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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Marriage Test

Is your marriage in the danger zone? How would you know? This article provides a marriage test to help you evaluate your marriage and see if you might need to obtain information or counsel about improving your marriage.

A few years ago I addressed the issue in an article titled, "Why Marriages Fail." The material came from PREP, which stands for the "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" developed at the University of Denver. The material was originally published in a book entitled *Fighting for Your Marriage*, and has been featured on numerous TV newsmagazine programs like *20/20.* There is also a Christian version of this material found in a book written by Scott Stanley entitled *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*.

Marriage Test

I want to extend that discussion by providing a test you can apply to your marriage. It is loosely based on a questionnaire developed by Howard Markman at the Center for Marital and Family Studies. There are fifteen questions you answer by giving your marriage points. At the end you total the points to see how your marriage is doing. If your total is positive, you are doing well. If it is negative, then you may need to do

some work and perhaps seek counseling.

The first three questions have to do with your background. Many of us come into a marriage without considering our previous family and marital backgrounds. The truth is that we are not blank slates when we get married. Our background does have an influence on our marriage.

The first question is about cohabitation. Living together before marriage could signal a lack of commitment. In fact, numerous studies show that living together can have a detrimental effect on a marriage. Often poor communication patterns are developed in such a living arrangement that carry over into marriage. Here's how you score the first question. If you moved in before the wedding give your marriage a 1. If you waited until after marriage, give your marriage a +1.

The second question involves your parents' marriage. Poor communication and conflict-management skills can be inherited from parents. If your parents had a poor marriage, give your marriage a 1. If they had a strong marriage, give your marriage a +1.

The third question involves a previous marriage that ended in divorce. It turns out that one of the best predictors for divorce is a previous divorce. Divorcing once could mean a willingness to divorce again. If you had a previous marriage, give your marriage a 1. If this is your first marriage, give it a +1.

Religion and Finances

The fourth question involves religion which can be the source of strength or strain in a marriage. Religion provides support for marriage and usually discourages divorce. But practicing separate ones can add strain. If you don't practice religion, give yourself a 2. If you practice different religions, give yourself a 1. If you both attend church regularly, give

yourselves a +2.

Question five concerns finances. Money is the number one cause of fights in a marriage. Frequently these differences can lead to marital disharmony or disruption. If you and your spouse fight about money, give your marriage a 1. If you generally agree about spending, give your marriage a +1.

The sixth question also involves finances. In particular it deals with income. Some men aren't comfortable when the wife is the family breadwinner. If the wife earns more in your marriage, give yourself a 1. If the husband earns more, give yourself a +1.

The seventh question is about your current age. Simply put, older couples are less likely to divorce. If your current age is under 30, give yourself a 1. If you are over 40, then give yourself a +1. If you are over 60, give yourself a +2.

The eighth question is about the length of your marriage. The longer you are married, the less likely you are to split. If you are married less than five years, give yourself a 1. If you have been married five to ten years, give yourself a +1. If have been married more than ten years, give yourself a +2.

Well, that's the first eight questions. As you can see these questions focus on all sorts of issues that engaged couples rarely consider, but can be significant indicators of marital success. Keep track of your score and see how your marriage is doing. Although this is not an exhaustive questionnaire, the answers to these questions give you a quick look at how your marriage is doing.

Support and Family

The ninth question concerns support for your marriage. A lack of support from family or friends for your marriage creates tension and can cause a couple to question their relationship. Was your family supportive of this marriage? Did your friends

support your choice in a marriage partner or were they concerned about your choice? If family and friends disapproved, give your marriage a 1. If family and friends approved, give your marriage a +1.

The tenth question revolves around changes in the family. Family additions or changes can impact a marriage. Having a baby, adjusting to an empty nest, or moving Grandma in adds stress. If you have had a recent family change, give your marriage 1. If there have been no big changes, then give your marriage a +1.

The eleventh question deals with conflicting attitudes. Opposing views on key issues in a marriage can cause division. Differences about commitment, beliefs, or expectations are just a few issues that can affect a marriage. If you mostly disagree with each other, give yourself a 2. If you are split about half-and-half, give yourself a 0. If you mostly agree, give yourself a +2.

The twelfth question concerns confidence. Feeling assured that relationships will survive anything can help couples through. If you are doubtful the marriage will last, give your marriage a 2. If you are pretty confident, give your marriage a 0. If you think your marriage will never fail, give yourself a +2.

Marital Communication

The thirteenth question involves marital communication. It’s best if a couple can talk openly about problems without fighting or withdrawing. If you always fight rather than talk about problems, then give yourself a 2. If you sometimes fight, give yourself a 0. If you mostly talk rather than fight, give yourself a +2.

The fourteenth question deals with happiness. Feeling fulfilled in marriage is critical. If you are unhappy in the relationship, give yourself a 3. If you are not consistently

happy, give yourself a 0. If you are happy in a relationship, give yourself a +3.

The fifteenth question deals with sex. Being unsatisfied with frequency or quality can create tension in a marriage. If you are unsatisfied with your sex life, give your marriage a 1. If you are satisfied, give yourself a +1.

Well, that's the test. If you have kept track of your answers to these questions, you should have a score. If your score is positive, especially if it is +5 or higher then your marriage is doing well. If your score is negative, then you may want to work on your marriage. That might mean reading a book on marriage, attending a marriage conference, or seek out counseling. That might be helpful even if you had a positive score, but it would be essential if you did not have a positive score.

As I mentioned previously in the article on "Why Marriages Fail," you should not be discouraged by a negative score. The research does show which marriages might have trouble, but that does not suggest that there is nothing we can do about it. As the book of James reminds us, it is not enough to just believe something, we must act upon it (James 1:25, 2:15-18, 3:13). So let's talk about what we can do.

Steps to Change

We have been talking about marriage and helped you to evaluate your marriage by taking a marriage test. The first few questions dealt with our marital background. Specifically the questions focused on cohabitation, your parents' marriage, and previous divorce. We do not come into a marriage as a blank slate. Our previous experiences do influence the way we interact with our spouse. Obviously, we can change our behavior but we have to make a concerted effort to do so or else we will fall back into patterns that may adversely affect our marriage.

Many of our other questions dealt with the current status of your marriage. This included such issues as religious background, finances, age, the length of your marriage, support for your marriage, changes in your family, conflicting attitudes, confidence, marital communication, happiness, and sexual satisfaction. Again, many of these factors can be changed with a desire and plan to do so. But if we do not change our behavior then we will fall back into patterns that could be detrimental to our marriage.

I hope you will take the time to act on the results of this test. Most of us go through life and go through our marriages on auto- pilot. We set the controls and then fall back into a pattern that is the result of our background and current circumstances. Perhaps this marriage test will encourage you to work on your marriage. Perhaps this test will show your spouse that there are some issues you need to address.

The sad social statistics about divorce show that many marriages fall apart for lack of adequate attention. Every year a million couples end up in divorce court. Yet if you asked them if that would be how their marriage would end, very few would have predicted it on their wedding day.

Most people get married because they want their marriage to work. Unfortunately, many of those marriages fail. Some fail because of poor marital communication. If you identify that as a problem, then I encourage you to read my article on "Why Marriages Fail." If you want to identify other potential problems, I encourage you to take this test with your spouse and then talk about the results. I pray that you will use this test to alert you and your spouse to any danger signs and then begin to change your habits and actions so that your marriage will be successful.

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5 Lies the Church Tells Women

[Note: This article is taken from J. Lee Grady's book *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women.* I do not subscribe to everything in this book, particularly the author's belief that there are no restrictions to women in the church. I do not agree that the office of pastor and elder are open to women, though I believe God has given many women, including me, the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher (which some find easier to receive when it's called "shepherd-teacher"). At Probe, we exhort people to be discerning in what we hear and read. Mr. Grady's book is firmly in the egalitarian camp, but as a complementarian who seeks to be discerning, I can recognize the truth of some of what he says without embracing what I believe is unbiblical. Please see the end of this article for other articles on the role of women I have written for our Web site.]

In this article I look at five lies the church tells women, inspired by the book by J. Lee Grady called *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women.*{1} I'm not saying all churches say all these things, but there are certain pockets of Christianity where these lies are circulated.

Lie #1: God Created Women as Inferior Beings, Destined to Serve Their Husbands.

The first lie is that God created women as inferior beings, destined to serve their husbands. Those looking for Scripture to back up their beliefs point to Genesis 2:18, where God makes a "helpmeet" for Adam. "See?" they say. "Helpers are subordinate to the ones they help, which proves women are here to serve men." This ignores the times in the Psalms (10:14, 27:9, 118:7) where God is praised as our helper, and He is certainly not inferior or subordinate to us!

Lee Grady points out, "[I]t is a cultural bias, not a spiritual or scientific principle, that women were 'made' for the kitchen or laundry room. This is the most common form of male chauvinism, a burden placed on women by selfish men who want someone to wash their dishes."{2}

This view that women are inferior to men is not biblical, but it has infected the church from the beginning.

> *The Greek culture into which the early church was born viewed women as "half animal," unworthy of education, to be kept quiet and kept locked away, obedient to their husbands. In Jewish culture it was considered inappropriate for a man to even speak to a woman in public—including his own wife. A woman speaking to a man who was not her husband was considered to be giving evidence that she had committed adultery with him, and could be divorced. You can imagine the scandal Jesus caused when he regularly sought the company of women and talked to them, and taught them, just as he did men. Or when he allowed prostitutes to talk to him or pour perfume on his feet.{3}*

Eve was not created to be Adam's servant, but his honored and respected wife and co-regent, fashioned to rule over creation with him. We see another picture of God's intention for the first Adam and Eve in our future as the church. The bride of the Second Adam, Christ, is created and is being fashioned to reign with Him forever.{4}

Lee Grady says, "Jesus modeled a revolutionary new paradigm of empowerment by affirming women as co-heirs of God's grace."{5} Paul continued this completely new, respectful view of women by inviting women to share in the ministry of the gospel and the church, and by teaching the equality of husbands and wives in the marriage relationship (although there is a biblical distinction of roles).

