



**BUILDING
STRONGER
MARRIAGE**

Contents

<i>Chapter One</i>	
FOOLS RUSH IN	1
<i>Chapter Two</i>	
IN MARRIAGE...1 + 1 = 1	5
<i>Chapter Three</i>	
LONELY IN LOVE?	9
<i>Chapter Four</i>	
SAVING YOUR MARRIAGE	13
<i>Chapter Five</i>	
LOVE ONE ANOTHER	20

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FOOLS RUSH IN

If you fail to plan, you plan to fail,” advises one adage. Most engaged couples do spend scores of hours carefully planning their wedding ceremonies. But, unfortunately, many marriages do fail. Shock, surprise and anger overwhelm these couples. They expected to be married “as long as we both shall live.” They had hoped to succeed, not to fail.

Pre-nuptial agreements, “marriage contracts,” separate bank accounts; these and other features of modern marriages are evidence that many couples, perhaps unconsciously, are expecting, even planning for their marriages to possibly fail. Even Christian couples committed to a biblical view of lifelong marriage sometimes “plan to fail” in their marriages. Where do they go wrong?

Many pastors grimly observe that most couples spend a lot more time planning for their wedding than planning for their marriage. The result is sad, but predictable. They’re unpre-

“Unhappy marriages are often the result of two people trying to change each other’s habits.” —Anonymous

pared to deal with the challenges of building a marriage that lasts. That was what happened to Jessica (not her real name).

“We had stars in our eyes and were certain that love would conquer everything,” Jessica said. But soon after their wedding, she and her husband began to have some serious disagreements which quickly became arguments and

then all-out fights. “Somehow, we never planned or prepared for them,” she said.

“Blinded” by love, many couples are unprepared to deal with the conflict and anger that is inevitable in any marriage. “When we argued, my husband just clammed up and didn’t say a word—sometimes for days. That just made me angrier and the situation even worse,” Jessica said. Since they hadn’t planned on having serious conflicts, they didn’t have a plan for resolving them.

Actually, Jessica and her husband were not only unprepared for resolving conflict, but had brought poor communication patterns into their marriage that made matters worse! Marriage Counselor H. Norman Wright says that the most important issue of marriage that engaged couples need to be aware of is communication. “Above all else” he says, “you will need to learn to communicate in a way that will build your relationship and bring glory to God,” as well as deal with anger, learn how to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) and resolve conflict in a godly, constructive way. Failing to plan for such important matters is “planning to fail” in marriage.

Who’ll Handle the Checkbook?

Studies show that disagreement over finances is one of the top sources of conflict leading to failed marriages. Who will balance the checkbook? Will there be separate or joint accounts? How much will we save and for what? What about tithing?

In pre-marital counseling, Pastor Steve Ford, of the Crossroads Baptist Church in Albany, New York, requires the couple to discuss financial issues and prepare a tentative family budget. “It’s always an eye-opener and discussion-starter for both partners,” he says.

Susan, who grew up in a family where money was a continual source of conflict between her parents, knows that separate checking accounts often reflect a lack of trust between marriage partners. Her advice? “Be sure to talk about money before you get married. Share your

‘monetary autobiography.’ What were the attitudes toward money in your family growing up? What are your attitudes now? Talking about it now will help avoid conflict later,” she said. And talking about finances before marriage is the main way couples develop the shared spending approach and trust that can make a joint account both possible and desirable.

Will both spouses work? Full time or part time? Where will we live? Where (how and with whom) will we celebrate the holidays? How will household chores be handled? What about children (when and how many)? How does each feel about sexual matters? What church will we attend? Do we agree on family roles and spiritual leadership?

During courtship, couples are often too “starry-eyed” or embarrassed to discuss these questions. But we all bring expectations to our marriages of what the answers will be. These expectations become our “plans” for how life will be after the wedding. When these “plans” are unrealized, the result can be tremendous disappointment, anger, bitterness and, ultimately, a failed marriage.

Planning to Succeed

In spite of all the distractions, some couples do plan their marriage as carefully as they plan their wedding. Sharonbeth and her husband, Russ, went on a Marriage Encounter weekend for engaged couples before their wedding. “It was a valuable time,” she said. “We didn’t have a lot of time to talk because we were separated by quite a distance during our engagement. The weekend not only helped us to get to know each other better, but taught us communication skills and how to fight without destroying each other.”

