

# MARRIAGE & FAMILY

## *Understanding and Applying God's Plan for Marriages and Families*



On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. (John 2:1-2)

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK**

The Christian marriage and family is the heart of our social structure. As the family goes, so goes the church and the nation. Marriages and families are in trouble today. This book is a collection of articles I have written over the years dealing with God's plan for the husband-wife relationship and for families. God created us and established marriages and families, so He knows how they best function and has given us that information in the Bible. The inventor knows how to make the best use of His creation, and God knows what is best for us as well.

There is a lot more information about families available on my web site, [ChristianTrainingOrganization.org](https://www.christiantrainingonline.org). Click on Marriage and Family, then Articles and Books or go directly to <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> If I can be of any help, you can email me at [Jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org](mailto:Jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org)

Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer

## **BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR**

Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer is a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary where he received his ThM in 1975 and DMin in 2006. He served as a church pastor in the USA for 35 years until 2016. He is founder of Christian Training Organization where he leads marriage, family, and youth conferences, and is active in counseling and mentoring pastors. He has ministered to pastors in India since 2006.

He has been married to Nancy, a nurse, since 1979. They enjoy their very large family and many grandchildren.

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# **MARRIAGE & FAMILY**

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# *Marriage and Family*

## **I. MARRIAGE: GOD'S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

UNDERSTANDING & APPLYING GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGES &  
FAMILIES

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*(Based on "Sacred Marriage" by Gary Thomas, the theme of our 2014 Marriage Retreat entitled "Marriage: God's Tool for Spiritual Growth." For more information feel free to contact Jerry Schmoyer at jerry@schmoyer.net. Copyright ©2014 Christian Training Organization).*

1. God's Tool for Spiritual Growth
2. Is Marriage to Make Us Happy or Holy?
3. God Uses Your Mate to Make You Like Jesus
4. Learning to Serve Your Mate
5. Giving Love to Get Love isn't Really Loving
6. God is Your Father-In-Law

# Marriage & Family – I. GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## 1. MARRIAGE: GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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Marriage struggles have been going on since the Adam and Eve. Socrates said “By all means marry. If you get a good wife you’ll become happy. If you get a bad one, you’ll become a philosopher.” The statistics about marriage success today would seem to indicate that many are becoming philosophers – certainly many marriages are not happy. Despite this, the theme of romance forever and living happily ever after appears in many songs, movies, books and TV programs. Mankind seems to be looking for something it isn’t finding – the perfect romance that never ends.

Even as Christians we look for this, expecting God to provide it for us. And He certainly could do so if He wanted. He is sovereign God; He can do anything. He could bring two people together and have them find total harmony and unending oneness. He could – but He doesn’t. He allows two people, both with sin natures, who are different in every way (male-female, introvert-extrovert, etc.) to come together and have to work through their sins and differences. For many people, it is the most difficult challenge they face in life. Unfortunately, a large number of couples experience more pain than pleasure from their marriage.

So, the questions is: “Why didn’t God make marriage to be easier?” Why doesn’t He let it be all we expect it to be when we get married? Surely He must have a good reason for this, a very good reason.

**What if God’s plan for marriage is not to make us happy, but to make us holy?** What if He designed marriage to be a tool He can use for our spiritual growth? What if He allows us to see our self-centeredness, and our mate’s selfishness, in order to show us our need of Him? What if He keeps another human being from meeting all our needs so we must ultimately depend on Him alone to meet those needs? Could it be that He allows the stretching and the pain to take place in order to mature us and make us more like Jesus? Is it more important to God to have us become Christ-like than to have us live happily ever after? It certainly seems that is the case!

And if that is true, then we need to completely change how we view marriage – what we expect of our mates and our marriages. Romance is fine and good for as far as it goes, but it falls far short of what we need to make a healthy marriage. Romantic love has no way of dealing with sin and the hurts of others. The danger of basing a relationship on romantic love is that it often doesn’t transition to real life. Romantic love is all about receiving, meeting our needs and making us happy. Married love needs to be other-focused, giving, meeting the needs of another no matter what we receive in return. If a relationship is not based on something stronger than romantic love, it won’t last longer than the romance lasts. If we were perfect perhaps it could work, but with our natural inclination to sin and self-centeredness (James 3:2) the potential for hurting each other can be endless.

Marriage doesn’t meet all our needs; it wasn’t designed to do so and it cannot do so. But it can point us to the One who can meet those needs. Marriage is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It’s important for us to understand and believe this in order correctly face the challenges and blessings that marriage brings. Too often we try to fix symptoms instead of getting to the root problem.

One day a man approached his car in a parking lot but his remote wouldn’t open the trunk or the doors. Finally, he got inside but the fuel gauge wasn’t working properly and the car wouldn’t start. He had it towed to a garage which told him that his Basic Control Module, the brain of the car, was not

working properly and had to be fixed. He could have replaced the trunk latch, door lock, fuel gauge and starter, but that wouldn't have fixed the problem. Often in marriage we, too, try to change a symptom such as lack of communication, financial problems, sexual incompatibility, poor conflict resolution, or child raising difficulties, when the problem goes deeper. Understanding God's purpose for marriage is key to having a meaningful, satisfying relationship with our mate. Did God create marriage to make us holy or happy? It may not always make you happy, but it can always make you holy if it brings you closer to Him!



# Marriage & Family – I. GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## 2. IS MARRIAGE TO MAKE US HAPPY OR HOLY?

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Francis de Sales once wrote: “The state of marriage is one that requires more virtue and constancy than any other. ... It is a perpetual exercise in mortification. ... From this thyme plant, in spite of the bitter nature of its juice, you may be able to draw and make the honey of a holy life.” That isn’t a very common or popular view of marriage. Today we often expect to find the one person who can make us happy for the rest of our lives. Then when that doesn’t happen we think we must have married the wrong person. We have an unrealistic perception of married life before marriage, and unless that corrects itself to see marriage as God created it to be, the relationship will fail to be all God wants it to be.

Somehow we have bought into the idea that out there lives a person who is our soul mate, the perfect person to complete us and meet all our needs. We marry thinking we have found that person, but married life soon reveals the imperfections in husband and wife. It’s natural then to think that we must have married the wrong person and we’ll never be happy until we find the right person and marry them. Nothing could be further from the truth. A successful marriage is not determined by marrying the right person, but by being the right person.

For as important marriage is, as all-consuming as it can be, most people enter with very little training or preparation. For the most part, we want a better relationship than our parents had. Yet we have no idea how to make that happen except to marry the perfect person and live happily ever after. The problem is, we never seem to find the perfect mate. We never will, because our focus is on the other person being right for us when it must be on us being right for our mate. We need to focus on ourselves and our own growth, not on our mate and their growth (or seeming lack of it).

God wants us to have meaningful, deeply satisfying marriage relationships. He wants our marriage to reflect His unconditional and sacrificial love for us (Ephesians 5). He wants our marriage to bring glory to Him (1 Corinthians 10:31). That only happens as we seek Him first and look for Him to be the primary source of satisfaction and joy in our life (Matthew 6:33).

Think of your marriage. What was your perception of married life before you were married? How has that opinion changed? What expectations did you have for your mate and your marriage? Were they realistic? If you expect your mate to make you happy, why is that setting up your marriage for failure? What can you do to change your focus from your mate to yourself? If God created marriage to make you holy instead of happy, how does that change how you view the challenges in your relationship? Are you allowing God to use your marriage as a tool to make you more like Jesus, or are you focusing your energy on blaming your wife for your struggles and hurts? Ask God to give you a renewed and deeper commitment to your mate, putting their needs before your own and going to God for needs they cannot meet.

# Marriage & Family – I. GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## 3. GOD USES YOUR MATE TO MAKE YOU LIKE JESUS

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Have you ever noticed how the most rewarding things in life are often the hardest things as well? For me, running half-marathons is very draining but also very rewarding. Spending a month training pastors in India each year is even harder, but the blessings are far greater. Yet the most difficult challenge I face in life, by far, is being the husband God wants me to be. That is far more stretching for me than being a parent or even a pastor. It is the hardest thing I do, but it is also the most rewarding.

God has used my wife, Nancy, to make me a more Christ-like person. I have had to learn to accept someone’s unconditional love when I didn’t deserve it. I strive to live up to standards of what she expects and needs in a husband. I am learning to forgive as soon as I am hurt instead of waiting for her to apologize and finding myself becoming passive-aggressive to her. The good in our marriage helps me become more like Jesus, but so do the problems and difficulties because they drive me to Him who alone can meet all my needs.

Abraham Lincoln is perhaps the highest rated President this country has ever had. His wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, is the least popular First Lady ever. She was a very difficult woman to live with, an embarrassment and a constant pain in the President’s side. Still, he stayed with her and did what he could to be kind and helpful to her. He faced much of the same in his presidency. He was hated and maligned by many for continuing the war with the south and losing the lives of so many soldiers in the process. But he was committed to keeping the north and south together when it would have been easier to let them split. He was willing to pay any price to make the union work. Could it have been that God, seeing what would be coming in Abraham’s life politically, allowed him to have a marriage that would prepare him for that? He learned commitment to unity despite the personal cost in his marriage, and so he was able to do the same for the country.

Could it be that God uses our mates to build into us the character traits He knows we will need as we move through life? Marriage is perhaps the biggest single event or activity in our lives as far as time, energy and expectations go. It only stands to reason that God would use that as a tool to form us into the person He wants us to be. God wants us, too, to be committed to unity no matter the cost. Every relationship will have seasons of incredible intimacy and joy but also those of painful distance and relational tension. We go through those cycles. If you look at God’s relationship with His people, the Jews, in the Old Testament you will see the same thing. There were times of great togetherness and bonding, then other times of distance and pain. When we end a marriage because of the we keep from being able to work through it and enter a time of satisfaction and pleasure. It takes time for a relationship to learn to adjust through these and transition from one to another, time to build a history together and time to dig a deep foundation of mutual understanding. Too many couples aren’t willing to invest that kind of time because they want the benefits of a lifetime of working through issues to happen immediately. It can’t happen that quickly.

Are you committed to work toward unity in your relationship no matter the personal cost? Are you able to put the needs of your mate before your own and focus on where you need to grow instead of where they need to grow? Have you discovered that God created marriage to make us holy, not just happy? Do you see your relationship with you mate as God’s tool to make you more like Jesus? Ask God to help you get your eyes off yourself and onto Him and His plan for you.

# Marriage & Family – I. GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## 4. LEARNING TO SERVE YOUR MATE

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Two brothers decided to play on sand banks by the river’s edge. Because the town depended on the river, it was regularly dredged and sand deposited in great mounds beside river. Children loved playing on the huge sand piles, but they are very dangerous. The sand dries on the top with rigid crusts that conceal cavernous internal voids formed by the escaping water in the wet sand underneath. If a child climbs on a mound of sand that has such a hidden void, the external surface easily collapses into the cavern. Sand from higher on the mound then rushes into the void, trapping the child in a sinkhole of loose sand. This is exactly what happened to the two brothers as they raced up one of the larger mounds.

When the boys did not return home at dinnertime, family and neighbors organized a search. They found the younger brother. Only his head and shoulders protruded from the mound. He was unconscious from the pressure of sand on his body. The searchers began digging frantically. When they had cleared the sand to his waist, he roused to consciousness.

“Where is your brother?” the rescuers shouted.

“I’m standing on his shoulders,” replied the child.

With the sacrifice of his own life, the older brother had lifted the younger to safety. So, too, did the One who is not ashamed to call Himself our brother. We live eternally by standing before God on the righteousness that Jesus Christ provided at the cost of his own life.

So, when we talk about becoming more like Jesus we are also talking about becoming more like Him in sacrificing ourselves for the sake of others. What better place is there to learn that than in marriage, with someone we love deeply? Even then it isn’t easy to serve each other, that is what God requires of us. “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21-6:1).

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). We live in a self-focused world, a world in which we are told we deserve a break today, we should have every need met right now, and we can expect to have it all immediately. But Jesus says His goal for us is to teach us to be servants (diakonos, someone who did menial work like waiting on tables) and even slaves (doulos, someone who had no rights of their own because they were owned by another whom they continually served). If that sounds like it is expecting too much, remember that is what Jesus did for us (Philippians 2:5-11). Being like Jesus means putting another person and their needs before our own, and what better place to work on that than in marriage! Marriage is the easiest, and hardest place to learn to serve.

In what ways does Jesus serve you? How does that compare to the way you serve your mate? Suppose Jesus treated you the way you treat your mate, would you like that? The Golden Rule says we are to treat others the way we want to be treated. Treat your mate as Jesus treats you. Be their servant, their slave. If you take care of their needs then Jesus will take care of yours. That’s a deal you can’t beat!

# Marriage & Family – I. GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## 5. GIVING LOVE TO GET LOVE ISN’T REALLY LOVING

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Each one of us is born with an innate value system of what is right and fair. We seek justice in all things. The problem is that we live in a world that is often unfair and unjust. Still, we expect those standards to be in place for us, and when they aren’t we are quick to take offense. The problem comes when we apply that reasoning to marriage. We must admit, though, that we apply our standards to our mate much more strictly than to ourselves. We are very quick to accept Jesus’ mercy and grace instead of justice in our lives, but we aren’t as quick to carry that over in showing mercy and grace to them even when they don’t deserve it.

If God was ‘fair’ with us and gave us what we deserved, each one of us would be in hell right now. Fortunately, God is full of mercy. In order for us to be like Him we must show continual mercy as well. That starts with our mates, for they can be the easiest as well as the hardest ones to show mercy to. We are motivated by love to show grace, but we can also be deeply hurt by them in unfair ways. Then it is much harder to show unconditional love and mercy.

If your primary motivation to love and serve your spouse is based on how they have treated you recently, you will be showing conditional love. We are to show unconditional love, like Jesus shows us. That’s why marriage does such an outstanding job of confronting our selfishness and self-focus. It reveals our inner motives, which are not always as pure as they should be.

Most married people do make an effort to love their mate. That is good. What isn’t so good is that many do it so that their mate will treat them better. Their ultimate reason for showing love is because they will benefit in the long run. But if you show love to get love, you don’t really love. You are just trading one thing for another. Then when you don’t get the response you were expecting you may stop showing love to your mate because “they don’t deserve it because of the way they are treating me.” That self-centered thinking is sin. It’s not how Jesus treats us, and we are to be more and more like Him!

What is your motive in how you treat your mate? Are you trading love to get love? Are you comparing how your mate treats you to how you treat them (“Love keeps no account or wrongs” 1 Corinthians 13:5)? Are you more concerned with having justice and getting what you think you deserve than in showing Christ-like mercy? Marriage can be very difficult because it exposes the inner motives and selfish attitudes of our heart. But that is exactly what God wants to happen so we can face them, repent of them and grow to become more like Jesus. Are you willing to do this? Are letting God use your mate to make you more like Him?

# Marriage & Family – I. GOD’S TOOL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

## 6. GOD IS YOUR FATHER-IN-LAW

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Ask the average man or woman who is about to get married about their future spouse and they will give you a whole list of wonderful traits and characteristics. But if you ask the average married man or woman about their mate you more than likely will get a list of their failures and shortcomings. When do we go from focusing on our mate’s strengths to focusing on their weaknesses? It seems clear that getting married has a lot to do with it! We go from thinking about what they do right to thinking about what they do wrong. We stop focusing on giving and start focusing on getting.

Why do we choose to overlook the weaknesses in order to focus on strengths before marriage? Why does that change after marriage? More than likely, it is because of our self-centered focus. Our personal needs are no longer being met by our mates as we’d like. Our expectations of them, and theirs of us, start conflicting and friction occurs. Friction brings pain, which no one likes. So, what can we do about this?

In counseling people, I often suggest that they pray and ask God to give them His love for their mate. I encourage them to be open to feeling the love for their mate that God feels for them. This will help them see their mate as a loved individual, not as an antagonist. Instead of seeing their mate as the roadblock on their way to happiness, they should start to see them as someone who is also hurting and struggling.

Think of it this way. God is your Father, and He has a father’s love for you. But He is also your mate’s Father and has a father’s love for your mate, the same as He does for you. In effect, God is both your Father and your Father-In-Law. If you have a daughter you know how a father’s heart goes out to your daughter or son, how you want to protect them and have the very best for them. God feels the same way about His children, even more so. So, when you hurt or neglect your mate you are hurting or neglecting someone very, very dear to the heart of God. By bringing pain to His child you are bringing pain to Him. Sometimes we get so self-centered we think God only cares about me, but He cares just as much about our mate. Remembering that can have a very positive affect on how we treat them.

Your mate is not the enemy, someone causing you pain. They are a beloved child of God, a son or daughter of the Father. Think of God, not just as your Father, but as your Father-In-Law – and then treat your mate appropriately. Take a few moments to quietly talk to your Father-In-Law, thanking them for his special child, your mate. Ask His forgiveness for hurts you have caused them, and Him as well for He hurts when they hurt. Pray and ask God to give you His love for them, to love them as He wants you to, as He loves you. If each mate does that then marriage will indeed be a picture of our love relationship with God as it was created to be.

# *Marriage and Family*

## **II. THE GODLY FAMILY**

### WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF FAMILIES

By **Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer**

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1. The Godly Husband (What God Expects of Husbands)  
How to be a Huggable Hubby
2. The Godly Man (What God Expects of Man)  
How to be a Marvelous Man
3. The Godly Wife (What God Expects of Wives)  
How to be a Wonderful Wife
4. The Godly Woman (What God Expects of Women)  
How to be a Bionic Christian Woman
5. The Godly Parent (What God Expects of Parents)  
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How to be a Charming Child
7. The Godly Teenager (What God Expects of Teenagers)  
How to have a Terrific Teenager
8. The Godly Family (What God Expects of Families)  
How to be a Fantastic Family
9. The Godly Home (What God Expects of Homes)  
How to have a heavenly Home



# Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

## 1. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF HUSBANDS

### (How to be a Huggable Hubby)

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C. T. Studd, one of the great English missionary pioneers of the nineteenth century, gave up fame and fortune as one of the top athletes of his day to go to the mission field. He went to England and for 17 years never saw his English homeland --or his wife! She remained in England to assist in the support of his mission organization. Eventually she came to Africa to visit various outposts of the mission's work. Her husband's station became part of the itinerary. C. T. met her boat and walked her to the front porch of his house. There they stayed for 30 minutes or so, visiting about the progress of winning the lost and then had a time of prayer. After that she returned to her boat and continued her tour.

Robertson McQuilkin did just the opposite. He recently resigned as president of Columbia Bible College and quit his writing and speaking engagements to stay home and take care of his wife, Muriel. She had Alzheimer's disease the point where she didn't recognize him as her husband but did respond better to his care of her than to anyone else's. "I don't HAVE to care for her," he says "I GET to! It's a high honor to care for so wonderful a person!"

One man totally gives up his wife to devote himself 100% to his ministry. Another man totally gives up his ministry to devote himself 100% to his wife. Who was right? Could they BOTH have been right? I'm sure you could get all kinds of advice and opinions about what to do in such a situation, but what does GOD expect of a husband in such a case?

**UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** One of the leading causes of problems in marriage is a wife not knowing what she has a right to expect from her husband. Usually, he doesn't know what she should legitimately expect, either. When too much is expected frustration and defeat result. My mother had entirely different expectations of my father than my wife does of me. What my neighbor expects of her husband is quite different than Nancy's expectations of me. Who is right?

When too little is expected self-centeredness grows. When the wrong things are expected the relationship won't grow. Knowing what GOD expects is very important to the health of a marriage. God doesn't expect too much, too little, or the wrong thing. What DOES God expect? Then wives and husbands will better know what to expect of themselves and each other.

	MAN	WOMAN
<b>NEED</b>	PROVIDE CVGUIDE	SECURITY LOVE
<b>DUTY</b>	SACRIFICIAL LOVE	SUBMIT, RESPECT

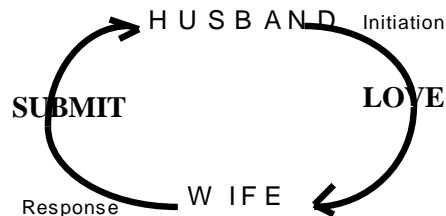
**WHAT GOD EXPECTS** What God expects of husbands is clearly stated in Ephesians 5:22-33. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (v. 25)" sums it up. A husband is to love his wife with unconditional agape love, the same as Hosea had for Gomer, the same as Jesus has for us. Women need to feel loved and secure, so men are to provide this by showing sacrificial, unconditional love. Conditional love ("if...", or "because...") won't

do. Also, the husband is to initiate this love. He is to take the first step, not waiting for the wife to do her part but act first, no matter how she responds. When she feels this security then she will respond with trust and submission. Just how is this done? There are six ways. Together they spell "SECURE," for that is the key word for husbands. What does God expect of husbands? To make their wives feel SECURE.

- S**acrificial Lover
- E**fficient Provider
- C**onsistent Leader
- U**nselfish Protector
- R**ealistic Teacher
- E**arnest Pastor

**SACRIFICIAL LOVER** Husbands are to love their wives just like Christ loves us (Ephesians 5:25). That is a sacrificial love, putting her first in all things. That means always treating her like you did before marriage! Keep courting and winning her. That doesn't come naturally, for we are naturally self-centered people, thinking about ourselves and our needs first. God says we need to love our wives that way (Ephesians 5:28, 33). Men are usually very production-oriented. Accomplish one task and then leave it and move on to the next challenge. We

win a woman's complete love and trust, then move on to something else (career, home, etc.). That isn't right!



The most common reason men give for leaving their wives is that "she isn't meeting my needs." They have it all wrong. That isn't the issue. The focus is to be on her needs, not our needs. Following our example, Jesus, we are to be servants (Matthew 20:26-28). We are to wash their feet (John 13) instead of expecting them to wash ours.

Love means GIVING, not GETTING. Again, God is our example. "God so loved the world that He GAVE..." (John 3:16). We give things to our mates, but what they really want is ourselves. Because our male egos are sensitive and often insecure, men often avoid close intimacy. We give things, even time, but not always our inner selves. Women can tell the difference.

At least once every day a man must reach out to his wife in love. By sincere words and a gentle touch, he must declare his love and need of her. This is life breath to women. A secure wife will do anything for her husband. An insecure one will feel she has to take care of her own needs because her husband isn't doing that. That's why Sarah changed from a submissive, obedient wife to a withdrawn, nagging, looking-out-for-herself wife after Abraham but his own safety before hers and told her to say she was his sister (to protect his life when she was taken into the king's harem) (Genesis 12:11-19). Conversely, Mary was willing to pack up and leave her home in the middle of the night on Joseph's say-so because she knew he was putting her first. He proved it by choosing to take the blame and loss himself to protect her when she turned up pregnant before marriage (Matthew 1:19).

Men, who are you more like: Abraham or Joseph? That will explain why your wife is more like Sarah than Mary. Your wife is a mirror of how you treat her. She returns what you give her. Is she more Christ-like because of you, or in spite of you?

**EFFICIENT PROVIDER** If a husband doesn't provide for his family, God says he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (I Tim. 5:8). This doesn't just refer to financial provision. It is my experience that money and possessions is more important to men than women. A man's self-worth gets too wrapped up in his career and financial provision. Women would be happier with more husband and less income. Men often have wrong expectations of themselves here.

More than financial provision, though, this refers to emotional provision. It is up to a husband to meet his wife's emotional needs. If he doesn't she find a substitute somewhere: children, career, home, clothes/jewelry, helping others, fantasy escapes (soap operas or romance novels,), gossip, etc. Lot's wife couldn't leave Sodom because her needs were met there, not by her husband Lot. If he had met her needs she would have been able to leave Sodom, for she was going with him. Women need to regularly and sincerely be complimented and encouraged, in private and public. Stand up for her when others question or criticize her, even (especially!) her family and yours.

In the Old Testament, God made provision for a woman's needs to be met by her husband. If he had more than one wife and didn't meet the needs of one of them she was free to leave (Exodus



21:7-11)! Suppose that would be true today? Would your wife leave? If not, what would keep her from leaving (why does she stay with you)?

**CONSISTENT LEADER** The Bible makes it clear that the husband is to be the leader (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3-5; Ephesians 5:23). This is important. One of the greatest causes of insecurity among wives today is a husband who doesn't lead. Few husbands have had a good example of a godly male leading his family. Usually, it is the woman who leads (often by default) and so we assume our wives will do the same. That isn't God's way, though.

Headship doesn't mean dictatorship. It doesn't mean a man is a superior human being. It is just God's way of leading. Since Eve was duped by Satan (1 Timothy 2:12-14), man is responsible for family decisions. That doesn't mean a man does everything, he just oversees it all, giving oversight. God uses the word "manage" to describe a husband's role (1 Tim. 3:4-5). A manager has the big picture and keeps things moving in the right direction, like a pastor or principal or president. Responsibility can be delegated, but the husband must know "the buck stops here."

I like to think of this role as similar to the scout on a wagon train heading west. He is the 'eyes' of the wagon train, knowing where they are, where they are going, and scouting out the best way to get there. He keeps in mind their resources and the obstacles ahead and makes decisions based on what is best for them reaching their ultimate destination. That is the way a husband must be with his family. Where is your family going? What are your goals for the individuals as well as the family as a whole? How will it reach those goals? What needs to happen today to move in that direction? When the scout isn't doing his job everyone is in danger. Now a wife can have wonderful vision, but not distance-vision like a man. She is uniquely equipped to see things close up and can tell things about people and situations that a man won't notice ("woman's intuition"). However, she doesn't have the over-all picture a man must have. Together there is perfect balance and tremendous strength. Children, by the way, have none of these. They just play around enjoying the trip. Thus, the man has to be the leader. How will you educate your children? What church will you go to? How involved will you get? What needs to be done to move our marriage ahead? Are we saving enough money for college and retirement? Do we have a balance of work and fun in our family? These are the things a scout must know.

Moses didn't lead in his family, and when God told him to take over or die it was too late. His wife took their sons and left (Exodus 4:18-26). Achan led his family, but into disaster (Joshua 7). So did Ananias (Acts 5). They put their greed before what was good for the family.

It doesn't matter if your family willingly follows or makes it hard for you to lead, a man is held responsible to God to lead. God gives the directions to the man and he must pass them on. Giving in to keep the peace and prevent strife is like letting a wagon train wander in any direction so the travel is easier, no matter if they are going in the right or wrong direction!

**UNSELFISH PROTECTOR** Matthew Henry said, "Eve was not taken out of Adam's head to top him, neither out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him." God Himself says:

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (1 Peter 3:7)

When God says women are 'weaker' he is mainly referring to them emotionally. Let me explain. Men are like stoneware, women like fine China. Men are rough, durable, rugged emotionally. Women are more delicate, sensitive, fine-tuned. They have a very precisely adjusted sensory system. When men treat women like they treat other men feelings are hurt. Men and women both need to understand these differences.

Boaz is a good example of a man protecting a woman (Ruth). He made sure she was safe among his workers, that her needs for food and water were provided, and that there was grain left for her to harvest. She felt secure and protected, which is what women need. He didn't do it as a superior to inferior, but in a way of respect and honor. He was impressed with her motive: taking care of Naomi. No wonder she responded with love and submission to him! Joseph protected Mary. Abraham didn't protect Sarah.

Protect your wife. Protect her from overworking herself. Help with what **MUST** be done, and let the rest go! Take the burden of child discipline off of her shoulders. Give her time off when she can do whatever she wants and you take over. Take her out on a day each week. Have a yearly vacation together, alone! Develop a close relationship with each child. Your family should be glad to see you come in the door at the end of the day, not fearful or dreading it.

**REALISTIC TEACHER** God expects men to teach their families (Genesis 18:19; Proverbs 4:1). Actually, this is part of leading. Since it is often overlooked let's consider it separately. Men are to teach, communicate knowledge and skills, to their wives and children. A recent national survey showed that only 10% of fathers of home-schooled children are actively involved in their children's education. Husbands are often dynamic at work, but not connected with their wife or children. Until recent time it was always the father's obligation to train children: in Bible times, Greece, Rome, even colonial America. Time often makes that impossible today. Still, husbands can do more than they do. This might seem like more of a father-function than husband function, but it really isn't. If the man doesn't do it, then it falls back on the wife to do this important job. A man must protect his wife from this by taking the responsibility on himself. She can do much of the work, but he must oversee it and do all he can.

I'm not referring mainly to school-type teaching, but that which comes up in everyday life. A husband must be alert to ways to apply the Bible to daily situations, to teach moral and spiritual values in every-day life situations (Deuteronomy. 6:7-9). Be alert to lessons you can teach as you clean, shop, eat, etc. The best Bible teaching takes place in real-life situations. Be alert for them!

**EARNEST PASTOR** Have you ever looked closely at a piece of rope? It looks like two strands braided together, but really it is three strands. It is impossible to weave two and have them stay together, but with three it is simple. That's how it is in our family life, too. Unless God is present in a relationship, it just won't stick together right (Psalm 127:1). Men, your marriage is the second most important relationship in your life! If you don't have a top-notch relationship with Jesus, you won't be able to be the husband God expects you to be. You've often heard that the nation and church go as the family goes. Well, the man is the key to the family. Who do you think Satan will attack if he wants to undermine the church and nation?

Even though Joseph wanted to marry Mary even though she was pregnant by someone else, he knew God forbade that and was willing to put God before Mary. That made Mary feel very secure in her relationship with Joseph. All women need to know that their man is listening to God. When a woman trusts a man with her welfare and future, she needs to be sure he is getting his instructions from God! That means a man must have meaningful private devotions each day, as well as leading his family in a time of Bible reading and prayer daily. The husband is the shepherd of the family, as the pastor is of the church. Make sure your sheep are protected from those who would harm them spiritually. Make sure they are fed and led as God wills.

Remember, too, that if you aren't the husband God wants you to be, if you don't treat your wife as God wants you to treat her, your relationship with God will be undermined (I Pt. 3:7).

What does God expect of husbands today? He expects them to make sure their wives feel secure in their love. Remember, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord" (Proverbs 18:22). Richard Halverson, Chaplain of the U S Senate, says: "It is my deep, settled conviction that 100% of the responsibility for the sustenance of the marriage relationship belongs to the husband. The scriptures tell us that as husbands we need to model ourselves after Jesus Christ, who gave Himself up in every way in order to present His bride to Himself without blemish or stain or spot or wrinkle." God expects you to make sure your wife feels secure in your love.

Grade yourself on a scale of 1 to 10. How do you rate as a sacrificial lover? efficient provider? consistent leader? unselfish protector? realistic teacher? earnest pastor? Where is most improvement needed? What can you do, starting TODAY, to be what God and your wife expect you to be? It won't be easy, but it'll be worth it!

Getting married is easy. Staying married is difficult. Staying happily married for a lifetime would be considered among the fine arts.

## Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

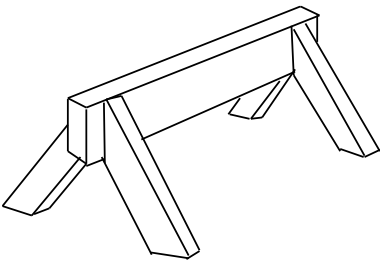
# 2. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF MEN

## (How to be a Marvelous Man)

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Men are in trouble today! Their suicide rate is four times as high as for women, life expectancy 10% shorter, comprise 80% of the homeless and 90% of all arrests for alcohol & drug abuse. By attacking men, Satan undermines the family and with it the church and our nation.

To being with, ask yourself: "What is a man?" How would you define a Christian man? Since that is our target, it is important we know what we are shooting at. If you don't really wrestle with that question you won't get very far. Personally, I like Mark Twain's definition: "A male is someone who starts pretending he is a man when he turns 12 and keeps doing it the rest of his life." That's how I usually feel, but recognizing that helps. Also knowing that I'm not alone in feeling that way helps, too. Often men feel like they are the only ones struggling, that everyone else has it all together and can somehow sense they struggle. Satan really uses things like these to isolate and defeat men today. Many men are trying to be godly Christian men but there are usually obstacles in the way. I think there are seven roadblocks a man needs to overcome to be a man of God today.



### **1. FATHER'S INFLUENCE**

Describe your father in 3 words. Were these what you needed when growing up? Would your children describe you in these same terms? What impact has your father had on you as a man? as a father? on your image of your heavenly Father?

Boys need a good, strong, accepting father image. Without it they have no one to show them what a man is to be like, and they find substitutes to 'prove' themselves. They need a father to affirm them and tell them when they become a man. If not, a boy will find what the world uses as standards of manhood and try to prove himself by these. Growing up in a woman's world (school, home, baby-sitters, even church) doesn't help boys really learn what a man is.

### **2. MOTHER'S INFLUENCE**

Describe your mother in three words? In what way is your wife like your mother? In what ways does she play a similar role in your life to that of your mother?

When a father doesn't fill the leadership role in a boy's life, he will turn to his mother to have that need met. Instead of meeting it, though, a mother can make it worse if her son becomes dependent on her. Then he will be dependent on women to accept him and affirm him for his whole life. His wife will replace his mother and, instead of leading her, he will have a need to please her and have her approval.

### **3. CAREER INFLUENCE**

Define success? Why do men identify themselves and others by what they do? Why are men so devastated when laid off and often fade when they retire? From little on up boys are told that being busy is important. They are told to work hard and are accepted for what they produce. This leads to workaholicism in men. Being busy can make us feel good about ourselves. Crossing things off a list can substitute for intimacy and growing relationships. Keeping busy keeps us from thinking about personal

problems, troubling emotions, and family needs. Having work fill needs that only family and God can fill can be devastating!

#### **4. UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

What expectations did your grandmother have of your grandfather? What about your mother for your father? Probably they expected their mates to bring home a paycheck and remain faithful to their wife. Is that all wives expect of men today? It certainly is not! Much more is expected. That's good -- because men are to be and do more. But it's also bad -- because no one has taught men just what they are to be/do or how to be/do it! While courting, men convince women they can and will meet all their needs but after marriage that obviously isn't so. Most wives have enormous expectations of their husbands, and men often have great expectations of themselves. If these are more than or different than God expects, though, there will be frustration and hurt. (see my article "What God Expects of husbands" for more on this.)

#### **5. HANDLING EMOTIONS**

How did your father handle his emotions? How has that influenced how you handle yours? Most men have a hard time handling emotions. From little on the message was to stuff them and be tuff. Now men are allowed, actually expected, to show emotions. The rules have changed and it is OK. That still doesn't help men know how to show emotion. There are very few good male role models, and showing emotion as women does isn't the solution, either. Love is sometimes hard to show correctly, but negative emotions like anger can be even harder. Little boys grow up afraid to show their anger (it just gets their mothers angry at them). In addition, these boys usually are afraid of their mother's anger and, as a result, grow up to have a built-in fear of woman anger. They'd do almost anything to keep peace and keep from having their wife get angry at them, for it brings back too many bad memories of the rejection they felt when their mother got angry at them. Yes, handling emotions can be a large roadblock.

#### **6. SEXUAL DISTRACTIONS**

What is the world's stereotype view of male sexuality? How much has that influenced how you view yourself and sex? Sexual problems are perhaps the most difficult for men to talk about, even among Christian men. Each seem to feel he alone struggles with thoughts and feelings that bring guilt. Deliverance seems impossible. Marriage difficulties can compound the problem. If not handled right, wrong sexual ideas and thoughts can block a man's spirituality.

#### **7. EXPRESSING SPIRITUALITY**

Who are more spiritual: men or women? Often we think women are more spiritual than men because they are more emotional, better at relationships and intimacy, more comfortable in church, and pray longer than men. That doesn't make them more spiritual, though -- unless you equate those feminine traits with spirituality! Jesus was certainly spiritual, yet he was in no way 'female'. Men are just as spiritual as women; they just express it in a different way. Men, don't feel guilty about how you pray or show your spirituality, Jesus accepts you as you are!

What's the solution to these roadblocks? Find which one God wants you to work on first (although they are all inter-related) and rely on the power of His Spirit to help you change. Turn to Him as your Heavenly Father to make up for what is missing as He makes you more like Jesus. It's a gradual process. If I can help in any way please let me know!

## Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

### 3. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF WIVES

#### (How to be a Wonderful Wife)

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An Andy Capp cartoon I have shows Andy coming home all dejected. “I didn’t get the job. They said I was too old, ME!” His loyal wife says, “Fools! Don’t brood on it, pet. . . . would you take my afternoon nap for me?” Andy answers, “Sure, kid, glad to.” After he leaves his wife says to the readers, “A man needs to feel needed.” She’s right, you know! God built into a man the desire to provide and care for his wife and family. He needs to know she needs him. Just like a wife needs to feel secure and loved by her husband, so a husband needs to know he is needed by his family.

**FEELING NEEDED** When a man doesn’t feel needed, something goes out of his spirit. That’s why men often turn to their work for satisfaction (and therefore overwork) but then when they retire or are laid off they decline in many ways. It is a wife’s duty to make her husband know he is needed. Just as a wife needs to hear she is loved, so a husband needs to hear he is needed. This is communicated in many ways. Just how is a wife to show her husband he is needed?

**NO UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** “Only Jesus can be Jesus,” says Ruth Graham, referring to the fact that NO husband is perfect, not even Billy Graham. Women tend to be idealistic, expecting a knight in shining armor to come into their life and make everything perfect. Men try to convince their mates during courtship that they can and will meet their every need. Then reality sets in and this doesn’t happen. It never will and never can. God is a jealous God and won’t let anyone, even a husband, replace His place in a woman’s life. God makes sure each husband falls short of perfection (with plenty of help from us men!) so that a woman will continue to trust in Him first.

<p><b>No Unrealistic Expectations</b></p> <p><b>Empty Spaces Filled</b></p> <p><b>Entire Self Submitted</b></p> <p><b>Desire Godly Life</b></p> <p><b>Encourage &amp; Respect Him</b></p> <p><b>Dwell on Internals, not Externals</b></p>
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Wives must understand this so they don’t withhold love from their less-than-perfect husband. Just as they need their husbands to love them unconditionally and not compare them to other women, so husbands need their wives to love them unconditionally, too. This agape love can only come from God (Galatians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 13). Never withhold love, affection, sex or compliments from your husband, no matter how much he seems to disappoint your expectations. We are to be servants to each other, not masters expecting the other to serve us.

Tell him often, “I need you.” That goes right to the depth of a man’s soul. He’ll do anything for a wife who needs him, much more than for a critical nag who acts like a mother to him!

Women must understand that men don’t understand women. If not, when a man reacts a certain way she will misinterpret it. She will think, “If I did/said that it would mean \_\_\_\_\_, therefore he must mean the same thing.” Hurt feelings and problems arise, and often the man doesn’t know why. This happens to Nancy and I. Fridays are our day off. I’ll make a list of things to accomplish that day and charge into it, efficiently trying to do as much as I can as quickly as I can. Sometimes, though, I’ll need to run to the hardware store to get something. Nancy will get

wind of this and, since this is our ‘day off,’ she’ll want to spend time with me and come along. Next thing I know we’re at the shopping center or a clothing store, and then it’s a furniture store or gift shop. We browse and wander. Nancy makes small talk, acting like she’s having a good time, holding my hand and drawing the whole thing out. Well, I have my little ways of communicating impatience, after

all I do have my list to conquer ASAP. Nancy snaps out of her mood and we rush home and get back to work. Later that evening, when I'm done with my list and feeling victorious about my accomplishments, I'll want to get close and cuddle up to Nancy. However, she's sort of stiff, not much eye contact, friendly but not warm, even unresponsive to my advances. Why? What happened? Men may not know, but women certainly understand. You see, men are compartmentalized and focus on one thing at a time. What happens at the store has no connection to what happens in the bedroom. Women, however, are not that way. They are connected, and what happens in the morning has everything to do with what happens at night!

Men focus on tasks, women on relationships. In focusing on my list, I was rejecting Nancy's need for our relationship to grow, for us to 'connect.' For women, relationships are more important than anything else. Watch little girls playing together sometime. If one gets hurt or upset all activity will stop and they'll gather around the injured girl. Her feelings come before the activity. They may never get back to the game. If it were little boys, however, and one fell or got his feelings hurt -- what would happen? They'd jump over him or run around him and keep going with their competition. The task comes before feelings and relationships.

This is why men often have a hard time getting gifts for women. They get practical, task-oriented gifts like they'd like: membership at the local gym, mud flaps for the car, catchers mit, some kind of tool. Men just don't naturally understand women. No one taught us, and we didn't see it patterned correctly in our fathers. Thus, we make stupid male mistakes. I think this is why "Home Improvements" is so successful on TV -- we laugh at ourselves for we see ourselves in the show.

MEN	WOMEN
Mind	Emotions
Rational comes first	Feeling comes first
Production-oriented	Relationship-oriented
shop to get what needed quickly & efficiently	shop to enjoy the experience, browse
long-range sight, distance planning, overall	near-sighted, present details, today's problems (

Talking is another area men often don't understand. To most men, it just seems women talk and talk about anything and everything. A typical male arrives home at the end of the day wanting to download, not interact with anyone, just relax and recharge. Unfortunately (or so it seems to him) he is met by a wife who just goes on and on about everything. If she'd just get to the bottom line (like men do) and relate the problem in a summarized form he could give her the solution and that would be the end of it. But it doesn't work that way. She doesn't want answers or solutions, she wants to relate, to connect. To a woman chit-chat is lifeblood to a relationship, the start of intimacy, the way she knows she is loved. For a man to stop what he is doing and give total focus and eye contact while she goes on and on shows a women in a very real way that she is loved and important to him. Anything less communicates that her needs aren't as important as his. Women need to understand that men don't understand, or they will take his ignorance for rejection. Wives, try to give your man a little time before talking. Try to understand his needs, too. Don't have unrealistic expectations. He won't respond with as much emotion and enthusiasm about what excites you as your female friends will. Don't assume your husband understands how you think and feel inside. Educate him! Don't expect too much from him, or you'll never be able to make him feel needed. Take unmet needs to God, He alone can meet them.

**EMPTY SPACES FILLED** Another way to show your husband you need him is to remember your role is to "fill his empty spaces" (Genesis 2:18, literal Hebrew translation). Adam had everything in paradise without sin, yet something was missing - a helper for him. God didn't create another man, or children, or a hobby, or a job to meet this need in man, but a woman.

Men have needs (empty spaces) that only a woman, THEIR woman, can meet. Make sure your first priority is meeting his needs. The acrostic J-O-Y (Jesus, Others, Yourself) is your goal. For too many women, though, it's C-H-E-W (Children, Home school, Everything else, Whatever is left for husband). No man can make it on a steady diet of emotional leftovers! Again, if your husband isn't meeting your needs like you'd like, go to Jesus with that. Don't substitute children, home, career, etc. Don't use that as an excuse to stop meeting his needs!

**ENTIRE SELF SUBMITTED** A "Hagar the Horrible" cartoon of several years ago shows Hagar talking to his wife and daughter. "What has happened to men?!!!" he asks. "This used to be a MAN'S WORLD! We ruled the whole place! We didn't have to answer to anyone! No one told us when to eat ... when to drink ... when to take a bath!! We were MEN! And men were SUPREME!" "Is that True, Mama?" the daughter asks. Mother replies, "Yes, Dear ... but that was before EVE."

A "Sally Forth" cartoon shows them talking while working around the house. He starts: "You know Dave Roper from my office? He and Laura invited us over on Saturday." "What'd you say?" she responds. "I said I thought we could come, but I'd have to check with the boss," he replies. She says, "You called me 'the boss' to one of your co-workers?" "You're not the boss?" he asks. "I didn't say that. I just think we should keep our pet names for each other private."

What is there about this male leadership thing that makes it all so hard to understand? We laugh at these cartoons because they remind us of ourselves. Why is it so hard when God clearly says to the woman: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). Man was created first and woman created to meet his needs (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35). Since Satan tricked Eve so easily, man is to use his rational abilities to be the leader (1 Tim 2:13-14).

Paul says women are to SUBMIT to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21-2). While this word is often misunderstood today, its meaning is simple. It comes from a Greek word root meaning "respond." "Wives, RESPOND to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" is what Paul says. This is a mental attitude decision of trust and dependency, in your husband but even more in your God (Who is in sovereign control over your husband).

What makes submission such a hard thing for women is that they usually have been hurt by men they have needed and trusted in the past: father, boyfriend or husband. They haven't seen a loving, trusting response of a woman for her husband in their home or among their friends. They know their husband's weaknesses and imperfections; All this makes it harder to trust.

Mary is a good example of trusting and submitting to a husband. When he awoke her in the middle of the night, after a full house of company all day (the wise men) and told her they had to move out before sunrise she followed. What if your husband did that to you? Unfortunately, there are more bad examples than good in the Bible: Zipporah (Ex. 4:18-26), Jezebel (1 Ki. 21) and Gomer (Hosea 1-3). The disaster that came into their lives is warning enough.

Submitting doesn't mean a wife can't express her feelings. She must do so: one time (any more is nagging and mothering) and stated calmly and in love. A wife doesn't have to put up with emotional or physical abuse (1 Corinthians 7:15b). Neither does a woman have to indulge in sin if her husband demands it (Acts 5:29). Vashti disobeyed her husband when he requested her to sin (Esther 1), and so did Abigail (1 Sam 25). Sarah (Genesis 12:13) and Sapphira (Acts 5) went along with their husbands and suffered the same consequences their husbands did -- God didn't excuse them for obeying their husbands, they were accountable. You see, a husband's authority is delegated from God and must be used to represent God. The same is true of parents over children and government over Christians. A sergeant cannot command his privates to rebel against the government, that is out of his realm. He has delegated authority to represent the government and when he stops doing that his authority stops, too. The same is true of husbands.



**DESIRE GODLY LIFE** These things we've been talking about are hard to do. No, they are impossible to do! Submitting, not expecting too much, putting his needs before your own, these aren't something that can be just done in our own strength. It is only as you trust God, grow daily in Him, and take your unmet needs to Him that you'll have the strength to do all God requires of you. It is purposefully impossible so you will need His help. God doesn't give us things we can do on our own, or we would do them on our own! Ask God to change and mature you, not just your husband. Take the plank out of your own eye before you work on the speck in his eye (Matthew 7:5). Don't use your children, friends, outside involvements or anything to substitute for needs that aren't met -- take them to God! No husband ever has or ever will meet all his wife's needs, so don't expect that. If he met all your needs you wouldn't need God, and God is a jealous God who wants to be first in your life, even before your husband.

**ENCOURAGE & RESPECT HIM** Down inside of every man is a little boy, full of dreams and fears. Maybe he shows that part to you, maybe he doesn't (it depends on how safe he feels sharing that part of himself with you). When boys become men, they stay little boys and put on a 'manly' facade. Really men are little boys with the same needs and joys, the same dreams and fears they had when young. Get to know this part of your husband. Understand he needs approval and affirmation (just as you do). He needs encouragement and support -- that's why he married you. Men need daily encouragement and compliments from their wives. If a wife doesn't give it, some flirt at the office will!

Men have two mirrors which they look into to see how they are doing as men; one is their work and other is their family. If they get the message they are a failure at home, they will turn all the more to their work to find satisfaction and affirmation. If your husband is putting time and energy into his family instead of work, then you need to make all the surer he feels it is worthwhile. When he breaks the work mirror and only has the family mirror, that becomes vitally important. He needs YOU to tell him he's doing a good job and you need him. Women often don't realize what a great impact their words have on their husbands (Proverbs 18:21). Listen to yourself speak through his ears, as he hears you -- you might be surprised at what you hear!

Be his best friend. Encourage him. Never mother him (read I Kings 21 for an interesting example of this). You are his friend, his team-mate, his lover, but never under any conditions his mother. If you feel you are in that role sometimes quietly stop filling that role!

One more thing, don't use sex to carry the load of your emotional relationship. Don't use sex to get his attention or affection. It works at first, but cheapens things and doesn't truly satisfy. If you think this is happening talk to him about it. I guarantee you he has no clue! Fall back to your courting days and work on your friendship. Be interested in what he is interested in. Let him talk and ask questions to draw him out. Be his best friend again, the rest will follow!

**DWELL ON INTERNALS, NOT EXTERNALS** The world today focuses on externals: youth, appearance, and body build. God clearly says godly women can look nice, but their main focus needs to be on inner beauty, not outer (I Peter 3:1-6, Titus 2:3-5). Unfortunately, men are shallow enough to be influenced by a woman's appearance at first, but give them credit. Men do know there is more to a woman than that. Don't be so bothered by the changes in your body and appearance that it keeps you from enjoying yourself or allowing your husband to love you. Spend some time being neat and attractive, but spend more time developing gentleness, self-control, and godliness (I Pt 3:1-6; Titus 2:3-5). A young, well-built, beautiful woman who complains, nags, criticizes and picks at things is unattractive to anyone (Proverbs 11:22). In a cartoon I have a friend asks Hagar, "What can I do that will be remembered and talked about forever?" Hagar replies, "Forget your wife's birthday!" Wives, would your husband laugh at that? Why?

Women, your husband needs to feel NEEDED by you. If you need him, let him know it. He needs to hear it as often and in as many ways as you need to hear that he loves you. A man will do anything for a wife who needs him! What can you do better TODAY to let him know you need him? Don't put it off -- he needs and deserves to hear from you! Look over the list ways to show him he is N-E-E-D-E-D and pray about the one God would have you start on right now. Pray about it and make sure you start the next time you see him. With God all things are possible!

## Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

### 4. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF WOMEN

#### (How to be a Bionic Christian Woman)

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A “Cathy” cartoon by Cathy Guisewite from several years ago shows Cathy watching TV, listening as the announcer says: “Welcome to ‘The Women’s Hour.’ Hello. We’re talking to Margie Miller, married, mother of two, founder and president of a small manufacturing empire, and author of two best-selling novels and three plays. Margie, at age 29, and with all this going on, how in the world do you have time to be on our show today?” “Oh, it’s nothing, Bob.” Margie says. “The little ones are at their Greek literature workshop, and the opera I have a small part in doesn’t begin until 7:00.” “Well, you must have a lot of help at home.” “Actually, I find a well-organized house runs itself. Of course, it has been a bit cluttered because of the addition I’m building this week.” Cathy’s eyes grow larger and the stress is evident on her face as the announcer continues, “My, my ... you don’t do anything the traditional way, do you?” “No, not unless you count the 250 sweater sets I knit each year for needy causes.” “Marge, thank you so much for being with us today.” Then, as Cathy slides to the floor in tears, the announcer concludes, “It’s women like you who are helping women all over the world feel better about themselves.”

As is obvious from the expression on Cathy’s face, she ISN’T feeling better about herself. Women like that just make her feel like a failure by comparison. That is often what the description of the “wife of noble character” in Proverbs 31 does to Christian women today! The purpose of it, though, isn’t to set a too-high standard so women feel like failures. That only happens when it isn’t really understood correctly. It is to set a good role model for godly women, an attainable set of qualities that is worth aiming for. That is how the Jews have always used in. In fact, they memorized it. To make memorization easier it was written in 22 couplets, each starting with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet (A, B, C, D, etc.). It is traditional for men to recite this to their wives each Sabbath evening. What does it really mean? Let’s look at it closely.

**HER WORTH** (31:10-27) This woman is described as **valuable**, rare, scarce (v. 10; Proverbs 12:4; 18:22). But just what does it mean to be of “noble character?” That’s what the rest of the chapter describes. For one thing, she is **faithful** (v. 11). Her husband has full confidence in her and she responds to that trust by acting worthy of it. He allows her freedom and she responds by using it wisely. She doesn’t take advantage of his goodness or misuse her freedom.

While her husband isn’t described, it doesn’t take much reading between the lines to learn about him, also. He obviously makes his wife feel loved and secure enough to want to please him. He shows his trust in her by not criticizing or pointing out imperfections. He meets her needs which results in her being able to meet his! A man can’t expect his wife to be a Proverbs 31 woman unless he is first a Proverbs 31 man!

When a woman is shown love and made to feel secure, she responds by **supporting** (v. 12) her husband. She “fills up his empty spaces” (Genesis 2:18-20), meeting his need to feel needed. You see, a perfect wife doesn’t expect to have a perfect husband! It is ideal when the man initiates and the woman can respond, but if he isn’t perfect or meeting all her needs she still is to treat him as if he were! By treating her husband as if he had already changed there is much

better opportunity for him to really make the changes. The surest way to keep him from changing is to try to change him! Treat him as if he has already changed. Go to God with your unmet needs. Let Him meet them (not friends, children, career, TV, books, etc.).

Another trait of a godly wife is that she is **useful** (v. 13). She is ambitious and works with a good attitude, not continually wasting time. The work she does is **efficient** (v. 14). She is a smart shopper, seeking the most effective use of her buying power. She's no impulsive shopper, but neither does she spend 3 hours driving around trying to save \$1.

