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Life



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In the beginning God created male and female and united them as one, making the first family. Thousands of years have passed, and nothing people can suggest is better than God’s plan for marriage.

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God’s message to husband is to love their wives, and His message to wives is to respect their husbands. When men truly love their wives, and wives truly respect their husbands, the home will be filled with harmony and joy.

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God's Plan for Marriage

In the beginning God created male and female and united them as one, making the first family. Thousands of years have passed and nothing's better than God's plan for marriage. God in His wisdom created us the way He wanted us to be, male and female united together as the basis of the family and the basis of society. The Lord's way is always the best way.

Great confusion about what constitutes family and marriage now permeates our society. A Pew Forum survey released in 2010 said 39 percent of Americans believe marriage is obsolete. This change in thinking profoundly impacts our country and especially children. In 1960, 72 percent of adults in America were married. Today only half of all adults are married. Many are waiting until later in life to marry, and the number of divorced people has tripled since 1960. More than that, the number of couples living together without marriage has grown dramatically.

From the beginning God made a pattern for the home. A pattern is a form or model designed to be imitated or copied. Psalm 145:17 says, "The LORD is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds." When people follow the Lord's way they find blessing. Psalm 119:2 says, "How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, Who seek Him with all their heart." We should all take the advice of Proverbs 3:5-7, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil." Sadly, some think that they have a better way than the Lord's way.

Our today reading comes from the Gospel According to Matthew 19:3-6.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, „For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh“? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

God's pattern for the family began at creation. The Lord God said, „Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.“ God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 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“ (Genesis 1:26-28).

God saw that it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Though Adam was surrounded by every living creature, "for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:20). "So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, „This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.“ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:21-25).

God showed his love and wisdom by giving a woman to Adam, giving him just what he needed. She was a helper designed specifically for him. He didn't need another male exactly like himself;

he needed a female. No doubt Adam realized that among the animals there was male and female of each kind. Man and woman need each other physically, socially, and spiritually. Like a lock with a key or a bow with a string, each needs the other to function properly. Alone neither can accomplish what God intended.

God uses the story to speak to every age, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Our Lord Jesus, in fact, quotes this very passage in Matthew 19:5. Marriage uniquely unites a male with a female physically and emotionally. The man and woman were to become one flesh, an intimate relationship that took priority over all others. Because of this physical bond, a man should loosen the bonds he has even with his parents and loyally hold fast to his wife.

God gave us a plan for marriage to bless us with a way that would be best for everyone. First, God showed his wisdom and love toward mankind by providing marriage as the basis and the model for family. The benefits of marriage as God designed it are numerous. God’s plan for marriage provides for procreation. God’s first commandment to man is found in Genesis 1:28. God said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” It’s undeniable that it takes both a male and a female to produce a child. Second, God’s plan for marriage provides the best environment for raising children. Every child needs both a father and a mother. Each parent has a necessary and meaningful role in the rearing of children. A mother can’t do everything a father can do, and a father can’t do what a mother can do.

Third, God’s plan for marriage provides a place where righteousness dwells. God said, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). When parents simply live together without being married they provide a morally-compromised home for their children. They can’t fulfill God’s instructions to fathers to “bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Fourth, God’s plan for marriage shows great durability. When a man and a woman honor their pledge to live together after the ordinance of God until death parts them they provide security for one another and security for their children. They turn their house into a home, a dwelling filled with love and happiness.

It’s not an accident that in the original Greek New Testament the word for husband (*aner*) is the same word for male and the word for wife (*gune*) is the same word for woman. According to the New Testament, all husbands are males and all wives are female. First Corinthians 7:2 says, “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife (*gune*) and each woman her own husband (*aner*).” The Scripture here is specific; marriage is between a male (*aner*) and a female (*gune*). A husband cannot marry a husband, and a wife cannot marry a wife. Males are physically and sexually made for females, and females for males. The Bible doesn’t confuse us about God’s will on this matter. We also see here that a man is to have his own wife, not wives; and a woman is to have her own husband, not husbands.

Some argue that any two people who love each other and are sexually attracted ought to have the right to marry. Some say love and desire are more important than the laws of God. They believe they can set God’s pattern for marriage aside. If any love relationship permits marriage then should we allow adults to marry little children? Should we let brothers marry their sisters? Recently communities are forming of open relationships consisting of multiple husbands, wives, boyfriends, and girlfriends. These open relationships with “many loves” have been called *polyamorous*. Such

behavior creates chaos and ruins the moral and social fabric of the home. It will surely lead to loneliness, betrayal and broken hearts.

The Lord himself designed marriage for the blessing and benefit of mankind. God's commandments relating to wedlock are just as binding as those which relate to the plan of salvation or to worship. God's way is always best, and no alternative can replace it. We should preserve the sanctity of marriage as God ordained it. Any civil or ecclesiastical effort to alter God's teaching will inevitably lead to moral confusion. Just because people have a sexual attraction to another person doesn't mean that we have a right to be with them. We might be convinced that pedophiles are born with a predisposition towards sex with children, but few would claim that therefore it was moral, right, and good. Alcoholics might be born with a predisposition to drink, but I have never heard of an alcoholic claim alcoholism to be a moral activity on these grounds.

Feelings or desires cannot turn something that is sinful into something morally acceptable. That would be a moral chaos. Imagine telling our young people, "Please live according to the teaching of God, but, if you discover something is really attractive or tempting to you, and if you discover that is difficult to avoid, then it's all right to do. The only behaviors that are really immoral are the ones that you feel no temptation to follow." What if we said that to our kids? If a person followed that advice, one would never know when he or she is being tempted. Sexual Attraction does not make fornication or living together without marriage morally acceptable. Nor does it sanctify same-sex marriage.

James 1:13-15 says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, „I am being tempted by God“; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." Sexual temptation comes to us as a feeling; it's a strong, a very strong enticement to sin. When people give in to their lusts and sin their sins bring for spiritual death. They're not right with God.

