

Keys to a Successful Marriage



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MARRIAGE AS A SPIRITUAL COVENANT

Revised and adapted from Dr. Clark Warren's "The Triumphant Marriage"
and Bill Gothard's "The True Significance of the Wedding Covenant."

"Set me as a seal upon thy heart..." Song of Solomon 8:6

Introduction: Refreshing & instilling marital commitment

- A. We do not enter a "marriage **contract**" but a "marriage **covenant!**" (Malachi 2:14, Proverbs 2:16f)
- B. What exactly is a covenant?
 - 1. A Hebrew word: "In the sense of cutting; a compact made by passing between pieces of flesh"
 - 2. Examples are found in Genesis 15:9-10, 17-18 and Jeremiah 34:13, 18
- C. Our forefathers began many wedding traditions and understood this well. Over time, the original meanings have been lost.
 - 1. "The True Significance of the Wedding Covenant" booklet opened my eyes.
 - 2. One covenant symbol: the different sides for seating the guests of the bride or groom represents the covenant relationship and the guests as "living sacrifices."
- D. A marriage is **sacred**. It is spiritual...heavenly. (Matthew 19:6)
 - 1. A "holy triune not a human duet!!"
 - 2. If you break your vow to your mate, you may still have to keep your vow to God ("until death do you part" not "until divorce do you part").
 - 3. "It is a snare to a man to say rashly, 'It is holy' and then to later make inquiry." Proverbs 20:25 (½ of all divorces in 1997 occurred within the first two years!)
 - 4. The difference between a **covenant and a contract**:
 - a. A covenant is based on **trust** – a contract on **distrust!**
 - b. A covenant is based on **unlimited responsibility** – a contract on **limited liability**.
Illustration: God's promise to Abraham and all He went through to keep His Word demonstrate unlimited responsibility. Just as the traditional words "...for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health."
 - c. A covenant is **lifelong and not to be broken** – a contract can be **voided by mutual consent**.
Illustration: The rainbow in the sky reminds everyone that God's promise has no statute of limitations.

I. COVENANT SYMBOLISM IN THE WEDDING CEREMONY

- A. The groom enters first – why? He is the initiator of the covenant.
- B. The father walks the bride down the aisle – why?
 - 1. The parents are an important part of the ceremony.
 - 2. The father’s duty is to present his daughter as a pure gift. (Deut 22:13-21)
 - 3. The white dress symbolizes purity.
- C. The father gives the bride away to show the full blessing of the parents. This is the formal transfer of authority from the father to the groom after he has asked for the daughter’s hand in marriage. (Numbers 30:4-8).
- D. The ring is a “token of the covenant.”
- E. The couple is introduced to establish the changing of names.
 - 1. *Illustration:* Abram’s name was changed to Abraham.
 - 2. Spiritually we wear the “new name” of Christian once we enter into a covenant relationship with God upon baptism.
- F. What is the significance of the guest book?
 - 1. It should be signed after—not before. It indicates there are witnesses to the covenant who have a vested interest in supporting the marriage.
 - 2. The Armenians have a low divorce rate. When a couple gets in trouble, the godparents move in until they get it settled!
- G. What is the purpose of the receiving line? To give a blessing to the couple as in Ruth 4:11, 14f.
- H. The food at the reception is for the covenant celebration. This is very similar to the Lord’s supper.
- I. The couple feeds each other cake and they become “one flesh” in the eating of the cake, just as we become one in the eating of the bread. (I Corinthians 11:24f)

II. DO WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH KEEPING VOWS & COMMITMENTS TODAY?

- A. A lax attitude in general makes the taking of our vows seriously difficult.
 - 1. Ronald Reagan in 1981 fired the air traffic controllers because they broke a contractual agreement. Doubtful that would happen today.
 - 2. During the revolutionary war both sides respected vows so much that they avoided taking prisoners. Instead they simply made them promise they would not return to fight again. If they violated their honor and did so, then they were executed.
- B. Examine these **scriptures that apply to the taking of vows:**
 - 1. Ecclesiastes 5:2-7
 - 2. Psalms 15:4b (Zion dweller – swears to his own hurt and changes not!!!)
 - 3. Numbers 30:2
 - 4. I Samuel 1:11-21 (Hannah’s vow)
 - 5. Joshua 9:16-20
- C. **Commitment: the cornerstone of a triumphant marriage!**
 - 1. Consider the following quote about the nature of commitment:

“**COMMITMENT** ... is what transforms a promise into reality. It is the words that speak boldly of your intentions. It is the actions that speak louder than words. It is making the time when there is none, coming through time after time, year after year. Commitment is the stuff character is made of, the power to change the face of things. It is the daily triumph of integrity over skepticism.”

2. *“Marriage demands toughness, and toughness proceeds out of commitment. No marriage will ever be stronger than the commitments that serve as its infrastructure.”*
- D. We ask couples to say some hard-hitting, heavy-duty vows before they get married. So where do we go wrong?
1. Are vows **treated superficially** with the preacher left to “perform the ceremony”? The couple is so nervous they hardly think about or realize the significance.
 - a. I encourage couples to **write their own vows** and wedding ceremony.
 - b. Suggestion: **Save the ceremony and go over it...at least once a year on your wedding anniversary.**
 2. It is important that what you have vowed to each other be kept current and fresh! It is so easy to forget.
- E. **What matters is your current level of commitment**
1. Often, the vows seem less vital and are less passionately held as time passes.
 2. Sadly, many only vaguely remember what they said.
 3. The commitment should be *active* not passive!!
Illustration: One may stay in a marriage by being passive. S/he doesn’t leave, but doesn’t *do anything* to make the marriage better either. Don’t forget the *positive*, radical part of **active commitment**.