**Responsive** (v. 15) is another word to describe her, for she responds to the needs of her family by getting up early and staying ahead of things. She is motivated by love so her work isn't drudgery. She is a very **practical** (v. 16; Proverbs. 11:22) carefully investing money so it earns a profit for them. Again, her husband trusts her and gives her freedom to make these decisions. On top of it all she is **healthy** (v. 17). She knows proper diet, rest and exercise makes her more effective mentally, emotionally and physically. Thus, she is a **cheerful** (v. 18; Proverbs. 21:9; 25:24; 21:19; 19:13; 27:15) person. That her light doesn't go out at night doesn't mean she stays up all night, for she couldn't do that and get up early, too! It means there is joy ("light") in her presence, not gloom ("darkness").

This woman is also **industrious** (v. 19) and doesn't mind working with her hands. She is no workaholic, but doesn't see herself as too important to pitch right in and work with the others. With all these traits she is financially prosperous, but this doesn't make her greedy for she is **generous** (v. 20) with those truly in need. She gives of her time, talent, money, sympathy, care and material possessions. Since she sees it as all coming from God, she doesn't feel she has to hang on to it. She knows God will provide for her family, and He does.

This woman plans ahead for predictable occurrences so her family is ready for them. This shows she is **organized** (v. 21), but all this doesn't go to her head. She is still **modest** (v. 22), both in dress and attitude. Her dress is tasteful but not brash. She has a good, balanced view of herself as a woman and also of her sexuality. She has self-confidence, and is secure enough to **submit** (v. 23) to him. He is a top official in their city and she does all she can to support & enhance his position. She works behind the scenes to take burden off him so he can do his job. She's not a woman's libber but is truly a liberated woman!

Again, her **skill** (v. 24) is mentioned, this time in sewing garments and selling them. This is probably something she supervises instead of doing herself. She has a good business head and produces excellent work. She is naturally **dependable** (v. 25), a person of strength and dignity. She has no fear of the future (v. 25b) because she knows God always provides. Thus, we see she is both **kind & wise** (v. 26). Her speech is characterized by positive compliments. She builds up her listeners and never gossips or criticizes. Finally, she is **ambitious** (v. 27), constantly alert to the needs of her family. She continually looks for ways to be of service to them.

**HER PRAISE** (31:18-31) Her **children** praise her for the kind of person she is (v. 28a). Note that she has grown children! Thus, this is an older, experienced woman without all the demands and needs of child care. She could never do all she does if that were the case! These children are obviously older and probably helping her with her activities. Note, too, that she has servants (v. 15) to do much of the mundane labor for her!

Her **husband** also highly compliments her (v. 28b-31), especially for her inner beauty. Notice that nothing is said about her outer appearance, size, weight, hair color, etc. **NOTHING** about her physical appearance is given, because that doesn't matter. That isn't what is important in being a good wife and mother!

One other Person compliments her - **God** (v. 31:30b). She "fears the Lord"-- she has respect for God and wants to please Him. She goes to Him with her unmet needs, knowing God has promised to meet them (Ex 22:22-23; Psalms 68:5). How much better it is to have His praise than anyone else's! If a woman makes that her goal in life, everything else will fall into line.

## Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

### 5. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF PARENTS

#### (How to be a Perfect Parent)

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One quiet afternoon a father took his young son out in the fields for a walk. Tiring a bit, he decided to lie down under a beautiful shade tree, for the day was hot. The little child ran about gathering wild flowers and bits of fern. Coming to his father he said: "Pretty! Pretty!" At last, the father dozed off. While he was sleeping the youngster wandered away. When he awoke his first thought was: "Where is my child?" He looked all around, but could not see him. He shouted at the top of his voice, but all he heard in return was the mocking echo of his own voice. Running to a little hill, he looked around but couldn't see the boy anywhere. Traveling a bit further he suddenly noticed a cliff. Advancing to the edge, he looked down and there upon the rocks and briars below was the mangled form of his dear little son. He rushed to the spot in tears, took up the lifeless form, and hugged it to himself. For the rest of his life, he accused himself of being the murderer of his own son.

Can you imagine living with guilt like that? That parent's neglect affected the child's whole life! There are other ways of neglecting children, though, ways with even worse consequences. Spiritual and emotional neglect can have eternal consequences. There are other ways of allowing our children to go their own way than falling asleep!

Just having a child doesn't make one a parent any more than owning a piano makes one a musician. There are certain basic needs a child has that must be met. Children need to feel LOVED. Did you feel the love you needed when growing up? I didn't ask if your parents loved you, I asked if you felt their love to the extent you needed it? What about your children? Do they feel the love they need -- continual, unconditional love? Love is the main thing we need and get from our heavenly Father. Love covers a multitude of sins (I Peter 4:8). How are to make sure our children feel loved?

<p><b>L</b>ove them Unconditionally</p> <p><b>O</b>versee them Instructionally</p> <p><b>V</b>alidate them Continually</p> <p><b>E</b>mancipate them Gradually</p> <p><b>D</b>iscipline them Consistently</p>
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**LOVE THEM UNCONDITIONALLY** Jesus sets the pattern by loving His children unconditionally, with agape love. This is love in spite of, not love because of, if love. Did your parents withhold love or acceptance when they disapproved of something you said or did (or didn't do)? How did it make you feel? Rejection is never a good form of correction. It brings the opposite results.

Joseph, step-father of Jesus, was an example of a man who loved his children unconditionally. He loved Mary the same way, and she responded by trusting and following him. Joseph spent 25 or so years in the carpentry shop with Jesus and 30+ years in the same home with Him. They spent every minute of every day together. What an impact he had on Jesus! By looking at the lives of some of Joseph's other sons, James and Jude, we can see what a loving, accepting man he was. That must be why God picked him to raise His Son.

David, on the other hand, didn't know how to make his children feel loved and secure. Maybe that was because his own father and brothers rejected and looked down on him. This culminated with Absalom doing all he could to get his father's approval but failing (I Sam 14:28-33). Finally, he rebels against his father and is killed. Finally, heartbroken, David's love for Absalom comes spilling out (II Samuel 19:4), but it is too late. Don't wait until it is too late to show love!

Who are you more like -- Joseph or David? Whom do your children respond more like, Jesus or Absalom? Love them unconditionally and you'll see a great change!

**OVERSEE THEM INSTRUCTIONALLY** The Bible says that children are like arrows (Psalm 127:1-5) - carefully formed so they can be sent to accomplish a task. Parents mold and aim the arrow. The target is Christ-likeness, what our goal is for our children. This is a life-long process which includes birth and grown, spiritually as well as physically:

**Birth** (salvation - John 1:12,13; 3:3) is the start of life. We must see to it that our children are born spiritually, not just physically. We must pray for them, set a godly example for them, and teach them God's Word. Children don't have to understand all about Jesus in order to accept His free gift of salvation. In fact, adults are to come to God as children, children are never told to come as adults (Matthew 19:14; Mk 10:14; Lk 18:16). What is the minimum requirement to be born again? I think it is to accept (more accurately stop rejecting) God's free gift of salvation. He wants to give it to us; we just allow Him to do so. A child can do that. When a child is old enough to understand their need and Jesus' provision, then can accept this free gift. This can be as young as 3-4, certainly by 8 to 10 years old. What we do is give all we have to all of Jesus which we understand. When we give all to all we know, we have salvation. Later, as a child matures, he understands more about himself and Jesus, so sometimes wonders if he really accepted Jesus as Savior. Periodically over the years a child will do this. Help them understand it doesn't mean the first time wasn't the decisive time, but that they have more of themselves to give as they mature, and they understand more about the Jesus Whom they decide to serve. We all do this. Husbands and wives do this to each other in marriage. Their marriage vows are what makes the marriage legal, but as they grow individually and in love for each other their commitment is reaffirmed and deepened. The same thing happens with salvation.

For this reason, I don't encourage my children to be baptized when really young. I'd like them to save that for later, as they grow and better understand more. However, when they come saying they want to be baptized I will never put them off for I don't want it to seem to them that Jesus is in some way putting them off for they aren't old enough for him. I don't push, but I don't hold back, either.

**Growth** comes wherever there is life. Following spiritual birth comes spiritual growth (2 Peter 3:18). **Nourishment** brings growth. We are to feed on the Bible, God's Word (1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Jeremiah 15:16). This starts from little on (2 Timothy 3:15). Not only are we to teach content, we are also to develop a desire for God's Word in them ("train up" in Proverbs 22:6 literally means "create a taste for"). **Communication** (talking = prayer) is something babies soon discover, by words or actions. We must teach our children to communicate with their Heavenly Father by prayer. These things are all done by daily example (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) as well as by teaching content. **Walking** soon follows when there is growth. Our children must learn to walk by faith (Galatians 5:16; 2 Corinthians 5:7), obeying God and parents.

It's exciting to see a baby grow physically and just exciting to see our children born and grow spiritually. Neither happen alone, though. Each take lots of work and time from the parents. Putting in that time and care shows children we love them. It helps them feel loved. It helps them start their life-time walk of becoming more Christlike.

**VALIDATE THEM CONTINUALLY** "Valid" means "sound, effective, well grounded." We produce this in our children when we 'validate' them by encouraging, complimenting them, and building them up. "Fathers (sometimes translated 'parents'), do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). We "instruct" by teaching, praying and setting a good example to build proper behavior and values into our children. We "train" (correct improper behavior) by disciplining children. These are what we DO. What we are to NOT do is frustrate or exasperate them. This can easily be done by expecting too

reward for success, swat with newspaper for failure. Often that is the way we raise our children, too. Better is intrinsic motivation, that which comes from within the person himself, from his own goals,

motives, priorities and values. Manipulation is forcing external actions without real inner change. It's better than nothing, but motivation from within must be our goal for our children. It takes maturity they usually don't have, but if we patiently keep working in this direction eventually we will see improvement.

HOW can we motivate our children? For one thing, **use their natural bent**. Train a child "in the way he should go" (Proverbs 22:6). Keep in mind his individual temperament, personality, learning style, birth order, etc. What works for one child won't work for another! Also, **use the salt principle** to motivate. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink, but you can feed it salt! Develop their natural interests. Use their curiosity and creativity. Work WITH them, not AGAINST them. Along with this, **help them choose their own goals**. The older they get the more long-range these goals can be. Instead of focusing on what is easiest at the moment, have them work toward a goal. This will help them motivate themselves. Always **let them experience the negative results of not reaching goals**. Don't bail them out. God uses natural consequences to teach us the importance of doing what is right, use them with your children. **Remember the power of praise**. Positive reinforcement (praise) works much better in motivating all of us to try harder than does criticism. Like a small spark that needs to be fanned, praise them for whatever you can.

**EMANCIPATE THEM GRADUALLY** Earlier we talked about children being like arrows which parents are to form into something useful. Arrows are made to be sent to a destination, a goal. Arrows must be released to accomplish their work. As in archery, the release of children is critical, too. It is not a one-time event but a life-long process which starts the day they are born! Many adults still struggle with freedom from parental control. Releasing a child smoothly takes real skill and maturity. It means overcoming the fear that your children can't make it without you, that maybe you didn't adequately prepare them for all they will face. It means denying your urge to be in control, to accept that you aren't as needed by them as you used to be. Letting go needs to be done over and over, each day. It means being totally convinced that they really belong to God and are just on temporary loan to us.

Emancipating doesn't just mean turning them loose to head any direction. The direction we shoot our arrows, the goal for them, is to be like Jesus. We want them to be the mature Christian man or woman that God wants them to be. When arrows were invented they changed the face of warfare forever, for a soldier could impact a battle scene from a great distance. He didn't have to be there to have an influence in the outcome. So, too, our children will go places and accomplish things far beyond anything we could do. They will impact a world for Jesus that we won't be able to touch! What a privilege to send them to a need world to show people Jesus!

**DISCIPLINE THEM CONSISTENTLY** Note the key word here is "consistently." Children need to be disciplined consistently (not CONSTANTLY). It's more important that we be consistent with where we draw the line than where the line is drawn. Too often we are inconsistent depending on our mood or stress, if others are around, etc. Inconsistency is very confusing and frustrating to children (Ephesians 6:4), and makes it very difficult for them to figure out what we really want. They end up either outwardly rebelling against everything or inwardly thinking they are miserable failures. Neither is a response we want!

The Bible makes it clear that children need discipline (Titus 1:6; I Tim 3:4-5; Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; 23:13-14; 29:17). Children won't admit that and come asking for it, but down inside they realize it and are insecure without it. It's not uncommon for a strong-willed woman to marry a weak man so she can control him, but when she does, she loses respect for him. Down inside something makes her know she needs him to be stronger than her (in a loving, gentle way). While she fights his every attempt to assert himself, secretly she wishes he could bring the control and order she needs in life. The same is true of strong-willed children.

For the first several years of life, babies can't be disciplined because they aren't able to make free-will decisions to rebel. Parents who give in to their every fussy need find they will eventually have a spoiled, demanding baby on their hands, so don't create self-centeredness by always giving in. But discipline is not an issue about 1 1/2 years. For the most part, firmly but lovingly removing the object from them (or whatever it is) will give them the idea. Be persistent and consistent. After age two, though, their will is strong enough to start making their own decisions. They begin to realize there is a more self-satisfying alternative than obedience, it's giving into the flesh. They will start to purposefully test the limits. Respond with loving, firm, consistent discipline: sitting in a chair or standing in the corner. Physical punishment should only be used for overt, willful rebellion, not immature mistakes, forgetfulness or clumsiness. It should never be administered in anger. From the age of 4 or 5 on try to teach them the why's of things, not just what they are to do by why. Part of maturity is being able to give up immediate gratification for a long-range goal. As they understand better the reasons for your rules, they will be better able to discipline themselves.

Part of good discipline is making sure they clearly understand just what is expected of them. Any good rule must be clearly understood and enforceable. Always reassure them with hugs and words after a confrontation is over. Always remember that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). Make sure they know they are loved no matter what. Better to overdo this than underdo it. Better to be a little spoiled than grow up with a poor self-image. The reality of life will quickly burn away the self-centeredness of being spoiled, but a poor self-image can take a lifetime to overcome.

A good way to help decide how to respond to a situation is to ask yourself how God would respond. After all, we teach about Him in how we treat our children, for from us they learn about the sovereign authority figure in their lives (us now, God later). As far as this goes, remember how God disciplines us. Usually if we go astray He lets us learn the hard way, but suffering the natural consequences of our actions (drive too fast - speed ticket, don't pay taxes - penalties and fines, ignore our health - sickness, neglect our mate - distance and conflicts). It's always good, from as soon as possible, to let children suffer the consequences of their actions instead of bailing them out. If they break something they must pay for it. If they hurt someone they can't be with people for a while. If they don't use their money wisely they don't have it when needed. Instead of nagging my children to practice their musical instruments, if their teacher says they aren't prepared for a lesson then we make them pay for the lesson themselves. The Bible sets up this principle when it says that anyone who doesn't work shouldn't be given free food (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Remember our goal is to discipline, not punish our children. Discipline is to train for future (Hebrews 12:10) while punishment just pays them back for what inconvenience or embarrassment they've caused us (Isaiah 13:11). Discipline is motivated by love, the mind controls and love and security results in the child. Punishment is motivated by anger and frustration, the emotions control, and fear, guilt and anger are built into the child.

As far as anger, it can't be that which controls us. However, we will sometimes feel it for justifiable reasons. We should be righteously indignant at a child who mocks a parent or hurts a sibling. Still, we must control the anger and not let the anger control us (as Jesus did when chasing out the money changers -- He could stop and weave a whip before doing anything [John 2:15]).

Remember, parents are nothing but baby-sitters for God. They are HIS children, and He will use all things to help them grow and mature (Romans 8:28). God gives us the children we need to help make us more like Jesus! No family is perfect, no parent perfect. We all struggle and wonder if we are failing. Raising children correctly is impossible without God's help and wisdom, but He does promise that if we just ask for it (James 1:5). Make sure you keep constantly going to Jesus for wisdom and power, for encouragement and guidance, for He alone can help you.



## Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

# 6. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF CHILDREN

### (How to be a Charming Child)

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George Washington's mother made an interesting reply at a banquet given to the allied officers after the surrender of Lord Cornwallis. A distinguished French officer asked Washington's mother how she managed to rear such a splendid son. She replied, "I taught him to obey." There's nothing clever or profound about that, nothing new or unexpected. We all try to teach our children to obey, some with better success than others! I wonder what Mrs. Washington did that worked for her? We all know the same thing doesn't work for everyone. Still, having children that obey isn't too much to expect -- it's what God expects of children.

**CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS** "Children, obey your parents..." (Ephesians 6:1, Col 3:20) is God's command to them. It's what He expects of children, so we should expect it, too. Jesus Himself obeyed his parents (Luke 2:51). Please understand that we're not talking about outer conformity here. We're talking about an inner attitude of respect. That's why God also says children are to "honor" their parents (Ephesians 6:2). Just like a wife isn't to submit outwardly while having an inner attitude of self-centeredness, and Christians are to serve God motivated by love, so children are to obey parents with their whole heart. This is why respecting parents is so important. That's where the parent comes in. Just as wives respond to a husband who sacrificially loves them and puts them first, as Christians do to God, so children respond in obedience much better when they are treated with consideration and respect. For children to respect parents, parents must respect their children. Be sensitive to their needs and emotions. Treat them as you would want to be treated, were you them (that's the Golden Rule, and it's still in effect). Expect obedience from them, but realize learning obedience is a life-long process. How complete is your obedience to God? Do you expect more from your child than God expects from you? Are you as patient and understanding with you children as you want God to be with you?

**WATCH WHAT YOU EXPECT** Remember, children are not short adults! "When I was a child, I talked like an adult, I thought like an adult, I reasoned like an adult" is NOT how 1 Corinthians 13:11 reads! Don't expect them to be adults. We are competing with no one but ourselves, trying to improve and grow. We measure ourselves now by comparing ourselves to how we were a year ago. Use the same standard on your children. Don't compare them with other children. Don't be expecting too much of them. That will just frustrate them and build anger into them (Ephesians 6:4). Too high expectations will discourage your child and work against them. The same happens when others expect too much of us. Children need encouragement and building up more than having every weakness and failure pointed out to them. If weaknesses are focused on more than strengths, than they will grow up insecure, feeling inferior, with a poor self-image. That is VERY difficult to overcome! I think it's more damaging in the long run that growing up a little indulged. Personally, I think it's better to err on the side of being too easy on a child than too hard. A semi-spoiled child will take a few knocks in life and learn they'll have to have more self-discipline, and they'll have the internal value and worth to be able to make the adjustment. An insecure person, though, won't have anything to fall back on and can struggle for years. To be perfectly honest, I think God is WAY too easy on me and lets me get away with FAR too much, but He knows what He is doing. We are to pattern ourselves after Him, and that means extending mercy in love.

I think our biggest problem with this is fear (they won't grow up right) and peer pressure (what will others think of me as a parent, they'll embarrass or inconvenience me, etc.). These are selfish reasons, thinking more about ourselves than the child!

Thus, expecting too much can cause disobedience more than curing it!

**LOOK FOR INNER MOTIVES** Not everyone will always get along with everyone else (Romans 12:5,9,13,15-18). Some temperaments clash, certain personalities rub each other wrong. It's harder to be nice and obedient when tired or sick. Being on top of the same people day after day can bring out the worst, too. It always helps to ask yourself WHY a child is disobeying. Become a student of your child, putting yourself in their mind and heart. Ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). Disobedience should be treated according to its cause. Ask yourself: Is this just natural, surface personality difference? Is this motivated by a legitimate need (not want) the child has which I'm not meeting? Is this because they are immature children and let everything out without thinking? Is this deep-seated inner rebellion and sin which they choose to harbor in their hearts? You see, we often treat all disobedience as if it is for the last reason when often it isn't. Please try to be sensitive to these differences.

**TEMPERAMENTS** We all know the promise in Proverbs 22:6 which says *"Train up a child according to his way (bent) and when he is old he will not turn from it."* The key to making it payoff is the command to train children up *"according to his way/bent."* This refers to the 'raw equipment' we receive from God at birth. Perhaps the most important, yet least understood factor is the temperament. Personally, God used it more than anything else to help me understand myself and work through problems that long plagued me. He continues to use knowledge of the temperaments in my family and ministry. I don't know of any one tool outside of the Bible that has been more helpful.

Hippocrates (460-370 BC), the father of medicine, first developed the four basic temperaments and showed that emotions affect our bodies. It has been passed on down by many men through the ages. Immanuel Kant backed it in 1798. In more recent times, though, it has been rejected because of Freud's influence, saying man is a total product of his environment and is not born with natural tendencies, a sin nature, etc. Man is just like other animals they say. Christians have been studying the temperaments as popularized by Tim LaHaye (and to some extent Gary Smalley). I strongly, strongly, strongly recommend you get a book on the temperaments by Tim LaHaye and devour it! There are many different ones: the temperaments in general or specifically related to man, woman or child.

Before surveying the four temperaments there is one more thing to understand. By temperament I am referring to inborn traits that subconsciously affect man's behavior. It differs from character (the real you: mind, will & emotions) & personality (the 'face' you show others).

**EXTROVERT – INTROVERT** There are four basic temperaments: two extrovert and two introvert. Extroverts are optimists, make friends easily, talk fluently, and are people-persons. Introverts are pessimist, shy, have few close friends, express themselves better in writing than talking, and are loners. The two extrovert temperaments are Sanguine and Choleric, the introvert temperaments are Melancholy and Phlegmatic. Everyone has one basic temperament and also a secondary temperament. These create a unique blend for everyone. God uses three colors (red, blue and yellow) to create all the various colors and shades today. He uses four temperaments to create all the various temperaments today.

Understanding these can help a LOT in knowing what to expect from your child, as well as understand WHY he does what he does.

## **BASIC TEMPERAMENTS** Taken from Tim LaHaye and Gary Smalley

	<b>SANGUINE</b>	<b>CHOLERIC</b>	<b>MELANCHOLY</b>	<b>PHLEGMATIC</b>
Teen	David - Esther	Joseph - Miriam	Daniel - Ruth	Timothy - Mary
Adult	Peter	Paul	Moses	Abraham
Color	bright YELLOW (sun)	hot RED (fire)	deep BLUE (ocean)	cool GREEN (grass)
Animal	Rooster	Lion	Beaver	Turtle
Summary	Respond to Environment	Strong Will	Sensitive Perfectionist	Easy-Going
"P" word	Popular	Powerful	Perfect	Peaceful
Extrov-Intro	Extrovert - Optimist	Extrovert - Optimist	Introvert - Pessimist	Introvert - Pessimist
Careers	Salesmen, Actors	Businessmen, Police	Art/Music, Computers	Accountant, Diplomat
Strengths	Friendly - Talkative Warm - Outgoing Emotional - Enthusiastic	Confident - Determined Practical - Productive Independent - Decisive	Gifted (talent, analyze, organized, intellect) Sacrificial/Loyal	Flexible - Conservative Easy-going - Dependable Calm - Humorous
Weakness'	Weak-willed - Unstable Changeable, Undisciplined Self-centered - Unorganize	Self-Sufficient - Proud Control - Unemotional Unsympathetic - Cruel	Insecure - Critical Negative - Moody Unsociable - Revengeful	Unmotivated - Fearful Self-protective - Selfish Slow - Stubborn
Problems	Personality carries through life, so hides many problems inside self. Puts hard things off, over-extends self, doesn't follow through and finish what he starts.	Most to offer in strengths, most to overcome in weaknesses. Lacks love. Needs love most, but hardest to love. Lacks kindness, wants to win.	Sets too high standards for self. Afraid of rejection, criticism because overly sensitive. Loyal to friends, but few close friends. Poor self-image.	Easy-going, loving nature hides deep problems of selfishness. Hurts people with unkind jest or humor. Does not put out full effort at consistent pace. Protects self from problems.
Teen Strengths	Popular, joins clubs Charming, want to please Daring, life of party Apologetic	Natural leader Organized Competent Excels in emergencies Responsible	Good student, organized High standards Conscientious, Responsi Sensitive Thrifty	Witty, humorous Good listener Casual attitude Hides emotions Gets along with everyone
Teen Weakness'	Deceptive, con-artist Needs peer approval Easily led astray Not responsible	Bossy, controlling Knows Everything Critical, judgmental Loner, few friends	Depressed, withdrawn Inferiority, poor self image Suspicious, critical Inflexible	Quietly stubborn Indecisive, procrastinates Sarcastic Uninvolved

**SIBLING RIVALRY** Often our major discipline problems come in trying to have our children get along with each other. That is one area where it's often hardest to get obedience. In trying to understand why children disobey and making sure we don't expect too much of them, knowing what makes siblings not get along is also helpful.

What causes sibling rivalry? Basically, it comes from having more than one child! It doesn't seem to take more than that! Two children, two sin natures, two immature self-centered people, and conflict is inevitable. There are factors, though, that make this much worse. These include:

**1. Favoritism by parents** If children feel they are competing for parent's attention or approval (it doesn't have to be real, even if they just imagine it) they will see each other as rivals to defeat. Since no two children are alike, none can be treated alike, and that can be perceived as favoritism. Isaac showed favoritism to Esau over Jacob, Jacob did the same with Joseph. These led to disastrous results. Children who feel left out will disobey to get attention. Even scolding is better than being ignored. Negative emotion coming their way is preferable no emotion!

**2. Displaced anger** When a child gets angry at others things or people in life they are often tempted to take it out on a sibling. Thus, Cain killed Able and Jacob and Esau grew up in constant conflict. Bickering and fighting are usually just the fruit of deeper problems within.

**3. Feelings of inferiority** I've always felt badly for Leah who wasn't as pretty or popular as her younger sister Rachel. Living in the shadow of a sibling that is more successful at something can cause anger.

**4. Developmental changes** As children become adolescents, they view of younger brothers and sisters can change. Part of their pulling away (see next article about Godly Teens) can be seen in impatience and looking down on younger siblings. Younger children can find good ways to "get to" these older ones. Understanding this can make prevention easier.

**5. Temperament differences** Some temperaments rub others wrong, some are just harder to get along with than others. All this can contribute to disobedience and not getting along.

**6. Birth order** Another important factor is birth order. Understanding that, too, can help us know better what to expect and to determine the cause of disobedience in a child.

**BIRTH ORDER** An understanding of the impact of birth order is very helpful.

**1. Eldest / first born** (the "bossy" one, the junior parent) Miriam, eldest sister of Aaron and Moses, is a typical firstborn: responsible, cooperative, willing to do unpleasant tasks for the parents, studious and serious. Reuben, the first-born in Joseph's family, was the same way. He was conscientious (protected Joseph from death). He was also the family boss, even when they were all grown. Because parents treat first-born in a more adult manner and give them more responsibility, they seem to mature more quickly. Firstborns need (demand) approval, especially from parents. First-born Absalom is a case in point, as are Cain and Esau. They strive for excellency and tend to become type A over achievers (James, Peter). They most closely identify

with parents and their values. (A middle child who is the first child of their sex can also show characteristics of a first-born. Also, the first of two or more children born after a long gap will be like a first born.) It's not unusual for first-born boys to have problems growing up. Just as God claimed the first-born male of Israel for His own, so it seems Satan works extra hard today to oppress first-born males, and through them the whole family.

**2. Only child** ("ruling the roost," the lonely only) Only children like Isaac, Samuel, timothy and Samson are in many ways similar to first-borns. They are treated as if they are the center of the universe and feel that way. They are often over-protected and more comfortable being with adults than peers. Judging himself by adult standards all the time makes him try to grow up quickly and often causes perfectionistic standards. (A single baby born long after others in the family will also show characteristics of an only child.)

**3. Middle child** ("I can't win") Middle children, especially second-borns, compete against the first-born for dominance, as Cain did to eldest Able. They often become the opposite of the first-born because, being younger, they can't beat the first-born at his/her strengths. They often are full of contradictions: shy but outgoing, impatient but laid back, competitive but not competitive, rebel but peacemaker, aggressive but avoiding conflict. They have more freedom to develop as themselves for they aren't working so hard to be adult-like and get adult approval. They tend to have lower expectations and don't expect things to always be fair. They are more likely, however, to rebel against authority (and parent's values) later in life. Out-of-family friends and peers are important and they are often more open to peer pressure. We see these traits in Andrew, John and Aaron. They are often not motivated to be very studious but can be good peacemakers and mediators. (Middle children who are the youngest of their sex take on some of the qualities usually seen in youngest. Remember, the closer children are in age the more emotional impact they will have on each other, especially if they are of the same sex.)

**4. Youngest child** ("baby") Last-born children often have the least expectations to meet and can become spoiled (over-protected, assuming others will take care of him). He can thus be unsure of himself and lack confidence. Last-born Joseph lost all of this during his imprisonment in Egypt (one of the reasons God allowed it). Youngest get less spontaneous joy from their parents at their accomplishments (it's no longer new and parents are busy with other siblings) Therefore they often becomes the clown of the family for it give him attention. However, he can have trouble being taken seriously. Last-born are perceptive people persons and often end up in people-oriented vocations. David, Moses and Solomon were last-borns. (If other children are born after a long gap, the original 'baby' still continues to have last-born characteristics even though others are born after him/her.)

**Solution** Pinpoint the severity of the conflict. Is it natural, normal rivalry or do you sense something more? Talk to the children, listen between the lines, draw out their feelings by questions ("How does that make you feel?"). Differentiate between normal personality differences (especially during adolescence) and deep bitterness from unmet emotional needs or allowing sin to dominate. Teach (by word and example) how to handle anger, frustration, unfairness, not getting your own way. Set a good example by your tone of voice and attitude. Teach them to label their feelings (hate, fear, jealousy, hurt, selfishness, etc.) so they can handle them. Show unconditional love no matter what. Seek counsel from mature Christians if necessary, don't be afraid to ask for help!

So, then -- obedience is our goal, and even if we realize we won't ever fully attain it, we must still aim for it. We must try to understand what causes our child's disobedience and deal with that, or at the most we will just force outer conformity (hypocrisy). Having them feel loved and secure is more important than discipline, but both should be accomplished. Treating them as we would want to be treated is important. Setting a good example by showing them how we discipline ourselves and handle our weakness' is a must. Asking God for wisdom and then treating our children as He treats us is something we must always remember. And, of course, pray, pray, pray, pray, pray, pray.

# Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

## 7. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF TEENAGERS

### (How to be a Terrific Teenager)

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**IN-BETWEEN-AGERS** Mark Twain once said, "When a kid turns 13, stick him in a barrel, nail the lid shut, and feed him through the knot hole. When he turns 16, plug the hole." What happens when a child turns 13, or 16, or whatever teen age, that causes such changes? What's it all about? Adolescence is like a house on moving day - a temporary mess! Everyone goes through it. Even the apostle Paul went through this process (1 Corinthians 13:11). How can parents help?

**CHALLENGING THE GIANTS** Children grow up seeing themselves as helpless, totally dependent on 20-foot-tall sovereign giants to provide for them in every area of life. They feel small and powerless, needing protection and care. Suddenly they are thrust into adolescence when their hypothalamus starts sending chemical messages to the pituitary gland telling it to start preparing the body for the onset of puberty. Changes in the body, mind and emotions begin. The child finds himself aiming for a position of equality with these giants. What a scary, seemingly-impossible task looms before them! If parents can understand this, though, they can help a lot. For one thing, it helps parents understand why their teens start paying more and more attention to the parent's faults and weakness'. He's trying to whittle the 20' giant down to size, to a more attainable goal. Mark Twain also said: "It was a curious thing. When I was about 13, my father's intelligence started to drop. His mental abilities continued to decline until I reached 21, when these abilities began miraculously to improve."

For adolescents, it's easier to pull away, to separate, to feel like they are abandoning their parent when they see that parent as more of an enemy than a friend. Also, if a parent can take himself down from the pedestal by admitting to his faults and sharing his own struggles (past and present) his child won't feel he has to look for chinks in the armor.

**CHILDHOOD ALL OVER AGAIN** It's interesting to note that the emotional stages adolescents go through are very similar to the physical stages young children go through. Both start with the child making an effort to separate from the parent and be their own person. They begin to discover who they are in their own right. Before long they start exploring the adult world around them, unaware of the dangers it holds. When they get into trouble or venture too far away they come running back to their parents to be cared for. They live in a very selfish, self-centered world, thinking only of themselves. They try taking on adult mannerisms and activities. Children will dress up and pretend different activities. Adolescents do something similar when they 'try on' various peer or adult actions, vocabulary, mannerisms, or activities. They'll find some that fit and others they reject. It's sort of trial and error. As more and more begin to fit they will become increasingly independent until they develop their own personality and character, something they like and which they feel fits them. The world calls this 'finding yourself.' Young children do this physically through the first years of life. Adolescents follow the same pattern emotionally during their teen years. It isn't always a smooth transfer. Some go through really rebellious times ("terrible twos" all over again). Often it is like a car stuck in the snow. They rock back and forth, gaining ground and sometimes losing ground, until there is a sudden surge ahead, only to repeat the same process.

**PREPARING THE SHIP TO LEAVE HARBOR** What is our role as parents in all of this? It's like preparing a ship to leave the harbor. Before heading out to sea on its own the ship is securely tied to the dock while it takes on fuel (love, acceptance, security, confidence, good experiences to draw from) and makes preparations for the voyage (training in values, knowledge, etc.). If the ship is sent off too soon it is doomed. Once the engine starts (hypothalamus, etc.) it better be loaded for if the ropes aren't cast off in time for a smooth departure it can tear some of the pier on its way out.

This leaving parental authority and control is natural and normal. It is a God-given drive to 'leave the nest,' 'cut the apron strings' or however you want to phrase it. Genesis 2:24 says a person must leave (break dependency) parents before being able to cleave to a mate. Parents must help their teens with this process. Thus, parents find their role changing from sovereign control (20' giant) to more of a friend-friend relationship. The lines of control are drawn in (but not completely severed). Responsibility for actions is passed to teen (let them suffer the consequences of actions, positive or negative). Peers take on more and more importance as adolescence compare themselves to see if they are acceptable to others their age.

During the early stages of adolescence teens will argue and talk back. During the later stages, though, if things haven't been worked out right, they'll start distancing themselves from their parents by rejecting some of their parent's more important values, especially spiritual ones. This is a prime way of 'getting back' at their parents. Often this is why pastor's and missionary's kids rebel so much.

If children don't work through these stages they won't mature into a balanced adult. We all know many adults who have immaturities from stages they missed as teens. In the parable of the prodigal (Luke 15:11-32) son we see this. The younger son rebelled (one extreme) to exert his independence. His ship pulled away prematurely and failed. However, the older brother who stayed home and never went through the stages of maturing wasn't any better off. He never established a secure identity for himself, that's why he couldn't rejoice in his brother's return. He still needed parental favoritism because he didn't have any security in himself. Sometimes they stay like that for the rest of their lives.

**MOTHERS & FATHERS, BOYS & GIRLS** It is usually the mother the teen first starts breaking from. Mothers stand for childhood, and being close to and dependent on a mother makes a teen feel like a child. Girls can have a harder time of this than boys. Not only do they tend to hypersensitivity and emotionalism more than boys during these years, but they often don't have anyone to turn to when they turn from their mother. Boys have long been taught not to be 'Mamma's boy', and they have their father to draw closer to. Fathers play important roles during these early adolescent years. They serve as way stations for adolescents leaving childhood (mother). They can greatly help their sons and daughters.

If mothers or even fathers talk to them or treat them like children they will immediately notice. This more than anything causes more rebellion in them. They aren't mature enough to say "I want to think and decide for myself. Don't treat me like a child. When you boss me around I feel like a child, and I don't like that." Parents must listen to hear that said in their actions and forms of rebellion. Parents must learn to really listen - be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry (James 1:19). That means parents must work through their own fears and insecurities, their own immaturities and lack of self-control, their own hesitancy about letting go. Adolescence, to be handled right, means a parent must be mature and secure in their own right. If you can't handle your emotions you can't handle theirs!

**EXIT PARENTS, ENTER PEERS** When adolescents start turning FROM parents, it is peers they turn TO. They need to know how they compare to others their age. Are they OK? Do they fit in? Can they make and keep new friends? These become VERY important for them. If they are unwilling to spend a night away from home, avoid peers, or seem especially fearful, then something is wrong.

Do your best to help them have the right friends. Make your home open for others. Get to know their friends (sometimes you can help someone else's adolescent better during these years than you can your own). Talk with them about their friends: why they picked them, traits they like and don't like (ones they'll want to copy or reject), why they do what they do, etc. It's a good way of keeping communication open and helping them think through what they are doing.

**OPPOSITE SEX FRIENDS** As adolescence progresses, teens are more and more interested in the opposite sex. As they become more secure with their own identity and fitting in with same-sex friends, they start wondering if the opposite sex will accept them for who they are becoming. This is natural and important. Anything having to do with dating, romance, love, etc., must be rejected (they should have been thoroughly trained in this for years - a future article will cover it). However, brother-sister friendships are very valuable. Unless they understand the opposite sex and know what traits in the opposite sex they like and dislike, they will have a much harder time when God does bring the right

person into their lives. It helps them know how to act around the opposite sex -- what is accepted and what is rejected.

**REGRESSIONS** Its natural for the boat to make a quick trip back to the dock to take on emergency supplies from time to time. Sudden regression is natural, they'll pass through it if you give them some space. Encourage them, but they must do it on their own. Like a bird getting out of an egg or butterfly out of a cocoon, they have to do it on their own to survive.

Thus, adolescence can be an exciting and growing time. Special bonding and closeness can take place. Or it can become a constant battle for control, a time of uncontrolled emotions and a home in uproar. Understanding what your teen is going through can help a lot. Working through your own problems is also essential. With God's help you can enjoy a rewarding relationship with your teens, one that will last the rest of your lives



# Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

## 8. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF FAMILIES

### (How to be a Fantastic Family)

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Most marriages go through a time of struggle. All face difficulties. None are perfect. Since opposites attract, and since we all come to marriage naturally self-centered and with a sin nature, conflict in families shouldn't surprise us. God uses our mates to bring our out sinfulness and polish our rough edges. What makes conflict in families so painful is that it is one place where we really desire and need peace. Is a peaceful palace too much to expect? What can we rightfully expect from our family? What does God expect? Let's look at these things.

**THE MYTH OF THE PERFECT FAMILY** Perfect mates come only in shoes and gloves. Unlike the children's' stories, we don't "live happily ever after." Someone said that all marriages are happy, it's the living together afterwards that is tough! Adam and Eve had problems with Cain. Abraham and Sarah certainly had their times (Genesis 16, 21), as did Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 27) and Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 30, 31). Moses's marriage to Zipporah failed (Exodus 4) and so did David and Michal's (2 Samuel 6). Hosea and Gomer ended up back together, but only after much pain and hurt. William Bradford's wife committed suicide on the Pilgrim's trip to this country. John Wesley had a very difficult time in his relationships with women. William Carey, the father of modern missions, had a disastrous first marriage and home life. The list could go on. Still, God has something better. Marriages can struggle, but homes don't have to always be in turmoil.

**CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN HOMES** Putting two sinful, self-centered people together where sharing and putting someone else first is required will sometimes bring out the worst in a person. It is inevitable. But there are other reasons why homes aren't always peaceful.

**1. Unrealistic expectations** Let's face it, we aren't honest with our mates before marriage. We put our best foot forward, are attentive to their needs, and do all we can to win and impress them. That is dishonest, for our mates assume we will be that way after marriage, too. We fall in love with a person's strengths, but then we end up living with their weakness' If love is blind, marriage can be a real eye-opener!

**2. Stages marriages go through** All marriage go through these stages.

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3
LOVERS: fall in love & marry	ANTAGONISTS: children & money problems	ALLIES: acceptance, maturity
ROMANTIC	RESENTFUL	HARMONIOUS
commitment UNTESTED	commitment UNCERTAIN - good times & bad	commitment UNDOUBTED
conflict AVOIDED	conflict CONSTANT open or below surface	conflict RESOLVED; trust grows
mate IDEALIZED - focus strength	mate DISAPPROVED (focus on weakness	mate ACCEPTED

The trick here is to make it from stage 2 to 3. Going from stage 1 to 2 will happen (it's downhill) but from 2 to 3 (uphill) often doesn't happen. Then the relationship ends in separation (physical,

which is divorce, or emotional, which is living and working together but without real intimacy). The transition from stage 2 to 3 takes work. It means working through conflict.

**CONFLICT ISN'T ALWAYS BAD** There's an old saying that a man has no business marrying a woman who can't make him miserable because it means she can't make him happy. A husband and wife have the capacity to make each other either more happy or more miserable than anyone else. Marriage can double your trouble and divide your joy or double your joy and divide your trouble. Moving parts always cause friction. The key is to keep the friction down with the oil of love.

**REASONS FOR FAILURE OF MARRIAGE** There are several reasons why some conflicts aren't worked through, but instead destroy a marriage.

**1. Failure to leave and cleave** In order for a marriage to be successful, each mate must totally abandon any emotional dependence they may have on their own parents ("leave" Genesis 2:24) and instead depend 100% on their mate for everything ("cleave" Genesis 2:24). It's hard enough for two people to bond and work together, but when one of their parents can still pull strings (and a parent can do this without saying a word, they can even do this after they have died) they the husband wife relationship will suffer. Needing a parent's approval, being influenced by past guilt, in any way being unable to make one's own value and priority judgments -- all these and more will undermine a home.

**2. Failure to understand male-female differences** Failure to understand this major difference will doom a relationship, for our expectations of the opposite sex will be unrealistic, we won't understand and meet their needs, and communication will break down.

MEN	WOMEN
Mind	Emotions
Rational comes first	Feeling comes first
Production-oriented	Relationship-oriented
shop to get what needed quickly & efficiently	shop to enjoy the experience, browse
long-range sight, distance planning, overall	near-sighted, today's problems ('nutrition')

**3. Failure to Communicate** Ann Landers says her experience shows that most family problems stem from the inability to communicate. Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2 explains some good principles to assure good communication:

**a. Be honest and truthful** (25) Don't fight to win or you will try to hurt & destroy. Be honest with yourself about your own feelings and motives. Plan ahead what you will say if you think conflict will result. Write it out and give the note to your mate, there's less pressure to respond quickly (and in anger/hurt). Ask yourself what you want to accomplish by what you say. If it's vindictive, to hurt back, to justify yourself, to win in any way then don't do it.

**b. Be self-controlled** (26a) Handle your hurt as pain. Don't turn it into anger and try to hurt someone back. Learn to listen. It does take two to fight.

**c. Keep it short** (26b-27) Never go to bed with unresolved conflict, don't let it settle in!

**d. Watch the timing** (26-27) Don't get into things when tired, hungry, busy, tense, etc.

**e. Take positive action** (28) Don't fight each other, find the common problem & fight it.

**f. Buildup, don't tear down** (29) Edify, build up, encourage - that takes humility

**g. Keep close to God** (30) Pray before talking and while talking (together & in own heart)

**h. Develop constructive behavior** (31) It takes time to break bad habits, but break them!

**i. Be forgiving** (32) Say "I'm sorry, forgive me," forgive others even when they are wrong

**j. Live by love** (5:1-2) Jesus is our example, ask yourself what Jesus would say/do

**PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CORRECTION (Ephesians 5:15-21)** Always lean on God's wisdom (15). Use your time correctly (16) which means saying NO to things. Be understanding and sensitive (17). Submit to God and your mate (18-21).

**ANY HOME CAN BE RESTORED** By building in God's strength on Biblical principles any marriage and home can be restored (Proverbs 24:3-4). It takes work and commitment. It means surrendering one's own pride and pain for the good of the relationship. It means putting God first and mate second with self last. That doesn't come naturally, but it can come. It must come.

## Marriage & Family – II. THE GODLY FAMILY

# 9. WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF GODLY HOMES

### (How to be a Heavenly Home)

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One of the most overlooked love stories in the Bible is the story of Ruth and Boaz. After coming back to Palestine with Naomi, a young widow named Ruth had no future from a human viewpoint. A Gentile in a small town, it took her full-time efforts just to provide food for herself and her mother-in-law. Israel was at a low ebb, spiritually destitute and far from God, in bondage to pagan neighbors, and in economic turmoil. The future looked bleak for young Ruth, but she trusted in God.

**A GODLY HUSBAND** God led her to Boaz's field where she was protected. Boaz loved and married her, sacrificing much of his finances to get Naomi out of debt. There was nothing in it for him, he took a financial loss. That's why a closer relative who should have done the same thing turned it down. Boaz was a sacrificial lover, an efficient provider, a consistent leader, an unselfish protector, a realistic pedagogue and an earnest pastor.

**A GODLY WIFE** Ruth responded to Boaz's protection, provision and sacrifice for her by submitting to and trusting him with her life. She was a very trusting wife. She had no unrealistic expectations. She put Boaz first and filled his empty spaces by encouraging, supporting and respecting him. She lived a godly life herself, focusing on internal qualities, not surface appearance.

**A GODLY CHILD** Before long Obed was born. God honored their faith and love and provided a special son. I'm sure they loved him unconditionally, oversaw him instructionally, validated him continually, emancipated him gradually and disciplined him consistently. His son, their grandson, was Jesse, father of David and ancestor of Jesus Himself.

**A GODLY HOME** Still, Boaz and Ruth weren't perfect. Boaz knew a woman needed to feel loved and protected, but he was slow to act and needed her to initiate the relationship (Ruth 3:8-14). Ruth had a good heart for God and others, but had a lot to learn about Boaz and marriage according to God's principles. Somewhere between Boaz and Jesse, something went wrong in the area of parenting, for Jesse seems to have been a poor father (he forgot about David as a son when Samuel came to anoint a king) and his sons were cruel to their brother (when David went to them in the army). No marriage is perfect. God uses marriage to help mature His people.

Someone said building a good marriage was like building a good log fire. You build with paper and kindling, careful of each step, and all of a sudden it goes up in a brilliant blaze. When the primary blaze burns down you wonder if the fire will fizzle out and leave you in the dark. You blow on it and fan it for all you are worth. Sometimes smoke billows out and almost chokes you, but if the materials are good and if you invest enough energy and interest in maintaining it, soon the big solid logs catch and your fire takes on new qualities. Protect your fire from rain (sin) which can slow or extinguish the fire. Pray. Patiently persevere. Pray. Humble yourself. Pray. Pray. Pray.

# *Marriage and Family*

## **III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE**

IN THE SONG OF SOLOMON

By **Rev. Dr. Jerry Schroyer**

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1. What to Look for in a Mate (2:8-14)
2. Problems to Solve before Marriage (2:15-17)
3. Duties & Responsibilities of Husbands & Wives (3:1-5)
4. When are People Married in God's Sight? (3:6-11)
5. Why God Created Sex (1:1-8)
6. Emotional & Sexual Differences Between Men & Women (1:9-14)
7. Sex in Marriage: What's OK and What Isn't (1:15-2:7)
8. Sexual Fulfillment in Marriage (4:1-5:1)
9. Romance, Rejection, Reality & Retribution in Marriage (5:2-8)
10. Having a 'Successful' Marriage (5:9-6:3)
11. Solving Marriage Problems (6:4-10)
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14. A Marriage to Last a Lifetime (8:5-14)

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

# 1. WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A MATE

## Song of Solomon 2:8-14

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Marriages today are in trouble! Fifty percent end in divorce. The statistic is even higher for second marriages. Of the ones who don't get divorced, few have what they would call mature, gratifying, satisfying, close personal relationships. Yet this isn't what we want or expect when entering into marriage. What is wrong? How can we avoid this? What can we change?

### **SONG OF SOLOMON - BACKGROUND**

As with all else, God has given us the answer in the Bible. They are in an obscure, often over-looked book, the Song of Solomon. Written by Solomon as a young man, it takes the form of a love song (a lyric idyll). The speaker is Shulamith, Solomon's wife. It is composed of a series of flashbacks as she recalls her courtship, marriage, wedding night, and subsequent ups and downs. Between each reminiscence a chorus speaks: making transitions, giving warnings, adding brief commentaries or emphasizing a point. The events are not in chronological order.

In summary, the story is about a young country girl from the hills of Galilee whom Solomon meets while in the area on business (vineyards). He visits her often, courting her. He asks her to marry him. She considers, then says yes. Plans are made to be married. He sends a fine procession which brings her to him in Jerusalem, the capital and largest city. They have a fine, beautiful wedding in Jerusalem. Much detail is given about the wedding day and night. The marriage is a good one, but some problems arise and they work through them. After this is past she thinks back on it all, and that is the book Song of Solomon. First comes information about their courtship.

### **COURTSHIP OF SOLOMON & SHULAMITH (2:8-14)**

*8 Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills 9 My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. 10 My lover spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. 11 See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. 12 Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come; the cooing of doves is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me." 14 My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.*

Solomon is coming to visit in the spring, after a long absence. Shulamith is waiting and watching, and is very excited as he approaches. He gets closer, finally arriving and asking her to go for a walk for he has missed her and wants to spend time with her. That is one of the main purposes of the period before marriage called courtship or engagement, spending quality and quantity time getting to know each other, developing a good close relationship and friendship. I think that's why Solomon was attracted to Shulamith instead of the fancy, sophisticated, charming

ladies in the court in Jerusalem. There was something real and natural about her, something honest and basic, something pure and good. That's what he loved in her.

We don't know anything about their relationship before this period. Exactly how did they meet? What made them interested in getting to know each other better? When and how did they know God had them for each other? We don't know the answers here, but we can pretty well assume they weren't hitting some local singles scene ('meat market') seeing whom they could pick up. I can't imagine them using all the tricks and ways people use today to catch someone of the opposite sex (at last hold them until a better catch comes along). That is a self-centered, what's-in-it-for-me, what-do-I-get-out-of-it approach to relationships. We are to focus on the other person and what is best for them, laying aside ourselves to serve in love.

### **EMOTIONAL VIRGINITY UNTIL MARRIAGE**

As Christians we emphasize physical virginity, saving our body for the one we marry, and rightly so! But then Christians go giving their heart away right and left, over and over again. They enter marriage with a pure body but with a heart that has been used, broken, dirtied, and abused. Emotional virginity is as important as physical virginity. Keeping your heart for the one God has for you is as important as keeping your body! There's a lot more to save for marriage than just sex! I'm convinced Solomon and Shulamith did just that. They show no symptoms of the modern dating phenomenon - give your heart away any number of times until you find the 'right' one, then check with God to see if it's the one He has for you! What a disaster! Dating (with the give-your-heart-away- attitude that accompanies it) just leads to breaking up multiple times. This prepares people for divorce, not marriage. Divorce today is just an extension of the old breaking up routine as done in dating.

Well then, what kind of relationships are we to have before God shows us the right one if it isn't trying to help him out by 'dating,' etc.? What kind of relationship did Solomon and Shulamith have before they knew God meant them to be together and they gave their hearts to each other? According to I Timothy 5:1-2, it was a brother-sister relationship. That means treating all those of the opposite sex equally, not making commitments or promises (verbally, by body language, by flirting, etc.). It means respecting the other's heart, as you would want your physical brother or sister to be treated. It means treating others the way you want your future mate to be treated by those he or she is with. It means being the same with the opposite sex as you would be were you married to someone else.

Granted, this is really a faith system. What if God doesn't provide? I'm getting older and my friends are all meeting people to be with or marry? I'll never meet anyone this way? Abraham and Sarah thought they had to help God out, and result is the Arab-Israeli conflict that lasts today. To Solomon it seemed impossible to find a pure, down-to-earth country girl. To Shulamith it seemed impossible to meet someone mature and caring like Solomon. How could ever get the king of Israel and a hill-country peasant girl together? But He did -- and He will do so today, too, if you let Him. Like everything else in life, it is a matter of faith. Since whom you will marry is the most important decision you will ever make (next to salvation), make sure you let God make it for you. Don't fall into the Devil's trap of doing things the world's way! Solomon, in all his wisdom didn't. Make sure you don't either.

## 2. PROBLEMS TO SOLVE BEFORE MARRIAGE

### Song of Solomon 2:15-17

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I do lots of counseling with people having marriage problems. While the surface problems vary, the root problem is always the same. There is self-centeredness on one or both partner's part, usually with an unwillingness to admit it and change. This isn't new, though. It's as old as Solomon and Shulamith (and I'm sure older than that).

After Solomon came north to visit Shulamith Galilee in spring, they went for a walk to talk. They were using their pre-marriage time wisely: learn to communicate with each other. In remembering back to this time, Shulamith recalls her request of Solomon as they walked and talked: 15 *Catch for us the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.* 16 *My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies.* 17 *Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.* (Song Solomon 2:15-17).

