

Celebrate Marriage!



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with

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Preface

Affirming the *Real* Traditional Marriage in Changing Times

As foundational as the marriage institution is considered to be by most societies, it is truly amazing that few, if any, engage in anything like a consistent periodic assessment of the “state of our unions” (The National Marriage Project, 1999). This is all the more astounding as societies around the globe find themselves in the midst of what social historians mark as “a world-historic transformation of marriage and family life” from which most are convinced “there will be no turning back” (Coontz, 2004, p. 979).

The *Symposium on Marriage and Its Future*, convened in the United States by the increasingly international National Council on Family Relations in 2003, marked several recurring themes that criss-cross current research literature on marriage (Smock, 2004):

Retreat of marriage. One theme stresses the “retreat of marriage,” at least in more developed regions, that is marked by well-documented indicators such as “declining fertility, increasing age at marriage, high levels of marital disruption, a growing separation between marriage and childbearing as manifested in an increasing proportion of children being born outside marriage, and the growth of nonmarital cohabitation” (Smock, 2004, p. 967). Most agree that the social, economic and cultural forces that undergird these realities are complex and interconnected. While causality is difficult to demonstrate, changes such as more flexibility in male-female roles in society and in the family, expectations for high levels of marital satisfaction and love in marriage, and the high value placed on personal choice and development accompany this shift.

High value placed on marriage. Even among the very poor where the decline of marriage is most notable, people still want to get married, even if realistically they don’t consider it likely. Researchers do note, however, that the “raising the bar” on marital expectation has also raised the bar on the “decision to marry or to stay married” (Smock, 2004, p. 968).

Economic well-being the driving factor in marrying and staying married. The bottom line is that those with adequate financial resources are more likely to marry and stay married. Many who would like to marry feel they cannot because they simply cannot find the resources to get married or to support themselves as a married couple at a level they find acceptable.

The importance of social context. As important as internal relational dynamics are to the couples’ sense of marital well-being, social factors such as “the availability of reliable child care, safer neighborhoods, affordable housing, higher wages, and improved access to high-quality medical care” (Bradbury & Karney, 2004) also profoundly affect the quality of the marital relationship at any given point in time.

So what of the future of marriage? The concern is certainly not new. “Ever since ancient Egypt and classical Rome, older generations have been bemoaning the loss of older family forms or marital values and predicting disaster for the next generation” (Coontz, 2004, p. 979). However, the best projection from the marriage experts, as they lift their professional binoculars to look down the road, is that marriage is here for the long haul.

Even more significant, however, is the conclusion that “marriage will never regain its monopoly over the regulation of sex, the rearing of children, [or] the transmission of resources from the older to the younger generation, or the organization of the division of labor by gender” (p. 978). In

the professionals' crystal ball, marriage forms will continue to proliferate as the strong wall of separation between what we call marriage and what we do not call marriage continues to crumble.

In these times of momentous change, some would call us back to "traditional marriage" as characterized by the "ideal family" of the 1950's in the Western world, the Victorian era of the nineteenth century, or some like vision from the past in other societies. However, the call of the gospel to Christians is to a bedrock ideal established by God Himself at the Creation.

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

. . . So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

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

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

It is in the stretch toward recapturing the institution and the experience of marriage—as it came from the Creator's hand and as it has been recreated in Christ—that this *Family Ministries Planbook 2005* moves from our desk to yours.

God bless!

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“And They Lived Happily Ever After”: The Myth and Miracle of Marriage

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Happily Ever After?

Our title is “And they lived happily ever after.” Isn’t that how every good fairy tale love story ends? Popular Christian writer and speaker Chuck Swindoll tells in his book *Strike the Original Match* (1980) about little four-year-old Suzie, who had just been told the story of “Snow White” for the first time in her life.

She could hardly wait to get home from nursery school to tell her mommy. With wide-eyed excitement, she retold the fairy tale to her mother that afternoon. After relating how Prince Charming had arrived on his beautiful white horse and kissed Snow White back to life, Suzie asked loudly:

"And do you know what happened then?"

"Well yes," said her mom, "they lived happily ever after."

"No," responded Suzie, with a frown, ". . . they got married." (p. 39)

A pretty perceptive comment from the lips of an innocent four-year-old, wouldn't you say? Because getting married and living happily ever after are not necessarily one and the same thing! Some have concluded they are never one and the same!

Consider the fairy tale wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Lady Diana Frances Spencer, herself the child of divorce with an unhappy girlhood, had fallen in love with the most eligible bachelor in the world, handsome Prince Charming himself. On July 29, 1981, three quarters of a billion people in 74 countries (my wife, Karen, and I were among them) tuned in to a brilliantly choreographed spectacle christened “The Wedding of the Century.” When the royal nuptial couple stood before the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, the whole world listened as he intoned a blessing upon the Prince and his Princess-to-be. Here is a bit of the wedding homily:

Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made: the Prince and Princess on their wedding day. But fairy tales usually end at this point with the simple phrase: "They lived happily ever after." This may be because fairy stories regard marriage as an anti-climax after the romance of courtship. (Brondos, 2004)

Little did the world know that the marriage created that day in London would in fact become exactly what the minister intoned that it wouldn't: “an anticlimax after the romance of courtship.” Sixteen years, one month, and one week later—the princess with whom the world fell in love died in Paris, the victim of a senseless automobile accident. This time, a billion people gathered about their television sets at the time of the state funeral to mourn the death of the princess who never lived happily ever after.

Beleaguered Marriages and Families

So, on that somber note, I ask you: What is the truth about “happy marriage”? Is it a myth? Is it a mystery? Is it a miracle? Is it even possible any more to live happily ever after?

It used to be fashionable to present woeful divorce statistics to make the case that marriage is an embattled institution. I’m not going to cite those statistics. The fact is, this present generation of young adults, dubbed “Generation X” or “GenXers,” if you please—needs no statistics about marriage. These young adults are the product of the most broken generation in the history of the world. If you want some numbers, try these: Every 24 hours, 3533 children are born to unmarried mothers and over 2500 children witness the divorce or separation of their parents. Added together, over 6033 children every day are ushered into the ranks of broken homes, shattered relationships, and fractured families. And that’s just in the United States. It is no wonder that GenXers carry a very jaded picture of marital stability. No wonder they are staying away from marriage in droves!

Is the picture hopeless? Is there hope for the embattled, beleaguered institution of holy wedlock (“unholy deadlock” as one quipster put it)? Can a broken home be healed? Can a fractured family be restored? Can a bad marriage become a good one? Can a good marriage become the best? Can a mediocre love become a marvelous love? And, even if I never get married, can I experience God’s very best gift of friendship and love in my life, too?

Well, I don’t want to promise you the moon, but do I have some very good news for all of us; it is wrapped up in the story of Jesus.

Preaching with Sensitivity about Marriage

Before we go to the Scriptures and the good news in Jesus, may I be candid with you? I’m a bit hesitant to preach on the topic of marriage. First of all, I’m afraid I might sound as if I were an expert on the subject. I am not! True, I have given pre-marital counsel to scores of couples and performed many weddings. Also, I have the experience of 24 ½ years of marriage with Karen (ever since that day that I said, “Wilt thou?” and she wilted!). And they have been, by and large, happy years. It wouldn’t be honest of me, though, to not admit that we’ve faced our share of marital struggles and adjustments along the way. We have not found every day to be a “tiptoeing through the tulips” as singer-entertainer Tiny Tim once crooned. The fact is, Karen and I, along with all who are married, are “in process” together. The journey of marriage goes on and on. My fear is that, when I speak about marriage, Karen will take notes, which I’m sure she’ll read back to me in negligent moments of forgetfulness on my part (“Now about that marriage sermon in which you said. . .!”).

My second reason for hesitancy comes from realizing that not all who hear this are married. Some are single by choice or by circumstances over which they have no control. I’m concerned that someone might conclude that marriage is the only prescribed formula for human happiness. Television host Art Linkletter once asked a little girl, “What’s your favorite Bible story?” “Noah’s ark,” she replied. “Oh really? And what does that story tell you?” he went on. “Well, the animals went in 2 by 2; so you have to get married if you don’t want to get left behind.” I really don’t think that was God’s intended lesson! I do want those who are single to find in the shining story we’re about to share some vital principles to make their relationships the most satisfying and fulfilling they can be.

Finally, I hesitate to speak about marriage because I know there are some very hurting hearts who are listening, some very dear hearts, whose pilgrimage has led them through divorce. I know that no matter how long ago the divorce took place, you may not be through with the pain. People who have experienced divorce tell me that the wounds, the hurts, and the scars run deep. So I hesitate . . . for fear that somehow it might sound as if married people are criticizing or condemning those who have suffered the hurt of divorce and who feel they have failed. God doesn’t castigate and condemn. I don’t plan to either. Neither should the church, by the way!

Jesus is in the business of offering healing and hope. He offers this to those who are surviving beyond marriage as well as those who are surviving within marriage, which means all of us who are married! Yes, you're right. God's blueprint for happiness in the Garden at the beginning was that marriage would be a joyful reality for the entire human race. But we do not live in a faultless Garden; we live in a fallen world. So, in the midst of all our failures and faults, God steps in with a word of hope and healing for every one of us: single, married, remarried, divorced, widowed, all of us.

The Divine Secret to Fulfilled Marriage and Friendship

Setting hesitations aside, let's turn to the hope and healing that are offered in Christ. Let's look closely at a single event in the life of Jesus, an incident that has much to do with our marriages and that reaches beyond marriage to touch us all. Let's read John 2:1-10:

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. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

There it is—the secret to every marriage, the secret to every relationship. It is found in the astonished exclamation of the master of ceremonies to the groom: “You have saved the best till now.” As one translation puts it, “You have saved the best till last!” Jesus provides that which is best, whether at a wedding, in a marriage, or in life! When you have Jesus, you have the Source of the miracle. Jesus, the Savior of the Marriage. Jesus, the Miracle Worker. Jesus, the Marriage Partner.

Three make a marriage. In God's strategic plan for happiness in marriage it always takes three to make a marriage. Also, it takes three to make a friendship last forever! That vital principle is powerfully expressed in the little book of Ecclesiastes. “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work” (Eccles. 4:9). “Two are better than one”—everyone who's wanted a friend knows that is certainly true, isn't it?

When I was a college student, an Australian band called *Three Dog Night* sang a song called “One,” with a truth we all recognize: “One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do.” We need others in our lives. In fact, there is a new take on that old Barbara Streisand song, “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.” We now know that people who need people are the healthiest, too!

Back in the 1970's Leonard Syme, professor of epidemiology at the University of California at Berkeley, was trying to find out why Japanese men living in California had two to five times as much heart disease, despite having the same cholesterol levels, as Japanese men living in Japan. The difference? Companionship and close social ties. Most of us, when we are one, long to be two. That longing, that built-in desire for companionship, is the stuff of which friendships are made!

Reading again in Ecclesiastes 4:9-11:

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:
If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one
to help him up!
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?*

But if you want to do the arithmetic of strength and durability and power you can do one better than two, that is, three! Let's continue and read verse 12:

*Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands
is not quickly broken.”*

There's an illustration I've used in wedding sermons: Take a look at a piece of decorative cord or rope, like the kind used on special occasions to designate reserved pews in a church. Notice the composition of this cord; it is made up of three strands. When those three strands are woven together, you have a cord that can withstand incredible stress and pull! That is precisely the point made in Scripture! The presence of Christ gives strength to marriage.

Created for Companionship

Go back with me to the day God created marriage, all the way back to the Garden of Eden!

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen. 1:27).

God is a relational Being who lives and loves for friendship. Why then should anyone be surprised that the human race, which He created in His own image, reflects that very same relational hunger? Human beings have been created from the beginning to thrive on companionship! God created one-half of the human race first, precisely so He might, in a forever sort of way, illustrate how we've all been created for companionship. Here is how the Bible records it:

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. (Gen. 2:19, 20)

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen. 2:18)

With that amazing self-discovery, Adam becomes the very first surgery patient! Read verses 21 and 22,

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

When Adam opened his eyes he was gazing upon the most heart-stopping, breath-taking, pulse-pounding, mouth-gaping, eye-widening beauty in all the world—Eve! “*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' . . .*” (Gen. 2: 23).

Now I have heard a lot of quips about God making man first and then woman. Some say that after God got through with Adam, He muttered to Himself, “I can do better than that,” and so He created Eve. The fact is, God created the male and female halves of the human race separately to heighten the dramatic realization that man and woman were meant for co-equal, co-operative companionship. Please note, gentlemen, God took a rib out of the side of Adam, not a bone out of his foot or a piece of his skull. No, she was not to lord it over him nor was she to be trodden underfoot. She came from his side, to stand by his side. God took a bone right over the heart of Adam, so that forever it would be shown that man and woman, husband and wife, were to be forever friends and forever partners, hand in hand and heart to heart, in caring for God’s perfect creation.

Who is it that preaches the first wedding sermon? It must be the One who brought them together. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). There you have it from the very beginning. Human marriages were designed by the Creator to operate at optimum happiness and fulfillment with God’s mathematics: God + Husband + Wife = One.

Somebody once had the audacity to quip: “In marriage a man and a woman become one; the trouble starts when they try to decide which one!” No, no, no! When marriage is a cord of three strands—God and man and woman—the miracle of oneness is the mysterious blending of two proud, independent lives joined by God into a single living, loving creation. In God’s arithmetic, $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. It was that way in the beginning. It must be that way in the ending, too. Even in this generation the promise of God’s arithmetic still holds true: *If you will be one in the Lord, He will make you into one for life!*

Practical Principles for Marriage

How does it work? Let me share with you several very practical, doable principles that God offers in His Word for those who are contemplating marriage, for those who long to turn their marriage around, and for those who want to make a good thing even better!

Principle 1 – “Love.” The first principle is wrapped up in the word “love.” Here is what Ephesians 5:25-29 says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--

There are no bigger babies in the world than men! Watch a man as he stares into the morning mirror. Notice how gently he strokes his face, shaving it as if it was a work of art, every little nick and cut is tenderly bathed and treated as if it were major surgery. Watch a man as he combs his hair (some just polish their dome!). Every hair is carefully laid down and manicured and sprayed. Women may be vain, but I believe men are “vainer”! *And that*, Paul writes, *is how you husbands are to care for your wives—just like you baby your bodies—with tender loving care.*

Paul adds as incentive the supreme example of loving in all human history. He takes us husbands to the cross of Christ and, pointing up into the dying face of Jesus, he exclaims, “*Listen guys, love your wives just like Christ loved the Church.*” The Greek word for “love”—*agape* (the noun) or *agapao* (the verb)—means “self-sacrificing, self-crucifying love.” It’s the same love as is found in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in

him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It is the kind of love that is willing to sacrifice itself for the good of the other. It places that which is best for the other above itself! Interpreted, husbands, this means that *we are to place the interests of our wives ahead of the interests of our lives*. My wife is more important than my life. I must love her like Jesus loved me.

I used to pastor churches in Coquille and Myrtle Point, Oregon, where there were several huge lumber mills. Sometimes, as they floated the timber down the river, all the logs got so jammed together that the entire flow was brought to a halt. The only way to free such a log jam was to remove the offending log that prevented the movement downstream of the rest. So, for example, when we have a marital argument and it really heats up to either high decibels or loud silence, it is my responsibility to initiate breaking the log jam. *It is the husband's duty to humble himself and remove that jamming log*. “Honey (You are not required to use that word, but generally a term of endearment wouldn't hurt on an occasion like this!), I'm sorry for letting this argument grow to this point. I was wrong (even though your point may have been right) in letting anger escalate. I apologize. I want to remove the log jam so that our marriage can flow smoothly once again.” It is the husband's responsibility to crucify self, initiate the apology, and seek reconciliation.

According to this self-sacrificing love principle, the man is not to pout and wait until his wife comes seeking reconciliation, “Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved...”

Principle number one is *love*, self-sacrificing love. By the way, just because Paul calls husbands to initiate self-sacrificing love doesn't mean that wives aren't to love in the same way! Ephesians 5:21 is clear, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” There is a mutual submission in love to one another! But somebody has got to take the initiative, and husbands, you and I are it! That doesn't make us greater; it should make us humbler. *Love*.

Principle 2 – “Like.” *Like* one another. That is a biblical principle, as the Song of Solomon clearly documents! The Song of Solomon, one of the greatest love songs in literature, says: “This is my lover, this my friend” (Song of Sol. 5:16). Marriages that last and last are not only for lovers, they're for friends—people who not only love each other, but who also like each other.

Marriages are not automatic; we have got to invest ourselves in this lifelong friendship. We put effort into every other friendship that lasts; why not marriage?

My mother sent Karen and me a wonderful book several years ago by Wayne Rickerson (1982) that deals with how to keep the spark and life and adventure growing in your marriage. The author's bottom line point is simple—we must *set goals* for our marriages. What does that mean? Listen to some of the practical ideas he suggests to keep us looking forward to our future together:

- Plan a tradition—something we can do each year.
- Select another couple to develop a close friendship with.
- Have dinner together, just the two of us, once a month.
- Schedule a yearly planning retreat for just the two of us.
- Plan a trip to Hawaii (long-range perhaps?).
- Take a class together (cooking, photography, landscaping, etc.).
- Take up a sport together (jogging, tennis, racket ball swimming, golf, etc.).
- Walk and talk—a regular time to walk together, talking of things of interest.
- A hobby—rock hounding, mountain climbing, photography, needlepoint, etc.
- Have lunch out together once a week
- Read a book together (perhaps one or two a year on marriage, and discuss). (p. 52)

Share something fun, something enjoyable through which you can grow closer and closer. Plainly stated, *keep liking each other!* I love the exclamation by Solomon’s lover in that passage we read earlier: “This is my lover and this is my friend!” With some intentional planning, we can all keep our marriages growing as friendships—*not only loving but also liking each other.*

Principle 3 – “Let . . .” I realize there could be 30 principles instead of 3, but this one is critical for healing marriages as well as growing them. We looked at “love” and “like.” This one is *Let . . .* “Love,” “Like” and “Let . . .;” more specifically, *let go.* That is exactly what the Bible is counseling in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Some of you have been hurt very deeply by your spouses. I know; I have heard the litany of heartache and tears as a pastor. I have listened to men sob and women sob, heartbroken over a broken marriage. But God freely offers a powerful healing balm to every marriage that wants it, to every spouse that will receive it. That marital potion, that special medicine is called *forgiveness.*

The common Greek word for “forgiveness” literally means “to pardon,” “to release,” “to *let go.*” No one is suggesting that spouse abuse or child abuse or continuing infidelity ought to be tolerated or embraced as some sort of virtuous humility. Such destructive behavior must be abandoned. If the one inflicting it will not abandon it, then the one receiving it will need, at least for a time, to step out from under that crippling and destroying abuse. But even then, can forgiveness become a healer?

I’ll never forget reading a news article about a grown son who described his life as a child with an alcoholic father. All the way through the article you feel the deep underlying bitterness of the pain inflicted on him by his father over the years. The son’s closing words: “I hated my father for the first twenty years of my life. I don’t hate him anymore. I understand, but I won’t forgive. So don’t go sticking your hand out, father, waiting for someone to shake it. Keep your hand to yourself.”

A paradox. Perhaps he won’t. But that is tragic, for without forgiveness he will never be healed either. Listen as Lewis Smedes describes the paradox of forgiveness: “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you” (Smedes, 1983, p. 26).

Reread Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” You see, Calvary is the shining summit for all loving, all liking, all letting go. At the cross we are confronted with the infinite price God Himself paid to forgive us as runaway rebels. Jesus on that fated Friday did *not* pray, “Father, curse them for they know what they do.” He prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Knowing the billion times I have spit in the face of God by choosing to ignore Him, knowing that He has gone on loving me and chasing me and pleading with me to accept His love and friendship, and knowing that I have been forgiven forever by my Father and Friend—then and only then can I know *that he has all the strength and courage and love I will need to forgive the one who has hurt me so deeply.*

Not forgetting, but letting go. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” *Forgiving does not mean forgetting.* There are some wounds and scars that are impossible to forget. As J. Allan Petersen has written in his book, *The Myth of the Greener Grass* (1983): “Forgiveness is not an eraser that wipes the memory of the act forever from your mind. That’s impossible. It is still history. The scar may be permanent” (p. 145).

It does not mean forgetting, but *forgiving does mean letting go,* releasing the one who has hurt you into the care and keeping of God with the quiet prayer: “I forgive you for what you did to me,

even as God has forgiven me for what I have done to Him. I choose to *let go* of my anger and bitterness toward you. I forgive you.”

Conclusion

A woman wrote this letter to “Dear Abby,” columnist Abigail Van Buren:

Dear Abby: I was twenty and he was twenty-six. We had been married two years and I hadn’t dreamed he could be unfaithful. The awful truth was brought home to me when a young widow from a neighboring farm came to tell me she was carrying my husband’s child. My world collapsed. I wanted to die. I fought an urge to kill her. And him.

I knew that wasn’t the answer. I prayed for strength and guidance. And it came. I knew I had to forgive this man, and I did. I forgave her, too. I calmly told my husband what I had learned and the three of us worked out a solution together. (What a frightened little creature she was!) The baby was born in my home. Everyone thought I had given birth and that my neighbor was ‘helping me.’ Actually it was the other way around. But the widow was spared humiliation (she had three other children), and the little boy was raised as my own. He never knew the truth.

Was this divine compensation for my own inability to bear a child? I do not know. I have never mentioned this incident to my husband. It has been a closed chapter in our lives for fifty years. But I’ve read the love and gratitude in his eyes a thousand times. (Quoted in Peterson, 1983, pp. 146, 147)

You see, the master of ceremonies at the village wedding was right: “You have saved the best till last,” because with Jesus the very best does come last. With Jesus you can love again . . . and like again . . . and let go again . . . and again . . . and again. With Jesus, living happily ever after turns a myth into a miracle. The very miracle every marriage was made for!

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Knowing Heavenly Father

by Ron Flowers

“I’ve Never Known Him as a God of Love”

“I’ve never known him as a God of love.” That was the declaration of the old man that day when the pastor visited him. An active layman, he had for years been this small congregation’s only elder. In recent times he had been preaching more and more, for the church district was large with multiple congregations, and the pastor depended on the elders to preach in his absence.

He was an old man, retired, with time to give. For years he had kept the congregation under his wing as his own. He was like a father to it, but not a gentle one. Complaints began to come in of his tough talk from the pulpit. Not only was he the head elder, but the dwindling group had made him their treasurer too. So, when tithes and offerings dropped off during one particularly difficult period in the little church, he took advantage of his position as the chief financial officer. He railed against the members, rebuking them for their failure to heed the commands of God given in Malachi to “bring all the tithes into the storehouse.” He chastised them for their ingratitude toward God, which was obvious, he pointed out, because of the decrease in freewill offerings. Again and again he ranted against the people for their lack of Bible knowledge, their failure to be on time, for the fact that they didn’t sing joyfully or loudly enough. And when their faces grew long, he frowned on them, admonishing that they should be smiling, happy Christians for all the world to see.

The situation reached critical proportions. Regulars were noticeably absent. Visitors came, usually only once. Some members complained, “He never preaches about the love of God.” “Please pastor,” pleaded an elderly widow one day, “don’t let this man preach to us anymore. He has the church in the palm of his hand and is squeezing it until all the juices squirt out between his fingers!”

That was the occasion for the visit the day the story came out. When the pastor brought up the desire of the members to hear more sermons on the love of God, the hard old elder actually broke into tears. Almost immediately, he launched into a tale about a little boy and his dad. The boy, it seems, had constantly tried to get his father’s attention, but was always pushed away. He never heard words of kindness or appreciation from his father, even when he brought home a good report card, even when he faithfully completed all his chores. He so much wanted an affectionate touch, a hug, a pat on the head. But no, his father would often slap him around, even kick him, telling him to get away—that he didn’t have time for silly games. And he was sure the boy had homework or chores or something that he wasn’t getting done.

The pastor listened, moved by the story, curious as to its point and purpose. Shortly he knew; this was the elder’s own story! The elder never said so, but it was evident—from the intimate description, the details of things that had happened more than seventy years ago, his tears as he told it. As if he were right there, as if it were yesterday, the old man went on about the boy and his sad situation, still using third person pronouns. Then, abruptly, he made the leap from this tale of yesteryear to his confession in first person, “They say God is a God of love. I’ve never known Him as a God of love.”

Seeing through a Child’s Eyes

A lot of things began to make sense to the pastor then. The old saying, “What goes around, comes around” was true. The elder as a young boy, reaching out desperately for love, warmth and

affection, had grown up, grown old. Life at home had shaped his view of the world, especially his view of the spiritual world. . . .

For children, God is first cast in the image of their parents, especially their father. That is not difficult to understand. Everyone bigger and older and in authority is viewed by children through the lens of the big people closest to them. And who are the big people they know? Their parents. So this God-person, the child's reasoning goes, must be like my mommy and daddy. And since they call this God-person "Father," He must be like my father.

It's important to see through a child's eyes. Here are two of the most profound statements we've found about how children reach conclusions about their world, especially the spiritual world. The first is by Harvard professor of psychiatry Armand Nicholi:

Early family experience determines our adult character structure, the inner picture we harbor of ourselves, how we see others and feel about them, our concept of right and wrong, our capacity to establish the close, warm, sustained relationships necessary to have a family of our own, our attitude toward authority and toward the Ultimate Authority in our lives, and the way we attempt to make sense out of our existence. No human interaction has a greater impact on our lives than our family experience. (Nicholi II, 1979, p. 11)

The second comment is from *How to Raise Confident Children* by Richard Strauss:

A person's image of God is often patterned after his image of his own parents, especially his father. If his parents were happy, loving, accepting, and forgiving, he finds it easier to experience a positive and satisfying relationship with God. But if his parents were cold and indifferent, he may feel that God is far away and disinterested in him personally. If his parents were angry, hostile, and rejecting, he often feels that God can never accept him. If his parents were hard to please, he usually has the nagging notion that God is not very happy with him either. (Strauss, 1975, pp. 23, 24)

What the elder's story revealed was that life at home was hard for him as a small boy. Relationships were difficult. Parental love was scarce at best, confusing at other times, even sometimes—as far as the boy was concerned—non-existent. Perhaps his parents would have been quick to point out that they *did* love him—they gave him a roof over his head, didn't they? Clean clothes, food—perhaps not as much as he wanted—but times were hard. And so on. Maybe both parents had to work outside the home to make ends meet. Maybe there were siblings with whom parental attention had to be shared; perhaps more children than the parents could really love.

The point is, the boy didn't *feel* love and that unloved feeling stuck. Time passed, and it embedded itself deep in him.

It is hard to love others when one doesn't feel loved. It's like squeezing a sponge to get water out of it when the sponge itself is dry and brittle. There's no moisture to share; not even enough to keep the sponge a sponge. His actions as a spiritual leader in the church reflected his view of himself, of people and relationships, and ultimately what he said and did reflected his view of God. Unloved. Unlovely. Un-love-like. He felt unloved; the people around him were unlovely; God was un-love-like. He became to that congregation what his father had been to him—harsh, dictatorial, demanding, unloving. He could not speak of the love of God, because he did not know God as a loving being. Think of it—he was unable to grasp, unable to make sense of what is perhaps *the* central text about God in the Bible, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). "They say God is a God of love," was his lament. "They say. . . ." "But I have never known Him as a God of love." He could acknowledge the report of God as a God of love by others, but it was not something he could personally connect with.

The encouraging word regarding this elder's experience is that sharing his story that day was something of a turning point for the aged and difficult leader. Hearing himself tell about his own sad boyhood, he was able to understand some of his personal issues and the negative effects of his influence on the congregation. The pastor who paid him the visit left that district soon after, but another, who presided at the elder's funeral several years later, reported that he did grow considerably warmer. He did come to experience more of God as love.

Meeting Heavenly Father

I'm thinking about those whose life story may be similar, those who might also say with the elder, "I've never known God as a God of love." Or, "I wish I knew God better," "I wish I felt His love more." Or, "I have children of my own, and I want to know how to help them know God as a God of love." Perhaps problems at home, even at church, have blocked your view of God, insulated you from the radiating warmth of His love and left you cold. Sadly, many young people have gotten from parents, caregivers, teachers, even sometimes from spiritual mentors, confusing messages about God and spiritual life. As they have grown older, some have nevertheless dragged themselves to church, trying to make the whole spiritual life thing work; some have put that life on pause; others, having come to a crossroads, have taken a break from church. It has just been difficult to know God as a God of love.

I had the privilege of baptizing my father a few years before he died. From his early manhood and during all the years that I was growing up and for more than 25 years after I left his home, he avoided having anything to do with religion, Bible reading, prayer, anything related to church—especially not the Adventist church, the church of his parents. I think now they must have been difficult years for him; they were often difficult for those of us with whom he lived. I knew that his father and mother, my grandparents, had been heavily invested, totally absorbed in the church when he was young. Parents/church, church/parents—they were all the same to him. So, when he was deeply hurt by family experiences and sought to escape it all by breaking ties with his parents and most of his many siblings, he cut himself off from the church also.

Late in life, his heart inclined toward God and toward reconciliation. A caring pastor, who knew God as a God of love, sensed this and picked up on the deepest need of my father's heart—for God's love, its warmth, acceptance, forgiveness and release from past hurts, and for relationships with people who had gotten a taste of God's love. He came to my dad, a carpenter and builder, and asked his help—told him he was needed in the construction of the new Adventist church. My dad liked this man. Not only did he guide that building project, but he threw himself into it in a way that demonstrated the change that was happening in him. I think it settled over him that he was building a house for God. And when it was finished, he worshipped there. It wasn't long before I got the call one night that my father wanted me to baptize him. At last! What joy!

The church elder's story, my father's story . . . these are not so unique. There are others for whom the taste left in the mouth—from life at home or from experiences in the church in which you expected more than you got—is bitter. You may feel used, victimized, or perhaps just by-passed and forgotten. Perhaps images of home and parents may make it difficult, if not impossible, for you to pray, let alone call God "Father."

I have an idea, and the pieces of it have drifted toward my mind from several directions. First, I encountered a book entitled *The Embrace of God*. In it, clinical psychologist Lloyd Erickson ministers lovingly to those for whom "father" conjures up difficult memories. Ever so gently, he squeezes past the negative images of God that have formed in our heads, and constructs new ones, tenderly leading the reader into a relationship with a warm, loving Person. Erickson removes the word "the," so that God is "Heavenly Father," rather than *the* Heavenly Father. (I was amazed at the

difference that simple shift made.) Heavenly Father wants to embrace your heart as no one has held it before.

From another direction, an article called “Guardian Neighbor” by Lynda Barry in a *Newsweek* special edition captured my imagination. She tells of things not going so well in her home as she was growing up. Then a family moved into her neighborhood where the father and mother loved each other and showed it. Their family life drew her like a magnet, and they invited her in, as often as she wanted. She caught the husband and wife once sharing a moment of affection. “And that was all I needed to see,” she wrote of the experience. “I only needed to see it once to be able to believe for the rest of my life that happiness between two people can exist.”

These ideas have mingled with the invitation that John, the disciple whose cold heart was warmed by the love of God manifested in Christ, has given us in one of his letters:

From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we’re telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.

We saw it, we heard it, and now we’re telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy! (1 John 1:1-4 TM)

The idea that has struck me is this: A warm, spontaneously affectionate Father has moved into our neighborhood. He throws wide the door to His place, inviting in all passers-by. There is love where He is! If you’ve not experienced love before, you’ll find it there. You’ll only need to find it once and it will change you forever. He wants to provide a re-parenting experience for everyone whose life so far has been difficult and forgettable. In fact, His home is open to all! Others have gone in ahead of us, and they’ve liked what they found.

Listen to what Scripture says,

*The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish. (John 1:14 TM)*

God offers this experience of family through knowing His Son, Jesus. Jesus is like Heavenly Father (cf. John 14:9). The prophets had used “Father” as a metaphor. God was Father of the nation. But Jesus called God “Father,” for the first time in the history of the world bringing the idea that God is a Parent who seeks a personal intimate relationship with every person on earth as His child. Jesus wants to introduce each of us to God His Father, our Father (cf. John 20:17).

Don’t wait. Take your Bible and, perhaps using a contemporary language version, walk along with Jesus in the pages of the Gospels. Listen to Him talk. Let Him introduce you to Heavenly Father. You may find yourself saying, “Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us?” (cf. Luke 24:32)

God knows every circumstance of our lives. He knows us, right where we are today. He loves with a love that is lasting. In Jesus, God bends low to gently whisper in the ear of every one whose family experience—at home, at church, or wherever—has been difficult. “I love you,” He says. He means it. He loves you. You can trust that.

Making Introductions

The anguished cry of the aged elder, “I’ve never known God as a God of love” touches the heart of every parent. With the brief insights we have into his story, we just sense that something important to the rearing of children was not present in the home where he grew up. Too bad we can’t interview the old elder or my dad to hear what counsel they might have for parents today. But from Scripture and experience we sense some things that will increase the likelihood that children growing up today will be in a better place in knowing Heavenly Father.

Love God and share your passion. The great passage on child rearing written down by Moses in Deuteronomy says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children” (Deut. 6:5-7). When I was growing up, there seemed to be a common phrase that parents used with their children: “Don’t do as I do: do as I say.” Despite the intention, that doesn’t work. Children do as we do. Values are caught more than they are taught.

Washington, D.C., where we live, is a big sports town and American football is in season now. On Sundays we see cars loaded with fans on the way to the game. They’re often festive—painted in the home team colors or have team insignia on them. Often team pennants whip in the wind from radio antennas or short masts affixed for the occasion. Parents are wearing the special team jersey sweaters and jackets. These sports fan clothes come in kids’ sizes too, and the youth are dressed just like their parents. Children tend to get very interested in what their parents are passionate about. They will pick up on your enthusiasm for God, just as they pick up on your zeal for sports.

Love at the feeling level. For years I carried this comment in my Bible, made by the founder and speaker of *The Voice of Prophecy* H. M. S. Richards at a campmeeting I once attended: “No one will ever enter the kingdom of God except he is loved in.” In John 13:35, Jesus’ thoughts on discipleship are about love and loving. “All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another,” He said. People hunger for love. Surveys of those who have stopped attending church show that often they did not drop away because of the beliefs. Many, in fact, still know the basic teachings of the church and still consider themselves Seventh-day Adventists, at least from the standpoint of beliefs. Then what happened? Why did they leave? They report that they did not find fellowship in the church. Knowing the doctrines of the faith are important (cf. Titus 2:1), but fellowship reflects more the need for relationships in which one is loved and cared about (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3-7).

Where do we learn about love? We learn first and most essentially about love from the families with whom we grow up. Children need for parents to love them at the feeling level.

If the parents would enter more fully into the feelings of their children and draw out what is in their hearts, it would have a beneficial influence upon them. (The Adventist Home, p. 190)

In fact, the capacity for love is best developed early. Some young friends of ours are teaching their two-year old son three languages. The father speaks to him in his native Norwegian, the mother in French, and the child learns English from house guests, playmates and Sabbath School. The developing brain of a young child has phenomenal abilities. This is when their capacity for love is best

established. Older ones can learn to love also, but, like languages, the process tends to be more difficult.

Build a friendship with your child. Parents cannot be “best buddies” with their children, for there is an appropriate generation boundary between parents and their children that is crucial to keep in place. But parents can and should be friends with their children—talking together, playing together, working together, having fun together.

The parents are to guard their children with wise, pleasant instruction. *As the very best friends* of these inexperienced ones, they should help them in the work of overcoming, for it means everything to them to be victorious. (*Child Guidance*, p. 496, emphasis supplied).

Ask yourself, do I *like* this person—my child? The English word “like” gets at the idea of friendship perhaps more quickly than does “love.” Jesus cultivated a friendship with his disciples. “I have called you friends,” He said, “for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). The disciples could risk being fully known, because with Jesus there was ready acceptance and complete assurance that, strengths and weaknesses together, they were fully loved. Later, they understood that this One who loved them so, who befriended them, was God Himself among them (cf. John 1:1, 14). When we relate to our children as friends, it helps them to grasp how they could be in a friendship relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Let your marriage heat your family. When Christ's love makes a marriage fragrant, its aroma will permeate throughout the whole family. David and Vera Mace, founders of the marriage enrichment movement, once wrote: “Mutual affection between husband and wife will be to the family what the heating system is to a house. It will maintain the relationship of all family members in a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere” (Mace, 1985, p. 109).

I remember a lot of cold winters where I grew up in eastern Canada. In our farmhouse, we used to have a wood-burning furnace with the heat forced upward into the house through one large walk-over steel grate that was positioned between the kitchen and the living room. Everybody used to like to take a turn standing on this grate, letting the intense heat seep into our chilled bones. I think of the power of that furnace to heat us through and through when I ponder the thoughts of David Mace.

Ellen White encouraged the expression of warmth and affection between husband and wife. Notice the direct effect this warmth can have on their children: “If the husband and wife would only continue to cultivate these attentions which nourish love, they would be happy in each other's society and would have a sanctifying influence upon their families” (*Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 158).

Some of these “attentions which nourish love” might be as simple as: • Kind words of appreciation, a loving touch, a happy smile offered to each other in the presence of the children. • A note or card written by one to the other which children know about or which might be read when they are present. • A gift given which children watch being unwrapped—perhaps a romantic surprise planned by one for the other with the help of the children.

Even in circumstances where they live with one parent following a divorce or separation, children monitor the relationship between their parents. The children continue to need for their father and mother to demonstrate attitudes toward each other that are respectful.

It's about proper introductions. John's gospel captures the exuberance of Andrew when He met the Savior. “The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon . . .” (John 1:40-42). Andrew reacted enthusiastically to learning that Jesus was the Messiah. That is how it is when one

has really good news. The news cannot be contained; it simply must be communicated to those who are near and dear to us. Andrew went beyond mere reporting, he arranged for Simon (whom Jesus named “Peter”) to be introduced to Jesus. *An enthusiastic report about Jesus and an introduction to Him as a person*—what a simple formula for sharing the gospel with children in our homes! After the introduction, Andrew stepped back. From there on, Jesus and Peter had a relationship that was unique to them. Parents are disciples making disciples. And our primary task after all is to introduce our children to “Heavenly Father.” Heavenly Father and our sons and daughters will take it from there.

Conclusion

Children in the home can often be overlooked as fitting recipients of gospel sharing efforts. Parents mistakenly assume that children will simply absorb family spirituality. This must not be taken for granted; while children and young people learn from the modeling they observe, it is also true that these younger members of the Lord’s family need individual attention and opportunity to be personally introduced to Him. Let commit ourselves to giving the time and putting forth the earnest efforts on behalf of children and youth that the next generation may meet Heavenly Father and become people of faith.

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A New Design for Relational Power

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Enjoying the Ride, Until . . .

When I (Ron) was a fourth grader, the old wooden see-saw on our school playground broke. I told my dad about it. One Sunday not long after, this farmer/builder father of mine motioned to me to come along as he loaded some lumber and tools on his farm truck and drove down the road to our one-room country school. There he removed the remnants of the rotted seesaw, our “teeter-totter” as we called it, and installed a new one. When Monday came, I was first at school, proudly presenting to each student who arrived the shiny new teeter-totter, freshly painted with leftover red barn paint.

Everybody wanted a turn on it. For a while things went well with friends riding on opposite ends, balancing one another, gliding up and down. Then something changed. Boys riding opposite girls started to dangle them in the air. The playground was filled with their squeals to get off while most of us fourth grade boys (sad to say now) were delighted at the sight. Then, one recess, I was riding on the seesaw when some really heavy fifth-grade boys pushed my friend off the other end and got on instead. Instantly I was jerked into the air and bounced there. It was scary. “Do you want down?” they jeered after a while. “Okay, you’re down!” And with that they hopped off. I crashed! Though bruised, I somehow avoided broken bones. I avoided the see-saw for a long time. That toy of which I was once so proud, that toy so capable of bringing much joy, had become a place of pain.

Relational “seesaws.” Close relationships resemble a see-saw. Each of us brings a certain “weight” or “power” to our relationships. The way we use our weight affects our experience and our partner’s experience. Just as a teeter-totter feels most satisfying when we achieve a sense of balance and a pleasant rhythm, so everybody experiences the most satisfaction in relationships when there is goodwill, unconditional acceptance and warm regard for each other. The apostle Paul made an interesting statement that describes the attitude necessary on a relational see-saw: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4 NIV).

In this delicately-worded verse the apostle places “your own interests” on one end of a relationship see-saw and “the interests of others” on the other. Both are to receive appropriate attention. The “but also” in the middle acts like a fulcrum that helps balance the two. Just as we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (cf. Matt. 22:39) so it is appropriate that each “should look not only to [his] own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:4 thus insures that the concept “consider others better than yourselves” of verse 3 does not mean the neglect of one’s own vital interests. When this gospel principle of harmony is not followed, where mutual goodwill, acceptance and respect are not present, relationships may be unsatisfying at best and, at worst, painful, perhaps even terrifying.

Relationships Out of Balance

Selfishness causes a relational see-saw to lose its balance. If we are self-absorbed, we are often insensitive to the needs and feelings of others. If we don’t feel very valuable or secure, we may try to build ourselves up by putting others down. We give our partner a bumpy ride. Selfishness manifests itself in a variety of ways.

Dominance. Some people are dominant types and seek relationships with those who are more submissive.

Pursuit of social status. Some seek to acquire the social weight that society often ascribes to those who have certain attributes. The wealthy enjoy greater status than the poor, the employed receive more respect than those who do not have jobs. Educated people are considered more valuable than the uneducated; the physically attractive are paraded above those deemed less attractive. The talented are sought after and rewarded more than the untalented.

Aggressiveness and abuse. Some who are thinking about their own ride on the see-saw, who are self-absorbed and insensitive to the needs and feelings of others, tend to be more aggressive toward them. Abuse is about using one's real or perceived power to control another person. It is about choosing to get what I want at the expense of others.

See-Saw Struggle

Attempts to cope. Because their families are so important to people, some who are weaker will do their best to adjust, just to keep the family together, just to avoid conflict, just to achieve family stability and balance. Some will even sacrifice themselves and accept abuse, though family relationships are a source of much unhappiness and pain.

God does not require a person who is being abused in a relationship to stay in that relationship and bear that pain. But those who work with victims of abuse know that many have a very hard time escaping the ties that bind them to their abusers.

