

# MARRIAGE: INTIMATES OR INMATES?

[Booklet Version]

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## INTRODUCTION

Apart from knowing God, marriage is the most significant relationship we can experience. But never has the institution of marriage been more threatened by external and internal problems than it is today. It is challenged from without by a culture which promotes an independent spirit, minimizes the responsibility of complete commitment, and offers divorce as an increasingly common and acceptable alternative. It is challenged from within by manipulation, unforgiveness, and a lack of communication.

As children of God, we need not settle for lackluster relationships where marriage partners feel more like inmates than intimates. When we believe and obey God's precepts and principles, our marriages can become increasingly fulfilling and meaningful as the years go by. In this booklet, we will look at these scriptural principles to see how we can enrich our lives through marital relationships that are characterized by commitment and communion.

## PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

According to Scripture, marriage was not invented by man, but instituted by God. It was divinely designed not only to be the basic building block of society, but also to provide an earthly analogy of spiritual truth. Marriage is a lifetime covenant of mutual commitment between a man and a woman which leads to oneness on every level: spirit, soul, and body. This communion and intimacy between marriage partners is designed to reflect the image of God and provide the context for a lasting relationship of love and respect. This relationship in turn is the foundation for the privilege of reproduction and the God-given responsibility of physical, psychological, and spiritual nurturing of children.

This is a high calling, and it is unattainable apart from conscious dependence upon the grace and power of God. It may seem safer to settle for less, but in doing so, we will miss out on the fulfillment God intended for us and end up in mediocrity. People do not accomplish more than they set out to attempt. No one plans to have a humdrum marriage, but without the right objectives, a couple will gradually drift into one. It is always tempting to concentrate on things rather than relationships, places rather than people, and the material rather than the spiritual.

If we want the joy of a marriage that grows into an incarnation of God's design, we must set goals that are consistent with God's purpose for marriage and implement these goals by walking in the power of the Spirit and not in the flesh.

- \* Write out the God-designed purpose for marriage.
  
- \* Reflect for a few moments on your marriage . . . is it directed toward those purposes? Is there discernible, positive progress?
  
- \* As you begin to study, write out a prayer of commitment to learn, grow, and change in your marriage relationship.

Dear God,

Love,

PRINCIPLE: Marriage is a reflection of a personal covenant relationship between two people.

#### PRINCIPLES FROM SCRIPTURE

##### Genesis 1-2

Genesis 1 describes the creation of the universe and climaxes with the creation of man. Genesis 2 concentrates on the creation of man and climaxes with the institution of marriage. The first chapter portrays God as powerful (the name Elohim is used of God as the creator); the second chapter portrays God as personal (the name Yahweh is used of God as the covenant-keeper).

Study chapters 1 and 2 and list several contrasts between them:

Genesis 1

Genesis 2

- 
- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| * Creation of the universe | * Creation of man              |
| * Climax: creation of man  | * Climax: creation of marriage |

Genesis 1:26-27 states that male and female together constitute the image of God. "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). It is the Lord who created the masculine and the feminine and endowed them with different characteristics so that each expresses something different about God. In a healthy marriage, these personality differences must be acknowledged and accepted. There are exceptions, but the male is more likely to be realistic, logical, and holistic in his thinking, while the female is more likely to be idealistic, intuitive, and detailed in her thinking. In general, men are more conscious of a need for achievement and significance, while women desire affection and security. When these differences are accepted by both partners, they become complimentary rather than competitive. The result is that the total becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

- \* Genesis 1:26-27 states that male and female are created in the image of God. What do you think this means?
  
- \* How does this affect your sense of self-worth? (Read Ps. 139: 13-16.)
  
- \* Accepting yourself sets you free to accept your partner. What truth in Genesis 1:27 helps you in the acceptance of your mate? (See also 1 Pet. 3:7.)

PRINCIPLE: The image of God is best expressed in the combination of male and female.

PRINCIPLE: The God-designed difference between male and female are to be accepted as complementary, not competitive.

Genesis 1:28-30 describes the divine mandate to the man and the woman: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it" (vs. 28). God's first command was to reproduce and have dominion over the earth. From the beginning, God made marriage and the family central to His creative and redemptive purposes.

PRINCIPLE: Marriage is a major part of God's plan to bring redemption to the human race. The seed of the marriage relationship provided the vehicle for the incarnation of the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Genesis 2:18-22 reveals that marriage was ordained by God, and not by men. It is a covenant relationship, and because it was divinely instituted before the fall (Gen. 3), it was part of God's plan from the beginning, not an emergency measure that resulted from sin.

Verse 18 says, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'" God created a sense of need in the man by having him name the animals and so that he would discover that none of them fully corresponded to him. Then from his side God fashioned a new creature that was wonderfully different and yet perfectly complemented him on a spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical level. Loneliness was replaced by companionship and completion, and this is central to God's design for marriage. The concept of "a helper suitable for him" (vss. 18,20) speaks of a supportive relationship between allies and in no way implies that one is inferior to another.

*[Either use the two paragraphs above or the questions below; to use both would be redundant.]*

- \* In Genesis 2:18-22 God declares that it is not good for man to be \_\_\_\_\_. The parade of animals demonstrated to Adam that they could not meet her need of \_\_\_\_\_.
- \* How did God resolve this dilemma?
- \* What does the concept of "a helper suitable for him" mean?
- \* What was man's response and why did he respond in this manner (Gen. 2:23-25)?

PRINCIPLE: Marriage is a divine, not human institution.

PRINCIPLE: Marriage is to be a relationship of companionship, completion, and communion.

Genesis 2:23-25 tells us that marriage was designed to be a permanent covenant relationship of mutual commitment, support, and esteem. The man's response in verse 23, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh," is an expression of delight that at last he has found one who corresponds to him. God ordained the marital relationship to be a source of joy and fulfillment, not drudgery.

Verses 24-25 present three essential prerequisites to a quality marriage, and we will look at these in the next section, "Portrait of Marriage."

PRINCIPLE: Marriage was designed by God to be a permanent, mutual, covenant relationship.

PRINCIPLE: God's intent is for marriage to be an inestimable source of joy and fulfillment.

### 1 Corinthians 7

While Genesis 1-2 portrays the institution of marriage, 1 Corinthians 7 provides specific instructions for marriage. Paul's letter was written to believers in a center of commerce that was noted for moral corruption and sexual promiscuity.