#### **"LITTLE FOXES" CAUSE THE MOST DAMAGE**

What does she mean when she asks Solomon to *"catch the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards"*? In Palestine gardeners would put rock walls around their orchards to keep out wolves, bears, lions, deer, etc. They could cause lots of damage eating the crops. However, there was a more subtle, more dangerous enemy to the vines -- young foxes. It was almost impossible to keep them out, for they could slip between cracks between the rocks. They would scratch the new buds forming on the vines as they started to grow, and that would ruin the new growth. Thus, they caused more damage in the long run than the wolves, bears or lions.

Shulamith is well aware that in relationships (*"our vineyards that are in bloom"*) it is the little problems that can cause the most damage. Big problems must be faced and worked through, or the relationship will end. However little things can be left and ignored. In the long run they are even more damaging, though. What are big problems? Those which so major they must be faced. What are little problems? Any that can be swept under the rug and ignored. People incorrectly think that they will just resolve themselves. However, problems that are not resolved before marriage are much harder to correctly resolve after marriage. Marriage magnifies problems, it doesn't solve them. Love and deep commitment are basic to working through these things (*"my love is mine and I am his"*) but love doesn't make them disappear.

#### **PROBLEMS TO WATCH OUT FOR**

Problems to be resolved before marriage include temperament differences, background differences (values, priorities, motives, goals, etc.), and feelings about important matters. This includes work load (who does what around the house), children (how many, when, discipline, whose main responsibility they are), finances (charge cards, debt, standard of living, savings), in-laws (responsibilities, role, need of approval) and sex (attitude, birth control, other's needs).



Shulamith wants to have these things worked out before marriage so they don't grow and ruin their relationship later. Notice she needs him to do this, for it is mainly the man's responsibility in the relationship. For the most part, though, men aren't big on working through problems, especially 'little' ones that can seemingly be ignored!

What problem was she specifically talking about? I don't know, but I do know she wanted and needed more time with him ("*turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills*"). She wants him to hurry back! He is just too busy being king in Jerusalem to spend as much time with her as she needs! What woman doesn't want more time with her man than she gets? It's interesting to remember that Solomon, the richest man in the world, could have given her anything that money can buy. But what does she want from him more than anything? She wants his TIME. And not just this 'quality time' cop-out that is talked about today. All time together is quality time. There is no substitute for quantity time -- before or after marriage. That is the only way to work on the little things, to get to know each other, to learn to communicate with each other.

### **COMMUNICATION**

The only way to prevent or cure these problems is by good communication. That's something that is talked about a lot today, but often not really understood. Ephesians 4:25-5:2 gives some good principles for communication. 1. Be honest and truthful (25): to yourself (identify your own feelings and find the main issue [why this bothers you]) and to your mate (in your talking and body language, also in your listening). 2. Be self-controlled (26a), don't let anger (yours or theirs) prevent communication. Handle your feelings of hurt and rejection as pain, don't let it turn to anger. 3. Keep it short (26b). Don't let negative feelings fester inside. Don't fight to win (or both loose) but work together to find the best solution for both. 4. Watch the timing (27). Don't bring up potentially explosive issues when either you or they are tired, distracted, burdened, busy, etc. Use the Golden Rule, approach sticky issues the way you would like to have them brought up to you. 5. Take positive actions (28) to prevent conflicts as well as to end current ones. 6. Build others up, don't tear them down (29). Don't fight the other person to win, instead along with the other person fight the problem to defeat it. 7. Keep close to God (30) for that is the only source of wisdom, love and patience. Pray together before starting a discussion, and stop and pray during a discussion if things start to get out of hand. 8. Develop constructive behavior (31). Don't focus on what is wrong with the other person, but what is right. 9. Be forgiving (32) of your mate as well as yourself. Pride is a real roadblock to good communication. 10. Live by love (5:1-2). Love is the grease, the oil that keeps friction from causing sparks. Make sure your love for your mate is greater than your love for yourself. Without love no relationship will grow.

Remember, you can't defeat the little foxes if you don't know what they are or where they are getting into your relationship. Where are your fences weak? What little things are unresolved in your relationship? What should you (not the other person) do about them now? If you aren't committed enough to keep out all the little foxes you won't have the kind of relationship you could have. If you aren't willing to pay the price to keep them out, sooner or later they'll destroy all you've been growing in your garden. It's up to you.

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

### 3. DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF HUSBANDS & WIVES

#### Song of Solomon 3:1-5

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I followed the story of Robertson and Muriel McQuilkin for some time. He is the former president of Columbia Bible College. Robertson traveled and spoke, wrote books, and had a great impact for Christ on the world. Muriel developed Alzheimer's disease about 8 years ago. Before long she couldn't recognize anyone and became like a little child, totally dependent on others for her care. She was only content when her husband was around, but in no ways was she a wife to him. He had a decision to make: his ministry or his wife. He resigned all his work just to take care of her. He promised to be with her in "sickness and health, for better or worse" and he plans to keep his promise. He loves her and delights in her presence. He tells about how she was faithful to him for 40 years and he could never repay her. "I don't have to care for her, I get to! It's a high honor to care for so wonderful a person."

While this seems very admirable, is it expecting too much of a person in today's world? Would you expect your mate to do that for you? Would you do it for your mate? Is it expecting too much or not? I think this is at the heart and core of many marriage problems today -- what should we expect of ourselves? of our mates? Unless we know what God expects, we will either expect too much or too little from ourselves and others. Either way is disaster!

**WILL HE HAVE ENOUGH TIME FOR ME?** Shulamith had this very problem with expectations before marrying Solomon (Song of Solomon 3:1-5). She kept dreaming he would be gone too much taking care of his kingly duties after they were married. This was the "little fox" she was concerned about earlier (2:15). It wasn't a matter of if she loved him and wanted to marry him, but if she could accept him and his limits. This issue must be confronted and worked through in the courtship time before marriage, not after marriage. Expectations must be clearly defined or confusion will surely result. We can only have proper expectations by looking at God's word for the answer.

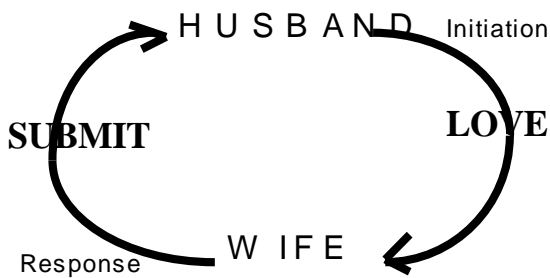
**WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF HUSBANDS** God expects husbands to meet their wife's need for love and security. Following Jesus' example, he is to sacrificially love her (Ephesians 5:22-33). Man is to have *agape* love (unconditional love, love in spite of, love no matter what) for his wife, as Jesus has for us. Too often our love instead is *phileo* (better translated 'like' than 'love,' for it is dependent on the recipient, love "because" or "if"). A woman needs to feel secure, so a husband is commanded (note it is a command, not suggestion) to have the same kind of sacrificial, unselfish, humble love for his wife that Jesus has for him.

**WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF WIVES** The Bible says God expects wives to be submissive to their husbands, as they submit to Jesus (Ephesians 5:22-33). The more a husband treats his wife as Jesus would, the better able she is to respond (the root meaning of the word 'submit') to him as she does to Jesus. Joseph sacrificially put Mary first, willing to take the financial loss and criticism himself rather than putting her up to public ridicule. No wonder she so willingly followed him!

Abraham, however, put himself before Sarah (telling her to say she was his sister) and so she decided she was going to have to watch out for herself since Abraham wasn't going to sacrifice to take care of her -- and that's what she did from then on!

Just as a woman has an innate, built-in need for love and security, a man has a built-in need to provide and guide. By submitting a woman allows him to fill that. Besides, God says the man is to be the leader, not the woman (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3-5; 1 Timothy 2:11-15). Thus, the man is to initiate the love. It's his responsibility to reach out in sacrificial love first, so she can respond with submission. A man needs to provide, he needs to feel needed. Women must let their men know they need them and appreciate them. All of this is what was happening before marriage, it must continue afterwards.

	MAN	WOMAN
NEED	PROVIDE GUIDE	SECURITY LOVE
DUTY	SACRIFICIAL LOVE	SUBMIT, RESPECT



Good advice for husbands and wives is to follow John Kennedy's slogan (with minor alterations): "Ask not what your mate can do for you, ask what you can do for your mate."

Women, don't expect too much of your husband. Men are basically little boys inside, trying to perform as they think men should perform. As Ruth Graham says, "Only Jesus can be Jesus." Love him unconditionally.

Realize men don't really understand the major differences between men and women. Help him understand your need to communicate, for romance, for time together, for his undivided attention when you talk, for long slow shopping trips, etc. Don't compare him to others. Don't assume he knows your mind (he doesn't), Don't focus on his weakness'. Don't criticize him. Your job is to build him up.

God created women to "fill up the empty spaces" in man (Genesis 2:18). Women are made to be completing men, not competing with them. A man isn't complete without the woman God has for him functioning as God wants her to. She finds her completion in helping him find his completion.

One final word about this subject. While God expects a man to sacrificially love his wife and a wife to let her man know he is needed, neither will ever totally do this as their mate needs. God will never let a woman meet all her husband's needs, or a man meet all his wife's needs. God is a jealous God and makes sure we ultimately come to Him for our needs. When your mate proves themselves to be less than perfect, go to God with your unmet needs. That's the only place to have them met.

So, is it expecting too much to have the kind of love Robertson McQuilkin had for his wife. I don't think so. This is what God wants us to expect. But when our expectations aren't met God wants us to come to Him, for He never disappoints us!

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

### 3. WHEN ARE PEOPLE MARRIED IN GOD'S SIGHT?

#### **Song of Solomon 3:6-11**

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Is it all right for Christians to hug and kiss before marriage? What is all right sexually and what isn't? We know sexual intercourse is forbidden (Deuteronomy. 22:13-30; Exodus 22:16) because it creates a unique oneness in God's sight (Genesis. 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). Does this in itself constitute marriage? Just what does God look for in a couple to consider them married in His sight? Just the sexual union? What about a wedding license? Let's see what God says:

#### **WHY GOD FORBIDS SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE**

In her reminiscence Shulamith remembers when Solomon sent for her, to have her escorted to Jerusalem in splendor for their wedding (Song of Solomon 3:6-11). They obviously have not been living together before marriage, nor (as becomes very evident later) have they had sex for both are virgins. God's word commands that, and not just to take away our 'fun' but because it is for our benefit. God made sex to be His wedding gift to us. Just like a parachute only works from an airplane, not the roof of a house, so sex only performs its proper function within the bounds of marriage. God created sex to be a picture of our union with him (Ephesians 5:22-31), the closest earthly experience to heaven. This can only follow a life-long commitment (salvation with God; marriage with mate). Sex is such a wonderful, powerful thing that it can only come AFTER a couple has grown to have a deep understanding and commitment culminating in marriage. When it enters before that it short-circuits further emotional growth and oneness in a couple. It will 'carry' a relationship for a while, but substitutes for the rock-solid foundation of communication every relationship needs. That's why the divorce rate among those who first live together is much higher than among those who don't. As Christians God Himself lives in us, we are His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Thus, Satan uses this powerful force to tempt to sin (Galatians 5:19). We are to live by self-control, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:12-13). Remember, God provides a way out of every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

It's easy to know and believe that sex before marriage is forbidden. But what other expressions of love, sexual or other? There's a lot of open space between shaking hands and sex -- where to draw the line? How far did Shulamith and Solomon go before getting married?

#### **DON'T AROUSE SEXUALLY IN ANY WAY**

The Song of Solomon repeatedly says "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). In other words, don't start anything you can't finish! Don't do ANYTHING to arouse the other person. Actually it's not so much what you do but how you do it. Hugging, kissing, holding hands, a caress of an arm or face, even talking -- all can be innocent ways of showing love or done in such a way as to get a sensual response. It is the latter that is always and totally wrong! Sex is like nitro glycerin - don't play around with it in any way until marriage. In marriage it is safe, outside it seems innocent but is very dangerous!

We must remember that everything we do must be for God's glory (1 Corinthians 6:20) and we must be able to ask God to bless whatever we do (Colossians 3:17). All we do should help

us grow spiritually (Hebrews 12:1). We are required to have a pure testimony to unbelievers (Col. 4:5) and believers (1 Corinthians 8:7-13). We are to be like Jesus, so ask yourself "Would Jesus do this?" Also, think of your future mate. What standards would you like her or him to keep? How would like your brother or sister to act? Apply that yourself.

### **WHAT CONSTITUTES MARRIAGE IN GOD'S SIGHT?**

**Sexual intercourse** creates a special oneness in the people involved (Genesis. 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6). Paul goes so far to say that sex with a prostitute even creates this bond (1 Corinthians 6:15-16). But does this mean that everyone that has sex is married in God's eyes? While this is one ingredient that creates a marriage in God's sight, it is not the only one.

**A public commitment** is also necessary. We are to follow the governmental guidelines which our country sets down (Romans 13) and that entails legal paperwork and vows said before a legally authorized person. People cannot avoid this yet claim to be married. For the Christian it should be more than the minimum justice of the peace, it should be done with God's people, sharing the blessing with them and wanting their help and support. It must be public.

Before the "one flesh" passage in Genesis. 2:24 comes a condition to be met first: "For this reason a man will **leave his father and mother and be united to his wife**, and they will become one flesh." "Leave" is a strong word, meaning to forsake or abandon. We must leave our relationship with our parents (but not our responsibility to help them and treat them with love and kindness). In my opinion the biggest cause of marriage problems comes from one or both people still needing their parent's approval and acceptance. Distance and even death do not break this pull. If basic emotional needs of love, acceptance and approval are not met by parents in childhood, children grow up to look for other ways of meeting them. Bringing them to Jesus is the only successful, healthy way. Substitutes include trying to earn approval by doing what the parent would want, going to the opposite extreme and doing the opposite of what the parent would want, looking for status and recognition in other ways (career, mate, children, sex, appearance, money, status, education, accomplishment, overwork, etc.). Admit these tendencies and needs to God, ask Him to forgive and heal from the past. Develop healthy, wholesome, positive relationships with true, open intimacy. Allow others to know the real you so you can feel this acceptance and love. Go for counseling if necessary. These things **MUST** be worked through before marriage. You can't 'give' yourself to your mate unless you 'have' yourself to give. These unmet needs are strings attaching you to the past and making you unable to truly give yourself to your mate. This **WILL** undermine any relationship!

After "leave" God says to "cleave" or "be united." This in Hebrew means to cling closely. It's used of skin to bone. This 100% total commitment is a must for a marriage to succeed, and God expects His children to make this kind of commitment to each other. **THEN** comes the "one flesh" - physically, emotionally and spiritually. This isn't an instant event, a once-and-done happening. "Shall be" is progressive. It takes **TIME** to truly be 'one flesh' in all ways.

Wherever you find yourself in the marriage process (single, engaged, newly married, long-time married) it's never too late to get on God's path. Confess the past, ask for healing and restoration, and start applying what you now know to your present relationship. Forget the past and press ahead in Jesus (Philippians 3:13). He'll guide you each step of the way!

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

### 5. WHY GOD CREATED SEX

#### Song of Solomon 1:1-8

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With sex being so abused and misused today, it's easy to forget that God Himself invented sex, created it for man and woman, and did this before there was any sin (while everyone and everything was perfectly holy). In order to get correct bearings in relationship to sex we must always keep this in mind. God created it special and holy, the perfect way to show, physically, the oneness that happens emotionally between husband and wife (Genesis 2:24). It pictures the oneness Jesus has with His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:22-31). No wonder Satan does all he can to confuse and undermine the correct use of this special gift! Where can we go to get the true, clear picture of the plan and purpose of sex? To the Bible, of course!

#### SHULAMITH ANTICIPATES HER WEDDING NIGHT WITH JOY

In the series of flashbacks which comprise the Song of Solomon, Shulamith reminisces on her marriage to Solomon. After the courtship time of getting to know each other better (2:8-3:5) Solomon brings her to Jerusalem for the wedding (3:6-11). As the wedding approaches her thoughts are on the wedding night (1:1-8), not the beautiful ceremony coming up, how she will be the center of attraction for the nation and the world, or the power and prestige that will be hers as queen. Her thoughts are on Solomon, not herself. That is one of the reasons he loves her. Men want a woman to love them for themselves, not for what they can provide.

She anticipates his kisses and caresses: "*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine*" (1:2). The Hebrew word 'love' ('dodem') refers to sexual love, caresses and kisses, foreplay as we would call it. In anticipation of this, Shulamith is anxious to go "*into his chambers*" (v. 4) -- his bedroom. Even though she is darker than the Jerusalem beauties (v. 5) from working in the fields for her family (v. 6), she feels good about herself as a person and accepts her body and appearance as God made it ("*the tents of Kedar, the tent curtains of Solomon*" were dark but very beautiful). Shulamith makes sure that Solomon shares her interest in sex. She doesn't want to chase after him like a prostitute ("*veiled woman*" v. 7).

Do you think less of Shulamith for her having this on her mind? Does it seem wrong for a 'good' woman to think such thoughts? Is 'holy lust' OK? Why DID God create sex anyway?

#### THE PURPOSE OF SEX

**Propagation** is one purpose of sex (Genesis 1:27-28; 9:1). That doesn't mean it is the only purpose, nor that there always has to be the chance of pregnancy. Birth control is an option for Christians. Such things as abortion or infanticide (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2) are strictly out, though. Personally, I don't feel right about sterilization (Deuteronomy. 23:1; Leviticus 21:20; 22:24) but I don't think that is a Biblical absolute. Just remember that conception is a GIFT from God (Genesis 4:1,13; 16:2; 17:19; 29:31; 30:22) and children are a blessing/reward from God (Psalm 127).

**Pleasure** is the other reason for sex. Unlike animals, sex for humans is "pleasure with a purpose." People continue to have sex after procreation is possible. There is a pleasure element added that animals don't have. God created sex to promote mutual love ("*one flesh*"). God told

Eve He would give her a physical desire for her husband strong enough to overcome the anticipation of labor and birth (Genesis. 3:16). Isaac "caressed" his wife Rebekah (Genesis 26:8) in a way that made Abimelech discover she was not his sister. The Bible often speaks of the joys of married love (Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 7:6-10).

**CONDITIONS FOR SEXUAL LOVE** God gives three conditions for sexual love: **1. Not before marriage** (Deuteronomy. 22:13-23:2; 27:20f; 2 Samuel 12:14). God clearly commands virginity until marriage and this includes emotional virginity. Not giving your heart away is as important as not giving your body away. The world's way is to have sex as long as nobody gets 'hurt,' but someone always does. Living together is accepted in many parts of society, but it is still sin.

**2. Only with your mate after marriage**, and this presumes the mate is of the opposite sex for homosexuality is sin (Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Leviticus 20:23). Sex with anyone other than your mate is adultery and is sin (Matthew 5:27-32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 5:9; 0, 18-20; Ex. 20:4; Deuteronomy. 5:18; 24:1-4; etc.).

**3. Put your mate's sexual needs before your own** (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 5:22-31). Don't be self-centered, thinking of your own pleasure. Don't fantasize or let anything other than your love for your mate come into your mind. Sex is to GIVE pleasure, not GET pleasure, that's one reason why pornography is so damaging. If each person seeds only to give pleasure to their mate, each in turn will receive much more pleasure than if they looked out for their own needs. This can only truly happen where there is a deep foundation of love and commitment, understanding and respect, self-acceptance and maturity (as with Shulamith and Solomon). A good sex life in marriage is not optional, God commands it! (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Without it our prayer and spiritual lives are hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

**DANGERS....** It's been my experience that Satan attacks men by popping improper thoughts into our minds any time, any place. If these thoughts are welcomed and allowed to remain they become sin (Matthew 5:27-30). Women lust isn't so much physical as emotional -- romance. Their biggest substitute is thoughts of romance, love, being needed & protected, etc. It can come in fantasy thoughts, watching soap operas, reading romance books, or gossiping about others' relationships. For men and women Satan loves to bring up past sins committed by us or against us. He undermines husband-wife relationships so their sex life is affected, too.

**RECLAIMING THE GIFT** What's the solution? **1. Confess your sin** (I Jn. 1:9). This includes wrong sexual actions or thoughts, fantasies, putting your own pleasure before your mate's, or withholding pleasure from your mate. **2. Accept God's forgiveness** and forgive yourself or you will carry around false guilt. This can be hard and sometimes requires counseling (except pride keeps us from talking about it, which is why sexual sins are often hard to defeat). Remember, everyone in the Bible who ever repented of sexual sin was forgiven (David, Gomer, Solomon, Samson, Rahab, etc.). **3. Take a stand** against any thought or action that is sinful, no matter what the cost (as Vashti did in Esther). It takes courage to draw the line and stick to it (Philippians 4:8). Know your weak spots and flee before it gets too late (as Joseph did Genesis 39:12; 1 Corinthians 10:13). Be willing to do whatever is necessary to defeat the sin. **4. Become accountable to a godly person** other than your mate (they won't ask the tough questions, and you'll deceive to spare their feelings). Pride keeps us from sharing our sexual struggles, and that keeps us in defeat. God knows all about them anyway, so go to Him with them. He understands.

## 6. EMOTIONAL & SEXUAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

### Song of Solomon 1:9-14

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What are your favorite memories of your wedding day? Are they about the opulence, the attention paid you, the celebrity status you have for a day? Or are they about special moments of closeness between you and your mate, intimate words in stolen moments? These are the kind of memories Shulamith had as she thought back to her wedding day (Song of Sol. 1:9-14). She remembers sitting at the banquet table as the day wound down and people started drifting away. Solomon is speaking to her privately, commending her, flirting with her. She remembers every word he said, for things like that are very important to a woman!

**SOLOMON COMPLIMENTS SHULAMITH** First he tells her she is more important to him than anything he has (even his favorite Egyptian horse, v. 9). He compliments her for how beautiful she looks in the new jewelry he gave her (v. 10) and promises her he will give her more in the near future (v. 11). It's not her greed for more and more expensive jewelry, but her need for the little expressions of love to continue after marriage. He is assuring her that he wasn't just romancing her to catch her, but that it will continue. As they talk the love just flows between them, like the fragrance of their perfume (v. 12). Shulamith responds to these words with more love for Solomon. His words of acclaim bring love out of her like her body heat brings fragrance out of the myrrh she wears around her neck (v. 13). Her love for him grows as he tells of his admiration of her (v. 14). The next stop for them is the bedroom, and that is what her memories move on to (1:15-2:7).

Why is it so important for women to be told, over and over again, that they are loved and special? Why do they need to hear it so often in so many different ways? Why don't men understand this? What ARE the basic differences between men and women?

**MEN AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT** When God created Adam he was perfect, sinless. Still, something was missing so God created woman to "fill the empty spaces" in man (Genesis 2:20). He was missing something that she provided; thus, she was different than him. He had something she didn't and she had something he didn't. Together there was a completeness that was missing alone. It has nothing to do with right or wrong, superior or inferior. It is just that they are different.

In boiling down the difference to its basic quality we can say that women tend to be more rational and men tend to be more emotional. Could this be why Satan picked on Eve first and used her to get Adam to sin, and why God says men are to lead in areas of rational decision-making (2 Timothy. 2:11-15)?

Men are more compartmentalized, focused on one thing at a time. What happens at the store has no connection to what happens in the bedroom. Women, on the other hand, are connected, comprehensive. What happens in the morning has everything to do with what happens in the evening. Men focus on tasks, accomplishing, crossing items off a list. Women



focus more on relationships, developing intimacy and closeness. It is the interplay between these that make programs such as *Home Improvements* so popular, because we identify with them.

Men don't naturally understand women. Often they don't have a clue! During courtship it may seem a man understands his mate, but that's just because he has radar on high all the time, and because she sends such obvious signals they are hard to miss. After marriage, when she assumes he's got it down and cuts back on the signals, things fall apart. Men just don't understand. Mothers don't teach their sons, and they don't see it taught in how their fathers treated their mothers.

**BASIC EMOTIONAL NEEDS** Women have some basic emotional needs. These include needing tenderness and affection to feel loved and secure. They need intimacy, contact, honesty and openness with no secrets. They need to feel secure in their relationships. Men, too, need to be loved and accepted, but for them it is shown by being the ones doing the protecting and providing. Men need to know they are important, respected, and are meeting the needs of their loved ones.

The first stage for women in developing intimacy is talking. It doesn't matter so much what is being said, just that her man cares enough to listen, to give of his time and attention. Men talk in memo's, direct & to the point, problem-solution. Women instead go into great detail of superfluous information, don't just give information for problem-solving, and when are given a solution by their husband often resent it. They just want him to listen and care. Female-male communication is light years different from male-male communication! Men must understand this or there will be bad problems in the relationship.

Each must understand how the other feels and communicates. If not, they will assume their mate feels and thinks just the same way they do and judge the response (or lack of it) accordingly. This guarantees hurt feelings, misunderstanding, and problems in the relationship.

**HANDLING MALE-FEMALE DIFFERENCES** What's the solution? Mainly, it's to communicate openly with your mate. Honestly and patiently say what needs to be said (nothing more, nothing less). Men: get in touch with your feelings, don't let things build, lovingly and gently say what you are feeling. Women: don't make him guess or read your mind. Be as open in your communication as during courtship. Each must listen to what the other is saying, listen between the lines, listen as you want to be listened to. Be patient with your mate as they, and God, are patient with you.

**UNDERSTANDING YOUR MATE'S SEXUAL DIFFERENCES** One final area to cover to complete this subject, and that has to do with sexual differences. Men and women are wired differently this way, too. Women need time talking and developing intimacy before lovemaking. It is literally an all-day process for them to feel close and secure enough to really respond sexually as God created them to respond. After lovemaking, it takes them time of intimacy to come down, too. Men turn on and then come down very quickly. If men don't understand this about women they won't meet her needs first. If women don't understand this about men they will think he is just being selfish and not caring about her needs. Too often the saying is true: men give love to get sex and women give sex to get love. This isn't God's way, and is far short of the richness God has for His people. Talk, think, be sensitive, learn to understand each other. It'll be well worth it in your marriage and life.

## 7. SET IN MARRIAGE: WHAT'S OK AND WHAT ISN'T

### Song of Solomon 1:15-2:7

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The banquet is over. All the guests have departed. Solomon and Shulamith are husband and wife. Now comes the time they have both been waiting for with love and anticipation. As Shulamith continues her series of reminiscences which compose the Song of Solomon she thinks of the wedding night and what went on then. What she thinks would shock many Christians today, not were it on TV or in a library book (its tame for that) but because it's in the Bible. Daily we overlook sexual comments and remarks in society that, in the church, would appall us, and not because of their content but because of sex being mentioned. It seems we've made sex a taboo subject in church and given the whole area up to Satan and the world to influence us and our children in wrong ways. As a result, we seem to have come to regard anything having to do with sex as dirty and to be rejected. WE have been so influenced by worldly values and slang that sex has lost its pureness and specialness. Instead, it has come to be seen as evil and sinful. Even though we know this isn't true in marriage, it still affects us deeply, making us unable to read what God has to say about it in an open way.

Picture in your minds two young people who haven't grown up in our culture, who were taught that sex was fine and special, a gift from God to show married love. Remember they have never been taught negative thoughts about sex, and it has been kept in balance their whole lives. This is the way God created it, and the way it is to be. It's the way we want our children to be, isn't it? Keep this in mind as you read on. If the things expressed in this or the next article shock or surprise you, remember it isn't the Bible that is at fault but our society and its effect on us. God created sex. He created it and gave it to man before there was any sin. He inspired the Bible, including Song of Solomon. He chose to have this book as part of His Holy Word for all time. There is nothing wrong with its words, the problem lies within us. Satan has succeeded in corruption that which God created to show the oneness we have with Him (Ephesians 5:21-33). He wanted to spoil and corrupt God's pure gift and has done so.

**WEDDING NIGHT MEMORIES** As Shulamith remembers her wedding night, she remembers Solomon continuing to complement and romance her (see article 6.). He complements her as they lay in bed, talking and touching each other. He is glad for her purity and innocence (Song of Solomon 1:15). She thanks him for his thoughtfulness in the luxurious bed (v. 16) and bedroom (v. 17) he has made just for her. He even used wood from her home area to make her feel at home. It seems to have been a special room, a retreat, a 'world apart' for them. That's what a bedroom should be -- not a place for unfolded wash, piled up mending, storage and clutter of all kinds. It should be a specially made room for romance and relaxation.

As the conversation continues Shulamith compares herself to the beautiful but humble rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley (v. 2:1). She is feeling like a common country girl around all the opulence and painted beauty of the big city women. Solomon reassures her that she is like a lily among thorns compared to them (they are the thorns!).

Communication during physical love is very important. It is especially important for a woman to communicate to her husband her needs and desires, as Shulamith did with Solomon. If not a man may assume his wife responds like he does, and her needs won't be met.

Meanwhile they continue to caress and touch ("embrace," v. 6, in Hebrew refers to fondling, stimulating - we'd call it foreplay). Then she says, "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste " (2:3). The apple tree was a symbol of sexual love. As the tempo of their lovemaking increases she praises him for what he is doing to her. It's not that he has learned a skill and technique, for he, too, is a virgin. It's his love that motivates him to want to please her. He is thinking only of her pleasure, not his own. In fact, the Hebrew for the last part of the verse refers to oral intercourse ("fruit sweet to my taste").

Does it surprise you that the Bible refers to this, and in a context of love and approval? The Bible has more to say than we think about these things, but they are usually translated in such a way as to be so general that we often miss the specific sexual reference.

**JUST WHAT IS OK IN MARRIAGE?** It certainly seems this has God's approval. That brings up the question: what, if anything, is forbidden sexually to married people? Leviticus 20:10-21 gives some limits: adultery (v. 10; Galatians 5:19), incest (11-12), homosexuality/lesbianism (13; Romans 1:26-32), bestiality (14-16), exhibitionism (17), with close relatives (19-21), and during menstruation (18). This later was because anything having to do with childbirth was a reminder of the fall and entrance of sin, thus the law was established to remind the Jews of the difference sin makes. We are no longer under the law.

If these are forbidden, does that mean anything else is all right? Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." This could also be translated "the marriage bed is pure," meaning everything in marriage is all right. The Bible does say that "everything is permissible" (1 Corinthians 6:12), but this isn't a license to indulge in selfish sex. God makes it very clear (1 Corinthians 7:1-6) that sex in marriage is giving, not getting. One mate is not to withhold their body from their mate, for it belongs to their mate and not themselves, and the only excuse to deny a mate sex is that one is fasting and praying (but even so only for a short time).

The Bible sets down some principles for each couple to decide what is acceptable for them. First, unselfish love must be the motive (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). When sex is more important than love, it is lust! Anything that both people do not see as an expression of love is out! Second, both must agree (Philippians 2:1-4). Just because Solomon & Shulamith agreed to something doesn't mean you have to, and it certainly is nothing to use to force a mate into something they feel uncomfortable with. The key element is mutual submission to each other (Ephesians 5:21).

In a day and age like ours, it is important for each person to pray for God to remove wrong ideas and impressions created by experiences or exposures in the past and to renew their minds (Romans 12:1-2). Pray together before beginning any expression of physical love.

Shulamith concludes this part of her reminiscence remembering how safe and secure she felt in her sexual relationship with Solomon (Song of Sol 2:4). In terms familiar to them then she remembers being completely overcome with sexual desire for Solomon and wanting him to satisfy her without delay (v. 5). She even remembers step by step all that happened (v. 6). The section concludes with an application by the chorus and Shulamith to remember to save every part of this wonderful gift of sexual love for marriage (v. 7). This is an especially important reminder for those in this day and age, and the key to keeping everything pure and innocent for marriage. Ask God to restore that to you, reject the world's filth, enjoy God's gift!

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

### 7. SEXUAL FULLMENT IN MARRIAGE

#### Song of Solomon 4:1-5:1

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In the last article we looked at Shulamith's recollections of her wedding night. We saw that sex is a beautiful wedding gift from God to seal the love of a husband and wife, but that the world today has so misused and abused it that it is sometimes hard to see it in that light. That's not how it was for Solomon and Shulamith. She continues her reminiscence of her wedding night in Song of Solomon 4:1 - 5:1.

**SOLOMON TAKES THE LEAD** As God intended; Solomon takes the lead in this as well as other areas of married life. He complements her hair (v 1) and eyes (v 1), then her teeth (v 2), lips and mouth (v 3) and temples (v 3). Working his way down he marvels over her stately neck (v 4) and breasts (v 5) and then down to her "mountain of myrrh and hill of incense" (v 6). He sums her all up by telling her she is beautiful and flawless (v 7). She feels totally loved and accepted, so she can respond in an uninhibited manner. There are no fat jokes, no critical comments, no uncomplimentary remarks about her body. That would ruin it for her, as it would for all women.

The conversation takes an abrupt change here, though, for Solomon starts talking to her about taking a trip back to her home (v 8). Why talk about this now? Put yourself in her shoes. In the last 48 hours she's gone from a bare-foot country girl to queen of one of the greatest countries in the world. She's culture shocked, drained, homesick and feeling out of place. As a result, she's distracted mentally from their lovemaking. Solomon could have pushed on, pretending he didn't notice. She would have felt guilty to 'deny' him and would have gone along as best she could. But that's not the way it should be. When each one puts their mate first that means being sensitive to the other's needs, not your own. Solomon's talking about the honeymoon for a while relax her and make her feel even closer to him.

It seems she starts sending signals to him with her eyes to continue their lovemaking (v 9) and he reassures her of his love (v 9). Then he complements her on her lovemaking ("love" here is the Hebrew word for "caresses" saying they are the greatest thing he's ever experienced. He encourages her in her kissing (v 11). Her knows she is a virgin (v 12) and that makes it all even more special for him.

This is in symbolic/poetic language, but that's the nicest way to refer to sexual things. Street slang is too crude and lacking in love. Medical terms are cold and impersonal. A husband and wife often develop their own language to talk about these things, and it is usually symbolic. The locked garden and spring enclosed refer to the same thing: a special, refreshing place reserved only for the owner to enjoy. Proverbs 5:15-23 clearly shows this meaning.

Solomon continues in this vein, focusing on her sexual organs and their fragrance (v 13-14). Her fluids show him she is as excited as he is (v 15). Shulamith responds by encouraging Solomon to fully enjoy her sexually (v 16) and he does so (v 5:1a).

Of great interest is the final comment of 5:1 "Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers." God Himself, the only spectator to this, is giving His full approval. He is pleased when

we enjoy this gift He created for us. Just like we enjoy watching our children enjoy a special present we give them, so God enjoys seeing us like His gift of sex.

**HOW TO HAVE SEXUAL FULFILLMENT IN MARRIAGE** Now that we are done with the wedding night accounts, lets glean from them several principles of how to have sexual fulfillment in marriage.

1. **DEVELOP A CLOSE, STRONG FRIENDSHIP** during courtship and afterwards. Learn to communicate, to know each other thoroughly and completely. Keep your emotional virginity until you know for sure whom God wants you to marry, then give your heart away completely.
2. **STAY A VIRGIN UNTIL MARRIAGE.** That means don't get sexually involved in ANY way. Don't do anything you wouldn't want your future mate to do, or anything Jesus wouldn't do!
3. **MAKE THE FOCUS OF YOUR WEDDING THE WEDDING CEREMONY AND NIGHT,** not the 'show' you are putting on for the guests. They are coming for the privilege of watching the ceremony, not to be fed and entertained. Put your time and energy into planning the ceremony and wedding night (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31). Make it a special memory.
4. **KEEP YOUR BEDROOM NEAT, PLEASING AND ROMANTIC.** Don't let it become a bed in a store/junk/work room. Decorate and keep it as a special retreat from the busy world around you, the nicest and most welcoming room in the house.
5. **START SEX WITH LOTS OF HEART-TO-HEART TALKING.** Share, complement each other, speak of your love. Go slow until both are relaxed and ready emotionally, then start things physically. Often the physical comes first and the emotions have to rush to try and catch up. Sex at bedtime starts when you get up in the morning by talking, listening and touching.
6. **IT TAKES MORE TIME FOR A WOMAN TO GET READY PHYSICALLY THAN A MAN.** Take your time, talk about little things going on in her life, listen, laugh, let the conversation take any turn it wishes. Men can't hurry for their own selfish fulfillment, but must put his wife's pleasure first. Take your time and learn to enjoy each step, not just the end.
7. **ANYTHING BETWEEN A HUSBAND AND WIFE IS OK IF IT'S DONE IN LOVE** and is pleasurable to both. God doesn't set off anything as wrong in itself. It is up to each to decide what is mutually respectful and pleasurable to both.
8. **COMMUNICATE ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING SEXUALLY.** By words, actions, etc. learn to communicate what you like, don't like, and so forth. Don't be afraid to communicate. That includes communicating with God, too.
9. **EMBARRASSMENT, FEAR, INHIBITION AND GUILT DESTROY GOOD SEX.** Do everything possible to help your mate remove those things. Remember, your body belongs to her and hers to you (1 Corinthians 7:3-6). Don't withhold your body from your mate. Don't use it to manipulate, punish or reward your mate. Don't say or do anything that in any way is critical of them.
10. **REMEMBER GOD IS WATCHING AND APPROVING.** There is no guilt if He is watching. He created sex, and that was before sin entered the world. It is pleasing in God's sight. Pray before (and even after) to ask for God's blessing, help, patience, wisdom, clean mind, etc.

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

### 9. ROMANCE, REJECTION, REALITY & RETRIBUTION IN MARRIAGE

#### Song of Solomon 5:2-8

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Until recently the typical story we read or watched would end up with the man and woman getting married and riding off into the sunset to “live happily ever after.” It got so we actually believed that was what would happen when we got married. Then reality struck! At first we thought it was just us, that everyone else lived happily ever after (except our parents, but we always knew our marriage would be better than theirs anyway). Upon closer examination we realized that we weren’t alone, that no one was “living happily ever after.” Friend after friends announced their divorce. What was happening? What went wrong? More importantly, what could be done? What was the magic secret to being able to live happily ever after?

Some claimed to have the answer so we read their books or went to their seminars. No change, except we felt guilty that their simple solution didn’t work for us. Sermons made it sound so simple: the man leads, the woman submits, and they live happily ever after. The church’s approach often was to hide marriage problems, refer to a secular counselor, or to subtly discourage those with marriage problems from being visible in church. The great cover-up didn’t work, either. Now what? Where to turn? Since God created mankind and marriage, perhaps He has something to say about it. So, we turn to the Bible and Bingo!

**SOLOMON & SHULAMITH: AFTER THE WEDDING** The wedding night was pure utopia and all indications were that it was all improvement from there. They were married and could spend nights as well as days together, they could legally live together and spend all their time with each other. It was what they looked forward to their whole lives! However, it didn’t turn out that way. Reality hit them (it’s nothing new today).

Shulamith was homesick, shell-shocked by culture change, and without friends or duties other than Solomon. He, as she knew before getting married, was gone on business a lot. Naturally she missed him, but instead of realizing she had counted the cost and felt not having him as much as she wanted was better than not having him at all she started feeling sorry for herself and taking his being gone as personal rejection, as if he was purposely avoiding her. An introvert with time on their hands can do all kinds of dangerous things in their minds!

To make things worse, when Solomon did get home late at night after being gone all day he still wanted to have sex, but her self-pity and feelings of rejection made her to want to avoid any kind of intimacy with him. This hurting others when we feel they have hurt us is sin. It goes totally against the Golden Rule and all the Bible says about putting others first. Shulamith knew that and felt guilty about her rejection responses but wasn’t able to resolve her conflict by giving up her self-pity (the only cure to her dilemma).

**THE DREAM:** It seems this unresolved conflict pushed itself to the forefront when she slept and, in the form of a dream, caused her to face her problem. Song of Solomon 5:2-8 records the dream. It was a dream, but so real she wasn’t at first sure (v. 2). Solomon comes to their bedroom late at night (early morning? - dew is forming). For safety purposes the door is locked from the inside and he wants to come in to be close to her. She hears him knock but pretends to be asleep

(other ways of avoiding intimacy could have included having a headache, staying up together too late, or picking/allowing an argument before going to bed). 1 Corinthians 7:35 clearly says the only reason to deny your mate sex is because both of you have agreed to fast and pray that day, but to not even do this long or often.

Of course, Shulamith justifies her refusal to let him in (v. 3). She'd have to get up and put a robe on (modesty from not feeling close to Solomon) and then he feet would get dirty from the floor and she's have to clean them before getting back into her clean bed. Solomon, the way he'd been treating her, just wasn't worth the trouble!

Solomon tries to reach through and open the door himself (v. 3), but Shulamith had moved the latch-string to the side so he couldn't reach it or the bar holding the door closed. In her anger/hurt she made sure he couldn't get in. When she realizes how badly he wants to come in she starts to relent and respond, so she gets up to open for him. By that time however he had given up and only his memory remained (v. 5). By now it's totally reversed. Solomon is gone and Shulamith is seeking for him (v. 6). Her wounded pride is replaced by her love, but too late. In her dream she ran looking for him (v. 7) and her guilty conscience punished her severely (watchmen beating her - figuratively not literally). She awakens and realizes what the dream was showing her and is anxious for Solomon to come to her, no matter what time the night, for she has focused on him and her love for him, not on herself and her assumed rejection (v. 8).

**REJECTION IN MARRIAGE** Marriage is powerful. There is no one who can make you any happier than your mate, nor is there anyone who can hurt you more (or whom you can hurt more) than your mate. Rejection is the most painful way of hurting another. It doesn't just apply to the woman who subtly withholds sex, it just as strongly applies to the man who withholds love. For a man to withhold what his wife needs (love, attention, sensitivity, touches, romance, communication, time together, etc.) and then criticize her for withholding sex is totally wrong. After all, it is up to the man to set the mood, to bring a loving response from his wife (see article 3). A man withholding love is just as bad as a woman withholding sex. Women withhold sex much quicker than love. For men it is the opposite. There is an old saying that a man gives love to get sex and a woman gives sex to get love. Both are wrong!

**WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?** Remember, any kind of intimacy in marriage takes **time**. When one or both are busy it is much harder for the intimacy to continue, much less grow. Intimacy also takes **timing**. Each mate must be sensitive to the other's needs and patterns of the other. The goal is to think only of a mate's needs and do everything possible to meet them. When we forget our own needs and focus only on the other's needs we find our needs are met much better than if we tried meeting them ourselves! Hurting another to punish them for perceived hurts to us is totally wrong. Another ingredient for intimacy is **talking**. That's important to women, for it is the first stage of connecting and without that deeper stages of closeness don't come. It's interesting the King James translated our word "intercourse" to refer to communication. **Trust** also must be present for intimacy to develop. That is a basic need in any relationship. Finally, **time away** is important: weekly dates and annual vacations without the children are a real **MUST** for intimacy to grow. It's as simple (and as hard) as that!



## 10. HAVING A ‘SUCCESSFUL’ MARRIAGE

### Song of Solomon 5:9-6:3

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It seems nothing brings out a person’s selfishness and self-centered in life more than having to share life with another person. We assume marriage will solve all our problems when in reality it just adds another layer of problems to be worked through. Like children, we do fine when we get what we want when we want it, but try putting our needs on hold so we can put someone else first, and sinful attitudes we didn’t realize we had raise their ugly heads. God uses marriage to make us more like Jesus by first showing us how little like Jesus we really are!

**SHULAMITH’S SELF-CENTEREDNESS** Shulamith wasn’t doing too well accepting Solomon gone working so many hours (see previous article in this series, No. 9). After being convicted in a dream of purposely hurting him (rejection) because she allowed herself to think he was purposefully hurting her (rejection), she awakes to feel guilt and remorse about how she has been treating him. What made the difference? It was how she saw her husband. Would she focus and dwell on his weaknesses and imperfections, on his failings and shortcomings and take them as personal rejection? Or would she instead keep foremost in her mind the fact that he loved her and wouldn’t really reject or hurt her, remembering why she married him in the first place? Like most things in life, our mental attitude determines our emotions and actions.

When I counsel people who are having marriage problems, especially very severe ones, I ask them two questions: 1) Do you love your mate? and 2) What attracted you to your mate in the first place? By focusing on this and remembering the good things, the problems can be put in better perspective. By renewing the friendship and enjoying each other as they are (without all the later expectations we add) a relationship can have a foundation to start working through problems and pain that have damaged it. This is what Shulamith is doing.

**REMEMBERING THE GOOD** The current passage, Song of Solomon 5:9-6:3, starts with the chorus posing a question (v. 9) to get Shulamith thinking about Solomon’s good points: Why do you love him? What are his good points? Shulamith pictures Solomon in her mind, thinking of his appearance (v. 10-16). The visual image stands for the total person, inside and out.

To Shulamith, Solomon is handsome and rugged (v. 10), with excellent hair (‘gold’ v. 11) that is wavy and black (v. 11). His eyes are like doves bathing in milk (v. 12), His cheeks and lips are associated with the spices he wore (v. 13). His arms are strong and well-formed (v. 14) and his entire body is beautiful and smooth, flat and firm (v. 14). His legs are also strong and well-formed, very masculine to her (v. 15). The words from his mouth are tender and loving. He isn’t just strong, but also gentle. A man must be both strong (to be the head of the wife) and tender (to make the wife feel loved and secure). A man must be strong enough to be gentle. Strength alone is cold; gentleness alone is weak. both are necessary. God is both strong (sovereign) and tender (loving) (Romans 8:28-39) and in that combination alone we find all we desire, the balance that meets every need.

The chorus has another question (6:1), to take things to the next step. Now that she sees him back in proper perspective, they ask why he isn’t with her. Is it because he doesn’t care and

is rejecting her? Or is it because he would love to be with her but has other things that must be done at the moment, then he will spend all the time with her he can? Shulamith realizes he is busy with affairs of state, something he warned her about before they were married (1:7; 2:16). She can't pity herself; she knew the cost and was willing to pay it to be married to him. She can't change her mind or the circumstances now. She knows you can't marry someone then expect to change them! She knows he loves her (v. 3) and, while she still misses him greatly, she doesn't take her pain out in anger on Solomon. If she doesn't make this mental adjustment she will keep hurting him back and long-term damage will be done to the relationship and their intimacy with each other.

**LET YOUR MIND EXPLAIN REALITY TO YOUR EMOTIONS** When you think about the change in her, it becomes obvious that now she is rationally considering all the facts while before she was reacting emotionally. She is letting her mind explain reality to her emotions, something especially important for a woman since the time of Eve when Satan used her emotions to derail and mislead her (1 Timothy 2:11-15). That is why men are to be the leaders. Men, too, get their emotions involved, especially in conflict with their wives.

**PAST HURTS MAGNIFY PRESENT PROBLEMS** Remember Shulamith's background? She spent years working in the orchards with her brothers (becoming dark tanned) who seemed to be responsible for her upbringing (1:5-6). Was her father also busy and gone a lot when she needed him as a little girl? Or was he gone because he had already died? Were her brothers, who took the place of her father, working so long and hard they weren't available when she needed them? Could these past hurts of seeming rejection make Solomon's being gone all the worse? Is this a sensitive area that she over-reacts to? I'm sure it is. We all have them, don't we. They make things much worse, and turn our minds off and emotions on without us even realizing it is happening. We must all be aware of unresolved hurts from the past which make us super-sensitive to anything that seems like the same hurt from our mate. We must know what to watch out for in our own life as well as our mate's life. For women it is usually a hurt (rejection, criticism, etc.) from their father. When the husband does something similar they quickly over-react, usually without even realizing they are doing so. For men it is often their pride being hit, their wife treating them like their mother did, stepping on a weak and sensitive ego. The solution is to keep our mind in control of our emotions, to remember our mate loves us and isn't purposely rejecting or hurting us, and to not take out past hurts on them.

**ON BEING A SERVANT** These wrong attitudes in marriage are made much worse when we focus on what we think we deserve, where our mate fails to meet our needs, and when our self-centeredness dominates. Jesus says we are to be servants of each other (Matthew 20:26-28), loving our mate unconditionally (1 Corinthians 13). "Ask not what your mate can do for you, but what you can do for your mate." Treat your mate as you want your mate to treat you (the Golden Rule applies to marriage, too). Make meeting your mate's needs your goal and forget your own needs. God will take care of them if you do, usually through your mate. Then the relationship will grow and mature into what God wants it to be and you won't be hurting each other but helping each other. Learn from Shulamith. Watch your self-centeredness!

## Marriage & Family – III. LOVE, SEX & MARRIAGE IN SONG OF SOLOMON

# 11. SOLVING MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

## Song of Solomon 6:4-10

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One evening a wife was reading her newspaper: “It says here that in some parts of India a man doesn’t know his wife until after the marriage.” The husband replied: “Why do they single out India?” How many married people can say they REALLY knew their mate before marriage? If love is blind, marriage can be a real eye-opener!

**SETTING THE STAGE.** We are up to the point in the chronological development of Song of Solomon where Shulamith is angry at Solomon for being gone so much in his kingly business. She took it as personal rejection and handled her hurt by hurting him back. This makes her feel guilty and she starts realizing what she is doing. She remembers the good about him instead of focusing on his weakness’. She dwells on why she married him. Her mind explains reality to her emotions. She knew he’d be gone a lot and agreed to marry him anyway. She remembers her commitment to love him unconditionally (1 Corinthians 13) and realizes he doesn’t love her less but is still devoted and committed to her, serving her in any way she can (Matthew 20:26-28).

**SOLOMON’S RESPONSE.** Shulamith’s next memory in this series of reminisces is of when Solomon returns after she has been rejecting him. He doesn’t make her apologize. He doesn’t pile on guilt. He doesn’t manipulate her. He doesn’t ‘forgive’ in a self-righteous, wounded, withdrawn way. Instead, he does what every husband should do: he reaches out in love! He praises and reassures her of his love no matter what. Solomon isn’t the perfect husband, but he certainly did the right thing this time!

He starts off praising her for her beauty (v. 4). Tirzah and Jerusalem were among the most beautiful cities of their day, and he says she is as beautiful as they. He also tells her she is as awesome, as majestic as his army in full parade (v. 4). In fact, he says she is too much for him to look at, that one penetrating glance from her eyes makes his heart melt (v. 5a). Next he compliments her hair, teeth and temples (v. 5b-7). What is interesting about this is that he uses the same words he used on their wedding night (5:1 - 5:1). This isn’t because he stumbled on something that works and is sticking with it, but because he wants her to know he still loves her the same now as he did then! In fact, he loves her more! She is the greatest woman he has ever met (v. 8-10).

Thus, before she can even apologize for her rejection of him, he reassures her of his total and unconditional love. What a magnificent way to keep a relationship growing!

**ALL MARRIAGES STRUGGLE.** There is no such thing as a perfect marriage. God uses marriage to stretch us. Any time you take two selfish, self-centered individuals (a husband and a wife) and put them in a situation where they have to sacrifice and put someone else first, rough edges are bound to crop up. God allows that to rub them smooth. In addition, opposites attract in marriage, and that makes the mix all the more interesting! Adam and Eve certainly were stretched with Cain. Abraham and Sarah had their times (Genesis 16; 21), as did Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 27) and Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 30, 31). Moses and Zipporah separated and never could

work it out (Ex 4). David and Michal's marriage fell apart, too (II Sam 6) and Hosea had all he could handle with Gomer (Hosea).

**LESS THAN TOTAL HONESTY** often starts marriages off wrong. We show our mate our strengths and put our best foot forward. We are sacrificial and put the other first before marriage. That doesn't last after marriage. One or two fights, seeing the sinful side of the other (and knowing they have seen our sinful side) can make it hard to be as open and trusting as before. The man starts (unconsciously at first) seeing his wife like his mother (in good as well as bad ways) and resents it for it makes him feel like a little boy. The wife has a hard time totally trusting a man because of the example of her own father and poor experiences she's had with men in the past. Thus, the honeymoon ends and reality sets in, as with Shulamith & Solomon.

**UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** that aren't adjusted to reality can throw us into a tailspin. At first husband and wife are lovers, romantic, idealize each other, and assume it will always be that way. Then unexpected conflict comes, either open or just below the surface. Children, finances, use of time, responsibility to in-laws, etc. make husband and wife seem more like antagonists than lovers. Romance is replaced by resentment. The pendulum has gone full to the opposite extreme. Often this causes couples to separate: physically or at least emotionally. Divorce or physical separation occur. If they stay together, a wall builds and the intense, loving, growing relationship dies. It is replaced by a functioning, team-work, brother-and-sister arrangement. A truce is signed and the fighting stops, individual responsibilities and freedoms are negotiated, and two separate individuals live and function in one household. But they are no longer one.