III. WE NEED THOROUGH, INSIGHTFUL UNDERSTANDING OF MARITAL PROMISES

- A. We need a “*promise orientation*” that is highly enlightened.
- B. The traditional vows have **6 separate parts**:
1. I will **love you** as long as we both live (kindness, sacrifice)
 2. I will **cherish and honor** you as long as we both live (thoughtfulness, attentiveness)
 3. I will be to you **what a husband or wife owes to a spouse** (dedication to doing my part and meeting the other’s needs)
 4. I will **take you as you are** (acceptance)
 5. I will **forsake all others** (faithfulness!!)
 6. I will do all these things **for better or worse, in sickness and in health** (unconditionally serve and stay with you for as long we live)
- C. **WOW! What does that mean, practically speaking??**
1. If we disagree, frustrate, disappoint, or hurt each other...?
 2. If I think I don’t get what I deserve...?

3. If I express how I feel, regardless of hardship...? **I will keep my vows!**
- D. **Now, REHEARSE THE PROMISES until they are BURNED INTO OUR BRAINS.**
 1. Marriage vows are usually spoken a single time, thus they have very little value in a marital crisis.
 2. Dr. Clark Warren, author of "The Triumphant Marriage", suggests a change in frequency of the marriage vows.
 - a. Instead of "once-in-a-lifetime", 2 or 3 times a week for the first 10 years, and at least once a week for the rest of the marriage.
 - b. Verbalized regularly over a long period of time for tremendous power!!
 - c. HOW? Find a way that is natural, meaningful, and even fun!
BE CREATIVE!!
 3. What about you?
 - a. The more you can find **new and creative ways** to affirm the commitment the better.
 - b. **Recite it over and over** so that when troubles come the brain will trigger new ideas on how to fulfill these vows!!

CONCLUSION:

- A. **Do your homework!** Write your own concise summary of your vows.
- B. Your marriage will benefit dramatically from a simple exercise designed to help both partners **clarify and articulate promises.**

Here is a sample of what Gail and I came up with after looking over our original ceremony and thinking about the basic, most important needs that we each share.

I PROMISE...

(A renewal of our vows from Brent to Gail)

I promise I will do everything in my power to help you get to heaven,
to **accept you**, and to **remain loyal** to you **always**.

I promise to put **you and our marriage second only to God** and to be **open
and honest with you always** as we strive for **oneness**.

I promise I will **cherish, honor, and support you in good times and bad** and strive to love you
selflessly, like Christ loves the church, as I meet your **deepest needs**.

I promise to **pilot, provide, and protect** you and our family and to do these things
unconditionally until death do us part...so help me God!!

I PROMISE...

(A renewal of vows from Gail to Brent)

I promise I will do everything in my power to help you get to heaven,
to **accept you**, and to **remain loyal** to you **always**.

I promise to put **you and our marriage second only to God** and to be **open
and honest with you always** as we strive for **oneness**.

I promise to **admire, honor, and obey you in good times and bad** and strive to be an excellent
keeper at home and be **sensitive to your deepest needs**.

I promise to **love you** and to do all these things
unconditionally until death do us part...so help me God!!

(Based on the fact that God has provided us with role-based relationships, I suggest you have different vows which focus in on each role. For help look at the handout of scriptures I have provided for you entitled "The Most Important Words about Husband and Wife.")

Refreshing and Re-instilling Marital Commitment

(Commitment and Vows in Marriage)

WORKSHOP WORKSHEET: STEPS TO RECONSTRUCT AND REFRESH YOUR VOWS

(Your marriage will benefit dramatically from this simple exercise designed to help both of you clarify and articulate the promises you have made to each other.)

1. What do you remember most about your wedding vows from memory? Quickly brainstorm together on a separate sheet of paper and see what you can piece together.
2. What vows have you heard said by others that you liked? Reflect upon what you have come to understand as vitally important to you and your marriage since your wedding day that could be added to a new, updated set of vows that you decide to commit to each other. Brainstorm together. Ask your mate for ideas as to what is important to him or her.
3. Look over the 6 parts listed on the handout for the traditional marriage vows and use this as a guide to help you reconstruct your vows. Can you put them in your own words that will have special meaning to you?
4. Given the different roles that God gives the man and the woman in marriage, look over the handout "The Most Important Words about Husband and Wife". Select from the scriptures some key concepts that reflect your unique roles that God would have you to commit to each other.
5. Condense all this into a brief list that you can both memorize and say to each other on a regular basis!! Periodic rewrites of the commitment statement will make it stronger and more meaningful.

Congratulations – you have done it!

Now write it out on a card, commit it to memory, and say it to each other regularly. You will crave and enjoy hearing your mate talk about the special kind of love you both share as you repeat your promises to each other. And let the kids overhear you say it or say it in front of them – it will teach them valuable lessons about marriage!!

The Most Important Words About Husband & Wife

“As therefore God’s picked representatives, purified and beloved, put on that nature which is merciful in action, kindly in heart, humble in mind. Accept life, and be most patient and tolerant with one another, always ready to forgive if you have a difference with anyone. Forgive as freely as the Lord has forgiven you. And, above everything else, be truly loving, for love binds all the virtues together in perfection. Let the peace of Christ guide all your decisions, for you were called to live as one, united body; and always be thankful. Let the full richness of Christ’s teaching find a home among you...

~ Colossians 3:12-16a (Phillips)

“Let all bitterness and indignation and wrath [passion, rage, bad temper] and resentment [anger, animosity] and quarreling [brawling, clamor, contention] and slander [evil speaking, abusive, and blasphemous language] be banished from you, with all malice [spite, ill-will, or baseness of any kind].

~ Ephesians 4:31 (Amplified)

“Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”

~ Romans 15:7 (New American Standard)

“Be subject to one another [“fit in with” each other] out of reverence for Christ...You WIVES must learn to adapt yourselves to your husbands, as you submit yourselves to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church and savior to the body. The willing subjection of the church to Christ should be reproduced in the submission of wives to their husbands in everything.”

~ Ephesians 5:21 (Amplified)

“In a similar way you wives should be submissive to your own husbands, so that if any of them will not be persuaded by the message, they may without message be won over by the conduct of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.”

~ 1 Peter 3:1,2 (New Berkeley)

“...Let the wife see that she respects and reverences her husband, that she notices him, regards him, honors him, prefers him, venerates him and esteems him; and that she defers to him, praises him, and loves and admires him exceedingly.