Verses 1-7 defends the legitimacy of marriage but also acknowledges the place of the celibate life. Paul relates celibacy to the gift of self-control (vss. 7,9) and states that there are certain advantages to remaining single if one has this gift. Two of these advantages are that the single person is more free to minister (especially in troubled times), and has fewer distractions to a life of devotion to God (vss. 29-35). It would be wrong to pressure a person with the gift of celibacy to get married; marriage is a may, but not a must.

Paul portrays marriage as a reciprocal relationship in which "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (vs. 4). Each is enjoined to regularly satisfy the sexual needs of the other ("Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband;" vs. 3). In the marital relationship, it is proper for the husband to concern himself with pleasing and

serving his wife, and for the wife to desire to please and serve her husband (vss. 33-34).

\* List two reasons why Paul advocates the celibate lifestyle.

\* Study Philippians 2:3-11. How does the example of Christ in this passage have a direct bearing on the marriage relationship?

PRINCIPLE: Celibacy is commendable for those called to it. Singleness is not a second-class state.

PRINCIPLE: Marriage is a reciprocal relationship, designed to meet the needs of others.

## PORTRAIT OF MARRIAGE

For this cause a man shall leave  
his father and his mother,  
and shall cleave to his wife;  
and they shall become one flesh.  
And the man and his wife were  
both naked and were not ashamed  
(Gen. 2:24-25).

These verses give us the clearest and most concise portrait of marriage ever presented. The three elements of leaving, cleaving, and establishing a one-flesh relationship are prerequisites to a healthy marital relationship of commitment, completeness, and companionship.

\* Study Genesis 2:24-25 and determine the three elements of God's ideal plan for marriage.

### Leave

Leaving must precede cleaving--marriage requires the forsaking of other relationships so that the husband and wife can be fully committed to each other. When a man and a woman leave home to start a new family unit, they are no longer under the authority of their parents, but are now directly responsible to God and to each other. They are to be independent of their parents in a geographical, emotional, and financial sense, and no other relationship should be allowed to come between them. Independence, however, is not the same as avoidance. Scripture requires them to continue to love and honor their parents and to assist them in times of need.

### Cleave

In a relationship of mutual commitment, leaving is the negative aspect, and cleaving is the positive. The marital vows that are expressed in the presence of witnesses establish a permanent covenant in which a man and a woman acknowledge that they are inseparably joined together. The word used in God's mandate for a man to "cleave to his wife" entails the idea of holding fast, of clinging, and of being glued or welded together. There are many external and internal forces that would threaten to sever this bond, but a Christian couple makes a solemn vow to cling together through troubled as well as calm waters. As they renew this vow, implement the principles of Scripture, and depend on God's grace, their relationship can continue to grow in spite of contrary circumstances.

Cleaving also means that the relationship between a husband and wife is to be second only to their relationship with the Lord. Their marriage is to have priority over everything else, including children, career, hobbies, friends, and ministry.

### One Flesh

"They shall become one flesh" is the mystery of marriage. While this phrase certainly alludes to the sexual relationship, it goes beyond this, saying that a man and wife actually become one (note that it is a process). The two complete one another physically, psychologically, and spiritually, and this completeness is used in the New Testament to portray an even deeper mystery:

For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32).

The sexual union was designed by God to be a delightful physical expression of a committed love relationship, and this relationship was in turn designed to portray the spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and His bride, the church.

The Scriptures are clear that polygamy, adultery, promiscuity, and divorce distort God's purpose for marriage (cf. Prov. 5:15-23; 6:32; Mal. 2:16) because they minimize its permanency and commitment. Marriage was never intended to be a static or dreary experience that tempts people to look elsewhere for fulfillment, but a dynamic process of deepening completeness and companionship. There is to be a new identity as two people become one in spirit, soul, and body. But growing marriages do not happen by default; they are cultivated by years of mutual effort (discipline) and reliance on the grace of God (dependence). When marital problems prevail, they inevitably arise from a failure to leave, a failure to cleave, or a failure to establish a one-flesh relationship.

See if you can fill in the following chart with examples from your own marriage or from any marriage with which you are familiar:

POSITIVE EXAMPLES

NEGATIVE EXAMPLES

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LEAVE

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CLEAVE

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ONE FLESH

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## PRIORITY OF LOVE

The threefold mandate of leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh cannot be fulfilled without love. This immediately raises a problem, because there are so many personal and cultural misconceptions about the nature of love. Many people confuse love with infatuation which is generally based on a superficial level of outward appearance, a desire for self-satisfaction, fantasy, and romantic euphoria.

The biblical perspective on love is radically different from what most people associate with the term. The Bible is in fact a love story from beginning to end, revealing God's unchanging and sacrificial love for rebellious people:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 5:25).

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

God's love is not static but dynamic, because it is manifested in action as well as attitude. It is a love which seeks the highest good for its object. This deepest love results from a choice to give rather than a desire to get. Marriage is to be modeled on the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, and it is the nature of Christ's love to serve and to give (see Mark 10:45).

Love is not primarily a matter of mysterious feelings and irrational passions. We can choose to love, we can learn to love, and we can develop the depth of our love even in times of difficulty. Esteem for the unique value of another is based more on choice than on feelings, and it is this esteem and commitment which provides stability in a marriage when feelings fluctuate. All of us desire the emotional aspects of love, but left to themselves, emotions can become tyrannical. According to Scripture, beliefs determine behavior. The right thinking will lead to the right actions, and this in turn will lead to the right emotions.

So far, we have been talking about agape, the highest form of love because it is the love which God has for us. But there are other aspects of love which should also be part of the marital relationship. In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis develops the meaning of four Greek words for love, and to this list we will add a fifth.

1. Epithumia--In a negative sense, this word is translated lust, but it can also be used in a positive way to speak of legitimate desire. Physical desire should be a part of each marriage; an absence or minimizing of the sexual relationship is symptomatic of problem areas that need to be corrected like painful experiences in the past or tension and poor communication in the present. Marriage was divinely designed to create oneness between a man and a woman on every level, and the shared experience of sexual pleasure is an important form of love which enriches the other forms of love in a marriage union.

