Divorce and You

How can you cope with divorce if it comes your way? How can you help a friend who is going through it? What about divorce and the ministry? Practical—and personal—thoughts on this important issue.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

It's Over

Divorce. What thoughts and feelings does that word kindle in you?

Are you happily married and feel that divorce is not an option? Maybe the concept scares you. The fear of loss seems overwhelming.

Are you in a struggling marriage and the end is near? Perhaps you are confused, angry, depressed, or grieving. Or maybe you are happy and envision this as the necessary end of an unpleasant relationship.

Perhaps your parents are divorced. Maybe you recall their angry disputes during your childhood, fear over your family's future, anguish over deciding with whom you would live.

Got any friends whose marriage is on the rocks? You might care for both of them, but how should you relate to them now? Take sides? Remain neutral? Intervene? Keep out of it?

In 1975 I married a wonderful woman. She was kind, sensitive, beautiful, loving, intelligent, fun, talented . . . my best friend. We traveled the globe together speaking in universities, on television and radio, writing books and articles about love, sex and marriage. She taught me much about love, kindness, sensitivity, communication. Much of the modest success I've seen in speaking and writing I owe in part

to her excellent coaching.

Twenty years later, in 1995, she told me she wanted out. I felt devastated. The love of my life didn't love me any more. The pain of rejection ran deep. I had not committed adultery or desertion. I felt helpless. Legally, I was helpless. California's "no-fault" divorce laws mean that in our state it takes two to get married but only one to get divorced. One partner can simply claim "irreconcilable differences" – no proof is needed – and a judge will dissolve the union after a six-month waiting period. The unwilling partner is legally powerless to stop it.

Imagine the worst spat you've ever had with your spouse, partner, or friend. Multiply the pain of that by a jillion and you have a glimpse of the hurt. It felt as if I were being reamed out by an emotional Roto Rooter. I cried buckets. It was really, really awful. Are you getting the idea that I did not like this experience?

What does the Bible say about divorce? How can you cope with divorce if it comes your way? How can you help a friend who is going through it? And what about divorce in the ministry? This article offers you some practical thoughts on this controversial topic.

Biblical Issues

Is divorce a solution or a cop-out?

I appreciate it when speakers or writers make clear their way of looking at the world. My worldview is a biblical one. You may agree or disagree, and I certainly respect that, but may I encourage you to consider what the biblical documents say on this issue?

Moses, the famous Jewish liberator, explained that God made the first man and woman for a close bond. "For this reason," Moses wrote, "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and

be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."{1}

Hundreds of years later, some religious leaders asked Jesus of Nazareth about divorce. He quoted Moses' statement, then added, "Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."{2} Jesus held marriage in high esteem: "God has joined them together," He declared, ". . . let no one separate them."

But if divorce is wrong, these male religious leaders responded, why did Moses discuss how to handle certain complicated divorce situations? Jesus explained: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you," Jesus continued, "that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."{3}

Strong words. What do they mean? Even dedicated followers of God differ about whether He allows divorce and under what circumstances. A thorough study exceeds the scope of this short series. I recommend Jay Adams' book, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible*,{4} for more detail.

Years before my own marriage began to crumble, I carefully studied a biblical perspective on divorce and remarriage. Here is what made the most sense to me. Partners should enter marriage for life, "until death do us part." If splits arise, reconciliation should always be the first aim. If reconciliation fails, I see two biblical bases for divorce and remarriage: adultery of one spouse{5}, and desertion{6}. Adultery or desertion do not mandate divorce, but they make it allowable.

As difficult as this subject may seem, remember that God loves you and wants the very best for you.{7} If you are hurting right now, He understands. He wants to wrap His arms around you, be your friend, and help you handle your deepest

disappointment.

Coping With Divorce

What are some ways to cope with a shipwrecked marriage?

Divorce can teach you a lot. I'm a sinful person who made plenty of mistakes in marriage. I could have been more thoughtful, sensitive, and kind. Though I tried hard to be a good husband, I realized I could not be responsible for another's decision.

About a year after the divorce, at some friends' encouragement, I began to speak publicly about what I had learned. I was determined not to speak ill of my ex wife, but I wanted to encourage others. My story got several reactions, which I began reflecting to audiences to help them process it. Maybe you can relate.

"Some of you feel uncomfortable with this topic," I would tell listeners. "You wish I would change the subject. I've felt that way. Others of you think, I wish the person I love would be as open with his heart as you're being.' Some of you are skeptical," I'd continue. "You'd like to hear *her* side of the story! I can appreciate that. Maybe you're angry. Perhaps I remind you of your ex-spouse. You think, He talks so sweet. But I bet he's a tyrant in private!' I realized that I cannot assume responsibility for all the people who have hurt you. But I can offer hope. Maybe people will reason, He's hurt; I've hurt. He says Jesus helped him with his hurt. Maybe Jesus can help me with my hurt.'"

Jesus can help you with your hurt. He said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls."{8}

Often divorcees experience the classic stages of loss: denial,

anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.{9} You may not believe you're experiencing this. You may be mad at your mate or God. You may promise God you'll follow Him if He restores your marriage. You may become depressed when the end seems certain. Eventually you may accept reality.

What helped my journey through grief? I had to believe that God really did cause "all things to work together for good to those who love" Him.{10} I sought to walk closely with Him. I asked forgiveness of my ex-wife for my many shortcomings. I forgave her and forgave myself.

I saw a skilled counselor. A wonderful divorce recovery group helped me understand what I was experiencing and feeling. I did not date for about two years after the divorce was final, to allow time to sort things out. And some fine friends helped me to land on my feet.

Responding to a Friend's Divorce

How might you be a friend to someone in the midst of divorce?

The couple next door is splitting up. One partner is bailing on the marriage. You and your family have known them for years. You've babysat each other's kids, carpooled to work, vacationed together, laughed and cried together. You are members of the same church.

How should you relate to them now? Take sides? Remain neutral? Intervene? Keep out of it?

If you are a follower of Jesus, you likely will want to seek divine wisdom. Every situation is different, and marital strife can be explosive. Jesus' mother Mary once had some wise advice that relates well to these situations. She said, "Whatever He [Jesus] says to you, do it."{11}

I was quite fortunate to have a circle of good friends who reached out in loving care. Perhaps their examples can give

you some ideas of what you might do.

My friends did not abandon me in my darkest hour. They stuck with me, let me know that they cared, asked how they could help, arranged opportunities for us to spend time together. One couple had me over to dinner every Friday night during the fall. Then we would watch their son play high school football. It helped take my mind off of my problems, relax, and enjoy being around other people.

Some recommended books,{12} met me for lunch, and invited me to a concert. One couple listened as I poured my heart out and helped me plan my future. Some organized a prayer meeting among close friends, helped me move, sat with me in court. They would call to ask how I was doing, especially when I felt particularly lonely or burdened.

Two friends tried to contact my estranged wife to encourage her to drop the divorce action.

After the divorce, many gracious folks welcomed me into their circles and encouraged me to serve others. Some pastors and theologians who knew me well told me they thought it was appropriate biblically for me to remarry. I was reluctant. I wondered if I could ever open my heart to another woman.

Then, at a conference, I met Meg Korpi, a beautiful, sensitive, kind, wise, caring, brilliant, fun woman. She was as dedicated to God as she was wise and gorgeous. (I get points for saying all this in writing, you understand!) I knew what I liked and I liked what I saw! We began to date almost three years after the divorce ended and were married about a year-and-a-half later. We are very happy together. We thank God often.

Divorcees and the Ministry

What about divorce and the ministry? If a ministry leader divorces, should he or she remain in ministry?

If a leader initiates an unbiblical divorce – or commits adultery or otherwise acts inappropriately – one should confront him or her as described in Matthew 18. In my view (not all will agree), with a change of mind and heart – and after appropriate time – it may be possible to restore a fallen leader to effective service. Paul wrote, "If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."{13}

What about the victim of an unbiblical divorce? There are both wise and unwise ways to deal with such tragedies. Ministry boards and executives should take special care to act biblically. They may be tempted to value public image and donations above biblical principles.

Perhaps my case will be instructive. My first wife and I were international speakers with a prominent evangelical movement with thousands of wonderful staff. We traveled the world together, wrote books, appeared on television. In my twenty-fifth year with this organization, my wife filed for divorce without – in my opinion – biblical grounds. This caused quite a stir.

Though initially expressing concern and care, corporate leaders claimed they had a policy requiring me to leave if my spouse divorced me. I was told I was a PR risk and would need to go. At one point they wanted me to agree never to speak or write about marriage, divorce, or remarriage (mine in particular or these themes in general). Things got "curiouser and curiouser."

Again, this movement has done much good around the globe. It helped me come to faith when I was a student. Please understand that I am seeking here the proper blend of grace and truth, not an easy task in these matters.

My employer owned a seminary, a separate corporation that had no automatic divorce restriction. The seminary president hired

me. He took some heat for acting biblically, but those like him who refused to convict me of a sin – divorce – that I did not commit were God's instruments of grace in my life. After a time of healing, I returned to the lecture circuit. Today, I am privileged to enjoy an even larger global influence via speaking and writing.