~ Ephesians 5:33 (Amplified)

*“For this cause a man shall **leave** his father and his mother, and shall **cleave** to his wife; and they shall become **one** flesh.”*

~ Gen. 2:24 (New American Standard)

*“Consequently they are no longer **two**, but **one** flesh. What therefore **God** has joined together, **let no man separate.**”*

~ Matthew 19:6 (New American Standard)

*“**Take heed** then, to your spirit, and **let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth.** For I **hate** divorce, says the Lord...”*

~ Malachi 2:15b, 16a (New American Standard)

*“The **HUSBAND** must give his wife the **same sort of love** that **Christ** gave to the church, when **He sacrificed Himself for her**...So men ought to give their wives the love they naturally have for their **own bodies**. The love a man gives his wife is the extending of his love for **himself** to enfold **her**. Nobody ever hated his own body; he **feeds** it and **looks after** it.”*

~ Ephesians 5:25,28-29a (Phillips)

*“...Let each man of you [without exception] **love** his wife [as being in a sense] his **very own** self.”*

~ Ephesians 5:33a (Amplified)

*“Husbands, **love** your wives – be **affectionate** and **sympathetic** with them – and do **not be harsh** or **bitter** or **resentful** toward them.”*

~ Colossians 3:19 (Amplified)

*“...You husbands need to live **understandingly** with your wives as with a **weaker** vessel, rendering them honor as **joint** heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your **praying** may not be **hindered.**”*

~ 1 Peter 3:7 (New Berkeley)

*“Love endures long and is **patient and kind**; love never is **envious** nor boils over with **jealousy**; it is **not boastful** or **vainglorious**, does not display itself **haughtily**. It is **not conceited**, arrogant and inflated with pride; it is **not rude** [unmannerly], and **does not act unbecomingly**. Love [God’s love in us] does **not** insist on its **own rights** or its own way, for it is not self-seeking. It is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it **takes no account of the evil done to it** - pays no attention to a suffered wrong. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love **bears up under anything and everything** that comes, is **ever ready to believe the best of every person**, its hopes are fadeless under **all** circumstances, and it **endures everything** [without weakening]. **Love never fails** - never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end... And so faith, hope, love abide; [faith, conviction, and belief respecting man’s relation to God and divine things; hope, joyful and confident expectation or eternal salvation; love, true affection for God and man, growing out of God’s love for us and in us], these three, but the **greatest of these is love**.*

~ 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13 (Amplified)

*“Do two walk **together**, except they...have **agreed**?”*

- Amos 3:3 (Amplified)

*“**Two are better than one** because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.”*

~ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (New American Standard)

*“So let us then definitely aim for and eagerly pursue what makes for **harmony** and for **mutual upbuilding** [edification and development] of one another.”*

~ Romans 14:19 (Amplified)

*“...Being of the **same mind**, maintaining the **same love, united**, intent on **one** purpose. Do nothing from **selfishness** or **empty conceit**, but with **humility of mind** let each of you **regard the other as more important than himself**; do not merely look out for your **own** personal interests, but also for the interests of **others**.”*

~ Philippians 2:2-4 (New American Standard)

*“Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do**, do **all** to the glory of God.”*

~ I Corinthians 10:31 (New American Standard)

TEN KEYS TO A CLOSE AND LOVING MARRIAGE

Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

By Brent Hunter

Introduction

- A. Two ideas to remember about hostility:
 - 1. It is natural. Motion (growth) requires some friction.
 - a. Marriages are made in heaven, but so are *thunder and lightening storms!*
 - b. Marriage is similar to the merging of two great rivers
 - 1) Merging into ONE two different lives, backgrounds, habits, etc.
 - 2) Trying to share the same time, space & resources
 - 3) What happens when rivers merge together – RAPIDS! WHITE WATER.
 - 4) It is only natural that the blending of lives together will produce some friction, disagreements and conflicts.
 - 2. Since it is inevitable, you must agree to settle differences "agreeably." **It is the #1 interpersonal skill necessary for long-term marital stability, so make sure you master it!**
- B. Handled properly conflict can be a good thing. Learn to view "*fight*s" not as tragedies, but opportunities!
 - 1. Venting personal frustrations through lips which have learned how to do so can serve a wonderful purpose.
 - 2. Skill and self-control **can** turn potentially destructive squabbles into "*fair fights*" which solve problems and yield positive results!
 - 3. Remember: The secret to a good marriage is not finding the right person, but *learning to fight well with the person you have found!*

Key #1—BE DRIVEN BY LOVE!

- A. This is the **one principle** from which all the others spring (we're laying the foundation). Husbands and wives are to love each other, **Eph. 5:25; Titus 2:4**.
 - 1. That means more than just having warm feelings of affection for each other. It means I always want to act in their best interest – always seeking their good and never doing anything to hurt them.
 - 2. It's not just an emotion; love is a decision to behave in a certain way. When Paul defined love, he described it as **a way of behaving**, I Cor. 13:4ff.
 - 3. If we want to manage conflict well, then we need to be sure that our actions are **always driven by love**, I must never do anything thing to hurt. I should always be acting in the best interest of my spouse.
 - a. Love needs to be the atmosphere that fills our homes and pulses through our marriage conflicts.
 - b. Before we speak or act, we need to ask, "Am I acting with love?"
 - c. Folks, that's not just a good idea, that's what God demands.
- B. Now, the other principles spring from this one. If you want to act with love, then before you can address a conflict, you first need to...

Key #2 -- DO YOUR THING TO COOL OFF! (Eph 4:26; Prov 29:8, 30:33, 17:27)

- A. Never be ashamed of anger--it is natural, not sinful. The only thing you need to regret is handling it badly. Prov 29:22 "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."
- B. Since you are literally in a state of **intoxication** when your "*fuse is lit*," reduce the emotional state before a discussion begins.
 - 1. "*There is more hope for a fool than a man of quick temper*" (Prov 29:20).
 - 2. "*...and a wrathful man stirs up contention*" (Prov 15:18).
 - 3. **IF YOU ARGUE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY, YOU'RE APT TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE!**
- C. If we are driven by love, we will do whatever it takes to cool off **FIRST!**
 - 1. Engage in some physical activity
 - 2. Go for a walk
 - 3. Take a hot bath
 - 4. Pray alone--it calms the spirit so you can see the situation more clearly.
- D. The key here is this: **Rule our passions, rather than allowing our passions to rule us!**
 - 1. Prov 16:32 "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, then he who captures a city."
 - 2. **No one likes living with a volcano** – we must cool off and get anger under control.
- D. Afterwards, you may just decide to forget the whole thing! (Prov 17:9, 19:11)
If not, proceed to Rule #3!