When God created woman, He didn't create an inferior being, He

created what He delights to call “the glory of man.”(1 Cor. 11:7)

Lie #2: A Man Needs to “Cover” a Woman in Her Ministry Activities.

The second lie is that a man needs to “cover” a woman in her ministry activities. “In many cases, leaders have innocently twisted various Bible verses to suggest that a woman’s public ministry can be valid only if she is properly ‘covered’ by a male who is present. Often women are told that they cannot even lead women’s Bible studies or prayer meetings unless a pastor, deacon or some other man can provide proper oversight.”{6}

One woman was told that she could not start a backyard Bible school class in her neighborhood during the summer unless her husband agreed to be present at each session and teach all the Bible lessons. Her church elders said she could plan each day’s crafts and make all the snacks, but a man had to conduct the “spiritual” aspects of the outreach since he is the proper “covering.”{7}

It is disturbing to think of the implication of this belief. When we, as women, use our spiritual gifts and respond to God’s call to minister in various ways (within the biblical restrictions for women) without a man present, is our ministry less legitimate and valid than a man doing the same work? What if a woman with the spiritual gift of evangelism senses the Holy Spirit directing her to speak to the cashier at the gas station, and there’s no man around? On a personal note, when I am speaking at one of Probe’s Mind Games conferences, do my lectures lack legitimacy or truth because the male Probe staff members are busy teaching in other rooms?

Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Out of respect for our own weaknesses and limitations, I believe that all of us who wish to minister to

others should pursue an attitude of humble submission to the body of Christ. We need to submit our beliefs and methods (and content, if we're teaching) to trusted believers who can provide support, direction, and, if needed, correction. And anyone engaged in ministry needs prayer support, which some have called a "prayer covering;" although that is not a biblical term.

But there is no verse that says, "If a woman teaches My word, make sure a man is present so she will be covered properly." Paul's instruction that older women teach the younger women doesn't include making sure that someone with a Y chromosome is present! What underlies this erroneous idea that a man's presence somehow validates any woman's ministry is, intentional or not, a profound disrespect and distrust of women.

Lie #3: Women Can't be Fulfilled or Spiritually Effective Without a Husband or Children.

The third lie is that women can't be fulfilled or spiritually effective without a husband or children. Some churches teach that God's perfect plan for every woman is to be a wife and mother. Period. Sometimes Christian women successful in business or some other professional field are made to feel unwelcome at a church, as if they are an unhealthy influence on "purer" women.

In some places, single women are prevented from leading home fellowship groups because they're single.{8} Others have been discouraged from running for political office or pursuing a graduate education because God's plan was for them to marry and keep house—even when God hadn't brought a groom into the picture!

Lee Grady says, "We must stop placing a heavy yoke on

unmarried and divorced women in the church by suggesting that they are not complete without a man in their lives or that a husband somehow legitimizes their ministries."{9}

In some churches, women are routinely taught that the best way for them to serve God is to get married, make their husbands happy, and have children. They think this should be the sole focus of women's lives. And to be honest, when God has given a woman a husband and children, especially young children, focusing her primary energies and gifting on her family truly *is* the most important way she serves God in that season of her life. Children will not be impressed with how many Bible studies their mother teaches each week. And most husbands will be less than enthusiastic for their wives to go off on several mission trips each year when it means the home is falling apart and everybody's life is in chaos.

But women, even women with families, are given spiritual gifts that God intends for us to use to build up the body of Christ, both inside and outside our families. When we exercise those spiritual gifts and abilities, God delights to honor us with a sense of fulfillment. And usually that involves ministry in the church or in the world, as long as it's secondary to our family priorities.

But not all women are called to marriage and motherhood. It is disrespectful to single Christian women to treat them as second-class women because they don't wear a wedding ring. It's heartbreaking and frustrating when a woman would love to be married, but God hasn't brought her to the man of His choice; it just adds unnecessary sorrow for the church to say, "Sorry, honey, without a man you don't have a place here."

Lie #4: Women Should Never Work Outside the Home.

The fourth lie is that women should never work outside the home. Women who take jobs are shamed and judged, because they

can’t please God if they do anything outside of being a wife and mother.

This is a hurtful lie to many women who don’t have a choice about working or not. There are huge numbers of divorced and widowed women in the church who would much rather stay at home with their families, but they’re the only breadwinners. And for many two-parent families, they honestly can’t survive on the husband’s paycheck alone.

This lie comes from a misreading of Paul’s exhortation in Titus 2:4 for women to be “workers at home.”

Paul wasn’t calling them to quit their day jobs to stay home. Women in that culture had no education and usually no opportunities for employment. He was addressing a character issue about being faithful and industrious, not lazy and self-centered. This letter was written to the pastor of a church on Crete, a society known for the laziness and self-indulgence of its people.{10}

Before the 1800’s and the Industrial Revolution, both men and women worked at home, and they worked hard. Whether farming, fishing, animal husbandry, or whatever trade they engaged in, they did it from home. The care and nurture of children was woven into the day’s work and extended families helped care for each other. There was no such thing, except among the very wealthy, as a woman who didn’t work.

This lie completely ignores the Proverbs 31 woman, who not only took excellent care of her family, but also had several home-based businesses that required her to leave her home to engage in these businesses. I personally appreciate this biblical pattern because I had a home-based business and a ministry the entire time my children were growing, both of which took me out of the home sometimes. I was able to grow my gifts as my kids were growing, and now that they’re both adults, I am able to use those gifts and abilities more fully

with my new freedom to leave home.

On the other hand, an equally distressing expectation common to younger people in today's churches is that women should always work, regardless of whether they have children or not. Our culture has so downgraded the importance of focused parenting that many people consider it wasteful for a woman to be "only" a homemaker. It's sexist to say that a woman's only valid contribution to the world or the church is to be a homemaker, but both extremes are wrong and harmful.

Lie #5: Women Must Obediently Submit to Their Husbands in All Situations.

The last lie says that women must obediently submit to their husbands in *all* situations. This lie really grieves me deeply, because it is probably responsible for more pain and abuse than any other lie we've looked at in this article.

In Ephesians 5:22, wives are commanded to submit to our husbands. For some people, this has been twisted to mean the husband is the boss and the wife's job is to obey his every whim. That is a relationship of power, not self-sacrificing love, as this marriage passage actually teaches. The wife is called to serve her husband through submission, and the husband is called to serve his wife through sacrificial love.

We have no idea how many women have been physically, emotionally, sexually, and spiritually abused by their husbands wielding the submission verses as a weapon. When they finally tell their pastor about their husband's rage-outs and physical assaults, they are often not believed, and sometimes they are told that if they would learn to submit the violence would stop. Then they are counseled that it would be a sin to separate and hold the husband accountable for what is a crime! Some abused women, who feared for their lives, have actually been told, "Don't worry. Even if you died you would go to be with the Lord. So you win either way. Just keep praying for

him. But you are not allowed to leave."{11}

A comprehensive study on domestic violence in the church in the mid 80's revealed that 26 percent of the pastors counseled an abused wife to keep submitting and trust that God would either stop the abuse or give her the strength to endure it. About a fourth of the pastors believed that abuse is the wife's fault because of her lack of submission! And a majority of the pastors said it is better for wives to endure violence against them than to seek a separation that might end in divorce.{12} I respectfully suggest that separation *with the goal of reconciliation* is often the only way to motivate an abusive husband to get help.{13} Just as we cast a broken limb to enable it to heal, separation is like putting a cast on a broken relationship as the first step to enable change and healing. We see in 1 Cor. 5 that God's plan for unrepentant believers is to experience the pain of isolation in separation from friends and loved ones; why would it be unthinkable for the same principle to be effective within an abusive marriage?

All the lies we've looked at in this article are the result of twisting God's word out of a misunderstanding of God's intent for His people. The way to combat the lies is to know the truth—because that's what sets us free.

Notes

1. Lee Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000).

2. Grady, 23.

3. George Byron Koch, "Shall a Woman Keep Silent? Part 1." http://www.resurrection.org/shall_a_woman____part_1.htm.

4. Rev. 22:5, 2 Tim. 2:12.

5. Grady, 21.

6. Grady, 89-90.

7. Grady, 90.

8. Grady, 140.

9. Grady, 143.

10. “Even one of their own prophets has said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.'” (Titus 1:2)

11. Grady, 172.

12. Grady, 174.

13. I especially recommend Dr. Paul Hegstrom of Life Skills Learning Centers. He is a recovered abusive husband and pastor who wrote an excellent book, *Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them: Breaking the Cycle of Physical and Emotional Abuse* (Beacon Hill Press, 1999). His Web site is http://www.lifeskillsintl.org.

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Online Affairs – A Christian Look at a Major Problem

Kerby Anderson highlights online affairs, the sin of adultery with an “electronic” relationship on the Internet.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

The Allure of Cyber-Relationships

The Internet is becoming a breeding ground for adultery, so say many experts who track the pattern of extramarital affairs. So we will discuss the phenomenon of online affairs.

Peggy Vaughn is the author of *The Monogamy Myth* and also serves as an expert for America Online on problems caused by infidelity. She predicts that one "role of the Internet in the future will be as a source of affairs." She is writing a second book on the subject of adultery and says she could base half of it just on the letters she receives from people who started an affair online.{1}

An online affair (or cyberaffair) is an intimate or sexually explicit communication between a married person and someone other than their spouse that takes place on the Internet. Usually this communication takes place through an online service such as America Online or CompuServe. Participants usually visit a chat room to begin a group conversation and then often move into a one-to-one mode of communication. Chat room categories range from "single and liking it" to "married and flirting" to "naked on the keyboard."