Divorce does not have to end ministry. Has any sin been dealt with in a biblical fashion? If so, then the divorced servant of Christ can, with God's direction and power – and with appropriate accountability – continue to touch lives for Him. Jesus welcomed the denying Peter into fellowship and service.

The wounded servant may become even more effective, able to connect with people on a deep level and to point them to the One who can heal their broken hearts.

Notes

1. Genesis 2:24 NASB.
2. Matthew 19:6 NLT.
3. Matthew 19:8-9 NIV.
4. Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).
5. Matthew 19:9.
6. 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, taken with Matthew 18:15-17. An outline of this argument regarding desertion is as follows: 1 Corinthians 7:12-15 can be understood to mean that when a spouse who does not believe in Christ deserts a spouse who does have faith in Christ, the deserted believer is not bound from remarriage. Regarding a marriage between two believers, a deserted spouse should first seek reconciliation. If the deserter will not reconcile, the deserted spouse should follow the biblical "progressive correction" prescription in Matthew 18:15-17. That is, s/he should confront the deserter with his/her sin individually, then (if the deserter continues to resist) with one or two others, then involving the church. If the deserting spouse still resists, then the Lord's admonition

to the church (which includes the deserted spouse) is “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” In other words, relate to that person just as you would to someone outside the church, as to an unbeliever. How does the church relate to unbelievers? One of the many biblical teachings regarding relationships between believers and unbelievers is that an unbelieving spouse who deserts a
believer does not bind that believer from remarriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-15). See Adams, op. cit., for a more complete discussion of desertion as allowable grounds for remarriage.
7. Romans 8:35-39; Psalm 23.
8. Matthew 11:28-29 NLT.
9. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., *On Death and Dying,* reprint edition (New York: Simon and Schuster, reprint, 1997).
10. Romans 8:28, NASB.
11. John 2:5 NASB.
12. Especially helpful are Joseph Warren Kniskern, *When the Vow*
Breaks (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993); and many of the Fresh Start resources
at www.freshstartseminars.org.
13. Galatians 6:1 NIV.

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Shark Victim Surfer Girl’s Simple Faith

Bethany Hamilton looks like any fun-loving young American teenager—bright eyed, smiling, excited about what she enjoys doing. She’s athletic, attractive, trim, tanned and blonde—qualities that in this culture can open many doors.

But Bethany faces a special challenge that many her age do not. She is missing her left arm just below the shoulder, lost to a shark attack while surfing in Hawaii in the fall of 2003. The 1,500-pound tiger shark also chomped a huge chunk from her surfboard. She's fortunate to be alive.

Bethany, who lives on Kauai, was the state's top-ranked female amateur surfer before the attack. Such a loss might seem devastating. *USA Today* reports that Bethany seems undismayed. Merely three months after the mishap, she was surfing competitively again. She aims to be among the world's best surfers.

Rather than hiding her left arm under clothing, she displays it in tank tops and calls it "Stumpy." When her prosthetic turned out to be too light in color to match her suntan, she nicknamed it Haole Girl, slang for a non-Hawaiian. She peels tangerines by holding them between her feet and using her right hand.

How to account for her bright spirits? Determination and dedication seem part of her makeup. But is there something more?

Her dad gives a clue. "She's not suffering," Tom Hamilton told the newspaper. "Somehow God gave Bethany an amazing amount of grace in this. I am in awe. She never says, 'Why me?'"

Bethany confirms her father's analysis: "This was God's plan for my life, and I'm going to go with it… I might not be here if I hadn't asked for God's help."

This surfer girl's simple faith astounds observers. She has become a media darling—with TV appearances on Oprah, 20/20 and Good Morning America. Book and movie offers have come. She threw out the first pitch for baseball's Oakland Athletics on opening day. Through it all, her family ties remain strong.

Her optimism echoes that of an early follower of Jesus, Paul,

whose life-experience log included unjust imprisonments, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks and social ostracism. He was convinced that “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love” Him.

Life can throw many curve balls: serious illness, accidents, terrorism, domestic strife, employment hassles, theft and more. Answers to “Why me?” and “What to do?” are often complex. Accompanying feelings of fear, confusion, grief or despair should not be ignored or minimized.

But perhaps a perspective that includes God in the picture can be a starting place for coping. Maybe the surfer girl’s belief and trust have something valuable to say to a society filled with pain and risk.

During a winter New York City media tour, Bethany spontaneously gave her ski jacket to a homeless girl sitting on a Times Square subway grate, then called off a shopping spree, citing her own material abundance.

Something very significant is happening in this young athlete’s life. Watch for more.

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Fear and Its Remedies

All set for the next terrorist attack? Got your biohazard suit? How ’bout your gas mask, radiation detector and potassium iodide pills? A new store opened in Manhattan recently, only a few blocks from Ground Zero. “Safer America” markets personal safety products for a post-9/11 world.

Work in a high-rise? Have you considered a personal parachute?

It comes in two models: the streamlined Executive Chute and the deluxe “HOPE” system (High Office Parachute Escape; opens automatically, good from heights over 100 feet, accommodates persons up to 300 pounds).

Safer America President Harvey Kushner takes a pragmatic approach to homeland security: “These products are no different than safety devices already commonplace in most homes, such as fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, and first-aid kits. We are enabling people to alleviate their fears by doing something smart and productive: preparing to overcome that which they most fear.”

Fears abound these days. CIA director George Tenet recently warned Congress that al-Qaida could attack at any time here or abroad. A sampler, from a guy who is privy to more intelligence data than most of us: “Based on what we have learned about the 11 September [attacks], an attempt to conduct another attack on U.S. soil is certain.

“You must make the analytical judgment that the possibility exists that people are planning to attack you inside the United States—multiple simultaneous attacks. We are the enemy, we’re the people they want to hurt inside this country,” Tenet said.

As Tenet spoke, the nation was still on alert code yellow—”significant risk of terrorist attacks”—because officials had no specific details about time and location of possible attacks. Frightening times. How should we deal with fear?

We trust military and law enforcement to keep us safe from harm. But we can never completely prepare for every risk in life. And eventually life will end for each of us. What then?

Besides taking reasonable precautions, might it also be worth considering something deeper as an ultimate solution to fear? An Israeli shepherd who became a king knew dangers from wild

beasts and wild political enemies who sought his life.

“The Lord is my shepherd,” he wrote. “I have everything I need. Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you [God] are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.”

A descendant of this king, Jesus of Nazareth, offered similar advice to His friends: “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God,” He taught. God loves people, values them and saves a spot in eternity for those who trust Him.

It’s hard to turn on the news these days without finding cause for fear: terrorism, snipers and financial woes augment personal concerns about relationships, family and job future. Maybe it’s time to look more closely toward One who can calm fears and who holds the future in His hands.

Abuse and Domestic Violence

Abuse and domestic violence affects our lives, our homes, and our society. Kerby Andersons looks at the problem of abuse and what the church can do to help victims of abuse.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Each year the lives of women (and men) are altered or destroyed by someone who abuses them. The resulting emotional scars, physical scars, and destruction are evident in social and crime statistics.

Although abuse is significantly under-reported, current crime statistics at least begin to tell the story. The FBI’s Uniform

Crime Report routinely lists domestic violence as the leading cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44 in the United States. These injuries are more than those from car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

Abuse may be open, flagrant, and in-your-face. But abuse can also be subtle and devious. It may explode on the scene or gradually creep into a relationship. Although women are the primary victims of abuse, men may be victims, also, of abuse.

One of the first steps in dealing with abuse is to identify it. Identifying it is often difficult because it can manifest itself in different forms. Here is a brief survey of the different types of abuse.

- *Emotional abuse* is the use of mental strategies or mind games. This would include such things as anger, aggression, humiliation, intimidation, stalking, fear, power, and control. The goal is to inflict emotional damage on the other person.
- *Physical abuse* would include the use of body parts or weapons to threaten, punish, dominate, restrain, control, or injure another person.
- *Sexual abuse* is the use of forced sexual actions which may dominate, manipulate, threaten, injure, corrupt, or control another person.
- *Social abuse* involves other forms of abuse to dominate, manipulate or control another person's social relationships.
- *Financial abuse* is the use of money or financially-related matters to dominate, threaten or control. This may be done to inflict damage on another person or take financial advantage of that person.
- *Spiritual abuse* is the controlling of another person's religious interests or practices. Spiritual damage may be inflicted by criticizing a person's religious convictions or misstating them for religious purposes.

Although abuse may take various forms, there are often common

elements. For example, there often is the tendency to blame the victim of abuse. A woman may be told to "submit" or "pray harder for her marriage" by a pastor or church members. And often women go back into abusive relationships, leaving many to wonder.

In this article, we will try to provide some answers and perspective on this important issue. (And I might note that we already have articles on the Probe Web site dealing with such issues as verbal abuse and spiritual abuse.)

Types of Abusers

Although abuse and domestic violence are one of the most pressing social problems of our time, most of society (including churches) still view the crisis as a private matter. Abused women are often advised by pastors and members of a congregation to "pray harder" or "try to become a better wife."

