Rekindle the Romance

A
t the marriage altar, the magnetic bond of love between husband and wife seems unassailable. But at some point those whose marriages endure recognize that lasting marital happiness consists of more than candlelit dinners and soft music. As romantic evenings give way to morning feedings, first days of school and high school graduations, those who succeed at marriage realize that “I love you” is only the beginning and not the end of an ever-enriching love.

If their marriage is to last, the couple eventually comes to grips with a deeper fundamental understanding of marriage. Although many books profess to have the answers for eliminating marital woes and maximizing an ever-enriching love, no book provides the answers that so many seek, but so few grasp. The Bible makes plain the importance of prioritizing our marriage partner: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). “In the same way, you husbands must show understanding in your married life: treat your wives with respect, not only because they are physically weaker, but also because God’s gift of life is something you share together. Then your prayers will not be impeded” (1 Peter 3:7, Revised English Bible).

The apostle Peter highlights a fact of great significance here: God views both husband and wife as equal inheritors of eternal life.

A fundamental biblical principle of marital happiness focuses on husbands and wives making each other a top priority. When a couple honors each other in this way, they show respect and honor toward God’s institution of marriage and, more importantly, an understanding of godly love—which is ongoing concern for others.

True love hinges on deliberate, selfless serving of others. Second only to our relationship with God, giving priority to our spouse is a divine directive. All loving marital behavior originates at the spiritual, not the physical, level. It stems from a mutual love and respect for one another. There is no substitute for this mandate. For those who desire a happy marriage, this is not an option.

When the sinless Jesus Christ died for sinful humankind, He set the standard for the marriage covenant. Jesus made humanity the top priority in His life (Ephesians 5:22-23), second only to His relationship with God the Father. In like manner, husbands and wives must make their mates a top priority in their lives.

There is no greater love than sacrificing ourselves for others. Jesus stated: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). This should especially be our attitude in marriage. Apart from an intimate relationship with God, there should be no closer relationship on earth than that between husband and wife.

The best way to breathe romance back into your marriage is by making your wife or your husband a top priority in your life. This unequivocally translates into time together—perhaps candlelit dinners, soft music and more.

Over time, candlelit dinners for two may blossom into exciting, memorable meals and school activities shared by a family that has been seeded by the mutual love of the parents. A couple’s love that’s fulfilled in a loving family inevitably sparks this heartfelt thought: “My cup truly runneth over.”

In your marriage, we hope that these articles from The Good News do what they are designed to do—help rekindle your romance!

—Jerold Aust
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What Are the Keys to a Happy Marriage?

by Jerold Aust

Many would have you believe that the marital union is archaic and unnecessary. Yet mankind’s Creator designed marriage as the ideal relationship for men and women. What fundamental principles can you practice to build a happy marriage?

Shannon was a beautiful young woman whose striking good looks were surpassed only by her inner beauty and character. The first time Paul saw her was shortly after work one day, when fellow coworkers met to play volleyball.

Paul had played volleyball with the group for a few weeks, but he had never seen Shannon there until that particularly balmy evening. That day Paul was enjoying a more competitive game with the men. Unexpectedly, two young women walked up and asked if they might join in the next game. The men readily agreed.

When Paul saw Shannon he knew why the men had immediately agreed. His heart raced when she smiled at him. For a moment Paul couldn’t think, though he instinctively smiled back. But his mind was no longer on the game of volleyball, as his unusual play indicated. Everyone except Paul seemed to know why he was making so many uncharacteristic mistakes.

But it was no mistake when Paul asked Shannon for a date. Soon they began wanting to spend more and more time together. So far it was an exciting storybook romance. But as they began to think about life together, they each knew they wanted more than just a fleeting romance in a world of divorce and marital discontent.

Their shared belief in God led them to seek counsel from a minister about how to prepare for a lasting, happy marriage. They committed themselves to keeping God at the center of their marriage.

About a year after they met they were married. Shannon had an inner beauty that proved to be the dream of Paul’s life. She was pleasant, thoughtful, supportive, encouraging and a good conversationalist who genuinely loved people.

Shannon proved to be a devoted wife and mother extraordinaire. They built a happy marriage and began to raise a loving family. And yet, as fairy-tale as this story
or happier marriage. Knowing that purpose there is a of sacrifice and service for it to work well. Yet “The Ultimate Goal of the Marriage Union”).

of an even greater spiritual relationship (see apostle Paul revealed marriage as a type union. Going beyond that relationship, the relationship that men and women can experience? integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond, the highest relationship that men and women can experience?

A March 2003 PBS special titled Marriage—Just a Piece of Paper? questioned whether the integrity and sanctity of marriage should be reestablished. To answer it, the program presented a series of alarming facts.

John Witte Jr., professor of law and ethics and director of the Law and Religion Program at Emory University, insightfully analyzed marriage as a piece of paper, yes, but a crucially important one.

Isn’t it about time human beings reestablished the integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond, the highest relationship that men and women can experience?

called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Yet marriage is more than just a physical union. Going beyond that relationship, the apostle Paul revealed marriage as a type of an even greater spiritual relationship (see “The Ultimate Goal of the Marriage Union”).

God knew perfectly well that the union of a husband and wife requires a certain level of sacrifice and service for it to work well. Yet there is a divine purpose for building a happy or happier marriage. Knowing that purpose can help you rise above the petty differences so common to matrimony.

Is marriage treated too casually?

“... The Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce ...” (Malachi 2:16).

God established the marital union between a husband and wife, but just look at what humankind has done to it! In the United States today, nearly half of all marriages will end in divorce.

Modern societies have unknowingly redefined the institution of marriage through the media. In the name of entertainment and profits, media have encouraged the incremental dissolution of the marriage union with impunity. Movies encourage infidelity and amorality while television sitcoms bathe our children in the notion that marriage is irrelevant. What matters most, they are essentially taught, is instant gratification.

Isn’t it about time human beings reestablished the integrity and sanctity of the marriage bond, the highest relationship that men and women can experience?

“The Good News — Marriage and Family Article Reprint

The Ultimate Goal of the Marriage Union

The five points in this article for building a happy marriage deal with the relationship in a mental and emotional sense. But there is more to this physical union than what is commonly experienced. Whether one marries or remains single, God wants us to understand there are spiritual implications to the marriage relationship.

The marriage union has an ultimate purpose that few understand. The apostle Paul gave us a glimpse of this truth when he wrote: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:31-32).

In the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ reveals that in the future, at His return to earth, He will marry the Church—the believers who have been faithful to Him and His Word. “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife [the church] has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ... Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (Revel 19:7-9).

Today’s physical marital union depicts tomorrow’s greater spiritual union—the marital union between Jesus and His Church. Some Christians are now preparing for and are actively a part of that future, permanent union. The spiritual growth of a Christian is the very process of proving ourselves ready for the ultimate goal of marriage to Christ, to be one with Him, resurrected to spirit as He is spirit (1 Corinthians 15:49-53; 1 John 3:2-3).

This is one of the underlying reasons that God instructed husband and wife to “become one flesh”—to portray the fact that we are ultimately to become spiritually at one with Christ and God the Father, Jesus prayed to the Father regarding His followers, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one...” (John 17:22-23).

For a man and woman, the marriage state is modeled on the Church’s relationship to Jesus Christ. Both relationships take sacrifice as both marriage partners work to become one with each other and with Christ.

The Church of God is now betrothed to Christ, which means the Church is promised to Him as a virgin bride (Revelation 19:7). Since human beings cannot make themselves pure, we are made clean by Jesus’ sacrifice and saved by His life (Romans 5:8-9; 1 Peter 1:18-19). However, with God’s assistance through His Holy Spirit, we are still required to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13).

The institution of marriage between a man and a woman is a tool to teach us of the Church’s eventual marriage to Jesus Christ. That marriage will be permanently and luxuriantly happy. Now is the time to begin modeling that eternal relationship with your husband or wife today, building a happy, fulfilling and productive marriage.

“Marriage, of course, is just a piece of paper,” he explained. “... But a lottery ticket is also just a piece of paper, and when it has a winning number on it that piece of paper is worth a lot. A little document that you sign, which is a mortgage contract that has thirty years of obligations that you have to discharge before you can own your home outright, is also just a piece of paper. It’s what the paper signifies.”

“What that piece of paper represents... is a bundle of rights, responsibilities, privileges, and immunities that these two parties, this couple, have vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the community. And the children that come from your union receive as a matter of course, by reason of being your children, constitutional rights of privacy, of due process, and of equal protection. They fall on you uniquely because of who you are in a marital unit.”

“... Zoning, property, taxation, social security, and a variety of other laws are in place to turn upon the marital status of the party. What you’re buying into with that piece of parchment is a bundle of rights, a bundle of responsibilities, that are quite unique to the institution” (Katherine Anderson, Don Browning and Brian Boyer, editors, Marriage—Just a Piece of Paper?, 2002, p. 410).

In spite of this, how do many people look at marriage? Some couples live together before they take a chance on marriage. This has become a social norm. Some call their first marriage a “starter marriage” or an “icebreaker marriage.”

Fifty years ago anyone discussing “starter marriages” or “icebreakers” would’ve been ostracized. Not so today. Today’s couples choose cohabitation and “icebreakers” without batting an eye. Anyone who shows
Recognize the stages of marriage

“People who are rigid in their personality and thinking—that is, highly resistant to change—were 42 percent more likely to report a high level of conflict in their relationship” (David Niven, 100 Simple Secrets of Great Relationships: What Scientists Have Learned and How You Can Use It, 2003, p. 179).

The first point in building a happy marriage is to recognize that every marriage evolves over time. Age, experience and family impact married life significantly over a lifetime.

Throughout the marital stages couples mature. They settle together, serve and love one another, smell the flowers along the way and enjoy the important things in life.

Automatic and unavoidable stages of change occur within the marriage union. When a young couple first weds, they enjoy a honeymoon period. Different couples experience marital bliss differently. Inevitably the honeymoon wears off. Then reality sets in.

After the honeymoon wears off and children begin to enter the family unit, fathers and mothers begin to adjust to a new and different set of responsibilities. Some husbands disclose that they were afraid of marriage, worried about the responsibility of taking care of a wife. Later, the new father and mother realize another, even greater, responsibility of taking care of a new baby.

Time passes, and the couple’s children enter elementary school, then the teen years, and finally they graduate from high school and either go to college or enter the workforce. All of these times are different marital stages and bring about an evolution of perspective.

But it doesn’t stop there. The kids grow older and marry, and the cycle continues. All of the little birds have flown the nest. With an empty nest, the parents may become grandparents and enter the autumn of their lives.

Throughout the marital stages—as newlyweds, parents and then grandparents—couples mature and find that struggling over cultural and gender differences is not worth the time and effort. They settle together, serve and love one another, smell the flowers along the way and enjoy the more important things in life: each other, their families and God.

Used wisely, these marital stages teach us to appreciate one another, our children, our grandchildren and life itself. Rather than resist these changes life brings, savor the stages God gives in a marriage and take good advantage of them.

Celebrate your differences

“Constant attention to the weaknesses of any relationship will weaken it. Constant attention to the strengths of any relationship will strengthen it” (Niven, p. 3).

The second point important to a happy marriage is to learn to celebrate gender differences, not compete with them. When a man and woman come together as husband and wife, there might not appear to be great differences to deal with. At first, love is blind. Later the couple discovers that life isn’t.

When a man and woman give themselves to each other, they are necessarily from two entirely different families. Often opposites will attract, which means that a couple may experience more surface differences than compatibility. Although it is good for unmarried people to seek a compatible mate, it’s not possible to find someone with no differences. And that’s not bad.

Consider your background and your marriage partner’s. Even if you married someone who lived in the same city, chances are good that your family cultures are different in many ways. Each has various talents, food preferences, music differences and activities that family members enjoy. Acceptance and compromise help alleviate these differences. The differences should be celebrated, appreciated and used for the benefit of the couple.

If couples don’t realize at first that men and women think differently, they’ll soon find out. Books abound addressing those differences.

Some marriage counselors say that women are more intuitive while men are more focused on the depth of an issue. Marriages can falter if couples don’t understand that the way men and women think is necessarily different. God made us this way so we can capitalize on our differences, making of two separate individuals one united couple—with much more strength.

Some couples catch on early that their various differences can blend and become great strengths. They use their differences wisely. Instead of fighting and struggling to make each other over in their own image, they take full advantage of their combined talents and abilities.

The good results in such marriages can be exponential and may play out in successful business and social opportunities. Embracing the differences between a husband and wife—indeed celebrating them rather than competing with one another—is a wise strategy.

Seek fulfillment in your spouse and you will find it. Seek utopia and you will be looking forever!

Where does friendship fit?

“For three out of five people, best friends were thought to be more supportive, more open in communication, and the source of stronger feelings of affection than [other] relationship partners” (Niven, p. 70).

The third point in building a happy or happier marriage is friendship. You love your partner, but do you like him or her?

Two of life’s closest relationships are married couples and best friends. Some married people assume they can share more things with a friend than with their spouse. An outside friendship might look easier on the
surface, but when does it have to deal with the struggles that inevitably arise in a marriage? If a couple can negotiate together the struggles they’ll experience in marriage, then they can also grow to appreciate their spouse as best friend.

Enjoying your spouse as both friend and marriage partner will help override many marital disagreements, whether financial or social. Couples who remain in love and in a marriage relationship will share the ups and downs that are almost inevitably must also be good friends. They will share the ups and downs that are common within the marriage relationship.

Sharing compliments and blame

“If we can learn . . . to graciously accept some of the blame and generously share the credit, we will be contributing to a happier relationship” (Niven, p. 121).

Point four in building a happy marriage has to do with sacrifice—personal sacrifice that involves sharing compliments and blame, realistically and appropriately. Realistically here means to see things as they are, as objectively as possible. Appropriately here means fitting for the occasion.

At first these might seem contradictory, as sharing one (compliments) is positive and sharing the other (blame) is negative. But the idea here is that both are done in an attitude of true—not feigned or contrived—honesty. Each must acknowledge having both strengths and weaknesses without feeling either superior or demeaned.

When you compliment your spouse, you are shining the spotlight on him or her. Giving honor that is deserved helps build a good relationship. It also takes courage and real humility for each marriage partner to realistically accept personal blame in an appropriate manner for his or her shortcomings and offenses. Both husband and wife should learn to show not only a supportive but also a sacrificing and healing attitude toward the other over the course of the marriage.

Personally I have found that the two most important phrases in a marriage relationship are “I’m sorry” and “Thank you.” When I use these phrases easily, legitimately and realistically, things naturally go more smoothly.

“You and I make our own marriage history. Try this: Share, realistically, the praise as well as the blame and watch your marriage prosper.

Remember the romance

“Satisfaction in a relationship is eight times more reliant on recent feelings and the ability to perceive improvements than it is based on the history of the relationship” (Niven, p. 86).

The fifth point is the fact that we don’t outgrow the need for human companionship or the desire to enjoy a husband-wife relationship. Do you remember when you were first married? Bells rang, stars fell from heaven and hearts melted at the sight of each other. That kind of romance should be cultivated through the years. Those who cultivate romance in their marriage will surely reap a happier marriage.

Shirley weathered a strained relationship for more than 30 years. Early in her married life, she faced a tragedy. Shortly after their wedding, her husband broke his neck. For three decades she served him as a full-time nurse. They had no satisfying relationship. She was widowed at age 60. Bravely she considered dating and drafted a list of requirements: The man had to be energetic, spiritual and younger than 71. He could not smoke, had to avoid facial hair, and would drink only on social occasions.

She found Jeff, a recent widower. They discovered each other at a roller-skating rink and spoke briefly. Before going home, Shirley said to Jeff that she was glad he came to the activity and hoped he’d return.

To make a long story short, the two have just celebrated their fifth anniversary together. They walk, dance, swim, travel and roller-skate. “My darling husband prepares breakfast daily and does so many thoughtful things like bringing me flowers often,” says Shirley. “Loving and being loved is the greatest gift in this life. And it can happen to you anytime” (Niven, pp. 173-174).

Age need not be a factor when it comes to romancing a husband or wife. Of course, health can restrict the romance. All the little things of life that we take for granted are exactly the kinds of things that keep romance alive—visiting, walking together, enjoying entertainment activities with one another, taking trips together, dining out. You can add your own host of other healthy activities that can either put romance back into your marriage or keep it going.

