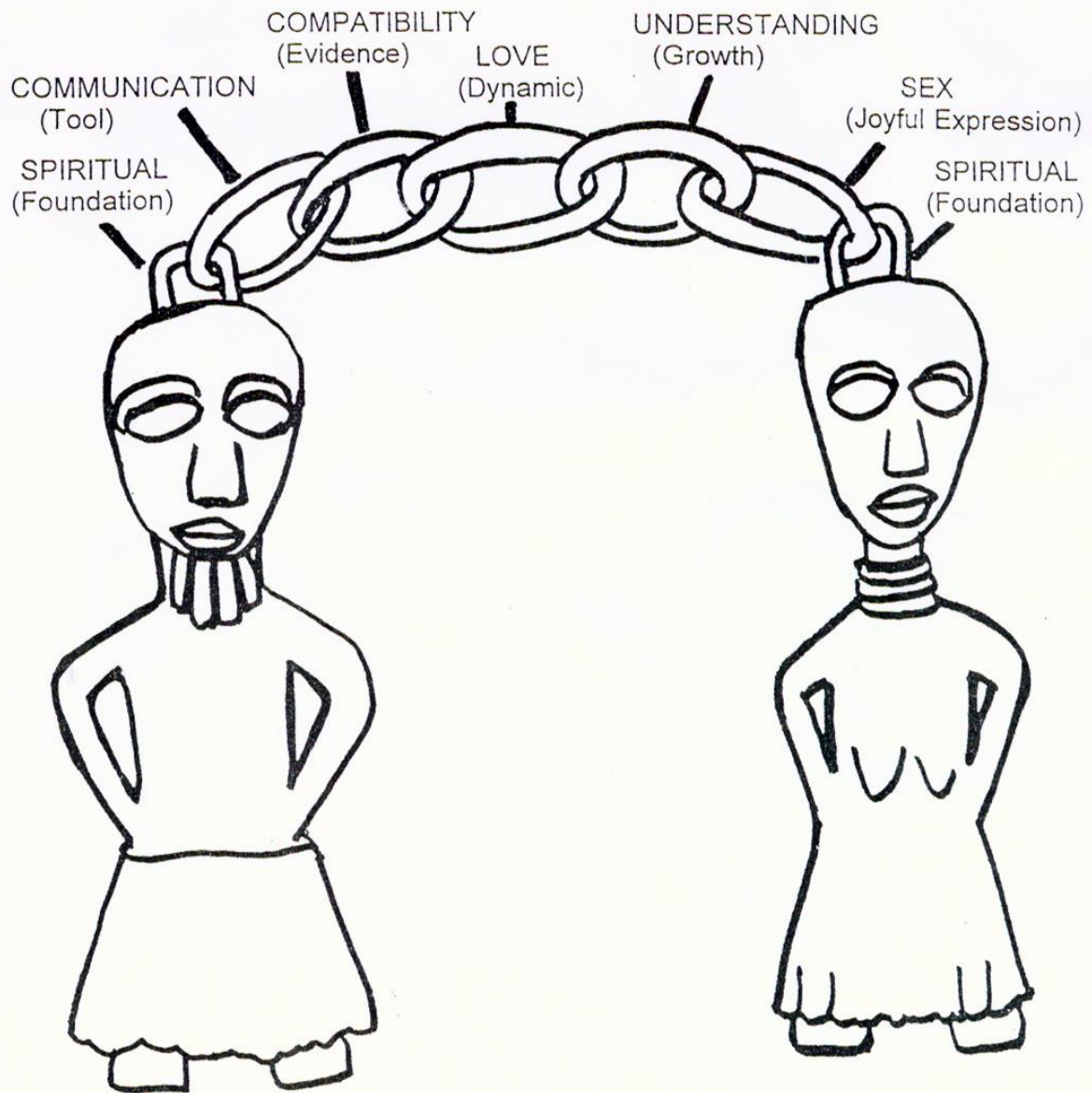




Foundations

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: PART 2

The Seven-Fold Tie of Marriage



The Seven Links of Oneness

This is the second of two booklets of notes that will remind you of what you heard on our broadcasts about marriage and the family. If you do not have a copy of the first booklet, try to obtain a copy before you read this one. You will appreciate this second booklet far more after you have read the first one.

To understand our broadcasts and these two booklets, you must know about an illustration that created the structure for all these studies. I must therefore repeat my description of that illustration which was in my first booklet. After this illustration is described again, I will continue where the first booklet concluded.

An African believer carved a beautiful symbol that profiles the relationship God intended when He created the first couple and declared them to be "one flesh". When this talented believer made his woodcarving, he was illustrating seven ways in which a husband and wife are to be "one flesh".

His beautiful woodcarving is of a man and a woman. They are joined together by a chain of five double links. This chain that joins them together is joined to a link each of them has on the top of their head. Each of these links represents a dimension of the oneness God intended for them. The links on the top of their heads represent the spiritual relationship they each have with God. The fact that all the other links are joined to these two links demonstrates the fact that their spiritual relationship is the foundation of all their dimensions of oneness.

The first double link represents communication, which is the tool that makes it possible for them to cultivate and maintain their oneness. The next link is compatibility, which

is the evidence of their oneness. The middle of these five links represents love, which is the dynamic of their oneness. The love link is followed by the link of understanding, which represents the growth of their oneness. The last of these double links that make them one flesh is sex, which is the joyful expression of their oneness.

The fact that all these links are double links presents the reality that all these dimensions of oneness are reciprocal, or involve a giving and receiving between the husband and wife. When you add these five links to the links they each have on their head, which represent the spiritual relationship each must have with God, you have the seven links of oneness.

Our broadcasts on marriage and family were based on the seven dimensions of marriage that are represented by the seven links that make this man and wife one flesh. In these two booklets, I want to give you a summary of what you heard on these broadcasts about God's law of marriage and family.

Chapter 1

The Link of Understanding

While counseling married couples during my years in pastoral ministry, I heard one complaint again and again: "He does not understand me." or, "She does not understand me." This lack of understanding was what motivated these troubled couples to discuss their marriage with their pastor. One definition of understanding is, "Mutual agreements that resolve differences." Another definition is, "Mutual comprehension of ideas and intentions that lead to discernment and sympathy."

The Apostle Peter instructs husbands to dwell with their wives with knowledge, or an understanding of their wives. (I Peter 3:7) Husband, how well do you know your wife? If she had an automobile accident and the doctors called you to the hospital, if they asked you, could you give them her complete medical history? If she had an emotional breakdown, could you give the health professionals her complete social history? It is only fair to ask wives the same questions about their husbands. How well do you know your husband? How well do you know each other? And do you understand each other?

How important is understanding in a marriage? How important is it to the oneness between a husband and wife? I do not think we can over-emphasize its importance if people who are joined together by God want to experience what God planned for them to experience in their marriage. If both marriage partners, individually and together, have a relationship with God; if in their relationship with each other they are joyfully expressing communication, compatibility, love, and understanding, then these links of oneness will make the difference between having a living arrangement, and the authentic marriage relationship God designed when He made the first man and woman one flesh.

I have had decades of experience reaching out evangelistically to men who were very secular in their values. On many occasions, I have told men this: "Think of everything your wife does for you. If you were wealthy enough, you could afford to buy all those things. You could buy the sex. You could even hire a surrogate mother to have babies for you, and a governess to raise them. But the one thing that you could not buy is the relationship God designed for a man and his wife.