While some submit to achieve balance, others resist. They may opt for unhealthy ways to exert themselves in order to right a power imbalance in their relational "see-saw," to keep from being constantly "dangled in the air."

How not to ride a see-saw: Isaac & Rebekah. Struggle on the relationship see-saw is illustrated by the household of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 27). Father Isaac pulled first-born twin son Esau onto his end of the marital see-saw. Isaac favored Esau and schemed to bestow the birthright upon him, despite God's instruction and with no consultation with his wife. Isaac rationalized that he had custom on his side and employed the excuse that he had to take action immediately because he was old and feeble, when in fact he had many more years of life in him.

Mother Rebekah countered by dragging second-born twin son Jacob, her favorite, with her onto her side. Taking full advantage of her husband's failing eyesight and her intimate knowledge of his tastes and habits, Rebekah sought to gain power for herself in the relationship and to promote the interests of Jacob, the son she loved. She determined that Jacob must receive the birthright blessing. Besides, hadn't God foretold that the elder (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob) (cf. Gen. 25:33)?

Both Isaac and Rebekah plotted to secure the greater power on their side and deliberately involved the twin brothers in their conflict. However, as is often the case, rather than achieving balance on the relational see-saw, conflict and pain were the inevitable result. The latent marital conflict was enflamed and the fire spread to engulf the sons. As a mother, Rebekah would never again see the son she loved, for he fled to Haran to escape Esau's wrath. She died before he returned. The two brothers were thus pitted against one another for two decades. For his part, Isaac lost a one-in-a-million opportunity to willfully bestow his blessing on the son of promise who would take his place in the covenant line that would lead to the birth of the Messiah.

Horns and roses. Those who feel weaker in a relationship often spend a lot of energy trying to achieve relief from the dominating, controlling people in their families or relationships. It is as though some ancient script is being played out, reminding us that God created humankind to be equal

with each other. Because of human brokenness and sin, however, we seldom are content with equality. We tend to go for “one-up” status, scheming, plotting, and working our way toward superiority over others.

Doug was a dominating husband and father and ordered his family about as if he were a military commander. His wife, Matilda, had her own way of dealing with him. One day, for example, he was in a particular rush for them to go someplace in the car. He went out to the garage, started the engine, and backed the car out onto the driveway. It was his way of demanding that she hurry.

When Matilda didn't come, he blew several long blasts on the horn. She heard the horn, but instead of joining him, detoured to the backyard and leisurely inspected her rose garden, plucking a few weeds, sniffing the fragrance of a few of the emerging blossoms. She made her way to the car in her own good time. (Flowers, 1997, p. 17)

The Gospel's New Design for Relationships

The good news of the gospel is that Christ has drawn us into fellowship with Himself (Eph. 2:19, 20; 1 John 1:3). He has triumphed over sin, paying its penalty (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2) and breaking its power (Rom. 6:14; 8:3, 4, 9). Whereas sin causes division, discord and a desire to assume superiority over one another, we can now relate to one another in fundamentally different ways, because through Him we are related (Matt.20:25-27; Gal. 3:28).

Though Christ and the apostles did not assault society and culture directly, they presented ideas of equality and mutuality in the family of God that would work a transformation from inside the human heart outward. Think about the barriers they crossed.

Every ethnic group included. The narratives of Jesus and the centurion (Matt. 8:5ff), Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4: 7ff), Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:34, 35), as well as Paul's mission to the Gentiles stand as witness: “How true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34, 35).

Every social class included. Jesus and the disciples broke down the barriers between social classes. Living examples of this are Jesus' contact with all classes of people, with the nobleman (John 4:46-50), with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2ff), and with the leper (Matt. 8:2-4). In Christ, wrote Paul, there is no favoritism shown between social strata (Eph. 6:9).

A dramatic example of this inclusion of all social groups is found in the shortest, but most profound letter of Paul, the letter to Philemon. A convert of Paul, Philemon was a wealthy resident of Colossae and, like many such residents, a slaveholder. One slave, Onesimus, had evidently robbed his master, escaped, and made his way to the sprawling capital city of Rome, perhaps hoping to lose himself amid the masses. There he encountered Paul. Paul preached the gospel to him and came to accept him as a son (Philemon 10). Onesimus was awakened to his responsibility to repent and make as much restitution as he could to Philemon for the wrongs he had done.

As he went back to Philemon, he carried with him a note of recommendation which Paul prepared. What we have in our Bibles is that note. In it is found a radical Christian message: Receive him “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother . . . in the Lord” (Philemon 16). Paul presents to Philemon a revolutionary concept of reconciliation, that of finding in Onesimus a beloved brother. Because of Jesus, believers see each other through new glasses, as it were, and love each other as members of one family.

That “thing” is working here. For nearly three decades we were members of a church congregation in Washington, D.C., a truly unique fellowship of believers. When we first joined the Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church, it was in a process of change from being mostly all-Caucasian to becoming a multi-national Christian family of some 45 nations. Over the years, CMC has responded to the preaching of the good news of God’s love and has endeavored to live by 1 John 4:11: “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” If the truth be told, the congregation didn’t especially like the same foods, nor enjoy the same music. Members wrestled hard with one another on church boards, but, with dedicated and persistent, Christ-centered pastoral leadership, this diverse group became family.

A crowning moment came one Easter season, when the church came together for a Friday evening agape meal and communion service. Assembled around the table of fellowship, illumined with candlelight, members bore testimony to their love for Christ and their love for one another. One African brother, serving in the diplomatic corps from South Africa, had been a member of the church since rediscovering Adventism at a prayer breakfast held at CMC for diplomats and their Seventh-day Adventist world leader counterparts at the time of an Annual Council. In the several years since, this brother, so familiar with the policies and practices of apartheid, had often marveled aloud that people from so many nations could worship, work, play and pray together. With a face lit with a light greater than that of the candles, Ezra stood and told a little of his story. We still remember the joyful comment he made: “That thing they speak about (that the gospel brings together red and yellow, black and white); it’s working here.”

Sexual equality for men and women. Jesus restored the sexual equality and nobility of women. Writes John Stott:

Without any fuss or publicity, Jesus terminated the curse of the Fall, reinvested woman with her partially lost nobility, and reclaimed for his new kingdom community the original creation blessing of sexual equality. (Stott, 1985, p. 136)

Women were among Jesus’ closest disciples (Luke 8:2, 3). Paul recognized that in Christ old gender barriers have been taken away: “There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

The Book of Acts shows that women believed and served in the church side by side with men. Acts reveals in the newfound status of all people in Christ. It does not elevate women above men, but shows that an equal fellowship and equal use of giftedness existed in the early church. “With the women” (Acts 1:14) indicates their inclusion with a new status in the new order. Peter acknowledges that the Spirit is being poured out on Christians without regard to gender in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28, 29 (Acts 2:16-18). Both genders are especially mentioned as becoming baptized believers (Acts 5:14; 8:12). The apostolic evangelists made special efforts to reach women (Acts 16:13; 17:4). A number of these early women converts are named as possessing qualities of faith, loyalty, and service just as did men: Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42), the Jewish mother of Timothy (Acts 16:1), Lydia (Acts 16:14, 15), Damaris (Acts 17:34), and Priscilla (Acts 18:2, 18, 26). Priscilla (actually named ahead of her husband in vs. 18; cf. 2 Tim. 4:19) seems to be singled out especially for her giftedness in biblical understanding, evangelistic fervor and persuasion alongside Aquila. Paul dwelt for some time with this couple and eventually took them with him as evangelistic companions. Priscilla and Aquila again head the list of those to be greeted for Paul by Timothy (2 Tim. 4:19).

Mutuality between husbands and wives. The curse subjected the wife to the husband (Gen. 3:16). The gospel emphasizes the love and the service of husband and wife to one another (Eph. 5:21-33).

Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64).

The gospel restores marriage “to its original sanctity and elevation” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 99). Christians seek to recapture that original mutuality known by the first husband and wife who shared the image of God, shared the one name “adam,” shared dominion over the earth, and shared God’s procreative blessing (Gen. 1:26-28). Peter instructs each husband to bestow honor (“great value”) on his wife, for the two of them are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). A text that stresses how absolute Christ would have mutuality in marriage to be is found in 1 Cor. 7:3, 4:

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.

Some Protestant reformers, who taught the super-ordination of the husband and the subordination of the wife, encountered difficulty with this passage. They concluded that, in the bedroom, there could be full equality and mutuality, but that outside, the wife was to be submissive. The gospel of Christ, however, does not limit marital mutuality only to the couple’s sexual life.

I hid my salary from my wife. An African pastor shared this story:

“Don’t tell your wife the amount of money you have,” my father whispered to me one evening as one of his counsels to me. Traditionally, many African husbands do not tell their wives the amount of money they possess. All the money, all the wealth belongs to the husband and father as head of the family. It is his monopoly. He uses it as he wishes, he squanders as he wants, and the wife just gets a little portion for clothing, shoes, and food for her and the children. . . .

The reason for not telling the wife the amount of money is just a matter of suspicion that she may constantly demand more, or that she may steal some money and pass it to her parents, relatives, and close friends. This suspicion is not well founded. It is just a selfish motive, and it must be discarded.

Hiding my salary from my wife caused a lot of problems and misunderstandings. She requested some money when I really had nothing. Since she was not involved in financial arrangements or the home budget, she did not know for sure when I had no money. So she made her demands. We almost had a big fight one day.

The solution came to us one day when one pastor preached at our campmeeting about the family or home budget which must be made out by the two, husband and wife. The subject was strange and new to me, but it came with deep meaning. The income must include the total of all money from me and from my wife’s small financial projects. The expenses must include the major four items:

- Tithe and offerings – God’s funds
- Food
- All other necessary life items
- Savings or fixed account for future use

This saved my home, for we all knew what we owned and what was to be expended. We discarded the husband’s monopoly of funds. . . .

“Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance. Then marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 106).

This kind of mutuality ought to be extended to financial planning of the budget. It will inspire trust and confidence and happiness to family life. (Kisaka, 1992, p. 71)

How the Gospel Redefines Power

Jesus redefined power both by His teaching and in His relating to others. Matthew records the comments of Jesus when James and John asked their mother to secure for them the top spots in His kingdom:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them,” He said. “But it shall not be so among 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.” (Matt. 20:25-28)

Empowerment. The practical outworking of the acknowledgement of Christ as Lord for Christians is that the sinful misuse of power is replaced by empowerment.

“Empowering can be defined as the attempt to establish power in another person. . . . Empowering is the process of helping the other recognize strengths and potentials within, as well as to encourage and guide the development of these qualities” (Balswick & Balswick, 1987, pp. 44, 45).

Instead of exerting “power over,” we become “the wind beneath the wings” of those we love. This “power under” approach to relationships means that our weight on the see-saw is used to lift up those with whom we are in relationship, to build them up, to give them every opportunity and encouragement to become all that they can be. Note these “empowerment” verses from Paul:

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21).

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (Rom. 14:19).

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11).

This Christian “empowerment” principle for relationships means that we are no longer thinking only about our ride on the see-saw, we want our partner to get a good ride also. The principle applies in the church and in the domestic relationships at home—the smallest church. Everything we learn from Christ about relationships at church must go into our homes also.

Conclusion

The power of God is mighty to save us and to change us. In *Fulton's Footprints in Fiji* Eric B. Hare tells of the conversion of Ratu Ambrose. The cruel chief had squandered the lives of many of his faithful subjects while pursuing his aggressive goals. Scarred and broken in body, one old fisherman, Matui, had survived the torturous experience of being one of the human “logs,” men bound with ropes and used as rollers upon which Ratu Ambrose had launched his heavy war canoes.

Pastor John Fulton's evangelistic efforts brought both Ratu Ambrose and Matui into the same Seventh-day Adventist church. God's power to transform hearts and habits powerfully demonstrated itself when the new believers celebrated their first Lord's Supper and footwashing service. Ratu Ambrose quickly took a towel and basin and knelt down before Matui to wash his feet. The bent, elderly fisherman at first resisted. "It is not right for you to wash my feet; you are a great chief." As Ratu Ambrose went on to bathe the feet of his former subject with tears filling his eyes and his heart, he replied, "There is only one Chief here in this room tonight, and that is Jesus." (Flowers, 1992, pp. 85, 86)

May there be one Chief in all our rooms—Jesus. May His empowering Spirit flood our lives, so that we learn what it means to love, to serve, to exercise our power and influence in our relationships in ways that demonstrate not "power over," but "power under."

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Developing Greater Intimacy in Marriage

by Bryan Craig, Director
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Theme

How emotional closeness is developed through effective communication with one another and how married couples can successfully deal with the emotional component in marital conflict.

How to Use This Resource

In this marriage enrichment resource, marriage and family therapist Dr. Bryan Craig offers an in-depth look at emotional closeness in marriage. Working from his clinical experience and research, he brings solid theory and practical insights to this cutting-edge discussion of the emotional component in marriage. Pastors, family ministries leaders, and others who work with married couples should find this resource informative and helpful, both for marriage seminars and work with couples in premarital guidance and pastoral counselling.

Beyond the sound research base, this resource provides helpful tools enabling couples to evaluate their relationship, and to grow in their communication and conflict resolution skills. Presenters should carefully digest the Leadership Resource segments in each of the three sessions before their own presentation notes, additional seminar handouts or visual aids are developed.

Sessions

- 1 - How Satisfying is your Marriage?
Handout: *Marital Satisfaction*
- 2 - Communication: The Key to Emotional Closeness
Handout: *Couple Communication*
- 3 - Understanding and Dealing with Marital Conflict
Handout: *Conflict Analysis*
Handout: *3 Step Model for Managing Conflict*

Session 1 **How Satisfying is your Marriage?**

Leadership Resources

Within every human heart there is a yearning for intimacy, a deep desire for connection. From the moment that we are born, we crave the acceptance of others and long to be in relationship with them. Intimacy is essential to survival. So we always need to know that there is someone who is there for us. We all desperately want to feel loved, to belong, to be part of community.

Made for community. We cannot be ourselves by ourselves. We were made for community. Each one has an innate capacity for giving and receiving love and for responding to people around us. We define who we are in the face of those people who constitute our community. The way we come to think and feel about ourselves is fashioned and shaped by the way we perceive others treat us. As Carolyn Saarni so aptly says, “we are the products of our relationships, which are always

transactional . . . we derive meaningfulness . . . from the people who have loved us, spent time with us, taught us, or spurned and perhaps even exploited us” (Saarni, 1999, p. 9).

In our search to find meaningful relationships and to experience a sense of love and intimacy in our lives, most of us turn to marriage. This is where all social connectedness between people begins. In marriage, we crave the company and the self-affirmation that comes from our partner; we relish the deep and intimate connections and thrive on a companionship that embeds us in a cocoon of safety. Through receiving emotional support and nurture we generate feelings of mutual trust, loyalty and respect. Because of this, a good marriage has always been seen as the strongest predictor of personal happiness and wellbeing, the primary relationship that satisfies best our basic emotional needs.

The Role of Emotion in Marital Intimacy

Emotion is important to the creation of attachment bonds. Through our emotions we discover what matters most to us and what meaning we place on particular events and experiences.

In this seminar we want to invite you as couples to explore several important dimensions of your own marriage relationship that will help you achieve a greater sense of intimacy and connectedness. We will examine these topics:

- The ways a couple establish a strong emotional bond with each other and achieve a sense of intimacy in their marital relationship.
- How emotional closeness is developed through effective communication with one another.
- How you can successfully deal with the emotional component in marital conflict.

Maintaining Our Love Relationship

We don't know as much as we'd like about how marital relationships are maintained. While we know a great deal about the factors involved in the formation of relationships and about the causes and consequences of relationships that fail and end in dissolution, very little research has been done to determine the key factors involved in relationship maintenance. Current marriage researchers are convinced of several factors however.

Reciprocity – working together. Marriages are not self-generating. They do not occur spontaneously or by chance. They require a great deal of energy and investment to make them work. To keep love alive, a sense of passion, commitment and intimacy, good marriages require *reciprocity*. This is an ongoing process of caring and closeness in which two people work together to create an enduring relationship. In this relationship they both experience increasing fulfilment and satisfaction (Masters, Johnson & Kolodny, 1994, p. 15).

Intentionality – being deliberate. Keeping love thriving and achieving marital growth requires that a couple be *intentional*. They can either allow their relationship to arbitrarily change as circumstances around them change, or they can be intentional about making choices that keep the flame of passion and love glowing and facilitate growth together. Marriage researcher John Gottman believes that married couples need to put forth effort in behaviours that keep marriage fresh. Couples who do nothing wrong but who do nothing to make things get better in their marriage will find that their marriage will still tend to get worse over time (Gottman, 1994, p. 61).

The importance of *maintaining and repairing marriage*. Another researcher, Jack Dominian, believes that marital love implies mutual growth—the ability to accept, change and grow together by acknowledging each other's reality, by unpacking one another's hidden world, and by demonstrating a capacity to forgive each other for not turning out to be all that was originally projected. Couples who want to keep their marriage healthy need to know how to nurture love over the whole

marital life cycle by both *maintaining* and *repairing* their relationship (Dominian, 1995, pp. 114-121). *Maintaining* means using strategies that build togetherness, harmony, warmth, affection and effective communication. *Repair* means preventing negativity from escalating out of control. Repair is “the secret weapon of emotionally intelligent couples” says Gottman, because it enables them to strengthen their marriage by over-riding negativity (Gottman, 1999a, pp. 22, 23).

Howard Markman, founder of the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) places similar emphasis on lowering the risks of marital conflict and distress (repair) and on taking measures to protect and enhance the relationship (maintenance). For him, maintenance measures include commitment, friendship, fun, sensuality, spirituality and religious intimacy (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, pp. 119-305).

Byrne and Murren talk about the crucial role of “reciprocal positive evaluative behaviour” in maintaining a satisfying and loving relationship. “If couples can *reinforce* one another, *interact* gently, and *behave* in ways that please each partner, their relationship should obviously benefit” (Byrne & Murnen, 1988, pp. 96-302).

Biblical Counsel on Maintaining Love Relationships

The New Testament apostles were very clear in their instructions to the Christian Church about what it takes to keep marriages and relationships alive, healthy and strong. Their writings suggest a range of attitudes and behaviours that are designed to maximise the positive (protection measures) and minimise the negative (risk factors). The author of Hebrews suggests that we should “stay on good terms with each other, held together by love” and that we must “honour marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband” (Heb. 13: 1, 4 TM).

The apostle James encourages us to “live well, live wisely, live humbly” (James 3:13 TM). It is not the way you talk that counts, he says, but the way you live your life. He goes on to say that the way we treat each other should not be affected by the ebb and flow of how we feel but by our acknowledgement of God’s wise ways.

Real wisdom begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour. (James 3:17, 18 TM)

The apostle Paul has much to say about maintaining love in our relationships. These behaviours, he believed, arise out of thankful hearts and lives filled with the grace of God. “Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other” (Col. 3:15 TM).

Love from the centre of who you are; don’t fake it . . . be good friends who love deeply . . . don’t burn out; keep yourselves fuelled and aflame. . . laugh with your happy friends when they’re happy; share tears when they’re down. Get along with each other . . . don’t hit back; discover beauty in everyone” (Rom. 12: 9-17 TM).

Paul further instructs us to “look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out” (1Thess. 5:15 TM). He encourages us to allow the gifts of God’s Spirit—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control” (Gal. 5:22, 23 NIV) to energise our relationship as we pour ourselves “out for each other in acts of love” (Eph. 4:2 TM).

Specific counsel for marriage comes from Paul also. He obviously sees respect as an important ingredient in building strong stable marriage. His counsel to couples follows immediately after he invites all to “out of respect for Christ be courteously reverent to one another” (Eph. 5:21 TM). Wives, he says, should “understand and support” their husbands (vs. 22) and husbands should “go all out in your love for your wives” (vs. 25). A husband should be a source of love and take the lead in cherishing, not dominating his wife. His love for her is to be a “a love marked by giving, not getting” (vs. 25), a love “designed to bring the best out of her” (vs. 26). A husband’s love for his wife is like Christ’s for the church, “His words evoke her beauty” (vs. 26).

The apostle Peter adds to this advice by suggesting that “in the new life of God’s grace” couples treat each other as equals, each honouring and delighting in their partner and seeking to be agreeable, sympathetic, loving, compassionate and humble (1 Peter 3: 7, 8 TM).

The New Testament writers understood that husbands and wives need to learn how to love in a special way in marriage. They saw that couples who respect, honour and support one another build a sense of meaning and purpose into their marriage and into their lives. The grace of God actively empowers and sustains such relationships.

What Does It Take To Keep Love Alive?

What helps develop a greater sense of intimacy in marriage? Gottman (1994) says couples must learn to *reconcile their conflicts* or differences constructively, *strengthen the positive side of their marriage* and regularly *inoculate their relationship* against the forces that lead to divorce (pp. 29, 30). He also believes that happy marriages are based on a deep friendship in which two people mutually respect and enjoy each others company. These are the couples who know each other intimately, who are well versed in their likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes and dreams, and who have an abiding regard and fondness for each other that is expressed in big and little ways day in day out (Gottman, 1999a, p. 19, 20).

Ten Qualities that Enhance Intimacy in Marriage

Here are the personal and interpersonal qualities, attitudes and behaviours that researchers highlight as important for maintaining and enhancing intimacy in marriage:

1. Goodwill. Displaying goodwill and cooperation toward your partner is absolutely fundamental to the survival and health of your relationship. Goodwill shows you’re on the other’s side and just as concerned about meeting their needs as you are your own. It signals that your spirits are open to each other and that you have empathy for your partner’s point of view. You want to play fair and not impugn your partner’s motives.

2. Mutual respect and trust. This is a central ingredient in all satisfying, long term marriage relationships. To show respect for your partner means that you recognise and accept them as a separate individual. You value and esteem them for who they are, not for what you can get from them. Respect honours and appreciates your partner’s separateness; values their contributions; acknowledges their differences; accepts their needs; and empathises with their feelings. Mutual respect can only be achieved when partners set appropriate boundaries, communicate honestly, and seek not to control one another. This separateness is the basis of the couple’s relational strength and reduces power struggles in the relationship. Usually, intimacy is only achieved when couples show each other an equality of importance and reciprocity of respect (Johnson & Greenberg, 1994, pp. 115, 119).

When two individuals are able to develop a relationship with mutual respect, a sense of love and trust will begin to emerge. This trust is critical to creating emotional safety and fostering true intimacy as the genuine individuality and true selves of each partner blossom and flourish.

3. Effective communication. Being able to communicate effectively is most important for connecting with each other. Couples who thrive in their marriage relationship indicate that they continue to dialogue with each other through good times as well as the difficult times in their relationship. A powerful part of intimate communication is emotional expression, because it conveys vulnerability, invites closeness, and, when congruent with non-verbal signs of emotion, conveys genuineness. Without emotional availability, intimacy is superficial and short lived (Carlson & Sperry, 1999, p. 147).

Communicating effectively with each other involves:

- being sensitive to and empathising with your partner's feelings,
- being able to talk with measured honesty about your own inner experience and feelings,
- actively listening,
- speaking and responding non-defensively,
- being able to validate what you have heard, understood and accepted as your partner's message,
- being able to affirm and encourage your partner and demonstrate your affection for them,
- being assertive and asking for what you want,
- being able to share honestly your beliefs, values, difficulties and accomplishments.

4. Mutual commitment. Commitment is the one quality that contributes most to the continuing development of intimacy and growth in marriage. In marriages that last, intimacy and commitment go hand in hand. A lack of commitment on the part of one or both is one of the surest and quickest ways of undermining a marriage relationship. Any indication that there may be ambivalence or pretence about one's dedication, loyalty or faithfulness creates a sense of uncertainty and insecurity. This causes a partner to become preoccupied with concerns about abandonment. By the act of commitment marital partners express their desire to tenaciously overcome their differences and dedicate themselves to building greater intimacy in their relationship.

5. Expressing appreciation and affection. It is important for couples to consistently do and say things that give emotional support and provide positive encouragement for their marital partner. Research emphasises that expressions of affection and the free and frequent exchange of tenderness and touch also have a powerful positive effect. They signify a couple's connectedness and high regard. These caring attitudes and behaviours are so important for fuelling the sense of romance and passion that keeps the relationship alive and fresh and creating a sense of playfulness and friendship in the marriage. Couples need to be intentional in promoting their partner's well-being and in improving the sense of bonding, attachment and intimacy in their relationship

6. Adaptability. Intimacy is very much related to one's ability to be open to change and to embrace new ideas. A spirit of compromise and the skill to be able to shift one's attitude or behaviour to deal with changing circumstances or cope with crises is important to keeping love alive. Rigid individuals who insist on always being right are usually not people who are well-loved. This can be particularly true in marriages involving religious couples who feel there is only one right way to do or see things and develop a dogmatic, inflexible attitude unforgiving of differences and potentially destructive of the relationship. Successful couples are also flexible about their roles in their relationship. The way they adjust to situations and needs that change over time and the way they handle difficulties as they arise is critical to relational harmony and happiness.

7. Resolve conflicts. Conflict is the gateway to intimacy. This view of conflict believes that, while conflict can be a challenge to any relationship, it can also be a creative, growth producing process. Couples willing to face their differences and work through their conflicts to find mutually acceptable solutions to their problems have found the way to developing a greater sense of understanding and intimacy. Such a creative process seeks resolution of issues without partners being overwhelmed by negative emotions or causing each other to feel angry, criticised, misunderstood, ignored or put down. It gives partners the opportunity to say “sorry” and restore the much needed equilibrium to their marriage.

Important to intimacy is determining to replace the recycling of gripes and complaints with skills that enable the sharing of hurts and fears, admission of errors, and acceptance of personal limitations. In this way a couple can get on with enjoying their relationship together. Also, couples need to get rid of the ghosts of the past and any unresolved childhood issues that constantly keep coming back to haunt and hurt them and stop them from taking responsibility for their unhappiness and disquiet.

8. Sexual satisfaction. Giving expression to sexual desire—for physical and emotional intimacy and closeness—is a core aspect of marriage. The level of sexual intimacy is often influenced by the overall state of the relationship. How willingly do a couple respect, trust and co-operate with each other? When marital partners understand and accommodate each other’s sexual needs, their love-making has the ability to strengthen their relationship bonds far beyond the bedroom. Couples who lack the ability to pleasure each other or to nurture a sense of spontaneity, curiosity and playfulness often find that their sex life is unexciting, unsatisfying and boring and their relational bond diminished.

9. Spiritual values. Religious and spiritual values play a much more important role in marital stability and happiness than most people realise. A couple’s spiritual orientation helps them to make sense out of life and provides meaning and purpose for virtually every aspect of their lives. While a person may be virtuous without being religious, religion does typically emphasise qualities most would consider virtuous—honesty, integrity, responsibility, commitment, forgiveness and compassion. Sociologist Andrew Greeley hypothesised that the warmer and more passionate one’s religious imaging, the warmer and more passionate one’s marriage. The higher one’s scores on the “grace” scale, the more satisfying and intense the sexual relationship with one’s partner is likely to be. He sees a direct correlation between marital intimacy and warm images of God (Coleman, 1992, pp. 139–141).

10. Social connectedness. Couples who develop and maintain healthy relationships with extended family and friends and others in the community find that this involvement has a positive effect on their marriage. The access to additional resources that such relationships typically supply improves their sense of self-esteem and relational skills. Their marital relationship is energised and empowered through the creation of a greater sense of adaptability, tolerance and openness to sharing.

Recognising the Signs of a Marriage in Trouble

Researchers have consistently found that the level of marital satisfaction declines steadily across the early years of a couple’s relationship, finding its lowest level during the adolescent years of the family life cycle (see Figure 1). Although this decline may coincide with particular periods in the life cycle, Clements and Markman have suggested that marital satisfaction is better explained by the way partners interact and treat each other (Clements et al., 1997, pp. 339-343). Couples often do not recognise the early warning signs that their marital relationship is in trouble. Once they recognise the warning signals and realize that their negativity is eroding the positives that feed their relationship,

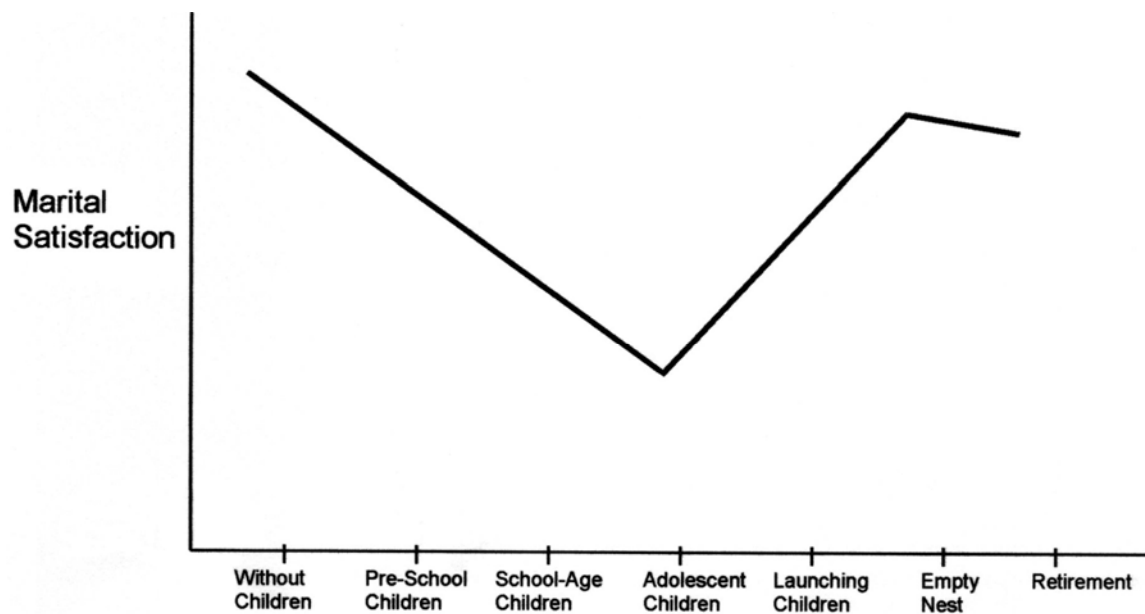


Figure 1 - Marriage Satisfaction across the Marriage Life Cycle

they can take steps to eliminate dysfunctional and destructive interaction patterns. The most common warning signs that emotional distance is developing in a marriage are identified in the following list.

1. Complaints of loss of feeling. A common sign is when one or both partners complain that they are no longer “in love” with their partner. Frequently, this loss of feeling is related to the fact that their anxiety and fears have been unexpressed or “bottled up.” Feelings of resentment, bitterness, even hatred have likely been harbored by one against the other.

2. Recurring unresolved arguments. Negativity and recurring, unresolved patterns of conflict have damaging effects on a marital relationship.

3. Loss of interest in sex. Sex can often be a barometer of marital health. Couples typically will show a lack of interest or attraction in each other when they don’t feel emotionally close to one another.

4. Signs of depression or withdrawal by one of the partners. Feelings of dissatisfaction, unhappiness, helplessness, or a fear of losing the relationship may cause one of the partners to withdraw and become depressed. A lack of sympathetic attention may account for the loss of enthusiasm and optimism in a marriage more than being stressed or over-worked (Gottman, 1994, pp. 29, 30).

5. Abandonment of joint activities. When partners begin to live parallel lives, there is little opportunity for time together or sharing in pleasurable activities that increase their feelings of attachment.

6. An affair. Becoming emotionally and sexually involved with someone outside the marriage can be a “cry for help” and a plea for both partners to acknowledge that the relationship is floundering.

7. Preoccupation with interests and activities outside the marriage. The investment of time and energy by one partner in career, work, church or other interests and activities may leave the other partner feeling neglected, even betrayed.

8. Arguments over child-rearing. Fighting over their respective methods and commitment to child-raising is another sign of marital breakdown. One partner may form an alliance with one or more of the children against the other partner.

9. Increased fatigue. Signs of tiredness and reduced ability to meet responsibilities at work may indicate that a lot of emotional energy is being expended on negative relational issues.

Emotional Barriers in Troubled Marriages

Early warning signs of a marriage in difficulty are usually accompanied by other issues that constitute serious barriers to intimacy. Some of these barriers include:

- **Fear of closeness.** One finds it hard to openly share their thoughts and feelings with their partner for fear of being hurt. They “play it safe” and keep their distance.

- **Unresolved anger.** Carrying hurt, anger, grief, or other unresolved personal issues will eventually erode intimacy. The mismanagement of anger is probably the greatest single barrier to marital intimacy.

- **Need for power and control.** Rigid, inflexible and controlling partners often use manipulation to stay in control, to ward off threats, or avoid discomfort and vulnerability.

- **Low self-esteem.** A partner who feels inferior or worthless does not contribute very much positive energy to the relationship. When one is tentative, uncertain, negative, or finds it hard to take initiatives with their partner, the relationship is affected. In most instances it is hard for the marriage to carry an emotionally hurting or wounded person for very long. Frequently this burden creates feelings of resentment in the other partner.

- **Jealousy and mistrust.** Doubting a partner or questioning their love and acceptance seriously undermines trust and confidence in the relationship. Sexual jealousy, arising from fear of loss or exclusion accompanied by feelings of anger, anxiety and resentment, is particularly distressing. It threatens the sense of security and blocks intimacy.

- **Idealisation of the relationship.** Some couples lack a sense of realism about their relationship and hang on to romantic notions of love. Expectations of unattainable levels of intimacy can stifle the relationship and create feelings of frustration and alienation.

Couple Exercise: Assessing your Own Level of Marital Satisfaction

Using the response sheet *Marital Satisfaction*, invite couples to:

1. Respond to the questionnaire separately.
2. Join together in exploring their individual responses with each other.
3. Discuss areas in their relationship where they clearly have differences and concerns.
4. Encourage them to highlight 3 areas for further dialogue and resolution.

MARITAL SATISFACTION

The following series of questions relates to the level of satisfaction that you usually find in your interaction with your spouse.

1. How satisfied are you with the way in which you and your partner usually handle each of the following areas of your family life? Please **circle** the number that best represents how satisfied you are in each area.

Draw a **square** around each answer that you think your partner will select in answering each question for him/herself.

	Mostly Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied		Moderately Unsatisfied	Mostly Unsatisfied
a. Our commitment to each other	1	2	3	4	5
b. Amount of communication with each other	1	2	3	4	5
c. Depth of sharing with each other	1	2	3	4	5
d. Display of affection for each other	1	2	3	4	5
e. Sharing feelings between the two of you	1	2	3	4	5
f. Trust in each other	1	2	3	4	5
g. Sexual fulfilment	1	2	3	4	5
h. Amount and quality of free time spent together	1	2	3	4	5
i. Management of chores and/or other home responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5
j. The level of our financial security	1	2	3	4	5
k. How we manage our money	1	2	3	4	5
l. Social interaction and time with friends	1	2	3	4	5
m. Relationships with in-laws and other relatives	1	2	3	4	5
n. The way we support each other (careers, parenting, tough times)	1	2	3	4	5
o. The way we make decisions	1	2	3	4	5
p. How we manage conflict	1	2	3	4	5
q. Our church involvements	1	2	3	4	5
r. Our spiritual interaction	1	2	3	4	5

2. Please read over the list and **tick** the three most important areas that you feel concerned about and that need further working on together.

Session 2

Communication: The Key to Emotional Closeness

Leadership Resources

Being able to communicate is unquestionably the most important human survival skill. Typically, nobody actually teaches us how to communicate effectively, yet our whole existence depends on our ability to transfer information from ourselves to others and build relationships with them. Good communication is a wonderful gift and provides the key to understanding, friendship and intimacy. Through good communication we give and receive love, express our thoughts and feelings, and acquire an appreciation of others' needs and wishes.

The Bible writers speak of the powerful effect that words can have in our relationships. "Be gracious in your speech," says Scripture, recognising that the goal of all communication is "to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out" (Colossians 4: 6 TM). Elsewhere, Paul admonishes us to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4: 15 NIV) and recognise that honesty and openness in our relationships with one another is an important ingredient to making intimate connections (cf. Proverbs 24: 26 NIV). The wise man Solomon endorses the concept that "cutting words wound and maim," but "kind words heal and help" (Proverbs 15:4 TM).

Communication Is Vital to Relationship Satisfaction

Communication is vital to marriage. Through the process of dialogue a couple access and articulate feelings, resolve differences, and share personal ideas, beliefs and values. Unique patterns of interacting with one another based on expressions, gestures, exchanges and symbols develop, creating for them a relationship that either strives or thrives. Their own special style of communicating forms a powerful emotional bond of shared meaning and enjoyment (Prager, 1995, p. 57).

Reliable research on intimate relationships has found that "communication is a primary determinant of relationship satisfaction" (Whisman, 1997, p. 395), and that patterns of marital interaction constitute the key to predicting the quality of the marriage relationship (Feeney, Noller, & Ward, 1997, p. 160). The degree of positive regard that marital partners have for each other, the amount of their interaction, the effectiveness of their communication, and the level of emotional gratification they enjoy, all contribute towards their sense of fulfilment, stability and satisfaction in the relationship (Feeney, Noller, & Ward, 1997, pp. 161, 162).

Principles of Effective Communication

In order for couples to understand the dynamics involved in effective communication they need to acknowledge the following six principles:

1. The skills of communication are learned. Learning to communicate effectively is a skill we all need to be taught. The process of building better relationships is learned through developing the skills of self-awareness, self-disclosure, empathic listening, responding and confirmation.

2. It is impossible *NOT* to communicate: Communication researcher Pat Noller says that "it is impossible to not communicate! Many people do not understand this because they limit their concept of communication to words and fail to realise that communication is going on whenever we are in the presence of someone else, even if we are only communicating that we want to have nothing to do with them" (Noller, 1984, p. 1). Communication involves words, but it is bigger than mere words; it takes several forms—verbal, non-verbal and written. It occurs at three levels: (1) *content*—*what* is being shared; (2) *feeling*—*how you feel* about the content and relate to the

message; and (3) *meaning—the interpretation, significance and value* we attach to the message and our emotional response to its content.

3. How you feel about yourself affects how you communicate. Our ability to dialogue with, listen to and connect with others is heavily influenced by the level of our self-esteem. If our inner dialogue about ourselves is immersed in feelings of inferiority, inadequacy or self pity, then we become distracted or unfocused in our communication with others.

4. Empathic listening is a vital part of good communication. In most instances, it is not what you say that counts the most in the communication process but what others *hear* you say that matters. The art of listening—accurately receiving and interpreting the message—is ultimately more significant than the sending of the message. As Stephen Covey says, “First seek to understand, then be understood” (Covey, 1989, pp. 236-260).

5. Playback before talkback. One of the cardinal rules of effective communication is that we always need to check out what we heard the other person say to make sure that we are not making any incorrect assumptions about the message we have received. So often our own biases or prejudices can cause us to make inaccurate or faulty interpretations.

6. Feelings are the essence of communication. All communication involves the expression of emotion, either through the direct expression of positive or negative feelings or through the intent or innuendo of language. One of the most critical factors in the communication process is the ability to identify and understand the feelings being expressed. Feelings are the gateway to a person’s heart and soul. Connecting with another person’s feelings constitutes the most powerful part of the intimacy process. When we truly connect with feelings, there is a sense of closeness, vulnerability and genuineness. Frequently, the emotional connection between two people at the feeling level is something that happens beyond the use of words.

These six principles bring into focus issues at the core of all effective marital communications. They highlight the need for marital partners to use and develop the skills and behaviours critical to growing a strong, healthy relationship.

Levels of Communication

Our freedom and comfort in communicating is influenced by how safe and secure we feel about ourselves when we are with other people. The extent of our willingness to go out of ourselves to reveal our thoughts and feelings to others is described by John Powell in his book “Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?” (Powell, 1969, pp. 50-62). He suggests that there are five levels at which we communicate with others. Each level leads to greater depths of intimacy. See Figure 2.

Level five: Cliché conversation. There is minimal self-disclosure at this level. We talk in clichés, such as, “How’s it going?” “What have you been doing?” or “Good to see you.” This conversation is superficial and shares nothing of who we are or what we feel about anything. In marriage, this level of dialogue can cause a lot of frustration, resentment and distance.

Level four: Reporting the facts. Just as we may hide behind clichés, so we avoid personal disclosure by just giving news, stories, and narratives that involve others. Content to pass on data, sometimes gossip, about people and events in our world, we give nothing of ourselves and invite nothing from our partner in return.

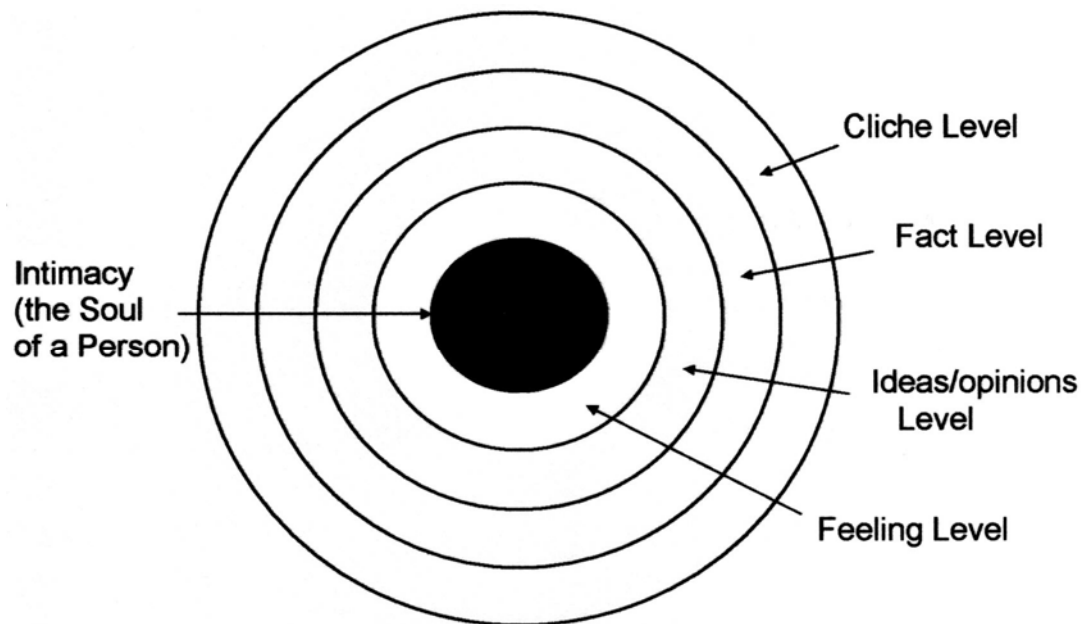


Figure 2 - Five Levels of Communication

Level three: My ideas and opinions. In expressing some of our own beliefs and views we give our partner some chance of getting to know us more intimately. However, we tend to be cautious, checking for signs of acceptance as we risk sharing a little of our ideas, thoughts, decisions or judgements.