Paul described those who would tamper with the Word of God as disgraceful and underhanded in 2 Corinthians 4:2. Tampering is the practice of twisting or distorting a Biblical passage so that it says what the person wants it to say. Tampering shows no respect for the authority of God. By its very nature, changing the Scriptures leads to deception and the corruption of the truth. Peter spoke of those "ignorant and unstable" souls who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction in 2 Peter 3:16. When people ignore God's teaching about marriage, they unalterably harm themselves.

God distinguishes sexual activity in marriage from every other sexual behavior. "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral (fornicators) and adulterous" (Hebrews 13:4). The Scriptures describe sex outside of marriage between two or more individuals as sexual immorality or fornication; in Greek it is the word *porneia*. *Porneia* is a broad term and refers to all kinds of sexual activity between unmarried people, including incest, prostitution, bestiality, and homosexuality.

Adultery takes place when a married person has a sexual contact with someone other than his or her spouse. Marriage is a covenant union that excludes all others. The Lord Jesus said, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, „Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh“? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separated" (Matthew 19:4-6). A part of the traditional marriage vow is that the two will remain united "until death do us part."

Sexual immorality of all kinds was common in pagan Corinth. Paul condemned the practice of sexual immorality; that is, fornication, adultery, and homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9. By inspiration Paul instructed the Corinthians to “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). Promiscuous, sexual immorality led to the many sexually transmitted diseases rampant in Corinth in those days, and it will lead to sexually transmitted disease today. Galatians 6:7-8 says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

Those who ignore God deceive themselves by imagining that they may have sex with whomever they please without consequences. The facts do not lie. According to a statement by Dr. Amy Lansky of the U. S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “AIDS is fifty times more prevalent among men who have sex with men than the rest of the population.” In 2008, men who had sex with men accounted for 63% of the primary and secondary syphilis cases in the United States.

The Scriptures describe homosexuality as unnatural. Romans 1:26-27 says, “For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” As a practice, sodomy is filled with filth and disease. God spoke against it because it’s harmful. God didn’t speak against it to be mean but because He loves us and knows that troubles come from sin. Let’s follow God.

I’m thankful for my sweet wife, Jackie. We’ve been married forty-five years. We committed ourselves to live a lifetime together in the holy bonds of matrimony. Divorce was never an option; we pledged nothing but death will ever separate us. Our commitment to each other has provided a stable and loving home for our four children and twelve grandchildren. Following God isn’t merely a good thing; it’s the best and the right thing to do! When people follow their feelings or the way of the world, they inevitably harm themselves. We need God’s teaching to guide us. Jeremiah 10:23 says, “I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.”

Following the Lord’s plan of salvation is also best and right. Being right with God is essential to the wellbeing of our souls. To be saved, to become a Christian, to believe, is believe Jesus is the Christ, repent of your sins, to confess Jesus as God’s Son, and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. When people heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, they acted with urgency! The people at Pentecost gladly received Peter’s words and were baptized (Acts 2:41). The men and women at Samaria heard Philip preaching the gospel, believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). The eunuch heard Philip’s sermon, saw water, and asked to be baptized. After hearing the truth, the jailer at Philippi was baptized though it was midnight (Acts 16:33). What are you waiting for? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name (Acts 22:16).

Love and Respect

God's message to husbands is to love their wives, and His message to wives is to respect their husbands. The Lord always gives the best instructions that provide for the peace and happiness of His people. The Lord's instructions on marriage are no exception. God unites us in marriage and gives us the guidance that we most need to live happy and godly lives. Marriage, as God wills it, provides love, security, and stability to our lives. It's truly the foundation of the family.

As a Christian husband and wife we should do what is right, even when doing what's right isn't easy. Jesus set the example. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21-23). Jesus loved us even when we were unlovely and sinful. He died for us, even when we were helpless and ungodly.

All marriages go through rough spots and challenges. I know that Jackie and I had our share of parenting responsibilities, financial challenges, and health problems. I'm certainly not the perfect husband, and Jackie has had to put up with all my weaknesses. Through it all, we've never forgotten the commitment that we made to each other in the presence of God and witnesses. Both of us vowed to love and respect each other. When we turn to Scripture, love and respect are the key to happiness in marriage.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians 5:22-27.

Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

The Scriptures teach the husband is the head of his wife, and she is to be subject to him. In our day, when equality seems to be so important, some think it's unfair that God gave authority to husbands over their wives. This authority, however, never gives men the right to abuse or dominate their wives. Any man who treats the woman he married unkindly is breaking God's law. He's not only disobeying God, he's also deceiving himself. Only a fool believes abusing his wife will benefit him. Wise husbands understand the better that they treat their wives, the more their wives will respond with love and respect.

When husbands fail to love their wives, their wives react with disrespect. When husbands sense a lack of respect from their wives they often act in ways that are unloving. So these feelings of being disrespected or unloved tear apart the marriage. When husbands show love and wives show respect, the marriage prospers and strengthens. You can make your marriage brighter and better, husbands, if you can learn to demonstrate Christian love to your wife.

If a disrespected husband will love his wife anyway, and if a wife who feels unloved will respect her husband anyway, they can start putting their damaged marriage back together. A wise husband pays attention to his wife. He's able to see what she needs to be happy. Every woman needs to feel her husband is close to her and cares about her. Some husbands keep their distance from their

wives, and their wives feel unloved because of it. Wives need husbands who will open up enough to share their thoughts and feelings. She feels unwanted or unneeded when he closes up and shuts her out of his life. When he keeps his life secret from her, she feels he doesn't love her enough to trust her. Wives need to know their husbands are loyal to the marriage, that he's not looking elsewhere. She also needs to know he sees her as the most important person in his life (except for God). She needs to know he cherishes and honors her.

The most important thing a husband can do is love his wife. First Corinthians 13:4-8 says, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." It never fails. Love may start with a warm feeling, but we must learn how to love our wives; and wives must learn how to love their husbands.

