

STRAIGHT TALK FOR MEN

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TO DEATH DO US APART

By Melvin L. Latimer

Genesis 2:22-25 tells us that God took the rib of a man and made woman. After the extraction of Adam's rib, man and woman became bone of bone and flesh of flesh. It was here through this biological process that God instituted the first marriage agreement. Here God established an institution (marriage) that a man and woman would enter into until death do they part. Marriage is one of the ultimate fulfillments of God's divine plan for mankind. As a result of sin, the institution of marriage has been under attack by the forces of hell. Sin ultimately destroys what God intends to last a lifetime. Sin also creates another demonic force in the earth called divorce (the separation of a man and woman) stopping them from achieving God's divine plan for their lives.

In the 1980s divorce destroyed millions of homes affecting the married couple as well as all associated with their union. In one year there was a reported 1.5 million cases of divorce. Of the 2,487,000 weddings performed in 1980, 25% involved a spouse who had previously been married at least once. Since 1920 the divorce rate in this country has increased an alarming 1,420%. The baby boomers are divorcing at a rate twice that of their parents. In the United States more than a million kids a year experience the devastating shock of marital separation and divorce. Sociologist Andrew Cherlin of John Hopkins University reports, "Today's children are the first generation in this country's history who think divorce and separation are normal features of the family." Another study found that 42% of children of divorced parents reported not having contact with their fathers for a year or longer since the divorce.

Friends, the demon of divorce is attacking the family on all sides even in the church. Never before have more preachers of the gospel and shepherds of flocks walked away from their families taking the cowardly way out. The church and community needs a new remnant of individuals and couples who will stay and fight. Al Green expresses these

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words in one of his infamous songs, “Let’s stay together, loving you forever ever, whether good or bad, happy or sad, Let’s stay together! So I’m saying to the men of the household develop some staying power.

If you made a vow and promise before God and man that for better or worse, through sickness and health, then employ the Lord Almighty’s help and stick with your vow. Be a man that sticks by his commitments and stands by his promises. When your marriage loses its spark – rekindle the flame. When parenting seems too overwhelming – run to your Daddy. When the job is crushing you – run to the Rock that is higher. When your children let you down – pick them up. When your wife is waging war – declare peace and hold on. When you feel all is lost – remain in the game until your morning comes. Announce to the devil and the world that I am recommitting to my vows – until death do us part!

Understand Your Wife

By: Whitney Hopler

Does your wife seem overly emotional to you? Do you wish you could understand why she acts in the sometimes puzzling ways she does? Women’s brains are wired differently from men’s, but there are ways you can understand your wife to connect with her more.

Here are some tips you can use to work effectively with your wife’s uniquely female behavior:

- **Accept her emotions.** Recognize that your wife’s emotions are a gift from God. Take them seriously. Rather than trying to squelch her emotions, validate them as she uses them to sort out issues in her life.
- **Actively listen to her.** Tell her that you value her opinion and assure her that you won’t act on a decision until you’ve fully heard her insights on the matter. When she speaks, give her your undivided attention, free of distractions such as the television on in the background. Make direct eye contact with her, nod as she’s speaking to show you’re following along, and repeat key points she makes to make sure you’ve heard her correctly.
- **Don’t try to solve her problems whenever she shares them with you.** Realize that women tend to process their thoughts by verbalizing them out loud. Know that what your wife really wants you to do is affirm her thoughts when she shares them without trying to offer unsolicited advice. Let her try to resolve her own issues as you simply listen to her and help her along the process. Ask her questions that could help her discover a solution herself. For example, you could ask, “What would you like the outcome of this to be, and why?”
- **Be physically affectionate in nonsexual ways.** Know that women tend to feel used if the only physical touch their husbands offer them leads to sexual intimacy. Nurture your wife in ways such as hugging her,

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holding her hands, and giving her a backrub without expecting sex in return. If you make nonsexual touch a regular habit, your wife should become more sexually responsive when you do make love.

- **Talk to her.** Understand that women spell intimacy T-A-L-K, not the way men spell it (S-E-X-). Share every part of your life with her. Discuss all areas of your life – your work, your friends, etc. – without holding anything back from your wife.
- **Pray for and with her.** Regularly pray for your wife, and tell you how you've been praying for her. Whenever possible, pray with her, and expect God to bond you spiritually as you do.
- **Anticipate her hormonal changes.** Understand that her hormones might affect her emotions at different times of each month. Talk to your wife about this, and anticipate the changes so you deal with them gently and wisely when they occur.
- **Make her feel as if she's your top priority.** Don't use up most of your time and energy at work or elsewhere; reserve some for your wife at the end of each day. Arrange your schedule around your relationship with her.
- **Be her best friend, and encourage her friendships with other women.** Share recreational activities together, and help her make time to get out regularly with her female friends. Know that female bonding builds emotional resilience for women.