As social creatures, we need companionship—and no less so in a union between a husband and a wife. A good marriage takes sacrifice and service from both partners. These lead to the security and peace both need and desire.

Marital happiness and you

Shannon and Paul built a happy marriage. They knew that God instituted the union of husband and wife. Both understood the importance of marital stages. They celebrated their differences, turning them into relational strengths.

They not only loved one another, they liked each other too. They were friends and lovers. Compliments and blame were realistically shared, for they knew how easy it was to take all the credit and accept no blame. Paul and Shannon put effort into keeping their romance alive, understanding how easy it might be to take each other for granted.

If you already have a happy marriage, you likely are already doing some or all of these things. If you don’t, you can have a happy, fulfilling marriage if you and your spouse are willing to work at it, sacrifice for it and truly serve each other.

The time to begin building a happy marriage is now. May your marriage be filled with perpetual bliss. May God bless you with a happy family and may you share marital happiness with many others! GN

All the little things of life that we take for granted are exactly the kinds of things that keep romance alive—walking together, enjoying activities with one another . . .
What Is True Love?

Many young couples would say their feelings are true love. But are they? Does the Bible offer guidance to understand what true love really is?

by Jerold Aust

Imagining you were the guest on a talk show and the topic was love and marriage. How would you answer the question, “What is true love?”

Love and marriage can seem to be a complicated and sometimes iffy pursuit. About half of all modern marriages end in divorce, and many couples ignore marriage altogether in favor of living together—at least until somebody better comes along.

A job description for a husband and wife, written by the other partner, might include the following: The husband must be a sensitive lover, lawn specialist, master mechanic, carpenter, electrician, plumber and all-around handyman with the body of a professional athlete and the face of a movie star. The wife is expected to be a gourmet cook, domestic superwoman and fellow sports fan and to dress and look like a supermodel.

No marriage license comes with a descriptive set of instructions, yet because of our media addiction, modern marital expectations demand more while delivering less.

With this as starters, how in the world can any potential couple know what true love is, let alone find it?

The best-selling book (and later popular movie) Bridges of Madison County was hailed as the love story of the century. But since when did a brief encounter that ended with the participants separating and pining for one another qualify as the love story of the century? The author and movie producers were plainly pandering to human passions.

Movies like Titanic, The English Patient, Casablanca, Message in a Bottle and Dr. Zhivago—all acclaimed love stories—depict couples who never married and lived together as husband and wife. In these films not one of the couples gets past the sexual or infatuation stages.

What do such movies (and books) tell us about ourselves? They tell us that we are far more interested in falling in love than remaining there or understanding what true love is really all about!

What are some of our common misconceptions about love? They include the following:

- If you happen to meet the right person, you will automatically live happily ever after.
- Life as we know it is not perfect. We don’t get everything we want when—or how—we want it.
- Love is all about emotional chemistry.
- If love dies, you can’t get it back.
- A deep longing for someone and great desire to be with that person is true love.
- If a relationship is rocky, it means you picked the wrong mate.
- There is one and only one “soul mate” for each and every person.
- Love is all about emotional chemistry.
- A relationship that has been neglected can be restored, as many couples can affirm. When one loses a loving mate in death, he or she

Misconceptions about marriage

Misconceptions about marriage can create a destructive approach toward a good relationship. Let’s test your marital mindset with a true-or-false quiz. Consider the following actions as they relate to a happy marriage.

- Couples who seem to have happy marriages:
  T-F. Never argue.
  T-F. Do not depend on each other.
  T-F. Both want sex equally.
  T-F. Always have their needs met.
  T-F. Are never lonely.
  T-F. Share all responsibilities equally.
  T-F. Think alike on most things.
  T-F. Always agree.
  T-F. Always perceive the other’s needs.
  T-F. Always resolve their problems.

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All of these are dangerously misguided concepts, yet they are promoted incessantly in popular movies, music, books and television. It’s no wonder so many marriages and relationships run into trouble!

Where in all these misconceptions do you find that a good marriage requires sacrifice and service on the part of both partners? Why is the truth about marriages based on true love so distorted?

Although in many cases it may serve as a beginning, infatuation is not true mature love. A relationship that has been neglected can be restored, as many couples can affirm. When one loses a loving mate in death, he or she might well find another and enjoy another truly loving relationship.

The chemistry that fires infatuation between two people does not always endure in marriage. And it’s a myth that there is a “one and only” person in the world just right for you and that finding him or her is simply a matter of luck. When a relationship goes on the rocks, it’s rarely because the husband and wife picked the wrong mate. This is adolescent thinking, taught and fostered by the media.

Infatuation versus true love

Accidentally “falling” in love is often characterized as the pinnacle of human

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None of these statements is true.

Each of these statements represents an area many men and women assume must be met to experience marital happiness. But this is far from the truth. Studies conducted in the last few years about true love and lasting, satisfying relationships have helped us understand what works in marriage and what doesn’t.

Although it isn’t clear what the result would be if a couple did indeed meet all these
existence and experience. Authors, actors, scriptwriters, painters, sculptors and poets have all contributed to this mythic oxymoron.

Falling is an accident, not a mature choice. Perhaps that’s why the root meaning of infatuation is “to be foolish or stupid.” There’s a vast difference between infatuation’s temporary chemistry and the mature, true love that should develop over time between a couple. While infatuation may be a first step, it must grow through constant, sensitive, outgoing attention to become lasting true love.

Falling in love can be described in the vernacular as “puppy love” rather than true love. And regrettably, age is no stranger to this type of infatuation.

As much as one might wish to think that his or her infatuation is the real thing, we should understand that infatuation is not unique to any one person or experience. It has happened to people the world over and from time immemorial (see “Infatuation and the Human Body,” page 10).

After infatuation, then what?

Infatuation is but a beginning. The pleasurable feelings it creates are the Creator’s way to stimulate a man and woman to grow interested in one another, which can then lead them to marry, procreate and build secure and happy families. At this early stage couples make their relationship a priority; later they learn to accept differences and show each other appreciation.

When infatuation ends and when the honeymoon is over, often couples will face a crossroads. The journey to ever-deepening love can either really pick up or start to end. Those couples who continue to give careful attention to each other will enjoy and appreciate their marriage trip to ongoing happiness. Those who don’t will find they have little motivation to maintain their relationship once the infatuation wears off.

A number of good books contribute immensely to accurately identifying true love. They delineate the stages of marriage, the differences between sexual attraction, infatuation, connectedness and the mechanics that provide for true love. However, they do not fully define true love as it is presented by God in the Bible.

True love comes from God. His Word describes Him as love personified. “God is love,” we are told in 1 John 4:8, 16 (emphasis added throughout).

The Greek word used for that divine, godly love is agape. It refers to an outgoing, selfless love, as opposed to a selfish feeling or craving. (Agape love should not be confused with the two other Greek words translated “love” in the Bible—eros, which means sexual love, and philo, which means to have fondness for or endearment).

While God wants us to extend His divine love to all human beings, we should apply that kind of selfless, outgoing love most of all in the closest of all human relationships—the marriage union.

Learning the meaning of godly love

Jesus Christ demonstrated how to show true love. He exemplified God’s love for mankind. He showed true love through His focus on self-sacrifice, the seeking of the well-being and benefit of others at one’s own expense. That is true love!

Christianity has long taught love, as have various other religions. However, generally people have thought that they should love only those they considered worthy of being loved. But this is not true godly love.

Romans 5:8 describes godly love in action: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God loved all mankind—you and me included—so much that He gave up what He loved most, His Son Jesus Christ, for our sakes (John 3:16).

He loved us not because we were lovable or worthy of that love, but because He is the personification of true love. So the greatness of godly love, true love, has been demonstrated by God Himself.

And that love is based on standards of behavior that show concern for the well-being of others over our own selfish wants and desires. God even gives His Spirit to enable us to exhibit true godly love toward others. Through His commands and laws He defines the kind of behavior that shows love for others.

As the apostle Paul explained: “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9-10).

It requires humility before Almighty God to accept His definition and conditions of love: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

God’s commandments and true love

Authors of books about love rarely understand the principle that true love translates into keeping God’s commandments. Consider biblical commentator John Stott’s keen analysis of 1 John 5:3: “Love for God has a second inescapable consequence, namely obedience. If we truly love God, we not only love his children, but also find ourselves carrying out his commands . . . ”

“Love for God is not an emotional experience so much as a moral commitment. Indeed, whether shown to God or human beings, agape is always practical and active. Love for our brothers and sisters expresses itself ‘with actions and in truth,’ and especially in sacrificial service (3:17-18); love for God in carrying out His commands. Jesus said the same thing about the meaning of love for Himself (Jn. 14:15, 21)’” (“The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 2000, Vol. 19, p. 175-176, emphasis in original).

Regrettably, few Bible instructors teach the seamless connection between God’s commandments and true love because they’ve been taught and influenced to believe that God’s commandments are largely arbitrary or outdated in our modern world.

Satan, the destroyer, the avowed enemy of humanity and of marital happiness, is the primary opponent of God’s true love (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Revelation 9:11; 12:9). One of his purposes is to destroy the family unit, and in so doing to wreak havoc.
Infatuation is an obsessive focus on one particular person. How does it work from a scientific point of view? The neurobiological effects of infatuation have been researched and identified. Dr. Pat Love writes:

"The infatuation syndrome is truly an example of Mother Nature at her finest. All the predictable behaviors that accompany that falling-in-love experience are brought on by a naturally orchestrated, drastic change in brain chemistry. When you meet a strong candidate for love, your limbic system is flooded with a powerful chemical concoction—so powerful that scientists now believe that the euphoria of infatuation is a bona fide, altered state of consciousness. It is induced by the action of phenylethylamine (PEA), which is a naturally occurring, amphetamine-like neurotransmitter. When we come into contact with a person who highly attracts us, our brain becomes saturated with a love cocktail comprised of PEA and several other excitatory neurotransmitters, including dopamine and norepinephrine.

"PEA, known as the 'love molecule,' works in concert with dopamine and norepinephrine and triggers incredible side effects. Symptoms include a delightfully positive attitude, increased energy, decreased need for sleep, and loss of appetite. Increased concentrations of dopamine in the brain are associated with euphoria. Norepinephrine, which is chemically derived from dopamine, is generally associated with exhilaration, excessive energy, and other excitatory responses." (The Truth About Love: The Highs, the Lows, and How You Can Make It Last Forever, 2001, pp. 28-29).

Recommended Reading

What is love all about? How can you better understand love and how to show true love in your life? Request or download our free booklet Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion to learn how God defines love and how He empowers us to learn to love others as He loves us. And to learn how to put His love into practice in many aspects of life, request your free copy of the booklet The Ten Commandments; God's guiding principles for showing love toward Him and toward our fellow man. The time is coming when all humanity will learn to live by those divine laws. Why not get a head start now?

Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org

Realistically, those who experience true love also experience occasional disagreements, occasionally don’t have their needs met, are sometimes lonely, may disagree on important issues and don’t always resolve their problems. That’s part of life between two imperfect human beings.

And it certainly can improve our marriage relationships. Through His Spirit, God conveys His true love to a husband and wife. (If you would like to learn more about the transforming power of God’s Spirit, request our free booklet Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion or contact our office nearest you. Also, we offer free ministerial counsel if you so desire.)

You can enjoy true love

True love, like life itself, experiences normal, predictable stages. The attraction between a man and a woman which God put within us can lead to the start of a strong emotional bond between husband and wife. Beyond this stage lies the joy of sacrificing, serving and sharing life and a spiritual bond together. Ultimately, true love leads to developing a lifelong friendship with our mate.

Realistically, those who experience true love also experience occasional disagreements, will desire romance at different times, occasionally don’t have their needs met, are sometimes lonely, may disagree on important issues, sometimes misperceive their partner’s needs and don’t always resolve their problems. That’s part of life between two imperfect human beings. That’s marriage. That’s reality. And resolving these differences successfully is part of what makes up true, lasting love.

True love grows through caring for each other in a selfless, and sometimes self-sacrificing, manner where each spouse freely gives of himself or herself. When we are on our deathbeds, will we wish that we had spent more time trying to make money rather than having spent more time with our mates and families? Far more often, the regret is for not having placed enough emphasis on our family relationships.

Husbands and wives, tell your beloved that you love him or her—daily. And in other ways communicate your love to each another. Cultivate your relationship with your mate. Then thank God for giving you a loving partner to share your life.

Remember that God is the author of true, unselfish love. If you want true love, go to God for it, for He can give you the power and desire to put into practice the little things in marriage that constitute true love. He can help you develop more outgoing concern for the needs of your husband or wife rather than concentrating solely on your own feelings and desires.

If you do, you can enjoy true love. True love comes to those who are willing to make their personal wants and desires secondary in giving of themselves to their beloved, lifelong marriage partner.

Don’t expect the fullness of true love overnight. True love grows as a husband and wife learn how to better meet the needs and desires of the other. True love matures through living experiences.

May your marriage reap the lasting benefits of true love! GN
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While you’re there, be sure to take a look at our sister publications, Virtual Christian Magazine (available only on the Internet at www.vcmagazine.org) and World News and Prophecy. You’ll find them filled with helpful articles much like those you enjoy in The Good News.

Our sister Web site, www.ucg.org, is packed with an astounding amount of information about the Bible. The most in-depth is our Bible Reading Program, a daily study that takes you on a chapter-by-chapter journey of discovery through the entire Bible. You’ll find a monthly reading schedule (with archives for previous months), enlightening commentary for each chapter, supplementary reading and graphic aids such as charts and maps to open up your understanding of the Scriptures as never before.

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My wife and I recently celebrated our silver wedding anniversary. We’ve been blessed with two wonderful children, now grown, and 25 years of marital happiness in what is popularly known as a “nuclear family.”

Looking at the world around us, we find ourselves in the minority. Traditional families like ours have diminished over recent decades as single-parent households have steadily increased.

During the social upheavals of the 1960s, some observers predicted that marriage itself would soon become obsolete. Recent evidence, however, indicates that the number of married couples compared to singles has stabilized.

But a new debate has arisen: What constitutes a marriage? Courts and legislatures wrestle with the issue. Some believe marriages between two consenting adults should be allowed regardless of their sex. Traditionalists view marriage as being, by definition, strictly limited to the union of a man and woman.

The importance of the Bible

What is marriage, and is there a tangible benefit to keeping it intact as an institution? Does marriage really matter?

Our earliest instructions on the fundamentals of the marriage relationship are found in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In the New Testament, in rehearsing the intent and purpose of marriage, Jesus Christ referred to an early chapter in Genesis (Mark 10:6-12; Genesis 1).

Though the earliest passages of this instruction book for mankind were recorded several thousand years ago, the Bible has repeatedly proven its relevance and validity on important issues facing us. (Be sure to request our free booklet Is the Bible True?) Accompanied by proof, backed up by real evidence, we can have confidence that God’s instructions to mankind regarding marriage and other basic tenets of a godly life remain our wisest course of action and the best way to pattern our lives. This is the supreme value of the Bible.

As regular readers of The Good News know, this magazine is dedicated to demonstrating the wisdom and veracity of the Bible’s instruction on many topics ranging from creation to geology to everyday living.

In this article we turn to the most intimate of human relationships—the marital union—and see that sociologists continue to discover evidence that applying biblical principles and instructions still leads to marital success—thousands of years after those instructions were first written down for us.

To understand what a marriage is, we need to set aside people’s opinions and carefully examine the biblical foundation of the institution that remains the building block of any stable society.

After our Creator made the first man, Adam, He observed, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). God’s creation of woman was a blessing not only for the first man. The divine institution of marriage—of husband and wife loving and helping each other—has benefited society down through the ages.

The woman God created for Adam was Eve (Genesis 1:27). After establishing the exclusive male-female relationship called marriage, God instructed that the pattern was to continue: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). An intimate sexual relationship was to be part of marriage. But throughout Scripture God condemns any sexual activity outside of marriage and warns us to “flee” from it (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

God has never condoned same-sex relationships (Leviticus 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10) or described them as marriages. Supposedly enlightened efforts to legitimize such relationships by equating them with marriage are contrary to Scripture.