Some folks are harder to love than others, that's true, and love will require lots of patience and kindness. Love demands that we set "self" aside. I can't love someone else if I'm focused only on myself and I'm self-centered. Love rules out envy, and arrogance and rudeness. It learns to let small things slide and not be irritated all the time. Love bears what marriage demands, it believes and hopes the best in our spouse, and it endures. Love determines to put the best interests of our spouses before our own, regardless of the cost. Jesus loved the church like that, and He asks husbands to love their wives that way as well.

Loving your wife involves taking the time to be close to her and to listen. The happiest couples spend time with each other, talking and listening to each other. Husbands and wives should spend a good while each day in meaningful conversation. Turn the TV off, get away from the computer, and talk face to face. A wise husband will take the time to share his life with the woman that he loves. He wants her to know about him and he wants to invest his life in her by listening. To fail to pay attention to your wife is to say to her that you don't care what she has to say. Such behavior is abusive not loving.

James 1:19-20 says, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires." Much of the anger in our homes would go away if people would take the time to listen and understand the people they love. Listen to your spouse, let her finish her sentences, don't act rashly or hastily. Try to understand her life from her point of view.

Treat your wife with kindness. "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Peter 3:7). Some men have the awful attitude that because husbands are the head of the wife that this position of authority gives them the right to dominate or abuse their wives with their power. Any man who treats his wife like a doormat violates the will of God. Abusive power is a marriage killer. Husbands, treat your wife kindly, tell your wife how important and valuable she is to you. Watch for the loving smile on her face when you do that! The writer of Proverbs said, "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain" (Proverbs 31:10-11). Notice how the wise husband trusts his wife's judgments and realizes how fortunate he is to have her. It's utter foolishness for a man to expect his wife to love him and meet all his needs while he treats her unkindly. Husbands, love your wives.

Jesus taught, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12). I’m amazed how kind and good people can be to those outside the family, they’ll be nice to them, but they’ll treat their own families with disrespect. If we could see ourselves as we really are and how we treat our families, we might be quite shocked. If we had a tape recording of our words or a video of our actions, we might see ourselves the way our families see us. Some folks never consider how difficult they make their family’s lives. That’s why, every now and then, it’s good for all of us to step back and take a long look at how we’ve treated our families. Empathy is the ability to see things through the eyes of another and to feel what he or she is feeling. Sometimes we look at ourselves through other’s eyes. When we do that, we ask, what are we going see? Will we like what we see?

A wise husband will also be the spiritual leader in his home. It’s spiritually important for couples to spend time together singing, praying, and reading the Bible. There’s great value in a husband and wife privately praying together every day. Prayer allows husbands and wives to take their burdens together to God the Father. It allows them to express to each other and with each other’s presence and in the presence of God to talk about their own concerns and needs. When two people pray with each other, they develop a spiritual intimacy and unity that builds their relationship. Christian marriages, where God is the center of the home, where love and where patience and forgiveness are present, and where God’s laws are obeyed, almost never end in divorce. God’s ways are not only right ways; they are the best ways. When people truly live out their faith, the way God intended, they find their marriages to be the happiest and most loving. Husbands, do your best to make your home what God would have it to be. Be the spiritual leader in your home. God’s way is truly, truly, a way of blessing.

Peter said, “Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. (1 Peter 3:1-6). Sarah is an ideal for Christian wives to follow. As an apostle, Peter was inspired of God and as an elder, Peter himself was married. He knew the great blessing of having a good wife.

God says, “But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband” (1 Corinthians 7:2). Making your home as God teaches is critical to a happy life. Proverbs 12:4, says, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rotteness in his bones.” In Proverbs 18:22 Solomon said, “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD”; but in 19:13 he said, “a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping.” Just like a dripping faucet, a quarrelsome wife is a constant irritation. Proverbs 19:14 says, “Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.” A man who has a godly and wise wife is doubly blessed. Proverbs 31 gives us a marvelous insight into a virtuous woman who would be a prize to any man. It begins in Proverbs 31:10 with the words, “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.” He ends the chapter by saying, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30).

What kind of wife does God wish women to be? Paul says wives should show respect for their husbands. Many women find it hard to respect men. Some have stereotyped men as crude or juvenile, unworthy of respect. Masculinity, as a whole, has been under attack in our culture. Some actually think that we don't need men at all, but humanity couldn't function or reproduce itself without men. Many men work very hard and sacrifice a great deal to provide for their wives and families. Many men spend hours caring for their wives and children every day. Many men are sensitive and understanding when they need to be and firm when they need to be. Men who love their wives and live the Christian life of honesty, and integrity and purity will be men worthy of love and respect. Some men, sadly, live without integrity or purity. They treat their wives harshly. I think how tragic! Wives, however, should still respect their husbands.

How can a wife respect her husband when he doesn't deserve it? She gives him respect because of who he is and because of who she is. She gives her husband respect because she belongs to God and it's God's will. Just as I'd tell a husband to love a wife that is hard to love, I'd tell a wife to respect her husband even when he is hard to respect. Paul said, "Nevertheless let each individual among you also love his own wife even as himself; and let the wife see to it that she respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

If you want a better marriage start looking at yourself. How are you treating your spouse? Instead of constantly criticizing, start evaluating yourself. You can help your marriage by improving yourself, rather than putting down your mate. Let's clean up our own lives before we focus on the faults of our spouses. Women, do you show respect to your husband? Men, do you show love to your wife? Men are you meeting your wife's needs for love and attention, and women are you honoring your husband by meeting his needs?

We can't change our spouses by making unreasonable demands, but we can change ourselves. When we change for the better our spouses will appreciate those changes and will want to change as well. Improving our marriages begins with improving our hearts. Nothing makes a more loving heart than entering into a loving relationship with God. When the love of God is in your heart, you'll become more loving and respectful to your family.