As spiritual people, who are seeking a spiritual and biblical approach to marriage and family, we begin by acknowledging the fact that God designed marriage to be a

relationship. As we build that relationship together, understanding each other must be one of our building blocks. Our individual relationships with God, and the way they impact our marriage, are the foundation of our oneness. Communication is the tool with which we cultivate and maintain our oneness. Compatibility is the evidence of our oneness. Divine love is the dynamic that drives our oneness, and understanding each other will result in the growth of our oneness. If we understand each other, we can build and see our relationship grow.

Several decades ago, a Swiss psychiatrist who was a devout believer, wrote an excellent booklet entitled, "To Understand Each Other". In the chapter titles of his excellent book, Dr. Paul Tounier tells us, that to understand each other we must want to understand each other; we must have the courage to really communicate; we must understand the differences between the sexes; we must understand the importance of the past, and we must have a spiritual dimension in our marriage.

Think about the perils of not understanding each other. In many parts of the world, there is epidemic divorce today. In many cultures and in many marriages, the husband leaves the house to go to work, while the wife has her responsibilities at home with the children. The husband, well dressed and attractive at the office, works side by side with people of the opposite sex who are also well dressed and attractive. Sometimes a man in this environment has more communication with his secretary than he does with his wife. He knows her better, talks to her more, and spends more time with her. It is not surprising that his secretary, or other women with whom he works, begin to take first place in his life, and that his marriage dissolves into divorce.

There are also millions of marriages in which both husband and wife leave the house for work in the morning. If these

married career people are too busy to work at their relationship and do not understand each other, it is only a matter of time until somebody else will. Because people have a deep need to be understood, that man – or that woman – will one day meet someone who cares enough to understand.

A man I knew came to faith after many years of living a very sinful life-style. I met with him three times a week for three years to disciple him. As I got to know him, I learned some things from him. Before coming to Christ he had the reputation of having slept with everybody's wife but his own. He was a big, handsome, charming man, and he claimed that a lot of these women had aggressively pursued him. He made this observation: "Those women I had affairs with did not become involved with me because they needed a sexual relationship. They were not looking for sex. What they really wanted was someone to talk to. They told me their husbands never talked to them, and did not understand them. So, they talked to me and they believed I understood them."

We also hear the reverse of the same story. A man who is not understood by his wife may be vulnerable to getting involved in affairs. It is very dangerous to ignore the need of our spouse to be understood. In many sports, the best defense is a strong offense. Our best defense against losing our spouse to someone else is to work at the growth of our oneness as a couple. One important dimension of that growth comes from our doing everything we can to understand each other.

Celebrating Differences

This is a good place to begin understanding your spouse: There is a difference between a man and a woman. There are biological, physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual differences between a man and a woman. There is a difference

between the way men and women think, act, feel and respond to situations. Men and women do not even worship the same way.

This was illustrated for me years ago in a way that I will never forget. A doctor's wife came to see me. She was a lovely person, a godly person, very devout, very active in her church, leading prayer groups and other activities. I had met her in the context of her church work. Her husband was an excellent surgeon, very successful, but through tears she said, "I am so concerned about my husband. He simply is not a spiritual man; he is not spiritual." I said, "Well, we need to pray about that, because only God can make him a spiritual man."

Three months later I was called to minister during the medical crisis of a female parishioner who had both a bad gall bladder and a heart condition. The gall bladder needed to be removed, but it was a risky operation because of the weakened heart. I was at the hospital with her husband, talking with him at his wife's bedside when the "unspiritual" surgeon called me outside the room. He said, "I really need to take this gall bladder but it is so risky. The hospital has a little chapel downstairs. Would you be willing to go down to the chapel and pray until I send a nurse down to tell you that we are over the worst of it?" I said, "Sure. I will be glad to go into that chapel and pray."

So I went down the chapel and prayed. At eleven o'clock that morning, I had such a spiritual experience in prayer for that woman that I knew God had done something. About fifteen minutes later the nurse came to the door of the chapel and said, "The doctor said everything is fine. We are through the worst of it."

After the operation, before the doctor even said anything to the patient's husband, he rushed over, shook my hand and said, "Thanks so much for praying. Oh, thank you so much. It was a miracle we got through this one."

Now, this was the doctor whose wife had said he was not a spiritual man. In my next meeting with her I said, "I think you have it all wrong. Your husband is a spiritual man." She cried when I told her what he had done. This doctor was a spiritual man, but he did not express his spirituality as his wife did. She took this to mean that he did not have any spiritual life at all. This also showed that she really did not know or understand her husband very well.

If we are going to understand the spouse we live with, we must understand such differences between the sexes. The two sexes are designed by God to be different; those differences are what attracted you to your spouse and made you attractive to your spouse. A woman is attracted to a man because of his maleness. A man is attracted to a woman because of her femaleness. These differences should be celebrated rather than resolved. How tragic for women to be told that in order to have worth as a woman, they must duplicate and compete with the role and function of a man. That is not what gives a woman her worth; in fact, quite the opposite is true. The role and function of a woman, as a woman, give her worth. And, of course, this is true the other way around. Men will find their true worth in fulfilling their God-ordained role and function as men.

If two of us were exactly alike, one of us would be unnecessary. God has made us different because, as we learned in the creation account in the Book of Genesis, our differences complement and supplement until, between the two of us, we make one whole "Adam." (God called their name "Adam," not "the Adamses." (Genesis 5:1) The plan of God was and is that it's not either/or, but both/and when God makes a man and a woman one flesh.

The Importance of the Past

All of us are shaped by our experiences in life. For as many years as you both lived before you met, your and your spouse were being shaped by circumstances and family influences to become the persons you were when you found each other. If you are going to understand each other, you simply must understand the importance of the past influences that made you the people you are. Let me give you only one personal illustration.

In the late 1960s, my wife, Ginny, was very ill. In fact, people who knew us then and who now come to see us expect to find her in a wheelchair. When I came home one day, Ginny had a high fever and her joints were extremely swollen. I got angry and depressed. I practically kicked the bed! Of course, that is the last kind of response she needed from her husband. What an encouraging husband I was! But later it was helpful for us to go back into the past and see if we could find out why I responded that way to her illness.

When I was very young, my mother was very sick. There were eleven of us children, and not long after the last child was born, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. After major surgery and two more years of serious illness, the Lord took her. During this time, I was watching my father. He had a house full of children and a sick wife. He delivered mail all day and drove a taxi at night to keep us together as a family.

An idea was apparently developing in my mind: "Women get sick and leave you with a house filled with children." When Ginny took ill we had five children, two in diapers and three toddlers. When I came home that day and found her in agony, all the influence of those hundreds of hours I watched my mother die and my father struggle caused me to respond the way I responded. When we sorted it all out, it was not hard to understand why I was angry and depressed when my wife became ill.

It was critically important for Ginny to understand my past. If she had not, she might have filed for a divorce! Instead, she took the time to understand where my anger and depression were really coming from. Finally I had to tell myself, "Shape up, man! This is not your mother. This is your wife, and she needs your help." There have been many times when it has helped me to understand all the past influences that shaped my wife into the person she is today. If you want to understand the person you live with, you must realize the importance of the past.

The Sacredness of Individuality

God meant for each one of us to be unique. He throws away the pattern every time He makes one of us. The word "self" is defined in the dictionary as "the uniqueness, the individuality of any given person that makes him distinct from every other living person." I have made the observation over many decades as a pastor, that one of the primary explanations for unhappiness is the reality that people are not who, what, and where God planned for them to be. A husband and wife can help each other discover their God-ordained individuality and the good, acceptable and perfect will of God for their lives. (Romans 12:1,2)

This is a key factor as we consider the importance of understanding in marriage. Someone defined understanding as "mutual agreements that resolve differences." Is not that a beautiful definition of understanding? Another definition says, "mutual comprehension of ideas and intentions that lead to discernment and sympathy." Now to understand the person that you live with, you have to understand the difference in the sexes; you have to understand the importance of the past.