Level two: My feelings and emotions. Communication at this level reveals a lot more about you and what goes on inside you. Your feelings clearly differentiate you from others and tell your partner who you really are. At this level, genuine emotional honesty and openness occurs and intimate connections can take place.

Level one: Intimate communication. Authentic communion occurs at this level between two people who are willing to risk being absolutely open, honest and genuine with each other. This personal encounter leads to deep insights, authentic friendship, emotional connection, mutual empathy, and understanding.

The Process of Communication

Now let us turn our attention to the six stages of the communication process. By understanding the dynamics involved in the way two people connect with each other, a marital couple can be encouraged to understand how their emotional attachments are formed and be motivated to develop the skills required.

Communication involves a “sender” and a “receiver”—someone who *encodes* and someone who *decodes* the message sent. Both individuals need to use specific skills in order for connection and understanding to occur without interference. Both need an attitude of respect and the ability to attend (listen) and be concrete (specific) if effective communication is to take place. The sender (encoder) needs to be able to self-disclose with openness and honesty and the receiver (decoder) needs the skills of emphatic listening and the ability to create a safe and receptive context in which understanding can occur.

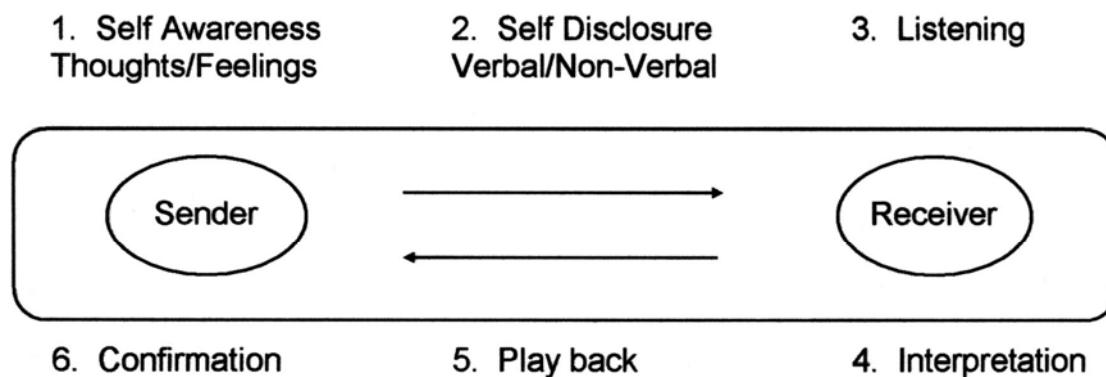


Figure 3 - The Process of Communication

Figure 3 indicates the six stages that must occur in the transfer of information from one person to another in order for them to achieve connection and experience a shared sense of meaning. These six stages actually highlight the six skills which are crucial in the process of making connection: self-awareness, self-disclosure, listening, interpretation, play-back, confirmation. A brief description of each skill and its part in the communication process follows.

Self-awareness. In terms of self-awareness, effective couple communication is dependent on two essential considerations: first, our ability to be aware of own thoughts and feelings and second, our awareness of how we feel about others. If we view ourselves as inadequate, inferior or insecure, this will affect the encoding of our message. If we see others as uncaring, unsupportive or aggressive, then this will also tend to shape our encoding. Being able to successfully encode messages to our marriage partner is vitally affected by our feelings of worth and self esteem. If we are not in touch with who we are and how we feel, we may have great difficulty formulating what we really want to say to others. Feelings that are not acknowledged cannot be shared. Other factors can distort our ability to reveal what we want to communicate to others also—our lack of expressiveness, our ambivalence about certain issues, or our active intention to hide or cover up feelings of anger, frustration, fear, dominance or deception (Noller, 1984, p. 71).

Self-disclosure. This very significant component in the process of communication involves verbally sharing our private thoughts, ideas, attitudes, beliefs and feelings. The emotional expressiveness involved helps develop rapport and increases the potential of the relationship with the other person. Self-disclosure also includes non-verbal sharing—a meaningful glance, an affectionate touch, other emotional expressions such as tears or laughter, and shared sexuality (Prager, 1995, p. 21).

The importance of non-verbal self-disclosure is grossly underestimated by many couples. Many are simply unaware of the powerful impact that messages expressed this way have on their experience of intimacy. Non-verbal communication accounts for about 93% of the message communicated, with only 7% being contained in words. 55% of the message is transmitted through body language or “visual aspects” (facial expression, gaze, posture, gestures) and 38% by means of the “vocal aspects” (tone of voice, loudness, tempo, pitch). Non-verbals therefore are the primary vehicle through which are conveyed one’s emotions, interpersonal attitudes of respect and empathy, and the feelings one has about the relationship (Noller, 1984, pp. 5-7).

Listening. Undoubtedly, listening is the most important communication skill, because it is the means by which the sender (the “encoder”) is affirmed as understandable and acceptable. On the other hand, nothing deflates and hurts us more than being ignored or cut off. Communication specialist Michael Nichols believes that listening is powerful because it enables us to immerse ourselves in another’s experience. Listening is the gift of our attention and understanding, making others feel validated and valued. Effective listening creates good will and provides the best way for us to enjoy others and learn from them. Through listening, couples connect with each other, build bonds of understanding, and strengthen their relationship (Nichols, 1995, pp. 4, 6, 10).

Interpretation. For communication to be effective, the message must be accurately interpreted. Questions that should be in the receiver’s mind are: What is being said by the sender? What is being felt? What does it mean? Decoding by the receiver must occur in a way that shows sensitivity and responsiveness to what matters most to the sender, i.e., (1) decoding effectively their feeling and (2) grasping the meaning and significance of their message. Nothing is more validating to a marriage partner than feeling heard and understood accurately.

Breakdowns can occur at any one of the six stages in the communication process, but no stage is more critical than the interpretation stage. *Knowing that your partner understands how you think and feel is the heart of making connection.* Disconnection, however, is common. Faulty decoding of the message causes effective communication to break down. Factors responsible for these interferences or breakdowns can include:

- words or meanings that are ambiguous,
- a negative attitude towards our partner,
- assumptions we make about the topic/issue that betray preconceived biases or prejudices,
- emotional defensiveness that is triggered by a self-absorption or feelings of hurt, fear or anger,
- interrupting or jumping to conclusions,
- the past history of the relationship (Noller, 1984, pp. 72, 185).

Play-back. In this part of the listening process, sometimes called “reflective listening,” we play back to the sender our understanding of what they have just said. We are checking to see that we accurately received the message and are reassuring the sender that we have taken their message seriously. As Hugh MacKay says, “reflective listening is the restraint which ensures that we will receive a message before we react to it.” If our playback is inaccurate, either in content or tone, the speaker is given an opportunity to correct our understanding of what has been said (Mackay, 1994, p. 178). The most effective method to use in playing back what we have heard is to paraphrase the total message—both the cognitive and feeling parts—so the sender can confirm that what they said has been “read” accurately.

Confirmation. Communication is completed when the sender confirms that connection has been made, the listener has accurately heard the message and acknowledged the reality of their (the sender’s) feelings. This act of confirmation is a moment of agreement that creates emotional intensity. It conveys the sender’s appreciation, acceptance and affirmation for the support and understanding that has been achieved. It greatly increases the sense of emotional bonding and the level of intimacy in the relationship. If confirmation is not given, then the sender and receiver can try again to establish the connection.

Understanding these stages of the communication process highlights two very important issues for marital communication that must be underscored. First, non-verbal communication plays a vital part in the process of emotional bonding. Receiving the total message not only insures a greater understanding, but provides the key to emotional connection. Failure to decode the nuances of feelings transmitted through the non-verbal channel greatly inhibits the prospects for intimacy and

dwarfs the potential for emotional closeness in the marriage. So often in marriage, communication takes place at the content level, but getting to the deeper levels of feelings and meaning does not occur because couples fail to listen carefully to *all* that is being communicated.

Secondly, listening is crucial to marital communication. Poor listening is one of the greatest dangers facing marital partners. Evidence suggests that people typically use only 25% of their listening capacity. We actually screen out, ignore, distort or misunderstand about 75% of all that we hear every day.

The Art of Listening

As has been already stated, listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give to another person. It is an act of love and caring. With it, we convey a very powerful message of affirmation about the value we attach to the individual who is speaking to us. In *The Lost Art of Listening*, Michael Nichols (1995) points out why listening is important:

- It is the way we receive information about others, our relationships, our world and even ourselves.
- It is the means whereby we validate the experiences of others and they recognise and validate our experiences.
- It nourishes our self-worth and helps us to feel loveable, acceptable and worthwhile as human beings.
- It has the ability to shape our character and make us feel secure.
- It is the bridge between the spaces that divide or separate us from others. We all yearn to escape the isolation of our existence to find community in the land of understanding (pp. 15, 16).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* (1954) writes of listening as a ministry. He says that the first service we owe to others consists of listening to them; that loving another person means learning to listen to them. Yet so often as Christians we feel we must always contribute something to others, thus forgetting that “listening can be a greater service than speaking” (p. 75). He then goes on to say:

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God, either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God, too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life (p. 75)

The Bible writers also confirm the importance of listening. Solomon said “the wise man learns by listening” (Proverbs 21:11 LB) and “answering before listening is both stupid and rude” (Proverbs 18:13 TM). The apostle James admonished everyone in the early Christian church to “be quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19 NIV).

So why is it that we all find it so hard to listen? Nichols suggests that “to listen well, we must forget ourselves and submit to the other person’s need for attention,” something that is not easy to do (Nichols, 1995, p. 3). Being preoccupied with our own immediate needs and concerns does prevent us from listening. Some of the common reasons for our failure to listen are:

- **Inattention** due to fatigue or busyness. Listening requires focused attention, energy and effort.
- **Preoccupation** with our own thoughts, feelings, work, needs.
- **Distraction**, either by our own inner dialogue, by noise or activity levels, or by trigger words or emotions generated by the dialogue.
- **Information overload**—too much information or information that we don't understand, e.g. technical language.
- **Actively and intentionally blocking** the communication process by filtering out what we don't want to hear, changing the subject, blaming the other person, busily rehearsing what to say in response, or giving a solution prematurely.
- **Boredom**—"I've heard all this before!"
- **Making assumptions** or snap judgements about what or how something is being said.
- Being focused on the details of the story and **missing the feelings and emotions being expressed**.

According to psychologist Carl Rogers (Simon, Howe, & Kirschenbaum, 1995), being a good listener requires being actively involved in the process of dialogue. Rogers made a clear distinction between "passive listening" and what he called "active listening". Passively listening, he said, involves merely hearing the topic or monologue of a speaker, whereas "active listening" involves two people engaged in interacting together, each listening intently and trying to understand and respond to what the other is saying. "Active listening" involves three key components:

1. Listening to words and feelings. The listener pays close attention to hearing not only what is being said (the words), but hearing and understanding the feelings behind the words as well.

2. Empathising with the speaker. Empathy is about understanding and responding to the emotional experience of the other person. The listener perceives with sensitivity what the other person is seeing and feeling. The listener puts himself in the position of the speaker and endeavours to see the world through their eyes. Empathy also means that the listener develops the capacity to let the speaker know that they are understood and respected.

3. Suspending judgement. The listener accepts the thoughts and feelings expressed by the speaker without making any judgement, without condemnation. The listener suspends their own value judgements and receives the whole message before they react to it. It suggests that the listener is willing to allow the speaker to have their feelings without any attempt to avoid, deny, fix, control or invalidate them.

Learning the art of actively listening is a skill that every couple needs to learn. It is often hard for us to be objective about how well we listen, because we are frequently blind to the bad habits that we have developed that prevent us from maintaining our focus and attending to the message being delivered. In addition to that, we find it hard to believe that our own anxiety to please or control could be the reason why our responses block the communication process.

Traits of a good listener. Here then, are a few traits of a good listener:

- Maintains good eye contact with the person speaking

- Responds with a smile, nod of the head or shows concern
- Pays close attention “to all that is going on”
- Does not interrupt the flow of information
- Maintains an open, accepting attitude and posture
- Learns to listen (even in the silences) and does not push the pace or rush the speaker
- Is empathetic, able to put themselves in the other person’s shoes
- Remains poised and emotionally controlled
- Does not change the topic, but allows the speaker to finish expressing their thoughts
- Connects with feelings
- Repeats those parts of the message not clearly understood
- Clarifies and reflects back the thoughts and feelings of the speaker by using a paraphrase of what has been said

Summary. It is important for marital couples to be consciously aware, not only of their differences, but of the need to communicate with each other. Failure to connect at the emotional level is the major reason a lot of marriages struggle to survive. When misunderstanding does occur, most couples stop listening to each other, become defensive and unreceptive to new information.

For an individual to be able to communicate effectively with their marital partner they need to be willing to reveal their inner feelings and risk extending themselves beyond those areas where they feel comfortable and unafraid. They must also be prepared to make it safe for their partner to communicate with and respond to them with empathy, acceptance and trust. One very good way to begin extending oneself is to make a point of telling ones partner about positive feelings, as these are easily accepted and present little risk. This action will tend to increase the opportunity for intimacy by reducing fears and inhibitions. It will create a climate in which it will be easier to reveal other feelings that are more difficult to share.

Couple Exercise: *Practicing Your Active Listening Skills*

As an exercise for this session, invite the couples in your group to practise their active listening skills with the following exercise:

The husband will tell a story about “one thing that really annoys me is” (For the sake of keeping a skill-building focus, the husband is directed to choose an issue outside their interpersonal relationship.) He has 3 minutes to tell his story. During this time the wife is to actively listen at two levels—(1) for the content of what is being said, and (2) for the feelings being expressed, which may be behind/beneath the words. She is not to say anything for the entire 3 minutes. She is to maintain appropriate eye contact, show interest and be pleasant, but say *nothing*.

At the end of 3 minutes, she will be given 1 minute to summarize or paraphrase what she heard him say, to give indication that she “heard” all that he said. He will validate her response if her feedback is accurate. If she fails to connect with all or only some of his story and his feelings, then she will need to try again and clarify further her understanding so that connection is established.

Repeat the exercise, with the wife now telling her story around “one thing that really frustrates me is” (Again, the wife should choose an issue outside their interpersonal relationship.) The husband does the listening and then has 1 minute to provide feedback.

Finally, call all couples together and debrief this learning experience by discussing together as a group what they observed and learned about the listening process. They are *not* to discuss the content of each couple’s story, but the listening exercise itself. The leader(s) may wish to explore

such questions as, “What was the most difficult thing about that exercise for you?” or “What did you learn about effective listening from that experience?” or “Why is listening so difficult?”

Couple Exercise: *Couple Communication*

Using the response sheet *Couple Communication*, invite couples to:

1. Respond to the questionnaire separately.
2. Join together in exploring their individual responses with each other.
3. Discuss areas in their relationship where they clearly have differences and concerns.
4. Encourage them to highlight 3 areas for further dialogue and resolution.

Couple Communication

Assess your satisfaction regarding the communication you have with your partner.

- **Circle** the response (1-5) that best describes the way you feel about each aspect of your marital communication. Draw a **square** around each answer that you think your partner will select in answering each question for him/herself.

	Definitely False	Usually False	Never True nor False	Usually True	Definitely True
1. I find it very easy to express all my true feelings to my partner	1	2	3	4	5
2. My partner is always a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am very happy with the way my partner and I talk with each other	1	2	3	4	5
4. Sometimes I am afraid to ask my partner for what I want	1	2	3	4	5
5. When we are having a problem, my partner often gives me the silent treatment	1	2	3	4	5
6. Sometimes I have trouble believing everything my partner tells me	1	2	3	4	5
7. My partner sometimes makes comments that put me down	1	2	3	4	5
8. I wish my partner was more willing to share their true feelings with me	1	2	3	4	5
9. I don't always share negative feelings I have about my partner because I'm afraid they will get angry	1	2	3	4	5
10. Often I do not tell my partner what I'm feeling because they should already know how I feel	1	2	3	4	5
11. My partner tends to talk too much and often monopolises the conversation	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am always a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
13. I enjoy the way my partner encourages me and expresses appreciation for what I've done	1	2	3	4	5
14. My partner let's me have my say without interrupting	1	2	3	4	5
15. I tend to avoid conflict with my partner and withdraw when confronted	1	2	3	4	5
16. I show my negative emotions non-verbally	1	2	3	4	5

- Please look over the list and **tick** the three most important areas of communication that you feel need to be improved, and share these concerns with each other.

Adapted from *The Couple Communication Scale* by D H Olson, D G Fournier and J M Druckman. Used by permission.

Session 3 Understanding and Dealing with Marital Conflict

Leadership Resources

Handling Marriage's Greatest Obstacle

It is not how much a couple love each other, how great their sex life is, how they deal with their money, or even how they discipline their children that best predicts the quality of their relationship. It is the way they deal with their differences (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, p. 6). Current research reveals that the greatest obstacle to intimacy and satisfaction in marriage is a couple's inability to successfully handle disagreement and conflict. Virginia Satir believed that individuals cannot be real or develop a truly human and zestful relationship with one another until they have confronted and successfully handled their differentness (Satir, 1972, p. 138). Being able to deal with "differentness"—the whole range of individual differences—is what constitutes the core experience of every successful marriage.

Reconciling differences. John Gottman notes how significant he has found this conflict resolution aspect throughout his last twenty years of research on marriage:

The one lesson I have learned from my years of research is that a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship. Many couples tend to equate a low level of conflict with happiness and believe the claim "we never fight" is a sign of health. But I believe we grow in our relationships by reconciling our differences. That is how we become more loving people and truly experience the fruits of marriage. (Gottman, 1994, p. 28)

Couples come to know each other more intimately by *reconciling* their differences. Gottman is not suggesting that marriage is about *resolving* or neutralising differences but about how well married partners learn to live together in spite of their inherent differences. What matters most is the way they handle the inevitable differences that arise whenever two people form a partnership. This raises the question "Why is it that dealing with our differences is so difficult?"

The Role of Emotion in Marital Conflict

Thanks to marital researchers like Gottman and others, the causes of unhappiness and distress in marriage are no longer a mystery. We now know that the nature of marital distress is related to the way couples handle their differentness and reconcile the problems that develop within their marriage when one or both feel (1) *flooded* by negative emotions and (2) *trapped* in narrow, negative interactional patterns that constrict and contain conflict and regulate feelings of fear and rejection (Johnson, 1996, pp. 1, 3).

We need to acknowledge the compelling role that emotion plays among couples as they try to resolve their differences. Once again, we must focus on the importance of the emotional bond that exists between two married people and the interactional process of attachment by which it is formed. The damage done to the marriage relationship by ongoing unresolved conflict, the feelings of vulnerability, insecurity and abandonment, can only be repaired as attention is given to developing those attachment behaviours that rebuild and strengthen the couple's emotional bond.

Many difficulties in marriage have their genesis in the way couples process their feelings with each other. Problems often arise when married partners fail to accurately read one another's emotions, attempt to avoid or control the expression of feelings, or otherwise respond negatively to

emotions within the relationship. This tends to foster cycles of negative interaction and create misunderstandings and distress that result in hostility, defensiveness, or withdrawal (Johnson & Greenberg, 1994, pp. 302, 309).

Fear of being misunderstood or rejected. Central to the issue of marital conflict is the degree to which partners feel vulnerable to each other or afraid that they will not be understood or supported emotionally. The fear of being attacked, abandoned, rejected, or being found incompetent or inadequate tends to restrict the way in which information is shared or processed. It also evokes behaviours that ultimately put the marriage at risk. When feelings of frustration, fear, anger and hurt remain after an intense emotional exchange, a partner can be left brooding over their wounds and contemplating the future state of the relationship. These feelings inhibit the growth of trust and intimacy and prevent the development of meaningful connection.

Heightened feelings of anxiety and insecurity. When couples are reactive to each other, the second major issue emerges. In their attempt to deal with the fear of being misunderstood or rejected, heightened feelings of anxiety and insecurity are generated within married partners. This anxiety is seen by many researchers as an attachment issue. The anxieties and insecurities foster the establishment of recurring cycles of negative interaction. These are attempts to re-establish connection by pleading or demanding that the other partner become more accessible and responsive. If this does not happen, the pursuing partner may intensify their efforts through behaviours like protesting, clinging or simply avoiding or withdrawing from the other partner, until the other partner becomes more available and responsive and re-establishes meaningful contact.

These negative repetitive cycles of interaction are maintained by emotional exchanges that take on a life of their own as married partners critically attack, condemn, blame and even show contempt towards each other. This negativity which begins to pervade the whole relationship can often result in the development of the common “attack – withdraw” pattern. Pursuit on the part of one partner is met by the other distancing himself. When a couple fails to resolve these negative patterns and to build positive connections with each other, respect and goodwill begin to disappear and the marriage really struggles to survive (Johnson & Greenberg, 1994, pp. 302, 309).

According to Gottman, what really separates contented couples from those in deep misery is the way they successfully establish a healthy balance between the positive and negative feelings and actions toward each other. With contented couples, negative feelings and frequent arguments are balanced with lots of love and compassion; lots of empathy and affirmation; plenty of touching, smiling and laughing. The predominance of these positive behaviours acts like a nutrient, nurturing the affection, joy and contentment that strengthen the couple’s ability to deal with their differences and weather the rough storms of conflict and disagreement.

Interestingly, Gottman has the view that conflict can serve a positive function in marriage. By facilitating the cycle of closeness and distance, conflict actually creates the dynamic that prevents stagnation and stimulates relational renewal and intimacy. He suggests that a certain amount of negativity may be required to foster creativity in the marriage and help it to thrive. While that may be true, it is quite clear that too much negativity is definitely destructive to the relationship (Gottman, 1994, pp. 56-67).

Defining Conflict

Robert Bolton believes that “you cannot find personal intimacy without conflict. Love and conflict are inseparable (Bolton, 1979, p. 207). That may be true! However, even though conflict may be a normal, unavoidable part of our relationships, it is not something we seek or enjoy. Most of us

find conflict disruptive and destructive, and will do anything to avoid it, even to the point of suppressing our feelings and emotional reactions when we are confronted, challenged, or frustrated.

The Scriptures warn us about the destructive effect that negative behaviours and conflict can have in our relationship. The wise man Solomon said that “gentle words cause life and health, griping brings discouragement” (Prov. 15:4 LB). He instructed us to remember that “it is hard to stop a quarrel once it starts, so don’t let it begin” (Prov. 17:14 LB).

Paul urged two individuals at Philippi to “iron out their differences and make up. God does not want his children holding grudges” (Phil. 4:1 TM). He also wrote a long letter to the believers at Ephesus counselling them not to “let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs . . . and get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:29, 31 NIV).

Conflict can be defined as “an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the actions of one person interfere with the actions of another” (Dominian, 1995, p. 87). Newton Malony sees conflict as a fight for life. He proposes that we make a clear distinction between conflict and problems. *Conflict* is about our inner response to those external threats that endanger our status, identity and self esteem. When our self esteem suffers a real or imaginary blow, we are forced to defend ourselves or be psychologically devastated. The term *problem* he applies to those situations that involve disputes, differences of opinion and struggle over goals and values between two individuals or groups of people (Malony, 1989, pp. 15, 18, 31).

The Basic Components of Conflict

There are two basic components to conflict, the *emotional* component and the *specific issues* component. The *emotional component* constitutes the relational dimension including feelings of anger, distrust, defensiveness, scorn, resentment, fear and rejection. *Specific issues* involves conflicting needs and values, disagreements over policies and practises, and differing conceptions of roles and uses of resources. These two components are often intertwined and difficult to separate (Bolton, 1979, p. 217). The specific issues frequently generate emotional conflict and the emotional component can tend to multiply the specific issues.

Two guiding principles generally apply when one is dealing with these two components of conflict. First, if the relationship is spontaneous and healthy, the emotional or relational aspect will tend to recede into the background. Secondly, the more one struggles to define or acknowledge the emotional component, the less importance is attached to the specific issues or content aspect of the conflict. Couples should be encouraged to identify these two components when conflict emerges in their relationship.

Deal constructively with the emotional component first. When adrenaline is flowing and emotions are aroused, when anger is being expressed either verbally or non-verbally, married partners are more volatile and ready for combat. It is very important that they learn to listen and connect first with each other’s feelings. Nothing will be resolved until first they connect with the frustration and hurt that motivates the anger.

Attend to specific issues second. When couples have first connected with the feelings, then they can seek to rationally examine the specific issues.

Sources of Conflict in Marriage

Money, sex, and communication. A number of issues typically create conflict for marital couples. Issues tend to change in importance and intensity throughout the family life cycle. Three main issues, however, are *money*, *sex*, and *communication*. They can be difficult because they are symptomatic of fundamental core issues related to survival, emotional security and intimacy. These specific issues are regularly encountered, therefore a means of managing them must be found if the relationship is to function effectively.

Poor communication. The initial complaint in marriage counselling is often “we just can’t communicate.” *Poor communication* is a common cause of conflict and disagreement arising when partners find it difficult to express their needs, wants and feelings or when they resort to constantly questioning, criticising or condemning their partner. If couples fail to share ideas, opinions and general information with each other, this often leaves them feeling isolated, ignored and emotionally unsupported. When this happens, they typically end up in the “pursue-withdraw” pattern.

Relationship and family matters. Other conflicts are related to *relationship and family matters*—lack of agreed upon leadership in the relationship. Who is responsible for making the final decisions? How will housework be distributed? What happens when there is failure to complete household chores? The discipline and care of children, appropriate boundaries with in-laws and extended family, balancing work and family are additional sources of conflict.

Differences. At a deeper level, *personality differences* and *gender differences* frequently influence marital conflict. Differences such as neatness, punctuality, self-discipline, ambition, energy levels, dominance, jealousy, lack of generosity, the need for excitement or relaxation, negativity or a lack of assertiveness, are part of the wide range of differences that can easily become wonderful grist for the mill of discontent, irritation and disputation.

Research finds that husbands tend to withdraw from conflict because of the unpleasantness of their physiological arousal during arguments, whereas wives tend to raise the intensity and escalate the conflict when they sense their husband’s non-responsiveness and avoidant behaviour. Men tend to be “too rational” and downplay emotions during conflict whereas women are more likely to complain and criticise (Gottman, 1994, pp. 149-153). Because men and women tend to have very different ways of experiencing and expressing emotion, this too can create a lot of misunderstanding and disagreement within marriage (Gottman, 1999b, p. 307).

Differences in family history and background are an often unrecognised source of conflict in marriage. The partners bring a variety of attitudes, values and beliefs about money (its importance and how it should be managed), sex (its value and function), religion (its central role in the family), and children (how they should be raised—strict or lenient?) that influence the way they connect and interact with each other as parents and as husband and wife. Even attitudes towards conflict itself, or how to deal with anger and stress, learned in the family as they were growing up, often cause bitter disagreements as the couple becomes frustrated over their mismatched scripts.

Six hidden issues often drive the most destructive arguments. By “hidden” we mean that they are not usually talked about or openly acknowledged (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, pp. 123-131).

Power. Couples may unconsciously fight over who has control of the relationship. Who has the final say? Power struggles occur to determine the outcome and resolution of concerns. Control issues are least likely to damage the relationship when a couple feels that they are a team and that the needs and desires of each are considered in making decisions.

Feeling loved. Married partners need to feel that they are loved and that their emotional needs are being met. Knowing that they are secure in the relationship and that they are needed and cared for by their partner paves the way for greater connection and more efficient problem solving.

Recognition. When couples receive recognition and appreciation from their partner for their accomplishments, they feel valued for who they are and for what they do. This not only prevents relationship burnout but provides them with the confidence to deal with issues openly and effectively.

Commitment. It is critical for married partners to feel secure in their relationship. When conflict arises, if an individual feels that their partner may “get up and leave,” then anxiety and uncertainty are aroused that can block the path to conflict resolution.

Integrity. Nothing undermines a couple’s ability to deal with their problems and differences more than the feeling that their partner questions their motives or intentions. When an individual feels that they are invalidated, insulted or that their integrity is questioned, these feelings take precedence over any attempts to resolve specific issues or problems.

Acceptance. All couples need to feel accepted and respected by each other. This issue underlies all other issues. The fear of being rejected or found to be unacceptable sabotages an individual’s desire to pursue serious conflict resolution. Markman sees “acceptance as the most basic hidden issue driving the issues of power, caring, commitment and integrity in arguments (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, pp. 132).

A Three-Step Model for Managing Conflict

Couples can help reduce distress and prevent the breakdown of their marriage by restraining or eliminating negativity—threatening, blaming and shaming each other or using judgmental language as a way of reacting to and controlling their partner’s behaviour and actions. They can learn how to effectively manage their conflict and resolve their problems in ways that protect their relationship.

Sadly, nobody formally teaches us how to deal with conflict, so we often stumble along with attitudes and behaviours that we learned in childhood as we watched our parents or other adults address disagreements.

Here is *a three step model* that will help married partners to connect with each other emotionally, establish a healthy dialogue, and resolve their problems amicably.

Step One: Connect with the emotion. Deal first with the emotional tensions generated by the conflict and connect with the feelings of the other person. Focus primarily on two areas—an acknowledgement of your own feelings and responses, and show a willingness to connect with the emotional reactions of your partner.

Calm yourself. Because being “emotionally flooded” is so destructive to a relationship, the first strategy you need to learn is to recognise when you are feeling overwhelmed; identify what triggers you off; and acknowledge how you get drawn into negative patterns of interaction. Take deliberate steps to calm yourself down:

- Tell yourself to relax as you monitor your physical responses, reduce your arousal level, and deal with your stress reactions so that you can enter into dialogue with your partner.
- Call “time out” so you can recover your composure.

- Talk to yourself, so that you get rid of negative, hurtful or vengeful thoughts and replace them with soothing and validating ones that you rehearse to yourself. (Gottman, 1994, pp. 176 –181).

Listen to your partner non-defensively. Connecting with your partner is crucial to understanding and resolving conflict. Listening empathically enables you to embrace your partner's feelings and prevents escalation, invalidation and withdrawal from occurring. Training yourself to speak to your partner in a way that does not trigger a negative response will reduce their defensiveness and improve your communication with each other (Gottman, 1994, pp. 181-194).

Validate each other's feelings. Accepting, appreciating and affirming your partner's feelings does not necessarily mean you agree with them. It does show that you empathise and understand. Nothing makes a person feel more valued, respected and loved (Gottman, 1994, pp. 195-199).

Step Two: Discuss the problem. Seek to understand your partner's concern about a specific issue. Here are a few attitudes and actions that are critical in the process of discussing the problem:

Make a "soft" start to the discussion. Research shows that couples in a happy, stable marriage are extremely careful about the way they begin their conflict discussions. "Softened start-ups" help minimise their partner's defensiveness (Gottman, 1999b, pp. 224, 225). Pay close attention to your own inner dialogue, managing your negative thoughts and the desire to respond defensively. Focus on raising issues only with friendship, sympathy and an understanding of your partner's situation in their mind.

Clearly define what the problem is that needs to be resolved. Be specific and make sure that you both understand what the nature of the problem is and how you both see the issue. Focus on one issue at a time. Do not complicate the issue by trying to discuss several different or related issues at the same time.

Discuss and validate your points of view. State the problem but do not try to solve it yet. Be sure you both understand and validate each other's point of view. Do not generalise about the problem, be specific and avoid using absolutes like "you always" or "you never". Avoid personally labelling each other and seek to eliminate all hidden agendas and the use of camouflaged messages.

The Speaker-Listener Technique. If discussing the problem with each other is really difficult or explosive, one or both of you may call "time out". This is not to avoid the issue but to allow time for you to calm down (return to step one) and refocus on the substantive issues involved in the conflict. When you are ready to recommence discussions, you might wish to, with respect and safety, utilise the very effective and proven method of communicating with each other called the "Speaker/Listener technique" developed by Markman, Stanley and Blumberg in their book *Fighting for Your Marriage* (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994, pp. 63, 64). This technique can operate as a "circuit breaker" by preventing the four destructive patterns of communication from emerging. It operates according to the following rules:

Rules for couples

- The one speaking "has the floor" and therefore the right to speak without interruption;
- The "floor" is shared over the course of the discussion as the couple switch roles;
- No problem solving is allowed. Just a good discussion of your thoughts and feelings.

Rules for the speaker

- Speak for yourself. Don't try to be a mind reader. Talk about your thoughts, feelings and concerns. Try to use "I" statements
- Don't go on and on. Confine what you say to brief manageable statements. No long monologues;
- Stop and let the listener paraphrase.

Rules for the listener

- Paraphrase and playback what you heard.
- Focus on the Speaker's message. Affirm what they said. Don't try to rebut their argument.

Step Three: Solve problems. Nothing will be resolved unless you feel positive towards one and another and are invested in each other's good. Having listened to and thoroughly understood each other's point of view, you must be willing to give and take; be responsive to each other's influence; and recognise that neither of you can have their own way all the time. Furthermore, you must be prepared to mutually co-operate in bringing about changes where these are important to the relationship. Such a collaborative problem solving process involves (Callan & Noller, 1987, p. 154).

Look at alternative solutions. Consider all options and alternatives open to you to resolve the problem. Brainstorm as many ideas as possible without criticism or evaluation.

Choose the best solution. Explore the consequences of each of the proposed alternatives. Endeavour to be flexible to ensure that both of your needs are met. This kind of *creative solution* (different from your original demands, yet satisfying to both) is superior to the alternatives—*capitulation* (giving your partner what they want), *compromise* (accepting a solution that goes part way towards each other's view), *co-existence* (agreeing to accept your current differences).

Plan and implement. Having chosen a solution, now work out an action plan and decide who will be responsible for doing what, where and when. Then, act on the plan.

Evaluate the outcome and the process. Finally, you need to monitor the effect of your decision, checking with each other about the process, what you wish you'd done differently, and how effective the outcome was. Set a time frame for revisiting the solution and evaluating it.

The value of this simple three step problem solving process is that it communicates to the partners an important mutually-affirming message about how much the relationship is valued. Their partner's needs are important enough for them to listen and understand and they are willing to risk new pathways in their search of ideas that will improve their marriage.

Common Mistakes in Conflict Resolution

- **Failure to listen to and deal with the feelings and emotions.**
- **Failure to clearly define the problem.** Partners must listen long enough to understand what the other is saying and clearly understand their concerns.
- **Failure to get all the information.** The solution stage cannot be hurried. Couples need to adequately understand and define the problem. Until they have all the facts, they are not ready to look for a solution. Some simply lack the motivation to resolve their differences, either because they don't care anymore about the relationship or they find it all too hard. They would sooner resolve the situation by being submissive or avoiding the conflict all together.

• **Failure to communicate effectively** can also create a huge barrier to conflict resolution. People who make the mistake of being critical, dogmatic or defensive and use a range of “power plays” to block the successful resolution of conflict, actively prevent their partner from feeling understood and appreciated within the marriage relationship.

Marriage brings together two people in a special relationship. Each marriage has its unique combination of styles for handling conflict. As indicated earlier, marriage partners tend to learn their mode of conflict management in their childhood years as they are growing up in their family of origin, where they observe, copy and react to the styles of their parents. As a result, couples can sometimes find themselves gridlocked in conflict, using two learned styles that don't work well together. This can be frustrating and confusing especially if they both believe innately that their way is right and that it is the only way to manage the conflict and achieve resolution, peace and harmony.

Couple Exercise: *Conflict Analysis*

Invite couples to use the response sheet *Conflict Analysis* to identify an area of concern that produces conflict in their current relationship. Using the *3 Step Model for Managing Conflict*, encourage couples to work through their issue toward resolution.

Alternatively, the couple may wish to take one of the issues of concern identified in Session 1 as a problem requiring resolution. The couple will use the *3 Step Model for Managing Conflict* to work toward resolving the problem.

Allow couples sufficient time to work together on this exercise so that they can achieve significant gains (approx: 20 -30 minutes).

CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Most couples have disagreements and conflicts in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

		Always Agree	Usually Agree	No Contest	Usually Disagree	Always Disagree
1.	Handling family finances	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Matters of recreation	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Religious matters	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Demonstrations of affection	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Friends	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Sex relations	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Conventionality (correct or proper behaviour)	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Philosophy of life	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Aims, goals, and things believed important	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Amount of time spent together	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Making major decisions	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Household tasks	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Leisure time interests and activities	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Career decisions	1	2	3	4	5
16.	Praying and Bible study together	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Child-rearing procedures	1	2	3	4	5
18.	Where we live	1	2	3	4	5
19.	The following line represents different degrees of satisfaction in how you presently resolve conflicts. Please circle the number which best describes how you feel (all things considered) about the level of conflict resolution in your relationship.					

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Extremely Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Fairly Unsatisfied</i>	<i>A little Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Extremely</i>	<i>Perfect</i>

Adapted from Graham Spanier, "Measuring Dyadic Adjustment: New Scales for Assessing the Quality of Marriage and Similar Dyads", *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, February 1976. Used by permission.

3 STEP MODEL FOR MANAGING CONFLICT

1. Connect with the Emotion

- a. Calm yourself
- b. Listen non-defensively
- c. Validate each other's feelings

2. Discuss the Problem

- a. Make a "soft" start to the discussion
- b. Clearly define the problem that needs to be resolved
- c. Discuss and validate your points of view

3. Solve the Problem

- a. Look at alternative solutions
- c. Choose the best solution
- c. Develop your action plan
- d. Implement the plan
- e. Evaluate the outcome, and the process used to get to resolution

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Best Friends

A Seminar for Parents on Helping Children Make and Be Good Friends

by Karen Flowers

*He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious
will have the king for his friend. ~ Proverbs*

Introduction

There is not a parent alive who has not known concern at one time or another over their child's choice of friends. Who of us can't identify with the mother whose son came home from his first day of school and announced, "Justin is going to be my best friend!" The problem was, this mother knew Justin. Everyone knew Justin. He was only a little boy, but he brought trouble wherever he went. Some had even suggested at the church that maybe they should quietly suggest to the man who picked him up that maybe bringing him to Sabbath School wasn't such a good idea. After all, the church had to put the well-being of its own children first!

In this seminar we will explore ways parents can help their children make good friends and be good friends. The friendship skills learned in childhood develop a child's capacity for warm, close relationships in marriage, in the family, and in the wider circle of God's children.

The Makings of a Friend

Materials needed:

- Copies of the following Bible passages for each participant.

Deut. 13:6-8
Prov. 17:17
Prov. 18:24
Prov. 22:11
Prov. 22:24

Prov. 27:6
Prov. 27:9
Eccl. 4:10
Lam. 1:2
Luke 15:6, 9
John 3:29

John 15:15
Acts 24:23
3 John 1:2
3 John 1:5
3 John 1:14

- Pencils for participants.

Small group activity:

In small groups of 4-6, read the Bible passages. Look for the characteristics of a good friend. Sometimes you will have to think in reverse to turn a negative attribute into a positive. Then rewrite the message of each text as a proverb, in language a child could understand. Are there other proverbs you would like to write for the collection? [*Note to Leaders: If the groups have difficulty writing the message as a proverb, consult the list below.*]

Deut. 13:6-8	A good friend helps you follow Jesus.
Prov. 17:17	A good friend loves you no matter what.
Prov. 18:24	A good friend sticks with you, even when things are bad.
Prov. 22:11	A good friend isn't phony. His words are kind.
Prov. 22:24	A good friend doesn't get mad at you all the time.
Prov. 27:6	A good friend will be honest with you.
Prov. 27:9	A good friend gives good advice.
Eccl. 4:10	A good friend helps you up when you are down.
Lam. 1:2	A good friend is loyal.
Luke 15:6, 9	A good friend is happy when you're happy.
John 3:29	A good friend likes to be where you are.
John 15:15	Good friends can talk openly to each other.
Acts 24:23	Good friends look out for each other.
3 John 1:2	A good friend wants the best for you.
3 John 1:5	A good friend compliments you when you've done a good job.
3 John 1:14	A good friend stays your friend, even when you are separated from each other.

A Parent's Place

Materials needed:

- Two pieces of cardboard large enough for the words on them to be visible to all members of the seminar. Write the words "Agree" and "Disagree" in large print on the two pieces.

Agree-Disagree:

- Ask for volunteers to hold the placards on opposite sides of the room at the front.
- Invite participants to stand to their feet and move to the appropriate side of the room to indicate whether or not they agree or disagree with each of the following statements. For each question, ask the parents on the "Agree" side to find another parent from the "Disagree" side and give them one minute to defend their positions to the other. If the parents are not evenly divided in their opinions, let two who have the same opinion pair up and talk together about why they stood where they did and not on the other side.

1. Parents should have the final say regarding who their children's friends are.
2. Children whose families have strong networks of family friends find it easier to make friends.
3. Parents who forbid their children to associate with friends who are a bad influence are only doing their duty as responsible parents.
4. A parent's role in helping their child choose friends is one aspect of parenting that does not change as the child gets older.
5. The more you try to influence your children's choice of friends, the less likely you will be to succeed.
6. It is better if adults do not intervene in conflicts between children.

7. Children can learn communication, anger-management, and problem-solving skills even as preschoolers.

Summing Up:

Spend a few minutes pooling ideas that came from the participants' discussions together. Augment their reports as necessary to include the following important points:

- Prevention is always better than cure. Whatever effort you expend teaching your child about friendship and developing their relational skills at home will make it less likely you will be faced with having to deal with "friend problems" later.
- When parents "forbid" and use other forceful tactics to try to separate friends, they run the risk that they will actually drive them closer together. It's better to open your home to many children your child's age and help them broaden their network of friends. You may even be able to include the "problem" child in a larger group and help him find acceptance without misbehaving.
- Children can be very cruel to one another. When a child is being put down, ridiculed or bullied, adults must intervene to protect the child from further harm and to send the clear message to the other children that such behavior will not be tolerated.
- Modeling good relational skills in the family is one of the best ways children learn. They can begin to develop these skills at a very young age if they are given opportunity to practice them at home.