Abuse has not only been ignored by the church but often by the medical profession. In their study of abuse, Evan Stark and Ann Flitcraft found that out of one million women who sought medical treatment for injuries sustained by husbands and boyfriends, doctors correctly identified the injuries as a result of battering only four percent of the time.{1}

Frequently child abuse and domestic violence go hand in hand. Men who abuse their wives will often also abuse their children. Research shows that in homes where domestic violence occurs, children are abused at a rate 1500 percent higher than the normal average.{2}

Often this abuse begins even before a child is born. One study of 1200 white, Latino, and African-American pregnant women, found that one in six reported physical abuse during pregnancy.{3}

Researchers now conclude that there are two types of abusers.

Neil Jacobson and John Gottman document this in their book, *When Men Batter Women*.{4} Their study of more than 200 couples in dangerous relationships helped shatter myths and shed new light on abusive relationships.

They describe two types of batterers: Cobras and Pit Bulls. The Cobras are more severely violent of the two. They strike swiftly and ferociously, always remaining in control and feeling entitled to whatever they want.

Pit Bulls are violent because they are insecure. They are more likely to lose control, letting their emotions burn slowly until they explode in anger.

Jacobson and Gottman intensively studied about 60 of the 200 couples by watching videotapes of non-violent arguments of severe batterers and their spouses. To eliminate some of the subjectivity, they also monitored the vital signs (heart rate, sweat flow) of the couples.

They found that Cobras resemble the snake for which they are named. They become still and focused just before striking their victim. They become internally calm during abuse. While the heart rates of Pit Bulls increase during abuse, the Cobras' heart rates actually decrease.

Pit Bulls are driven by deep insecurity and often have an unhealthy dependence on the mates they abuse. They are afraid of losing their wives and therefore try to control them through physical and emotional abuse. Cobras have often been physically or sexually abused themselves (frequently in childhood) and tend to see violence as an unavoidable part of life.

Boundaries

Often victims of abuse feel they deserve the abuse they receive. They have been convinced (by their partner or perhaps by society in general) that the abuse is their fault. It is

not. To reinforce this claim, here are eight things that no one deserves:{5}

- No one deserves to be pushed, slapped, bruised, or kicked. No excuse makes such actions justifiable, whether drugs, alcohol, financial problems or family problems.

- No one deserves to be verbally abused. No one should be called names or yelled at for no apparent reason.

- No one deserves to have possessions damaged (dishes thrown, clothes torn) or gifts destroyed. These things don't automatically become "his" just because he paid for them from a joint checking account.

- No one deserves to be interfered with in coming and going. You do not need to be told when you can or cannot leave the house, go shopping, or go to school.

- No one deserves to be followed, harassed, or spied upon. As an adult, you have the right to go where you want, and spend time the way you choose.

- No one deserves to be ridiculed, put down, made fun of, or belittled. This applies both at home and in public.

- No one deserves to be emotionally starved. Everyone has emotional needs: to love, to be loved, to care and be cared for, to need others and to be needed by others. This involves more than just one person who is demanding your time and attention.

- No one deserves to be isolated. You deserve to have a community of people around you rather than just a spouse who dominates your life.

Each person has rights that should be asserted to prevent abuse from taking place. Here is a short list of those rights:

- You have the right to be treated with respect. All are created in the image of God (Gen. 2:26-27) and have value and dignity. You deserve respect regardless of

your economic status, race, religion, or sex.

• You have the right to be heard. You have ideas and opinions and should be free to express them.

• You have the right to have a support system. You shouldn't have to depend on one person in your life to provide all your emotional needs and who cuts you off from the rest of society.

• You have the right to come and go as you please. You should be able to make choices about what you do with your free time.

• You have the right to have privacy and space of your own. You don't give up those rights when you get married or when you begin to have children.

• You have the right to maintain a separate identity.

Each of these rights are important in establishing boundaries in a relationship. These are key components in preventing abuse.

Myths of Abuse

Let's turn now to some of the myths of abuse.{6}

One myth is that victims of abuse come from lower-income families with little education. In reality, victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life. Race, religion, socio-economic background are no predictor of abuse. Victims of abuse may be well-educated or uneducated, professionals or common laborers.

A second myth is that victims stay in abusive relationships because they like being abused. That is simply not true. Many have been conditioned to accept beatings because they are blamed by their abusers, but they do not like being beaten. Many victims actually "accept abuse as common in relationships."{7}

So, why don't victims leave? The answer to that is often quite complex. Many women believe they cannot leave because "He can't live without me." They may fear he will have a nervous breakdown, commit suicide, or lose his job.

She may believe that the children need a father, rationalizing that an abusive father is better than no father at all. And she may think she cannot make it alone in the job market.

Many women fear they will be killed if they leave an abusive relationship. And that fear may be justified. Studies show that battered women are more likely to be killed *after* leaving an abusive relationship.{8}

Abuse victims also convince themselves that things are going to get better. Hope springs eternal, and there is always the hope that with the right changes and hard work, abuse will go away. Sadly, it does not.

A third myth is that violence happens mostly between strangers. Contrary to popular belief, a woman's greatest risk of assault is from an intimate partner. Statistics from the Department of Justice indicate that women are attacked seven times more often by offenders with whom they have an intimate relationship than are male victims of violence.{9}

A fourth myth is that abuse is not a major problem. Domestic violence is one of the most serious health problems today. As we have mentioned, it affects every socioeconomic segment of society. "Federal officials estimate that domestic violence costs U.S. firms $4 billion a year in lower productivity, staff turnover, absenteeism, and excessive use of medical benefits."{10}

What the Church Can Do

Domestic violence is pervasive in our society and crosses all socioeconomic levels, religious belief, and cultural backgrounds. Abuse affects our lives, our homes, and our

society. Is there anything the church can do to deal with this important issue? Here are a few suggestions.{11}

First, pastors and church members should be aware of the extent of the problem. I have provided some social statistics to demonstrate how pervasive abuse is within our society. It isn't a problem to be ignored or addressed through simple clichés.

Second, pastors and counselors need to help abuse victims set boundaries in their lives. Battered women often find it difficult to make choices because someone else has been making decisions for them. Many women who live in violent homes went from their father's house straight to their abuser's house. They never have had much experience in making their own personal choices.

If you are seeking to help an abuse victim, you should encourage her to make her own decisions. Resist the temptation to rescue and take over her life. She needs to feel empowered not helpless. At the same time, you can provide suggestions about finding a family counselor or a domestic violence agency.

Third, if you are a pastor, a counselor, or just a caring friend, you can provide counsel and comfort. She needs to hear from you that she doesn't deserve to be abused. Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, and don't let her convince herself that the abuse will go away.

Fourth, be prepared for crisis intervention. Quick action may be necessary to protect her and her children. Ask her to describe the circumstances of the last two or three beatings. What preceded his attack (drugs, alcohol, argument)? Where is her relationship right now?

A pastor or counselor who receives a crisis call only has a few moments to discern the extent of the threat and appropriate actions that should be taken. Can she find her way

to a safe place immediately? Do you have a place for her to go, if necessary?

Sometimes the crisis arrives at your office or home. A pastor, counselor, or caring friend may need to arrange for medical attention and a safe place away from the abuser.

If the couple is separated, she may be stalked by her abuser. She needs to know who can protect her and how to contact legal services.

Fifth, the church should address this important issue of domestic abuse. By speaking to this issue, we break the silence surrounding abuse and confront it with biblical principles. The church should hold batterers responsible for their actions. Intervention, confrontation, and tough love should be tools used to fight abuse in our communities.

If the batterer is a member of the church, then Matthew 18 provides a model for confronting "offenders" within the church. Galatians 5:22-25 talks about the fruit of the Spirit with includes kindness, gentleness, and self-control. These and many other verses provide a model for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Christians have an important role in dealing with abuse within our society.

Notes

1. Evan Stark and Ann Flitcraft, "Medical Therapy as Repression: The Case of the Battered Woman," *Health and Medicine,* 1982, 29-32.
2. Maria Roy, "Children in the Crossfire," *Health Communications,* 1988.
3. Judith McFarlane, "Abuse During Pregnancy: A Cross-Cultural Study of Frequency and Severity of Injuries," *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Fact Sheet* (Denver, 1994).
4. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman, *When Men Batter Women: New Insights into Ending Abusive Relationships* (New York: Simon &

Schuster, 1998).
5. A more detailed list can be found in Mary Marecek, *Breaking Free from Partner Abuse* (Buena Park, Calif: Morning Glory Press, 1999).
6. Andrea Lissette and Richard Kraus, *Free Yourself from an Abusive Relationship* (Alameda, Calif: Hunter House, 2000).
7. Eve Buzawa and Carl Buzawa, *Domestic Violence: The Criminal Justice Response* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1996).
8. Mary Ann Dutton, "The Dynamics of Domestic Violence: Understanding the Response from Battered Women," *The Florida Bar Journal,* October 1994.
9. "Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey, August 1995," *Report from the U.S. Justice Department* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1996).
10. Ibid.
11. Patricia Riddle Gaddis, *Battered But Not Broken* (Valley Forge, Pa: Judson Press, 1996).