- **Safeguard your relationship.** Keep your emotional connection to her strong so she's not tempted to get her emotional needs met by another man. Don't discuss lots of personal details with any other woman, and distance yourself from women who flirt with you. Assure your wife that you are exclusively committed to her, and set strong boundaries to avoid being drawn into an emotional or physical affair with someone else.
- **Pursue romance.** Invest the time and effort to learn what your wife considers romantic. Then do those things, on a regular basis.
- **Love her unconditionally, and let her know you do.** Ask God to help you forgive your wife for her mistakes and respond gracefully to her shortcomings. Let her know that you will never leave her.
- **Thank her.** Look for opportunities to let her know that you appreciate her, such as after she's done some task to help you. Help her know that you notice her hard work.

Adapted from *"Connecting with Your Wife,"* © 2003 by Barbara Rosberg. Published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., www.tyndale.com. Barbara Rosberg and her husband, Gary, are the hosts of America's Family Coaches ... LIVE! This nationally syndicated, daily radio program centers on family issues. They have written several books together, including *"The 5 Love Needs of Men & Women"*, *"40 Unforgettable Dates with*

Your Mate”, and *“Divorce-Proof Your Marriage.”* Barbara and Gary live in Des Moines, Iowa, and have two daughters.

Understand Your Husband

Does your husband’s behavior sometimes baffle you? Do you wish he would talk to you more? Men’s testosterone-soaked brains operate much differently from women’s brains, but there are ways you can understand your husband that will help you connect with him more.

- Communicate your feelings using stories and objects. Know that the male brain responds mostly to facts. So when discussing your feelings with your husband, use stories and object lessons to illustrate your point in tangible ways. For example, when describing sadness, you could show him an empty container and say that you feel empty, too. Or, to tell him you feel overworked, describe a chaotic, dirty locker room after a football game and share how you feel like you have to handle all that mess by yourself.
- Use discernment in conversations. Realize that men generally speak far fewer words per day than women do. Understand that your husband’s lack of conversation with you doesn’t mean he doesn’t love you; it’s just normal for men not to talk as much as women. When you first see your husband at the end of the day, don’t ask him multiple questions. Instead, give him a chance to unwind. Choose to talk only about topics that are directly relevant to him to hold his

interest (regularly sharing details irrelevant to his life may cause him to assume you don’t have anything important to say). Choose good times and places to talk, where your husband isn’t feeling stressed or distracted.

- Strive to meet his physical needs while helping him become more emotionally intimate. Realize that physical intimacy is as important to men as emotional intimacy is to women. Don’t use negative tactics like giving your husband the silent treatment or withholding sex to try to punish him into becoming more sensitive. Instead, be affectionate to him, and work on training him toward emotional intimacy. To help him tap more into his emotions, connect his current situation to an event from his past, a situation at work, or a sports analogy so he can recognize the feelings that those things stir up in him and apply them to the situation at hand.
- Encourage him however you can. Let him know how much you love and respect him regularly. Thank him for big and small things he does for you. Ask him about his dreams, and support him as he pursues them. Complement him – especially in front of others. Create special surprises for him around the things he enjoys the most, such as by cooking his favorite meal for dinner.
- Don’t take his competitiveness personally. Know that men want to win at all costs, no matter what the situation, but that desire to conquer has nothing to do with you. Do all you can to make your husband feel like a winner.

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Regularly point out areas in which he excels, and affirm him in those areas.

- Work with him to deal with housework. Set realistic goals, and consider whether your expectations for how clean your house should be might be too high and cause unnecessary stress. Sit down with your husband to write a plan for equitable division of the household chores, switching off the ones that neither of you wants to do so both of you can sometimes get a break from them. Don't keep score, but be most concerned about how you can serve each other. Don't nag or manipulate your husband; instead, use positive reinforcement such as complements for completed tasks to encourage more of the same.
- Be his companion. Ask him questions about his interests and hobbies, and make time to participate with him in his recreational pursuits. Share fun activities together on a regular basis.