God knows best

Although some may think same-sex relationships are as legitimate and workable as opposite-sex ones, sociologists confirm that God knew long ago what was best for mankind. Three researchers from Carnegie-Mellon University recently put some common assumptions to the test about sex differences in communication.

In comparing the effects of male-male, female-female and male-female discussions, they found
that people listened better to others of their own sex but noted that “more emotional support was provided during opposite-sex interactions than during same-sex interactions” (Mickelson, Helgeson and Weiner, p. 220). In establishing marriage as a male-female relationship, God gave humanity the best foundation for emotional support.

From the beginning God intended that couples should not divorce (Malachi 2:16) but remain together in a respectful, loving relationship for the rest of their lives. God’s purpose was for the two to conceive children and raise a family (Malachi 2:15; 1 Timothy 5:14), teach children His ways (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) and grow in love for each other (Ephesians 5:25; John 13:34) and their Creator (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37) throughout their lives.

Many people either don’t know or don’t understand God’s instructions about how to live this kind of life. God laments that people invariably suffer when they either remain ignorant of or reject His instruction. As Hosea 4:6 tells us, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . .”

The Good News remains committed to disseminating this priceless information and instruction, the knowledge revealed by God that is so obviously missing in the thinking extant in our world.

**Impact on children**

Many people readily appreciate the benefits of happy, traditional marriages, and The Good News frequently offers information on building successful marital relationships. However, an often-overlooked aspect of marriage is its impact on children, whether good or bad. Although many single parents do commendable jobs raising their children, they can never completely replicate the benefits a child receives while living with two loving parents in the same household.

Children whose parents have successfully married are blessed with the ideal environment to grow up in as productive and emotionally stable leaders of the next generation. From firsthand experience they can learn how good relationships and happy marriages operate.

In addition to these benefits, a health dividend seems to be an additional blessing. Marianne Herring says that “children from single-parent homes are 20 percent to 40 percent more likely to suffer health problems” (“Believe Well, Live Well,” Focus on the Family, September 1994, pp. 2-4). Successful, enduring marriages greatly benefit not only the married partners but also the children they raise.

The Bible aptly advises: “Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain [temporary] life which He has given you under the sun . . . for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

Remember, marriage is a divine institution designed by God as a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman.

As I toasted my wife on our wedding anniversary, I was grateful for the understanding that she and I have received from God’s Word that has allowed us to have a happy marriage. Our experience has proven that God’s instructions work and that His teaching on marriage does not need redefining. Let’s be thankful to our great Creator for this wonderful gift. **GN**
Many great men and women have read the Bible and based their lives on it. Abraham Lincoln called it “the best gift God has ever given to man.” George Washington stated that “it is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” William Gladstone observed that “the Bible is stamped with a Specialty of Origin, and an immeasurable distance separates it from all its competitors.”

What was it that these great men came to understand? What did they discover that you don’t know? Isn’t it about time you found out, that you read God’s instruction manual for us?

We invite you to join us in the new *Good News* Bible Reading Program. In this revealing, in-depth course we’ll read through the entire Bible, book by book, in less than three years. We’ll cover the background, history and authorship of each book, discussing the time in which it was written, its major themes, the many intriguing people whose lives the Bible records for us, and the crucial lessons God wants us to learn. You’ll learn a great deal from the optional reading material we’re preparing for you and gain the kind of in-depth insight you learn from the articles in *The Good News*.

This Internet-based program is available now. You’ll find a monthly reading schedule, enlightening commentary and supplementary material to help you gain the most from your reading. You can start with the fascinating book of Genesis, which reveals the origins of the universe, life, mankind, the nations, the condition of our world and so much more, and then move forward at your own pace through the Bible.

Be sure to join us in this exciting new program. You have nothing to lose, and a new, deeper understanding of God’s Word to gain!

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Lessons From the First Marriage

God is the designer of marriage, instituting it with our first human parents, Adam and Eve. What can we learn from their marriage?

by David Treybig

The first love story is recorded for us in Genesis 2. There we read about God creating Adam as, initially, the only human being. In mankind’s earliest beginning, no Eve was to be found. “But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him,” we read in Genesis 2:20. We do not know how long Adam remained alone, but at this time he was single, isolated, the only human being anywhere.

The Bible reveals that something was wrong with this scene.

After God created Adam, according to Genesis 2:15, “then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.” So Adam had a responsibility, a job that surely proved to be fascinating for him. Adam explored and learned all about the world—animals, plants, the beautiful and intricate variations of God’s creation. Not only was he learning, but God gave him the privilege of naming all the birds and animals and other living creatures (verse 19).

A helper for the first man

Whether Adam knew it or not, God knew something was not right. “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’” (Genesis 2:18). Let’s think for a moment about why it was not good for Adam to be alone. He, of all the physical creation, was without a helper on his own level (verse 20).

If Adam were by himself for any significant amount of time, imagine how he must have felt when he observed that even animals had their mates. Through Adam’s observations of the animal kingdom, in its maleness and femaleness, he would have been constantly reminded that he was the lone human being on the planet. He was a male with no corresponding female.

Single people often find themselves in lonely circumstances. They want friendships and feel the isolation of being alone. Because of situations all too common in our world, even married people can experience loneliness.

God recognized that Adam had a problem and provided him the perfect solution—a woman to be his wife. God, as the source of every perfect gift, knew just how to form the woman (James 1:17).

God had made Adam from the ground. Adam is simply a shortened form of the Hebrew word adamah, which means “ground.” But, instead of using more soil to make Eve, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and made Eve out of one of his ribs (Genesis 2:21-22). The Hebrew word for “made” is banah and is translated “build.” God literally built Eve. Ever loving, kind and merciful, God took great delight in forming Eve, physically and mentally, to be the perfect complement for Adam.

Scripture emphasizes another aspect of the first marital relationship. Because God made Eve from one of Adam’s ribs, an undeniable bond existed between Adam and Eve. This point was undoubtedly significant to Adam. His first recorded words regarding Eve were, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). Adam recognized his link to this creature named Eve. She was part of him, and he was part of her.

The first marriage

The simple, historical account does not tell us what Adam and Eve were thinking or how they felt while they got to know each other. But in the next two verses we learn the outline of the basis of marriage as established by God. “Therefore a
man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:24-25).

An important aspect of marriage is leaving “father and mother,” establishing a new family unit. Adam and Eve did not have physical parents to leave, but future generations would need to apply this instruction.

Honoring parents and seeking their advice is advisable, but newlyweds need to remember they are a new family unit. Just because things were done a particular way in your family does not mean your mate will want to do things the same way.

Two people must learn to work together in marriage, showing respect and love to each other. Such an approach follows the biblical principles of wives submitting to their husbands and husbands loving and honoring their wives (Ephesians 5:22, 25; 1 Peter 3:1, 7). Establishing family guidelines and traditions in an atmosphere of love and respect gives the newly married a foundation upon which to build their lives together.

**Be joined**

Genesis 2:24 says a husband should be “joined” to his wife. Other translations say he should cling or cleave to her. Today we would say he should bond with her. Besides God, she should be his highest commitment.

The biblical text is clear that a man should build this special, close relationship with his wife. The idea of clinging to multiple wives is foreign to these verses in Genesis. Even though God allowed some men in the Old Testament to have several wives at the same time, such arrangements were not God’s intent from the beginning. In listing the qualifications of bishops, or overseers, of the Church, 1 Timothy 3:2 makes clear that such a man must follow God’s instructions and “be blameless, the husband of one wife.”

How can husbands and wives bind with each other and make their relationships loving and lasting? Simple actions like hugs, kisses and pledges of love build and strengthen the bond God intended for marital partners. When husbands and wives constantly work at building their relationship, they find it easier to agree on workable options in settling family disagreements.

Some people think love is a magical, mysterious emotion that two people fall into or out of for no apparent reason. The truth is different: Loving relationships must be nurtured. They take work. Love is care and consideration directed toward another person, not just an ethereal emotion.

The work involved in building and preserving the marital bond is well worth the time and effort. Husbands and wives who are committed to this positive process often describe their mates as their best friends. This is simply another way of describing the kind of bond God desires for every marriage.

A marriage built around this godly bond includes two people who are willing to listen and talk about their problems in a spirit of humility. If they cannot solve their problems on their own, they seek counsel because they value their relationship and don’t want to lose it.

Recent studies confirm that measuring the level of conflict in a relationship can accurately predict whether a marriage will survive (see “Will Your Marriage Survive?,” this page).

People whose marriages are failing often say they have lost the desire for a special relationship with their mate. Some marriage partners have rekindled this desire by asking God for a loving, humble attitude and doing things to show love to their mate, even when they don’t feel like it.

Many married people have found that the feelings they longed for returned
when they decided to do the things that bind two people together (see “Building Bonds in Marriage,” this page).

**Becoming one flesh**

The next principle from Genesis 2 says that a husband and wife shall become one flesh; that is, enjoy an intimate sexual relationship (verse 24; 1 Corinthians 6:16).

The steps that lead to a loving and proper sexual relationship are vital to a successful marriage. God reveals that candidates for marriage should develop a deep and lasting friendship but should not indulge in a sexual relationship until after the marriage ceremony. Most people fail miserably to follow God’s instructions in this matter. “Dating” someone often means “sleeping” with someone. In Western societies the overwhelming majority of young adults of both sexes engage in sexual intercourse before marriage. They take the supposedly enlightened view that sex is not part of a sacred, loving relationship but simply a biological function to be indulged in without restraint.

God intended sex to be part of the marriage relationship and not take place outside of marriage. Only in the married state does God permit sexual relations (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:2). His instruction for us to refrain from fornication (sex before marriage) and adultery (sex when one or both sex partners is married to someone else) is a safeguard for our marriages (1 Corinthians 6:9, 18).

God intended sex to be an intimate, binding experience for a man and woman and meant for it to help marriages survive conflict more easily, communicate better and are less likely to divorce. A majority of men and women (60 percent) believe that the sexual relationship is more satisfying within the marriage union. Considering that one of every four Americans will contract a sexually transmitted disease, a disorder preventable by practicing godly guidelines, one of one’s body to other members of the opposite sex can invite the breaking of God’s commands against lust and unlawful sexual relations. Jesus warned that “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Males and females alike need to control their minds and dress modestly to discourage sexual arousal outside of marriage.

**Some people think love is a magical, mysterious emotion that two people fall into or out of for no apparent reason. The truth is different: Loving relationships must be nurtured. They take work.**

Modern research verifies that God’s instructions, given thousands of years ago to Adam and Eve, are still the best recipe for success in marriage. Couples who do not live together before marriage handle lines, it becomes obvious that God’s teachings are superior to anything devised by man.

**Not ashamed**

The last principle from God’s inspired guidelines for marriage reveals that Adam and Eve were naked but not embarrassed by their nakedness (Genesis 2:25). Since they were the only two humans on the planet, privacy was not an issue. Sexuality was not and is not intrinsically dirty or shameful.

Within marriage a husband and wife should feel comfortable with each other’s masculinity or femininity. But revealing too much of one’s body to other members of the opposite sex can invite the breaking of God’s commands against lust and unlawful sexual relations. Jesus warned that “whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Males and females alike need to control their minds and dress modestly to discourage sexual arousal outside of marriage.

Paul told the early Church to remember that God calls Christians to holiness and not to defraud or mistreat others in marriage or the relationships leading up to it (1 Thessalonians 4:6-7). “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel [spouse] in sanctification and honor” (verses 3-4).

Marriage is one of God’s wonderful gifts to mankind. It is something to treasure and sustain. The guidelines He gives in Genesis 2 are as valid as ever. To follow them is to make the honorable, godly choice. No shame comes from following God’s instructions. Only rewards result from godly behavior in marriage. Why not make God’s ways your ways? Giv
How would you describe our age? Sociologists have used various labels to define the mood or mentality of the world we live in. For example, some say that an “age of anxiety” followed World War II. That era was followed by an “age of melancholy.” More recently we hear terms such as the “computer age” or the “information age.”

If we define an era by what people have most on their minds, the most accurate description of our time is the age of sex. None of us can remember a time when sex has been more openly flaunted with so many people obviously obsessed with the subject.

Sexual awareness has always existed. It is natural in the human mind. But today it is incessantly stimulated by sex-saturated news and entertainment media. Sexual content is not only blatantly displayed, but objects that have no sexuality are labeled as sexy—from cars to computers and beverages to body lotions.

Is this the way we should treat sexuality? We’re in a kind of sexual wilderness,
lacking right directions and guidelines. Sadly, this situation has cost societies dearly in many major ways—in financial losses, health crises, marriage and family breakdowns and a lack of sexual fulfillment and happiness.

Few understand the purpose of sex. They are told that sex is an evolutionary accident. Therefore they assume that anything goes as long as it occurs between consenting adults. But that approach is naive. It is an unsubstantiated assumption that avoids candidly addressing the question of where sex and marriage came from.

The simple and often overlooked answer is that God reveals that He created both sex and marriage. His reasons for doing so are nothing short of wonderful. Ignorance of God’s purpose for sex has brought about enormous problems.

The first command God gave Adam and Eve was to begin an intimate sexual relationship and reproduce.

Why did God create sex and marriage? Let’s consider the reasons.

The first purpose

Perhaps the most obvious of God’s purposes for sex and marriage is for the reproduction of the human species. Notice the first statement in the Bible about God’s creation of man: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27, emphasis added throughout).

The statement that God created them male and female is the first reference to human sexuality. God created the sexes; it wasn’t an evolutionary accident. (If you’d like to read proof that God exists and Darwinian evolution is but a modern-day myth, be sure to request the free booklets Life’s Ultimate Question: Does God Exist? and Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?)

Next we read: “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it . . .’” (verse 28). The statement that men and women are to reproduce is part of the blessing that God pronounces in this verse.

An air of sacredness permeates the process described here. God gave a blessing to the creation of children through a loving sexual relationship. God sanctified sexual relations between married men and women, in that the first command He gave Adam and Eve was to begin an intimate sexual relationship and reproduce!

God essentially repeats His command in Genesis 2:24, adding another crucial thought: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” In speaking these words, God formally created the institutions of marriage and family. Since God created and commanded these relationships, marriage and the family are holy institutions, not mere creations of human society.

We see here God’s obvious intent that children should be conceived and born into a family relationship, a family consisting of a husband and wife.

Historically this has been the norm. But the last several decades have produced a drastic departure from God’s pattern. People have tried to redefine the family in all kinds of ways.

Make no mistake: God’s Word reveals it is a serious blunder to profane sex and marriage in this way, even as societies are already experiencing the bitter fruits of people trying to do things their own way. God’s reasons for creating sex include the purpose of reproduction. But His specific intent is that it should occur within the divine institution of marriage.

Part of God’s plan

Though God created our sexuality and ordained sexual relations between married men and women to populate the earth, this was only the first part of God’s ultimate vision for humanity. God desires to fill the earth with human beings who can eventually enter His own spirit family: “The physical human family, brought about through marriage, is a model of God’s spirit-composed family of the future.

God sent His Son into the world so all could eventually have eternal life through Him. “. . . The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). His Word reveals that “the Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). All men are appointed to die once (Hebrews 9:27), but afterward all who will repent of their sins can receive eternal life through a resurrection.

Those who are given life through a resurrection will be the children of God.

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possessing eternal spiritual life, as God is spirit (John 4:24). Those who now repent, are baptized and receive God’s Spirit (Acts 2:38) are actually called children of God at this time, though not yet immortal. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16, King James Version).

Hebrews 2:10 tells us that God’s ultimate purpose is to bring “many sons [and daughters, 2 Corinthians 6:18] to glory.” This “glory” will include immortal spiritual life as children of God.

God designed human reproduction through sex as a means to populate the earth. But His eventual intent is to bring as many of the billions who have been born—those who will repent—into His family as spiritual children. In a sense He, too, is reproducing Himself.

Therefore, we can see that reproduction of human beings has two purposes—to give physical life now to our posterity and to provide the potential for many children of God to receive eternal spiritual life.

The human process of reproduction is a physical type, a model, if you will, of what God is doing on the spiritual level. This grand design is the marvelous purpose and sexual appeal in human beings. This in itself is a healthy trait of the human mind and is triggered by hormones that God designed the body to produce.

But why? God created this sustained interest in sex as a means for men and women to express love in marriage.

This is one of the great purposes for sex that many have failed to understand. A look at history reveals that we’re no further along in understanding this aspect of God’s design than were many bygone cultures.