Try This at Home

One of the best skills you can teach your child to help them make good friends is how to listen. You can begin very early to help children hear one another. Rather than taking sides or offering solutions when two children are having a problem, use your listening skills to help them really hear what each other are saying and feeling.

Materials needed:

- Copies of the *Demonstration* script below for volunteers ("Julie," "Jeff," "Mom") to use in reading to the group.
- Copies of the *Role-play* script for each member of the seminar.

Demonstration:

Use the following script to demonstrate how a parent can teach children to listen to one another. Ask for two volunteers to read the parts of the "Julie" and "Jeff." You may choose another "Mom" or you, as the seminar leader, may read the part of the parent.

Julie: "Jeff won't let me color in his coloring book."

Mom: (talking back and forth between the children to clarify) "Just a minute, Jeff. Let me help you make sure you heard what Julie said and how she is feeling right now. Julie, you correct me if I don't get your message right, okay? Jeff, I hear Julie saying she's upset because you won't let her color in your book."

Jeff: "She colors on all the pages and uses up the whole book."

Mom: "Now hold on, Julie. Let's make sure you heard what Jeff is trying to tell you. Jeff wants you to know that the reason he gets frustrated and doesn't want you to color in his book is that he thinks you color on too many pages. Right, Jeff?"

Julie: "I do not. I only colored on three pages."

Mom: "Jeff, Julie is upset because she says she didn't color on all the pages, just three of them. Do you think the two of you can come to an agreement on how many pages Julie can color, or which books you can share?"

This dialogue is from real life. The payoff for the mother came when Jeff said, "Come on, Julie. We might as well work this out ourselves. If we stay here, Mom will only tell us what we just said and waste all our play time!"

Can you identify the two common elements in each of the mother's responses?

(1) She rephrases the content of the child's message; and (2) she names the feeling she thinks the child is experiencing.

In this way the parent helps the other child to hear what her playmate is saying and understand how this makes her feel. Often this is enough to resolve the problem. If not, the parent may need to help the children explore possible solutions until they can agree on one that satisfies them both. It will not be long before the children will be able to listen to one another without the help of the parent.

Role-play:

Read the following scenario and then ask for two participants to volunteer to role-play the dialogue between the two children. Ask the rest of the class to play the role of the parent, offering possible responses after each child speaks. Remember, the parental listening response has two parts: (1) rephrasing content, and (2) identifying feelings.

Sallie and Kevin were playing kickball in the yard. Sallie comes running to her dad all covered with mud.

Sallie: "Daddy, Daddy. Kevin tripped me and made me fall down in the mud."

Dad: [Let volunteers from the group try to formulate a listening response. Look for a response that rephrases content and identifies feeling, something like the following: "You don't like being covered with mud, and you think Kevin made you fall."]

Kevin: "I didn't trip her. She fell over the ball."

Dad: [Again, let volunteers offer responses. Example: "You are upset that you are being blamed because you think it was the ball that made her fall."]

Sallie: "He wanted me to fall because I was winning!"

Dad: [Example: "You are certain Kevin tripped you on purpose."]

Kevin: “She’s the one that always has to win!”

Dad: [Example: “You feel strongly that Sallie is blaming you because she wanted to win.”]

How long this kind of exchange will go on will vary. The parent simply listens back and forth until the children resolve the problem or it becomes evident they need help to find a mutually satisfying solution. In most cases, children will solve their own problems themselves or become weary and go back to their play. Meanwhile, they have seen yet another demonstration of how to be a good listener.

Listening skills are often “caught” more than they are “taught.” The great side benefit for the parent is that this is one of the best known cures for tattling. Tattling is only attractive when one child is successful in getting the parent to side with them against the other. The listening parent does not take sides. They simply facilitate the children resolving their own issues.

If time permits, you may want to come up with some scenarios in the group and practice your skills.

The Anger Ladder

One of the most important friendship skills you can give your child is the ability to manage anger constructively. Ross Campbell (1996) suggests a process for helping your child learn to handle anger in ways that are not destructive either of things or people. He helps parents understand that it is not good for a child to bottle up negative emotions inside where they will create additional physical and emotional distress. When a child is angry, it can be very helpful to think as a parent, “Get it out, Suzie. It’s okay to have strong feelings. I can’t help you deal with these feelings until we know what is going on inside of you. So tell me everything you’re thinking and feeling.”

While you as the parent recognize the importance of encouraging the child to share what they are thinking and feeling openly, you also want to help them express their thoughts and feelings in ways that are not destructive. Campbell suggests helping your child “climb the anger ladder” (Campbell, 1996, p. 208).

On the lower rungs, the child uses mostly inappropriate and negative ways of expressing anger, such as screaming, using bad language, throwing things, etc. The higher rungs of the anger ladder represent more appropriate, positive ways of handling strong negative emotion, such as being able to control one’s impulses, holding to one issue, and verbalizing thoughts and feelings coherently.

The process of helping your child climb the anger ladder is quite simple. Two steps are involved:

(1) When your child is angry, try to find one thing that’s good about the way they are trying to tell you about it. Say things like,

“I really like it when you tell me how you are feeling.”

“It’s very good that you can tell me you are angry without throwing anything.”

“You are doing very well at telling me exactly how you feel when your sister knocks over your tower.”

(2) Then suggest one thing they can do better next time. Say things like,

“Next time, I hope you can tell me about it as soon as you feel yourself getting angry.”

“Next time, I want you to try to talk, not scream.”

“Next time, do you think you could tell me about it without using any bad words?”

Practice runs:

Have parents role-play scenes from their memories of times when their children were filled with negative emotion. Let the group work together to come up with parental responses that (1) affirm the child for something good about the way they are handling their emotions, and (2) suggest one thing they might do better next time.

Peer Pressure: Friend or Foe?

As children move outside the family into the wider circles of neighborhood, church and school, the influences that can affect their behavior also expand. Friends can have a powerful impact for good or for ill especially as peer pressure comes to full crescendo in adolescence. One of the most important skills you can give your child is an assertiveness skill that can help them resist negative peer pressure. It is one of the best ways to help your child maintain their choice to live by the Christian values they have espoused in your family circle.

Materials needed:

- Copies of the dialogue below for volunteers playing “Janet” and “Susan” to read.

An Assertive Response:

Using an assertive response is a way that a young person can listen to a friend and let them know they care enough about them to want to understand what they are saying and feeling. At the same time, it is also a way of strongly asserting the value by which the young person has decided to live. An assertive response has two parts:

(1) First the child conveys to their friend that they care about them and the relationship enough to listen to what they have to say. The child shows they are trying to understand by rephrasing what they think they heard their friend say and identifying the feelings they think their friend is experiencing.

(2) Then the child states (and restates) their own value or decision.

A Sample Scenario:

Here’s the situation. Your daughter Susan has a big history test tomorrow and needs to study. Her friend Janet wants to go shopping. [Recruit two parents to volunteer to read the dialogue between them.] That dialogue that might go something like this:

Janet: “You always say you have to study when I want to go shopping.”

Susan: “It’s frustrating that I always seem to need to study when you want to have fun. But I have decided to spend the evening getting ready for my history test.”

Janet: “You know, sometimes I wonder if you really want to be my friend.”

Susan: “You are really feeling neglected and beginning to wonder how much our friendship means to me. Your friendship is very important to me, but tonight I have decided to spend the evening getting ready for my history test.”

Janet: “I just don’t think it’s necessary to put that much time into schoolwork. You’ll get an ‘A’ anyway.”

Susan: “It’s frustrating to you that I put such a high priority on my schoolwork. But I have decided to spend the evening getting ready for my history test.”

Group response:

Read the dialogue again, stopping after each of Susan’s responses. See if the class can identify the two parts to each assertive response. The real genius to this skill is that *the second part of the response never changes*. A person does not have to defend their values. Values are personal, and each person has a right to determine their own value system. Thus, in an assertive response, the young person only needs to restate their value. They can thus avoid getting into an argument over whether it is a good value or not.

Practice runs:

Practice the assertiveness skill with real-life scenarios suggested by the group as time allows.

For small group discussion:

- In what kinds of situations do you see this skill as being useful?
- What ideas do you have for helping your teen practice this skill at home?
- How might you use this skill yourself as a parent?
- What other ways have you found to help your child handle negative peer pressure without going against their values?

Who Wants to Eat Stone Soup?

The following story may make a suitable close for your seminar on helping children make and be best friends.

Materials needed:

- Large piece of poster board
- Sticky note or small card (such as a 3 x 5 note card) for each participant. Give each participant their sticky note or their card before reading the story.
- Tape or other adhesive for use in attaching the cards or notes on the large poster board.

Soup story:

There is an old story about a pot of soup. It seems there was to be a big meeting of twelve village chiefs to discuss how they could work together better to share food and other resources in difficult times. Each chief was asked to bring along a vegetable to put into a pot of soup. The soup would be left to cook over the fire all day long, and after the meeting there would be plenty of soup for everyone to eat as much as they liked.

Chief Makuna lived in a distant village and was on the trail before sunrise. He was more than half way to the meeting when he suddenly remembered that he was supposed to bring a vegetable for the soup. He had nothing in his basket, except a banana that he was planning to eat for lunch. He couldn't put a banana in the soup! All along the path he looked for something suitable, but he didn't find anything. As he neared the village, he grew more and more concerned! He didn't want the others to know he had brought nothing to contribute. He'd have to pretend to put something into the big black pot. It would have to be something big enough to make a splash, or the others would know he was faking.

Stooping down he found a clean stone. "That'll make a nice splash!" he thought to himself, "and the stone will sink to the bottom so no one will get it in their bowl of soup. It won't be discovered until someone cleans out the pot! And no one will ever know how it got there. Anyway, everyone else will bring plenty of vegetables, so there'll be more than enough. My vegetable wouldn't have made much of a difference anyway!" And so it was that Chief Makuna dropped his stone into the boiling water, and then sat down with all the other chiefs.

The day was long and the meeting was difficult, and by evening there was still much dissension over the plan they had devised for sharing resources. But one thing was sure. Everyone was looking forward to a big bowl of delicious soup. With great ceremony, the chief of the host village held up a big dipper and poured the first sampling of soup into a gourd bowl. But when he looked into the bowl, he could hardly believe his eyes! The soup looked like nothing more than hot water! Puzzled, he stirred the big pot, certain that there must be better soup down at the bottom. But all he found was more hot water. In desperation, he tipped up the big black pot and poured the water onto the ground. In the bottom of the pot were eleven large stones.

Questions for reflection:

The Bible says, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Prov. 18:24 NKJV). Think about your children and the young people of your church. How can you help them make sure they have something good to contribute to the "relational soup" when they come to their circle of friends? What attitudes, qualities and relational skills can you help them develop that will make them attractive in a circle of wholesome friends?

Closing exercise:

- Invite seminar participants to write their ideas on their sticky note or card and paste it with all the others on the poster board at the front to create a collage.

- Ask someone to read what the group has written.

- Covenant with one another and with God in the closing prayer that all will be supportive of one another in growing children and teens who know how to make, and how to be, best friends.

References

Campbell, R. (1996). *How to really love your children*. New York: Inspirational Press.

Holford, K, with Flowers, K. & R. (In process). *Jumpstart connections: 31 fresh ideas to invigorate your relationships*. Silver Spring, MD: Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Great Peace for Children

A Seminar on Nurturing Non-Violent Children

by Bernie and Karen Holford
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with Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

This seminar is designed to help parents nurture children for non-violence. It is built on the premise that the church can be a strong support to parents in their responsibility to nurture children for healthy relationships.

Key Bible Text

“And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isaiah 54:13 KJV).

Purpose and Overview

Relationships in which persons demonstrate respect, love and a willingness to listen to one another are much more likely to experience peace-filled living and positive relationships and less likely to experience aggression, outbursts of anger and wrath, and violent episodes. An understanding of the biblical principle of honoring one another provides a foundational motivation for developing relational skills that can help God's children of all ages connect with one another in positive ways. This program will help families and the church family explore useful ways of talking and relating that show honor and support for each other and that model non-violent ways of living together and meeting one another's needs for our children.

The seminar incorporates multigenerational learning experiences through which important people skills can be developed that will help children grow toward relating to others in positive ways. The focus will be on developing a more supportive communication style, becoming more caring and compassionate in our responses to others, and learning to manage anger in ways that contribute to positive relational growth. These skills are hallmarks of non-violent relationships—in the family as well as in the church and community.

Important note. *This program is not intended to be therapeutic treatment for abusers or persons experiencing abuse and violence in relationships. Nor is it specifically designed as treatment for those who have experienced abuse in the past. Treatment in cases of abuse and violence belongs in the hands of a network of professionals with appropriate training and expertise. Spiritual leaders should identify such professionals in the church and community about them and encourage and support individuals who have special needs as they avail themselves of such services. Because the seminar does open the issue of abuse and violence in relationships, it would be wise to have a pastor or counselor present (someone who is not involved in leading the seminar) in case the discussion brings up concerns for one or more of the participants that call for personal attention.*

How to Use This Seminar Resource

This resource is an idea bank of interactive activities designed to bring together the entire congregation for a multigenerational nurturing experience. The seminar resources are divided as follows:

- Section A** Personal or leadership-group preparation.
- Section B** An icebreaker to draw seminar participants into interaction with one another.
- Section C** “Activity Idea Bank” - seminar activities from which to pick and choose as interest, time and facilities allow.
- Section D** Closure activity for the seminar.

Section A

Leadership Preparation

Sensitivity required. As we explore ways of helping children to relate to others in non-violent ways, it is important to think about our own attitudes, ideas and beliefs about violence and the ideas of those around us. An individual might decide they would rather not lead such a seminar. There are a number of understandable reasons for this, and any request to be excused should be honored—no questions asked.

Identify resources. As you open these issues in the church, even among your leadership team, people should always be made aware of resource persons in your community, i.e., a pastor, counselor, or others in the helping professions, who can assist them in finding help if they or someone they know are dealing with personal issues related to abuse and violence.

Devotional thought. Reflect on the Scripture: “*All thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children*” (Isaiah 54:13 KJV).

The peace of the Christian gospel was brought to us, delivered to us in Christ. That peace was personified in the person of Christ. When Christ was born, God’s attitude toward earth became one of peace (Luke 2:14). “*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil . . .*” (Jer. 29:11 KJV). Jesus was the One prophesied to be the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6; cf. Eph. 2:14-17). His wish for His followers was for His peace to be with them (John 14:27).

Why is it important for children to know this peace? In what ways is it in our power to convey it to them? The prayer, “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace” is attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi. How can we be instruments of God’s peace in our children’s lives? Let us dedicate ourselves and this seminar to that purpose. [You may want to share some of your devotional insights on peace as an introduction to the seminar itself.]

Questions worth thinking about. The following questions are worth considering before leading a seminar on how to nurture children in ways that will make them less likely to use violence against others. Take time to reflect personally on these questions and discuss your thoughts together with other group leaders.

- What concerns do you share as a leader regarding violence in the family and in the community?
- What messages about violence are being conveyed by the media in your context?
- In what ways does your society promote non-violent relationships?
- In what ways might your society be inadvertently encouraging people to resort to violence?
- What do you think the Bible teaches about violence? What Scripture principles can you identify? Locate appropriate Bible texts and passages.
- What do you perceive as the most significant benefits of nurturing non-violent children?
- What might make nurturing non-violent children difficult in your particular setting?
- What legitimate concerns might be raised about encouraging children to respond non-violently in all situations?

***Note:** Sadly, children must be made aware that some older youth and adults—even family members and people that they know—cannot be trusted and may try to hurt them. Children must be taught that it’s okay to say “no” forcefully and to resist adults who would harm them in any way—such as through acts of violence, sexual abuse, etc. They need to know how to report such action to an adult who can help them.*

Section B

Icebreaker: Demolition Squad or Construction Crew?

This icebreaker is designed to introduce the seminar by contrasting the kinds of communication and actions that build people up and strengthen relationships with the kinds of communication and behaviors that tear people down and are destructive to relationships.

Materials needed:

- Fifteen large boxes, identical in size. You may be able to find these at a grocery store or shipping company.
- White paper for covering boxes as indicated.
- Felt-tip marker pens (one red and one blue) with thick tips (the actual colors you use are not important, but using two different colors will be helpful in doing the activity).
- Black marker pens with thick tips (you will need several, depending on the size of the seminar group).

Set-up instructions:

Make the following preparations in advance of the seminar:

- Stack the boxes at the front of the room (as if they were bricks or cement blocks) to form a large 5 x 3 “cube” or “wall” (5 boxes high x 3 boxes deep). You will end up with a front and a back

sidewall, each made up of the 15 boxes showing. Depending on the size of the boxes, and the size of the group, you may wish to assemble the visual aid on a platform or table so all can see.

- Cover those sides of the boxes that form the two large front and back walls of the cube with white paper. You need to cover each outer box face separately, as you will be taking the cube apart and putting it back together.

- Number the boxes on one side face of the cube to help you reassemble the cube as instructed for the activity.

- With the white paper in place, restack the boxes. Then, on the front face of the cube, draw a simple outline of a person with the red marker (see Leadership Resource 1 – *Artwork for Boxes*).

- On the back side of the cube, draw a similar outline of a person with the blue marker.

Icebreaker activity directions:

- At the start of the meeting, talk about the effect of our words and actions on others. Some Bible texts illustrate the point: “*Reckless words pierce like a sword . . .*” (Prov. 12:18). “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue*” (Prov. 18:1). Describe how the things we say and the things we do can either build people up or tear them down, just as a construction crew can build a wall or a building or a demolition squad can bring one down.

- Invite seminar participants to offer ideas about the kinds of words and behaviors that tear people down. Talk also about why such words and actions are so destructive to persons and to relationships.

- Invite those who are contributing ideas to come forward and write these hurtful words and actions on the boxes that have bits of the red outline of a person on them. (Use the black felt tip markers.) This will take a few minutes. Cover the outline of the person from head to toe with the written words, phrases and descriptions of hurtful actions. You may have to add ideas of your own if the group does not come up with important ones you wish to highlight in the discussion.

- As the space around the red body outline showing on each box is filled, slowly dismantle the outline of the person by removing box after box from the cube, placing them around on the floor with the words and ideas still visible to the group. You will end up with a “person” that has been taken to pieces and left in disarray.

- Next, discuss with the group how much better it is when words and actions encourage the people around us and build them up. “*The tongue of the wise brings healing*” (Prov. 12:18). “*An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up*” (Prov. 12:25). Invite people to share the kinds of words and actions that have brought them encouragement and made them happy to be in a particular relationship.

- As you talk, turn the boxes on the floor around, so that the blue outline shows on them. Invite participants to write their positive ideas on the sides of the boxes that have bits of the blue outline. Start with the boxes that form the base of the cube (use the numbers you placed on the sides of the boxes to help you). Then slowly put together the blue outline of the person by stacking the boxes once again to create the cube with the design in place, visually demonstrating how to build a person up.

- Leave the cube with the blue “person” and all the constructive ideas for building people up visible at the front throughout the program. Use it to help groups further develop their ideas during other activities.

Section C

Activity Idea Bank

Activity 1

Relationships of Honor: Jesus and the Young, Lonely, Weak and Vulnerable

Use this activity to discover how Jesus relates to people and to learn how His responses can shape our own words and actions toward our children.

Invite someone to read Romans 12:10: *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

Small group activity: Seeing people through God’s eyes of love and wonder can help us respond to them—especially the young, lonely, weak and vulnerable—with care and compassion. For this activity, divide participants into small groups of 4-6 people. Assign each group one of the following Bible passages from the Gospel of Luke. Instruct them to read it together and discuss the questions below. When the groups are winding down, open discussion in the large group about each question, learning what you can from each of the stories.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| • Luke 7:36-50 | Jesus and the woman who anointed His feet |
| • Luke 8:40-48 | Jesus and the woman who was bleeding |
| • Luke 17:11-19 | Jesus and the lepers |
| • Luke 18:15-17 | Jesus and the children |
| • Luke 19:1-10 | Jesus and Zacchaeus |

Questions to consider:

- How does Jesus respond to the main character(s) in this story?
- How does Jesus practically demonstrate His compassion for them and offer them His grace?
- What does Jesus do and say that conveys His honor and respect for each individual?
- What do you think they appreciated most about Jesus’ response to them?
- How do you think this encounter with Jesus transformed the way they thought about themselves? How did it transform their relationship with Jesus? Their relationships with others?
- What practical ideas can we glean from Jesus’ dealings with these and others to whom He ministered? How can His words and actions guide our responses to our children and others to whom God wants to communicate His love, honor and respect through us?

Activity 2

Proverb Projects

Use this activity to help participants to explore relational wisdom from the Book of Proverbs and then to consider the benefits of this wisdom about compassion and caring for their own relationships.

Materials needed:

- Copies of Proverb cards. See Leadership Resource 2 – *Proverb Projects* for 10 Proverb cards. (Cut the sheet into individual Proverb cards. Each group of four participants will need one card.)
- Assorted craft supplies (large sheets of paper, colored paper, clay, pipe cleaners, colored markers, cotton balls, yarn, etc.)
- Stick adhesives (glue, paste, tape)
- Large sheets of sturdy poster board
- Assorted newspapers and magazines
- Pieces of fabric, clothes and other props for costuming
- Musical instruments as available (may be as simple as makeshift rhythm sticks or clean combs with sheer paper to hum through, etc.)
- Individual sheets of writing paper and pens

Small group activity:

- Divide the group into small groups of four (or by families or whatever suits your setting). Keep the groups quite small, however, so everyone can participate.
- Give each group one Proverb card.
- Allow groups 30 minutes together to develop a short drama, role play, mime, song, poem, collage, poster or other visual aid, etc. that illustrates the proverb they have been given and/or how it can be applied in relationships today.
- Give each group opportunity to share their creation with the large group.
- After each group has presented their selection, open up discussion about what they learned about supportive communication, compassionate caring and relationships of honor from working on their Proverb Projects.

Activity 3

What Do You Make of This Report?

Use this activity to reflect on the basic needs of children and how improved efforts to understand and provide for them could powerfully influence their behavior. Read or tell the following story, then reflect as a seminar group on the question that is provided.

In Great Britain there was a man whose job it was to inspect the prisons and to make sure that the prisoners were treated well and the staff members were happy. As the inspector sat in the

office of a prison director drinking a cup of coffee, he asked the administrator a question. “If I could give you money for anything that would help you do your job better, what would you spend it on?”

The director thought for a moment and then said, “Well, if I lost all my staff here, but could keep one person, I’d keep the speech and language therapist. So I guess I’d spend the money on more speech and language therapists.”

The inspector was amazed! This was a surprise! He’d not heard this from the other prison directors he’d visited.

“Why the speech and language therapist?” he asked

“Well, I’d say that 90% of the men in here have some kind of language and communication problem, and I reckon that many of them wouldn’t have resorted to crime and violence if they could have expressed themselves more clearly, helped others to understand their needs, held down jobs and built closer relationships with people.”

Question for reflection:

• What might we do differently as parents, as a church family, if we believed that improved communication could lead to less violence in our homes and in society?

Activity 4

Reflections on a Poetry Classic: *Children Learn What They Live*

This activity highlights the beneficial outcomes of relationships in which family members honor one another and communicate in supportive ways. Use the poem to emphasize the importance of modeling the behavior we desire to see in our children through our own words and actions.

Materials needed:

• Copies of the poem for each seminar participant (See Leadership Resource 3 – *Children Learn What They Live*)

• Pencils for anyone who may not have a writing instrument.

Activity directions:

• Read the poem aloud and invite people to jot down on the back of their sheet the thoughts the poem brings to mind as they reflect on the following questions:

- Can you remember a time as a child or as an adult, when you experienced a moment in relationship with another that was uplifting and encouraging?
- Which line of the poem best describes your experience?
- What effect has this experience had on your life?
- How might this poem help us to relate in ways that promote health and well-being in the lives of the children with whom we are in relationship?
- Where will you begin?

• Invite group members to share the personal reflections they feel comfortable sharing with one other person.

• After 5-10 minutes of sharing in two’s, invite feedback in the large group and summarize ideas on a flip chart.

• Sum up the ideas positively, looking at how the ideas can help us to understand the effect of supportive communication, respectful attitudes, compassionate caring, and “honoring” relationships on those with whom we are in close relationship.

Activity 5

Becoming a Supportive Communicator

Use this activity to develop more supportive communication. When we communicate with others we can choose to defend ourselves, our ideas, our ways of doing things and our power in the relationship, or we can communicate in ways that show respect for others and invite co-operation and a sharing of ideas, hopes and feelings.

Materials needed:

- Two large posters to illustrate the difference between the approach of a defensive communicator and that of a supportive communicator. Use your creativity to make an attractive poster to convey your message as a presenter about the tactics defensive communicators use and the more positive approaches of a supportive communicator.

- Two easels or other means of displaying your posters for all to see.

Activity instructions:

- Review the two styles of communication in the large group.

- Defensive communicators use tactics like:

- Evaluation—judging the other person, blaming, using words like “you always” and “you never.”
- Control—imposing one’s own ideas on others.
- Strategy—manipulating the situation and others to get one’s own way.
- Neutrality—showing a lack of care and concern for others.
- Superiority—using one’s knowledge or power in a relationship to influence people to do things the way we want them done.
- Certainty—declaring one’s own way the “right” or “better” way to do things.

- Supportive communicators use approaches like:

- Making requests—inviting the other person to share information and their perspectives.
- Sharing problem ownership—considering the problem to be “ours” rather than the other person’s problem.
- Spontaneity—being straightforward and honest, giving each person opportunity to talk about what they would find helpful in the situation.
- Compassion—showing caring concern for the other person and their needs.
- Equality—placing oneself on an equal footing with the other person, remembering that God shows no partiality.
- Experimentation—being willing to explore different alternatives for solving a problem until one can be found that meets the needs of all involved.

Small group activity:

- Invite group members to share in small groups, as they feel comfortable:

- an experience when they have seen a defensive communicator in action.
- a time when they might have used a defensive communication style with their children or another adult.
- a time when someone used this approach toward them.

- As participants reflect on these experiences with defensive communicators, ask them to consider the following questions:

- What was the effect of this experience on the person receiving the communication?
- Do you think this was the response the communicator hoped to achieve?

- If you could rewind the tape and give the communicator another chance, how would you use what you have learned about supportive communication to coach them on a better approach? What would you like to see them do and say differently to communicate more positively?

Activity 6

What Would You Do?

Use this activity with case studies to discern non-violent ways to resolve situations that are highly charged with emotion and conflict.

Materials needed:

- The 5 drama scenarios below printed on sheets of paper, providing at least one scenario per small group as needed. As an alternative, you may wish to arrange ahead of time for young people to dramatize the scenarios, improvising with their own dialogue, etc.

Scenario #1

Luke is fourteen. While he is washing the car with his dad, he gets up his courage to mention that some of the guys are talking about their girlfriends, making sexually explicit comments about their appearance and the kinds of things they would like to do with them. Luke doesn't like this talk, but if he says anything the guys get angry and call him a prude. Now just being with them has started to make his stomach churn, but they are the only friends he has.

Scenario #2

Heather is twelve. Since she was much younger, Heather has been the brunt of many cruel jokes and is often bullied by her classmates. She is very distressed about the situation. Her older brother Danny feels sorry for her and gets angry whenever she talks to him about it. He says that whenever she's ready, he'll step in and give those bullies a beating.

Scenario #3

Ten-year-old Sarah has been playing with her little brother Jonah. He has gotten hold of one of her dolls, and she is afraid he will break it. When she tries to take it from him, he won't let go. In desperation, she pinches him hard to get him to let go. Jonah starts to scream and brings Mother running from the other room.

Scenario #4

John is thirteen. As he is walking home from school after band practice, a couple of older boys approach him and try to steal his cell-phone. John resists, but he's afraid he's going to get hurt.

Scenario #5

The Smith family is together in the family room. On the evening news there is a feature on the rising incidence of family violence in their community. Mr. Smith grew up next door to a man who used to beat his wife and children, but he has never talked with his family about the affect that this experience had on him or the deliberate decision he made never to use force or physical violence in his own home. The news item makes him wish he could talk about the problem of abuse and family violence with his family, but he's not sure how.

Activity instructions:

- Read the scenario assigned to your small group or watch as it is dramatized for you from the front (in which case all the groups will discuss the same scenario simultaneously).

- Debrief on the scenarios in small groups and then recap in the large group. Talk about how you can apply what you have learned to help the main characters resolve the situations in which they find themselves in non-violent ways.

Section D

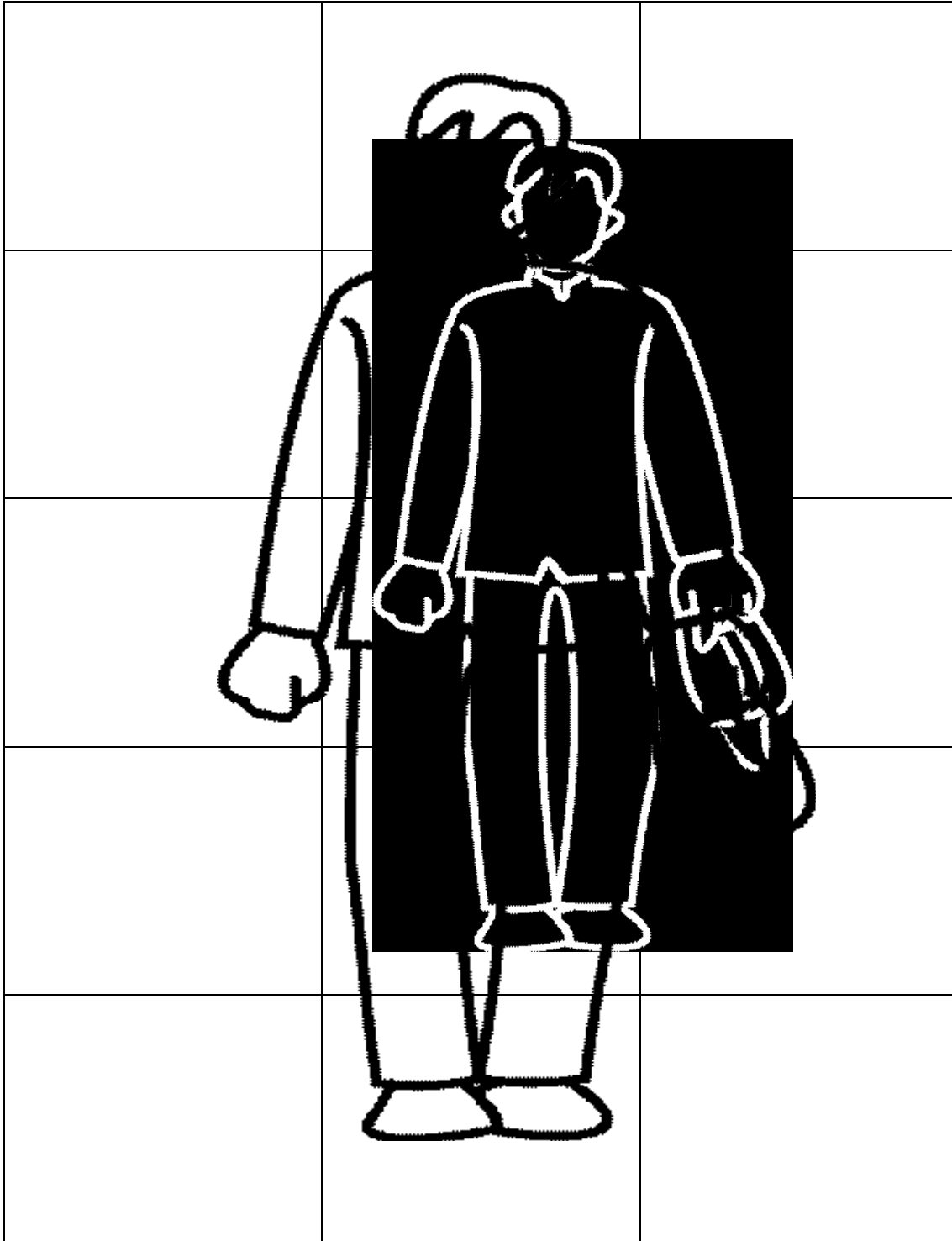
Summing Up

- Give everyone a chance to volunteer an “I learned . . .” statement for the seminar. Then give participants time to share with one other person something they would like to do differently or something they are more committed to doing than ever before because they have been part of this seminar. To close, invite each two-some to pray for one another and for each other’s families and their relationships in the wider circle.

- You may wish to make copies of Leadership Resource 4 -*Growing Non-Violent Children* and distribute it as a handout to take home.

- After the seminar, you may wish to collate the ideas from the cube, flip charts, and other discussion notes and use them to write a report on the seminar for your church newsletter.

Sample outline of body shape to be drawn on the boxes



Proverb Projects Cards

<p>Proverbs 10:12</p> <p><i>Hatred starts fights, but love pulls a quilt over the bickering.</i></p> <p><i>Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.</i></p>	<p>Proverbs 11:16</p> <p><i>A woman of gentle grace gets respect, but men of rough violence grab for loot.</i></p> <p><i>A gracious woman retaineth honor: and strong men retain riches.</i></p>
<p>Proverbs 11:25</p> <p><i>The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped.</i></p> <p><i>The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.</i></p>	<p>Proverbs 15:1</p> <p><i>A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire.</i></p> <p><i>A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.</i></p>
<p>Proverbs 16:24</p> <p><i>Gracious speech is like clover honey - good taste to the soul, quick energy for the body.</i></p> <p><i>Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.</i></p>	<p>Proverbs 16:32</p> <p><i>Moderation is better than muscle, self-control better than political power.</i></p> <p><i>He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.</i></p>
<p>Proverbs 22:11</p> <p><i>God loves the pure-hearted and well-spoken; good leaders also delight in their friendship.</i></p> <p><i>He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.</i></p>	<p>Proverbs 11:17</p> <p><i>When you're kind to others, you help yourself; when you're cruel to others you hurt yourself.</i></p> <p><i>The merciful man doeth good to his own soul: but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh.</i></p>
<p>Proverbs 15:18</p> <p><i>Hot tempers start fights; a calm, cool spirit keeps the peace.</i></p> <p><i>The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.</i></p>	<p>Proverbs 17:1</p> <p><i>A meal of bread and water in contented peace is better than a banquet spiced with quarrels.</i></p> <p><i>Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.</i></p>

All verses have been taken from *The Message Bible* and *The King James Version*.

Children Learn What They Live

Dorothy Law Nolte

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

Excerpted from the book CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE
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Growing Non-violent Children

The first place to start growing non-violent children is in your own heart.

- Take time every day to experience God's love and peace in your heart. When you know His love and peace personally, you are more able to pass them on to others.
- Think how you can show God's loving grace and compassion to everyone you meet each day, including your children and other family members.
- Consider each person a child of God, a crowning glory of His creation, and be filled with wonder toward them.

Handle children with care.

- Always deal with your children gently, compassionately, and with a loving firmness so that they learn to deal with others this way.
- Demonstrate the respect and honor you have for them in your words and actions.
- Speak lovingly and respectfully to them as much as you can.
- Handle issues of discipline with generous amounts of grace.
- Encourage children to be gentle with people and property from an early age.
- Involve them in compassionate acts of service for others.
- Teach them how to treat pets and animals with care.
- Help them understand the pain others feel when they are treated unkindly or physically hurt by them.
- Let your children know when you do and don't feel honored and supported by them. Your affirmation and gentle rebuke will encourage them to honor you and others in relationships.

Be a good role model for your children.

- Model respect and compassion for others no matter who they are. Let your children see that you respect and care for people regardless of position, wealth, or gender.
- Model good management of your own emotions, and talk about how you manage powerful emotions when you experience them.
- Teach your children to identify their emotions and to find useful ways of expressing themselves.
- Model an open, respectful and loving marriage so that your children can see what a good relationship looks like. Even if you are a single parent, your children can see how well you treat friends, relatives and people you meet everyday.
- Model equal power sharing in the home.

Talk about important issues.

- Use news stories, TV shows, cartoons, music, whatever is in your children's media, to discuss violence in relationships. Talk together about what you are hearing and seeing.
- Talk about where to seek help when you are having difficulty respecting others and relating in positive ways.
- Role-play how to handle difficult circumstances.
- Develop good communication skills.
- Listen to your children and enable them to make a significant contribution to the ideas in your family.

Seeing Is Believing

by Karen Flowers

George lived in a small town. Many of the families went to the same church, and most of the grownups worked at the same factory. George's friend Lyle had a tree house, and all the boys in the neighborhood used it as a clubhouse. No girls allowed. When Lyle's mother baked cookies, she baked enough for all the kids likely to be hanging around.

George's parents both worked at the factory. When George was little, things seemed fine at his house. But lately, George had observed some things that made his stomach churn. Sometimes after his parents thought he was asleep, he would hear them arguing. He couldn't help but worry. What if they got a divorce like his friend Paul's parents? After the divorce Paul had to spend his weekends going back and forth between his mom's place and his dad's place. He couldn't get involved in sports or in the youth activities at church because it seemed he was never where he wanted to be. George was afraid every time he heard his parents arguing that something like this would happen to him too. There were other signs that things were not going well between his mom and dad. George was getting more and more worried.

Sometimes George could forget about his worries and think about other things. Other times, his worries kept him awake at night and made it hard for him to concentrate on his school work. That's when he was glad to be able to escape to Lyle's place. He hadn't talked to Lyle's parents about what was going on at home, but somehow just being around them made him feel better. One night when he was still hanging around their place at supper time, Lyle's mom just seemed to sense that he was worried about something. She didn't ask embarrassing questions. She just asked if he would like to check with his mom if he could stay for supper. Then she put another plate on

the table like it was the most usual thing in the world.

During dinner, George felt good inside when Lyle's mom joked with his dad as she passed him the potatoes. He liked the best-thing-worst-thing game they played every night at the table. Everyone laughed when he said that the best thing that had happened to him that day was that his dog had smothered him with wet kisses before he could even get up the porch steps after school. He wasn't ready yet to talk about the worst thing that had happened to him, but everybody just let that pass. In Lyle's family, you could talk when you were ready.

Most all families go through times when they have problems that are hard to solve. Some moms and dads have had more opportunities to develop skills in solving problems than some others. Talking to someone when you are concerned about something can open the way for you and your family to get the help you need. There are professionals who can help with family problems just like doctors can help when you're sick. Think about some people who care about your family and who would want to help you if your family was in trouble. Then when you need to talk to someone, you'll already have someone in mind. Remember, telling someone about your problems is often the first step in solving them in ways that are good for everyone.

Being with Lyle's family made George think people really could find ways to resolve their problems and get along. Maybe one of these days he could talk to Lyle's parents about his worries. Maybe they could help his mom and dad get help before it was too late. But one thing George knew for sure. When he grew up and got married, he wanted his family to be just like Lyle's.

Promises, Promises

by Karen Flowers

What's a promise? A promise is telling someone you will do something, and then making sure you do it! Promises are for things that are very important.

Have you ever made a promise? What did you promise? Did you keep your promise?

Are there any kinds of promises you shouldn't keep? Yes, there are. There are some things people should never ask you to promise. And even if you do promise, these kinds of promises should be broken. You can always break a promise to keep it a secret when someone touches you, or asks you to touch them, in ways that make you feel uncomfortable. You can always break a promise not to tell when someone asks you to take your clothes off so they can see or take pictures of the parts of your body that would be covered by your bathing suit. These kinds of actions are very hurtful to children. Adults who ask you to promise not to tell about such things cannot be trusted. When this kind of thing happens, you should tell the person "no"—no matter who they are—and run away. Then be sure to tell an adult—like your mom or your teacher or your pastor—exactly what the person said and did.

But what about good promises that won't hurt anybody? Why is keeping a promise so important? It's important to keep a promise because when you tell someone you will do something, they depend on you to do it. They trust you to keep your word. When you break a promise, sometimes something very important are left undone or important relationships are damaged. It can be very hard to trust someone who breaks a promise.

Judy wanted a pet guinea pig so-o-o bad! She thought of every possible reason why she should have a guinea pig. And of course she *promised* she would take care of it every day so her mom wouldn't have to do a thing. She would

make sure it had food and water. She would make sure to treat it gently. She would always be careful to close the door securely whenever she put her little pet back in its cage. Finally her mom took her to the pet store to choose one for her very own. She chose the cutest little brown and white guinea pig with just a touch of black, and she named him Pete.

Judy loved Pete. Every day she filled his little tray with special guinea pig food and made sure his water bottle was full. For treats, she put crisp lettuce and celery leaves and sometimes a carrot in the bottom of his cage. She laughed and laughed when he got on his exercise wheel. He ran so fast his legs were just a blur. Every day she took him out of his cage and played with him on her bed. It seemed to her that what he liked best was to snuggle into her neck and take a nap.

But there were lots of other things Judy liked to do too. She liked to play outside, and she liked to go over to her friend Alice's house, and she liked to play kickball after school. Of course she also had to practice her flute and do her homework. One morning when she was very tired, she didn't get up in time to take care of Pete. She asked her mom if she would please feed him and give him water. Her mom agreed to do it just this once. But after that, it seemed like Judy was always asking her mom to take care of Pete. Finally her mom said Judy would have to make a choice. Either she would keep her promise to take care of Pete, or they would have to give him away. Judy promised again that she would take full responsibility for Pete, and for a few weeks she did.

Then one morning she got up late again. She didn't have time to take care of Pete, and she didn't want to ask her mom. So she said to herself, "I'll feed him right after school. He'll have enough food and water to last until then." But after school she was thinking about

homework and practice and getting over to Alice's house, and she forgot all about Pete. Later that night when she remembered, Pete was all out of food and water. She felt so bad, she took him out of his cage and cuddled him for awhile. But forgetting once became many times. Once she forgot for two days in a row. When she finally remembered, Pete didn't look so good.

