Thorndike, when asked if she had ever considered divorcing her husband, Sir Lewis Casson.

Divorce statistics

In "Intelligence Report" by Lyric Wallwork Winik, *Parade*, May 1, 2005, the author gives the following divorce statistics for our own country:

"We routinely hear that 50% of marriages in the U.S. end in divorce. But is it true? Yes and no, says David Popenoe of Rutgers University's National Marriage Project. Yes, nearly half of new marriages are projected to end in divorce. But that statistic is based on '90's figures, and the divorce rate has been falling since 1980. Also, various factors are involved: If you earn more than \$50,000 a year, your risk of divorce falls by 30%. If you're over 25 when you marry, or if you have a baby after being married at least seven months, your risk is 24% less than if you gave birth earlier. Some ethnic groups have higher breakup rates than others. Being religious lowers your risk by 14%, as does having parents who stayed married." (Visit www.parade.com and click on "Intelligence" for more about divorce rates.)

Here's a sampling of some of the most recently available statistics on marriage and divorce in the U.S.:

Number of marriages: 2,077,000. Marriage rate: 6.8 per 1,000 total population. Divorce rate: 3.4 per 1,000 population (National Center for Health Statistics, based on 2010 figures). These

Second marriages have a higher failure rate than the first time down the aisle.

— David Popenoe

figures seem to indicate that the divorce rate is precisely 50 percent of the marriage rate. In other words, one out of every two marriages ends in divorce. If this figure is anything like accurate, and some doubt it, our nation is in deep mud over the impermanence of marriages.

We live at a time when sex seems to rule, when living together without the sanctity, legality, and permanence of marriage is becoming an epidemic, and when adultery is common. The end of all of this is precisely what Solomon warned about — moral and spiritual destruction, as well as the destruction of marriage and the traditional home.

In a November 18, 2010 survey by the Pew Research Foundation, it was revealed that nearly one in every three children is living with a parent who is divorced, separated, or never married. This is a five-fold increase since 1960. With recent jumps in unmarried couples living together, even the Census Bureau is planning a revised definition of what makes a family.

Of those surveyed, 44 percent said that they had lived with a partner without being married. That number rose to 57 percent among those 30-49 years of age. Only 29 percent said that this trend was troubling, with 32 percent saying that this kind of arrangement made no difference, while 34 percent felt that it was good for society.

Do you see any problem here with our society? What can be done to change the direction it is taking? What can be done to reverse our nation's addiction to sex?

Divorce a necessary evil?

Many of us appear to assume that divorce is a necessary evil and even beneficial in some cases. Many of us assume that the breakup of marriage is a fact of modern life, and we might as well get used to it. Before we give up, however, on the low state of marriage and the high state of divorce, some researchers, marriage counselors, and writers believe that this condition can be reversed.

Single parenthood and cohabitation, domestic disasters

Another domestic disaster that has overtaken our nation is that of single parenthood, which is on the rise. We will also look at the increasingly common phenomenon of cohabitation.

A case for Divorce Prevention

In this book I want to present the case for “Divorce Prevention” against divorce, cohabitation, and single parenthood, rather than the pounds of often failing cures *after the fact*. In the process we will look at the history of divorce in our nation and the causes behind it. Then we will look at some suggestions for heading divorce off before it gains a foothold in marriages. We will explore the various stages of life, indicating steps that can be taken at each stage to help ward off divorce. We will also explore some of the causes of cohabitation and single parenthood, and possible Divorce Prevention against these conditions that are undermining our society. Last, we will consider the challenges

to marriage when the children leave home and the husband and wife have only each other to consider on a daily basis. Often, such a vacuum is created that the marriage falls apart.

Ponder these Bible verses

“I hate divorce,’ says the Lord God of Israel ... ” (Malachi 2:16).

“So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matthew 19:6).

Chapter 1

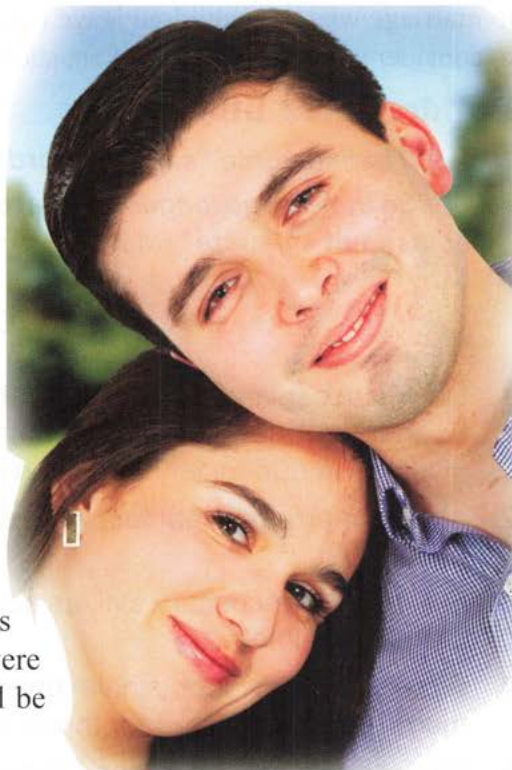
1. Do you accept the statistics that show a current divorce rate of 45 to 50 percent? Even if the true figure is not that high, would you say that there are too many divorces in our society and even in churches? Why do you think so?
2. Among marriages that fail, why does this happen most among couples who are under 40?
3. Is divorce a necessary evil, as some suppose, or is it something to be avoided, if at all possible?
4. Would you consider single parenthood and cohabitation, without benefit of marriage, good or bad for those involved and for society? Explain.
5. Why should we consider Divorce Prevention for divorce and extra-marital arrangements, rather than applying pounds of attempted cure late in a deteriorating relationship?

Chapter 2

Setting the Stage for Divorce Prevention

**"He that loves not his wife and
children, feeds a lioness at home
and broods a nest of sorrows."**

— Jeremy Taylor



There is yet more involved in preparing for marriage, apart from all of the physical details involved in the ceremony. Some of these were touched on in the previous chapter, but they will be further developed here.

Abstain from sex before marriage

This admonition is both for the intended mates and for any other persons of the opposite sex before marriage. Premarital sex robs the honeymoon and marital union of some of their uniqueness and magic. The one guilty of premarital sex is soiled goods. Can he or she be trusted to maintain sexual relations *only with the spouse* after marriage? Entering marriage as virgins helps bring about a more uncomplicated union, free of the shadow of former sex mates or activity. This sounds hopelessly old-fashioned, but is based on sound principles, not only biblical, but also sociological and psychological.

Dr. Jim Talley, who has counseled thousands of dating and engaged couples, says on this:

"Premarital sex creates instability in the relationship. It is like trying to build the second floor of a building on a few sticks on the ground. There is guilt, an unrealistic expectation of marriage, when neither made that commitment, and an intensity in the relationship without a foundation of friendship to hold it up" (cited in McManus 1995:95).

Building a patient, self-controlled relationship does not characterize modern romance. By today's standards, especially in movies and on TV, the sooner the couple goes to bed together, the better. Sexual intimacy is the style of the day, with little or no mention of real love and commitment. In today's sexually saturated environment, how can a couple remain chaste until the wedding night?

Talley counsels couples with these words:

"Falling into love and being sexually

**Premarital counseling should
be a must for any couple.**

attracted to a member of the opposite sex is no guarantee for a successful marriage. A marriage is more than romance and sex. It is an ongoing relationship" (cited in McManus 1995:95).

Know your future mate

Know as well as possible your future mate before marriage. This can be accomplished only through time and communication. Learn early on how to communicate well. Couples rushing into marriage (or cohabiting, as occurs in many cases) have not had sufficient time in which to really become acquainted with each other.

There will be a lot of latter-day revelations coming to light very soon after the wedding vows are uttered.

Taking premarital and temperament analysis tests can help, as can premarital counseling. In fact, premarital counseling should be a must for any couple. However, make sure that the counselor you choose has an ethical and a religious view of marriage. Some counselors, unfortunately, hold to a contemporary view of this institution and reflect this view in their counseling.

Marry someone of reasonably like background as yours — in culture, social level, and education. For a Christian, common ground religiously should be the first consideration. Assuming that you are going to win over your future mate to your faith may be assuming far too much. Assuming that your values will become the values of your intended may also be erroneous thinking.

Realize that neither you nor your prospective mate is perfect

We may be blind to each other's faults before marriage, but we must realize that they exist. John Ortberg says it well:

"When you deal with human beings, you have come to the 'as is' corner of the universe... (People) come with a little tag: There's a flaw here. A streak of deception, a cruel tongue, a passive spirit, an out-of-control temper. I'm not going to tell you where it is, but it's there. So when you find it — and you will find it — don't be surprised. If you want to enter a relationship with this model, there is only one way: 'As is'" (Ortberg 2003:10).

Believe it or not, your prospective mate may snore. He may have the untidy habit of leaving his dirty clothes in a heap on the floor. She may toss her stockings anywhere or leave shoes everywhere. She may spend money as if it were going out of style. He may be a tightwad. Neither one may be good at keeping books or paying bills on time.

He may not like to shave often. She may leave the bathroom sink a mess after her hair-combing or making up her face. And the list goes on and on. There will be a lot of latter-day revelations coming to light very soon after the wedding vows are uttered. Be prepared. Perfection is not in our nature as human beings. We *are* human, after all, and our defects will soon be evident.

Do not attempt to reform your mate after the wedding

Do not assume that you can reform your mate's nature and habits after the wedding ceremony. Your mate's *nature* is built in largely from birth and is not going to change much. *Habits* can change, but only if the person sees the need for change and is willing to do so. The joke about how many people it takes to change a light bulb fits here — just one, but the bulb has to want to change. Your mate may willingly change some and may eventually change even more, given time and patience. But wholesale change will probably never take place and should not be expected.

Do not assume that you can reform your mate's nature and habits after the wedding ceremony.

Following the wedding, he or she may have a need for time alone, for golf, shopping or continued association with friends. However, such times should be kept within reasonable bounds. Your first commitment is to each other. You are not married to your golf clubs, your hobbies, your interests, or your friends, but to your spouse.

Enter a COVENANT marriage rather than a CONTRACT marriage

Enter marriage with a **commitment for life**. Agree to a covenant marriage, rather than a marriage by civil contract only. A contract can be easily broken. A covenant concept of marriage demands permanence and goes a long way toward making this happen.

The concept of contractual marriage means that either party can opt at any time to tear up the contract. The concept of covenant marriage is clearly seen in the Bible and is God's plan for a permanent union. Here is His Word on the matter:

When the Lord talks about marriage as a covenant, He is talking about a permanent union, offered by Him and agreed upon in His presence by the two getting married.

“Wisdom will save you from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God” (Proverbs 2:16-17).

This verse condemns the wife for having been unfaithful to her covenant partner. Now what does the Word say about the wayward husband?

“... the Lord is acting as a 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” (Malachi 2:14).

As you prepare for marriage, make sure that you understand and accept the responsibilities inherent in the covenantal relationship.

What does this principle of covenant mean? In ancient times there were several kinds of covenants. The one in question here is the suzerainty covenant. This is a one sided agreement imposed by a superior party (in this case, God) to a weaker party (in this case, a man and his wife). Lusk says that “When God

enters into a covenant relationship with men, He institutes a life and death bond. ... a bond of life and death, administered by the suzerain to [His subjects]" (Lusk 1994:19).

So when the Lord talks about marriage as a covenant, He is talking about a permanent union, offered by Him and agreed upon in His presence by the two getting married. **"Till death do us part" is not some archaic expression in the marriage ceremony, but a solemn and binding oath made to God.**

When a marriage is entered into on this basis, its permanence is much more assured than any contractual marriage can be. So as you prepare for marriage, make sure that you understand and accept the responsibilities inherent in the covenantal relationship. (For more information on this subject, read Lusk's **God of the Covenant** and my **Marriage Is a Covenant, not a Contract**.)

Have realistic expectations for marriage and for your mate

Neither of you is perfect — far from it. Do not expect your mate to be like you or to have your background and interests, not even your way of looking at and solving problems.

An anonymous source gives us five tips for women:

- ◆ It is important that a man help you around the house and has a job.
- ◆ It is important that a man make you laugh.
- ◆ It is important to find a man you can count on and who doesn't lie to you.
- ◆ It is important that a man love you and spoil you.
- ◆ It is important that these four men don't know each other.

Well, a better summary of these tips would be to find all of these characteristics in one man. Happy hunting! Hopefully, there may be one like that out there, but it is doubtful. Columnist Kathleen Parker observes, from experience with the four males in her house,

"(On the first point above) decades of experience suggest that most men don't value the results of housework as much as women do. Could it be their nature?... They (men) will never meet my standards. If they do, they'll need behavioral therapy and medication.

... Some things will never be exactly equal until men and women are exactly the same. When that happens, we will doubtless be tidier — and living alone (Parker, *"The Drudgery Report," The Daily Oklahoman*, April 14, 2008).

Disillusionment, if not defused, eventually ends in despair and the explosion of a separation and divorce.

On the first four points I am in agreement, even emphasizing that our wives need to be spoiled, to some extent. On the last point, no comment!

Stages of marriage

Marriages go through stages, some of them early on. They begin as the romance to end all romances. Then disillusionment sets in: "I discovered he snores." "She is a sloppy housekeeper." "He wastes a lot of money on his own fun and games." "She has 30 or 40

pairs of shoes and keeps buying more.” “He won’t help me with any domestic duties.” “She dresses sloppily around the house.” “His armpits smell.” And so it goes. “This is not the person I married. This is someone else and I don’t like him (or her).”

Disillusionment, if not defused, eventually ends in despair and the explosion of a separation and divorce. Despair fosters depression and/or the desire to flee a no-longer-happy situation. This unhappy cycle doesn’t have to occur if we go into marriage with realistic expectations.

Determine beforehand a division of domestic duties

Decide before you marry how decisions are to be reached, how money is to be spent and recorded, and how the responsibilities of the home are to be divided.

Decide before you marry how decisions are to be reached, how money is to be spent and recorded, and how the responsibilities of the home are to be divided. For instance, who will cook the meals, do the dishes, clean up the kitchen, do the laundry, iron, vacuum the floors, dust, buy the groceries, maintain the car or cars,

mow the lawn, keep up the house and property, care for the flower beds, and such questions. In addition, who will decide on major expenditures, and who will pay the bills and keep the family’s financial records?

As I write this, the Spanish government has decreed that husbands must share equally with their wives in caring for domestic duties. Does it mean that if the baby is changed 12 times a day, six of those times must be done by the husband? Does it also mean that the wife must take out the garbage, fix the car, mow the lawn, trim the trees, and share equally with the husband in these domestic duties? Common sense is called for in this matter of sharing domestic responsibilities. If other men are like me, they don’t even see some of the domestic chores to be done and share even less in caring for them. We can all do a better job in this realm.

Determine who has the final word in split decisions

Know beforehand who has the final word if there is a disagreement over something important. A family cannot have two heads. In the case of a logjam in the decision process, it is sometimes painfully necessary for the husband to step forward as the God-ordained head of the family to make a decision (Ephesians 5:23). If, for example, he is to be transferred in his work to some other city and the wife puts her foot down, maybe even on his neck, saying that she does not want to make the move and will not cooperate with him in it, he must remove her foot. After exhausting all means of communication on the subject, he may finally have to say, “We’re moving, so make the best of it.”

Decide on joint or separate ownership of property

If both parties own a house or apartment, what is to be done with them? Should they be sold and the total applied on a new place? Should one be

Everything brought into the marriage must be examined and re-evaluated in the light of joint ownership.

sold and the other kept? Shall titles on their cars be kept in their own name or in both of their names together? What about bank accounts, savings, investments and other financial interests? Everything brought into the marriage must be examined and re-evaluated in the light of joint ownership. This becomes extremely difficult if one of the two is wealthy and the other is not. When we married, there was no such problem. We were as poor as the proverbial church mice. We entered marriage with \$25, our clothes, a few books and personal effects, and a broken-down old car.

Determine the number of children you hope to have

It is wise to enter marriage with some idea of having children or not, or how many to have. We made no decisions on this matter, at first just letting nature take its course. We ended up with four sons, and then we adopted a daughter and took on a foster-daughter. It was tough in the early years of our family to feed and clothe our children, but now we rejoice in them and in our 13 grandchildren.

Decide how discipline is to be done

Again, temperament and experiential background of the two mates have much to do with style of discipline. One may come out of an autocratic background, while the other may come out of a laid-back “laissez-faire” attitude toward discipline. For one mate, corporal punishment is called for, while the other mate may look on punishment as a “time out” or as a period of talking with the child about his or her behavior.

One child may listen to his or her parents, while another may let the words fall off his or her back like water.

Another consideration in discipline is the temperament of the child. This cannot be known, of course, before birth, but soon after a basic temperament or temperaments begin to show. One comedian had it right in describing the birth of his two daughters. The first one arrived and said, “Hello, Mommy. Hello, Daddy. I love you.” The second one appeared and said, “Aw’right. Who’s in charge here?”

One child may listen to his or her parents, while others may let the words fall off his or her back like water. One child may respond to denied privileges as punishment, while another may not. One may respond well to corporal punishment, while another may just turn even more rebellious. Our oldest son could be talked to. Our second paid no attention. In fact, if we wanted him to play in the yard, we would suggest that he stay indoors. Bang! went the door as he raced outside. Our third son was crushed by any kind of punishment, while the fourth one would stubbornly listen and then loudly slam his bedroom door as a punctuation mark to his frustration with us.

Finally, there is the matter of self-discipline. “Do as I say, not as I do,” never works. We must be disciplined ourselves if we are to expect our children to be disciplined. They see and hear it all. If they see and hear cheating, lying, hypocrisy, profanity, immoral behavior and the like, they will copy that kind of behavior in their own lives. What do we want out of our kids? We must first demonstrate that kind of behavior in our lives and marriages.

Achieve sexual compatibility

Learn all you can about sexual compatibility, early on, through reading and counseling. If we rely on the media, our views of sex will be distorted. It is not something that comes automatically and that is always wildly erotic and successful. Like any other skill, it must be learned and practiced with patience.

I can assure you that in most cases, the husband and wife will not always be on the same wavelength sexually.

Sex should never be used as a bribe, nor should refusing sex be punishment or revenge. Bribing your partner to do your bidding by offering sex cheapens the whole experience, turning it into merchandising. Do not withhold sex from your mate, except, as the Bible says, by mutual consent for reasons of prayer and devotion (1 Corinthians 7:1-6). Even then, this abstinence should be very temporary, unless travel or illness intervenes. Paul says that sexual abstinence in marriage, if prolonged, will create a situation that can lead to infidelity. Marriages come apart and are destroyed by this very thing. One mate freezes out the other, and so the offended one seeks warmth in someone else's arms. Yet, who is blamed for this? Not often the one who does the freezing.

The sexual appetite of each of the mates will probably be different. The man may be a "prancing, leering goat," as one wife called her husband. The wife may be very responsive or slow to show sexual interest and arousal. I can assure you that in most cases, the husband and wife will not always be on the same wavelength sexually. There are times during her monthly cycle when she is more responsive. At other times, forget it! That doesn't mean she has rejected her husband. She has just put sex on the back burner for a few days. As for the husband, there may be times when he is just too tired to respond sexually. Or he may be preoccupied over something. He may even be under the weather, health-wise. We men are not sex machines, as we would like to think. Sometimes the machine just doesn't want to start. Or once started, it may not run well.

Work out your relationship with in-laws

We don't just marry a person; we marry a family. That family may be very open or may be distant in its relationship with a son- or a daughter-in-law. If you are the husband,

It is good to spend some time with parents, but they must not be permitted to dominate the new home and family.

you have taken their "baby" from them and they may feel that you are not good enough for her. It is your task, as difficult as it may seem, to build a bridge of friendship with her family. And, of course, the reverse is also true.

Although it is only a comic strip, "Cathy" is exaggerated but still pretty true to life. She runs to Mother for everything, and Mother expects to spend the rest of her life hovering over her daughter. Shortly after we married, we moved 1,500 miles from Los Angeles to Dallas, far from parents on both sides. In five years there, we drove back home only once and they came to visit us once. We had to work out our problems pretty much by ourselves. This was good, but we could have used a bit more parental input than we received.

Conflicts may arise over with which parents to spend holidays. The only solution to this dilemma is to rotate between families. Conflicts may also arise over style of marriage and, when children come along, over style of training and discipline. In the final analysis, the couple must form a new home and make it strong. It is good to spend some time with parents, but they must not be permitted to dominate the new home and family.