Some men in ancient Greece seem to have viewed marriage with distaste and submitted to it primarily to have a housekeeper and produce progeny. The idea of having deep love for one’s wife seems to have appeared foreign to many Greek men. Demosthenes, the Greek orator of the fourth century B.C., illustrated his opinion of the low status of wives this way: “Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for daily attendance upon our persons and wives to bear us legitimate children and be our housekeepers” (quoted by Morton Hunt, The Natural History of Love, 1994, p. 25).

Marriage and sex in the Roman Empire bore many similarities to Greece. Money of the Christian religion advocated views that caused marriage and sex to be held in low regard. Augustine, of the fourth century, wrote: “I have decided that there is nothing I should avoid so much as marriage. I know nothing which brings the manly mind down from the heights more than a woman’s caresses and that joining of bodies without which one cannot have a wife” (Christian History, 2000, Vol. 19, Issue 3, p. 36).

Augustine made this comment shortly after his conversion. Eventually he rose to a high position in the Catholic Church, and it wasn’t long before his views and those of others resulted in marriage and sex being regarded as a less-honorable state than celibacy. The church came to erroneously teach that the sole purpose of sex was reproduction.

But was this all that God intended? Certainly not! God designed the male and female bodies to provide pleasure in marriage. Regrettably, one of the tragic results of distorted religious views stipulating that sex was given solely for reproduction was that it often caused enormous guilt in married couples who engaged in sexual behavior as an expression of their love for each other, as God intended.

It’s long been a common practice among men to manipulate women just to obtain sexual favors from them. Women in turn manipulate men so they can get something in return. Sadly, this practice is still common even in the relationship between some husbands and wives. When such selfish attitudes persist in a marriage, at least one and possibly both mates use sex to get something, even if it is nothing more than sensual gratification, rather than to give and express love. Genuine love, as God designed it, is an act of giving. In marriage it is cherishing one’s mate. It is an eagerness to please, help and encourage.

As we noted earlier, God’s first command recorded in the Bible is that man should “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28). In Genesis 2:24 we see another command: that, after leaving the families of their birth and forming their own family through marriage, they should “become one flesh” (verse 24). God’s directive that they should become one flesh means specifically that they should become one through sexual union, although the expression also has spiritual implications affecting every aspect of married life.

Next the Bible states that “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (verse 25). This shows that the sexual relationship, as God created it, was intended as completely pure and wholesome. In Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament, sexual intercourse is described as “knowing.” This is because there is no more

Some have mistakenly believed that, after Adam and Eve sinned, purity was removed from marital relations.

God is working out on earth.

This plan is sometimes referred to in the Bible as the “mystery” of the Kingdom of God. It is a mystery because only a tiny minority of humanity presently understands it, the majority being ignorant of what the Bible as the “mystery” of the Kingdom of God is working out on earth.

The only illegal one was adultery, but up-to-date Greek orator of the fourth century B.C., illustrated his opinion of the low status of wives this way: “Mistresses we keep for pleasure, concubines for daily attendance upon our persons and wives to bear us legitimate children and be our housekeepers” (quoted by Morton Hunt, The Natural History of Love, 1994, p. 25).

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Showing love in marriage

Sex in the human and animal kingdoms serves the purpose of reproduction, but in virtually all animal species reproduction is the only purpose. In observing the habits of higher animals, we can see that, except for those periods in the female’s cycle when she is susceptible to fertilization through the sexual act, only a very few species of animals ever engage in sexual intercourse at all.

With human beings, however, sexual interest between men and women isn’t restricted to the woman’s fertility period, either on a monthly basis or over the life of the human being. Typically humans develop a strong interest in sex beginning at least by puberty and may, if they remain healthy, stay sexually active long after their reproductive years.

God created a continuing sexual interest and power were often motives for marriage. “Roman love as it emerged in the second and first centuries B.C. involved a variety of possible unions, all of them outside of marriage. The only illegal one was adultery, but up-to-date Romans favored it above all others, regarding it much as modern man regards cheating on his income-tax return” (Hunt, pp. 66-67).

The degeneration of sex and family life contributed significantly to the decline and eventual collapse of the empire.

Distorted views of sex and marriage

Some of the leaders in the early centuries...
**What Is True Love?**

What Is This Thing Called Love? is a popular song by the late Cole Porter. Love is the most popular theme of songwriters and poets. Yet, as the title of Mr. Porter’s song suggests, many—perhaps most—do not know what love really is.

The word has a multitude of meanings and linguistic usages, at least in English. We may speak of loving a particular food. We might love our job. Or we could love a particular song or movie.

We frequently use love to describe relationships between two people. But here again the meaning can vary widely. The word can refer to a relationship of tender affection or apply simply to the physical sex act. Using the latter definition, the word can be used to describe an orgy, and it has been so used. But an orgy is not love but lust. It is indulged in as a result of an inordinate desire for sensual pleasure, to gratify the self.

The original Greek of the New Testament contains three words translated “love.” One is eros, a love that is romantic or sexual in nature. Eros is different from lust, though, because the Greek language has other words for lust.

Another Greek word for love is philia, or the related word philadelphia. These refer to brotherly love or friendship. Companionship, communication and cooperation are hallmarks of this kind of love.

The third Greek word translated “love” is agape. This is the word used to describe God's love (1 John 4:8), the love He expresses toward mankind. This kind of love is listed as a fruit—a characteristic product—of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Because the Greek language has other words for lust.

But the Bible calls these actions fornication and adultery, offenses serious enough to deserve the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10; compare Romans 6:23). The Seventh Commandment (Exodus 20:14) forbids such behavior, and the Bible states elsewhere that “fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).

Many are aware that marriage should be a relationship built on love. One thing many people do not realize is that the relationship between a husband and wife should provide a mirror image of the loving relationship between Christ and His Church. After speaking of a man and his wife becoming one flesh in Ephesians 5:31, Paul said, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (verse 32).

Jesus Christ had a totally self-sacrificing love for the Church, a love so deep that He died for her. Marriage is supposed to be a picture of this great love. Human marriage is imperfect, to be sure. Nevertheless Jesus’ love for the Church is the kind of loving relationship marriage is intended to portray.

In the physical realm a man and woman become one flesh in marriage. In a Christian’s relationship with Christ, he or she becomes spiritually “joined to the Lord [and] is one spirit with Him” (1 Corinthians 6:17). The genuinely loving “one flesh” relationship of marriage parallels the close “one spirit” relationship we are to have with Christ.

Paul calls this marvelous truth a “great mystery.” The word for “great” in Greek is mega. It expresses the magnitude or the profound nature of the mystery. It is called a mystery because so few understand this truth.

When we comprehend God’s incredibly high view of marriage as revealed in the Bible, it should inspire us to treasure marriage as never before. We should commit ourselves to continually improving our marriages, striving for a relationship that seeks to emulate—on the human level—the deep, timeless love Christ has for the Church.

We should also strive to be completely faithful to our husband or wife in mind and body. No one should ever become one flesh with anyone else but his or her marriage partner. This alone produces a wholesome relationship fit to engender and rear healthy and happy children (see Malachi 2:15). This alone produces the kind of marriage and family life God wants us to experience. GN

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**Recommended Reading**

How can your marriage be successful? What can you do to make your marriage work? Discover many vital biblical principles in our free booklet, Making Life Work. You’ll also find timeless guidance on family relationships, dating, parenting, friendships, finances, health and your job and career—all to help your life work better. Also request your free copy of The Ten Commandments, a practical, down-to-earth guide to living by the basic rules our Creator handed down to us so we can lead happy, productive and successful lives. Be sure to request your free copies of both booklets today.

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Living Together: What Aren’t They Telling You?

Millions of people choose to live together outside of marriage, thinking that will bring them happiness and a stable relationship. The truth, however, is far different.

by Noel Hornor

It used to be called living in sin. At one time every U.S. state had laws against it. Some believe that rising rates of sexually transmitted diseases have applied a brake to the sexual revolution, but cohabitation—unmarried couples living together—is one trend that has not slowed.

The 2000 census figures for America show that “3.8 million households ... were classified as unmarried-partner households.” This figure is probably lower than the actual number of unmarried partner households because, in an interview, some couples “may describe themselves as roommates, housemates, or friends not related to each other” (America’s Families and Living Arrangements, June 2000).

U.S. News & World Report noted that “in America ... cohabiting couples make up ... about 7 percent of the total” of couples living together (March 13, 2000). This was a sevenfold increase from 1970, during the heart of the sexual revolution (Information Please Almanac, 1997, p. 434).

Although living together without the benefit of matrimony carries virtually no social stigma, some still worry about it. Says psychologist and divorce researcher Judith Wallerstein: “What can we do when ... the most common living arrangement nowadays is a household of unmarried people with no children? These numbers are terrifying. But like all massive social change, what’s happening is affecting us in ways that we have yet to understand” (The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, 2000, pp. 295-296).

Widespread practice

Living together while unmarried is trendy in other Western nations too. “In Sweden ... nearly all couples cohabit before marrying ... and about half of all births occur to cohabiting, unmarried women” (Andrew Cherlin, Public And Private Families: An Introduction, 1996, p. 245).

“... Unmarried couples ... make up about 30 percent of couples sharing households” in Sweden (U.S. News & World Report). “France is somewhere between the extremes of the United States and Sweden” (Cherlin, p. 245). And “in Britain ... three-quarters of all couples now live together before they marry” (The Economist, Feb. 14, 1998).

The reason given by many couples who cohabit is that they believe they will increase the chances of success when they eventually marry. However, research has shown that this idea is a fallacy. “Although most theories of marital choice predict that cohabitation would increase the stability of later marriages for those couples who marry, evidence to date suggests the opposite; couples who cohabit before marriage seem to end their marriages at significantly higher rates than couples who never lived together before the wedding” (Demography, August 1995, p. 438, emphasis added).

Some studies put the divorce rate at 50 percent higher for couples who cohabit; others put it as high as 80 percent.

One factor that seems to be different among American cohabitants and Europeans is that a larger proportion of the latter eventually marry. In America roughly 40 percent of cohabiting couples break up before marriage. Many couples apparently move in together intending to marry later. “One study revealed that 70 percent of women moved in with a man with marriage on their minds” (Ben Young and Dr. Samuel Adams, The 10 Commandments of Dating, 1999, p. 110).

Taking the romance out of it

We shouldn’t be surprised, however, that American men are less likely to have marriage on their minds when they set up housekeeping than do women. Many men simply choose this option for the availability of easy sex. In a national sex survey of married couples and unmarrieds living together, “men who were cohabiting scored lower on commitment than anyone else in the survey” (Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, The Case for Marriage, 2000, p. 85).

Many of those who choose to live together before marriage show they are reluctant to commit to a relationship and want to keep their options open. Apparently they value their autonomy and individuality. However, these temporary living arrangements subject any children involved to an unstable home life. “Over a quarter of unmarried mothers are cohabiting at the time of their children’s birth, and many other cohabiting families have children from other
unions” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 38).

Some believe—erroneously—that children do well as long as they live in a home in which there is a male and female, whether married or not. But the evidence doesn’t support this. “Children living with cohabiting partners and in stepfamilies generally do less well than those living with both married biological parents” (The American Prospect, April 8, 2002).

Some people are serial cohabitants, living with several partners in succession. Their living patterns magnify the risk inherent with the cohabitation lifestyle. The children involved must adjust to a progression of adult partners whom their parents select. The risk of spreading deadly sexually transmitted diseases is also higher among this group.

In spite of these troubling facts and figures, many American singles still seem to believe that a marital test drive is the preferred choice before committing to marriage. An NBC poll found that “66 percent of young people ages 18 to 32 believe that you should first live together before you get married” (Young and Adams, pp. 104-105).

Young people who entertain romantic notions about cohabiting should think twice. Compared to married couples, there is “more cheating by both partners [as well as] more domestic violence and a higher incidence of depression” among those who simply live together (U.S. News & World Report).

How bad is the sexual unfaithfulness among those in cohabiting relationships? “The National Sex Survey found that cohabiting men were about four times as likely as husbands to report infidelity in the past year. Women were more faithful in general, but still cohabiting women were eight times more likely than wives to cheat on their partners” (Waite and Gallagher, pp. 92-93, emphasis added).

A distinct advantage to marriage over cohabitation is the higher degree of emotional commitment in marriage. Popular media often present the view that sex outside of marriage is much more exciting and thrilling than married sex. But the opposite is true. Research shows that, because married couples are generally more committed to each, they enjoy a higher level of sexual satisfaction.

“Emotional commitment improves one’s sex life . . . For example, sex with someone you love literally doubles your sexual pleasure: You get satisfaction not only from your own sexual response but from your partner’s as well. Emotional commitment to a partner makes satisfying him or her important in and of itself.

“Demanding a loving relationship before having sex, using sex to express love, and striving to meet the sexual needs of one’s partner all increase satisfaction with sex. Love and a concern for one’s partner shifts the focus away from the self in a sexual relationship and toward the other person. This selfless approach to sex, paradoxically, is far more likely to bring sexual satisfaction to both men and women” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 89).

Devaluing marriage

Part of the boom in cohabitation rates is fueled by a growing bias against marriage. Various authorities speak of marriage as an institution that robs individuals of freedom, describing it as an oppressive state, especially to women. A college textbook even claimed that “marriage has an adverse effect on women’s mental health” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 1).

As a result, in some quarters simply using the word marriage is passé. “A strange embarrassment or reluctance to use the word marriage is visible all over the Western world. The Marriage Guidance Council of Australia recently changed its name to Relationships Australia; Britain’s Marriage Guidance Council metamorphosed into Relate” (Waite and Gallagher, p. 8).

That which is presented as a right—the freedom to have sex outside of marriage whenever we want, however we want, with whomever or whatever we want—is a perversion of our Creator’s intention for humanity and a plunge into moral degradation. Regrettably, the concept of sex as something special to be saved for marriage has largely become outdated for many singles.

“Carelessly, thoughtlessly, casually, sex—in the short space of a single generation—went from being the culminating act of committed love to being a precondition, a tryout, for future emotional involvement” (Danielle Crittenden, What Our Mothers Didn’t Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman, 2000, p. 30).

Sex outside of marriage is a sin against God. “. . . A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). God said a man should be joined to his wife, not simply another person or a live-in lover (Exodus 20:14). But human beings refuse to admit that the very Creator of male and female sexuality knows what’s best for us. It is He who created the institution of marriage to develop a morally and socially sound relationship.

Cohabitation represents a threat to societal stability. History demonstrates that marriage and family are the building blocks of strong societies. Those who ignore the lesson of history place their happiness—and their nation’s future—in peril. GN

Who’s Behind The Good News?

Who’s behind The Good News magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide The Good News free to all who request it. Simply put, The Good News is provided by people—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: To proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful good news of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43, 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all mankind’s problems. Through the pages of The Good News and various booklets (also free) we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten the very survival of humankind.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God’s purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

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Sex Outside of Marriage: What’s the Big Deal?

The sexual revolution of the ‘60s encouraged us to liberate ourselves from old sexual taboos. Millions did. What have we learned?

by Noel Hornor

Of all the gifts God has given mankind, one of the most beautiful and meaningful is the gift of sexuality. Yet it’s also one of the most abused.

Sex plays a vital part in God’s plan for human beings. The first command recorded in the Bible that God gave to Adam and Eve was to have sexual relations (Genesis 1:28). He essentially repeated the command in Genesis 2:24-25: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

One aspect that should leap out at us from verse 24 is that God created sex for marriage. But the 20th century brought dramatic changes in attitudes toward what is considered to be proper sexual behavior.

The sexual revolution of the ‘60s resulted in a drastic relaxation of sexual mores and—aided by easy availability of birth-control pills—created the notion that freewheeling sex had practically no consequences. The idea of sex with no repercussions led to slogans such as “If it feels good, do it!”

Advocates of sexual freedom said that, since sex is enjoyable, we should shed our inhibitions and jump in. What they didn’t say, however, is that sex is never consequence-free, and sex outside of marriage is heavily laden with negative repercussions, especially for girls and women.

The audible furor that accompanied the sexual experimentation of the ‘60s is no longer as loud, but the revolution was successful in that to a considerable extent the extreme behaviors of that time are now commonplace.

