

*Handbook
Of
Christian
Marriage*

by Pastor Louie Monteith

INTRODUCTION

Without question, marriage can be the most wonderful experience on earth! You don't have to focus on the tragedies and nightmares you or others have had. God has designed marriage to work! It is with confidence that I present to you principles that are based on the word of God. My prayer is that you will be encouraged in the Lord and in your marriage. The word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12) and speaks about all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4), yes, even marriage! This handbook is designed to be read individually, as a couple, or studied as a group. It can also be used as a pre-marital manual. As you read this handbook, I hope you will be able to confidently say what the Bible affirms, that "two are better than one"! (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

(Genesis 2:18-24) And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." {19} Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. {20} So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. {21} And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. {22} Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. {23} And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." {24} Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

(Ephesians 5:31-32) "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." {32} This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

You've heard about a marriage made in heaven? Well, guess what? The first marriage was and your's can be too! The union of Adam and Eve was designed and brought together by God Himself. God saw Adam all alone and said it wasn't a good state for him to be in. He needed a helper comparable to him. What he lacked she would supply and what she lacked he would supply. That's why two are better than one:

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12) Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. {10} For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. {11} Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone? {12} Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

A husband's strength is usually his wife's weakness and the wife's strength is usually her husband's weakness. This is how God made marriage so the two would be drawn together in mutual love and need.

There are some things you just can't do alone. Have you ever tried to wash the middle of your back with soap? How many times do you drop the soap-bar? How about tying a ribbon on a package? You've got the string pulled tight but now you need somebody's finger to keep it tight as you make your final loop and tie down. It is not a weakness to be weak. It is God's way of forcing us out of our self to receive the strength of another. Adam was not complete until Eve came along. That's why singleness is such a special calling (Matthew 19:10-12) but most people do not have that gift.

THE HEAVENLY MATCHMAKER

The Bible says God brought Eve to Adam. What tremendous application this has for us today! Jesus taught us to ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7-11) and if we do, we will receive, find, and the door of heavenly gifts will open to us. I believe if a person is praying for a Christian mate, God will bring the right person along in His good timing. The person is going to be God's pick, no doubt about it.

When I came to the Lord as a teenager, my friend's mother prayed that in God's time we would meet the women God had for us. I never forgot that. As I got older I started to pray that prayer myself. Little did I know that my future bride was praying that in God's time she would meet the right man for her! How exciting it was to see God work!! We met and soon fell in love. I never had second thoughts that she was the one for me. I approached the altar with confidence in God's working in my life. I've never second-guessed God's decision for me, even through the rough times. God just doesn't make mistakes!

WAITING ON THE LORD...A WORD TO SINGLES

Where was Adam when Eve came to him? He was sleeping! This is an encouragement to the single person. Wait on the Lord and rest in Him:

(Psalms 37:7) Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

There will be a tendency to rush ahead of the Lord to find a mate. Don't do it!! Wait for God's choice. Draw close to Jesus in your loneliness, and make Him your everything. Be content in Him, and God will be free to work in your life. The alternative is tragic. Let me tell you a story.

A woman came to me and asked if I could marry her and her fiance. I discovered he wasn't a Christian and declined based upon 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. She would be unequally yoked. She admitted that she didn't want to be lonely anymore. She became upset with me, and told people that I was unfair, and went out and got married anyway. About a year later she confessed how utterly miserable she was and wanted to leave him. He was stone cold to her and very demanding. Now she felt trapped and wanted out.

Don't sell out for second best. Hold out for God's best and He will come through for you. I know you get lonely and frustrated waiting and waiting but He has promised He will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5; Ruth 3:11, 18). Adam had to name all the beasts before Eve came along. Don't get desperate and end up with a brute!!

HAPPILY MARRIED

Is marriage supposed to be all bliss and no sorrow? Of course not. But we can be happily married in the Lord. Look at Adam's response when he saw Eve:

(Genesis 2:23) And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."

One look and He was excited! Adam said that she shall be called "Woman". Is this because she was so beautiful that all he could say was "Whoa, man!". I'm sure this is how he felt. God designed marriage and family to work and to be a blessing. Look at Psalm 128, especially verse 3:

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, Your children like olive plants all around your table.

Are you excited about your mate? If your marriage isn't very happy right now, perhaps it's because someone in the relationship isn't applying the word of God. Psalm 128 says you will be blessed. What is hindering your blessing? The tendency is to point the finger right away at your mate. There are times when the other person is the problem but we have to remember that our reaction to the person is where we can drop the ball. This contributes to an even more unhappy marriage. The bottom line is, God wants to bless your marriage in ways beyond your comprehension.

LEAVE AND CLEAVE

When a couple gets married they are to leave behind all ties and become one with each other. Adam and Eve had no parents, so this was speaking of relationships to come. Your "number one" now should be your spouse. Parents and friends take on an outside priority. They should not be neglected, but your mate should be the only human being you cherish in the center of your heart.