Arrive at decisions on religious commitment and giving

If the husband is not a churchgoer, how can he ever obey the Lord's injunction to bring up his children in the training and instruction of the Lord?

Margie and I were of the same religious conviction, I from birth and she from about 14 years of age. There was no tension over where or how often to attend worship, classes and church activities. This facilitated greatly our religious life from day one of our marriage. In fact, I crashed her 15th birthday party, held in the church basement of the congregation we would attend for the next five years.

However, we have not always agreed on how much to give of our means and to whom. I am an impulsive giver, while Margie is a cautious giver. We are still working on this conflict.

I feel sad for the couples who do not agree religiously. The husband may go his way and the wife her way. Or one of the two may not follow any religious commitment at all. If the husband is not a churchgoer, how can he ever obey the Lord's injunction to bring up his children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4)? Sons, especially, will look at Dad and decide that if he doesn't have to go to church, why should they? If the two parents are active in different religious groups, the children have to feel torn between the two faiths. They may end up in no faith or in some totally different faith.

Bad seeds may already have been sown

Remember that even early on in marriage the seeds of infidelity, incompatibility, and divorce may already have been sown. They may have been implanted by friends, family, books, articles, TV programs, the Internet, and a variety of other sources. These seeds must be ruthlessly rooted out before they grow into a monstrously poison plant in your marriage.

Even early on in marriage the seeds of infidelity, incompatibility, and divorce may already have been sown.

In our case, we decided before we married that divorce would never be a consideration. A few times Margie would have liked to leave me, when we were dead broke and struggling to even survive, and go perhaps to my parents for sympathy. She knew she would get no sympathy from her mother. She knew that she would have to take the kids with her. Fortunately, her strong common sense prevailed and she stuck it out, for she had married me for better or for worse. And things did get worse before they got better, as is often the case as marriages face challenges and then reach maturity.

An ounce of prevention

It is one thing to read a book. It is another to draw lessons from it and then apply them. The best way to apply this chapter to your married life is to go over it several times and determine how you as a couple can best put these points to use. They are not theory. Rather, they are sound principles that can help you build a strong spiritual base for your new home and family. Above all, enter a marriage that is covenantal, pledged before God, rather than a simple contract marriage. This can make all the difference in the world. And if you do not have a covenantal marriage, seek help in making it so.

At a musical show we attended in Branson, Missouri, Margie and I were interviewed as the couple with the most years of marriage — at the time, 59 years. The M.C. asked us where we were born and how we met. Then he asked me the secret to our marital longevity. I thought, “Oh, boy. I had better get this right.” So, after a pause, I answered, “I still consider her the babe I married 59 years ago.” The audience applauded and, more important, Margie approved of my answer.

Our marriage is based on God’s covenant for marital relations. He is the final head of our family. I am far from perfect (just ask Margie), but am slowly improving — a work in progress. I suggest that you married men do the same. If I can improve in caring for home responsibilities and loving concern for my wife, so can you. I think that I can safely guarantee your wife’s positive response to such improvement.

Study this passage:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

Chapter 2

1. Explain why premarital sex may rob a couple of some of the uniqueness and magic of the sex act?
2. Why is a prior foundation of friendship so important in building a successful sexual relationship?
3. What is the danger in attempting to reform one's mate after the wedding?
4. Explain the difference between a civil marriage contract and a covenant marriage? Who, besides the husband and wife, is involved in a covenant marriage?
5. Why is it essential to have realistic expectations about marriage and marital relations?

Chapter 3

More Exercises for Divorce Prevention



The first years of marriage are, for many, an extension of the honeymoon. Well, not totally, because the newly-married couple has a number of mundane chores to take care of. They do have to pay their bills, care for their home and car (or cars), and manage a number of other necessary daily details. But for the most part, the couple is still floating along on Cloud Nine, with few cares in the world.

These are the years, however, when marital and family habits are formed, when family traditions are started and when new attitudes develop. These are the years when the pace and nature of the marriage take shape. These are the years of learning how to interpret what your mate says, does, and implies.

Quit reading into the sketch request

Did someone say, “implies”? I worked for a period of time as a staff artist for Dow Chemical Company in its package design division. Salesmen would go out and talk with customers about packaging a new product or updating the existing packaging. They would then bring in a sketch request, sometimes described only and sometimes including a crude drawing. One day a salesman came in, extremely irritated with me. I had designed a simple label that said, “Caution. Electronic parts inside.” I told him that I had assumed this was a label to go on a small package of some kind. He explained, with a few choice words of profanity, that I had missed the point entirely. He added, “This was to be a large plastic sheet taped to the side of a missile. Quit reading into the sketch request!”

That expression entered our family vocabulary and has remained there ever since. When one of us jumps to a conclusion that the other didn’t intend, he or she is reminded, “Don’t read into the sketch request!” That may cause us to back up and do a better job of communicating, or it may only aggravate the problem, but it is worth trying.

Communication, an art that must be developed between spouses

Communication is an art that must be developed between spouses, and it isn’t easy because he lives on Mars and she on Venus. Their perceptions are different. What they *think* they hear is different. Their interpretations of what they hear is different. The cartoon

character, Maxine, by J. Wagner, has Maxine praying: “Dear Lord, I pray for wisdom to understand a man; love, to forgive him; patience, for his moods. Because, Lord, if I pray for strength, I’ll just beat him to death.” There may be some truth to that.

Sometimes communication even fails totally. Two examples may help here. One evening I was sitting in the living room as the kids tore up the place. I was so engrossed in what I was reading that I heard and saw nothing. Margie finally came into the room, glared at me and asked, “Will you make a noise like a father?” I jumped up and down and growled fiercely. It worked. There was total shocked silence.

On another occasion I was driving us through the desert, aiming for some natural attraction. The road, however, got worse and worse. Margie asked several times if I was sure this was the way. Finally, out of patience, she said, “Stop the car. Either turn around and go back or let me out here!” She communicated clearly that time. No, she didn’t have to get out.

It is imperative to interpret correctly what our spouse says and does, and even attempt to interpret his or her motives. This may take, at times, reading the other’s mind, but we must be able to understand what is going on and communicate about it. I am convinced from experience and from counseling couples that the ones in trouble are certain that their negative interpretations of their spouses are 100 percent correct. “He always ...” or “She always ...”

Such interpretations only fuel the further conviction that “I’m right about my spouse” since even good deeds can be transformed into something negative by attributing to them evil motives. Such a mentality about one’s spouse becomes a filter that blocks any positive interaction. Problems between mates are seldom, if ever, totally the fault of one or the other. You don’t agree? That should say something about your own attitude, that you could not possibly be at fault on any point. In most cases that I have counseled or observed, careful examination revealed some degree of blame on the shoulders of each partner — *some* degree, and not necessarily 50-50.

Learn patience and forgiveness

Saying, “I’m sorry. Please forgive me,” is a vital part of a positive marriage. And answering, “I understand and forgive you,” is also vital. Let’s face it. We all mess up sooner or later. I have messed up a good many times in my life. The grace to humbly repent and then show our repentance by proper behavior can help save a marriage that may be headed toward an implosion. Peter’s bitter tears of repentance turned him around 180 degrees after he had denied Christ. I vividly recall the public tears of penitence falling down the face of a Christian brother who had engaged in very wrong behavior for 25 years.

Regarding forgiveness, Jesus tells us to forgive even “seven times a day” (Luke 17:3-4). In fact, the Lord’s forgiving us depends in part on our willingness to forgive. But you know, as hard as it is to ask forgiveness, it is often much harder for us to forgive others.

Both asking forgiveness and forgiving must be genuine. I remember a ditty from my childhood: “Sorry, sorry, ha, ha, ha!” Sorry, but that is not repentance. “I’ll forgive you this

**Problems between mates
are seldom if ever totally
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time, but never do it again,” is forgiveness with a large string attached. It is in the same category as, “I forgive you, but I will never forget what you did to me.” Or, “If I did wrong, please forgive me.” That “if” is a huge barrier to real repentance. No ifs, ands, or buts are allowable in a truly penitent spirit.

Should we forgive our mate for spousal abuse? Drunkenness? Unfaithfulness? Such behavior is a major test of forgiveness. Since I am no Solomon, I have no solutions to offer, except that it probably is a matter of individual decision based on whether or not the offense is an isolated case or is chronic, and whether or not the guilty one’s spouse can find the strength and courage to forgive. It is wise to urge the fallen spouse to seek professional help for his or her errant behavior.

It takes a large bucket of patience and forgiveness to live together as husband and wife.

It takes a large bucket of patience and forgiveness to live together as husband and wife.

Avoid even the chance of falling to temptations

Today, temptation surrounds us. It may come in the form of explicit sexual displays in movies and on TV, as well as in books, video disks, and magazines. Now we must include the Internet, which has become a major venue for the distribution of pornographic material.

In fact, recent research discussed on TV reveals that there are at least 4 million web pages worldwide devoted to pornography. Temptation may come more directly in the body of an attractive and available

According to the Bible, temptation seduces us by appealing to visual lust, physical lust, and pride.

colleague at work, at a bar, or in other settings. It may come with that drink or two, with drugs or other potentially dangerous substances. Or it may come with a tendency to make one’s profession, sport, hobby or other interest of supreme importance, above that of spouse and family. Satan may dress it up in many forms, but it is still temptation.

According to the Bible, temptation seduces us by appealing to visual lust, physical lust, and pride. These were the three manifestations of temptation he dangled before the nose of Eve, the same ones he tried on Jesus, and the same ones John warned us about in his writings (Genesis 3:1-7; Luke 4:1-13; 1 John 2:15-17). The Tempter has only three weapons to shoot at us. If we can learn to recognize them for what they are, as did Jesus, we are a long way toward resisting them.

Remember, no one is exempt from temptation. Even a newly-married person, very much in love, can fall to the bait Satan dangles before his or her eyes.

Avoid lengthy separations if possible

Military leaders and marriage counselors are finding that couples, separated for months or years by war, may suffer a greatly increased risk of divorce after the spouse in the service returns home. Both mates are changed by the separation and their different experiences. The one in a war zone has seen and done violent things. The one remaining home has learned to

live without his or her mate, perhaps even having had an affair during the interval.

Lengthy separations, whether caused by war, business, or other factors, are risky business. While the house is half-empty or the military camp is lonely, Satan moves in and takes advantage of the situation. Couples were meant by God to be together and to have sex together. If this cannot be done, temptation may overcome them. Read 1 Corinthians 7:2-6 again and apply it to your marriage. It not only talks about sexual separation, but also about a healthy attitude toward each other, sexually. We are not autonomous beings, but a pair, joined by the covenant of marriage. We are not our own, but belong to each other. Lengthy separations play havoc with the togetherness that marriage demands.

Lengthy separations, whether caused by war, business, or other factors, are risky business.

Avoid gross behavior and lack of sensitivity toward your mate

We men tend to be Neanderthals at times in our behavior, thinking that grossness is equal to being a truly macho man. The real man is one who is tough in defending his family, but gentle with it. ***“Husbands, love your wives”*** says Paul in Ephesians 5:25. The Greek word in the original is not “eros”, or sexual love, but “agape”, or sacrificial love: the love that gives with no thought of receiving, that cherishes and protects, just as Christ loves the church and gave Himself for her. A commercial ad many decades ago stated, “Tough but oh, so gentle.” It pictured a football-lineman type holding a baby gently in his arms.

This is the kind of love that a real man shows his wife and family. He may be tough in discipline, but this toughness is undergirded by kindness and gentleness.

The real man is one who is tough in defending his family, but gentle with it.

Back to gross behavior, men are more likely than women to shave irregularly, bathe seldom, and fail to use deodorants. A smelly, prickly husband doesn't light many fires of loving passion in his mate. Both mates should

give special attention to personal hygiene as a means of maintaining a healthy marriage. Dare I add here a terribly overweight husband or wife as a deterrent to a loving, sexually-satisfying marriage? There may be a direct ratio between shedding pounds and increasing sexual desire on the part of both mates.

Do special things for your spouse

If a spouse does only what is expected, there is no element of surprise in the marriage. Cleaning up the kitchen without her asking, washing his car, or giving her a day off to do as she pleases are examples of unexpected giving. Even bringing home a box of chocolates or a single rose when she doesn't expect it racks up a lot of love points with the wife. Of course, Hubby will get to sample some of the chocolates. As my daughter-in-law says, that's a “mouse tax”. Just this week I bought a small bouquet for Margie. When I was checking out at the store, I commented that the bouquet was not on the list, but was a

special extra. The girl at the cash register answered, “If it was on the list, you get no points for it.” Spontaneity, anyone?

Restoring romance to a marriage

As time passes, the once-romantic period before and for awhile after the wedding ceremony begins to disappear under the pressures of work and family-rearing. The husband who is task-oriented has won his prize — his beautiful wife. He then may scratch that assignment off his list and move on to the next one, never realizing that continued romance is the oil that keeps a marriage flourishing. The Hybels talk about a young couple that had lost the “R” word from their relationship:

“... [they] were best friends all through high school, dated happily throughout college, and married with the total blessing of family and friends. But five years into the marriage they sat across from each other on their living room floor, weeping over the lack of feeling in their marriage. They weren’t spiritually incompatible. They hadn’t lost respect for each other. They didn’t have serious temperament clashes or poor conflict resolution skills. They had simply poured themselves into their careers and neglected to treasure one another” (Hybels 1991;148-149).

As time passes, the once-romantic period before and for awhile after the wedding ceremony begins to disappear under the pressures of work and family-rearing.

When children come along, again both (the wife, especially) may become so involved in their care that she neglects nurturing her husband. “They forget that they are husbands and wives first, parents second” (ibid.).

Both mates must love and cherish (read that, *treasure*) each other. Ephesians 5:28-29 says:

“... 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.”

Retaining a high level of romance in a marriage

What can be done on a continuing basis to retain a high level of romance in a marriage?

- ◆ Take her flowers or a box (a little box, if she is on a diet) of candy, a piece of jewelry or, if you are brave, an article of clothing.
- ◆ Give him that book he has been wanting, a new shirt, a tool for his workshop collection ...
- ◆ Do the vacuuming or kitchen cleanup for her without being asked.
- ◆ Give her a foot massage.
- ◆ Dress up for your dates out on the town, even if it is to a budget movie.
- ◆ Plan a Saturday or holiday away from home at some cozy bed-and-breakfast.
- ◆ Make vacations a special time together. One time we drove from Oklahoma to California, taking in 10 national parks in transit. We will long remember that vacation.

◆ See that anniversaries and birthdays are memorable. We always try to get out of town for our wedding anniversary to keep the romance alive and renew our vows to each other.

Arrange early for savings, investments and insurance

We couldn't do any of the above early in our marriage because we came back from our frugal honeymoon with \$5.00 to our name. It took us years to even have a savings account and insurance, to say nothing of investments. Taking out family insurance early on makes for far lower premiums and covers the real possibility of someone in the family dying in an accident or as the result of an illness. Never think that relative youth is insurance against a car wreck or other tragedy. Trauma hits every home sooner or later.

Set up a living trust

A will is a mixed blessing. The cost of administering it after a death is an expensive proposition. Far better is a living trust. Such a trust bypasses litigation and probate in courts, leaving the estate (home, vehicles and other possessions, as well as bank accounts and investments) intact. Any attorney can assist you with living trust.

Build boundaries for the marriage

"Don't fence me in" may be the title of a song that was at one time popular. However, fences or boundaries are necessary. Even cattle ranches have fences which are patrolled

Families need boundaries and need to know what they are. Families need protection from themselves, so as not to step beyond what is good behavior.

and maintained. I spent part of one summer during my college years on a cattle ranch in eastern Oregon. One of my duties was checking the miles of barbed wire fencing around the ranch. It was a hot and tiring job, but essential to the protection of the cattle.

Our present back yard has a wooden picket fence, but it is about to fall down. Very soon we will either have to take it out or replace it.

All families need boundaries, as described in Cloud and Townsend's book, **Boundaries in Marriage**, and Jerry B. Jenkins' book, **Hedges: Loving Your Marriage Enough to Protect it**. The premise of both of these volumes is that families need boundaries and need to know what they are. Families need protection from themselves, so as not to step beyond what is good behavior. They also need protection from outside influences that would tear them down. These boundaries need to be established early in the marriage and then heeded.

Cloud and Townsend say on this subject:

"When boundaries are not established in the beginning of a marriage, or when they break down, marriages break down as well. Or such marriages don't grow past the initial attraction and transform into real intimacy. They never reach the true 'knowing' of each other and the ongoing ability to abide in love and to grow as individuals and as a couple — the long-term fulfillment that was God's design" (Cloud and Townsend 1999:17).

Boundaries are simply the defining line of ownership. They are a property line. In a marriage they are the lines of responsibility and ownership of attitudes that spell out the relationship between the two spouses. Adam and Eve had a boundary problem. They refused to accept responsibility for their actions, blaming them on someone else.

Another defining line is the “hedge” described by Jenkins. A hedge is a protective device. We fence in our property to define its borders and to protect it from trespassing. At our home in Brazil we had a hedge of Crown of Thorns plants. The thorns were close to an inch long. No one — and I mean no one — would try to get through or over that hedge. Jenkins says that for many different situations we face in marriage hedges need to be in place. One he mentions is:

“Whenever I need to meet or dine or travel with an unrelated woman, I make it a threesome. Should an unavoidable last-minute complication make this impossible, my wife hears it from me first” (Jenkins 1989:750).

Around his marriage, Jenkins planted a hedge of protection against sexual temptation. He determined to never, if he could help it, be alone with a woman not his wife, not even to grab a hamburger. He was concerned about falling to temptation, but also about avoiding the very appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). If he took care about how things looked to others, he would at the same time be concerned about how they were to him.

Other hedges he mentions include taking care about touching others, except family members and friends, and only then in a circumspect way. Another is taking care about the nature of compliments given to someone of the opposite sex. Another is avoiding flirtation or suggestive words, even in jest. Yet another is keeping in mind, and repeating to your spouse, your wedding vows. He also has a hedge of maintaining quality time for his wife and family. To this end he takes no work home with him from the office. “No work from the office?” Ouch! How many times I have done that, burying myself in paperwork during the evening hours.

Ounce of prevention

“I’m sorry. I promise to do my best to avoid doing that again,” goes a long way toward marital unity. “To err is human; to forgive, divine” is very true as a guideline for all couples. To mark mutually understood boundaries and to erect hedges of protection are also valuable guidelines for couples.

Meditate on this passage:

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other, and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:12-13).

Chapter 3

1. Why are the first years of marriage so important in forming a healthy home?
2. How important is correct interpretation of what one's mate says or does?
3. What parts do patience and forgiveness play in a successful marriage?
4. What three kinds of temptation face every couple, perhaps daily? How did Jesus respond to these temptations?
5. What is the danger to marital relations and to the home of long separations between husband and wife?

Chapter 4

The Family's Influence on Attitudes and Behavior

Parents' attitude and behavior in marriage has an influence on the children's concepts about marriage and life in general. The little ones see all, hear all, and copy all. The lifestyle of the home has a profound influence on the entire family. As an individual contemplates marriage with a future spouse, it is vital to understand the family influences that have gone into that person's whole outlook on life — his or her world-view.



"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." — James Baldwin

Parents' marriage, a pattern for their children

If the parents' marriage is loving and tranquil; if the father and mother are tender and kind toward each other and their offspring, yet firm in discipline; if the marriage continues unmarred by infidelity, reaching 50 years or more, the chances are good that the children will have loving and tranquil marriages. Of course there are exceptions. My parents lived well past 50 years of marriage, but both my brother and sister were involved in divorces. As a general rule, however, long-term marital commitment on the part of the mother and father says a lot to the children about marital stability.

Zig Ziglar notes on the ideal mentality of the man entering marriage:

"... when a man falls in love with a woman, dedicating himself to care for her and protect her and support her, he suddenly becomes the mainstay of social order. Instead of using his energies to pursue his own lusts and desires, he sweats to build a home and save for the future and seek the best job available. His selfish impulses are inhibited; his sexual passions are channeled. He discovers a sense of pride — yes, masculine pride — because he is needed by his wife and children. Everyone benefits from the relationship" (Ziglar 1990:21).

The sad truth is that some men never grow up. They remain just big boys. Columnist Kathleen Parker notes this verifiable fact about males:

"I personally have a special death mask that I wear when the four males with whom I've shared a roof the past 20 years fail to notice that towels are not rugs" (*"The Drudgery Report," The Daily Oklahoman*, April 14, 2008).

Some men appear to be incapable of, or to resist the notion of, being responsible heads of their families. When this happens, storm clouds will soon show up to dampen the home.