The results have been monumental—and devastating in many countries. As former Harvard University professor Pitirim Sorokin observed about changes in sexual standards: “Any considerable change in marriage behavior; any increase in sexual promiscuity, and illicit relations, is pregnant with momentous consequences. A sex revolution drastically affects the lives of millions, deeply disturbs the community, and decisively influences the future of society” (The American Sex Revolution, 1956, p. 7).

The sexual revolution was not just an American phenomenon. Europe experienced its own upheaval. In fact, much of the world joined in throwing off sexual restraint. Why are millions of Africans infected with the AIDS virus? “The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s in the West spread globally and penetrated Africa. . . We know of many cases where young people, children really, are already sexually active” (Christiinity Today, Feb. 7, 2000).

The shocking numbers

The level of premarital sexual activity in Western nations is extraordinary. Establishing exact data can be elusive, but one report states that the “median age of first intercourse for American boys [is] 15.5” and “for American girls [it is] 16” (S.I. McMillen, M.D., and David Stern, M.D., None of These Diseases, 2000, p. 141).

Circumstances are similar in Britain, where “the average age for both sexes to lose their virginity is 16” (The Observer, Dec. 2, 2001).

Premarital sexual activity among French girls is also extremely high. “Whereas it used to be the case that for 50 per cent of French women their first sexual partner would be the man they would marry, by the 1990s it was only true for 10 per cent” (Angus McLaren, Twentieth-Century Divorce’s Devastating Impact on Children

Children of divorce often experience the same hardships suffered by children born out of wedlock. Because divorce typically slashes the mother’s financial resources, “mothers and children in families that were not poor before separation suffered an average decline in income after divorce of 50 percent” (Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, The Divorce Culture, 1996, p. 93).

The consequences of divorce on children are far-reaching. One detailed study found that, “five years after the divorce, more than a third of the children were experiencing moderate or severe depression. At ten years a significant number of the now-grown young men and women appeared to be troubled, drifting, and underachieving. At the fifteen-year mark, many of the thirtyish adults were struggling to establish secure love relationships of their own. . . Cruelly, the experience of parental divorce damaged many young adults’ ability to forge strong attachments of their own, in both their work and their family lives” (Whitehead, p. 99).

A 25-year landmark study of 131 children of divorce demonstrated some alarming facts. “Adolescence begins early in divorced homes and, compared with that of the youngsters raised in intact families, is more likely to include more early sexual experiences for girls and higher alcohol and drug use for girls and boys” (Judith Wallerstein, The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, 2000, p. 299).

The study also found that “one in four of the children in this study started using drugs and alcohol before their fourteenth birthdays” (p. 188). Cohabitation rates were high among the group. Several of the single young women felt that simply moving in with a man “was safer than marriage because escape was easier if they needed to get out or if the man left” (p. 289). Their reasons boiled down to a distrust of men that resulted when their parents divorced.

Many children of divorce rush into cohabitation or early marriage in young adulthood. “Being alone raises memories of lonely years in the post divorce family and feels like the abandonment they dread. They’re trapped between the wish for love and the fear of loss. This amalgam of fear and loneliness can lead to multiple affairs, hasty marriages, early divorce, and—if no lessons are gleaned from it all—a second and third round of the same” (pp. 31-32).

The results of the study indicate that, when marriages end in divorce, often the children experience difficulty in relationships, including an increased likelihood of divorce and promiscuous sex.

Not as well publicized is the much-higher rate of delinquent behavior among children of single-parent or otherwise divorced households. For example, “a study of Stanford University’s Center for the Study of Youth Development in 1985 indicated that children in single-parent families headed by a mother have higher arrest rates, more disciplinary problems in school, and a greater tendency to smoke and run away from home than do their peers who live with both natural parents—no matter what their income, race, or ethnicity” (Daniel Amnes, The Garbage Generation, 1990, p. 215).

A far more extensive study of Bureau of Justice statistics of 25,000 jailed juveniles found that “72 percent of them came from broken homes” and “a child growing up in a single-parent home (usually female-headed) is seven times as likely to be a delinquent” (Amnes, p. 179).

In light of these debilitating consequences, we shouldn’t be surprised when God thunders that He “hates divorce” (Malachi 2:16).
Although these figures are bad enough, even more shocking is the rampant promiscuity among so many. For example, among Britain’s 16- to 24-year-olds, “19.7 percent of men and 14.6 percent of women have already had 10 or more partners” (The Guardian, Nov. 30, 2001).

The telling consequences

The consequences of premarital sexual involvement are damaging on many levels. On an emotional level they often include a profound sense of guilt, shame and regret.

During the ’60s and ’70s many young people were “liberated” to believe that one-night stands were not only acceptable but desirable. This dogma was badly flawed. Wendy Shalit describes how such an encounter can affect many a young woman: “A young girl spends the rest of the night crying and bleeding” after she loses her virginity to a guy she barely knew” (A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue, 1999, p. 57).

In recent years a new term, “hooking up,” has sprouted on American college campuses for what used to be called “quickie” sexual interaction. A hookup may involve a range of intimate activities from kissing to forms of sex and usually involves alcohol. It is sex without commitment or emotional involvement, usually between people who know little if anything about each other and expect nothing more from each other than the gratification of that lone encounter.

According to a survey by the Institute for American Values, “40 percent of college women have hooked up at least once, and 10 percent more than six times” (Christian Century, Aug. 15, 2001). The empty ritual leaves many young women feeling used, disillusioned and burdened with emotional confusion.

Different motivations for sex

Whether the setting is a one-night stand or sex within a relationship, the pressure on young women to engage in illicit sex relations is intense. Premarital sexual involvement is perhaps most apt to occur when a couple begins dating steadily. Couples use various rationales to justify sex, such as “It’s okay if you’re in love,” “Everybody’s doing it” or “We need to sleep together before we get married so we can know if we are sexually compatible.”

None of these rationalizations is realistic. It’s important for young women to realize that their motives for having sex are often quite different from those of a man. Women often consider that intercourse will solidify a relationship with their partner, but to a young man it often represents something different—a coming of age or, in too many cases, simply another conquest. Males are constructed differently emotionally and psychologically and often pursue sex purely for pleasure’s sake, with no thought to a relationship.

When a woman has a casual sexual relationship, later she will often regret it, especially when hopes for an enduring relationship are dashed. Her male partner may feel like a victor but she often feels like a victim.

And indeed she is. If a girl dates someone whom she thinks is “the one,” she usually does not enhance her chances of maintaining a relationship by giving in sexually.

Often, after he has had his way, he will simply discard her. Such an action demonstrates that he was not the one after all. If a man jilts a woman because she will not surrender sexually, she is not losing much. Such men are interested in using a woman’s body for their own gratification rather than being interested in her as a person or pursuing a lifelong relationship.

Girls who take a stand and refuse to consent to sexual relations before marriage are wise. When they surrender their bodies in premarital sex, they lose a precious part of themselves that they can never regain.

By holding fast to her virginity, a girl will, in the long run, win the respect of many

Advocates of sexual freedom said that, since sex is enjoyable, we should shed our inhibitions and jump in. What they didn’t say, however, is that sex outside of marriage is heavily laden with negative repercussions.

Illicit Sex: The Threat to Children

The major consequences of sex before marriage include the problems of disease, premarital pregnancies, single mothers and fatherless children. Since 1960 in the United States, “out of wedlock births have skyrocketed 511 percent, and the percentage of single-parent families has more than tripled” (Human Life Review, Spring-Summer 2000).

In Europe “the proportion of French babies born out of wedlock rose from 3 percent in 1975 to 33 percent in 1996. In England and Wales 28 percent of all births in 1990 were extramarital” (Angus McLaren, Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History, 1999, p. 213).

Life is much more difficult for teen mothers who have babies. The fathers of those infants are generally not in the picture, having abandoned the girl or providing little or no help. “Having a baby outside marriage makes getting married later much more difficult and much less likely. Having a baby before finishing high school makes parenthood and education a bigger challenge” (Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, The Case for Marriage, 2000, pp. 199-200). One result is that single mothers and their children are far more likely to live in poverty.

When teenage boys (and young men, as is often the case) take advantage of teenage girls and the girls become pregnant, bitter seeds are sown at an immature age. The girls are then forced to deal with pregnancy, devastating emotional consequences and often abandonment before they have even begun to experience some of the best life has to offer. Their own children are in turn at greater risk for out-of-wedlock pregnancies. One reason for this is that they, too, typically begin having sex at a much earlier age.

Also disturbing is a study of the female prison population in the United States that found that “more than half are single mothers living on welfare” (Daniel Amneus, The Garbage Generation, 1990, p. 224).

Children born out of wedlock are also at greater risk for abuse. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that “children of single parents had a 77 percent greater risk of being harmed by physical abuse, an 87 percent greater risk of being harmed by physical neglect, and an 80 percent greater risk of serious injury from harm or neglect than children living with both parents.”

For children of unwed mothers, live-in boyfriends and other sexual partners can prove deadly. The Heritage Foundation recently reported that of the 2,000 children killed each year, more than a fourth are victims of live-in boyfriends. Many, however, are not killed outright. Each year thousands more suffer life-changing, crippling injuries.

Again, many of the most heinous incidents occur at the hands of a mother’s boyfriend in what has come to be known as shaken-baby syndrome. This is a term used to describe the injuries that result from the violent shaking of a child or infant, often resulting in brain injuries from the baby’s head being jerked and snapped back and forth. The damage inflicted can range from relatively minor injuries to mental retardation, coma and death. An estimated 20 percent of such injuries are inflicted by live-in boyfriends.
males. As a university student explained, “. . . In the real world, the more casual that women allow their physical relationships with men to become, the less respect they earn” (Danielle Crittenden, What Our Mothers Didn’t Tell Us, 2000, p. 33).

Less-obvious consequences

Though in some respects a girl who experiments with premarital or extramarital sex may suffer more severely than a male who does so, men are also damaged by illicit sex. In addition to their own later feelings of guilt for having used young women, they often find it hard to build and maintain a long-term relationship with one other person.

Any sexual experimentation outside of marriage is a mistake. A man will never be the same in the sense that he has surrendered a part of himself that he should have reserved for his bride. Premarital sex may provide momentary gratification, but the result is a loss of the purity that God intended. Each conquest robs him of some of the care and tenderness he should be cultivating for just the right girl.

Much of the attraction of sex outside of marriage is based on its illicit nature. The attitude that “stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Proverbs 9:17) has been around for a long time.

Sometimes couples find sex to be intense and gratifying before they marry but after marriage discover it is not as exciting to them. Once they have devalued their respect for each other through premarital sex before marriage, rarely can they find the same attraction and respect shared by couples who marry without premarital sex.

Many couples who have sex before marriage find that it actually dampens the feelings they have for each other and, as a result, dampens their long-term sexual enjoyment. Their violation of God’s law in succumbing to premarital sexual activity removes some of the beauty and splendor their married sexual relations could have had.

There is another danger in succumbing to sexual temptation, even if getting married is your intent. The possibility always exists that you may for some reason decide against marrying this person. When this happens you have, through sexual involvement, given a part of yourself to someone other than your spouse, a part you should have saved for your future wife or husband.

When two people become “one flesh” in a sexual relationship (see 1 Corinthians 6:16), a bonding occurs between them. If, after they become sexually involved, one partner severs the relationship against the wishes of the other, the separation has a wrenching effect, especially for the jilted person, who is left feeling mentally and emotionally burned.

Sex counselors and schools push contraceptive devices as a means of assuring marital sex are sin and therefore to be avoided completely. Why is God so adamant on this point? To protect us from the inevitable harmful consequences. Notice Paul’s warning to Christians in the sex-saturated city of Corinth: “Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18, New Living Translation).

God created sex to be a blessing and benefit of a committed marriage. When you cheapen your body by giving it freely outside of marriage, you treat your body with disrespect.

In the King James and New King James versions of the Bible, sexual intercourse in the Old Testament is referred to as “knowing.” Sexual relations within the context of a loving, committed marriage enable two people to know each other in the most intimate and personal way.

Loving sex in this context is deeply satisfying and creates a unifying of two lives. It is much more than simply the coupling of two bodies. The couple becomes one flesh as God intended (Genesis 2:24). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes this kind of knowledge as “not just cognitive, but always experiential and deeply personal; and sexual intercourse is never just physiological, but always involves mystery and touches the whole person” (1988, Vol. 4, “Sex,” p. 433).

It is partially the mystery about the opposite sex that makes relating to one another so special. That mystery is destroyed and lost forever when human beings hook up as casually as many species of animals do. Our sexuality is a gift God gave us. It is so special that it should be protected and saved for marriage as God intended. GN

Recommended Reading

What are the reasons behind God’s laws about premarital and extramarital sex? Does our Creator simply not want us to have fun, or is there something deeper, something life-transforming, about His laws and instructions? You need to read our free booklets The Ten Commandments and Making Life Work. Both are yours for the asking. Contact any of our offices listed on page 2, or request or download them from our Web site at www.gnmagazine.org

Sex counselors and schools push contraceptive devices as a means of assuring “safe sex,” but no device can protect a person’s heart.

“safe sex,” but no device can protect a person’s heart. When the heart is assaulted, defensive patterns develop that will affect any future relationship.

Permanent injury

The hazards and negative consequences of adultery are numerous. Extramarital affairs also generally bring intense feelings of guilt and shame. When discovered—as affairs often are—the result is often permanent injury or destruction of the marriage, with severe damage to relationships between other family members and friends.

Some couples can put their marriages back together when one mate has had an affair, yet the infidelity inflicts a wound that is difficult if not impossible to heal. The betrayed wife or husband will likely never feel completely secure again. The quality of the marriage will suffer because trust has been violated. Even if the wound can heal, the scars remain.

Divorce proceedings are rarely cordial, but those that occur because of marital infidelity are among the most hostile. When sexual betrayal from one who loved was expected to last for life occurs, it creates bitterness and resentment that may never heal.

When children are involved, the two parties’ lives generally remain interlocked because of visitation rights. In such cases there is no escaping the continuing hard feelings. When children sense the tensions and animosities, they are often emotionally scarred as a result (see “Divorce’s Devastating Impact on Children,” page 10).

The Bible states that premarital and extra-
The Dark Shadow Over Illicit Sex

Those who advocated premarital sex in the ’60s assured us that premarital sex was healthy and good for us. Liberated sex was not only pleasurable; it was even supposed to be beneficial. But now, 40 years later, what is the track record of free-sex relationships? Besides the fact that promiscuity causes relationship and emotional difficulties—rather than solving them—the physical results of casual sex have proven dangerous and destructive. Rates of sexually transmitted diseases have gone through the roof. What are we doing to ourselves? Consider:

- “Worldwide, estimates hold that there are more than 300 million cases of STIs [sexually transmitted infections] annually” (Johns Hopkins Family Health Book, 1999, p. 861).
- “Heterosexual intercourse is the fastest growing way to catch HIV. Around the world, over 90 percent of AIDS cases are spread by heterosexual intercourse” (S.I. McMillen, M.D., and David E. Stern, M.D., None of These Diseases, 2000, p. 111).
- “In America more children lose a parent to AIDS than to motor vehicle accidents” (McMillen and Stern, p. 115).
- “Worldwide in the next few decades AIDS is expected to kill almost 300 million—more than the population of the entire United States” (McMillen and Stern, p. 116).
- “Dr. Susan Weller of the University of Texas reviewed every study on condoms and STDs. Then she concluded in the journal Social Science and Medicine: ‘Results of HIV transmission studies indicate that condoms may reduce risk of HIV infection by approximately 69 percent. Thus efficacy may be much lower than commonly assumed.’ . . . The world is placing its hope for AIDS prevention in a method that fails about one-third of the time . . . There’s nothing safe about it . . . An article for doctors in Patient Care admitted the condom’s ‘effectiveness against STD’s is only ‘30-60 percent’’” (McMillen and Stern, pp. 144-145).
- “An estimated 45 million people in the U.S. are infected with genital herpes, and 1 million new cases occur every year. Sexually transmitted disease rates in the U.S. are the highest in the developed world . . . One in five sexually active adults may be infected with genital herpes” (Psychology Today, January-February 2002).
- “Nearly one in five U.S. adolescent females has an undiagnosed infection . . . Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States, affecting an estimated 13 percent of women” (Women’s Health Weekly, June 28, 2001).
- “Chlamydia, which causes pelvic inflammatory disease, is ‘the most common curable STD and a major cause of infertility in women,’ and ‘10 percent of healthy young men carry silent infections’ of the disease (McMillen and Stern, p. 123).
- “In the U.K., sexually transmitted infections have increased across the board from 624,000 in 1990 to almost 1.25 million in 1999 (The Observer, April 8, 2001).
- “The Children’s Aid Society estimates that one in every four sexually active American teenagers catches an STD every year” (McMillen and Stern, p. 141).
- “Do not be fooled into thinking that you are safe from STD transmission if you use a condom. ‘Condoms, long the mainstay of the safe-sex public-health model, do not protect against the spread of nearly all sexually transmitted diseases . . . ’” (Women’s Health Weekly, Sept. 6, 2001).