To understand your spouse, you must want to understand your spouse. There are married people who do not want to spend the

time and emotional energy it takes to understand their partner. How about you? Do you really want to understand your mate? If you do, here are some suggestions.

First, to understand our spouses, we must apply the Golden Rule. Jesus said, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12) This is the greatest verse in the Bible on human relationships. To apply this teaching, wives must ask themselves, "If I were my husband, what would I want my wife to do, and husbands must ask themselves, "If I were my wife, what would I want my husband to do?" That goes against our self-serving human nature, but if we ask God to give us grace, we can be spouse-centered and apply the Golden Rule of Jesus as we try to understand each other.

Second, we must listen to our spouse. Listening is really an art, and there is a lot to be learned about listening that most of us have not learned. It is sometimes obvious that a husband and wife are not listening to each other. When they say they are listening to each other, what they sometimes really mean is, "I am thinking about what I am going to say when you shut up." Jesus said, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15) Do you really hear your wife or your husband when he or she is trying to communicate with you?

The Gospel of Luke records a story that describes Jesus visiting in the home of a Pharisee. A woman comes in and she weeps when she discovers that the Pharisee has not washed the feet of Jesus. This means the Pharisee has not extended common hospitality to Jesus. She lets her tears fall on His feet, and then she wipes them dry with her hair. The Pharisee is thinking to himself, "If He knew what kind of a woman this is, He would not let this happen."

But, while the Pharisee is thinking those thoughts, Jesus asks him an important question. He said, "Simon, do you see

this woman?" There are a lot of different words in Greek for "see." In this case, the word Jesus uses means, "Do you really see her? Or, what do you see when you look at this woman?" I think this is an excellent question for husbands. Do you really see the woman you have married? Do you really hear your wife when she tries to communicate with you?

Francis of Assisi is one of my heroes. When he went into the seminary, it was big news because he was from an important family. After doing all the seminary training (which in those days meant begging with a burlap sack for a couple of years simply to prove that you had renounced the world, the flesh and the devil), at ordination time the custom was for the candidate to preach. The cathedral was packed for Francis's ordination because he was such a famous person before he went into the monastery. When he got up to preach what everybody thought was going to be the greatest sermon ever, he said, "God has not called me to preach but to do. Let us pray." And then he prayed this prayer:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light, and where there is sadness, joy. Oh, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

That is a magnificent prayer and a wonderful attitude we should apply to the challenge of understanding our partner in marriage. "Grant that I may not so much seek to be understood as to understand." The key to understanding the person you live with is to be spouse-centered. To understand your spouse, you

must "read between the lines" and "hear between the words," the needs of your spouse.

Like the teaching of Jesus, this prayer of Francis conveys a relatively simple concept. But this simple truth can have a revolutionary impact when you apply that truth to your marriage. That truth is, put your mate at the center and do not worry so much about being understood yourself. The issue that should concern you is not your spouse understanding you, but you understanding your spouse. The question is not whether you are receiving love, but whether you are giving love.

Depth in communication

To understand your spouse, you must communicate at a deep level. There are different levels of communication in marriage. First, there is the non-communication level, the superficial level where you and your spouse do not talk about anything important. At a somewhat deeper level, you and your spouse talk about what you know. Going deeper, you start sharing what you think, and then what you feel. At the deepest level of communication, you begin talking about who, what, and where you are in your life as it relates to who, what, and where you believe God wants you to be.

Obviously, this goes beyond small talk like "pass the salt" or "it is going to rain today". When you communicate at a deep level, you are placing your heart in the hand of your spouse, and they can do anything they want with it. They can squeeze it. They can throw it down and step on it. Probably the worst thing they can do with your heart in their hand is to ignore it.

The most unkind thing I ever heard anyone say to their spouse was in a counseling session. He was a really big, tough man. His wife kept asking him all the way through the session, "What do you think of me? What you do think of me?" Finally, he looked at her and said, "You flatter yourself, woman. I do

not think about you at all.” The opposite of love is not hate; it is indifference. That husband was communicating the opposite of love when he spoke those words to his wife.

If you put your heart in your spouse’s hand you might get hurt. But you will never achieve understanding until you are willing to be vulnerable. Communicating at a deep level means learning to deal with conflict. When you get into deep communication, your spouse is not always going to say what you want to hear. A good spouse who is concerned about your growth will say what you need to hear, and you may not want to hear that. That’s why Dr. Tounier wrote a chapter about “the courage to communicate.” When your spouse says something you need, but do not want to hear, you can withdraw like a turtle into its shell, or you can learn how to deal with the conflict that may come out of your deep levels of communication.

Dealing with Anger

A married couple communicating at a deep level will also have to learn how to deal with anger. The people we love the most have the greatest capacity to make us angry. Anger is an interesting emotion. What do you think about anger in the life of a believer? Do you believe that God wants the Spirit-filled follower of Christ to be angry? Is anger an acceptable emotion for a disciple of Jesus? Listen to these words of Paul about anger in the lives of believers:

“If you are angry, do not sin by nursing your grudge. Do not let the sun go down with you still angry. Get over it quickly for when you are angry, and continue to be angry, you give a mighty foothold to the Devil... Do not cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live. Remember He is the one who makes you to be present on that day when salvation from sin will be complete... Stop being mean, bad tempered and angry; quarreling, harsh words and dislike of others should have no

place in your lives.” (Ephesians 4:26, 27, 30, 31) James gives us a short and candid observation about anger when he writes: “For a man’s anger cannot promote the justice of God.” (James 1:20)

A Personal Perspective

I was a believer but a very angry believer when I got married. I told myself it was righteous indignation, but it clearly was not. I had to search the Scripture to learn what God says about anger. On one occasion, I smashed my fist into the top of a portable radio, leaving a big hole in the top of our radio. It looked like a bomb had hit it! When we moved a couple of years later, Ginny brought that radio with us. She put it on the bookcase near our bed simply to remind me. I tried to explain to her that I had not really been angry with her. I had been embarrassed by a banker when applying for a loan. I was actually angry with myself for mismanaging our finances, so I smashed my fist into the radio.

There are some questions you should always ask yourself about your anger. Why are you angry? With whom are you angry? What is the source of your anger? What is the true object of your anger? The source and the true object of our anger is very seldom the person upon whom we are venting our wrath. We are often angry with ourselves, as I was. Perhaps you are angry with the boss and, since you ca not hit him in his face, you break something when you get home. Even though it looks as if you are, and she certainly thinks you are angry with her, you may not be angry with her. You may not even be angry with your boss. You may be angry with yourself. It is important for you, and also for your partner, to understand the source of your anger.

It is obvious in the passage about anger quoted above that God does not want Spirit-controlled believers to be angry. In

the New Testament we read: "Be angry and sin not." (Ephesians 4:26) Some people make those first two words their life's verse: "Be angry." But a better translation of the verse is, "When you are angry, sin not." God is realistic enough to know that we will sometimes be angry. But, the message of the Bible for angry believers is, "Only do not let the anger lead to sin, and never let the sun go down upon it." The essence of what the Scripture says to us about our anger is that we are to "put away" all anger and wrath. (Ephesians 4:26-27)

When I realized that God told me in His inspired Word that I was not to be angry, I was to "put it away", my question was, "How?" My question led me to a chapter in the Book of Genesis that has not only given me some answers to my question, but has delivered me from my anger. I recommend it to you if you are dealing with this problem. It is one of the great and one of the most familiar stories of the Bible:

"In the process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. Its desire is for you but you should rule over it.'