I remember when my wife Cheryl and I got engaged, my best friend got upset. He was a great guy but my future wife held all my attention and energy. I had to leave and cleave. I was getting married, and my focus was on my soon-to-be bride.

I knew of a couple who lived with her parents. That's not a very good thing. The Bible says to leave and cleave and to start your own family unit. Marital oneness should not be sacrificed for convenience. Parents are always parents and will do what they are meant to do . . . parent! When you get married, you don't need that anymore. You are starting your own family and need to leave and cleave. The couple I told you about living with her parents? Well, they eventually moved only a few houses down. I felt sorry for the husband because it seemed that his wife's affections were too often with her parents. He put up with it, but I don't think it was the best thing according to the word of God. Resentment can harbor in the heart and eventually manifest itself in a most insidious way.

A MARRIAGE IN HEAVEN

(Ephesians 5:31-32) "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." {32} This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Did you know that marriage on earth is a picture of marriage in heaven? I'm not saying that people are going to get married in heaven because they are not (Mark 12:25). What I'm saying is that when a husband and wife are joined together in marriage, it is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. Another name for the church is the "Bride of Christ" (Revelation 21:9, 22:17). In heaven we will be wed to Christ for all eternity. Praise the Lord! What a relationship that is going to be! If my marriage is a picture of this glorious bond between Christ and the church, that elevates my relationship to my wife. I am like Christ to the Bride of Christ, and she is like the Bride of Christ to Jesus. Of all analogies the Lord could have used of His relationship to the church, He used marriage. That means God places a high value on the relationship of a man and woman in marriage. Therefore, I see our relationship as more than getting married, working, and raising kids. My wife and I portray a great mystery--the union of Christ and the church. That's important in this day and age of disposable marriages. What an impact we can have on the world just by having a fruitful marriage. Our earthly marriage can actually point to the great marriage in heaven. When people ask why we are so excited about our spouses and families, we can share the love of Jesus and extend the royal invitation for them to be a part of the Bride of Christ. No wonder it says in Revelation 22:17, "...the Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'!"

HUSBANDS

(Ephesians 5:25-28) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, {26} that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, {27} that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. {28} So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

(1 Peter 3:7) Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Husbands, you have only one thing to remember when it comes to how to treat your wife, and that is to love her. You might say, "Of course I love her, I break my back working to provide for her and the kids, don't I?" But husbands . . . women need more. They need more than your paycheck, they desire a relationship with you. A relationship like you used to have when you were first courting and married . . . when you went the distance to show your love and commitment to her. It's not about flowers or candy or an expensive ring, it's about sacrifice. What charms a woman's heart the most is when her lover proves his admiration to her in sacrificial ways. That way she knows you love her and that she is highly valuable in your eyes.

This is the way Christ loved the church. It says in Ephesians 5:25 that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. That sounds to me like John 3:16, "for God so loved the world that He gave..." What did God give? He gave His one and only Son. What a sacrifice! He not only said He loved us, but He proved His love by giving His own Son for our sins. True love is seen in the giving.

Notice the effect Christ had on the church when he gave Himself for it. It says in Ephesians 5:26-27 that He sanctified it and cleansed it with the washing of water by the word and was able to present His redeemed to Himself as a glorious church. As a man gives himself for his wife, he

sets her apart as something special and she becomes glorious! In other words, you've got to attend to your wife's needs, beyond just "bringing home the bacon." As you attend to her needs and serve her in this way, she becomes a gloriously fulfilled woman, of which you will reap the benefits.

Men need to know that women are as the Bible says, the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). Women are like a flower in their husband's care. You say you don't like flowers that much? Well, your wife is like a flower so you need to learn how to take care of her! You've got to learn what makes her tick! It says in 1 Peter 3:7 that men are to dwell together with their wives with understanding. A man needs to pray and ask God to reveal the uniqueness of a woman to him. Then with that understanding, he can meet his wife's needs in love, truly taking care of that precious flower in his hands.

I can tell by looking at a wife if her husband is laying down his life for her. The woman who looks so haggard all the time? Usually the husband is off in his own world and sees the wife as someone who exists to serve his needs. But the woman who has that glow about her? Usually the husband is very attentive to her and seeks ways to show his love for her. Some men get afraid because they are so "macho" and they perceive it as a sign of weakness to show any sacrificial love to their wives. But then again, a man has power to contribute to that flower growing or to let it wilt and die. It says in Ephesians 5:28 that if a husband loves his wife, it's like loving himself. So a man is only doing himself a favor by humbling himself and serving his wife's needs.

WASHED BY THE WORD

Ephesians 5:26 states that Christ sanctified and cleansed the church by the washing of water by the word. Jesus said in John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." The word of God has a tremendous cleansing effect upon our lives. That's why we feel so clean before the Lord after we read our Bibles or after a Bible study at church.