Adapted from "Connecting with Your Husband" by Gary Smalley, Smalley Publishing Group, LLC. Published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., www.tyndale.com

Dr. Gary Smalley is a well-known author and speaker on family relationships. He has written 16 best-selling books, including "The Language of Love," and has appeared on national television programs such as "The Oprah Winfrey Show," and "Larry King Live." He is the founder and chairman of the board of the Smalley Relationship Center. Gary and

his wife, Norma, live in Branson, Missouri, and have three grown children.

Think Before You Propose

If you've thinking about getting married, don't do it unless it's to the right person and you are willing to make big changes in your life. Marriage is a lifelong commitment that should not be entered into without prayerful consideration – and with your eyes wide open.

This is what you need to know before you propose:

- **Marriage is God's ideal.** His plan was for Adam to have a mate, remarkably different from him, yet a perfect compliment to Adam. His desire is for a man and woman to live together in harmony in spite of their differences.
- **Men and women are different.** The more you understand and accept the fact that God made men and women differently, the easier it will be to handle marital conflicts later. God made each gender different for a reason, and it's best to appreciate those differences rather than trying to change them.
- **Single hood is hard to give up.** When you're single, the only person you have to worry about is you. When you get married you share everything you have and everything you are with this other person.
- **Marriage is a magnificent way to learn about yourself.** In the first few years of marriage, the blind spots of your character – that

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love previously overlooked – become exposed. For instance, when you are single you may think of yourself as the most giving person in the world, but when you get married you find out about your selfishness. Sadly, a lot of marriages don't make it because the period of self-discovery is so painful, and instead of making your own personal correction, you lash out at your mate.

- **Only marry a complete person.** Don't expect to change this person any more than you expect to change yourself. Aim for choosing a finished product. Both of you will change, develop, and grow over the years, but you want to begin with a complete person, who knows his/her strengths and weaknesses, and has a sense of purpose and direction in life.
- **Agree on God.** The Bible tells us not to be yoked with a non-believer. When love takes over, it is easy to overlook this admonition or to minimize its impact on the relationship. When the two of you share the most important thing in the world – a relationship with the Lord – you have a bond that cannot be easily broken. Being married to an unbeliever keeps you from accomplishing many of the things you could be accomplishing for God.
- **It's a big step from love to commitment.** Marriage is for the long haul. Arguments, disagreements, and differences have to be worked out. Storming out the door, not speaking to each

other for a week, or breaking up are no longer options.

- **Marriage is a covenant.** It is an agreement between God and the two of you that you will love one another and stand by one another no matter what happens and no matter what differences may arise between the two of you. Divorce is not an option.

Taken from *It Takes Respect* by Aeneas Williams.

Aeneas Williams has been the Phoenix Cardinals starting defensive back for seven years and has started in the Pro Bowl for the last three years. He led the NFL in interceptions in 1994 and has intercepted a record 26 passes since then. He lives with his wife, Tracy, and daughter in Arizona. He is a graduate of Southern University in Louisiana.

I've Had an Affair ... What Next?

By: Chuck Snyder

QUESTION: I need your guidance! Four years ago, I fell in love and had an affair with a married man. He promised he would leave his wife. We now have a two year-old daughter. He is apart from his wife. We are still in love. I want to raise my daughter as a Christian, and I know I need to be a role model for her. My boyfriend and I are still involved. I want to be with him, but I want to "turn over a new leaf" so to speak. I want to follow God. I told him that I don't want to continue to have an affair with him because he's still married. We love each other very much, but I love God more. He wants to become Christian again, but "someday" is what he says. I cannot wait. This is a big mess. What do you suggest?

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ANSWER: Thanks for the note about your tangled life. I am so impressed that you want to do the right thing. I know part of your heart is with your married friend, but you have to cut him off cold. If you are having sex then you are committing adultery, and even if you aren't, it is still an affair of the mind which God considers the same thing as having sex physically. I grieve for your daughter being caught in this mess, but you can ask God's forgiveness for bringing her into this world without any foundation. Your so-called friend needs to turn over a new leaf and go back to his wife. In effect you are enabling his gross sin just by continuing to be with him and letting him come around. Hopefully you can put yourself in the shoes of that poor wife and feel what she is feeling too. He never was a Christian or he would not be abusing his wife in this way. I hope he DOES have someone come into his life who can introduce him to Jesus Christ, but that is not your problem. RUN RUN RUN RUN RUN RUN ... because you can get hurt worse. I know this is a hard message, but I took you at your word that you "loved God more" than you do your friend, so I needed to be honest. Dust your sandals and move on. And by the way, I want you to know what God does with the sins you have committed with your boyfriend. HE FORGETS THEM when you ask His forgiveness with a broken heart. Here are some scriptures that talk about this.