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Trash Your Marriage in Eight Easy Steps – A Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin helps us take a biblical perspective on eight activities and attitudes that will tear down our marriage. Fortunately, she also provides us eight Christian alternatives that will help build up our marriages.

The divorce rate is at an all-time high, and marriages are

falling apart everywhere you look. Marriages of church-going people are crashing and burning especially fast. There are forces in our culture that contribute to marriage stresses such as pornography, the prevalence of drivenness, two-career families, and the dynamics of the blended family. But people also make foolish choices to destroy their marriages from within.

Talking about the family, Proverbs 14:1 says, “The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands.” Ephesians 5:28 exhorts husbands to love their wives as their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing them. God’s plan is that we treasure and cultivate our marriages, but it’s very easy to trash them instead. Let’s take a tongue-in-cheek look at eight ways that people trash their marriages.

Be Selfish

The first step is to *be selfish*. My pastor once said that the AIDS of marriage is justified self-centeredness. Everything needs to revolve around you because, let’s face it, you *are* at the center of the universe, right? If you find something you like to do that ignores your spouses’ feelings and interests, go ahead and do it! Too bad if they don’t like it! You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get!

Always insist on having things your own way. If you don’t get your own way, throw a tantrum. Or freeze your spouse out. Get your kids involved in this game by saying things like, “Would you please ask your father to pass the salt?” Don’t be afraid to withhold sex if your spouse isn’t letting you have things your own way. There’s a *lot* of power in that, so don’t waste it!

If there’s only enough money in your budget for what one of you wants, make sure you get what *you* want. Especially if you’re the wage earner, or if you make more than the other. Money is power, and don’t be afraid to use it against your

spouse!

Make demands instead of requests. Wives, let your husband know that he *will* do things your way, or you'll make his life miserable. Husbands, when you want your wife to do something, just *tell* her to do it. "Please" and "thank you" are for the kids. This is your spouse you're talking about—they don't need it. Save all your courtesy for strangers; don't waste it on the person you said you'd spend the rest of your life with.

What we really mean to say:

Selfishness is guaranteed to hurt marriages, so ask for God's help in putting your husband or wife ahead of yourself so you *don't* trash your marriage.

Pick at Each Other

The second step is to *pick at each other.* If you know that something you do annoys your spouse, be sure to do it often. And intentionally. When she complains about it, tell her to buzz off, it's not as annoying as the stupid things she does to bug *you*. The more childish the annoying habit, the better.

Be critical of the smallest thing the other one says and does. Don't let your spouse get away with anything! Stay vigilant for every little offense. Be sure to address these small details with an air of superiority . . . unless it works better for you to act like a martyr, as if you deserve the Nobel Prize for putting up with someone who doesn't squeeze the toothpaste from the end.

Always get the last word when you're arguing. Dr. Phil McGraw has said that the most accurate predictor of divorce is when people don't allow their partners to retreat with dignity. So make your spouse feel whipped and defeated at the end of a fight. As long as you win, that's what matters.

Let The Kids Be More Important

A third step to trashing your marriage is to *let the kids become more important than your spouse.* Moms, make your husband feel left out of the intimate, secret relationship between you and your baby. As the baby grows, continue to draw the line where it's you and your child on one side, your husband on the other. Keep your Mommy hat on all day and all night. Your kids don't care if your hair is brushed and if you put on perfume and a little makeup before Daddy comes home, so why should he?

Dads, invest all your energies into making your child succeed at what he's good at, or what you *want* him to be good at. Squeeze out Mom so that you will be your kid's favorite parent. Work so hard on homework and school projects that there's no time for family time.

Let the kids and your other priorities crowd out your "alone together" time. Date nights are for unmarried people! In order to be fulfilled as a person, it is essential to invest all your energies in parenting, career, housework, church commitments and hobbies, so don't worry if there isn't enough time left over for the two of you. It's no big deal. There's always tomorrow. Or next year.

What we really mean to say:

Hey! If you find yourself doing these things, *stop*! You don't have to trash your marriage!

Show Disrespect

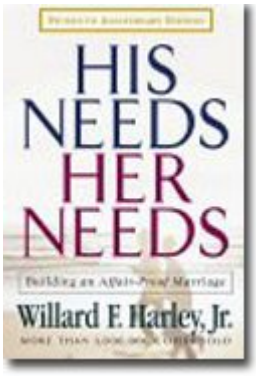
Show disrespect for your spouse, especially in public. One of the best ways to disrespect your partner is ugly name-calling, especially about things he or she can't change. However, the old standbys of "stupid," "fat," "ugly," "weak," and "loser" are always effective, too.

Complain about your spouse to your friends. It's even more powerful if you do it in front of your spouse. Then, if he objects, punch him in the arm and say, "I'm just kidding! You take everything so *seriously!*"

There are a number of ways to show disrespect with nonverbal communication. Roll your eyes, cluck your tongue, narrow your eyes in contempt. The heavy sigh is a real winner, too.

Wives: Straighten out your husband when he makes a mistake, especially in front of others. Lecture him. Ridicule him: his feelings, his behavior, his dreams, his thoughts. Do everything you can to emasculate your husband. Husbands: Let your wife know you think your opinion is better than hers. Interrupt her when she's speaking.

Refuse to Meet Emotional Needs



Another easy way to trash your marriage is *to refuse to meet your spouse's emotional needs.* Men and women need different things from their life partners. Dr. Willard Harley discovered and examined a pattern in his excellent book *His Needs, Her Needs.* Husbands' top needs, it turns out, are: first of all sexual fulfillment; second, recreational companionship; third, an attractive spouse; fourth, domestic support; and fifth, admiration. Wives, if you want to trash your marriage, ignore his need for sex and that you be there for him in leisure time. Blow off his desire that you look your best and he can be proud that you're his wife. Make your home as stressful and chaotic as you can, and never, ever tell him what you admire about him.

Wives' top needs are: first of all affection; second conversations; third, honesty and openness; fourth, financial commitment; and fifth, family commitment. So guys, if you want to trash your marriage, don't show your wife you love and

appreciate her. Don't talk to her. Close off your heart to her. Make her constantly worry about finances. Don't be a faithful husband and father.

Dr. Harley's got a Web site, MarriageBuilders.com, that has a lot of good, practical information for building strong marriages, so you'd better stay away from there if you're not interested in being intentional and constructive!

Remember, we're being tongue-in-cheek here. We want you to *build* your marriage, not *trash* it!

Treat Your Friends Better than Your Spouse

The sixth easy step to trashing your marriage is to *treat your friends better than your spouse.* Since a lot of men unfortunately don't even have friends, this is something women tend to do more. Women know how to treat their girlfriends. They call them up just to encourage them. They drop off flowers for no reason. They send them cards, and they listen intently to whatever's going on in their lives. They are emotionally invested in their friends. They are quick to mention when someone looks nice or does something well because women are usually good at affirming each other. If you want to trash your marriage, don't do any of these thoughtful kindnesses for your husband. If your girlfriend is having a bad day, go out of your way to take her a wonderful casserole *and* fresh salad *and* dessert . . . but serve your husband Spaghetti-O's.

But husbands, if your wife needs you for something at home, and your buddy scores some tickets to a game, tell your wife "too bad, so sad." After all, she'll be around forever but tonight's hockey game won't. If someone at church or in the neighborhood needs something fixed, drop everything to take care of it, even if it means that the broken things around *your* house will continue to go unfixed.

Be a Pansy

Step number seven for trashing your marriage has two parts. Husbands, *be a pansy*. Retreat into the safety of passivity. Refuse to take initiative or responsibility in making plans or suggestions. That way, when things go wrong, you can say, “Don’t blame me! It’s not my fault!” These are great ways to trash your marriage.

Be His Mother

Wives, *be a mother* to your husband. When people ask how many children you have, say things like, “Two—three, if you count my husband.” Tell him to wear a coat when it’s cold and take an umbrella when it’s raining, because he can’t figure it out on his own. Be sure to say “I told you so” as often as possible. If he is passive or irresponsible, jump in and rescue him so he won’t have to deal with the consequences of his own choices. Make sure he feels three years old. Tell him how to live his life, down to the smallest detail.

What we really mean to say:

Please, if you find yourself doing these things, ask for God’s help in being *con*structive instead of *de*structive. We want to help you *build* your marriage, not *trash* it.

When You’re Angry, Blow Up

Let’s talk about one final way to trash your marriage. Yell and scream, or quietly say hurtful words; it doesn’t matter. Inflicting pain is the important thing. Call each other names in the heat of your emotion. Dredge up the past and bring up old hurts. You can hit or slap with words as well as with hands, and they each leave a different kind of lasting damage to your spouse and to your marriage. Losing control when you’re angry is a powerful way to hurt your spouse.

Build Your Marriage in Eight *Harder* Steps

Well, enough of ways to trash your marriage—how about eight steps to build it? All we have to do is look at the opposite of this article's negative, destructive steps.