Women in a chat room are often surprised at what develops in a fairly short period of time. At first the conversation is stimulating, though flirtatious. Quickly, however, women are often confronted with increasingly sexual questions and comments. Even if the comments don't turn personal, women find themselves quickly sharing intimate information about themselves and their relationships that they would never share with someone in person. Peggy Vaughn says, "Stay-at-home moms in chat rooms are sharing all this personal stuff they are hiding from their partners." She finds that the intensity of women's online relationships can "quickly escalate into thinking they have found a soulmate."

Online affairs differ from physical world affairs in some ways, but are similar in others. Cyberaffairs are based upon written communication where a person may feel more free to express herself anonymously than in person. Frequently the communication becomes sexually graphic and kinky in ways that probably would not occur if a real person were hearing these comments and could act on them. Participants in an online

affair will often tell their life stories and their innermost secrets. They will also create a new persona, become sexually adventurous, and pretend to be different than they really are.

Pretending is a major theme in cyberaffairs. Men claim to be professionals (doctors, lawyers) who work out every day in the gym. And they universally claim that if their wives met their needs, they wouldn't be sex shopping on the Internet. Women claim to be slim, sexy, and adventurous. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to divulge (or even create) their wildest fantasies. In fact, their frank talk and flirtation pays great dividends in the number of men in a chat room who want to talk to them and get together with them.

Just as the Internet has become a new source of pornography for many, so it seems that it has also become a new source for affairs. Relationships online frequently go over the line leaving pain, heartbreak, and even divorce in their wake. Even though these online affairs don't involve sex, they can be very intense and threaten a marriage just the same.

Current Statistics on Adultery

In a previous article, I talked about some of the statistics concerning adultery. Before we continue, let me update some of those numbers with a multitude of studies all coming to similar conclusions.

One conclusion is that adultery is becoming more common, and researchers are finding that women are as likely as men to have an affair. A 1983 study found that 29 percent of married people under 25 had had an affair with no statistical difference between the number of men and women who chose to be unfaithful to their spouses early in life.{2} By comparison, only 9 percent of spouses in the 1950s under the age of 25 had been involved in extramarital sex. Another study concluded that by age 40 about 50 to 65 percent of husbands and 45 to 55 percent of wives become involved in an extramarital affair.{3}

Affairs are usually more than a one-time event. A 1987 study surveyed 200 men and women and found that their affairs lasted an average of two years.{4} In fact, affairs go through transitions over time. They may begin as romantic, sexual, or emotional relationships and may become intimate friendships. Affairs that become friendships can last decades or a lifetime.

Online affairs differ from other affairs in that they may not involve a physical component, but the emotional attachment is still there. Online affairs develop because of the dual attraction of attention and anonymity. Someone who has been ignored by a spouse (or at least perceives that he or she is ignored) suddenly becomes the center of attention in a chat room or a one-on-one e-mail exchange. A woman finds it exciting, even intoxicating, that all these men want to talk to her. And they are eager to hear what she says and needs.

Anonymity feeds this intoxication because the person on the other end of this cyberaffair is unknown. He or she can be as beautiful and intelligent as your dreams can imagine. The fantasy is fueled by the lack of information and the anonymity. No one in cyberland has bad breath, a bald head, love handles, or a bad temper. The sex is the best you can imagine. Men are warm, sensitive, caring, and communicative. Women are daring, sensual, and erotic.

Is it all too good to be true? Of course it is. Cyberaffairs are only make-believe. Usually when cyberlovers meet, there is a major letdown. No real person can compete with a dream lover. No marriage can compete with a cyberaffair. But then an online affair can’t really compete with a real relationship that provides true friendship and marital intimacy.

Nevertheless, online affairs are seductive. An Internet addict calls out to a spouse “one more minute” just as an alcoholic justifies “one more drink.” Cyberaffairs provide an opportunity to become another person and chat with distant and

invisible neighbors in the high-tech limbo of cyberspace. Social and emotional needs are met, flirting is allowed and even encouraged, and an illusion of intimacy feeds the addiction that has caught so many unsuspecting Internet surfers.

Motivations for Affairs

Affairs usually develop because the relationship meets various social and psychological needs. Self-esteem needs are often at the top of the list. Self-esteem needs are met through knowing, understanding, and acceptance. Psychologists say that those needs are enhanced through talking intimately about feelings, thoughts, and needs. This can take place in person or take place through the Internet.

Even though online affairs may not involve a physical component, the emotional attachment can be just as strong and even overwhelming. And when they end, this strong attachment usually leaves participants in emotional pain.

Women report feeling thrilled by their lover’s interest in them physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They are also excited about the chance to know a different man (how he thinks and feels). They also feel intimate with their lovers because they can talk about their feelings openly. However, when the affair ends, they feel a great deal of guilt with regard to their husband and children. They also regret the deceit that accompanied the affair.

Men report feeling excited about the sexual experience of the affair. They try to control their feelings in the affair and do not compete with their feelings for their wife. Often they limit the emotional involvement with their lover. Men also feel guilt and regret over deceit when an affair ends, but less so than most women.

Men and women have affairs for different reasons. Research has

shown that women seek affairs in order to be loved, have a friend, and feel needed. Men seek affairs for sexual fulfillment, friendship, and fun.{5}

It appears that the percentage of women who have extramarital sex has increased the last few decades. In 1953 Alfred Kinsey found that 29 percent of married women admitted to at least one affair.{6} A *Psychology Today* survey in 1970 reported that 36 percent of their female readers had extramarital sex.{7} One study in 1987 found that 70 percent of women surveyed had been involved in an affair.{8}

It also appears that women who are employed full-time outside of the home are more likely to have an affair than full-time homemakers. Several studies come to this same conclusion. One study found that 47 percent of wives who were employed full-time and 27 percent of full-time homemakers had been involved in an affair before they were 40 years old.{9} And *New Woman* magazine found that 57 percent of employed wives who had an affair met their lover at work.{10}

Contrary to conventional wisdom, an affair will not help your marriage. In 1975, Linda Wolfe published *Playing Around* after she studied twenty-one women who were having affairs to keep their marriages intact.{11} The reasoning for many of these women was that if they could meet their own needs, their marriages would be more successful. Many said they were desperately lonely. Others were afraid, believing their husbands did not love them or were not committed to their marriage. Five years after the initial study, only three of the twenty-one women were still married.

Adultery can destroy a marriage, whether a physical affair or an online affair.

Preventing an Affair

The general outline for some of these ideas comes from family

therapist Frank Pittman, author of *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, although I have added additional material. He has counseled 10,000 couples over the last forty years, and about 7,000 have experienced infidelity. He has nineteen specific suggestions for couples on how to avoid affairs.{12} Let's look at a few of them.

First, accept the possibility of being sexually attracted to another and of having sexual fantasies. Frank Pittman believes we should acknowledge that such thoughts can develop so that you don't scare them into hiding. But he also says you shouldn't act on them.

Second, we should hang out with monogamous people. He says, "They make a good support system." To state it negatively, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Third, work on your marriage. He says to keep your marriage sexy and work to be intimate with your spouse. He also says to make marriage an important part of your identity. "Carry your marriage with you wherever you go."

Fourth, be realistic about your marriage. Pittman says, "Don't expect your marriage to make you happy. See your partner as a source of comfort rather than a cause of unhappiness." Accept the reality of marriage; it isn't always beautiful. Also accept that you are both imperfect.

Fifth, keep the marriage equal. Share parenting duties. "If not, one partner will become the full-time parent, and the other will become a full-time child" without responsibilities, who seeks to be taken care of. And keep the relationships equal. Pittman says, "The more equal it is, the more both partners will respect and value it."

Sixth, if you aren't already married, be careful in your choice of a marriage partner. For example, marry someone who believes in, and has a family history of, monogamy. Frank

Pittman says, “It is a bad idea to become the fifth husband of a woman who has been unfaithful to her previous four.” Also, marry someone who respects and likes your gender. “They will get over the specialness of you yourself and eventually consider you as part of a gender they dislike.”

Seventh, call home every day you travel. “Otherwise, you begin to have a separate life.” And stay faithful. “If you want your partner to (stay faithful), it is a good idea to stay faithful yourself.” And make sure you are open, honest, and authentic. Lies and deception create a secret life that can allow an affair to occur.

Finally, don’t overreact or exaggerate the consequences of an affair if it occurs. Pittman says, “It doesn’t mean there will be a divorce, murder or suicide. Catch yourself and work your way back into the marriage.”

Affairs can destroy a marriage. Take the time to affair-proof your marriage so you avoid the pain, guilt and regret that inevitably results. And if you have fallen into an affair, work your way back and rebuild your marriage.

Consequences of Affairs

When God commands, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14), He did so for our own good. There are significant social, psychological, and spiritual consequences to adultery.

A major social cost is divorce. An affair that is discovered does not have to lead to divorce, but often it does. About one- third of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair, while the other two-thirds usually divorce.

Not surprisingly, the divorce rate is higher among people who have affairs. Annette Lawson (author of *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*) found that spouses who did not have affairs had the lowest rate of divorce. Women who had multiple

affairs (especially if they started early in the marriage) had the highest rate of divorce.

A lesser known fact is that those who divorce rarely marry the person with whom they are having the affair. For example, Dr. Jan Halper's study of successful men (executives, entrepreneurs, professionals) found that very few men who have affairs divorce their wife and marry their lovers. Only 3 percent of the 4,100 successful men surveyed eventually married their lovers.{13}

Frank Pittman has found that the divorce rate among those who married their lovers was 75 percent.{14} The reasons for the high divorce rate include: intervention of reality, guilt, expectations, a general distrust of marriage, and a distrust of the affairee.