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' And God said, 'What have you done?'" (Genesis 4:3-10)

In this little drama, we find a great teaching about anger. You have two men, Mr. Acceptable (Able) and Mr. Unacceptable (Cain). They both make offerings to God. It is actually Cain's

idea to do this. Now, God is pleased with Able and with Abel's offering, but he is not pleased with Cain or with Cain's offering. I do not believe we are told what was unacceptable about Cain's offering. He was a farmer, so he brought produce. The story does imply that he did not bring the best of his produce.

Abel was a shepherd, so he brought an animal. Some people say the problem was that Abel's was a blood sacrifice and Cain's was not, but there had been no instruction at this point in the Bible about offering blood sacrifices. I think the emphasis is on the two men more than their offerings. One of these men is acceptable, so God accepts his offering. The other man is not acceptable, so God would not accept his offering.

The drama continues; Mr. Acceptable walks by Mr. Unacceptable and Mr. Unacceptable beats him to death. God comes to Cain afterward and essentially asks him, "Why are you angry? Why are you depressed? Where is your brother? What have you done? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? If you do not, this anger is a sin that will destroy you!"

This is a great lesson on anger. In the radio incident, I was not angry with my wife. I was angry with myself because I was "Mr. Unacceptable." Because of the way I had mismanaged our finances, I was angry with myself. God had to ask me, "Why are you angry? Why did you smash that little radio there?" The major lesson for me was, "Get yourself right with God. Learn to manage your finances and you would not be so unacceptable to yourself and God and everybody else. If you do not resolve your anger by becoming acceptable, you are going to go through life smashing radios, or "beating Abels" and that will destroy you!"

The Apostle Paul has another important insight on this subject later on in Ephesians. He writes, "He who loves his wife, loves himself." (5:28) You see, if I had loved myself during that radio episode, I would have had the capacity to love

my wife. But because I was down on myself, I was expressing rage and anger toward her.

As I was trying to work out my anger problem, it occurred to me that I loved my wife and I loved my children. But, I did not always express my love for them, especially when I did not "love myself." When I was down on myself, for whatever reason, I had a diminished capacity to express love. What I needed to develop was a legitimate sense of self-respect and see my self as God sees me.

In Matthew, a lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Matthew 22:36) And Jesus answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (22:37-40)

In this passage, Jesus was saying that we must master three perspectives in life to have what Jesus described as "eternal life" or "life more abundantly." We must look up and be all that we need to be in our relationship with God; we must look in and be all God wants us to be; and we must look around and be what God tells us in His Word our relationships with others must be. Jesus summarizes those three perspectives by teaching that we are to look up, and love God completely. We are to look in, and love ourselves correctly. And we are to look around, and love others unconditionally.

Now, loving yourself does not mean that you should stop to worship every time you pass a mirror. That is what some people think it means. But a friend of mine, a recovering alcoholic and drug addict, summarizes it this way: "Love God completely, love your self correctly, and love one another unconditionally." My friend grew spiritually when he was able to grasp all three,

and as a result, he has been sober for seventeen years, and is the chairman of the elders in our church.

When Paul says, "He who loves his wife loves himself," he is letting us in on a secret. If you do not love when you look in, if you have self-anger to the point of self-contempt and self-destruction, you are not going to get along with anybody, especially your spouse.

If you are going to share your life with someone in a marriage relationship, you must understand that person. We cannot separate our understanding one another from our communication with each other, and with God.

How Can We Understand Each Other?

The truth is, we do not fully understand ourselves, let alone our partners. Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) In the next verse, the voice of God answered Jeremiah's question. "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind..." (10) Since that is true, then like David we should look up and say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts." (Psalm 139:23) That kind of communication with God is really the only way we can understand ourselves and begin to understand each other in marriage. If one or both spouses have no communication with God, then they will never properly understand each other.

James instructs us: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask of God, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5) In other words, you may not understand your spouse, but God does. When you realize that you cannot understand your partner without God's help, ask God for the wisdom you confess you do not have.

Chapter 2

A Spiritual Compass

The Book of Genesis is a book of beginnings. That is what the word "genesis" means. In the Book of Genesis, God tells us about the beginnings of many things because He wants us to understand those things as He intended them to be. God's first recorded dialogue with man is found in the third chapter of Genesis, right after Adam and Eve had eaten fruit their Creator had forbidden them to eat. By their disobedience, they had gained the knowledge of good and evil, so they hid themselves because they felt guilt and shame.

We read that God pursued His rebellious creatures in the garden, and when He found them He asked them questions. Now, when the Creator asks his creatures questions, it is not because He does not know the answers. God's purpose in asking questions is to make man think. I have found these questions of God to be like a "spiritual compass." Since the biblical strategy for working on our marriage is to begin with the two persons in that marriage, I want to share eight questions God asks us in the Bible that can help the persons in a marriage understand themselves and each other.

God's first recorded words for fallen man in the Bible are questions. His first question is, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) This implies, "You are supposed to be somewhere and you are not there. So where are you?" Essentially, the question was, "Think about where you are, because you are not where you are supposed to be."

Adam answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." (10) In other words,

"When I hear your voice it frightens me. I know it is going to expose my nakedness and I do not want to be exposed."

This is a very accurate description of human nature, as it was, and as it is today. Do you sometimes have the conviction that you are supposed to be somewhere, and you are not there? Consider the possibility that your conviction could be God asking you the question, "Where are you?" Could it be that what we call an "identity crisis" is what God told us about in this third chapter of Genesis? Is it possible that God wants us to understand, like it was, the miracle that our Creator pursues us today with haunting questions about where we are, because we are not where He wills us to be?

The second question God asks man is, "Who told you?" Specifically, "Who told you that you were naked?" (11) The Hebrew is literally, "Who made you know that you were naked?" This second question of God directs Adam and Eve back to when they had eaten from the forbidden tree. When they ate of the wrong tree, we read: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." (7)

Now God is asking, "When you knew that you were naked, Who made you know that you were naked?" The answer is that their God Himself has made them know that they were naked because He loves them. This dialog God has with Adam and Eve is a beautiful description of the love of God, as it was, and as it is today. It was God Who had opened their eyes, because He wanted His creatures to understand what they had done, and to do something about the fact that they were not where they were supposed to be. God expresses His love for us the same way today.

God's third and fourth questions lead them to confession. The third question was: "Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" (11) I believe these trees are

allegorical. I do not mean they are a myth or fictitious and have no meaning. An allegory is a story in which the people, places and things have deeper meanings, often morally or spiritually significant meanings. Have you ever seen a tree of knowledge? Have you ever seen a tree of life? Have you ever seen or heard a voice walk? This has to be allegorical language, but what truth is it teaching?

In the allegory of these trees, God is simply saying this: "I put you in this world and I know what your needs are better than you do. I can meet all your needs through these trees if you will eat of them precisely as I direct you to meet your needs through these trees."

We read that God planted these trees in an order of priority. (Genesis 2:8-9) First, the trees were meant to meet the need of their eye. In the Bible, the eye sometimes represents the mind, or how you see things. Jesus essentially told us, "If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye, (the way you see things), is defective, your whole body will be filled with darkness." (Matthew 6:22,23) How we see things is important. According to Jesus, how we see things makes the difference between a body filled with light and a body filled with darkness. Here in Genesis, God is saying allegorically, "The greatest need you have is for Me to show you how to see things."