Then the worst thing happened. Judy must not have latched the door to Pete's cage securely when she put him to bed for the night. When she went to feed him the next morning, the door was open and Pete was not there. Judy didn't have time to look for him before she left for school, and when she got home she forgot. The next morning she was in a hurry again, and so it went for more than a week. Now what could she do? She was afraid to tell her mom, but she was getting very worried about Pete. Finally she decided to drop everything and look for him. She finally found him hiding in one of her slippers in the back of her closet. But oh

my, Pete was in bad shape. When she picked him up, his little body just drooped over her hand. There was thick yellow stuff running out of his nose and the corners of his eyes. When she offered him his favorite food and put his mouth up to his water bottle, Pete refused to eat or drink. Finally, she just put him down on the floor of his cage. Sometime that night Pete died.

Judy was heart broken. She knew Pete died because she didn't keep her promise. Judy learned a lot about the importance of keeping promises that day. When she was a bit older, Judy got a puppy for a pet. You can be sure Judy took very good care of her puppy. Whenever Judy was tempted to break a good promise, she thought about Pete. Even when she grew up and got married, she thought about Pete when she made a promise to love her husband for the rest of her life. You can think about Pete too when you are making choices to keep the good promises you have made. You'll be glad you did.

Picking Friends

by Karen Flowers

It was Sally's first day of school. She was so excited about her new lunch box and crayons. Most of all, Sally was excited about making new friends. There were 18 students in the first grade. Sally knew some of them from church and from the girl's soccer league she had joined over the summer. But there was a new girl with red hair sitting in front of her that Sally had never seen before. The teacher went around the room and let each of the children introduce themselves. The new girl said her name was Sarah. She had just moved into the area with her family. She said she liked playing games and that she had a little brother named Ricky. Sally wondered if she would be a good new friend.

How do you choose a good friend anyway? What makes the difference between a good friend and a not-so-good friend?

Good friends are people you can have fun with. They like doing the same kinds of things you do. Sometimes they encourage you to try something new, and sometimes you get them into something they have never done before. Usually everyone ends up having a good time.

Good friends are people who encourage you to do your best. They accept you for who you are and don't expect you to be perfect. They also see the things you are good at and encourage you to develop your talents. Sometimes they even see strengths in you that you didn't know you had. Good friends are like

cheerleaders. With them cheering you on, you may even find yourself doing things you would never have believed you could do.

Good friends are people who make you feel better when you are having a bad day. Everyone has days when it seems like nothing goes right. Everyone makes mistakes, even some pretty bad ones. Everyone fails at least once at something that was important to them. Good friends listen and care about you no matter what. It feels good to have them around.

Good friends help you make good choices. Good friends would not ask you to do something that is not good for you or that you don't believe is right. Good friends want to help you live like Jesus taught His followers to live.

Sally looked again at Sarah's red hair—that was about all she could see from her seat behind her. "I think I'll talk to her at recess," Sally thought. She looks like she'd make a good friend, but I'll need to know her better before I decide. You have to think about who you want for your very best friends.

"Hey, Sarah," Sally called out. "Where did you say you came from? I really like to play games too. What's your favorite?"

The girls really did like each other and turned out to be good friends. Good friends are some of the best things to collect over your lifetime.

Looking Again at Ephesians 5

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Paul’s “In Christ” Theme and Human Relationships

Sin deforms human kinship ties, but God’s act in Christ God reconciles humanity to Himself and restores oneness in human relationships (2 Cor. 5:18, 19; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:3; 5:21-6:9). Galatians 3:28 constitutes a Magna Carta for human relationships: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In Christ all barriers that separate people from each other are abolished, whether religious, cultural, or social.

Relational unity in Ephesians. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians constitutes the high water mark in the New Testament on the subject of unity. The overarching theme of the letter is “the doctrine of the unity of mankind in Christ” (Robinson, n.d.), unity in the cosmos, unity in the church, and unity in the home.

Discussing the unity Christians know despite their background as Jews and Gentiles, Paul exalts the cross of Christ as the source of reconciliation. In doing so, he uses language that could as easily be applied to other human relationships which have been disrupted by sin (Eph. 2:14-18). “To create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace” (vs. 15 NEB) is not only good news for Jew-Gentile relationships, it is good news for all. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1959) grasps the centrality of Christ to the unity which the gospel brings to human ties:

In the most intimate relationships of life, in our kinship with father and mother, brothers and sisters, in married love, and in our duty to the community, direct relationships are impossible. Since the coming of Christ, his followers have no more immediate realities of their own, not in their family relationships nor in the ties with their nation nor in the relationships formed in the process of living. Between father and son, husband and wife, the individual and the nation, stands Christ the Mediator, whether they are able to recognize him or not. We cannot establish direct contact outside ourselves except through him, through his word, and through our following of him. To think otherwise is to deceive ourselves.

The same mediator who makes us individuals is also the founder of a new fellowship. He stands in the centre between my neighbor and myself. He divides, but he also unites. Thus although the direct way to our neighbor is barred, we now find the new and only real way to him--the way which passes through the Mediator. (p. 86)

Male-female relationships are embraced in the truths of Ephesians 2:14-18, especially marriage, the closest male-female relationship. The cross of Christ defeats the power of sin over marriage, abolishes the curse on marriage (Gen. 3:16) and makes the way possible for couples to know the “one flesh” experience of Genesis 2:24.

Heaven to home. It has been said that Ephesians begins in heaven and ends in the home. In chapters 1-3, Paul describes the status of believers in Christ. A one-verse summary might well be, “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Chapters 4-6 contain counsel on how to live on earth as believers, given this exalted spiritual position. Domestic relationships are treated in Eph. 5:22--6:9 in the so-called *Haustafel*, “the table of household duties that exist in the mutual relationships of the family” (Sampley, 1971, p. 10). Three

pairs of household relationships are addressed: wives and husbands (Eph. 5:22-33), children and parents (Eph. 6:1-4), slaves and masters (Eph. 6:5-9). Several other instances of *Haustafeln* are also found in the New Testament: Col. 3:18--4:1; 1 Pet. 2:17--3:9; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 6:1-10; Titus 2:1-10 (Sampley, 1971).

Contrasting Views of the Wife-Husband Relationship

How to understand the meaning of the wife-husband relationship (Eph. 5:22-33) has been the subject of debate. One view is articulated by Piper and Grudem (1991):

The instruction about wives and husbands found in Ephesians and Colossians, expressed in the key terms “be subject” for wives and “head” for husbands, teaches distinctive roles for wives and husbands. That instruction may be summarized both as a divinely mandated leadership role for husbands in the marriage relationship and a divinely mandated submission to that leadership for wives. (p. 177)

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen summarizes an alternate understanding of earliest Christian teaching on gender relationships applicable to marriage:

With regard to gender relations, we see that Jesus elevated the status of women and subverted the structures supporting male privilege and superiority. . . . The trenchant social inequalities of the culture surrounding the New Testament church were thus undermined and transformed by the grace and calling of Christ. Inequality and subordination based on race, class, and sex were undermined in principle and subverted in practice. The gospel called neither for a social revolution nor for a passive acceptance of the status quo. Rather, it initiated a transformation of social relations toward equality, mutuality, and positive interdependence. (1993, pp. 8, 11)

Proponents of the differing views find themselves dealing with the hermeneutics of the scriptural passages and with farther-reaching questions of gender relationships in the Bible and in culture. What is the meaning of “submission”? What is the meaning of “male headship”?

At the risk of over-simplification, the first view distills the matter to a straightforward question of male leadership and female response to that leadership. The headship of the man is affirmed, being rooted in the Calvinist view of male superordination at creation (Reid, 1982) or as decreed by God following the Fall in Gen. 3:16, a view apparently held by Luther and also espoused by other Protestant groups (Smith & Gallinger, 1979). Submission or subjection to that leadership is the duty of the wife based on typical meanings of the Greek *hupotasso* as used, for example, in Rom. 13:1, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” Cultural notions of male leadership are not challenged in the traditional view, but men are admonished to exercise their authority and leadership in Christlike ways.

Some general comments about the *Haustafel* can be made. First, it is interesting to note that Paul singles out certain dyadic relationships as the most significant targets for the principles of the gospel which he has enunciated. He is anxious to bring the gospel to bear on these key relationships. Secondly, he places the marital relationship at the head of the list. H. C. G. Moule comments on the significance of the marital relationship:

He [Paul] has spoken first of its heads and leaders, because the whole tone of the circle, children and household, must so vitally depend upon what they are, each in his and her personal life, and both together in their life mutual and one. Nothing but a miracle of abnormal grace can make the home company happy and holy when the Parents are not towards one

another living the full Christian life. So not till that has been depicted does he say one word about children, or about servants. (Moule, 1900, p. 303)

Voluntary submission. Regarding the interpretation of the *Haustafel*, it should be noted that the Greek *hupotasso* can be understood as “submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love” (Arndt and Gingrich, 1979). This response differs from that to be rendered to governing authorities. It is “the yieldedness given by one person to another on the basis of voluntary choice because of loving relationships” (Howell, 1979, p. 57). This unique principle, found in the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 20:26-28) and elsewhere in the New Testament (Phil. 2:3-5; 1 Peter 5:5), is presented again in Eph. 5:21 as a characteristic of Christian believers who are filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Such submission is motivated by Christology—“out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21 NIV). Such submission is also mutual, involving all Christian relationships; it is “to one another.” With its “demand for mutuality in self-giving” the notion of mutual submission was “a dramatically new teaching about social relationships” (Howell, 1979, p. 67). It is the means whereby believers realize in their subjective experience the spiritual reality that all humanity without partiality are one and have been made alive with Christ, raised with Christ and seated with Christ in heavenly places (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:5, 6).

Meaning in an absent verb. Other points regarding the exegesis of Eph. 5:22--6:9 must be noted. In what are considered the best Greek manuscripts, the verb is absent in Eph. 5:22. No break exists between vss. 21 and 22. No specific imperative to submit is given the wife only; the injunction upon her is that enjoined upon all Christians in vs. 21. The continuity between vs. 21 and vs. 22 highlights the intent of the participle *hupotassomenoi* in vs. 22. It is linked, not only to the wife, but to all that follows. The mutual submission principle of vs. 21 forms a prelude or heading for the entire segment 5:22--6:9 (Howell, 1979; Sampley, 1971). This view is not new. Abbott (1909) writes, “The whole following section, which is not a mere digression, depends on the thought expressed in this clause [vs. 21] of which it is a development” (p. 164). According to this view, submission is to be evidenced on the part of each household member as they relate to others in the household. Although the wider witness of the Word supplies additional imperatives which shed light on the meaning of submission, Paul here uses only a few imperatives: the wife is to respect her husband (Eph. 5:33); the husband is to love his wife (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33); children are to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1); parents are to nurture their children (Eph. 6:4); servants are to serve obediently with good will (Eph. 6:5-7); masters are to relate without partiality to their servants (Eph. 6:9).

Three pairs of relationships. Gundry (1980) offers a further consideration in the quest to understand Eph. 5:22--6:9 when she notes that the pairs which are addressed constitute “three of the most unequal relationships in the society of that day” (p. 95). Subjection on the part of wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters did not need to be taught, it existed already in society. What needed to be taught was the difference between the cultural expectation and the Christian voluntary submission to one another in love which “is one way of letting the mind of Christ be revealed in human relationships (Phil. 2:5)” (Howell, 1979, p. 58). Paul knows all human beings are equal in Christ. Old distinctions have been done away with in Him. So, in addressing each of the three pairs, Paul speaks to those considered by society to be the weaker side and he seeks to explain what is meant by Christian submission first to them. He consistently uses a qualifier which makes a distinction between Christian submission and cultural subjection. Their submission is always qualified: as “to the Lord” in the case of wives (Eph. 5:22), “in the Lord” as regards children (Eph. 6:1), and “as to Christ” on the part of servants (Eph. 6:5).

That part of the pair which society considered stronger always receives a powerful directive toward a submission which is not common to the culture, but a directive designed to pierce any remnants of societal armor and bring the gospel home to the heart. These directives must have astonished the believers of the first century. Husbands are to love (Gr. *agapao*), parents are to turn from attitudes and behavior which engender resentment and to nurture their children, and masters

are to demonstrate the care and impartiality of God to their servants.

One marvels at God's plan to effect reconciliation, to restore oneness and enable people in families to develop their full personhood and yet dwell together in unity in the midst of a world where power, control, domination by one over another is commonplace. The gospel ushers in a new design for relational power—empowering—encouraging and building up through serving one another (Balswick & Balswick, 1991). The gospel results in a new creation, not merely a window-dressing over the sin problem. The work of the gospel is not merely to maintain the power imbalance in relationships by introducing more benevolent power and control. Says Jeff VanVonderen:

It is not our job to perform the Curse more nicely, or in a more spiritual way than the rest of the world does. God has given us a new plan. It is our wonderful freedom to grow in relationships that carry out God's plan. (VanVonderen, 1992, p. 23)

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Relationships and Time

by Willie Oliver, Director
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Time is the stuff life is made up of. Relationships are what make life worth living. When we share our time we share our lives. The more meaningful time we share together the more we will matter and be closer to each other.

One of the greatest challenges to relationships in Western society today is the high value we place on individualism. The delicate balance between individual rights and family rights has tilted in favor of individual rights. However, more recently, family clinicians and sociologists have been shifting their focus from the individual to the family system. When we look at family relations through the prism of systems theory we quickly realize that all the players that belong to a particular system are interrelated in that they each affect the outcome of the entire system.

From the beginning of time, God created family systems. Genesis 2:18 declares: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him'." (NASB)

This text records the creation of the first woman and the institution of marriage, so it says much about the foundation of family relationships as planned by God for humanity. God intended husband and wife to be a spiritual, functional unity, walking in integrity, serving God, and keeping His commandments together. When this harmony is functioning, society prospers under God's hand. When this model is not in place, we suffer the consequences of a less than ideal arrangement.

Adam was alone and that was not good. Everything else in Creation was good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). As Adam began to function as God's representative by naming the animals (Genesis 2:19-20), which symbolized his dominion over them (Genesis 1:28), he became aware of his solitude (Genesis 2:20). God therefore put Adam to sleep (Genesis 2:21) and created Eve from his flesh and bone (Genesis 2:21-23).

This biblical narrative makes clear that God decided to make a helper suitable (that corresponded to him) for Adam, as He created the first family system. The term *helper*, to be sure, is not a demeaning term; it is often used in Scripture to describe God (Psalm 33:20; 70:5; 115:9). God's method of taking a rib from Adam, teaches that man and woman share a common identity. They are equals, each fully participating in God's gift of His image and likeness (Genesis 2:21-23). Yet they are different, so that a man and woman can bond together as husband and wife, and so meet each other's deepest needs for intimacy, lifelong commitment, and mutual support (Genesis 2:24-25).

Social beings. Ellen White makes clear that it was God's plan for man to be a social being, not for him to live alone. Despite the beautiful scenes of Eden, as well as close association with the angels and with God, it simply was not enough to satisfy man's desire for empathy and companionship (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46).

Genesis 1:28 states, “God blessed them; and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (NASB)

A principal role assigned to Adam and Eve was to populate the earth (Genesis 1:28). This reveals some aspects of the nature and abilities of men and women: people were created to be members of families (to belong to a family system). Everyone was created to be a social creature. The image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27) is most immediately linked to humanity’s power to rule over creation (Genesis 1:26) and to reflect the nature and graces of male and female gender (Genesis 1:27). Human rule over the earth reflects God’s perfect and sovereign rule over the universe. Human gender reflects God’s infinitely deep character as the potent Creator and the perfectly wise, loving, and nurturing Person.

The need for time with each other. It is amazing how far we have come from God’s ideal for the human race. God created us to be in relationship and in community. And, in order for intimacy (closeness) to develop, we need to spend time with one another. Spending time with each other means much more than just merely sharing an apartment or house with another. In order for people to really feel close to each other, so that meaningful relationship can be identified; meaningful interaction needs to take place within the boundaries of accepted and acceptable behavior. This is the very reason why bridging the gap of alienation and separation in relationships is the greatest challenge facing families in the church and in society today.

The 20th century was a time of great discovery, invention and expansion in the American Republic and can aptly be called the American century. During this time American society and to a great extent Western society evolved through several large historical cycles. We went from an agrarian (farming) economy to the Industrial Revolution and on to the information age. These cycles, to be sure, have had a direct impact on how we negotiate relationships in the family and elsewhere.

During the agrarian period most of the population lived on small farms. Most parents, children, as well as other relatives often lived and worked together each day planting crops or doing chores in close proximity of each other. Physical proximity facilitated emotional and spiritual closeness, nurture and support. However, the Industrial Revolution arrived with the invention of mechanization. The factory and the truck took husbands and fathers away from their families for long hours each day. With physical separation came emotional disconnection and alienation between spouses as well as between fathers (and subsequently mothers) and children.

The information age has simply taken alienation a quantum leap further by invading the home with warped ideas and values through the medium of television, also the proliferation of cable TV and video and DVD rental outlets. Other video-related electronic gadgets like PS2 and X-box, as well as the invention of the cellular phone, which most teenagers own today, has robbed parents and children of important face-to-face time that is important for building meaningful relationships and transmitting important values.

Planning Intentionally for Togetherness

Couples will naturally drift apart in the fast-paced context that we inhabit today, where husbands and wives invariably work outside of the home and children are left to fend for themselves after school as best they can. To remain close and together in marital relationships, as well as in relationships with our children, we need a certain level of intentionality.

Create a spiritual oasis. In our family we have been intentional about spending meaningful time together each day. Daily family worship at 5:45 each morning in our home has been a wonderful

way to stay connected to Jesus and to each other. During this time each morning, we catch up with each other's lives and have an opportunity to pray together for the challenges of the day ahead. This daily environment in a family creates an emotional and spiritual oasis that connects family members to each other.

Have dinner with appreciation. Another way we are intentional in our family about spending meaningful time together each day is by having dinner together as often as possible. A dinner ritual that we have developed in recent months with great positive results is to give each member of the family an opportunity to share one thing they appreciate about each person in our family circle of four. This is truly a wonderful way to make emotional deposits in the lives of each of the members of our family system and create an environment of support and intimacy.

We are not suggesting perfect families. There is no such thing on this side of Jordan. We are talking about intentionally developing family systems that are nurturing, supportive, protective and caring, despite the ups and downs that every family will experience, especially if you are raising teenagers like we are right now. Satan knows that families who are strong and healthy are a great witness for the truth and that the opposite is also true. This means that families are engaged in the great controversy between good and evil. Unless they choose Jesus every day, Satan is going to win.

Time together brings rewards. What about single parents? Some of you may ask. And our response is the same. While the task of parenting is comparatively much more taxing on the average single parent; being intentional about connecting positively every day with their children is a goal every Christian parent should have. In families where parents are close to their children and there is mutual trust, disciplinary problems remain at a minimum. However, where there is constant strife between parents and children we also find the debris of broken lives and broken dreams.

Ellen White states in *The Adventist Home*: "One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached" (p. 32). Order and discipline are virtues that are only evident when we make time with our children a high priority. Since we are all humans and make mistakes, we need to remember that God is willing to forgive and help us to re-arrange our priorities.

In Ephesians 6:4 the Bible states: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (NASB). Here the apostle Paul cautions fathers and parents in general to not use their authority to abuse their children; and directs them to nurture their children physically—by providing food, shelter, and clothing, but also emotionally and spiritually. And lastly, Paul urges parents to discipline in love and not in anger, lest we injure either the body or the spirit of the child, or possibly both. We must be sure that our discipline is fair and consistent.

Jesus is coming soon, and we need to be ready with our families for this wonderful and blessed event. To be ready we need to be intentional about creating an environment in our homes that communicates value to every member of the family. By spending meaningful time together, we can develop intimacy and cohesion that will bring health to our family relationships and spiritual health to share with our neighbors. This is the reality we are praying for. We are praying for our family and for each of yours as well. Maranatha!!!

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Four Words for Love

by Roberto Badenas, Director
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What do we mean by “love”? Is it a feeling? Is it a need? A desire? An art? An illusion? A myth? A mystery? What does the word “love” mean for us?

Can “love” even be defined? Thousands of poets, writers, philosophers, thinkers and scientists have sung, exalted, described, analyzed, and tried to explain the complex reality that we call “love”. What has not already been said about love? We can find many opinions and definitions of love. But why so many divergent ideas about such a universal reality?

The language of love is very revealing. “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34). It is eloquent both when it reveals feelings and when it tries to hide them. The language of love, in the same way as the experience of it, varies according to persons, times and circumstances. It changes from one century and from one age of life to another. Every country, every culture, every society has its own language for love. Individuals also have their own personal ways to express their love.

In English, the one word “love” is often used indiscriminately. It can convey such diverse feelings as love for God, a mate, a country, a perfume, or even a fruit. Other languages have different words for expressing these different “loves”.

Without pretending to organize the quite complex and subjective world of feelings, I would like to distinguish four types of love, according to the four different terms used by the ancient Greeks: *eros*, *storgē*, *philia* and *agapē*.

Eros: Love as Attraction

It seems evident that much of what is called love in our societies is related to physical attraction, sentimental feelings and sexual drive. The word *eros*, related to the English terms “eroticism” and “erotic”, describes this form of love which presents itself as a strong need, an urgent, even irresistible desire, not dependent on our will. It is a force that attracts us to someone, in spite of ourselves, sometimes even against our own reason.

Plato described *eros* as “a furor, a delirium, a passion” that overwhelms the individual independently of their personal will and reason. The person “in love” has the impression of having “fallen” into something that comes from outside, the victim of an aggressive force whose mechanisms remain obscure.

This impression of being the “victim” or object of love, rather than the subject of it, comes from Greco-Roman mythology in which the young god Cupid plays by piercing the hearts of his victims with the arrows that he blindly shoots around him. This very graphically describes the sensation of being a victim of a force that does not seem to depend on us, of being under the effect of unconscious or even “supernatural” forces that have erupted in us, and that we cannot fully control.

A very powerful definition of this type of love is attributed to King Solomon:

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.

Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned” (Song of Songs 8:6-7).

This type of love, romantic, capricious, exalted and constantly re-invented by western literature over many centuries, and popularized by the media, has been often prized for its lack of responsibility; that it is to say, for the tendency to refuse any accountability to any norm. This love is like a kind of sickness that strikes the one who “falls in love”. It also disappears as it has come, suddenly and without any explanation.

Most of the forms of love associated with *eros* are most likely vulnerable and unpredictable, for they are based on desire. The nature of desire is to disappear after being satisfied. Desire and pleasure are by definition unstable, ephemeral, changing and temporary. In a story told in 2 Samuel 13:1-19, Amnon was obsessed with desire for his half-sister, the beautiful Tamar, to the point that he raped her. But “then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he loved her . . .” (v. 15).

Storgē: Love as Affection

The verb *stergein* was used in the Hellenistic world for the natural, spontaneous affection normally shared by the members of the same family, tribe or group united by natural ties of blood or geography. We usually experience this kind of love with our parents, our children, our land, our village, etc. This love gives a sense of belonging to a dynasty, to a family, to a group.

One of the most beautiful stories of *storgē* in the Bible is the story of Ruth and Naomi. Her *storgē* love causes Ruth to say to her mother-in-law:

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

Such love consists in the natural acceptance of links that tie us naturally, socially and affectionately to others apart from their choice, because we share with them a common destiny. The tendency to patriotism—from war to sport—in all cultures is closely related to this type of love. When pushed too far this form of love is characterized by its tendency to become exclusive and possessive. At the same time, this type of love may lead to heroism, as it is shown in the story of Rizpah, who was able to love and protect the corpses of her children long after their death (2 Sam. 21:1-14).

Philia: Love as Friendship

Not all forms of love are related to instinct or desire. There is a very widespread type of love which comes from shared affinity and affection. The Greeks called it *philia*, from the verb *phileo*: to love in the sense of “to appreciate, to feel a shared affection for someone”. We could describe this form of love as friendship.

This kind of love is very general and affects all types of relationships, both within and outside the spheres of the couple and the family. Contrary to romantic love, which is mainly exclusive (either you love me or not), the love of friendship admits an extremely broad spectrum of partners and expresses itself in varying degrees. *Philia* consists in the satisfaction of an affective relationship that may be more or less permanent, involving two or more people.

An essential ingredient of *philia* is reciprocity. We may “fall in love (*eros*)” with somebody without any positive response. Friendship (*philia*) however, does not really exist if it is not shared. If there is not true mutual satisfaction, there is not true friendship. When we are in love as *eros*, we often idealize the object of our love and do not see the true reality of the loved one. On the contrary, friends are attracted by the very reality of each other.

Philia is made both of admiration and acceptance of the friend. The relationship has stability and is typically independent of most circumstances. As the Bible says, “A friend loves at all times” (Prov. 17:17), and sometimes “there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). A beautiful story of friendship in the Bible is the story of David and Jonathan, despite the fact that Jonathan was the son of David’s enemy (1 Sam. 18:1-5; 20:1-42; 2 Sam. 1:26). Jesus called Himself a “friend” of His disciples, giving us the most perfect example of friendship ever (John 15:12-17).

Agapē: Love as Self-giving Engagement

Although the terms *eros*, *storgē* and *philia* are the most frequent words in ancient Greek for love, the New Testament prefers to use another term: *agapē*. That term is very rare in classical Greek and describes the supreme form of love. It is used of the love of God for us, the love that God would like to receive from us, and the love that we should have toward each other (John 3:16; Matt. 22:37, 39). *Agapē* in the New Testament (like *ahav* in the Old Testament) is a kind of love that can be commanded, because it means first of all a pledge of loyalty and allegiance.

The word *agapē* describes a type of love that has been decided deliberately and independently of our feelings and emotions. It signifies the decision to do good to someone, to act in the interest of a person. This love is a decision of the will, a commitment before God or before someone else. It could be translated by faithfulness.

When we reach the limits of our capacity to love, when we reach the limits of our love as *eros*, *storgē* or *philia*, when we love someone further than that, we may enter into the fourth dimension of *agapē* love. In fact, when passion dies out, when desire fades or burns out, when the feelings are hurt and trust is threatened, *agapē* love may still blossom, if we know how to cultivate it. *Agapē* love is not an instinct; it is not a twist of fate. It results from our personal decision. To love with *agapē* is a verb of action.

This is the lesson that Saint-Exupéry has transmitted in *The Little Prince* (2000). After flying from his planet, and traveling through many other worlds, the little prince discovers that in order to be happy he should return to his own planet: “I am responsible for my rose”. The little prince discovers the *agapē* dimension of love and with it the need to decide his own future, respecting the will of the rose, without forcing it. As Thomas Aquinas said, *agapē* is the desire to make the other happy.

Martin Luther King in *Strength to Love* (1963) defines this form of love as “essential will”. Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled* (1978), says that “true love is an act of the will; it is both decision and action”. *Agapē* love consists in seeking the good of someone and then acting in this direction. This form of love is acceptance of the loved with his/her differences. It is made of respect and encouragement. Enrique Rojas calls it “intelligent love”.

Paul gives one of the most famous and complete definitions ever of *agapē*:

“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, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Agapē is the term that the Bible authors have chosen for describing the love of God. He loves us, not because we are lovely, but because He is *agapē*. Perfect love defines His character (1 John 4:8, 7-16). He wants always our best. In fact, perfect *agapē* is found only in God. Only God can impart to us this superior kind of love. God has loved us in a supreme way through Jesus Christ, even when we were not lovable at all (Rom 5:8). He did this because He wants our good, and He is ready to do anything for our happiness. In fact, only a great love is capable of a great sacrifice.

Any true love relationship may enter with the help of God into the realm of *agapē*. We enter the realm of *agapē* when we decide to love without asking anything in return, when we want the best for the loved one, when we open our hearts to the noblest feelings. There is no better example of *agapē* than the love of Jesus for us: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love (John 13:1).

We can say, in conclusion, that any form of love, *eros*, *philia*, or *storgē*, may always, if we really wish, be enriched by *agapē*. For the married couple, these four aspects of love have their place, and they are all necessary if we want to build together links of love that are strong, deep, mature, intelligent and durable. God, through His *agapē*, can give us constant joy and satisfaction as we advance in the difficult and exciting art of love.

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FOUR WORDS FOR LOVE

(or four types of love)

	EROS	STORGE	PHILIA	AGAPE
Description	Love related to physical/ sexual attraction	Love determined by family links	Love made of mutual affection	Love that transcends the personal relationships
Origin	Physical, sexual and aesthetic attraction	Fellowship, both imposed and accepted by family links	Mutual affinity	Deliberate choice of loyalty and faithfulness
Nature	Physical	Psychical	Social	Spiritual
Synonyms	Passion/Attraction	Affection	Friendship	Charity, action in favour of others
Results	Gratification of self	Affirmation of common links	Satisfaction of social needs	Self-giving service
Object	Pleasure	Responsibility	Solidarity	Commitment
Values involved	Physical, aesthetic and imaginary values	Family interdependence values	Relational values	Moral and spiritual values

“In The Usual Way”

by Helen Christoffel

It was 62 years ago last August that I came to Andrews University, then “Emmanuel Missionary College”. I was given a roommate who was planning to get married in September. We became fast friends. She asked me to give a reading at her reception called “In the Usual Way”. In passing, she told me that her fiancé had a brother. I really gave it no thought, because I had a group of friends from Ohio, near my home, and among that group were some very nice fellows I was kind of checking out.

On September 10, 1942 I made the trip to Aurora, Illinois to attend the wedding. At that time I met Garth, the brother of the groom. Friends have told me many times of Garth’s clear intentions as he rearranged the transportation back to campus so that he would be in the same car with me. Before dropping me off at the dorm, it was all arranged—our first date, to the muskmelon feed that traditionally opened every school year.

And—as the reading I gave at the wedding reception goes—“In the Usual Way,” one thing led to another and before long we were arranging to see each other as often as possible.

Dating in those days was much different than now. Students did not have cars. If we wanted to go shopping in South Bend we were required to find an adult chaperone with a car and go with a group. We sat on opposite sides of the chapel for worship and church. We were not allowed to walk together back to the dorms after services. In fact, Garth and I tried it once, got caught, and had all privileges taken away for awhile. But we survived!

The cafeteria was in the basement of Birch Hall, the girl’s dorm. At meal time, girls entered the cafeteria by one door and the fellows by another. The matron seated first a girl and then a boy. We never knew who would be seated at the table where we were assigned. Garth and I tried to get around the system. Garth worked at College Wood Products, a furniture factory on campus. He liked to take a shower before coming to dinner. I would stay in my room waiting for his signal that he was ready to leave his dorm. He would flash the lights in his room and I would flash mine back. Then we both would leave for the cafeteria hoping to arrive so we would be assigned to the same table. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t. Fortunately, our matron understood young people and was a friend to all of us.

The school year went on and, “In the Usual Way,” we spent as much time together as we could get away with. The following summer we both worked on campus to help with our tuition expenses. Part way through the summer, we took a break and made a trip by bus to Ohio so Garth could meet my family. We had a wonderful time, going to the park and zoo, etc.—ALONE! On the way back to campus Garth asked me to marry him and, “In the Usual Way,” I said yes.

So, on August 7, 1943 we were married. Now 60 years later I can tell you that marriage is truly a gift from God. We were blessed with four children and they are a wonderful support to me now. I lost my best friend when Garth passed away eight years ago. But I have many very happy memories and I love to talk about him.

Everywhere in my home I am reminded of him, from the bedroom furniture that he made to shelves on the wall. He loved woodworking.

Oh, yes, I can't forget the marshmallow cream jars. Garth was a “saver” and I am a “tosser”. He was known for the wonderful chocolate fudge he made that called for marshmallow cream. He washed and saved all the jars. I asked him what in the world he was saving all those jars for. He replied that he was going to sort all his nails, screws, and bolts and organize them in the jars. Of course, he never did. When I was cleaning out his shop after he passed away, I found jars and more jars—happy, funny memories.

Just to show how parents pass along their habits to children, let me give an example. Once while visiting my daughter in Washington, DC, I asked her what I could do to help her while she was at work. She said I could take everything out of a closet and when she got home we would sort and reorganize the contents. What do you suppose I found way back in the corner? Marshmallow jars!! Like father, like daughter.

Sometimes when cleaning I would throw out things I thought we didn't need. Before long I would see Garth bringing these things back in from the garage. I would fuss and fume, but oh, how pleased he was when I found use for something I had tossed out and I confessed that I was glad he had retrieved it.

Fifty-two years with the same person is really a learning experience. Two people growing up in entirely different worlds do not always agree about everything—like how to raise children and manage money. We found that when we had a problem, and all married couples do, if we were open and honest, with God's help, it would work out. Maybe not as each one would like, but at a midpoint that was acceptable to both. After a while we were surprised to find that more and more we would be thinking alike. As I said, it's really a learning experience.

We lived on a very tight budget. I did not work and so with four children, money was tight. Because of our different backgrounds, we had different views of managing money. I was a spend thrift but Garth had been raised to stay on a budget. Another learning experience—it took a while—but I finally learned! The kids would see Dad with money in his wallet and think that we had lots of money. I remember once he made several piles of money—one for tithe and offerings, one for food, one for tuition, and one for utilities. There was not much left that was not spoken for. This demonstration helped them understand about budgets.

Going to church was routine in our family. One time, one of our teenage sons said, “I'm not going to church tomorrow.” Well, we didn't quite know how to handle that. Not too much was said at first. Then I told him that his Sabbath shirt was clean and his pants were pressed. He could make up his own mind. Sabbath found him in the pew with us. Nothing pleased us more than for the six of us to be sitting together in church. Of course, we decided that there comes a time when each child must make his or her own choice. (Sometimes it is very hard for parents to accept.) Our children did not always choose what we wanted, but they needed the freedom to choose just as God has given each of us that freedom. Then we must love them unconditionally.

What makes good marriages work? I'm certainly no authority. But the good news is that what we are powerless to accomplish in ourselves can be ours in Jesus. He is ready to work a miracle in every marriage if the partners turn to Him.

THE USUAL WAY

There was once a little man, and his rod and line he took,
For he said “I’ll go a-fishing in the neighboring brook”.
And it chanced a little maiden was walking out that day,
And they met—in the usual way.

Then he sat him down beside her, and hour or two went by,
But still upon the grassy brink his rod and line did lie;
“I thought,” she shyly whispered, “you’d be fishing all the day!”
And they met—in the usual way.

So he gravely took his rod in hand, and threw the line about,
But the fish perceived distinctly he was not looking out;
And he said, “Sweetheart, I love you,” but she said she could not stay,
But she did—in the usual way.

Then the stars came out above them, and she gave a little sigh
As they watched the silver ripples, like moments running by;
“We must say good-bye,” she whispered, by the alders old and gray,
And they did—in the usual way.

And day by day beside the stream they wandered to and fro.
And day by day the fishes swam securely down below;
Till this little story ended, as such little stories may,
Very much—in the usual way.

And now that they are married, do they always bill and coo;
Do they never fret and quarrel like other couples do?
Does he cherish her and love her? Does she honor and obey?
Well . . . they . . . do—in the usual way.

~ Anonymous

Helen Christoffel is the mother of Karen Flowers. She writes from her home in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Adapted from her presentation at Andrews Academy Chapel program, October 6, 2003.

How to Prepare Couples for Marriage

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Marriage is a Process

A wedding *is* one of life's most significant celebrations. It merits all the careful thought and planning usually invested in its preparation. Of course planning for the ceremony itself is a part of preparation for marriage and you—the pastor—will have your responsibilities to attend to in every cultural setting. However, wedding plans do not form the sum and substance of an effective ministry to premarital couples.

David and Vera Mace, a pastoral couple who pioneered in research and ministry for married couples and with whom we had the privilege to study, often made the point that a wedding is not a marriage. A wedding, they affirm, is a significant moment in the history of a couple. It is the ceremony at which a covenant—a promise of faithfulness and lifelong commitment—is solemnized before God, family and friends. But a marriage is more than a ceremony. A marriage is the working out of the promised commitment over a lifetime.

To the wedding, the bride and groom each bring a suitcase. A suitcase filled with the family traditions, values, interests, dreams, relational experiences and abilities they have gathered since birth. A marriage is the sorting and mingling together of the contents of these two suitcases over a lifetime. A marriage is a process of creating a new suitcase. It will be filled with some things old and some things new which the couple chooses for their journey together.

Ideally, this process begins intentionally three to six months before the wedding. At that time the couple enters with their pastor into a period of concentrated preparation for marriage.

The Pastor's Role as Coach

In his book *Generation to Generation* (1985), Dr. Edwin Friedman portrays the role of an effective pastor in ministry to families as being like that of a coach, guiding the family through the seasons of marriage and family life. You are often called upon to officiate at significant family events such as weddings, baby dedications, graduations and funerals. But the pastor who serves merely as an officiator at events misses many great opportunities for ministry—opportunities to help families negotiate life transitions successfully and to enhance their relationships and spirituality during these seasons when they are most open to growth.

These opportunities for ministry are open to you because you, like no one else, are drawn into the family circle in times of crisis and at significant family transition points. The quality of the relationship between you and the families to whom you minister will to a large degree determine your effectiveness during these important seasons. The special relationship developed between a pastor and a couple during the premarital period can set the stage for effective ministry to that couple in the future.

Objectives of Premarital Guidance

1. Illuminate biblical principles undergirding Christian marriage. The first goal of premarital guidance is to help the couple establish a Christian foundation for their marriage. It places emphasis on the biblical principles which undergird a Christian marriage relationship. Among these are principles like redemptive, self-giving love, respect for each other as persons created and

redeemed by Christ, mutuality, covenant-keeping, commitment, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Premarital guidance is intended to open up dialogue between the couple on such spiritual questions as “How would you describe your personal commitment to Jesus Christ?” “What makes a marriage Christian?” “What is your personal commitment and your couple commitment to grow toward God’s ideals for marriage in your relationship as husband and wife?”

2. Prepare the couple for the transition into married life. Another primary goal of premarital guidance is to alert the couple to the transitions they can expect within married life and to prepare them for the most immediate transition—moving from singleness to marriage. David Augsburger in his book *Sustaining Love* (1988) speaks of four marriages within a marriage—the marriages of *dream*, *disillusionment*, *discovery* and *depth*. Couples may vary in the number of years spent in each stage, but the pattern appears to be consistent among couples who stay together. Augsburger is not alone in his observations. Many experts in family living have noted common transition points and stages across the family life cycle—the birth of the first child, midlife, the emptying of the parental nest, retirement. As the seasons change, adjustments are absolutely necessary.

Couples who are able to anticipate predictable transitions in the journey ahead and who are realistic about their expectations of themselves, each other, and their relationship throughout life’s various seasons will be less likely to abandon their covenant as the seasons change.

In real life, human love is like the tide. It ebbs and flows. There are seasons of ecstasy when the tide rushes in, and there are seasons of disillusionment when the mud flats of the relationship are exposed. Couples who are encouraged to dialogue before marriage about this reality will be in a much better position to understand and traverse the experience. How will they cope in times when rose-tinted glasses give way to a crystal clear view of hard reality? How will their commitment to the Christian ideals of mutuality, respect, faithfulness, forgiveness and caring about one another’s deepest needs impact their responses to one another when difficulties arise? Of course such questions cannot be fully answered before marriage. But the opening of such issues at this time will give the couple a sense of permission to address them again as the twists and turns of married life unfold.

3. Enhance relational skills. The period of premarital preparation also provides opportunity for the couple to further develop the relational skills necessary for couple intimacy. By intimacy we mean the experience of being fully known and fully loved. Intimacy is not only physical and sexual, but emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual. The ability to convey and receive love, to affirm one’s partner, to communicate, to process anger, and to resolve conflicts effectively can be learned by any couple willing to listen to one another and put energy into finding mutually satisfying solutions.

4. Provide opportunity to re-evaluate the decision to marry. The premarital guidance process also provides a chance for the couple to re-evaluate their decision to marry. For some, the premarital sessions will highlight immaturity, unresolved issues with parents, relational difficulties or other reasons why it may be best to postpone the wedding or even reconsider the decision to marry each other at any time.

To get couples beyond their typical “bliss barrier,” to gently open their eyes so they can take a realistic look at each other—wonders and warts tied up in a single package—are important goals of preparation for marriage. Some are so romantically smitten it’s next to impossible to get them to see reality. Others fear that a close look might spoil something. As one woman remarked, “I no more want to know about Everett before marriage than I want an inventory of my Christmas gifts before Christmas!”

After several months of premarital counseling, one young woman who came into our offices on the end of her fiancé's finger, romantically smitten, decided to postpone the wedding. She came to realize that getting married was her way of retaliating against her parents—not a good reason for marriage. She spent the next year repairing and rebuilding her relationship with both of her parents. About a year later she was ready to move ahead with the marriage, which she did. The premarital process helped her to clarify her motivations for marriage, to mature personally, and to secure important family support for herself and her marriage.

The detection of issues that may later adversely affect the marriage, or a couple's re-evaluation of a decision to marry, should be regarded as positive outcomes of premarital counseling. Couples need assurance that they have not failed because they decide to alter their plans. Rather, they have made a very positive decision in choosing not to move forward inappropriately. If they decide to postpone or to cancel their plans to marry, you may wish to invite them to visit with you individually to help them work through the sense of grief which may accompany such a loss.

Usually couples come out of a premarital guidance program feeling much more secure about their decision to marry. One young wife wrote of their experience: "Before starting the pre-marriage program, we were nervous. He was uncomfortable about the type of self-revealing questions he might have to answer, but the first meeting set him at ease. I was worried that I might find out something that would cause me to call off the wedding, but as time went on, just the opposite happened. I was surer than ever that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. In a nutshell, we could say that the pre-marriage program helped us to be more relaxed about the wedding and marriage itself and helped us adjust more easily to being married."

5. Develop confidence and trust in the pastor and the counseling process. As has been mentioned, it is also hoped that one of the significant outcomes of premarital sessions with the pastor will be the development of confidence and trust in the pastor and the counseling process. This will set the stage for the couple to turn to the pastor or a counselor in the future for marriage enrichment and for counseling when needed.

In the last two decades, many denominations have undertaken efforts to provide premarital guidance for couples requesting marriage. In 1984, the Seventh-day Adventist Church took the official action charging pastors with the responsibility of providing premarital guidance for all couples requesting marriage. Of course, many pastors and churches were already providing this important service, but the denomination's action sent the clear message that the church considers premarital guidance important and that it accepts responsibility for helping couples with their preparation for marriage.