2. Eros--This word was commonly used in Greek literature, though it does not appear in the New Testament. While it is the basis for our word erotic, it is not limited to the sensual dimension of love but goes beyond this to the romantic preoccupation with the beloved. Eros can be present with or without epithumia or sexual desire (what Lewis calls "Venus"). It can lead to such a powerful identification that it virtually overcomes the distinction between giving and receiving. Because it is such an emotional love, eros cannot be summoned at will or sustained without help.

3. Storge--Like eros, this word is not used in the New Testament. Storge is the love of affection and belonging, and it borne out of familiarity. It is a love shared by members of a family who know they belong together and are comfortable in one another's presence. It provides a sense of security and an emotional refuge from the outside world.

4. Phileo--This is the love of friendship, companionship, and openness. It is the product of shared interests, time, insights, vision, and experiences. In eros, the lover is occupied with the beloved; in phileo, two or more companions are occupied with common interests and activities. Without this dimension of friendship, a marriage will slip into the rut of mediocrity.

5. Agape--We have already seen that this is the highest of the loves because it is characterized by unselfishness and giving, even to the point of sacrifice. Agape is not a conditional "if" love that places others on a performance basis. Nor is it a "because" love that results from mutual attraction or friendship. Agape is an "in spite of" love which sets no conditions and stands firm in spite of circumstances. It is prompted by a willful choice to put another's interest before one's own and to serve another person regardless of his or her response. It relates more to the will

than to the emotions. Agape is not theoretical but practical, because it is expressed in actions.

Agape is not natural. It is a divine love, and our choice to love others in this way requires us to be willing vessels of God's love. It is not something we can manufacture in the power of the flesh. Agape is the only love which can provide a true foundation for a successful Christian marriage. The other loves are all important, and each of them should be facets of the marital relationship. But they are like flowers in a garden that must be cultivated, nourished, and weeded by agape. Without it, the other loves can degenerate and become ends in themselves:

- Epithumia can become an addictive and selfish quest for the acquisition of pleasure; legitimate sexual desire for a spouse can turn into sexual lust for other men or women.
- Eros can become a tyrant; the feeling of "being in love" can be so romanticized that it speaks with the voice of a god and leads people into illicit relationships.
- Storge can lead to rudeness, bad manners, jealousy, the demanding of "rights," and the need to be needed.
- Phileo can degenerate into the sharing of secret evils and hatreds; it can lead to a we-versus-they mentality that excludes outsiders.

When these loves are controlled and transformed by the love of God, each of them can become aspects of agape while also remaining, in the best sense, the natural loves they were. Frictions and faults are really invitations to turn these loves into agape, "which is the perfect bond of unity" (Col. 3:14), so that we respond with "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other" (Col. 3:12-13).

#### LET'S REVIEW

\* Write out a personal definition for each word for "love":

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EPITHUMIA

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EROS

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STORGE

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PHILEO

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AGAPE

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\* In this exercise, note the dangers of each kind of love apart from agape. Then describe how each is controlled and transformed when expressed in the context of God's love, agape.

Dangers Apart from Agape      Fruits in Context of Agape

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Epithumia

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Eros

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Storge

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Phileo

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\* Now that you understand the five kinds of love and the important contribution each makes to a healthy marriage relationship, take some time to discuss them with your spouse to see how each can be enhanced in your marriage.

\* Exercise: Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 two times to gain a better understanding of agape in action. Then read it a third time and visualize the life of Christ as you substitute the name of Jesus for love. Finally, read the passage a fourth time while substituting your own name, and use this as a diagnostic tool to surface areas of deficiency in your own love for your husband or wife. Acknowledge these areas to the Lord and ask Him to transform the quality of your love.

## COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

The word communication is derived from the Latin word *communis*, which means to have in common. Commonalty is essential to every form of love. Studies consistently reveal that the primary cause of marital problems and divorces is a lack of communication.

Communication is the process of sharing thoughts and feelings, through verbal and non-verbal means, with another person so that he or she understands what you are attempting to express. Effective communication does not happen by accident; it is a skill which requires the discipline of development. There are three essential components of the communication process: talking, listening, and caring.

### Talking

The most obvious aspect of communication is verbalizing. Scripture exhorts us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and this requires a mutual attitude of openness and honesty. For love to grow in a marriage there must be regular times of interaction and comradeship. At some point in each day, both partners should make an effort to move beyond the level of routine conversation to verbalize hopes, disappointments, joys, fears, prayer requests and answers, plans, ideas, and interests. As a couple talks things over, confides in each other, and spends time together, they become better and better friends.

Your mate should be your best friend. Tragically, this rarely occurs in marriage. Too often, couples get so wrapped up with their children that they hardly know each other. Then when the children leave, they discover that they are like strangers who have been living for years under the same roof. This does not need to happen, but effort is required to avoid it. Friendships are cultivated by shared thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

## Listening

Listening is the biggest problem in effective communication. Most of us have developed poor listening habits, and this is especially true in the way we listen to our mates. Because we think we know our partners so well, we often tune them out and miss what they are really trying to say. Preoccupation, daydreaming, worry, distractions (e.g., television), and lack of interest are a few of the barriers to real listening. Norm Wright mentions another barrier in *Communication: Key to Your Marriage*. He observes that when one person talks to another, there are actually six messages that can be communicated:

- What you mean to say.
- What you actually say.
- What the other person hears.
- What the other person thinks he hears.
- What the other person says about what you said.
- What you think the other person said about what you said.

It is easy for the speaker to fall short of the ideal in verbalization, "Say what you mean and mean what you say." It is even easier for the listener to incorrectly perceive, interpret, evaluate, and respond to a message.

A study conducted by Albert Mehrabian demonstrated that a listener determines the attitude of a speaker toward him by three components: the words themselves, the tone of voice, and non-verbal factors. Significantly, the words account for only 7% of the message; the remaining 93% is communicated by the tone of voice (38%) and non-verbal cues (55%). This is a sharp reminder that what we do speaks so loudly that our partners often cannot hear what we say.

Here are several suggestions for improving your listening skills:

1. Listening requires focused attention. Avoid the temptation of doing other things while conversing with your mate.
2. Make an effort to establish good eye contact. Much is communicated through facial expressions and the eyes, so look at your partner, not at the floor, ceiling, or television.
3. Because you can think faster than a person can speak, there is a temptation to drift away and get engaged in your own thoughts. Use this extra time by looking for key words, feelings, and subliminal messages. Work on concentrating on what your mate is really saying.
4. Show enthusiasm and interest, and be sure to ask probing and

clarifying questions to ensure effective communication.