To build your marriage, fight selfishness by developing a servant's heart. Commit yourself to acting in your spouse's best interests. Do at least one unselfish deed for your husband or wife every day.

Second, instead of picking at each other, choose to let things go. Be grace-givers. Remember that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Third, be intentional in keeping your marriage at the center of your family. Have regular date nights, and schedule times away to invest in the intimacy of your relationship. Go to a FamilyLife Marriage Conference (www.familylife.com).

Fourth, commit to actively be respectful to your spouse by never saying anything negative to other people. Be kind in your words and actions. Treat each other as courteously and with the kind of honor you would bestow on a stranger or a dear friend.

Fifth, talk about your spouse's particular emotional needs. Read Willard Harley's excellent book *His Needs, Her Needs.* Find out which ones are most important to *your* partner, and do everything in your power to meet them.

Sixth, treat your husband or wife at least as well as you treat your friends. Be as thoughtful and encouraging and affirming as you can possibly be.

Seventh: Ladies, resign as your husband's mother. You married an adult; treat him with the respect an adult deserves. Men: Your wife needs a servant-leader—someone who refuses either passivity or tyranny—to love her as Christ loves the church.

And last, when you're angry, express it wisely and constructively. Use words like "I'm angry about this" instead of yelling or hurtful silence. If you're too mad to speak with self-control, wait till you cool down. And don't go to bed without dealing with the situation (Eph. 4:26).

You don't *have* to trash your marriage. You can treasure it instead.

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Laugh a Little: It's Good For Your Health

Had a good laugh recently? Need one?

Stressful days can invite comic relief. Doctors realize that laughter can enhance physical and mental health. Now it seems even looking forward to laughter can be good for you.

WebMD reports that Lee Berk, MD, a University of California Irvine medical professor, and his associates have for years investigated how moods affect immune systems and illness. They've found laughter has a role in fighting viruses, bacteria, cancer and heart disease.

Stress can hamper your immune system; a good chuckle can help. Berk found earlier that watching a one-hour humorous video reduced stress hormone secretion and helped the immune system counter viruses and bacteria.

But there's more: Berk now says the mere anticipation of laughing can help. He studied ten men, measured their stress signs, and told them that in about three days they would see a

humorous video. In each man, spirits lifted before viewing the video.

Two days before the viewing, depression was down 51 percent, confusion 36 percent, anger 19 percent, fatigue 15 percent and tension 9 percent. Right after the viewing, depression and anger were both down 98 percent, fatigue 87 percent, confusion 75 percent and tension 61 percent.

Berk feels anticipating humor brightens life and affects health. He calls this influence the “biology of hope.” Berk says, “Positive anticipation of humor starts the ball rolling in a sense, in which moods begin to change in ways that help the body fight illness. We believe this shows that even anticipation can be used to help patients recover from a wide range of disorders.”

Moral: Planning humor can benefit your health. Watch a funny movie, spend time with humorous people. Tell your boss, professor, clergy or club chairperson to liven up their speeches a bit if they want healthy employees, students, or members. Put laugh-breaks on your calendar, since anticipation is part of the therapy.

A Jewish proverb observes, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” Paul, a first-Century follower of Jesus, emphasized hope: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope. . .” Those biblical writers have some good advice now and then, practical stuff for everyday life.

The other day, a friend sent what he claimed were comments from federal employee performance evaluations. Maybe because I’ve encountered a groundswell of administrivia-creating bureaucrats recently, some of the remarks left me roaring. . .and feeling much better. With apologies to the many capable federal workers, know anyone like this?

“Since my last report, this employee has reached rock bottom and has started to dig.”

“I would not allow this employee to breed.”

“This young lady has delusions of adequacy.”

“He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.”

“Got a full 6-pack, but lacks the plastic thing to hold it all together.”

Those biblical writers would probably tell me to pray for those who hassle me, advice I should heed. But this laughter-break lifted my spirits and got me going again.

So, laugh more. You’ll like it. And say, have you heard the one about. . .?

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Romantic Hyperbole: A Humorous Look at Honesty in Love

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

It would be a great way to express my enduring affection for my wife. I would find seven romantic birthday cards and give one to Meg each day for a week, starting on her birthday. It would continue a sweet tradition begun before we married.

Each card would have a simple picture that would tenderly

convey our feelings for one another. Inside would be an endearing slogan or affirmation to which I would add a personal expression of my love for her.

I didn't foresee that Day Three would bring an ethical dilemma.

I carefully selected the cards and arranged them in an appropriate sequence. Day One showed a cute puppy with a pink rose. Inside: "You're the one I love."

Day Two featured a picture of a little boy and girl in a meadow with their arms over each other's shoulders. The slogan: "Happy Birthday to my favorite playmate."

Day Three depicted a beautiful tropical sunset: bluish pink sky, vast ocean, silhouetted palm trees. You could almost feel the balmy breeze. Inside: "Paradise is anywhere with you", to which I added personal mention of places holding special memories for us: an island vacation spot, a North Carolina hotel, our home.

I completed the remaining cards, dated the envelopes, and planned to bestow one card each morning of her birth week. Then reality happened.

You see, I had agreed to go camping with her for Days One and Two. Camping is something Meg thrives on—outdoor living, clean air, hiking, camp fires. It's in her blood. Camping is something I did in Boy Scouts—dust, mosquitoes, noisy campers, smelly latrines. It ranks just below root canals on my list of favorites.

We camped at a state park only fifteen minutes from our home. On her birthday morning, she liked the fluffy puppy. Day Two, the cute kids made her smile. So far, so good.

Meanwhile, I was tolerating camping, doing my best to keep my attitude positive. The food was OK; the bugs were scarce.

After two days, I was ready to go home as planned. Meg wanted to stay an extra day. We each got our wish.

Once home and alone, I pulled out Meg's card for "Day Three," the one with the tropical sunset and the "paradise is anywhere with you" slogan.

Should I give her the card? I had chosen to leave the campground. "But," I reasoned with myself, "the slogan was true lots of the time."

I settled on a compromise, a post-it note on the envelope explaining, "You may find that this card contains just a bit of romantic hyperbole."

Might giving it a clever-sounding label defuse my hypocrisy?

The echoes of her laughter still reverberate through our home. I got off easy.

"Speak the truth to each other," wrote a Jewish sage. "Speak. . . the truth in love," advocated a first-century biblical writer. Wise advice for just about any relationship.

"Romantic hyperbole" has become a humorous gauge of truthfulness in our relationship, a test for honesty. Neither of us enjoys every location on earth. She feels some sporting events are a waste of time. I can get bored at shopping malls. But as long as we are honest with each other about our feelings, the bond seems to grow stronger.

That's no hyperbole.

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Love Myths

Soul Mates

In this article we are going to focus on a few of the myths surrounding love and romance that can have a negative effect on dating and marriage. Some of these ideas have become so pervasive in our society that it may seem heretical to label them as myths. But as we will see, they can have a devastating impact if they are accepted uncritically.

The first myth is the belief that you will know when you meet "the one." Of course, this assumes that there is only one person who is right for you—a soul mate you must find and marry. Garry Friesen in his book *Decision Making & the Will of God* (along with many other Christian writers) question whether there is *only* one right person for you to marry. But I will set aside this theological question to focus on some relevant practical issues.

First, is the problem of a false positive. We have all heard stories about couples who met and immediately one or both of them knew they were going to marry the other person. Often we call this "love at first sight." But we don't hear as much about the many other people who met, thought they had met "the one," but later decided not to get married or ended up getting married and then divorced.

Certain people come into our lives and we immediately "click" with them. Why? We carry around in our minds a template of what that certain ideal person may be. It is influenced by our family background, our own expectations, books, movies, and personal experiences. When that template comes into our lives sparks fly. We may not even know much about that person's social, family, and religious background, but we are immediately attracted to him or her. We may feel that he or

she is “the one,” but over time our relationship may surface concerns that might be detrimental to a successful marriage. Unfortunately, many people can be blinded by a belief that they have met “the one” and thus ignore important warning signs.

Second is the problem of the false negative. We also no doubt have heard stories of couples who weren’t attracted to each other when they first met. Many didn’t even like the other person. Only over time did they get to know each other and began to see admirable qualities in what became their marriage partner.

Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* (New York: Pedigree, 2000) says we are a romance-addicted society. We love movies with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, but life is more complicated than what is portrayed in movies with skillfully written plots, blended music, beautiful actors, and exotic locations.

Choosing a marriage partner requires more than romance and emotion. For every story someone tells of finding “the one” and experiencing “love at first sight,” there are many more where those initial emotions turned out to be wrong.

Two Peas in a Pod

The second love myth is the belief that you should be similar to your partner. This myth is quite pervasive in part because there is some truth to it. Obviously, there should be some common basis of belief within a marriage. The Bible warns Christians not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” (2 Cor. 6:14) And there should be some common areas of social and cultural similarity.

But I believe we should question the prevailing belief that your life partner should be the same age, height, and race while having the same interests, gifts, and abilities. As some

marriage counselors have said, “If your mate is exactly like you, then one of you is redundant.” Strong marriages celebrate the differences and work to have each person’s gifts and abilities complement the other. One partner may be good with the finances. The other partner may be good in the kitchen. One partner may be good at details. The other partner may be able to look at the bigger picture and plan for the future. Each partner’s gifts complement the other partner’s gifts.