God said the trees in the garden would meet their need for food. That represents all the things a human being needs or even wants. Allegorically this is saying what Jesus would say centuries later: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4) You see, if we first allow God to show us how to see things, all our other needs will be met through what these trees represent.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they violated the priority of these trees. They ate of the forbidden tree first because it

was good for food, then because it was pleasant to the eye. (Genesis 3:6) This violation of God's priorities ultimately led to their expulsion from the garden. If we refuse to be governed and guided by the Word of God that shows us how to live together in relationships, our violation of those priorities today could lead to the use of thermonuclear weapons, and even possibly escalate to thermonuclear war and our expulsion from the planet.

In this profound, inspired allegory God is saying, "I put man in this world, and I have not left him to grope in darkness. I have given him My Word, but when he hears My Voice through My Word, My Voice is going to make him uncomfortable. He is going to hide from it, because it will expose his nakedness, or his need. If he will not apply My Word to his need, he will spend his entire life hiding from Me and from the truth of My Word." God's question was essentially, "Have you eaten from the wrong tree?" which means, "Are you looking in the wrong places for your answers?"

You may be asking, "What does this have to do with marriage?" This directly applies to our discussion of biblical marriage. Do you remember, that at the beginning of these studies of marriage and family, I made the observation that the four problem areas in any marriage are:

- Problem area number one is the husband;
- Problem area number two is the wife;
- Problem area number three is the man and wife, and
- Problem area number four is the children.

I also made the point that the place to begin working on our marriage is with the two persons who make up that marriage, especially the person you can do something about, and for whom you are responsible - yourself.

The right answers to these questions make these questions "A Spiritual Compass" that can help a husband and wife to be where they should be as persons, which will add great health,

strength, and stability to their relationship as marriage partners.

Before we consider the next question, I have a question I would like to ask you about your marriage and family. "Are you getting your directions for your marriage from the culture, or from Scripture?" Another way of asking this question is, "Are you eating from the right trees or the wrong trees as you seek a blueprint for your marriage?" Another question is, "If you are getting your blueprint for marriage from the culture, how healthy is your marriage and family?"

Psalm One describes what the Bible calls "The Blessed Man." That word "blessed" means "happy." One of the first things we are told about the happy man is that he is a blessed man because he "does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly." (1) Do you walk in the counsel of the ungodly? For example, when you have a problem, do you go for God's counsel to your pastor or some other spiritual leader in your church, a godly person who knows the Scriptures? Or do you go to someone who is secular and ungodly?

When I was in seminary, I often had to take out student loans. At the bank where we borrowed money there was a little sign that asked: "If you are so smart, why are you not rich?" As seminary students, we thought we knew everything! But, that sign confronted us. Why were we so poor if we were so smart?

Many of us need to consider a similar question: If we are so smart, why are not we happy? Why do not we have a happier marriage and family? Perhaps we do not understand the Bible so well. If we are happy, and we have the exemplary happy family, then by the grace of God we are the blessed man and woman and we have a blessed marriage and family. If that is not our experience, then we need to, individually, come to the Word of God and let God ask us these questions.

Perhaps our marriage and family are not blessed because we are walking in the counsel of the ungodly when we need to go back to these basic principles of marriage and family presented in the Scriptures. If we continue, "eating from the wrong trees", our marriage and family will never be blessed by God.

Now to return to these great questions, the fourth question God asked, which clarified the confession God drew from Adam and Eve by His third question, was, "What have you done?" (Genesis 3:13) The word "confess" in Scripture is a compound word, which combines the words for speaking and sameness. The essential meaning is, "to say the same thing God says about our sin," or, "to agree with God." This is what God is doing when He asks Adam and Eve, "What have you done?" He knows exactly what they have done, but He wants to hear them say what He already knows. This is obviously not for His benefit, but for theirs.

When we confess our sins to God, we are not telling God something He does not know. It is not for God's benefit that we confess our sins, but for our salvation. No one is perfect and there are no perfect marriages. Individually, and together as a married couple, we need to let God ask us the question, "What have you done?" and then say the same thing God says about what we have done. We have the promise of God that if we confess our sins, He is faithful to His Word and will forgive what we have done, and what we have not done in our marriages. (I John 1:9)

We find a fifth profound question later in the Book of Genesis, when the angel of the Lord seeks after Hagar, the runaway maidservant of Abram and Sarai. The angel asks her, "Where have you come from, and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:8)

I do not know if you think much about God's will for your life and marriage, but, if you do, this is a good question to let God ask you periodically. It is the kind of question we should let God ask us during the last days of an old year before

we begin a new year. In the context of our marriages, this is a good question to establish our quiet times of dialog with God on our wedding anniversaries.

The essence of the question is that unless we have a crisis of change, we are going where we came from. We are going to experience more of the same unless something happens. Have you ever reached the place in your life where the thought of more of the same was an unbearable thought?

The Bible never asks us to change ourselves. The Bible commands us to meet certain conditions and then let God change us. Jesus tells us that we must be born again (John 3:3-5). But we are not told to give spiritual birth to ourselves. Birth is a passive experience. We were born on a certain day in a certain year. Our birth happened to us. The same is true of our spiritual birth. We are born again. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. (Romans 12:1,2)

Born again followers of Christ are changed people, they are people who are changing and they are moving toward the eternal state when they will be changed forever. (II Corinthians 5:17; 3:18; I Corinthians 15:51) The fact that we can be changed means that we do not have to go where we have come from in our journey of life and faith. Our past does not make our present and future life predictable. We do not have to live with more of the same, year after year. If you cannot tolerate the thought of having ten more years like the ten years you have lived in your marriage or in your life experience, tell that to God and ask Him to make the changes that will fill your present and future with hope and unquenchable optimism.

There is a sixth profound question in the Book of Genesis that we need to answer before God, individually, and as a couple. That question is, "Who are you?" (Genesis 27:18, 32) In another profound allegory, Jacob and Esau are both asked this

question. Jacob lies and Esau cries with a loud voice when they are asked, "Who are you?"

This question is asked several times in the Bible. In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, the question is asked of John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner on earth. The religious leaders asked him, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (John 1:22)

John answered with the words of Isaiah the prophet: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" (23) It was a simple, direct answer. He might have added, "That is who I am, that is what I am, that is where I am. It is impossible for me to be any more than that. I would not think of being anything less than that. I am who, what, and where I am supposed to be."

Jesus said John the Baptist was the greatest man that ever lived. What was so great about him? Quite simply, he knew who he was, and he knew who he was not. He accepted the responsibility for his God-given abilities, and for his assignment in God's plan. But he also accepted the limits of his limitations. He knew the right answer when he was asked, "Who are you?"

Do you know who you are? What do you have to say about yourself? When two persons who have a marriage in the sight of God want to build and strengthen their marriage, they should start with themselves. Their marriage will be as happy and fulfilled as they are as individual persons before God. When each person can say what John the Baptist said about who they are, they have the foundation building blocks of a good marriage and a happy family.

Once you discover that God likes to ask His people questions, you will find Him doing that throughout the Old and New Testament. Jesus asks eighty-three questions in the Gospel

of Matthew. As you continue to grow in your individual walks with God, let God ask you these questions as you read through your Bible.