"He has removed our sins as far away from us as the east is from the west."
Psalms 103:12 (Living Bible)

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Acts 3:19 (KJV)

"... and blotted out the charges proved against you, the list of his commandments which you had not obeyed. He took this list of sins and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross." Col 2:14 (Living Bible)

"For God was in Christ, restoring the world to himself, no longer counting men's sins against them but blotting them out. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others." 2 Cor 5:19 (Living Bible)

You're probably too young to remember blotters, but we used to use pen and ink in school. We would blot the ink to keep it from smearing, because it dried slowly. However if you blotted it TOO quickly, you took all the ink away. We use a paper towel to blot water off a kitchen counter. God's "blotter" erased all of our sins.

"I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds when sins have once been forever forgiven and forgotten, there is no need to offer more sacrifices to get rid of them." Heb 10:17-18 (Living Bible)

"And I will be merciful to them in their wrongdoing, and I will remember their sins no more." Heb 8:12 (Living Bible)

I take God at His Word when the Bible says He will never remember our sins anymore. They are forever out of His memory. What a gift that is.

"It was good for me to go through all of this bitterness. You have delivered me from death, and have put all of my sins behind Your back." Isaiah 38:17

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I love the picture of God reaching around and putting my sins behind His back where He can't get at them.

There are many other scriptures that imply that our sins have been covered by Christ's blood and thrown in the deepest sea. God forgives our mistakes, so we can forgive others for their mistakes as well, and help them go on. After you ask God's forgiveness, you are as pure as the purest snow. My prayer for you is that God will bring a true, born again, sold out, dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ into your life, who can love you and your precious little one like God intended.

Businessman, author, speaker, Bible study teacher, counselor and co-chaplain for the Seattle Mariners, Chuck Snyder is the co-author of "Incompatibility, Still Grounds for a Great Marriage." He and his wife, Barb, also teach the Seahawk Couple's Bible Studies.

Five Keys for Resolving Marital Conflict

Don and Sally Meredith

Hand grenades or land mines?

Husbands and wives are usually one or the other when it comes to dealing with conflict in marriage – we tend to either explode immediately or bury our feelings to be triggered at a later date. Some of us are quick to throw our anger and pain right back at our spouse when a conflict surfaces. Some of us avoid conflict at all costs, burying our hurt deep in the recesses of our hearts until our spouse inadvertently detonates the pain.

If you are married and are two hand grenades, explosions are probably frequent, but quick, leaving scars on your souls.

If you are married and are two land mines, explosions are rare, but huge, leaving craters in your hearts.

If you are married as a hand grenade and a land mine, watch out, you never know when the explosions will come and they inflict all kinds of damage.

Which one are you?

Conflict is a reality in all marriages. How you deal with conflict is the ultimate test of your ability to communicate as a couple. Fortunately, scripture provides us with meaningful insights into effectively resolving conflict. The following five exhortations, founded on Scripture, are vital to accomplish redemptive conflict resolution.

1. Approach Each Other with Kindness and Concern

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for the building up of others according to their needs that it may benefit those whose listen." (Ephesians 4:29)

Rejection, fear, and bitterness destroy communication, and conflicts cannot be resolved in threatening environments. Therefore, couples must seek God's perspective in establishing an environment of kindness and concern. We are to "be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave us" and "clothe [ourselves] with compassion, kindness,

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humility, gentleness and patience” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12).

These positive attitudes form the “door” to marital communication through which husbands and wives must enter if they hope to resolve their differences.

2. Establish an Atmosphere of Mutual Vulnerability and Transparency

“For I wrote out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.” (2 Corinthians 2:4)

Vulnerability is the ability to share one’s innermost feelings, thoughts, concerns, and aspirations without fear of rejection. Before differences can be resolved, both spouses must be able to trust each other enough to openly share without being put down or scolded.

This requires transparency – showing an honesty and openness in disclosing events, opinions, and feelings. If one spouse is truly transparent, the other will feel trusted and loved as well as respected. Being vulnerable says, “I respect and trust you enough to be transparent.” Transparency says, “I love you” and “I need you.”

3. Become Effective Listeners

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19)

When trying to resolve our conflicts, rather than listening we often tend to fall into one of these traps:

- Planning our answer before our spouse is done talking.
- Selectively hearing what only sounds right to us.
- Coming into the conversation with our judgments already made.