In many cases, having a similar partner can actually be a source of conflict. Kevin Leman has found that two “first-borns” bring their perfectionist tendencies into a marriage. They will often “pick” at each other leading to increased marital conflict. Does that mean that two first-born children should never marry? Of course not. But they might want to reconsider whether they want to marry someone who is so similar to them.

What about differences in age? Couples should obviously consider the implications of vast differences in age in terms of energy level, hobbies, activities, and friendships. But there is also good reason to begin to rethink the prevailing assumption that compatibility must be based upon similar ages. Once again different ages and life experiences might be a significant way to bring complementarity into a marriage.

The same could be said about difference in ethnicity. Not so long ago, society frowned upon so-called mixed marriages. Today, more and more marriage partners come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. While we still tend to marry people who come from the same social and cultural background, this trend seems to be changing.

The key point is this: you don’t have to be similar to your partner to have a good marriage. In fact, your differences might actually help you to complement each other in marriage.

Annoying Habits

Now I would like to focus on the question of whether little annoying habits are unimportant in a long-term relationship.

When we are in love, little things like bad manners or chronic lateness may seem insignificant. Besides, we reason, we can always change our partner later on so that this is no longer a problem. We may even convince ourselves that these little annoying habits are kind of cute.

Well, they may seem cute in the courtship phase of a relationship, but they usually don't stay cute once you are married and have to deal with them every day. In fact, small habits often grow into bigger habits once they are indulged.

The book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* describes a study done by Professor Diane Femly at the University of California-Davis. The researcher asked people why they married and then why they divorced. The reasons for both were often quite similar. The only difference is that what was once sweet had now turned sour.

For example, a person might say: "I married him for his incredible sense of humor." When asked why they broke up, she might say: "He was always silly, he was a lightweight." Another person might cite her partner's creativity and spontaneity as a big attraction, but later said of her spouse that he was "a dreamer" who "couldn't stick with any one thing, couldn't plan anything ahead of time."

So it wasn't that these people didn't know who they married. Their spouse hadn't changed, but their tolerance of their habits had changed. What was a minor annoyance before they married, became a major reason for their breakup later on.

Frankly, I believe one of the real tests in a marriage are the minor annoyances of everyday life because they accumulate day after day. A quirky habit might be even attractive when you

first encounter it, but with daily repetition can become annoying and irksome.

A related issue is the iceberg problem. Most of the mass of an iceberg is below the surface. Likewise, most of the really difficult problems a person may have will stay below the surface during the dating and courtship phase of a relationship. Many couples, in fact, awake on their honeymoons to an entirely different person than the one they thought they married.

Here are a few issues to consider:

> • *Cleanliness: what might at first seem like an admirable lack of vanity may indicate a general lack of personal hygiene.*
>
> • *Neatness: although keeping things in order may seem like a small thing, it can develop into a major problem in marriage reminiscent of scenes from "The Odd Couple."*

The bottom line is this: consider the long-term impact these little annoying habits will have in your marriage, *before* you get married.

Living Together

Next I would like to look at the question of living together before marriage.

In our society today, cohabitation has become an extension of dating and courtship. Couples see living together as an audition for marriage, reasoning that you want to get to know someone intimately before you marry them. Although the logic seems sound, it not only goes against biblical injunctions but against sound sociological research.

A 1999 study by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead released through the National Marriage Project at

Rutgers University confirms earlier studies about the danger of cohabiting and added additional detail. They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. Whitehead says that living together is “a fragile family form that poses increased risk to women and children.”

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. “Women tend to see [living together] as a step toward eventual marriage, while men regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment.” And people who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems, and instead will seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

The National Institute for Healthcare Research has found that couples who live together and then marry report less satisfaction in their marriages than other couples. Scott Stanley at the University of Denver has found that cohabiting couples who get married have a significantly higher rate of divorce than those who did not live together.(*A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Josey-Bass, 1998)

Couples argue that living together will provide important information about how a partner will behave and interact once married. But a cohabiting person may be quite different from a person within marriage. Marriage is a commitment for life, while cohabitation is usually a commitment for a season. That makes a big difference in a relationship. It’s like the difference between being in a play and auditioning for the play. In the first example, you are in the stage production and working to make the play the best it can be. In the second example, you are trying out for the play and have much less invested.

Couples may also argue that they can live together and

eventually get married when they are ready for children. But will that day ever come? The living together arrangement actually erodes a foundation of commitment rather than strengthening it. And if the woman becomes pregnant during cohabitation rather than marriage, it is less likely that the children will have a legal (and committed) father.

Living together before marriage may sound like a good idea, until you look at the facts.

Got Problems? Have Kids

Finally I would like to conclude by focusing on the idea that children bring a couple closer.

To begin, let’s acknowledge that Psalm 127:3 says that children are a gift from the Lord. Children are wonderful. A Christian family with children is delightful.

The issue here is the prevailing belief that bringing a child into a relationship that has problems will improve the situation. There is good evidence to believe that is not the case. If anything, a child can increase the tensions that are already present. Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* believes this may be the most damaging myth of the 25 myths she addresses in her book.

The fantasy that children will increase love and intimacy needs to be balanced by the reality that child-rearing also involves time and energy that can increase stress, fatigue, and worry. It will also decrease privacy and communication between partners. Unfortunately, many young couples may underestimate the impact of children on their marriage and be unprepared for the constant daily attention necessary to be a successful parent.

While having a child may be one of the most intimate things a man and a woman can do, the erosion of intimacy after the child arrives often surprises many couples. Even before the

child arrives, a pregnant mother often begins to feel fat and unattractive. Once the baby arrives, she must give most of her time and attention to the child. On the positive side, she is madly in love with the child but may tend to squeeze her husband out of the picture. On the negative side, she may be so exhausted from caring for a child all day that she has little energy left for her husband.

Even good marriages must work hard not to allow their marriage to be pulled into two parallel worlds. It is natural to begin to divide tasks and focus on those, but couples need to schedule "date nights" and "talk times" to make sure their two worlds intersect. Isolation is a natural drift in any marriage. Children and children's activities can increase isolation if marriage partners don't attempt to counter-program against the pressures that naturally will push a couple apart.

Couples should also plan ahead for a time when children are not a constant focus of the marriage. In my article on *The Second Half of Marriage,* I talk about the time when children begin to leave the nest. No longer does the marriage have to be child-focused. It should return to a partner-focused marriage. Even while a couple is traveling through "the valley of the diapers," they should keep a clear focus on the need to invest time, energy, and emotions in their partner.

Children are a gift from the Lord, but couples should understand their impact on a marriage. If a marriage has problems, having children will not bring that couple closer.

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Boys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus: Raising Gender-Healthy Children

Sue Bohlin begins with the concepts from John Gray's best-seller and applies them to understanding and supporting our child's gender to develop a healthy self understanding. Recognizing the wide variation among children, she is still able to apply biblical truth from a Christian perspective to give sound advice on this important topic.

Gender Differences

John Gray's best-seller *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*{1} woke up millions of people to the truth that men and women are different, and different is good. The politically correct lie that gender is a culturally bound social construct was shown to be just that, a lie, because life doesn't work that way.

In this article I look at gender differences in boys and girls, examining the importance of supporting our children's gender to encourage a healthy self-concept as a possible means of preventing the development of homosexuality. (While I by no means wish to oversimplify this very complex subject, there are nonetheless patterns that show up in many people who experience same-sex attraction.{2})

(Disclaimer: I do realize I am painting these gender differences in broad strokes. Not every boy and not every girl will follow along these lines. However, these generalizations are true for the vast majority of children, as well as adults.)

Boys get their sense of self from achievement. They're wired to be self-reliant. One of my son's first whole sentences was,

“Me do it!” They think they get extra brownie points for doing things on their own. For boys, asking for help means admitting defeat, and being offering help means being disrespected. When I used to say, “Let Mommy help you” to my two sons, they would be offended and I never knew why. If I could do it over again, I would tell them, “Let’s see if you can do it on your own. If it doesn’t work, I’ll be glad to help.”

Girls, on the other hand, get their sense of self from relationships. Most everything is about people, and asking for help is a way to build a bridge to other people. When a girl is offered help, she often feels loved and valued. So when a Daddy from Mars lets his little girl struggle on her own, because that’s what a boy would appreciate, she can feel hurt and abandoned.

Boys are very linear in their thinking; they focus on one thing at a time. Girls are usually multi-taskers, able to juggle several things at once. Both of these are strengths. I finally learned to show respect for my boys’ one-thing-at-a-time kind of thinking by giving them my full attention when they were talking to me. Although *I* knew that I could focus on them even if my hands were busy, they didn’t think I was really listening. It’s also important for men to realize that girls can do more than one thing at a time without being disrespectful, like simultaneously embroider and truly listen to someone talk.