Marriage Life Conferences, headed by Dr. Dennis Rainey, offer sessions especially for engaged couples, also. These special sessions help couples develop a shared vision of God’s will for their relationship, as well as planning to meet the challenges facing newly married couples.

A new resource available to engaged couples is “mentoring” by a married couple in their church or community. “Marriage Savers,” founded by Michael and Harriet McManus, trains married couples to help engaged and newly married couples plan for and cope with challenges to their marriage posed by conflict, finances, sexual intimacy and differing communication styles.

Of course, weekend conferences and mentoring are most effective as part of a program of at least 4 pre-marital counseling sessions spread over 3-4 months. This gives couples time to talk and pray together about the questions and issues they must confront. Many wise pastors require at least four sessions during which couples discuss the biblical view of the roles of husbands and wives, plans for children, finances, conflict and communication and other topics. “Often,” said one pastor, “if I hadn’t forced the issues, they never would have been tackled.” As a result, he encourages couples to spend a lot of time discussing these issues carefully before their wedding.

It’s true that “if you fail to plan” for the many challenges couples face, “you’re really planning to fail” in your marriage. But marriage conferences, mentoring, pre-marital counseling (and, of course, plenty of time to dream and pray together) all offer couples proven, biblical resources for planning for a marriage that lasts—marriage not “for awhile” but for a lifetime!

For more information on marriage conferences or mentoring programs for engaged couples, contact:

Family Life (Marriage Life Conferences)
1-800-FL-TODAY

“Toward A Growing Marriage” Seminars
1-800-254-2022

Marriage Savers, Inc. 1-301-469-5873

Marriage Encounter 1-800-795-LOVE

In Marriage...1+1=1

When it comes to marriage, the Bible says 1 + 1 should equal 1. It tells us two “I’s” must become one “we” if a marriage is to thrive. Marriage counselors and psychologists who study healthy marriages agree.

Experts Find “We-ness”

In one classic analysis, social historian Jeanette Lauer and her husband, Robert, a specialist in human behavior, studied couples with enduring marriages. Among the couples the Lauers studied were 300 who had been happily married for 15 years or longer. The Lauers described in an article in *Psychology Today* how the couples reflected a we-ness approach to their marriages. The couples made many “we” statements when describing their married life:

“We agree on goals.” “We laugh together.” “We agree on a philosophy of life.” “We share outside hobbies and interests.” “We agree about our sex life.” “We have a stimulating exchange of

“All deep relationships, especially marriage relationships, must be based on absolute openness and honesty.”

—H. Norman Wright

ideas.” “We agree on how and how often to show affection.” “My spouse is my best friend.” “I like my spouse as a person.” “I confide in my spouse.”

The happily married couples studied by the Lauers tried to do as many things together as possible. One husband said of his wife: “I would

rather spend time with her, talk with her, be with her than with anyone else.” Another said: “We try to share everything.” For these couples, said the Lauers: “‘Till death do us part’ is not a

binding clause but a gratifying reality.”

U.S. psychologist Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain, his colleague, have conducted studies of what they call “strong families.” More than 3,000 families from all around the world contributed to the research and conclusions these authors described in the book *Secrets of Strong Families*.

A husband and wife are not merely two separate selves who happened to sign a marriage document. They make a new oneness—a “couple.”

They discovered that these families had several characteristics in common, in spite of the fact that they lived in such far-flung corners of the earth as Central and South America, South Africa, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The we-ness factor loomed large as binding glue in their marriages. “Members of strong families feel good about themselves as a family unit or team,” wrote authors Stinnett and DeFrain. “They have a sense of belonging with each other—a sense of ‘we.’” One husband said: “It came to me that the joy of life comes from the two of us together rather than outside things like career, hobbies, or leisure activities.”

These husbands and wives are first and foremost “we-always” couples. They are, we might say, wired together. “They share all (or nearly all) aspects of their lives with interest and joy,” wrote Stinnett and DeFrain. “They are mates, lovers, companions, partners, and best friends.”

The biblical perspective—what God says about the relationship he created—also tells us that we-ness is central to marriage. The tie that binds is described in Genesis 2:24: “A man will

leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” A husband and wife are not merely two separate selves who happened to sign a marriage document. They make up a new oneness—a “couple.”