However, proper listening resolves differences by clarifying what our spouse is really feeling and saying. Consider these characteristics of effective listening:

- Creating a non-threatening environment of understanding
- Shutting our mouths and opening our ears!
- Seeking clarification
- Providing more empathy rather than merely sympathy
- Demonstrating a teachable spirit

4. Speak the Truth in Love

“Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15)

Speaking the truth in love requires discipline and a true desire for redemption. Here are a few points to keep in mind when speaking the truth in love:

- Your goal should be to restore your spouse.
- Your motivation should be to gain understanding
- Avoid cutting remarks that could start the “insult cycle.”
- Try to keep your emotions under control.
- Be a good listener by stopping and restating your spouse’s argument.

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- Make sure to pick a private place and optimal time for communicating.
- Work toward prompt resolution and do not let the conflict linger.

5. Be Willing to Forgive

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” (Matthew 6:14)

Giving and receiving forgiveness is a nonnegotiable issue in resolving conflict and creating better communication with your spouse. Your ability to forgive your spouse is directly related to your spouse’s ability to rebound from conflict and sin and also to forgive you.

When you say, “I just can’t forgive you for what you did,” what you really mean is, “I choose not to forgive you.” Forgiveness is an act of the will based on faith in Christ.

When your spouse wrongs you, immediately entrust yourself to the Lord. Seek His perspective on the matter. Leave revenge to the Lord (Romans 12:14-20).

Remember, every marriage encounters conflict. In this conflict we have an opportunity to choose to trust God and His principles – leading to redemption and resolution – or to trust our own human instincts – leading to continued pain and desolation.

Two Becoming One publications and small group resources help couples understand God’s purposes, principles and provisions for marriage. Many key concepts in *Two*

Becoming One are taught in the popular Family Life Ministry marriage seminars.

If God created marriage, can He make it work? *Two Becoming One*, by Don and Sally Meredith. You’ll learn the five reasons why marriages fail, how to overcome trials and much more.

The Art of Marital Communication Barry & Mary Leventhal

Every marriage survey ranks it as the number one problem. You guessed it, marital communication. “We just don’t communicate like we used to. My husband never talks to me.” My wife is always trying to get me to talk. I feel like I’m being dragged, kicking and screaming, into every conversation.” Sound familiar? Probably so. Most marriages seem to bog down in this quagmire of bad communication. And when communication breaks down, barriers build up, until the cold shoulder is the normative posture in a marriage.

Created for Communication

But we were created for communication, especially in marriage. Of all places, marital communication should reflect the intimate and harmonious communication of God Himself. For God is a Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the only trust and perfect Communication from all eternity. Whatever intimate and harmonious communication is, it is found perfectly in the Trinity. And we were created in God’s image. So we were created for communication, communication that is designed for beauty, intimacy, and harmony. Of all places, this should be best expressed in our Christian marriages.

Barriers to Communication

What makes marital communication so difficult? Basically, we all face specific barriers that hinder a deepening communication in our marriages. First, we all carry some baggage with us from our upbringing. Our parents may have never communicated with each other or with us. They may have told us that children are to be seen and not heard. Second, we live in an isolating culture. Things like television, the Internet, and video games isolate us from those nearest and dearest to us. We get comfortable finding our own meaning, purpose, and values without having to interact and communicate with others. Third, we are bombarded with outside pressures. Jobs, car pools, church meetings, and the like, can steal the quality time needed for real communication between husbands and wives. Fourth, we tend to be lazy, gravitating to the nearest comfort zone. Real marital communication takes time, effort, and planning. It is not for the fainthearted. And fifth, we may be fearful of showing our emotions or of being rejected if we communicate openly and honestly.

The Art of Marital Communication

Marital communication is an art. It can be nurtured into the joy that God intended for couples. Try the following steps to make it happen.

- As a couple before God, commit yourselves to the recovery of a Trinitarian communication. Ask Him to nurture the language of intimacy and relationship in your lives. Great communication begins with God, the Author and Perfecter of all communication.

Ears that hear and eyes that see – the LORD has made them both (Proverbs 20:12)

- Accept the fact that God alone is the perfect Communicator. Your marriage will always need His redeeming touch for intimate communication to develop. And you will never arrive at the place of perfect communication in marriage.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (Psalms 34:15; 1 Peter 3:12).

- Recognize that there will be times of spontaneous communication as well as structured communication in your marriage. So be sensitive to both. Grab it when the need bursts into your marriage. Plan it when you are strung out on life's pressures.

A person finds joy in giving an apt answer – how good is a timely word (Proverbs 15:23).

The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry (Proverbs 25:11, The Message).

- Beware of the power of your words, both for healing and for hurting. The goal of good marital communication is “more light than heat.”