The better alternative is to grow through this second stage, learn from it, and keep the commitment and love new and strong. Resolve the conflicts, feed the love, stay open and vulnerable. No one can make us happier, or more miserable, than our mate. Work on the 'making happier' part.

**RENEWED COMMITMENT** (daily, sometimes hourly) is necessary in marriage. Genesis 2:24 says: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." LEAVE (Genesis 2:24) anything that in any way meets needs that your mate should be meeting (love, attention, security, acceptance). CLEAVE (the Hebrew word means "as skin to bone") means to turn to your mate only to have those needs met. ONE FLESH is the ultimate goal: physical, spiritual and emotional oneness. SHALL BE means this is a process, not something attained quickly or easily.

Marriage takes a commitment as strong as our commitment to Jesus. In fact, by committing to Jesus we are committing to our marriage. Put the other first. Follow Solomon's example of sacrificially loving and serving your mate (Matthew 20:26-28). Remember, the marriages which are the most successful and happiest are those in which each of the partners believes that he or she got the best of it! Are you doing all you can to make sure your mate thinks they got the best of it? Solomon did, so can you!

## 12. MAKING A MARRIAGE GROW

### Song of Solomon 3:11-13a

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Marriage is serious business. It is also difficult business. God takes two self-centered people and tells them to sacrifice, serve and put the other first. He tells them to treat each other like He treats them, saying their union is a picture of His union with them. At first a marriage goes great: each partner is giving, forgiving, sacrificial and loving. Conflict is avoided and strengths are focused on. But something always changes, and two people who were perfect for each other and totally in love find themselves seeing only the other person's faults and weakness.' Impatience, what's-in-it-for-me, and resentment replace the perfect love. At this point many marriages end. Some divorce, others stay living under the same roof. Either way, the intensity and intimate dynamics that make a marriage a marriage end. No one wants that. No one believes that will happen to their marriage, but it does. Often we miss the warning signs.

**WARNING SIGNS** There are some warning signs that can help reverse the process soon enough to keep the pain to a minimum. One warning sign is that you find yourself looking for alternatives to being with your spouse. Instead of trying to spend every possible minute together, you find legitimate demands on your time -- work, church, community, children, extended family, etc. Other relationships are meeting needs that your marriage used to meet.

Another warning sign is that you feel increasingly irritated at your mate's behavior. Little things that you overlooked before not get magnified out of proportion. Also, you don't ask your spouse to do things for you as much as you used to. Mutual dependency is replaced by independence, you don't want to be dependent on them. Walls go up and intimacy goes down. As a result, you stop sharing details of your life like you used to. Your sexual interest wanes. You argue before going to bed, go to bed before (or after) your mate, etc. to avoid intimacy. The most dangerous sign is when another person of the opposite sex catches your notice. The spark that used to be lit only by your mate now is lit by another. You think of them more than you should.

What can be done to keep a marriage growing? Remember your commitment to your mate. Remember what God expects of you -- be a servant and meet their needs, forgetting about your own. Put your mate first. This is what Shulamith did with Solomon.

**MARRIAGE ONENESS** Shulamith had problems after marriage adjusting to Solomon's being gone so much and so long. Although she counted the cost and knew to expect it, she starts taking it personally and feeling personal rejection. She handled this hurt by hurting Solomon back and rejecting him. Then she felt guilty and regretted it. Solomon reassured her of his unconditional love, even before she could apologize. They were restored. After this Shulamith thinks back on what happened a little later. She went to her garden (6:11). It was spring. She remembered her home in spring and the longing to return became greater and greater in her. She heard some chariots going by outside the garden wall (12) and imagines being in one heading back home. She still loves Solomon and doesn't want to leave him, but she feels pulled to what now seems like a more peaceful, serene time in her life. She feels the need to get away and get home for a bit. What should she do? How should she handle these thoughts and desires? The chorus

quickly supplies the answer (13) calling her back to the present and away from any fantasy and mental escape. They call her “Shulamite,” from whence we get her name. While this is the title of a person from a place called Shulamith, it is also the feminine form of Solomon. She is being reminded that she is Solomon’s counterpart, and they are one. She remembers her commitment to count the cost and stay no matter what. She must stop indulging in selfish and self-pitying thoughts. That doesn’t mean there isn’t a time or place to think of our legitimate needs and pray about how best to have them met, but it does mean that our mate’s needs come before our own.

It’s time for her to have a good talk with Solomon so together they can come up with some answers. Is she expecting too much of Solomon wanting him around more? Is he expecting too much of her by assuming she gets enough of him? Are their expectations of themselves and each other realistic or not? Is her loneliness legitimate? What should be done about it? These things need to be addressed and worked on together. Real communication must take place. This means no fighting, but it also means not using other things we resort to when we want to ‘win’

**DANGEROUS FIGHTING STYLES** These include things like apologizing prematurely just to end things (this shuts down communication), refusing to take the disagreement seriously or avoiding any kind of confrontation. Using intimate knowledge of the partner to ‘hit below the belt’ (cheap character attacks) can ‘win’ an argument but not solve the root problem. It’s easy to hurt someone you know so well and who trusts you so much. No one can hurt your mate easier or deeper than you, and vice versa. Using unrelated issues to help you win also brings no good conclusion (“what about the time when you...”). When you fight to win everyone loses. The opponent is the problem, and husband and wife together must identify and then attack the problem, not each other! Your mate is your best help in overcoming your common enemy.

Other dangerous fighting styles, things that interfere with real communication that helps a marriage grow, include picking to undermine the person (attacking them indirectly by criticizing a favorite idea, activity, value or object of theirs). Character analysis is also wrong when it’s done to win (“you’re really angry because ..... and you’re just taking it out on me!”). Withholding affection, approval, recognition, privileges, love or sex is also dirty fighting. Undermining the person by arousing their insecurities is also no way to come to a true solution. This includes things like hinting about the marriage ending, leaving, dying, harm to the children, etc.). Getting outsiders involved to take your side in wrong (parent, child, friend, pastor, coworker, etc.). Watch for these and other things, they just make things worse.

**MAKING YOUR MARRIAGE GROW** How, then, can we help our marriages grow? By heeding the warning signs and making sure we communicate (and avoid dangerous fighting styles)... Also, by following some directions given in Ephesians 5:15-21. Lean on God’s wisdom (v. 15). Follow God’s wisdom, not the world’s, in all areas, especially danger areas of money, sex, children, relatives, use of spare time, and who is responsible for what chores. Then use your time correctly (v. 16). Marriage has to be the number one priority. Do things together, like shop, clean, etc. Read the Bible and pray together. Make sacrifices for each other regularly and consistently. Develop common interests. Blend your recreation programs. Have regular time together: a date-night each week and a few days away alone together each year. This is a must, especially when children are young. Then, too, be understanding and sensitive (v. 17). Men: listen to your wife. Women: watch how you talk (no gossip, criticism, nagging, mothering). Submit to God and mate (v. 19-21). Put your mate first.

## 13. OVERCOMING INHIBITIONS

### Song of Solomon 3:13b-8:4

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Everyone likes a happy ending. We especially like happy endings to love stories. Song of Solomon is a love story about Solomon and Shulamith. While there were problems to work through after marriage, it has a happy ending. Shulamith felt guilty for rejecting Solomon because he wasn't giving her enough time. He loved her unconditionally and reassured her of his love no matter what. She renewed her commitment to Solomon. In her reminiscences Shulamith thinks of how their relationship grew even closer following that. As she became more and more secure in his love and acceptance, her own inhibitions melted away. In fact, she fondly remembers a time she danced for him, and the special memory it made.

**SHULAMITH DANCES** Evidently Shulamith was being coy. Solomon loved watching her dance (6:13). The dance was one of love, beauty and sensuality. She is doing the dance to arouse and please Solomon, and it does both of them quite well! She knows her body does not belong to her alone, but to Solomon, too. She is not withholding it from him (1 Corinthians 7:4).

**SOLOMON ADMIRES** Starting at her feet and working his way upward, Solomon complements her on her body. It seems all she had on was sandals (7:1), for practical reasons (floor cold or dirty). He admires her graceful legs and the sway of her hips (Hebrew says literally: "vibration of thighs"). He moves up (7:2) to her "navel," which is translated "garden" everywhere else (4:12,15,16,16;5:1;6:2). It was her genitals he was referring to. "Rounded goblet" refers to the same. This area never lacks "blended wine" (7:2). Wine was a symbol of sexual pleasure, and she brought that to him. Blended wine refers to their mutual pleasure mixed together.

Next his gaze and comments move up to her waist (7:2b) with its pale (not sunburnt) and smooth skin. It is the color of wheat. Her breasts draw his compliments, too (7:3), like "twins of a gazelle" (also in 4:5). This refers to their youthful freshness, lightness and grace, perfect match and the joy and gaiety they produce. Gazelle was a delicacy to eat. As he continues his upward progress he refers to her smooth neck, soft & beautiful eyes, and stately nose (7:4). Solomon concludes by praising her head and hair, saying it all has a royal beauty and queenly bearing about it (7:5).

**"Beauty is in the sight of the beholder."** Solomon summarizes by telling her how beautiful and pleasing she is (7:6). Think about it for a minute, though. Was she really beautiful or did she just seem that way to Solomon? Did others then think she was beautiful? If we had seen her would we have thought she was beautiful? Does it really matter if anyone else thought she was beautiful, or if she really was, as long as she was beautiful to Solomon? We say "love is blind," as if that explains it. I think the opposite isn't true. Love doesn't blind us to our mate's shortcomings, what it does is really open our eyes to their many other, more important assets. Love isn't blind, it just focuses on what is REALLY important, and minor physical imperfections aren't important when you love someone! When a man loves a woman he sees her in totality, the inner beauty as well as the outer, and therein lies the real beauty. That's how Solomon saw Shulamith. That's how husbands see wives today.

The difference, though, is that many wives, unlike Shulamith, have a hard time accepting the fact that their mate thinks they are beautiful. They don't believe it is true, and don't feel their men can think it is true. They fear rejection, being mocked, or falling short. Girls today grow up in constant competition with the 'perfect female' in ads, TV and even pornography. All this contributes to their being inhibited physically, while men usually have far fewer inhibitions.

It must be noted, though, that women are not inhibited emotionally, while men often are. Perhaps if men think about why they are emotionally inhibited they can better understand their wife's physical inhibitions, and learn lessons about how to help her over it.

Back to Solomon and Shulamith. Watching her dance makes Solomon desire her sexually. He wants to touch and caress (7:7) and then totally enjoy her sexual pleasures (7:8). (Palm trees were artificially fertilized by climbing a female tree with a male flower and tying it there. This is Solomon's way of expressing his desire for Shulamith.) He even sees her mouth as bringing sensual pleasure (7:9a).

**SHULAMITH SUGGESTS** All this attention from Solomon is just the result Shulamith wanted to get from Solomon. She wants to grant his sexual desires (7:9b). She is thrilled that he desires her (7:10) just as she desires him (Genesis 3:16).

Later, lying together and talking, she fantasizes about spending the night with him back in her home area (7:11). During their courtship they spent much time in the vineyards, talking and getting to know each other. Nothing sexual happened then, but now she'd like to go on their promised honeymoon back home and have sex in those same vineyards (7:12), and even in her childhood home (8:2). She sees that as very sexually stimulating ("mandrakes," 7:13, were aphrodisiacs in the ancient world). She promises "both new and old" sexual experiences (7:13). She's not referring to anything kinky or extreme, but nice, creative love-making.

Shulamith feels so close to Solomon she wishes she could hug or kiss him any time she wants, even in public. That was only allowed by brothers and sisters, though (8:1). She concludes with remembering their plans for a spring honeymoon back in her home area (8:2). As her memory fades she thinks of lying with her left arm around her and his right arm embracing (caressing) her (8:3).

**CHORUS CONCLUDES** The concluding statement is very revealing. The chorus says, "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires" (8:4). This pleasant time of sex now and thinking of their time back in her home area, where they never experienced sex, makes them glad they waited! They agree that sex is so much better after marriage because they didn't have any sex (or do anything more than a brother and sister would do) before marriage. They have no guilt, no memories of sex with others, no wondering about their mate's physical involvements with others before marriage. Their emotional and physical virginity until marriage is something they do not regret, but now see more clearly as being very important.

Sexual enjoyment in marriage is God-ordained and God-blessed. Inhibition (physical or emotional) cuts back on that enjoyment. Initiating sex in creative ways helps overcome those inhibitions and bring the original joy and meaning back to sex. It works that way today, too.



## 14. A MARRIAGE TO LAST A LIFETIME

### Song of Solomon 8:5-14

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The Song of Solomon starts on a high note of love and expectation. The middle is a reality of difficulties encountered. The end is of highness attained and problems worked through. Previously Shulamith has danced for Solomon and that resulted in a great time of love and closeness. Afterwards they lay and planned their anniversary honeymoon back to her home area (8:1-4). Now, in this last flash-back which Shulamith recalls, they are on that honeymoon. She had promised him sexual pleasures outside in their favorite vineyards (7:11-12), some old experiences and some new ones, too (7:13).

**SECOND HONEYMOON** Evidently the second honeymoon was a great success. Shulamith had promised some surprises for Solomon (8:1-4) and it seems they had a great time. Away from the distractions and pressures of Jerusalem they could focus more on their love and meeting each other's needs, both physical and emotional. The problem of not enough time and rejection is a million miles away. They are at peace.

Shulamith's memory starts with picturing them returning to her home from a special time together outside (8:5a). She is thinking of the physical closeness they have just shared (8:5), and of how strong her love is for Solomon at this time. She feels very secure in the fact that he is hers ("seal" shows ownership, v. 6). She feels protected by him ("arm" v. 6). Her love is final and irreversible, something that cannot be changed (like "death" and the "grave" - v. 6). It is an unquenchable fire, burning so intently (v. 6) even a river could not put it out (v. 7).

This kind of love, she realizes, cannot be purchased with all the money in the world (v. 7). Actually, trying to buy love fails for that love is scorned and doesn't last. Shulamith basks in the fact that she doesn't have to do anything or be anything to earn or keep Solomon's love. Therefore, there is nothing she can do to lose it! Today we try to 'buy' love in many ways: money, possessions, flattery, appearance, doing things, etc. Love just can't be bought. Sex, physical attention, external actions can be bought, but not real, deep love. Often people settle for the lesser, though, because they don't feel they can ever have the real thing. Shulamith is glad she was raised to know the difference, and to await the real thing. She remembers when she was first taught these truths.

**IMPACT OF FATHERS & OLDER BROTHERS ON A YOUNG GIRL** Evidently Shulamith's father was dead, for it seems her brothers raised her (v. 8). Even before puberty they prepared a strategy to help her grow into a fine, godly woman (v. 8). They decided that if she showed an inclination to use her body to get male attention, if she seemed easily seduced ("door", v. 9) they will step in and protect her from anything like that. If she wasn't inclined in that direction all the better ("wall" v. 9). Either way, they would build into her a sense of value and specialness ("towers of silver on her," "panels of cedar" v. 9). They would let her, and those who knew her, be aware of fine traits and inner qualities. They would accept her for herself, the real person inside, and unconditionally love her. They wouldn't indulge and spoil her, but would make sure she always knew, by word and action, that she was valuable and special for who she was. With this good

self-esteem she would know her value as a person and act accordingly. This makes a GREAT difference in a young woman!

Too many females in the twentieth century use their looks and appearance to get male attention, feeling that is the only (or best) thing they have to offer. They haven't been assured of their internal value, and thus don't treat themselves as worthy people, or expect others to treat them that way, either. Too typical is the young female who uses her body to get male attention and, when she is used or abused, feels that somehow it is her fault and what she deserves in life. Girls seem to marry men like their fathers. If they had a good, loving, accepting father they will look for that in a husband. If they didn't they will look for a male similar to their father (often with the same weakness) and try anything to get his affirmation of their femininity as a father substitute. Fathers and older brothers have a tremendous impact on a young girl reaching and going through puberty!

To some extent the same is true of boys and their mothers, but it seems especially serious in father-daughter relationships. Both are greatly influenced by how they are raised. Still, each one has his or her own free will choice to make, no matter how they are raised. Shulamith was raised to be pure in all ways, and chose to follow that course when older and the choice was up to her ("wall" v. 10).

**FREE WILL CHOICE** Shulamith, when of age to make her own choices ("breasts like towers" v. 10), chose the path of virtue and purity ("wall" v. 10). She lives for her future mate. Her choices then were with her coming husband in mind. That is rare, both then and now. Solomon recognized that rarity and appreciated it. *"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies"* (Proverbs 31:10). Shulamith brought him contentment (v. 10).

Shulamith tells a parable to explain this same truth. Her brothers took care of Solomon's vineyard for him, producing good fruit which benefited him (v. 11). They also took care of Solomon's future bride (although they didn't know that at the time) and with her produced even better fruit (v. 12). From the vineyard Solomon got 20% profit, from Shulamith he got 100% profit! Not only did they keep her pure, but they built value into her. If she wouldn't have had security and self-confidence, she would have shied away from Solomon. People often marry the mate they feel they deserve. If a person doesn't feel they deserve the best in life they will settle for a mate who is less than the best to them. Feelings of inferiority affect all areas of life!

**SECOND HONEYMOON ENDS** The second honeymoon ends, as always must happen. Solomon tells Shulamith to say good bye to her childhood friends who have seen her off (v. 13), but he also asks to "hear your voice (v. 13)," evidently with a specific idea in mind. She responds (v. 14) by inviting him to one more time of sexual pleasure before leaving.

**THE REST OF THE STORY ...** The relationship between Solomon and Shulamith started out idealistically, assuming all would be fine when married. Reality and selfishness brought problems that had to be worked through or the relationship would have withered and died. They did work them through with unconditional love and patience for each other. Now they have the rest of their lives to enjoy the fruits of this. Times of difficulties surely continued to come, but with love and commitment, with learning to communicate and put the other first, the relationship became what God wanted it to be. Can you say that of your marriage? With God's help, that can be true of any and every marriage, but it must be done His way and with His help.

# ***Marriage and Family***

## ***IV. MATE SERVICE***

BIBLICAL SERVANTHOOD: THE KEY TO A LIFELONG, HEALTHY  
MARRIAGE

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1. Sacrificial Husband
2. Sacrificial Wife
3. Sacrificial Marriage
4. Sacrificial Love

## Marriage & Family – IV. MATE SERVICE

### 1. SACRIFICIAL HUSBAND

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Two brothers decided to play on sand banks by the river's edge. Because the town depended on the river, it was regularly dredged and sand deposited in great mounds beside the river. Children loved playing on the huge sand piles, but they are very dangerous. The sand dries on the top with rigid crusts that conceal cavernous internal voids formed by the escaping water in the wet sand underneath. If a child climbs on a mound of sand that has such a hidden void, the external surface easily collapses into the cavern. Sand from higher on the mound then rushes into the void, trapping the child in a sinkhole of loose sand. This is exactly what happened to the two brothers as they raced up one of the larger mounds.

When the boys did not return home at dinnertime, family and neighbors organized a search. They found the younger brother. Only his head and shoulders protruded from the mound. He was unconscious from the pressure of sand on his body. The searchers began digging frantically. When they had cleared the sand to his waist, he roused to consciousness.

"Where is your brother?" the rescuers shouted.

"I'm standing on his shoulders," replied the child.

With the sacrifice of his own life, the older brother had lifted the younger to safety. So, too, did the One who is not ashamed to call Himself our brother. We live eternally by standing before God on the righteousness that Jesus Christ provided at the cost of his own life.

He is our example of 'bearing one another's burdens.'

**SERVANTHOOD DESCRIBED *Ephesians 5:21-6:1* Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 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. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husband's ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

***Matt 20:26-28* Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**

Two words are used for 'servant' in this passage. 'Diakonos' (v. 26) means 'to run errands' and was used for someone who was an attendant, a waiter on tables, someone who did menial tasks. Our word 'deacon' comes from this word. 'Doulos' (v. 27) means literally "in bondage, a slave." "When we think of a servant, in our sense of the word, we think of a man who gives a certain agreed part of his time to his master, and who receives a certain agreed wage for doing so. Within that agreed time he is at the disposal and in the command of his master. But, when that time ends, he is free to do exactly as he likes. But in Paul's time, the status of the slave was quite different. Quite literally he had no time which belonged to himself. He had no moment when he was free. Every single moment of his time belonged to his master. He was the absolutely exclusive possession of his master, and there was no one single moment of his life when he could do as he liked. In Paul's time a slave could never do what he liked; it was impossible for him to serve two masters, because he was the exclusive possession of one master. That is the picture that is in Paul's mind."

**Servanthood starts in the mind.** It is an attitude first, then shows itself in an action. The attitude of servanthood is always active, while acts of servanthood are only occasional. Acts must be based on attitude. It's the opposite of what our flesh (sin nature) naturally does. It's not what comes normally to us to do. How many children, say "A servant" when asked what they want to do when they grow up? Jesus is our only real example of servanthood. The rest of us are more like the mother of James and John who wanted the first place. Paul uses Jesus as an example:

***"When we think of a servant, in our sense of the word, we think of a man who gives a certain agreed part of his time to his master, and who receives a certain agreed wage for doing so. Within that agreed time he is at the disposal and in the command of his master. But, when that time ends, he is free to do exactly as he likes. But in Paul's time, the status of the slave was quite different. Quite literally he had no time which belonged to himself. He had no moment when he was free. Every single moment of his time belonged to his master. He was the absolutely exclusive possession of his master, and there was no one single moment of his life when he could do as he liked. In Paul's time a slave could never do what he liked; it was impossible for him to serve two masters, because he was the exclusive possession of one master. That is the picture that is in Paul's mind."***

**Servanthood is about strength, not weakness** (v. 6). It's about security, not insecurity. One is secure enough to do whatever asked to do. It's about giving, not being taken advantage of (v. 8a). If you give willingly, it can't be taken from you. It's about taking care of another's world, not taking care of my world first (v. 8a). It's about being a sacrifice, but not a doormat. It's about pleasing God, not the person you are serving, even if they don't notice or appreciate.

**I. REQUIREMENTS OF SERVANT HEADSHIP** Now let's apply this about servanthood to a husband's role in marriage. A husband is the head of his family, but he is to lead as a servant. SERVANT HEADSHIP is the key phrase to describe his role. Let's look at this more closely:

**Servant headship assumes responsibility.** Like Christ as the head of the church took responsibility for our needs, even to the extent of dying for us, the man is responsible to meet the needs of his family. Think of a covered wagon going west. The wife takes care of the wagon, handling the daily details of life. She does a good job of that. The man, though, has the role of scout. He has to have the big picture in mind: where they are, where they want to go and how to get there. He looks out for dangers and knows safe camping spots. He assumes responsibility to get the family to its destination.

**Servant headship actively initiates.** A man can't sit back and let his family find its own way, simply following along with what they decide. Neither can he exercise self-seeking power plays for his own benefit. However, for every husband who uses his headship position to justify harsh dictatorship, there are a hundred who go to the other extreme and abdicate their responsibility by not doing all they should. Ask the average Christian wife if they want their husband to take more or less of a leadership role in the family and most will answer more. Often the pattern is that the man does not actively lead so the wife nags him to do so. Then he explodes and runs things in a rage for a short time until he drifts back to his normal passive pattern. Men go to one extreme or another, but have a hard time finding middle-of-the-road balance.

**Servant headship leads by serving.** Again, Christ is our example. What would Jesus do? Men are His under-shepherds. We are to represent Him by acting in a way He would act if He were in our position. A man does not have any authority to act in any way other than the way Jesus would act. Man does not have carte blanche authority to rule his family, he only has delegated authority to represent Jesus in his family. His role to his family is like that of a pastor to his church. Servant headship is the conscientious and loving use of the authority God grants a husband to ensure that a home (and all its members) honor God and experience His blessings.

**Servant headship gives, not takes.** It is not a matter of if my wife meets my needs but if I meet hers. To alter what John Kennedy said: "Ask not what your wife can do for you, but what you can do for your wife." It's not wondering what God expects of my wife to make her better for me, but what He expects of me to make life better for her. Thus, it truly takes personal sacrifice to be a servant-leader. Jesus-style love is the opposite of the world's power-based 'love.' Christian love means putting the other person first, seeking the other person's wellbeing regardless of what it costs. It doesn't mean a man has the final word, but the final responsibility. That responsibility is to do what is right and best for her.

**Servant headship seeks to glorify the wife.** Again, as Christ does for us, a husband is to make his wife feel full of worth. Men are to encourage, praise and build up their wives.

**Servant headship communicates forgiveness.** Marriage is the most important and most difficult relationship in which to practice forgiveness. It's natural to blame others, as Adam blamed Eve and she blamed the serpent. Forgiving means to give up any right to have another hurt for the hurt they have caused you. One takes the hurt and goes to God for healing. This is especially hard in marriage because our mate can hurt us quicker and deeper than anyone else. Also, we can hurt them back just as quickly and easily. God commands forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31-32). If we don't forgive it opens us to demonic influence (Ephesians 4:26-27). To be like Jesus we must forgive. Jesus said that when we offend someone we are responsible to go and ask for forgiveness before we can worship (Matthew 5:23f). When we are the one offended then, too, we must forgive – 490 plus times a day (Matthew 18:21-35). Either way, it's your move to restore the relationship!

**Servant headship means loving unconditionally.** As Jesus loves us unconditionally, so we men are to love our wives unconditionally. God's love for us is unconditional agape love and we are to love our wives the same way. Robertson McQuilkin is a good example of that. He was the president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary until 1990 when he resigned college and speaking circuit to take care of wife, MURIEL, who was afflicted with Alzheimer's disease. During

the last 2 years of his presidency, she would follow him to college, walking ½ mile 10 times a day just to be near him. She didn't know him but was distressed when around others and peaceful when around him. One night when she took off her shoes she found her feet bloody from all the walking. He washed her feet (Christ-like), bathed, dressed her, did all house work, etc. He could have had her institutionalized, but instead quit own job to take care of her. She didn't know him, but he was the only one who could control her. When asked how he felt about having to take care of her he replied, "I don't HAVE to care for her, I GET to take care of her. To me it is a privilege and an honor.

**Servant headship loves even when hurting.** It's one thing to love your wife even if she unknowingly hurts you, but it's even harder to love her unconditionally when she purposefully hurts you as only she can. Jesus loved us even when we brought Him nothing but pain. Men must take their pain and unmet needs to God and let Him alone meet them. Remember, she is a sinner, but so are you! She's self-centered, but so are you. That's when a man can and must show God's love to his wife. Ask God to give you His love for her, to full you with His Holy Spirit (and the fruit of love), and to have Him love her through you. Loving your wife is not to love her as a saint but as a sinner. If you love her just for her saintliness you don't really love her at all.

**Servant headship means providing care for the wife.** Paul says we as men are to "care for" our wives as we do our own body (Ephesians 5:28). This means we are to nourish, bring up, feed, care for, etc. Physically we are to do our best to provide enough income. Emotionally we are to meet her needs for love and security. Spiritually we are to lead in prayer and devotions. Intellectually we are to lead in teaching our children and informing our mates about things we find of interest and importance. This consists of being a servant in the little things that make up each day. Fred Craddock, in an address to ministers, caught the practical implications of consecration. "To give my life for Christ appears glorious," he said. "To pour myself out for others ... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom--I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory. "We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table--'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' "But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give up a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. "Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul."

**Servant headship relies on the wife's skills, too.** Allow your wife to outgrow you in areas of her strengths. Marriage is like climbing a mountain. Mountain climbers always work together to help each other. If both don't make it, neither will make it!

**II. REASONS FOR SERVANT HEADSHIP** Why should a man go to all this trouble to be a servant head? For one thing, **God commands it** (Ephesians 5:21-6:1). We must do it in obedience to God. For another thing, **God blesses it** (Ephesians 5:31). Man isn't complete until he is 'one flesh' with his wife.

**III. RESOURCES FOR SERVANT HEADSHIP** How, then, is a man to do this humanly impossible task of loving his wife and putting her before himself? God always equips us to do

what He commands us to do. Back to Robertson McQuilkin. “How do you do it? What are your resources?” asked the host on the TV show *Day of Discovery*. I hadn’t thought about it, but since then I have. Praise helps. Right now, I think my life must be happier than 95% of the people on planet earth. Muriel’s a joy to me, and life is good to both of us, in different ways. But I’m thinking of something more basic than “counting your blessings.” By 1992, the blows of life had left me numb – my dearest slipping from me, my eldest son snatched away in a tragic accident, my life’s work abandoned at its peak. I didn’t hold it against God, but my faith could better be described as resignation. The joy had drained away, the passion in my love for God has frozen over. I was in trouble... Of course, the passion of Christ’s love for me had never cooled. Even in my darkest hours when I felt my grip slipping and was in danger of sliding into the abyss of doubt, what always caught and held me was the vision of God’s best loved, pinioned in my place... Then I remembered the secret I had learned in younger days – going to a mountain hideaway to be alone with God. There, though it was slow in coming, I was able to break free from preoccupation with my troubles and concentrate on Jesus. When that happened, I relearned what God had taught me more than once before: the heavy heart lifts on wings of praise.”

So how can we have that same sacrificial attitude to our wives and families?

**A close personal relationship with God.** Quite obviously no one can continually and genuinely put others first unless they have God’s supernatural power within to do so. Thus, salvation is the first necessity. Then it is essential to be living in God’s strength each day. Private and family devotions, Bible study, Scripture memorization, a growing personal intimacy, close involvement with a Body of believers and continual confession of sins is necessary.

**A commitment to show sacrificial love.** To sacrifice for another means we must first sacrifice our own desires and selfishness. As Romans 12:1-2 explains, it is first a mental decision to make and commit to, then it becomes a day-by-day, even moment-by-moment recommitment to stay with it. As long as physical withdrawal (divorce) or even just emotional withdrawal is an option to you, you won’t make a 100% commitment to serve your mate. It has to be something you decide to do. A hospital visitor saw a nurse tending the sores of a leprosy patient and said, “I’d never do that for a million dollars!” The nurse answered, “Neither would I. But I do it for Jesus for nothing.” If you can’t do it for your mate, or for yourself, you can certainly do it for Jesus!

**Filled with the fruit of the Spirit.** No matter how committed you may be, that alone isn’t enough. It’s not our commitment that does it, but it’s our commitment that allows God’s Holy Spirit to work through us to do this (Galatians 5:22-24). If we just pretend love, force ourselves to act like we are patient, or withhold negative comments, we can only do that for so long. We as men simply can’t do this on our own. To be like Jesus and do what Jesus would do, we need His strength. We need Jesus in us by the Holy Spirit in order to really think and act like Jesus. He will produce His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23) through us when we allow Him to do so.

**Follow Jesus’ example** “Whoever wants to become great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave –JUST AS the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:26-28) He is our example, the One we are to emulate. “A student is not above his teacher, not a servant above his master.” (Matthew 10:24-25). He told us He was setting the example for us when He washed the disciples’ feet and told them to do likewise (John 13:1-17). Men, to be like Jesus means you must ‘wash



your wife's feet' regularly. It's different for each one of us, and it doesn't appeal to the flesh, but it's what it means to be like Jesus. Think of yourself as washing Jesus' feet by doing that act of kindness for your wife. He'll bless you for it, even if your wife doesn't.

So, men, how are you doing as a servant leader? Where does God want you to Improve? What can you do to start? Chicago Bears Hall-of-Fame Middle Linebacker Mike Singletary says: "The first thing in my life by far and the reason I do everything is my love for Jesus Christ. Number two is my family—being there for them and making sure I'm not missing time that I can't get back. Number three is my work. I don't care where I'm at or what I'm doing, the thing I want to do now in my life is make a difference and serve with a capital S. Serve in my home. Serve in my relationship with my wife. And serve my fellow man.... For me, it's a matter of "What am I doing to make a difference? What am I doing except making money." There are a lot of people out there who are hurting." And it all starts with serving our wives. Serving with a capital S. It's what God wants us. It's what our wives need. It's what makes us like Jesus. Serve. Serve. Serve.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS.** The following are for you to talk about with your mate or contemplate on your own.

Men: What part of servant headship that was talked about is the hardest for you personally? Why?

Men: What have you found that helps you to be more the husband God wants you to be?

Women: What can you do to help your husband be the servant leader God wants him to be?

Think of your marriage as the gear shift in your car: **R – N – 1<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>**

Using the analogy, where is your marriage now? Reverse? Neut? 1<sup>st</sup>? 2<sup>nd</sup>? 3<sup>rd</sup>? 4<sup>th</sup>? 5<sup>th</sup>?

Where was your marriage this time last year?

What can you do to help move it up a gear?

What five personal qualities about your mate to you most appreciate?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

List 3 things you would change about yourself if you could?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Marriage & Family – IV. MATE SERVICE

### 2. SACRIFICIAL WIFE

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An admirer once asked the famous orchestra conductor Leonard Bernstein what was the most difficult instrument to play. He responded with quick wit: "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who plays second violin with as much enthusiasm or second French horn or second flute, now that's a problem. And yet if no one plays second, we have no harmony."

Today no one wants to play second fiddle, or second anything! The focus is on independence, self-fulfillment and self-gratification. Humility is 'out' and pride in 'in.' Humility is no longer a virtue, now it's often seen as a defect. Pride in our possessions, our position and our self is in. We take great pride in the labels on our clothing, the letters after our names and the logo on our car.

Yet if we are to be a servant, this is not the way we are to be. A servant doesn't need and doesn't live for pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotion or popularity. A servant doesn't always have to be right, first, recognized, praised, regarded or rewarded.

God commands all of us to be servants (Matthew 20:24-28) of God and each other. He commands husbands to be servant leaders of their families. He commands wives to be submissive servants to their husbands. ***Ephesians 5:21-6:1 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 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. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husband's ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.***

This passage clearly outlines the wife's role as submissive servant. But what exactly does this mean?

#### I. REQUIREMENTS OF SERVANT SUBMISSION

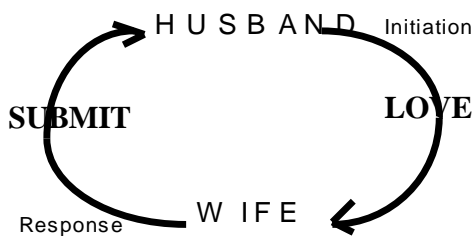
**Servant submission means responding to your husband's love.** The Greek word "submit" is actually a military term which means to respond to authority. A woman is a responder, and this word recognizes that. ***"Wives, RESPOND to your own husband as unto the Lord!"***

In the Greek it is in the present tense meaning it must be done continually. It is an imperative, meaning it is a command. Finally, it is in the middle voice, meaning the woman is benefited by doing this. Submitting/responding isn't just done for the man's sake, so he can fulfill his God-given responsibility of guiding and providing, it is also done for the woman's sake. She benefits by her submission, for that is God's provision and protection for her. When she is in her proper God-given place she benefits greatly. Perhaps that's why Satan attacks this so greatly today.

Now by saying that a woman is a responder, we are assuming there is the proper person in her life for her to respond to. If a woman is to respond, then the man is to initiate, to bring out that response in her. As the chart below shows, men are created with a God-given desire to provide and guide their families, that's why women are commanded to submit/respond to them, so they can carry meet this inner need. Women, on the other hand, need love and security, which is why men are commanded to sacrificially love their wives as Christ loves them.

Yes, a woman is a responder. Men, do you want your wife to treat you like a king? Then treat her like a queen! Man must initiate this response. He must take the lead in showing his wife love and security. Then she will better be able to respond in submission.

	MAN	WOMAN
ED	PROVIDE, GUIDE	SECURITY, LOVE
DUTY	SACRIFICIAL LOVE	SUBMIT, RESPECT



Please do not understand me to say that if a wife doesn't properly submit/respond and respect her husband that it is all a husband's fault. No, the woman is responsible to do this as unto the Lord, even if the husband is far from perfect in treating her like Jesus does. Along the same lines, though, men often don't realize just when and how much a wife often is submitting. We men just don't realize that and

they often don't get the credit they deserve. It isn't natural for a woman to submit, nor it is easy. The world's example without and the sin nature within combine to make it very difficult for most women to trust a man to that extent.

Still, our pattern is Jesus. The husband is to love the wife sacrificially and put her first, as Jesus does for us. His motive for all he does is to be his love for her. Christians are not to presume on Jesus' love nor take advantage of it, but love and serve Him because of it. The same is true of wives to their husbands.

So, first of all we see that servant submission is responding to a husband's love with an attitude of respect and trust, letting him provide for and guide the family.

**Servant submission is an attitude and an act.** True Biblical submission that pleases the Lord starts with an inner attitude of respect for her husband as a man seeking to follow God's will to the best of his ability (Ephesians 5:33) and shows itself in outer actions (1 Peter 3:6) that allow him to lead as a servant leader.

**Servant submission shows respect and honor.** An old commercial for car wax depicts a young woman preparing to sell her car. Aged and dull, the vehicle that she has used for years holds no more allure for her. Yet when she uses the 'miracle' wax to put shine back on the

vehicle's finish, the new glow revives the woman's old affection for her car. She throws away the "For Sale" sign, and drives away, happy again in a car she treasures anew. Women, try the 'miracle wax' of respect and honor on your husband and you'll see him in a new light – like you did before you married him. You respected him then, respect him now. God commands it (Eph 5:33) and your husband needs it to feel good about himself as a man. Why do you think men always show off for their women? They need your respect and admiration!

***"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."***  
**Proverbs 18:21** That certainly applies to a woman's tongue after marriage. She can bring life or death to her husband and marriage by how she responds to him verbally. ***"Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife."*** **Proverbs 25:24**

Just how does a woman show respect and honor to her husband? You do this when you come to him for advice, when you praise him or thank him, when you brag on him to others (especially in his hearing) and when you practice the Golden Rule in response to his mistakes and failures.

You don't show him respect because he is perfect, nor withhold it because he is so very imperfect. You show respect because he is God's chosen vessel to use in your life. God has provided you with a pastor you are to respect. There are policemen and others who fill roles that benefit you, and you respect him for it. Your husband is placed in your life by God as God's chosen undershepherd over you and your children. He is Jesus' stand-in in your life. Respect him for his position, not his perfection.

Men desperately need encouragement from their women. We get beat up in the world and most of us carry emotional scars from our childhood. We don't need someone pointing out our faults – we know them better than you do! We need someone to come alongside us and help us, to love us unconditionally. We need a cheerleader to keep us going. If you, our wives, aren't doing the job, that leaves the door wide open for someone else to come meet that need. For many men it's pornography – a responsive woman who needs him and doesn't criticize or nag but just wants to please him. That's why the emotional appeal of pornography is so much stronger than the physical appeal.

Another thing, women – don't compare him to others. You don't like when he does that with you, don't do it with him. Don't focus on his weakness. ***"whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things"*** (**Philippians 4:8**) Does this describe your thoughts about your husband?

Never act like his mother. You won't be showing him respect and honor if you treat him in such a way. Don't scold, nag or criticize. You can have your say once, if you speak the truth in love, then don't repeat it but leave it up to God to work in him.

**Servant submission is really to Jesus.** Paul says ***"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."*** (**Ephesians 5:21**) How do you respond to Jesus? Do you respond to your husbands the same way? "Oh", you say, "but he isn't anything like Jesus!" Probably not, but that means your submission is conditional. Do you want his love for you to be conditional on what you deserve? When you think of your submission to him as really being submission to Jesus it should be a lot easier to accomplish.

An executive secretary once said, "When I began to envision Jesus standing behind my boss, my work changed. I had to do my very best. Even the menial task of serving coffee became a joy, and my attitude changed from arrogance to respect." It's easier to serve your mate if you envision your loving Lord rather than your flawed spouse. Picture doing it for Jesus. The imposition then becomes an honor.

If you submit in this way it'll be a privilege for you. If you don't it'll be forced slavery. The choice is up to your attitude to it. If you say to God, "How can I show You my love and devotion?" He'll say "By submitting to your husband."

**Servant submission includes all areas of life. "Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in EVERYTHING." Ephesians 5:24**

First let me assure you that this doesn't refer to areas of obvious sin. Nor does it mean a wife must stay in a state of real abuse (1 Corinthians 7). There are numerous Biblical principles and precedents for that.

However, the word 'everything' is very strong and all-encompassing. It doesn't allow for a woman to choose what she will and what she won't submit in. Many women can submit in most areas, but there are always some areas that are very hard. Often this comes from having a bad experience in the past in trusting a male figure who hurt them. Other times this comes from a rebellion in their own flesh (sin nature). 'Everything' means 'everything.' It doesn't mean just things that come easy for you, or areas where your husband seems competent and right. 'Everything' means EVERY THING.

**Servant submission means giving up control. Genesis 3:16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."** Too often women unknowingly look for a man they can control and marry him. This is the pattern they saw in their mother and father. Also, past disappointments in relationships with men when young, including their own father, teach them that men aren't to be trusted. But when they control their husband, they lose respect for him. Often it is more the wife's inability to trust her husband than his weakness that causes her to resist submitting.

The Bible makes this principle clear over and over. Man is to be the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). Women are to be silent in church and let the men lead (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Because Eve exercised control over Adam, women are not to be in authority over men (1 Timothy 2:13-14).

Mary is a great example of this. She submitted to her husband's headship when he woke her in the middle of the night, the day after the wise men visited and told her they were immediately leaving for Egypt. Then they returned to hostile Nazareth instead of friendly Bethlehem at his word. She trusted him because he earned her trust by putting her before himself when she was pregnant before they got married. He had decided to divorce her quietly instead of publicly humiliating her, even though it seemed she had wronged him. She never forgot that. However, a woman is still to submit even if her husband doesn't put her first. God will be her protector and defender, not her herself.

**Servant submission is unconditional.** Real love means loving your husband for who he is, not who you want him to be. It's the Golden Rule, loving him as you want him to love you. You don't have to like everything about him, but you must love him. You are never commanded to like all he does, but you are commanded to love him. This love isn't something you can pretend, talk yourself into, or just whip up when you need it. It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, the first mentioned fruit (Galatians 5:23).

God strictly warns against withholding love from one's mate, including sexual love (1 Corinthians 7: 4-5). Being a servant means putting your mate's needs before your own. If you don't do this with your husband, if you withhold in any way, you are leaving him vulnerable for some other woman to inadvertently come along and meet those needs. That's how 'affairs' begin.

**Servant submission allows him to lead.** A man's number one need is to be needed by his wife and children. "I need you" goes right to the depth of a man's soul. He'll do anything for a woman who needs him. If you treat him like a critical, nagging mother he may do what you say to get you off his back, but you won't get his heart. Allow him to lead by drawing back and letting him grow to fill the role. Don't prompt him or try to pull his strings. Don't pick up the pieces unless he asks you to. Do this out of love for him and for God.

**Servant submission develops an inner beauty.** The world today focuses on youth, appearance, build, etc. This was probably very important to you and him when you married. Now your appearance has changed. You have aged and grown larger. Things have changed shape. Men can often overlook this more in their wives than they can in themselves. Yet the Bible says it's the inner things that matter most (1 Peter 3:1-4). Husbands discover this as they age. Being submissive to your husbands means developing your inner beauty and maturity, your character and personality. If all you care about is your appearance you will be quite shallow and not at all what he really wants and needs. A good rule of thumb is this: when someone first meets you do they remember you for your appearance or for you as a person? Which most affects them: how you look or your gracious manner?

Having looked at the requirements of servant submission, lets now look at the reasons to be this way:

## **II. REASONS FOR SERVANT SUBMISSION**

There are two good reasons for women to be submissive servants: God commands it and blesses them for it.

**Obedience to God** is the first reason to be a submissive servant. ***Philippians 2:2-8 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!***

Jesus wrapped a towel around His waist and washed the feet of His disciples, even though they didn't deserve it. He set an example for us to follow as servants.

**Blessing from God** is the other reason to be a submissive servant. God blesses in many ways. He blesses the woman by using her submission to change her husband (1 Peter 3:1-6). He uses it to bring a closer union between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:31). It causes them to work together instead of competing with each other, like mountain climbers work together.

By submitting to her husband, a woman ‘fills up his empty spaces’ (Genesis 2:18). Elizabeth Elliot writes: “The first woman, Eve, was made specifically for the first man, a helper, to meet, respond to, surrender to, and complement him. God made her FROM the man, out of his very bone, and then he brought her TO the man. When Adam named Eve, he accepted responsibility to “husband” her – to provide for her, to cherish her, to protect her. These two people together represent the image of God – one of them in a special way the initiator, the other the responder. Neither the one nor the other was adequate alone to bear the divine image.”

If this fills a man’s empty spaces, then what fills a woman’s empty spaces? Her submission to her husband fills her spaces as well as his. Don’t try to fill your own with romance stories, children, career, possessions, etc. Focus on filling up your husband and your own needs will be met directly or indirectly, by your husband or by God.

Now that we’ve seen the requirements of servant submission as well as reasons for it, let’s look at how to be able to be a servant.

### **III. RESOURCES FOR SERVANT SUBMISSION**

**A close personal relationship with God** is the first resource. Salvation and a commitment to live for Him each day is essential. Wives must first and foremost depend on their heavenly Husband and develop their relationship with Him. Without His help there is no way they will be able to show a submissive spirit.

**Commitment to show submission** is the next step. Make a decision to be his servant no matter what. Remember that servanthood isn’t always rewarded. Don’t assume he will notice or appreciate your actions. Don’t assume he will instantly change and treat you differently. If you start being a servant because of what you will get out of it you are all wrong. That motive won’t work at all. Your rewards will be in heaven. Anything on this earth is just extra, if it happens. Take a moment now to make sure your motives are pure, meaning you are doing it out of love and service to God and not for anything you may expect to receive back because of it. Jesus is our example in this as well.

**Filled with fruit of the Spirit Galatians 5:22-24** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* As I already said, no human being can produce the kind of love that brings sacrifice for another out of their own flesh. It is only as God’s Spirit fills us that we can love as He loves. It’s impossible to do without His help. Make sure you ask to be filled with the fruit of His Spirit every morning. List them, emphasizing the ones you especially lack.

Anita Bryant in “Bless This House” says, “Only as I practice yielding to Jesus can I learn to submit, as the Bible instructs me, to the loving leadership of my husband. Only the power of Christ can enable a woman like me to become submissive in the Lord.”

**Follow Jesus' example** is the final key to being a submissive servant. In each situation ask yourself what Jesus would do (WWJD) – and then do just that very thing!

Pray for your husband instead of criticizing. That's what Jesus does. This is all new and unnatural to him, too. He probably didn't have the role model he needed in this either. Also pray for yourself. As Jesus says, you must take the plank out of your own eye before you can remove the speck from his (Matthew 7:5).

Following Jesus' example, too, means going to God with your unmet needs as Jesus did. Don't go to any other false substitute (friends, romance stories, children, etc.). Talk to your husband about your unmet needs. Do it in a way to educate him in love, not that he feels criticized or a failure. You shoot yourself in the foot when you do that. You won't find many talk shows or TV programs that will help you learn how to be a submissive servant, but it is God's way and the right way. It isn't an easy way, but is the only way. Alone you can't do it, but with Jesus as your example and help remember that all things are possible.

A happy couple had always raised cucumbers and made sweet pickles together. The husband just loved to watch things grow. Thus, he spent his winters studying the seed catalogues to get the best possible cucumbers. The whole family enjoyed preparing the soil, planting and caring for the plants. He would often go out and just enjoy the way they grew. His wife loved to make sweet pickles. She studied the best recipes and the best methods of preparing and preserving them. They were such a happy family, and all their visitors went home with a jar of their famous pickles. The church always had a good supply of their pickles as well. People marveled at this family that had found a project to do together.

Finally, the man died. The next spring all the children returned home. They said to their mother, "We know how much you love making pickles, so we are going to prepare the garden and plant them for you." The mother smiled and said, "Thanks a lot children, but you don't have to do any planting for I really don't enjoy pickle making. I only did that because your father loved to grow the cucumbers so much." The children were all amazed, but the youngest son was upset, because the father had pulled him aside not too long before and shared with him that he really didn't like growing cucumbers, but only did it to please the mother! This story may not be a good example of communication, but it does show the loving benefits of being a servant to one's mate. Wouldn't it be great to have a marriage like that? You can. Just be a servant.

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS.** The following are for you to talk about with your mate or contemplate on your own.

Women: What part or requirement of servant submission is hardest for you? Why?

Women: What have you found that helps you be more the wife God wants you to be?

Men: What can you do to help your wife be more of a submissive servant?

Does all you do support your mate so they can be a better servant to you? What do you do that makes it hard for them to serve you?

Do you pray for your mate daily?

Would you say that you really listen to your mate? That you understand them?

When you have sex with your mate, what can you do to focus more on their needs or yours?

Do you praise your mate regularly?

Are you quick and sincere in your apologies?



## Marriage & Family – IV. MATE SERVICE

### 3. SACRIFICIAL MARRIAGE

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Marriages are in trouble today! The divorce rate today is about 50%, and the rate for Christians is slightly higher than among those who aren't Christians. Studies show that 40% of all marriages will be touched in some way by infidelity before the people reach 40. "I never thought it would happen to me" is heard over and over.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. The Bible gives us God's perfect prevention for this. It's found in Proverbs 24:30-34.

#### ***Proverbs 24:30-34***

***30 I went past the field of the sluggard,  
past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment;***

***31 thorns had come up everywhere,  
the ground was covered with weeds,  
and the stone wall was in ruins.***

***32 I applied my heart to what I observed  
and learned a lesson from what I saw:***

***33 A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest--***

***34 and poverty will come on you like a bandit  
and scarcity like an armed man.***

The writer of Proverbs here uses a garden analogy to explain life lessons that can be accurately applied to the family. A relationship, like a garden, needs care and attention to survive. Neglect allows weeds to take over and destroy the good productivity. First, let's look at the cause of weeds growing.

#### **I. THE CAUSE**

The cause of the weeds in this garden is simply neglect of routine maintenance. There is no gross immoral evil going on. The owner is actually a nice, easy-going guy. He means no harm. ***"A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit."*** It wasn't even a LOT of sleep and slumber, just a LITTLE. He was just a little slow in getting to things that needed doing. He was too lazy to keep up with routine maintenance. He put off the work until he next day. He'd do it, just a little later. He had no desire to destroy his garden, he just didn't feel like doing the required labors right then.

The lesson is clear. A little neglect brings a whole lot of ruin. As I counsel couples going through marriage difficulties I find that there seldom is one sin that caused the problems. It always seems to go back to a slow drifting from the 'little' things they did together before marriage or the point where they find themselves. Doing nice things with and for each other gets neglected, put off until another time. Maintenance work on a relationship is neglected because we are so busy with other things that seem more important. Or we have been hurt by our mate (knowingly or

unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally) and we withdraw. A little neglect in a relationship also brings a whole lot of ruin.

## **II. THE RESULT**

The result of this neglect is complete ruin with no hope of recovery. It is too late. Weeds have taken over and choked out the good productive plants. The weeds of self-centeredness, anger, fear, criticalness, withdrawal, and so forth soon kill the tender and productive shoots of love and care that have started growing. You've seen it happen in other relationships. You may even be able to see it happening in your relationship.

Notice, too, the walls of this garden fell down in places. The wall was the boundary marker and served to keep animals of destruction out. The walls didn't come down all at once, just slowly, stone by stone, here a little and there a little. "What does one stone matter?" the gardener can ask. But then there is another stone and soon still another. The same, too, in our relationship.

When we don't meet our mate's needs, we leave the walls down for them to be vulnerable to someone who can wander by and meet that need. We lose the protection around our hearts and families through neglect.

"What does one little stone matter?" A whole lot!

**III. THE WARNING** The clear warning here is to watch our putting off basic maintenance of our marriage. Procrastination leads to devastation. It doesn't take sinful behavior to spoil our marriage garden, simple neglect will do just fine. This includes things like not giving a hug and kiss when leaving the house and not saying things like "Thank you," and "I love you." It may be being too distracted to talk or listen, or too busy to have devotions and pray together. Not taking regular alone time together to go on dates and really connect again is certainly neglecting basic necessary marriage maintenance. Think of the special little things you did before marriage and right after. You never imagined you'd stop those things. You thought they would grow. Now they've stopped and your garden is full of weeds. Get back to those things at all costs or it will be too late!

## **IV. THE PREVENTION**

From long-time gardeners with prize-winning gardens, we can glean principles that can help us prevent weeds from taking over and causing destruction.