That oneness is not just a nice thought, it is real. Many of us have had the sad experience of seeing longtime friends who have divorced. Something about each of the former spouses seems missing. This is what Genesis 2:24 is telling us. A real bond exists between a truly happily married couple. In fact, this God-created relationship must be present and growing if the marriage is real, and if it is to work.

Leave, Cleave, Weave

Failed marriages do not usually follow the formula given in Genesis. First, the partners do not leave their parents in a broad sense. They are still holding on to past unhealthy attitudes, beliefs, desires and needs. Neither are they cleaving to their partner, in all that this represents. They still think of themselves as “I” first.

As a result, these couples do not develop a unity in their relationship. God’s purpose for marriage is that husbands and wives *leave* their parents and *cleave* to one another. Once this is done, the couple must work on their relationship and *weave* their lives together into one “we.”

“Don’t marry someone you can live with. Marry someone you can’t live without.”

—Josh McDowell

Paul defined this unification—this interweaving oneness—in his letters. He spoke of it in the context of the sexual union between husbands and wives. Paul wrote: “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:4). That is a powerful example of the we-ness factor at work in a couple’s life.

Ephesians 5 tells us that a bonded marriage stands as a symbol for the intertwining relationship between Christ and the Church. Christian marriage really involves three persons: a man, a woman and Christ. Christian marriage ought to be a uniquely “we” relationship. A marriage is a cleaving and weaving relationship. It is a God-created we-ness between two people who experience themselves as one, and act accordingly.

James Olthuis of the Institute of Christian Studies in Toronto summarized it as well as anyone: “Marriage is the ultimate human connection in which two people commit themselves to each other in a lifelong communion of sharing and caring.”

The first connection is made when two strangers of the opposite sex meet. A strong bond begins to take shape and the couple marry. Throughout life, the bond grows and grows into a massive steel cable of ever-increasing strength.

The weaving, however, is never complete. No marriage will ever be perfect because it is composed of two imperfect people. But Christian marriages are a journey, with Christ as their standard and God’s love as the goal.

“Marriage Clues For The Clueless”

Filled with laughs and triumphs, marriage is a special partnership that God gives two people. But marriage isn’t always upbeat and easy. Sometimes the joys and emotional heights give way to tears, anger and misunderstanding. Whether you need rules about “fighting fair,” dealing with children, or you simply need encouragement to make your marriage better, this book can help.

Inside, you’ll find:

- Amazing stories and facts.
- Perspective—help in stepping back and looking at the whole picture.
- Reminders—clues too important to forget.

Marriage Clues for the Clueless is published by Promise Press, and available through your local Christian bookstore.

Lonely in Love?

When you were single, you may have expected that marriage meant an end to loneliness. After all, didn’t God say, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18)? God gave marriage as a solution to loneliness.

But even though you may be married, you may have learned that marriage isn’t an automatic solution to loneliness. Your expectations of intimate companionship haven’t come true. Your marriage may even have left you more lonely than before.

All marriages go through rough times and hardships, of course. With careers, children, education, church activities, community service and the thousand-and-one other demands on you, your relationship is stretched to its limit.

But if you as a couple understand that these stressful times are temporary, then they needn’t cause major marital problems. It’s when the occasional moments of loneliness become the standard that you worry.

Loneliness often begins with small decisions. “He will understand if I stay late at work again.” “She doesn’t mind if I go out with the guys.”

You still love each other, but other priorities take up more and more of your time. You may end up seeing each other at home only between other responsibilities. You share your house, your expenses, your children and your church, but you aren’t sharing your love, your goals, your dreams and your life. Rather than husband and wife, you feel like roommates.

Men feel loneliness as often as women. Many men will not define the discontent that they feel as loneliness, but that’s what it is. One husband

explained it like this: “I have a stressful job. Sometimes the pressures are so great that I can’t help but want to bring the frustrations home with me. However, I don’t feel comfortable telling my wife about work. She just wants to talk about how hard she has it with her own job and the kids. But I miss all the discussions we used to have about our plans and goals. There was a time when all we wanted to do was be together.”

Some women identify loneliness quickly and may respond emotionally. This wife explains: “When we are able to come home together, he finds the newspaper, sits in front of the television and waits for dinner. When we do eat together, it is in front of the television set. After we finish, I clear the dishes and straighten the kitchen. Then we settle in for an evening of more television. I don’t want to change my husband—much. I don’t think it is too much to ask him to talk to me. But when I bring up spending more time together talking, he thinks I’m emotional and overreacting.”