The psychological consequences are also significant, even if they are sometimes more difficult to discern. People who pursue an affair often do so for self-esteem needs, but often further erode those feelings by violating trust, intimacy, and stability in a marriage relationship. Affairs do not stabilize a marriage, they upset it.

Affairs destroy trust. It's not surprising that marriages formed after an affair and a divorce have such a high divorce rate. If your new spouse cheated before, what guarantee do you have that this person won't begin to cheat on you? Distrust of marriage and distrust of the affairee are significant issues.

Finally, there are spiritual consequences to affairs. We grieve the Lord by our actions. We disgrace the Lord as we become one more statistic of moral failure within the body of Christ. We threaten the sacred marriage bond between us and our spouse. We bring guilt into our lives and shame into our marriage and family. Affairs extract a tremendous price in our lives and the lives of those we love and hold dear.

And let's not forget the long-term consequences. Affairs, for

example, can lead to unwanted pregnancies. According to one report, “Studies of blood typing show that as many as 1 out of every 10 babies born in North America is not the offspring of the mother’s husband.”{15} Affairs can also result in sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, or even AIDS. Many of these diseases are not curable and will last for a lifetime.

Adultery is dangerous, and so are online affairs. The popularity of the recent movie *You’ve Got Mail* has helped feed the fantasy that you are writing to Tom Hanks or Meg Ryan. In nearly every case, nothing could be further from the truth. An online affair could happen to you, and the plot might be more like *Fatal Attraction*.

Notes

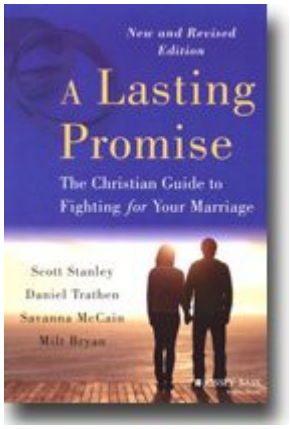
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Why Marriages Fail

Why do marriages fail? While the answers to that question are many, there is a growing body of empirical research to suggest there are four negative risk factors that create barriers to oneness in marriage and increase a couple's chances for marital failure.



I am going to look at these risk factors and see how they can be corrosive elements to oneness in marriage. Most of the material I will cover comes from PREP, which stands for the "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" developed at the University of Denver. The material was originally published in a book entitled *Fighting for Your Marriage,* and has been featured on numerous TV newsmagazine programs like "20/20." There is a Christian version of this material found in a book written by Scott Stanley entitled *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Perhaps you have heard marriage speakers like Gary Smalley or Dave and Claudia Arp recommend this book (which should be available in your local Christian bookstore and is also available online at Amazon.com).

The significance of this research is two-fold. First, it provides a strong body of university research on what makes marriages fail. Other Christian books, though very helpful, are often based upon the opinions and spiritual insights of the authors. The material we will be talking about in this article is based on clinical studies which validate biblical principles others have discussed.

Second, the research provides an extremely accurate predictor of subsequent behavior and marital failure. In one of the key studies, researchers followed a sample of 135 couples for twelve years, starting before they were married. The researchers found that using only data from before the couple married, they were able to differentiate those couples who do well from those who do not, with up to 91% accuracy. In other words, the seeds of distress and possible divorce were already sown before the couples went to the altar.

Now please do not be discouraged by those numbers. At the outset it seems to be telling us that certain marriages are doomed to failure, and there is nothing a couple can do. But we need to reconsider that conclusion. This research, while showing us marriages which might fall apart, does not suggest that there is nothing we can do about it. This research simply shows us what behaviors can be changed and warns us what will probably happen if we are unwilling or unable to change. As the book of James reminds us, it is not enough to just believe something, we must act upon it (James 1:25, 2:15-18, 3:13).

Since knowing precedes acting, it is necessary to discuss these four negative risk factors that can be barriers to oneness, for oneness is God’s design for marriage. Genesis 2:24 says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” When Jesus was confronted by the scribes and Pharisees about the issue of divorce, He brought them back to this foundational truth and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two

will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:5-6).

Escalation

According to the research done over the last two decades, negative patterns can destroy a relationship. Couples who want to save their marriage need to focus on changing these negative behavior patterns. There are four such patterns I will discuss here, the first of which is escalation.

According to the researchers, "escalation occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile."{1} 1 Peter 3:9 says, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult." But this is exactly what happens with escalation. Each negative comment increases the level of anger and frustration, and soon a small disagreement blows up into a major fight.

Research shows that couples who have a good marriage are less prone to escalation. And if the argument starts to escalate, they are able to stop the negative process before it erupts into a full-blown fight. Marriages that will have problems, and even fail, find that arguments escalate so that such damaging things are said that they may even threaten the lifeblood of the marriage.

Escalation can develop in two different ways. The first is a major shouting fight that may erupt over a conflict as small as putting the cap back on the toothpaste. As the battle heats up the partners get more and more angry, saying mean things about each other. Frequently there are threats to end the relationship. Over time those angry words damage oneness, and angry threats to leave begin to seem like prophecy. Once negative comments are made, they are hard to take back and drive a knife into the partner's heart. Proverbs 12:18 says,

“Reckless words pierce like a sword.”

These reckless words can do great damage to a marriage because when an argument escalates, every comment and vulnerability becomes fair game. Concerns, failings, and past mistakes can now be used by the attacking partner. Oneness and intimacy can be shattered quickly by a few reckless words.

You may be thinking, “we don’t fight like cats and dogs.” And while that may be true, your marriage may still have this risk factor. Damaging escalation is not always dramatic. Voices do not have to be raised for couples to get into a cycle of returning negative for negative. Conflict over paying the rent, taking out the garbage, running errands that result in muttering to oneself, rolling your eyes, or throwing up your hands can also be examples of escalation.

Couples who escalate arguments must control their emotions and control their tongues. James writes, “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless” (James 1:26). Couples who want a strong marriage must learn to counteract the tendency to escalate as a couple. The key to a strong and stable marriage is learning to control your emotions and learning how to keep a rein on your tongue.

Invalidation

Having covered escalation, I will now turn to the second of the four negative risk factors to oneness. This risk factor is called invalidation. “Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.”{2}

Invalidation can take many forms. Sometimes it can be caustic, in which one partner (or both) attacks the other person verbally. You can hear, and even feel, the contempt one partner has for another.

Sarcastic phrases like “Well, I’m sorry I’m not perfect like you” or “I forgot how lucky I am to be married to you” can cut like a knife. These are attacks on the person’s character and personality that easily destroy a marriage. Research has found that invalidation is one of the best predictors of future problems and divorce.

Jesus taught that attacks on the character of another person are sinful and harmful. “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matt. 5:22). Calling a person worthless or empty-headed (which is what the Aramaic term *raca* means) is not what a Christian should do.

Invalidation can also be much more subtle. It may involve an argument where contempt for the other partner is not so obvious. One partner may merely be putting the other partner down for his or her feelings. The message conveyed is that your feelings do not matter. A husband may put his wife down because she is more emotional or because she is more easily hurt by comments. A husband may invalidate a wife’s fears about the children’s safety. A wife may invalidate a husband’s desire to succeed in the company, saying that it really doesn’t matter if he becomes district manager. Ultimately the partner receiving these comments begins to share less and less so that the intimate level of sharing evaporates. When this happens, oneness is lost.

Sometimes invalidation may be nothing more than trite cliches like “It’s not so bad” or “Just trust in the Lord.” While the sayings may be true, they invalidate the pain or concern of the other partner. They make the other partner feel like their fears or frustration are inappropriate. This kind of invalidation is what Solomon called “singing songs to a heavy heart” (Prov. 25:20). When one partner is hurting, the other partner should find words of encouragement that do not

invalidate his or her pain or concerns.

The antidote to invalidation is validation. Couples must work at validating and accepting the feelings of their spouse. That does not mean you have to agree with your spouse on the issue at hand, but it does mean that you listen to and respect the other person's perspective. Providing care, concern, and comfort will build intimacy. Invalidating fears and feelings will build barriers in a marriage. Discipline yourself to encourage your spouse without invalidating his or her feelings.

Negative Interpretations

So far we have looked at the negative risk factors of escalation and invalidation. The third risk factor is negative interpretations. "Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case."{3}

Such behavior can be a very destructive pattern in a relationship, and quickly erode intimacy and oneness in a marriage. A wife may believe that her husband does not like her parents. As a result, she may attack him anytime he is not overly enthusiastic about visiting them. He may be concerned with the financial cost of going home for Christmas or about whether he has enough vacation time. She, in turn, considers his behavior as disliking her parents.

When a relationship becomes more distressed, the negative interpretations mount and help create an environment of hopelessness. The attacked partner gives up trying to make himself or herself clear and becomes demoralized.

Another kind of negative interpretation is mind reading. "Mind reading occurs when you assume you know what your partner is thinking or why he or she did something." Nearly everyone is guilty of mind reading at some time or other. And when you

mind read positively, it does not tend to do much harm. But when you mind read on the negative side, it can spell trouble for a marriage.

Paul warned against attempting to judge the thoughts and motives of others (1 Cor. 4:5). And Jesus asked, “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Luke 6:41).

Negative interpretations are hard to detect and counteract. Research shows that in distressed marriages there is a tendency for partners to discount the positive things they see, attributing them to causes such as chance rather than to positive characteristics of the partner. That is why negative interpretations do not change easily.