Today, many couples no longer see premarital guidance as a requirement. They have heard the good word from others that premarital counseling not only helps couples prepare for the future; it also provides an opportunity to address current issues in their relationship. So, many actively seek out the benefits premarital preparation provides as they launch their marital relationship.

Further, much more data is now in to support premarital efforts. Studies show clearly that couples who have put some energy into premarital preparation typically fare better than those who do not.

Effective Methods of Premarital Guidance

However, some approaches to premarital guidance have been shown to be more effective than others in terms of keeping marriages together and generating higher levels of marital satisfaction. Pastors and counselors have rightly observed that the months just prior to the wedding do not afford many “teachable moments” in the lives of couples preparing for marriage. Rose-tinted glasses tend to filter out any view of one’s beloved or the relationship which is less than the most flattering. What has come to be called a “bliss barrier” closes eyes and ears to the best admonition and advice that could be offered. Premarital preparation which emphasizes an advice-giving or didactic approach has proven to be little more than a waste of time. But research has highlighted three significant factors in effective premarital programs. Long term benefits are associated with a process which enhances a couple’s (1) understanding of themselves and one another; (2) exploration of a wide spectrum of marital issues; and (3) relational skill-building.

In an effective premarital program, couples come to understand themselves and one another better through the use of psychological tests and other assessment tools. These assessment instruments offer insights into individual temperaments and a person’s psychological adjustment. They also provide a means of determining how well the couple knows each other. Discussion surrounding these test results may also be helpful in assessing the degree to which the couple accepts one another unconditionally and, by contrast, the extent to which expectations that they will be able to change the other once they are married may create a problem.

When a pastor facilitates a couple’s exploration of a wide spectrum of relational issues, topics are introduced into the couple’s conversation which they may never have thought to discuss. Inevitably such dialogue will unmask differences in perspectives and expectations which may already be, or may become, problematic. As necessary, the pastor will then be in a position to assist the couple as they seek to understand one another and deal with significant differences.

Through this process, the pastor is also able to evaluate a couple’s relational skills. As necessary, he will then take steps to help the couple develop their skills in communication, anger management and conflict resolution.

You will note that in this model of premarital counseling, the pastoral counselor primarily serves as a facilitator to enable the couple to understand themselves, discover their relational strengths and areas where growth is needed, and to enhance their relational skills. He or she does provide information when necessary and models and teaches skills, but does so in the context of the couple interaction in the session.

Assessment Instruments

In addition to your own intuition and judgment, tools exist which can help you in your assessment of the temperaments, the personal and relationship adjustment and the relational skills of the couple. Such assessment instruments provide a number of avenues whereby the couple may grow in their understanding of themselves and of one another. They will also help you evaluate relational strengths on which the couple can build and areas where growth is needed. Here are a few assessment instruments we have found helpful:

Cruise-Blitchington Temperament Inventory. The Cruise-Blitchington Temperament Inventory and the book *Understanding Your Temperament* (Blitchington & Cruise, 1979) offers a simple schema for understanding differences between human beings. It is based on an age-old view that humanity can be sorted into four major types—choleric, melancholy, phlegmatic and sanguine. It can provide beginning insights for the couple into the habits and behaviors of each partner.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) shows how individuals perceive information and make decisions and their preferred ways of dealing with people, ideas, schedules and the world around them. Training in administration and interpretation is recommended. Materials are available in a number of languages from different sources in a number of countries. The book *Gifts Differing* by Isabel Myers (1980) provides an excellent overview of the psychological aspects of the test and its interpretation.

Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis. The T-JTA is an instrument designed to measure levels of emotional adjustment in nine areas referred to as "traits". The criss-cross use of the T-JTA provides insight into how the couple view each other and how well they know one another. The T-JTA is also available in a number of languages and has been normed for several different cultures. Training to use the T-JTA is required before materials can be obtained.

Genogram. A genogram graphically portrays how persons are connected to their extended families. It is a helpful tool for exploring the impact of relational patterns within each family of origin on the individuals and on the couple. Since people tend to replicate the dynamics within their families of origin across generations, creating a genogram can be an enlightening way for couples to meet each other's families. A genogram provides a visual alert to the potential that certain traits will pass from generation to generation unless conscious efforts are put forth to change them. A book such as McGoldrick and Gerson's *Genograms in Family Assessment* (1985) provides further direction on drawing a genogram.

Prepare/Enrich Inventories. The *Prepare/Enrich Inventories* provide comprehensive relationship assessment tools for couples at different stages. *Prepare* is for premarital couples. *Prepare MC* is for premarital couples with children. *Enrich* is for married couples, and *Mate* is for couples over the age of 50. The inventories are completed by the couple and then computer scored by the organization. The results are returned to the pastor/counselor. These inventories provide a wealth of information about the couple's relationship, thus enhancing your effectiveness as a pastoral counselor. They can help the couple increase their awareness of strengths and potential areas for growth. They can be used to stimulate dialogue and provide opportunity for relational skill building. They can also build the couple's confidence in their ability to have a strong and committed marital relationship.

Preparing for Marriage Inventory. The *Preparing for Marriage Inventory* is a part of the General Conference program for premarital guidance, *Preparing for Marriage*. It is a comprehensive inventory completed by the bride- and groom-to-be individually. It provides opportunity for each partner to think through and express his or her views on such issues as selecting a life partner, values and goals, expressions of love, religious beliefs and expectations, roles and responsibilities, communication and conflict resolution, in-law relationships, finances, sexuality and family planning, health and habits, and family background. The results are then used as a basis for couple dialogue in the premarital sessions with the pastor to enhance a couple's understanding of one another and to provide insights into relational strengths and potential areas for growth.

Skill-building in Premarital Counseling

In this model of premarital counseling in which the pastor facilitates the work of the couple, attention is given to the development of three special skills—(1) couple dialogue, (2) processing anger effectively, and (3) resolving conflicts constructively.

Couple dialogue. The couple's dialogue forms the heart of the counseling sessions together. Couple dialogue involves the couple turning to each other and talking to one another in your presence. While this may seem awkward at first, with your gentle coaching to talk to one another as

though you were not there, most couples soon relax and discover the benefits of sharing even difficult issues within the safety of the counseling session. The dialogue may be based on something they have learned from one of the assessment instruments, the sharing of their responses to a question you pose, or a pressing issue which they bring to the premarital session.

Couple dialogue is a skill which most couples have to develop through coaching and practice. Encourage the couple to engage each other by using the second person pronoun “you” rather than speaking about each other by using “he” or “she.” In the early premarital sessions, you will want to listen for and affirm the couple’s strengths in their ability to communicate. You may note, for example, that they do well at looking one another in the eye, at communicating non-verbally through caring touch and gestures, that they are able to express feelings to one another, that they listen to one another and check to see if they have understood correctly, or that they are not afraid to address problem areas.

In time you will also be able to open some areas where there is potential for growth and coach the couple in the development of better communication skills. Perhaps you will see that the couple could improve their abilities to listen. Perhaps both talk, but neither seems to be hearing what the other is saying. Perhaps one is good at talking, but the other tends to be quieter. At this point you will want to ask their permission to point out something you are observing. Encourage them to share more than information and opinions; suggest that they try to put their feelings into words.

When an opportunity presents itself, you will introduce the skill known as “active listening” or “reflective listening.” Active or reflective listening is a skill which helps individuals receive both the content and the feelings of a message being sent to them. It provides a way to check back with the sender to see if the message was fully understood before proceeding with the dialogue. The process is not difficult. One partner, let’s say the bride-to-be, conveys a message. The groom receives the message and attempts to decode both the content and the feelings behind it. To make sure he has decoded her message correctly, he reflects what he thinks he heard—both the content and the feeling—back to the bride. If the bride agrees that her message has been heard correctly, she confirms this to him. The groom then has a chance to send a message of his own to the bride. However, if the bride’s message has been incorrectly understood, the bride can communicate her message again and the groom can try again to decode it more accurately. At first, when practicing the skill of active listening, it can be helpful to use introductory clauses like, “I hear you saying that . . .” or “I think you are feeling . . .” If you and your wife are providing the premarital counseling together, you may wish to model this skill as a couple.

Assure the couple that while this feels mechanical at first, it soon becomes very natural and almost automatic. What’s important is that active listening will go far toward minimizing the misunderstandings which can create many problems in a relationship.

When you have explained and modeled these skills, invite the couple to try dialoguing again on the same topic, but this time using the skill they have just learned to make sure they have fully understood what their partner has said before proceeding with comments of their own. You will likely have to coach them along the way as they attempt to put their new talking and listening skills into practice.

One difficulty couples often experience is the inability of one or both partners to express feelings. They may need you to help them feel comfortable with the full spectrum of human emotion and find words to express their feelings. A look through the Psalms to identify the feeling words and emotions being expressed by the Psalmist can be a helpful homework assignment.

The process of having the couple dialogue in your presence can also alert you to the level of communication at which they usually function. John Powell, in his book *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am* (1969), identifies five levels of communication. They range from a superficial cliché level of very surface communication to the deepest level of communication where the couple is able to disclose to each other their innermost being. In between, are three levels which progress from reporting information, to sharing opinions, to a level which incorporates the sharing of feelings.

Of course there are situations in which each of the five levels is appropriate. But you will want to draw attention to the importance of communication at the deeper levels. You are in a good position at this time to provide insight into the levels of communication and to encourage and coach the couple as they stretch toward the self-disclosure which leads to intimacy. Sherod and Phyllis Miller's organization, Interpersonal Communication Programs, Inc., provides excellent training and resources on communication skills (Miller et al., 1991).

Positive processing of anger. Handling anger is a second vital skill to be cultivated in premarital counseling. In *Love and Anger in Marriage* (1982), David Mace suggests that anger is important to a growing marriage:

Anger, rightly used, is as healthy an emotion as love. . . . Anger is the defense system of the ego and protects your personality. . . . By getting behind the anger to the hurt feeling that has triggered it, the couple can learn something important about their relationship and clear it up. This is one of the most valuable ways in which relationships grow. (p. 58)

Many Christians have difficulty viewing anger in a positive light. As one woman having trouble even acknowledging the presence of the emotion in her life put it, "Good Christians don't get angry . . . and this whole discussion irritates me!" But the apostle Paul includes anger among the characteristics of the "new man" (Eph. 4:24-26). He does, however, admonish believers to "be angry but sin not."

Anger is presented in Scripture as an appropriate response to injustice and the victimization of the weak and vulnerable. Anger sets the boundaries on abusive treatment and gives energy to the victims to respond by rejecting such treatment and taking action to protect themselves and those for whom they are responsible. Anger serves as an early warning signal that there is a problem in the relationship which needs to be addressed. In each of these circumstances, anger is a friend if it is heeded and the issue behind it resolved. However anger which is allowed to fester and which is never processed constructively in a relationship will damage the relationship, perhaps irreparably, and rob the couple of the intimacy for which God created marriage.

By the time they enter premarital counseling, couples have usually been in a relationship long enough to have already experienced the pain of unresolved anger. The subject may be difficult for them to talk about, but your matter-of-fact approach can help normalize their experience and give them permission to address the subject. Many have discovered that individuals handle anger in different ways. Some suppress it, while others explode violently. Some find it easier to identify and own their angry feelings; others live in denial and find its expression very difficult. Learning how anger was dealt with in the families in which they grew up and exploring their own mechanisms for handling anger before marriage can open the way for growth toward the constructive processing of anger in the future.

Both partners can learn to acknowledge the presence of anger within them and accept responsibility for their behavior when they are angry. Encourage the couple to make a commitment never to strike or emotionally wound one another in a fit of anger. In the premarital setting, couples

can begin to develop their ability to identify the unresolved feelings that lie beneath their anger—i.e., feelings of hurt, betrayal, fatigue, frustration, belittlement, rejection. They can become more adept at expressing these feelings and accepting one another when they have these feelings. They can develop skills for resolving the issues associated with these primary feelings before anger has emerged with force. They can come to view anger as a friend, as a signal that growth is needed in a particular area. They can experience the benefits of turning to one another for help in resolving the pressing issue rather than allowing this powerful emotion to wreck havoc in their lives.

As a pastoral counselor, you may need to think through your own attitudes toward anger so that you do not become afraid of it when it arises between the couple as issues are discussed in the premarital sessions. In fact, if it does not arise spontaneously, it is important for you to open the subject. It is important to give couples an opportunity to look at their existing mechanisms for handling anger and to develop new skills which lead to a more constructive use of anger in the relationship. This may be one of the best outcomes of the premarital process.

At this juncture we should also say that it is important for you as a pastoral counselor to have a more experienced pastor or qualified mental health professional to whom you can turn to discuss the issues that arise in yourself and/or in the individuals with whom you are counseling, especially in situations where you sense the need for an additional opinion or personal support.

Resolving Conflict Creatively

Likewise, couples who learn before marriage to resolve conflict creatively will have a distinct advantage in their marriages over couples who have no skills to work through a difficult problem. Jack and Judy Balswick in their book *The Family* (1999) discuss five common ways of dealing with conflict. (1) Some individuals avoid conflict and withdraw from the relationship when conflict arises. (2) Others accommodate and prefer to yield rather than confront the issue. (3) Still others compete to win. (4) Compromise—you give a little and I'll give a little—is the route others prefer. While there may be circumstances when each of these styles of conflict management may be useful, they do not usually prove adequate over the long haul. (5) However, there is a fifth style which usually proves the most satisfactory. Balswicks call it the collaborative style, in which conflict is resolved in ways that take the needs of all concerned into consideration.

Ideally, in the premarital setting you can help couples to identify their usual style of resolving conflict and build on their abilities to resolve conflict collaboratively. The General Conference resource *Caring for Marriage* includes a helpful model for resolving conflict in creative ways which consider the needs of both partners. Steps in such a model include:

1. Deal with issues and grievances as they occur without bringing up the past.
2. Use your communication skills to listen and share. Attack the problem, not your partner.
3. Identify the needs of each partner in relationship to the issue.
4. Accommodate your partner if you can without jeopardizing your own needs. When accommodation is not possible,
5. Consider alternative solutions. Generate as many as you can without evaluating them at this point.
6. Evaluate your possibilities. Reject any which are unacceptable to either or you. Choose the one which best meets the needs and concerns of both. Generate more alternatives if necessary.
7. Plan to re-evaluate the solution you have chosen in the near future to determine if it has proven satisfactory.

8. Attend to restoring the relationship. Conflict creates stress. Sharing deep feelings is often difficult and emotionally exhausting. Take time for some positive, relationship-building experiences. You may want to pray together.

Couples may choose to use such a model to work through a real issue which concerns them in one of the premarital sessions with you. They may at times need information and genuinely seek your opinion. Avoid the temptation to give unsolicited advice. Rather, help them to explore their values, consider the various options open to them, and reach solutions that are fitting for them. If a real issue does not present itself, it can be helpful for you to present some case studies to demonstrate how the model works.

The Premarital Sessions

Let's turn our attention now to the premarital sessions themselves.

Individual and group programs. In some settings where several couples may be preparing for marriage at the same time, a series of classes for a group or a weekend retreat may provide a useful format to accomplish a number of the objectives of premarital guidance. However, for best results, group programs should be followed up with individual sessions. Settings where the counselor meets with the individual couples afford the optimal environment for couples to make themselves vulnerable and receive help with their individual needs.

Curricular and customized programs. Ideally, the premarital sessions should be set up to accomplish three things: (1) to learn about and attend to the particular needs and issues of the couple, (2) to determine their level of skill in dialogue, handling anger and conflict resolution and develop these as necessary, and (3) to provide opportunity for them to discuss and learn about a number of common marital issues.

Some premarital counselors find it easier to have a more structured curriculum of assignments and session outlines. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' resource *Preparing for Marriage* and other books such as *Premarital Counseling* by H. Norman Wright provide models for such a structured program and rich resources if you decide to assemble your own. Among the topics that are typically covered in such structured programs are: religious beliefs and expectations, family background, temperament/personality similarities and differences, fears and anxieties about marriage, values and goals, roles and responsibilities in marriage, understanding emotions, communication, decision-making and conflict resolution, in-law relationships, friendships, finances, sexuality and family planning, health and habits.

You may prefer to make an assessment of the unique needs of each couple and then customize their premarital program, working in the various skill-building elements with opportunities to explore specific marital issues that may be most essential for them.

Number of sessions. To accomplish the primary objectives of facilitating a process of self-discovery and skill-building for the couple, we recommend that you plan six to eight sessions with the couple prior to the wedding and at least one post-wedding session within six months after the wedding. A more structured program might proceed as follows:

Session 1: Foundations of Marriage (definitions of marriage, reasons for marrying this person, expectations of premarital counseling, transition issues)

Session 2: Family and Relationship History (family background, family systems issues)

Session 3: Celebrating Our Differences (review of results of assessment instruments, self-esteem issues, personal regard for each other, understanding and valuing differentness)

Session 4: Communication (verbal/non-verbal communication, speaking and listening skills, communication levels and barriers, male-female differences in communication)

Session 5: Handling Conflict (understanding anger, conflict management styles, the role of forgiveness)

Session 6: Roles, Finances and In-laws (marriage patterns, financial stewardship, family budget, family support, differentiation from family)

Session 7: Bonding and Sexuality (sexuality, family planning, pair-bonding)

Session 8: Wedding Planning (order of service, vows, sermon/homily ideas)

Session 9: Post-Wedding Session (adjustment, communication, enrichment)

Of course, you and the couple may agree to have additional sessions together before and after the wedding to work further on certain issues, cover topics unfinished from the pre-wedding sessions, and to check on how things are going through the first year to eighteen months. The first year and a half of marriage is generally thought to be the period when relational patterns are being set and during which adjustments are made more readily. You will want to set the date for the first post-wedding session at the last pre-wedding session. If the couple intends to move from your area, you will want to talk with them about arranging for a post-wedding session with another pastoral counselor. In the post-wedding session or sessions (which are really marital counseling sessions) you can also introduce couples to the process of marriage enrichment and invite them to join an enrichment group of other couples for fellowship and marital growth.

Duration and frequency. Sessions may range in length from 60 to 90 minutes. Generally, since couples will likely have some between-session assignments, meeting every other week is preferable. Some time lapse will also give them opportunity to work on developing their relational skills. In some cases your expectations will need to be very flexible, since it is not unusual for couples to conduct a long-distance romance while one or both are away from home for college, work, or military service. Assignments can be given and independent study done by the bride and groom-to-be, followed up by conference calls and extended sessions when the couple do have opportunity to meet with you. In such cases, the post-wedding sessions can be even more important to help them cover vital areas that they were unable to attend to beforehand.

During the last month before the wedding, the event itself looms with such importance that the possibility for skill-building and relational growth diminish. The focus of the premarital sessions should then shift to making last-minute plans for the wedding day. During this month you can have a final pre-wedding session with the couple to discuss their order of service and their preferences with regard to their vows. Today, many couples prefer to personalize their vows to each other. Also, you can invite their input into your wedding sermon or homily—such as their favorite promises and verses about love and marriage. For a good resource, see *Wedding Ceremony Idea Book* by George W. Knight (1984).

Format. Some counselors visit separately with the bride and the groom for one session or for part of a session, giving opportunity to get more personally acquainted with each partner and to allow opportunity for disclosure of issues that might not occur in a conjoint session. In our opinion, such individual sessions should be undertaken only when considered necessary, since such sessions may complicate the process of openness and the partners' vulnerability to each other which you are wanting to establish. Such sessions may also set up a circumstance where you as a pastoral counselor may have to decide what to do if one or the other asks you to keep a secret.

Generally, sessions should feature couple dialogue as much as possible, with input from the pastoral counselor as necessary for coaching, for sharing helpful information and facilitating skill-building and relational growth. As we have mentioned, couple dialogue can be stimulated by a

discussion of the results and interpretation of an assessment instrument, by a question or situation posed by the pastor, or an issue which the couple brings to the session.

Questions and statements that invite couple participation. Some questions and statements that facilitate the couple's interaction and dialogue with each other which we have found helpful include:

- Introduce your beloved to me.
- What will be different about your relationship after the wedding day?
- What hurdles do you foresee you will have to surmount?
- How is your fiancée similar to or different from your father and mother?
- What is there about your parents' marriage and your fiancé's parents' marriage that you want or don't want?
- How would you like feelings of love, warmth, and tenderness shown to you in public and in your home?
- What is there about yourself or your past that you think might seriously affect your marriage?
- In the light of what is happening to marriages today, why will yours be different?
- In what ways do you expect your partner to change after marriage?
- What will it mean for you if changes do not take place in the way you expect?
- How can the differences you exhibit strengthen your marriage?
- How would you see forgiveness operating in a marriage?
- If you were to write a letter to your prospective in-laws stating reasons why you are glad to be joining their family what would you put in it?
- What do you plan to do about the characteristics you do not like in your future in-laws?
- How much money from your family finances should your partner be able to spend without your permission? How did you arrive at this?
- What are some of the wishes of both families which you intend to include in your wedding plans?
- What difference would being a Christian make in a couple's sexual relationship in marriage?
- How will you respond and deal with it if, after you are married, another person is attracted to you and approaches you?
- How many children do you think will be ideal for you and how does your fiancé feel about it?
- What are some things about which you don't seem to be able to communicate?

The *Preparing for Marriage Inventory* in the General Conference resource *Preparing for Marriage* was designed for such use in premarital sessions.

Recently some young friends of ours gave us the great honor of participating in their wedding ceremony. Eight months earlier Bobby and Jackie had come to us, enjoying a good friendship, attracted to each other, thinking about marriage, but genuinely wondering whether it would be a good idea. After several appointments, however, we were delighted when they announced their engagement. That delight was doubled when they asked us to perform their wedding ceremony. It was a day for making memories. The groom, overcome by the setting, the music, the joy of becoming a husband, and the beauty of his bride, excitedly replied to the question, "Will you take this woman . . .?" with a resounding, "I sure will!" Then his romantic flair overcame all inhibitions. Upon their introduction as husband and wife, he boldly scooped her into his arms and strode exuberantly off the rostrum down the steep bank of steps to the sanctuary floor.

We will not soon forget the joy of that day. Joy born of being part of the establishment of another home which testifies to the world of God's goodness in creating male and female and bringing them together as one-flesh. Joy in the day to day as we watch this young couple's love mature and flourish. Joy in knowing that a process set in motion during the premarital period has paved the way for ministry into the future. We wish this joy for all of you as we recommit ourselves to ministry to couples during this most significant season in their lives.

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Adapted from *How to Prepare Couples for Marriage* (1999) by Karen and Ron Flowers, a one-hour leadership development video produced for the *Seminar-in-a-Box* (1999) series by the Ministerial Resource Center, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Phone: 888-771-0738 / Website: <http://www.ministrialassociation.com>.

Premarital Resources for Pastors

Compiled by Willie and Elaine Oliver
Department of Family Ministries
North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Premarital Assessment Questionnaires (PAQ)

PREPARE 2000. David Olson, Ph.D.

The **PREPARE Program** (premarital preparation), begins with a 195 question couple inventory and 6 to 8 weeks of feedback based on a 15 page computer report. Six couple exercises identify strengths, develop communication and conflict resolution skills, deal with family or origin, finances, and set goals.

195 item inventory; 30-45 minutes to administer; requires one-day training seminar or self-study with video; \$30

For training information or to locate a program:

Life Innovations, Inc.
P.O. Box 190
Minneapolis, MN 55440-0190
800-331-1661; Fax 651-636-1668
Email: cs@lifeinnovations.com
Web: www.lifeinnovation.com

FOCCUS. Barbara Markey, Ph.D.

The **FOCCUS** (Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, & Study) instrument is a marriage preparation inventory which can be tailored for interchurch, second marriage or cohabitating couples. FOCCUS Inc. provides an inexpensive scoring service plus hand and PC scoring options. It is designed to reflect the values of Christian marriage such as permanency, fidelity, openness to children, forgiveness, etc.

156 item instrument; 45 minutes to administer; optional one-day seminar or video; \$10. Also available in Spanish.

For more information:

FOCCUS, Inc.
3214 North 60th Street
Omaha, NE 68104
Toll free: 877-883-5422
Email: FOCCUS@foccusinc.com
Web: <http://www.foccusinc.com>

RELATE. Brigham Young University

The **RELATIONship Evaluation** (RELATE) questionnaire is an assessment tool for marriage preparation. Based on over 50 years of research, RELATE covers every major predictor of marital quality. RELATE is computer scored, and each couple receives a 19 page report with almost a dozen graphs and charts containing information on over 60 aspects of their relationship, including: couple unity in values, attitudes, and beliefs; personality readiness for marriage; partner readiness; couple readiness; and background and home environment factors.

204 item instrument; 60-90 minutes to administer; recommended self study with video; \$8

For more information and to order a sample set:

Relate Institute
P.O. Box 25391
Provo, Utah 84602-5391
801-422-4359 ; Fax 801-422-0225
Email: RELATE@byu.edu
Web: <http://relate.byu.edu>

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Isabel Briggs Myers and Katherine C. Briggs.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator helps individuals gain valuable insight about themselves and the people they interact with daily. The book *Gifts Differing* by Isabel Myers gives an excellent overview of the psychological aspects of the test and its interpretation. Requires training prior to purchasing materials.

For more information or training sites:

Consulting Psychologists Press
Davies-Black Publishing
3803 East Bayshore Road
P.O. Box 10096
Palo Alto, CA 94303
800-624-1765 or 650-969-8901; Fax 650-969-8608
Email: custserv@cpp-db.com
Web: <http://cpp-db.com>

Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (T-JTA). Robert M. Taylor, PhD, and W. Lee Morrison, PhD.

This brief 180-question test takes about 30 minutes and can be administered to individuals, couples, or groups. The results provide a visual evaluation of how individuals felt about themselves at the time they answered the test questions. The T-JTA may be taken in “criss-cross” fashion, to provide information about the feelings, attitudes, and behavior patterns of two individual respondents (e.g. Spouses or parent-child). Handbook is provided with test manual which provides specialized instruction in the administration and scoring of the test and the interpretation of trait scores. Scoring may be by hand or by computer.

For more information and to order:

Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.
16204 N. Florida Ave.,
Lutz, FL 33549
800-331-TEST or 813-968-3003; Fax 813-968-2598
Web: <http://www.parinc.com>

Premarital Programs

CPREP (Christian PREP – The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program)

Scott Stanley, PhD, et. al.

Based on over twenty years of empirical research, CPREP is a comprehensive premarital/marital program which teaches couples essential skills for maintaining a lasting love: how to communicate effectively, oneness and permanence, spirituality in marriage, forgiveness, commitment, friendship, and sensuality. CPREP is built on foundations of Christian teaching and

wisdom and is complemented by the very best that research has to offer in helping couples develop and maintain strong marriages

For information on training and free-standing materials (books and tapes):

PREP Inc.
P.O. Box 4793
Greenwood Village, CO 80155
800-366-0166
Email: info@prepic.com
Web: <http://www.prepinc.com>

Engaged Encounter

Engaged Encounter was developed by the Catholic Church but is now available through other Protestant denominations. These retreat weekends are designed to give couples the opportunity to talk honestly and privately and share attitudes about ambitions, goals, money, sex, children, family and their role in church and society. The presenters share their experiences to encourage engaged couples to examine their own relationship. The format includes questions for individuals to answer privately and time for couples to discuss their thoughts with each other. Available nationwide and internationally.

For Adventist Engaged Encounter contact:

Stan and Angie Hardt (Sponsored by Union College Campus Ministries)
Lincoln NE
Phone: 401-486-2508 / 402-423-2896
Email: sthardt@ucollege.edu

National Organization: 800-811-3661
Email: ceenet@radiks.net
Web: <http://www.Engaged-Encounter.org>

Marriage Savers. Mike & Harriet McManus.

Marriage Savers is a national organization with a proven strategy to help churches train mentoring couples to achieve these great goals: help couples avoid a bad marriage before it begins, prepare couples for a life-long marriage, and strengthen existing marriages.

For training information and materials:

Marriage Savers Inc.
9311 Harrington Drive
Potomac, MD 20854
301-469-5873
Web: www.marriagesavers.org

Videos

How To Do Premarital Counseling. H. Norman Wright. Gospel Light, Ventura, CA. 1996.

This video series has 3 two-hour videotapes of a seminar and real counseling sessions led by H. Norman Wright. It includes a 32-page reproducible information and resource guide.

For purchasing information contact your local Christian Bookstore.

Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts (SYMBIS). Drs. Les & Leslie Parrott. 1995.

This video series integrates research from the academic world with a spiritual dimension, and is very strong and awareness and skill building. It covers topics such as marital expectations, passion, commitment and intimacy, communication, conflict, and spiritual health. It includes his/her workbooks with brief exercises and self-tests. Strongly encourages the use of mentor couples. (2 videos, 8 30-minute sessions).

For more information:

Seattle's Address

Center for Relationship Development
Seattle Pacific University
3307 3rd. Ave. W.
Seattle, WA 98119
866-264-1317; Fax 800-446-0454
Email: lpiii@spu.edu
Web: www.realrelationships.com

Atlanta's Address

INJOY
4725 River Green Parkway
Duluth, GA 30096

So You're Getting Married. H. Norman Wright. Family Resources. 1995.

This interactive video series has two volumes with eight one-hour videotapes for 13 premarital sessions. Covers topics such as commitment, expectations, intimacy, sexual relations, communication, personality, gender differences, finances, background factors, couple interactive processes. Includes the workbook *So You're Getting Married*.

To purchase contact: Grace Products, 800-527-4014.

Books

The Premarital Counseling Handbook. H. Norman Wright. Moody Press. 1992 rev.

This book draws on more than 25 years of counseling experience and observing successful premarital counseling programs in countless churches. Dr. Wright encourages the pastor/counselor to take very seriously the premarital counseling process and shows you step-by-step how to conduct counseling sessions that will reap rewards long after the wedding ceremony is over.

A Lasting Promise. Scott Stanley. Jossey-Bass. 1998.

This book is based on the CPREP program, the internationally acclaimed marital conflict resolution program. It provides salient Christian principles on what it takes to make a great marriage and assists couples in fighting for their marriages.

Before You Say "I Do". H. Norman Wright & Wes Roberts. Harvest House. 1997 rev.

This workbook is a marriage preparation workbook with exercises for skill building in the various areas including: expectations, commitment, communication, gender roles, conflict, sexuality, and spiritual life. It is very thorough and user-friendly and encourages a post-marital review of premarital exercises.

Getting Your Sex Life Off to a Great Start. Clifford Penner & Joyce Penner. Word. 1995.

This book will help couples prepare deliberately for fulfilling and nurturing sexual experiences; it guides couples through an encouraging process of getting to know themselves and each other emotionally and physically.

Mentoring Engaged and Newlywed Couples. Dr. Les Parrott and Dr. Leslie Parrott. Zondervan Books. 1997.

This book provides a clear blueprint to initiate a marriage-mentoring program with helpful hints on *how-to's* for marriage mentors.

Questions Couples Ask: Answers to the Top 100 Marital Questions.

Dr. Les Parrott and Dr. Leslie Parrott. Harper Collins Books. 1996.

This resource provides excellent insight into marital communication, conflict, sex, in-laws, and money. Each section offers a great discussion in to these critical areas of marital health. Resources are listed at the end of each chapter.

All books can be purchased or ordered from your local Christian bookstore.

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This resource was originally developed for the *Seventh-day Adventist World Ministerial Council – Toronto 2000*.

1 Corinthians 13: A Responsive Reading

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.

All my elegant words come back to me, empty and hollow.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I
have faith that can move mountains,
but have not love,

I am nothing.

All my brilliance is wasted; I never took time to care for others.

If I give all I possess to the poor, and surrender my body to the flames,
but have not love,

I gain nothing.

Everything I have sacrificed has been just a shallow show.

Love is patient

Even when someone takes a long time to respond to our love.

Love is kind

And loves gently, even when others do unlovable things.

Love does not envy

It is happy to take a servant role when the lead is given to someone else.

Love does not boast

It does not put itself forward, but encourages those who are struggling.

Love is not rude

It shows respect for others, even when they do things differently.

Love is not self-seeking

It puts self aside for a while so it can freely meet the needs of others.

Love is not easily angered

But calmly looks for peaceful solutions.

Love keeps no record of wrongs

But has a very short memory of times it has been hurt or rejected.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth
Keeps on looking for the good in everyone and everything.

Love always protects
Helps others to feel safe.

Love always trusts
Takes risks and believes the best in everyone.

Love always hopes
It knows the future can hold many miracles.

Love always perseveres
And keeps on working at the relationship, even when it would be easy to give up.

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
But a bond of love can bind hearts together forever.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
But when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears
Because something better has been discovered.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
But when I became a man, I put childish ways behind me
***Because my understanding of love had matured and I had found better ways to
talk and think and be with others.***

Now we see but a poor reflection,
then we shall see face to face
Because we will be ushered into the very presence of our perfectly loving God.

Now I know in part,
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known
***And at last I will be able to comprehend the full height and depth and breadth of God's eternal
love for me.***

And now these three remain, faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love
***So receive God's love for you, fill every corner of your heart with His love, and then let it
overflow, freely and joyfully, on everyone you meet.***

Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage

Biblical Teachings on Marriage

The Origin of Marriage—Marriage is a divine institution established by God Himself before the fall when everything, including marriage, was “very good.” (Gen. 1:31). “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). “God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. ‘Marriage is honourable’; it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise.” (*The Adventist Home*, pp. 25, 26)

The Oneness of Marriage—God intended the marriage of Adam and Eve to be the pattern for all future marriages, and Christ endorsed this original concept saying: “Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:4-6).

The Permanence of Marriage—Marriage is a lifelong commitment of husband and wife to each other and between the couple and God (Mark 10:2-9; Rom. 7:2). Paul indicates that the commitment which Christ has for the church is a model of the relationship between husband and wife (Eph. 5:31, 32). God intended the marriage relationship to be as permanent as Christ’s relationship with the church.

Sexual Intimacy in Marriage—Sexual intimacy within marriage is a sacred gift from God to the human family. It is an integral part of marriage, reserved for marriage only (Gen. 2:24; Prov. 5:5-20). Such intimacy, designed to be shared exclusively between husband and wife, promotes ever-increasing closeness, happiness, and security, and provides for the perpetuation of the human race. In addition to being monogamous, marriage, as instituted by God, is a heterosexual relationship (Matt. 19:4, 5).

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Partnership in Marriage—Unity in marriage is achieved by mutual respect and love. No one is superior (Eph. 5:21-28). “Marriage, a union for life, is a symbol of the union between Christ and His church. The spirit that Christ manifests toward the church is the spirit that husband and wife are to manifest toward each other.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 46. God’s Word condemns violence in personal relationships (Gen. 6:11, 13; Ps. 11:5; Isa. 58:4, 5; Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:19-21). It is the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or demean them (Rom. 12:10; 14:19; Eph. 4:26; 5:28, 29; Col. 3:8-14; 1 Thess. 5:11). There is no room among Christ’s followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power (Matt. 20:25-28; Eph. 6:4). Violence in the setting of marriage and family is abhorrent (see *Adventist Home*, p. 343).

“Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other.” (*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 47)

The Effects of the Fall on Marriage—The entrance of sin adversely affected marriage. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost the oneness which they had known with God and with one another (Gen. 3:6-24). Their relationship became marked with guilt, shame, blame, and pain. Wherever sin reigns, its sad effects on marriage include alienation, desertion, unfaithfulness, neglect, abuse, violence, separation, divorce, domination of one partner by the other, and sexual perversion. Marriages involving more than one spouse are also an expression of the effects of sin on the institution of marriage. Such marriages, although practiced in Old Testament times, are not in harmony with the divine design. God’s plan for marriage requires His people to transcend the mores of popular culture which are in conflict with the biblical view.

Restoration and Healing—1. Divine Ideal to be Restored in Christ—In redeeming the world from sin and its consequences, God also seeks to restore marriage to its original ideal. This is envisioned for the lives of those who have been born again into the kingdom of Christ, those whose hearts are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit and who have as their primary purpose in life the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See also 1 Peter 3:7; *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.)

2. Oneness and Equality to be Restored in Christ—The gospel emphasizes the love and submission of husband and wife to one another (1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Eph. 5:21). The model for the husband’s leadership is the

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self-sacrificial love and service that Christ gives to the church (Eph. 5:24, 25). Both Peter and Paul speak about the need for respect in the marriage relationship (1 Peter 3:7; Eph. 5:22, 23).

3. Grace Available for All—God seeks to restore to wholeness and reconcile to Himself all who have failed to attain the divine standard (2 Cor. 5:19). This includes those who have experienced broken marriage relationships.

4. The Role of the Church—Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament dealt with the problems caused by broken marriages (Deut. 24:1-5; 1 Cor. 7:11). Both, while upholding and affirming the ideal, worked constructively and redemptively with those who had fallen short of the divine standard. Similarly, the church today is called to uphold and affirm God’s ideal for marriage and, at the same time, to be a reconciling, forgiving, healing community, showing understanding and compassion when brokenness occurs.

Biblical Teachings on Divorce

God’s Original Purpose—Divorce is contrary to God’s original purpose in creating marriage (Matt. 19:3-8; Mark 10:2-9), but the Bible is not silent about it. Because divorce occurred as part of the fallen human experience, biblical legislation was given to limit the damage it caused (Deut. 24:1-4). The Bible consistently seeks to elevate marriage and to discourage divorce by describing the joys of married love and faithfulness (Prov. 5:18-20; Song of Sol. 2:16; 4:9-5:1), by referring to the marriage-like relationship of God with His people (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:1), by focusing on the possibilities of forgiveness and marital renewal (Hosea 3:1-3), and by indicating God’s abhorrence of divorce and

the misery it causes (Mal. 2:15, 16). Jesus restored the creation view of marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and between the couple and God (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). Much biblical instruction affirms marriage and seeks to correct problems which tend to weaken or destroy the foundation of marriage (Eph. 5:21-33; Heb. 13:4; 1 Peter 3:7).

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Marriages Can Be Destroyed—Marriage rests on principles of love, loyalty, exclusiveness, trust, and support upheld by both partners in obedience to God (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 5:21-29; 1 Thess. 4:1-7). When these principles are violated, the marriage is endangered. Scripture acknowledges that tragic circumstances can destroy marriage.

Divine Grace—Divine grace is the only remedy for the brokenness of divorce. When marriage fails, former partners should be encouraged to examine their experience and to seek God's will for their lives. God provides comfort to those who have been wounded. God also accepts the repentance of individuals who commit the most destructive sins, even those that carry with them irreparable consequences (2 Sam. 11; 12; Ps. 34:18; 86:5; Joel 2:12, 13; John 8:2-11; 1 John 1:9).

Grounds for Divorce—Scripture recognizes adultery and/or fornication (Matt. 5:32) as well as abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor. 7:10-15) as grounds for divorce.

Biblical Teachings on Remarriage

There is no direct teaching in Scripture regarding remarriage after divorce. However, there is a strong implication in Jesus' words in Matthew 19:9 that would allow the remarriage of one who has remained faithful, but whose spouse has been unfaithful to the marriage vow.

The Church's Position on Divorce and Remarriage

Acknowledging the teachings of the Bible on marriage, the church is aware that marriage relationships are less than ideal in many cases. The problem of divorce and remarriage can be seen in its true light only as it is viewed from Heaven's viewpoint and against the background of the Garden of Eden. Central to God's holy plan for our world was the creation of beings made in His image who would multiply and replenish the earth and live together in purity, harmony, and happiness. He brought forth Eve from the side of Adam and gave her to Adam as his wife. Thus was marriage instituted—God the author of the institution, God the officiator at the first marriage. After the Lord had revealed to Adam that Eve was verily bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, there could never arise a doubt in his mind that they twain were one flesh. Nor could ever a doubt arise in the mind of either of the holy pair that God intended that their home should endure forever.

The church adheres to this view of marriage and home without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. The belief that marriage is a divine institution rests upon the Holy Scriptures. Accordingly, all thinking and reasoning in the perplexing field of divorce and remarriage must constantly be harmonized with that holy ideal revealed in Eden.

The church believes in the law of God; it also believes in the forgiving

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mercy of God. It believes that victory and salvation can as surely be found by those who have transgressed in the matter of divorce and remarriage as by those who have failed in any other of God's holy standards. Nothing presented here is intended to minimize the mercy of God or the forgiveness of God. In the fear of the Lord, the church here sets forth the principles and practices that should apply in this matter of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Though marriage was first performed by God alone, it is recognized that people now live under civil governments on this earth; therefore, marriage has both a divine and a civil aspect. The divine aspect is governed by the laws of God, the civil by the laws of the state.

In harmony with these teachings, the following statements set forth the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

1. When Jesus said, "Let not man put asunder," He established a rule of conduct for the church under the dispensation of grace which must transcend all civil enactments which would go beyond His interpretation of the divine law governing the marriage relation. Here He gives a rule to His followers who should adhere to it whether or not the state or prevailing custom allows larger liberty. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared plainly that there could be no dissolution of the marriage tie, except for unfaithfulness to the marriage vow."—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 63. (Matt. 5:32; 19:9.)

2. Unfaithfulness to the marriage vow has generally been seen to mean adultery and/or fornication. However, the New Testament word for fornication includes certain other sexual irregularities. (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:9, 10; Rom. 1:24-27.) Therefore, sexual perversions, including incest, child sexual abuse, and homosexual practices, are also recognized as a misuse of sexual powers and a violation of the divine intention in marriage. As such they are just cause for separation or divorce.

Even though the Scriptures allow divorce for the reasons mentioned above, as well as for abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:10-15), earnest endeavors should be made by the church and those concerned to effect a reconciliation, urging the spouses to manifest toward each other a Christ-like spirit of forgiveness and restoration. The church is urged to relate lovingly and redemptively toward the couple in order to assist in the reconciliation process.

3. In the event that reconciliation is not effected, the spouse who has remained faithful to the spouse who violated the marriage vow has the biblical right to secure a divorce and also to remarry.

3. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow (see sections 1. and 2. above) shall be subject to discipline by the local church. (See Chapter 13, Church Discipline, pp. 167-174.) If genuinely repentant, the spouse may be

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placed under censure for a stated period of time rather than removed from church membership. A spouse who gives no evidence of full and sincere repentance, shall be removed from church membership. In case the violation has brought public reproach on the cause of God, the church, in

order to maintain its high standards and good name, may remove the individual from church membership even though there is evidence of repentance.