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The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit (Proverbs 18:21).

An anxious heart weighs a person down, but a kind word cheers him up (Proverbs 12:25).

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit (Proverbs 15:4).

Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones (Proverbs 16:24).

When words are many, sin is not absent, but the one who holds his tongue is wise (Proverbs 10:19).

Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing (Proverbs 12:18)

- Focus on listening to your mate – really listening – before speaking. Listen with two sets of ears: to the obvious words of the mouth and the not so obvious words of the heart.

The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil (Proverbs 15:28).

Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue (Proverbs 17:28).

The one who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame (Proverbs 18:13).

- Look for things for which you can praise your mate – there are more than enough for daily appreciation. Praise is the daily bread of good marital communication. Thank God for the gift of your mate.

A man is praised according to his wisdom, but men with warped minds are despised (Proverbs 12:8).

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate [i.e., the town council] (Proverbs 31:30-31).

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Making Your Wife Feel Important

Dr. Gary Smalley

The Smalley Relationship Center

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word...” (Ephesians 5:25-26).

Sandy was so sexually responsive to her husband, Rick, one afternoon that he was stunned and surprised by her excitement.

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How did Rick motivate her? With one very simple statement. He was getting ready for work that morning, running a little late, when he heard Sandy complaining of a growing neck ache.

“Let me rub your neck,” he offered.

“No, you don’t have time,” she replied.
“You’ve got to get to work.”

His usual response would have been,
“Yeah, your right. I don’t want to be late. But I hope you feel better. Take an aspirin.”

On this particular morning, he said, “I tell you what. I’d rather be with you any day. Let me rub your neck.” As he gently massaged her tender muscles, he continued, “Work can wait. . . You’re more important to me.” She was so thrilled with his attitude and so encouraged by his sensitivity and gentleness that she could hardly resist giving herself to him in every way.

We men are not aware of the effect we have on our wives by being gentle and tender, showing our unshakable devotion. Do you want a more enjoyable marriage? It’s possible, and it all starts by loving your wife more than any other person or activity.

Here are a few questions you can ask your wife to open up a discussion concerning her real feelings about the place she shares in your life:

1. Do you feel you are the most important person in my life?
2. Are there any activities in my life you feel are more important to me than you are?

3. Are there any special ways you believe I could better communicate how important you are to me?

The more you do to build a valuable, healthy relationship, the better you’ll feel about your marriage. If you change any of your activities because you want to enrich your relationship, at first you may feel you’re giving up your favorite pastime. But in the long run, you’ll not only gain a better marriage, but a greater freedom to enjoy other areas of life. Today, I wouldn’t trade my deep friendship with Norma for anything on this earth. I am finding that the more important a man’s wife is to him, the more she encourages him to enjoy life.

For more information about the Smalleys, please visit their Web site at www.smalleyonline.com. You will find many resources to help you with all your most important relationships.

Returning the Romance to Your Marriage

Dr. Barry Leventhal, Ph.D.

Like most couples, Will and Megan began their marriage with stars in their eyes. Their engagement was chocked full of romance and great adventure – the entire year flew by in a flash.

Their wedding and honeymoon were fantastic realizing every wish Megan had since she was a young girl. Yet, after six short months of marital bliss, the stars turned into sand. Will and Megan were wondering just what they got themselves into. “Will isn’t the man I thought I married,” said Megan. “He used to be so sensitive and romantic, but now all he

thinks about is work.” Will’s response is similar, “Megan never used to complain. Our sex life was frequent and intense. But now it’s all retreated onto the back burner.” They both wondered how they lost the romance so quickly.

Any marriage counselor will tell you that Will and Megan’s story is not uncommon. Couples date for a season, fall in love, and then decide to get married.

But within a short time, the romance of marital bliss has disintegrated into the work – and sometimes agony – of married life. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover:

- 34 percent of all marriages today are expected to end in divorce
- 33 percent of Christian marriages will end in divorce
- 50 percent of divorces happen in the first 7.8 years of marriage.

The problem is not that young couples lack the aspiration for a happy marriage. According to a recent study by the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, 94 percent of singles in their 20’s who had never been married say they want nothing less than a soul mate, leading some experts to believe that our desires have surpassed reality.

But is it wrong to hope for a soul mate in marriage? Is it really possible to work through the agony in a marriage and recapture the romance? Yes it is. God not only created marriage, He has also given us the owner’s manual, the Bible, in order to know how to make it work. And beyond that, He also desires to personally reside in each marriage. God’s written Word and

personal presence guarantee that any marriage can recover the romance even in the midst of the agony. But first, each married couple must embrace two fundamental realities in God’s blueprint for marriage.