The key to battling negative interpretations is to reconsider what you think about your partner’s motives. Perhaps your partner is more positive than you think. This is not some unrealistic “positive thinking” program, but a realistic assessment of negative assumptions you may be bringing to the marriage.

Did your spouse really forget to do what you asked? Was it intentional or accidental? Does he or she try to annoy you or are you being more critical than is warranted? Most of the time, people think they are doing the best they can. It hurts to be accused of something you never intended to be hurtful. For couples to have a good marriage this pattern of negative interpretation must be eliminated.

Often this is easier said than done. First, you have to ask yourself if your thinking might be overly negative. Do you give your spouse the benefit of the doubt? Second, you have to push yourself to look for evidence that is contrary to your negative interpretation. Often it is easier to see his or her speck than your own plank. Give your mate the benefit of the doubt rather than let inaccurate interpretations sabotage your

marriage.

Withdrawal and Avoidance

Escalation, invalidation, and negative interpretations are three of the four negative risk factors identified by researchers at the University of Denver. The last of these has two descriptors: withdrawal and avoidance. These are two different manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening.

“Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as ‘turning off’ or ‘shutting down’ during an argument. The withdrawer often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a partner’s suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intention of following through.”{4}

“Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain discussions, with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place. A person prone to avoidance would prefer that the topic not come up and, if it does, may manifest the signs of withdrawal just described.”{5}

In a typical marriage, one partner is the pursuer and the other is the withdrawer. Studies show that it is usually the man who wants to avoid these discussions and is more likely in the withdrawing role. However, sometimes the roles reverse. But, for the sake of this discussion, we will assume that the husband is the one who withdraws.

Why does he withdraw? Because he does not feel emotionally safe to stay in the argument. Sometimes he may even be afraid that if he stays in the discussion or argument that he might turn violent, so he retreats.

When the husband withdraws, the wife feels shut out and believes that he does not care about the marriage. In other

words, lack of talking equals lack of caring. But that is often a negative interpretation about the withdrawer.

He, on the other hand, may believe that his wife gets upset too much of the time, nagging and picking fights. This is also a negative interpretation because most pursuers really want to stay connected and resolve the issue he does not want to talk about.

Couples who want to have a good marriage must learn to stay engaged. Paul said, writing to the church in Ephesus, “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Eph. 4:25-27).

Although the immediate context in this passage is anger, the broader principle is the importance of not allowing avoidance to become a corrosive pattern in your marriage. Couples should build oneness and intimacy by speaking openly and honestly about important issues in their marriage.

Conclusion

Each of these four risk factors (escalation, invalidation, negative interpretations, and withdrawal and avoidance) can build barriers in a marriage leading ultimately to loneliness and isolation. The research shows that couples that want a good marriage need to eliminate these risk factors from their marriage, or else the negative factors will overwhelm the positive aspects of the marriage. It is never too late to put your marriage back on track.

For further study on this topic, I would once again recommend that you purchase the book *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage.* This book is widely available and is a good source for help in establishing and

maintaining the oneness that God desires for every marriage.

Notes

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Marriage Reminders

Numerous books, essays, magazine articles, radio and television commentaries, and sermons have been dedicated to the subject of Christian marriage. In light of the tragic divorce rate and the continuing struggles that are experienced by many couples, this is not surprising. Marriage is a subject that has immediate application to a large portion of the population. The comments that are offered in this essay are not necessarily intended to provide new perspectives. They are intended to serve as reminders to all of us, no matter what our marital state may be. After all, few of us can stay "on track" at all times. We sometimes need a gentle or not-so-gentle nudge to return to what God intends for His creation: marriage.

Foundational Truths About Marriage

The first reminder focuses on what we will call "foundational truths." These truths are found in two passages in the first

two chapters of Genesis.

The first passage is Genesis 1:26-28. It states that both the man and woman were created in God's image. Among many results of such a statement, this affirms the dignity of both sexes among all mankind. Human beings are the zenith of creation; men and women are blessed uniquely by God.

The second passage is Genesis 2:18-25 which asserts several truths that are applicable to the marriage union. First, the woman was fashioned from the fiber of the man, and she was created as an equal but opposite helper for him. Upon observing the newly created woman, the man reacted in a way that indicates he recognized her very special significance. We can only imagine his joy and excitement when he first caught a glimpse of her. Second, God affirms the marital union by commanding that couples are to leave their parents. The priorities are changed; a new family is to be formed. Third, the couple is to cleave together and become one flesh, an affirmation of the sexual union in marriage.

But it is to be much more than simply a sexual union; it is to be a holistic union, a union of the total person, both material and immaterial, a "oneness."

These two passages from Genesis should spur us to better appreciate how highly God values marriage and how we should as well. The fact that we are made in God's image means we should "reverence" and "respect" each other. If it is true that my spouse is made in God's image, that should prompt me to treat her with great respect and honor. She is not an accidental being; she is specially related to the Creator of the universe. When I treat her with reverence I am paying homage to God.

Second, God's foundational instructions should lead us to live with our spouses with a sense of commitment that transcends any other earthly relationship. If we are to leave our

parents, if we are to cleave to our spouses, and if we are to be one flesh, then we must remember that such concepts are unique. Thus I am giving myself to the most important person in my life. I don't think of returning to my parents physically or emotionally; I don't cleave to anyone else the way I cleave to my wife; I am not one flesh with anyone other than her. And the beauty of all this is that God has related these commands for our good. They constitute the first steps to marital fulfillment.

Biblical Symbiosis

Our second marriage reminder centers on what we call "biblical symbiosis." An illustration of symbiosis from the animal kingdom may be helpful here. There is, for example, a particular species of fish that spends its life in close proximity to the mouth of a shark. In fact, it eats from the shark's teeth. (This keeps the shark from making too many visits to the dentist.) This is an illustration of symbiosis, or "two different organisms living in close association or union, especially where such an arrangement is advantageous to both." On the other hand, most of us have had to deal with the irritating results of a mosquito's attack. The mosquito is an example of parasitism, "a relationship in which one organism lives off another and derives sustenance and protection from it without making compensation."

Which of these two illustrations should serve as an example of Christian marriage? Surely most of us would reply that symbiosis, not parasitism, should be the correct model. Unfortunately, this model is not always lived out among spouses. The results of a parasitic relationship are devastating, to which many can testify.

The Bible, of course, provides insights that remind us of how the proper model for marriage should be constructed. First, Galatians 3:28 asserts that there is "neither male nor female" and all are "one in Christ Jesus." And 1 Peter 3:7 states that

the husband should treat his wife as “a fellow-heir of the grace of life.” Thus Christian couples should remember that they are spiritual equals with sexual differences.

Second, we should follow Christ’s model. The Lord put Himself in subjection to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51-52) as well as the heavenly Father. He adapted Himself to earthly orders. Even though He was total deity, He humbled Himself for our benefit (Phil. 2:1- 11). In addition, 1 Corinthians 11:3 indicates that Christ modeled the concept of “necessary headship” in that “God is the head of Christ.”

Third, we need to be reminded that all things are subjected to Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). This includes His body, the church, of which the Christian couple is a part. Thus a proper view of authority and subjection begins with our allegiance to Christ, the head of the church.

Several thoughts come to mind in regard to these Biblical perspectives, and all of them revolve around the attitude and character of Christ Himself.

Wouldn’t it be odd to think that Christ views us based upon whether we are male or female? He didn’t die for males before females, or vice-versa. In our relationship to Him there is no sexual distinction. The Christian couple should take this to heart; there is not to be a “lording over” each other; there is to be no spiritual pride.

It is clear that both spouses are to remember that subjection is the responsibility of all Christians. The Lord has demonstrated this most perfectly. The couple begins with this foundation; then they discover how to combine subjection with a proper view of authority within the family, a concept we will discuss in the next portion of this essay.

Let’s return to our definition of symbiosis: “Two different organisms living in close association or union, especially where such an arrangement is advantageous to both.” Christian

marriage should be composed of two different people in a loving union that is based upon subjection first to Christ and then one another. And surely such an arrangement will prove to be advantageous to both.

Responsibilities

What's a wife to do? What's a husband to do? Does the Bible provide specific guidelines for each? The answer is a resounding, "Yes!" Our continuing review of "Marriage Reminders" brings us to the third reminder, which we will simply call "responsibilities."

The wife's responsibility is most succinctly stated in Ephesians 5:22-24. The term "subjection" is the summary word for her. She is to submit to her husband. Before we continue, though, it is important to note that the verb for subjection is found in verse 21; then it is implied in verse 22. And verse 21 states that all Christians are to "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." As we stressed earlier, subjection applies to all of us. But verse 22 does stress that the wife is to have a particular attitude toward her husband.

There is another very important element of this verse that is not stressed often enough. We cannot honestly approach this verse without emphasizing the latter part of it: "as to the Lord." The wife's subjection is first of all to the Lord, then to her husband, because this is the Lord's pragmatic plan for marriage. She is to respect the headship of her husband because this is God's idea, not her husband's. This is not demeaning. It is Godly. Her self-esteem is not based upon her husband; it is based upon her place in the sight of God. There is an important analogy here. She is to recognize that her husband is said to be her head "as Christ also is the head of the church" (verse 23). The wife should recognize this analogy and realize that her husband has been compared to the compassionate and perfect Christ. He has a grave responsibility, and she needs to encourage him by following

God’s design for her.