If the parents' marriage is stormy; if the father is abusive toward the mother and/or children; if the marriage ends up in divorce, the chances are considerable that the children's marriages will replicate that of the parents. A friend suggested, "Take a careful look at the mother. If you don't like what you see, you may not like what you get in your future mate." This may be especially true in the case of daughters.

A teenage girl, watching her mother divorce twice, vowed, "I will never, ever get a divorce! I see what it does to the family." Guess what? Later on, her marriage broke up and she divorced.

Bennett says, following a long list of the detrimental effects of divorce on the children:

"They tend to be more depressed, resentful, or withdrawn; to have worse relations with peers and other adults; to show less affection to, and feel less supported by, their parents; and to be more likely to divorce when they themselves marry" (Bennett 2001:152).

Stage set early for marital attitudes

The early formative years of a child's life set the stage for many of his or her later attitudes.

The early formative years of a child's life set the stage for many of his or her later attitudes. Apparently the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree. There may be exceptions to this old adage, but for the most part it is true. Look at some Bible examples: Moses' parents had him under their influence for perhaps his

first three or four years (Exodus 2:1-10). Hannah had the infant Samuel under her guidance until he was weaned, perhaps three years of age (1 Samuel 1:21-28). In both of these cases early parental influence was so strong that it remained with the son all of his life.

On the contrary, David's sons were a mess, even though for the most part he was a godly man. Eli's sons and Samuel's sons were a disaster, although both men were servants of God. Solomon's son Rehoboam showed none of the wisdom of his father. Hezekiah was dedicated to God but his son Manasseh was an idolater. There is not always any accounting for how a child will turn out, even brought up in a godly home.

A child's home environment generally has a strong bearing on how that particular child turns out. Therefore, as you contemplate marriage with someone, take a look at the entire family scene in which your prospective mate grew up. Disclose frankly your own family background. Your future mate should look at your family in action, just as you are looking at his or her family in action. Discuss both families frankly and openly. Determine what effect all of this may have on your marriage.

We are reminded of the iconic movie, “My Big Fat Greek Wedding”, as a case in point on marrying into a family, and not just into the life of your intended. That film is a classic example of the vast differences between the “apple pie” American male who becomes engaged to a woman of strong Greek roots. He makes all of the concessions necessary to adapt to her culture, including a change in his religion. As the wedding approached, he knew what he had to do to be accepted by her very large and noisy family, so he did it. This is not the case in many marriages that join two people of different backgrounds. Marriages that bring together two different races, religions, social levels, educational levels or other important factors have many hurdles to overcome.

Marriages divided by religious or other barriers

In most churches there are dozens of spiritually-divided marriages. I applaud the mates who are faithful, despite the almost total lack of participation in church affairs by their partners. This has to be a discouragement for the faithful mate and perhaps a source of resentment for the non-member mate. Other unequal yokes that some marriage partners bear include those that are inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-social-level and inter-educational. These are not insurmountable, but they add special burdens to the marital relationship.

Consider the temperament types of the two sets of parents

Determine the temperament of the parents, because the built-in characteristics of differing temperament types have a strong bearing on the nature of the children. Their entire way of thinking and acting is based in part on the temperament with which they were born.

We need to understand that no one person is a single temperament type, since we have two parents and four grandparents, all of whom contribute genetically to our own temperament.

For instance, are the parents choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic, or melancholic, or a combination of these basic temperaments? LaHaye describes these as:

◆ **The Choleric.** “Rocky Choleric is the hot, quick, active, practical, and strong-willed temperament. He is often self-sufficient, and very independent. He tends to be decisive and opinionated, finding it easy to make decisions for himself as well as for others. Mr. Choleric thrives on activity ... He is not frightened by adversities ... He has dogged determination and often succeeds where others fail ... He does not sympathize easily with others, nor does he naturally show or express compassion ... He has little appreciation for the fine arts; his primary interest is in the utilitarian values of life.”

◆ **The Sanguine.** “Sparky Sanguine is the warm, buoyant, live and ‘enjoying’ temperament. He is receptive by nature, and external impressions easily find their way to his heart ... Feelings predominate to form his decisions rather than reflective thoughts ... He can genuinely feel the joys and sorrows of the person he meets and has the capacity to make him feel important ... He enjoys people,

does not like solitude, but is at his best when surrounded by friends where he is the life of the party ... His noisy, blustering, friendly ways make him appear more confident than he really is, but his energy and lovable disposition get him by the rough spots of life."

◆ **The Phlegmatic.** "Flip Phlegmatic ... is so calm and easy-going that he never seems to get ruffled, no matter what the circumstances. He ... seldom explodes in anger or laughter, but keeps his emotions in control ... Beneath the cool, reticent, almost timid personality of Mr. Phlegmatic is a very capable combination of abilities. He feels much more emotion than appears on the surface and has a good capacity to appreciate the fine arts and the better things of life ... He tends to be a spectator in life and tries not to get too involved with the activities of others. In fact, it is usually with great reluctance that he is ever motivated to any form of activity beyond his daily routine."

◆ **The Melancholic.** "Maestro Melancholic ... is the richest of all the temperaments, for he is an analytical, self-sacrificing, gifted, perfectionist type, with a very sensitive emotional nature. No one gets more enjoyment from the fine arts than the melancholic. By nature he is prone to be an introvert ... Mr. Melancholy is a very faithful friend, but unlike the Sanguine, he does not make friends easily. He will not push himself forward to meet people, but rather lets people come to him. He is perhaps the most dependable of all the temperaments ... His exceptional analytical ability causes him to diagnose accurately the obstacles and dangers of any project he has a part in planning. This is in sharp contrast to the Choleric, who rarely anticipates problems or difficulties ... Occasionally when he [the Melancholic] is in one of his great moods of emotional ecstasy or inspiration he may produce some great work of art or genius ... Mr. Melancholy usually finds his greatest meaning in life through personal sacrifice." (LaHaye 1966:10-23).

We need to understand that no one person is a single temperament type, since we have two parents and four grandparents, all of whom contribute genetically to our own temperament. However, one of the four temperament types tends to dominate.

Parents' and grandparents' temperaments

Now, attempt to analyze the temperament of your own parents and grandparents, as well as those of your prospective mate. Some types do not adapt well to other types. In my own case, the melancholic predominates, so I have always been ill at ease with the choleric, who I feel is too strong-willed and precipitous for my nature. I have some problems with the sanguine, who appears to be too back-slapping. And I have difficulties at times with the phlegmatic, who appears to be stuck in a non-imaginary rut.

Temperament differences may be overcome or at least tolerated, but we must first come to recognize them and accept the fact that people often have a different approach to life than we.

Do you see some of the built-in problems you may have with your new inlaws or even with your spouse? If you are a choleric, you may inadvertently bruise the tender nature of your melancholic spouse. If you are a phlegmatic, your mate may become discouraged by your lack of “ambition”. If your mate’s family tends to be choleric, you may feel yourself intimidated by it. Or you may find yourself marrying into a family of artists, who you feel do not have their feet on the ground.

Temperament differences may be overcome or at least tolerated, but we must first come to recognize them and accept the fact that people often have a different approach to life than we. For instance, a compulsively tidy person will find it extremely difficult to live daily with a slob. A person prudent with money will have problems with a mate who is a spendthrift.

We come into a marriage with an accumulation of temperaments among our family members and a resulting lifestyle developed largely out of those temperaments and the family’s world-view.

Back to the Greek wedding: the groom expected much interference from his new in-laws and seemed to accept it. In fact, they dominated his life, even to the point of buying him and his bride a house next door to her parents’ home. This kind of adaptation does not happen in many cases. As a result, real differences of opinion and style arise in the home. Many of these are traceable to temperament differences.

With these differences in mind, find out as much as you can about your future mate before you marry. You will probably go right ahead and marry, but at least you will be forewarned.

Other points to consider in your relationship with your spouse

Here are some other pertinent points to consider in your relationship with your spouse:

- ◆ Examine the level of dependence on his or her parents. If your future mate was very dependent, he or she will run to momma and poppa whenever a problem arises.
- ◆ Was your future mate brought up to be responsible and respectful; to do chores; to keep his or her bedroom tidy; to understand money and how to control its use?
- ◆ Take a look at how that family cares for its home and possessions. Is the home clean or dirty, neat or messy? Are the vehicles properly cared for? Does the family handle its resources wisely?
- ◆ What are its preferences in entertainment, vacation, sports, and exercise?
- ◆ What are some family or hereditary health issues that should be known in advance?
- ◆ What are the religious, political, and social convictions of the family?
- ◆ What are some of the basic assumptions, values, and loyalties of the family? In other words, what is its collective world view?

Why all of this research into the temperament and lifestyle of your future mate and you, along with those of the families involved? Because very often children marry and follow the lifestyle of their growing-up years at home. We come into a marriage with

an accumulation of temperaments among our family members and a resulting lifestyle developed largely out of those temperaments and the family's world view.

We also bring to marriage the accumulated experiences of our years from birth to the day of the wedding. These experiences may involve serious illnesses, accidents, death, business and investment failures, loss of jobs, financial stress, betrayal by friends, parental infidelity and divorce, child or spousal abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, gossip against us, mistreatment by colleagues, sexually transmitted diseases, and a host of other issues.

Hopefully, our experiences may involve true love and faithfulness on the part of our parents, genuine love and care for the children, religious faith, honesty, integrity, loyalty, dedication to a cause, and other positive factors. All of these will impact the marriage.

The sum total of our backgrounds

A current TV commercial talks about the DNA makeup of the individual who inherits from his or her ancestors a tendency toward high cholesterol. In the same line of reasoning, we are the sum total of all of the genetic, temperamental, and experiential factors that make us what we are. We never change much in temperament, but we can make some changes in lifestyle, difficult as that may be.

Before marriage, come to a mutual understanding about such matters. Know beforehand with what you are dealing. Do not expect a radical change in your mate's temperament or lifestyle. Trying to make over your mate is an exercise in frustration for both of you. Take this into account. If you can't live with these differences in makeup and style, perhaps you should reconsider marriage to that person.

An ounce of prevention

In wrapping up this chapter, the ounce of prevention we have emphasized is that of knowing well the temperament of your spouse, even before marriage. This can lead you to understand better his or her way of thinking and acting. You may or may not want to get on intimate terms with someone of your potential mate's temperament. And don't think you will be able to give your mate a total overhaul. It won't happen. He or she may change some, but never in basic temperament.

Think on these passages:

"Better to live on a corner of the roof, than share a house with a quarrelsome wife" (Proverbs 25:24).

"Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company ... " (Proverbs 24:1).

Chapter 4

1. What influence does the attitude and behavior of parents have on their children?
2. Is there any truth to the suggestion that a child's future marriage may replicate that of his or her parents? Why may this be true?
3. What part may parental influence play on a child during his or her early years?

4. What are some of the hurdles faced by a couple of different ethnic, religious, social, or cultural backgrounds?
5. Discuss the four temperament types reviewed in this chapter. How may a particular temperament or combination of temperaments influence marital and family unity?

Chapter 5

Putting Kids into the Mix

Even one child changes greatly the marital mix. Someone recently called babies “little terrorists”. Their aim is to wear parents down by their constant demands, robbing them of sleep and giving them plenty of cause for worry and frustration. From the time they are born they are selfish. The world rotates around them, or so they think. All is forgiven, however, when their little faces light up in a smile or when they gurgle with pleasure.



Expect your privacy to largely vanish

Once children are on their feet and toddling around, your parental privacy begins to diminish. I vividly recall that we could not engage in sexual activity until all of the young ones were asleep. Then we prayed that they would stay asleep for awhile. Young children, especially, may burst into a bathroom or bedroom unannounced. It doesn't matter a bit to them whether you are on the commode, getting dressed or undressed, or even stark naked.

Vanished privacy also involves quiet time to yourself, reading, watching your favorite TV programs, exercising, or engaging in any number of other activities in your home. When the little ones suddenly appear, you may have to switch programs. You may have to quit reading or doing a puzzle or working at your computer. Children may still be small, but they can be a very large presence and one that demands attention. They have no right to dominate all of your time, but that doesn't mean that attention to them should be neglected.

Children may still be small, but they can be a very large presence and one that demands attention.

Accept responsibility for your children

Both parents brought these young ones into the world, and both are responsible for them. It is an affront against God, our society, and the children if one or both parents fail to conscientiously care for their own offspring.

Regarding the Lord's mandates to parents, hear what His Word says:

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his

immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

Pretty clear, isn't it? Yet, despite these injunctions, the world is full of deadbeat dads who abandon their families. Our society is plagued with one-parent homes caused by abandonment, divorce, or other misfortune, including non-married partners who come and go, leaving their DNA mark on their offspring, but little if anything more.

God's ideal is two parents leading a family

Children need both parents living together in a loving, caring atmosphere. One parent alone cannot provide all of the guidance that two good parents can provide.

Kids need a father who will bring them up to know and serve the Lord, protect them, care for them, discipline them firmly but fairly and consistently, set an example of godly manliness, and show them genuine love. The father should be a protector, provider, teacher, model, and hero for his children. Boys need a model to follow. Now more than ever, with the Gay issue so prominent, boys must look to a manly father as a guide to sound masculine behavior. Fathers contribute (or should contribute) to the destiny of their children and grandchildren. The Lord said of Abraham,

"For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just ..."
(Genesis 18:19).

Farrar emphasizes the important role of the father in a family with these words:

"Every child in America needs a moral compass. A strict moral relative. And that strict moral relative should be Dad. America desperately needs some strict fathers. There are hundreds of thousands of children walking around our schools, streets and malls who desperately need someone in their lives who loves them enough to say 'no'" (Farrar 1994:51).

Children who know their father truly loves them are more likely to obey and accept punishment for disobedience.

Farrar adds that our country needs strict fathers who love their kids, who are affectionate with their kids, who verbally praise their kids, and who emotionally support their kids (Farrar 1994:53). This sounds like a paradox, doesn't it? Can a father really be strict and affectionate at the same time? Or, can he insist on obedience, yet at the same time be loving and affectionate? Yes, he can, and children who know their father truly loves them are more likely to obey and to accept punishment for disobedience.

By strictness, Farrar does not mean meanness, aloofness, distance, harshness, or abuse. He does mean love, affection, praise, and emotional support when these are called for, but also discipline when it is called for. Discipline is balanced by positive qualities that give the children love and acceptance (Farrar 1994:53).

Fathers should also act as priests of their households, being the leader in spiritual

example, nurturing, and teaching. This is not the primary task of the mother, but of the father. In Genesis 18:19 the Lord said of Abraham that he would direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord. In Joshua 4:20-24, Joshua set up memorial stones at the point where Israel crossed the Jordan River. When children later on asked their fathers what those stones meant, the fathers were to explain how the Lord had delivered Israel. Yes, fathers should tell their children what God has done in the past and what He is doing now, and what He can do in the future through them.

In a day when the media makes fathers out to be bumbling idiots, fathers should stand

Kids need a mother who nurtures them, teaches them the finer points of behavior and etiquette, shows them what a godly mother is like, and gives them unconditional love.

tall as the spiritual and moral leaders of their families. Without their proper leadership, families as a rule falter and collapse.

And kids need a mother who can give them what only a mother brings to the family. Mothers, too, are protectors, but also tamers of wild energies, teaching their

children gentleness, mannerly behavior and respect. They need a mother who nurtures them, teaches them the finer points of behavior and etiquette, shows them what a godly mother is like, and gives them unconditional love. Both parents need to be united in training and disciplining their children, especially if they are caught using cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs, or behaving immorally.

This is all part of accepting full responsibility for our children until they are grown and on their own. Parents have absolutely no right to bail out of their obligations to their family.

Expect accidents, illnesses, and other problems

Murphy's Law says that if an accident can happen, it will. One of our sons was accident-prone as a child. When an infant, he was seated in a baby butler, a movable table with a baby chair cut into it. Margie opened a can of peaches, leaving the ragged-edged lid sitting at an angle atop the can. He reached for it, toppled out of his chair and struck the can lid with his foot, gashing it open. Later on, we were camping in California. He was warned not to play in the campfire, but he did, catching a live coal in his pants cuff. Then, when he ran, the coal flared up, burning his pants and his leg. Forest rangers came and took him in their truck to a first-aid station. He declared to one and all that he had been rescued by the Texas Rangers.

Parents soon get well acquainted with emergency rooms. If it isn't accidents, it is childhood illnesses or worse.

Later still, he was watching some boys throwing pocket knives at a tree trunk. One knife careened off, again slicing him open. On and on it went. He dove into a mountain river when he couldn't swim, and Dad had to rescue him. He was jumping from rafter to rafter in a building under construction when he fell, landing on his head on the concrete floor. Concussion, anyone? By the time he was six, he had been sewed up six times.

That's the way it is with kids, some more so than others. A recent comic strip had the

father saying to the receptionist in a restaurant, “Four chairs, a high chair, and three dozen napkins.” Very true, because kids are messy and often get into trouble. Parents soon get well acquainted with emergency rooms. If it isn’t accidents, it is childhood illnesses or worse. Some families suffer the heartache of even a very young child being stricken with cancer or some other major health trauma. At best, their growing-up years mean shots, colds, chicken pox, and other ailments, along with perhaps dental bills and glasses.

Expect independence and rebellion

It is natural for children to want to be independent. Our oldest son was very much this way from infancy. “My do it myself!” was his adamant statement in any and all situations in which he was involved. Sometimes he messed up, but he at least was asserting his desire to succeed at a task without help.

Expect two-year-olds to be independent and boisterous, even tiresome. It is their nature to explore the world they are discovering. It is no wonder they are called the “terrible twos”. This, too, shall pass. Just give them time.

Expect teenagers to be independent, rebellious, and tiresome. The comic strip “Zits”, by Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman, portrays it pretty accurately. In a June 26, 2005 installment, Mother is asking her teenage son, “Are you ready to go, Jeremy?” He asks, “Go where?” “Shopping! I told you that I wanted to buy you some new shirts!” “You did? When?” “This morning!! You were sitting at the table eating a bowl of cereal and looking right at me!” “And that made you think that I was listening?” And Mom collapses onto the table in despair.

Teenagers can become worse than fictional Jeremy. They can be rebellious to the point of skipping school, drinking, using drugs, engaging in sex, and doing other outrageous things. If they go to these extremes, the whole family may need professional help. At the very least, there must be rigid discipline, curfews, and withdrawal of privileges until the situation dramatically improves. Anti-drug TV commercials emphasize this idea of not yielding to the teen’s efforts to pressure the parents into relenting.

Parents of teens, you can expect crises over dating, late nights, driving, sex, drugs, and alcohol, to name a few of the pitfalls out there. Be prepared and pray for the wisdom of Solomon in handling such issues.

Rather than siding always with the kids, try siding with the authorities

It is our task as parents to make certain that our children have the best education we can provide. This education begins at home and continues through the school years. Therefore, we will always demand that they do their homework and apply themselves to their schooling. And we will expect them to respect their teachers.

When our kids were in school, if they got into trouble with their teachers, they were also

Teens can be rebellious to the point of skipping school, drinking, using drugs, engaging in sex, and doing other outrageous things.

in trouble with us. No longer! In today's anti-authority culture, parents appear to almost uniformly take the side of their offspring. There may be some cases in which this is justified, but in most cases it probably isn't. At the very least, meet with teachers and principals to

If you don't respect authority, how can you expect your children to?

hear with open ears their side of the problem.

The same consideration should be given to police and other authorities. If you don't respect authority, how can you expect your children to? If you ignore traffic laws, they will ignore not only traffic laws, but others as well. If you cheat on your taxes, they will cheat on their tests.

Parents, you are required by the Lord to be in submission to civil authority, whether that authority is school, local law enforcement personnel, state or federal government. Paul commands us,

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established ... Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves" (Romans 13:1,2).

We must not only submit to authority, but honor it. "What? Do you mean to say that I must honor that president or congressman, governor or mayor?" Yes, I mean exactly that, regardless of my own and that person's political party and actions. Remember that Paul was speaking about Roman rulers who were not paragons of virtue. Some were even demagogues, perverts, and men deluded into thinking that they were gods on earth. Paul added,

"Give everyone what you owe him: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor" (Romans 13:7).

Our free society generates much abuse against our leaders. Whoever the president is, he is ridiculed, lampooned, and viciously attacked. We do not help the situation by badmouthing our leaders before our children. They will only end up hating those officials and rebelling against them. I find it disgusting to listen to the vitriol poured out on TV shows against our elected officials, and especially, against our president, be he Democratic or Republican. Where is the respect for his office, demanded by Scripture?