Key #3--ARGUE WITH THE RIGHT PERSON (Prov 3:30, 25:9)

- A. Remember to express frustration/anger toward the person you are really angry with and **not some innocent party.**
 - 1. Be honest. Husbands, how many times are you angry and frustrated at something at work, and the poor wife suddenly can't do anything right?
 - 2. Similarly, wives can be frustrated after dealing with the kids all day and consequently are ready for war as soon as their husbands come in the door?
 - 3. We all do it – and it is grossly unfair!
Prov 3:30 "Do not accuse a man for no reason – when he has done you no harm!"
- B. Beating up on innocent third parties is called "*dumping*."
 - 1. **Dumping is cruel**, it allows you to **escape** the real person or issue, and **resolves nothing**. It only makes matters worse!
 - 2. So, have the courage to **make sure** you are bringing your complaint to the right person.

Key #4--ARGUE ABOUT THE RIGHT THING (Prov 15:7, 28)

- A. Seems obvious too, but how many marriage conflicts are really about an **unspoken agenda?** Many arguments are fought about the **wrong subjects.**
 - 1. Ex. Husband criticizes his wife's housekeeping when the real complaint is a lack of intimacy in the relationship!
 - 2. Ex. Wife criticizes her husband's tardiness when the real issue is she is feeling neglected?

3. We must be **in touch with our feelings** and ask, "*Am I really angry because of this or is it something else?*"
4. Sometimes our arguments solve nothing because we are not talking about the right thing.
5. A good indication of a hidden agenda is when OUR ANGER IS OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE OFFENSE.

B. The issue here is one of Honesty, Eph 4:25.

1. We must learn to be upfront about our frustrations and stop working with a hidden agenda.
2. Not only is it dishonest and unfair, but arguing about the wrong thing does nothing to solve the problem!
3. Jn 8:32 Jesus said: "*The truth will set you FREE.*" You will not have an *authentic* successful marriage unless you are honest.

Key #5--ARGUE AT THE RIGHT TIME (Ecc 3:1-11; Prov 25:8).

- A. Both must agree the time is right before beginning. Something as simple as timing can make a big difference in how we resolve our marriage conflicts.
- B. Here are some times ***not*** to argue:
 1. **In front of company.** To do so is *degrading*. *Violates trust*.
 2. **When there is not enough time to finish.** Have you ever found yourself in the middle of big argument right before company arrives or it is time to go to services?
 3. **When either party is hungry or tired**
 4. **Just as one or both spouses come home from work**
 - a. 80% of marital fights occur between 5-6 pm
 - b. Instead of celebrating being together, we dump on each other. That is a bad time.
 - c. Good rule of thumb: Do not discuss problems until **after** dinner.

Key #6--DON'T BE HISTORICAL (Eph 4:26).

- A. Man complains, "My wife always gets historical." Amused, his friend replied, "I think you mean hysterical." "No, I mean historical," he said. When we argue she reminds me of everything I've ever done wrong."
 1. Why do we drag up the past? Often, we are losing an argument so past blunders are brought up in order to gain some advantage.
 2. Example: "I might be wrong now, but you are just as guilty." This moves us in the wrong direction!
- B. Be committed to **not bring up past fights**.
 1. "*He that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends.*" Prov 17:9
 2. Bringing up items that you thought were resolved **breeds mistrust** and a **lack of confidence** in the relationship.
- C. The real issue is one of **FORGIVENESS**. Eph 4:31-32
 1. Once an argument is resolved, it is to be **buried and never resurrected**. Don't bury the hatchet with the handle left sticking out of the ground.
 2. Before ending an argument, make sure it is closed for both parties.
 - a. If it's not, don't drop it until it is resolved.
 - b. But when it is finished, then **both must agree is over**. Period.
 3. Paul said that in true love, I Cor 13:5 one does not "*Take into account a wrong suffered.*" Love means we stop keeping the books.

Key #7 – DON'T RAISE YOUR VOICE.

- A. That is tough if increasing the decibel level is how you grew up! To some, a fight isn't a fight without some yelling!
1. Truth is, loudness does not make things better; and it does not communicate love. In fact, it's often when we start getting louder that hurtful things come out of our mouth.
 2. Yelling at someone is *disrespectful and degrading*. It certainly is not the golden rule.
 3. Harsh, loud words are **not consistent with the love that should drive our actions**. Paul said that love leads us to be "kind," (I Cor 13.4).
- B. **Listen to Solomon:** Prov 15:1, ***"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."***
1. Here is the key: "Lower your voice one octave, rather than raising it two."
 2. Make a point as the heat goes up in a discussion, to take the volume down.

Key #8--AVOID NAME CALLING (Prov 14:22, 27:4)

- A. There is no excuse for hurling insults or profane names at loved ones.
1. Abusing intimacy and resorting to *"knife twisting"* are especially harmful.
 2. Thoughtless names (labels) puncture deeply and are remembered for years.
- B. Three reasons why personal verbal assaults are so destructive:
1. They throw an argument off-track and does not lead to a resolution.
 2. They focus attention on the mate, not on solving the problem.
 3. They hurt the relationship and **ruin mutual respect**.
- C. Three suggestions:
1. Tackle the problem, not the person.
 2. Replace **"you"** statements with **"I"** statements. (Instead of *"You lazy bum!"* say, *"I feel you're not working as hard as you could."*)
 3. Be determined to only use words that edify! Eph 4:29 "Let no unwholesome words proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so it will give grace to those who hear."
- D. Insults, sarcasm, filthy and profane names are sometimes used with our spouse that we would never even consider using with anyone else!
1. We should treat our families the best, not the worst!
 2. I Cor 13 tells us love is patient, kind, does not act unbecomingly.
- E. Name calling is counter-productive because it often creates a problem that is bigger than the original problem that provoked the argument!
1. Careless insults can create pain for years to come. How absurd!
 2. Solomon in Prov 12:8 "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
 3. Words are powerful. If we want to manage our conflicts well, we must use words that edify!