Compared to the wife’s responsibility, the husband has a sobering and challenging one. His role is also outlined in Ephesians, verses 5:25-33. The most important aspect of this role can be found in the Greek term “agape” (love), which is used to describe how a husband is to respond to his wife. It is important to note that the word is used in the imperative mood. Thus it is a strong command which involves action, not just “feeling.” This love is demonstrated, just as God demonstrated His love by giving His son (John 3:16). Also, a humbling analogy is given. The husband is to “agape” his wife as Christ “loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” This entails action and sacrifice. The husband is to show his wife that he loves her because she is worth sacrificing himself on her behalf. What an awesome responsibility—a responsibility that should be humbling for those husbands who would use their authority as head of the home to treat their wives in a tyrannical manner. This does not imply that the husband’s authority is weakened. The husband is still in a position of headship, but that headship should be used to treat his wife as a “fellow-heir of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). As with the wife’s role, the husband’s role demonstrates God’s pragmatic plan for marital life.

So the responsibilities are clear: the wife is to submit “as to the Lord;” the husband is to love as Christ loved.

Communication

Most married couples are in need of another very important reminder. That is, their relationship requires communication. The joy of marriage stems from a commitment that is communicated. This vital principle can be related in many ways. We will share three of them.

First, the couple must learn to talk with one another. Perhaps that sounds simple, but don’t let its simplicity fool you.

Actually too many couples have experienced and are experiencing a deteriorating relationship because they have lost their ability to relate verbally. In my many years of experience in the ministry it has become obvious that one of the major flaws in Christian marriages is a lack of conversation involving anything beyond the absolute necessities. Too many couples don't really know each other. They are often total strangers.

Each spouse has a need to express the deepest longings of the heart and soul with his or her lifetime companion. Sometimes this requires a great deal of effort and courage, especially for a partner who is not accustomed to being vulnerable. But the effort required offers wonderful results. Sharing words that contain a spouse's thoughts, ideas, complaints, doubts, fears, expectations, plans, dreams, joys, and even frustrations can lead to a deepening bond that in turn leads to a stronger marriage.

This type of communication requires concentration. It should be done without interference. Each spouse should give undivided attention to the other. If one is talking, the other must listen. That's the only way this form of communication can be successful.

Second, couples need to be reminded to communicate better sexually. God has given us the freedom to experience the joy of expressing marital commitment by "becoming one flesh." This rich phrase is certainly meant to refer to sex in marriage, but we cannot forget that the type of sex that we are designed to experience involves more than just a physical act. It also involves the most intimate form of human communication. The Song of Solomon, for example, is full of expressions that indicate the beauty of communication that include, but also transcend the physical. Proverbs 5:15-19 contains many expressions of intimacy, such as forms of the words "rejoice," "satisfaction," and "exhilaration" which emphasize both the physical and non-physical aspects of sexual intimacy. 1

Thessalonians 4:4 states that a spouse is “to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,” words that entail something beyond the physical. It would be difficult, for example, for a man to honor his wife sexually without communicating love, appreciation, patience, compassion, and many other attitudes that are much-needed by his spouse.

Third, most marriages can benefit from communication that is unspoken and nonsexual. Meaningful glances, unexpected flowers, cards sent for no reason other than as an expression of love, a gentle touch; these are the ways of communicating that can sometimes mean the most. They are the types of things that are stored in a couple’s memory bank to be withdrawn again and again.

It is helpful to note that nonverbal communication often leads to or reinforces verbal and sexual communication. A certain glance can be very romantic to some; an unexpected flower can remind one of a very special day; a card can spur significant verbal communication.

The couple that learns to communicate verbally, sexually, and nonverbally will experience the joy of marriage.

Little Things Mean a Lot

“Little things mean a lot” is a maxim with a lot of meaning for marriage. Most husbands and wives can benefit from being reminded of this. The following lists include some of those “little things.” They are offered with the hope that they will encourage you to consider which of them could be helpful in your marriage. Wives, in particular, are usually deeply touched and encouraged through such things. And husbands can certainly be positively affected when their wives take the time to do the little things that mean so much.

We begin with suggestions for wives.

- *Pray for your husband daily.*
- *Show him you love him unconditionally.*
- *Tell him you think he's the greatest.*
- *Show him you believe in him.*
- *Don't talk negatively to him or about him.*
- *Tell him daily that you love him.*
- *Give him adoring looks.*
- *Show him that you enjoy being with him.*
- *Listen to him when he talks with you.*
- *Hug him often.*
- *Kiss him tenderly and romantically at times.*
- *Show him that you enjoy the thought of sex.*
- *Show him you enjoy meeting his sexual needs.*
- *Take the sexual initiative at times.*
- *Express interest in his interests.*
- *Fix his favorite meal at an unexpected time.*
- *Demonstrate your dedication to him in public.*
- *Do things for him he doesn't expect.*
- *Show others you are proud to be his wife.*
- *Rub his back, legs, and feet.*
- *Stress his strengths, not his weaknesses.*
- *Don't try to mold him into someone else.*
- *Revel in his joys; share his disappointments.*
- *Show him your favorite times are with him.*
- *Show him you respect him more than anyone.*
- *Don't give him reason to doubt your love.*
- *Leave "I love you" notes in unexpected places.*
- *Give him your undivided attention often.*
- *Tell him he is your "greatest claim to fame."*
- *Let him hear you thank God for him.*

Now here are suggestions for husbands.

- *Say "I love you" several times a day.*
- *Tell her she is beautiful often.*
- *Kiss her several times a day.*

- *Hug her several times a day.*
- *Put your arm around her often.*
- *Hold her hand while walking.*
- *Come up behind her and hug her.*
- *Always sit by her when possible.*
- *Rub her feet occasionally.*
- *Give her a massage occasionally.*
- *Always open doors for her.*
- *Always help her with chairs, etc.*
- *Ask her opinion when making decisions.*
- *Show interest in what she does.*
- *Take her flowers unexpectedly.*
- *Plan a surprise night out.*
- *Ask if there are things you can do for her.*
- *Communicate with her sexually.*
- *Show affection in public places.*
- *Serve her breakfast in bed.*
- *Train yourself to think of her first.*
- *Show her you are proud to be her husband.*
- *Train yourself to be romantic.*
- *Write a love note on the bathroom mirror.*
- *Call during the day to say "I love you."*
- *Always call and tell her if you will be late.*
- *Let her catch you staring lovingly at her.*
- *Praise her in front of others.*
- *Tell her she is your "greatest claim to fame."*
- *Let her hear you thank God for her.*

Of course these lists are not exhaustive. The number of things that can be done to build up a marriage may be limitless. When our imaginations are active, we can discover exciting and uplifting ways to experience the wonder of marriage.

In summary, we have seen that marriage needs to be built on God's foundational truths, that marriage should be a relationship that blesses each partner, that specific responsibilities are given to the wife and husband, that

communication is one of the important building blocks of a strong marriage, and lastly we have been reminded that “little things mean a lot.”

May God bless us as we strive to put these reminders into practice.

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Safe Sex?

Starlight dances off the sparkling water as the waves gently lap the shore. A cool breeze brushes across your face as you stroll hand in hand along the moonlit beach.

The party was getting crowded and the two of you decided to take a walk on the deserted waterfront. You’ve only known each other a short while but things seem so right. You laugh together and sense a longing to know this person in a deeper way.

You pause and tenderly gaze into each other’s eyes, blood rushing throughout your body as your heart beats faster. Soon you are in each other’s arms kissing softly at first, then fervently. You tug at each other’s clothes and both kneel to the sand. The condom comes on. You join in passionate lovemaking, then relax, hearing only the gentle waves and each other’s breathing, grateful that you are comfortable in mutual care and that all is safe.

Or is it?

Was the condom you used enough to keep you safe? Aside from the emotional and psychological implications of your romantic encounter, realize that the condom is not a 100% guarantee of

safety against AIDS for the same reason the condom is not a 100% guarantee of safety against pregnancy. There's always the possibility of human or mechanical error. Condoms can slip and break. They also can leak. Even the experts aren't certain condoms can guarantee against sexual transmission of the HIV virus.

Theresa Crenshaw, M.D., has been a member of the President' s Commission on HIV. She is past president of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists{1} and once asked this question to 500 marriage and family therapists in Chicago: "How many of you recommend condoms for AIDS protection?"

A majority of the hands went up. Then she asked how many in the room would have sex with an AIDS infected partner using a condom. Not one hand went up.

These were marriage and family therapists, the "experts" who advise others. Dr. Crenshaw admonished them that, "It is irresponsible to give students, clients, patients advice that you would not live by yourself because they may die by it."{2} What does this tell you about the confidence experts have in condoms to protect persons against AIDS?

Not too long ago herpes caught the public's attention. Now, of course, the focus is on AIDS. As with herpes, it is very difficult to be absolutely certain that your partner in premarital sex does not have AIDS and there is no known cure. But, of course, there's a big difference between herpes and AIDS: herpes will make you sick; AIDS will kill you.

Assessing the Risk

After I had made these remarks at a university in California, one young man asked me to explain what I meant when I said that condoms aren't safe. Consider this:

Condoms have an 85% (annual) success rate in protecting

against pregnancy. That's 15% a failure rate.{3} But remember, a women can get pregnant only about six days per month.{4} HIV can infect a person 31 days per month.

Latex rubber, from which latex gloves and condoms are made, has tiny, naturally occurring voids or capillaries measuring on the order of one micron in diameter. Pores or holes five microns in diameter have been detected in cross sections of latex gloves.{5} (A micron is one thousandth of a millimeter.) Latex condoms will generally block the human sperm, which is much larger than the HIV virus. (A human sperm is about 60 microns long and three to five microns in diameter at the head.{6} But the HIV virus is only 0.1 micron in diameter.{7} A five- micron hole is 50 times larger than the HIV virus. A one-micron hole is 10 times larger. The virus can easily fit through. It's kind of like running a football play with no defense on the field to stop you or shooting a soccer ball into an open goal. The hole is huge!

In other words, many of the tiny pores in the latex condom are large enough to pass the HIV virus (that causes AIDS) in its fluid medium.