Sometimes the consequences of sex before marriage do not surface until after marriage. For example, a man can be a silent carrier of herpes. When he marries he can pass the virus on to his new bride. She may be startled, sometimes within days of first having intercourse, to find her genital area invaded by unsightly, painful sores. The herpes virus can also spread to the brain and cause encephalitis. When a woman who has genital herpes gives birth, the baby can get herpes or suffer brain damage.

The only way to practice safe sex is for both partners to abstain from sex outside of marriage as God instructs. This provides the only sure shield against STDs.

The Transforming Power of Forgiveness

The religious leaders had caught a woman in the very act of adultery. They brought her to Jesus, reminding Him that the law stated she deserved to die.

Yet Jesus knew they were also sinners and hard-hearted men who lacked compassion and mercy for others. He also recognized that they were trying to trap Him into making a mistake so they could condemn and discredit Him. The woman was merely a tool they were using for this purpose.

Jesus refused to take the bait. He told them that yes, they could stone her to death—and whoever was innocent among them should throw the first stone. After Jesus said this, they all slunk away, condemned by their own consciences. He then turned His attention to the fearful woman. He asked her if anyone was still accusing her, and she said no. Jesus responded: “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:3-11, emphasis added).

Many who have violated God’s laws of sexual conduct have come to see the kind of damage such sins have brought on themselves and others. They rightfully wonder what they can do next. Jesus’ words provide clear direction.

Upon repentance, we should also strive to forgive ourselves so that guilt regarding past sexual sins doesn’t carry forward in a negative attitude towards God’s gift of sex and jeopardize a happy, joyful, loving intimate relationship in marriage.

Once forgiven, we need to see ourselves as God sees us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “some of you” were formerly “fornicators, . . . adulterers, . . . homosexuals, [and] sodomites,” but they had been washed and sanctified—made holy—through the forgiveness made possible by Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Though some physical penalties may have persisted, the spiritual penalty of their sins was completely removed.

If you have made past mistakes, rest assured that God will clear your record if you seek Him in heartfelt repentance. He promises us that, “though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

To learn more about repentance and overcoming guilt and sin, please request our free booklet Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion.
hat’s in for me? When somebody asks us or tells us to do something, we naturally want to know what we can expect and how we will benefit from a particular course of action.

We might ask ourselves how this applies on a spiritual level. What’s in it for us if we decide to obey God’s instructions in the Bible?

This is an important question when it comes to sex, marriage and religion. Of course, these questions are not new. People have been asking them for a long time.

More than 2,500 years ago the prophet Ezekiel noted that his own people were saying that “the way of the LORD is not fair” (Ezekiel 33:17, 20). Just as in our day, people didn’t like being told what to do—even by their Creator. Paradoxically, many would rather choose their own way than follow the path that produces the greatest happiness.

Many people see God’s instructions to avoid premarital sex, adultery and divorce (1 Thessalonians 4:3; Exodus 20:14; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:3-9) as hopelessly outdated. Conventional wisdom claims sex is no problem as long as it takes place between consenting adults and as long as the participants take precautions against venereal disease and pregnancy.

As for religion, some of the same people view it as unnecessary as long as one strives to be a good person.

This highly subjective approach tempts some to describe God’s way as simply one of many equally valid ways of life. But is it?

In recent years researchers have tried to discover the underlying principles that lead to successful family relationships. This kind of examination is something God Himself approves. Concerning one biblical principle, God says, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows” (Malachi 3:10, New American Standard Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Notice this helpful tip: God recommends proving His way by doing it. Why? So we can immediately realize the benefits of obedience without paying penalties for disobedience.

Keys to successful relationships

What are the results of research into family relationships?

Concerning divorce: “A 1989 American Demographics report stated, ‘Many studies show that broken marriages create stress, resulting in weight changes, stomach upset, fatigue, appetite loss, headaches, nervousness, nightmares, difficulty in sleeping, and tension. No wonder divorced men and women are more likely than the married to suffer from chronic conditions, acute illnesses, and injuries’” (Current Thoughts and Trends review of Focus on the Family, September 1994, “Believe Well, Live Well,” Marianne Hering).
A happy marriage brings more benefits than divorce. Too bad that not everyone is willing to follow the Bible principles that help prevent divorce and promote happy marriages.

What about attending church? A Heritage Foundation study concluded: “Churchgoers have lower rates of depression, alcohol/drug abuse and criminal activity. Frequent worshippers have longer, happier marriages. Religious women even have better sex lives than agnostics. Regular church attendance reduces a person’s blood pressure by 5 millimeters—enough to reduce the mortality rate by 20 percent . . .

God recommends proving His way by doing it. Why? So we can immediately realize the benefits of obedience without paying penalties for disobedience.


A University of Nevada study reported that “black men in prison come almost exclusively from one group—those who never went to church or who stopped going at about age 10” (ibid.).

God really did know best

This line of research confirms that God’s way really is best. The Bible long ago said as much. Speaking to ancient Israel, God imparted some valuable advice: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). In contrast, Proverbs 14:12 adds, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

What about premarital sex and living together before marriage? “Statistics demonstrate that cohabiting couples are 33 percent more likely to divorce than couples who don’t live together before marriage. Women who are virgins when they marry are far less likely to divorce than women who are not” (Current Thoughts and Trends review of U.S. News and World Report, May 19, 1997, “Was It Good for Us?,” David Whitman).

Two University of Wisconsin–Madison sociologists came to a similar conclusion after analyzing the cohabitation and marriage patterns of 13,000 adults. “. . . Couples who live together before marriage experience higher levels of marital conflict and do not communicate as well. Such couples were less committed to marriage and saw divorce as more likely than those who had not cohabited prior to marriage” (Current Thoughts and Trends review of Journal of Marriage and the Family, Vol. 54, 1992).

With such positive support for God’s instructions for families, it is puzzling why so many disdain the teachings of the Bible.

David Larson, a senior researcher with the National Institute of Mental Health, admitted: “I actually believed the evidence would indicate religion was harmful, but I found almost no empirical data supporting the idea” (Current Thoughts and Trends review of “Holy Health!,” Christopher Hall, Christianity Today, Nov. 23, 1992).

Mr. Larson explained that studying the effects of religion on health is considered academically incorrect unless the study purports to show harmful effects of practicing religion. In a personal survey of evidence reported by prestigious psychiatric journals, he found that “in over 80 percent of the cases reported in the journals religion was beneficial to the patient.” He also found that “religion also plays a preventive role as well as a curative one. Out of 20 different alcoholism studies, all but one found that religious commitment kept people from developing drinking problems. Without a single exception, 16 studies on suicide indicated that a religious person is significantly less likely to take his or her own life” (Christopher Hall).

Promise of abundant life

Even though not all will accept it, such research that affirms the benefits of following God’s instructions should surprise no one. Living God’s way enhances one’s life. Almost 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Later the apostle Paul noted that “godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Perhaps King David summarized it best: “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven” (2 Samuel 22:31).

Recommended Reading

Can you believe the Bible? Can you prove whether the Bible is truly the Word of God? Is this book really what it claims the be, the ultimate guide to human life and behavior? Be sure to request your free copies of Is the Bible True? and How to Understand the Bible. If you’d like to understand and live by God’s fundamental guide to behavior, also ask for The Ten Commandments. All are free for the asking at the address in your country (or the country nearest you) listed on page 2.
What does it take to have a successful marriage? Here are practical ways to make your marriage happy and fulfilling!
Sixty-five years ago Stella Fels and Valden White were married in Manson, Washington, part of that state’s famous apple-producing area. During those years of recovery from the Great Depression, which had begun in 1929, people in the U.S. Northwest were fortunate to find stable work in orchards. Times were tough, but most families managed to make enough money to keep themselves in food and clothing.

This was the setting for the real-life love story of Stella and Val that has stood the test of time.

Chance meeting leads to lifelong love

Even though as children they lived only eight miles apart, they didn’t meet until 1931, after Val had graduated from high school in Chelan and Stella was in her last year at Manson. One day Val was driving along the highway between the two towns when he spotted three girls walking along the highway. Stopping to give them a ride, Val first met Stella and her two cousins. From the moment Val saw her, he thought Stella was one of the most attractive girls he had ever seen.

This was the beginning of many automobile rides and a lifelong love that sustained them while raising two children and working at four occupations. This same love now graces the golden years of their lives.

Some people believe marriages like the Whites’ are anomalies and virtually impossible in the postmodern world. Based on current divorce rates, that view seems sadly accurate. But where does that leave us? Do happy marriages have to be a thing of the past, or can we hope for a life-long relationship with our mate that grows deeper with the passing of years?

Marriage is a natural union between man and woman, but it’s also a divine relationship instituted by God at the foundation of the world. As the Creator of marriage, God knows what makes marriage work, and He reveals this knowledge to us through His Word, the Bible.

The reason for marriage

To learn how to have a happy marriage, let’s examine God’s purpose for marriage and what marriage symbolizes.

We find the earliest biblical writings on marriage in the first two chapters of Genesis. There we learn that God created humans male and female and instructed them to populate the earth and exercise dominion over it (Genesis 1:26-31). God said marital partners were to leave their parents, be joined together and have a sexual relationship (Genesis 2:24-25). Noting that “it is not good that man should be alone” (verse 18), God gave humans the wonderful gift of marriage.

How can you practice love and respect in your marriage? How can you start living these two important principles?

The Bible gives many practical, workable ways to love and respect your spouse. Consider the following instructions from the Bible:

• Be faithful. Engage in sexual relations only within marriage, as God instructs (1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18; 7:2; Galatians 5:19; Matthew 5:32). Faithfulness in marriage promotes a special emotional bond between mates.

• Share your financial resources. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household,” wrote Paul, “he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). When couples work hard and unselfishly share their money for the good of the family, they demonstrate their commitment and promote respect.

• Don’t speak unkindly to each other. One of the surest indicators of a couple’s relationship is the way they talk to each other. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” A courteous tone of voice allows couples to focus their energies on the subject at hand rather than on each other.

• Forgive. We must forgive others if we want God to forgive us (Matthew 6:12-15). Without forgiveness, any human relationship is doomed to failure.

• Remember romance. Before marriage most couples spend much of their time wooing and courting. The special attention given to each other before marriage is a “wonderful” thing (Proverbs 30:18-19), and it should not cease after marriage. Thoughtful acts, including saying, “I love you,” reassure a wife that her husband thinks she is special (and vice versa).

• Include God in your relationship. “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1). Look to God for enduring values, including the purpose of your marriage.

—David Treybig

Photos courtesy Valden and Stella White
And what a gift it is! Besides giving the delight and satisfaction of the marriage relationship to husband and wife, marriage provides structure to civilization.

Some 2,500 years ago ancient Israel wallowed in moral decay. Its leaders were not teaching God’s values (Malachi 1:6; 2:7-8). Just as today, marriages were falling apart as people selfishly sought only their own gratification. In this setting God sent the prophet Malachi to identify the Israelites’ mistakes and explain what they should do to secure God’s blessings again. In doing so, God revealed another purpose of marriage. What had the Israelites done wrong?

“Judah has broken faith,” Malachi explained under divine inspiration. “A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god” (Malachi 2:11, New International Version).

Many Israelite men had married women from other nations who enticed them to worship their gods rather than the true God. When some of these men decided to worship God in addition to these foreign deities, they found that He would not accept their offerings (verses 12-13). But there was more.

“You ask, ‘Why?’” proclaimed the prophet. “It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. ‘I hate divorce,’ says the LORD God of Israel, ‘and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,’ says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith” (Malachi 2:14-16, NIV, emphasis added throughout).

Besides paying homage to other gods, the men of Israel also sinned by breaking their marriage covenants and divorcing their wives. These actions thwarted one of God’s great purposes for marriage, the development of “godly offspring” (verse 15); that is, children who accept God’s values as their own. One reason God hates divorce is that it hinders such children. Instead of witnessing a successful marriage, children of divorce experience the negative effects of a failed relationship.

Divorce brings additional problems, from financial hardship to the scars of emotional trauma. One of the greatest fears of young people today is that their parents will separate.

**Instruction about divorce**

Because not everyone accepts or practices God’s ideals for marriage, some conclude that divorce is sometimes the only answer. Jesus Christ addressed the problem of divorce by first affirming God’s values as stated in Genesis and then by saying, “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus was not in favor of divorce.

When pressed, however, Jesus said divorce was allowed for “sexual immorality” (verse 9). Jesus’ perspective was that divorce should be legal but rare. If everyone would refrain from sexual intercourse before marriage and experience it only within marriage, many divorces could be avoided. Tragically, sexual permissiveness is rampant in our society. Few couples today enter marriage as virgins, and, sadly, many will not remain faithful to their marriage partner. Most people want happy marriages, but they don’t want to follow God’s advice on how to achieve them. The same was true in Jesus’ day. Few were willing to live according to God’s instructions. This is why Jesus said, “All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given” (verse 11).

**A higher relationship**

The apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians explains how husbands and wives are to treat each other in marriage. After giving specific instruction to husbands to love their wives, Paul wrote: “For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:29-32).

Here Paul teaches us that the marriage relationship is similar to our relationship with Jesus Christ. Physical marriage is modeled after a godly relationship. A proper relationship between a husband and wife gives insight into the spiritual relationship God wants to have with each of us. This spiritual aspect of marriage sets it apart and puts it on a higher plane. Marriage is a God-plane relationship.

Just as marriages produce families,
God is building His family. God provides for the right spiritual relationship between a husband and wife to teach us about Himself and his great purpose.

Throughout the book of Ephesians, Paul speaks repeatedly of the family God is developing. He begins by speaking of our “adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Ephesians 1:5). Then he calls us “members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). Later he writes, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14-15). Thus, when Paul speaks of godly marriage as similar to “Christ and the church” in Ephesians 5:32, he is explaining how human families, on a physical level, can be like God’s spiritual family.

As the head of His spiritual family, God promises never to break His relationship with His people (Revelation 3:21; 21:7). He makes a covenant with them and writes His laws in their hearts (Hebrews 8:10) and promises never to forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). Just as God honors His commitments, so should we honor our marriage vows.

The most wonderful marriages human beings can experience parallel a proper spiritual relationship with our Creator. Understanding this higher spiritual purpose for the marital relationship should give us added respect and appreciation for happy, fulfilling marriages now.

Building lifelong, happy marriages

When Stella and Valden White were wed 65 years ago, people expected marriages to last a lifetime. Though formal sexual education was virtually nonexistent, many marriages of that era proved stronger than those of today. What made the difference? The Whites believe part of the answer lies in attitude.

According to Stella and Valden, too many people fail to show loving respect for their marriage partner. If couples encounter a serious problem, the simple solution is to get a divorce and start over with someone else. The Whites say they experienced tough times but never faced a problem they were not determined to work out. They believe being honest and considerate of each other can make a lasting difference in relationships.

Practicing God’s values is a time-honored key to building a happy marriage. Further, as we submit to God’s marital roles for us in this life, we learn how to submit to God for eternity. Let’s now consider two important keys to success.

**Love and respect**

In Ephesians 5:33 Paul summed up a passage on marriage: “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Love and respect are two simple but important principles husbands and wives can use to build sound, stable, happy marriages.

People think that love is an uncontrollable and uncontrollable emotion. They believe it just happens and that humans fall prey to this seemingly unpredictable force. We speak of “falling in love” as though it were some fortunate accident. By popular, idealized convention, love continues ever joyful and fun.

