

TOGETHER
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Life



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SEARCH PROGRAMS

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OCTOBER 6 – GOD’S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

In the beginning God created male and female and united them as one, making the first family. God’s plan was for husband and wife to live together in a committed, married relationship for life.

OCTOBER 13 – LOVE AND RESPECT

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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 is better than God's plan for marriage. God in His wisdom created us to be the way He wanted us to be, male and female united together as the basis of the family and 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 A Pew Forum survey released in 2010 said 39 percent of Americans believe marriage is obsolete.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 our 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. 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 they have a better way than the Lord's way.

Our reading today 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 according to Genesis 2:18. Though Adam was surrounded by every living creature, "for Adam there was not a helper found that was fit for him" (Verse 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. 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.

Some have suggested that Adam's declaration, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" in Genesis 2:23 reveals his commitment to Eve under all circumstances. Here God uses this 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 the 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. That is God's first commandment to man 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 cannot do everything a father can do, and a father cannot 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 cannot 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 females. First Corinthians 7:2 says, "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality (that is fornication), each man should have his own wife (that is, gune) and each woman should have her own husband (that is, aner)." The Scripture here is specific; marriage is between a male (aner) and a female (gune). A husband cannot marry another husband, and a wife cannot marry another 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. But if any love relationship permits marriage, then should we allow adults to marry little children? Or should we let brothers marry their sisters? Recently, communities are forming 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 it 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 we have the right to be with that person. We might be convinced that pedophiles are born with a predisposition toward sex with children, but I think only a few people would ever claim that it was moral, right, and good for a pedophile to violate a child. Alcoholics might be born with a predisposition to drink, but I've never heard an alcoholic claim that alcoholism is to be a moral activity just because of these grounds.

Feelings cannot turn something sinful into something moral and 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 it is difficult to avoid, then it's okay." The only behaviors that are really immoral, according to some people, are the ones that you feel no temptation to follow." If one followed that advice, one would never know when he or she is being tempted. Sexual attraction doesn't 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. And 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 enticement to sin. When people give in to their lusts and sin, their sins bring forth spiritual death. They are 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 model of 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 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's 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 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. And what

therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (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, and 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 that were rampant in Corinth in those days, and it will lead to 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 thumb their noses at God deceive themselves by imagining that they may have sex with whomever they please without consequences. The facts do not lie. According to a recent 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. Oh, Friend, let’s follow God!

I’m so thankful for my sweet wife, Jackie. We’ve been married nearly forty years; my folks were married nearly forty-five years; and Jackie’s parents were married more than fifty. We committed ourselves to live a lifetime together in the holy bonds of matrimony. Divorce was never an option; we pledged that nothing but death will ever separate us. Our commitment to each other has provided a stable and loving home for our four children and now our ten grandchildren. Following God isn’t merely a good thing; it’s the best and 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 not one option among many but is essential to the wellbeing of our souls. To be saved, to become a Christian, you must believe Jesus is the Christ, repent of your sins, confess Jesus as the Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. This is the consistent pattern found in the book of Acts. When people heard the good news about Jesus Christ, they responded! They acted with urgency! The people at Pentecost gladly received Peter’s words and were baptized (Acts 2:41). When the people at Samaria heard Philip preaching the gospel, they believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12). When the eunuch heard Philip’s sermon and saw water, he asked to be baptized. When the jailer at Philippi found out what to do to be saved, he was baptized at once 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.

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 and the society.

As Christian husbands and wives, we should do what is right, even when doing what is right isn't easy. Jesus set the example. First Peter 2:21-23 says, "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 trusting himself to him who judges righteously." 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 have had our share of parenting responsibilities, and financial challenges, and health problems. I'm certainly not the perfect husband, and Jackie has had to put up with all my weaknesses. But 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 keys to happiness in marriage.

Our reading today comes from Paul's epistle to the church at Ephesus, chapter 5, verses 22 to 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 that 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 to 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 that abusing his wife will be a benefit to him. Wise husbands know that the better 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 behavior that shows a lack of respect. 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. But when husbands show love and wives show respect, the marriage prospers and develops. 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 is able to see what she needs to be happy in this life and to fulfill those needs. Every woman needs to feel that her husband is close to her and cares about her. Many 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 that 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 somewhere else. She also needs to know that he sees her as the most important person in his life, except for God. She needs to know that he cherishes and honors her.