For some reason, known perhaps only to God, our president at any given time is there by His authority and we should respect his office and person, as difficult as that may be. The same is true for our other elected officials.

Do not wrap your lives totally around your children

This sounds like a contrary statement to what we have been discussing, but it isn't. Children are not the center of the universe. They must be cared for properly, which takes a great deal of time and attention, but fathers and mothers must also have a life in which they live and love.

As we have said earlier, arrange time alone together. Go out alone together. I know baby sitters are a problem, but not having time alone together can be an even greater problem.

Ounce of prevention

The price of bringing up children is high, indeed. It begins with prenatal care, birth expenses, pediatric care, clothes, school, sports and eventually high school, a car, college tuition, much time, tears, and joys ...

If we bring children into the world, we must be willing to pay the price. They didn't choose to be born into our family, so they are our responsibility to care for and nurture until they can be on their own. The ounce of prevention here is to learn what it takes to be a good parent and to accept the cost of doing so.

Verses to consider:

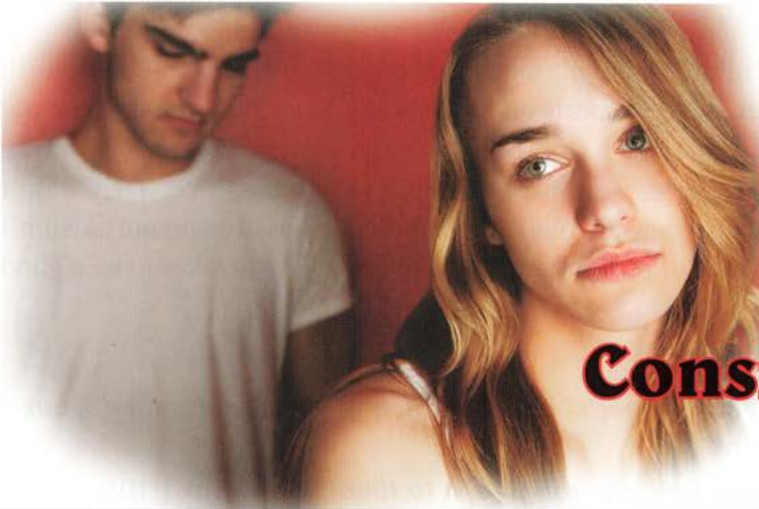
“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8).

“My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them” (Proverbs 1:10).

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor you father and mother’ — which is the first commandment with a promise — that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Chapter 5

1. How do children change the marital mix? How can this change be gracefully handled?
2. Why do children need both parents living together in love and in a caring atmosphere?
3. How should the father be serving as priest of the home? What important roles does a mother play in the upbringing of children?
4. If parents do not respect authority, how will this translate in the lives of their children?
5. Why should parents not wrap their entire lives around those of their children?



Some Other Considerations about Marriage

"A loving wife will do anything for her husband except stop criticizing and trying to improve him"

— J.B. Priestley

Some additional matters that should be considered

These observations cover all of the stages of married life. The following quote from the Bible is a beginning point:

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

"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. 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" (Ephesians 5:22-33 NIV).

Some elements of this passage women love, for instance the part about husbands loving their wives. Others they don't care so much for, such as submitting to and respecting their husbands. This is not politically or socially acceptable in feminist circles, but is a clear Bible requirement.

In the first place Paul instructs wives to **submit to their husbands** as to the Lord. Oh, how controversial this is! However, it is a spiritual principle that must be honored. If Christ is the head of the church, the husband is equally the head of his wife and family. No family can have two heads, no more so than the church can have two heads. This entire passage is an exegesis comparing marriage to the structure of the church. Just as the church submits to Christ in all things, so also the wife submits to her husband in all things.

Now, before you wives reading this conclude that I am anti-feminist, let me assure you that I am not, nor was Paul. He goes on to safeguard this submission with instructions to the husband to love his wife, just as Christ loves the church and gave all for her. As Christ loves the church, His body, so the husband loves his wife as his own body. He does nothing on purpose to harm his body. Since he loves his wife as his own body, he will do nothing to harm her. She is therefore safe in his love and protection. She can submit to him because he will always care for her.

Emerson Eggerichs says that the thing a wife most wants is her husband's unconditional love, and the thing a husband most desperately needs is his wife's respect (Eggerichs 2004).

Paul notes in passing that the oneness of the body of Christ is illustrated by the oneness of marriage. A man will leave his parents and be united to his wife, becoming one flesh with her. Since they are one flesh, the husband must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Emerson Eggerichs says that the thing a wife most wants is her husband's unconditional love, and the thing a husband most desperately needs is his wife's respect (Eggerichs 2004). Without love from her husband, a wife reacts without respect. Without respect from his wife, a husband reacts without love. Eggerich calls this "the crazy cycle" (Eggerichs 2004:307).

I recall a cartoon that shows a crane trying to down a frog, but the frog has his hands tightly around the neck of the crane, so he can't be swallowed. The caption reads, "Never, never, never give up." Marriage has been around for a long time and hopefully will be for a long time to come. It is well worth hanging onto. May we never, never, never give up on it.

Ounce of prevention

The best prevention against divorce is unconditional agape love, and not just erotic love, on the part of both the husband and the wife. Erotic love is a wonderful thing, but it can never hold a candlestick to the caring, sacrificial love God's Word calls us to practice in our marital relations.

Prayerfully reread these passages:

"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. 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” (Ephesians 5:25-30).

“Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

Chapter 6

1. What is the “politically incorrect” instruction Paul (by inspiration) gives to wives?
2. Why is this an instruction of protection, rather than unfair discrimination against women?
3. What is the balancing instruction for husbands?
4. The love of a man for his wife is paralleled with the love of Christ for _____, which is His bride.
5. What does Emerson Eggerich say a wife most wants from her husband? The husband from his wife? Do God’s instructions to both show His perfect understand of both?

Chapter 7

'Til Realities Do Us Part

“‘This man,’ she reasons, as she looks at her husband, ‘is a poor fish. But he is the nearest I can get to the big one that got away.’” — Nigel Denis

Some days it appears that almost every family around us is on a second or third merry-go-round of marriages. Children in the typical home have various last names and tenuous relationships with the rest of the family. Several years ago my wife and I attended the funeral for her non-Christian brother. He had been divorced, remarried and widowed. In his two marriages he had nine children. Some of them have married and divorced. Some are in second marriages. Some are cohabiting with a “significant other”. And one has several children, but has never married. To say the least, I never did quite figure out all of the dynamics at play in that complicated set of relationships.

Society’s standards for marriage and divorce

Michael McManus, a newspaper and radio specialist in ethics and religions, says,

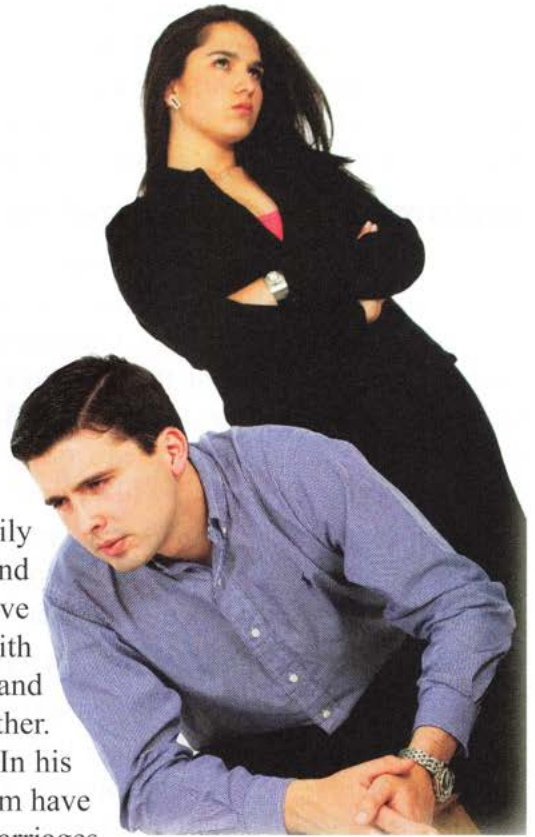
“Instead of holding up a high ideal for our marriage, we use society’s standards and even settle for separation or divorce because that seems more common nowadays than good marriages ...” (McManus 1995:221).

William Bennett, in his book, **The Broken Hearth**, writes that

“Nothing has done more to undermine family life today than the ‘divorce revolution,’ which began roughly thirty-five years ago and is now a prominent and, in the opinion of some, a permanent feature of the American landscape” (Bennett 2001:142).

Divorce portrayed as the “thing”

The world of cheating on one’s spouse, going to bed with whoever is “hot”, rampant cohabitation, divorce, single family homes and all of the other ills of the modern-day social realm are played up on TV and in the movies as being the “thing”. Well-known entertainment figures flaunt their having babies with men not their spouses. And guess what? The media love it!



As this was written, one short cul-de-sac in our city netted the following family situations: Of fourteen homes, five consisted apparently of stable marriages, three had a cohabitation arrangement, four were composed of single adults and two were places rented to college students who had members of the opposite sex in and out. What does that say about the general stability of homes on that particular street?

Legitimizing extramarital and homosexual behavior

All of this, along with an emphasis on condoning and legitimizing homosexuality, has become standard fare, so much so that such behavior is considered perfectly normal and acceptable. As I write this, Oklahoma State Representative Sally Kern is in hot water over her public statement that “homosexuality is more dangerous to our country than terrorism.” She based her assertion on Bible teaching about homosexual behavior. She is being condemned and threatened worldwide for her so-politically-incorrect position. How did this all come about? We will explore some of what I believe to be the reasons.

When I was growing up in western Oregon back in the “dark ages”, divorce was almost unknown in that region. I was aware of just one woman who had divorced and her being a divorcee cast a pall of blame over her. She was considered “unclean” and to be avoided.

Divorce rate accelerated in the 1960's

Then it was during the 1960's that something happened to accelerate the divorce rate in our nation. Before then, divorce was on the increase, even from after World War I on, but the rate was uneven. What caused a sudden jump in the rates, beginning in the 1960's? Was it a new chemical in our drinking water? New fast foods? Post-World-War-II trauma?

It was during the 1960's that something happened to accelerate the divorce rate in our nation.

Many-faceted cause for increasing divorce rates

Actually, the cause was many-faceted, rooted even in the basic assumptions of our American society — the concepts of liberty, independence, and emancipation. Out of these concepts developed the ethic, Bennett says, of individualism, “which influenced our political life for the better, and our family lives for the worse” (op. cit. : 143).

By the 1970's divorce was being heralded as a “sophisticated and even a morally correct thing to do.” Divorce, it was argued, “would strengthen society” (op. cit.: 146). That it has not done so is abundantly evident at this point, three decades or more later.

Some basic assumptions about marriage and divorce, and a developing emphasis on the individual and his or her happiness above all, changed.

Our nation had definitely entered a new era, labeled the psychological revolution. As Barbara Dafoe Whitehead so clearly shows in her book, **The Divorce Culture**, some basic assumptions about marriage and divorce, and a developing emphasis on the individual and his or her happiness above all, changed. Here is some of what she said:

"The emphasis on seeking personal happiness in relationships had profound impact on women's family lives. Just as rising economic expectations bred a material dissatisfaction earlier in the century, so now rising emotional expectations fostered a growing sense of emotional dissatisfaction and restlessness in marriage. ...

"As it altered views of marriage, the psychological revolution changed the conception of divorce. First, it redefined divorce as an individual experience rather than a legal, social and family event, with far-reaching consequences for others. ... According to this new conception of divorce, leaving a marriage offered opportunities to build a stronger identity and to achieve a more coherent and fully realized sense of self. ...

"In describing their economic lives, these [recently-divorced] men and women emphasized the new expressive opportunities and freedoms unleashed by divorce. Leaving a marriage brought economic as well as personal freedom" (Whitehead 1997:45-61).

Relative ease of obtaining a divorce

Jack was a successful engineer, earning a very comfortable living. He had a beautiful home, two sporty family cars, an SUV, and a mobile home. He had been married about 20 years to his high school sweetheart and they had two children, a boy and a girl.

Outwardly, the two were an ideal "beautiful" couple. Inwardly, however, there were problems. Jack's work kept him on the road frequently, so his communication and bonding with his family became almost non-existent. He still loved his wife, but their marital relations were becoming rocky.

The ability to divorce has been greatly enhanced in recent decades by a relaxing of divorce laws and the addition of no-fault divorce.

— Dr. Phil McGraw

One day Jack left on yet another trip for the company, but this time he took along a beautiful young secretary to prepare and send off a progress report on the firm's major construction project. Of course, the two ate together, and before the trip was over, they slept together. Jack fell head-over-heels for her.

Upon his return home, he soon announced to his wife that he was leaving her. This devastated both her and the kids, although she had sensed earlier that he was drifting away from her. Jack contacted a divorce lawyer friend who facilitated, for a hefty fee, a no-fault divorce for him. He was soon free of his wife and family and living with the secretary, who, however, had no intention of marrying. She was of the generation of women who didn't believe in the legal entanglements of a marriage license.

The famous Dr. Phil McGraw said recently on his daily TV show, "Divorce doesn't just happen." By this he meant that it creeps up on couples over a period of time, with many causative factors at work. Some of these factors at play in the "marriage game" are these:

The ability to divorce has been greatly enhanced in recent decades by a relaxing of divorce laws and the addition of no-fault divorce. Earlier, divorce proceedings were expensive, long and tedious, and required a court procedure to ascertain the infidelity

or other misbehavior of one of the mates in the dissolution of a marriage. Now the process is relatively easy, inexpensive and “blameless”. The person being sued for divorce has no voice in the matter and is not even required to appear in court. If he or she did make an appearance, little would be accomplished by his or her testimony.

No more respect for marriage as covenant

Both husband and wife are partners in a holy covenant, instituted by God and made in His presence.

In our times of lessened respect for any authority, it is little wonder that we have lost respect for the authority of God and His Word regarding marriage. We have lost respect for the marriage vows we mouthed at our weddings. It is little wonder that we no longer respect marriage

as a covenant, despite what God clearly says in the Bible:

“[Wisdom] will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God” (Proverbs 2:16-17).

“... the Lord is acting as a 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” (Malachi 2:14).

Both husband and wife are partners in a holy covenant, instituted by God and made in His presence, as I affirmed in my books, **Marriage is a Covenant, not a Contract** (1995:14-15) and **Covenant Marriage: God’s Blueprint for Couples** (2007:14-15), God’s Word is explicit regarding the folly of breaking covenants. This, of course, applies especially to the covenant of marriage. ***“I hate divorce,”*** says the Lord in Malachi 2:16. Regarding covenants in general, He commands, ***“You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised”*** (Deuteronomy 23:23 NASB).

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, a Bible scholar who has researched the meaning of *hesed*, God’s covenant faithfulness, notes:

“Contemporary uncertainty and disease about long-term commitments show themselves in many ways in the context of the decision to marry: the transformation of vows into legal contracts that lay out all rights and duties in advance; the advice to a soon-to-be-married young woman, ‘Don’t worry, you can always get a divorce’; ‘trial’ living together, in which each becomes afraid either to ask for or to offer commitment; marriages with specified ending dates ... most of these alternatives rule out by definition the possibility of faithfulness, no matter what. God’s faithfulness in all circumstances suggests that our own commitments should not seek to know every contingency in advance” (cited in Shipp 2007:15).

God certainly cannot be happy over those who break their vows to Him and their marriage partners. And He cannot be pleased with what effects breaking the marriage bond has on children, family, friends, and society in general.

New competencies for divorced women

As contemporary women gained higher positions and salaries in the workplace, many of them no longer felt bound to their husbands by financial restraints. Free of the bonds of marriage, they believed that they could fly on wings of eagles. Whitehead notes that such a mentality encouraged even more mothers to divorce:

“The notion that divorce and single-motherhood provided the opportunity for mothers to gain new competencies that had value in the larger world of work overturned the earlier conception of divorce as a source of hardship and disadvantage to divorced mothers and their children. ...

“Finally, if divorce gave mothers the opportunity to gain such psychological benefits as self-esteem, a sense of control, and a stronger identity, why should anyone interfere with the acquisition or development of such valuable personal assets?” (Whitehead 1995:64-65).

A new divorce ethic

Out of such a rationale came a new divorce ethic, which included no-fault divorce. No-fault divorce simply means that one of the marriage partners can initiate and conclude divorce proceedings without the wish or consent of the other partner. How many thousands of marital mates have experienced this fate? It appears to me that no-fault divorce is often self-centered and self-serving. Little if any concern seems to be felt for others involved in the divorce — mate, children, family, friends ...

Whitehead explains it in these words:

“If expressive divorce excluded the idea that there are other parties at interest in the ‘divorce experience,’ it also overturned earlier notions about one’s moral responsibilities to others. An individual’s right to divorce was rooted in the individual’s right to have a satisfying inner life to fulfill his/her needs and desires. The entitlement to divorce was based on the individual entitlement to pursue inner happiness” (Whitehead 1995:67).

New attitude of divorced women

Of course, there is in many divorces the matter of children. Up until the 1960’s women were encouraged to remain even in an unhappy marriage for the sake of their offspring. Afterward the whole mentality of divorce and single motherhood changed. In a government survey, 60 percent of divorced mothers said that their career opportunities were better after divorce, and 54 percent reported that their overall situation for caring for their children had improved.

No longer was there deep-seated concern for children as they faced the separation and divorce of their parents.

Is a positive male role model in the home all that important? Current studies indicate a resounding, “Yes”. The father is to be the head of the family. He is to take command, in a

kind way, of course. He is to show loving tenderness to his mate, which teaches the children what tenderness means. He is to show marital faithfulness at all times. He is to be the principle disciplinarian in the family. He is to set an example of godliness and dedication to the Lord's cause. He is to lead his family to Bible study and worship, rather than sitting at home, the eternal couch potato. He is to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. However, today's fathers are in a state of crisis. Columnist Kathleen Parker comments about fathers:

If the father demonstrates a sound role model for his children, then both boys and girls learn what it means to be an authentic man and father.

"The American father, maligned and marginalized the past few decades, makes underdogs feel smug. ... fathers are critical to children's lives, just as mothers are, and the diminution of Father in our culture may be the single stupidest turn in human history yet. The proof of our folly is all around us as measured in the pathologies afflicting our young, yet we persist in denial lest truth inconvenience our next act of self-affirmation" (Parker, The Daily Oklahoman, June 19, 2005:20A).

Parker goes on to say that it is hard enough raising boys in homes without fathers, let alone in a world that finds traditional male characteristics boorish (ibid.).

If the father demonstrates a sound role model for his children, then both boys and girls learn what it means to be an authentic man and father. The sons learn what it means to be a genuine man, strong but gentle. The daughters learn to respond to genuine male love. They both learn to rely on their guardian and protector, and expect to see that kind of man reproduced in their own marriage. "Like father, like son" may be more true than we have imagined.

Of course, they also learn from their mother — nurture, compassion, manners, a cultured lifestyle ... Mothers, hopefully, tame the little "tyrants," turning them into civilized human beings. In other words, they knock off the rough edges, rounding them out and preparing them to be fit for a better society.

No one escapes a divorce unscathed

No one — parents, kids, extended family, friends — escapes a divorce unscathed. The extended family will never be quite the same after a couple has divorced. One or both of the divorcees often disappears for good. The children may not be available for family gatherings. Friends of the couple find it awkward to deal with just one, when they have loved both. They are shocked and disappointed. Their "world" has diminished to some degree, the circle of friendship broken.

Just reasons for divorce

This may sound strange, after what we have just said, but certainly there are some valid reasons for divorce. One of these is marital infidelity. Even Scripture recognizes this reason:

"Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were

hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:8-9).

Marital unfaithfulness — cheating on one's spouse — is a valid reason for divorce, according to Matthew 19:9. However, there are cases in which the unfaithful mate has truly repented and has been forgiven and restored to the embrace of the offended mate. A one-time lapse may be repairable, so such a situation might not necessarily call for divorce. A continued pattern of infidelity is a difficult case, indeed, and may well justify divorce.

Family abandonment or abuse are possible justifications for divorce.

Another possibly valid reason for divorce, but not remarriage, biblically, is espousal or family abuse which may involve alcoholism or drugs. If one of the mates habitually mistreats — including actual physical injury — his or her spouse and children, perhaps the

only solution is to put legally-enforced distance between the abuser and the abused.

Yet another is abandonment of the mate and children. If, say, the father runs away and leaves the family without leadership and support, the wife may have no other recourse than to divorce him. Abandonment may even be stretched to include failure on the husband's part to work and support his family.