A seventh profound question, "What are you?" is a question that is implied in these words of the Apostle Paul: "By the grace of God I am what I am." (I Corinthians 15:10) He also wrote to the Corinthians: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not?" (I Corinthians 4:7) What we are relates to our natural and spiritual abilities, gifts, and talents and addresses our vocation. All these things come from God to equip us to be who and what and where He wants us to be.

The Old Testament begins with God asking, "Where are you?" The New Testament begins with wise men asking, "Where is He?" (Matthew 2:2) The Gospel of John begins with Jesus asking a profound eighth question. That question is: "What do you want?" or "What do you seek?" (37) When Jesus asked this eighth question, He was raising two questions that each of us must answer: Do we want to be who, what and where God wills us to be, and how much do we want the right answers to these questions?

A Magnificent Obsession

These eight questions from the Scriptures point us to an absolute spiritual reality. There is a place where God wants us to be in this life. There is somebody God wants us to be. There is something God wants us to be and something God wants us to do in this world. When the risen, living Christ enters our lives, like the Apostle Paul, our magnificent obsession should be to arrest the purpose for which He has arrested us. Our daily question for Him should be, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" The only place we will find happiness is in what Paul calls "the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God." (Romans

12:2) In the perfect will of God, we find our place, our identity, and our unique calling.

A Spiritual Compass

Since there are eight points on a compass, I consider these eight questions we have considered my spiritual compass. I look at them often. The questions do not change, but the answers are always changing. There are right answers to these questions, and neither you nor the person you live with will be happy until you find them. Discuss the questions with your spouse, and share with one another how you feel about the answers for yourselves as individual believers, your marriage and your family.

Based on five decades of experience counseling devout couples, my observation is that if a husband or a wife is an unhappy person, their partnership will be unhappy. The greatest single cause of unhappiness among believers is not having the right answers to these great questions of God and others just like them.

I would like to challenge you, as a married couple, to pursue a deep level of communication by answering these questions before God and discussing them with each other. Then really listen to your spouse's answers. If you will do this, you will be amazed at what God might do in your lives.

It is tragic for a devout couple to go through life and never think about these things. Many believers are living defeated lives and they do not even know it. If you are not satisfied with the quality of your spiritual life, seriously consider these questions as if God were asking you each one of them. These questions and their answers can turn your life around. When that happens to a devout husband or wife, their personal fullness in Christ can transform them and transfuse life into their marriage.

Chapter 3

The Joyful Expression of Oneness

In the creation account, we read in the Book of Genesis that God looks at everything He creates and says, "Good!" But then He observes something that is "not good." He says, "It is not good for the man to be alone." (Genesis 2:18) So God creates a helpmate for Adam, and the two of them become "one flesh."

One of the first things we ought to observe about God's creation of the sexual relationship is that God intended sex for procreation. "Be fruitful and multiply," He commanded Adam and Eve. (Genesis 1:28) We have learned that marriage is God's plan for populating the earth with good people. He does not simply want to populate the earth with people, but with good people. For that to happen, the parents must be solid, mature people. They must also be strong as partners so they can be strong as parents and then produce strong people through their marriage and family. So, obviously, God intended sex to function in the context of marriage and family, and God intended sex for procreation.

Beyond procreation, God intended sex as a vehicle of expression for a married couple. When couples have sexual problems, before they focus on the details of their sexual problems, they should examine their spiritual oneness. They should think about their communication and their other areas of compatibility. They should think about the qualities of real, Christ-like love and the issues involved in their understanding each other. Only then should they confront their sexual problems.

It is no secret that sex, which God designed to be the joyful expression of our oneness, can become an obstacle to our oneness. If the physical expression of our oneness is what it is designed by God to be, it is perhaps ten percent of the relationship. But if the physical relationship is not what it is designed to be, it can be ninety percent of the problem. Marriages break up over sex, because when one partner is not fulfilled, it is only a matter of time before they meet someone who will offer them that fulfillment.

Ironically, what God designed to be the joyful means of expressing our oneness can become one of the greatest obstacles to that oneness. Only the evil one could take what God designed to be the joyful expression of our oneness and convert it into one of the greatest obstacles to our oneness.

When sex is ninety percent of the problem between a husband and wife, their first concern should be: What are they expressing when they have sex? If there is no spiritual oneness, no communication, no love, no understanding, what can they be expressing? If they have none of these deeper levels of relationship, how can their sexual relationship be what God designed it to be? If they have no real oneness to express, their sexual relationship is like the copulation of animals.

When you enter into the act of sexual union, are you totally committed to the other person's gratification? That is the kind of commitment that makes sex what God intended it to be. In other words, without communicating the "love-link" God designed for their marriage, they will never have the sexual relationship God declared to be "very good." Put still another way, their degree of spiritual oneness will determine the quality of the physical unity they have in their marriage.

God intended sex for procreation and as a vehicle of expression for a married couple, but He also intended sex for pleasure. I do not know where it got started. Many believe it

was during the Victorian age in England. But, a long time ago, Christian people got the idea that sexual pleasure is not good. In their view, God could never have anything to do with sex.

I cannot possibly emphasize enough how important it is to get over this very unbiblical idea. When a man or woman really believes that sex is not good or even wrong, they may be impotent or frigid in marriage. Sex is sacred. It is holy. We should never believe otherwise or give our children any other impression. This is a challenge, of course. If you want your sons and daughters to be virgins when they marry, it's hard to encourage abstinence without giving them the impression that there is something wrong with sex.

Beginning with the creation account, the Bible tells us that sex is good. The Song of Solomon, for example, is one of the most wonderful books in the Bible. In my opinion, its purpose in the canon of Scripture is to show us that sex is beautiful and created by God. It is a wonderful thing to have a sexual relationship like the one described in the Song of Solomon. There is also an allegory there. It pictures the love of Christ for the Church, and Jehovah God for Israel. But that is a secondary application. The primary application of the book is to show us that sex is good.

Sex is beautiful. It is designed by God to be holy, sacred, good, and a joyful expression of love between a husband and wife. Any concept of sex in the context of marriage that falls short of those descriptions of sexual love is not coming from God, but from the evil one.

What are your expectations and attitudes where physical unity in marriage is concerned? Deuteronomy 24:5 describes a Jewish law that mandated a special period of bliss for the newly married couple: "If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he

is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.”

Most scholars say that phrase “bring happiness” means that the husband was supposed to make his wife sexually happy, to give her sexual pleasure. In other words, the law called for a one-year honeymoon. Do you think that makes a statement about the way God feels about sex?

In the New Testament, there is a challenge to honor marriage and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between a husband and wife. “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Hebrews 13:4) Here God draws a line against casual sex, but insists that marriage is honorable and the married sexual relationship a thing of sacred purity.

You will also benefit from studying First Corinthians 7:1-7 and Proverbs 5:15-20, and the Song of Solomon. Consider these passages of Scripture, and then ask yourself what your attitudes and expectations for sex should be. Attitude is vitally important in a sexual relationship. It has been observed that the most important sex organ we have is our brain.

You can apply to the sexual relationship the allegory of the trees in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis that I described in our previous chapter. You were created with a sex drive, but your greatest need is to ask God to meet the need of your eye, or to show you the purpose, place and function of sex. If you put that need first, then you will not miss all that God intended when He gave you and your spouse the means of joyfully expressing your love for each other. If you do it God’s way, you will get all the fulfillment there is to be found in sex. But, if you put the gratification of your sex drive first, especially outside the context of marriage, you will pay the consequences.

It is through the Scriptures that God shows us how we should see things. If we will allow God's Word to show us what our attitudes and expectations about sex should be, we will discover that sex is designed by God to be expressed in the context of the God-ordained institutions of marriage and family.