Does the love of God live in you? Are you committed to Christ? To become a Christian you must have love for and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Loving God means turning away from the sinful and hurtful ways of the world and embracing the loving and righteous ways of Christ. We call this repentance, a change of heart that leads to a change of life. Upon your repentance and the confession of your faith the Lord asks you to be baptized in His name, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins. In baptism you'll be united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection according to Romans 6:3-7. The Lord will wash away your sins (Acts 22:16) and add you to His church (Acts 2:47). You'll be in God's family. I hope you'll come to Christ today.

Communication

Communicating love is one of the most important elements of any relationship. God's Word reveals valuable insights for every aspect of our lives. When we follow God's instructions we can see how our lives and our relationships improve. When we selfishly ignore God's teaching life becomes bitter and hurtful. Reading Scripture is not simply a good habit; it's how we learn the wisdom of God. Proverbs 3:13-15 says, "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom And the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her." Someone said, "I know you think you know what I'm saying, but what you think I'm saying and what I am actually saying may not be the same thing." Misunderstanding can happen between husbands and wives. One only half hears the other and assumes he or she was saying something very different from what the person was actually saying.

Communication is the barometer of any relationship, and couples who don't communicate well will find their relationship in trouble. Even when a man and woman genuinely love each other nothing can short-circuit or kill a positive relationship quicker than poorly or unfairly communicated messages. For communication to take place the hearer must not only understand what the speaker is saying but also understand what the speaker intended to say. If one speaks with the wrong tone of voice or with poorly chosen words he may well communicate a message that he never intended. If one's body language accentuates a message the speaker never intended, the listener may come away hurt or defensive. Both people must communicate their messages with love and respect.

Today's reading comes from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians 4:29-32.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Many of the problems between husbands and wives start with their inability to communicate effectively. The most valuable skill couples need is the ability to communicate with each other what they feel, what's happening, and what they need. If they refuse to talk with each other or refuse to listen to each other they cannot have a home that honors Christ. They merely have two people who live in the same house. Love works through communication. When two people stop communicating love and begin fussing and feuding, their harsh words and cruel ways build a barrier that destroys their home.

Each of us needs to examine himself or herself. Rather than looking at your spouse, look at your own behavior. Are you kind, are you forgiving, and do you treat your spouse the way you'd like to be treated? Rather than complain to your spouse continually about his or her behavior, take a look at what you're doing. What are you doing to make your lives better?

When Job suffered the loss of his family, his servants, his property, and even his health, his three friends came to comfort him. The only problem was that their harsh, accusing language was no comfort at all. They were "miserable comforters." The three couldn't see themselves; all they could see was how Job brought all his troubles upon himself. Which he didn't. Job said, "Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom!" (Job 13:5). We must realize that how, when, and

what we communicate matters to those who are listening. Attitudes, tone of voice, and body language can shape how people perceive what we say. Some messages are confused because what we say and how we say it give a mixed message.

For communication to take place the hearer must not only understand what the speaker is saying but also understand what the speaker was intending to say. If one speaks a message with the wrong tone of voice or with a poorly chosen words, he may communicate what he never intended. If one's body language accentuates a message that the speaker never intended, the listener may come away hurt or defensive. In fact, people will believe what we communicate with our body language or our tone of voice more readily than the actual words that we've spoken. Both husbands and wives must communicate their messages with love and respect.

How can we speak that what way, a way that will bless others? Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupting talk (unwholesome talk) come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Our speech to our loved ones ought to bless them, encourage them, comfort them, and build them up. Proverbs 16:23-24 says, "The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body."

People who quickly get angry and say whatever is on their mind often hurt those to whom they speak. Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back." Verse 20 of the same chapter says, "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." Loud, rude words create anger and cause a lot of trouble for those who speak and those who hear them. Proverbs 18:6-7 says, "A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul." We should pause and think before we speak. You can't take back a harsh and hurtful word after you've spoken it. You may crush a heart, you may spoil a whole day, or wound a soul with an unkind remark.

Proverbs 13:3 says, "Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." You may, like David, say, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!" (Psalm 141:3). What we say reveals what's in our hearts; and you can tell a lot about the character of a person by listening to the things he says. The Lord Jesus said, "The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:35-37).

Proverbs 12:18 says, "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing." Avoid excessive faultfinding and criticism. No one wants to hear day after day that they are worthless and a failure. Solomon said, "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife" (Proverbs 21:9). Again, "It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman" (Proverbs 21:19). Again, "As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife" (Proverbs 26:21). Whether you're male or female, be careful about being quarrelsome. Never belittle your spouse by calling names or labeling. Calling our spouses names like stupid, lazy, selfish, moron, idiot, hard-headed, ugly, fat, stubborn, insensitive, or cruel only demeans them. Such name-calling is destructive to love. Some use name-calling to punish their spouses when they're hurt, frustrated, or angry. No one wins a name-calling contest.

James 1:26 says, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless." Some people are rude and cruel to their spouses and families, treating them more rudely than they would anyone outside the home. When you don't love people, you show you don't love God as you should. First John 4:20 says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." First Peter 3:7 teaches husbands to live with their wives in an understanding way and to show her honor, "so that your prayers will not be hindered." God watches how we treat our spouses; and that seriously affects our relationship with our Father in heaven.

We also want to think about how we listen to our spouses. One of the greatest gifts you can give your husband or wife is to pay close attention to them, to hear what they want to say from their hearts. Listening is love! Spouses who listen well give the gift of themselves to their mates. Spouses must not only hear what their spouses say, they must intend to listen carefully. When both spouses give their undivided attention and understanding to their mates, they'll find their marriage relationship steadily improving. James 1:19-20 says, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires."

When you're listening, tune out everything else and give your mate your complete attention when you have matters to discuss, whether important or trivial. What may seem trivial to you could be very important to your mate. Try to put yourself in your spouse's place. The Lord Jesus said, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Treat your spouse the way that you want them to treat you is fundamental to a good relationship.