In each of these cases there may be a continuing possibility of correction and reconciliation. So, before we conclude that adultery, family abuse, alcoholism, drug addiction, abandonment, or some other factor should automatically result in divorce, we need to exhaust every effort to rehabilitate the offender and rescue the marriage.

What about the other justifications given?

Here are some other scenarios that are used to justify divorce:

◆ The couple, or at least one mate, has unrealistic expectations for marriage. For instance, he or she expects a perfect mate and marriage. He or she expects the romantic high of the wedding day to continue forever. Maggie Gallagher says that, in many cases, marriage based solely on romance is doomed to eventual "romantic divorce" (Gallagher 1996: Chapter 16). Actually, what we get in marriage is another human being, warts and all. Initial romance fades and reality sets in. Then one or both of the spouses may want out. "After all," they argue, "I have a right to romance and happiness. This partner no longer is romantic. He or she no longer makes me happy. It is time to walk away and find someone who fulfills my longing for romance and happiness."

In an honest, intimate account of her own marriage, Lauren Slater asks,

"Does passion necessarily diminish over time? How reliable is romantic love, really, as a means of choosing one's mate? Can a marriage be good when Eros is replaced with friendship, or even economic partnership ... ?" (*National Geographic*, February 2006, 35).

◆ As romance disappears from the marriage, it is soon followed by a sense that the

couple is no longer in love. Thoughtful acts such as giving flowers, helping the wife into and out of the car, and other such demonstrations of love no longer occur. There is no more sexual attraction or excitement. Happiness has fled the home and the marriage bed. One hundred people recently interviewed by the Family Feud program were asked to rate the level of excitement in their marriage. Their response, on a 1 to 10 scale, was a 1. This was to me a revelation of how marriages have lost their “electricity”.

◆ The husband becomes a slob, not shaving or caring for his appearance, not exercising, not maintaining the house and grounds in good repair, failing to discipline the children or being overly-harsh with them, or failing to honor even the basic rules of etiquette or good conduct. Or the wife lets herself go, becomes a fat “slob”, fails to keep the house even minimally clean, refuses to cook, wash the clothes or care for other domestic chores, or emotionally abandons husband and children. The Rosbergs call this “emotional divorce”, the marriage destroyed in spirit, if not in legal procedure (Rosberg and Rosberg, op. cit.:18-19).

◆ Husband or wife meets someone else exciting, sexy, and available. This may occur at the office, on a business trip, or in an educational or social setting. Before long this encounter ripens into an affair. “Close encounters of the second kind” can easily be a recipe for marital fracturing.

◆ One or both of the mates feel trapped, unfulfilled, unable to have the freedom to grow and to become successful in some professional field. “If I were not married, I could really climb the professional ladder.” This mentality is often aided and abetted by one’s colleagues, who encourage this person to get out and make something of his or her life.

Self-centeredness is at the heart of many divorces. We want what we want, and we want it now!

◆ There is no longer any meaningful communication going on between the marriage partners. What little communication occurs is shallow and merely for survival: “Where are my clean socks? Did you pay the electric bill? Are you going to pick up the kids or do I have to?” At a deeper level they withdraw into their own world and never more do the two worlds meet. It is more likely that they eventually collide, the marriage fractured beyond repair. We have all seen couples in a restaurant who eat an entire meal without a word of conversation between them.

◆ There is a lack of commitment to anything or anybody, including one’s school, employment, church, friendships, family, and mate. Two members of the championship University of Oklahoma basketball team left the team because they weren’t starters. They did get in much playing time and believed they were being held back, which might limit their opportunity for big dollars in the NBA. It is as if the university is merely a farm team for the pros. Athletes use their schools as a means to a selfish end. I could detect in media interviews with such students no loyalty whatsoever to their team and school. It was all “what I deserve”. Transfer that mentality to the home. Without a lifelong commitment to marriage and one’s mate, any excuse will serve for breaking that relationship.

◆ Family finances are in a shambles. The husband loses his job and cannot find another. One or both partners spend money irresponsibly. Credit card debts soar. Bankruptcy looms on the horizon. Today, bankruptcy is no longer on the horizon. It has landed in our homes. So many couples overbought homes at flexible mortgage rates, only to find too late that they had fallen into a serious financial trap. For such couples, there appears to be no way out unless one bails out on the marriage and leaves the other holding the empty financial bag. Divorced couples, especially in this kind of situation, find that their financial future is even more grim than before.

The church where I serve as an elder offers a door of escape from this monetary trap. It is called Financial Peace University. A few sessions in the Financial Peace course show couples how to restructure their finances, pay down their debts and control their spending.

◆ One or both of the marriage partners is hooked on alcohol or drugs, damaging and even destroying the fabric of their relationship and of the home. Addictions of these kinds are often a sure cause for separation and divorce. Kudos to the husband or wife who patiently suffers through a mate's addiction and, hopefully, rehab.

◆ The children are out of control. They are drinking, doping, and engaging in other acts that are harmful and illegal. They no longer listen to their parents. Divorce appears to be a means of separating oneself from an unpleasant home situation.

◆ Society itself contributes much to the prevalence of divorce. Teens growing up into marital age face unprecedented pressures from the drug and drink culture. They see out-of-wedlock births by the dozens. They see abused children. They see marriages breaking up all around them, so they can easily conclude that this is the norm for life. A young female friend of ours has been living with her boyfriend for several years. When we asked her why they didn't marry, her answer was, "I've seen too many marriages fail. I don't need a ring or a ceremony. I can enjoy the companionship I have with him without being tied down by a marriage license and a ring." The problem is that she is not tied down to any commitment.

An ounce of prevention

Divorce is an ugly fact of contemporary life, affecting all of us. Although there are some valid reasons to divorce, there are many others that are invalid or even frivolous, and certainly unbiblical. Many divorces today arise out of selfishness — "I have a right to be happy. My mate no longer makes me happy. Therefore, I have just cause to divorce."

Well, just where in Scripture or any other document is happiness guaranteed? Jesus said just the opposite: **"In this world you will have trouble ... "** (John 16:33). What about our "guaranteed" right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? We have no certainty of life. Liberty is a relative thing. Pursuit of happiness? We can pursue it perhaps, but we have no guarantee of achieving it.

Self-centeredness is at the heart of many divorces. We want what we want, and we want it **now!** I have news for all of us. The world does not turn around us. On the contrary, **we exist as human beings, to serve and not to be served.** If we are married and have produced kids, **we live to serve each other and to bring up our brood in the nurture and admonition of the Lord** (Ephesians 6:4).

We are confronted with cases regularly of impending divorce. One frustration in this is that we church leaders often hear about a marital conflict too late to resolve it. The couple is on the verge of breaking up before counsel is sought, even if then.

There ought to be a better way of handling such matters as conjugal bliss turning into conjugal curse, a broken home, distraught mates, shattered children, and perhaps financial ruin. I believe there is a better way. It lies in prevention, beginning from infancy.

There is a better way than ignoring problems until they are too great to resolve. Eggerichs says in his book, **Love and Respect**,

“Something in a man longs for his wife to look up to him ... and when she does, it motivates him, not because he is arrogant, but because of how God constructed him. Few husbands walk around claiming, ‘I’m first among equals’.”

The husband with good will (and good sense) knows this respect isn’t his right, but it is his responsibility to live in such a way as to earn it.

“She, on the other hand, possesses something within that thirsts to be valued as ‘first in importance.’ Nothing energizes her more! She is not self-centered. God placed this in her by nature” (Eggerichs 2004:53-54).

It is true that “men are from Mars and women are from Venus.” Their whole approach to life is different. So we say with the French, “Viva la difference!”

Ponder this Bible passage:

“Some Pharisees came to [Jesus] 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? So they are no longer two, but one’” (Matthew 19:3-5).

Chapter 7

1. Why is it unwise to follow the moral standards of our society?
2. How have the notions of liberty, independence, and emancipation contributed to the breakup of traditional marriage and the home?
3. What is the new concept about divorce? How has it changed attitudes in reference to divorce?
4. How would you define covenant marriage? How does it differ from a civil marriage contract?
5. How have new attitudes toward children in a family contributed to the rise in divorce rates? Does divorce have any negative influence on children? Does anyone escape a divorce unscathed?

Chapter 8

Repercussions for Divorced Mates

One of our sons is divorced and remarried. His first wife left him, applying for a “no-fault” divorce. He fought it unsuccessfully and continued throughout the lengthy process to suffer acute depression. Only when the divorce was final did he begin to live again. He is now a successful counselor, and from his experience he can empathize with couples who are having divorce issues.



Grace is a divorcée whose husband left her and originated the divorce proceedings. The diary she kept following their separation reveals the depth of her heartache and loneliness. Her diary goes on and on, heartbreakingly. Although she is a beauty, she thinks she is just a “plain Jane”. She has lost her sense of self-worth along with her loss of a companion and father for her kids. And our society says that divorce is alright, that it has no lasting effects on its victim!

Listen to the story of one abandoned wife and mother:

“I was the mother of a newborn child and a three-year-old ... My husband left; my marriage ended. Just like that! ... Almost overnight everything I had known, was comfortable with, believed in, was over. Over! I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t accept it. I kept seeing rays of hope, beams of light through the closed door ...

“Judges, as a class, display in the matter of arranging alimony, that reckless generosity that is found only in men who are giving away someone else’s cash.” — P.G. Wodehouse

“I sat rocking the baby as my husband took his last load of personal belongings out into the early dawn ... I was weeping. My infant son, nestled in my arms, slept comfortably — unaware. ... I was in a state of shock. I didn’t know where to turn, what to do next.

“The following two years passed like twenty. For every step I took forward, it seemed I slipped back three. I experienced continual emotional and physical anguish. I learned to know, like the psalmist, the pits of depression and despair” (Peppler 1982:15-16.

Here is another case history, this one of Marv, whose wife of 18 years left him and took away their children:

"I felt God had abandoned me and I could not figure out why He would let this happen to me, but I realized later that God was on my side. Oh, the loneliness I felt ... A year after my divorce I met a wonderful lady whom I love very much and married her. She has helped me through my pain and my loneliness. But getting married again offered some new challenges. ...

"Divorce has changed my life in so many ways. I feel like I go around with a big "D" planted on my forehead that says there is something wrong with this person. It changes how people look at you. ... It makes me angry because it's not my fault. This is just one of the many things divorce does to your life. To sum up my feelings in a few words: Anger, the anger I feel for having my kids ripped away from me. Embarrassment, the embarrassment I feel as a Christian father not being able to hold my family together. And the sadness I feel for my friends and people in general who go through divorce because if they knew what it does to you, they wouldn't do it" (source withheld for the sake of privacy).

His last sentence is compelling, isn't it? Divorce really does impact deeply those who experience it. Both husband and wife carry the scars the rest of their lives. And this scarring carries over into the lives of their children.

It was refreshing for me to read this last quote, because dads, even good ones, are pictured in our society as inept and irresponsible. Columnist Kathleen Parker observes about a projected series on Fox TV, "Bad Dads":

"Executive Producer JD Roth describes his creation as 'justice'. 'It's a show that depicts the sacrifice and heartache of incredibly brave women on behalf of their kids ... '

"Really? How gratifying can it be for children watching television to see fathers humiliated in front of the world? ...

"'Bad Dads' is just the latest insult to men and especially fathers who feel, appropriately, that they have been maligned and minimized through television programming and advertising. In sitcoms, men are typically buffoons. And fathers, if they exist, are inept and unreliable, while Mom is a paragon of virtue and competence" (Parker, "Fox's 'Bad Dads' a bad idea." The Oklahoman, May 4, 2008, 21A).

Divorce Prevention

Let's set the record straight. Divorce is not only due to an irresponsible male partner. In my experience both partners must share some blame for the failure of their marriage. He may have left her, but are we absolutely certain that she was not at fault at some point? Or, as happens more and more frequently nowadays, she may have left him. Was he a total bum and she a "paragon of virtue and competence"?

Divorce can be prevented in great part by adequate preparation for marriage, including premarital counseling by a Christian counselor, and/or premarital classes. It can be prevented in part by understanding beforehand that marriage is a covenant and not a civil contract, as

such. It can also be prevented in part by a serious look at the long-term consequences in the heart and mind of each partner and those for their kids. In the next chapter we will look at repercussions of divorce from their perspective.

Meditate seriously on this passage again:

“Some Pharisees came to [Jesus] 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? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:3-6).

Chapter 8

1. Is there any sense of embarrassment, discomfort, or guilt involved in a divorce? Is there any feeling of loneliness or lostness, of alienation, even from the children?
2. How does divorce contribute to emotional depression?
3. How are dads usually pictured in family breakups and divorces? Are they ever portrayed as dull and slow, while mothers are pictured as paragons of virtue and competence? What does this do the image of fathers?
4. Would you say that, in many cases, the “innocent” party in a marriage breakup is not totally innocent of blame? What might he or she have done, or failed to do, to contribute to the breakup?
5. How can the future possibility of divorce be prevented, even before marriage?

Repercussions for Children of Divorce



What are the repercussions for children of divorced couples, especially those living with their divorced mom? Some insist that the kids are OK with the divorce, but research shows that this is not the case. McManus notes that:

"It is important to understand that children have completely different reactions to divorce than do adults. Adults typically blame each other for the broken marriage (almost never blaming themselves). Kids, however, blame both parents for their selfishness in putting their needs ahead of the children. Children of all ages feel intensely rejected and lonely when their parents divorce. Both boys and girls from broken homes are far more likely than those in stable homes to be in trouble with the law" (ibid.)

"It is easier for a father to have children, than for children to have a real father." — Pope John XXIII

Some children will side with their mother and blame their father for everything, especially if he has been abusive or has had a problem with alcohol or drugs. Or they may blame themselves: "If I had just obeyed better, if I had done better in school, if I ... "

Listen to the cry of one child of divorce:

"My name is Jon. My parents got divorced when I was little, but I still remember when Dad lived with us. ... When Dad left, I was scared, and I cried a lot. Mom said everything would be okay, but I was afraid she might leave, too. Dad said he would always love me, but if he loved me, why did he leave? Maybe I hadn't been a good boy. Maybe if I tried harder, he would come back ... " (Mills 1989:58-59).

Family counselors Gary and Barbara Rosberg note on the damage done to children of divorcees:

“More than one million children are hurt by their parents’ divorce each year. Consider the emotional devastation in the lives of these children — the loss of security, the anger, the broken spirit, the disillusionment — all underscoring the tragedy in our divorce-ridden culture” (Rosberg and Rosberg 2002:18).

The Rosbergs witnessed a dialogue in a restaurant between a grandfather and his granddaughter. Their conversation was difficult. The girl complained that her parents wouldn’t even talk to each other or respond to each other’s phone calls. And now, she added, she didn’t get to see her dad anymore (ibid.)

Long-lasting effects on the children

As reported by Stephen A. Grunlan, in a major study of a group of children of divorce, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1990), “found that the effects of divorce on children were long-lasting and affected their relationships into their adulthood” (Grunlan 1999:290).

In his powerful book, **Divorce Poison**, writer Richard A. Warshak talks about this phenomenon:

“Divorce poison comes in different concentrations. In mild form it consists of occasional blaming and bad-mouthing. In its more potent form it constitutes full-fledged brainwashing. ... An effective response to bad-mouthing will be ineffective in the face of brainwashing” (Warshak 2001:24).

Warshak says that the most volatile time in the divorce process is immediately before and after the separation. It is then that the parents tend to lay blame on their mate, demeaning each other before the children. “Above all,” he notes, “don’t retaliate to bad-mouthing” (op. cit., 24-25).

Brainwashing the kids

From bad-mouthing and bashing to brainwashing is a process that often occurs. One or both parents attempt to alienate the children from the mate, even going so far as to brainwash the kids into hating the other mate. This can totally alienate the father or mother, and even that mate’s entire family. The brainwashed child begins to show fear and hatred toward the mate who has been the target of the brainwashing. This situation was given the name, “Parental Alienation Syndrome”, by Dr. Richard A. Gardner, in his 1971 work, **The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce**.

Children’s reactions to divorce

Alice Peppler, abandoned by two different husbands, calls children the unwilling victims of divorce. Among the reactions children have to their parents’ divorce are:

◆ **Shock.** “One is stunned, disbelieving. Lights flash, the mind whirls, nothing is real. The universe spins, one’s personal world shatters, and all learned rules no longer seem to exist” (Peppler 1982:32).

◆ **Denial.** See my poem in the preface of this book. I believe it to be a factual portrayal of the anguish created in the heart of a daughter who finds out that her parents are divorcing. Her denial of the reality of this disaster is seen in her efforts to convince her parents to kiss and make up.

◆ **Grief.** As Peppler describes it, children of divorcées experience a pervasive state of sadness, crying often, withdrawing from the family, severe depression, anger, aggressiveness, losing emotional control — these are just some of the manifestations of a profound sense of grief the children experience (Peppler, op. cit., 334-35).

◆ **Guilt.** Children may internalize their fears and frustrations over their parents' divorce. They may feel that somehow they have caused the separation. "If I had only been a better son or daughter, if I hadn't done some bad things, if I had only obeyed my parents better, if I had done better in school, if I had helped more at home. If I had gotten along better with my siblings ... These are some of the outward symptoms of a sense of personal guilt over the parents' separation.

◆ **Rejection.** Peppler says that some children turn away from one or both of their parents, believing that "if they only loved me, this wouldn't happen." Or, "My parents don't care about me at all. They only care about themselves" (op. cit., 37). Rejection may result in a case of withdrawal to the point of taking drugs or committing suicide.

◆ **Fear.** This is fear of the future, fear for the family and even fear of marriage. "If my parents didn't make it, then how can I make it? Marriage isn't for me."

◆ **Anger.** Out of all of the above factors may come intense anger against parents, against siblings, teachers and adults in general. They may show anti-social behavior, taking their frustrations out on others.

◆ **Embarrassment.** Peppler ends her list of behavior that children may show following a separation and divorce by mentioning embarrassment. Children of divorcées may feel that they are odd, "left out", no longer like their peers, alienated. This is not helped any by cruel remarks of other kids or by an over-protective attitude on the part of some adults in their lives (op. cit., 40,41).

Other general effects

Other studies of children of divorcées produced the following general effects:

1. They experience more psychological problems and are more often in counseling.
2. They have problems in school, tend to drop out of school, and are less likely to go on to college.
3. Girls of divorced parents are more likely than others to start sexual activity at an early age and even cohabit.
4. Children of divorced parents are more likely to go through divorce themselves.
5. As adults they tend to experience more physical illnesses (from Yorburg, 1993:340-342).

Divorce is almost always more devastating for children than for parents.

Dr. Judith Wallerstein did research into the long-term effects of divorce on the children. A decade after divorce, she tracked down 115 children in 60 families that had been fractured by divorce. Her findings showed that divorce "is almost always more devastating for children than for parents" (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1990. Cited in McManus 1995:235).

She found that boys at first reacted rebelliously over the parents' separation, but that

later on girls were even more tragically affected by it. She calls this the “sleeper effect”. Two-thirds of the girls tested “feared betrayal and abandonment” by a man, even though they themselves had not been directly betrayed (Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1990:24,63,67).

Cost of divorce too high for the children

We can safely conclude from these studies that the cost of divorce in the lives of the children is much too high to pay. As a TV commercial says, it is “incalculable”. Yet, many people divorcing or having divorced, with whom I have conversed, are reluctant to admit just what damage they are doing to their kids.

“Most kids place tremendous value on the marriage of their parents. To them a good marriage between Mom and Dad represents stability, security and love — three things children desperately need and long for.

“As you consider the worth of your marriage, keep in mind the value it has in your children’s eyes. They long for you to have a strong, lasting marriage. The decisions you make in your marriage have a great impact on more than just you and your spouse. Please work to preserve and enrich your marriage, not only for your sake and because it is what God desires, but do it for your children “ (Roper 2005:2).

An ounce of prevention

Divorce has profound effects on the children involved. Anyone who dismisses these effects on the basis that “our kids are strong. They can handle it,” is deluding himself or herself. I have family members caught up in divorces or those of their parents. One of my nieces, watching her mother’s two divorces, declared, “I will never divorce. I see what it does to the family.” Guess what? Later on she divorced. The chickens of divorce seem to always come home to roost. The pain caused by divorce is visited on the children. Parents, kiss and make up! You owe it to yourselves, to your kids, to your family, and to everyone else out there who knows you.

Think about this passage:

“Fathers [and mothers], do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Chapter 9

1. What causes children to have a different reaction to divorce than their divorced parents?
2. What may cause a child to blame himself or herself for the parents’ divorce?
3. How can parental divorce affect the children’s attitudes as adults?
4. What effect might an absentee father have on the formation of his sons?
5. What after-effects of parental divorce can a child have in attitude and behavior?