Sound familiar? You can tell you are heading toward loneliness in marriage when you need to turn to others for support, when you want to be with your friends more than your spouse.

What can you do if your marriage is moving toward isolation? Discuss your feelings of loneliness with your spouse. Pick a good time when you won’t be interrupted, and talk with your mate about your needs and concerns. Avoid accusing your spouse or overdramatizing your feelings. Simply explain how you feel about the problem.

You may even discover that your spouse has also felt the distance in your relationship, and that he or she also wants to improve the situation.

Reassure your spouse that you do love him or her. Change will take effort from both of you, so both of you must commit yourselves to improving your marriage with love and patience.

Consider praying together. This may be a difficult area to share. Begin small: before meals,

in preparation for special activities, before a trip. Realize that it may take time, but praying together can be the springboard for an improved God-centered relationship.

- Put your marriage second only to your relationship with God. If you are extremely busy with separate activities, then plan time when you can be together. You develop communication and intimacy by spending both quantity and quality time together. If your schedules are overbooked, you may need to evaluate your priorities and forgo some activities.

You can make your marriage relationship happier by understanding and being tolerant of the differences between you and your spouse.

- Listen to what your spouse *doesn't* say. What does this tell you about his or her needs? Discuss what you need. Don’t assume that he should know, or she won’t understand. Be honest. Discuss specific areas that both can improve to support each other.

- Try to become receptive to ways to improve yourself for your spouse. What can *you* do to improve the level of communication? How can you make your mate happier when you are together?

- Learn to understand the differences between you and your spouse. Then be tolerant.

- Recognize and accept the limitations in your relationship. Your mate cannot fulfill 100 percent of your emotional needs and should not feel pressured to do so.

Marriage is not a guarantee that you will never be lonely. But learning to love, give, share, sacrifice and grow alongside the man or woman you love is a guarantee for fulfillment and happiness. You will come to appreciate, from positive experience, why God said it is not good that a person should be alone.

“BUT WHAT IF...”

But what if your spouse doesn't respond to your needs? There are still ways to improve your situation.

- Pray for your spouse. Pray that he or she will learn to understand and respond to you with God's help.
- Love your spouse. It is more difficult to give to someone who doesn't respond. But if you can avoid seeking revenge for the hurts inflicted on you and return good for bad, you will improve yourself and your relationship.
- Make it easier for your spouse to love you. Are you consistently complaining and overly critical? If you are, these traits will make your husband or wife defensive and cause them to want to push you away. Instead, be a good companion. If the time you are together is enjoyable, your spouse will want to be with you.
- Seek advice from a close friend or minister on how to remain loving without becoming resentful of your spouse. Complaining to friends about your spouse's shortcomings isn't constructive.
- Realize that you can only change yourself. This is one of the most difficult lessons for any of us to learn.

Even though you cannot force your spouse to change, you can change how you view your situation. With God's help and guidance, you can overcome the loneliness you feel.

Finding the right type of help is important. In some cases you may need to get professional counseling. Marriage counseling can help husbands and wives learn how to better communicate with each other.

Saving Your Marriage

What is godly love, and where can it be found? The word *love* has been used so loosely that it has lost much of its true meaning. In her song, “What's Love Got to Do With It?” (from the album *Private Dancer*, Capital Records, 1984), Tina Turner said of love, “What's love, but a secondhand emotion?” Secondhand emotions masquerading as love have caused many divorces. Secondhand emotions rush people into marriage, and they can drop people out of marriage.

The most common problem among married people is selfishness expressed in feelings. Many marriages fail because feelings fail. In *The Case Against Divorce*, Diane Medved cautions couples about building a marriage on the shaky foundation of fleeting feelings that masquerade as love.

“One of the most critical facts I try to impress on couples who come to me for premarital counseling is that *passion fades*.... The sizzle fades, which to many means that love fizzles, compared to what you first had or to what the media try to tell you love is—fireworks, sexual frenzy, heated exploration” (pages 21-22).

Some people marry because they think the other person will satisfy their needs. What happens when they do come together? They mutually take and take until they have taken all the life out of each other. The marriage becomes empty. Then they can throw it away, like some emptied soda can.