**Keep a close watch on the garden.** Good maintenance results in great blessing. Attentiveness is the key. Marriages need to be watched and attended like a prized possession. Your relationship needs to be monitored for small cracks in the walls and little weeds sticking up their heads. At once action must be taken to remove them and strengthen the marriage. Marriages, like gardens, don't go to seed overnight, but they do go to seed when neglected.

Keeping the communication lines open is an important part of this as well. Neglect will cause hurt that will break down real communication. Then people start assuming things, usually wrong things, and the weeds really grow.

**Fertilize what you want to grow.** Plants need food to grow. So do marriage relationships. Appreciation is a good marriage fertilizer, especially when used in liberal amounts. Fertilize your

mate's strengths both verbally to them and also in your own mind. Starve (ignore) their weaknesses and pretty soon they will fade.

Another good fertilizer is doing acts of kindness. Know your mate's love language: words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service and physical touch. Speak their language often, even if it isn't your language (it probably won't be). Initiate, don't wait to be asked. Take on the role of a servant and you'll help your relationship grow.

**Watch out for weeds.** You don't have to try to grow weeds, they'll grow all by themselves. You have to work to grow something productive. All you have to do to grow weeds is nothing – neglect. When weeds do pop up they must be removed quickly or the roots will get a strong foothold (Eph 4:26). Weeds start small and grow – like resentment, jealousy, hurt, feeling unappreciated, etc.

Weeds always start below the surface and aren't immediately visible until they grow. Hurt starts inside, and if not handled right will grow into a very nasty weed resistant to anything we can do to remove it. It takes skill to tell a weed from a plant when they are both very small. Learn to recognize the difference in your marriage. Don't hesitate to ask others for wisdom: friends, pastor or God.

One of the things that makes weeds so hard to get rid of is that they seem to appeal to our flesh, something we want to hang onto and not give up. Lust, fantasies, flirting, self-centeredness and the like fit this category very well.

Weeds are very 'invasive' – they aren't content to stay where they start but insist on spreading and taking over every area of space. Anger is that way. By the end of the day a small anger grows to be all-consuming. That's true of lust, bitterness, discontent, and other sins as well. Watch them. Weeds aren't content until they choke out everything good and productive. They keep the good plants from receiving light and nutrients and so they will fade and die.

**Keep your walls in good repair.** Walls protect gardens from predators who will destroy them. Build strong walls of love, servant-hood, spending time alone, praying together, laughing, meeting each other's emotional needs, and putting the other first. These strong walls will protect your marriage and you as well. Neither of you will be as open to temptation. Outside predators won't be able to get in and destroy your marriage.

We've seen the cause, the result, the warning and the prevention of damage to our garden/marriage. Finally let's see the good fruit that comes from a garden well attended.

## **V. THE FRUIT**

The reward of hard work in a garden is fruit (and vegetables) to enjoy when winter and hard times come. Make your marriage strong now so that as time goes on and hard times come you can coast on the good produce you have stored away for it. Build it solid now and it will produce for many years to come. It will carry you through problems with children and finances, illness and career problems, and it will carry you through your elderly years in close friendship and love.

Remember, though, good gardens don't just happen – they take work. ***“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit.”***

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS.** The following are for you to talk about with your mate or contemplate on your own.

What parallels do you see between your relationship and a garden?

Who is the main ‘gardener’ in your relationship, the one who works hardest to keep the weeds out and things growing? If it isn't you, then thank your mate for doing that.

Give some examples of weeds that can destroy a relationship.

What weeds do you see that were present in your parent's relationship?

What weeds have you been battling in your marriage?

What is the biggest problem in communication in your marriage? What can you do to improve things?

What walls do you have to protect your marriage?

What other walls do you need to have to improve your marriage?

What are some of the hard decisions you're going to have to make and stick to in order to have time to devote to your garden/marriage?

## Marriage & Family – IV. MATE SERVICE

### 4. SACRIFICIAL LOVE

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In the movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, the ocean liner *S. S. Poseidon* is on the open sea when it hits a huge storm. A wall of water crashes through the ballroom chandelier. Men in tuxes and women in evening gowns scream and run. Lights go out, smoke pours into rooms and, amid all the confusion, the ship flips over. Because of the air trapped inside the ocean liner, it floats upside down. But in the confusion, the passengers can't figure out what's going on. They scramble to get out, mostly by climbing the steps to the top deck. The problem is, the top deck is now 100 feet under water. In trying to get to the top of the ship, they drown. The only survivors are the few who do what doesn't make sense. They do the opposite of what everyone else is doing and descend into the dark belly of the ship until they reach the hull. By going down, they reach the ocean's surface. Rescuers hear them banging and cut them free. In marriage, it's as if God has turned the ship over and the only way for us to find freedom is to choose what doesn't make sense: lay down our lives by serving, supporting, and sacrificing for our spouses.

Servanthood is both an act and an attitude. You can't have one without the other and really be a servant. Jesus has both and we are to be like Him. He came to serve us because He LOVED us. That was His motive in all He did and still does – love for us. The flesh says look out for yourself and have others serve you, but Jesus gives us a way that seems upside down – love and serve others. This whole concept is expanded and explained by Paul in I Corinthians 13.

***1 Corinthians 13 1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.***

***4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.***

***8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.***

***13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

## **I. LOVE IS NECESSARY**

**Ultimate communication without love is worthless. 1 Corinthians 13:1 *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*** “If I speak” refers to communication, which is key to a growing relationship. Yet even the very best marriage communication skills without love are nothing. Without love the best skills and techniques are like a cymbal or gong – loud but hollow and empty. Without love there is nothing worthwhile to say. However true they may be, words without love bring hurt and harm. Words must be motivated by love. That is what real servanthood is all about.

‘Love’ here is the Geek word agape, referring to God’s unconditional love. It isn’t our pitiful conditional love “if” or “because of.” It’s like God’s “in spite of” love. This love only comes from God, the fruit of His Spirit working in us.

**Ultimate knowledge without love is useless. 2 *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*** It takes great wisdom to understand the opposite sex and how to meet their needs. Yet, even if one has all knowledge of how to be the perfect husband or wife yet doesn’t have God’s sacrificial love that causes us to put our mate first, we have nothing.

**Ultimate sacrifice without love still disappoints. 3 *If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*** Ultimate sacrifice, even being the ultimate servant externally, if done without love as the motive, amounts to nothing. Knowing all about your mate’s love language and doing all the right things means nothing if not done with a loving heart.

How can sacrifice without love fail? It fails because it’s done in our own strength and for selfish and self-centered motives. Someone put it this way: Though I speak of my love with all the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett or Robert Browning and sprinkle my daily conversations with "Darling," "Sweetheart," "Honey," and "I love you," but have not agape for my spouse, I'm just making a lot of meaningless noise. And though I read all the how to have a good marriage books I can, and attend numerous marriage congresses, conferences, seminars, enrichments and encounters; and though I have the Ph.D. in marriage and family counseling so that I can help other couples toward wedded bliss, but have not agape for my mate, I am nothing as a partner. And though I dutifully perform my marital responsibilities as my culture, my church and my conscience dictate even to the point of being fatigued, ruining my health or dying in the process, but have not agape for my partner, all these grand actions don't amount to a wad of chewed gum.

What makes the perfect mate? Is it great communication? Is it genius IQ so as to understand all about our mate? It is doing sacrificial acts because that’s what we’re supposed to do? No, all these without love fail. Since love is so important we better understand what it is.

## **II. WHAT LOVE IS**

**Love is patient** Love waits with contentment, without demanding a change, without anxiety and anger. Love means being patient with your mate’s faults and weaknesses without trying to change them, without nagging or criticizing. Sam Levison once said, “Love at first sight

is nothing special. It's when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle."

**Love is kind** The Greek literally means that love is "easy" on the other person. This comes from a servant heart dedicated to the Lord and filled with His love. Patience without kindness can be cold, distant and hard. Love is kind. It sees a need in your mate and meets it. It means taking the initiative to help wherever needed. It doesn't matter how large or small the act, for it is the heart motive God sees. Brother Lawrence says "We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, Who regards not the greatness of the work but the love with which it is performed." A godly marriage is full of random acts of kindness done swiftly and unexpectedly.

**Love does not envy** It is not jealous. It means I do not desire what I cannot or do not have. I do not compare my mate to others and wish they were different in some way. Jealousy is self-centered. Love looks through a telescope, envy through a microscope. Love does not complain and blame God for not giving you a better mate. Love trusts God and is content with what He has given. Love does not seek to control our mate but grants them freedom to be themselves.

**Love does not boast** Boasting is done to impress, to win points. It seldom accomplishes this, however. Boasting is self-centered. Servant love is the opposite. Arrogance may win a battle in marriage, but it won't improve the marriage or the situation. If you must correct your mate do it after much prayer and humbling on one's self. Do it privately, gently, and in love – as you would want them to correct you. Instead brag on your mate publicly, praise them in private and before others. Make sure it is genuine and you mean it.

**Love is not proud** Pride is the attitude behind the boaster. It comes from an over-inflated sense of one's own importance. It demands to be the center of attention. Love, however, stays humble and inflates others instead of self. Arrogance smothers love, humility overflows with love. Humility admits its faults and doesn't have to win the argument or prove one's self right. Humility is an act of submission, following the example of Jesus. Humility builds your mate up, not yourself. ***Philippians 2:3-11 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

**Love is not rude** Love has good manners. It says "Thank You," "Please," and "I'm sorry." Love means treating your mate as politely as you treat others. Before marriage we treat our mate better than others but somehow after we are married awhile we find ourselves being short, rude, inconsiderate and impatient.

**Love is not self-seeking** Love does not seek to further its own profit or advantage. Love is not selfish. Love is a servant. A servant is not self-seeking. This means more than just sitting back and letting others go first. It means lifting others up, escorting them to the front of the line. This is a good summary of all the other descriptions of love. A true servant has only one agenda: the Master's agenda. Think about it: if both husband and wife put the other first, seek to meet their mate's needs and not their own, then things will be as God intended. If the husband meets the wife's needs and she his, then their needs will be better met than if they tried to meet their own.

**Love is not easily angered** Love doesn't let another's words or actions arouse anger (which comes from pride, self-centeredness). Love has a slow fuse. In many marriages one mate will use anger as a control factor, a way of manipulating and getting what they want. What a terrible tool this is, and what an awful example for one's children. This doesn't mean there is no place for righteous indignation in marriage. Sometimes some very hurtful and wrong things are done. Even then, though, anger must be controlled and handled in a godly way. (See my articles on *Anger Control* for more information about anger.)

**Love keeps no record of wrongs** Instead of being easily angered, love keeps no record of wrongs. It doesn't keep a mental list of hurts or failures. This results in bitterness and bondage. Instead show mercy, as God shows you. We are too concerned with getting justice, when what God gives us is not justice but mercy. Forgiveness means not giving another what they deserve – that's what God does for us when He forgives us. It is a mental choice to give up our right for revenge. It means not punishing the other by words or actions, not withholding love or sex. In his book, *Lee: The Last Years*, Charles Bracelen Flood reports that after the Civil War, Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky lady who took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. There she bitterly cried that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Federal Artillery fire. She looked to Lee for a word condemning the North or at least sympathizing with her loss. After a brief silence, Lee said, "Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it." It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to remain, let bitterness take root and poison the rest of our life (Eph 4:26). How would you feel if you knew your mate automatically and totally forgave everything you did to hurt them? You can't control what they do, but you can decide to be that way yourself.

No one ever said it better than C. S. Lewis: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket -- safe, dark, motionless, airless -- it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.... The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love... is Hell."

**Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth** Love makes you genuinely GLAD for the other one when they prosper and hurt when they hurt. Love isn't secretly glad when one's mate learns something the hard way. Love never uses deception to gain the upper hand. Love is always truthful. Lying and deceiving can become such a habit we aren't always aware we are doing it. Love never deals in deception, it traffics in truth. Love tells the truth even when it hurts. Love tells the truth especially when it hurts. Love shares inner feelings and hurts. Love tells the truth in love. Love builds up, it doesn't tear down. Deception prevents total intimacy in



marriage. It takes wisdom to know when your mate needs love that is patient or love that speaks the truth. Ask God for that wisdom.

**Love always protects** Love bears up under adverse circumstances for the welfare of others. Love hangs tough. Love tolerates imperfection and accepts personal differences. When life or marriage throws unexpected or irritating things our way, love can handle it. Love doesn't cut and run when things get tough. When a person in marriage has an attitude of "what's in it for me?" or "what do I get out of it?" that marriage won't meet its God-given potential. Servant love tries to protect your mate, not yourself.

**Love always trusts** Love 'believes all things.' Love complements, encourages and helps others do difficult things. Love doesn't question the ability of your mate to do something God wants them to do but supports them in it. Love communicates confidence. Love is in the construction business – building others up. Your mate will become what you convince them they will be.

**Love always hopes** Hope knows where it is headed. 'Hope' in the Bible means 'confident assurance.' Love is optimistic, based on God's faithfulness. Love doesn't give up on a marriage or a mate. It always knows all things are possible for God. When someone quits or gives up, then nothing good can come to that relationship. Servant love never quits.

**Love always perseveres** This refers especially to tough times and difficult circumstances. Love is willing to suffer and persist through pain. When we love someone we go through suffering for their sake, to help them to take pain from them, to endure pain they cause, to stick with them. Love sticks even when the marriage isn't fun or fair.

**Love never fails** It 'never lets you down.' With love any marriage can grow. Without it nothing happens. This is God's promise to us if we let God fill us with His sacrificial servant love.

***1 Corinthians 13:8 But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.*** We can't see the overall picture of our life, mate or marriage – but God does. In heaven all these earthly difficulties will be gone. There'll be no more marriage hurts or problems. Then we will see it all in perfect perspective. Now we trust Him and obey Him by being a loving servant like Him.

Now that we've seen that love is necessary for a servant and what love is, let's look at how to have this kind of love in our hearts. This is the essence of being like Jesus.

### **III. HOW TO LOVE YOUR MATE**

**Love is of God, not man, so get connected. 1 John 4:7-13** *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*

**Love is rooted in God's person and character.** We can't counterfeit love, nor whip it up on our own. Agape love is God's unconditional love. Authors such as Dwight Small can speak eloquently about the application of agape love to marriage: "Agape is not born of a lover's need, nor does it have its source in the love object. Agape doesn't exist in order to get what it wants but empties itself to give what the other needs. Its motives rise wholly from within its own nature. Agape lives in order to die to self for the blessedness of caring for another, spending for another, spending itself for the sake of the beloved."

**Love is a reflection of God's presence.** When we aren't showing His love we aren't being like Him. When we stay close to Him we'll reflect what He is like – love! Love is the first fruit of the Spirit mentioned. D. L. Moody wrote: "The fruit of the Spirit begins with love. There are nine graces spoken of, and of these nine Paul puts love at the head of the list; love is the first thing, the first in that precious cluster of fruit. Someone has said that all the other eight can be put in terms of love. Joy is love exulting; peace is love in repose; longsuffering is love on trial; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in action; faith is love on the battlefield; meekness is love at school; and temperance is love in training... If we only just brought forth the fruit of the Spirit, what a world we would have! Men would have no desire to do evil."

**Love is an act, not a feeling, so just do it. 1 John 3:18** *Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.* You can't link love to feelings. 'Phileo' love is conditional love, how we 'feel' about someone. But God's love which He shows through us is unconditional agape love. In your marriage don't base things on your feelings. Chose to let God love your mate through you and start acting in loving ways. Then feelings of love may or may not follow. The decisions to love will result in feelings of love, don't let feelings of love, or lack of them, be the standard you use to measure love. That's the world's way, not God's way. For many years in various parts of the world marriages were arranged and these seemed to often work out better than our system of choosing whom we will marry based on how we 'feel' about them. That system has led to a high divorce rate, unfaithfulness in marriage and living together without marriage. When a marriage is based on how we feel for someone then it is on shaky ground, for feelings come and go.

**Love is a gift, not a wage or bribe, so give it freely. Luke 6:32-38** *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' love those who love them. 33 And*

*if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even `sinners' lend to `sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."* This passage is often used to teach about financial giving, but the context is in discussion of the nature of love. Give freely and you'll get more back than you gave. If you just show love to your mate as a wage – because they earn or deserve it – then you are missing what agape love is really all about. If you show love to your mate as a **bribe** so they will love you and you will benefit from it then you are totally missing the whole point of being a loving servant.

**Love is an obligation, not an option, so pay it.** *Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.* This is also used about finances but the context is really about love. Love is a debt, not an option. It is something we **MUST** give. ***1 John 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*** God doesn't love us because we love Him, we love Him because He first loved us. We must love our mates as well – it is a command, not an option.

**Love must grow, so nurture it.** *1 Thess 3:11-12 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. 12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.* Love is dynamic, it can grow or fade. God's love never changes, for it is always 100%, but ours is far from that so it has room to increase or decrease.

Read and reread I Corinthians 13, Use it as your standard for love. Ask God to use it to teach you have to be a loving servant to your mate and family. Make godly servanthood motivated by agape love your life goal. That's the only way to be like Jesus!

**APPLICATION QUESTIONS.** The following are for you to talk about with your mate or contemplate on your own.

Is your love for your mate increasing or decreasing?

What can you do to have in increase more? What stands in the way? (you can't use your mate as an excuse, for that means your love is conditional on them)

Evaluate yourself (not your mate) in each category below. Where are you strongest? Where are you weakest? Which traits do you need to work on most? How can you improve?

Love is patient,

love is kind.

It does not envy,

it does not boast,

it is not proud.

It is not rude,

it is not self-seeking,

it is not easily angered,

it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects,

always trusts,

always hopes,

always perseveres.

Love never fails.

Where is your mate strongest in showing love – which of those above best apply to them?

What 3 things can you start doing (or stop doing) to better show agape love to your mate?

# ***Marriage and Family***

## **V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

### **AND YOUR FAMILY**

UNDERSTANDING & APPLYING GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGES  
& FAMILIES

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Based on 2019 CTO Marriage Retreat “Winning the Battle  
for Your Family”

1. Satan Hates Marriage
2. The Root of Marriage Problems
3. Occupy the Conquered Territory
4. Forgiveness and Demonizing
5. Satan Hates Children
6. Demonic Access to Children
7. Delivering Children from Demonizing
8. How to Pray for Your Children
9. Dress for Battle
10. The Battle for the Mind
11. Cracks in Our Armor
12. Peace + Faith = Victory
13. Going on the Offense
14. Warfare Promises

For more information on Spiritual Warfare see my books “Spiritual Warfare Handbook” and “Spiritual Warfare in the Bible” at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/> or email me at [jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org](mailto:jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org) and I will send a PDF copy.

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

### 1. SATAN HATES MARRIAGE

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Satan hates marriage. He hates Christian marriages in particular because they have the potential to show the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). By hurting Christian marriages, Satan hinders their witness to the world. He knows that whoever owns the family owns the future. He didn't bother Adam until he got married, then he went after them both!

Satan is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). As such he blinds and deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He is the head of a vast, powerful organization that opposes God and all he stands for. Jesus decisively defeated Satan and his domain by the cross and His resurrection (Ephesians 1:19-20; Colossians 2:15). However, he is still free to oppose God and His people. To withstand these attacks, we must understand God's design for marriage and the family, Satan's strategy against it, and how to stand firm to have victory. That's what this series of blogs will be about.

Unfortunately, books about marriage seldom include spiritual warfare. Andreas Kostenberger said, "Regularly the focus (in marriage books) is on fulfilling one's partner's needs in marriage, improving one's communication skills, or resolving marital conflict. From reading any of these books, one would never know that spiritual warfare is a vital issue in marriage and the family. Yet, in fact, spiritual warfare is an all-encompassing reality." Spiritual warfare is often completely ignored by most marriage counselors and popular treatments on marriage. Yet it has been a part of male-female relationships since Satan attacked Adam and Eve.

Remember, though, that not all marriage problems are spiritual warfare problems. Spiritual warfare is one tool God gives us in our collection of tools for victory in life. It is a great tool when needed, but no one tool does everything. If you were making a table you'd need a hammer, saw, sandpaper, paint brush, etc. No one tool alone would do all that is needed. Each is needed. If you tried to use a hammer for cutting wood, or a saw to hammer nails, you would fail. Spiritual warfare is one tool in our marriage tool belt. It is an essential tool, but not the only one. Other tools include communication, showing unconditional love, conflict resolution, forgiveness, sacrificing for others and showing respect. Spiritual warfare isn't the only tool we need to have a great marriage, but when it is needed no other tool will do. These blogs will be about learning how to use the tool of spiritual warfare to have a better marriage and family.

***2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.***

*How competent are you with the tool of spiritual warfare? Do you know when to use it, and how to use it? Ask God for wisdom and insight as you apply His truths to your marriage.*

#### **SATAN ATTACKS MARRIAGES**

*(2 of 15 blogs about spiritual warfare and marriage/family, taken from material I presented at a marriage retreat, Winning the Battle For Your Family, in 2019)*

Satan has been attacking marriage since the beginning. God planned for marriage to be a permanent union of one man and one woman for their whole lives. Satan attacks every part of God's plan. He sows doubt that God's way is best (Genesis 3:1). He used one mate to get another to sin (Genesis 3:6). As a result, they blamed each other (Genesis 3:12-13). Remember, the enemy of your marriage is NOT your spouse, regardless of whatever they may be doing wrong. The enemy of your marriage is God's enemy, Satan and his kingdom.

Satan attacked God's plan of one man and one woman with multiple wives (Lamech, Genesis 4:19; Abraham, Genesis 16:3; David, 1 Chronicles 3:1-9). He attacked one man one women with homosexuality (Genesis 18:16-19:28) and the permanency of marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Marriages of believers and unbelievers brought idolatry into the nation. Sex outside marriage became common (Samson, David, etc.).

He continues to attack marriage today. He will exaggerate your mate's failures and inadequacies, put suspicion in your mind, focus on your self-pity and self-centeredness and provide you with thoughts that someone else would be a better mate. How can you know when your marriage is attacked? Here are some signs of problems in your marriage. They could be caused by the flesh, the enemy or both.

1. Lack of fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Instead of love, joy, peace, patience, etc., there is conflict, impatience, anger and hurt.
2. Self-centeredness. One or both people focus on themselves and what they can get out of marriage. It's all about meeting their needs and what the other does wrong. The relationship is neglected.
3. Unforgiveness. Resentment and bitterness grow and are shown. Anger and conflict are common
4. Weak spiritual life. Reading the Bible and praying, separately or together, is uncommon. When it is practiced it is weak and ineffective.
5. Picking at little things. Either or both get irritated at little things the other does or doesn't do. Minor faults are pointed out and remembered.

***1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.***

*Do you see any of the symptoms of marriage problems in your relationship? Which ones?*

*Is the problem caused by the flesh (sin nature in each of you) or the enemy (Satan) – or both?*

*What must you do about it right away to correct it?*

# Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

## 2. THE ROOT OF MARRIAGE PROBLEMS

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At their root, virtually all marriage problems are individual problems which affect the marriage. Leaving the current mate and marrying someone else does not keep the problem from reoccurring. When Biblical counsel, trying harder, and doing all the right things to help a marriage do not work, then it could be something demonic is affecting one or both partners and therefore the whole marriage.

If your parents, siblings or other relatives are struggling with the same issues (personal or marriage) and you can see a pattern in your family of origin, it certainly could be something demonic that is passed down family lines. If so, that needs to be confessed and broken in Jesus' name.

Is there unconfessed sexual sin in your life now or in your past? Sex forms oneness between those involved, even if there isn't emotional attachment (1 Corinthians 6:16). Emotional bonding without sex can also form an emotional/spiritual oneness between people. If one of the people involved is open to any demonic activity then those demons can and often will claim access to the other person as well. This oneness, physical or emotional, needs to be confessed and broken. Any access any demons claim from it must be removed and put under the blood of Jesus. Those demons must be commanded to be gone forever in Jesus' name.

Individual sin can also open the door to demons affecting not just the individual but the marriage and family. This includes things like anger, fear, lust, pornography, romantic fantasies, greed, etc. These may also have roots in your family line and that must be taken broken in Jesus' name as well. Even when the sin comes down through the family line, when you commit it you are personally guilty and that must be confessed and renounced (1 John 1:9). Then the demons must be commanded to be gone in Jesus' name.

Unforgiveness, bitterness, revenge, criticism and the like all open the door to demonic attack (Ephesians 4:26-27; Matthew 15:19-20; etc.). The person needs to be forgiven and the opening closed by Jesus. Demons with access must be commanded to be gone in Jesus' name.

To have victory we must repent of sin and confess it (1 John 1:9), putting it under the blood of Jesus. If it is ancestral we must break that in Jesus' name as well, claiming our oneness with Jesus as of first priority (2 Corinthians 5:17). If it is from an unbiblical bonding that, too, must be broken. These things close the door that lets the demons in to work. But the demons already with access will still be there so the second step is to make sure they are commanded to be gone in Jesus' name. Close the door and then empty the room. Then the room must be filled with God's present – that will be what the next blog is about.

***John 10:9-10 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

*If God is showing you any of these are active in your life or your marriage, pray for wisdom and courage, then attack them as described in the blog. Pray with your mate if at all possible.*



## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

### 3. OCCUPY THE CONQUERED TERRITORY

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When an army moves against an enemy they first drive them out and conquer their territory. Then they occupy the newly conquered territory so it stays under their control. The same must be done in our spiritual warfare. We have talked previously about driving out the enemy and regaining territory we have lost. We do that through spiritual warfare prayer and using God's Word. We close the door and then empty the room. Then we must occupy and fill the new territory so it doesn't fall back into enemy hands. If we don't fill ourselves after deliverance, Jesus says the end result will be 8 times as many demons as there were to begin with (Matthew 12:43-46; Luke 12:24-26).

We fill ourselves with God's presence. This means a personal relationship with Jesus – salvation. But it doesn't stop there. We must be committed to following Him as disciples, living for Him and serving Him in all we do. As we let His Holy Spirit direct and control our lives we are filled with His presence and do not leave any openings for demons to return. For husbands this results in showing unconditional, sacrificial love to their wives. A man can't do that unless he is submitted to Jesus and accepting His unconditional, sacrificial love for him. Only as we experience this from Jesus can we show it to our wives. For a wife it means totally trusting Jesus and yielding to Him so she can fully trust and yield to her husband. Together it means understanding and implementing the principles of a godly marriage as contained in God's Word.

As you work against what the enemy is doing in your marriage (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9), you must replace it with Jesus' presence in every area of your life and God's truth about what marriage is to be. (You can find many articles about this on the Marriage and Family portion of the CTO web site (<https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/>)).

Never underestimate the enemy and his tactics. God has brought you together but Satan wants to pull you apart (1 Peter 5:8). Use all the tools in your marriage tool belt to get victory, and that includes spiritual warfare. It also means using the tools of open communication, conflict resolution, serving each other, praying together and forgiveness. Focus on changing yourself. There is no one else you can change! Ask God to show you where YOU need to grow and be open to what He shows you. Don't focus on your mate's issues. Get rid of the plank in your own eye before going after the speck in theirs (Matthew 7:3-5).

**Matthew 12:43-46; Luke 12:24-26** *“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”*

*Are you totally yielded to Jesus and doing all you can to live for Him alone? If not, you are leaving room for the enemy to work. Allowing sin or disobedience in your life leaves an opening for demons to fill. We don't follow Jesus out of fear of demons working against us, but it is a sobering reality to keep in mind.*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

# 4. FORGIVENESS AND DEMONIZING

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Jesus had some very strong, sober words to say about those who do not forgive others (Matthew 18:32-35). He commands us to forgive 77 times (Matthew 18:21-22). There are many reasons for this. One is that unforgiveness is one of the most direct ways of opening one's self to demons (Ephesians 4:26; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11). This is especially true in marriage.

Forgiveness is not easy to do. Often we think it means saying that what was done to us is OK, or that we aren't going to think about it anymore. We may feel like we are letting them off the hook for what they have done. They don't deserve forgiveness. No one deserves forgiveness from Jesus, yet He gives it freely. Understanding what forgiveness means is important for us to be free.

Anger is a secondary emotion, used to cover pain. When we hit our thumb with a hammer we feel pain but we react in anger because that's an easier emotion to express. In order to forgive, though, we must admit and confront the pain we feel when others wound us. Our pride wants revenge, to hurt them back – but then we are trapped in unforgiveness and bitterness. Forgiveness is a mental choice, not an emotional feeling.

Forgiving means giving up your right to hurt the other person back because they hurt you. Forgiveness has a price – you give up your right to revenge, to see them hurt for hurting you. That's what Jesus does when He forgives us!

Instead of covering pain with anger, turn your hurt over to God in prayer. You need to do it over and over, each time you remember the pain. If not it will turn into anger and unforgiveness. Rely on God's power to help you handle the pain in a healthy way. Experience the hurt so you can move beyond it. Often times making a list of past hurts, from your mate or others, is the first step to forgiveness. Make sure you have forgiven those in your past: parents, those in past relationships, friends and enemies.

Forgiveness is not a quick emotional switch in your heart, it takes time to heal and move on. It is a process that must be repeated each time the painful memory comes back. Gradually the pain will lessen and be gone. When it tries to come back you cannot allow it to stay.

Remember how God has forgiven you. Think about what Christ did for you on the cross and recall His mercy to you in so many ways. Ask Him to help you forgive through the power of His love. We can forgive the unforgiveable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us.

When someone sins against you, forgive them immediately, even while they are still committing the offense. Even if they are doing it unintentionally, forgive immediately. Don't wait for them to apologize or admit their wrong. Forgive as quickly as you expect God to forgive you. If not your prayers will be hindered and evil can gain access to your life.

When this happens in marriage reach out to your mate immediately. Withholding love is a form of revenge and shows forgiveness has not been given. Forgiving means treating them as if the offense never occurred – the same as God forgives you. By forgiving others for having

hurt us we can let go of the painful past and create a healthier relationship. That's important in marriage as well as in all relationships in life. Learn to forgive. Forgiveness is a very important tool we all need to learn to use and use regularly.

***Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.***

***2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.***

*When you think of forgiving those who have hurt you, does God bring anyone to mind? If so, make sure you have forgiven them, and continue to do so each time the hurt returns. Make sure there isn't anything you haven't forgiven your mate for. If you need their forgiveness please ask them right away.*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

### 5. SATAN HATES CHILDREN

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Not only does Satan hate marriage, he hates children as well. He wants to devour them (1 Peter 5:8). He knows they are a bright reflection of God's glory and enjoy an intimacy with God that he lost. He fears them because they have the potential to trust God and defeat him. They represent the future of the church. Jesus loves the little children, but Satan hates them!

He attacked the baby boys in Moses' day and in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. He incited the Jews to offer their children as sacrifices to Baal (Jeremiah 19:5). Today 60 million babies have been aborted in the USA. Worldwide 50 million are killed each year – 125,000 a day. When a baby or child is destroyed, a picture of Jesus Himself is destroyed for children are made in the image of Jesus (Matthew 25:40, 45).

If Satan can't kill children, he will do all he can to bring anxiety, frustration and fear into the home. Through an unhealthy home life, children grow up wounded and often rebellious. When a marriage is weakened, so are the children and thus the church and nation.

In Jesus' day demons afflicted children with physical illness (Matthew 17:15; Mark 9:18, 25). They prevent children from being able to control their own emotions (Mark 9:17, 22). They physically tried to harm children (Mark 9:20-22, 26-27). Satan instills hatred between siblings: Cain and Able, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, etc.

Dedicate your children to God – publicly and in your own hearts. Ask Him to be their guide and protector. Teach them about spiritual warfare. Show them how to live for Jesus, by your own life and actions as well as your words. Help them learn to see and overcome their weaknesses as well as develop their strengths. Assure them they are not alone. Share your own battles with them. Encourage them to have godly friends and love Jesus. Satan hates children, but God loves them and has a wonderful plan for them, and for you as well!

***Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.***

*Pray for the protection of the children in your family and church. Pray one by one, by name, for each child you know. Be sensitive to the ones God puts on your heart for more regular prayer. Write their names down and pray for them. If God points them out it is for a good reason!*

# Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

## 6. DEMONIC ACCESS TO CHILDREN

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While children are considered innocent by God until they are old enough to be accountable for their sin, Satan offers no period of grace. He attacks as soon as possible, even while still in the womb. Here are some of the reasons children are open to demonizing.

1. ANCESTRAL SIN OPENINGS, especially if the child is a male, firstborn, or named after someone who is demonized.
2. ILLEGITIMACY means a child is not conceived or born under a marriage covenant between a committed, loving man and woman. The parents are out of God's will because of sex outside marriage. Any negative thoughts or feelings they have about the unwanted pregnancy become a curse against the baby. Any kind of rejection of the baby opens the baby up to demons stepping in to fill that void in its life.
3. REJECTION in any form of a baby or child will also open them to demons filling that void. An unwanted baby coming to a married couple can have the same result. A difficult labor, painful delivery, physical or mental defects or the baby being the 'wrong' sex all can bring feelings of rejection. Problems raising the child or problems from health issues with the child, health or work load of the parents or marriage problems can cause feelings of rejection toward the growing child.

Adopted babies can be very susceptible to this. Ancestral sins from birth parents' families pass on to them. Often these children come from unbelieving parents and/or countries where demonizing is rampant. The baby can be claimed by demons in the family line as well as demons from the country of origin. In addition, there is rejection by one or both parents when the baby is put up for adoption. Even if it is done for a good reason, the baby has no covering or protection from the birth parents and is open to demonizing.

If this is true of you, first forgive the person who rejected you. In Jesus name break any curses they made against you, even if they weren't aware they were doing it. Command any demons that have come in through rejection or ancestral openings to be gone in Jesus' name. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit and presence.

4. ABUSE opens the door to demonizing as well. Incest or physical or emotional abuse cause trauma which breaks down the person's natural defense mechanisms and leaves them open and vulnerable. Abuse also overlaps with rejection as well.
5. OTHER TRAUMA can also break down normal reasoning and open the child to demonizing. Extremely fearful situations, being lost, car or other of accidents, scary TV show/movie or viewing physical abuse or violence can all cause this.
6. WORLDLY INFLUENCES GROWING UP such as games, toys, cartoons, TV programs, movies or comics that have occult or demonic activity can be an open door. Such things as Harry Potter open the door to an acceptance of anti-god supernaturalism. School activities, meditation, Ouija Boards, even yoga may open a door in a child's life. Such things as occult or

cult interest, alcohol, drugs, pornography and sexual experimentation also invite demonic influence.

7. **REBELLION** against authority, parents or school, is a sign of bitterness and unforgiveness. God says rebellion is similar to occult involvement (1 Samuel 15:23).

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, but Satan hates you and has a terrible plan for your life – and it starts even before birth. David sinned with Bathsheba and greatly affected himself, his family and the whole Jewish nation. Satan had started sowing the seeds for that sin in David's life when he was very young. He learned to lie and deceive to cover up sin. He then developed a desire for multiple women. Satan tries to get a foothold in our lives as soon as he can today as well. Don't let him!

***Psalm 127:3-5 Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court.***

*If any of these are true of your past stop now and pray about it as I described above. If this is true of others you know who are still children, or are now adults, intercede for them in the same way.*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

# 7. DELIVERING CHILDREN FROM DEMONIZING

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Some parents see their children as a burden, a bother and imposition. That leads to rejection. Other parents live for their children and focus everything around them. They use their children to meet their needs for self-worth, accomplishment and meaning in life. These parents make their children into idols. Both extremes are wrong. The truth is our children are gifts from God (Psalm 126:3) and must be seen as such. They belong to Him and are only on temporary loan to us. They are His, not ours. We are stewards entrusted with raising them. We aren't to either reject them nor idolize them, but to love them and raise them for His glory. Our greatest contribution to God's kingdom may not be what we do but someone we raise.

Raising them for Jesus means, in part, developing a warrior mindset in them. Too many children grow up indulged, spoiled and feeling entitled to whatever they want. Christian children must grow up with a biblical world view which includes understanding spiritual warfare. They must see themselves as living behind enemy lines and being pursued by an enemy who will do anything to destroy them. They must be trained to fight constant spiritual guerilla warfare. They need to know how to protect themselves from attacks, how to counter attack the enemy to have victory, and how to rescue those taken captive by Satan's forces. Satan is serious about destroying our children. He fires real bullets!

We train our children to have life skills, educational skills and whatever skill is needed for success in daily life. Too often we neglect spiritual training. Parents leave it up to the church. How can 1 or 2 hours a week counter all they are hit with the other 166 hours a week!

Teach them God's Word. Of course, that means you must first know it yourself! Make sure they don't just know the facts in their head but that they are motivated to apply it to their lives. They must be challenged to believe because THEY believe, not because you do or because it was what they were always taught. Ask them often: "Do YOU believe this for yourself, not just because you've been taught it?" "If you really believe this is true, what changes will this make in your life?"

Memorized Scripture is one of our best weapons in spiritual warfare. When Jesus was tempted He quoted Scripture to have victory over Satan's (Matthew 4:1-11). Paul says our only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Psalm 119:9,11 tells us that it's through God's Word that we have victory. Quote Scripture to overcome demonic attacks and temptations. Ask God to show you verses that will help against these things. Write them down and memorize them. Say them over and over when these thoughts attack you. That is the only way to victory, and God guarantees it will work!

Instill in your children a love for Jesus. They need to see that in you first of all. If they act like Christians because they fear God or want to impress you, it won't last. We should start raising them to be like Jesus from the moment of birth. After all, they are His and belong to Him. They are on loan to us temporarily to raise for Him.

***Psalm 127:1,3 Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.***

*Do your children understand spiritual warfare? Can they recognize Satan's attacks against them? Do they have a good understanding of God's Word and how to use it to have victory? Do they know how to pray for themselves and others? Do they spend time alone with God each day? Can they survive in Satan-occupied territory when they leave your home?*

For more information about teenagers and spiritual warfare see VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS, chapter 12: Spiritual Warfare, at the end of this book.



# Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

## 8. HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN

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One of the main responsibilities a father, or even a mother, has is to pray for the protection of their family. No matter how old your children are, no matter their spiritual condition, pray for them. Job prayed for his children, even when they were grown and living on their own (Job 1:4-5).

Job was righteous (Job 1:8). He prayed regularly for his children's protection (Job 1:4-5). This is a man's responsibility, but mothers and grandparents can do it as well, especially when the father is not doing his job. He must also pray for his wife's protection. He should know her needs and weaknesses and cover them in prayer each morning. He needs to pray for his own protection, too, because Satan will do anything he can to spiritually defeat him so he doesn't pray (Job 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8).

Job prayed for a hedge of protection around his children (Job 1:10). A hedge is a wall, a large fence, something to shelter what is inside. It is like the log walls of a wooden stockade which was erected for protection in the early days of the American west.

If there is sin in our lives when we pray the hedge is broken down. Job lived a holy life (Job 1:1, 8) so his spiritual hedge around his children was solid and Satan couldn't penetrate it (Job 1:10-11). If we allow sin in our life our hedge won't be effective.

If you know the story of Job, you know that, despite Job's prayers, God allowed Satan to break down the hedge and attack and kill Job's children. So, what good did it do for him to be holy and pray for a hedge? When Satan killed his children, he knew that what happened was God's perfect will for his family and not because of a failure on his part. When we pray, we always leave the results in God's hands for His will to be done. Sometimes that will is painful to us, like it was to Job. God allowed this to happen to use Job as a witness and testimony to angels and demons, as well as millions of people since (including us today). It stretched Job's faith as well so he grew. Are you willing to allow God whatever He thinks is best for His glory and your growth? Job certainly did (Job 1:21; 13:15).

If God removes the hedge for His glory, that is His right. He promises He will be with us and not give us more than we can handle with His help. But if the hedge is faulty because of sin in our life, or isn't there because we don't pray for it, then the results are on us! Facing trials from God to mature us and bring glory to Him are one thing, but to face them because of our sin and failure is something else entirely.

Every father, no matter how old his children, needs to pray for them every day. As the head of the family, fathers have a special authority to represent the children before God. Pray for problems and difficulties in their lives. Look for weak spots. Be alert to where the enemy is attacking. This is also true when you pray for your wife and yourself. Any sin must be put under the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:9).

Parents, especially fathers (and even grandparents) must stand in the forefront of the battle for their families. We go before them, as an officer leads his troops into battle. We do this by prayer. Prayer is not preliminary to the battle; prayer IS the battle. The battle for your

children and family is won or lost during your prayer time. Are you fighting for them as you should? Men, don't let the responsibility fall on your wife. It is your God-given duty as a father. Get out there and fight for your family!

***Job 1:1-2 4-5 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had seven sons and three daughters, ... His sons used to hold feasts in their homes on their birthdays, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would make arrangements for them to be purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.***

*Men, women, grandparents (whoever you are) spend time now praying for a hedge of protection around your children and grandchildren. Pray for each one by name. Make sure you cover each weakness and sin area in their lives as well. Do this daily, or as many times a week as possible. Prayer DOES make a difference!*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

### 9. DRESS FOR BATTLE (Armor 1)

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When I was 19 years old I was drafted into the United States Army. Others said it would be great to be a soldier, a special privilege. But I found it very, very hard. I had to learn how to defend myself against those who wanted to destroy me. I had to learn how to fight an enemy army. When I was in the army I committed my life to God, to live for Him. Others said it would be great to be a Christian, a special privilege. But I found it very, very hard. I had to learn how to defend myself against another enemy who wanted to destroy me. I had to learn how to fight an unseen enemy.

I am no longer in the United States Army so I no longer fight the enemies of America. But I am still in God's Army – and I still must fight God's enemies. If you are in God's Army you will understand what I mean. You, too, face many battles as you live for Him.

We are at war (1 John 5:19). We are living in enemy-occupied territory (2 Corinthians 4:4) surrounded by those who would destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). In an army, the commander provides the equipment and the soldiers learn how to use it. God, our Commander, provides what we need to defend ourselves and to have victory (2 Corinthians 10:4) but we must learn how to use the equipment. Paul describes what these are in Ephesians 6:10-18.

Paul wrote these words in prison, chained to a Roman soldier. As he came to the end of the book of Ephesians he looked for a way to describe our battle and how to have victory. Looking at the Roman soldier with him, Paul used his equipment as a picture of what God provides for us.

Paul begins by commanding us to be strong, but not in our strength, only in God's strength (Ephesians 6:10). The same power that defeated Satan at the cross (Hebrews 2:14-15) and that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:18-23) is available to us. God's power is greater than Satan's power (1 John 4:4). Satan is more powerful than us, but not than God.

Paul describes this power as pieces of armor we are to put on and use (Ephesians 6:11). We are commanded to put it on. Its use is not optional but mandatory for soldiers of God. And we are commanded to put on ALL of it, not just some.

The reason we need it is because Satan has "schemes" to deceive and trap us (Ephesians 6:11). This word is used of a hunter trapping an animal. Paul calls our conflict a "struggle" (Ephesians 6:12). This word refers to a fight to the death. Satan will do anything he can to destroy you, your family and your church!

So, what are we to do? How are to have victory against these schemes and struggles? Here's where the armor comes in. (Continued in next blog)

***Ephesians 6:10-13 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor***

***so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.***

*Do you have a warrior mentality when it comes to living your Christian life? Are you alert to the attacks, traps and schemes against you? Do you know where the enemy tries to get you to sin? Are you able to defeat his efforts? Pray and ask God for wisdom and insight into your battle so you can better withstand.*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

# 10. THE BATTLE FOR THE MIND (Armor 2)

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When a soldier faces his enemy, he needs to use the armor provided by his commander to be victorious. The same is true in our Christian life. The first piece of equipment we are commanded to wear is the helmet of salvation (Ephesians 6:17).

The Roman soldier chained to Paul in prison wore a helmet made out of metal. Enemies would attack with a large, heavy sword which they would try to bring down on the Roman soldier's head. Thus, the helmet had to be strong to protect their head. The same is true for us. Satan attacks our mind and thoughts first. He puts doubt, fear, confusion, lust, greed and whatever defeats us in our mind. Our spiritual battles are won or lost in our mind (thoughts) first of all. That's why we need the mind of Christ to have victory (1 Corinthians 2:16).

We must know who we are in Christ so we don't give in to discouragement, fear or anger. We must be aware of all we have so we don't turn to sin to meet needs God has already met. We are a new creation and must know what that means and how it applies (2 Corinthians 5:17). Knowing God's truth is the only way to protect our minds against Satan's lies.

God has given us over two hundred benefits that come at the moment of salvation. For one thing, He promises that past, present and future sins are gone forever (Romans 8:1). He deals with us in grace, not works.

We are in God's family by birth (John 3:3) and by adoption (Ephesians 1:5). Thus, we are children of God (John 1:12). Ours is a family relationship with God, not king and servant or master and slave. God is our Father, Jesus our Elder Brother (Hebrews 2:11-13). We are family, with all its security, benefits and privileges. Those are ours now, not something we have to wait to have. Not only are we in His family, but we are also friends with God (John 15:15). Can you imagine God calling you a friend? Great privileges are ours! As such she shares His plans and blessings with us.

We must know beyond a doubt that we are unconditionally loved by God, now and forever (Romans 8:38-39). It has nothing to do with what we deserve or don't deserve, and there's no way we can lose it. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us more. There is nothing we can do to make Him love us less. He can't love us more and He won't love us less.

When we are hit with doubt about His provision we must remember He has promised to meet all our needs (Philippians 4:19). When we doubt His love we must remember we can never lose our salvation (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). When we get weary we must remember we will be in heaven with Him forever (Philippians 3:20). When we struggle with sin we must remember He gives us victory over sin (Galatians 2:20). When we struggle in our warfare with Satan's forces we must remember that He has promised victory over them (Colossians 1:13; Luke 10:18-19).

When both husband and wife are committed believers and wear the helmet of salvation they will be likeminded in their values, priorities, motives and goals in life. They know only Jesus can meet all their needs, not their mate, and turn to Him to have them met. Children,

too, must understand all they have in Jesus as Christians. This is key to preventing Satan's attacks to our mind and thoughts.

***Colossians 1:13 For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.***

***2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!***

***2 Corinthians 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.***

*Who is winning the battle for your mind? Do your thoughts line up with Jesus' thoughts? Are you able to control your thoughts and make them obedient to Christ? If not, write down what you must do and ask God for His help doing it.*

# Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

## 11. CRACKS IN OUR ARMOR (Armor 3)

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Sin in life can provide an opening for demons to work against us (Ephesians 4:26-27; Mark 7:21-23; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-8). Even one sin that is allowed to remain can give an opening for demonizing. That's why God provides a spiritual breastplate for us to wear (Ephesians 6:14).

The Roman soldier chained to Paul wore a breastplate to protect his heart and vital organs. It wasn't always easy or comfortable to wear, but if he didn't put it on he was vulnerable. Even if he wore it but it allowed holes or weak spots in it, the enemy would attack those spots and defeat him. The same is true spiritually.

Paul says this represents our righteousness (Ephesians 6:14). It reminds us of the importance of being covered with Jesus' righteousness. We receive it with salvation when our sins are forgiven (Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:23). Breaks and weak areas are covered when we confess our sin (1 John 1:9).

In marriage a husband and wife are to encourage and help each other to overcome sin. They are to set a good example for each other. Too many times one will do or say that which leads the other to sin, like Eve did to Adam. When each one lives like Jesus, serving and forgiving each other, the couple together wears the breastplate of righteousness. It is of the utmost importance for each mate to overcome sin in their lives and to help their mate do the same. When they have children they are included in this as well so the whole family is an example of holiness.

While the breastplate protects all from above the waist, the belt of truth (Ephesians 6:14) covers the waist and below. The belt helped the soldier keep his garments and weapons secured so he didn't stumble. God's truth keeps us from stumbling and falling spiritually. Satan wants to trip us up with his lies and deception. Whenever we get a thought that doesn't line up with God's truth in the Bible we must reject it. That means we must know God's Word well.

In marriage, too, we must guard against the lies the world and the flesh give us about marriage. Self-centered values, unbiblical expectations, unforgiving attitudes and me-first selfishness abound in the world and it's easy for Christians to be influenced by them as well. Children, too, must know God's truth or they, also, will fall for the lies the enemy and their flesh tell them. We must know God's truth, for only it sets us free (John 8:32).

**John 8:32** *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

**1 Peter 1:16** *It is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

*Is there a sin in your life that has control over you? Get counseling, ask others to pray and do everything possible to have victory over it.*

*Make sure you know and live in God's truth. Lies like, "You'll never have victory over that sin" abound. What lies do you struggle with? What gives you victory over them?*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

### **12. PEACE + FAITH = VICTORY (Armor 4)**

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Peace. Everyone talks about it but few have it. The world abounds with substitutes or that which seeks to mask the pain of emptiness. Yet God's peace is necessary to have victory in our lives. Paul, looking at the Roman soldier with him, says we need peace like the soldier needs solid, dependable footwear (Ephesians 6:15). The enemy would pick a place to attack that was advantageous to them and difficult for the Romans. Water, loose sand, sharp rocks or uneven terrain all gave the enemy an advantage. Therefore, the Romans needed sturdy, strong footwear to keep their footing. If they slipped or stumbled they were defeated.

Satan attacks us when and where he thinks he has the best opportunity of winning. We need to be at peace with God so we are secure in Him and can stand no matter what happens in life. God never said He would remove our conflicts but that He would help us through them (John 17:15). He doesn't promise us absence of difficulties, but He does promise peace despite them (Philippians 4:6-7; Isaiah 26:3; John 14:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:16).

If a husband or wife do not have God's peace but instead have turmoil, anxiety, stress or confusion that will negatively affect their marriage. Each needs to have peace with God first, then based on that they can be at peace with each other. This will give them a firm footing no matter what the enemy throws at them. Without God's peace in your heart and relationship your marriage will be characterized by conflict. That not only harms you but your children, and their impression of marriage. Children, too, need the peace of Jesus so they can mature to be like Him and fight their own spiritual battles.

The next piece of armor listed by Paul is the shield of faith. So far all the armor was part of the soldier's inner defense. The shield is the outer wall of defense (Ephesians 6:16). Roman soldiers carried large shields which they held in front of them for protection from the burning tar the enemy would fling at them (Ephesians 6:16). Without a shield they would have to dodge the fiery missiles and not be able to do any other fighting. Paul said this shield did for the soldier what our faith does for us.

Faith in God's love and sovereignty is our outer wall of defense. If we truly believe that no matter what happens God is in control and only allows what is for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28), then we won't be defeated by life's problems and pains. The greater our faith is, the stronger our protection is. It's like having a large shield compared to a very small one.

Marriage, too, must be built on faith – in God and each other. Love must be unconditional; commitment must be unshakable and forgiveness must be continual. When hard times hit a marriage, faith in God keeps both partners focused on God and not the problem or each other's failings. Don't battle your mate. Trust God and together battle your common enemy. Have faith that God knows and does what is best for you, and that your mate is His perfect choice for you for the rest of your life.

Teach your children to walk by faith and obedience. Start by teaching them to trust and obey you when young. Show you are worthy of trust. Help them transfer this to God as they get



older. They must have a faith of their own. They can't hide behind your shield but must 'own' their faith and develop their individual faith in God. Start building their faith right now.

***John 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.***

***Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."***

*On a scale of 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong) where would you rate your peace? What takes away your peace quicker than anything else? What should you do about it?*

*On a scale of 1 (very weak) to 10 (very strong) where would you rate your faith? Where/when is your faith the strongest? Where/when is it the weakest? What should you do to increase your faith?*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

# 13. GOING ON THE OFFENSE (Armor 5)

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All the pieces of equipment we've seen in Ephesians 6 so far have been defensive. We can protect ourselves but we can't have victory. We need an offensive weapon to go on the attack and defeat our enemy. That is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). With their short, double-edged sword the Romans conquered the known world. There was no protection for their back so they couldn't turn and run, they had to move ahead against their enemies, and that is what we must do as well.

This sword of the Spirit refers to the Word of God – it is so important we get this right that Paul says so (Ephesians 6:17). Jesus quoted the Bible when tempted (Matthew 4:1-11). Read Scripture. Memorize Scripture. Quote Scripture. Pray Scripture. Think Scripture. It is the only way we can drive away temptation, lies and attacks of the enemy.

To have a healthy, growing, godly marriage, a husband and wife need to know God's Word. They need to study it individually and together. They must know how to apply it when in spiritual warfare. They must be comfortable praying Bible verses. They must teach their children the Bible as well. Too many children of Christian parents turn from the faith when they leave home because it never became part of them. They need to know God's Word, memorize portions of it, and believe it for themselves. If our children follow Jesus they WILL be attacked, so they must now how to use their only offensive weapon, God's Word.