Chapter 10

The Catastrophe of Unlocked Wedlock



We all know the peril of leaving our house unlocked, as we head out to the store or on a trip. An imaginary red light flashes on our front porch, announcing, “Welcome, thief, take all you want.” A far more significant red light is flashing at the door to our home life. This light is announcing, “Marriage is meaningless for me. I will have my sex and even my children, without having to go through meaningless marriage vows.”

Stumbling along as single parents

So countless individuals stumble along through life as single parents. By “single parents”, I will not be talking about those left single by the death of their mates. “Widowhood” is a condition over which there was no choice. If children are still at home, the grieving and lonely parent must cope with bringing them up and caring for their needs without the support of a mate.

Widowhood can be a crushing burden for all concerned — an emotional, spiritual, and financial burden. If the single parent is a woman (and this appears to be the case most often), she has the struggle of trying to support her family financially, generally on a lower salary than her mate had received. She has the struggle of trying to balance work and domestic responsibilities. She must provide both the masculine and feminine influence on her children.

God’s plan — fathers and mothers bringing up children

Make no mistake. The Lord’s plan was for two responsible parents to be in the home. The Word of God says,

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Fathers have the special responsibility of portraying a firm but gentle man — a loving man — in the best possible sense. He is a role model, not of a rough-hewn redneck, but of a gentle “giant” who knows how to properly discipline, but at the same time to properly love. As the Ephesians text says, it is his task to bring up his children to know and serve God. No one else can adequately provide the model he is to provide. Many widowed mothers, bless their hearts, do their best at this, but they cannot be both “mother” and “father” in the

total way the Lord intended for the home. Widowhood is a tragedy for all impacted by it.

The problem with serial lovers and its consequences

We've been talking about single parenthood brought on by the death of a spouse. Now what about those parents who have never married — those living with a “significant other” or those who are “serial lovers”? By serial lovers we mean those who have a succession of sexual encounters outside of marriage and who produce a succession of offspring, most often by their succession of sex partners. What are the difficulties they face? What kind of home do they have? What is their example for their children?

In a May 14, 2010 editorial in The Oklahoman, columnist Rich Lowry warned against the skyrocketing breakdown of the family. Citing a Brookings Institution report from 2008, he noted that:

“Black out-of-wedlock births had increased from 18 percent in 1950 to 23.6 percent in 1963. ... In central Harlem, 43 percent of births to non-white women were out of wedlock. ... By 2008 ... the black out-of-wedlock birthrate hit 72.3 percent; for everyone, it was 40.6 percent. This is a slow-moving social catastrophe.”

Moynihan, cited above, wrote in 1965,

“... a community that allows a large number of men to grow up in broken homes, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring rational expectations about the future — that community asks for and gets chaos” (Moynihan paper, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action”).

It was precisely in 1965 that I overheard a conversation between two young black women. One told the other, “Make another baby, honey. The government will give you more money.” So Moynihan’s analysis of the situation was underscored by that conversation.

What can be done about this tragedy?

That our present out-of-wedlock situation is a tragedy should be obvious to any thinking person. But what can be done about it?

First, those involved in single-parent situations, or those contemplating it, need to be educated as to the dangers. Knowing the facts may awaken some before they get involved in such a destructive lifestyle. However, education, as such, may not bring about many changes to those already involved. Look at how long advertising has been going on about the dangers of smoking, yet only a small percentage of smokers ever quit the addiction. On the other hand, it seems that fewer people now take up the habit of smoking, being forewarned about its dangers.

Second, individuals must want to change their way of doing things. This is extremely difficult, because most people don’t really want to give up the lifestyle they have chosen.

Third, they must be truly willing to change. There is a joke about this: “How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the bulb must be willing to change.” We all have many wants, but for most of them, we are not that willing to invest what is required to see our wants realized. For example, I wanted to be a great violinist, but

never seemed to have the time or money to invest in perfecting that skill.

Fourth, they must be motivated to change. Only those who are highly motivated (and have the basic skills necessary) can ever reach the top in their professions. It requires an immense amount of labor and desire to become a champion marathon runner, gymnast, ball player, painter ... It also takes serious motivation to quit smoking or to stop playing around with sex.

Fifth, they must realize the need for help. Benjamin Franklin was reported to have determined one January 1st that he would list his twelve besetting weaknesses, overcoming one of them each month. Well, he did pretty well through February, but then in March, he looked back to discover that he had already slipped on his January and February resolutions. His problem is ours. We cannot do it by ourselves. We need help — teaching, counseling, psychiatric, a support group ...

The highest level of help we can acquire is from above. We need God's help, if we are to overcome our sins and weaknesses. Spiritual intervention is the most enduring source of help available. The one who seeks it sincerely can find in it the strength to overcome. Here is a passage that may enable us to turn to the Lord for strength:

“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22).

However, divine help comes to those who are willing to submit their lives in obedience to God. There is no guarantee that He will listen and respond to the person who only needs a “goodie” from Him and is not willing to turn to Him in faith, repentance, and obedience.

DIFFICULTIES FACED IN A SINGLE-PARENT HOME

As of 2000, one of the most common household types in the U.S. is people living alone. Twenty-seven million American households consist of a person living alone. More than one in four American households (25.8%) consists of such a situation (Hobbs, Frank. “Examining American Household Composition: 1990 and 2000.” U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

Other stats on unmarried childbearing and parenting

◆ 41% of unmarried partner households have children under 18 living in them (U.S. Census Bureau, America's Families and Living Arrangements 2000).

◆ 33% of all births are to unmarried women (National Center for Health Statistics, 2000 data report released in 2002).

◆ 41% of first births to unmarried women are actually babies born to cohabiting couples, not “single” women (Bumpass, Larry and Lu, Hsien-Hen(2000). “Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children's Family Contexts in the United States.” Population Studies, 54: 29-41).

As of 2003, 43.7% of custodial mothers and 56.2% of custodial fathers were either separated or divorced. And in 2002, 7.8 million Americans paid about \$40 billion in child and/or spousal support (84% of the payers were male). (Faststats Home | NCHS Home | CDC). These statistics pose all kinds of difficulties, not the least of which are financial and emotional.

Of course, some single parents have had no choice in the matter of living alone. Death may have taken away the mate. He or she may have fled marital responsibility, even to the point of sharing a bedroom with someone else. Occasionally, a single person adopts a child. In the church I serve as an elder, one young single woman went to China and adopted a beautiful baby from there. She is now married and this baby is a teenager. Yes, there are cases in which being a single parent is unavoidable, but there are definite problems involved in this kind of home.

Financial strains in a single-parent home

Let's talk first about the single mother. She suddenly finds herself alone with kids. She now becomes, by necessity, both mother and father, and also provider, finance manager, homemaker, coach, repairer of everything, mentor, spiritual guide and what else? How in the world can she accomplish all of this? Peppler observes,

"You have to keep on working — or begin working. Financial responsibilities are there and always will be there. And the children, with all their problems and readjustments, are with you. So you can't, and wouldn't want to, ignore their needs. And the place in which you live needs care, too. The pantry needs to be stocked, the laundry done, the rooms cleaned, snow shoveled, lawn cut, and on and on. And you're all alone, or so it seems" (Peppler 1982:51).

The awful feeling of being alone

Virginia Watts says in her book on single parenting about her life following the death of her husband:

"I felt alone! Desperately alone! This feeling came ... when I was truly alone — walking down a crowded street, shopping in a busy store, attending a gala party, or living with my four children. Aloneness is probably the first emotion that those who have recently become single must deal with" (Watts 1976:17).

Loneliness, of course, is not limited to the mate left alone. Deep-seated loneliness is a pervading mental illness that is widespread in our impersonal world. Being something of a melancholic, I know well the feeling. Just put me in a noisy crowd of people I do not know and shortly I seek a way to leave. I feel alone, even though there may be a crowd milling around me. Even in a group of people I know, especially if the conversation centers on areas that are foreign to me, I am ready after an hour or so to leave.

I have a loving and caring wife, which makes it difficult for me to identify fully with the spouse suddenly left alone to ramble around a home that feels empty. One Christian brother whose wife was suddenly taken from him in death, continued his daily routine as a business owner, but without his heart being in it. Inept in the kitchen, he ate out, often sitting alone. Only later on, when he connected with a woman who was a long-time family friend, also single again, did he again begin to smile.

Loss of friendship connections

Loss of friendship connections is a very real problem for those suddenly left single. In the case of a divorce, the ex-mate's friends become a delicate issue. Acquaintances may feel awkward in the presence of the divorcee, who may bring on part of the tension of lost friendship by imagining that others are pointing a finger of blame at him or her. Out of a sense of shame, this individual may quit attending church and other public functions, thus multiplying the sense of loneliness.

Anger

Watts says that "Being thrown into a single state produces reactions other than loneliness." I would say, "other reactions, in addition to loneliness." One of these is anger — anger, blaming God for having taken a mate in death or allowing a mate to destroy the marriage, anger at the mate, anger at self for not having done enough to save the marriage, or at least to not have seen a separation coming.

In any case, both death and divorce are traumatic because they are the irreversible end to a relationship. No wonder we feel frustrated and angry. Our emotional upheaval can destroy us, if we do not learn to deal with it.

Fear

Fear is the normal response to danger, to emergencies, or to the unknown. Fear of death is commonplace, as is fear of what life may throw at us. Dr. Abraham Maslow, psychologist at Brandeis University says of fear:

"Each step forward is a step into the unfamiliar and is possibly dangerous. It also means giving up something familiar and good and satisfying. It frequently means a parting and a separation, even a kind of death ... with consequent nostalgia, fear, loneliness and mourning. It also often means giving up a simpler and easier life in exchange for a more demanding, more responsible, and more difficult life" (cited in Watts, op. cit.:65).

Depression

Both death and divorce often bring on depression, not just that feeling of lostness all of us suffer at times, but clinical depression, one so deep and long-lasting that it requires professional help to overcome.

A long-time friend and fellow missionary called us out of the blue recently, sharing with us that two different husbands have walked out on her over the years, leaving her emotionally wounded and depressed. To make matters worse, she has a 25-year-old Downs Syndrome son who requires constant care. Now she must attend to his needs alone. This, incidentally, may have been a factor in the second husband's bailing out of the marriage.

Sexual deprivation

A married person who has had at least some sexual activity with his or her mate suddenly is left with no sexual outlet, unless it is with a prostitute or someone picked up

for a one-nighter. The mate abandoned by death or divorce becomes sexually tense and frustrated. This individual may feel that his or her sexual capacity was inadequate to keep the marriage together. A sense of guilt over an intense longing for sexual gratification may overwhelm the abandoned mate.

The need for sexual fulfillment is God-endowed. We are sexual beings, as Watts points out (1976:76). Some single parents or mates attempt to cope with this need by strict abstinence from sex. This may solve the problem for some, but not for many. The pressing need is for the love, acceptance, and commitment involved in satisfying sexual intercourse. The solution lies not in the sexual feelings the single parent has, but how he or she copes with it.

Coping with this frustration may well call for seeking a future mate through Christian dating services or single ministries in a local church, if the single person is free to marry, scripturally. Otherwise, prayer, exercise, reading a good book, avoiding suggestive reading or visuals, developing an outlet through music, art, writing, or other creative expression, serving God and community, and cultivating an inner circle of genuine friends may provide fulfilling answers to the need.

Sharing the children with an ex-mate

The law may come down hard on one or the other of the divorced mates, denying him or her the right to custody of the children. In the majority of the cases, custody is given to the mother. This means that the father may have visitation rights with the children on weekends, once every two weeks or once a month. Not always are the children granted to the right parent, but that is another issue.

At best, the parent without custodial care has little time or opportunity to devote to the kids. This may create a situation in which the youngsters slowly separate themselves emotionally from this parent. Or, if they or this parent feel that the custodial parent is too demanding of them, they may end up being overly permissive or may lavish expensive outings and gifts on the offspring. Little if any discipline is practiced by this parent, who may act to counter the discipline practiced by the other parent. The end result is resentment on the part of the custodial parent, as well as demanding and judgmental children.

If children are to be shared by divorced parents, both should make very sure that they are supporting the demands and discipline of each other. The kids must be made aware that they cannot manipulate the "weekend" parent or undermine the authority of the custodial parent.

The challenge of special days

Finally, there is the matter of holidays and other special family occasions. For the single parent, holidays are faced with a degree of fear and trepidation. Watts says:

"Christmas seems to trigger a special time of depression. To begin with, we naturally dread going through this season without our mate ... it often fails to meet expectations ... buying gifts seems meaningless now that our special one is gone" (Watts 1976:21).

Rather than facing such times alone, the person left alone may travel, bury self in work or sit at home and mope, or contemplate suicide. The first may have some merit as an “escape” from reality. The second may offer temporary relief. The third doesn’t help the situation at all. And the fourth? Too permanent! Sooner or later this individual must seek out a more positive solution to the dilemma of special days.

If children are involved, the difficulties of special days are compounded. They must be given special love and care at such times, for their feeling of loss is also compounded during holidays. With which parent shall the children spend Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, and other holidays? In which home shall they celebrate birthdays? How many gifts should they receive and should these gifts be merely bribes, to make sure of their cooperation?

Christian premarital counseling is a must for all couples contemplating marriage.

We cannot undo what has gone before in our families’ histories, but we can facilitate entry into marriage by sound classes and counseling. We can then continue to prepare married couples to be more successful in their conjugal life. We can encourage couples in trouble to seek adequate help. We can offer support of all kinds to those individuals left without a mate. They must be encouraged, not condemned, and guided into their future, whether it be another marriage or a celibate life.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER ABOUT NON-MARITAL HOMES

If you are caught up in a domestic situation that involves cohabitation or single parenthood, there will be real and lifelong consequences of the lifestyle you have chosen. God has clearly laid down His laws concerning marriage and relationships between men and women. For the happiness of everyone involved, it is imperative that we live by His rules.

Following are some serious questions for cohabiting couples and “single” parents to consider:

COHABITATION

1. Do you have any guarantees of faithfulness in this relationship?
2. Do you have any way to protect your own property or that which is mutually owned?
3. How do you manage shopping, purchases, and bill paying?
4. Do you and your “significant other” have any plans for marriage?
5. Do the two of you truly love each other?
6. Are children involved in your relationship? If so, does this cohabitation give them any legal status or protection?
7. Who is responsible for the care and feeding of the children? Their discipline? Their schooling?
8. Who is responsible for the maintenance of your home, furnishings, grounds, vehicles, and other properties?

9. How do you file your tax returns, separately or jointly?
10. How do you present yourselves as individuals or as a couple to others?
11. How do you handle your religious responsibilities, such as training your children in spiritual matters and taking them to worship and church activities?
12. How do you explain to the children your status with your partner?
13. How do you handle a separation, when it occurs? If you have brought children into the world with this partner, what will happen to them?

SINGLE PARENT

1. Is there anything you could have done to prevent your present situation?
2. Have you given yourself sufficient time to overcome your shock, grief, fear, pain, despair, and anger? Remember that these emotions go through stages and may come and go at unexpected moments.
3. Have you talked with a trusted friend and/or a trusted Christian counselor about your challenges as a single parent?
4. Have you sought help to straighten out your legal and financial situation following the trauma of separation?
5. What measures have you taken to quit focusing on your ex-mate?
6. What have you done to understand yourself, become aware of your choices, and evaluate the issues you are facing?
7. How well have you done to forgive your ex-partner, in keeping with Jesus' injunction to forgive those who wrong you? (Matthew 6:14-15).
8. How have you gone about explaining to your children (if you have any at home) your present circumstances and how they can help you cope with them?
9. Are you avoiding becoming committed again too soon to another person? Give yourself sufficient time to heal, reassess your life, and avoid making the same mistakes that you may have made in the past. (Some of the above points were adapted from an article by Paula Burkes, staff writer, The Daily Oklahoman, April 28, 2008, Page 6C, with material contributed by counselors Diana Cox Crawford, Linda Drake, and Wayne Raiter,)

Ounce of prevention

The only prevention that succeeds long-term is that which goes to the heart of the matter of single-parent homes: the heart itself. Our society is in urgent need of returning to God's way of living and doing.

These are awkward and very real dilemmas faced by the single parent. If death has taken one's mate, probably little if anything could have been done to prevent this loss. But if the single state has been caused by separation, abandonment, or divorce, what steps might have been taken to avoid such a trauma?

Verses to ponder:

“ ... if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned” (Jeremiah 18:8).

“ ... I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander” (1 Timothy 5:14).

“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Chapter 10

1. What has brought about the current phenomenon of live-in sex partners?
2. What do the statistics tell us about the fragility of cohabitation? Is there any real legal basis or protection for cohabitation?
3. Discuss the meaning and implications of cohabitation regarding the stability of marriage?
4. What are the moral and spiritual implications of so-called gay or lesbian marriage? What are such “marriages” considered in God’s sight? Some claim that they are homosexual, genetically, and cannot help it. Such claims are not supported scientifically, but also from a biblical perspective, would the claims be true? Would it be called a sin, if it could not be overcome?
5. Why is it essential to teach our children God’s plan for marriage?

Chapter 11

The Pitfalls of Cohabitation



“Judy” has lived with a man for several years, but believes that marriage is unnecessary. She has no faith at all in a piece of paper binding a man and a woman together. I found this difficult to accept and asked her about the total lack of legality in their relationship. She laughed the question off.

“Jon” got his girlfriend pregnant. They decided to live together, but when I asked him about legalizing the relationship for the sake of their child, he said he felt that they could provide all of the care and love the child would need without a marriage license.

“But what about the baby?” I asked. “It has no legal status at all.”

He had no good answer for that. Whether he accepts the fact or not, the child will bear a certain stigma of illegitimacy, as well as a questionable legal status. Counselors tell me that, by its very nature, cohabitation is instable. Dr. Phil McGraw said in his daily TV program May 1, 2008 that 95 percent of people who had cohabited earlier ended up with a failed marriage or marriages later on. It appears to be a case of “easy come, easy go”. There is no binding contract — or better — binding covenant, to keep the two together.

Live-in partners common today

Live-in partners are common in today’s society. Following are statistics from the 2000 Federal Census:

- ◆ There are currently about 11 million people living with an unmarried partner in the U.S. This includes both same-sex and different-sex couples. There are 9.7 million Americans living with an unmarried different-sex partner and 1.2 million American living with a same-sex partner. 11% of unmarried partners are same-sex couples.

- ◆ The number of unmarried couples living together increased 72% between 1990 and 2000. The number of unmarried couples living together has increased tenfold between 1960 and 2000.

And from the Department of Health and Human Services come these figures:

- ◆ 41% of American women ages 15-44 have cohabited (lived with an unmarried

different-sex partner) at some point. This includes 9% of women ages 15-19, 38% of women ages 20-24, 49% of women ages 25-29, 51% of women ages 30-34, 50% of women ages 35-39, and 43% of women ages 40-44 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Re-marriage in the United States." Vital Health and Statistics Series 23, Number 22).

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development reports:

"Cohabitation, once rare, is now the norm: The researchers found that more than half (54 percent) of all first marriages between 1990 and 1994 began with unmarried cohabitation. They estimate that a majority of young men and women of marriageable age today will spend some time in a cohabiting relationship. ... Cohabiting relationships are less stable than marriages and that instability is increasing, the study found."

◆ About two-fifths of children are expected to live in a cohabiting household at some point (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Some cohabitation facts

◆ Living together is considered to be more stressful than being married.

◆ Just over 50% of first cohabiting couples ever get married.

◆ In the United States and in the UK, couples who live together are at a greater risk for divorce than non-cohabiting couples.

◆ Couples who lived together before marriage tend to divorce early in their marriage.

◆ 55% of different-sex cohabitators get married within 5 years of moving in together. 40% break up within that same time period. About 10% remain in an unmarried relationship five years or longer (Smock, Pamela. "Cohabitation in the United States." Annual Review of Sociology, 2000).

◆ About 20% of all male-female cohabitators, or 1.6 million people, have been living together for more than five years. There is little known about these long-term unmarrieds because no research has focused on this subgroup (Bumpass, Larry, James Sweet and Andrew Cherlin (1991). *"The Role of Cohabitation in Declining Rates of Marriage."* Journal of Marriage and the Family, 1991,53:913-27).