Dr. Medved has also found that feelings can lead people into divorce. “Over the past several years the one thing we've been taught not to doubt is our feelings.... Never mind that mar-

riages crumbled because personal feelings were allowed to dictate behavior rather than courtesy and dignity and commitment to one's spouse.... The problem is that we've come to view feelings as solid and immutable, when in reality, we can shape them and choose them moment to moment" (page 172).

The Real Thing

In many marriages, the relationship is conditional on the performance of the partner: "I'll give to you if you...." At other times, it's based on the worthiness of the partner: "I give to you because you are...." Conditional relationships usually fail. But godly love gives unconditionally. How can you recognize feelings for what they are and acquire godly love? Love is clearly a gift of God. He gives love to you so that you can give it to others.

Some have had it backwards. They have looked for love in all the wrong places. They have looked to other people, especially to their wives or husbands, to fill them with love. But the truth is, only God can fill us with his love. He fills us through an intimate relationship with him.

It starts by realizing that he loves you unconditionally, even though we are not worthy: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This is the model of love that is lived in many successful marriages.

To love or not to love. The decision is yours to make, and not a feeling to follow. Surrender your feelings for self-satisfaction to God. You will be amazed at the love that will spring forth.

Love in Action

God's love is more than words. It is expressed in action toward one's partner. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 13 and see a few of the ways love can be expressed in marriage.

Love "is not self-seeking" (verse 5). This is the guiding principle in every situation of marriage. God will inspire you to seek the best for

your spouse. If you are seeking a divorce, are you seeking the best for yourself or for others? (In cases of physical and sexual abuse, separation or divorce may be best for all concerned. It is wise to seek counsel on these serious issues.)

Have you considered the emotional, mental and physical effect on your family and community? Is it worth the imagined relief you think you will have after a divorce? They say the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. But a beautiful lawn needs to be fertilized, watered and mowed. So why not give that kind of attention to your own partner? You may be pleasantly surprised as your marriage grows more beautiful.

"Happy marriages begin when we marry the ones we love, and they blossom when we love the ones we marry."

—Tom Mullen

"Love is patient" (verse 4). You may not see immediate results; love takes time. You may feel the need to have your marriage fixed as soon as yesterday. But think about it, isn't that a cry for self-satisfaction? Doesn't your spouse need time to adjust to the new you? Give your partner time. Give your husband or wife space to change his or her response to you. Most importantly, give God room to work in your partner's life. You are not God. God does not force anyone to change. But he can work miracles if you give your partner time and space. Patience costs you nothing, but a divorce may cost you everything.

"Love is kind" (verse 4). You may not feel like being kind. Your spouse may not deserve your kindness, but allow God to give kindness through you. Acting on feelings has caused many harsh and hurtful things to be said and done. Ask God to inspire and empower you to decide to give kind words and kind acts. Remember, love is an act of the will, not the reaction of the emotions. You can choose to give kindness even in the face of bitterness.

“SEX BEGINS IN THE KITCHEN”

The young lawyer was having a rough day of it. As she typed up her notes, her fingers just weren't hitting the correct letters. She lost track of an important document and accidentally dropped her cell phone in the trash. “What's the matter with you?” her partner teased. “Are you in love or something?” “Of course I'm not in love,” she snapped back. “I'm married.”

It's sad, but it's true—we often think of marriage and love as having precious little to do with each other or even as being contradictions in terms. If you want to take the romance out of a relationship, run out and get a marriage license. It's almost as if there's something magical about a wedding ring. Slip it on the finger of someone you love, and all the romance evaporates into thin air.

And if you watch TV much, you might get the same idea of marriage from a number of modern programs. On the screen, marriage seldom seems fulfilling. It's a battleground, a swamp of dissatisfaction. Complaints are comical. Bliss is boring.

What do you think? What's your image of married life? Does marriage turn people into dolts and dingbats as the TV sitcoms tell us? Unfortunately, the answer is yes...sometimes. Many married couples do live that sort of life—but it doesn't have to be that way—not at all.