The apostle Paul, though, penned a different definition. “Love suffers long,” he wrote (1 Corinthians 13:4). Paul’s words equated loving someone with being willing to suffer for or with that person. True love, as defined in the Bible, requires a willingness to suffer patiently for or with someone for, if necessary, a lifetime. This kind of love comes by choice, not by accident. This love demonstrates an unselfish concern for another, even when showing such love grows difficult or inconvenient.

“Love suffers long and is kind,” Paul continued; “love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (verses 4-8). This kind of love will sustain a relationship, not just through the good times, but through the difficult and bleak times all marriages encounter.

Like love, respect implies that a choice has to be made. We can choose to respect someone for his positive attributes or disrespect him for his faults. As contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (verses 8-9).

When we treat others as God commands, we enjoy the fruit of His way. As Peter asked, “who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?” (verse 13). God’s instructions work. They produce happy, fulfilling, stable relationships.

Wise King Solomon said, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint: but happy is he who keeps the law” (Proverbs 29:18, NKJV). Even though this famous king experienced his own marital problems (1 Kings 11:1-4), he did understand an important connection between happiness and practicing God’s ways. During the past 65 years, Stella and Val have proved this point. They began with the goal of a happy, life-long marriage. They never considered anything else, and their goal became reality. So can yours if you accept God’s purpose for marriage and obey His laws and the divine principles governing it. GN
Gary Smalley: It began in 1988. Our first guest was Dick Clark. Now we have people like Frank and Kathie Lee Gifford, John Tesh and Connie Sellica. Because of the impact of the program, the Air Force ordered a set for every base in the United States, and many of our naval fleet and other military branches also have them.

One aircraft carrier did a study on our marriage videos. On a return trip from a six-month tour, they required many of the 5,000 men aboard ship to watch all 18 videos. Normally they would hear of 60 divorces following a tour, but in that one study they had only 11 divorces. The military is testing this approach in different parts of the services now.

**GN:** How did you get interested in family and marital relationships?

**GS:** My parents argued a lot. My father was an angry man. I thought all families were like this, that all were having difficulties in their relationships. Some of them ended in divorce, and I didn’t want that to happen to me. That’s when I decided to learn about what it takes to have a lasting marriage.

**Couples should do things together.**
*Go to the beach, enjoy fun nights out, or take a pleasant drive. Do things together that are fun to both of you. Fun things bond us emotionally.*

Later, after I got married, the first five years of my marriage were very frustrating for my wife, Norma. Many of our arguments went unresolved. We were losing the love we had for one another. That’s when I began interviewing women and counselors and reading books on the subject. Over time I found that women had a built-in marriage manual: They seem able to explain what makes up a good relationship and how to arrive at that kind of relationship.

I began to pick up on this little by little. Early on I taught a college-aged marriage-preparation class. I had 500 students. I shared 10 things I had learned about helping a man get ready to get married and 10 things to help a woman prepare for marriage. I alternated those points and gave them material every week.

I repeated this procedure for three years, and the same people kept hearing the same points over and over again. But they never seemed to tire of them, so I put those lectures into a little booklet. That really started it all.

That booklet and those lectures were the basis of my first two books. I kept doing research, asking couples what they needed, what worked and what didn’t work. About three years ago I discovered Dr. Howard Markman and Dr. Scott Stanley of Denver University. I found them to be professional and scientific in their approach to marriage and the family. They probably know more about divorce prevention than anyone else in the world. In fact, they can now predict
with 90 percent accuracy whether a couple is going to divorce. This they base on a 32-question instrument which reveals whether an engaged couple will make it or not. They have figured out four reasons why couples divorce. These four reasons are the main reasons for the anger inside of us.

The basis of their findings became the heart of Making Love Last Forever. Their scientific evidence reinforced some of the things I had already learned. Today I can speak with tremendous confidence about what hurts a marriage and what keeps it alive. The greatest killer of marriage and love is anger stored away in the heart.

Let’s discuss unresolved anger. What constitutes unresolved anger? Does it evolve from minor unresolved disagreements or a couple of major ones or from both?

All of the above. If they are minor ones left unresolved, they can build up like an ugly growth inside of us. It’s like a cancer. They begin feeling deeply hurt, then fear, then frustration sets in.

If a person is continually frustrated, hurt and feeling unsafe, it’s like developing cancer. They actually talk themselves into it; they choose anger. It is a choice. We all have a lot of choices to make, but people have a tendency to choose anger as their first reaction.

Why do you think this is our first choice? Could you shed a little more light on this aspect of a relationship?

It’s just human nature; it’s a primary, natural tendency we all have. It takes about five to seven years for this anger to grow in the average couple’s hearts, then it kills the love they once had. Love cannot coexist with anger. And, remember, anger is a continual buildup of little embers of frustration, hurt and fear. If we don’t resolve them they simply kill the love that was there.

Anger is like arterial plaque. It can do a lot of damage to the heart, and the love can fail. Then comes divorce.

Resentment is bad, but raging bitterness is much worse. You should realize that the anger doesn’t just have to be against the wife; it can be resentment toward the boss or something else, and that resentment can eventually kill a husband’s love for his wife or a wife’s for her husband.

So I charge around the country saying: “Anger is coming! Anger is coming!” If we don’t clear it up, we will suffer the consequences. We have all this racial anger, anger in the workplace, anger in many other areas of our lives. I’m just trying to expose it and trying to encourage people to admit it and get it resolved. We are, after all, responsible for our own anger. We can’t continue to blame others for our own anger. We have to learn how to forgive.

More and more, mates are coming to see that a husband and wife think differently. Would you give our readers what you consider to be the most important things each one needs in his or her relationship?

I have noticed four things that every man and woman needs in a marriage.

First, women need to feel secure and know that they are highly treasured. Things like saying “I love you,” giving her cards and flowers from time to time, reinforce this. The husband might unexpectedly say something like: “I was just thinking of you, because I’m committed to you for life, and no matter what we go through, good or bad, for better or for worse, I’m committed to you. I love you, I highly treasure you and am laying my life down for you.”

If you say these words to her, that’s like giving sunlight to a plant. She will blossom. She needs this from her husband.

Second, a wife needs meaningful communication. Meaningful communication is primarily just listening to her feelings and needs, and valuing those feelings and needs which will help her build the faith she needs to express herself in the future.

The husband should not just try to fix what he sees as her problem; he must simply try to understand her needs and treasure those needs as unique to her. The husband should value her special feelings and needs. Just take the time to really listen to her; it’s like water to a plant.

Third, a husband and wife should do things together. Go to the beach, take vacations, enjoy fun nights out, or take a pleasant drive on a Sunday afternoon. Do things together that are fun to both of you. Fun things bond us emotionally. Laughing together is important. If this one point were followed faithfully, it could revitalize a couple’s marriage overnight. But do not mix your fun times with arguments. Under no circumstances do my wife and I ever argue during fun times.

The fourth thing a wife needs is regular touching, hugging, hand-holding. We are not talking about sexual contact—just touching, like I just mentioned. You can even touch with your eyes. This is also a meaningful way to communicate your love. Sex is a reflection of the fruit of security which comes from the loving, affectionate, caring touch and from these four things being practiced in marriage.

Men’s needs are different. Men have a deep need to feel safe in their relationships. Men hate turmoil in their marriages, even though they sometimes provoke arguments. That’s really the reason men withdraw from an argument, because they have this need to feel safe.

Another need for men is that they need rules to live by, so they often create rules in marriage. When a woman gets into an argument with a man, if no rules are present the man will tend to either close down or heat up, either become mean or withdraw. When a wife doesn’t realize that, she can get her husband all worked up in an argument and do a lot of damage to their marriage.

So men need rules and need to feel safe, and a woman has to say to herself: What do I need to do to help him feel safe?

I have found that one of the best things for both mates is to develop some very simple rules to follow if they find themselves in a disagreement. Most couples really don’t know how to argue an issue.

Women are usually more aware of things in a relationship than men are. They think we are as aware as they are of their needs, which is why it hurts their feelings so much when they find we are not. They begin to assume all kinds of things that aren’t true or accurate. At the same time it’s very important for men to feel safe in a relationship. We also want to be understood and not have our wives believe things about us that aren’t true. We want our wives to be supportive of us, to listen to us and to treasure us.

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Love cannot coexist with anger. Anger is a continual buildup of little embers of frustration, hurt and fear. If we don’t resolve them they simply kill the love that was there.
Will Your Marriage Survive the Tough Times?

We all face difficult times. When the storms of life hit, how will they affect your marriage? What can you do to make sure your marriage will survive?

by Becky Sweat

Last year Mike and Ramona Taylor were forced to shut down their restaurant, which they had used their life savings to start only a year earlier. “Losing the business was especially hard on Mike,” Ramona says. “He’d just sit around the apartment every day, hardly saying a word. If I suggested he send out some résumés, he’d take that as criticism and storm out the door in a huff. Eventually he found work, which helped our finances. But still there’s a distance between us that wasn’t there a year ago.”

After a fire destroyed the home of Bob and Arlene Larson, they spent three stressful months living in a motel room with their two small children. “Our kids bickered the whole time, and we had one hassle after another with the insurance company,” Bob says. “But, even though it was a rough time, my wife and I both look back at what happened and feel we have a stronger marriage as a result.”

Sooner or later most couples face a test of their marriage vows. Tough times can leave a husband and wife more committed than ever before, or they can sever their relationship.

For better or worse

Sooner or later most couples face a test of their marriage vows: a serious automobile accident, the loss of a job, a diagnosis of cancer in the family, a house fire, the death of a loved one. Going through tough times can leave a husband and wife feeling closer and more committed to each other than ever before, or it can sever their relationship.

How would your marriage fare in facing such traumatic times? Would it survive?

The key to helping your marriage survive tough times is to make sure your relationship is built on a strong foundation before hard times strike.

“Some couples come through a crisis and feel that it strengthened the bond between them because they conquered the problem together,” says Norman Epstein, professor of family studies at the University of Maryland. “But in the majority of cases, unfortunately, tragedies tend to drive husbands and wives apart.”

It’s during tough times that couples often do the things that tend to undermine their marriage, just when they need each other the most. “When couples are under a lot of stress, they tend to only do the necessary things for day-to-day survival, and their relationship fades into the background,” Dr. Epstein says. “They focus all their time and energy into the crisis and don’t have any energy left for their marriage. Eventually they may get worn down to the point where they feel alienated from one another.”

Who’s counting?

“If you let a stressful situation dominate your life, that’s when it’s easy to start thinking your mate is not doing his or her share of the couple’s responsibilities and begin keeping score,” says Scott Stanley, codirector of the Center for Marital and Family Studies at the University of Denver and author of Fighting for Your Marriage.

“Keeping score is one of the worst things you can do, because marriage partners rarely keep score fairly,” he says. “You usually see everything you do that’s positive in the relationship, but only a fraction of what your partner does. If you start keeping score, even if you’re totally accurate, you’re going to end up resenting your mate before too long.”

Along with scorekeeping often comes blame-placing. “Pointing the finger is the hallmark of a couple under a lot of stress,” Dr. Stanley says. “It’s easy for couples facing a difficult situation to start thinking each other is not pulling their weight, that one’s doing more, being more responsible or working harder than the other. But all that does is create a sense of divisiveness. It ends up me vs. you and you’re not doing enough.”

Marriage partners blame each other for problems in an ill-advised attempt to try to gain some control over a situation, according to Douglas Sprenkle, professor of marriage and family therapy at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. “Oftentimes when terrible events happen in life, what makes you feel the worst is the fact that you have no control over what happened,” he says. “Blaming can be a way of gaining some control. If you can at least point the finger at your partner, then that makes some sense of the situation rather than it just being a random, uncontrollable event.”

It doesn’t have to be a negative experience such as the loss of a job, health problems or a natural disaster to create marriage stress. Even predictable, life-in-progress events such as the birth of a first child, job promotion or retirement can strain a relationship. “Any kind of change that requires the individual and the family...
to reorganize is going to mean a certain amount of stress,” Dr. Epstein says.

Every married couple is going to have its share of stressful situations. Obviously, you want to use tough times to draw closer to your mate and build a stronger marriage, rather than let a tragedy create a wedge between you and your spouse. “The crucial factor is the degree to which you and your mate can handle stress and how well you work as a team,” Dr. Stanley says.

Here are 10 ways to strengthen your relationship and keep your marriage intact when the going gets rough:

**Work together**

- **Talk matters out.** Be willing to share your concerns, fears and hopes without criticizing or judging. “In order for a couple to work as a team, they have to know what each other is thinking,” says Pauline Boss, professor of family studies at the University of Minnesota and author of *Family Stress Management.* “The longer you wait to talk to your spouse, the greater the chance of your feelings being buried under the rug and never being addressed.”

  Ask each other for ideas to improve the situation. Think in terms of presenting a united front against the problem, rather than allowing the problem to divide the two of you. Talk about out how you can work together to ease the stress.

- **Accept each other’s differences.** When you talk to your spouse about the situation, you may be surprised at how differently he or she sees things. “It’s a big mistake to think your mate sees everything the same way you do,” Mr. Stanley says. “The same event may make one person angry or frightened, while the other is hurt or depressed.”

  Each person has his own perspective. Learn to respect your spouse’s opinion, even when he or she sees things from a different point of view.

- **Avoid finger-pointing.** Fight the urge to keep score, cast blame or say I told you so. Stop and think about the advantages and disadvantages of blaming.

- **Keep the tragedy in perspective.** Distinguish your fears of the worst-case scenario from what is likely to happen.

- **Distinguish your fears of the worst-case scenario from what is likely to happen.** “There are some temporary advantages that can make you feel better about your own role in the situation,” says Dr. Epstein. “The disadvantage is that if you blame you’re probably going to get blamed back, and you’re going to feel like adversaries instead of teammates.”

  Rather than point a finger, you should protect each other from self-reproach and criticism. Reassure your mate by telling him or her: “I know you did all you could,” or “This could have happened to anyone.”

- **Worst-case scenario**

- **Keep the tragedy in perspective.** Distinguish your fears of the worst-case scenario from what is likely to happen.
After 25 years of marriage, Bill and Ann finally discovered the secret to keeping the romance alive in their marriage: "I started dating another woman," he said proudly. "It was my wife’s idea."

Ann took Bill by complete surprise with this advice: "Life is too short not to spend more intimate time with the one you love. I think the more time you spend with her, the closer you will become to her."

Bill followed her advice and began immediately and openly to date this other woman, to show her the attention, care and love he had felt toward his new bride some 25 years earlier.

Ann was right. It did draw them much closer together. Their romance blossomed. The other woman was none other than Ann herself, Bill’s wife of 25 years. Ann was not the same Ann she had been before. She began to look at life anew, recalling the times she had spent with Bill when they were younger and newlywed.

Bill and Ann put romance back into their marriage. You can too.

Myths and unrealistic expectations

When two people marry, ideally they experience a delightful sense of togetherness. They can’t wait until the minister says those exciting words: “I now pronounce you husband and wife.” Although the bride and groom know they have lived different lives, they minimize those differences in the light of this momentous event. Although they may realize they will experience conflict in their future, most assume that their love is strong enough to conquer any future problems.

Heartfelt intentions stated before hundreds of witnesses can, however, be all but forgotten in the routine of everyday life.

It’s then that unrealistic expectations and myths about marriage surface.

One couple’s experience

Robert and Dawn were deeply in love. Floating on clouds of imagined marital bliss, they planned their wedding.

Everything went well until, six months into their marriage, Dawn began to feel that Robert wasn’t as loving as he had once been. Robert began to feel that Dawn was trying to change him, being too picky about minor things.

Soon they were retreating from each other, justifying their actions against a backdrop of real and imagined offenses. After seeking counseling, Robert and Dawn began to recognize their unrealistic expectations. They resolved to become more tolerant, more understanding with each other. They also agreed to spend more time thinking about each other’s
needs. These course corrections put them back on track for a productive and fulfilling marriage.

Rude awakenings after marriage
The roots of marital disenchantment are usually exposed shortly after marriage, when reality intrudes on fantasy. This adjustment period reveals the other’s imperfections. Shortcomings, once viewed as minor and glossed over in the full bloom of love, suddenly take on ominous dimensions. Cute eccentricities grow into annoyances. Rudeness replaces romance.