◆ About 75% of cohabitators say they plan to marry their partners (about 6.2 million people) (Smock, Pamela. "Cohabitation in the United States." Annual Review of Sociology, 2000). However, the facts show that relatively few people living with a "significant other" actually marry that person. Another, and very serious factor in cohabitation is that it is seldom successful. As family counselor Randy Roper commented to me, "Besides the moral considerations, cohabitation doesn't work." It appears to be a case of "easy come, easy go."

◆ The majority of couples marrying today have lived together first (53% of women's first marriages are preceded by cohabitation) (Bumpass, Larry and Lu, Hsien-Hen (2000). "Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children's Family Contexts in the United States." Population Studies, 54: 29-41).

◆ In 1995, 24% of women ages 25-34 were cohabiting, compared to 22% of women ages 35-39, and 15% for women 40-44. In every age category, the percentages have increased since 1987 (Bumpass, Larry and Lu, Hsien-Hen. "Trends in Cohabitation and Implications for Children's Family Contexts in the United States." Population Studies, 54: 29-41).

What do these alarming statistics tell us?

That cohabitation has become almost the thing to do, rather than go through the expense and binding nature of a formal marriage. And the trend toward cohabitation appears to be steadily climbing. Why is this? It may be due to the fear that formal marriages so often break up, with many legal tangles and expenses. Therefore, couples, unsure about their future, opt to live together in a "significant other" relationship without the entanglement of a marital document. Another factor may be the breakdown in our society of respect for both law and tradition. The mentality seems to be that of the Israelites in the time of the judges, when it was written, ***"At that time there was no king in Israel. Everyone did as he saw fit"*** (Judges 21:25).

Spiritual implications

Nowhere does God's Word support men and women living together without the legality and restraints of marriage. In the very beginning the Bible says, in referring to the first couple, Adam and Eve,

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' because she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:23-24).

In the New Testament the sanctity of marriage and condemnation of those who live other sexual lifestyles is clearly emphasized in these words,

"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually impure" (Hebrews 13:4).

What about gay marriage?

Proponents of the gay lifestyle have constantly pushed for legitimizing marriage for homosexual couples until, now, it has become recognized law. However, neither the dictionary nor Scripture defines marriage to include such a relationship. Webster's New World Dictionary defines marriage as "the relationship between husband and wife." The Bible clearly condemns such a relationship, as in the following passages:

"... God gave them (human beings who had not followed His will) over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another."

...gay marriage is not marriage in the sight of God. Moreover, counselors say that such relationships normally are short-lived and, of course, cannot produce offspring.

Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (Romans 1:26-27).

Galatians 5:19-21 and Revelation 22:15 list sexual immorality as one of the evils that will keep a person out of Heaven, unless that person repents and changes his or her lifestyle. Someone may develop a disposition that facilitates homosexuality, or may grow up without a strong father image to follow, but these influences can be overcome. If not, the Bible would not list them as sin.

No, gay marriage is not marriage in the sight of God. Moreover, counselors say that such relationships normally are short-lived and, of course, cannot produce offspring, which is one of the major purposes for marriage. This kind of relationship no more meets God's expectations for marriage than does cohabitation in general.

An ounce of prevention

We can only prevent these abnormal relationships posing as legitimate marriages or substitutes for marriage by teaching our children God's way for marriage and the home. This teaching, however, must be accompanied by a consistent example on our part of what real marriage should be.

How can cohabitation be prevented? Prevention goes back to the individual's upbringing and attitude toward traditional marriage. The best place in which to begin is with children and young people, instilling in them the concept of the covenantal permanence of marriage and the necessity of maintaining a relationship that is legal, as well as spiritually and morally sound.

(See the appendix for 2010 figures about marriage, divorce and cohabitation.)

Passages to remember:

"The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. ... " (John 4:18).

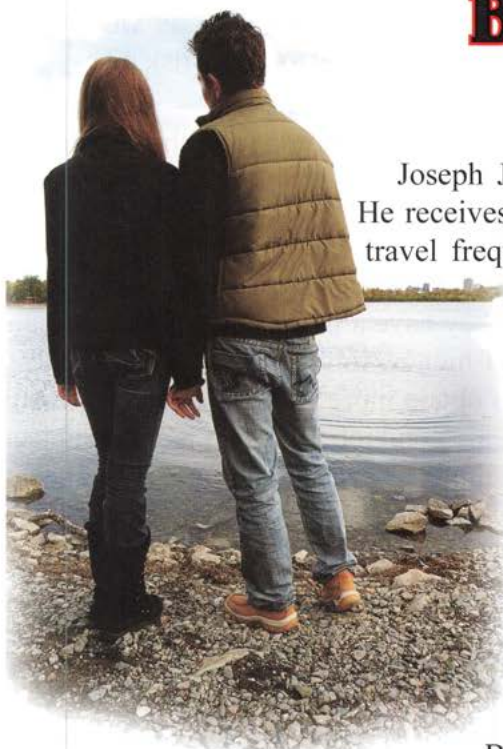
"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another" (Romans 1:24).

Chapter 11

1. What has brought about the current phenomenon of live-in sex partners?
2. What do the statistics tell us about the fragility of cohabitation? Is there any real legal basis or protection for cohabitation?
3. Discuss the meaning and implications of cohabitation on the stability of marriage?
4. What are the moral and spiritual implications of so-called gay or lesbian marriage? What are they considered in God's sight? Some claim that they are just this way and cannot help it. From a Biblical perspective, is this true? Would it be called a sin, if it could not be overcome?
5. Why is it vital to teach children God's laws about marriage from an early age?

Chapter 12

Beat the World at All Costs



Joseph Jones, Jr., is a typical corporate junior executive. He receives a good salary, but is required by his company to travel frequently, even at times overseas. He is surrounded by beautiful single women who are a constant enticement to him. He is expected to attend seminars, often in other cities, and all company functions. His work load is so demanding that he must frequently go to the office on weekends. His family sees little of him.

However, he provides well for it. He bought a large home in an exclusive gated community. His place has a beautiful swimming pool, well-manicured grounds and all of the amenities that a young executive's home should have. The most expensive cars are parked in his large garage. Because of his position, he feels compelled to throw

dinners and parties, all at considerable personal expense.

Joe is ambitious. He sees himself one day as president of the company and then CEO. Or perhaps he will begin his own corporation. Yes, he has dreams, but he doesn't dream that his family is coming apart, even in its luxurious surroundings. In fact, he is beginning to feel that his wife and kids are holding him back. They are not the perfect showcase family his rising

position calls for. So one day he announces that he is leaving. He is no longer in love with his wife. She no longer fills the bill as his "trophy" wife. She has gained weight. She has wrinkles. He needs a young, ravishingly-beautiful woman to host his dinners and

... he is beginning to feel that his wife and kids are holding him back. They are not the perfect showcase family his rising position calls for.

parties. His kids, he guarantees them, will not suffer. They will be well taken care of. By this, he means financially. It never seems to enter his head that he is removing himself largely from his fatherly role and damaging both his wife and family for life.

Sexual temptation lurks around every corner, on every TV set, on the Internet, at the office and even in private situations. Sallie Foley answers a woman who says that an old flame of her husband has resurfaced and is trying to rekindle a friendship with him. She is concerned, rightly so. Foley says,

"It sounds suspect. He seems to be enjoying her attention while throwing you the world's oldest bone: 'But honey, we're only friends.'

"My advice: don't fall for it. If this was just a lovely reunion, you'd be wholeheartedly included. ... Most relationships that failed once fail the second time as well, but occasionally rekindled romances do wreck long, stable marriages. Why risk it? ...

"If he says you're overreacting, or his actions seem weak, tell him — and mean it — that his reconnection with the past could destroy his marriage in the present" (Foley, AARP, July, August 2005:26).

Sacrificing all on the altar of success

As parents reach their thirties and forties or beyond, they often sacrifice themselves and their families on the altar of professional success. They have a passion to succeed at their profession, no matter the cost. This cost may be of money, time, energy, or the ruthless destroying of others in their climb to the top. Or, to obtain more "things" to keep up with the Joneses or surpass them, they may even take on a second job. They are like the subject in a commercial on debt consolidation. He has everything: a beautiful family, a magnificent home, luxury cars, membership in the country club, and on and on it goes. How has he done this? By becoming in debt up to his eyeballs. He cries for help.

Work ethic demands success

Our American work ethic demands success. It is expected that, if we just apply ourselves, we will become successful, wealthy, and in the local or national spotlight. The reverse of that coin is that if we are not successful and reasonably well off financially after a period of time, we didn't apply ourselves.

The business world operates on the premise that employees will march to its drumbeat.

The business world operates on the premise that employees will march to its drumbeat, be reassigned to wherever it dictates, give everything possible and then some to the task and be willing to climb the corporate ladder according to its schedule and demands. To get to the top of the ladder often means sacrificing everything else, including family. Is it really worth this kind of sacrifice, especially since there is no guarantee that the employee will be retained by his or her company and will have automatic upgrades in status and income?

The true cost of success

Those who force themselves to reach "success" may find that they are suffering high blood pressure, anxiety, and a world of stresses that undermine their health. They also may find that their mate and family have suffered terribly. They are, in essence, absentee dads or moms, dedicated far more to their professions than to their families. This is often excused on the basis that it is necessary; and that they are really providing for their family in the long haul. Are they really? Are they providing quality time and attention? Are they providing a positive example? Are they providing spiritual guidance? If all they are providing is

money, that will eventually prove to be a false security for their loved ones. The wife and kids, or the husband and kids, may be saying, "All I want is you!"

Instead, what they are getting is a drain on energy, resulting in irritability and deteriorating home relations, all the while perhaps in a fine house with all of the trappings of success. Our home has never been that well decorated, except for many of my paintings on the walls. My professional life has never earned much money because it has centered primarily in the service sector, which pays only modestly. Still, especially in our early years of marriage, when I was struggling to grow professionally, I allowed much of my time at home to be consumed with research, writing, lesson, and sermon preparation. I only dimly came to realize later that Margie resented it and the kids were deprived of much of my evening and weekend hours. Oh, if I could only do it over!

... what they (family members) are getting is a drain on energy, resulting in irritability and deteriorating home relations, all the while perhaps in a fine home with all of the trappings of success.

McManus talks about writing love letters to one's spouse as a means of confessing shortcomings and reaffirming affection. This is in the context of mates who have allowed their profession to drown out love for their mates. Here is a sample from one such letter:

"You have always criticized me for loving my work more than my family. I think you were partly right, but only partly. What really happened was that I took you for granted, did not realize that you needed watering like a garden, and that by deciding to shower my rains of love on you, I would myself be refreshed. The burden of my work — I now see has been too much for me. It wasn't that I loved my work more. I often hated it. I look back now and wonder how I forced myself to work. I was pursuing some vision of glory that was beyond ... you, beyond the children" (McManus 1995:187).

Do you see how disastrous it can be to sacrifice all on the altar of profession and thus destroy the people closest to us? There has to be some kind of balance here, balance between work and family, between husband and wife, between parents and children. This may well mean not receiving those "important" promotions or that fabulous salary. On the contrary, it may mean saving your marriage and family. Three cheers for the father or mother who turns down a promotion that will eventually consume him or her, in order to be around for birthdays, ball games, and other family activities.

Absenteeism not limited to work

This absenteeism from parenthood is not just limited to work. The drive to excel may take the form of sports, recreation, music, art, hobby, or some other interest that consumes time and money.

This absenteeism from parenthood is not just limited to work. The drive to excel may take the form of sports, recreation, music, art, hobbies, or other interests that consume time and money. How many dads leave the family at home every Saturday to play golf? How many tool around on

their Harley? There are even some who place church or humanitarian activities at such a level that family is neglected.

Service-oriented work profitable in other ways than salary

Some people, however, do not follow that particular drumbeat. They serve as teachers, nurses, caretakers of the elderly, professors in Christian schools, ministers, or in other traditionally low-paid positions. They will probably never make much money, yet may be most successful in their chosen calling. There is no real place in our national health, wealth, and prosperity ethic for those who work in such service or non-profit roles. Yet, their contribution to society is essential and enormous. Moreover, they are not running on the endless treadmill of prestige and possessions.

A word of warning is appropriate here, however. It is entirely possible to become a slave to your service-oriented position, just as much as to a moneymaking profession. Take it from one who has been guilty of this. I have worked day and night to be a success at my low-paying service as a minister, missionary, teacher in a Christian university, and managing editor of a Christian newspaper. Some of this was perhaps necessary, but not all of it. In order to meet a newspaper deadline, press week required working until two or three in the morning for several nights in a row. That was largely unavoidable, but it took a toll on my health and my family relations.

Some guidelines for a balanced life

With all of this in mind, what guidelines should we follow in relation to our professions and possessions, our interests and our hobbies? The following are some that may be of help:

Control an all-consuming passion for work or toys

I have been to more than 50 countries and have brought back souvenirs from just about all of them. Our living room and library are museums of these “treasures” — a collection of carved elephants, copies of the Terra-cotta soldiers from Tian, China, carvings, crystals, and other artifacts from all over Latin America, potsherds, and rock samples from Israel, etc. What a collection! Not any of them is particularly expensive, but they are a collection, nonetheless. Then there are the dozens of paintings I have done that have not been sold or given away. And there are thousands of slides and photos, not to mention perhaps 2,000 books. One day whose shall these things be?

Well, I have (almost) quit collecting. And I have quit trying to constantly improve our financial status. Being retired, it appears to be beyond improving anyway. In fact, it is going down hill. And you? Are you still collecting? Are you still attempting to buy that better home, better car, better electronic gear, better clothes? Think about it. The Bible says that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6:21). Where is your heart?

Be content with what you have

Advertising is dedicated to making you want to buy more and better, to make you discontent with what you have. One auto dealer in our city puts a shame trip on people

who are driving older cars, attempting to convince them to buy a current-year model. The message is continuous — what you are driving is an embarrassment to you and your family.

You must buy this model now before the opportunity is gone. You can't be one of the cool people without it ... Yet God's Word warns us:

Advertising is dedicated to making you want to buy more and better; to make you discontent with what you have.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19-20).

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

Whoa! Those verses really cut against the grain of much modern-day advertising. In fact, they run counter to our society and its values. Yet, at the end of your life, whose shall all of these things be? They don't really bring deep-down satisfaction.

Howard Hughes, one of the wealthiest men of his day, died a recluse. Learn the lesson from Scripture: Cut down on your goodies and quit trying to obtain more. Greed and the drive to have more create tremendous strains on a marriage. This is a spiritual disease fueled by two notions: “I am what I have” and “What I have will make me happy.” If possessions are the basis for happiness, then many of us must be very unhappy, because we have relatively little of what society considers “must have” items.

At the end of your life, whose shall all of these things be? They don't really bring deep-down satisfaction.

Jesus flatly warned against the curse of these spiritual malignancies when He taught that a person's

life does not consist of the abundance of his or her possessions. True peace of heart comes from the Lord, not from things. True values are moral and spiritual, not temporal.

Give your spouse and family the proper value

We make our decisions based on a hierarchy of values. If we value money above all else, then our decisions orbit around money. If we value notoriety above everything else, we make our decisions based on gaining a name for ourselves. If we value sports above all else, then our lives are centered on sports. And on and on it goes.

However, the Lord tells us to seek the kingdom of Heaven first and He will then take care of our needs. Surely that must be at the pinnacle of our pyramid of values, and we will give it our first allegiance.

Next under it, however, is the value we give to mate and family. If our spouse's welfare is not placed above work and our own self-centered pleasure, then the daily choices we make will promote something other than a healthy married life.

On the other hand, sometimes a mate is placed on a pedestal almost above God. Only by placing the Lord first can we better fulfill His purposes for our family and better care for the true well-being of our spouse. In the case of overly-elevating our mate, either our own sense of what is best for him or her, or our mate's sense is what is best for himself or herself will rule. In either case disaster is assured, sooner or later.

The Lord tells us to seek the Kingdom of Heaven first and He will then take care of our needs.

Invest regularly in your spouse

This investment is not only in money, but also in time and energy. Money-wise, it can be a tiny investment. Today I brought home a little bouquet of wild flowers for Margie. It was no special occasion, just a reminder to her that I love her and seek her good. We all need such reminders.

As for time invested in my spouse, we make it a practice almost every Friday night of going out to dinner and a show. Since we go mostly to the discount theater and can get a ticket at a low matinee price, we go about 4 P.M. and then eat afterward. Our restaurant meals are modest. Generally we split one main dish and order a separate side salad. Sometimes these hours together mean participating in weekend church activities or public events. It isn't so much what is spent or what we do as how often we have special times together.

As for energy, we have little left compared to past decades, but we do attempt to invest what we have of energy in the Lord, in each other, and in maintaining our home, yard, and vehicle.

Confess your own missteps, forgive and ask for forgiveness freely

We might have mentioned this before, but if so, it bears repeating: We never out-mature our penchant for doing wrong things or doing good things wrongly. Saying "I'm sorry, I forgot to stop off at the pharmacy on the way home" is much better than becoming defensive over our lapse of memory.

Ounce of prevention

Count the true cost of "success". Are you willing to pay it? How much better it is to invest in your spouse and family than to put all of your investments of time and energy into your career. It will eventually disappear, but your investment in your marriage and family will last a lifetime and even into the lifetimes of descendants.

Consider these passages:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break through and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... " (Matthew 6:19-20).

"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

Chapter 12

1. What can the drive for success and wealth do to a marriage? What may be the true cost of success? How can we avoid the work ethic that calls for success at all costs?
2. Discuss the sexual temptations that lurk for the professional, especially one who must travel frequently. How can these be guarded against?
3. What might writing love letters to each other as spouses do for strengthening the marriage?
4. What does the expression mean, "Your marriage needs watering, as a garden"?
5. Is there ever a time to turn down a promotion or a company-required move to a new location? Explain.

Chapter 13



Empty Nest and Empty Life?

When the kids have all left the nest, what then? This will happen perhaps suddenly or perhaps by degrees, but in most families it will eventually happen. Of course, some don't want to leave the nest. Children in their 20's or 30's may still be single and living at home with mom and dad. Or they may try out their wings for awhile but find life too expensive or threatening for them, so they return to the nest to sponge indefinitely off their family. That poses another set of problems. When will the parents ever have real privacy?

"Let your children go, if you want to keep them." — Malcolm Forbes

However, there are perhaps a few bright spots even in this scenario. The parents can take a trip with the confidence that their son or daughter will care for the home in their absence! If he or she can't be trusted with such an assignment, you have an entirely different set of issues with which to deal. "With a little bit of luck," as the musical *My Fair Lady*, said it, the at-home offspring may even contribute to family expenses.

I remember well our final day of nesting chicks. Each time one of our four sons left Brazil for college in the States, it was tough on all of us. However, when our daughter, Cindy, packed her bags and headed to the U.S. to begin college, it was especially difficult for us. I held up well until we got back from the airport. Then when I passed her bedroom, the tears ran down my face. She was gone, just as our four sons were, and life would never be the same again for any of us.

She, especially, having spent 16 of her 18 years in Brazil, was more a Brasileira than an American. She had a difficult time adapting to college life in the U.S. She didn't know the latest rock-n-roll idols. Her American vocabulary was a bit limited. Her wardrobe was not the latest style. So other girls, sharp-tongued, gave her a bad time. One day she called us, crying about this. I told her, "Look, Cindy, you know more than they may ever know about some things, such as other languages, cultures, and worlds." This helped her some, but didn't ease the ache in our hearts for her or in hers for us.

Some pluses

There are some pluses to having an empty nest. For one thing, the couple normally will have much more privacy. If they wish, they can run around naked with their hair on fire, but I wouldn't recommend the fire bit. They can go to the lake or to some other favorite place. In Brazil we had a Bible camp about 20 minutes out of the city. Margie and I would sometimes go there on a Monday to while away several hours, hopefully all alone, except for the caretaker. We also had a tiny mountain plot where we planted several fruit trees. Since grapefruit were unknown on the market, we decided to go to a nursery to see if we could find one to plant. We looked up the word for grapefruit in Portuguese — “pomal”. We headed to the nursery and asked if they had a pomal. The nurseryman looked puzzled. I explained that it was yellow like a lemon, round like an orange but larger. “Oh!” he said, “Graypeefrootche!” So much for “pomal”. We did get our grapefruit tree and planted it but returned to the U.S. before it ever produced.

Back to hideaways, we enjoyed going from time to time to a national park not far away from our city and frequented by few tourists. There was a remote waterfall that not many ever saw. We heard about it and hiked in to see it. It was well worth the trip and the day spent there, until I fell down a cliff trying to get a better picture of it and cracked two ribs. We also enjoyed occasional journeys to the Atlantic coast to a fishing village.

All of this is to say that empty-nesters have more flexibility to get away from home than they had when the house was full of kids. Use this time of freedom to go and do things you couldn't do when the kids were home.