Key #9--AVOID "STAMP-SAVING" (Prov 10:18).

- A. Some save up grievances like stamps, waiting until the book is full to cash it in.
1. Ex. Unloading other complaints in rapid succession during an argument over something else.

2. Be sure to only discuss one disagreement at a time.
- B. Don't let things build up! Foster the type of relationship where you can express irritations as they occur.
- C. Stamp-saving...
 1. Overwhelms the poor mate who is bombarded with so much all at once.
 2. Is disconcerting to the one who discovers that true feelings weren't revealed earlier.
 3. Breeds both a lack of trust as well as confidence.
- D. **The cure:**
 1. Express displeasure at the earliest convenient time.
 2. Mention it next time it occurs (if a recurring fault), and not during an argument about something else or choose to forget it forever!

Key #10: Don't Focus on Winning. (Eph 5:21) "Submit yourselves one to the other in the fear of Christ."

- A. If we're not careful, our marriage conflicts can take on a life of their own.
 1. The focus can become **winning the argument rather than reaching a resolution.**
 2. When that happens, *everything changes.*
 - a. We begin to use every trick in the book so we can win.
 - b. We refuse to admit any wrong or acknowledge any validity in what the other person is saying, less we give them some advantage.
 - c. We begin to pick a part every little detail of what is said, i.e. "I don't forget to take out the trash all the time; I did once last year!"
 - d. The conversation begins to be dotted with challenges, i.e. "prove it" or "give me one example when I did that."
 3. When we reach that point, **no one will come out a winner.** We may win the battle, but ultimately lose the war...and the "good will" and mutual respect we both need and desire for a good relationship.
- B. What we need to remember is that marriage is a ***cooperative enterprise.***
 1. If my goal is to **win and get my way**, then I'm going to make my spouse miserable.
 2. The goal should be to **reach a solution that will please God** and that both of us can live with. A good marriage provides for some "give and take."
 3. I've got to be unselfish and take into account the needs of my spouse as we try to work this out, Phil. 2:3-4.
 4. In I Cor. 13:5 Paul says that love "does not seek it's own."
 5. We need to accept our share of the blame and never resort to threats or give ultimatums. We certainly should never use sex or money as weapon.
 6. We need to reach a conclusion that if possible will suit both, not just one. To do otherwise may help us win more arguments, but in the end, **we'll lose the war – and perhaps our marriage too!**

CONCLUSION:

- A. Take these homes and make a pact to live by God's rules when managing conflicts.
- B. Mature partners know that differences are not wrong. Conflicts can be worked out fairly, amiably, and lovingly.

- C. Both must be honest, so a wall of silence will not be built and drive them apart.
- D. Marriage run by God's principles can be a little bit of Paradise left to bless both man and woman in a sinful world.
- E. Remember: *"Marriages are made in heaven, but the maintenance contract must be maintained on earth."*
- F. God has the answers for our every need; do you rely and depend upon Him for help?



~~ End ~~

SUCCESSFUL QUARRELING

Introduction:

- A. Conflict is inevitable. “A fellow who says he has never had an argument with his wife is apt to lie about other things, too.”
- B. If you have a partnership, you have to work on things together. You will have disagreements due to different backgrounds and opinions you both possess.
 - 1. Marriage is two *becoming* one and the whole time you are trying to determine which one it is!
 - 2. One fellow said, “The nice thing about being single is that all the decisions are unanimous.”
- C. This subject is vitally important because the number one criterion necessary for long-term marital stability and happiness is **the ability to resolve conflict successfully!**
 - 1. The positives initially draw people together, but the negatives (and how they are handled) ultimately pull people apart.
 - 2. Research has found that there are 4 factors that if not dealt with are precursors of divorce: **CRITICISM, CONTEMPT, DEFENSIVENESS, AND WITHDRAWAL**. These are the 4 emotional land mines that will blast apart and destroy almost any marriage if they become chronic. Notice: They all deal with conflict resolution!
 - 3. This is critically important, yet so often neglected.

I. GENERAL POINTERS

- A. Be *careful*...One zinger erases twenty positives!
 - 1. Song: “Angry words, oh, let them never...” holds good advice.
 - 2. Hurtful, harsh, unkind comments can become huge withdrawals from the love bank and do serious damage to the relationship.
- B. When in doubt, *wait*.
 - 1. You can always go back and say it later, but once it is out the hurt is not so easily taken back.
 - 2. One secret to a happy marriage: Let three things go every day...unsaid!
- C. Relationships have *momentum*. They have an ebb and flow to them that is either positive or negative.
 - 1. Things tend to be like a snowball rolling downhill. This works both to your advantage and disadvantage.
 - 2. When things start to go in the wrong direction, one or both parties need to recognize it and say, “Let’s get off this negative cycle and stop hurting each other. Let’s instead apologize, put it behind us, and start doing things to show love and build each other up, instead of tear each other down!”
- D. Beware of the modern *egalitarian marriage*.
 - 1. People quarrel more and more today than ever before because the traditional roles have been discarded. There is **no final arbitrator of disputes**.
 - 2. No other organization on earth functions this way, but modern marriages attempt to do so. The result is that relationships deteriorate into power plays.

3. Blurred roles and **no more established rules** put untold strain on modern American marriages.

II. WHAT DO MOST COUPLES ARGUE ABOUT?

- A. There are **5 traditional areas** of conflict that all couples have argued about as far back as such things have been studied.
 1. Sex
 2. Children (whether or when to have them and how to raise them)
 3. Money
 4. In-laws (“What’s more important to you, your parents or me?”)
 5. Tremendous Trifles -- small, theoretically inconsequential things that drive most people to the brink of mayhem, divorce, or screaming meemies!
 - a. A trifle is something small, but it can be a tremendous source of conflict.
 - b. They are usually things one never thought about before marriage.
 - c. Examples: Dog-earring pages of a book, leaving hairs in the sink, squeezing the toothpaste “wrong”, eating styles, sleeping habits, etc.
 1. One man on his 25th wedding anniversary calculated he had kicked the sheets loose about 7,500 times, and that this had taken him at least a minute each night.
 2. Therefore, he figured he had wasted 125 hours of his life since he had gotten married fighting with his wife over the sheets!
 - d. If the relationship already has problems, these can become the focus. However, if the relationship is solid, they are usually just irritants that will not destroy the marriage.
- B. **New top issues!**
 1. Who does the domestic chores? (Women are often resentful if they have to work full-time and then pull a double shift at home, too.)
 2. How do we spend our precious and limited leisure time?

III. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAPPY AND UNHAPPY COUPLES?

- A. Ironically, both happy and unhappy couples argue about the *same things*. The number of disagreements and how often spouses disagree is not a significant factor in marital satisfaction. The difference is in *how* the parties argue.
 1. Happy couples argue as if the issue is *external to the relationship*.
 2. Unhappy couples get personal and “hit below the belt” which attacks the *person* rather than the *problem*.
 - a. Learning to apply the “Seven Rules for Fighting Fairly” is important.
 - b. Following these guidelines will prevent harming the relationship as disagreements are worked out.
- B. Mudd and Hay, two social scientists, found that even after a particular area of conflict or tremendous trifle was fixed in a marriage, it did not solve the problem..
 1. The real problem was the *relationship itself*. Other surface issues were just symptoms of the relationship problems.
 2. **Serious relationship problems** were revealed such as:

- a. Feeling lonely and unloved
 - b. Feeling misunderstood (can't communicate)
 - c. Losing perspective (forgetting what spouses once meant to each other)
 - d. Feeling rejected and unworthy (partner causing a self-esteem problem instead, being a solution)
3. Time was wasted focusing on peripheral issues instead of on the *relationship*.
- C. Happy couples are very careful to not even think, much less express, the “**fatal thought**” which is two-fold: “This means **you don't love me** anymore, so therefore maybe we ought to **divorce.**”

IV. WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS DURING CONFLICT THAT MAKES IT SO **CRUCIAL TO THE RELATIONSHIP?**

A. Willard Harley in **His Needs, Her Needs** explains it well when he talks about **THE THREE STAGES OF MARITAL INTIMACY.**

1. **Stage one:** You have become INTIMATE and feel close, so you tell each other *everything*.
 2. **Stage two:** You begin to have disagreements and enter into CONFLICT. This is not bad as long as you can *resolve the conflict so you can restore intimacy*. Couples go from stage one to stage two all the time. The key is to always return to stage one. Paul admonishes, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” Eph 4:26
 3. **Stage three:** You remain in conflict and cannot resolve it. You begin to feel frustrated and misunderstood. The parties begin to hurt each other and the relationship. Emotional turmoil becomes the norm. Eventually one or both parties give up and erect deadly walls of defense. He/she enters into **WITHDRAWAL.**
- B. **The withdrawal decision...is a very serious one.** It means you have given up and decided that the way to cope with the hurt is to *emotionally disconnect* yourself from your spouse. This has far-reaching consequences.
1. You become emotionally and spiritually divorced from each other. You wake up one day and decide you “do not love him” or her anymore. The woman especially dreads physical contact because she cannot give of herself in this state.
 2. The wall you have built keeps out the good as well as the bad. This explains why even thoughtful, positive things don't mean a thing and will not be allowed as “deposits in your love bank” until you feel **SAFE** enough to let the wall down.
 3. **Warning: WHEN THE OPEN SHARING OF FEELINGS STOPS, PASSION DIES!** Romantic love is lost!
 4. The irony about romantic love is that when you have it, you think you can never lose it; and when you lose it, you think you can never regain it. Both are untrue and naive.
 - a. Romantic love *can be regained* if the parties understand what has happened to them. **Learning how to resolve conflict** will let both parties feel **SAFE** enough to share feelings so the walls can come down.
 - b. Trust is re-established and over time the old feelings of **intimacy and romance return!!**

- c. The key to **preventing affairs** is to commit to full disclosure about hard topics. Affairs happen when walls (secrets) are created between spouses and windows of intimacy with someone else. Deep sharing on a feeling level is what causes someone to fall in love.
- d. However, if there is **nothing important your spouse doesn't know** about, an affair will almost never happen.

Conclusion:

- A. If you stay in stage one (intimacy) and learn how to avoid stage three (withdrawal), you will remain happily married!
- B. To avoid the wall, learn how to resolve conflict constructively. Have courage to not avoid tough topics to begin with. If a wall is already up, bravely go back and work through the conflict in order to regain the intimacy you both desire.
- C. In order to accomplish this, you need guidelines and rules to follow so that you feel safe. That is the reason for and the importance of the next lesson on “Rules for Fighting Fairly”.
- D. Following these principles from the start can prevent a wall from forming and keep the marriage strong. However, if the wall has been there for years, and bitterness and anonymity have crept in, then a third party counselor is necessary to help you work through it!
- E. It is painful and a bit scary, but it is **well worth it**. After a couple comes through the crisis, they are often better off and closer than they have ever been before! Just like with a bone that breaks. Nature heals it back stronger than it was before the break.
- F. When folks tell you it's no use and that their love is “dead”, give them HOPE. Remind them that we serve a God who specializes in the *resurrection from the dead!*

SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DIVORCE

Symptoms of **spiritual divorce** are indicators that a separation is *developing* and needs to be confronted through dialogue. They are “*signs*” and are present at some time in every marriage. **Take about 20 minutes apiece for each to privately do this exercise then exchange your answers and discuss together.** Don’t allow fear to prevent you from being open with each other.