Paul is done listing the armor, but not done telling us how to have victory. He next mentions prayer (Ephesians 6:18-20). We can equate prayer to communication between the commander and his soldiers. Without good communication, the soldier will not know where to go or what to do. He will be left on his own. We need time talking to God and listening to Him.

Praying together is very important for Christian couples. Deep, open, heartfelt prayer will bring a couple closer and help them have victory. A prayerless marriage is a powerless marriage. If your marriage is only as strong as your prayer life as a couple, how strong would it be? Maybe that's why it is so open to attack! Children, too, need to develop their own prayer life with God. They need to learn to talk to Him as well as recognize His voice when He talks to them. Communication by prayer is essential to victory. Jesus has given us His authority to pray in His name and to command demons to be gone in His name (Matthew 28:18-19; Luke 9:1; 10:18-19). He also gives us His power to have victory in our spiritual warfare (Acts 1:8). We have power from His divine nature in us (2 Peter 1:4). We have power to live the abundant life He gives us (John 10:10). Through His Word and prayer, we have all we need to have victory. What great blessings we have!

***Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.***

*How well do you know the Bible? How skilled are you at using this weapon to attain victory when attacked? How strong is your prayer life? What do you need to do to have better communication with God? Spend some time now reading your Bible and praying.*

## Marriage & Family – V. SPIRITUAL WARFARE & FAMILY

### 14. WARFARE PROMISES (Armor 6)

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Listed below are promises related to spiritual warfare. God's promises are true (Joshua 21:45; 23:14). He keeps them no matter what. They are only good for this life; we won't need them in heaven. Carefully look over the ones listed below and mark the ones that you need right now.

Our Adversaries Will Be Defeated: Deuteronomy 32:43; Philippians 1:28; Deuteronomy 33:27

Victory is Promised: 1 Corinthians 15:57; I Chronicles 29:11; Proverbs 21:31; 1 John 5:4, 18; Rev.12:11; 15:2; Romans 8:37; 2 Corinthians 2:14; John 16:33

God Promises To Fight For Us: 1 Samuel 14:47; Jeremiah 1:8

No Weapon Formed Against The Believer Can Prosper: Isaiah 54:17

Jesus Is Constantly Praying & Interceding On Our Behalf: 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25

God Is Always With Us: Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 18:20; John 14:16, 21; Revelations 3:20

Confession Means Cleansing & Forgiveness: 1 John 1:8-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 1 Timothy 4:5; Luke 11:13; 2 Timothy 2:21; Jude 1; Romans 8:33-39; Titus 3:4-5

God Hears & Answers Prayer: Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9; Jeremiah 33:3

We will never Be Separated From God: Romans 8:35-39; John 10:27-29; 3:36; 5:24

God Will Meet All Your Needs: Philippians 4:19; Psalm 84:11; Romans 8:32; 1 Samuel 12:24

There Is No Need To Worry: Matthew 6:25,34; 1 Peter 5:7; Isaiah 40:11; Matthew 5:38-39; Psalm 37:1-9; Jude 24

God Promises His Care & Protection: Deuteronomy 33:27; Genesis 17:1; Jeremiah 23:24; 32:7

Everything Will Work Out Right In the End: Romans 8:28

You Won't Ever Face Anything You Can't Handle With God's Help: 1 Corinthians 10:13

Peace Is Available No Matter What: John 14:27; Romans 5:1; Colossians 1:20; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 11:28-30; 2 Timothy 1:7

Trials Are Allowed To Bring Spiritual Growth: Psalm 119:67,71,75; 94:12; Isaiah 48:10; Romans 5:3

The Believer Has Nothing To Fear: Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; 2 Samuel 22:33-35,40-41

We Are Assured Of Eventual Triumph Over Our Adversaries: Acts 2:39

Victory Is Guaranteed Us: 1 Corinthians 15:57; Romans 8:37; 1 Chronicles 29:11; 1 John 5:4, 18; 1 Chronicles 32:8; Revelation 3:5; 21:7

God Will Help Us Carry Our Burdens: Nehemiah 4:10; Matthew 11:30; Psalm 55:22

God Promises Comfort: Psalm 23:4; Lamentations 3:22-23; Matthew 5:4; 11:28-30; John 14:16, 18; John 14:16, 18; Romans 15:4; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

God Will Give Us Courage: Proverbs 38:1; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Timothy 1:7

Guidance Is Promised: Psalm 32:8; Isaiah 30:21; 58:11; Luke 1:79; John 15:13

God Will Help In Your Sorrow: Proverbs 10:22; Isaiah 53:4; John 16:22; 2 Corinthians 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13; Revelation 21:4

Wisdom Is Promised Those Who Ask: James 1:5; 3:15-17; Luke 16:8; 21:15; 1 Corinthians 2:5; 3:19

Rejecting Wrong Thoughts: 2 Corinthians 10:5; Psalm 139:23-24; 141:3-4; Isaiah 26:3-4; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:18-21

Power of the Word of God: Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Isaiah 55:11; 59:21; Psalm 119:81, 105, 111-112; Proverbs 30:5; Lamentations 2:17; 3:37; Matt 24:35; John 5:24; 8:51; 15:7; Romans 10:17

God's Promise of Angelic Intervention: 2 Kings 6:17; Psalm 34:6-7; 91:11; Daniel 6:22; 10:5-14; Acts 12:15

***Joshua 21:45 Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.***

*Look up the promises you need from the list above. Write them on a piece of paper, word for word, and keep it with you. Read it many times during the day until you commit it to memory. Then you will have His Word in your heart for any time you need it – and you WILL need it!*

# *Marriage and Family*

## **VI. LIES WE BELIEVE ABOUT MARRIAGE**

UNDERSTANDING & APPLYING GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGES  
& FAMILIES

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Based on 2019 CTO Marriage Retreat

1. I Married the Wrong Person
2. We Fell Out of Love
3. I Should be Happy But I'm Not
4. Marriage is a 50-50 Proposition
5. Ignore the Problem and It'll Go Away
6. My Mate Needs to Change
7. It's Too Late, Things Will Never Change
8. It's OK to Fight Sometimes
9. There is Too Much to Forgive
10. The Honeymoon Should Never End

### GENERAL LIES

1. What Am I Worth?
2. I'm Entitled!
3. Need More Time
4. God is Like My Father
5. Truths That Set Us Free

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 1. “I MARRIED THE WRONG PERSON” (Lie 1)

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A lie is a false statement with deliberate intent to deceive. It is an inaccurate declaration to mislead. A lie is an imposter of the truth. Lies find their source in Satan because “**there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies**” (John 8:44). Lies are one of Satan’s most productive tools. Why attack head on when he can be so much more effective with deception? If we are to have victory over him we must understand his lies.

Human history starts with a story of Eve believing lies from Satan, the “**father of lies**” (John 8:44). She listened to what he was saying and, because she wasn’t well versed in the truth, she believed him (Genesis 3:3). She distorted God’s truth by adding to what God said (“nor shall you touch the fruit”). Her ignorance of the truth was the weak link Satan needed to get her to believe his lie. He told her that God was withholding something good from her. The truth is that God never withholds anything good (Psalm 84:11). If He doesn’t give us something, He knows it isn’t ‘good’ for us.

Once a lie is believed then it is acted on. Beliefs lead to actions (Proverbs 23:7). And actions have consequences. Eve encouraged Adam to disobey and eat, and the consequence was sin entering the world (Romans 5:12). Satan has been lying to us ever since.

Since marriage and family are foundational relationships for us, it’s no surprise that many of Satan’s most productive lies concern the husband-wife relationship. He tries to work through one mate to spread a lie to the other, as he used Eve to influence Adam to sin (Genesis 3). We are more susceptible to deception if it comes from a trusted and influential source, like a mate. When one believes a lie, it impacts their mate as well.

One of the most common lies Satan feeds a person when there are difficulties in their marriage is, “**I married the wrong person, life would have been better if I had married someone else.**” It doesn’t matter how long you have been married. This lie can pop into your mind at any time. There are a couple of lies behind this lie that make this lie effective.

The first lie behind the lie is, “**There is only right person for me to marry.**” Disney, fairy tales and romantic literature imply that there is one ‘soul mate’ for you out there. When you find them, you will live happily ever after. They picture it with no sin nature, no self-centeredness, no anger, pride or fear interfering. If you find and marry the one right person for you, marriage will be near to perfect.

The other lie behind this lie is the assumption that, “**We must live happily ever after.**” If we aren’t there must be something wrong with the other person. “It’s all their fault.” “I don’t have to try.” “No matter what I do it will never work out.”

The truth is that marriage doesn’t create problems, it reveals problems already within us. Our sin nature flares up when we get hurt, don’t get our own way, have to yield, things don’t seem fair, we are misunderstood, our needs aren’t met, etc. etc. etc. The truth is that there is no person so perfect we won’t have to struggle and stretching, because we all sin continually (Genesis 6:5). Marriage can bring out the worse in us so we can identify our sin and control it

through His power. God created marriage to make us holy, not happy. Even if you didn't consult God and married someone you shouldn't have married, once you say "I do" God takes it from there and He will use that mate and that marriage to mature both of you to make you more Christlike and bless each of you through the other (Romans 8:28-29). God allowed you to marry that person and He doesn't make mistakes (Isaiah 46:10).

If you struggle with this lie, remember the truth is that happiness doesn't come through finding the right person. Rather it is through your being the right person. The world says keep looking until you find that perfect soul mate where you will live happily ever after. God says be the right person, the person God created you to be, and let Him use your marriage and mate to make you more like Jesus. God never commands us to always like each other, but He does promise to always give us love for each other when we put Him first. And if you aren't married, if you are **single**, a widow or widower, God will use that state to stretch and mature you into the image of Jesus as well.

*When is the last time you wondered if you married the wrong person? What do you do with that lie when it pops into your mind?*

*What other lies about marriage are you believing? You'll know they are lies if they don't line up with what Scripture tell us.*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 2. “WE FELL OUT OF LOVE” (Lie 2)

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What should I say when a couple I married several years earlier tells me they are separating because they “fell out of love”? They may say they married too young and have grown apart. I remember one young man who wanted to save his marriage but his wife said that ‘loving feeling’ was gone and she wanted to find it with someone else. I worked with them for months but nothing changed her mind and she left. Is it really possible to “fall out of love”? Or is that just a lie Satan uses to undermine couples and destroy families?

The lie behind the lie here is that love is some powerful forces that overtakes us and carries us along. Love must make us feel good or it isn't love. Isn't that what many songs, movies and books tell us? We don't fall out of love; we stop making the choice to love and to pay the price to keep on loving. When we follow this lie, our mind is in not control, we go by our feelings or emotions. A common phrase today is to “follow your heart,” but God says ***“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jeremiah 17:9).***

Love based on feelings, i.e., **romantic love, is weak.** It has no way of dealing with sin and hurts. If you marry someone with a sin nature, they will let you down and disappoint you. You will find they are self-centered. Romantic love can't deal with that because it is no elasticity to it. It can't be stretched, it simply shatters. Romance always fades as a motivating emotion, thus the phrase “the honeymoon is over.” Romance is weak because it is self-centered, it is all about me and how I feel. If it isn't replaced with something deeper and more solid, then the relationship will fall apart. That kind of emotion can end, but we can and must still feed the love we have for each other, even if the feeling fades.

Another lie behind the “I fell out of love” lie, is that love is what holds a relationship together. Therefore, when the feeling of love is gone, so is the marriage. Marriage is a commitment based on vows given. “As long as we both shall live” is now often replaced by “as long as love shall last.” When the feeling fades, they think it's time to find it again with another person. Living together instead of marriage makes it easier to move on, and there are no vows to keep or break, so many couples aren't getting married.

**Singles** deal with many of the same issues in their relationships with family and friends. “Feelings” come and go in all relationships and aren't to be depended on. Solid friendships go deeper and don't depend on emotions.

Feelings are unreliable. How many parents always feel deep love for their children? When things happen that stretch that love, should they say that this parent-child relationship isn't working so they need to find other children to raise instead? That is ridiculous. The parents are committed to that child for better or for worse. The same as in marriage.

The solution is to remember that **love is a choice.** It is an act of the will, choosing to see good in the other and letting God fill our hearts with love. Much of the world has arranged marriages. We see them all the time in India. Couples unite with entirely different expectations and assumptions in these kinds of marriage. They aren't looking for a Hollywood romance to sweep them off their feet. When they commit to treating each other in loving, respectful ways, love grows. The truth is, **a good marriage takes hard work.** It means falling in love over and over again, but always with the same person. Ask God to fill your heart with love for your mate so you can love them as He loves them. God is good (Psalm 136:1) and all things do work



together for good for those living for Him (Romans 8:28). The same is true if you aren't married. You still need God to work in you and through you to unconditionally love those in your life.

*What expectations did you bring into marriage? How have they played out? How have you adjusted? Where do you need to continue to adjust?*

*How do you see your marriage making you more like Jesus?*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 3. “I SHOULD BE HAPPY BUT I’M NOT” (Lie 3)

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Are you as happy now as you expected to be when you got married? If you say “yes”, it means you’ve worked through some hard times, made adjustments and grown together. If you say “no”, then you’re stuck back where you started. The world promotes the **“I should be happy”** lie, everywhere: TV, movies, ads, music and books. But is happiness God’s highest purpose for marriage? Let’s start with some of the lies behind this lie which Satan uses to destroy marriages.

Behind the “I should be happy” lie is another one stating **“It’s their responsibility to make me happy.”** Our entitlement mentality, taught from childhood on, is that I’m supposed to be happy. “Others are to meet my needs and put me first.” “If this mate can’t make me happy, there must be someone else who can.” Lies, all of them.

A couple who had been married over 15 years, with children old enough to have a life of their own, came to me because they weren’t happy. They were bored, in a rut, and constantly picking at each other. They didn’t try to keep the peace as they did when the children were younger. He had promised he’d make her happy if she married him, and it wasn’t happening. She wasn’t making him happy either.

The truth is that **no one can MAKE you happy!** First, you have to define “happy.” When you do, you’ll find it’s a very shallow, self-centered emotion that is easily challenged by the reality of life. If the purpose of marriage is to make us happy, how can single people find fulfillment? Actually, we were made to need something much deeper than happiness and that is joy.

Satan uses this lie on **singles** as well. They can believe they need to be married to be happy. This lie makes them dissatisfied with the life God has given them. They look to others to meet needs only God can meet. Finding happiness can become the most important thing in life.

The **pursuit of happiness is an idol** we must destroy, or it will destroy us. Joy is deep inner satisfaction despite outer conditions. Happiness is dependent on our circumstances. Happiness is self-centered, joy is all encompassing. Happiness comes from being served, but joy from serving, as Jesus serves us. Life doesn’t always make us happy. It is hard. We stretch and grow through trying times. Our goal in marriage is oneness, not happiness. Take your unhappiness, discontent, etc. to God, not to your mate.

The other lie behind the “I should be happy” lie is, **the purpose of marriage is to be happy.** The entertainment industry sells us on the idea that we are to “live happily ever after” if we are with the right person. Yet most people “live miserably ever after.” But that isn’t the fault of marriage. As Christians, we are sometimes guilty of putting too much responsibility on the husband to meet all his wife’s needs and make her happy. We do the same to wives, whose submission is to bring happiness to marriage. When those impossible expectations aren’t met, we become discouraged with our mate or ourself.

The truth is that any time you take two very imperfect, self-centered human beings and put them together 24-7 you won't get perfect unity. Not only do they have a sin nature, they are of the opposite sex, temperament, and often birth order. That is a recipe for disaster, not ecstasy.

The purpose of marriage is for our growth and God's glory (Colossians 1:16-18). Holiness is much more important than happiness (1 Peter 1:16). Marriage gives us opportunity to face the ugliness in ourselves and grow through it so we become more like Jesus. Happiness is temporary, holiness is eternal. Happiness costs us nothing, it just happens to us. Holiness comes at the high cost of sacrifice, pain, obedience, self-denial and continual forgiveness. It is a fruit God's Spirit produces in us (Galatians 5:22-23).

Instead of striving to be happy, **seek contentment**. It doesn't come naturally; it is a learned skill (Philippians 4:11-13). **Don't expect marriage or your mate to meet all your needs**. It will never happen. God won't let it happen. He is a jealous God and won't let anyone replace Him in your life. He will make sure your mate falls short so you still need and go to Him. Marriage can't and won't meet all your needs, but it can turn you to the One who can meet all of them (Philippians 4:19). Don't expect a finite being to meet needs only an eternal God can meet. Your relationship with your mate is temporary, but your relationship with God is eternal.

**Marriage is a means to an end, not an end in itself.** The end is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 9:29). Marriage, when faced from a Biblical world view, helps accomplish that. We see areas where we need to change and we have a mate who loves us unconditionally and helps us make those changes. God's purpose for your marriage is that you each look more like Jesus because of each other.

*Has your marriage been accomplishing that? What is happening in your relationship now to stretch you and make you holy?*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 4. “MARRIAGE IS A 50-50 PROPOSITION” (Lie 4)

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Did you believe the common lie that marriage is 50-50 when you got married? Do you still believe it? Like all lies, it sounds true when you first hear it. It seems to make sense to think that if both marriage partners do their half they will meet in the middle and everything will be fine. After all, it isn't fair for one to do more than the other, is it? When they do their part, then I'll do mine. Sound familiar?

Similarly, those who aren't married can see their **friendships** and other relationships the same way. “What's in it for me?” “What am I getting out of this relationship?” “Is this friendship worth the effort?” “I won't reach out to them unless they reach out to me first.”

Satan subtly weaves these lies into our culture to feed on our pride and self-centeredness. It's very easy to forget we are to serve others as Jesus serves us and instead expect them to serve us as well (John 13:14-15). Servanthood is the key, in marriage or in friendship (Philippians 2:3-8).

The truth, of course, is that **relationships demand 100% from each person**. Both mates must be fully committed to do their very best all the time no matter what. If we do any less the relationship will fail. If you only do 50%, who will determine what 'half' is? Where is this 'middle' where we are supposed to meet? Just where is the middle where we need to meet? Jesus doesn't meet us half way. He doesn't say that if we do our 50% then He'll do His 50%. How would that work? Jesus does 100% when it comes to salvation, and continues to do so as He guides, forgives, restores and uses us. We are to be like Him. We are to give 100% as well (1 Corinthians 13:7-8).

Be aware of subtle lies that will undermine your marriage. We believe lies because **we deceive ourselves**. Our pride, self-focus and ignorance open us to self-deception. We will believe what we want to believe, which agrees with what we think. We think we are wise but really, we are fools (1 Corinthians 3:18-20).

Truth does not come from within us, it comes from God's Word (Psalm 119:15-16). The better we know God's Word the more clearly, we will see the lies of the enemy. If we fill ourselves with worldly thoughts and ideas by what we watch and listen to, we will be secretly fed lie after lie. Nourish yourself on God's Word and know His truth instead. Only God's truth can bring freedom (John 8:31-32).

*Do you have trouble meeting your meet more than half way? Do you secretly keep score to make sure they are working as hard as you are? What would it look like if each of you totally gave 100% all the time?*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 5. “IGNORE THE PROBLEM AND IT’LL GO AWAY” (Lie 5)

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If only this lie was true, we’d all have perfect marriages and friendships! Single or married, we are often tempted to avoid facing difficulties in our associations with others. What if we could ignore every difficult issue and live happily ever after? It doesn’t take long to find that doesn’t work!

Of course, Satan doesn’t want us to face and work through sins in our lives or relationships. He is using them to bring hurt and damage to all involved, so he wants them to continue. He wants us to keep them secret so he can feed them and keep them alive. He loves it when we keep our problems and defeats in the darkness, but the darkness is where he rules and reigns. He loves when we think if we ignore a problem it will go away.

The lie behind this is that **a great marriage doesn’t take work – it just happens**. “Our great love overcomes all obstacles, just give it time.” “If we ignore the issues long enough, they’ll fade and be gone, so don’t make a big deal of it.” The same lie is used to undermine relationships of those who aren’t married as well. It can be easier to let something painful go because we feel it’ll be even more hurtful to face it and work it through.

The truth is that **marriage takes commitment, work and forgiveness**. It’s been said that great marriages are made in heaven. They come in kits and you have to put them together yourselves. And believe me, it’s not easy assembling a godly marriage! It takes honesty, openness, confession, forgiveness and a humble, teachable spirit. It also takes time, both quality and quantity, to work through issues and keep growing. A marriage ceremony takes about an hour, but a marriage takes a lifetime.

Instead of overlooking uncomfortable situations, identify the problems and face them together. It’s not about blame or whose fault it is, but about what each person can do to overcome the problem. The enemy is not your mate, it’s the problem. Your mate is your teammate in overcoming it. Attend a marriage retreat, get godly Christian counseling, read good books and talk to mature Christian couples who have worked through similar situations together. However, you do it, you must **face the problem**.

That’s not just true of current, ongoing problems, it’s also true of difficulties and sins from long ago. **Problems in the past don’t stay in the past**. Even issues from before you met your mate must be worked through. Past baggage like pornography, unhealthy past relationships, sexual immorality, addictions, dysfunctional family of origin, rage, abuse, etc. must be dealt with. Don’t think you can ignore them and they will go away, they pop up again and can be very destructive. It takes courage to recognize, admit, face and work through these matters. God forgives all sin in our past (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), but the consequences often remain and need to be overcome. If it’s something you can deal with together, do so. If it’s bigger than that, get help. Just don’t believe the lie that says that if you ignore it then it’ll go away!

*If there are any issues in your past or your mate’s past that seem to pop up and influence your relationship today, pray about them. Pray together regularly, and follow God’s leading as He starts working to heal these areas.*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 6. “MY MATE NEEDS TO CHANGE” (Lie 6)

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Every counselor knows they can't listen to just one side of the story when there are relationship conflicts. No matter how clear everything seems or how convincing the person may be, the other side needs to be heard before conclusions can be drawn. That's because there are always two sides. Seldom is it all one person's fault while the other is completely innocent. Counselors know that, but Satan feeds that lie to anyone who will listen.

**Single** people can feel this way about their relationships with family or friends. Are they faced or do we pass the blame off on someone else? It's very easy to see the speck in someone else's eye and miss the log in your own (Matthew 7:5).

It's so easy to think that whatever happens **is all their fault**. We say, "If they were like when we first met, we'd be fine, they've changed and expect too much of me." "I've tried for years and it hasn't helped, now it's up to them."

The lie behind the lie here is quite obvious: "**It couldn't be my fault.**" "I'm doing OK." "If they would change it'd be all right." "If they would accept me like I am and stop trying to change me, our marriage would be OK."

Sometimes the lie is the opposite: "**It's all my fault.**" "I'm a mess and hopeless." "I'll never change." "I'll never be good enough for them." "It's impossible, so why should I even try?" "I'll never be perfect." Satan doesn't care which form the lies takes because it all comes from pride and self-centeredness. He is the originator of pride and knows all about it (John 8:44; 1 Timothy 3:6).

The solution in both extremes is the same, **look for where you can grow**. Unrealistic expectations of ourselves, our mate or our marriage are the basis of many marriage problems. We bring assumptions into our relationship that are often idealistic and not possible, then wonder what is wrong when they aren't met. Singles do that as well as married people. The truth is that no human being can meet our deepest needs, only God can (Philippians 4:19).

When we believe the lie that it's my mate that needs to change, not me, then we develop a taker mentality, not a giver. We need to confess our critical, judgmental attitude. Jesus condemned those who look for fault in others but ignore the bigger problems in their own life (Matthew 7:5). To change John Kennedy's famous quote, we should ask not what our mate can do for us but we can do for our mate. That's what Jesus does for us.

We can't change anyone else, only ourselves. We are called to unconditionally love our mate, like Jesus loves us (1 Corinthians 13). We need to honestly and humbly ask God to show us where we need to grow and mature so we can be a better Christian and mate. God promises to help us grow (Philippians 1:6). There is nothing we can't overcome with His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9). No matter what issues we face in our life or our marriage, God's grace can help us cope and, through it, grow to become more Christ-like.

*The only person you can change is yourself? How are you coming along with that? How willing are you to let God change you? Take a few minutes to give Him the authority to change you where you need to be changed.*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 7. “IT’S TOO LATE” (Lie 7)

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If you never perform maintenance on your car it will deteriorate to the place where it can't be fixed. It'll be too late. A little preventive upkeep can present a disaster. The same is true in marriage. Relationships need continual care to function at their best. If that is neglected your marriage can get so bad it may seem hopeless and impossible to fix. Then it's easy to believe Satan's lie, **this marriage has gone too far to be fixed**. “It's beyond repair, love can never return.” “Once trust is broken it can't be restored.” “It's easier to divorce and start over with someone new than try to fix this impossible mess.” Satan's goal is to defeat God's kingdom on earth, and he does that by attacking the church through the families and singles in it. He undermines relationships by feeding people the lie that the relationship can't be restored. We need to know how to have victory over these lies and attacks.

The truth that defeats these lies is that **nothing is too hard for God** (Matthew 19:26). He is a miracle-working God and specializes in impossible situations, for then He gets all the credit. He is the healer of relationships, but He does that through us. It takes work on our part: forgiveness, humbling ourselves to apologize and be willing to change, putting the past behind and starting again, turning our hurts over to God to heal and not replacing them with anger, going to God with unmet needs and becoming totally dependent on God to give us His love for our mate. These things take commitment, time and often outside help such as godly counseling. But things can change, it's never too late. This lie becomes an excuse to blame and not keep trying. God never quits on us and we, to be like Him, can never quit on each other.

To move away from this lie you need to **make an unbreakable commitment** to your mate: no divorce. That has to be completely off the table as an option. No matter what, you can't even think of it. “Till death do us part...” Your mate needs to know you are committed whatever the cost. Every couple needs to make and keep that commitment, for there will be times it will seem easier to divorce than work through problems. You also need to make a commitment to not make things worse: don't blame, argue, fight, do or say things to hurt each other, passively withdraw or talk to others (except a godly Christian counselor).

When things fall apart for a sports team, they fall back to **focusing on the basics**. The same is true for marriage. Following Jesus' example, men need to love their wives unconditionally, putting their needs first – just like Jesus does for us. Wives need to show respect to their husbands and trust God is working through them – just like we trust Jesus. Ephesians 5:21-33 expands on this. I have some good articles about how to do this. They are on my web site <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> or email me at [jerry@schmoyer.net](mailto:jerry@schmoyer.net) and I'll send them to you.

Marriage starts when we marry the one we love, but it grows when we **love the one we marry**. Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult. But having a growing marriage throughout your life is rare and can only be done with much commitment and God's help. Remember what you did to win the heart and hand of your mate? You need to keep doing that to stay married. If you left your first love, return to it. Give your mate the very best

you have, not just what's left over after you have given your best to everyone else. Trust God's promises to forgive and forget the past (Romans 8:1), provide all your needs (Philippians 4:19) and always be with you (Hebrews 13:5). God can be trusted. Make sure you can be as well.

*Are there areas of your marriage that you have given up on, thinking they will never change? They can, or at least your attitude to them can change. Are you willing to pay the price for one of those two to happen? If so, talk it over with God right now.*



## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 8. “IT’S OK TO FIGHT SOMETIMES” (Lie 8)

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When I was growing up, I knew a couple that fought over and over. I had never seen anything like it. There was yelling, cursing, complaining and criticizing one day, then the next day all would be normal. I never knew when it would start or stop. It went on their whole married life. It embarrassed me and it scared me, but it was just a way of life for them. It was normal – or was it? Is it OK to fight now and then?

The answer is no. We won’t always agree, we will hurt each other and bring out emotions in each other, but fighting to win and/or hurt someone is never right. Still, that **it’s OK to fight sometimes** is a common lie to that many believe. The lie says that it’s no big deal because every couple fights from time to time. “Fights aren’t that bad; they help clear the air and let emotions out – or so they claim.” But it’s a lie. If it’s between married couples or friends doesn’t matter. Fighting does much harm but no good.

The opposite side of the coin is that we should never disagree about anything because if we do, something is wrong with our marriage. That isn’t true either. **Disagreements are inevitable, but not fights.**

Satan is all about anger (John 8:44) and loves to provoke people who love each other to get angry with each other. That’s a weapon of his we need to know how to counter. The Bible says to **never go to bed angry** (Ephesians 4:26) – and that doesn’t mean to stay up and fight all night! It means we need to learn to communicate and work things through. No one really wins in a fight. One person may get their own way, but the relationship loses. Usually the louder, angrier, stronger person comes out on top, except when the quieter one is so good at their passive aggression, they ‘win.’ When we are wrong, we need to admit it and when we are right, we need to keep quiet. That’s good advice!

Each couple needs to learn to **communicate**, which really means to learn to listen and understand what the other is saying. One person, usually the more introverted person, should talk first and explain their concern in a gentle, quiet way (1 Peter 3:4). The other must focus on understanding what is said. When the listener can repeat to the speaker what they are feeling and saying, then the other can address what is said. But they shouldn’t speak, argue, disagree or say anything until they can repeat the first person’s words in an acceptable way. Speaking we can do – listening we are very poor at. Make it your goal to be a good listener. If you want to read more about this look on my web site <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> or write me at [jerry@schmoyer.net](mailto:jerry@schmoyer.net).

Most fights are not about the thing you are arguing about. You probably follow the same pattern with different topics or subjects. What’s really behind them is a person’s pride and ego. She feels unloved and is hurt. He feels disrespected and is hurt. Stubbornness, pride and self-centeredness are what fights are about. **Discussions are about issues; fights are about control and winning.** No, it’s never OK to fight.

*Do you and your mate fight to win? Or do you listen to each other to better understand where they are coming from? Do you feel ‘listened to and understood’ in your marriage? Does your mate?*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 9. “THERE’S TOO MUCH TO FORGIVE” (Lie 9)

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Have you ever been so badly hurt by your mate you didn't know if you could ever forgive them? It may have been done accidentally or on purpose. Perhaps they haven't apologized. Maybe they continue to say or do the same thing. What if it gets to the point where you no longer want to forgive? Poison spreads within you that robs you of all peace and joy. You become critical and negative, distrusting and bitter. You feel trapped because you think the offense is just too much to forgive. That's a lie. So is the lie behind the lie: they don't deserve to be forgiven, instead they deserve to hurt like I am hurting. "They need to earn my forgiveness, but I'm not going to give it."

Satan is the epitome of bitterness and revenge. He promotes unforgiveness wherever possible by reminding us of past hurts, magnifying present issues and focusing our thoughts on ourselves and our pride. Unforgiveness is a great tool of bondage that Satan uses whenever possible. The only antidote is forgiveness, that is our only way of victory. If Jesus can forgive us everything, how can we withhold forgiveness from those who have done far less to us? It's been said that a good marriage is the union of two good forgivers and that is very true. That's true of friendships between those who aren't married as well.

**God commands us to forgive** (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:31-32), so if we don't, we are disobeying Him. He is so serious about it that He says He will forgive us the same way we forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15; Luke 6:37). When we forgive, we are freed from bondage, for unforgiveness is a leading cause of demonization (Ephesians 4:26-27). Forgiveness reflects Jesus in our lives and is a beautiful testimony to others (Ephesians 4:32).

Jesus had some very strong, sober words to say about those who do not forgive others (Matthew 18:32-35). He commands us to forgive 77 times (Matthew 18:21-22). There are many reasons for this. One is that unforgiveness is one of the most direct ways of opening one's self to demons (Ephesians 4:26; 2 Corinthians 2:10-11). This is especially true in marriage.

**Forgiveness is not easy to do.** Often, we think it means saying that what was done to us is OK, or that we aren't going to think about it anymore. We may feel like we are letting them off the hook for what they have done. "They don't deserve forgiveness." True. No one deserves forgiveness from Jesus, yet He gives it freely. Understanding what forgiveness means is important for us to be free.

Anger is a secondary emotion, used to cover pain. When we hit our thumb with a hammer, we feel pain but we react in anger because that's an easier emotion to express. In order to forgive, though, we must admit and confront the pain we feel when others wound us. Our pride wants revenge, to hurt them back – but then we are trapped in unforgiveness and bitterness. Forgiveness is a mental choice, not an emotional feeling.

**Forgiving means giving up your right to hurt the other person back** because they hurt you. Forgiveness has a price – you give up your right to revenge, to see them hurt for hurting you. That's what Jesus does when He forgives us!

Instead of covering pain with anger, turn your hurt over to God in prayer. You need to do it over and over, each time you remember the pain. If not, it will turn into anger and unforgiveness. Rely on God's power to help you handle the pain in a healthy way. Experience the hurt so you can move beyond it. Often times making a list of past hurts, from your mate or others, is the first step to forgiveness. Make sure you have forgiven those in your past: parents, those in past relationships, friends and enemies. Until you do, you'll be in bondage.

Forgiveness is not a quick emotional switch in your heart, it takes time to heal and move on. It is a process that must be repeated each time the painful memory comes back. Gradually the pain will lessen and be gone. When it tries to come back you cannot allow it to stay.

Remember how God has forgiven you. Think about what Christ did for you on the cross and recall His mercy to you in so many ways. Ask Him to help you forgive through the power of His love. We can forgive the unforgiveable in others because God has forgiven the inexcusable in us.

When someone sins against you, forgive them immediately, even while they are still committing the offense. Even if they are doing it unintentionally, forgive immediately. Don't wait for them to apologize or admit their wrong. Forgive as quickly as you expect God to forgive you. If not, your prayers will be hindered and evil can gain access to your life.

When this happens in marriage reach out to your mate immediately. Withholding love is a form of revenge and shows forgiveness has not been given. Forgiving means treating them as if the offense never occurred – the same as God forgives you. By forgiving others for having hurt us we can let go of the painful past and create a healthier relationship. That's important in marriage as well as in all relationships in life. Learn to forgive. Forgiveness is a very important tool we all need to learn to use and use regularly.

*When you think of forgiving those who have hurt you, does God bring anyone to mind? If so, make sure you have forgiven them, and continue to do so each time the hurt returns. Make sure there isn't anything you haven't forgiven your mate for. If you need their forgiveness please ask them right away.*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 10. “THE HONEYMOON SHOULD NEVER END” (Lie 10)

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When two people love each other and are in the center of God’s will when they marry, their whole life should be like the honeymoon – right? Not right. “Shouldn’t true love overcome everything?” Eventually, but not right away. It takes work, sacrifice and forgiveness for marriage to work. Even Paul said “Those who marry will face many troubles in this life” (1 Corinthians 7:28). Paul is referring to the extra pressures on marriages during times of persecution, but the truth is that married tests people in ways they haven’t been tested before. Outside pressures can’t destroy a marriage, it is the couple’s response to the pressures that can cause trouble.

The same is true with all relationships. If a **single** person makes a new friend, things go great at first. But the closer the people get the more likely hurts or misunderstandings will arise. That’s natural and inevitable for people with a sin nature.

The lie behind the lie here is that if my relationship takes this much work, we must not be right for each other. We think that after all these years it shouldn’t take this much work. But that isn’t true. Two sinners, who are opposites in many ways, are now together 24-7, will find many points of friction. God uses marriage to unveil those rough spots so they can be smoothed over as we become more Christ-like. The truth is that marriages go through similar stages. Basically, we can say there are three stages of growth to maturity.

Stage one is when the couple function as **lovers**. They fall in love and marry. The relationship is characterized by romance. They see their mate as the answer to all their problems. Their commitment is untested, conflict is avoided and the mate is idolized because their strengths are in focus and weaknesses are ignored or denied.

The second stage is when they become **antagonists**. The pendulum moves to the opposite extreme and weaknesses are magnified while strengths are forgotten. Pressures of life, children, work and financial stress grow during this stage. Our unrealistic expectations of ourselves and our mate come crashing down and we become resentful of each other. Power struggles develop and hurts are not forgiven. The couple questions their commitment because conflict and resistance keep growing. This is a bad stage. Romance is gone. The best they can hope for is efficient teamwork and to decrease the hurt they cause each other. Many couples stay in this for the rest of their marriage. Some divorce, others stay together legally, but live separate lives under the same roof. But no one has to stay in this stage forever. In fact, some couples move through it quickly and with a minimum of pain.

When the problems of stage 2 are overcome, they enter stage three where they become **allies, partners** in life. Maturity brings acceptances of themselves and their mate just as they are. Growth continues, but they help each other through the changes. They have learned to adjust their expectations and live in harmony. Each one honestly and humbly recognizes their own sin and faults so that a balanced view of self and their mate results. Their commitment has been tested and is dependable because it has lasted. Unconditional love grows and they feel safe and secure with each other. They have learned how to face conflict and resolve it in healthy ways. Peace and harmony are present. That doesn’t mean there aren’t still issues that

pop up nor trips back to stage 2 to resolve problem areas, but it does mean that, for the most part, life is good and the relationship is sound and secure.

Yes, the honeymoon will end, and the going may be rough for a while. But the end result, stage 3, is much better than the honeymoon. Love is deep and secure; it is tested and proven. Two really do become “one flesh” when their very souls are knit together.

How to get from stage 2 to stage 3? Return to the basics of forgiveness, communication, showing unconditional love and respect, humble service and sacrifice and totally depending on God to do His work in you individually and in your marriage. You can find more detailed help on these at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> or write me at [jerry@schmoyer.net](mailto:jerry@schmoyer.net).

*Which stage are you in? If you aren't in stage 3, what do you need to do to keep moving in that direction? If you are in stage 3, what do you need to do to stay there?*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

# 11. “WHAT AM I WORTH” (General Lie 1)

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Time was when we could take what we are told as truth. Integrity and honesty were on the top of the list of character traits. Not anymore. Now power and wealth seems to be what everyone is after. It doesn't matter how it is attained. Telling the truth just gets in the way. We need to be very careful about everything we hear or we will be deceived. The most dangerous lies are the ones that hide inside truth so they aren't noticed so easily. The closer to the truth they are the more deadly they become. The same is true of spiritual lies.

Human history starts with a story of Eve believing lies from Satan, the “father of lies” (John 8:44). She listened to what he was saying and, because she wasn't well versed in the truth, she believed what Satan said (Genesis 3:3). She distorted God's truth by adding to what God said (“nor shall you touch the fruit”). That was the weak link Satan needed to get her to believe his lie. He told her that God was withholding something good from her. The truth is that God never withholds anything good (Psalm 84:11). If He doesn't give us something, He knows it isn't 'good' for us. Once a lie is believed then it is acted on. Beliefs lead to actions (Proverbs 23:7). And actions have consequences. Eve encouraged Adam to disobey and eat, and the consequence was sin entering the world (Romans 5:12). Satan has been lying to us ever since.

One of the most common lies that we believe is that we lack worth, we are inferior and failures. Believing this lie takes away our joy and peace, and it leads to trying to earn approval and acceptance from God and others. We think we haven't been successful in life, we aren't smart, or our appearance is lacking. That's because we compare ourselves to others using an imaginary standard of perfection. What really matters, though, is what God thinks of us, what He thinks we are worth. The value of something is determined by what price will be paid for it. That is true of jewelry, homes, clothing and everything we purchase. It is also true of our souls. What price was God willing to pay for us? Hebrews 12:2 says Jesus endured the cross, disregarding its shame, because of the joy awaiting Him (Hebrews 12:2). Sometimes we think that joy was heaven, but He already had been in heaven and left it to attain this joy. He could have returned to heaven any time without having to go to the cross. The joy He gained through the cross was having US with Him in heaven! That shows how much we are worth to Him. It dishonors Him when we think we are without worth. It is a lie of Satan to defeat us and take glory from God. Don't let it work with you!

***John 8:44 “The devil ... was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”***

***Psalms 139: 13-14 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well.***

*Do you still believe the lie that you aren't worth much, that something is lacking in you? Spend time thinking about the price Jesus paid for you. He thought of you on the cross. If you would have been the only sinner He still would have done it just for you. His love gives us unimaginable worth. Thank Him for it.*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 12. “I’M ENTITLED” (General Lie 2)

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Today in the USA we very aware of our rights. They are guaranteed us by the US Constitution. Advertisers promise we have the right to be happy, understood, loved, successful, healthy and prosperous. We expect all our needs to be met: food, medical help, possessions, mate and children, etc. If something is lacking we are quickly aware of it and complain to God or others (or both). But are we right to believe this, or is it another lie of Satan to deceive and defeat us?

Jonah felt he had a right to hate the Ninevites because of their cruelty to his people, possibly his very own family. He felt he was entitled to choose to whom he wanted to minister. He was angry when God wanted to spare the Ninevites and to use him to bring that about. He felt his rights had been violated and asked God to take his life (Jonah 4:1). God asked him what justification he had to be angry because God didn’t do everything he wanted (Jonah 4:4). God could often ask us the same question. Who are we to demand of Him, to question Him, to accuse Him of being unfair to us or of making life too hard on us? As Christians, we want to claim our rights from God. We want all we feel we are entitled to from Him.

But suppose God gave us what we were entitled to, what we deserved and what was rightfully ours? Where would we be right now? Yes, in hell for all eternity. We can be glad God doesn’t give us we warrant! Instead of trying to claim our rights we need to yield our rights.

When we feel God owes us something, or is withholding something good, we are believing a lie from Satan. It’s the very same lie he used with Eve (Genesis 3:1-5). God’s purpose is to make us like Jesus and to be glorified through us, not to give us heaven on earth. Heaven will come later, now is the time to grow and serve Him. Thinking He is withholding something we have a right to just makes us question and doubt Him. We aren’t thankful, don’t worship, don’t trust Him and turn from Him to meet our own needs. And that is exactly what Satan wants to happen!

***Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.***

***Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.***

***Philippians 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs (not wants) according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.***

*How content are you with your lot in life? Do you hold back from God because you think He is*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 13. “I NEED MORE TIME” (General Lie 3)

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Despite all our labor-saving devices and means of instant communication today, we seem to be busier than ever. We look forward to the kids being grown, then gone and then to retirement – thinking at each of these junctures we won't have so much to do. Still, we seem to be busier than before. We spend our time doing good things and then don't have enough time for the best things. Our relationships with God and others suffers because we lack quality and quantity time to invest in them. Then we live with guilt because we don't have time to pray and read the Bible or to spend with family and loved ones. Books are written, seminars held and many claim to have the cure – but nothing changes. Is this the way life is to be, or are we being somehow deceived (lied to) about what we need to do? I think we are. The lie is that we don't have enough time to do everything. But the truth is that we have enough time to do everything God wants us to do. The tricky part is separating what God wants us to do from all the other 'stuff' we want to do. That may seem impossible to do, but Jesus did it. He made an amazing statement recorded in John 17:4 “I have finished the work which You gave me to do.”

Well, you say, He was Jesus so He could do that. But remember He went through everything as a person like us, not as God (“kenosis” Philippians 2:7). His key to success is seen in what He said: “I have finished the work which YOU gave me to do.” Everything wasn't done. The New Testament still had to be written, churches started, leaders trained, theology developed, etc., etc., etc. There was more to be done, much more – but God didn't give that to Jesus to do. God gave Jesus 7 24-hour days in a week and expected Him to accomplish all that NEEDED to be done in that time. He expects the same with us as well. And that includes stewardship of our bodies, relaxation, time with God and investing in relationships, to say nothing of taking one day off a week to rest! So, either God is giving us more to do than He is giving us time to do it, or we are adding to the things God wants us to do. That is wrong because it takes time from what He does want us to do. We end up doing them instead of, not in addition to, what God wants, even if we neglect our health and relationships to do so. The solution is to not try to squeeze more into a day, but to be sensitive to what God wants us to do. Martin Luther once said, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” Oh, that we would say that today!

***Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.***

*Do you believe the lie that you need more time in a day? You need more money, but you prioritize to pay what comes first so you can live within the amount of money you have (at least I hope you do!). Do you skimp on your time with God and family in*



## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 14. “GOD IS LIKE MY FATHER” (General Lie 4)

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God gave us parents so that, among other things, we would learn to receive love and protection from a powerful authority figure who we would, in turn, love and trust. At least that was the plan. I don't have to tell you how often parents fall far short of that. In fact, many times the impact parents have on their children in exemplifying God is more negative than positive. When a child grows up with a parent, especially a father, who is harsh, cruel, distant, manipulative, unfair or self-centered, the child naturally attributes those same traits to God. We believe the lie that God is just like my father. Similar lies include: “God is never there for me,” “God expects too much from me,” “God is disappointed with me,” and many others. This gives us a wrong picture of God and undermines, or prevents, a close personal relationship with him. I've had to work through some of those lies in my life and I'm sure you have had to as well.

The truth, though, is that God is not like any human parent. He is far above any person, not even close enough to be compared. Only as we get to know God as He really is will we grow in love and trust in our relationship with Him. God is totally and only good (Psalm 136:1). He loves us and wants us to have His best (Romans 9:32-39). There is nothing we can do to earn or deserve His love. There is nothing we can do to have Him love us anymore, nor is there anything we can do to have Him love us any less!

We are complete and accepted in Him (Ephesians 1:4-6). Others show conditional love and acceptance, but with God we already have all His blessing now and forever. He truly cares about us or He wouldn't have left heaven to come to earth to pay for sins on the cross! He will never reject or condemn us (Romans 8:1). He will meet all our needs (Philippians 4:19). He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He guarantees us eternal life (1 John 2:25).

God promises to protect, provide, teach, guide and sustain us. He promises to be our best friend, companion and servant. As His children, He wants us to honor and respect Him (Exodus 20:12), follow His counsel (Proverbs 1:8), obey Him (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20) and serve Him in any way we can while on this earth.

If you struggle with seeing God as He really is because of a poor relationship with your parents, think about how your parents have wounded you and how you carry that over to God. Ask God to help you forgive them and take your pain to Him. Talk to a mature Christian about these things. Look for a good role model of a godly man and get to know him. Use what you see in him as a foundation to change how you see God. Remember God is your Father, your Heavenly Father, not your earthly father (or mother).

***Psalm 103:13-14 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.***

***How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! –1 John 3:1***

*What hurts and disappointments from your own parents influence the way you see God? Ask Him to show you and then to reveal His truth to you. Ask Him to help you see Him as your*

## Marriage & Family – VI. LIES ABOUT MARRIAGE

### 15. TRUTHS THAT SET US FREE

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Every area of bondage in our lives can be traced back to a lie we believe. When we exchange God's truth for a lie, we find ourselves in slavery to it (Romans 1:21-25). The lie becomes our master (2 Peter 2:19) and we serve it. We only have freedom when we ask God to show us the lies we believe (Psalm 139:23) and replace them with His truth (John 8:31-32). Only as we know His truth will we be truly free. There are hundreds of lies we could talk about, but it is better to learn His truth. Counterfeiters are trained by studying real money for when they know it in detail they can tell anything that varies from it. When we know God's truth we can discern lies and deceptions of the enemy. Listed below are basic truths about God. I have adapted them from "Lies Women Believe and the Truth that Sets Them Free" by Nancy DeMoss. (November 19, 2018 Doylestown, PA)

#### **THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD:**

God is good in all He does (Psalm 136:1)

God loves us and wants the best for us (Romans 8:32-39)

God is enough to provide for all our needs (Psalm 23:1)

God can be trusted to keep His promises (Romans 8:1; 1 John 1:9; 2:25; Philippians 4:19; Hebrews 13:5)

God doesn't make any mistakes, ever (Isaiah 46:10)

God's grace is sufficient no matter what (2 Corinthians 12:9)

#### **THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS**

Jesus totally accepts and fully completes us, unconditionally (Ephesians 1:4-6)

Jesus' blood is sufficient to cover all sin (1 John 1:7; Psalm 103:12; Micah 7:19; Isaiah 44:22; Jeremiah 31:34)

Jesus' work on the cross conquers all sin (Romans 6:6-7)

#### **THE TRUTH ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit enables us to do anything God commands us to do (Philippians 2:13) including loving those who hurt us, rejoicing in difficulties, etc.

#### **THE TRUTH ABOUT THE BIBLE**

God's Word is sufficient to lead, teach and heal anyone (Psalm 119:105)

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT MYSELF**

There is no higher, holier career calling than being married or a parent. (Titus 2:4-5)

Personal holiness is more important than temporal happiness (1 Peter 1:16)

I am personally responsible for my behavior, responses and choices (James 4:17)

I will reap what I sow (Galatians 6:7-8)

I find true joy when I relinquish control to God or the authority He has placed over me (Matthew 16:25; Ephesians 5:21)

I don't have to feel guilty about my past when I confess my sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

God is more concerned about changing me and glorifying Himself than about solving my problems (Romans 8:29)

I can't grow in Christ-likeness without suffering (1 Peter 5:10)

My suffering will only be in this life (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

It's not about me, it's all about Him (Colossians 1:16-18)

***John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."***

***John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***

*Think of some areas where you struggle. Which of these truths apply to them? What lies are you believing that allow these to be problem areas?*

# *Marriage and Family*

## **VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS**

UNDERSTANDING & APPLYING GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGES  
& FAMILIES

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer

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1. Factors Which Form Teenagers
2. The Four Basic Temperaments
3. Stages of Adolescence
4. Sibling Rivalry, Birth Order
5. Discipline & Training
6. God's Will for Your Career
7. The Great Christian Music Debate
9. Peer Pressure and Self Worth
10. Courtship and Marriage
11. Spiritual Growth
12. Spiritual Warfare and Teens

## Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

# 1. FACTORS WHICH FORM TEENAGERS

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TO THINK ABOUT: Why does God have children go through such a thing as adolescence?

### THE TEENAGE DILEMMA

When Tim, our oldest son, was about to turn 13 he wasn't excited about it. In fact, to our surprise he didn't want to be a teenager! It seems most of what he knew about them was bad and he didn't want to be that way. He hasn't, but there is truth to what he feared. Teenagers don't have a good reputation today. Statistics bear this out: one million will run away from home this year, 250,000 teenage girls will give birth to illegitimate babies, almost 1/2 million will have an abortion, and half a million will attempt suicide (10% will succeed). Twelve million regularly will use drugs.

Home school families aren't immune to this. Many feel insecure about raising teens anyway. Can I prepare them for college or career? Can I help them mature into an adult while teaching my other children? Our children are the front wave of the first generation of wide-spread homeschooling to through adolescence at home. There isn't much to turn to for help in this. It can be difficult for the whole family. Then, too, the family has other challenges: younger children to teach, changes in careers and goals as parents meet middle age, etc.

Still, adolescence can be a second chance for parents to fix some weaknesses or missed spots in their relationship with their teens. It can be a rewarding and enjoyable time!

I now have 4 children in the 10 and above category (when adolescence starts), and have done much study in order to equip myself to be the best father I can be for them. This series of articles is based on that research as presented to our local support group.

### UNDERSTANDING TEENS

Following is the outline I will use in this: first you must understand (analyze) your teen, then apply what you know.

#### I. ANALYZE THE PERSON

A. Factors we are born with which form us

Temperaments, learning style

B. Factors after birth which form us

Stages of adolescence, siblings, peers, self-acceptance

#### II. APPLY THE PRINCIPLE

A. Exercise influence, not control (discipline, communicate, motivate)

B. Give guidance, not orders (God's will, choosing career, music, mate)

C. Create a balanced attitude to the body (appearance, sex, drugs)

D. Instill spiritual reality (commitment, growth, spiritual warfare)

Before trying to understand teens, we must break down the various factors that make them. God creates a person (the raw material) and then that is formed and shaped by factors that influence change and form it. Below is a breakdown of how I understand this:

# FORMING CHARACTER

CHARACTER: The real you ("soul"), mind, will & emotions.



## AT BIRTH

Factors God decides before birth which can't be changed ('raw equipment' we have to work with)

### **PHYSICAL EQUIPMENT**

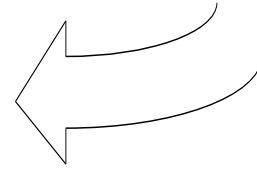
(size, height, shape, sex, color, etc.)

### **MENTAL EQUIPMENT**

(IQ, skills/talents, etc.)

### **EMOTIONAL EQUIPMENT**

(temperament)



## AFTER BIRTH

Factors that influence, but cannot completely change the traits we are born with (forms the raw equipment)

### **PARENTS**

(discipline, acceptance, training, love)

### **FAMILY**

(birth order, relationship with siblings)

**HEALTH** (diet, exercise, illness)

### **ENVIRONMENT**

(neighborhood, friends, life experiences)

### **FREE WILL CHOICES**

(follow flesh or God)

God gave us our children to love and raise, and that includes their teenage years. Parents are still the best ones to raise their teens. It's no time to quit or give up, to panic or fear. When we better understand our teens (what they are going through, what's happening to their minds and bodies, etc.) and how to respond to these things, we can have a better, more peaceful relationship with them. Psalm 127:3-5 is true of teens, too! *Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate.*

**ASSIGNMENT:** Parents, talk with your children about with your children about when you were a teenager. Speak honestly of and failure. Give them a balanced view of what to expect, avoid extremes. Answer their questions honestly. Then let them talk about how they feel about the teenager years. What are their hopes and fears? What can you do to help? Turn them to God as the only One who can really help them through this time.