Boys, being linear, tend to focus on a goal, whereas girls can enjoy the process as well. I frustrated my kids so many times when they’d be dressed and ready for a soccer game and I’d think, “We’ve got 10 minutes before we have to leave! Let’s get the living room vacuumed!” They would be focused on the goal of playing soccer and I’d drive them crazy with my emphasis on the process of running a household.

Boys tend to be competitive and girls cooperative. That makes sense since boys get their sense of self from achieving, and

girls get their sense of self from relationships. There has been a definite anti-male bias in many of our schools over the past several years where competition is seen as evil and hurtful, so it's been removed whenever possible. This means educational policy has been directed *against* boys' very nature.{3} They often achieve more through competition, even friendly competition, and that includes building relationships. Boys (and men) bond best with other guys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaged in a competition or a common task. Girls (and women) bond best face-to-face. We need to support these differences for each gender to be who God made them to be.

Boys are action-oriented. Many little boys naturally throw themselves into a chair rather than sit in it. They are naturally active, which frustrates both parents and teachers, but the solution is not to drug them or try to turn them into girls. We need to change our expectations of what makes for acceptable levels of activity in boys, and provide safe channels for all that energy.

Where boys are primarily action-oriented, girls are primarily verbal. This verbal nature of females is not a design flaw; God, who defines Himself as "the Word" in the Bible, imparted that part of His own nature to girls and women. Girls' very wordiness is what allows them to connect with other people, to be the relational beings that God intended.

These differences really show up when kids get hostile. Boys will often get physical when they're mad or frustrated. The testosterone that flows through boys' bodies is part of their physical hostility, and it needs to be respected. This very same tendency to hit or kick when angered is usually channeled into the glory of adult masculinity where a man will fight to protect his family or his country.

When girls get hostile, they use their tongues. It's not true that "sticks and stones can hurt my bones but names will never

hurt me." Unfortunately, more long-term damage can be inflicted with hurtful words than by hitting or kicking. That's why it's so important to teach girls what Proverbs teaches about the destructive power of the tongue,{4} and to work at using their verbal skills to uplift and encourage and nurture.

Follow God's Rules for Marriage and Family

Although there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why homosexuality develops, many who struggle with same-gender attraction can identify unhealthy patterns of relating in their families as they were growing up.

One of the ways that the development of a homosexual identity can be prevented is by following God's rules for marriage and the family.{5}

First, Both husband and wife have clearly defined roles. Children need to see that mothers and fathers are not interchangeable, and there are distinct roles that men and women fulfill. They need to know that a man shows his masculinity by protecting and providing for his family, using his strength to serve them and not hurt them. They need to see the beauty of femininity expressed in their mother's nurturing and intuitive capabilities.

Second, The father is an involved leader, and is warm and affectionate toward his children. All children, but most especially boys, long for their dads' acceptance, praise and physical affection. When boys don't get it, it creates an emotional void of a sense of intimate connection with a man, and a boy can grow up not comfortable with being male.

Third, The mother loves and nurtures her family without being controlling. Girls need their mothers to show them that being a female is a good and lovely gift from God, and boys need

their mothers to love and respect them without smothering.

Fourth, The father loves the mother. In showing love for his wife, the father creates the climate in which a little girl can believe it is safe and good to be a woman, and men can be trusted. When a boy sees his father loving his mother, cherishing and protecting her, he sees a man going beyond himself, the glory of masculine strength. He sees that being a man is a good and wonderful gift from God.

Fifth, The mother shows respect for the father. For the daughter, her mother's esteem for her father again shows that men are to be trusted, that women can enjoy and celebrate men. The mother's view of the father can become her view of him—and her view of men in general. Many lesbians deeply believe that men are idiots or brutes, worthless and repulsive, and something desperately sad shaped that belief.

If a boy's mother treats his father with love and respect, it says being a man is a good thing. But a weak father who accepts contempt, or a mean father who fights back, can both lead the boy to choose to identify with his mother and against his father. This just confuses his developing gender identity.

Following God's command to love wisely and well usually produces emotionally healthy kids.

Affirm Children's Gender

A wise person once said that it's easier to build a healthy child than repair an adult. The best way to build emotionally healthy children who accept and enjoy their gender is for us as parents (and grandparents and teachers) to affirm boys in their masculinity and girls in their femininity.

Boys and girls are definitely created differently from conception, and we should support those God-ordained differences. Boys who are typically active boy need to hear words of affirmation and acceptance for what makes them boys.

A friend of mine recently took her little boy for a walk down to the lake. Along the way she said, “Parker, let’s look for frogs and toads. Mommy is so glad God made you a little boy so you could like yucky things like frogs and toads.” When they got back to the house, his grandmother asked, “So how was your walk?” and Parker said, “Mommy’s glad that I’m a boy because I like yucky things like frogs and toads!”

Boys who are NOT typically boy, those who prefer quieter pursuits like reading and music and the performing arts, especially need to be supported in their masculinity. These boys can grow up to be the King Davids in our world, and we need them! I should also point out that these sensitive, quieter types, when cherished in their masculinity, grow up to be the best kind of husbands, and men with a shepherd’s heart. All boys need to hear their parents affirm their existence with comments like “I’m so glad God made you a boy” and “You’re going to make a fine man when you grow up.” They need to hear that a boy can be a good strong male whether or not they play sports and like rough stuff.

Feminine little girls need to be admired and cherished for their girlishness. A little girl in a new dress can be praised by her mother and friends all day long, but she won’t really believe she’s beautiful until her daddy tells her she is. And girls need to hear the “b” word—they they are beautiful. It’s a part of the feminine heart. Not every girl or woman is beauty-pageant material, but there are many kinds of beauty, and we all need to hear that we are beautiful. Girls who aren’t typically girly, the tomboys and “jockettes,” especially need to be appreciated for their particular expression of femininity by praising and encouraging them. They need to know that one can be a soft, feminine lady AND a strong leader or a great athlete.

Every child’s heart longs to hear “I’m so glad you’re you, and I love you just the way you are.”

Understanding Gender Differences

I think it's crucial for us as adults to understand gender differences in children and support them with a sense of humor, not condemnation.

One of my friends tells of an elaborate classroom Christmas craft where the kids were to fill socks with rice, tie them off and decorate them to be snowmen—a craft created by mothers of girls. The boys filled the socks with rice, tied them off and gleefully announced, "Look! A snow worm!"

I remember hearing another friend informing her young boys, "We don't roughhouse. We play quietly and gently." She didn't mean to, but she was trying to teach her boys to be girls. NOT a good plan!

Those who experience same-gender attraction, especially men, are usually uncomfortable and insecure in their masculinity or femininity. Homosexuality isn't primarily a sexual issue, but an emotional one, and it often starts with not being comfortable or confident in the gender God chose for us. So it's important to be on the lookout for signs that children might be struggling with their gender identity and may be vulnerable to developing a homosexual identity later:

- Kids who don't fit in.
- Kids who lack a close relationship with their father, especially boys.
- Kids who wear clothes and play with toys associated with the other gender.
- Boys who are TOO good, everyone seeing them as "the good little boy."
- Poor peer relationships, not bonding with other children their same sex, often lonely.
- Kids who are bullied and shamed by other kids.

In closing, let me give three suggestions for raising emotionally healthy children with a strong sense of gender:

•Cultivate warm, affectionate, respectful relationships—between husband and wife, and between parents and children. A hurtful relationship with the same-sex parent, whether real or just perceived, is the number one contributor to the later development of homosexuality.{6} Both boys and girls, but especially boys, need a daddy's approval, acceptance and affection. Girls develop problems with gender identity from not being protected and cherished. They need to be encouraged toward feminine things with a close and loving relationship with Mom.

•Cherish and support your child's gender. Understand the God-designed differences and tell them how special it is to be a boy or a girl.

•When you see patterns of inappropriate gender behavior, lovingly correct it. For instance, boys don't wear girls' clothes or makeup or jewelry. And boys don't play with Barbies the way girls do. However, it's OK to play with Barbies the way BOYS would! That would include physical aggression and sound effects as well as nurturing behavior.

God knew what He was doing when he chose each child's gender, and we would be wise to support His choice.

Notes

1. Gray, John. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
2. For example, see *Portraits of Freedom*, Bob Davies [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 9-10. Also, I highly recommend Don Schmierer's excellent book *An Ounce of Prevention: Preventing the Homosexual Condition in Today's Youth* [Word, 1998].
3. Please see my colleague Don Closson's article on the Probe Web site, "The Feminization of American Schools" at www.probe.org/the-feminization-of-american-schools/.
4. E.g., Prov. 18:21, 21:23, 25:23, 26:28.

5. I am indebted to Scott Lively's insight in his online book, *Seven Steps to Recruit-Proof Your Child* at www.defendthefamily.com/pfrc/books/sevensteps/Chapter5/index.html.
6. Lecture by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, "Prevention of Male Homosexuality," Focus on the Family's *Love Won Out* conference, May 6, 2000, Dallas, Texas.