One study focused on married couples in which one partner was HIV positive. When couples used condoms for protection, after one and one-half years, 17% of the healthy partners had become infected.{8} That' s about one in six, the same odds as Russian roulette.

One U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) study tested condoms in the laboratory for leakage of HIV-sized particles. Almost 33% leaked.{9} One in three.

One analysis of 11 studies on condom effectiveness found that condoms had a 31% estimated failure rate in protecting against HIV transmission. In other words, as the report stated, "These results indicate that exposed condom users will be about a third as likely to become infected as exposed individuals

practicing “unprotected” sex…. The public at large may not understand the difference between “condoms may reduce risk of” and “condoms will prevent” HIV transmission. It is a disservice to encourage the belief that condoms will prevent sexual transmission of HIV. Condoms will not eliminate risk of sexual transmission and, in fact, may only lower risk somewhat.”{10} Burlington County, New Jersey, banned condom distribution at its own county AIDS counseling center. Officials feared the legal liabilities if people contracted AIDS or died after using the condoms the county distributed. They were afraid the county would be held legally responsible for the deaths. {11}

Over Easy Please

Latex condoms are sensitive to heat, cold, light, and pressure. The FDA recommends they be stored in “a cool, dry place, out of direct sunlight, perhaps in a drawer or closet.”{12} Yet they are often shipped in metal truck trailers without climate control. In winter the trailers are like freezers. In summer they’re like ovens. Some have reached 185F (85C) inside. A worker once fried eggs in a skillet next to the condoms, using the heat that had accumulated inside the trailer.{13} Are you thinking of entrusting you life to this little piece of rubber?

Is the condom safe? Is it safer? Safer than what?

Look at it this way: If you decide to drive the wrong way down a divided highway, is it safer if you use a seat belt?{14} You wouldn’t call the process “safe.” To call it “safer” completely misses the point. It’ s still a very riskyand a very foolishthing to do.

Remember that a national study found that condoms have a 15% failure rate with pregnancy. Perhaps you have flown in airplanes. Suppose only 15 crashes occurred for every 100 plane flights. Would you say airline travel was safe?

Safer?{15} Would you still fly?

AIDS expert Dr. Redfield of the Walter Reed Hospital put it like this at an AIDS briefing in Washington, DC: If my teenage son realizes it's foolish to drink a fifth of bourbon before he drives to the party, do I tell him to go ahead and drink a six pack of beer first, instead? {16} According to Dr. Redfield, when you're considering AIDS, "Condoms aren't safe; they're dangerous."{17}

The Test

You might say, "We've both been tested for AIDS. Neither of us has it."

The time span between HIV infection and detection of HIV antibodies has been found to be anywhere from three to six months, sometimes longer. {18}In rare cases it can even take years for signs of the virus to appear.{19} Dr. Redfield says that after he was exposed to HIV in his work, he waited 14 months before having sex with his wife.{20} Suppose you meet someone who says, "I had an HIV test a year ago; it was negative. I haven't had sex for a year. I just had another test; it was negative. I'm safe." You see the test results in writing. Is it safe to sleep with that person?

We all know how hormones can influence honesty. It comes down to this: Are they telling the truth about not being sexually active in the interim? Is there even a chance that person might twist the truth even slightly in order to get into bed with you? Even with the tests, it all boils down to trust. That's why I say, "It's very difficult to be absolutely certain that your partner in premarital sex does not have AIDS."

"Condom sense" is very, very risky. Common sense says, "If you want to be safe, wait."

The Total You

There are many other benefits to waiting (or to stopping until marriage, if you're a sexually active single). By "waiting," I mean reserving sex for marriage.

Sex involves your total personalitybody, mind, and spirit. Besides being physically risky, premarital sex can hurt you emotionally and relationally. While you are single, sex can breed insecurity ("Am I the only one they've slept with? Have there been, or will there be, others?"). It can generate performance fears that can dampen sexual response. (If you fear even slightly that your acceptance by your partner hinges on your sexual performance, that fear can hamper your performance.) It can cloud the issue, confusing you into mistaking sexually charged sensations for genuine love.

After you marry, you might wonder, "If they slept with me before we married, how do I know that they won't sleep with someone else now that we are married?" (Marital faithfulness in the age of AIDS is, of course, important both emotionally and physically.) When disagreements crop up with your mate, will you be tempted to ask yourself, "Did we just marry on a wave of passion?" Don't forget flashbacks, those mental images of previous sexual encounters that have a nasty way of creeping back into your mind during arousal. Who wants to be thinking of previous sex partners while making love with their spouse? Worse, who wants their spouse to be thinking of previous sex partners?

Waiting until marriage can help you both have the confidence, security, trust, and self respect that a solid, intimate relationship needs. "I really like what you said about waiting," said a recently married young woman after a lecture at Sydney University in Australia. "My fianc and I had to make the decision and we decided to wait." (Each had been sexually active in other previous relationships.) "With all the other tensions, decisions, and stress of engagement, sex would have

been just another worry. Waiting 'till our marriage before we had sex was the best decision we ever made."{21}

Why Is It Hard to Wait?

Apart from the obvious physical power of one's sex drive, there are other equally powerful emotional factors that can make it difficult to wait. A longing to be close to someone or a yearning to express love can generate intense desires for physical intimacy. Many singles today want to wait but lack the inner strength or self-esteem They want to be lovedas we all do and may fear losing love if they postpone sex. They are frustrated when unable to control their sexual drives or when relationships prove unfulfilling.

Often sex brings an emptiness rather than the wholeness people seek through it. As one TV producer told me, "Frankly, I think the sexual revolution has backfired in our faces. It's degrading to be treated like a piece of meat." The previous night her lover had justified his decision to sleep around by telling her, "There's plenty of me for everyone." What I suspect he meant was, "There's plenty of everyone for me." She felt betrayed and alone.

I explained to her and to her TV audience that sexuality also involves the spiritual. One wise spiritual teacher understood our loneliness and longings for love. He recognized human emotional needs for esteem, acceptance, and wholeness and offered a plan to meet them. His plan has helped people to become whole "new creatures,"{22} that is, "brand new person(s) inside."{23} He taught that we can be accepted just as we are, even with our faults.{24} We can enjoy the self-esteem that comes from knowing who we are and that our lives can count for something significant.{25} He promised unconditional love to all who ask.{26} Once we know we're loved and accepted, we can have greater security to be vulnerable in relationships and new inner strength to make wise choices for safe living.{27} This teacher said, "You

shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."{28} "My peace I give to you," He explained. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."{29} Millions attest to the safety and security He can provide in relationships. His name, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth. I placed my faith in Him personally my freshman year at Duke, Two Lambda Chis influenced me in that direction. Though I was skeptical at first, it "has made all the difference," as Robert Frost would say.

Sex and spirituality are, of course, quite controversial topics. I realize that our International Fraternity contains a wide spectrum of beliefs on these issues. I offer these perspectives not to preach but to stimulate healthy thinking.

Diversity was one of the things that attracted me to our chapter at Duke. Politically, philosophically, and spiritually we ran the gamut. There were liberals, conservatives, Christians, Jews, atheists, and agnostics. We tried to respect one another and learn from each other even when we differed on issues like these. That is the spirit in which I offer these remarks; may I encourage you to consider them in the same way.

To summarize, the only truly safe sex is the lovemaking that occurs in a faithful monogamous relationship where both partners are HIV negative. Condoms may reduce the risk of HIV transmission somewhat, but they can't guarantee prevention. Please, don't entrust your life to something as risky as a condom.

Notes

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Loneliness

Kerby Anderson discusses the pervasiveness of loneliness in our culture, particularly within marriage.

The baby boom generation is headed for a crisis of loneliness. The reasons are simple: demographics and social isolation. More boomers are living alone than in previous generations, and those living with another person will still feel the nagging pangs of loneliness.

In previous centuries where extended families dominated the social landscape, a sizable proportion of adults living alone was unthinkable. And even in this century, adults living alone have usually been found near the beginning (singles) and end (widows) of adult life. But these periods of living alone are now longer due to lifestyle choices on the front end and advances in modern medicine on the back end. Baby boomers are postponing marriage and thus extending the number of years of being single. Moreover, their parents are (and presumably they will be) living longer, thereby increasing the number of years one adult will be living alone. Yet the increase in the number of adults living alone originates from more than just changes at the beginning and end of adult life. Increasing numbers of boomers are living most or all of their adult lives alone.

In the 1950s, about one in every ten households had only one person in them. These were primarily widows. But today, due to the three D’s of social statistics (death, divorce, and deferred marriage), about one in every four households is a single person household. And if current trends continue, sociologists predict that ratio will increase to one in every three households by the twenty-first century.

In the past, gender differences have been significant in determining the number of adults living alone. For example, young single households are more likely to be men, since women

marry younger. On the other hand, old single households are more likely to be women, because women live longer than men. While these trends still hold true, the gender distinctions are blurring as boomers of both sexes reject the traditional attitudes towards marriage. Compared with their parents, boomers are marrying less, marrying later, and staying married for shorter periods of time.

Marriage Patterns

The most marriageable generation in history has not made the trip to the altar in the same percentage as their parents. In 1946, the parents of the baby boom set an all-time record of 2,291,000 marriages. This record was not broken during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when millions of boomers entered the marriage-prone years. Finally, in 1979, the record that had lasted 33 years was finally broken when the children of the baby boom made 2,317,000 marriages.

Instead of marrying, many boomers chose merely to “live together.” When this generation entered the traditional years of marriageability, the number of unmarried couples living together in the United States doubled in just ten years to well over a million. The sharpest change was among cohabiting couples under 25, who increased ninefold after 1970. Demographers estimate that there have been as many as one-and-a-half to two million cohabiting couples in the U.S. Yet even high figures underestimate the lifestyle changes of boomers. These figures merely represent the number of couples living together at any one time. Cohabitation is a fluid state, so the total number living together or living alone is in the millions.