Where are you getting your information on sex? If you are getting your signals from the culture, you will not be getting information that helps in the creation of a happy marriage and a Christian family. So, then, where should you get your signals about sex? From the educators? From your doctor? From the government? Some people will say the home is where the role of sexuality should be defined. But who is instructing the people who are making those homes? Where are married couples being told about God's plan for sex?

I have concluded that if the church does not tell them, nobody will and nobody else really should. Honestly, where can you learn about the true place and purpose of sex if you do not learn it in the church? Marriage is God's idea, and it is documented in Scripture. The same is true of sex. When you read Scriptures like the Song of Solomon, you realize that God is not silent about sex. So preachers should not be silent either.

I have often said that before one preaches from the Song of Solomon, one should have white hair. When I was a young ministerial student, we had an old man with white hair come to talk to us about sex. After his talk, which was very informative and helpful, I asked him, "When does the sex drive begin to fade away? When does the flame start to burn lower?" He smiled from ear to ear and said, "I would not have the slightest idea!" He was eighty-two years old! So, you see, you do not have to be young to enjoy the joyful expression of oneness.

The sexual relationship was designed by God to bring sexual fulfillment to the husband and to the wife. But according to survey data, there are many women who never experience that fulfillment. I believe two of the primary reasons for that lack of fulfillment are the selfishness and the ignorance of husbands.

The fifteen virtues of love outlined in 1 Corinthians 13 – which I profiled in the first of these two booklets – are all “eccentric.” The word “eccentric” means, “having another center.” Since we are all sinners, our center before we come to faith is self. But, when we are born again, our center becomes Christ, and then all those others whose lives intersect our lives. When we are married, our most important “other” is our spouse. For sexual fulfillment to be experienced between a man and a woman, the husband has to be other-centered to be the lover God intended him to be.

It is only people with changed centers who will have the fulfilled sexual relationship that God intended. This means that the husband and wife have to communicate. The man may think that what he is doing is bringing his wife to release and fulfillment, but he may be having the opposite affect. She has to talk to him, tell him, communicate to him what she wants and needs. Many people have negative sexual experiences in their backgrounds, and this can make it very difficult for them to experience fulfillment in their sexual union. These things need to be brought out into the open to bring about inner healing and then sexual fulfillment can follow.

Chapter 4

The Marriage Chapter of the Bible

The seventh chapter of First Corinthians is one of the finest passages in Scripture on the intimacies of marriage. Paul discusses the subject while responding to questions that the Corinthian Church asked him in a letter. As you study his answers, you get an idea of what the questions must have been.

In verse 26 Paul writes, "I suppose that in the light of the present distress, all of these things I am telling you are true." What was the present distress? Apparently it was persecution. The early Christians lived under the threat of persecution much of the time, and it makes sense that if you were being persecuted, imprisoned, or fed to the lions, it would be better if you did not have a wife and children. In many generations, and in many cultures, devout couples have put their marriage plans on hold until a war ended.

The Corinthians had asked Paul such questions as, "Should our young people marry today, just as in normal times?" Paul replies, "No." Several times in the chapter, he says, "Better to stay single" and he means, "in the light of the present distress." Then they asked, "If they decide to stay single, then should they have any physical contact?" And Paul writes, essentially, "No. And if you are not going to marry, if you are not going to consummate this relationship sexually, then it is not wise to burn with passion."

Paul writes that, in the light of the present distress, it would be better if these young people did not marry; and if they did not marry, they were not to have any sexual interaction. That explains his opening statement that it is good to never touch a woman. What a way to begin a chapter on marriage! Paul concedes that if they cannot control their passions, they

should marry, because it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

But what about those who were already married? Should they have a normal sex life? Paul replies in what is a great passage on the sexual relationship of two believers: "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command." (1 Corinthians 7:1-6)

This is a magnificent piece of marriage counseling that addresses the physical union of a Christian couple. Some summary observations of what Paul is writing about the joyful expression of oneness in a relationship that is a marriage in the sight of God:

Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide a balanced and fulfilling sex life that will protect this couple from the temptations in the decadent culture in which the Corinthian couple was living.

His emphasis is that the husband must seek to satisfy his wife, while the wife must seek to satisfy her husband. In other words, the husband must be wife-centered and the wife must be husband-centered.

Abstinence from sex is permissible, but only for a time and for getting closer to God through prayer and fasting. (The proverbial headache is not grounds for abstinence.) The

important principle here is that their relationship with God is still private and separate. Even though they share this relationship in many ways, and their relationship with God is the foundation of their oneness, they are not instructed to seek closeness with God together as a couple.

The idea of mutuality is especially important. One question about sex often comes up in counseling with people who have been married a long time. "Are there any things that are perverted or wrong?" I think the answer is that nothing between a husband and a wife is wrong if it is mutually pleasing to both. The proper question is not, "What is right," but "What is mutual?" People ask questions about frequency of sexual union, about what is normal, or average. The most important consideration is mutuality.

Observe that Paul says that sex involves a choice. It is a decision to give pleasure or to serve the other spouse. When you make a commitment to love somebody, you make a commitment to the physical relationship. It is designed by God to be a commitment that is mutual, volitional, and unconditional. If each partner is fiercely committed to the pleasure, or the fulfillment of the other, they have the key that will make a sexual relationship work.

Husbands often tell counselors, "My wife is not a bit interested in sex. What can I do to make her interested?" The same complaint is often heard the other way around: "My husband is not interested in sex." Lack of sexual interest is often the result of a lack of other-centeredness on the part of one or both partners.

I have already observed that it is especially important for the man to be other-centered in this dimension of marriage. If you are a man dealing with diminished sexual interest on the part of your spouse, make sure you have a good education where sex is concerned. For all the macho sex talk that passes among

some men, many men are woefully ignorant about the sexual anatomy of a woman. Does your wife reach fulfillment or release when you have physical unity? If she seldom or never does, I want to ask you a question: If you never experienced a climax, how would that affect your attitude toward physical unity with your wife? I think that is a fair question.

The Golden Rule is effective here. "All things whatsoever you would that men would do for you, do unto them. This is the whole law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12) The challenge of the Golden Rule is putting yourself in the other person's place. If you were the spouse not interested in the physical relationship, what would you want your spouse to do? When you find the answer to that question, do it, because that is the Golden Rule of the joyful expression of oneness.

It is said that, in the epistles of Peter and Paul, the model for marriage is Christ and the Church. It is meant to be a total communion of two whole personalities, and that is pictured in the communion between Christ and His Bride, the Church. It is a spiritual oneness. So while physical unity involves, mutual, and unconditional, there must also be a spiritual quality in the relationship. That spiritual quality is the unselfish, others-centered love of the risen, living Christ.

Chapter 5

The Seven Spiritual Wonders of the World

Years ago I was having lunch with a man, and he told me that his church had made him an elder and the chairman of the

church board. And then he said, "Can you imagine that? I'm not even a Christian!"

Another man who was having lunch with us said to him, "You would not be an elder in this man's [referring to me] church if you were not a Christian." He replied, "Then you are the man I have been wanting to meet for a long time. I want to ask you a question. What is a Christian?"

When I had talked for about five minutes, he looked at his watch and said, "Hey, I only asked you for the time, and you're telling me how to make a watch. Cannot you tell me more clearly than this the answer to my simple question?"

The Lord used that man to show me that I needed to be much better prepared to answer that question. So, I wrote a little pamphlet I called, "The Seven Spiritual Wonders of the World." My objective was to tell a secular person what they needed to know and what they needed to do to experience salvation.