Instructions:

- A. **Read through all the symptoms. Which symptoms are currently present** in your marriage? Place a check mark next to each one.
 - B. Re-read those that are checked. Select **2 or 3 you feel most strongly about** right now.
 - C. **Write and describe your feelings** about those 2 or 3. If time allows, continue on to the others checked.
1. Prolonged **moods of sadness** in our marriage and in the family
 2. Feelings of **disillusionment, boredom, and emptiness**
 3. **Dissatisfaction**
 4. **Indifference** to each other’s problems
 5. Occasions of **coldness** in our relationship
 6. **Avoiding or refusing sexual relationship**
 7. No interest in things of the other – **lack of sensitivity**
 8. Lack of **kindness, tenderness, and small courtesies**
 9. **Failure to take time to think deeply**
 10. Feelings of **insecurity and mutual distrust**
 11. **More confidence in a third person** other than with each other
 12. Lack of **dialogue and intimate communication**
 13. Most **communication mechanical, routine, and surface**
 14. Feelings of **being alone and not understood**
 15. Frequent **bad humor and tension**
 16. Feeling **used**
 17. Frequent **quarrels:** in private, or in front of children or others
 18. **Ridicule** of each other
 19. **Superficial life and continuous escapes,** together or alone, such as liquor, drugs, TV, compulsive socializing
 20. Attitude of **selfishness**
 21. **Insults, rude words, and sarcasm**
 22. **Avoidance of situations that deeply need attention**
 23. Personal **relationship with God causing conflict**
 24. Lack of **appreciation**
 25. Lack or **loss of a sense of wonder**
 26. Lack of **faith in love and marriage**
 27. **Insensitive teasing**
 28. **Nagging**
 29. Lack of **planning things together**



THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

The Ultimate Blessing

INTERACTIVE OUTLINE

Saturday October 15th
 Scripture reading: Eph 4:32

Class session 2:15 p.m.
 Speaker: Brent Hunter

INTRODUCTION:

- A. "For thou, Lord, art good and r_____ to forgive" (Ps 86:5).
- B. The truth "sets us free" from the burden/guilt of our sin (Jn 8:32).

I. WHAT IS THE DIVINE STANDARD OF FORGIVENESS?

- A. He will "hurl our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19).
- B. He will "remove our t_____ as far as the east is from the west" (Ps 103:12).

II. WHAT ARE THE TWO DEFINITIONS OF BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS?

- A. "An attitude of heart which restores the offender to the former state."
- B. "To cease to feel r_____ against, or to seek payback."

III. FORGIVENESS IS A COMMAND, AND NOT OPTIONAL.

- A. "Forgive one another, even as Christ has forgiven you (Col 3:13).
- B. "If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents, forgive him (Lk 17:3).
- C. Forgiveness is c_____ on repentance (I Jn 1:9, Acts 2:38).

IV. WHAT ARE THE HORIZONTAL IMPLICATIONS OF ALL THIS?

- A. One can forgive and not forget the sin happened (Heb 8:12, Isa 43:18).
- B. We can "*distinctly remember that the sin ever happened.*"
- C. Even if someone does not show remorse, our attitude must be to hold no malice or bitterness in our hearts against them (Acts 7:60, Matt 5:44).
- D. Forgiveness is to be **un**_____ (Matt 18:21-22).
- E. If we won't forgive others, GOD won't forgive us (Matt 6:15)!
 - 1. We will receive mercy based upon how merciful we are (Matt 7:1-2).
 - 2. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matt 5:7).
 - 3. This is a matter of heaven and hell!

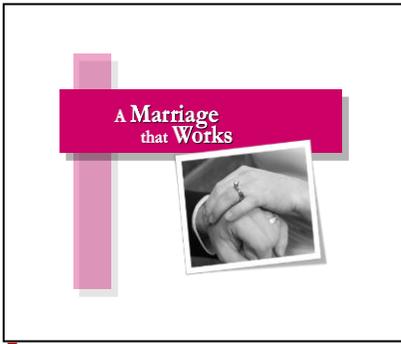
CONCLUSION:

- A. Our sins against one another are small in comparison to the sins we have committed against God (Matt 18:23-35).
- B. Remember the **g**_____ rule, how have you felt when someone has refused to forgive you (Matt 7:12)?
- C. Oh Lord, increase our faith and help us to truly forgive others, even as we have been forgiven by God.

NOTES

SCRAMBLED ANSWERS:

resentment
 transgressions
 conditional
 unlimited
 ready
 golden



A Marriage that Works (Part one)

Keeping Love and Passion Alive

INTERACTIVE OUTLINE

Sunday morning: 9:30 a.m.

Scripture Reading: I Cor 13:4-8

October 16th, 2022

Speaker: Brent Hunter

Intro:

A. The key to a successful marriage is for both parties to learn to care and protect each other in practical ways.

1. The caring involves *meeting each other's n_____*.
2. The protecting involves avoiding *behaviors that hurt/offend*.

B. The handout entitled "Key concepts that make a marriage work" explains this in detail. Today, I introduce some basic principles.

I. WHAT IS LOVE, AND WHAT IS THE LOVE BANK?

A. Love is not a **f_____**, but an act of the will and how we treat someone.

1. I Cor 13:4-8 is the Divine definition of love, and it equals 8 verbs.
2. How you feel is determined by the love **b_____**.

B. If there are positive exchanges it equals deposits of love units, and if there are negative exchanges it equals **w_____**.

1. When the love bank is **full** you have **romantic love**.
2. When the love bank is **empty** there is **no feeling**.
3. When it is overdrawn, there is **anger and bitterness**.

II. WHAT IS THE ROMANTIC MYTH?

A. Once you possess romantic love you can never lose it, and once you lose it, it can never be regained.

B. This is untrue and unbiblical. It can be **r_____**! There is **HOPE**.

1. "All things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).
2. Our God specializes in the resurrection of the dead, including resurrecting a love that is dead. *Romantic love can be reborn!*

III. HAPPY COUPLES LEARN TO DEVELOP THE RIGHT HABITS.

A. We must "discipline ourselves unto godliness" (I Tim 4:7).

B. "Make level the paths of thy feet and let all thy ways be established" (Prov 4:26).

C. Focus on avoiding **h_____** that make withdrawals and practicing those that please the other person. This requires good communication!