Reality #1: Marriage is a Covenant Relationship

First, marriage is a covenant relationship. “[S]he is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal. 2:14). “[She] leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God” (Prov. 2:17). When God initiates a marital covenant relationship, marriage takes on a sense of the sacred, something uniquely set apart to Him. By God’s design, marriage becomes a binding, contractual relationship, into which He commits Himself to a nurturing role. Husbands and wives are not left alone to hack out their marriage. In reality, marriage is not a straight line with the husband and wife merely tethered together at the two ends of the line. No, marriage is a triangle with the husband and wife bound together at the base of the triangle as well as to God who is at the apex of the triangle. Drawing near to Him will draw them closer to each other. In other words, marriage is not merely the two becoming one, it is actually the three becoming one: a covenant arrangement of God, the husband, and the wife.

Reality #2: Marriage is a Transformative Relationship

Second, marriage is a transformative relationship. In a certain sense every relationship is a transformative relationship, for better or for worse. “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm”

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(Prov. 13:20). “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Cor. 15:33). God has committed Himself to changing us into nothing less than the likeness of His own Son (Rom. 8:29-30; 2 Cor. 3:18). And that likeness is the likeness of a servant (Phil. 2:5-11).

Marriage is God’s ultimate training ground for Christ-like servanthood. Most couples are not prepared for the shocking experience of meeting such selfishness in the early months and years of their marriage. Assuming that such selfishness is in their mate, usually to no avail. That’s when the agony sets in. But we can only recapture the romance when we begin to realize that we need to be changed, not our mates. You see, God uses marriage to work out our selfishness and to work in His servanthood. This is often a slow and painful process. But God is faithful “who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us” (Eph. 3:20).

The key principle for success in a Christian marriage is to move the relationship from performance – what you think your mate should do for you - to faith – what God has promised to do in your life and your spouse’s life if you focus on Him and His plan for your marriage.

Do you want to transform your marital agony into marital ecstasy? Then take the following steps:

- Reaffirm your marital covenant relationship by committing your marriage to God and to each other in prayer and before another couple who are also living in a

committed marital covenant relationship.

- Confess to God that you have been trying to change your mate and that it has been a miserable failure. Also ask your mate to forgive you for trying to play God in your marriage. Ask the Lord to transform you into a Christ-like servant in your marriage, no matter what it takes. Move your relationship from performance to faith.
- Finally, share your prayer requests with another couple who will not only pray for you, but who will also encourage and hold you accountable to these new commitments.

Two Becoming One publications and small group resources help couples understand God’s purposes, principles and provisions for marriage. Many key concepts in *Two Becoming One* are taught in the popular Family Life Ministry marriage seminars.

Is Your Spouse Your Best Friend?

Friendship is built on trust, and takes time to grow and develop. What better context for this kind of friendship to grow than in your marriage. Friendship is intimate sharing; a place where you can talk about feelings and hurts and hopes, with honesty, transparency, and loyalty. Friendship, like a good marriage, grows over time. If you and your spouse don’t share this kind of friendship, don’t wait for the other to reach out. Take the initial step and see how he/she responds.

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Teach your spouse how to be your best friend:

- 1. Assign top priority to your friendship.** Nothing gets in the way of our doing what is most important to us. If you really want to be friends with your spouse, make time for it. It will be time well spent. One of the hindrances to spending time with your spouse may be your kids. They demand time, but remember that you were husband and wife before you were dad and mom. Make each other the priority of the family. Besides, you teach your children a valuable lesson by showing them that mom and dad are in love with each other.
- 2. Cultivate transparency in your relationship.** Honesty, with yourself and each other, makes you a better friend. First, honor God who made you the person you are. Discover the freedom that comes with being who you are. Risk being the “same person” at work and at home, in your dealings with friends and strangers.
- 3. Dare to risk talking about your affection.** Make, and use, a batch of little cards that say, “I love you because...” Fill in the blank and put them in lunch boxes for your kids, in jacket pockets for your spouse, in letters to dear friends. Your spouse, especially, wants to know he/she is loved. It’s a way of looking at your marriage in a fresh way, and sharing the discovery.
- 4. Learn the language of love.** Each person needs to learn how to say “I love you,” not only in those three little

words but through actions of respect. Do you show your spouse that you love him/her with their favorite meal, a bouquet of flowers, a small gift, remembering to do an errand, doing a chore without being asked? Keep your eyes open for common, everyday events that give you the chance to express your love.