5. Try to set aside a special time for undistracted conversation.  
For many people, the late evening is best.
6. Be careful not to interrupt or jump to premature conclusions.
7. Look for understanding even when you disagree; try to see issues from your partner's perspective.

\* Exercise: Look up the following passages and write down a communication principle for each one:

Principles that Help Communication	Principles that Hinder Communication
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=====	

Proverbs 12:25

Proverbs 11:13

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Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 12:22

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Proverbs 15:23

Proverbs 18:2

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Proverbs 25:11

Proverbs 18:13

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Isaiah 50:4

Proverbs 18:19

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Ephesians 4:15

Proverbs 21:9,19

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Ephesians 4:29b

Ephesians 4:26-27

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1 Peter. 2:22-23; 3:9-10

Ephesians 4:29a

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James 1:19-20

James 3:5-12

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### Caring

Caring is a key ingredient in effective communication, because it is the genuine desire to understand the other person, to build areas of common ground, and to deepen the relationship. Real caring requires a willingness to concentrate on

another person's strengths and accept his or her weaknesses. Caring involves transparency, vulnerability, and supportiveness; it is other-centered rather than self-centered.

Here are some suggestions for developing this aspect of your relationship. Check the areas you need to work on:

- \_\_\_\_\_1. You can enhance positive associations with your mate by visualizing times of shared joys and experiences and remembering the good things you have done together.
- \_\_\_\_\_2. At least once a year, plan an overnight or a weekend retreat (if you have children, get a baby sitter). Use this time to relax and discuss your marriage, family goals, spiritual life, recreation, finances, and so forth.
- \_\_\_\_\_3. Display physical affection. Touch, pat, hug, and kiss your partner.
- \_\_\_\_\_4. Make it a point to notice and pay attention to your spouse when other people are present.
- \_\_\_\_\_5. Steer away from the habit of nagging and criticism.
- \_\_\_\_\_6. Stretch your sphere of interests to include at least some of your mate's, and look for ways to do things together (gardening, special projects, cultural events, tennis, etc.).
- \_\_\_\_\_7. Compliment your husband or wife whenever possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_8. Don't take your partner for granted; extend the kind of courtesy you showed when you were dating.

\* Quality communication is essential to a maturing, dynamic relationship. Don't settle for mediocrity. Develop some specific, achievable goals for improving the quality of your mental communication. Two examples are provided to get you started.

1. Set up a time to study the HELPS and HINDRANCES passages with my mate.
2. Plan an overnight rendezvous with my spouse (get a baby sitter if you have kids) and discuss marriage and family

goals (e.g., spiritual life, recreation, finances, etc.).

3.

4.

## CHALLENGES TO MARRIAGE

We live in a culture that has succumbed to the process of secularization and reflects materialistic values on every level. Though we are supposed to love people and use things, more and more of us use people and love things. Increasing stress and rootlessness, along with confusion of roles and excessive activities have threatened the stability of the family unit. Communication and creative participation in the home have been on the decline for years. As marital and parental bonds grow weaker, separation and divorce become more common. These and other cultural influences challenge the viability of quality marriages and affect us all.

In such a relativistic society, we need more than ever to be grounded in an absolute frame of reference. If we do not daily renew our minds by the truths of the Word in this and in other areas of life, we will unavoidably slip into the mind-set of our surrounding culture and our marriages will be severely threatened. Many Christians have already absorbed the prevailing attitude that divorce is a live option. When two people enter into a marriage thinking that they can always bail out when times get rough, the possibility of divorce is greatly enhanced.

The Bible is clear in its teaching that marriage is to be permanent ("For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel;" Mal. 2:16). Separation and divorce are contrary to the purposes for which God instituted marriage. When Jesus was tested by the Pharisees in this area, He went back to God's original design for marriage, quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 and concluding, "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6; Mark 10:9). When a man and a woman marry, God yokes them in an indissoluble union. It is therefore dishonoring to God to even consider divorce as an escape hatch, because this distorts the spiritual reality of marriage and creates a breach in commitment that can widen under pressure.

As Christians, we are to pursue a higher standard than that of the prevailing culture. God's pattern and purpose for marriage is constantly imperiled by internal forces of selfishness and external forces of society. Because of the problem of sin, we all fall short of God's ideal for our marriages. It is only as we abide in His power that we can fulfill His plan in this most important of earthly relationships.

God deals with us in the present; if in the past you have made mistakes that have lead to separation or divorce, you can claim His forgiveness in the present and be relieved from any burden of guilt. Like Paul, you can forget what lies behind and

reach forward to what lies ahead (Phil. 3:13). If in the present you are suffering from an unhappy marriage, you can prayerfully apply biblical principles and maintain your commitment by God's power regardless of the response of your mate. If for the sake of Christ you have been called to endure hardship, God's grace will be sufficient for you as you honor Him (see Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; 12:9; Phil. 4:13; 1 Pet. 2:19-21; 3:1).

\* Exercise: Carefully read Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-12; and 1 Corinthians 7:10-28. Write down the key principles you gain on marriage, divorce, and remarriage from these crucial passages:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

## COMMUNION IN MARRIAGE

The goal of marriage is communion: it is a relationship of oneness on the spiritual, psychological, and physical levels.

### Spirit

On the deepest level, we are spiritual beings, created in God's image to have an eternal relationship with Him. Nothing short of this relationship will satisfy our God-given needs for unconditional love and acceptance, significance and identity, and competence and achievement. In our new position in Christ we are perfectly loved and accepted as sons and daughters of God's family; we have significance and identity as members of the body of Christ; and we have been made competent by the gifts of the Spirit to achieve God's purposes for our lives.

If we look to our marriage partners to get our personal worth needs met, we will be exploiting the relationship to get something the other person can never deliver. But if we look to Christ and daily renew our minds with the truth that our needs are fully met in Him, we will liberate our partners from unrealistic demands and find fulfillment rather than frustration. When we trust God's love for us and believe His

promise that our deepest longings are satisfied in Him, we are then free to give to the other person without expecting or demanding anything in return. Even if we are rejected in our efforts to serve, we can continue to give in spite of the pain as we acknowledge our feelings to God and reaffirm our true and unchanging position in Christ. We can do this knowing that we are secure in the love of Christ; our true significance is not threatened when we are hurt and rejected by others.