Any of these forms of discipline shall be applied by the local church in a manner that would seek to attain the two objectives of church discipline—to correct and redeem. In the gospel of Christ, the redemptive side of discipline is always tied to an authentic transformation of the sinner into a new creature in Jesus Christ.

5. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow and who is divorced does not have the moral right to marry another while the spouse who has been faithful to the marriage vow still lives and remains unmarried and chaste. The person who does so shall be removed from church membership. The person whom he/she marries, if a member, shall also be removed from church membership.

6. It is recognized that sometimes marriage relations deteriorate to the point where it is better for a husband and wife to separate. “To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10, 11, RSV). In many such cases the custody of the children, the adjustment of property rights, or even personal protection may make necessary a change in marital status. In such cases it may be permissible to secure what is known in some countries as a legal separation. However, in some civil jurisdictions such a separation can be secured only by divorce.

A separation or divorce which results from factors such as physical violence or in which “unfaithfulness to the marriage vow” (see sections 1. and 2. above) is not involved, does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried; committed adultery or fornication; or died. Should a member who has been thus divorced remarry without these biblical grounds, he/she shall be removed from church membership; and the one whom he/she marries, if a member, shall also be removed from church membership. (See pp. 168-170.)

7. A spouse who has violated the marriage vow and has been divorced and removed from church membership and who has remarried, or a person who has been divorced on other than the grounds set forth in sections 1. and 2. above and has remarried, and who has been removed from church membership, shall be considered ineligible for membership except as hereinafter provided.

8. The marriage contract is not only sacred but also infinitely more

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complex than ordinary contracts in its possible involvements; for example, with children. Hence, in a request for readmittance to church membership, the options available to the repentant may be severely limited. Before final action is taken by the local church, the request for readmittance shall be brought by the church through the pastor or district leader to the conference/mission/field committee for counsel and recommendation as to any possible steps that the repentant one, or ones, may take to secure such readmittance.

9. Readmittance to membership of those who have been removed from church membership for reasons given in the foregoing sections shall normally be on the basis of rebaptism. (See p. 173.)

10. When a person who has been removed from membership is readmitted to church membership, as provided in section 8., every care should be exercised to safeguard the unity and harmony of the church by not giving such a person responsibility as a leader; especially in an office which requires the rite of ordination, unless by very careful counsel with the conference/mission/field

administration.

11. No Seventh-day Adventist minister has the right to officiate at the remarriage of any person who, under the stipulation of the preceding paragraphs, has no scriptural right to remarry.

Local Church Ministry for Families

The church as a redemptive agency of Christ is to minister to its members in all of their needs and to nurture every one so that all may grow into a mature Christian experience. This is particularly true when members face lifelong decisions such as marriage and distressful experiences such as divorce. When a couple's marriage is in danger of breaking down, every effort should be made by the partners and those in the church or family who minister to them to bring about their reconciliation in harmony with divine principles for restoring wounded relationships (Hosea 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal. 6:1).

Resources are available through the local church or other church organizations which can be of assistance to members in the development of a strong Christian home. These resources include: (1) programs of orientation for couples engaged to be married, (2) programs of instruction for married couples with their families, and (3) programs of support for broken families and divorced individuals.

Pastoral support is vital in the area of instruction and orientation in the case of marriage, and healing and restoration in the case of divorce. The pastoral function in the latter case is both disciplinary and supportive. That function includes the sharing of information relevant to the case; however, the disclosure of sensitive information should be done with great discretion.

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This ethical concern alone should not be the grounds for avoiding disciplinary actions established in sections 1. to 11. above.

Church members are called to forgive and accept those who have failed as God has forgiven them (Isa. 54:5-8; Matt. 6:14, 15; Eph. 4:32). The Bible urges patience, compassion, and forgiveness in the Christian care of those who have erred (Matt. 18:10-20; Gal. 6:1, 2). During the time when individuals are under discipline, either by censure or by being removed from membership, the church, as an instrument of God's mission, shall make every effort to maintain caring and spiritually nurturing contact with them.

**This document was voted at the 57th Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, August, 2000 as a revision of chapter 15 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 1995 edition.*

An Affirmation of Marriage

Issues related to marriage can be seen in their true light only as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image; and He instituted marriage, a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as "one flesh."

Arising from the diversity of the two human genders, the oneness of marriage images in a singular way the unity within diversity of the Godhead. Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God's self-giving love and covenant with His people. The harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. Further, the Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose, but to provide for the propagation and perpetuation of the human family. In the divine purpose, procreation springs from and is entwined with the same process whereby husband and wife may find joy, pleasure and physical completeness. It is to a husband and wife whose love has enabled them to know each other in a deep sexual bond that a child may be entrusted. Their child is a living embodiment of their oneness. The growing child thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity in which he or she was conceived and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is affirmed as the divinely ordained foundation of the family and social life and the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression. However, the estate of marriage is not God's only plan for the meeting of human relational needs or for knowing the experience of family. Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. The companionship and support of friends looms in importance in both biblical testaments. The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state. Scripture, however, places a solid demarcation socially and sexually between such friendship relations and marriage.

To this biblical view of marriage the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. Because marriage has been corrupted by sin, the purity and beauty of marriage as it was designed by God needs to be restored. Through an appreciation of the redemptive work of Christ and the work of His Spirit in human hearts, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered and the delightful and wholesome experience of marriage realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in the marriage covenant.

Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions: A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage

Over the past several decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has felt it necessary to clearly state in various ways its position in regards to marriage, the family, and human sexuality. These subjects are at the heart of many pressing issues facing society. That which for centuries has been considered to be basic Christian morality in the marriage setting is now increasingly called into question, not only in secular society but within Christian churches themselves.

The institutions of family and marriage are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart. An increasing number of nations are now debating the topic of "same-sex unions," thus making it a world issue. The public discussion has engendered strong emotions. In light of these developments, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is clearly restating its position.

We reaffirm, without hesitation, our long-standing position. As expressed in the Church's Fundamental Beliefs, "marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship."¹ Though "sin has perverted God's ideals for marriage and family," "the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship," and thus "families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships" (*An Affirmation of Family*, 1990).² God instituted "marriage, a covenant-based union of two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as 'one flesh.'" "The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is . . . the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression." "Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal" (*An Affirmation of Marriage*, 1996).³

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disorder and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by sin coming into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen human nature, "we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word" (*Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality*, 1999).⁴

We hold that all people, no matter what their sexual orientation, are children of God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. However, it is very clear that God's Word does not countenance a homosexual lifestyle; neither has the Christian Church throughout her 2000 year history. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical teaching is still valid today, because it is anchored in the very nature of humanity and God's plan at creation for marriage.

1 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe--A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*, Doctrine 22 on 'Marriage and the Family.'

2 Public Statement, *An Affirmation of Family*, released July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session, Indianapolis, Indiana.

3 Statement voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996.

4 Statement voted by the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 3, 1999.

Marriage: Twin of the Sabbath, But a Day Older

by Ron and Karen Flowers

“Marriage! The oldest of all human institutions—a twin of the Sabbath,¹ but a day older. It was the very first Friday when God said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall be one flesh.’ So dear is marriage to the heart of God that all through Scripture human marriage is the symbol of choice for God’s love for His people. All that God created on the sixth day was ‘very good.’ God has not changed His mind about that. Marriage is very good!”

These thoughts still linger in the homily notes, memories, and memorabilia from the high day when our son Jeff and our daughter-in-love Pam committed their lives to each other. Christian weddings give us opportunity to bring to life the truths we affirm and to gaze again on marriage and family from God’s perspective. Such moments are important, for the times we

live in are not the best for the institution of marriage. Maligned in the media, made a mockery by “stars,” and challenged by so-called alternative sexual relationships in the social marketplace, marriage often seems to come up the loser.

Many adult children are frightened by commitment, sickened by the marital abuses they’ve witnessed, and seared by divorces that have altered their lives. Many others like our son and his wife still choose to make promises to love, honor, and cherish one another for as long as they live, no matter what life may bring.

With their promises, they join a braided cord of couples stretching back across time to Eden itself when the first man and the first woman surrendered themselves to marriage before God.

Elements of Seventh-day Adventist Faith, Belief #22: Marriage and the Family.

“Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. (Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:3-9; John 2:1-11; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:21-33; Matt. 5:31, 32; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-4; Deut. 6:5-9; Prov. 22:6; Mal. 4:5, 6.)”

The spiritual significance of family relationships

Article 22 in the Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, “Marriage and Family,” reflects the importance Scripture places on human relationships. In the biblical understanding, life among humankind was meant to be an expression of the self-giving love and relational nature of God.

God is love (1 John 4:8) and God is manifested to us in Three Persons (cf. Matt. 3:16, 17; 1 John 5:7). The perfectly harmonious Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—exemplifies the essence of self-giving love that is manifested in the fellowship of persons in relationship. As creatures made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), the need for harmonious and loving relationships are integral to our very being.

Jesus elevated human relationships by assigning to them a moral significance alongside a relationship with God. “You shall love the Lord your God,” He said, and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-40, NKJV). Neighbor is often taken to mean the individual with the closest street address, but the original word has a more intimate, homey sense. Your neighbor is “the person next to you.” The way we live with others who eat, sleep, work, play, and worship beside us—our closest neighbors in marriage and family life—matters much to our God.

Centerpiece of the family

As the cornerstone is to a great edifice, so is marriage to the family. It is the social relationship at the foundation. Upon its integrity and strength, the quality of all family relationships rests. Says the psalmist, “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Ps. 127:1, NIV).

In Genesis 1 and 2, the divine Architect revealed His blueprint for marriage. The plan calls for marriage to be a lifelong, covenant-based, exclusive union of mutual companionship between one man and one woman. Jesus affirmed this creation plan (Matt.

19:4-6), and it is of paramount importance that we rediscover and reaffirm God’s design in our time. Profound in its simplicity, it really needs no updating, no retouching. It needs living!

Marriage is the only divinely ordained setting for sexual intimacy. The union of one male and one female is specifically intended in the divine blueprint. Such a complementary, committed union reflects in a singular way the Godhead who dwells in a unity of love.² Scripture specifically denounces sexual intercourse between members of the same sex (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; cf. Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9). All are called to respect marriage by their adherence to God’s plan for sexuality—with singles living celibately and the married living faithfully (cf. Exod. 20:14, 17; Prov. 5:1-20; Song of Sol. 2:16; 4:12; 6:3; Matt. 5:27, 28; 1 Cor. 6:15-19; Heb. 13:4).

The blessings of friendship and the fellowship of the church—the household of God—are available to all regardless of their married state. However, Scripture places a solid social and sexual demarcation between such friendship relations and marriage.³

The injunction to leave father and mother (Gen. 2:24) further recognizes the precedence marriage is given over other family relationships. “Leave” implies sufficient maturity on the part of the couple and obliges the older generation to release the younger to establish a new home. An important boundary is thus established around the couple, even as they continue to receive support, nurture, and counsel from family members and others who can help them.

More than any natural order or assigned primacy, the nature of the marriage relationship establishes it as the centerpiece of the family. The marital union is not secured by ties of blood, but by ties of promise.

Marriage as covenant

To use biblical language, marriage is a special human covenant—a mutually binding agreement with each other before God that

includes promises, privileges, and obligations. “She is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant” (Mal. 2:14, NIV; cf. Gen. 21:27-32; 31:44-53; 1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8, 16; 23:18). The foundational passage on marriage in Genesis 2 uses covenantal language: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Attachment, mutuality, and self-giving further describe this covenant. As the bride declares, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Sol. 2:16, NKJV; cf. 6:3; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4).

While the eternal covenant of God is of a different order (cf. Isa. 55:3; Heb. 13:20), Scripture sometimes uses marital imagery to describe God’s relationship with His people (cf. Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 2 Cor. 11:2). Couples are thereby summoned to marriages of steadfast love, goodwill, fidelity, commitment, and permanence that reflect the relationship between Christ and His church (Ps. 89:28-34; Song of Sol. 8:6, 7; Isa. 54:5, 10; Jer. 32:40, 41; Hos. 2:19-23; 3:1-3; Rev. 21:2, 3). Scripture consistently calls for marriage to be between partners who share a common faith (2 Cor. 6:14-18; cf. Gen. 24:3; 28:1; Judges 14:3; Ezra 10:2, 10; Amos 3:3).

The marriage covenant is not, however, inherently indissoluble. It must be maintained with constant vigilance. “Guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth” (Mal. 2:15, NIV).

“Marriage rests on principles of love, loyalty, exclusivity, trust, and support upheld by both partners in obedience to God (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 5:21-29; 1 Thess. 4:1-7). When these principles are violated, the marriage is endangered. Scripture acknowledges that tragic circumstances can destroy marriage.”⁴

Divorce is the antithesis of covenant. In the expression “I hate divorce” (Mal. 2:16, NIV), we hear the profound sadness of the Creator as His creation is marred. In the discussion of marriage and divorce in Matthew, Jesus acknowledged that the provision for divorce had been given because human hearts were “hard,” adding wistfully, “It was not this way from the beginning” (Matt. 19:8, NIV).

Hardness is evidenced in the willful breach of covenant, as well as in the erosion of human relational capacities including the ability to apply the healing balm of grace to troubled marriage relationships as a result of sin. Jesus pointed to the tragic consequences of indiscriminate divorce and indicated that the circumstances for which divorce might be contemplated should be rare (Matt. 19:9).

The *Church Manual* expresses the Seventh-day Adventist view: “Scripture recognizes adultery and/or fornication (Matt. 5:32) as well as abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor. 7:10-15) as grounds for divorce.”⁵

When marriages struggle

Couples who marry embark upon a life experience together. Many today put almost exclusive emphasis on marital satisfaction. The downside of this heavy accent on marriage as an experience is that, with legal and social supports for marriage diminished in many places, the dissatisfied can and do leave marriage with greater ease than ever before. While we cannot support all their reasons or the seemingly casual way in which many exit marriage, we can affirm that an increased emphasis on quality of life in marriage has also been a good thing.

Too often in the past the state of marital life has been downplayed for the sake of the estate of marriage. Many spouses and children have been trapped in abusive situations with no recourse. That unfortunate circumstance is changing. The *Church Manual* acknowledges that sometimes marriage relations deteriorate to the point that individuals, for personal protection and other stated reasons, need a change in marital status.⁶

Child sexual abuse is specifically cited as “just cause for separation or divorce.”⁷ Increased attention on the experiential aspect of marriage has also engendered greater appreciation of scriptural themes about the joys of married love and faithfulness (Prov. 5:18-20; Song of Sol. 2:16; 4:9-5:1; Heb. 13:4), the possibilities of forgiveness and renewal in

marriage (Jer. 3:1; Hos. 3:1-3; 11:8, 9; Luke 17:3, 4; Eph. 4:32), and the lofty principle of mutual submission which counteracts fallen human tendencies toward power and control (Eph. 5:21-33).

Couples need encouragement and support to honor their promises and enrich their experience: “Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church.”⁸

The *Church Manual* speaks of specific ministries: “The church as a redemptive agency of Christ is to minister to its members in all of their needs and to nurture every one so that all may grow into a mature Christian experience. This is particularly true when members face lifelong decisions such as marriage and distressful experiences such as divorce.

“When a couple’s marriage is in danger of breaking down, every effort should be made by the partners and those in the church or family who minister to them, to bring about their reconciliation in harmony with divine principles for restoring wounded relationships (Hos. 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal. 6:1).

“Resources are available through the local church or other church organizations which can be of assistance to members in the development of a strong Christian home. These resources include programs for: (1) premarital preparation, (2) marriage and family strengthening, and (3) the support of troubled families and divorced individuals.”⁹

The family circle and its mission

In God’s plan, married couples are entrusted with the responsibility for the perpetuation of the human family (Gen. 1:28). Scripture puts a high value on children as an inheritance from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). Children can be a source of great joy as parents delight in the wonder of new life and share in the original creation blessing. They can help

parents to better understand God and to grow in compassion, caring, humility, and unselfishness.

Bearing children, however, is not to be a selfish act, nor is it an obligation in order to please God, family, or society. Rather, it is a divinely bestowed privilege, a choice to be made responsibly, with the parents’ ability to provide for children a primary consideration (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8).

The family is “the primary setting in which values are learned and the capacity for close relationships with God and with other human beings is developed.”¹⁰ Parents are disciples making disciples. Introducing children and youth to Jesus so they may also follow Him is the family’s highest mission.

Looking to the heavenly Parent for guidance and strength, parents build strong connections with children as they attend to their physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual needs, especially the need for love. They patiently seek to pass on a legacy of truth, modeling the Christian life in winsome ways and correcting their children with a redemptive rather than punitive spirit.

God feels the distress of parents whose children ignore counsel, behave in disappointing ways, and even discard home values (cf. Hos. 11:1, 2). As our heavenly Parent, He has bound Himself to all children through Christ¹¹ and will never let them go except by their own deliberate, persistent, and ultimate choice. Yet, He values human freedom. God will help earthly parents do the same—to take a long view of their children’s salvation and keep the conduit of parental influence open through warm relationships.

While our work for Christ is to begin with the family,¹² the mission of the home extends beyond its members.¹³ Families where Jesus has transformed hearts and lives are beacons of light for the community, winsome witnessing centers that draw others to the Savior. In the quest to discover God’s purpose for our homes, the various personalities, talents, gifts, and abilities of each family member are recognized

as precious resources for the mission God has in mind for our unique family circle.

The gospel message and family reconciliation

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal statement on marriage and family closes with a reference to Malachi 4:5, 6 which points to increasing family closeness as one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. Malachi predicts a work of reconciliation and reconnecting in families, a turning of “the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.” This is to be accomplished by Elijah and is predicted to happen “before the coming of the great day of the Lord.”

In the time of historic reform begun by the prophet Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 18:36-39), God had shown Himself to be a gracious Father whose heart was turned toward His errant children and who longed for them to respond by turning in faith to Him (cf. Isa. 44:22; Mal. 3:7). Elijah had prayed for God to give evidence that the work of reconciliation was His—“so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again” (1 Kings 18:37, NIV, emphasis supplied).

Jeremiah corroborates what Elijah understood; any turning we do is in response to God’s grace. “Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may return” (Lam. 5:21, NIV). On Carmel, the people had turned their hearts toward God as, in a mighty demonstration of grace, God’s wrath against their sin had fallen on the sacrifice instead of them (1 Kings 18:39). Refreshing rains had ended the curse upon the earth (1 Kings 18:45).

The sacrifice on Carmel pointed to Jesus, in whom God reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18, 19). God has once for all turned His Father heart toward His children and embraced them in Christ.

Included in the magnificent mystery of the Cross is the reality that Christ has brought estranged people together in His crucified body (Eph. 2:13, 14, 16-18). As God’s messengers

carry the gospel of grace to the world with renewed urgency, it is as though Elijah has reappeared, for the message is like his.

God’s ambassadors plead with all to believe and accept the incredible good news of a Father who has already turned His heart toward them and longs for them to cease their hostility and unbelief and be reconciled to Him and to each other (2 Cor. 5:20).

The most significant arena in which this final gospel message must take hold is the home. Like all things created, marriage and family are entangled in the web of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. It is the purpose of the gospel to restore marriage and family to God’s original design.¹⁴

Families desperately need reconciliation between the generations, within each generation and between the genders. The world desperately needs the witness that such reconciliation bears. So significant is this coming together in unity that Jesus made it the focal point of His prayer for His followers.

Through our relationships in Christian marriage and family life, we may honor Jesus’ prayer: “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23, NIV).

Ron and Karen direct the worldwide Family Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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¹See Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1955), 63.

²“An Affirmation of Marriage,” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee, April 23, 1996.

³Ibid.

⁴Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, Revised 2000, 193.

⁵Ibid., 194.

⁶Ibid., 196.

⁷Ibid., 195.

⁸ Fundamental Beliefs, Article 22.

⁹ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, Revised 2000, 196.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹ See Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., 1892), 72.

¹² ———, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 35.

¹³ ———, *The Ministry of Healing* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), 352.

¹⁴ See Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, 64.

Marital Enrichment Program Evaluation

by Judith Balswick and Jack Balswick

In this article we review marital enrichment programs for the quality and research basis of material presented, adequacy of the leaders guide, processing of exercises, user friendliness for teaching and application, view of gender roles, and degree to which the program is integrated into a biblical/theological perspective. After considering the relative strengths and limitations of available programs, we conclude that different programs are useful at different times in a couple's life. It is important to offer a variety of enrichment programs and formats to build stronger marriages.

Many church leaders are committed to devoting attention to pre-marital and marital programs to prepare their members for the challenges of married life. In the past, religious institutions did not spend much attention on helping couples learn how to live happily ever after in the life long, monogamous marriage they endorsed. The truth is, marriage takes a commitment that goes beyond romantic idealism. It's not a matter of just "doing what comes naturally" but teaching people the necessary skills to keep marriages vital and effective.

Marriage is a complex venture of meshing two unique individuals from unique family backgrounds into what they hope will be an effective, harmonious unit. So often, doing nothing means couples are on their own to learn the skills they need to build a solid marriage. Then, when a couple is in trouble, the best we do is refer them for therapy. Whereas research generally shows religiosity to be a deterrent to divorce, based on his telephone sample of over 7000 adults, Barna (2001) makes the rather startling report that born-again adults (27%) are just as likely to divorce as non-born-again adults (24%). Since 1986, according to Cornes (1993), most divorces in the United States take place by the seventh year of marriage. In light of these findings, it certainly makes sense to take proactive steps to assist marriages early on and throughout the marital life stages.

Churches can assist couples in developing skills and attitudes that will strengthen and sometimes save troubled marriages. Marriage is a lifelong vocation and couples will go through

stresses and strain throughout their various life stages. Providing education and training can be one way the church supports and provides resources to enhance the health of their married members.

Marital Enrichment Program

Given the differing format, focus, and nature of marital enrichment materials, we present these programs under three categories: First, marriage enrichment workshop formats include programmed materials for larger audiences and a focused time period (week-end retreat setting). For the most part, these materials include video-tape presentations, demonstration of skills and couple participation exercises. Second, small group books and workbooks are written for couple reflection, assessment and assignments in a small group setting. The third category of materials reviewed are those specifically written for couples to use in the privacy of their home. Whenever possible, we provide website information on the programs. We include in this article marriage enrichment programs, particularly designed to assist the couple through practical assessment and skill development. Some marriage books, though not explicitly designed for workshop or group formats, could easily be adapted for a married couples' Sunday school class, a ten-week series or neighborhood study group on marriage. In this case, a leader would direct the couples to study a book chapter each week and lead a discussion of the materials. The couple exercises and assessments could either be done at home or during a specified time at the weekly meeting.

We watched more than 60 hours of video and reviewed over 2000 pages of books and instruction manuals. Initially, we were only going to evaluate marital enrichment programs that had a Christian orientation. However, we have included several well-known secular programs, believing these materials can be useful in the hands of a knowledgeable leader who can bring biblical/theological content to augment these materials. We have identified materials as Christian or secular in terms of the content and the author's orientation.

Specific criteria used to evaluate programs include:

1. over-all quality of the program determined by organization, attractiveness and comprehension;
2. adequacy of the leaders guide regarding instruction provided, organization, teaching aids, assessment instruments, and exercises;
3. written content in terms of information presented, skill development offered, and explanations given to support the ideas;
4. gender role orientation categorized as egalitarian, complementary or soft patriarchy (a suffering servant/spiritual leadership view of male headship as opposed to a power based authoritarian "hard patriarchy" view);
5. citation or reference made to research, social science and professional marital literature; and
6. use of biblical or theological integration in the materials.

At times, our judgment of quality was undoubtedly influenced by personal bias. Our personal bias is for egalitarian marriage with an emphasis on "giftedness," creative flexibility, mutual empowerment, and decision making. In addition, we believe the most effective marriage enrichment programs are those that integrate the best of social science literature with a practical and comprehensive biblical model of marriage.

In reference to gender role issues, our strategy was to indicate the position taken in a program, rather than comment on the position taken. The same is true when we evaluate the biblical/theological basis for the program, although at times we comment on the adequacy of the information. We also give some limited background information on the authors of a program when deemed useful.¹

Marital Enrichment Workshop Format

These enrichment programs are intended for a weekend, large groups, or audiences. Videotaped materials by the presenter(s) are shown to the audience to introduce the topic and explain the marital concepts. Volunteer couples in the video demonstrate the skills. The videotapes can be stopped at designated points during the session so couples can interact with each other about the concepts presented and practice the skills.

¹For over four decades, marriage enrichment programs have been designed to enhance marital functioning. When marriage enrichment programs began in the 1960s they were influenced by the human potential movement, thus they have been characterized by a positive focus, seeking to strengthen relational growth. David and Vera Mace, pioneers in the marital enrichment movement, published *Close Companions: The Marriage Enrichment Handbook* (1982), which provided an excellent overview of marital enrichment programs available at that time. While most of the programs developed before the 1980s were general in focus, by the 1990s programs had been developed to target specific types of marriages (Stahman & Salts, 1993; Arcus, 1995).

It is noteworthy that the 1980 decade review issue of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (JMF) contained no mention on empirical research on marital enrichment for the previous decade. In their 1980 review of marriage enrichment, Hof and Miller (1980) noted that programs are based on a philosophy of building strengths and opening up untapped potential in spouses. So, from the very start, the core of marriage enrichment has been a positive, growth-oriented optimism that marriages can experience dynamic growth. Perhaps the most comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness

- ***Communication: Key to your Marriage, and Relationships that Work and Those that Don't***

This workshop is presented by H. Norman Wright, founder of Christian Marriage Enrichment. Dr. Wright has contributed 65 books on the field of marriage from a biblical perspective. These two videos are designed for marriage and pre-marital couples, respectively. The complete curriculum teaching kit can be used in marriage seminars but also in other formats like Sunday school class, retreats, or small group settings. The kit gives structure, an outline, time sequence and learning activities along with transparencies for teaching. Wright is relaxed, fun, and a good communicator in the videos. The couple's guide is most practical and includes couple assessment forms and reflection questions to evaluate the couple relationship and instruction on how to practice skills.

Wright makes some reference to relevant literature and liberally uses Bible verses to support his material. Male/female differences are discussed in terms of the tendency to do things according to gender scripts. He advocates servant leader attitudes in marital partners, finding men and women equal in every way except authority and responsibility. Husbands are to listen to their wives but it is the husband who bears the responsibility before God. Wright's material is readable, personal and clearly based on Scripture.

- ***Everything that Parents Should Teach, and Singles Should Know about How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk: The Way to Follow Your Heart Without Losing Your Mind***

This series, by John Van Epp of Partner Premarital Interpersonal Choices Training Program, includes six videotapes, a discussion workbook, a Bible study and leader's guide. Van Epp explains his relationship attachment model and the five major principles of knowledge, trust, reliance, commitment and sex. He presents to a large audience but does not involve his audience in any demonstration or participation.

The format can vary, but generally the couple will listen to the tape to get a bird's eye view of the session topics and then complete the exercises while the tape is turned off. The Training workbook provides diagrams and overheads of the materials presented along with a set of questions for the participants.

No reference is given to social science research. Van Epp uses Bible verses to support his points of view and makes a valiant attempt to address a worthy topic, but we found this material somewhat confusing and uneven.

- ***Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples***
- ***Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide***

of marital enrichment programs is a meta-analysis of outcome studies conducted by Giblin, Sprenkle, and Seehan (1985). These authors concluded that the average participant was better off than 67% of non-participants and that these gains were sustained over at least several months time. This study also found that it was easier to show treatment effects through *behavioral* measures than *self-report* measures.

In the 1990 review issue of JMF, Guerny and Maxson (1990:1127-1135) concluded that, "on the whole, enrichment programs work and the field is an entirely legitimate one." However, they specified a need for evaluating "which programs work best for what populations, what makes them best, and how they – and new programs – can be made more efficient and less costly and be better marketed." In a number of self-report studies, couples who have been a part of a Marriage Encounter weekend indicate improvement in their marriage relationship according to Elin (1999). It is rather disheartening to report that the 2000 JMF decade review made no mention of marital enrichment research conducted during the 1990s.

Both are written by Harville Hendrix and based on his “Imago” concept of marriage. According to Hendrix, the picture in each spouse’s mind of the ideal parent is that person’s imago. After marriage, the spouse is expected to satisfy the yearnings and wounding of childhood and meet this ideal, inevitably bringing up marital disappointment and struggle. Becoming aware of the family of origin dynamics and unmet childhood needs gives each spouse a conscious and compassionate understanding of themselves and their spouse. Dealing with these dynamics brings personal and relational growth. The couple moves from romantic attraction to power struggle issues and hopefully into a conscious marriage.

There are prescribed exercises to help the couple develop a conscious marriage, i.e., the place where empathy for the partner and reaching beyond one’s comfort zone to meet the spouse’s need is a transforming experience. Training is provided for professionals to become certified to do these marriage workshops.

The *Guide for Couples Video Series* is an abridged version of the more extensive training workshop. The video includes didactic information given by Hendrix to the workshop audience, demonstration of the techniques with a volunteer couple, reflection on what happened, and careful instruction for couples to try the exercise in the privacy of their own home. The manual contains written exercises for the couple to complete, as well as guided visualization (audiotape) to get a couple ready for some of the exercises. There is on-screen instruction as well as detailed instruction in the manual.

This material could be used in a weekend or weekly format, in a group or at home. The video series, produced by Harville’s wife, Helen Hunt, is engaging, personal and of high quality. Each couple has a workbook to follow along as they go through the tape one session at a time. Excellent, step-by-step instructions are given in terms of how to proceed. Actual couples used in the video demonstrations represent a cross-section in terms of culture, age, class, and marital problems. References are made to

various developmental and social science theories.

No specific reference is made to gender, but an egalitarian relationship and love reciprocity are strongly emphasized. Mutual acceptance and respect is the theme. Although there is no specific biblical content or references to God in the Imago model, during the personal interview in the video, Helen brings out the spiritual dimension that has been crucial to their journey as a married couple. Spiritual themes are not developed or incorporated into the materials, although the program’s use of concepts such as unconditional love could be easily be understood in light of God’s love.

The program provides thorough information, helpful instruction, and an excellent video production. Safety is a requirement and couples are cautioned to seek a counselor to help them through more serious power issues. In summary, we found this material to be of the highest professional quality. Limitations include needing to “buy into” this theoretical framework of the marriage relationship and to integrate it with a biblical perspective.

• ***Living Love Series***

This series is a secular video series taught by seven leading professional marriage and family therapy experts; Richard Stuart, Bill and Carleen Glasser, Harville Hendrix, Michele Weiner-Davis, Pat Love and John Gray. Pat Love and Jon Carlson, marriage and family educators/therapists, serve as co-hosts to each presenter, along with a studio audience who interacts with and volunteer to demonstrate exercises led by the particular presenter(s). This effective format makes for a lively, fun presentation dealing with real issues of actual couples. Assessment questions addressing various aspects of marriage are asked throughout the presentations. Each presenter has his or her perspective, presenting didactic information as well as practical exercises for couples to do. The presenters serve as the facilitator when the couple is practicing an exercise, followed by group discussion of the couple’s experience. The video has appropriate

pause time to allow a couple to practice. Video topics include *Create a Positive Relationship* by Richard Stewart with sessions on Caring Days/Negotiation/Authority/Decision Making & Future Planning; *Make Right Choices* by Bill and Carlene Glasser with sessions on Solving circle/Basic needs/Seven deadly habits/ Language of closeness/Choosing solutions; *Conscious Communication* by Harville Hendrix with sessions on Mirroring/Validating/ Commitment exercises; *Deepen Connection* by Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks with sessions on Acceptance/Commitment/Time for each other/ Receiving and giving compliments; *Getting Unstuck* by Michelle Weiner-Davis with sessions on Defining love/Goal setting/Takes one to tango; *Creating Loving Sexuality* by Pat Love with sessions on Chemistry/Deepening/Beyond self-centeredness; and *Keeping Passion Alive* by John Gray with sessions on Venting/The feeling letter/Responsibility/Visualization.

Each presentation includes key components of the expert's experience and popular success in working with marriages. The studio audience is engaged in a series of practical exercises, giving the viewer an opportunity not only to listen to the ideas but to watch the exercises being demonstrated and then being given an opportunity to participate and practice. The leader of a small couples group or seminar can easily use the videotaped didactic information, stop the tape after the presenter offers his/her ideas, let viewers see a particular exercise being demonstrated and then do the exercise themselves. Taking time to discuss the experience, just as the studio audience shares their responses to a particular exercise, will enhance the group dynamics. These well-known presenters each have their own style and are very enthusiastic about how they use their material to enhance the marriage relationship.

Although each presenter refers to specific *research* supportive of her or his approach, there is little detail given. For the most part, gender is not a primary focus in this series but equity is seen as more important than equality, which can easily lead to score keeping. John Gray is the exception in that he wants couples

to be aware of how gender stereotypes impact the relationship.

Since this is a secular series, there is no attempt made to bring in a spiritual or biblical dimension. The foundational tenet is for couples to give primacy to their relationship as a living unit that requires nurturing and attention. Differences and disagreements are normalized so spouses can work together on their conflicts. The series presents quality material on marriage enrichment; perhaps the leader can augment it with biblical concepts.

- ***Marriage on the Rock***

This resource includes a book, audiotape and videotape by pastor Jimmy Evans, founder of *Family & Marriage Today*. Although not specifically trained in psychology or marital and family therapy, he speaks authoritatively from biblical passages. He is an engaging speaker and uses his book as the foundation of his marriage principles. It's hard to recommend this program as enrichment since there are no specific exercises, demonstration of skills or discussion questions to go along with the didactic information given. Therefore, there is no opportunity to apply the information.

Evans accentuates gender differences because he believes they help spouses understand each other better. No references are made to social science literature or research. Surveys are referred to in his videotape lectures but no sources are given.

- ***Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts: A Marriage Curriculum for Engaged, About-to-be Engaged, and the Newly Married***

Saving Your Marriage is an excellent eight-session program presented by Les and Leslie Parrott, co-directors of The Center for Relationship Development. The program includes two videos, the book, *Saving your Marriage Before it Starts*, a workbook for women, a workbook for men, a leader's guide, and a marriage mentor manual. The mentoring book offers a few simple guidelines to experienced married couples helping

newlyweds build a solid marriage bond. This curriculum can be used as eight weekly, two-hour sessions, a weekend retreat, or a one or two-day seminar event at a church or organization. It provides a suggested structure for each setting and specific instructions on how to best use the materials. Suggestions include using video clips from movies, expanding a session with role-play activities, and discussion questions.

Viewing the Parrotts on the video is the stimulus for each of the program's topic. The setting is an informal and comfortable one, and the Parrotts are delightful, warm, and entertaining in presenting their materials. Couples have an opportunity to interact with the materials and to hear interviews with the couples on the video as they process the materials.

The Parrotts have a solid reputation in the Christian community as writers of Christian books and family life educators, yet little reference to social science research or Scripture is incorporated in their presentation. They have a balanced view of gender. This is an excellent program, especially for younger couples.

- ***Ten Great Dates to Energize Your Marriage***
- ***The Second Half of Marriage: Facing the Eight Challenges of the Empty-Nest Years***

Produced by Marriage Alive International, the founders and co-directors, David and Claudia Arp, were trained by David and Vera Mace, the pioneers of the marriage enrichment movement. They have adapted some of the Maces' materials in their *Marriage Alive* seminars. The first video curriculum was developed for couples of any age and the second is a specific curriculum for later life marriages. In each video series, the Arps present the materials to a workshop audience. They introduce and expand on a specific topic in the book that accompanies the workshop. They share personal stories to illustrate their points and invite couples to interact with each other at the end of each session using workbook exercises. The home viewing audience can pause the tape and take the time they need to

go through the exercise before going on to the next session, allowing couples to go at their own pace. Each session is designed to engage couples in meaningful dialogue about their marriage in order to set goals and evaluate their progress.

The Arps' *Leader's Guide* gives thoughtful and thorough instruction on each topic presented. The workshop leader has clear guidance but also can be flexible according to the needs of a particular group. Although the Arps give no over-riding biblical principles to frame their materials, they bring in Scripture from time to time. They give personal testimony of their faith in Christ and freely indicate their Christian commitment. They include a session on spiritual aspects of the marital relationship, dealing with topics like "What makes a marriage Christian?" and "Ways to promote spiritual meaning and closeness in a marriage."

In terms of gender, the Arps promote a companionship marriage, adopting democratic ideals and the New Testament mandates of mutual submission and reciprocal servanthood. They use terms like, "together serve others" and ask the question "does your marriage reflect God's image?" They look at differences in personalities and teach couples how to balance these differences to strengthen the marriage. They do cite some research.

In conclusion, the Arps are a personable couple who have produced a well-organized professionally produced video series. Direct interaction with couples and demonstration would have enhanced their program and brought more energy to the project.

- ***The Marriage Breakthrough***

The *Marriage Breakthrough* includes a leader's kit; five, thirty-minute interactive video seminars, along with a "*Keeping Love Alive*" audio program, the book *Divorce Busting*, and a 200-page leader's guide which includes a complete set of reproducible handouts. Michele Weiner-Davis, a marriage and family therapist, is author and presenter of the materials. The tenant of Weiner-Davis' solution focused approach is that successful marriages have

nothing to do with luck or choosing the right person or being more in love, but about learning effective skills. The leader encourages participants to become solution-minded by looking for the positive ways they can improve their relationships.

The material is beautifully packaged and well written. Weiner-Davis' presentation to a live audience is energetic, entertaining and informative. Her enthusiasm about marriage education and enrichment as a "divorce busting" act is contagious. She is relaxed, open, and humorous in her talk on the sexual relationship. The nice balance between didactic and experiential exercises gives couples an opportunity to reflect privately on the material. The materials can be used in various formats, such as a weekend series, workshop, or small group setting.

Weiner-Davis references current research through her presentation. While her secular approach does not include a biblical or theological perspective, we believe her material represents the very best of what a marital enrichment program can be. She brings out the need for forgiveness and acceptance and builds on the bond of friendship and relational commitment-components in relationships that comport nicely with Christian values.

The materials are designed to use the program "right out of the box" with no additional training needed for educators, clergy, and counselors. The program is not only easy to use but also easy to teach. The material claims to be psychobabble free, goal oriented, and effective even if only one spouse attends. There are no demonstrations, but couples are able to spend time reflecting on the materials in private. There is information about how to advertise and market enrichment programs that we found helpful. We believe these materials could easily be used in a religious setting with the presence of a trained church leader who is capable of integrating a biblical perspective.

- ***The Marriage Connection: Wedding the Spiritual & the Practical***

This resource by Bridgett Brennans of The Cana Institute is a real gem. This facilitator's guide instructs leaders on how to assist young married couples in their marital journey. The outline provides a helpful structure in how to use the material in a workshop or retreat setting. The comfortable pace creates a safe and relaxed atmosphere in which couples can reflect upon and process topical ideas in mini-conversations. This material is suitable for use at the parish/church or community level. The material can easily be adapted for a series of sessions as well.

The poem, "Magnificate of Betrothal" by Ann Johnson along with the ending prayer of healing is an example of the religious sensitivity and focus of the program. Topics in this book range from covenant/contract, values, finances, conflict, lovemaking (which includes housework and childcare as well as mysteries of love and relationship), and the healing power of love. There is flexibility in using and adapting the material according to the leader's insights and creativity. The guide serves as a background text and contains attractive handouts that can be copied and used directly with couples.

This book is well documented, including a bibliography of current writing and research in the field, although the research findings are not applied within the program *per se*. Some of the exercises are adapted from LifePartnerQuest. Gender egalitarian marriage is emphasized. Marriage is viewed as a call and decision to share lives together as a blessing to the world and the church.

Marriage Enrichment Small Group Format

These materials are put together for the purposes of small group marriage enrichment. The authors encourage couples to work on a weekly basis in the context of a small group

setting where other group members can encourage and keep them accountable in their marriages.

- ***A Handbook for Married Couples***
- ***A Handbook for Engaged Couples***
- ***Marriage: God's Design for Intimacy***

These two handbooks published by Intersivity Press and written by Alice and Robert Fryling are worthy of mention in this article. The strength of these handbooks is the quality and helpfulness of the questions and exercises given for an individual, couple or group reflection. A range of topics are covered, including motivation, money and possessions, spiritual growth, moods and emotions, sexual fulfillment, failure and forgiveness, and setting goals. The authors refer to relevant social science literature and biblical texts. The Frylings hold up a mutual submission, egalitarian model as the foundation for gender roles in marriage.

Another part of the Intersivity *LifeGuide Bible Study* series is the beneficial booklet *Marriage: God's Design for Intimacy*, written by James and Martha Reapsome. Biblical passages serve as the focus for each chapter and provide provocative reflection and discussion. Leaders' notes at the end of the book are an excellent help. The booklet contains no reference to social science literature, relies strongly on biblical passages, and has a balanced view of gender.

- ***Authentic Marriages: How to Connect with Other Couples Through a Marriage Accountability Group***
- ***Authentic Marriages Workbook***

Written by Jeff and Lora Helton, these are designed for couples who want to keep each other accountable for marital health through a small group setting. This is an excellent source on how to form an accountability group and keep it meaningful. Part I includes how to get to know each other in a group setting, authenticity, fears and stages of the group. Part II provides helpful ideas about starting a group, keeping covenant, care and support, accountability, forgiveness, and communication. The "Before

the Group" section prepares members for the scheduled meetings, while "During the Group" and "After the Group" sections give instruction about group process and activities for each couple to do on their own. The materials also include helpful sections on tasks and tools, check-in discussion questions, focus for the evening, group interaction time, reflections and practical application to marriage.

Aspects of the Heltons' program include community, genuineness, integrity, growth and speaking the truth in love. The purpose of this program is to provide a structure for how to participate in an accountability group, offering starting points and practical ideas for spending fifteen weeks together as couples. The program includes in the material real-life examples, psychologically and theologically sound reflections, couple assessment tools, topics to be discussed, and assignments to apply the principles.