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The Second Half of Marriage

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. Kerby Anderson looks at the book The Second Half of Marriage *by David and Claudia Arp and describes the eight challenges of second-half marriages.*

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. In this article we are going to be looking at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* (Zondervan, 1998) by David and Claudia Arp. Suddenly marriages that were child-centered once again become couple-centered. Many marriages do not survive the transition. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, while divorce generally declined, divorces among couples married thirty years or more increased significantly.

In their book, the Arps describe eight themes within a second-half marriage. One is the need to transition from a child-focused marriage to a more partner-centered marriage. Without children as buffers, couples face the challenge of redefining their marriage. Either it becomes more intimate or it slowly disintegrates. A husband married for nineteen years said, "I'm

fearful that when our children leave home, we will go our separate ways, because our priorities and interests are so different."

Couples must learn how to communicate and effectively deal with conflict and anger. Couples often lose the ability to communicate in marriage because there is such an urgent focus on the kids and their needs and problems. One wife said, "The greatest stress in my marriage is lack of communication—just being able to converse at the end of the day. I always feel as if I'm competing with the computer, the newspaper, or CNN news."

Couples in the second half of marriage must also learn to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. Your parents may have placed certain expectations on you and your marriage that you are still feeling in midlife. A wife married thirty-one years said, "Whatever I do for my parents, I can never meet all of their expectations. Yet I keep trying. I'd have to say unmet expectations are the hardest to deal with. I need to add that my expectations are the hardest to deal with."

Reconnecting with your adult children is also a challenge. As children leave the nest, they leave behind certain requirements and expectations. Our relationship with them changes, and couples in the second half of marriage must reconnect with children who are now adults on a different level. Often we must learn to resist giving advice unless it is requested. And even when we give advice, we should mentally prepare ourselves for the possibility that our grown children may not act on it.

Here we will be looking at these eight themes of second half marriages and discuss the challenges of each of them. We will view them from the kaleidoscope of over five hundred survey responses used by the Arps in writing their book. We pray that this look at second half marriages will help strengthen your

marriage no matter how long you have been married.

Expectations and Companionship

The first challenge is to learn to let go of past marital disappointment, forgive each other, and commit to making the rest of your marriage the best. All of us go into marriage with certain dreams and expectations. Some of these will never be realized. Are you willing to let go of unmet expectations and unrealistic dreams? You may never build your dream house or go on that exotic vacation. Are you willing to let it go? Can you accept those extra pounds or that gray hair or even no hair at all? Giving up lost dreams and dealing with each other's imperfections is a positive step toward forgiving past hurts and moving on in your marriage.

A wife married for twenty-five years said, "After twenty years of marriage, I finally realized my husband will never be home at 5 p.m. While this is disappointing to me, I simply had to let that expectation go." Another wife said, "During times of testing and disappointment, we kept working on our relationship. We learned how to forgive each other and how to work things out. We are committed to our marriage and we never give up. That's our secret."

The second challenge is to create a marriage that is partner-focused rather than child-focused. When children leave the nest, couples often move from a child-focused marriage to an activity-focused marriage. Community or church activities may now take up the time and energy formerly devoted to children. As valuable as these activities might be, they still serve as buffers to a mutual, partnership marriage. In the second half of marriage, couples need to redefine their roles and functions. What previously worked may no longer be relevant. Marriage can be more personal and more fulfilling as you focus on the couple's relationship rather than the children.

A wife married for thirty-three years said, "It's important to

build a good relationship with your spouse so that when the children leave, you have the underlying joy of focusing on each other and not on your adult children."

Key to this is to develop what is called a "companionship marriage." This has been defined as a socially registered commitment between a man and a woman where they seek to know themselves and each other as far as they are capable of being known. It also involves mutual affection and affirmation where they help each other grow and change in order to become the loving and creative persons they are capable of becoming.

These then are the first two of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Next we will look at two more challenges.

Communication and Conflict

The third challenge is to maintain an effective communication system that allows you to express your deepest feelings, joys, and concerns. Communication is the lifeblood of a good marriage. But what do you do when the communication patterns that seemed to work in the first half of marriage seem inadequate for the second half? When children are gone, there are more spaces of silence, and there is often less to say to each other. Couples may wonder how they made it this far only to end up as quiet strangers in front of each other. Couples in the second half of marriage need to develop intimate and honest communication that focuses on their needs, wants, and dreams at midlife.

A wife married for eighteen years said, "My greatest fear is that when the kids are gone, we won't communicate or have anything in common. I'm afraid of being left alone with someone who never speaks, pays attention, or ever touches me." Another wife said, "The greatest frustration for me in my marriage is simply not being understood."

The fourth challenge is to use anger and conflict in a

creative way to build your relationship. Anger and conflict are part of any marriage. Mature couples need to learn how to process anger. Marriage must become a safe place to express your concerns in the context of a loving relationship. This challenge is critical because often the real problem isn't the facts but the strong negative feelings we harbor. Once those feelings are dealt with, it's easier to move on and resolve the conflict.

A wife of eighteen years said, "We had the divorce papers ready to sign a couple of times a number of years ago, but both times we looked at each other and said, 'But I haven't stopped loving you.' Even when we couldn't agree on virtually anything else, we have always agreed on that. Nothing we've been through was bad enough to kill the love we have for each other."

Often the key to dealing with anger is to objectively state the problem and then begin to set forward the solutions. In the process, the couple can also identify what is at stake and what each partner has invested. Finding a solution to the problem is easier when both partners are committed to each other and committed to a mutually satisfying solution. Sometimes this will involve compromise and in other cases, it will involve showing love to your partner by accepting his or her perspective.

These then are the first four of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. In the next section we will look at two more challenges.

Friendship and Romance

The fifth challenge is to build a deeper friendship and enjoy your spouse. In the second half of marriage, we can deepen our friendship and become close companions. When we are in a long-term marriage, we become more familiar and comfortable with each other. When we acknowledge that we aren't perfect, we can

relax and enjoy each other. What are you doing to build your friendship with your spouse? Are you working to expand your boundaries and prevent boredom? Are you trying to put more fun back into your marriage? Fun and friendship are two key ingredients in the second half of marriage.

One wife married for twenty years said, “This year has been a time of growth for us as a couple. It started with lots of stress—overcommitment and relationship problems—but God helped us through it. We just celebrated our twentieth anniversary with a romantic getaway. We’ve become best friends again. Hope can be restored!”

In their book, the Arps provide some concrete tips for making the second half more enjoyable. First, take care of yourself. Sometimes our back muscles can give us a midlife wake-up call, so exercise and physical therapy should become a way of life. Second, pace yourself. Third, build relationships and maintain them. This is the time of life to beef up your friendships and develop a support system. Fourth, stretch your boundaries. Fifth, stay involved with life. Sixth, hang in there. When you are discouraged, don’t throw your life away.

The sixth challenge is to renew romance and restore a pleasurable, sexual relationship. Contrary to popular belief, interest in sex does not have to diminish as we grow older. Actually the research done by the Arps tends to indicate that sexual satisfaction increases rather than decreases with the number of years married. Couples in the second half of marriage need to do three things: protect privacy, cherish the love relationship, and renew romance. These are important priorities.

The Arps list six secrets to rekindle romance. These are: be affectionate, be a listener, be adventuresome, be playful, be in shape, and be a little wacky. As we grow older, the pace of life changes and there is a greater need to stay in shape by eating well, working out, and watching our weight. This is not

only good for your marriage. It is good for your health.

These then are the first six of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Let’s look at the last two challenges.

Adapted Relationships and Spiritual Growth

The seventh challenge is to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. As children leave the nest, we release them into adulthood. But it is also important to reconnect with them on an adult level. At the same time, you need to balance relationships with your own parents. This will be difficult, especially if your parents did not successfully meet this challenge in their marriage. Whatever your situation, your relationship with your adult children and your elderly parents will affect your marriage. Accepting the circumstances can be key in building a strong second half of marriage. You can’t go back and change your family history, but you can make wise choices for the future based upon past circumstances.

The drain of family commitments can take its toll on a second half marriage. One wife of twenty-eight years said, “For me, the emotional drain of trying to be everything to everybody is affecting my relationship with my husband. There is no energy left at the end of the day for me to invest in our marriage.”

The challenge of rearing children and sending them into a world also affects one of the other challenges we have discussed: the challenge of communication. One husband of thirty years said, “We don’t have an empty nest yet, although two out of three are gone. We’ve tried to push our children out of the nest but leave the lines of communication open to advise and assist when needed.”

The final challenge is to evaluate where you are on your spiritual pilgrimage, grow closer to each other and to God,

and together serve others. Our faith in God should make a difference in our marriage. The relationship of a husband and wife to God provides the foundation for a good marriage that will be tested by the changing circumstances of the second half of marriage. Couples should evaluate their spiritual pilgrimage and seek to grow closer spiritually to each other and to God.

A husband married for thirty-two years said, “The best aspects of our marriage are companionship, our faith in God, and our love for each other. We try to add to the other’s happiness by surprising each other with little gifts, a hug, a kiss, or giving a compliment—or just being thoughtful.”

We trust that this has been helpful to you as you seek to strengthen your marriage and grow closer to God. We believe you will grow closer to each other as you grow closer to God. May God bless you.

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