Oneness takes place on the spiritual level when both partners look to the Lord to meet their needs and encourage each other to develop this sense of complete dependence. As the two draw nearer to God, they also come closer to each other because both are finding meaning and fulfillment in the same source.

[Triangle of relationships illustration.]

Couples can cultivate their spiritual oneness by taking a little time in the morning or evening to study the Bible and pray together (consistency is crucial).

Isn't it strange, even tragic, that so few couples pray together? They share meals and conversation, work and play; they share their own bodies and hopes and plans. But they do not openly share God together. Yet He is their deepest source of unity, joy and fulfillment (Armand Nigro).

In addition to shared time in prayer and Scripture, it can also be helpful to read and discuss Christian books of mutual interest and listen together to tapes by various Bible teachers.

\* What are the three God-given needs that all people have?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

\* How are these three needs met by God?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Soul

On the spiritual level, a husband and wife must depend on the Lord to meet their deepest needs. As they encourage each other to do this, a spiritual oneness develops between them. This in turn is the basis for unity on the psychological level; married couples have been called to an interpersonal oneness of mind, emotion, and will. While they cannot alter the reality of their security and significance in Christ, they can enhance one another's realization of this truth.

In *The Marriage Builder*, Larry Crabb discusses two opposing principles that surface in Christian marriages: the principle of manipulation versus the principle of ministry. He states the important truth that beliefs determine goals. If a man or woman does not believe that his or her needs are really met in Christ, that person will pursue the goal of manipulating others to get those needs met. When this happens, marriage motivations are self-centered rather than other-centered, and this leads to parasitic relationships.

The only way to turn from the goal of manipulation to the goal of ministry is a change of beliefs. When we believe the New Testament truth that our fulfillment is found in Christ, we are then free to give ourselves unconditionally to our spouses. Knowing who we are in Christ, we can choose in the power of the Spirit to minister to our partner's needs.

It is natural to desire that our partners reciprocate in this process, but this desire must not become our goal, since it depends on the other person for its fulfillment. We must continue to pursue the goal of ministry and leave our desires in God's hands. If we fail to do so, we will slip into the subtle trap of manipulating our partners to change according to our desires. We must rely on the grace of God to sustain us during times of sadness, failure, rejection, and disappointment in marriage so that we will not succumb to despair. During such trials, we must cling to the truth of God's goodness, believing that regardless of our circumstances, God's good and loving purpose is to make us more like Christ. With this attitude, we can joyfully obey God's mandate to commit ourselves to the satisfaction of our spouses. We can accept and forgive them just as we have been accepted and forgiven by Jesus.

\* In this section, we discussed the difference between the goal of manipulation and the goal of ministry. In what ways have you tried to manipulate your mate to conform to your desires?

- \* What practical steps do you need to implement the principle of ministry to your spouse? For example: Pray with my wife regularly. Share a word of encouragement with my mate in a phone call.
  
- \* What truth do you need to believe in order to selflessly minister to your mate?

## Body

Oneness on the level of spirit and soul provides the basis for physical oneness in marriage. From a biblical standpoint, sex should not be regarded as "making love" but as expressing love. Sexual intimacy was designed to be an expression of spiritual and psychological (mental, emotional, and volitional) intimacy. As Larry Crabb notes, the two bodies that come together should house two persons who are already together. The sexual relationship was never intended to lead to a good marriage, but to be the product of a good marriage.

Our culture has cheapened and debased the idea of sexuality by minimizing this dimension of personal meaning and ignoring the boundaries originally set by God. Sex has become associated with coarse humor, promiscuity, obsession, perversion, exploitation, and abuse. It is a tyrannical master of those who pursue physical pleasure as a solution for their personal problems.

The biblical perspective is utterly opposed to this mentality. Scripture teaches that God is the originator of the sexual relationship; it was not produced in the gutter but in glory. It is God who designs, but man who degenerates. Listen to what C. S. Lewis has the demon Screwtape say to his nephew Wormwood in *The Screwtape Letters*:

Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one.

Larry Christenson in *The Christian Family* observes that believers tend to fall into two basic errors in their attitude toward sex. The first is the Puritanical and Victorian attitude that sex is a kind of necessary evil. This mentality is not derived from the Bible, but from the ancient Greek dualism between the physical (evil) and the spiritual (good). By contrast, Genesis teaches that marriage and sex were given as a gift of God before, not after the fall. It is therefore good, not sinful, when used according to His design.

\* Exercise: Look up these passages to determine the divine parameters for the use of the gift of sex:

Genesis 2:24

Exodus 20:14

Proverbs 5:15-17

Proverbs 6:23-32

1 Corinthians 6:15-20

Ephesians 5:3

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Hebrews 13:4

While the first basic error deprecates sex, the second error spiritualizes it. It is sometimes described in such elevated terms that one would hardly know that the primary aspect of the sexual relationship is physical and emotional pleasure. Sex is sometimes solemnized to the point that Christians are afraid to admit it is fun. Play and laughter should not be banished from the bedroom.

Scripture reveals three purposes for the sexual dimension of marriage: procreation, pleasure, and protection.

Procreation--The divine mandate to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" was given before the fall (Gen. 1:28) and after the flood (Gen. 9:7) so that the earth would be populated. Children are the logical outcome of a love relationship.

Pleasure--God created the pleasure of sexuality to enhance this aspect of communication and shared experience. Read these passages to see what they say about sexual desire and pleasure:

Genesis 3:16

Genesis 18:12

Genesis 26:8

Deuteronomy 24:5

Proverbs 5:18-19

The relationship between Solomon and Shulamith so beautifully portrayed in the rich poetic imagery of the Song of Solomon offers an unparalleled illustration of sensuous love. For a clear picture of this pattern for the sexual expression of love, you and your partner may want to read *A Song for Lovers* by S. Craig Glickman, a commentary on the Song of Solomon which includes a new translation and paraphrase of the book.

Protection--Another divine purpose for the sexual union between a husband and wife is to protect them both from immorality.

But because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Cor. 7:2-5).