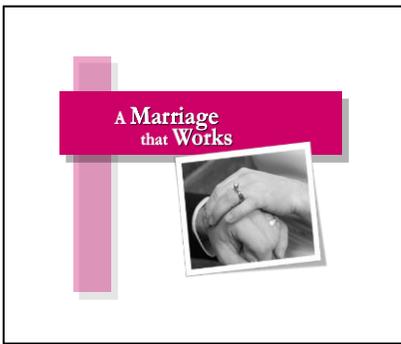
Conclusion:

A. They key is to first avoid the love busters because they are what produce walls of resentment.

B. We will discuss love busters and what they are in Part two.

ANSWERS:

needs habits
feeling
bank
withdrawals
reborn



A Marriage that Works

Overcoming Love Busters

INTERACTIVE OUTLINE

Sunday Morning: Worship Period
Scripture Reading: I Cor 13:4-8

Sunday, October 16th, 2022
Speaker: Brent Hunter

Intro:

- A. We established in lesson one the principle of the **LOVE BANK**.
- B. Today we will look at overcoming **Love Busters**.

I. WHAT IS A LOVE BUSTER?

- A. It is a marital **h**_____ that offends and creates walls of *resentment* which creates *emotional distance*.
- B. It is repeated behavior that causes the spouse to be unhappy and therefore **w**_____ love units.

II. THE SIX TYPICAL LOVE BUSTERS.

- A. **A**_____ outbursts.
 - 1. Harshness creates disrespect.
 - 2. "He that is quick-tempered acts foolishly" (Prov 14:17).
- B. **D**_____ judgments.
 - 1. We are to judge righteous judgments (Jn 7:24).
 - 2. Must avoid impugning motives/forcing opinions.
- C. *Annoying behaviors* which irritate the other party.
- D. *Selfish demands* which choke out love.
- E. *Dishonesty*, which breaks down trust (Col 3:9-10).
- F. **I**_____ behavior.

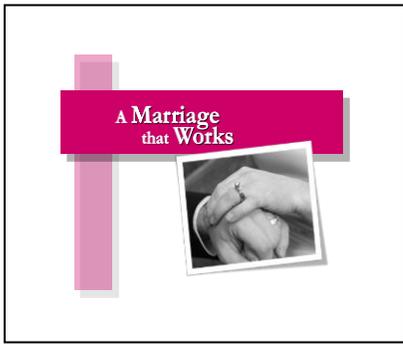
III. SOLUTIONS:

- A. Identify the "why" and avoid "triggers."
- B. Develop alternative behaviors. **Pray!**

Conclusion:

- A. Restore an atmosphere of trust and keep walls down.
- B. You can then become free to meet each other's needs.

ANSWERS:
Independent
Disrespectful
Angry
habit
withdraws



A Marriage that Works (Part 3)

Meeting Each Other's Needs

INTERACTIVE OUTLINE

Sunday afternoon: 1:00 p.m. Part three

Scripture Reading: I Cor 13:4-8

October 16th, 2022

Speaker: Brent Hunter

Intro:

- A. In part two we established the principle of the *love busters*.
- B. In part three, we look at **making deposits and meeting needs**.
 1. Both need to practice the g_____ rule on a deep level.
 2. Remember: Needs are *gender specific*.

I. FIVE TYPICAL NEEDS OF A WOMAN.

- A. **Affection** (Rom 12:10). Not the same as sex.
- B. **Conversation** (Eph 4:29). Be quick to l_____ (Jas 1:19).
- C. **Financial support** (I Tim 5:18).
- D. **Family commitment** (Eph 6:4). H_____ = "house band."
- E. **Honesty and openness** (Prov 12:19).

II. FIVE TYPICAL NEEDS OF A MAN.

- A. **Admiration and respect** (Eph 5:33).
- B. **Sexual commitment** (I Cor 7:5).
- C. **Physical a_____** (Judges 14:1-3).
- D. **R_____ companionship** (Ecc 3:1).
- E. **Domestic support** (I Tim 5:14, Titus 2:4-5).

III. SOLUTIONS:

- A. Rate your needs and communicate them honestly.
- B. Work on becoming an e_____ at meeting your spouse's needs.

Conclusion:

- A. Jesus died on the cross. He loved and sacrificed to meet our needs.
- B. We need to follow His example and "walk in His steps" (I Peter 2:21).

ANSWERS:

golden
expert
recreational
husband
listen

REFERENCES:

I highly recommend any of Willard Harley's books. Especially recommended are: *His Needs, Her Needs, Love Busters, Fall in Love, Stay in Love, and I Promise*. For further details go to the excellent website: www.marriagebuilders.com.

You will also find hundreds of audio files and scores of lessons on marriage and family that I have done while at the Kirkland church at www.kirklandchurchofChrist.com I have compiled a revised summary of Harley's work that I use with couples.

NOTE: Be aware that Willard Harley does not quote the Bible though he uses many Biblical principles. His material is very practical and works! However, be careful. He does not believe that the man is the head of the house or in Biblical submission. This is subtle but it comes out in some of his principles and applications. Also, he does not discuss meeting spiritual needs. A huge omission! Like any book, read his carefully and of course reject anything that does not square 100% with scripture.

My favorite book for men is: "If Only He Knew." by Gary Smalley. It is a classic that explains to a man how he can best love his wife from her view point like Christ loves the church.

My favorite book for women is: "Creative Counterpart" by Linda Dillow.

The **Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts** by Gary Chapman is also excellent. See www.thefivelovelanguages.com

I also highly recommend: **"Love and Respect"** (The Love she most desires, the Respect he desperately needs) by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs. This book is published by Focus on the Family and is very practical and biblically based. There is also a good set of DVD's that go with it.

"Love life for every married couple" by Dr. Ed. Wheat is an easy read and has great Biblically based material in it that is good for both the husband and the wife.

Dr. John Gray's best selling book: "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" has some very good insights. I especially like chapter 11 on "How to communicate difficult feelings." Really helpful practical material.

Two books on the sexual relationship that are very good and tastefully done are **"The Act of Marriage"** by Tim LaHaye, **"The Act of Marriage after 40"** updated by Tim LaHaye, and **"Intended for Pleasure"** by Dr. Ed Wheat.

"Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families" by Dr. Steven Covey is very practical and character building!

Most of these books can be found cheaply at Amazon.com and are available in paperback and in used condition. No need to spend a small fortune to acquire excellent resources and helps in this vital area!