The program is clearly designed for a Christian audience, with Scripture verses and prayer times included in the small group guidelines. Keeping track of personal and marriage prayer requests is a part of each session. In dealing with personality differences, the authors make the comment that men and women operate best when they both strive for a balance. They recognize that people don't always fit gender stereotypes and yet note the tendency to complement one's spouse as a common tendency. There are no social science research references although the authors do refer to other well-known Christian writers in the counseling field. This is an excellent help for lay couples who want a well-organized small group experience to keep their marriage strong.

- ***Bethany House Marriage Materials***

Several authors have contributed to this enrichment series designed for small Bible study groups. *What if I Married the Wrong Person: Help and Hope on the Question Nearly Every Couple Asks* by Matteson and Harris (1996), a sensitive, inspirational book, is suitable for an individual, couple or small group format. Each chapter includes exercises,

journaling, assessment, contemplations, and prayer to help the reader put into practice the knowledge given.

Robert (Methodist pastor) and Debra Bruce have written *Reclaiming Intimacy in Your Marriage: A Plan for Facing Life's Ebb and Flow Together* (1996). This step-by-step eight-week program is designed to strengthen the emotional, practical and spiritual bonds that make a solid marriage, including daily exercises assisting the couple in dealing with topics like being spiritual soul-mates, recharging friendship, de-stressing life, taking time for romance and facing life's interruptions. Marital and family resources are used throughout this excellent book.

Steve Carr, a Calvary Chapel pastor, has written a compassionate book, *Married and How to Stay That Way! A Treasury of Radical Solutions Based Solely on God's Word* (1998). The end of each chapter provides a list of actions to be taken as well as group discussion questions. Carr uses concepts like covenant, companionship, reconciliation, and honoring. Although an eight part video series and accompanying worksheet is available, we did not receive copies of these materials to review.

These three books offer a "soft patriarchy" in which mutual submission to Christ is taught, and readers are offered correctives on what male leadership and female submission do not mean. In general, the biblical passages and principles are offered as the foundation for marital relationships. The authors do not cite research support for their work.

- ***Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate***
- ***Toward a Growing Marriage: Building the Love Relationship of Your Dreams***
- ***Five Signs of a Loving Family***
- ***The World's Easiest Guide to Family Relationships***

The best-selling book, *Five Love Languages*, written by Gary Chapman, Ph.D. includes a comprehensive study guide in the back and a video or audio version. The

materials are attractively packaged and can be used by the couple or in a small group. Chapman's book, *Toward a Growing Marriage* includes a helpful "growth assignment" section with a separate set of questions for married and unmarried couples. His two books on family relationships are worth mentioning: *Five Signs of a Loving Family* and *The World's Easiest Guide to Family Relationships* (with Randy Southern). These books include a variety of exercises to help couples, parents, and children evaluate themselves in relationships, with a special focus on anger, power, love languages, and showing affection. The accompanying handbook includes marriage dynamics. All these materials include couple exercises and self-rating scales. The daily "love talk" questions can easily be used as interesting table conversation to assist couples in knowing each other better.

While Chapman's original marriage book was characterized by a strong scriptural presence, his later books contain few references to Scripture. The love languages are not gender specific but reference is made to the importance of understanding the unique needs of the spouse and how gender differences present themselves in the love languages. Although resources are listed, no social science research is cited. The material is easily applied and helpful to those who want to understand and relate to each other more effectively. The practical ideas and exercises increase relationship functioning.

- ***Love in the Trenches: A Couples Guide to Overcoming the Power Struggle***
- ***I'd Rather Be Married: Finding Your Future Spouse***

Al Crowell, a social worker, offers a book and videotape for couples to use in the privacy of their home or in a church or community small group setting. Crowell explains a particular technique, then demonstrates with real couples using the skill in everyday situations at home. The video sessions include: listening and validating, using anger as a constructive asset, making do-able requests, making friends with your feelings, growing in self knowledge, and

relationship as a spiritual path. Gender as a factor is not addressed. No social science references are given, nor is there reference to the Bible or theological principles.

I'd Rather Be Married is a workbook written by Crowell for singles who are looking for a suitable match and want to choose the right partner. It prepares them to get ready for a relationship that works, to find available partners, to figure out if the person is right, and to learn about intimacy. Each chapter ends with a series of exercises to help persons discover more about themselves. The program addresses family of origin influences, dating feedback, ambivalence about relationships and a safety yardstick.

- **Prevention and Relation Enhancement Program (PREP)**
- **Christian PREP**

PREP is a program based on 15 years of research at the University of Denver. The program offers a variety of products and material for couples wanting to incorporate the PREP approach into their relationships. Instructor training is provided to mental health professionals, counselors, clergy members or lay leaders who want to give retreats on PREP. A book for mentoring couples by Savanna McCain is a comprehensive manual dealing with the leader's role, selecting, training and evaluating mentors, as well as offering step-by-step directions for using PREP.

The material is intended for small groups of couples, with a format covering a four to ten week time frame. There are weekly homework assignments with an accompanying study guide. The leader facilitates the group's shared activities and guides the couple as they practice the PREP skills.

The three-tape video series has edited stops so a couple can work along with the materials in the book, *Fighting for Your Marriage* co-authored by Howard Markman, Scott Stanley & Susan Blumberg. Also available are four videos that show couples going through the step-by-step process of learning the critical communication and conflict resolution skills. An

audiotape of this series is available as well. All these materials are of highest quality.

Readers will be most interested in *Christian PREP*, a version of PREP written by Scott Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain and Milt Bryan in the book, *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (1998). The premise of *Christian PREP* is that "all truth is God's truth." Thus the authors draw wisdom from both the Bible and social science research. Scott Stanley and Milt Bryan designed this program for newly engaged to long-time married Christian couples wanting to learn communication and conflict resolution skills in order to prevent problems. *Christian PREP* also includes a video demonstrating the key relational skills to be practiced. Real couples provide clear examples of why communication breaks down or escalates and how speaker-listener skills facilitate understanding and resolution.

Christian PREP is based on the framework of "no longer two but one" and "the three-fold cord" as images of unity through faith in God. Commitment, forgiveness, and spiritual themes are promoted and Scripture verses are offered as support for communication and conflict resolution skills, as couples seek to break old patterns that destroy oneness. Part II focuses on spiritual beliefs and expectations, commitment, forgiveness, friendship, sexual, and spiritual intimacy, each of which include helpful reflection questions for a couple. A major strength of the program is that it includes a strong emphasis on both understanding marital dynamics and on training and relational skills building. *Christian PREP* recognizes personality and gender differences that impact the marriage relationship. Jesus is used as a model to define marriage – a relationship in which both partners seek to serve the other based on a mutual commitment to a shared future.

The PREP program brings the strongest research base for marital communication and conflict. It is one of the few marriage enrichment programs that has demonstrated its effectiveness. Since 1980, 135 couples from the Denver community have been followed to determine the short and long term effect of

PREP when compared with a control group (Stanley, Blumberg & Markman, 1999, pp. 297-301). Pre-post analyses indicate that PREP couples showed significant improvement in conflict management skills compared to the control couples where no such gains occurred. Marital satisfaction was also maintained with the PREP couples, whereas the control couples showed significant decline in satisfaction over time. In addition, PREP couples showed significantly lower levels of aggression than the control group after 7-12 years.

Participants in this program report significant gains in communication (skills usage, positive affect, problem-solving skill, and support/validation) as well as conflict management skills from pre-to post-test. There was a lower divorce rate for participants in the program (1.6%) as compared to controls (12.5%). PREP couples showed less withdrawal, less denial, less dominance, less negative affect, less overall negative communication, and fewer instances of physical violence than the control couples (Stanley, Blumberg & Markman, 1999, pp. 298-299).

• ***Starting Your Marriage Right: What You Need to Know and Do in the Early Years to Make it Last a Lifetime***

Dennis Rainey, executive director of Homebuilders Couple Series introduces this program in an 8-minute informational video. The book builds on small group principles including individual reflection, couple discussion questions, and a couple's action item. An entire series of spiral bound study guides cover a variety of marital topics such as: *Building Your Marriage, Improving Your Communication, Growing Together in Christ, Mastering Money, Building Teamwork, Overcoming Stress, and Resolving Conflict*.

The kit includes a helpful *Leader's Guide* with solid instruction on starting and leading a couples group. A step-by-step instruction book for the leader and participants, *Building Teamwork in Your Marriage* by Robert Lewis, is especially useful in a couples' group setting. It includes non-threatening interaction ideas along with photocopy privileges of the materials. Each

week there is a warm-up time, a focus on a particular topic, sharing time, special exercises, and conclusion. The small group topics can be an avenue of evangelizing neighbors and non-churched people. Some of the study guides are in Spanish.

In this series the Bible is regarded as a blueprint and final authority for building a godly marriage and dealing with practical issues of living. Scripture passages are used and applied in practical ways to the marriage relationship. The major theme is to rely on the Holy Spirit and God's Word to do what God requires in making marriage strong.

The homebuilder gender principle is to affirm true equality in marriage through understanding, appreciating and honoring each other's differences. Believing that the woman's greatest need is to be loved rightly and the man's is to be respected, they promote a servant-leader role for men and a submissive role for women as a spiritual response allowing the husband to fulfill his spiritual role. This soft patriarchy stance is compassionate, but puts a great deal of emphasis on male/female stereotypical roles rather than roles developed out of mutual consent. Although no social science references are given in the text, some are given at the end of each chapter.

• ***The Essential Humility of Marriage***

This useful book by Terry Hargrave, Professor of Marriage and Family at Amarillo College, advocates keeping the marriage alive through nurturing the "Us" (relationship). Love and trust are established through three characteristics – stability, security, and sincerity. He espouses a committed, reliable, responsible partnership that involves sacrifice, teachability, and responsiveness to one's spouse and the relationship.

While Hargrave's materials are written primarily for therapists, it can be beneficial for family life ministers and adapted for marriage retreats/conferences. The book can also serve as a resource guide for a couple or a small group. Topics include realities of marriage, marital stability, family of origin issues, conflict

patterns, power issues in work/finances, parenting, sexual infidelity and building trust.

Key marital literature and research findings are referenced throughout the book. He promotes companionship and egalitarian marriage over traditional models, asserting that both husbands and wives must learn to accommodate for the good of the other and the relationship. Although Hargrave makes no biblical references, he takes a moral position based on sound relationship principles consistent with Scripture. Unique aspects of the book include 16 couple exercises, an assessment scale, and a focus on the counselor's role.

Marriage Enrichment/Study Guide In-Home Formats

These in-home formats are written for married couples who are putting energy into improving their relationship in the privacy of their home. Couples read the book, chapter by chapter, engage in reflection questions at the end of the chapter and work on suggested exercises promoted in the book.

- ***As for Me and My House: Crafting Your Marriage to Last (expanded edition with study guide)***

The expanded edition of *As for Me and My House* by Walter Wangerin, Jr., is a wonderful addition to this popular book on marriage. The study guide provides the couple with an opportunity to work through the materials at home or in a small group setting. The thirteen-session format makes it easy to use as an adult Sunday school class elective. There are specific discussion items for group reflection and a "between couples" sharing opportunity. Each chapter ends with a closing prayer.

This devotional book unfolds the personal story of Wangerin's marriage and his conviction that marriage is a gift. He deals with intriguing topics like: "What is Marriage Meant to Be?," "The Divine Ideal;" "What is Forgiveness?;" "The Divine Absurdity;" "Faithfulness unto Death;" "Truthfulness and Dependability;" "Sharing the Work of Survival;" "Making Love;" and "Healing."

This book helps couples examine, understand their relationship and inspires them to a fresh honesty and future hope.

No social science research is referenced. Given its devotional nature, Scripture is central. As for gender, "mutualization" is a word used to describe the way spouses need to harmonize as husband and wife. The focus is on individual giftedness, even though instrumental and emotional gender differences are noted. The challenge is for the couple to achieve mutuality. Spouses learn to live together in harmony by knowing and nourishing the "oneness" of their marriage as they put the priority on the relationship.

- ***It Takes Two: The Joy of Intimate Marriage***

This sensible guide written by Andrew D. and Judith L. Lester discusses how to create an intimate marriage from the outset and develop levels of intimacy not yet experienced. Preventive in nature, the focal point is how to protect and enrich the marital commitment. Andrew (pastoral counselor) and Judith (licensed therapist) have been married to each other for nearly 40 years and have firsthand knowledge to share from their own journey as well as through the stories of those they have counseled over the years.

Aware of the research and writing in the field of marriage and family, the Lesters focus on particular themes on the marital journey. Acknowledging that much of the literature on marriage is Euro-American, mainline Protestant middle-class, the authors invite the reader to interpret information given in light of their own ethnic background, social history and religious traditions. Topics covered are: sharing power and responsibility; the joy of sexual intimacy; the spiritual journey of forgiveness and justice; and making changes through covenants. Suggested resources are given at the end of each chapter for those who desire to pursue the topic further. This is a delightful find in the enrichment materials reviewed.

The Lesters write from the Judeo-Christian tradition, bringing in theological concepts on marriage gleaned from the Bible. The authors

stress gender equality before God, assuming that male and female are created in God's image and equally loved and cherished by God. The ideal marriage is defined as a partnership characterized by mutuality, sharing responsibility in making decisions and meeting the needs of both self and partner. Marriage is viewed as a unique journey and the couple is invited to develop their personal couple story. Guided through participation exercises at the end of each chapter, a couple can practice and reflect in the privacy of their home or in a smallgroup format. The Lesters' guide is the most culturally sensitive of all the material we reviewed.

- ***The Five Love Needs of Men and Women***

The Five Love Needs of Men and Women is the product of Gary and Barbara Rosberg, co-founders of America's Family Coaches. These authors teach couples practical ways to meet each other's needs through discussion questions and goal setting tips at the end of each chapter. No reference is made to social science research. Scripture verses are given throughout the book. Although the Rosbergs discuss relational needs along gender-specific lines, there is an awareness of common needs among husbands and wives as well.

- ***The 5 Steps to Romantic Love Workbook***
- ***Lovebusters***
- ***His Needs, Her Needs***
- ***Fall in Love, Stay in Love***

These books are written by clinical psychologist and licensed marital and family therapist, Willard F. Harley, Jr. Harley presents a practical workbook that contains instruction, contracts, questionnaires, inventories, worksheets and forms to be used by a couple or group leader for strategizing to defeat old patterns and develop new approaches to marital problems. The five-step sequence includes: making a commitment to build romantic love, identifying love busters, overcoming love busters (anger, disrespectful judgments, annoying behavior, selfish demands and dishonesty), identifying emotional needs, and learning to meet emotional needs.

Harley's most recent book, *Fall in Love, Stay in Love* offers insights and techniques to build and sustain love in marriage. Each chapter ends with "Key Principles" and a "Thinking it Through" section. The appendix gives a summary of the basic concepts, questionnaires, and agreement forms.

No social science references or biblical references are cited. Gender differences are not emphasized since both men and women are challenged to care for each other and the marriage by developing strategies for quality time, family commitment, domestic and financial support, recreational companionship, fair negotiation and joint agreement tactics. We found these books to be sensitive and practical in nature.

Summary

We have found much variation in the marriage enrichment programs we reviewed. Different delivery styles may be needed to best reach alternative types of marriage situations. An advantage of the weekend "marathon" retreat is the concentrated time that allows for subsequent sessions to build upon previous ones, resulting in an intensity of focus.

The marathon retreat may result in a "mountain top" experience, however, and have less long-term benefit than a series of sessions in which couples have time to practice and focus on a weekly basis. Arcus, Schvaneveldt & Moss' (1993) conclusion that the benefits of "marriage enrichment programs do appear to diminish over time" would lend support for small group interaction over a longer time frame. It is noteworthy that Guerny and Maxson (1990) advocate "booster programs" following the marathon weekend, when skill building can continue to take place as a solution to this dilemma.

To date, there is more impressionistic than empirical research assessing the strengths, limitations and efficacy of enrichment programs (with the exception of PREP). There is some evidence that programs seem to be more effective "when they are experiential and involve behavioral rehearsal process," according to

Arcus, Schvaneveldt, & Moss (1993, p. 50). Undoubtedly some couples do benefit from learning content about marriage through lecture type presentations. Others would be reluctant to attend a program that requires participation. Skill building makes content applicable to real life situations, however. The broader literature on effective education and learning methods indicate that marriage enrichment programs will be most effective when participants are given a chance to *process* and *practice* the content (Berger & Hannah, 1999; Arcus, Schvaneveldt & Moss, 1993).

The common denominator of all these programs is the view that strength-based curriculum and skill development will increase a couple's satisfaction with their marriage relationship and working on the major areas of stress and conflict in marriage will alleviate a couple's dissatisfaction. Therefore, learning good communication and conflict resolution is a primary focus. While there is variation in the specific content in the program curriculum, typical problems addressed are children, sex, money, in-laws, religion, roles, and personality differences.

In their interview of 120 couples who had been married an average of nine years, Barbara Fiese, Ph.D. and Thomas Tomcho (2001) discovered that those who find meaning in shared religious holiday rituals were more satisfied with marriage. Intimacy and connection through religious practices along with the husband's emotional investment in these events was an important indicator of marital satisfaction. We would urge church leaders to consider the importance of this finding when giving marriage enrichment retreats. Incorporating religious meaning through rituals and ceremonies can be a very significant part of a marriage enrichment program. Having a corporate time of worship, prayer, a communion service, and a renewal of vows during marriage retreats can deepen the spiritual connection and marital satisfaction.

In general, there seems to be an inverse relationship between building a program on biblical texts and building a program on social science literature and research. In most

instances, the Bible seems to be used as a *proof text*, rather than as an integrated theological model for marriage. If God is the author of all knowledge, then it seems to us that what is most needed is the developmental of marital enrichment programs that are based on an integration of the best empirical studies on marriage, social science literature, outcome research on program effectiveness and a comprehensive use of biblical truth as a foundation for marriage.

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Program Information

ARPS Marriage Alive International

www.marriagealive.com

Bethany House Publishers, 11400 Hampshire Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55438
Phone: (800) 328-6109

Cana Institute

www.joy@canainstitute.org

The Marriage Connection, 5937 Keith Place, St. Louis, MO 63109
Phone: (314) 832-0512

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PO Box 463, Arroyo Grande, CT 93421
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www.moodyconferences.com/couples/tagm/index.html

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3819 23rd Street S.F. CA 94114
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<http://www.famtoday.com/contact.cfm>

Family & Marriage Today, PO Box 8400, Amarillo, TX 79114
Phone: (800) 705-5556

Fryling, Alice and Robert

InterVarsity Press, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515

Phone: (630) 734-4000 · E-mail: @ivpress.com

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Parrott, Les & Leslie

www.RealRelationships.com
The Center for Relationship Development

PREP

www.prepinc.com
PO Box 102530, Denver, CO 80250, or 1780 S.
Bellaire, Suite 520, Denver, CO 80222
Phone: (303) 759-9931 or (800) 366-0166 · Fax:
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Rainey, Dennis

www.familylife.com
Homebuilders, Family Life, PO Box 23840, Little
Rock, AR 72221-3840
Phone: (800) 358-6329

Rosberg, Gary & Barbara

www.americanfamilycoaches.com
America's Family Coaches, 2540 106th St.
Urbandale, IA 50322
Phone: (888) 767-2374

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www.divorcebusting.com
The Divorce Busting Center, 100 N. Benton,
Woodstock, Illinois, 60098.
Phone: (815) 337-8000 or (800) 664-2435 · Fax:
(815) 337-8014

VanEpp, John

www.nojerks.com
Life Changes, 600 East Smith Road, Medina,
OH 44256
Phone: (330) 321-3527

Wright, H. Norman

www.hnormanwright.com
Christian Marriage Enrichment, PO Box 2468,
Orange, CA 92859
Phone: (800) 875-7560

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<http://www.walterwangerinjr.org>
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Sexual Identity and Salvation

by Willie Oliver, Director
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Question:

I am seventeen and involved in my church. What confuses me is that instead of finding girls attractive, I find other young men attractive. Why would God make me this way if it is true that the Bible says that God doesn't agree with homosexuality? Can I make it to heaven with these feelings that I have for other men? Please help me. I want to do what's right.

~ Name withheld—Albuquerque, New Mexico

Answer:

Thank you for asking such an important question, and for your bravery in doing so. First, getting to heaven isn't based on how we feel; it is based on what God already did. In John 3:16 the Bible states: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

In Ephesians 2:8, 9 the Bible continues: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Therefore, believing in Jesus, and having faith in the promise of His gift of salvation, is the role we play in our salvation. In John 14:15 Jesus says: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." This last statement describes the terms of the relationship with Jesus. Loving Jesus means doing what He says.

Second, about homosexuals—and the same can be said for lesbians—the Bible states in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor *homosexuals*, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." The first part of this passage of Scripture is in the active voice—which means that individuals are actively participating in these habits of unrighteousness. The second part of the passage deals with a transition to a different life after these same individuals have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus.

Third, there is a difference between being tempted and acting out on the temptation. Being saved by grace, to be sure, doesn't mean we can do whatever we want. The Bible states in Romans 6:14-18: "For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."

Fourth, if God lists homosexuality among unrighteous acts in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, you can be assured that God didn't make you a homosexual, just like He didn't make someone else a fornicator, idolater, adulterer, thief, drunkard or with any other sinful tendency. We have to accept the

fact that since sin came into the world—after Adam and Eve sinned—the human race has inherited sinful tendencies from thousands of years of brokenness.

Fifth, God is in the salvation business not in the condemnation business, and says to all of us who are afflicted by habits mentioned in the list above: “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more” (John 8:11). On this note, we hope that from this day forward you will stay close to the Lord, seek help from a trusted pastor and/or Christian counselor, and remember that it isn’t about your *feelings*, but about your *actions*, and that God’s promise of success is: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

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Treasure Hunt

If God had a treasure box, what would be in it?

by Larry Libby, Senior Editor
Multnomah Publishers

I keep a little stash of treasures in my bedroom. I store them (please keep this to yourself) in a small box covered with smooth, polished lambskin. It has my name on it in gold, and I hide it under the dresser. There aren't any diamonds in there or tiny silver keys to some lockbox in a Swiss bank, just a few things I've kept over the years because...well, because I treasure them. There's a necklace of black beads, created and placed into my hand by a gypsy woman in some desolate corner of India. A plastic "stained glass" elephant my daughter painted for me when she was five or six. My grandmother's gold pocket watch. And a silver dollar. I don't treasure the dollar because it's particularly old or particularly rare or because it's worth \$12.50 at some collector's joint. I value it because of who held it and where it has been. When I was in high school, one of my older brothers was a young Marine heading for Vietnam as a medical corpsman. On the day he shipped out, I handed him that silver dollar and said, "I want you to bring this back to me."

He looked at me and said, "I will."

And he did. A year later, after a lifetime in that place of heat and sorrow and chaos and death, he walked back through our front door in Eugene, Oregon. "Here's your dollar," he said.

Those are a few of the things I'll always keep. They may not add up to much, but I treasure them.

Does God have some things He likes to keep around and look at now and then? Does God have a box where He stores His valuables? And if He has such a box (with His name spelled out in gold on the lid), what might we find inside?

God's Delight

Is it odd to think of God treasuring something? After all, God is the very fountainhead of value. Everything of worth and beauty and delight flows from Him. The headwaters of joy thunder from His courts. Any gladness or peace or wonder to be had in this universe springs directly from His heart and nowhere else.

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (Jas. 1:16-17)

So what could God possibly value or treasure beyond Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Think of the Trinity enjoying perfect, overflowing fellowship in eternity past. God didn't need anything then, and He doesn't need anything now. He is utterly complete, perfect, and sufficient within Himself. If He ever wanted for anything, if He ever discovered a lack or shortage within Himself, He would no longer be God. As He once told His people,

I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.... If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. (Ps. 50:9-10, 12, emphasis mine)

Fair enough. And yet...

God created man and woman for a reason. No, the world isn't anything like it might have been if Adam and Eve had kept the faith. Even so, God's love for His redeemed sons and

daughters in a broken, battle-weary world occupies a large part of His great heart. How could anyone read Scripture and conclude otherwise?

God delights in His people. Certain things about certain of His kids at certain times bring a particular surge of joy to His heart. I can't explain it, I can't quantify it, and I don't pretend to understand it. I just observe it in His book.

God isn't reluctant to tell us about His treasures. If we want to look in His box, He'll show us.

A Worshipping Heart

What God seeks, He finds. He can track every molecule in a universe vast beyond comprehension—from a grain of sand on some lonely dune on Mars to a chip of frozen methane on a nameless planet circling Alpha Centauri.

The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. (John. 4:23)

God, who possesses the stars in their courses and galaxies innumerable, is watching, listening, and considering. Right now. He's looking for people who will worship Him "in spirit and truth."

The Lord Jesus spoke those particular words to a questionable woman. In Samaria. At high noon, when no one was about. What was He doing in a place like that, seeking worship from a woman like her? Wasn't there a big-time, brand-name worship center in Jerusalem, just 35 miles away? Didn't the boys at the temple have all the right stuff—the right priests wearing the right robes and burning the right incense at the right times?

Maybe. Yet the God of the universe was pursuing the potential worship of a disgraced and dispirited woman under the blazing Mideastern sun.

It seems crazy, but her worship mattered to Him.

And so does yours.

Have you ever thought about that when you're alone, doing some mundane task? In those common, ordinary moments, you could (if you would) give God something He will treasure for a trillion years (just for starters). You could offer something the Almighty seeks all over the world. Lift up praise and adoration, straight from your heart, and it just may end up in God's treasure box.

A Humble Heart

The Pharisees, who loved money, sneered at the Lord's teaching on the treasures of heaven. At one point, Jesus turned to them with this piercing remark:

You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. (Luke. 16:15)

Jesus was saying, "You've set yourselves up as the experts. You claim to represent God to the people. But you guys don't have a clue what God values."

If the Pharisees had been better students of God, they might have remembered this verse in the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Is. 66:2). God values humility. He takes careful note of those who bow low in His presence, those who fear and honor His name.

In the sad, closing days of the Old Testament, many of the Lord's people had grown cynical and bored in their relationship with Him. He had delivered them out of hopeless captivity in Babylon, returned them to their own land, and allowed them to build a new temple on the ashes of the old for the honor of His name. Yet even before the paint had time to

dry, the people's hearts began to wander. They became slipshod in their attitudes and were no longer careful to honor Him.

Even so, the prophet Malachi tells us that God's eyes rested on a small group of earnest believers who met together—quietly and unofficially—to praise God and share with one another. Was it a small home fellowship on the outskirts of Jerusalem? A group of young moms and their babies who sat on blankets under some trees? A small gathering of farm workers in an olive orchard? A circle of teenagers who met before school? The Bible doesn't say.

The prophet simply tells us,

Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. (Mal. 3:16)

God commanded some heavenly scribe to write down the names of that little band of folks who feared Him, and then He tucked the list into His treasure box—all because a small group of His people bucked the prevailing trends to meet together and give Him glory and praise.

Did the Lord value these hearts? Just listen. “They will be mine,” says the Lord Almighty, “in the day when I make up my treasured possession” (v. 17).

Sounds like a treasure box to me.

An Obedient Heart

“If you love me,” Jesus told His disciples, “you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). The Lord doesn't just acknowledge obedience; He delights in it. Obedience brings Him pleasure.

Samuel tried to get that across to King Saul at Gilgal. But he might as well have been talking to a fence post. It was too late for that cowardly king who had already grieved the heart of God and shipwrecked his kingdom. The last judge of Israel said to its first king,

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. (1 Sam. 15:22)

The Lord treasures those who simply obey. They may not understand God's commands, they may not like God's commands, they may not see the logic in God's commands. But when His people accept and align their lives with His commands, they've joined company with the angels of heaven who instantly obey His merest thought.

A day will come in the glad regions of heaven when obedience will no longer be an issue for you and me. We will be changed. We will be transformed. As we draw the sweet air of heaven into immortal lungs, obedience will be as the beat of our hearts. The slightest desire to disobey will be part of an old world, passed away and out of mind.

Today, however, we can still choose to follow His commands out of a simple desire to please our heavenly Father. My late wife once told me that the sweetest times in parenting were when our children had done something—cleaned their rooms, washed the dishes, picked up their stuff—just because they wanted to please her.

You and I can do that in this narrow window of time between two eternities. We can choose to obey His every command—not just because we ought to, but because we long to bring pleasure to His heart.

The Lord's eye does not miss such decisions; He slips them into His treasure box.

A Sacrifice of Praise

Some gifts are harder to give than others. I remember when my little son gave me his knife. He held it behind his back and said, “I have a surprise for you, Daddy.” Then he put it into my hand, still warm (and a bit sticky) from his hand.

It was just an ordinary knife. Then again, it wasn't ordinary at all. It was his knife, and he

didn't have another. It was one of his chief treasures. Something in his heart had said, "I want to give my dad something. I know, I'll give him my knife. He likes knives. It will make him happy."

And it did.

Have you ever found it difficult to offer praise to the Lord? In the grip of fear or sorrow or nameless desolation, have you ever felt His prompting to offer that which your flesh opposed?

The writer of Hebrews urges, "Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb. 13:15). When my wife underwent invasive cancer surgery—followed by grueling, heartbreaking weeks of chemotherapy and radiation treatments—I stood in our church's worship service one Sunday and had no desire at all to sing of God's goodness or shout of His great love.

How can you sing when your throat is tightly constricted? How can you lift your heart when it's made of lead? I missed her at my side that Sunday as though I was missing one of my own limbs. Yet there came a moment, as when a door cracks open and before it blows closed again, when I looked up at God's throne through my tears and whispered a word of praise.

Poor and hesitant as it was, the Lord seemed to say, "I know what that was, My son. It cost you something. And I will tell you that its aroma is sweet. I will never forget it."

If memory serves me, I found a way to return my little son's knife.

The Father who seeks treasure from His dearly-loved children also knows how to give in return.

Ten-thousandfold.

Libby, L. (2004). Treasure hunt. *Discipleship Journal*, 139, 23-27. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers. Used by permission.

“Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, for They Will Be Comforted”

by Larry Libby, Senior Editor
Multnomah Publishers

Just yesterday, I went back to the hospital. I knew I shouldn't, but I did.

Parking my car, I retraced my steps down the sidewalks as far as the south entrance.

My wife, Laura, and I went in through those doors a year ago this week. And those were the doors I walked out of to go home a few days later. Without her. My wife of 25 years went through her own door home, succumbing to cancer.

On yesterday's return journey, I stopped to pick one of the tiny lavender wildflowers growing along the hospital's rustic fitness trail. Last year, I picked a whole fistful, took them to her room, and presented my makeshift bouquet to her in a Styrofoam cup half filled with water. For a moment, she smiled.

A year later, the little flowers are blooming again, and new leaves are budding on the aspens. I made my way over to the same picnic bench where I sat and wept last year. And I wept again.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). Yet where is the blessedness of mourning? Where is the comfort?

What I hear in Jesus' words these days is something like this: “If you are filled with grief today, don't give in to black despair. Cling to My promise: It will be better. The worst is here now, having its day. But the better is coming. Comfort is coming. I tell you, it is almost here.”

As temporary residents of a fallen world, we mourn for many reasons. We grieve over

missed opportunities, broken dreams, unfulfilled desires, personal failures, dashed expectations, and difficult circumstances. We weep over lost health, lost innocence, and lost security. Disappointment and sorrow are as much a part of our planet's atmosphere as nitrogen and oxygen.

But Jesus, who is in a position to know, says it won't always be so. He says comfort is coming.

I can hold on to that assurance.

And I do, as best I can.

I may not be able to explain it, but I can cling to His words and wait on Him. Just the other day, on the way to work, He gave me a little picture that has helped me in my waiting.

Veiled Glory

My commute traverses a highway that reaches west from the high desert plateau around my small hometown of Bend, Oregon, to the hamlet of Sisters, nestled against the eastern flanks of the Cascade Mountains.

In the winter, seven towering snowcaps glow in the reflected glory of the rising sun. In the summer, morning rainbows cling to the clefts between the mountains.

One morning last winter, snow flurries veiled my view. On the long straightaway that usually gives me the best look at the seven-mountain panorama, a billowing curtain of dry, blowing snow descended, clouding my vision.

A few miles from Sisters, however, the curtain became translucent for a few moments.

What I saw filled me with awe: Through gaps in that silent, rippling sheet of snowfall, I glimpsed mountains bathed in sunlight against a sky of pale blue. I looked from one climate zone into another. From the high desert, I could see the mountains' beauty through the edge of the storm.

Some days that has been the way with my sorrow too. The storm closes in, obscuring all. I can't see more than a few feet.

I mourn.

With David, I whisper my pain into the gathering darkness.

“I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak” (Ps. 31:9-10).

But there are other days. Days when the storm parts, when the clouds become sheer, and I glimpse another time, another land, another place. Through tears, I see comfort. On up ahead. It will come.

The Shimmering Horizon

For now, there is mourning. I am sad for the loss of my companion and best friend. I grieve for the years we might have shared had God spared her. I grieve for my children, who must navigate the rest of life without their mother who loved them. I struggle with the loneliness, the heaviness, and the days when the bottom seems to drop out of life altogether.

But it will not always be so. Comfort waits ahead. I have seen it through the clouds. I have glimpsed it on the edge of the storm.

A mountain of white.

A sky of blue.

A land golden with morning light.

I am heading in that direction. One day I will leave this climate zone for that one. I will see Jesus, and I will see Laura.

Is my comfort, then, all future? Is there nothing for today?

There is, and it is this: Through the worst year of my life, the darkest 12 months I can imagine, I have found the best of friends. At one time, friends were a pleasant accessory to life, a nice diversion. Now I need them desperately, and my brothers and sisters in Jesus have walked steadfastly by my side.

And I have found my Savior as never before. I used to pray politely, using all the right phrases. Now I cry out like a lost and lonely child. I have prayed on my face. I have reached for the hem of His garments. I have held my arm aloft in the darkness of the night, needing the firm grasp of His hand.

I never used to pray that way. I never used to hope that way.

Now I do.

In the middle of the storm, I have found those who walk with me. When the storm parts, if only for a moment, I have seen comfort shimmering on the horizon.

Not so very far away.

Libby, L. (2003). “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” *Discipleship Journal*, 138, 48-50. Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers. Used by permission.

Marriage Made in Eden

by Alice P. Matthews and M. Gay Hubbard
Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2004. 285 pages

Reviewed by Peggy and Roger Dudley

This book is in defense of marriage as originally planned by God versus a culture that is not friendly to the Eden teaching. Marriage as described here, however, is not primarily for a couple's happiness, rather it is to be a witness of what God has planned for His children. It is to be both missional and transformational.

When we speak of marriage as *missional*, we mean the ways in which marriage as practiced by God's people can be a living demonstration to those who are not his people both of God's love and of the transforming power of the resurrection life. It is in the transformation of our everyday, ordinary life—our sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life, including our marriages—through which God seeks to reach those who have not yet chosen to be his people. (p. 25)

Alice Matthews is an associate professor of women's ministries at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and producer and participant of the daily radio program, *Discover the Word*. Gay Hubbard is a visiting lecturer in women's studies at Gordon-Conwell and in private practice with Christian Counseling Associates. Both have been married for many years. Their book is not a "how-to" volume, but a serious scholarly work with 24 pages of end references. While we found every chapter interesting and thought-provoking, it is not a "fast read." For those, however, who wish a solid biblical study of marriage, it will be worth the effort invested.

After an introductory chapter, the book is divided into two main sections. The first approaches "The Culture's Case *against* Marriage" from an historical and sociological perspective. The second and most important part responds with "God's Case *for* Marriage." This part is highly biblical and theological.

In the first section the authors hold that God's plan for marriage finds a hostile, toxic environment in the present post-modern culture. The defining characteristic of post-modernism is the belief that there is no absolute truth, but that each person creates his/her own reality. It is a "me-first" and "no-commitment" mind set.

The goal of marriage in postmodern thinking becomes then the satisfaction of the individual's quest for meaning and fulfillment. . . . And because people change, and their sense of what is good changes, marriage must remain open to revision—and to termination if or when either of the individuals' needs and desires are no longer satisfied in the relationship. (p. 40)

Thus, since 1970 the rate of new marriages in the United States has dropped by one third, and out-of-wedlock births have increased from 11% to 33%. The greatest challenge to marriage comes from cohabitation which has increased 1000% since 1970.

While these alternatives come mainly from non-believers, severe challenges to God's plan also come from the evangelical right. This results from the idealization of Victorian marriage as representing God's plan. This age developed the "doctrine of separate spheres." Men worked outside

the home as the major providers. Women kept the house and reared the children. Women were to be submissive to men. Men gained their identity in the workplace; women in the home. This was a reversal from the biblical plan for marriage which called for shared parenting, shared providing, and shared accountability.

The glue that holds two people together for life must include shared tasks that enable them to prosper and grow together. Though romance is lovely, without shared tasks, it is not enough to sustain a marriage for a lifetime. (p. 148)

Moving to the theological section, the authors maintain that God has laid out His plan for marriage throughout the entire Bible, not just in those passages that give direct instruction. What we see in Scripture is that there are no perfect people and no perfect marriages. Though human beings were created in the image of God, that image was bent and broken by sin. Yet it is God's purpose to restore that image, and one of the ways He does that is through restoring the imperfect marriages of imperfect people. In this restoration we bear witness to God's transforming power.

Incidentally, in light of current attempts to pass legislation that would define marriage, it is interesting to read: "As Christians prepare to hear God's case for marriage, they must hear it as a mandate for *Christian living* not as an agenda for legislative action" (p. 169).

The authors anchor their theology of marriage in Genesis 1 and 2. Male and female were both created in the image of God. They were given joint responsibility for procreation and for care of the earth. Their relationship would model that of the Godhead—the unity among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Humans were made for relationships. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone." As He joined the first pair, He admonished them to leave parents, cleave to each other, and become one flesh. Sin ruptured that relationship, but it is God's plan to transform those bent and broken image bearers into sons and daughters of God, and it is the restoration of the Eden marriage that demonstrates His power to do this.

The household codes of Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter are examined by the authors. They find that a notion of headship which permits one to rule over the other is a misunderstanding of the teachings of Scripture. While this review does not allow us to examine this position in detail, we note their comment that "whenever Christ is upheld as the model for husbands to follow, it is not his power, his lordship, and his authority that are presented as the traits to emulate but his humility, his abnegation, and his servant-behavior" (p. 209). The authors hold that a hierarchical view of marriage violates the four components of biblical marriage: (1) a shared calling, (2) a shared parenting, (3) a shared provisioning, and (4) a shared accountability or mutuality. Christians are called to be subject to Christ and to each other.

The book employs the theological concept of "the already-but-not-yet." As with our personal lives, our marriages are being daily transformed by God's power, but they are still imperfect. The complete transformation awaits the day of final restoration. But note:

In the light of the already-but-not-yet life of God's people, marriage is not about power. It is not about forming a hierarchy of privilege or of authority or of importance. It is not about one broken image-bearer controlling another. (p. 200)

A problem, according to Matthews and Hubbard, comes "when we act as if the 'not yet' can become the 'already' if we just get the right combination of people or try hard enough" (p. 226). We often fail to realize that human effort or changing partners is not sufficient. While we need relational skills, the Eden marriage also demands spiritual transformation. "By our choice and the Spirit's enablement, we do more than simply act better than we once acted. We *become* better than we once

were” (p. 229). “The purpose of our mission,” the authors go to explain, “is straightforward. It is our task to live as a radical alternative to the culture in a way that persuades individuals in the watching culture to choose allegiance to the Christ whom we serve,” (p. 244).

Key thoughts of the book seem summarized in the author’s contention that Christian marriage is “the intentional surrender of the individual to the commingling of two lives. Two become one, yet remain two, each the more complete for the lost individuation, the freer for the lost autonomy. . . . And in Christian marriage we have the opportunity to embody for a watching world the reality of God’s loving, powerful presence in the life of his people” (p. 250).

Drs. Peggy and Roger Dudley write from their home in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Active in marriage strengthening ministry, they are the authors of *Married and Glad of It* (Review & Herald, 1980) and *Maximum Marriage* (Review & Herald, 2003).

Raising Children To Adore God

by Patrick Kavanaugh
Grand Rapids MI: Chosen Books,
A division of Baker Book House Company, 2003. 175 pages.

Reviewed by Linda Mei Lin Koh

Raising children to glorify God! To adore God! Undoubtedly, this is a lofty goal that is close to the hearts of all Christian parents. We want to teach our children to adore God so that long after we are gone they will spend a lifetime worshiping Him. But is it really possible? This goal is sometimes overwhelming. But the author argues with passion and conviction that we can nurture such faith in our children's hearts. The entire book is filled with principles and guidelines for parents to follow through to achieve this goal.

Kavanaugh identifies modeling as a key factor in shaping our children's passion for God. Parents need to model a love for God, a lifestyle of worship, the characteristics of God and a personal relationship with Him. According to the author, adoring our God should be a seven-day affair! It is not just a Sunday or Sabbath day of corporate worship at church. It is a daily worship of our Maker. We cannot expect our children to be any more dedicated to Christ than we are ourselves.

Such counsels are really not new to Christian parents who have long clung to such verses as Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Proverbs 22; as God's word to pass on the torch of faith. But Kavanaugh's reiteration of these principles forces us to once again reexamine our own spiritual priorities. Have other things like work, sports, recreation crowded out God in our daily schedule? Have we been too busy to teach and model "when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:7)?

In addressing worship within the context of the home, the church and the child's friends, Kavanaugh brings out two very important points that are worthwhile revisiting by parents. One is the need to take a proactive involvement in our children's friendships with their peers. This is in line with biblical principle, "Know the condition of your flocks" (Proverbs 27:23). These friendships are important as they lean toward following Christ.

The second point Kavanaugh raises is the need for parents to be flexible. We need to have sound biblical principles that we hold on to without exception. But we also need to be flexible and creative with their practical implementation as our children move from infancy to young adulthood.

The chapter on the stages of children's worship is especially valuable for parents. Here the worship needs of children of different ages are identified, with suggestions on how to help them grow in spirituality in the different seasons of childhood.

This is an inspiring book based on biblical principles which I would recommend as an excellent resource for parents and teachers as well. No parent should miss reading this if they want to inspire their children to adore God, to embrace a Christian faith and lifestyle that won't end when grown children walk out of their door. Time is short; rearing children to develop a personal faith in Jesus Christ is the need of the hour!