This is not a matter of legalized prostitution, because both sides are equally represented in this passage. There is no double standard here; Paul speaks of mutual responsibility. The husband and the wife have relinquished the right to their bodies and turned that authority over to each other. The wife's body belongs to her husband, and the husband's body belongs to his wife. Neither has the right to withhold physical affection or use sex in a manipulative way. Sex is not to be used as a club or as a reward for good behavior. Instead, both partners are responsible to care for and fulfill one another's physical needs. Sex was never intended to be self-oriented but partner-oriented.

Verse 5 teaches that apart from brief periods by mutual consent, a couple should not defraud each other by abstaining from habitual sexual practice, because this would lead to excessive temptation. Each should serve as a magnet to the other so that they will be able to resist the pull of outside attraction (see Prov. 5:15-17,20; 1 Cor. 7:9).

\* 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 is one of the clearest passages in the Bible on the importance of sex in marriage. According to these verses, mark the following statements either true or false:

T. F. The husband has the greater need for sex; it is assumed that the wife has little interest in or need for sex.

T. F. Failure to meet the sexual need of one's partner is sin.

T. F. Meeting your mate's sexual needs is an option, not an obligation.

\* What conditions are required in verse 5 for sexual abstinence in marriage?

1.

2.

3.

There are three principal barriers to a fulfilling sexual relationship in marriage. The first arises from painful experiences in the past that relate to sexuality. These can lead to inhibitions and a fear of full participation with one's mate. This obstacle is overcome when a person realizes that his or her needs are fully met in Christ, and that rejection or painful associations do not threaten his or her true identity and security.

The second barrier stems from spiritual and/or psychological tension between marriage partners. When there is a lack of caring and communication, when there is anger, guilt, unforgiveness, and resentment, when there is anxiety because of insecurity in the relationship, sexual responsiveness is impaired. The solution lies in what was said earlier about exchanging goals of manipulation for goals of ministry. When we believe that we are complete in Christ, we can look beyond ourselves to the needs of our mates and pursue the proper goal of being God's instruments to touch those needs.

The third barrier is poor sexual technique. This can be overcome by a better understanding of the physiological and psychological aspects of romance, warmth, sensitivity, caressing, arousal, etc. For help in this area, consider reading one of the following: *Intended for Pleasure* by Ed and Gaye Wheat, *The Gift of Sex* by Clifford and Joyce Penner, *Sexual Happiness in Marriage* by Herbert J. Miles, or *The Act of Marriage* by Tim and Beverly LaHaye.

\* What are the three principal barriers to a fulfilling sexual relationship in marriage, and how is each overcome?

1.

2.

3.

Spiritual, psychological, and physical communion in marriage can continue to grow through the years when a man and a woman are committed to ministering to one another on every level. In *Love-Life for Every Married Couple*, Ed Wheat presents a helpful list of the strands that make up the bond of intimacy between a husband and wife:

- Physical touching of an affectionate, non-sexual nature  
(touch should not be used exclusively as a signal for sex)
- Shared feelings
- Closeness without inhibitions
- Absence of psychological defenses
- Open communication and honesty
- Intellectual agreement on major issues
- Spiritual harmony
- Sensitive appreciation of the mate's physical and emotional responses
- Similar values held
- Imparted secrets
- Genuine understanding
- Mutual confidence
- A sense of warmth, safety, and relaxation when together
- Sensuous nearness
- Sexual pleasures lovingly shared
- Signs of love freely given and received
- Mutual responsibility and caring

## --Abiding trust

\* Personal inventory exercise: Use this list to examine your own marriage. Pray about the areas of deficiency and ask for God's grace and enabling to minister more effectively to your mate.

### ROLE OF THE HUSBAND

"Roles always determine relationships, and relationships create responsibility" (Howard Hendricks). Because of the abuse and misunderstanding of roles and because of the current cultural trend away from role differentiation, this subject is often looked upon with disfavor. But the Scriptures clearly teach that men and women have distinctive roles to fulfill in Christian marriage, and that these roles actually reflect and illustrate the spiritual relationship between Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:22-33 paints the clearest biblical portrait of the position of the husband and wife. Significantly, this passage is set within the context of the manifestations of the filling of the Spirit. Verse 21 tells us that one evidence of the Spirit-controlled life is mutual submission in the fear of Christ. Submission is not the exclusive responsibility of the woman; it is to be the life-style of every believer. No one who refuses to live under authority is fit to wield authority. All Christians are called to submit to the authority of Christ and to the truths of God's Word. One of these truths is that marriage best reflects the relationship between Christ and His bride (the church) when the husband assumes the responsibility of being the head of the home. As God's representative authority, he is to take the initiative and leadership in the marriage relationship.

Before we can clearly see what the Bible means by headship, we need to clear away the debris of misconceptions. Here are five (modified from Heaven Help the Home by Howard Hendricks):

1. Headship is not dictatorship. The Bible does not give the husband permission to set up an autocracy in the home. Husbands are not to lord their authority over their family, but exercise it in humility. Ephesians 5:23 says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body." Christ is not the dictator but the lover and Savior of the church.
2. Headship does not mean that the husband is superior. Men and women have an equal standing before Christ (see Gal. 3:28). The best biblical analogy is in 1 Corinthians 11:3--"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." Clearly,

this is not a matter of inferiority, but of function. It is just as heretical to say that women are inferior to men as it is to say that Christ is inferior to God.

3. Headship does not mean that the husband must make all the decisions. Husbands are told to manage their households (1 Tim. 3:12); a wise manager does not make decisions in areas of incompetence, but delegates authority.
4. Headship does not mean that the husband is always right. It does mean that he is responsible for the decisions that are made.
5. Headship is not to be demanded. Husbands are commanded to love their wives, not to make them submit by lecturing and haranguing them.

The husband's God-given task is nothing less than a leadership of love:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her . . . . So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:25-26,28).

There could be no higher analogy; a husband's love for his wife is to be modeled after Christ's supreme passion for the church. This love is rooted in self-sacrifice; like Christ, husbands are actually told to give themselves up for the spiritual welfare of their wives. They are called to protect their wives physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The husband is to be the initiator not only in leadership, but also in love. He is to manifest both authority and affection as head and heart of the home. This provides the perfect balance, because it avoids the two extremes of autocracy (leadership without love) and sentimentality (love without leadership). This can only be achieved by being dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

### The Ideal Husband

Ephesians 5:21 introduces the best known passage in Scripture on the role of the husband and wife in marriage. You as a husband are to be subject to your wife through the proper exercise of your God-given role. Always keep this basic relational principle before you as you proceed through this study.