You also may have more financial freedom, unless you are having to support grown kids and grandkids, even elderly parents. Hopefully, this freedom will enable you to take those trips, redo your house, upgrade your transportation, and do other things that you weren't financially able to do earlier. Of course, you may never get over the feeling that you should be helping your kids and grandkids. They may need it, but it isn't wise to rob yourselves of fulfilling your own needs to care for theirs, unless it is a real emergency. Such crises are to be expected, but having your grown children “fail to launch” should not long be tolerated. Unless they are incapacitated or temporarily out of work, they should stand on their own feet financially.

Be prepared for this period of your life

If your lives are built around your children, rather than around each other, when the nest is suddenly empty, what do you have left? You may find, in this case, that you and your mate have little in common, including the lack of a really loving relationship. It is wise to develop mutual interests and activities that hold you together — some sport such as tennis, golf, or bowling, some hobby, games, reading; puzzles, or perhaps some church, or benevolence project.

Bill and Fran were empty-nesters who had little in common beyond their departed children. Bill's passion was golf, so he played it three times or so a week. Fran hated golf,

so she never participated in it with him. Fran loved to travel, but Bill preferred to stay near home. So how did they survive? They didn't. Eventually Fran got a divorce on the basis that she had long since lost all love for her husband. He blamed her for their troubles. "If she had only learned to play golf, all would have gone well with our marriage," he complained. "If Bill had gotten off the golf course and gone with me on some trips, we could perhaps have saved our marriage," Fran complained.

This twosome hardly had a chance to survive as a couple. They lived in two separate worlds and had no interest in visiting the world of their mate. They had remained together for the sake of their kids, but when the kids were gone, there was no reason left, they thought, to carry on the sham of a marriage, which was obviously not covenantal.

If your parental lives are built around your children, rather than around each other, when the nest is suddenly empty, what do you have left?

Go back to school

Don't stagnate. Learning opens up new worlds for you.

Now if you are an empty-nester, it is time to fly again. As a means of expanding your universe, return to the classroom, even if it is taking a course by extension or on the Internet. Learn new worlds of information. Further develop your skills. I completed my doctorate at almost 59, so if I can do it, perhaps you can also. There is no end to what you can still learn.

Don't stagnate. Learning opens up new worlds for you. This can be especially fruitful if both mates in a marriage study the same material. A word of warning, however: Don't try to out-compete your mate. Say you are a whiz at tennis. Every time you talk your wife into a game with you, she has no chance. You enjoy hammering the ball across the net and grinning when she can't return it. This kind of competitive behavior can only land you in trouble and it will discourage your partner. In such a case, it may be wise to take separate courses and avoid competition that will humiliate your mate.

Build up the self-confidence of your spouse

All of us have doubts at times about our gifts, talents, and abilities. As married couples we at least should know the gifts of our mates. It is our task to encourage their development and use. Barbara Rosberg comments on this point:

"One of the most valuable gifts Gary [her husband] gives to me is honor. ... He generously voices his appreciation for me with an attitude of honor. Once he gets focused for work, he doesn't say as much. The work mode has a way of changing the whole focus of a man. Then hours later we can be seated in a team meeting, and Gary will begin talking about his 'wonderful wife' and something she said that was strong, wise and relevant. Sometimes when he does this, he catches me so off guard that I lean forward on the boardroom table thinking, I wish I could be this woman. Gary makes me sound far better than I am, and I'm honored by it" (Rosberg and Rosberg 2002:125-126).

I confess that I have been blind at times to Margie's needs. She is a great woman — excellent cook, excellent seamstress, good at serving people and counseling, a caring homemaker, and a loving wife. She seldom teaches, but reinforces my teaching. She is the best critic of my artwork, writing, and speaking. Yet, historically she has had little self-confidence. In the past I didn't do enough to encourage her to use her gifts. Now, however, I try harder to reinforce her abilities and to praise her efforts. "What would I do without her?" I ask. "I don't tell her that often enough."

Unrealized dreams

As the years pass, couples begin to realize that they are growing older and haven't accomplished all they wanted. By now they feel that they should have been vice presidents, at least, of their company, but they may still be only functionaries.

They should have become successful and sought-after musicians or artists. They should have excelled at some sport, but they haven't, not to their satisfaction, at least. This can lead them to redouble their efforts, to the detriment of their home life and even of their health. They are frustrated and may take their frustration out on their mate. "You never have backed me. You never have understood me. If only I had married someone else ..." is their complaint.

The couple begins to realize that they are growing older and haven't accomplished all they wanted.

Understand that this is a prime time for drifting apart

As couples go through middle age and beyond, they face real crises. Neither mate is getting younger. Age is bringing wrinkles and a sagging body. Neither husband nor wife can compete athletically as he or she once did. Few men can remain pros in athletics after 40 and few women after 30 or 35. A 40-year-old man on the Dr. Phil TV show said that his goal was to play professional football. Dr. Phil was quick to point out to him that his goal was unrealistic. "At your age," he observed, "you are not going to make the National Football League."

If both husband and wife work, they are probably overworked and stressed out. They have little time or energy for each other, so their love turns colder and colder.

What is the tendency of some individuals in this critical period of mid-life crisis? To drift

What is the tendency in the critical period of mid-life crisis? To seek out new excitement and romance with someone else.

apart and seek out new excitement and romance with someone else. The Arps quote a wife, married for 18 years, who reflects a secret concern that many couples appear to face:

"My greatest fear is that when the kids are gone, we won't communicate or have anything in common. I'm afraid of being left alone with someone who never speaks, pays attention or ever touches me" (Arps 996:86).

One husband looked at his aging wife and told her that he felt he had 15 more good years and wasn't going to spend them with her. So, she was not the prime physical specimen

she once was, but neither was he. I pity the woman he ended up with, because he may soon tire of her also. This was a denial of all he pledged to his spouse at the wedding ceremony. He married for better or for worse. So now it was worse. That is all part of the covenant of lifelong commitment to each other, and all marriages should have such a commitment.

Avoid the temptation for sexual adventures

To avoid the tendency toward sexual adventures outside of marriage, both mates must build a wall of protection against such temptation. If the sexual pasture is excellent at home, the old goat will not be so likely to roam. If the temptation is severe while on a business trip to go to bed with a colleague, it would be better to turn down such trips, even if you have to lose your job in the process.

Jerry Jenkins calls for a high hedge of protection to grow around a marriage — a hedge that will turn away temptations to wander outside the bounds of marriage. He says:

“If I embrace only dear friends or relatives and only in the presence of others, I am not even tempted to make the embrace longer or more impassioned than is appropriate. ... If I allowed myself to embrace just anyone, even dear friends, in private, I would be less confident of my motives and my subsequent actions” (Jenkins 1989:89).

There is more to the matter than just embracing, however. As a religious leader, it has fallen to us over the years to make house calls — to counsel, teach, evangelize, grieve, pray and aid those in need in a variety of ways. Early on, it never entered our minds to refrain from entering the home in which there was a woman alone. If kids were all around, then it was probably safer, but the very appearance of it was not wise. We did no wrong in the house, but someone could have started a chain of gossip on the matter and ruined more than one person’s reputation.

It is important not to be caught in possibly compromising situations. Some counselors are so careful about this that they do not work with female clients alone. Doctors are equally as cautious. A male doctor has a nurse present when he examines a female patient. All married people should be equally as careful at work, play, or in any other situation about being alone with someone of the opposite sex who is not their mate. It should be our goal always to “avoid the very appearance of evil.”

Hope is still alive for the middle-aged baby boomer

Fortunately, according to a recent poll, many baby boomers are tired of the corporate rat race and are looking to service professions as a means of giving meaning to their empty lives. More and more couples in that age group are seeking counseling or seminars on marriage. May this trend continue! Yet, there is still the temptation to get out there and have one more fling before time passes us by. This must be resisted by every means possible. There is more than one way to have a fling, and some are safe and biblically acceptable. I joked when I bought a bright red van years ago that I had never had an affair, but finally had my red car!

Hope includes spiritual rejuvenation

Growing older should enhance our longing for God. When we stop to look at ourselves,

we realize that we are many steps closer than ever to the end of our lives. That end can come at a time when we least expect it. Therefore, we should be prepared daily for it. Younger people think that they are invincible. We who are older realize that we are not — far from it.

The wisest thing for empty-nesters and retirees is to rededicate themselves to prayer, devotion, and church life. McManus suggests that getting up 20 minutes earlier each day for a period of Bible reading, prayer, and devotion can restore both life and marriage (McManus 1995:214). We would extend that time period to 30 minutes. Reading two or three chapters from the Bible, praying, and meditating on spiritual matters can easily consume a half-hour, and it is time well spent together.

Ounce of prevention

Brazil has a custom that could serve well in the U.S. Couples reaching their 25th wedding anniversary go through a second wedding ceremony and exchange new rings. These are simple gold bands with a raised white gold band in the center, symbolizing the silver anniversary.

This is a good idea, so I encourage you to practice it. If you have already passed your 25th, do it anyway. Arrange for a simple ceremony and the exchange of new rings. Renew your covenant of marriage at this critical time in your relationship.

Think about this passage:

“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30).

Chapter 13

1. What are some negatives to the “empty nest” stage of marriage?
2. What are some pluses?
3. Why is it important to build up the self-confidence of your mate?
4. What is “mid-life crisis” and what are some of the warning signs?
5. What will increased spiritual depth accomplish in this period of life?

Chapter 14

Bumps in the Aging Road

Retirement has its blessings, such as ample time, if health and finances permit, to engage in a number of activities and do a lot of traveling. However, it isn't always all it is cracked up to be. We are retired, but in fact, both of us are a bit cracked. We retired from positions at a Christian university, I at almost 74 and she at 73. We decided that we had followed the work path long enough. We soon experienced some bumps in the retirement road, however.

The financial bump

A year or so into retirement, we realized that our IRA and other investments were going to be inadequate. Since that time we have continued to cut back on our lifestyle, even attempting now to survive with only one car. Here is another one of Murphy's laws: As funds decrease, expenses rise. The cost of gasoline becomes scandalously high. House payments go up. Bills are higher than ever and there is no end in sight. Finally, as our home more and more resembles a pharmacy, medical expenses and the cost of prescriptions have skyrocketed, despite Medicare and supplementary insurance, which, incidentally, goes up each year. Right now we are perplexed by the many prescription plans being offered, hoping for one that will not bankrupt us as we are being bankrupted by prescriptions.

Such a situation drives some couples to separate and some to divorce. I have news for them. Unless they marry someone wealthy, their financial woes will continue to dog them. As a friend recently commented, "When you get older, it's just repair, repair, repair!"

The loss of position bump

Before retirement I had been Managing Editor for a worldwide religious newspaper, with perks that included various trips overseas, speaking engagements on lecture programs and seminars, and various plaques of recognition.

Once I announced my retirement, however, the situation began to change rapidly. I suddenly felt myself a "has-been" who no longer had much of value to say. This has been hard to handle. It does no good to take it out on Margie or anyone else. My ego was greatly bolstered recently, however, at a missionary conference when our years of service on the field were honored with a standing ovation.

This process of diminished public attention during the retirement years is a fact of life, apparently, and gets worse as we move closer and closer toward the end of our days. Unless the unexpected occurs and I write a book that really catches on (unlikely) or make some scientific breakthrough (highly unlikely), the chances are good that I will be largely forgotten in my retirement years. We can choose to either accept it or resent it. At funerals, I am often amazed to learn of the great contributions that some elderly person made during his or her lifetime that I had never before heard about. It is a shame that such people are not honored until their funeral.

The bump of lost contacts

Former colleagues at work move on. Those who remain may not be particularly fond of spending time with retirees. Even those leading the firm with which they worked may soon forget them entirely. The only solution is to seek out new contacts and develop a friendship with them. However, we should still not be in intimate situations with people of the opposite sex. Apparently, we are never fully exempt from the temptation to dally with someone not our mate. Especially vulnerable may be the widow or widower, who is lonely and sometimes seeks love in ways that are not proper.

The communication bump

In my manuscript, **Twice as Much Husband; Facing Reality in the Retirement Years**, I noted,

“Believe it or not, one of the biggest challenges faced by retired couples is not monetary, or even health issues. It is communication, or the lack thereof. After 40 or more years of living together, you would think that a couple has learned by now to converse intelligently, but it is not necessarily so” (Shipp).

I think the problem is that the couple has become so accustomed to each other, like an old pair of slippers, that they no longer feel the need to express much love or concern for each other, or even to communicate on more than a subsistence level. Their life involves hours spent watching the Boob Tube, rather than conversing. Have they really exhausted all of the subject matter they might be discussing? Or have they just grown old and tired of even talking to each other? This is a serious bump in the road that can drive them slowly off course in their relationship. They may share the same house and even the same bed, but share little else.

The bump of diminishing sexual drive

Margie and I have had a wonderful sexual relationship. However, as we reached retirement age, with unlimited opportunities for sex, we found our sexual drive diminishing rapidly. Now it is only a shadow of its former self. It is still there, but weak. We long to be younger again, but that will never happen. Some elderly people, still with a good libido, become highly dissatisfied with their mates and seek out someone who will satisfy their sexual needs. Sex has to be worked at very patiently in our marriages, if it is to survive into the 70's and 80's, but God's boundaries must always be recognized and honored.

Remember that when you reach the geriatric age, neither of you will be a prize catch, physically. The only catch will be in your back.

The bump of deteriorating health

Is it wise to retire before you just have to or are forced to by the system? In our case we retired voluntarily, but have noticed a decline in health since then. Instead of going to the office, we go to the doctors' offices. Instead of buying anything for our home, we buy prescriptions.

One or both of you will be under medical care during this stage of your life, if not earlier. Be prepared to give much aid and comfort to each other, due to increasing health problems. This may be an especially trying time of life for both partners. One may be largely or totally incapacitated, which may require more from the other mate than he or she can provide. In such a case it becomes necessary to arrange for outside help.

Accept the possibility of assisted living or nursing homes

The day we put my mother in a nursing home was traumatic for all three of us. Yet, it had to be because she was already well into Alzheimers, and her behavior was erratic. After that experience I have little love for nursing homes in general. We found that Mother was not well attended, the few things she had in the nursing home (including her wedding band) were stolen, and the environment was less than desirable. Yet, one or both of us may end our days in one. The partner who is placed in such a home may feel that he or she is in a lost situation, lonely and largely abandoned. The partner who remains at home is also lonely, doesn't eat right, and often neglects his or her health. Income is greatly diminished. Bills are difficult to remember and pay. Life is almost over. I respect one elderly man at church whose wife is in a nursing home. He is always present at services, classes, and work periods, and is always dressed well. He is an exception to the rule, to my thinking.

Then there is the matter of hospital stays. They tend to become more and more frequent, and the stays are longer. My own experience in hospitals is that the patient has little real rest, day or night. He or she is hooked up to a variety of machines, is constantly medicated, and yet suffers from pain and discomfort. In addition, the patient may be awakened at odd hours during the night to administer some medication or perhaps just to verify that he or she is sleeping! Bless their hearts, doctors and nurses do their best, but hospitals are no vacation spots.

Divorce may occur even at 60 and beyond

Couples in their 60s and beyond tend to stay together, but there are notable exceptions. As I write this, the Dr. Phil show has just ended. He was interviewing a man who, at 69, divorced his wife and married a woman who is 27, after having had an affair with her for several years. The man appeared to show no remorse whatsoever. His family was aghast at his behavior. Dr. Phil asked the new wife, married to him for a week, if she was aware that, by the time she is in her 30s, she may be nursing a very elderly husband whose health has broken. She had no answer, nor did he. Then Dr. Phil closed the session by noting that

couples married out of prior infidelity have only a 10 percent chance of success with their new marriage.

The blessing of marital longevity

For those readers who are married and at least reasonably happy after 50 or more years, congratulations to you. You have been through wars — World War II, Vietnam, Gulf War I, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. You have been through family difficulties of all kinds, including divorces close to you. You have watched homes fall apart. You have witnessed the moral and social decline of our nation. You have weathered health problems and perhaps financial problems. You have seen it all. Yet, you have remained together, in part because you applied some Divorce Prevention against separation and divorce.

Ounce of prevention

By now you have accumulated a good stockpile of prevention ounces. It is time, not to sit back in your recliner and vegetate, but to share some of these Divorce Prevention with the younger families about you. Become mentors to your children and grandchildren. Your children may still be at a critical age for splitting up their marriages. You may be too late to save their union, but not too late to influence your grandkids to build better marriages.

Verses to ponder:

“Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” (Proverbs 31:28).

“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older ...”
(1 Peter 5:5).

Chapter 14

1. Discuss some of the various “bumps” that come in old age.
2. Why would the communication bump occur?
3. Which bump would you consider to be the most difficult?
4. When older couples divorce, do their second marriages usually work?
5. How can older couples use their experiences to help others?

Conclusion

AND NOW TO WRAP IT UP

An organization called BegottenNotMade asks some chilling questions about the future of marriage in our society:

“What happens to a nation when transient relationships and insecure emotional attachments are the only kind ever known? What will become of the kids who hear ‘Mommy and daddy can’t get along’ and ‘You can visit daddy every other weekend’ and ‘This is mommy’s new friend ...’ two or three times before their teens are over? Will they become adults capable of the sound judgment and self control that make for a stable marriage? Or will they become adults who say, ‘I’ve never loved anyone like I love you — lately’ and ‘Marry me — for a few years until I find someone else in the thrill parade’” (an email message from BegottenNotMade, a Roman Catholic Professional organization, received May 25, 2008).

Our world has bought into the idea that divorce is normal — no stigmas attached. Wallerstein says on this:

“Each child in a classroom half full of children of divorce cries out, ‘Why me?’... By following the life of one child of divorce ... I can say without a doubt that they have worries apart from their peers raised in intact homes. These worries are reshaping our society in ways we never dreamt about” (Wallerstein, Lewis and Blakeslee 2000: xxviii).

And now we have the dismal picture of gay couplings being legitimized as “gay marriage”, in total contradiction to every biblical law concerning marriage, and also of the historical definition. However, even my computer dictionary now defines marriage as both traditionally male and female, but also male and male, or female and female. This situation is akin to the generally acknowledged arrangement of “partners” or cohabiters”. A form I just filled out had these options, along with marriage, to indicate my legal or social status.

Set a stellar example in a sin-darkened world

All of this is worthy of the most serious thought and prayer. Who will make his or her voice heard on what is happening to marriage? Will Christian couples stand up and say, “As for us and our house, we will show the biblical standard for marriage. We who are married have a special obligation to all of those marriages (and singles) about us.” Marriage counselor Paul Faulkner notes,

“If God designed marriage to reflect the unity of the Godhead — and I believe He did — then Christian marriages should point people to God in ways that most have not yet accomplished. The oneness of purpose among the Father, Son and Spirit should be modeled by Christians in the marriage relationship ... ” (Faulkner, *“What Does Your Marriage Say about God?”* **Abundant Living**, Sept. 2006, P. 6).

Our world has lost contact with God's principles for almost all facets of life, including married life. Our marriages should be spreading salt, light, and leaven to our families, street, community, and world. Oh, yes, we are good at rubbing salt into others' wounds, but that is not what Jesus meant by our use of salt. Our light should illuminate the pathway to a good, biblical marriage. Our leavening influence should be at work daily in our marriages, in our work, and in our life in general. And it certainly should permeate the lives of our children. They should see in us what God intended for marriage to be.

Closing thoughts

First, mates can have their marriage reinforced by a covenant agreement. Recently I received an anguished request from a woman whose marriage apparently was about to implode. She wanted two copies of my book, **Covenant Marriage: God's Blueprint for Couples**. Hopefully, both read the book and profited from it, but as yet, no response has come my way. By the way, their rereading all that the Bible says about marriage and divorce might be the best medicine for their marriage.

Second, at the first signs of marital disruption, the couple should do some serious communicating, confessing and praying, all potent responses to their conflicts. If those steps don't seem to help, the couple should seek a competent Christian counselor and then listen to him or her. What often occurs, counselors say to me, is putting off professional help until it is too late, or almost too late, to save the marriage.

Begin biblical marriage training at birth

The best possible prevention against the present abuses we see in marriage, cohabitation and single parenthood is to *begin at the birth of our children*. If we are to change the dismal situation in our marital and extra-marital society, they must see in us the living Christ and His will for our marriage. O that we had a burning concern for bringing up our children from birth in the nurture and admonition of the Lord! Their place in eternity depends on our passion for instilling God's precious truths within them from the earliest ages. Let that be our focus.

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