As I have shared this biblical perspective on marriage with you, it has occurred to me that everything I have shared is impossible for you if you are not a born-again disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus told us we will never be adequate partners without God's help. (Matthew 19:3-11) Solomon told us we will never be adequate parents without God's help (Psalm 127). The message of the entire Bible, which is emphasized by Jesus, is that we cannot be adequate persons without God's help. (John 3:6,7) I cannot conclude this study without telling you what you need to know and what you need to do to be born again. Therefore, I conclude with "The Seven Spiritual Wonders of the World."

The first spiritual wonder is what I call, "the greatest design in the world." If you look at this world through a telescope or a microscope, you can not help but be impressed with the design you see. But, for you and me, the most important and beautiful design in this world is the special plan

God has for every human being that is born into this world (Romans 12:1,2; Psalm 139:16).

Every person created by God is unique and individual. Is not it amazing that there are more than sixty billion fingers in this world, and no two of them have the same fingerprints? We now have sophisticated electronic equipment that can identify you by your "voiceprints", because nobody talks exactly as you talk. Now with DNA technology, the unique physical structure of every human being on earth can be identified and proven in courts of law all over the world. If the miracle of our unique individuality can be so clearly proven, is it really hard to believe that the God Who created us as unique individuals physically, has a unique plan for each of our lives? According to the Bible, God does have such a plan and that plan is one of the spiritual wonders of the world.

You may be wondering, "If God has a plan for every human life, why are people so unhappy, and why is our world filled with riots, wars, and overwhelming social problems?" Your question is answered by the second spiritual wonder of the world, which is what I call "the greatest divorce in the world." Divorce is epidemic in many cultures today, but the greatest divorce in this world is the divorce between God and man.

The Bible tells us that God created man as a creature of choice. He gave this creature the power to say to his Creator, "You created me with this great design, but I do not want any part of it. I'm going to live my life my way." Scripture tells us that this is what everyone says to God. The Bible calls this sin. By their sinful rebellion, people divorce themselves from God, and God lets them do it. This divorce is the cause of all the chaos we see in the world today. The fact that God creates us with the ability to divorce ourselves from Him is another spiritual wonder of the world.

I call the third spiritual wonder "the greatest dilemma in the world." As a result of the greatest divorce in the world, God faced the same dilemma we often face as parents. We love our children, and there are certain behaviors and attitudes we would like to see in their lives. But, horror of horrors, they do things that displease us. They break our hearts by the things they do. When these things happen, how should we respond? We want to express our love for our children, but we do not want to turn a blind eye to these hurtful actions. That is a dilemma every parent experiences.

In a sense, God has the same dilemma (not that He is ever really faced by what he sees as an unsolvable problem). He sees His creatures divorce themselves from their Creator and do abominable things that He never intended them to do. The greatest dilemma in the world is the dilemma God has to face all day and every night with the human family.

This greatest dilemma in the world is resolved by what we hear in the fourth spiritual wonder - "the greatest declaration in the world." The greatest declaration in the world is not some government document. The greatest declaration is found in the Bible, it is called the "Gospel," or the "Good News" that God sent His only Son into the world to die on a cross for you and me. When He did this, God did everything that had to be done to resolve the greatest dilemma and reconcile the greatest divorce in the world. When you understand this great declaration, you realize that the cross of Jesus Christ is truly one of the spiritual wonders of the world.

That leads to the fifth spiritual wonder, I call it "the greatest decision in the world." When Jesus was on earth, He stayed up late one night talking with a rabbi named Nicodemus. (John 3:1-21) Essentially, Jesus said to him, "I am going to the cross because I am God's only Son, I am God's only solution to the problem of sin and I am God's only Savior. If you believe

that, you will not be condemned. But, if you do not believe that, you will be condemned, not for your sin, but because you do not believe in Me."

It is almost as if God has offered the world a life-saving contract. Jesus has signed that contract in His blood, but there is a place there for you and me to "sign it" with faith. That makes the decision to believe what Jesus said about Himself the greatest decision in the world - and one of the spiritual wonders of the world. The fact that a decision we make can mean the difference between eternal life and condemnation makes that decision another one of the spiritual wonders of the world.

How do you know when you have made the decision that determines your eternal destiny? In Scripture, the Greek word for "believe" does not simply mean intellectual agreement. It is not simply a matter of nodding your head and saying, "I believe that." I heard it illustrated this way. A man stretched a rope across the largest waterfall in America. He rode a bicycle on that tiny rope from one side to the other and back again. The crowd that witnessed it clapped and cheered. The man asked them, "How many of you believe I can do that again with a passenger on the bicycle?" Several of them raised their hands, and he pointed to a fellow with his hand up and said, "Get on the handlebars!" The spectator said, "Not me!" The man replied, "Then you do not really believe."

The Greek word for "believe" essentially means to "get on the bicycle." If you were an invalid and your house was on fire, if someone came to your bedroom and offered to carry you out of the burning house, you would need to rest the full weight of your body on the rescuer and trust him to carry you from your burning house. That is the way one translation of the New Testament translates the word for believe in the sixteenth verse of the third chapter of the Gospel of John: "Whoever rests his full weight on Jesus will not perish, but have everlasting

life." You believe when you fully trust your salvation to the proposition that the claims of Jesus about being God's only Son, Solution and Savior are true.

And how do you know when you truly believe? The sixth spiritual wonder is what I call "the greatest direction in the world." In the Gospels, we read that every time someone said to Jesus, "I believe You," He spoke two words to them. Those two words were: "Follow Me." When they heard those words, they realized that to follow Him, they had to turn away from the way they were living their lives. Most of them did not want to do that, so they did not follow Him. They discovered that they really did not believe.

However, there was a committed minority of people who did believe and follow Him. They discovered that the direction of following Jesus was the greatest direction in the world. He established a covenant with them, which was essentially, "Follow Me and I will make you." (Matthew 4:19) When they made the commitment to follow Him, as they followed Him, He made them into what He wanted them to be. Sixty years later, one of them dedicated the last book in the Bible to Jesus with these words, "Unto Him Who loved us, and made us kings and priests..." To the Apostle John, the direction of following Jesus was another spiritual wonder of the world.

I call the seventh spiritual wonder "the greatest dynamic in the world." We do not fully understand this, but Jesus taught that when we make the decision to follow Him, we experience a dynamic change that is like being born all over again. Through a miracle, His Holy Spirit takes up residence in your body, and we experience the greatest dynamic in the world. This new birth, Christ living in us, gives us the power we need to follow Christ.

These are the seven most wonderful things I know anything about. The greatest design in the world, the greatest divorce

in the world, the greatest dilemma in the world, the greatest declaration in the world, the greatest decision in the world, the greatest direction in the world, and the greatest dynamic in the world. I call them, "The Seven Spiritual Wonders of the World."

You can make the decision to move in the direction of following Jesus Christ and receive from the risen Christ the dynamic to be born again. The miracle of the new birth starts with that decision to really believe. Would you like to make that decision right now?

Believing these seven spiritual wonders will give you the spiritual foundation that can make a marriage in the sight of God possible for you. You must experience the saving grace and love of Christ yourself, as an individual, before you can relate to your marriage partner in all the loving, Christ-like ways I have profiled in this study. Without this spiritual foundation, your marriage will never be what God designed marriage to be.

My prayer and desire is that God will help you apply these principles to your marriage and family, beginning with your salvation and your own personal spiritual relationship to God.