### Leader

The first role of a husband mentioned in Ephesians 5:23 is that he should be the head of the wife.

HEAD: As God's representative authority, the husband is to take the initiative, leadership, and responsibility for the marriage relationship.

1. Being the head means to be the initiator. List five key areas of the marriage or family relationship in which a husband should fulfill his role as head of his wife.
  
2. What is a current misapplication of this principle?
  
3. If you applied the same initiative, drive, creativity, planning, and priority to a business of which you were the chief executive officer as you currently apply to your marriage and family, which of the following terms would most appropriately describe the outcome of your business venture?
  - Miserable failure
  - Still alive but doing poorly
  - Maintaining status quo
  - Doing well but have a long way to go
  - Growing, successful company
  
4. What positive effect has your spiritual growth had on the climate of your home?
  
5. Are you willing to take the initiative in praying with and for your wife?

### Lover

The second role of a husband is that he is to love his wife.

1. Are there any conditions listed in Ephesians 5:25-29 which free a man from the responsibility to love his wife sacrificially?
  
2. Paul tells husbands to love their wives in two ways. What are they?
  - a.

b.

3. After careful thought, fill in the chart below with some practical ways you can love your wife.

- 
4. Now take time out for an interview with your wife. Carefully jot down in the space below her responses to the following questions (you may wish to write her answers on a separate sheet of paper):
- a. What are your needs (e.g., emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual, etc.)?
  - b. How would you prioritize these needs?
  - c. What practical suggestions do you have for me so that I can help meet these needs?
5. What do you think Peter means when he says, "live with your wives in an understanding way" (1 Pet. 3:7)?
6. You can measure your "U.Q." (understanding quotient) by checking the statements that are true for you:
- \_\_\_ I listen carefully and attentively when my wife describes the activities of her day and the various difficulties she encounters.
  - \_\_\_ Even when I believe my wife is wrong, I am compassionate toward her and considerate of why she feels the way she does.
  - \_\_\_ I make a habit of trying to overlook the surface words and actions of my wife when she expresses anger or hurt and patiently try to discover the real cause.
  - \_\_\_ I am a student of my wife and pay close attention to her

feelings, likes, dislikes, attitudes, etc.

Point to Ponder: "I used to pray, 'God, change my wife.' Then I realized I was praying the wrong prayer, and began to pray, 'God, change my wife's husband.'"

## ROLE OF THE WIFE

Jay Adams has summarized God's high calling for married believers in two questions: "Husbands, do you love your wives enough to die for them? Wives, do you love your husbands enough to live for them?" The husband is to love his wife as his own body and give himself up for her. The wife is to respect her husband and voluntarily respond to his God-given authority.

Ephesians 5:22-24 and the parallel passage in Colossians 3:18 tell wives to be subject to their own husbands as is fitting in the Lord in the same way that the church is subject to Christ. Many people in our culture have taken issue with this mandate because they misunderstand the New Testament picture of submission. Paul was no woman-hater; his epistles often commend and speak of women with graciousness and respect. It is important to overcome misconceptions in this area:

1. Submission does not mean inferiority. In 1 Peter, there is a clear parallel between Christ's submission to "Him who judges righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23) and the mandate for wives to be submissive "in the same way" to their own husbands (1 Pet. 3:1). This, coupled with the analogy between Christ and the Father in 1 Corinthians 11:3, shows that the wife's role is dignified, not demeaned, because it so clearly reflects the life Jesus lived.
2. Submission does not mean that a wife must place her brain on the shelf. A woman can creatively use her talents and exercise her spiritual gifts within the context of her divinely-given role and responsibilities.
3. Submission does not mean a lack of fulfillment. True freedom comes from obedience to God's design. Rebellion against biblical truth in an attempt to go one's own way leads to frustration, not fulfillment.

Exercise: Proverbs 31:10-31 is a beautiful portrait of an excellent wife who has found fulfillment in her God-given role. She recognizes her worth and creatively uses every one of her gifts in the service of her household. Read this passage and list ten of her qualities. How does her husband respond?

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- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.
- j.

4. Submission does not mean passivity. It is an active choice that requires the courage of trusting God and depending on Him in the midst of the trials and circumstances of married life.

5. Submission does not mean servility. Important decisions in a family should not be made without the perspectives and opinions of the wife. A woman can be outspoken in her ideas and still maintain a biblical attitude toward her husband.

"To be submissive means to yield humble and intelligent obedience to an ordained power or authority" (Larry Christenson). We have seen that submission is not restricted to women; it is to be the life-style of every believer. There are different spheres of authority (e.g., government, employment, church), and corresponding spheres of responsibility. In the home, God has ordained that the final responsibility for decision-making rests in the hands of the husband.

As a wife submits to her husband, she honors God by obeying His design for marriage and reflecting Christ's complete submission to His Father:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the

behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Though Christ suffered innocently, He did not lash back. In a similar way, a Christian woman is told to be submissive even if her husband fails in his role. Like Jesus (see 1 Pet. 2:21-25), she can entrust herself to God, knowing that she is never alone, and believing that the ultimate result of obedience to Him is worth the cost. The real test is not how others act, but how we react. By God's grace, both men and women should pursue the legitimate goal of being the right person rather than the illegitimate goal of changing their mates' behavior. Because God is loving and good, they can trust Him for the final outcome.

Peter adds that while external adornment may fade, inner adornment in a woman can increase with time. The quality of a gentle and quiet spirit is imperishable and precious in the sight of God (1 Pet. 3:3-4). This inward attractiveness is maintained by hope in God and manifested by submission to the husband (1 Pet. 3:5). When a woman honors God in this way, she does not need to be afraid of the consequences of her obedience (1 Pet. 3:6). (If her husband asks her to do something that is clearly in violation of Scripture, she should try to find an alternative course of action. If he persists, she must obey God and respectfully disobey her husband.)

### The Ideal Wife

Ephesians 5:21 introduces the best known passage in Scripture on the role of the husband and wife in marriage. You are to be subject to your husband through the proper exercise of your God-given role. Always keep this basic relational principle before you as you proceed through this study.

The primary role of a wife mentioned in Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 is that she is to be submissive to her husband.