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 2. THE FOUR BASIC TEMPERAMENTS

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TO THINK ABOUT: What is your favorite color and why?

### **BACKGROUND**

We all know the promise in Proverbs 22:6 which says "*Train up a child according to his way (bent) and when he is old he will not turn from it.*" The key to making it payoff is the command to train children up "*according to his way/bent.*" This refers to the 'raw equipment' we receive from God at birth (see article 1 "Factors Which Form Teenagers"). Perhaps the most important, yet least understood factor is the temperament. Personally, God used it more than anything else to help me understand myself and work through problems that long plagued me. He continues to use knowledge of the temperaments in my family and ministry. I don't know of any one tool outside of the Bible that has been more helpful.

Hippocrates (460-370 BC), the father of medicine, first developed the four basic temperaments and showed that emotions affect our bodies. It has been passed on down by many men through the ages. Immanuel Kant backed it in 1798. In more recent times, though, it has been rejected because of Freud's influence, saying man is a total product of his environment and is not born with natural tendencies, a sin nature, etc. Man is just like other animals they say. Christians have been studying the temperaments as popularized by Tim LaHaye (and to some extent Gary Smalley). I strongly, strongly, strongly recommend you get a book on the temperaments by Tim LaHaye and devour it! There are many different ones: the temperaments in general or specifically related to man, woman or child.

Before surveying the four temperaments there is one more thing to understand. By temperament I am referring to inborn traits that subconsciously affect man's behavior. It differs from character (the real you: mind, will & emotions) & personality (the 'face' you show others).

### **EXTROVERT - INTROVERT**

There are four basic temperaments: two extrovert and two introvert. Extroverts are optimists, make friends easily, talk fluently, and are people-persons. Introverts are pessimist, shy, have few close friends, express themselves better in writing than talking, and are loners.

The two extrovert temperaments are Sanguine and Choleric, the introvert temperaments are Melancholy and Phlegmatic. Everyone has one basic temperament and also a secondary temperament. These create a unique blend for everyone. God uses three colors (red, blue and yellow) to create all the various colors and shades today. He uses four temperaments to create all the various temperaments today.

ASSIGNMENT: Write an evaluation of yourself and your temperament. Include your strengths and weaknesses. How does knowing this help you? What can you do to improve?

## **BASIC TEMPERAMENTS** Taken from Tim LaHaye and Gary Smalley

	<b>SANGUINE</b>	<b>CHOLERIC</b>	<b>MELANCHOLY</b>	<b>PHLEGMATIC</b>
Teen	David - Esther	Joseph - Miriam	Daniel - Ruth	Timothy - Mary
Adult	Peter	Paul	Moses	Abraham
Color	bright YELLOW (sun)	hot RED (fire)	deep BLUE (ocean)	cool GREEN (grass)
Animal	Rooster	Lion	Beaver	Turtle
Summary	Respond to Environment	Strong Will	Sensitive Perfectionist	Easy-Going
"P" word	Popular	Powerful	Perfect	Peaceful
Extrov-Intro	Extrovert - Optimist	Extrovert - Optimist	Introvert - Pessimist	Introvert - Pessimist
Careers	Salesmen, Actors	Businessmen, Police	Art/Music, Computers	Accountant, Diplomat
Strengths	Friendly - Talkative Warm - Outgoing Emotional - Enthusiastic	Confident - Determined Practical - Productive Independent - Decisive	Gifted (talent, analyze, organized, intellect) Sacrificial/Loyal	Flexible - Conservative Easy-going - Dependable Calm - Humorous
Weakness'	Weak-willed - Unstable Changeable, Undisciplined Self-centered - Unorganize	Self-Sufficient - Proud Control - Unemotional Unsympathetic - Cruel	Insecure - Critical Negative - Moody Unsociable - Revengeful	Unmotivated - Fearful Self-protective - Selfish Slow - Stubborn
Problems	Personality carries through life, so hides many problems inside self. Puts hard things off, over-extends self, doesn't follow through and finish what he starts.	Most to offer in strengths, most to overcome in weaknesses. Lacks love. Needs love most, but hardest to love. Lacks kindness, wants to win.	Sets too high standards for self. Afraid of rejection, criticism because overly sensitive. Loyal to friends, but few close friends. Poor self-image.	Easy-going, loving nature hides deep problems of selfishness. Hurts people with unkind jest or humor. Does not put out full effort at consistent pace. Protects self from problems.
Teen Strengths	Popular, joins clubs Charming, want to please Daring, life of party Apologetic	Natural leader Organized Competent Excels in emergencies Responsible	Good student, organized High standards Conscientious, Responsi Sensitive Thrifty	Witty, humorous Good listener Casual attitude Hides emotions Gets along with everyone
Teen Weakness'	Deceptive, con-artist Needs peer approval Easily led astray Not responsible	Bossy, controlling Knows Everything Critical, judgmental Loner, few friends	Depressed, withdrawn Inferiority, poor self image Suspicious, critical Inflexible	Quietly stubborn Indecisive, procrastinates Sarcastic Uninvolved



# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 3. STAGES OF ADOLESCENCE

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TO THINK ABOUT: What animal would you rather be if you had to be an animal? (What animal best pictures your father? your mother?)

**IN-BETWEEN-AGERS** Mark Twain once said, "When a kid turns 13, stick him in a barrel, nail the lid shut, and feed him through the knot hole. When he turns 16, plug the hole." What happens when a child turns 13, or 16, or whatever teen age, that causes such changes? What's it all about?

Adolescence is like a house on moving day - a temporary mess! Everyone goes through it. Even the apostle Paul went through this process (1 Corinthians 13:11). Let's see if we can't make some order and understanding out of this mess, though. If we as parents are to train and raise them, there must be some way of getting hold of what is going and how we can make it better instead of worse.

**CHALLENGING THE GIANTS** Children grow up seeing themselves as helpless, totally dependent on 20-foot-tall sovereign giants to provide for them in every area of life. They feel small and powerless, needing protection and care. Suddenly they are thrust into adolescence when their hypothalamus starts sending chemical messages to the pituitary gland telling it to start preparing the body for the onset of puberty. Changes in the body, mind and emotions begin. The child finds himself aiming for a position of equality with these giants. What a scary, seemingly-impossible task looms before them! If parents can understand this, though, they can help a lot. For one thing, it helps parents understand why their teens start paying more and more attention to the parent's faults and weakness'. He's trying to whittle the 20' giant down to size, to a more attainable goal. Mark Twain also said: "It was a curious thing. When I was about 13, my father's intelligence started to drop. His mental abilities continued to decline until I reached 21, when these abilities began miraculously to improve."

For adolescents, it's easier to pull away, to separate, to feel like they are abandoning their parent when they see that parent as more of an enemy than a friend. Also, if a parent can take himself down from the pedestal by admitting to his faults and sharing his own struggles (past and present) his child won't feel he has to look for chinks in the armor.

**CHILDHOOD ALL OVER AGAIN** It's interesting to note that the emotional stages adolescents go through are very similar to the physical stages young children go through. Both start with the child making an effort to separate from the parent and be their own person. They begin to discover who they are in their own right. Before long they start exploring the adult world around them, unaware of the dangers it holds. When they get into trouble or venture too far away they come running back to their parents to be cared for. They live in a very selfish, self-centered world, thinking only of themselves. They try taking on adult mannerisms and activities. Children will dress up and pretend different activities. Adolescents do something similar when they 'try on' various peer or adult actions, vocabulary, mannerisms, or activities. They'll find some that fit and others they reject. It's sort of trial and error. As more and more begin to fit they will become increasingly independent until they develop their own personality and character, something they like and which they feel fits them. The world calls this 'finding yourself.' Young children do this physically through the first years of life. Adolescents follow the same pattern emotionally during their teen years. It isn't always a smooth

transfer. Some go through really rebellious times ("terrible twos" all over again). Often it is like a car stuck in the snow. They rock back and forth, gaining ground and sometimes losing ground, until there is a sudden surge ahead, only to repeat the same process.

**PREPARING THE SHIP TO LEAVE HARBOR** What is our role as parents in all of this? It's like preparing a ship to leave the harbor. Before heading out to sea on its own the ship is securely tied to the dock while it takes on fuel (love, acceptance, security, confidence, good experiences to draw from) and makes preparations for the voyage (training in values, knowledge, etc.). If the ship is sent off too soon it is doomed. Once the engine starts (hypothalamus, etc.) it better be loaded for if the ropes aren't cast off in time for a smooth departure it can tear some of the pier on its way out.

This leaving parental authority and control is natural and normal. It is a God-given drive to 'leave the nest,' 'cut the apron strings' or however you want to phrase it. Genesis 2:24 says a person must leave (break dependency) parents before being able to cleave to a mate. Parents must help their teens with this process. Thus, parents find their role changing from sovereign control (20' giant) to more of a friend-friend relationship. The lines of control are drawn in (but not completely severed). Responsibility for actions is passed from parent to teen (let them suffer the consequences of their actions, both positive and negative). Peers take on more and more importance as adolescence compare themselves to see if they are acceptable to others their age.

During the early stages of adolescence teens will argue and talk back. During the later stages, though, if things haven't been worked out right, they'll start distancing themselves from their parents by rejecting some of their parent's more important values, especially spiritual ones. This is a prime way of 'getting back' at their parents. It is often the cause for PK's (Pastor's Kids) and MK's (Missionaries Kids) having such a bad reputation!

If children don't work through these stages they won't mature into a balanced adult. We all know many adults who have immaturities from stages they missed as teens. In the parable of the prodigal (Luke 15:11-32) son we see this. The younger son rebelled (one extreme) to exert his independence. His ship pulled away prematurely and failed. However, the older brother who stayed home and never went through the stages of maturing wasn't any better off. He never established a secure identity for himself, that's why he couldn't rejoice in his brother's return. He still needed parental favoritism because he didn't have any security in himself.

**MOTHERS & FATHERS, BOYS & GIRLS** It is usually the mother the teen first starts breaking from. Mothers stand for childhood, and being close to and dependent on a mother makes a teen feel like a child. Girls can have a harder time of this than boys. Not only do they tend to hypersensitivity and emotionalism more than boys during these years, but they often don't have anyone to turn to when they turn from their mother. Boys have long been taught not to be 'Mamma's boy', and they have their father to draw closer to. Fathers play important roles during these early adolescent years. They serve as way stations for adolescents leaving childhood (mother). If they are sensitive and available they can greatly help their sons and daughters.

If mothers or even fathers talk to them or treat them like children they will immediately notice. This more than anything causes more rebellion in them. They aren't mature enough to say "I want to think and decide for myself. Don't treat me like a child. When you boss me around I feel like a child, and I don't like that." Parents must listen to hear that said in their actions and forms of rebellion. Parents must learn to really listen - be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry (James

1:19). That means parents must work through their own fears and insecurities, their own immaturities and lack of self-control, their own hesitancy about letting go. Adolescence, to be handled right, means a parent must be mature and secure in their own right. If you can't handle your emotions you can't handle theirs!

**EXIT PARENTS, ENTER PEERS** When adolescents start turning FROM parents, it is peers they turn TO. They need to know how they compare to others their age. Are they OK? Do they fit in? Can they make and keep new friends? These become VERY important for them. If they are unwilling to spend a night away from home, avoid peers, seem especially fearful, or are anxious when not with their parents, then something is wrong.

Give them more freedom: let them stay up later, go some places with their friends, have more responsibility and input around the house. Teens are like kites. They are a bit difficult at first to get off the ground, when as you give them more and more string they can perform nicely some distance from you. Give too much string and they'll fly away, though.

Do your best to help them have the right friends. Make your home open for others. Get to know their friends (sometimes you can help someone else's adolescent better during these years than you can your own). Talk with them about their friends: why they picked them, traits they like and don't like (ones they'll want to copy or reject), why they do what they do, etc. It's a good way of keeping communication open and helping them think through what they are doing.

**OPPOSITE SEX FRIENDS** As adolescence progresses, teens are more and more interested in the opposite sex. As they become more secure with their own identity and fitting in with same-sex friends, they start wondering if the opposite sex will accept them for who they are becoming. This is natural and important. Anything having to do with dating, romance, love, etc., must be rejected (they should have been thoroughly trained in this for years - a future article will cover it). However, brother-sister friendships are very valuable. Unless they understand the opposite sex and know what traits in the opposite sex they like and dislike, they will have a much harder time when God does bring the right person into their lives. It helps them know how to act around the opposite sex -- what is accepted and what is rejected. Again, though, it must be around godly teens with the same values your teens have.

**REGRESSIONS** Its natural for the boat to make a quick trip back to the dock to take on emergency supplies from time to time. Sudden regression is natural, they'll pass through it if you give them some space. They can't be forced or pushed in their progression through the various stages of adolescence. Encourage them, but they must do it on their own. Like a bird getting out of an egg or butterfly out of a cocoon, they have to do it on their own to survive.

Thus, adolescence can be an exciting and growing time. Special bonding and closeness can take place. Or it can become a constant battle for control, a time of uncontrolled emotions and a home in uproar. Understanding what your teen is going through can help a lot. Working through your own problems is also essential. With God's help you can enjoy a rewarding relationship with your teens, one that will last the rest of your lives.

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 4. SIBLING RIVALRY, BIRTH ORDER

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TO THINK ABOUT: Where do you fit in your family's birth order and what difference did that make?

A few years ago, I came across a verse that I hadn't really noticed before, but it really struck me when I saw it. In fact, we all memorized it and it is quoted around here quite often. Its Psalm 133:1: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." With my three oldest boys all in or near their teen years the verse becomes truer each year. Yet how are we to have our children live in unity? Just what degree of love and cooperation is to be expected? What conflict is normal and natural? It gets hard for parents, and especially home-schooling parents. We, who love our children so much and want them around us so we can enjoy them, often find we experience more and more disunity. Being together all the time can seemingly make this worse, not better. How can we understand this? What are we to do? First, we must realize that this is a universal problem, not just your family. It's not new, either. It's always been.

**JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS** Joseph's brothers hated him (Genesis 37:4) for getting them into trouble by tattling on them (Genesis 37:2) and because their father overtly favored Joseph over them (Genesis 37:3-4). Joseph's telling them about a dream in which they bowed down to him (Genesis 37:5-10) didn't help the relationship, either. I'm sure it grieved Jacob to have his children not get along. Of course, you know what happened, how Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt.

**WHY SIBLING RIVALRY HAPPENS** While it is good to come from homes with other children because of the life-lessons learned, parents must still be careful of sibling rivalry. One cause is **parental favoritism**. If a child feels he is competing for his parent's love he will see siblings as rivals (as with Joseph's brothers, Jacob to Esau and Absalom needing David). Natural selfishness and self-centeredness, rooted in a child's sin nature, comes right to the surface quickly. Children naturally assume those younger or older have it better, and things aren't fair for them. Sometimes it doesn't take much of a spark to set the gasoline off!

**Displaced anger** is another reason for sibling rivalry. Hurts, frustrations and problems from other situations in life which can't be attacked get stored inside, often to be released on a more convenient target. The boss comes down on dad who criticizes mom who yells at the kids who kick the dog (or each other). This taking it out on each other is just a symptom of a deeper problem inside, like Cain killing Able (rebellion against God) and Jacob cheating Esau (jealousy over father's approval).

Another cause comes from **feelings of inferiority** by being compared (consciously or subconsciously) with a more accomplished sibling. Leah's antagonism to Rachael was because of this. These reasons are magnified when children go through adolescence and privacy and fairness are more important to them. Adolescents become more critical and are often easier targets for others in the family who want to get back at them for past or present actions.

**Birth order** has a lot to do with causing sibling rivalry, too, and must be understood.

**ELDEST / FIRST BORN** (the "bossy" one, the junior parent) Miriam, eldest sister of Aaron and Moses, is a typical firstborn: responsible, cooperative, willing to do unpleasant tasks for the parents, studious and serious. Reuben, the first-born in Joseph's family, was the same way. He was conscientious (protected Joseph from death). He was also the family boss, even when they were all grown. Because parents treat first-born in a more adult manner and give them more responsibility, they seem to mature more quickly. Firstborns need (demand) approval, especially from parents. First-born Absalom is a case in point, as are Cain and Esau. They strive for excellency and tend to become type A over achievers (James, Peter). They most closely identify with parents and their values. (A middle child who is the first child of their sex can also show characteristics of a first-born. Also, the first of two or more children born after a long gap will be like a first

born.) It's not unusual for first-born boys to have problems growing up. Just as God claimed the first-born male of Israel for His own, so it seems Satan works extra hard today to oppress first-born males, and through them the whole family.

**ONLY CHILD** ("ruling the roost," the lonely only) Only children like Isaac, Samuel, timothy and Samson are in many ways similar to first-borns. They are treated as if they are the center of the universe and feel that way. They are often over-protected and more comfortable being with adults than peers. Judging himself by adult standards all the time makes him try to grow up quickly and often causes perfectionistic standards. (A single baby born long after others in the family will also show characteristics of an only child.)

**MIDDLE CHILD** ("I can't win") Middle children, especially second-borns, compete against the first-born for dominance, as Cain did to eldest Able. They often become the opposite of the first-born because, being younger, they can't beat the first-born at his/her strengths. They often are full of contradictions: shy but outgoing, impatient but laid back, competitive but not competitive, rebel but peacemaker, aggressive but avoiding conflict. They have more freedom to develop as themselves for they aren't working so hard to be adult-like and get adult approval. They tend to have lower expectations and don't expect things to always be fair. They are more likely, however, to rebel against authority (and parent's values) later in life. Out-of-family friends and peers are important and they are often more open to peer pressure. We see these traits in Andrew, John and Aaron. They are often not motivated to be very studious but can be good peacemakers and mediators. (Middle children who are the youngest of their sex take on some of the qualities usually seen in youngest. Remember, the closer children are in age the more emotional impact they will have on each other, especially if they are of the same sex.)

**YOUNGEST CHILD** ("baby") Last-born children often have the least expectations to meet and can become spoiled (over-protected, assuming others will take care of him). He can thus be unsure of himself and lack confidence. Last-born Joseph lost all of this during his imprisonment in Egypt (one of the reasons God allowed it). Youngest get less spontaneous joy from their parents at their accomplishments (it's no longer new and parents are busy with other siblings) Therefore they often becomes the clown of the family for it give him attention. However, he can have trouble being taken seriously. Last-born are perceptive people persons and often end up in people-oriented vocations. David, Moses and Solomon were last-borns. (If other children are born after a long gap, the original 'baby' still continues to have last-born characteristics even though others are born after him/her.)

**SOLUTION - PARENT'S SIDE** Pinpoint the severity of the conflict. Is it natural, normal rivalry or do you sense something more? Talk to the children, listen between the lines, draw out their feelings by questions ("How does that make you feel?"). Differentiate between normal personality differences (especially during adolescence) and deep bitterness from unmet emotional needs or allowing sin to dominate. Teach (by word and example) how to handle anger, frustration, unfairness, not getting your own way. Set a good example by your tone of voice and attitude. Teach them to label their feelings (hate, fear, jealousy, hurt, selfishness, etc.) so they can handle them. Show unconditional love no matter what. Seek counsel from mature Christians if necessary, don't be afraid to ask for help!

**SOLUTION - ADOLESCENT'S SIDE** Don't always run to your parents with every little conflict. That really wears on parents! Realize everything can't and won't be fair. Be like Jesus and turn the other cheek. Practice the Golden Rule, even if others don't. Walk away from problem situations, give yourself and others time to cool off. Willow trees last through storms that destroy oaks because in hard times they can bend but oaks cannot. Put some time between yourself and the event, things look better after time passes. Don't think you'll accomplish anything by hurting someone back. They'll just try to hurt you back even more. Don't let unforgiveness build, don't let it out in little things like sarcasm, teasing, tattling, etc. Forgive them with Jesus' help. God commands you, too: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, life at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:5,9,13,15-18). With God's help all things are possible!

## Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

### 5. DISCIPLINE & TRAINING TEENS

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TO THINK ABOUT: Who is your favorite Bible person? Why? Who in the Bible seems similar to you (who can you identify with)? What other Bible characters have your temperament?

Why is it that adolescents are so obedient and others aren't? How can we account for the sacrificialness of Ruth (giving up own future) and Isaac (willing to give up own life)? What can we do to have our teens obey without having to nag and threaten? Ephesians 6:4 tells us.

*"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ... Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

#### **PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY (Ephesians 6:4)**

**"FATHERS"** are the ones responsible for the training of children of all ages. Even if they aren't with the child as much as the mother, they are ultimately responsible before God for the whole family. The wife is under the husband's authority and carries out his (their) goals. She implements what they together decide, but he is the leader with oversight and final say. That is seen in this word, too, for sometimes it is translated "parents" (Hebrews 11:23).

**"DO NOT EXASPERATE"** is the command given to parents. That means don't frustrate a youth by too high expectations, criticism without love, withholding love, inconsistency, rejection, overburdening them with rules, expecting too much (perfectionism), overprotecting, spoiling, being over permissive or too severe. Anything but firm, consistent, loving discipline for clearly defined rules can frustrate. Especially disciplining in anger or criticizing can exasperate. Disciplining or treating adolescence like children can quickly frustrate them, too, for they have a God-given inner drive to leave childhood and become adults. They can't be like these 20-foot giants they are trying to become, if they are treated as children. They aren't mature enough to say "Don't treat me like a child. When you speak to me that way I feel like a little kid and it makes me want to fight back to show I'm not a child anymore." Their negative response says it, though. Give them reasons for your rules, not "Because I said so, that's why."

**"INSTEAD BRING THEM UP"** means to "nourish," bring to maturity, shepherd" them. Parents do this physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually and spiritually. How is this to be done? By bringing them up *"in the training and instruction of the Lord."*

**"IN THE TRAINING OF THE LORD"** refers to discipline, correction, teaching self-control until they can exercise self-control over their own actions. The word "disciple" comes from this word. This requires discipline, and until self-discipline kicks in, parents must provide the discipline from without. God commands this (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 13:24) and children need it so they feel loved & secure. Besides, it is an example of how God treats His children (Hebrews 12:11) and our discipline of our teens must reflect God's discipline of us (consistent, in love, for our betterment not just to pay for the inconvenience we have caused Him, etc.)

To correctly discipline an adolescent, it is very helpful to consider the cause. There is a big difference between willful, stubborn rebellion against authority from their free will and the natural and necessary pulling away that is part of their maturity. Knowing what comes from changing hormones

and what comes from the sin nature can be very helpful! Teens need limits, but also freedom and flexibility. Treat them like adults but expect them to act like children. They have the same emotional needs of children for love, security and acceptance, even though they don't always show it.

It can be helpful, too, to notice in what area they choose to rebel. It's usually social life & customs (friends, dress, hair, always gone), responsibility (not carry own load, help), school performance (grades, study habits, attitudes), family relationships (getting along with parents or siblings) or values and morals (sex, TV shows, talk, deceitfulness). Why does he choose THIS area to rebel in? Is it because I expect too much in this area? Is it because it's an area I haven't totally got under control in my own life? It is overly important to me so he knows he can get to me quicker through this area? Pray and ask God for wisdom and insight into these things.

Pick your battles carefully. Don't expect instant, immediate obedience in everything. They are no longer children, give them some space to exercise their own free will. If you can't win a battle, don't let it start. Decide what is major enough to make an issue of and what isn't. When you draw the line, do it with love. *"Love covers a multitude of sins."* Always, in as many ways as possible, assure them of your unconditional love. Keep their emotional tank full.

When you must discipline, use natural consequences instead of nagging, threatening or yelling. Deprive them of a privilege that goes with their sin. The Bible says that anyone who doesn't work shouldn't eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). School is their work. They shouldn't eat until they do it. If they don't get along with their siblings they can't spend time with friends outside the family. If they don't treat others nicely they are isolated and can't be around others. If they spend money unwisely don't give them more or an important occasion, have them do without. Avoid power struggles and nagging at all costs! Don't spank, for it builds hate & resentment. Anything that makes them feel like you are treating them like a little child is counterproductive. Make sure you don't play favorites to a child of the same sex as you -- or opposite sex. Also make sure you don't expect more of a child because he is a boy or a girl or born first.

**"IN THE INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD"** refers to training, prevention, so correction/discipline isn't as necessary. This is done by our example as well as words (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Communicate your feelings and emotions, struggles (current and as a teen) and difficulties with them. Draw them out. Ask "How did that make you feel?" Silently listen, be very slow to give advice. (James 1:19). Encourage them (1 Thessalonians 5:11). It takes 99 compliments to make up for 1 criticism.

**AFTER YOU'VE BLOWN IT** take responsibility for your part without blaming or justifying. Confess your sin to them and God, asking for forgiveness. Forgive yourself and reestablish communication with them. Make necessary changes so it doesn't happen again. Be patient!

**TEEN'S RESPONSIBILITY (Ephesians 6:1-3)** The key for children (anyone still living at home and therefore under their parent's authority) is obedience out of love and respect, following the example of Jesus (Lk. 2:51). If you feel your parents are wrong be careful, maybe they have some insight you aren't aware of. Sometimes they will be wrong, allow them that right. They aren't perfect, either. Never confront them when emotions are high if you think they are wrong. Respond in love, as you want them to do to you. When you are wrong, apologize and admit your sin to them and God. Seek the root problem, not just the surface symptom. Set goals to help you act in love: "The first words to my parents will be thanks." "I will clean my room before being asked." "I will have meaningful devotions each morning." Remember, this brings God's blessing. Obey in love...

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 6. GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR CAREER

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**TO THINK ABOUT:** What career does God want for you? What about who to marry? How will you know God's will in these and other areas?

**KNOWING GOD'S WILL** God has His perfect will for all of us in all areas of our life. It's not difficult to find, although we must be 100% committed to doing what He wants before He reveals His will to us. We can't ask Him to reveal it to us so we can consider it with our other options. If we are committed to do whatever God wants us to do it is His responsibility to lead and guide us to make sure it gets done. We must be open and sensitive to His guidance, but He will make sure we end up doing His will and not missing it. He usually leads by putting certain desires in us, ones we can recognize as coming from Him. Acts 11:5-16 explains what some of these are: prayer (5), mind (6), His word (7-10), providential circumstances (11), Holy Spirit (12), advice of others (13-15) and Scripture memory (16). When my children want my guidance I make sure they receive it, and God does the same with us.

Sometimes we think God's will is always hard and unpleasant, that God will send us to Africa or have us do the opposite of what we'd like. It isn't unpleasant, but is good, pleasing and perfect (Romans 12:1-2). In fact, if we had all the information God has we would pick just the exact same thing for ourselves.

**AREAS OF GOD'S WILL** God's will in our lives covers three areas: Christian character, activities, and service. **Christian character** refers to our being conformed to the image of Jesus in all we say, do and think. This is God's will for all of us, it's not something we have to ask. His will is for us to live holy lives of service and submission. If the Bible tells us to do or not do something, then there is no reason to ask God's will.

Sometimes, though, the Bible doesn't speak directly about an issue. God does give us guidelines to determine His will in **Christian activities**. This area includes dress, music, entertainment, etc. Questions to ask to determine God's will in these areas include: Will it hold me back in my Christian life (Hebrews 12:1)? Is it, or could it become a habit (1 Corinthians 6:12)? Does it have a good influence on other Christians (1 Corinthians 8:7-13) and unbelievers (Colossians 4:5)? Will it be a good testimony for Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:31)? Can I ask Him to help me do it? Would He do it with me if He were here?

The area of **Christian service** is the third area of knowing and doing God's will. It covers major life decisions such as what to do (career), where to live, whom to marry, etc. God has a perfect will for each one of us (Numbers. 22:12), but often we refuse to obey and instead insist on doing our own will. He permits this (Numbers. 22:20) because we have a free will and He doesn't treat us like robots. Sometimes, though, for our sake or the sake of others, He over-rules in our lives (Numbers 23:5,12,26).

**KNOWING GOD'S CAREER FOR YOU** There seem to be two ways God leads teens into His choice of a career for those who want to do His perfect will. Sometimes he puts a desire for a certain career into them before they finish high school. My wife always knew she wanted to be a nurse so took courses leading to that goal. Not everyone knows the final produce ahead of time, though. Often God just directs step by step. Finish high school, go to college, major in this area, learn more about that, try a job doing a certain thing, etc., until they find themselves in a place they realize is God's will. This is a faith walk, step-by-step trust on God's guidance. If this seems to be the lesser of the two ways, remember that what God keeps hidden from us is also hidden from Satan, so he can't mislead, counterfeit, confuse, etc. Trust God with it!

All along the way, especially in their teens, parents can build good work habits and attitudes into their children while praying God will lead them into the career of His choosing. Learning about various careers, even trying certain aspects of them by talking to people in those careers or visiting places of work. Part-time



jobs can also give good exposure. Learn what kind of education and training is required for them, too. The more information you have the better decision you can make.

Teens also should be praying daily about God's leading in this area. They should be open to suggestions from parents and other adults who know them well. Develop talents and gifts you have, knowing God often has provided these for your future career use.

**ADOLESCENT STAGES AFFECT CAREER PLANNING** As teens look for their own individual identity they become more aware of having to choose a life career and it becomes more important to them, for their self-identification becomes wrapped up in it. This is especially true for boys (who pick it up from their fathers and other men). Make sure you don't just pick a high-status career so others will be impressed with you now or later. Be patient, allow God to make changes as time goes on.

**BIRTH ORDER AFFECTS CAREER PLANNING** Traits and characteristics that are built into children by their birth order affect careers they are attracted to also. God uses these things to form them and to lead them into the path of His choosing.

**First borns** become natural leaders in whatever career they choose. They want responsibility, are reliable, loyal and hard working. They are able and willing to work their way from the bottom to top.

**Only children** are comfortable with authority figures and get along well with bosses. They want to please them as they did their parents. They are often driven perfectionists, hard or over workers.

**Middle children** fit in well in the corporate world in mid-level positions in large organizations. They are not as driven and ambitious as first borns and have learned to get along with others. They don't need a lot of recognition, are good team players, and don't bring their own problems to work. They are good negotiators and keep the peace where they are.

**Youngest children** are entrepreneurs, innovative and creative. Often they don't know what to do until late in life. They can be insecure and sensitive to criticism, not liking to be told what to do. They are independent, competitive and not good team players (they undermine the authority of those over them). They are good listeners and pick up on other's feelings.

**TEMPERAMENTS AFFECT CAREER PLANNING** Temperaments have a lot to do with career choice. Always keep them in mind when thinking of a career. God will stretch you so you have to depend on Him, but won't lead you to do something totally opposite of your temperament.

**Sanguines** are people-oriented salesman types who excel in working with people. They make great salesmen (except the paper work), actors, entertainers, auctioneers, politicians, and receptionists.

**Cholerics** are strong natural leaders that are goal/project oriented and like to manage others. They are natural developers, entrepreneurs, visionaries, police, military people, administrators, high school teachers, crusaders and bank trust officers.

**Melancholies** are creative, analytical individuals with strong perfectionistic tendencies who have aesthetic traits. They become composers, artists, musicians, inventors, philosophers, theoreticians, theologians, scientists, educators, beauticians and authors.

**Phlegmatics** are cool, detailed individuals who tend to limit themselves. They can do statistical, microscopic work that would drive others crazy! They become good elementary school teachers, counselors, engineers, mechanics, veterinarians, dentists, carpenters, farmers, accountants, diplomats, gourmet cooks, electricians and repairmen.

Do you want God's will done in your life? If you do and try your best to be totally open and sensitive to God, He will make sure it comes about. The key is open submission!

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 7. THE GREAT CHRISTIAN MUSIC DEBATE

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TO THINK ABOUT: What kind of music do you like best? What kind of Christian music? Why? What is it about this music that especially appeals to you?

Music and teenagers -- what images come to mind? Parents, remember what role music played in your adolescent years. Music and adolescence has always been and will always be closely connected. For one thing, music is a great way of expressing emotions and feelings, and teens have plenty of those they often don't know how to express in any other way. Also, it becomes a way of independence, of expressing their own ability to think and choose for themselves (by choosing something different than what parents choose). It thus becomes a form of rebellion, as well as a way of fitting in with other peers, of being accepted.

Unfortunately, Christians and even home-schooling Christians aren't exempt from this. Some feel even praise songs shouldn't be sung in church, others find nothing wrong with heavy metal Christian groups. It has become divisive among churches and Christians, as well as among home schoolers. Who is right? Is anyone right? How can we handle this area? Let's begin by looking at a fine musician in the Bible.

**DAVID THE MUSICIAN** David, the man after God's own heart, had three careers. He was a shepherd (because his earthly father told him to be it), a king (because his heavenly Father told him to be it) and a musician (because he chose that for himself). It was where his own natural ability and desire lay. From a youth on he played his harp, composed and sang songs to God (Psalms in the Bible). There was no music controversy in David's day. There was variety, but all kinds were accepted by all people. There was no difference between secular and religious music. Instruments used included harps (Revelation 5:8), stringed instruments (Habakkuk 3:19; Psalms 8; 92:3), horns, trumpets, loud-sounding cymbals (Psalms 150:5), harps, lyres (1 Chronicles 15:28-29), timbrels, tambourines (Exodus 15:20), and pipes (Psalms 150:4). This certainly gave them a wide variety of sounds. In fact, the Bible speaks of this variety. Some music was loud (2 Chronicles 30:21), like a waterfall or thunder (Revelation 5:9) or shouting (1 Chronicles 15:28). Other times it was quieter, like harps (Revelation 14:2) or singing voices (12 Chronicles 5:12-13), or a joyful noise (Psalms 95:1). Music was often accompanied by leaping and making merry (1 Chronicles 15:29), clapping (Psalms 47:1), dancing (Exodus 15:20), lifting hands (Psalms 134:2), standing (1 Chronicles 23:30) or bowing or kneeling (Psalms 95:6).

### PRINCIPLES TO GO BY

**1. There are no absolutes, large variety is allowable.** There was no one way to use music. But then, remember that all secular music came from religious music (not vice versa). Today we have a much greater variety of music. In fact, if all of it is indeed 'music' depends on your definition of music! Still, I don't believe there is any innate right and wrong concerning the mainstream of Christian music today (perhaps some of the extreme fringes - but we won't all agree on what is an extreme fringe either, will we?). I believe it is more personal preference, how God leads individuals. He leads us to different conclusions about churches and denominations, clothes and styles, home decor, TV programs, tastes in food and entertainment, etc. Paul says we should think of things that

are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8). Those mean different things to different people in different cultures. We aren't to judge another by our standards.

**2. It is legitimate to use music for entertainment, not just worship.** If we enjoy music but it doesn't lead to worship, does that mean it isn't right? I don't think the only use of music is worship. The Jews used it for all kinds of things, even going to war (12 Chronicles 20:21). While indirectly all we do can come under the broad umbrella of 'worship,' in its strict definition I feel it is legitimate to enjoy worship that doesn't lead to worship. I like "Oklahoma," but it doesn't lead me to worship. Should I not listen to it? No! God allows beautiful art, fine literature, and good music to entertain and enjoy without them being worship.

It's important to tell how the music affects the person. Some touches the soul and causes worship, some (or sometimes the very same music) touches our flesh and provides enjoyment, entertainment. That is fine, too. However sometimes the part of our flesh that is moved is part of the sin nature, and the music brings feelings, emotions and responses that aren't from God's Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks of "flesh" in both these terms: the sin nature (2 Peter 2:18; 1 John 2:16; Romans 7:5; 8:8-9) and man himself as a human being (Philippians 3:3-4; 1 Cor 15:50; Jn 6:51-57; 2 Corinthians 7:5; James 5:3). This is the 'human' part of Adam, before sin entered, that we still all retain. Jesus Himself had this as a man (John 1:14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 2 John 7; 1 John 4:2).

**WHEN YOUR TEEN LIKES MUSIC YOU DISLIKE...** Chances are your teen wants to listen to music you don't like and aren't sure if he should or not. What should you do?

1. PRAY for openness, patience, wisdom (James 1), insight, sensitivity.

2. GATHER INFORMATION about the groups and kind of music your teen likes as well as the whole Contemporary Christian music debate. Read books from BOTH sides of the issue. Talk to other parents and teens. Do all this with an open mind.

3. FOCUS ON THE ROOT CAUSE. Realize music is more a symptom than a problem, and we shouldn't treat symptoms. Ask your teen WHY he likes his form of music and groups. Listen carefully. Ask questions to get to the root of it, so he thinks through this subject himself and isn't just doing what others are doing. Be sensitive to the need to be independent and different from parents -- that is the root cause. It isn't a problem unless the rebellion is very open, strong and inflexible. The root rebellion needs to be worked out before the music issue can be addressed.

4. LEARN TO COMMUNICATE. Make sure you carefully listen to them with an open heart, the same way you want them to listen to you. Be able to give them their own reasoning back in your own words, and make sure they can express your concerns/position to you in their own words. The conclusion you come to over this isn't nearly important in the long run as how you come to that conclusion. You will be establishing patterns of how to handle differences that will last. Therefore, the process of handling this issue is really more important than the final product.

5. COME TO AN ACCEPTABLE COMPROMISE, both sides willing to bend. Clearly define where the limits are set and what is expected. Perhaps a limited amount of music of their choice 30 minutes or 1 hour a day, after school, with head set so others don't hear it, could be an acceptable compromise instead of the all-or-nothing, winner-take-all battles that often go on. Remember to keep your relationship with your teen 10 and 20 years down the road in mind as you handle this issue, and remember yourself at that age!

## Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

### 8. PEER PRESSURE AND SELF-WORTH

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TO THINK ABOUT: On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to you is what other people think of you? How important is it to your children?

**DANIEL** Peer pressure is nothing new. Peter succumbed to it when he denied Jesus. Lot lived his life by it. Rehoboam lost his kingdom by giving it to it. Daniel is a good example of someone who didn't give in, and whom God blessed. Away from family and friends, he "resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine," and, despite the external pressure to be like everyone else, took a stand for God (Daniel 1). As a result, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah rallied around him. The other Jewish boys in captivity gave in and went along. Everyone today is like one of these three groups: give in and go along, follow a strong leader who does what is right, or be the strong one to take the stand yourself no matter what others do. Which group do you fit into? Which do your children fit into? By the way, parents, what do you think Daniel's parents did so that he took such a stand in his early teen years?

**PEERS AND FRIENDS** The reason peer pressure is such a force in teenage years is because adolescents turn from their parents and move to ones their own age for approval and acceptance. God made them to become independent, to break the apron strings, to fly the nest and become adults in their own right. They must stop being children dependent on their parents. Still the jump from child dependent on parents (the 20' giant) to being independent adults is too big to make in one leap, so a middle step, a safe island between those two continents, is found. Teens turn from parents to each other, making the break from parents easier and the distance to cover less great. Then, when they find they are secure with others, they make the final leg of the journey to adult independence without needing per approval. At least that is how it is supposed to work!

Daniel and his 3 friends helped each other through this, but before long they have gone their separate ways. Early teen years (junior high or middle school) is when peer pressure is greatest. By later teen years (high school) there is more independence and freedom to be themselves. How smoothly and easily this transition is made depends on the security and acceptance that they found in their family up to this time. Do you know who Jephthah was? His father was a great warrior, but his mother was a prostitute (Judges 11). Legitimate siblings rejected him and he left home to lead a gang of lawless youths. There he found the acceptance and respect he should have found at home. God used the lessons he learned in fighting and leadership for he became a fairly good judge of Israel in his day. It is obvious he used his friends to meet needs in his life, and those needs were magnified by his family not having accepted him when he was younger. Leaving home is natural and normal ("a man must leave his father and mother..." Genesis 2:24), and having the right friends can help a whole lot.

**IMPORTANCE OF GOOD FRIENDS** Don't deny your adolescents peer relationships for that will make it harder for them to take that jump to independent adulthood. Extroverts especially need peers. Introverts who are afraid (they won't admit it is fear, though) of developing at least a few friendships may have trouble making the adjustment. Instead, do your best to help your teens develop good relationships. Encourage wholesome friendships.

**HOW MUCH PROTECTION?** How are we to know when we are overprotecting our teens or when we are not protecting them enough? Each teen is different and many factors enter in. I like to think of children like plants. Young plants do much better in a greenhouse where they are protected from anything harmful, fertilized, watered, pruned, and carefully watched. The idea is to develop a strong root structure (Psalm 1). The purpose of the plant is to live outside the green house, though. Putting it outside too soon will kill it, keeping it in too long will keep it from being what it was meant to be. Short exposure in safe conditions is a good start, gradually building up to being able to withstand harsher and harsher environment until they can be outside all the time (when they leave home, late teen years). Some point to a strong tree growing alone on a hillside and say it was never sheltered and is better off for it. However, for every tree that makes it in that environment dozens, perhaps hundreds, die before reaching maturity, and many of the ones which survived are permanently dwarfed or deformed. Get the idea? Apply this to your children. Are they on schedule for when they will leave home?

**SELF WORTH** In order to take that giant leap from dependent child to independent adult a teen must have confidence in himself and his ability to function in the world. Who is he? How does he measure up? Where does he fit in? How adequate is he or she as a male or female? What are their own beliefs and values? Here again peers come in for it is in comparing themselves with others that they see where they measure up. A natural stage all go through is to feel unsure about themselves. Adolescence are very sensitive to their weak areas and magnify them. It's not unusual to feel inferior during these years. Sometimes, though, a combination of too high expectations (or no expectations at all) from their parents and an introvert temperament combine to have a child feel extra bad about themselves. This can result in overt rebellion and desire to conform to peers, eating disorders (bulimia nervosa or anorexia nervosa, especially for girls), alcohol or drug usage, or even thoughts/attempts of suicide. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death for teens and college age youth. A realistic acceptance of one's self and feelings of worth are very important to prevent/cure these.

Notice I am not using the term "self-love," for I feel that is self-centered, prideful and unbiblical (2 Timothy. 3:1-5). We must accept ourselves (recognize and accept both our strengths and weakness) as God made us. Avoid extremes: self-love (I'm better than others) and self-hate (I'm no good, I'm worse than others). Both are an inordinate focus on self as being too good/bad for God. The Bible says we are to forget ourselves and be preoccupied with God, not self. We are to be servants of others. Self-evaluation is a must, or how can we know what weak areas to improve and what sin to confess. Recognizing our strengths helps know and use our talents and spiritual gifts for God.

Help your child reject Satan's lies when he tries to have them feel inferior and no good. God created each one of us the way He wants us (and He did it before the world was created - Psalm 139:13-16). He loves us just the way we are and doesn't expect perfection from us (Psalm 103:1-4, esp. 14). Make sure your teen sees you applying these principles to your own life. Talk openly with him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him. Pray for him.

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 9. CHANGING BODIES (Sex, Dress, etc.)

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**TO THINK ABOUT:** What is the difference between what the world says about sex and appearance and what the Bible says?

Vashti is one of the unsung heroes (heroines) of the Bible. Even though she wasn't a follower of God, she had enough moral integrity to give up everything in life rather compromise her moral convictions (Esther 1). Obviously beautiful, she wouldn't allow her beauty to be used for immoral purposes. Her replacement as queen, Esther, was also very beautiful (chosen for her beauty). She, too, had more than outer looks. Despite being a young teenager, she risked her life for the sake of her people, the Jews. God honored that. While the Bible tells us much about the people on its pages, it gives almost no information about the appearance of any of them. Was Ruth tall and slim? Was Mary short and cross-eyed? Did John have acne? Were they fashionable in dress? None of this is given, as if saying these things don't matter! Unfortunately, in the 20th century these things matter a lot -- too much! Jesus Himself looked just like everyone else, no different at all. That's one reason Judas was needed to point Him out in a group. In our shallowness today we seem to base everything on outer appearances. For youth growing up in this culture there is great pressure to conform, subtle messages that the body and sex mean everything.

**MAKING A 'STATEMENT'** Dress, like music, can be used as a way of rebellion against adult standards. It can be a way of making a 'statement.' Conformity to peers and independence from parents can be shown loudly and clearly. Adolescence is a hard time to remember that it's what's inside that matters to God and to those who really count (1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Peter 3:1-6).

**TEENAGE SEXUALITY** Unfortunately focusing on the outer body doesn't stop with clothing, but spills over to include sexuality and morality. Outer dress is just a symptom of a deeper preoccupation with sex. Studies show that 70% of teens have had sex by age 18, and the statistics of sex among Christians is only slightly lower! In a time when society gives no clear-cut passage from childhood to adulthood (like Bar Mitzvah for the Jews or initiation rites for American Indians), sexuality has been used to show maturity. It becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Samson is typical of many today who use sex to get love and attention, to prove their adulthood, to fill a void in life that only a close relationship with God can fill.

**NO SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE** The Bible clearly says sex is only for marriage. It is God's wedding gift to man, created before sin entered. Just like a parachute only works from a plane and not a building, so sex only meets its God-created purpose in the commitment of marriage. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17) and everything we do must be for God's glory (1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31). Satan uses sex to tempt people to sin (Galatians 5:19) (Joseph and Potiphar's wife; David and Bathsheba). Everything we do must be done with God's blessing (Col 3:17) and to help us grow spiritually (Hebrews 12:1). God provides self-control (1 Corinthians 6:12-13) so we can be a good testimony to unbelievers (Col 4:5) and believers (1 Corinthians 8:7-13). He provides a way out of every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

**HOW FAR TO GO???** While Christians agree that sex before marriage is forbidden, there isn't much agreement on just where to draw the line. Song of Solomon (2:7; 3:5; 8:4) says to not start any kind of sexual desire in another person. That certainly can be done by touching, kissing or hugging.

However not every touch, kiss or hug produces sexual urges or desires to do more. When wondering where to draw the line ask yourself what Jesus would do were he in your situation. Think about what you want your future mate to do in a similar situation. Treat each other as a brother or sister.

**SEX IN GOD'S SIGHT** The reason sex is so special (and so attacked by Satan) is that it, in a special way, seals the oneness of a husband and wife while showing the oneness of a Christian and Jesus (Ephesians 5:31; Genesis 2:24). Thus, sexual sin breaks a very special union between two people (1 Corinthians 6:16) and between man and God

**MENTAL SIN** While not doing anything sexual before marriage is one thing, the Bible says we aren't even to entertain sexual thoughts for that is as sinful as sexual acts (Matthew 5:28). Men who look at or think of things they shouldn't are committing sin. For women the forbidden lust takes a more romantic turn than physical, for women are made to respond to romance more while men are more physically oriented. Romance books (even Christian ones), soap operas, and things of that nature are emotional lust, desiring something God doesn't give, seeking to bring pleasure to one's self through our imagination and fantasy. It is as dangerous and sinful for girls as pornography for boys.

**PURPOSE OF SEX IN MARRIAGE** The purpose of sex in marriage is two-fold. Propagation (Genesis 1:27-28; 9:1) is one reason. Adolescence need to learn about birth control and reproduction as soon as they can (gradually from young on, bit by bit as they need/can understand more and more). Without truth they will imagine answers or glean them from the world, both worse than the truth. The Bible says conception is a gift from God (Genesis 4:1,13; 16:2; 17:19; 29:31; 30:22) and children are a blessing from God (Psalm 127). The Bible doesn't say that proper birth control is sinful, but that God must lead in this area of life, too. Sex isn't just for procreation; it is also to promote mutual love (Genesis 3:16; 18:12; 26:8; Deuteronomy 34:7; 24:5; Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Sol 7:6-10). It is for pleasure, without guilt (Hebrews 13:5).

**TEMPERAMENTS AND SEXUAL RESPONSES** Sanguines are most susceptible to sexual temptation since they often have a big need to be loved and weak self-control. Choleric are too goal-oriented to get side tracked easily. Melancholies who choose to use sex as a substitute for love can get drawn in, as can Phlegmatics looking for acceptance. Middle children seem to have a harder time avoiding sex before marriage than other birth orders.

**WHAT TEENS CAN DO** Commit yourself to be pure in mind and body. It's your decision, no one can force you for its a decision of your mind. Focus on Jesus. Pray and memorize Scripture (Psalm 119:9,11). Find someone you can talk to (an adult of the same sex) about questions and temptations you have, someone who will pray for you and hold you accountable.

**WHAT PARENTS CAN DO** Realize there is a big difference between having a child who is pure and one who is naive. Keep them pure, but not naive. Give them all the information they can handle. Truth is the best weapon against error and confusion. It's not just facts, but attitudes that you communicate that mean as much or more than the facts. Welcome their physical changes and help them feel good about their bodies and developing sexuality. Encourage positive relationships with the opposite sex. Let them know lines must be drawn and help them to internalize moral standards (not just conform outwardly because you make them). If they do these things they will have the conviction to carry through when you aren't around as well as in their thought life (where you can't get). Also, their dress will then fall in line with Biblical standards and you won't have to be nagging them about little things all the time. Spend much time praying for them, and for wisdom for yourself.

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 10. COURTSHIP & MARRIAGE

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TO THINK ABOUT: Name three traits you want in the person you will marry?

The second most important decision anyone has to make is whom to marry (the first is to accept Jesus as Savior). It's a very difficult decision for many, especially if the choice isn't left to God. Mistakes in this area have far-reaching consequences. Consider Samson's decision to marry an unbelieving Philistine, David to marry Michal, and Dinah's wanting to marry Shechem (Genesis 34). Those who left the choice to God, like Ruth (for Boaz) and Isaac (for Rebekah). Joseph and Mary are fine examples, too.

**JOSEPH & MARY** They are special because they both put God before their mate, and their mate before themselves. Mary was willing to give up Joseph to have God's Son, for she had no guarantee he would believe the source of her pregnancy, or even if he did would still want to marry her. Joseph also obeyed God by deciding not to marry her when local gossip reached him informing Him of her pregnancy. His choice was to suffer financial and social loss instead of allowing her to be publicly ridiculed for being pregnancy before marriage. No wonder she could trust him and defer to him, obeying him when he said to move in the middle of the night. Putting God first is a must to have a successful courtship and marriage.

Let's look at the elements that go into being and finding the right mate:

**STAGES OF ADOLESCENCE** Before adolescence starts, children go through a time when they really dislike the opposite sex and don't want anything to do with them. They all but ignore their existence, except to be disgusted with them. While their backs are turned to each other, God starts working into children to turn them into adults. All of a sudden they start noticing each other, and are amazed and impressed with the change that has taken place!

At first adolescents need affirmation of their maleness/femaleness by acceptance by those of their same sex, but after a couple years this expands to include those of the opposite sex. Friendships with the opposite sex are very important for what an adolescent learns about themselves as well as how to relate to the opposite sex. This is important for them to discover what traits they like and don't like in the opposite sex, as well as how to communicate.

**TEMPERAMENTS AND MARRIAGE** Sanguines are natural charmers and can easily win others, but usually do it for selfish reasons (so they will be liked). They need to develop deep moral principles from young and stay close to the Spirit for their own self-control is weak. They need a loving, responsive and affectionate mate who responds well.

Cholerics are so goal-oriented they will do all the right things to win a mate, but when they have them their goal switches to providing and they can easily become workaholics. They need to mature emotionally (instead of ignoring and stuffing their emotions) and have a mate who is secure, mature and can speak the truth in love.

Melancholies have high expectations of themselves and others. They are sensitive and sacrificial enough to win a mate, but then often become introverted and depressed. They need God's



help to give unconditional love. They need to marry a person not easily offended, who can encourage and reassure them.

Phlegmatics attract others because of their gentleness and acceptance. They don't get pushy, but often manipulate without noticing it. They need Jesus' help to put other's first, show love, and have victory over fear. They need a mate who will understand and accept their seeming lack of motivation without resentment and will bring out the best in them.

Introverts tend to marry extroverts. Seldom will two introverts or extroverts marry, and rarely will two of the same temperament marry. Opposites attract, for we see another's strength where our weaknesses are and admire that. We must be aware of the weakness', too. Usually mates will share one temperament (predominate in one, secondary in another) and that will be the 'glue' that gives them something in common, a place to start building.

**BIRTH ORDER AND MARRIAGE** Firstborns like to be in charge and seldom marry other first borns or only children. Middle children make good mates for they know how to compromise and avoid difficulties, but usually don't marry each other because they tend to avoid difficulties. The babies of the family need a mate with patience who will reassure them.