Not only is this generation marrying less; they are also marrying later. Until the baby boom generation arrived on the scene, the median age of marriage remained stable. But since the mid-fifties, the median age of first marriage has been edging up. Now both “men and women are marrying a full

eighteen months later than their counterparts a generation earlier.”

Another reason for a crisis in loneliness is marital stability. Not only is this generation marrying less and marrying later; they also stay married less than their parents. The baby boom generation has the highest divorce rate of any generation in history. But this is only part of the statistical picture. Not only do they divorce more often; they divorce earlier. When the divorce rate shot up in the sixties and seventies, the increase did not come from empty nesters finally filing for divorce after sending their children into the world.Instead, it came from young couples divorcing before they even had children. Demographer Tobert Michael of Stanford calculated that while men and women in their twenties comprised only about 20 percent of the population, they contributed 60 percent of the growth in the divorce rate in the sixties and early seventies.

Taken together, these statistics point to a coming crisis of loneliness for the boom generation. More and more middle-aged adults will find themselves living alone. Thomas Exter, writing in *American Demographics*, predicts that

> The most dramatic growth in single-person households should occur among those aged 45 to 64, as baby boomers become middle-aged.

These households are expected to increase by 42 percent, and it appears the number of men living alone is growing faster than the number of women.

The crisis of loneliness will affect more than just the increasing number of baby boomers living alone. While the increase in adults living alone is staggering and unprecedented, these numbers are fractional compared with the number of baby boomers in relationships that leave them feeling very much alone.

The “C” word (as it was often called in the 80s) is a significant issue. Commitment is a foreign concept to most of the million-plus cohabiting couples. These fluid and highly mobile situations form more often out of convenience and demonstrate little of the commitment necessary to make a relationship work. These relationships are transitory and form and dissolve with alarming frequency. Anyone looking for intimacy and commitment will not find them in these relationships.

Commitment is also a problem in marriages. Spawned in the streams of sexual freedom and multiple lifestyle options, boomers may be less committed to making marriage work than previous generations. Marriages, which are supposed to be the source of stability and intimacy, often produce uncertainty and isolation.

Living-Together Loneliness

Psychologist and best-selling author Dan Kiley has coined the term “living-together loneliness,” or LTL, to describe this phenomenon. He has estimated that 10 to 20 million people (primarily women) suffer from “living together loneliness.”

LTL is an affliction of the individual, not the relationship, though that may be troubled too. Instead, Dan Kiley believes LTL has more to do with two issues: the changing roles of men and women and the crisis of expectations. In the last few decades, especially following the rise of the modern feminist movement, expectations that men have of women and that women have of men have been significantly altered. When these expectations do not match reality, disappointment (and eventually loneliness) sets in. Dan Kiley first noted this phenomenon among his female patients in 1970. He began to realize that loneliness comes in two varieties. The first is the loneliness felt by single, shy people who have no friends. The second is more elusive because it involves the person in a relationship who nevertheless feels isolated and very much

alone.

According to Kiley, “There is nothing in any diagnostic or statistical manual about this. I found out about it by listening to people.” He has discovered that some men have similar feelings, but most tend to be women. The typical LTL sufferer is a woman between the ages of 33 and 46, married and living a comfortable life. She may have children. She blames her husband or live-in partner for her loneliness. Often he’s critical, demanding, uncommunicative. The typical LTL woman realizes she is becoming obsessed with her bitterness and is often in counseling for depression or anxiety. She is frequently isolated and feels some estrangement from other people, even close friends. Sometimes she will have a fantasy about her partner dying, believing that her loneliness will end if that man is out of her life.

To determine if a woman is a victim of LTL, Kiley employs a variation of an “uncoupled loneliness” scale devised by researchers at the University of California at Los Angeles. For example, an LTL woman would agree with the following propositions: (1) I can’t turn to him when I feel bad, (2) I feel left out of his life, (3) I feel isolated from him, even when he’s in the same room, (4) I am unhappy being shut off from him, (5) No one really knows me well.

Kiley also documents five identifiable stages of LTL which are likely to affect baby boom women. A typical LTL woman who marries at about age 22 will feel bewildered until she is 28. At that point, isolation sets in. At 34, she begins to feel agitated. This turns to depression between the ages of 43 and 50. After that, a woman faces absolute exhaustion.

Women may soon find that loneliness has become a part of their lives whether they are living alone or “in a relationship,” because loneliness is more a state of mind than it is a social situation. People who find themselves trapped in a relationship may be more lonely than a person living alone.

The fundamental issue is whether they reach out and develop strong relationship bonds.

Male Loneliness

In recent years, social psychologists have expressed concern about the friendless male. Many studies have concluded that women have better relational skills which help them to be more successful at making and keeping friends. Women, for example, are more likely than men to express their emotions and display empathy and compassion in response to the emotions of others. Men, on the other hand, are frequently more isolated and competitive and therefore have fewer (if any) close friends.

Men, in fact, may not even be conscious of their loneliness and isolation. In his book *The Hazards of Being Male: The Myth of Masculine Privilege*, Herb Goldberg asked adult men if they had any close friends. Most of them seemed surprised by the question and usually responded, “No, why? Should I?”

David Smith lists in his book *Men Without Friends* the following six characteristics of men which prove to be barriers to friendship. First, men show an aversion to showing emotions. Expressing feelings is generally taboo for males. At a young age, boys receive the cultural message that they are to be strong and stoic. As men, they shun emotions. Such an aversion makes deep relationships difficult, thus men find it difficult to make and keep friendships.

Second, men seemingly have an inherent inability to fellowship. In fact, men find it hard to accept the fact that they need fellowship. If someone suggests lunch, it is often followed by the response, “Sure, what’s up?” Men may get together for business, sports, or recreation (hunting and fishing), but they rarely do so just to enjoy each other’s company. Centering a meeting around an activity is not bad, it is just that the conversation often never moves beyond work or sports to deeper levels.

Third, men have inadequate role models. The male macho image prevents strong friendships since a mask of aggressiveness and strength keeps men from knowing themselves and others. A fourth barrier is male competition. Men are inordinately competitive. Men feel they must excel in what they do. Yet this competitive spirit is frequently a barrier to friendship.

Fifth is an inability to ask for help. Men rarely ask for help because they perceive it as a sign of weakness. Others simply don't want to burden their family or colleagues with their problems. In the end, male attempts at self-sufficiency rob them of fulfilling relationships.

A final barrier is incorrect priorities. Men often have a distorted order of priorities in which physical things are more important than relationships. Success and status is determined by material wealth rather than by the number of close friends.

Men tend to limit their friendships and thus their own identity. H. Norman Wright warns:

> The more a man centers his identity in just one phase of his life—such as vocation, family, or career—the more vulnerable he is to threats against his identity and the more prone he is to experience a personal crisis. A man who has limited sources of identity is potentially the most fragile. Men need to broaden their basis for identity. They need to see themselves in several roles rather than just a teacher, just a salesman, just a handsome, strong male, just a husband.

Crowded Loneliness

Loneliness, it turns out, is not just a problem of the individual. Loneliness is endemic to our modern, urban society. In rural communities, although the farm houses are far apart, community is usually very strong. Yet in our urban and suburban communities today, people are physically very

close to each other but emotionally very distant from each other. Close proximity does not translate into close community.

Dr. Roberta Hestenes at Eastern College has referred to this as “crowded loneliness.” She says:

> Today we are seeing the breakdown of natural “community” network groups in neighborhoods like relatives, PTA, etc. At the same time, we have relationships with so many people. Twenty percent of the American population moves each year. If they think they are moving, they won’t put down roots. People don’t know how to reach out and touch people. This combination produces crowded loneliness.

Another reason for social isolation is the American desire for privacy. Though many boomers desire community and long for a greater intimacy with other members of their generation, they will choose privacy even if it means a nagging loneliness. Ralph Keyes, in his book *We the Lonely People*, says that above all else Americans value mobility, privacy, and convenience. These three values make developing a sense of community almost impossible. In his book *A Nation of Strangers*, Vance Packard argued that the mobility of American society contributed to social isolation and loneliness. He described five forms of uprooting that were creating greater distances between people.

First is the uprooting of people who move again and again. An old Carole King song asked the question, “Doesn’t anybody stay in one place any more?” At the time when Packard wrote the book, he estimated that the average American would move about 14 times in his lifetime. By contrast, he estimated that the average Japanese would move five times.

The second is the uprooting that occurs when communities undergo upheaval. The accelerated population growth during the baby boom along with urban renewal and flight to the suburbs have been disruptive to previously stable communities.

Third, there is the uprooting from housing changes within communities. The proliferation of multiple-dwelling units in urban areas crowd people together who frequently live side by side in anonymity.

Fourth is the increasing isolation due to work schedules. When continuous-operation plants and offices dominate an area's economy, neighbors remain strangers.

And fifth, there is the accelerating fragmentation of the family. The steady rise in the number of broken families and the segmentation of the older population from the younger heightens social isolation. In a very real sense, a crisis in relationships precipitates a crisis in loneliness.

Taken together, these various aspects of loneliness paint a chilling picture of the 1990s. But they also present a strategic opportunity for the church. Loneliness will be on the increase in this decade, and Christians have an opportunity to minister to people cut off from normal, healthy relationships.

The local church should provide opportunities for outreach and fellowship in their communities. Individual Christians must reach out to lonely people and become their friends. And ultimately we must help a lost, lonely world realize that their best friend of all is Jesus Christ.

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