The most important thing a husband can do is to 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." Love may start with a warm feeling, but we have to learn how to love our wives; and wives have to learn how to love their husbands. Some folks are harder to love than others, and love will require lots of patience and kindness. Love demands that we set "self" aside. I can't love someone else if selfishness and self-centeredness is my way. Love rules out envy, arrogance, and rudeness. It learns to let small things slide and not be irritated all the time. Love puts up with a lot of demands; it believes and hopes the best for others, and endures. Love is the determination to put the best interests of another before our own, regardless of the cost. Jesus loved the church like that, and He asks husbands to love their wives the same way.

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 television 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 to know about her and is willing 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 said, "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" (James 1:19-20). 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 her with kindness. First Peter 3:7 says, "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." 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 is violating 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 Proverbs' writer 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, realizing 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 and unfairly. 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 at how kind and good people can be to those outside the family but 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 that our families see us. Some folks never consider how difficult they make their family's lives. That is why, every now and then, it's good for all of us to step back and take a long look at how we have treated our families. Empathy is the ability to see things through the eyes of another and to feel what the other is feeling. When we look at ourselves through other's eyes, what will we see? Will we like what we see when we look at ourselves?

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 in each other's presence and in the presence of God their 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 a 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.

Solomon had a lot to say about wives in the book of Proverbs. Solomon, of course, had 700 wives and 300 concubines. While I don't recommend that, I know Solomon had been given the wisdom of God; and we can learn from God through him. Solomon said, "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is as rottenness in his bones" (Proverbs 12:4). Again, Solomon said, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22). He also says, "a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping" (Proverbs 19:13). 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. King Lemuel, not

Solomon, in Proverbs 31 gave a marvelous insight into a virtuous woman. He said, “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies” (Proverbs 31:10). 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, and 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, integrity and purity will be men worthy of 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.

Why do you say that? How can a wife respect her husband, you might ask, when he doesn't deserve it? She gives him respect, both because of who he is as her husband and because of who she is as a Christian wife. She gives her husband respect because she belongs to God and it's God's will. We must do what is right regardless of what others do. Just as I would tell a husband to love a wife that's hard to love, I would 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 your spouse, why not evaluate yourself? You can improve your marriage best by starting with yourself, rather than pointing a finger at 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? 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 make changes for the better in ourselves, our spouses will appreciate those changes and will want to do better as well. Improving our marriages begins with improving our hearts. Nothing makes a better, more giving and more loving heart, than entering into a loving relationship with God. When the love of God is in your heart, you will become more loving and respectful to your family.

Does the love of God live in you? Are you a committed Christian? To become a Christian you must have love and faith in your heart for the Lord Jesus Christ. Loving God means turning away from the sinful and hurtful ways of the world and embracing and loving the righteous ways of Christ. We call this repentance; it's a change of heart that leads to a change of life. Upon your repentance and a confession of your faith, the Lord asks you to be baptized in His name; that is 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. At that time, the Lord will wash away your sins; He will add you to His church. You'll be in the family of God, blessed by Him. Oh, I hope you'll come to Christ today.

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 the 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 in their book, *The Case for Marriage*, declare, "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 also need to realize that our faith affects our marriage. When two committed Christians get married, they are less likely to end their marriage in divorce than those who have no religious affiliation. 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 Jesus.

Our reading today comes from Ephesians 4:26-32. "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. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. 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." 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 the 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. And by 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 makes a bigger 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 and they lead many women to end their marriages. Selfish and unfeeling women who neglect the needs of their husbands, and 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, life together can become unbearable.

Deal with your problems quickly, and don't let them grow. Though every marriage has its bumps and its bruises, don't let them outgrow your marriage. If we allow our 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." Again, 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 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 that take many 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 irritates. 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 are 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 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 found in 1 Peter 2:23, "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." 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, "that 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 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 a 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, tender-hearted, 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, 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, “Well, 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.” This is not forgiveness; forgiveness lets a matter 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 to gently and humbly 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 will 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. And in the end, someone gets devastated. I hope you aren’t listening today with a broken heart. I hope that your marriage is everything that you hoped for. But 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?” How did Jesus forgive you of all you have done to Him?