- 5. Give your spouse freedom.** Don’t let your unforgiveness or possessiveness control your spouse. Give them room to explore their potential, learn from their mistakes, and have some personal private time that is totally their own. Accept your spouse – unconditionally – and encourage him/her to be the person God created in them. And, as the seasons of your lives change, notice and make adjustment for the variations in your friendship.

Remember that a friendship that is tended, nurtured, and rooted in the Lord will endure. And being your spouse’s friend will also enable your marriage to endure.

Bob Barnes travels around the country with his wife, Emilie, hosting their popular *More Hours in My Day* seminars. He is the author of *15-Minutes Alone with God for Me*, and *Minute Meditations for Men*. Together they have written *The 15-Minute Money Manager* and *15-Minute Devotions for Couples*. For more information regarding speaking engagements and additional material, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: More Hours in My Day, 2838 Rumsey Drive, Riverside, CA 92506.

Overcoming Sexual Addiction in Marriage

Dr. Barry Leventhal for Two Becoming One

The problem is so prevalent we have had to invent a new phrase for it: *sexual addiction*. Men and women, young and old, are being swept into the compulsive behavior of sexual addictions at an alarming rate. A recent survey of adults, ranging from ages 18 to 59, reported that 40 percent of women and 30 percent of men suffer from some form of sexual dysfunction. And one of the fastest growing dysfunctions in America is sexual addiction. It is estimated that sex addiction affects 3 to 6 percent of our population. Not surprisingly, this sexual epidemic has also lodged itself in the Church as well. From youth pastors to seasoned missionaries, among both men and women, pornography has invaded our sanctuaries, classrooms, and bedrooms. Whole ministries, as well as marriages, have reaped the whirlwind of this scourge and have gone down in destruction. Those involved in marriage counseling are aware of the devastation sexual addiction can cause.

But what can we do to prevent sexual addictions from invading our lives and wiping us out? Or, if we have been infected with the disease, how can we find the healing and deliverance from this sexual onslaught? Once again, we need to go back and recapture the basic biblical realities of God's perspective on human sexuality and how it has degenerated into its present state of affairs. Jesus promised that if we would abide in His Word, we would become His disciples and that we would "know the truth, and the truth would set [us] free" (John 8:31-32).

First, all addictions, and sexual addictions in particular, are a judgment from God.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity (Rom. 1:24-29).

The operative word in this portion of Holy Scripture is, of course, "God gave them over," mentioned three times. When we forsake God for other things, He gives us over to these things, thus creating a spiritual and moral vacuum in our lives. All of nature loves a vacuum. So it should not be surprising that something must rush into this vacuum. In fact, it is not merely something – it is everything!

God allows us to sink into sexual addictions in order to get our attention. It is the out-working of the law of

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diminishing returns: We need to have more and more stimulation to get less and less satisfaction! This can only end up in one place: in a spiritual and moral rut. Someone has defined “a rut” as a grave with both ends kicked out!

[The immoral woman] gives no thought to the way of life; her paths [lit. wagon wheel ruts] are crooked, but she knows it not. ... For [an immoral] man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and He examines all his paths [lit. wagon wheel ruts]. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own follow(Prov. 5:6, 21-23).

When we finally realize that we are hooked and lying face down in our sexual rut (i.e., the wagon wheel rut), all we have to do is turn over and call out to God. That is the first step toward recovery.

Second, if God’s judgment is expressed in turning us over to sexual addictions, then the good news is that He will also provide grace to work our way out of the rut. But it will not always be an easy way out. It will require a committed and determined assault on the addictive enemy itself.

So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom. 8:12-13).

You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (Matt. 5:27-30).

Sexual addictions will not retreat in the face of a half-hearted commitment and effort on our part. Rather, we must take nothing less than a cut-throat offensive against all sexual addictions. It is kill or be killed! That’s why Jesus used hyperbole or extravagant exaggeration in telling us how to deal with adultery in thought or deed. “Pluck out the eye” that commits adultery in mind! “Cut off the hand” that commits adultery in deed! That is strong language for a strong enemy. Nothing else will suffice.

So what steps should we take in order to dig our way out of our sexual ruts?

- Begin by always confessing your sin to God. “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
- Become a part of a caring and confronting community, a small group of men with men and women with women. Memorize Scripture and pray together. “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that

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you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16).

- Whatever is dragging you down into your sexual rut must be dramatically and definitively extracted from your life: all pornography from whatever source, any person or thing that is sexually imploding on your life, etc. Keep this commitment before God and your support group on a regular basis.

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