If the spark is missing from your marriage and nothing happens when the bedroom door closes, you need psychologist and marriage counselor Kevin Leman's new book, *Sex Begins in the Kitchen*, from which the previous paragraphs were excerpted. Dr. Leman believes that sexual intimacy is an expression of intimacy a couple shares in all areas of their life. In this humorous book, you'll learn how to satisfy your mate without ever setting foot in the bedroom. You'll discover:

- Why taking out the garbage without being asked is foreplay.
- How birth order plays in marriage.
- Why it's important to read your mate's mind.
- Three things a wife can do to make her husband want to please her.

With Dr. Leman's recipe, you can put the spice back in your marriage! *Sex Begins in the Kitchen*, published by Revell, is available through your local Christian bookstore.

Love “keeps no record of wrongs” (verse 5). In other words, love forgives, and forgiveness is an important key to reconciliation. Let's face it, you and your spouse have both made mistakes. You can't live the past all over again, but you can have the past forgiven.

Decide to exercise love by forgiving your partner as Christ forgave you. Forgiveness is one of the most powerful medicines for the human spirit. It can heal your broken heart and marriage.

Your spouse will sense sweetness instead of bitterness in you—peace instead of anger. Your partner will experience the love of God from the gentleness in your voice to the sincerity in your eyes. He or she will be drawn to you, and may even be inspired to reconcile with you.

God's Love Through You

Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). This blessing does not come from your partner. It comes from Jesus Christ, who loves you completely. He will give you a joy and peace that is indescribable. He will satisfy your deepest longings in a way your husband or wife never can. Why not sacrifice your feelings for self-fulfillment on the altar of love? Why not allow God to give your spouse the love you never could give? Why not allow God to take care of your emotional needs? Allow him to love your partner through you, and save your marriage!

Decide to exercise love by forgiving your partner as Christ forgave you. Forgiveness is one of the most powerful medicines for the human spirit. It can heal your broken heart and marriage.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

The Male Perspective

In the world of romance, one single rule applies: Make the woman happy. Do something she likes, and you get points. Do something she dislikes, and points are subtracted. You don't get any points for doing something she expects. Sorry, that's the way the game is played.

Here is a guide to the point system.

Simple Duties:

You make the bed. +1

You make the bed but forget to add the decorative pillows. 0

You throw the bedspread over rumpled sheets. -1

You leave the toilet seat up. -5

You replace the toilet-paper roll when it's empty. 0

When the toilet-paper roll is barren, you resort to Kleenex. -1

You check out a suspicious noise at night. 0

You check out a suspicious noise, and it's nothing. 0

You check out a suspicious noise, and it's something. +5

You pummel it with a six iron. +10

It's her father. -10

Her Birthday

You take her out to dinner. 0

You take her out to dinner, and it's not a sports bar. +1

Okay, it is a sports bar. -2

And it's all-you-can-eat night. -3

It's a sports bar, it's all-you-can-eat night, and your face is painted the colors of your favorite team. -10

A Night Out With The Boys

Go out with a pal. -5

And the pal is happily married. -4

Or frighteningly single. -7

And he drives a Mustang. -10

With a personalized license plate (SIN GLE). -15

Your Physique

You develop a noticeable potbelly. -15

You develop a noticeable potbelly and exercise to get rid of it. +10

You develop a noticeable potbelly and resort to loose jeans and baggy Hawaiian shirts. -30

You say, "I don't care because you have one too." -800

FROM THE INTERNET

The Female Perspective

(a suggested edit of Proverbs 31)

PROVERBS 31 HUSBAND

Verily, my daughter, an husband is a good thing. He giveth the house a finished look— Like unto a brass door knocker or a potted palm on the patio.

A perfect husband—who can find one?

For his price is far above Telecom shares.

The heart of his wife rejoiceth in him,

And he shall lack for no encouragement.

He worketh willingly with his hands and bringeth home all his shekels.

He riseth with the alarm and putteth on the kettle;

He bringeth his wife a cup of tea in the bed,

And kisseth her, occasionally.

All week doth he labor at the office,

And upon his day off he doeth chores about the house for relaxation.

With his own hand he runneth the lawnmower and washeth the car;

He layeth his hand also to the dripping tap.

Yea, even unto the blocked cistern.

He remembereth the garbage collection day.

His greasy footmark falleth not upon the carpet, Nor his grimy hand upon the drapery.

His wife is known within the gates when she luncheth with her peers,

By the cut of her gowns and imported shoes.

He always noticeth her new outfit

And grumbleth not at the bills.

He luncheth meagerly upon a low-cal salad

That he may adorn her with fine jewels.