**BIBLICAL BOY-GIRL RELATIONSHIPS** The world says "marry the one you love." The Bible says "love the one you marry" (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4). The world says you are to go from one relationship to the next until you find the 'right' one. The Bible says you don't give your heart away until you do find the right one. Traditional Christianity says you should save your body for the right person only (physical virginity), but you can give your heart away many times. The Bible says to save your heart and body both for the right person (emotional virginity). The Bible is right! Not only is it God's inspired Word, but look at the mess relationships going the world's way are in today! We know the world's way doesn't work.

"Treat younger men as brothers and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (I Timothy 5:12). While Paul wasn't talking about boy-girl relationships, the principle set down here certainly does apply. Boys and girls should treat each other like brothers and sisters in all their relationships and dealings until God has clearly shown them the one they are to marry. Then they can commit themselves and romance can enter the picture. "Dating" as our world does it doesn't teach us how to marry, it teaches us how to break up and divorce. The things we do to impress, win and keep a boyfriend or girlfriend are usually dishonest and self-centered. They do not prepare for married life. We resemble the animal kingdom where the male struts to win a female whom he then jealously defends against all others.

By using the brother-sister pattern and not giving their hearts away until they are ready to marry, our children can be much better off than we were! The purpose in their relationships with the opposite sex should be to bless the other person and do what is best for them in the long run. They should treat people in whom they have no romantic interest no worse than they treat people in whom they do have a romantic interest. They are to treat members of both sexes the same. They are to treat those in and outside their family the same. They are to do nothing now with members of the opposite sex that they wouldn't do later when married to someone else. They are to treat all others like brothers or sisters. This would take a lot of the pressure off and allow wholesome relationships and friendships to develop. Time together can be spent doing worthwhile things with others instead of paring up in a way and place that leads to temptation and trouble.

# Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

## 11. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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A Sunday School teacher became deeply concerned for the conversion of a teen-age girl in her class. Lovingly and earnestly, she spoke to the girl on the all-important subject -- her soul's salvation. The girl listened respectfully. She decided against Christ, saying that in later years she would give consideration to her relationship to Christ. The teacher went away with a sad heart. On her way home she thought of a novel plan to impress on the girl the unfairness of giving her youthful years to sin and then turning to Christ for forgiveness. Stopping at a florist's shop she bought a dozen beautiful roses. She kept the roses in the florist's box for several days. Then she sent them to the girl. The girl was elated to receive the gift until she opened the box and saw the faded and wilted flowers. "Some practical joke has been played on me," she said in disgust. Shortly thereafter the teacher called on the girl again. The girl told her about the faded roses she had received. "I sent them" said the teacher. "When you chose not to give Christ your youthful years, you decided to present to Him later a life faded and withered like those roses!" The girl answered, "Teacher, I see it. It will not be that way. I will give myself to Christ right now and live for His glory."

**GODLY TEENS TODAY** This is a commitment every teen must make. It isn't easy for anyone, and especially adolescents who are separating from their parents and seeking what they believe for themselves. Peer pressure doesn't make it any easier. The Bible says: "*Remember your Creator in the days of your youth*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). There are good Bible examples of godly teenagers: John, John Mark and Josiah to name a few. It was their choice to follow Jesus, nothing that could have been forced on them. They were motivated to do it, not manipulated. Manipulation does not produce long-term results!

**MANIPULATION VS MOTIVATION** Motivation is the process of instilling the desire to act. It comes from within (self and/or Holy Spirit). Manipulation only forces external action but no internal compliance. It is done in the flesh. Motivation appeals to reasoning, wisdom, long-range goals based on love and trust for God and others. Manipulation is based on fear, greed and pride. God never manipulates anyone; He does motivate through His Spirit. We cannot manipulate teens, especially in spiritual matters. We can do our best to motivate them, though.

**1. Use Their Natural Bent** "*Train up a child in the way he should go* (literally "according to his natural bent") *and when he is old he will not turn from it*" (Proverbs 22:6). This especially refers to temperaments. Sanguines and Phlegmatics must set their own long-range goals and believe in them, then trust God for daily self-control to move in that direction. Choleric are very goal-oriented, but must have goals that benefit God and others, not just themselves. Melancholies are motivated by genuine praise, not by criticism. Their perfectionism causes them to set too high goals (or none at all out of fear of failure).

**2. Use the Salt Principle** You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. True, but you can feed him salt! Find a spark of interest and fan and feed it like a small fire. Use their interests to create curiosity in other areas.

**3. Help Them Choose Their Own Goals** Ask them: "What do you want from life? What would you like to be doing 20 years from now? Who would you like to be when you grow up (and why)?" Then together talk about the steps that will have to be taken to reach those goals.

**4. Let Them Experience the Negative Results of Not Reaching Goals** Don't always bail them out, allow them to fail. Natural consequences teach great lessons! Let them wear dirty clothing, miss a meal or activity, not have enough money for an activity or purchase, etc., if they don't plan ahead and follow through. God teaches us this way - it's called "life."

**5. Remember the Power of Praise** Positive reinforcement works much better than fear, threats or bribery. Praise them for the spiritual sparks that are there. Complement them for what they do right, spiritually and in other ways. Communicate that you expect them to succeed, not fail. Don't point out failures, they already know these well enough!

**SPIRITUAL GROWTH** Our goal as parents is to motivate them to grow spiritually, but we can't do the spiritual growing for them any more than we could do their physical growing when first born. Following spiritual birth (John 1:12,13; 3:3) comes growth (2 Peter 3:18). This comes from taking in healthy nourishment (the Bible - 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Jeremiah. 15:16). As growth comes, communication skills develop (prayer - 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 6:18; Hebrews 4:16). Mobility (walking) comes close behind (Galatians 5:16; 2 Corinthians 5:7; John 8:12). Walking in obedience to Jesus, facing obstacles (temptations) without falling, and when we do stumble we get up (confession). These are all skills that need to be taught to younger children. Older children and teens need to be motivated to continue in them, They must be encouraged to develop their relationship with Jesus on their own.

**TEENS MUST INTERNALIZE VALUES & BELIEFS** If things haven't gone well with parent and teen during children, during adolescence they will often reject their parent's beliefs when they pull away from their parents. Even when the relationship has been good and the pulling away smooth and gentle, teens still must internalize their parent's beliefs and values as their own. It is no longer good enough that they have always been taught something, now they must believe it for themselves. Give them space and time to work through things. This process should start during childhood. Allow them to question, discuss, experiment and think through things. Don't force outer conformity!!! Tell them the WHY of things, especially spiritual things (start this early in life, too). Give them freedom and flexibility to be able to start doing things, especially spiritual beliefs and practices, because they choose to do them for themselves. Help them set their own spiritual goals: short and long-range. Talk with them about how to attain these goals.

**CHURCH INVOLVEMENT** Should teens be forced to go to church with their parents? How much freedom and flexibility should we give? There are areas where we as parents must step in and overrule, especially if long-term damage can result. Church attendance is not optional (Hebrews 10:25). This doesn't mean we should make them go every time the church doors are open. Perhaps they could be allowed to choose a service to attend (something more substantial than the youth program, though, like a worship service). In fact, you might feel they are better off NOT attending your church's youth program.

Remember, church is a means to an end, not the end itself. Commitment to Jesus and growth in His likeness are the end products we seek. It can be embarrassing to parents to allow our teens some space, especially in spiritual areas, but that is our problem with peer pressure! We must do what is right for them in the long run, not what is easiest for us in the present. Our teens are sharp enough to pick this up, and it speaks volumes to them!

**PRAY!** Above all, over all, before and after all, during all -pray, pray, pray, pray, pray and pray.

## Marriage & Family – VII. RAISING GODLY TEENAGERS

### 12. SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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As we conclude this series on raising Godly teenagers we must cover one final element. While God wants us to raise our children to be like Jesus, and that is our goal as parents, we have an enemy who is doing all he can to harm our children and keep them from God's best. Doing all things right without protecting them from this danger means we will fail. Educating a soldier without giving him weapons and armor is a sure way to defeat. Satan is our enemy, and if he can keep our children from God's will he can control a whole generation!

**ADOLESCENCE: A DANGEROUS TIME** Because teens move away from their family they also often move away from God and the church. They want independence and freedom from any and all authority. They want to decide for themselves. They move toward others their age and the whole worldly teen culture to find acceptance and recognition. They experiment with new (and previously forbidden) things. All this opens them up in a very real way to Satanic forces having access to work in or against them. That's why things like suicide, anorexia and bulimia are so prevalent among teens today. Parents and teens alike must learn how to prevent this.

**TEENS IMPACT ON THE WHOLE FAMILY** Satan not only tries to defeat teens themselves, he tries to make the whole family miserable through them. For years our family has battled demons named "Frustration" and "Misery" whose work was just what their names suggested. They would cause strife among the children, especially through one particular child, and it would spread to the whole house. Their plan was to make things miserable and they quite often succeeded. We have learned to pray against that at the start of each day and as soon as we sense ourselves feeling it happen. More recently there is a spirit of "Argumentativeness" that rears its ugly head. "Hate" tries to do just that in the children, so they hate each other. As soon as we notice these things we pray against them, usually with the children involved. Quite often demons incite children to behavior that will affect others in the family.

We've seen several cases of children being motivated to do things to get into trouble so they would get scolded a lot. That developed an inferiority feeling in them, an image of always being bad or not pleasing their parents. Unless reversed that sets a pattern for life that is all too common! This just feeds rebellion and causes teens to turn to peers for acceptance.

**ADOLESCENTS & DEMONIZING** While we often overlook this fact, children & adolescents can be demonized (strongly influenced by demons). Even young children are attacked. Mark 9:14-29 tells about a young boy who "from childhood" (small toddler), was possessed by a spirit that robbed him of speech, seized him and threw him to the ground. It made him foam at the mouth, gnash his teeth and become rigid. Mark 7:24-30 tells about a "little daughter" (very young girl) who was possessed by an evil spirit. If this can happen to children it can happen to teens.

Often first-born males are especially attacked (demons move down family lines through firstborn males when possible, the same as God did in the Old Testament with the Jews). The form the demonic attacks take could be anything from unwholesome fantasies to bitterness toward siblings to open rebellion against parents.

Make sure the teen who is under attack knows that he is not the problem but that he has a problem. Often children and teens are more aware of these things than we think. They may be so used to hearing voices in their heads, seeing manifestations in their room at night, or being controlled by feelings/emotions beyond their control that they don't realize these are unusual. Spend some unrushed time letting them talk. Ask lots of questions and listen carefully to the answers. Try to put yourself in their place. Take everything they says seriously. Make notes of things to pray about or talk about later. Be sensitive to God's leading. Go with your impulses and thoughts, they are from God at a time like this. Pray for wisdom from God (James 1) about these things and what the openings may be. Pray specifically for God's deliverance from the things you see going wrong in their life ("rebellion," "hate," etc.).

When too young to understand (below 5 or 6) children don't even have to be present when you pray for their deliverance. As a parent you can pray for your children with authority (Job 1:5), the same as you pray for yourself. When they are older (about 5 to 10) they should be included for the purpose of educating them about these things. By adolescence they can pray for themselves, and they can start learning about spiritual warfare, too. Of course, when there is specific sin in their lives they should confess it. The older they are the more responsible they become (especially from about 8 years old on) and the more they should be involved. Their openness to this depends on the type of oppression they are receiving. Rebellion will draw them from you while fear can bring them closer to you. The father as the spiritual leader should pray for the children. Each morning he should pray specifically for each one by name. If for whatever reason the father isn't filling this role as he should the mother can and should take over.

As for praying for deliverance for children or adolescence, just follow Jesus' example. He administered deliverance to children the same as He did to adults (Mark 7:24-30; 9:14-25).

**PRAYING FOR YOUR TEEN** Pray regularly and specifically for your child. Satan has a plan and purpose for their life. Be sensitive to what it might be and break it in Jesus' name. Some of the time pray out loud with them so they can learn how to pray for themselves and so they know they are committed to God's care and protection. Pray that Jesus be formed in the youth (Galatians 4:19), that they be delivered from Satan (Matthew 6:13; Proverbs 11:21), that they will be taught by God and experience His peace (Isaiah 54:13), that they will learn to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:14; 1 Peter 3:21), that God's principles will be in their minds and on their hearts (Hebrews 8:10), that they will choose friends who are wise and a good influence (Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 5:11), that they will remain sexually pure (Ephesians 5:3,31-33), that they will trust and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), that they will find as well as be the right mate and that their marriage will last their whole life, and that they will know the career of God's choosing.

There is no substitute for regular, specific, serious prayer for your family and especially adolescents and teens. Don't neglect this. It isn't always easy to do, but is a real must! Remember, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world!" (1 John 4:4).

For more information see Chapter V. above, "Spiritual Warfare and the Family." Or get my books "Spiritual Warfare Handbook" and "Spiritual Warfare in the Bible" at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/> or email me at [jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org](mailto:jerry@ChristianTrainingOrganization.org) and I will send a PDF copy.



# *Marriage and Family*

## **VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD**

LESSONS FROM DAVID'S LIFE AND FAMILY

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1. David: Example of a Dysfunctional Family
2. David: Lessons for Dysfunctional Families
3. Solomon's Family: Results of Dysfunctional Families
  4. Abigail: Picture of Codependency
  5. Joseph: Breaking codependency
6. David: Effects of False Guilt on a Family
7. Jesus: Recovery From Codependency, Dysfunction and False Guilt

# Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

## 1. DAVID: EXAMPLE OF A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

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TO THINK ABOUT: Why does God have children go through such a thing as adolescence?

King David is probably one of the best loved people in the bible. The stories of how he fought the bear, lion and even Goliath never cease to thrill us. He was well liked and popular with everyone, even God. He was a skilled musician, a poet, a might warrior and best of all he was “a man after God’s own heart.” Yet all wasn’t perfect in his life. He sinned with Bathsheba, but he confessed that and sought reconciliation with God. Where David failed, however, was with his own family. That is a bad place for a Christian leader to fail (I Timothy 3:4-5). Actually, the groundwork for that failure was set much earlier.

**SEEDS OF FAILURE SOWN** Ruth and Boaz seemed to have a good, healthy relationship. Not much is known about their son Obed, but his son Jesse seems to have had problems meeting his son’s needs. He didn’t consider David equal to the older brothers (I Samuel 16:4-11). They never learned to treat their younger brother with respect. They were very rude to him when he came to bring them food in the army (I Samuel 17:28-29). Not only was this hard on David, but he didn’t grow up with a good example of how to be a godly father and man. Although he developed a good, mature intimacy with God, it doesn’t seem he ever accomplished this in his family relationships. They are characterized by a lack of emotional intimacy. The sad story starts in II Samuel 11.

**SIN PLANTS THE SEEDS OF DYSFUNCTION** David wasn’t where God wanted him to be (II Sam 11:1) when his army went to war and ended up committing adultery with Bathsheba (II Sam 11:2-5). When he found out she was pregnant he should have had the courage to face up to his sin. Instead, he tried to cover it up, even to the extent of having Bathsheba’s husband killed so no one would know the baby wasn’t his (II Sam 11:14-27). Then he married Bathsheba and ignored everything else. When confronted by God for his sin, David repented and was restored (II Sam 12:13). Still, there were grave consequences to David’s sin.

First, the baby died (II Sam 12:16-18). David never allowed his feelings of grief to surface; he stuffed his pain down and tried to ignore it (II Sam 12:21-23). Then he ignored the emotional impact this must have had on the others in the family. How would his grown children feel when they learned about the adultery and murder? However, they felt, there was no open ground for communication. They had to follow David’s example and bury their feelings. David dealt with the sin between himself and God, but never between himself and his family.

**DYSFUNCTION REPEATS ITSELF IN THE NEXT GENERATION** Family dysfunction often begins with an inability to handle emotions and tends to become more extreme as time passes. Amnon, David’s oldest son, was sexually attracted to his step-sister, Tamar (II Sam 13:1-2). In the same way that David had planned to manipulate circumstances so he could have the woman he lusted after without facing consequences, Amnon planned to do the same thing. He manipulated his father (II Sam 13:6) so he could get in a position to rape his sister (13:11-18). Then when he had to face the consequences of his action he lacked courage to do so, blaming and hating Tamar for it.

As could be expected, Tamar was devastated (13:18-19). Her brother Absalom saw her and suspected what had happened (13:20a). Why hadn’t he done something to head it off? Because in David’s family problems were buried, emotions ignored, and everyone had to pretend everything was all right. In fact, that’s how Absalom responded to Tamar’s desolation. Instead of giving her a hug and some reassurance that justice would be done, he told her, in effect, to not take this seriously because it is a family matter and we must not make a big thing out of it (13:20b).



When David heard about what happened he was furious (13:21) but didn't take any action to right things, comfort Tamar, or even enforce God's law which required stoning or at least exile of the guilty party. Everyone had to pretend it never happened.

**UNRESOLVED PAIN GOES UNDERGROUND** On the surface everything seems smooth, but underneath a storm is raging. David is furious, Tamar's life is ruined, Amnon hates Tamar, and Absalom hates Amnon. As in dysfunctional families, these feelings do not lessen as time passes but grow stronger.

After two years of denial Absalom moves to end the stalemate. He approaches David about getting the whole family together but David balks at the suggestion. For some strange reason he allowed Absalom to invite Amnon over, although he knew of the problem between them (13:23-27). Direct communication is difficult in dysfunctional families. Change only occurs in crisis situations. This was David's last chance to resolve this issue in a mature, peaceful way, but he again avoids the whole issue. Thus Absalom, who has lost trust in and respect for his father, takes the issue into his own hands and kills Amnon (13:28-29).

Again, David is grieved and Absalom must go into exile, but nothing else is done. Often in dysfunctional families one 'rebel' doesn't play by the rules (ignore the pain, pretend things are OK, cover over all emotions, etc.). He acts out the pain that has not been faced by the rest of the family. The blame for what is wrong in the family gets heaped upon him instead of those who are really responsible. He becomes the scapegoat. In David's family it was Absalom. In fact, many today still see Absalom as the rebellious son, not understanding the forces that drove him.

For 3 years Absalom was in exile, David not allowing him to return but not handling the root issues, either. This rejection made Absalom's bitterness grow. He was continually reminded of Tamar's pain for she lived in his household. That so impacted him that he even named his only daughter 'Tamar.' He had never learned from his father how to correctly handle pain and hurt, though.

Finally, David allowed Absalom to return from exile and live in Jerusalem. Absalom had to really force the issue to finally, after being back for two years, get to see his father David (14:30-32). It's important for a child, especially a son, to know where he stands with his father. David kissed Absalom (14:33) but it was very superficial and no change or reconciliation took place, despite Absalom really wanting and needing this. This seems to have been the last straw for Absalom, who has been trying to get things straight for the last seven years since the rape took place.

**DYSFUNCTION DESTROYS** Absalom now starts telling the people that their king will not hear their needs or complaints, which was really a direct reflection of Absalom's assessment of his family life. Before long most of the nation was supporting Absalom in a revolt against David (15:1-23). Eventually David's faithful soldiers were able to put down the revolt and kill Absalom. When he heard of Absalom's death it seems something broke in David. "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you -- O Absalom, my son, my son!" (18:33). Finally, all his grief could no longer be ignored and pushed down, and David is crushed. In fact, he was so carried away in it all that it offended the soldiers who defended David so much that they almost deserted him. Still, though, nothing is really changed. Lives are ruined: Tamar, Amnon, Absalom, even David's life continues to go downhill from here.

Dysfunctional families are nothing new. Still, they don't need to be. We can change ours so we don't pass these things down to our children. What was your family of origin like? Was it similar to David's family? In what ways? Who in David's family do you most identify with? What can you do right now to start moving into healthy relationships? Each journey starts with one step. Take your first one now.

# Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

## 2. DAVID: LESSONS FOR DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

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God never makes a mistake. He didn't make one when he revealed that David -- spiritual giant that he was -- had family problems. The story of David's family shows that God has a far greater understanding of and concern for our most intimate family relationships than we realize. Like David, we may be growing spiritually and close to God, yet still struggle in our interpersonal relationships. The solution isn't to confess, submit or rededicate. It is to understand and work through the negative affects our pasts have had on us.

While having close intimacy with God, David didn't seem able to have the same intimacy with other people. As a result, his family became very dysfunctional. Before long the family broke up and even the nation. It wasn't until 1947 that the nation was reunited as one. Dysfunction can have far lasting consequences!

From the family of David there are some characteristics of dysfunctional families that we can look at and apply to our families today.

**Instead of facing problems, dysfunctional family members cover them up and instead manipulate situations.** David tried to manipulate circumstances by passing the blame for his sin to Uriah, and when that didn't work having him murdered. Parents today manipulate in many ways: "I guess your father and I will just have to spend this Thanksgiving alone...." Guilt, shame or reward are used to manipulate. Love and acceptance is given or withdrawn as a tool to control the behavior of others. This is definitely wrong!

**Psychometric illnesses are common in dysfunctional families.** Amnon so desired sex with his step-sister that he became physically ill. Some say 80% of all illnesses today have their roots emotional stress and strain. For example, a child with asthma in a high-stress family will generally have more frequent asthma attacks than a child from a more nurturing family.

**Pain is avoided or denied in dysfunctional families.** David took the route of denial in his affair with Bathsheba. He didn't face the pain of the death of the baby he and Bathsheba lost. Even though a father will sometimes abuse his children, a wife won't do anything because the children seem to be doing fine so she says what is happening must not be that bad.

**Relational boundaries are broken in dysfunctional families.** Amnon felt nothing wrong with having sex with his step-sister. Absalom usurped his father's role and tried to solve the family problems. When the roles of each in the family aren't clearly defined and followed along traditional lines something is wrong. When emotional and physical boundaries aren't set and privacy respected, then again something is wrong.

**Emotional reaction instead of healthy response characterized dysfunctional families.** David was furious when he heard about Amnon raping Tamar -- but didn't do anything. Various happenings in his family bothered and upset him, but he never took corrective action.

**Trying to change another's behavior instead of directly communicating with them is common in dysfunctional families.** Absalom wanted to solve the family's problem by having a big get-together where everyone could have a good time with each other. Today, too, fathers often give gifts or things to family members to help them through a hard time instead of sitting down and talking heart-to-heart.

**Stopping talking to a family member is one of the wrong ways dysfunctional families handle conflict.** Absalom wouldn't speak to Amnon. David cut off all contact with Absalom for several years. Tamar cut herself off from the outside world. Many people still do that today.

**A scapegoat is found to blame for family problems in many dysfunctional families.** Absalom was clearly the scapegoat in David's family. He acted out the pain everyone else felt. He didn't go along with the 'rules' of keeping everything quiet and stuffed within, of blaming one's self and avoiding the real issues. To those in the family HE was the real problem. If he'd have kept quiet all would have been fine! His attempts to do something showed more signs of emotional health than others in the family. The family 'scapegoat' has the best chance of moving out of the cycle of dysfunction.

**Dysfunctional family members create increasingly serious crises to communicate their pain.** Absalom just couldn't keep his emotions locked in. He created crisis after crisis. He murdered Amnon, set Joab's fields on fire and started a national civil war. Children in dysfunctional families today may develop eating disorders. They may do other things to get attention: become sexually active, use drugs or alcohol, develop an 'attitude,' rebel in any number of ways, even attempt suicide.

**Dysfunctional family members hope that the passage of time will heal the problems.** After Tamar was raped, no one did anything. Even Absalom waited two years before killing Amnon, then waited five years to see what his father David really thought of him. Dysfunctional families ignore hurts and emotional pain, hoping that time will heal the soul as it does the body. Instead of fading, the hurts go deeper and continue to grow.

Unfortunately, it wasn't only David's family that has these problems. They are common today, even in the best Christian families. In fact, being a good Christian family doesn't guarantee immunity from dysfunction. These things are usually passed on from generation to generation: trouble handling emotions, denying feelings, inability to express motions correctly, blaming others, overreacting to small things, etc.

**WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?** There is no quick and easy solution to this. There is no simple one-two-three step procedure to remove it. These things are learned over time, and must be unlearned over time as well. The first thing to do, though, is to recognize and admit the dysfunction in your family of origin and see how that has carried on into your current family. Feel the hurt and pain that you have been stuffing. A time of anger is natural, but don't let it set in and fester. Forgive and move on in life. Start changing your behavior by working on the areas God reveals to you as needing work. Wherever He shines the light is where you start changing your behavior. Go by your mind and what you know is right instead of letting your emotions control and dominate. Let your mind explain reality to your emotions. Good, godly counsel can be most helpful in moving this process along quicker. With God's help and a willingness to work these things through no matter the price there can and will be gradual freedom. The truth really will set you free (John 8:32), don't fear it!

God promises that when He begins to work in your life to make you more like Jesus He won't stop (Philippians 1:6). Trust Him to do the work. He does a good job!

## Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

### 3. SOLOMON'S FAMILY: RESULTS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

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Solomon was remarkable! He was unbelievably wise, unimaginably wealthy, immensely powerful and incredibly gifted. He wrote three books of the Bible (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Proverbs). Being David's youngest son, he seems to have had a closer relationship to his father than his older siblings. Changes were taking place in David over the years. Still, it was too little too late. Imagine how he must have felt when he heard the servants whispering about how his father had his mother's first husband killed because he had gotten her pregnant, and that that baby had died. How did he respond to his older sister's despair when rumors of her rape circulated? What about the two older brothers that tickled and played with him -- what was he to think when he found one killed the other and he didn't see either anymore? No one talked to him about these things, and there was no one for him to talk to. This had a deep impact on making him the person he became. He lived out these hurts in his adult life.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-16 chronicles some of the ways he attempted to deal with the inner pain in his life. He filled himself with pleasure, laughter, wine, sex and foolishness. He undertook great projects, building gardens, parks and entire cities. He amassed more wealth than anyone. He educated himself as thoroughly as possible. In the end, he achieved the American dream, but it didn't help him feel better. Still, everything was empty and meaningless (Eccl 1:2).

From his life we can see traits and characteristics of adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families. This can help us pinpoint symptoms in our lives so we can get to the root cause and heal them. Below are some of the symptoms:

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often go to extremes: overachieve or underachieve.** For Solomon it was overachieving. He built the temple and a great palace. He was known worldwide for his wisdom. He wrote 1005 psalms and 3,000 parables (I Kings 4:32). Still, it didn't meet the void in his heart. It was empty (Eccl 1:2).

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often get addictions.** Something is found to deaden pain. For Solomon, by his own admission, it was alcohol (Eccl 2:3; Prov 23:29-35). He seems intimately acquainted with the symptoms of alcoholism. Also, one could say he was addicted to work and sex as well. In order for those who are addicted to get victory today, the hidden pains that are being ignored must surface and be worked through.

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have a hard time with intimacy.** Solomon had 600 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3) -- the ultimate in seeking closeness but not being able to find it. He gave up quality for quantity. He wasn't able to relate intimately one on one, the same problem his father had. Despite all the people around him, he often talks of his loneliness

(Eccl 4:8). Many, many men especially have a hard time with intimacy today. Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families are often unable to have deep, consistent and meaningful relationships with others.

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have trouble labeling and expressing their feelings and emotions.** Substitutes are found: sex, power, success, etc. But they don't satisfy. For all his wisdom Solomon wasn't able to label his feelings in order to get a handle on them and deal with them in a mature way. He wasn't able to truly express his needs, his fears, his hurts and his anger. This is another common symptom today.

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often have a pattern of getting into one destructive relationship after another.** Solomon married one ungodly woman after another, despite the fact that they turned his and the nation against God (I Kings 11:2). How often do we see a woman go from one abusive man to another, or a young man be used and drained by a succession of selfish women?

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have trouble doing what they know is right.** Solomon knew God's word and had all wisdom, but he chose sex, alcohol, overwork and pagan idols over the living, true God. Knowing what one should do and then following through on that are very hard for adults who grew up in dysfunctional families. Thus, the solution isn't to educate them about what to do, but to remove the inner pains and bad patterns that keep them from doing what they know they should.

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families often continue to feel (and sometimes act) like children well into adulthood.** Solomon often refers to himself as a little child (I Ki 3:7). Often these adults feel like a small, vulnerable child who doesn't measure up to the adults around him. A fear of failure and/or rejection permeates everything. Often childlike reactions and behaviors are also present.

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families have a hard time handling success.** While they strive for it and need it to feel good about themselves, they have a hard time handling it when it does come. Solomon brought Israel to its high point but ended up a failure, not able to handle the role of a great king.

**Adults who have grown up in dysfunctional families pass on the family dysfunction to their children.** Solomon was influenced by his father David who was influenced by his father Jesse. Perhaps this went back through Obed and Boaz. Solomon then passed these traits on to his son Rehoboam. Instead of trusting the wisdom of those older and wiser than he, he put his own selfish greed first and increased the taxes on the people when he became king. This caused the nation to split. He was unable to take criticism and advice, he couldn't handle emotions in a mature, open way. What devastation that brings!

**WHAT KEEPS DYSFUNCTION GOING?** When a child grows up with a deep feeling of worthlessness, inadequacy and failure they affect every part of his life until they are removed. Unless a child has a good, healthy self-concept they won't have confidence or security to feel or express emotions. Everything will be geared to protecting themselves. Substitutes to real love and acceptance will abound, but none will satisfy. Guilt, fear, shame and manipulation will be the controlling factors in life. Only as one finds his security in Jesus' unconditional love and acceptance

can this be broken. If this sounds like you, turn to God for healing, forgiveness and an awareness of God's unconditional love and acceptance. What better place to start?

## Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

### 4. ABIGAIL: PICTURE OF CODEPENDENCY

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God created the family to, among other things, provide love and security for children. Children need to feel unconditionally loved and totally secure to mature emotionally into healthy adults. When they don't feel that from their parents, they must substitute or compensate in some way. They can't really mature past that until they find unconditional acceptance. Many never find it, and that's why so many turn to addictive or compulsive behaviors. They are trying to meet a legitimate need, but it will never be met by illegitimate means. I myself turned to sports in college and then good grades in college to impress people, because I needed everyone's approval. I didn't think people could like me for myself so I had to do things to earn their approval. This carried over into my ministry when I found myself 'serving' others more to meet my needs of approval and affirmation than to meet their needs. With God's help I have been able to make progress in breaking this, but it is dangerous because it so closely counterfeits Jesus' commands to die to self and live a life of service to others. Dysfunctional families also cause children to grow up as compulsives and addicts, but these are so obviously we as Christians clearly see their wrong. Codependency is much more difficult to point to as wrong and destructive. Putting others first can seem so virtuous. We even admire the person.

Maybe we should stop and define codependency before we go any further. The way I see it, a codependent person is one who is dependent on another to have emotional needs met. A wife who makes excuses and covers up for her alcoholic husband does so for her own sake, because she needs to feel like she is 'helping' him. She is dependent on his doing well for her to feel all right about herself. She cannot leave him to the consequences of his own wrong choices and still feel good about herself. She only finds meaning and purpose as she pours her life into 'helping' him, which in effect means she allows his sin pattern to continue. It takes both of them doing their part for his alcoholism to continue.

Codependents are well-adjusted, loving, caring, sincere people. Their love for God and others is true. However, they have been programmed from childhood on to take on more responsibility than they should have to have. They can handle high levels of pain with seeming ease. They can give and give and give. They become deeply angry inside that no one notices the great personal sacrifices they make. They never show the anger, for that would bring rejection. They stuff it inside and it turns to depression and causes them to dysfunction. With an already empty love tank, this extra drain on their emotional battery eventually leads to burnout and apathy. It's not a pretty picture.

**ABIGAIL** Seeing this in operation makes it easier to understand. Abigail and Nabal are such a couple. On the outside they seem like they have it all. She is beautiful and intelligent. He is wealthy and successful in business (1 Samuel 25:2). However, he was surly and mean (3). No one ever held him accountable for his behavior, instead they bailed him out and enable him to continue in it. We see this in the story of Nabal's encounter with David and his men. Because all of Nabal's men

were busy shearing his 3,000 sheep David was a good neighbor and protected the rest of Nabal's flocks and herds. When David's men went to collect their customary payment, Nabal was rude and insulting to them and refused to pay (4-11). David got 400 of his men and marched to destroy Nabal and all his family (12-13), which seems to have been a bit of an overreaction.

Obviously this kind of thing had been happening regularly, for everyone knew what to do. The servants bypassed Nabal and went to Abigail (14-17) who dropped everything and very efficiently handled the situation. She could be counted on to come through, putting the needs of others before her own no matter the personal sacrifices. Codependents feel they need to rescue or fix whatever goes wrong around them. They are great in a crisis and thrive on the responsibility, for it gives them a false sense of self-worth. They feel needed. Abigail came through, gathering much food (18) and taking it to David without telling Nathan (19). Codependents are used to facing problems alone. What is worse, they feel the problem is somehow their fault. If only they had been better or done this or that then the problem wouldn't have occurred. Abigail actually takes the blame for the whole thing when she meets David (20-25). She says she is at fault because she didn't find out about David's men, intercept them, and take care of the issue before they got to Nabal. Talk about enabling someone else to continue in their sin! That's like the woman who blames herself because her husband beats her, saying it wouldn't happen if she could just be a better wife.

Codependents are often very able, competent people. They can exert power when necessary. Abigail was able to persuade David to not take revenge (26-35). They are quite good at what they do, with excellent people-skills developed over the years. They are sincerely trying to help others, but things never work out for them, for they don't do anything to change destructive behavior, they just allow it to continue.

Abigail kept all this to herself, unable to talk to Nabal about it. Because he was drinking she knew she couldn't talk to him about it right away (36). When she did tell him he got so angry he had a stroke and eventually died (37-38). While his alcoholism contributed to this, Abigail didn't really help him by constantly bailing him out. She was just carrying on a codependent pattern she had probably learned earlier in life. These things just end up in destruction all around. The story didn't end nicely for Abigail, either.

Instead of taking time to get her life together (she was financially set for life) and relax for a while, she immediately married David. She needed to serve someone, and said she would serve David as well as David's servants (40-41). She never did get the personal relationship with a husband she needed, for David had already had other wives and married several more after Abigail. While excellent in his intimacy with God, David wasn't the best in his interpersonal relationships with family members. Thus, Abigail continued her pattern of giving and not getting for the rest of her life (or until she burnt out). I can almost imagine her blaming herself for David's multiple wives, thinking it was because she wasn't wife enough to satisfy him in all ways. Abigail was an excellent, godly woman with a very giving heart. However, she never learned that sometimes you can do more for someone by doing less for them. Her poor self-image caused her to have to do anything she could to feel good about herself and have others think highly of her. It drove her her whole life.

**SOLUTION** What about you? If you are unable to say no, feel guilty for not putting others first, neglect your own needs for the sake of others, and they feel drained and resentful about all you must do, you have codependent traits. Doing the same thing out of service for Jesus means being able to say no if that is what is best for the other, not being concerned about who knows what you've

done or how it all turns out, and you come away with peace and joy because you gave of yourself. When's it's done for Jesus it is true giving, when it's codependency it's really done for selfish reasons. Search your heart. It's important to recognize and admit the pattern in your own life. With God's help it can be broken, but it must be admitted to first of all.

## Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

### 5. JOSEPH: BREAKING CODEPENDENCY

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**AREN'T WE ALL DYSFUNCTIONAL?** We live in a fallen world in which nothing is perfect. No one is perfect, no relationship is perfect, no family is perfect. We all dysfunction in some ways. It's inevitable. We all bring our own emotional 'baggage' into our relationships. It's not a matter of IF we dysfunction but HOW and TO WHAT EXTENT we dysfunction. Just the same, it's not a matter of IF we are codependent, but HOW and TO WHAT EXTENT. All people have difficulties. All families have difficulties. What matters is what direction we are heading! Are our dysfunctions becoming more or less severe? Are we growing through and out of them, or are they getting more and more control over us?

**JOSEPH: A VICTIM OF A DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY** Joseph's dysfunction pattern actually started with his great-grandparents, Abraham and Sarah. To protect himself Abraham said that Sarah was his sister (Genesis 12:10), He was interested in his own survival no matter what happened to her. In fact, he did the same thing again later in life (Gen 20:1-18). Then that same destructive behavior repeated itself with his son, Isaac (Gen 26:7-10). This selfish pattern also exhibited itself by each parent, Isaac and Rebekah, choosing a favorite child. Deception and trickery between them and their children, Jacob and Esau, continued unabated. In a story that sounds like a soap opera, Jacob married Laban's two daughters. He had his favorites and the sisters became very competitive for his attention. As a result, Jacob ended up with twelve sons and one daughter. The sons competed intensely for their father's attention. Lying, resentment, jealousy, favoritism, manipulation, hatred and deception were a 'normal' part of their lives. Joseph, the choice of his father, was given special treatment (Genesis 37:3-4) and the brothers took their anger and hurt out on Joseph, selling him as a slave to a caravan headed to Egypt. This forced Joseph to begin a new life. He had to break old patterns and rely solely on God. He developed unusual strength and confidence in God's love and provision. He had to break old patterns to survive. It must have been painful, but it obviously happened for when his brothers showed up to buy food during the famine, Joseph handled it in a very mature way. Despite the conflicting and painful emotions raging inside him, he didn't brush off past hurts nor punish them for the past. Today we would call it a plan for intervention, for it was a way of causing each one to assume responsibility for their own actions and then challenging them to take positive steps to change their dysfunctional actions. The plan involved keeping one brother so they would have to bring Benjamin, then when Benjamin came planting his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack of grain. The brothers took responsibility for their sins against Joseph, and Judah even volunteered to suffer instead of Benjamin. Joseph had the courage to approach them in a way that would bring healing and reconciliation, and that is what happened. God used those 20 years in Egypt to do many things in Joseph's life, but one of those things was having him grow through his family's dysfunction. What happened? How did this happen? Probably it went something like this:



**FACE THE PAIN** What fuels dysfunction and codependency is fear of pain. Instead of feeling the pain of childhood rejection, abuse or neglect these are ignored and denied. It takes a lot of emotional energy to deny and ignore this pain, though, so there isn't enough emotional energy to be used for healthy, 'normal' life and relationships. The love tank is always empty. There is no emotional depth, no flexibility, no real stability. Fear is always just below the surface. The solution isn't to get in healthier relationships or act in less self-defeating ways. The solution is to look inside, recognize and admit the pain so healing can take place, and continue the growth process that stopped when the pain started. You have to explore your past and admit the truth of it in order to grow past it.

**What wrong roles did you play?** Were you the family Hero (like David) who was addicted to recognition and success, who always had to achieve more and more so he could uphold the family name, and who became an empty perfectionist? Were you the family Rebel (like Absalom) who deliberately underachieve, who became the family scapegoat who, by getting into trouble, kept the focus off the real problems in the family? Or maybe you were the family Caretaker (like Abigail), the little parent who was super-responsible, self-sacrificing and did everything possible to cover for the failures of others in the family? There are many other roles, too. To be free you must recognize the role and rewrite a healthier script to follow.

**What wrong rules did you learn?** All homes have rules, some are unhealthy and inappropriate such as: Don't talk about anything that upsets your parents. Don't think for yourself, just believe what you are told. Don't show or even feel 'bad' emotions. Be perfect. Don't make mistakes. Don't embarrass or bother others. Don't reveal family secrets. Recognize these when you find yourself applying them. Rewrite them by memorizing appropriate Scripture passages.

**What wrong recordings did you hear?** These are messages we have been given; statements made which play in our heads throughout life. 'You should be ashamed of yourself.' 'You'll never amount to anything.' 'Just look what you are doing to your mother!' 'Stop acting like a baby.' 'I'll give you something to cry about.' 'Why can't you be more like \_\_\_\_\_?' Recognize when they play in your head. Counter with God's truth. Reprogram your recordings.

Good Scripture passages to memorize include Rom 8:1, 15, 31; Psalm 103:11-14; Isaiah 49:15-16; Zeph 3:17; Mt 11:28-29; Psalm 103; etc.

**STOP THE SUBSTITUTES** To make the pain/love hunger/low self-esteem bearable a substitute for real love and intimacy is often used. These include work, sexual activities, food, spending, rescuing, romance novels, computer work, hobbies, drugs, alcohol, gambling, TV or any other number of addictive agents. Although they provide temporary relief, they don't remove the root problem. The guilt from the addiction and its consequences causes more pain, so a stronger dose of the agent is needed next time. The whole process is like a series of downward cycles. This must be recognized, admitted to and freely dropped. It isn't easy but is necessary. In fact, the pain gets worse before it gets better. Allowing the pain to surface while denying one's self any pain-killing substitutes can get really tough! That stage is the darkness before dawn, though.

**REPLACING THE UNHEALTHY WITH HEALTHY** Once that place is reached, then new self-perceptions and experiences can be molded to replace old, unhealthy ones. It's a long, slow process, but progress upward begins. Confidence develops as real intimacy and sound relationships develop. There is no one way, it's a little different for everyone. Still, these are the basic steps to

be followed to bring deliverance from codependency and dysfunction. It isn't easy, but most worthwhile things aren't. Remember, with Jesus all things are possible (Matt 19:26).

# Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

## 6. DAVID: EFFECTS OF FALSE GUILT ON A FAMILY

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There is an old Jewish proverb that says “Shame is an iron fence that guards us from sin.” That’s true. Feeling shameful (guilty) for sinful behavior acts as a preventative. It’s only helpful, though, if the shame and guilt we feel is true, legitimate, God-given shame. Unfortunately, we learn to feel guilty about many things that we shouldn’t feel guilty for, such as our own legitimate needs and thinking of ourselves as equal to other people. While God created guilt to motivate us to keep from sin, and to confess it as soon as we commit it, many people are taught to feel guilty about things that aren’t sinful. This leads to much confusion.

**ADAM & EVE** were the first to feel any shame for they were the first to sin. They covered themselves and hid from God (Gen. 3:7). This was healthy, legitimate spiritual shame because they had done something dreadfully wrong. True guilt stems from the violation or transgression of God’s principles as expressed in the Bible. It motivates us to ask for forgiveness. However, like Adam and Eve, we often don’t take the blame for our sin but rationalize it, deny our actions, or blame others. Adam and Eve tried to hide their sin, then tried to remove it (cover themselves) themselves and finally blamed someone else. Sin brings shame, but it must be confessed and removed. This is true humility. Seeing ourselves in comparison to God’s greatness brings healthy guilt (Isa 6:1-8).

If we don’t deal with legitimate guilt according to God’s standards or repentance and forgiveness, then it becomes a toxic force that leads us down an increasingly destructive path. God has freely provided for the removal of our legitimate shame by the blood of Jesus. He doesn’t want us to wallow in that misery and guilt. When Jesus talked to the woman at the well He pointed out her sin of immorality, but only to show her her need of Him. He didn’t rub it in or put her down.

**HEALTHY SPIRITUAL SHAME** convicts us of sin, prompts us to repent, and draws us toward God. Toxic spiritual shame, that which doesn’t come from God, makes us feel distant from God and causes us to believe we are too bad or somehow unworthy of God’s love. This results from not handling healthy spiritual shame by confessing and accepting God’s forgiveness. It can also come from wrong ideas of what is shameful that have built into us in childhood. The same is true of guilt that comes from wrong behavior in our dealings with others.

**HEALTHY RELATIONAL SHAME**, like spiritual shame, shows us a relationship has been damaged by something we did (or didn’t do). In the spiritual realm this affects our relationship with God, but the same thing is true in our relationships with others. Healthy relational shame enables us to say “I’m sorry” when we have injured others. It helps us to set legitimate boundaries in areas of health, privacy and modesty. It is the foundation for a healthy embarrassment. False guilt in relationships with others, though, just pushes us further into perfectionism. We think we must be perfect to like ourselves or to have anyone like us. It causes us to need other people’s approval (codependency) and we end up buying the law that we never can be good enough. We deny and ‘stuff’ our feelings and problems instead of facing them. Healthy shame lets us know when we have violated a law or principle and need to make amends. That’s why it’s so important for children to learn true, healthy limits and values. Building guilt into children for things which God doesn’t label as sin can be devastating. Using false guilt or shame to manipulate behavior is extremely damaging!

**DAVID’S SHAME MESSAGES** from God were heeded and led to his repentance. Spiritually he received and handled shame messages well. Unfortunately, the relational shame messages he internalized were primarily toxic. He put guilt on his children for things they weren’t guilty of. Tamar was made to feel guilty because she was raped and wanted justice done. Absalom was shamed for trying to bring the family problems

into the open so they could be addressed. When they believed these messages from David their healthy behavior became unhealthy. Accepting false guilt as true guilt causes a person to adopt dysfunctional, codependent, compulsive and addictive behaviors in a vain attempt to anesthetize the bad feelings of toxic shame. People in recovery are actively working to internalize healthy shame messages and let go of the toxic shame messages that have kept them in dysfunction.

Individuals in shame-bound families tend to place the blame for their difficulties on other family members, not themselves. Amnon blamed Tamar for being raped and so did David by his silence. A husband may blame his affair or his drinking on his wife's lack of sexual responsiveness to him instead of taking responsibility for his own sin.

In shame-based families, feelings are considered to be 'bad,' so emotions are ignored, denied or punished. That happened to Amnon and Absalom. Certain members of shame-based families tend to dominate and strive to maintain the status quo. David was afraid of change and wouldn't face the family problems. He kept certain family members apart so things would go 'smoothly on. There is much controlling going on in their families.

People are made to feel worthless by rejection, shame, silence or other means. David wouldn't talk to Absalom for years, and Absalom told Tamar to be silent about her problems.

**TOXIC SHAME MESSAGES IN CHILDHOOD** come to children in dysfunctional families because they have normal needs and desires to be held, emotionally nurtured, ask questions and test boundaries. Children in dysfunctional families receive shame and guilt when they express these normal needs. Thus, they grow up feeling guilty because they have these needs. Not only are the needs never correctly met, but rejection comes for even having the need. Children feel something is wrong with them, they are inferior, sinful, 'bad' and unworthy. They push all this into their subconscious because facing the hurt from it is too painful. Children are unable to realize that their parents are sending wrong messages and they are too immature to handle these messages in a healthy way. These end up totally affecting the way a person will relate to others as well as God. Normal daily interactions with people trigger deep feelings of toxic shame from within. Fear, rejection, failure, legitimate needs and many other hidden feelings start the cycle of shame, guilt, withdrawal, defensiveness and substituting with other means of meeting legitimate needs.

Perfectionism results, for that is the only way of feeling worthy. Of course, it is never attained. Unattainable standards make it impossible for the person themselves or those around them to ever measure up. Thus, more guilt is felt and the standards get even higher and higher. Forgiving self or others is impossible, for we don't feel worthy of being forgiven and we are caught in the trap proving we are better than others. Forgiving them just doesn't fit. Bitterness and anger build. Denial of all of this keeps the pain hidden within. God seems distant and grace is just an abstract term.

**RELIGIOUS SHAME** makes this even worse. Often churches and Christians communicate that it is not permissible to admit deep hurts or confess personal struggles. Negative emotions are to be hid to be a 'good' Christian. Anyone who breaks these rules is looked down on, thus adding to their shame and guilt. Sometimes even God Himself appears to be in on it, for parents often use the Bible to support these wrong opinions. Too often Christians see having problems as being sinful, that they must be perfect, and that emotions (especially negative ones) are sinful. Fun and pleasure are looked upon as sinful, as is sex. Success is sinful, and so is lack of success. If one is a Christian but still struggles shame is felt, for often we are told that if we prayed enough, had enough faith, or whatever, our problems would be gone.

**CHANGE IS HARD** as well as scary, but it can be done. It is a gradual process of recognizing that some of our feelings of shame and guilt are wrong, false, unhealthy. They must be labeled and identified, then God's truth must be held up against them. Our mind must explain reality to our emotions until the truth starts replacing the lies in our minds and hearts. The idea isn't just to change outer behavior but replace inner lies with truth. God's promise stands true: The truth still sets man free (John 8:32).

# Marriage & Family – VIII. HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL WORLD

## 7. JESUS: RECOVERY FROM CODEPENDENCY, DYSFUNCTION AND FALSE GUILT

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As in all things, Jesus is our model of healthy Christian living. Often we think He wouldn't care or understand, but that just isn't so! He knows all we go through, not just because He is God but because He went through everything we go through (Heb. 4:15-16). *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

If you wonder how He could possibly understand, just remember His life. His mother was pregnant before getting married, and the gossip and criticism of that followed Him His whole life (John 8:41). He was born in a barn (cave) far from home to young parents who faced fear, anxiety, tension and shame because she was pregnant before getting married. Before long a powerful king was doing everything he could to have Him killed. He lived in four different homes before He was four years old!

When He was 12 He had to start setting appropriate boundaries with His parents so He could pull away and be the Person God wanted Him to be (Luke 2:41-52). He had to take control of His own life instead of letting His parents control Him. The same thing happened in Cana when His mother gave Him orders of what she wanted. Jesus had to lovingly draw the line (set a boundary) (John 2:4). A little while later His brothers came with His mother to take Him home because they thought He had lost His mind (Mark 3:31-35). Talk about lacking family support and approval!

He had to set boundaries against evil, too (Mt 4:1-11). Standing up to everyone when He cleansed the temple (done twice) was quite a stand which brought much rejection (Mt 21:12-16). He needed to set boundaries to protect His time, often withdrawing from the crowds and sometimes even from the disciples so He could have much-needed time alone (Mt 14:13-24).

He set boundaries for others, too -- protecting children when they were criticized by the disciples (Matt 18:5-6; Mark 10:13-14). Thus, it is easy to see how Jesus can understand our hurt, pain, rejection, misunderstanding and loneliness. He truly does know -- so turn to Him for help (Heb 4:15-16).

### **A TIME FOR EVERYTHING ...**

*1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:*

*2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,*

*3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,*

*4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,*

*5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,*

*6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,*

*7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,*

*8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. - Eccl 3:1-8*

This well-known passage sums up how we are to handle the changes taking place within. It's good wisdom in all areas, and its truths apply very well to overcoming dysfunction.

**A time to plant and a time to uproot.** Farmers learn patience, and that is important in having victory over dysfunction. It takes time. Seeds are planed unseen and germinate without any visible change, then the results start popping through the surface. That happens in the changes God makes within. He will patiently keep them growing until they yield fruit -- in HIS time: *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6)*. Also remember that things grow in cycles: growth then rest to absorb the growth, strengthen, and get ready for the next growth spurt. This happens all over physically, and also is the way God works spiritually and emotionally, too.

**A time to be born and a time to die.** We can't control the most important things in life, birth and death, so we shouldn't try to the things in-between, either. Emotional health means giving up trying to control everything and letting God be the one in control.

**A time to kill and a time to heal.** Notice the order: death comes first, then healing. There are thoughts, patterns, ideas and memories that need to be killed. We have monsters to face, pain to feel, fear to work through and bitterness to confess. Then, and only then, will God heal.

**A time to tear down and a time to build ... a time to tear and a time to mend.** Tearing down must come before mending. Barriers we have built up, walls to keep others out, dysfunctional patterns -- all must be torn down for new to be built. Instead of tearing down others around us we need to tear down the dysfunctional responses that have been built into us.

**A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance.** We need to allow ourselves to experience the whole realm of emotions. We must give ourselves permission to feel and express the deep emotions that have been shut down for so long. Until we get in touch with our own feelings we won't be able to be in touch with the feelings of others. This is especially true of men. Weeping is allowed! Jesus wept (Jn 11:35). Emotions stuffed inside since childhood must be allowed out. Laughter, too, is important. We must give ourselves permission to laugh and enjoy life, realize we are worthy of pleasure and deserve it.

**A time to embrace and a time to refrain.** An embrace communicates so much, but often it is a big risk to reach out and touch someone or allow some to touch us. That is an important part of healing. Sometimes this can become a crutch, a substitute, or bring back painful childhood memories of abusive touching. That's when it's time to refrain.

**A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. A time to search and a time to give up. A time to keep and a time to throw away.** Recovery means dealing with new feelings, redefining one's identity, rediscovering new ways to relate to people, and changing the rules we live by. Change can be scary. May would rather stay in pain and dysfunction than face the unknown that change brings. Talking with other helps. Putting your feelings into words allows you to put a word label on them so you can handle them. Journalizing is a good way of accomplishing this, too.

**A time to be silent and a time to speak.** Part of healthy maturity is knowing what to say when and then when to not talk. Silence can speak volumes at the right time and in the right way.

**A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.** Recovery means an increased ability to experience the full range of emotions that God created. That's the goal of maturity. Spiritual growth is so dependent on emotional maturity that one can't just grow as a Christian without working through hurts and issues from the past. We aren't to dwell on them, but they must be faced and removed. There is a time to focus on them and a time to set them aside and go on with life. Only God can give wisdom to know which to do when. He will provide that for us -- just ask Him. He waits to help you walk this new path, but you must ask.