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 is good. Upon the confession of your faith, be baptized into Christ. 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 we want to stay close to Him. The best way to truly 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 that 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 whole 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 time into that relationship. They must be willing to make their marriages a priority and must be willing to grow together. Whether you are in a problem marriage or you've grown complacent, there's 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. "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." It is impossible for a meaningful marriage to exist without intimacy. For two hearts to touch 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 be bonded together, they cannot be strangers. Some people 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 have 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-some 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 have preferred to be a hermit in some ways." No, intimacy is not automatic; it takes work to build a good marriage.

There are three types of intimacy in marriage. The first is emotional: loving support, sharing of burdens, sharing of goals, affirming that you esteem the other person, and loving attention. In The 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 The Song of Solomon 6:3, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." It's two hearts and two lives that are so intertwined that they belong to each other and they long for each other.

A second form of intimacy is physical: it's affection, touching, sharing in duties, the sexual act. Genesis 4:1 says, "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD.'" God

regards this physical intimacy between husband and wife in marriage as honorable. First Corinthians 7:2-3 says in the English Standard Version, "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, but it is the will of God in marriage.

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 Priscilla and Aquila pulled him aside "and explained to him the way of God more accurately." First Corinthians 16:19 says Aquila and Priscilla had a church meeting in their house. Paul said, "Greet Prisca (that is, 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 are 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, and 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 us a very 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 simply says, "Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death." Intimacy is first and foremost 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 throughout my whole life. All husbands and wives have differences in the way they think, the way that they do things, what they like to eat, and the way they react to many things. Accepting my spouse means that I will love and respect him or her, even though we may differ on things that don't matter. Some things matter and some don't. We need to accept our spouse in everyday matters that are neither right nor wrong. I'm not speaking here of accepting or approving of sin. Should your spouse sin, loving your spouse means humbly confronting the sin in the hope that they will repent. But in those matters which don't involve sin, your spouse needs to know that you love and accept them as a person.

Second, everyone needs affection that's non-sexual. They need to know that they are cared for through loving words and through physical touch. Hugs and kisses are essential 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. And 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.

Everyone needs to be acknowledged for the good that they do. Saying “thank you” and “I appreciate you” ought to be part of our everyday conversation with our mates.

Fourth, we must give our spouses our undivided attention, interest, and support. By withholding your attention from your spouse, you’re saying, “Well, 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 that 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, give them comfort. Comfort means coming to their side with 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 the 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 need to hurt with them and to comfort them.

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 that we married.

Seventh, we need to be secure in our relationship with the one that we love. We need to know that they will help us 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; that 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 a woman marry, they no longer think and act as a single person. It’s 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, it’s a tremendous source of comfort and support to know that here is another person who will pray for you and with you. When you’re struggling financially, or with problems at work, when you have tough decisions to make, or face a medical crisis, to be able to share the burden with your spouse lightens the load.

Couples need to pray together for the health of their marriage. When you married, you entered into an adventure that has risks. 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'll be encouraged as they see how God works in their lives.

When couples pray together, it has 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, wouldn't that have an effect on how you pray for him or her? Wouldn't that also have an effect on how their prayers matter to God? 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 Jackie has given me all these nearly 40 years in spite of my weaknesses, I'm grateful to her and for her. Because of her faith in God and her love for me, she "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Her love never fails. True devotion doesn't stop loving, even when people are unlovely. God loves that way, and so should we as husbands and wives.

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 you husbands and wives are spending time together. The things that made husbands and wives fall in love are the things that keep them loving. There simply isn't any substitute for time. After nearly forty years of marriage, I've learned that both Jackie and I have matured and changed. When you marry for a lifetime, you pass through several stages of life, and each one of those stages is different. Only by maintaining a close intimacy can two people continue to grow together for life. When you give your spouse your time, you're giving him or her your most precious possession – 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. Every day read from His Word; every day pray fervently to Him; every day praise Him in song; and every day count your blessings. When you give God your time, you're giving Him your most precious possession – yourself.

When we become Christians and are added to the Lord's church, we unite with Christ in a covenant relationship. We have His promise of His grace and love, but we must trust and obey Him. To enter into that relationship, that covenant relationship, we must hear His words, confess our faith in Him, repent of our sins and determine to take up our cross, and be baptized into Christ. When we are baptized into Christ, we're baptized into His death. At that time, the blood of Jesus washes away our sins, and unites us with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. In baptism, we are crucified with Him and we rise to walk in newness of life according to Romans 6:3-7.