**SUBMISSION:** Submission is a voluntary, positive and respectful response to the God-given authority of the husband.

1. Circle the appropriate answer(s) to the following statement:  
A woman should submit to her husband's authority because . . .
  - a. Women are generally incompetent in the area of decision making.
  - b. Someone must have the final say, and God has given this responsibility to the husband.
  - c. Husbands are normally more deserving of the role of authority.

- d. The husband is stronger physically and intellectually.
  - e. This is what God asked her to do.
  - f. The husband says he is the boss, and that's the way it is.
  - g. Her opinions and feelings are relatively unimportant.
2. Ephesians 5:24 commands submission "in everything." Daniel 3:1-30 cites an exception to this principle, and Daniel 1:1-21 is an example of a creative response to a conflict in the authority pattern. Briefly write your advice regarding the following situations:
- a. My husband asked me to lie on our income tax.
  - b. My husband is not a Christian and he has told me not to attend church.
  - c. My husband has told me not to wear my favorite red dress anymore.

- Principles to Ponder:
- 1. I must always obey God.
  - 2. He has commanded me in His Word to obey those in authority over me (i.e., government and employer--1 Pet. 2; home--1 Pet. 3; Eph. 6; church leaders--1 Pet. 5).
  - 3. I must obey God and respectfully disobey my human authority when I am asked by them to violate a clear biblical absolute (e.g., my husband asked me to lie, steal, murder, commit adultery, etc.).

3. Read 1 Peter 3:1-2 and complete the following statement:  
If a wife becomes a Christian and her husband is still an unbeliever, the best way for her to help him become a Christian is:

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4. In verse 1, wives are told to be submissive "in like manner." To what or to whom does this phrase refer? (See 1 Pet. 2:21-25.)
5. Does 1 Peter 3:3-4 suggest that external appearances should be totally unimportant to the Christian wife and that it does not matter whether or not she looks nice? If not, exactly what is

the point of the passage?

6. Are there any conditions listed in 1 Peter 3:1-6 which your husband must meet in order for you to respect and submit to him?

#### RELATING TO IN-LAWS

"For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother . . ." (Gen. 2:24). We have already seen that a successful marriage requires a separation from both sets of parents. This separation can be traumatic to all concerned if the parents have not been preparing their children for the responsibilities of married life. Maturity involves a process of moving from complete dependence to complete independence.

Serious marital problems can develop when this independence is incomplete. (1) Physical. It is not advisable to live with parents or even to spend great amounts of time with them. This can threaten the establishment of a bond of intimacy between a husband and wife. (2) Emotional. The psychological umbilical cord must be severed, or there will always be the temptation to turn to parents to fulfill roles that should be reserved for your spouse. (3) Financial. Financial dependence upon parents can lead to domination, low self-esteem, and marital tension.

Another source of strife between couples is an unloving and critical attitude toward in-laws. Even if they are unkind in their treatment, Scripture tells us to respond with kindness, forgiveness, and prayer (see Luke 6:27-28). Paul adds, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

- \* In what ways, if any, have you failed to develop a healthy independent relationship with your in-laws? What action steps are necessary to correct this?

#### Practical suggestions

A marriage relationship is never static, but dynamic. It is either growing or dying. That is why periodic evaluation is always healthy. The following practical suggestions are designed to facilitate the evaluation process. Prayerfully go through the checklist, mark those areas the Holy Spirit impresses upon you, and go to work on them. Do it now. Do it regularly. You'll develop a wonderful marriage in the process!

#### Suggestions for Husbands

\_\_\_\_ Find creative ways to do special things for your wife.

- \_\_\_ Regularly share your hopes and plans with your wife and listen carefully to hers.
- \_\_\_ Be sensitive to her emotional needs and tune in to what she is feeling.
- \_\_\_ Look for her strengths and praise her for them.
- \_\_\_ Leave her weaknesses to the Lord and pray about them.
- \_\_\_ Do not get slack in courtesy and good manners.
- \_\_\_ Avoid a domineering and bossy attitude.
- \_\_\_ Try to learn new things about her and the things she enjoys.
- \_\_\_ Do not compare her with other women.
- \_\_\_ Encourage her in her activities.
- \_\_\_ Keep yourself spiritually, mentally, and physically fit.

#### Suggestions for Wives

- \_\_\_ Find creative ways to do special things for your husband.
- \_\_\_ Look for his strengths and praise him for them.
- \_\_\_ Leave his weaknesses to the Lord and pray about them.
- \_\_\_ Try to learn new things about him and the things he enjoys.
- \_\_\_ Do not compare him with other men.
- \_\_\_ Encourage him in his activities.
- \_\_\_ Keep yourself spiritually, mentally, and physically fit.

#### Suggestions for Couples

- \_\_\_ Study the Bible together and talk about practical applications.
- \_\_\_ Pray together on a daily basis.
- \_\_\_ Do not criticize, nag, or taunt each other.
- \_\_\_ Do your financial planning together. Try hard to reach a unified attitude on credit, spending, and savings. Disharmony over finances is one of the greatest threats to marriage.
- \_\_\_ Do not go to sleep with unresolved anger or grievances.
- \_\_\_ Practice the art of communication.
- \_\_\_ Resolve to make the best of what is rather than fantasizing about what might have been.
- \_\_\_ Pursue the goal of ministering to the needs of your mate, knowing that your needs are already met in Christ.
- \_\_\_ Notice each other when in public and never make a public remark at the expense of your mate.
- \_\_\_ Look for common activities and interests and try to develop them.
- \_\_\_ Plan a weekend retreat or vacation alone with your mate at least once a year.

Here are six passages which, if consistently applied, can revolutionize your marriage. Write a sentence on the relevance of each of these passages to your relationship with your mate:

Matthew 18:21-35 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 2:2-5 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 4:4-7 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 4:8-9 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 4:13 \_\_\_\_\_

## BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Communication: Key to Your Marriage by H. Norman Wright (Regal Books)  
Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective by James B. Hurley (Zondervan)  
Marriage Takes More Than Love by Jack and Carole Mayhall (NavPress)  
Maximum Marriage by Tim Timmons (Revell)  
Strike the Original Match by Charles R. Swindoll (Multnomah Press)  
The Marriage Builder by Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr. (Zondervan)  
What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women by James Dobson  
(Tyndale)

## SCRIPTURE MEMORY CARDS

Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 15:1; 18:13; Ephesians 5:22-23; 5:25; Philippians 4:8;  
Colossians 3:12-13; James 1:19.