His mouth is filled with praise for his wife's cooking,

Though she daily offereth a burnt offering.

And he perceiveth not the existence of other women.

Alas, my daughter, weep not if this man hath passed you by,

For the happiest wife is not she who getteth the best husband,

But she who maketh the best of what she doth get.

Behold, the Lord maketh the man,

But the wife maketh an husband!

Love One Another

So many people struggle with marriage today; and it is no wonder. Generations of unhappiness hound the human family. We pass such unhappiness from father to son and mother to daughter—and from father to daughter and mother to son.

Somebody simply has to break the cycle. Countless adults have been unloved in childhood and bereft of good parental examples; men and women who have not been taught how to love—how to comfort—how to effectively help other human beings. How would they know? They never saw much love between their own father and mother.

If they do learn how to love later from a step-mother or step-father, their own husband or wife, or from a constant struggle to fulfill the teaching of God's Word, the change will require great effort. How our parents treated one another is not unrelated to our own situation. What is the one thing parents can do to help the future happiness of their children? In three words, *love one another!*

Sound Advice About Love

The Bible is filled with advice about relationships. The apostle Paul told husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and willingly died for it (Ephesians 5:25). This is the love of sacrifice, protection and concern.

However, something more is required of a man. A husband also has to love his wife as an equal human being—just for being herself. This is the love of acceptance, of active tolerance. He has to be concerned for her as another human being. Not solely in the way he thinks she could

be or the way he would like her to be, but in the way she is in her activities, hopes and dreams, and certainly not just as an extension of himself.

Even a husband's love, sacrifice, protection and concern fall somewhat short of the ideal. A special, individual, highly-focused marital love is essential for each to be really fulfilled.

“Marriage—as its veterans know well—is the continuous process of getting used to things you hadn't expected.”

—Anonymous

Very few couples are perfectly suited for each other. However, when wooden joints do not fit, a carpenter keeps planing them down until they do. Likewise, a married couple has to soften the rough edges of their relationship. This involves time and hard work. You try it and if the rough edges still do not fit, you keep on until they do.

Of course, the ideal place to begin a good marriage is long before the wedding ceremony. Background is very important. Carefully consider, with advice from those close to you and whose own marriages you respect, whether or not you are suited for each other.

There is no replacement for time spent together in different circumstances. Doubts or areas of concern which must be faced will not come to light over candle-lit dinners alone. Honest communication is important. Talk about your beliefs, your attitude toward life, the way you feel about all sorts of day-to-day things. Do you share the same values, priorities and opinions?

In a world where extended families and communities are separated, it can be difficult to meet the right person. (Remember, not everyone is necessarily suited for marriage or has met someone they would be fully suited to yet. There is *nothing wrong* with staying single!) What is most important is to be living a positive life with a wide group of friends.

Once You Are Married

Once you are married (whether for six months or 60 years), the challenge to love is yours. However, *do not* deceive one another. Some express love verbally while at the same time being unfaithful! Approximately 80 percent of those going into marriage expect total faithfulness, but roughly 60 percent of men and 40 percent of women in Western societies are unfaithful! This behavior—so common, yet so destructive—is an insult to the very words and actions meant to express love.

If you sincerely give to one another in words and actions, love will continue to grow. Do not let your marriage drift. You cannot afford to wait until you “feel right.” Love is an art. A few wrong brush-strokes need not ruin the canvas, though. Love can be regenerated. King David of Israel said: “Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me” (Psalm 27:10). God is always there. His very nature is perfect love. He can impart this love to you.

The apostle Peter told husbands to be considerate of their wives (1 Peter 3:7). To do this properly, they have to get to know their wives. To describe the intimate marriage relationship, the King James translators of Genesis said, “Adam knew Eve his wife” (Genesis 4:1).

What an insightful way of depicting what good marriages should be all about. To know. To understand. Not to know is to court certain marital danger. To know manifests itself in unexpected ways. As in giving a gift, the better you know a person, the more suitable your gift will be. The real beneficiary of gifts given in marriage (directly or otherwise) will not only be one another but also the generation to come.

If you really love your husband or wife, if you show deep and appropriate affection based on intimate personal knowledge, your children will also be infused with a happiness hard to come by in any other way. Bring love into your marriage. Work at it. Do it for yourselves—and your children!