If they start the conversation, give them plenty of time to finish what they intend to say. If you start the conversation, give your spouse equal time to respond. If you cheat your spouse out of an opportunity to speak his or her heart, you'll damage your relationship altogether. When your spouse speaks to you, listen with your ears, your eyes, and your heart. Look him or her in the eye. Read their body language and facial expressions. Listen not only to his or her words but also to the tone of voice. Become aware not only of the content of the message but also of the feelings expressed. The speaker's task is to speak with honesty and accuracy, but the listener's task is to hear and understand what the speaker intends to say.

While your spouse is speaking, don't interrupt. Interrupting can be rude and presumptuous. Interrupting causes our spouses to feel that we don't care about them, that we aren't listening, that we only want to speak our mind, or that what they have to say isn't important. Interrupting means that we haven't given our spouses a chance to say fully what is on their minds. Instead of interrupting, listen closely so that you'll be able to repeat what they have said and what they mean. Wait on all the facts. Proverbs 18:13 says, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." Be sure you've understood correctly what they're saying.

It's a helpful exercise to repeat what a partner has said and meant, asking your loved one, "Did I hear what you meant to say to me? Did I accurately understand your feelings?" Listening to fair criticism can be painful. It demands humility, concentration, and self-control to be a great listener. We must be willing to put our own thoughts aside so that we can understand what another is feeling and wanting to say to us.

We must also avoid mind-reading. Assuming what the other person thinks so that there is no need to listen or ask questions is both unloving and disrespectful. It's better to ask questions than it is to accuse someone rashly. John 7:51 says, "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?" Proverbs 18:17 says, "The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him."

When we listen well, we give our spouses the opportunity to think out loud, to say something to himself or herself. Listening with love and patience allows our spouses to vent the emotions that have built up inside them. First Peter 4:8 says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." It's better to let someone speak what is on their heart than to refuse to listen to their complaints and frustrations. Let them express what they feel rather than let their frustrations develop into anger and the decision to strike back.

The love two people share with each other should dictate how they communicate with each other. Nagging, put-downs, unfair accusations, constant complaining, and lying never help to build strong marriages. Learning to ask politely, to endure patiently, to forgive repeatedly will strengthen any marriage. If you're facing serious problems in your marriage, you may want to pray fervently about them and read through the book of Proverbs. You may also consider a marriage counselor who has Christian values to help you work through your problems.

Work on your own problems first. When you make changes for the better, your mate will notice and appreciate them. It will lead him or her to make changes in their lives too. You can have a better marriage by following the Lord Jesus Christ, by overcoming your hurts, and by drawing closer to your spouse. We all make mistakes, but we can change the way we speak and behave towards those we love. Why not make your commitment today to be more loving and kind to your spouse!

Every husband and wife need to communicate some essential things to their spouses. We all need to stop the world for a day and focus on your spouses. First, we need to say to them, "I love you". We ought to tell our mates we love them often every day. These are the most important times of your day as a married person. Second, we should also say, "I like you." This is the key to romance and marriage—friendship. Let them know that you enjoy being with them.

Reassurance is vital to a happy home. Tell your spouse, "You can trust me. I want us to be best friends and love each other. I'll never hurt you intentionally—not with words, or with actions. I want us to grow—individually and as a couple. I want us to be open with each other, transparent. I will be that way with you." When difficulties come and mistakes are made, we should tell our spouses, "You have permission to be angry with me. Let's talk about it. I won't hurt you when I am angry." We should say, "If you need help, I'll give it. If we need help, we'll get help. I'll be here for you, always."

The Lord Jesus can make our homes stronger when we follow His teaching. We can also find eternal life when we deny ourselves, take up our crosses daily, and follow Him. Believe in the Lord Jesus, repent of your sins, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized in His name for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). When you're baptized into Christ (baptism is an act of emersion in water) you become a child of God (Galatians 3:26 -7), and the Lord adds you to His church (Acts 2:47).

Overcoming Hurts

Living with the people that you love isn't always easy. God's Word teaches us how to have happy lives in spite of our weaknesses. When people obey God, they find their lives grow richer and better. God's wisdom found in the Word truly leads us to an abundant life. Nothing could be better than to have a happy home filled with love and peace. Following the Lord is the way to find just such a home. God designed marriage for the happiness of us all.

Sociologist Linda Waite and researcher Maggie Gallagher declare that, "The evidence from four decades of research is surprisingly clear: A good marriage is both men's and women's best bet for living a long and healthy life." Men and women in their first marriages, on average, enjoy significantly higher levels of physical and mental health than those who are either single, divorced or living together. The research on this is very strong.

We must realize our faith affects our marriage. When two committed Christians get married, they're less likely to get a divorce than those who have no commitment to Christ. Committed Christians who know and love the Lord deal with conflict and offenses differently than those who don't have faith in God. Their love for God means that they take their vows seriously and they strive to work through their problems rather than give up when times get tough. The love of God opens the door for them to show their love to their spouses in ways that keep the marriage alive and strong. We can overcome the hurts and offenses of life by following the Lord.

Our reading today comes from Paul's Letter to the Colossians 3:12-15.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Perhaps your marriage has suffered from years of unhealthy ways of dealing with conflict. We know we can't change the past, but we can start fresh for the future. We need to begin by taking responsibility for our part in conflicts. Husbands and wives have different experiences, concerns, and perspectives about resolving conflicts. People often handle conflict the way that their parents handled it. The more we can learn about how our spouse's family reacted to problems, the better opportunity we have to understand our spouses.

We must learn to handle our conflicts correctly, so we can keep our marriages healthy. First Peter 4:8 says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." Every day, spouses need to affirm their love and respect for one another. Saying, "I love you," "thank you," "I appreciate you," shows them that we care by being open and honest. Listening attentively and carefully builds intimacy and trust into the relationship. Your marriage is what you make it. If you feed it with good things, it will grow happier; but if you neglect your spouse and become selfish, you'll ruin your home.

Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Keep thinking of your family as more important than yourself. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." To maintain a healthy marriage, you must watch your attitude. When

you disagree with your spouse, are you being selfish? Are you acting as a faultfinder? Are you trying to understand things from your spouse's point of view? Have you considered that your spouse may be reacting to something offensive that you've done?

Don't avoid conflict by the silent treatment. This only builds a larger barrier. Don't try to overcome conflict by acting out your emotions. Anger and shouting break down any opportunity for communication and working through problems. Instead, become an active and empathetic listener. Work hard at trying to understand what your mate is saying. Control your mouth and your emotions. Frustration causes much trouble in marriage. Men don't usually frustrate their wives by what they're doing so much as by what they fail to do. Failing to communicate, neglecting the needs of their wives, and indifference are forms of cruelty. These practices lead many women to end their marriages.

Selfish and unfeeling women who neglect the needs of their husbands, who put their husbands last in their priorities, and who constantly criticize and complain often alienate their husbands. Neglecting our spouses leads to great frustration and unhappiness. If the frustration doesn't stop, anger will grow. Life may become unbearable. Deal with your problems quickly, and don't let them multiply. Although every marriage has its bumps and its bruises, don't let them outgrow your marriage. If we allow unresolved anger to grow, it will eventually explode into deep wounds and great hurt. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." Proverbs 29:22 says, "An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."

Give each other permission to call a "time out." Each of us may need a little more time to cool off before we begin looking honestly and fairly at our differences. Don't let the sun set on your anger, but calm your anger before you speak. Let your love for each other work out the differences between you.

Some people think that manliness or strength of character means never saying you're sorry, but refusing to apologize is selfish and prideful. Refusing to apologize deeply hurts others and builds barriers between people, barriers that take years to overcome. We all need to be willing to say, "I was wrong, and I'm sorry. I know that I hurt you and I don't want to hurt you again. Please forgive me." Accept responsibility for your mistakes. The Lord Jesus said, "If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and you go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matthew 5:23).

We can't maintain a right relationship with God if we're unwilling to deal with our sins against our spouses. First Peter 3:7 says, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." How we treat our spouses matters to God! Sometimes it's better to be defrauded, neglected, and hurt than it is to blame your spouse for every transgression. "Love covers a multitude of sins." God is merciful to us when we show mercy.

Marriage can be hard and harsh at times; and the real test of love is if it can survive the tests of the unlovely. Not every matter is worth confronting your mate over. Sometimes love means allowing them to be what they are, even when it's irritating. Philippians 4:5 says, "Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near." We all need a gentle spirit that's willing to let our

love cover a multitude of sins and weaknesses. If you're having problems, focus on finding a solution to your differences rather than arguing, or accusing, or blaming.

No matter how troubled, frustrated, or angry we become, we must guard our tongues. Spoken words can cut and bruise the heart, and they're not easily forgotten. Once you speak, you can't take back your words. If you say something that cuts and hurts, apologize for it immediately. Using the word "divorce" can break a person's heart. This word wounds, rejects, and abandons hope for a continued relationship. Spouses who use such words plant the seeds of hopelessness and failure.

If there's physical abuse, unfaithfulness, or drug or alcohol abuse, then seek some help to keep your marriage alive. Everyone in an argument needs to step back in humility and ask, "Is winning this argument really worth losing my spouse?" When you love and respect your spouse, you want to build them up and encourage them. You want them to know that you admire them and are thankful to have them as your partner in life. Paul told the church, "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you're also doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Just as we ought to encourage our church family, so we ought also to encourage our spouses and to assure them of our love. If someone verbally attacks, or criticizes, or blames you, don't respond in the same manner. Romans 12:17 says, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." Then verse 21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Think of the wonderful example of Jesus, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; and while suffering, He uttered no threats, but He kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Even while suffering on the cross Jesus didn't verbally abuse or threaten anybody. First Peter 3:9 reminds us, "not to be returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."

Your spouse might get angry with you, but you don't have to respond in the same way. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger." Choose to respond with gentleness. There's no greater need in a relationship than to apologize and to forgive. When you've done something wrong, apologize immediately. When your mate has penitently asked your forgiveness, then, by all means, forgive.

Forgiveness is "forgetting against"; it means that once you've forgiven your mate you never bring up the transgression again or hold it against them. Forgiveness opens the door to reconciliation, which means that we become "friends" again. Second Corinthians 5:19 explains, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." When God forgave us, He never again counted that sin against us. Psalm 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."

We have to avoid the temptation to start figuring out ways to hurt the one who hurt us. We must not tell everyone that we know that he or she said or did something to offend us. We should never bring up our spouse's faults in front of others. Holding a grudge destroys any opportunity to grow beyond the problem. The Bible says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Forgiving our loved ones is not just God's suggestion. It's God's law! When we fail to forgive our spouses, actually we condemn ourselves. The Lord Jesus said, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15). Instead of being haughty

when we approach our loved ones who've hurt us, we should humble ourselves and approach them gently. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

When you decide to forgive, you're free to begin a more healthy method of resolving conflict. A man who was telling his friend about an argument he had had with his wife said, "Oh how I hate it, every time we have an argument; she gets historical." The friend said, "You mean hysterical." He said, "No, I mean historical. Every time we argue she drags up everything from the past and holds it against me." Folks, this is not forgiveness; forgiveness lets a matter go, and it lets it go for good. It never brings it up again.

Here is what should happen between Christian husbands and wives. When a spouse is truly hurt and needs to deal with an offense, he or she needs the courage gently and humbly to tell the one who offended, "I was hurt when you said this or did this." They need to explain what hurt them and why it hurt.