Each spouse defends his or her own territory, and the one union reverts to two identities as the fantasy of romantic oneness begins to fade. Requests become demands. Marital disharmony takes over, and negative actions, left unchecked, can spell disaster for two well-intentioned former lovers.

Sometimes marriage partners in difficulty realize they’ve invested much in their union and don’t want to give up without asking for outside help. Marriage counseling, however, is never a guaranteed solution to problems. If, for example, the counselor simply urges the couple to communicate more, this advice may inadvertently compound the problems. Although communication is important in resolving differences, simply communicating more may lead to finding new ways to blame and complain.

A better answer to the dilemma is available. It consists of taking action. Acting, doing, impacts another person more than just communicating. Positive action, mixed with healthy and positive communication, can dramatically improve a failing marital relationship.

The secret power of self-direction
To enjoy a happier marriage, partners must become self-directed.

Drs. Melvyn Kinder and Connell Cowan, in their book Husbands and Wives, explain the concept of self-direction (Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York, 1989). Mates must become responsible for their own actions, they say. Each mate should identify and recognize his or her inaccurate, exaggerated expectations.

Recognition precedes change. By recognizing exaggerated expectations, each mate creates room for maneuvering and motivation for change. This, then, is self-direction: directing the attention to our own unrealistic expectations of the other.

Each mate takes full responsibility for his or her thoughts and actions, whether they are realistic or selfishly imagined. Now change can begin to take place in a marriage.

“The implications of this new approach are enormous,” write Drs. Kinder and Cowan.

“It takes two people to have a marriage, but only one to change it. We end up feeling helpless and out of control in our marriages simply because we can’t control our partners. The truth is that we need only learn to control ourselves. We ultimately come to feel alone in our marriages because we have replaced an accepting attitude toward our partner with unconscious expectations that are ultimately self-defeating” (Kinder and Cowan, p. 13, emphasis added).

Power to the partners
Being self-directed—taking personal responsibility for one’s own actions—empowers both husband and wife. Rather than feeling victimized, each mate gains greater control over his or her life. A positive, constructive effect begins to transform the marriage. Counselors know that, when one mate begins to change for the better, invariably the entire relationship improves.

Many couples are committed to marriage in spite of the self-centered, self-gratifying, self-oriented influences of the world around them. When a husband and wife, struggling to get their own way in marriage, begin to shift their frame of thinking from a demanding to a sustaining and supportive one, they can happily find themselves in a second honeymoon.

Specific steps must be taken to pave the way to a renewed and revitalized relationship. Marital happiness requires demythologizing marriage, fairly evaluating unrealistic expectations and replacing them with the healthy realities of a fulfilling relationship.

What positive steps can you take to...
rebuild your relationship, to put real romance and love in your marriage?

• **Face the facts.** The notion that if your mate really loves you he or she will automatically change for you is usually an illusion. Here is where self-direction can help. Rather than demanding that your mate change for you, why not ask your mate what he or she would like you to change?

This can bring immediate positive benefits. As one partner begins to change, renewed respect follows, and an example is set for the other to follow. It’s never easy to admit to personal faults and shortcomings, but, when we ask for them to be pointed out and take concrete steps to change them, the situation improves for both partners.

Be honest, and face the facts, even if you’re uncomfortable taking these steps. Realize that you need to grow. When you do your marital relationship will also grow.

• **Understanding your mate’s needs.**

Another myth is that if your mate really loved you he or she would always understand you. The story goes that an older couple sought marriage counseling, and the counselor asked the husband if he had ever told his wife of 35 years that he loved her. He responded: “Well, I don’t think I need to do that over and over. After all, I told her I loved her when we got married.”

This man—along with, perhaps, you and me—didn’t realize that we all need reassurance now and then to allay our normal doubts and insecurities. Understanding of your mate requires a certain sensitivity to his or her needs. The two sexes are, after all, quite different.

• **Differences as strengths.** Well-meaning couples sometimes see differences as negotiable. But negotiation is too often motivated by a selfish want rather than by love or selflessness. No two human beings are exactly alike. On the surface we may appear similar in many ways. But beneath the surface many differences lie hidden.

Those differences become more pronounced under pressure. Rather than negotiating differences to fit one’s selfish desires, try to view your mate’s differences positively, as strengths.

Look around you. The earth’s biological systems work independently and interdependently. The ecological systems are interdependent. Birds, insects, flowers and fruit trees all function independently within their species. Yet there is an interdependence when the fertilization of flowers and trees often depends on both birds and insects in search of food.

In a similar way, a husband and wife can benefit from their differences, thus making two much stronger than one. Women are usually more intuitive, while men are more analytical. Rather than seeing “I love you” is good, but showing “I love you” is better. This, perhaps more than any other ingredient, is the greatest single factor in putting romance back into marriage.

Saying “I love you” is good, but showing “I love you” is better. The notion that if your mate really loves you he or she would like something wrong with it. Perhaps this assumption comes from a naively romantic outlook toward marriage shaped by popular entertainment and culture. Most who plan to marry assume their marriage is different and therefore impervious to marital problems so common to the rest of us. What every married couple soon finds out is that, although marriage is wonderful, it is also sometimes quite difficult.

Difficult is not always bad. The human experience is fraught with difficulties, and thus we can empathize with others in their hardships. As in life, so it is in marriage. Life in general and marriage specifically can be happy, but both can be filled with difficulties.

Good relationships don’t just happen; they are cultivated. The good ones are sustained by good works. To bear the rich fruit of a happier marriage requires a personal investment of time, interest and diligence. One person put it this way: The only relationship that doesn’t require work is the one that’s not worth having.

Some assume that having to work on marriage after saying “I do” is proof that the relationship wasn’t good enough in the beginning. This notion demonstrates a lack of understanding. The truth is that all marriages, and especially those we consider the happiest, are marriages that both partners have worked on. It’s no accident that “for better or for worse” is part of many marriage ceremonies?

Work correctly implies sacrifice; work or sacrifice in marriage helps make romantic lovers into inseparable friends.

• **Friends and lovers.** In the most fruitful and productive marriages, mates share the relationship of friendship as well as romantic love. Many psychological and emotional differences come into play in these relationships, of course. Friendship brings a significantly different array of experiences and feelings to a marriage from those brought by romance.

In terms of its effect, the friendship relationship within marriage can be the most significant because of the amount of time marriage partners spend together, especially as the marriage matures and grows. Still, romance in marriage should be rekindled. It will be by those who are working at having happier marriages.

**The basics of restoring romance**

What are some of the steps you can take to stir up romance in your marriage? Let’s notice a few common-sense, practical requirements any marriage must have to be romantic, happy and secure.

Telling your mate you love her or him—and doing this often—is essential toward rekindling romance in your marriage. Complimenting your mate infuses your marriage with romance, something you experienced early in your relationship.

Spending time talking with and listening to your mate is vital to restoring romance. Wives especially enjoy and need communication with their husbands. Marriages are more romantic when the husband understands this need...
and gives himself to fulfilling it. Husband and wife can experience a richer relationship in proportion to the time they spend sincerely communicating with one another.

Presenting yourself to your mate in a desirable way likewise helps put romance back into your marriage. Cleanliness and grooming are basic ways of showing respect and love for your partner. Affection is essential to a romantic marriage. Saying “I love you” is good, but showing “I love you” is better. Lovers will hug and kiss each other often. This, perhaps more than any other ingredient, is the greatest single factor in putting romance back into marriage. The more couples do these things, the more romantic and loving their marriages become.

Dining by candlelight can help create an atmosphere of romance. The thoughtful husband will occasionally but regularly take his wife out on a date away from home. Laying careful plans for such romantic interludes, which might even include a weekend away from the home and its routines, will help stir romance and love in a marriage. The effects of soft music, candlelight and intimate conversation can restore the deeper feelings both have had for one another and can be well worth the effort and expense.

The joy of love

The basic principles involved in building a loving, romantic relationship are found in Scripture. The Bible is an eminently practical book, especially in the area of human relationships.

Scripture tells us to look on the needs of others (Philippians 2:2-4), helping them to be happy. Unselfishly providing for another person brings one of the ultimate joys in life and in marriage lays the foundation for a more romantic and fulfilling relationship.

The basis of any successful human relationship is to give of oneself unselfishly to another (1 John 3:17; 4:20-21). The Bible describes this as being our brother’s keeper (Genesis 4:7). This especially applies to the marriage union. God informs us that a good marriage is based on genuine outgoing concern for our spouse (Ephesians 5). This kind of love looks out for the benefit of one’s mate.

The author of marriage is God, who instituted it shortly after creation (Genesis 2:24). God, the maker of humanity, offers His creation—every current and future husband and wife—instructions on how to experience a happy and romantic marriage. Jesus Christ inspired the apostle Paul to give mankind some foundational instructions on marriage in Ephesians 5. The basis for a happy, romantic marriage is simple: “submitting to one another in the fear of God” (verse 21). Husbands and wives are to recognize who our true Master is and treat our mate accordingly.

Scripture shows both husband and wife the importance Jesus Christ places on the marriage union. The wife is to submit to her husband (verses 22-23); the husband should love his wife as he loves himself (verse 28). When both husband and wife submit themselves to one another’s needs, and, yes, even sometimes to their wishes, such a union will blossom with romance, respect and abiding love. The ultimate joy in marriage is both living for and loving one another, totally submitting to one another.

Make your marriage blossom

You can put romance back into your marriage, if you aspire to it strongly enough. Doing so requires that you commit yourself to self-direction, evaluating whether you are laboring under two enemies of marriage: marital myths and unreasonable expectations.

Aspiring for a romantic marriage also necessitates submission to your mate, as Jesus Christ, through Paul’s instruction, advises (Ephesians 5:21-33). This can be God’s gift to you and your mate. It is yours for the asking. If you do step up to take advantage of it, you can expect to enjoy a renewed, revitalized relationship.

Remember Bill and Ann? They agreed to do something good for their marriage. Bill began dating a new Ann, and they successfully put romance back into their marriage. You can too.

You are in charge of restoring romance to your marriage. With God’s help you can do it. May your marriage blossom as never before! GN

Tough Times

Continued from page 37

week, to be alone with your mate and get away from whatever is causing you stress. Walk around the block. Go to dinner at a quiet restaurant. Share a pot of tea after the kids are in bed.

“No matter how terrible the stress is, you should give yourselves a respite now and then,” Dr. Boss says. “You need time to talk with each other, without the tragedy facing you, so that you can regroup your thoughts and say to your mate, ‘Yes, I’m tired,’ or I need a hug.’ When couples are under a lot of stress, they often have so much to say to each other but no time to say it.”

- Show your affection. Make it a point to tell each other “I love you,” and say it often. “When you are in the middle of something awful, that is the worst time to just assume your mate knows how you feel,” Dr. Boss says. “It’s during the tough times that your partner needs the reassurance of your love even more.”

Express your devotion through small acts of kindness. Put a note in his briefcase to say how much you appreciate him. Take the baby’s 4 a.m. feeding so she can get some extra sleep. Tell him you know things will work out and that you’re behind him 100 percent. Acknowledge that she has had a rough day and offer to finish her chores. Small gestures like these can go a long way when times get rough.

- Don’t wait for a crisis to build relationship skills. Of course, you shouldn’t wait until times get tough to learn how to work as a team. “Look for opportunities when you’re not under stress to solve problems together so that when something terrible does happen you’re not suddenly trying to invent skills you don’t have,” Dr. Boss says. “Even when you’re trying to decide something as simple as what movie to go to, these are the same skills you are going to use when you have to figure out what to do after your house burns down.”

You need communication and problem-solving abilities such as openness, acceptance, understanding, flexibility, cooperation and kindness—in good times and bad. Use the carefree times in your life to build these skills so that you can draw on them when you need them most. GN
Standing before a large crowd of friends, another young couple solemnly exchanged wedding vows. The minister asked the groom, “Do you faithfully promise and covenant with God in the presence of these witnesses to take so-and-so to be your lawful wedded wife—in sickness and in health, in good times and in difficult times, for as long as you both shall live?”

He then asked the question of the bride. Both joyfully said, “I do.” But would they? In much of the Western world many couples do not honor their vows by staying together as husband and wife. The tragedy of divorce dismantles a significantly high number of households. The pain of failed marriages is experienced all too often. Although every failed marriage has its own sad tale, several common misunderstandings contribute to the problem.

Marriage more than a physical relationship

Debates over mankind’s origin don’t help. The common—and erroneous—view that Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution explains our existence is confusing and detrimental to marriages. The theory classifies man as part of the animal kingdom. Though placed at the top of a hierarchy of animals because of his superior skills and abilities, such thinking degrades humanity and hides the fact that God created us to be part of His Kingdom.

We humans often live up to the expectations of our parents or other influential figures. If we are taught or influenced to believe that we are no more than animals, should we be surprised that many of us act like animals? Although a few species of animals mate for life, most do not remain faithful to one partner throughout their lifetimes. When the females of the species go into heat, they have sex with any opposite-sex member of their species that happens along. Driven by their sexual urges and not realizing their ultimate potential, some people live their lives in a similarly promiscuous fashion.

Although most people agree that a committed relationship with one person is ideal, television shows and movies continue to glamorize and portray indiscriminate sexual relations and divorce as normal and even desirable. Such entertainment, coupled with disregard for our spiritual potential, takes a toll. Marriages pay a dear price for such confusion and aberrant messages.

From the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), God’s plan has been to expand His family (Ephesians 3:14-15). Jesus Christ came to earth to help us attain our spiritual potential—“to become children of God” (John 1:12). Those who respond to this high calling will be invited to the greatest wedding in the history of the universe—“the marriage supper of the Lamb.” When Jesus returns He will take as His bride those who have made themselves ready through “righteous acts” (Revelation 19:7-9).

The apostle Paul understood that God instituted marriage between human beings as representative of the great marriage to Christ and a way for us to better understand the loving relationship between Jesus and His devoted followers, who comprise His Church. Paul taught wives to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22) and husbands to love their wives “just as Christ also loved the church” (verse 25). Concluding his explanation of godly marriage, Paul wrote: “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (verse 32).

Marriage is not simply a physical relationship that exists on a human level. It is a God-plane relationship. It was instituted by God to help us prepare for an eternal relationship with Him and His Son, Jesus. (If you wish to know more about God’s plan for humanity, please request our free booklets What Is Your Destiny? and The Gospel of the Kingdom.)

Understanding love

Another misunderstanding that threatens marriages relates to love. Many people don’t know what real love is. Assuming
that love just mysteriously happens and they have no control over it, some believe divorce is the solution when problems appear. It seems too many forget their vows to stay together in the good times and the bad.

Writing to members of the Church in Corinth, the apostle Paul described how true love works. “Love suffers,” he explained. And not only does it suffer, it “suffers long” (1 Corinthians 13:4). Some people apparently have never understood that love entails considerable patience, bearing with another’s human weaknesses and faults. Paul’s instruction is not meant to condone abusive behaviors or immorality but to teach us that the little irritants of living with another human being—their likes and dislikes and foibles—need to be tolerated.

As Paul wrote: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (verses 4 to 8).

The biblical definition of love does not cast humans as victims of a capricious, uncontrollable emotion. Instead, love involves conscious choice—and its depth and breadth are demonstrated most fully not in good times, but through difficulty.

Immature love is an emotion that focuses primarily on personal gratification—what someone else can do for us. Godly love, the kind of love that Paul and other biblical writers describe, focuses on what we can do for others and how we can make ourselves both more loving and lovable. (If you would like to know more about this kind of love, please request our free booklet The Ten Commandments.)

**Marriage and commitment**

When we understand that marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14), that understanding should have a positive impact on the longevity of our relationship with our husband or wife. Though we commonly speak of exchanging wedding vows, many forget the three-party covenant involved in marriage. They lose sight that the marriage covenant is a solemn agreement that includes not only one’s mate but God Himself.

When we make a covenant with God He expects us to honor that commitment—even on the days we wake up feeling no longer “in love.” Wise King Solomon explains: “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God” (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7).

Emphasizing the personal responsibility each of us must take in fulfilling our vows, King David wrote a song that included this phrase: “Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God” (Psalm 56:12). He concluded another psalm: “So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may daily perform [honor] my vows” (Psalm 61:8).

If you are married, consider these important questions. Do you understand that marriage is a God-plane relationship? Do you realize love is something we do rather than only something we feel? Finally, have you performed your vow today? GN
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