In response, the other spouse needs to say humbly and penitently, "I'm sorry I hurt you; please forgive me. I'll make every effort never to do this again." Once a sincere and penitent apology is given, the offended spouse needs to say, "I forgive you, and I will never bring this situation up to you again." This process of dealing with conflict is vital, because it opens the door to reconciliation. The promise not to repeat the offense and the promise not to hold it against the offender gives a foundation to maintain the relationship. This is how God treats us and how He wishes us to treat one another. Once the fires of marriage begin to cool, it's easy to take our spouses for granted and become complacent. People stop being as kind and courteous as they ought. They may neglect their spouse's needs and selfishly pursue their own desires. In the end, someone gets devastated.

I hope you aren't listening today with a broken heart. I hope your marriage is everything you hoped for. If you're broken hearted, you may be asking, "How do I forgive this deep wound in my life? How do I stop holding these offenses against my spouse?" Think with me. How did Jesus forgive you of all your sins?

Can you recall the worst sins you have ever committed, the sins of which you're most ashamed? When you became a Christian, Jesus forgave them. Can you recall the smallest sins that you've ever committed, things that you don't think are so bad but which offend God? When you became a Christian, Jesus forgave them, too. Every one of those sins – big or small – brought and still brings spiritual death if not forgiven. Where would we be without the blood of Jesus? His forgiveness and His grace is a blessing to us.

If the Lord Jesus could forgive us, can we not forgive? Forgiveness is better than forgetting, because forgiveness offers the hope of reconciliation. Forgiveness brings reconciliation, making friends again; and Jesus bore the cross paying for our sins so that we might be forgiven and may be able to be a friend to God. God wants us to remain close to Him, so He made the way possible through the blood of Jesus for us to be forgiven. To become a Christian you must believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart. Out of love for Him, you must repent of your sins by turning away from all evil and turning to what's good. Upon the confession of your faith, be baptized into Christ. And in baptism, the blood of Jesus will wash away your sins. Get right with God today!

Building Intimacy

How can husbands and wives grow closer and make their marriages stronger? Today, we're going to discuss building intimacy in marriage. We study God's Word because we love Him and want to stay close to Him. The best way truly to know God is to study what God has revealed about Himself in His Word. We also realize that the One who blessed mankind with the marriage of Adam and Eve still has the best plan for men and women today.

Intimacy is the close sharing of ourselves with our mates—our thoughts, feelings, plans, hopes and dreams—our very souls and bodies. Intimacy has two essential elements: first, the security of being truly loved, accepted, and valued for what we are. Second, the significance and privilege of making a substantial, lasting, positive impact on another person we love. When we love and stay close to each other as God wills, we make each other better and stronger.

The Scriptures, in Malachi 2:14, call marriage a covenant, a lifelong relationship, in which a man and a woman have vowed to remain true to each other until death parts them. It will take work to keep any marriage strong and warm for a lifetime. The key to keeping a good marriage lies in the quality of the relationship. Close marriages don't just happen. Men and women must intend to have good marriages and be willing to invest their hearts and their time into that relationship. They must be willing to make their marriages a priority and must be willing to grow together. Whether you're in a problem marriage or you've grown complacent, there's still hope for you. If you're willing to make some changes, you can have a great marriage.

Our reading today comes from Proverbs 5:15-18. Solomon is giving advice to a young man about how he should treat his wife and how he should act.

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets? Let
them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be
blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.

A loving and meaningful marriage requires intimacy. For two hearts to embrace each other, intimacy is a must. If you don't know how your partner thinks and feels about various issues or concerns, he or she is somewhat of a stranger to you. For two hearts to bond, they cannot be strangers. Some assume that intimacy automatically occurs between married partners, but I've seen far too many "married strangers." I've talked to too many husbands and wives who feel isolated from their spouses and lonely, even after many years of marriage. I've heard statements like, "We share the same house, the same table, and the same bed, but we might as well be strangers." Or, "We've lived together for twenty-three years, and yet I don't know my spouse any better now than when we first married." Or, "What really hurts is that we can spend a weekend together and I still feel lonely. I think I married someone who would rather be a hermit." Intimacy is not automatic; it takes work for two people to grow close.

There are three types of intimacy in marriage. The first is emotional: loving support, sharing of burdens, sharing of goals, showing that we esteem our mate, and loving attention. In Song of Solomon 3:2, the bride says, "I will seek him whom my soul loves." True intimacy is more than a physical desire; it must involve the whole person, so that we can say with Song of Solomon 6:3, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." It's two hearts and two lives so intertwined that they belong to each other and they long for each other.

A second form of intimacy is physical: affection, touching, sharing in duties, and the sexual act. "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, „I have gotten a man child with the help of the LORD“" (Genesis 4:1). God regards this physical intimacy between husband and wife in marriage as honorable. First Corinthians 7:2-3 in the English Standard Version says, "But because of the temptation to sexual

immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.” Physical intimacy is not only approved in marriage but also is God’s will.

A third kind of intimacy is spiritual: shared prayer and devotions, shared morals and values, shared spiritual goals, and a shared style of handling forgiveness and reconciliation. I think here of Aquila and Priscilla, who were tent-makers and worked and traveled with Paul. When you read about one, you read about the other. When Apollos came to Ephesus, Acts 18:26 says that Priscilla and Aquila pulled him aside “and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” First Corinthians 16:19 says that Aquila and Priscilla had a church meeting in their house. Paul said, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well” (Romans 16:3-4). Aquila and Priscilla shared their lives and their faith together.

When couples share faith and values, they’re able to teach others the gospel together and to give their children an unconfused message about God. When a husband and wife disagree over morals, spiritual truths, and values, they leave their children guessing as to what is right and wrong. Couples need to be united spiritually in the truth of God’s word.

The Scriptures give a sad picture of a husband and wife who never had the kind of intimacy that God desires. I’m speaking here of King David and Michal, the daughter of Saul. Second Samuel 6:16 records, “Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.” Verse 23 says, “Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.” Intimacy is first a matter of the heart. To have true intimacy two people must love each other and must maintain that love.

How can I develop this intimacy in my marriage? First, I must accept and welcome my spouse as my partner in life. All husbands and wives have differences in the way they think, the way they do things, and the way they like to eat, the things they eat and the way they react to things. Accepting my spouse means I will love and respect him or her, even though we may differ on things that do not matter. Some things matter and some things don’t. We need to accept our spouses in matters that don’t involve accepting or approving sin. Should your spouse sin, loving your spouse means humbly confronting the sin in the hope they will repent. In those matters which do not involve sin, your spouse needs to know you love and accept them as a person.

Second, everyone needs affection. They need to know that they’re cared for through loving words and through physical touch. Hugs and kisses are essential to happiness in marriage. Sweet notes, caring deeds, and expressions of love ought to flow between husbands and wives. Virginia Satir, a family therapist, said, “We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need twelve hugs a day for growth.” Five times the Scriptures urge Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss or a kiss of love. Everyone needs affection.

Third, husbands and wives need appreciation. They need the feeling of gratefulness from their spouse. Nothing hurts more than to feel unappreciated for what you do for your family. Every husband and every wife need recognition for the good they do and the sacrifices they make for the family. Saying “thank you” and “I appreciate you” should be part of our everyday conversation with our mates.

Fourth, we must give our spouses our undivided attention, interest, and support. Withholding your attention from your spouse says, “I don’t care about you.” When your spouse needs you, don’t selfishly refuse them. Giving your spouse your attention is how you let them know you

genuinely care for them and respect them. You want your spouse to feel highly valued and prized in your heart. Show them by paying attention.

Fifth, when your spouse hurts physically or emotionally, give them comfort. Comfort means saying tender words, putting an arm around them, and feeling their hurts with them. When Mary and Martha lost their brother Lazarus, Jesus wept with them. Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). When those we love hurt, we should empathize and give comfort.

Sixth, everyone needs encouragement. Husbands and wives need to know their spouses believe in them and want them to move forward and to grow as a person. First Thessalonians 5:11 says to all Christians, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” We especially need encouragement from the person we’ve married.

Seventh, we need to be secure in our relationship with the one we love. We need to know that they will help us, all of us need that, and that they will help us to remain free from harm or danger. A secure and stable home, where mom and dad love each other, is the best place for children to grow and prosper. Every parent wants his child to grow as Jesus did. Luke 2:52 says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” Children in Christian homes where mother and father are secure in their love make better grades and avoid the pitfalls of life.

Last, husbands and wives need to support one another. Each one needs to know that he or she has someone to walk alongside and help carry the loads of life. They have someone to share their victories and their grief, someone who understands their burdens and their dreams. Marriage is a partnership of two people who complete each other and who help each other succeed in the challenges of life. Everyone needs to know there is someone in their corner who will cheer them and stand by them. Just as the Lord supports and watches over us, we as married couples need to say to our spouses, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

It’s vitally important for husbands and wives to pray together. When a man and woman marry they no longer think and act as a single person. It is no longer “I” but “we.” All of life is then lived in connection with another person. Everything you do affects this significant person. You’re a team of two, and when both of you participate, you function better. When you confront problems and crises in your life (and you will), you can find tremendous comfort and support in your loved one who prays for you and with you. When you’re struggling financially, when you have problems at work, when you have tough decisions to make, or when you face a medical crisis, you can share the burden with your spouse; that will lighten the load.

Couples need to pray together for the health of their marriages. When you two are married, you entered into an adventure with risks and challenges. The vows that you took at your wedding will be attacked on all sides by Satan and by others. Praying together will make your marriage stronger as well as help protect you from allowing the challenges of life to separate the two of you. Couples who have prayer lists and pray daily and fervently will come to see the results of answered prayer. They will be encouraged as they see how God works in their lives.

When couples pray together, their prayers make an impact on disagreements, conflicts, and anger expressed toward each other. When you see your spouse as a child of God, valuable and precious in His sight, someone that He sent His Son to die for, that will affect how you pray for him or her. You’ll pray for what is best for your spouse. Praying together will bring you closer together. I want my wife to pray for me and with me.

Praying together brings peace for a couple. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Why do we discuss intimacy? Because intimacy with our spouses is what keeps our marriages strong and secure. When people grow close to each other, intimacy allows each to see the other as they really are. They see their strengths and weaknesses, their beauty and their flaws. This kind of closeness may seem to open the door to vulnerability, but it also provides the greatest sense of security. It allows each to say, “My spouse loves me in spite of my flaws and weaknesses. My spouse loves me for me.” When I think of the love that my devoted wife has given me in spite of my weaknesses, I’m grateful to her and I’m grateful for her, as God’s gift to me. Because of her faith in God and her love for me, she “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Love never fails. True devotion doesn’t stop loving, even when people are unlovely. God loves us that way, and so should we.

Willard F. Harley in his book, *His Needs, Her Needs*, suggests, “Give your undivided attention to your spouse a minimum of fifteen hours each week, meeting some of your spouse’s most important needs.” I hope that you two are spending time together. The things that made husbands and wives fall in love are the things that keep them loving each other. There simply isn’t any substitute for time. After forty-five years of marriage, both Jackie and I have matured; and our marriage has developed with time. When you marry for a lifetime, you pass through several stages of life, and each stage is different. By maintaining close intimacy, two people can grow together for life a lifetime. When you give your spouse your time; you’re actually giving him or her your most precious possession— that’s yourself.

That’s true of marriage, and it’s true of our relationship with God. You can’t be close to God if you never spend time with Him. Everyday read from His Word and pray fervently to Him; praise Him in song; and count your blessings. When you give God your time; you’re giving Him your most precious possession—and that’s yourself.

When we become Christians, the Lord adds us to His church; and we unite with Christ in a covenant relationship. We have His promise of grace and love, but we must commit to trust and obey Him. To enter that covenant relationship we must hear His words, confess our faith in Him, repent of our sins, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water and it means we’re baptized into His death. That’s when the blood of Jesus washes away our sins and causes us to be born again. In baptism we’re crucified with Christ and we rise to walk in newness of life according to Romans 6:3-7.