Men, you can wash your precious wife with the word of God! That's right, just like Jesus did the church. You are to "wear the pants" in the family (1 Corinthians 11:3) not only in regard to decisions and discipline of the kids, but also as the spiritual leader of your family. You are to feed the word of God to your wife. But before you can do that, you've got to be able to feed yourself. I encourage you, brother, to read the Bible everyday (Psalm 1:2). Study the scriptures as you would your "Sports Illustrated" magazine. Pour over it, get adept in it so you won't be ashamed about your ability to navigate through the word or how you handle the sword of the Spirit when you are called upon (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Peter 3:15). Go to church and get involved in a Bible study. Get into the word so the word can get into you. Then you can get the word into your wife and bathe her in the truth and promises of God.

Read the Bible with your wife. She might have a lot of questions and you can fill in the gaps when her questions are not answered at church (1 Corinthians 14:35). Just open the scriptures and start reading, and watch the Holy Spirit work in your wife! She will be washed with the word and will be so full that it will have a direct reflection . . . not only in her life, but in your relationship, and in the lives of your children.

WHAT MAKES HER TICK

If you want to have the best marriage on the block, you've got to understand a fundamental principle in marriage that is often overlooked by men. The principle is this: a woman is different

than a man. We know they are different physically, and we are grateful for that, but God made them different inside. Many marital problems stem from the fact that there is a failure to comprehend the differences between the sexes. Women in society are gaining equality with men in the workplace, but there still is a fundamental difference in the way God made men and women.

1 Peter 3:7 says men are to dwell with their wives with understanding. That means they are to study their wives. The old saying says you can never figure out a woman. That is truer to scripture than you think! There is a mystique about a woman that a man must uncover. He must realize that she values kindness and tenderness. Men don't tend to value these traits. Women are excellent intuitive thinkers, men seem to be a little diluted in this area. Women love to communicate deeply, men would rather talk about the weather or sports. It matters like this that men must study in order to dwell with them in understanding. What a challenge! But God gives us wisdom as we seek Him (James 1:5).

HEIRS TOGETHER

You and your wife are heirs together of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). Jesus in your marriage is a three-fold cord that cannot be easily be broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12). It's exciting to make Jesus the foundation of your marriage so that no matter what you go through, you're going to come out victorious. But notice that it says heirs "together." God wants to not only bless you as individuals, but as a couple as well.

Men, are you "together" with your wife? Or do you do your own thing and she does hers? God sees you as "together," not separate. You are "one flesh" in His eyes. Is your union with your wife a necessary evil or "heirs together"? Spend time with your wife. Do things together. Experience life together. That way you'll never lack memories to share. God wants to bless you, meaning plural. He wants to fill your relationship with the riches of His grace.

My wife and I share everything together. We don't live separate lives. We have some separate interests, but not separate lives. We like to be together because we like each other. If you don't like to be with your wife maybe it's because you don't know her. And if you don't know her then maybe you're not spending the time to get to know her.

I tell my wife everything. I find that she loves to know my world. I have no secrets from my wife because we are "heirs together" of the grace of life. We are a part of each others' hobbies and interests because we want to be together. We talk together, pray together, laugh together, go through the valleys of life together, eat together, watch old movies together, basically do everything together because we love each other and even like each other.

HINDERED PRAYERS

Men, if we don't dwell together with our wives in understanding and give honor to her as the weaker vessel, the Lord won't answer our prayers! If we mistreat our wives, we will have to answer to God for it! You see, God loves mercy, justice, and humility (Micah 5:8). If we are merciless, unfair, and proud in relation to our wives, it places a wedge not only in our relationship with our wives, but it also hinders our relationship with God. We are held accountable to the vows we took before God and others at our wedding ceremony. Do you remember what you said at the altar? You said you would love, honor, and cherish her all your

life, through good and bad. If we stray from what we know is right, we will decline spiritually. That's why Colossians 3:19 says not to be bitter towards our wives.

God has made man the initiator and the woman the responder. Men say, "My wife doesn't submit to me like scripture says". Maybe she's not submitting because you aren't loving her the way Christ would. If we would initiate love then she would respond by love. If we dish out anger and bitterness, what do we expect in return? The Bible says you reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7). We can have the most blessed marriage if we would just love and serve our wives. Don't worry about your wife taking advantage of you. Rather, she will love you all the more and make you feel more like a man than you could ever imagine.

WIVES

(Ephesians 5:22-24) Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. {23} For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. {24} Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

(1 Peter 3:1-6) Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, {2} when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. {3} Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; {4} rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. {5} For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, {6} as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

"SUBMIT" IS NOT A DIRTY WORD

The Bible is timeless. It transcends all cultures and periods. Its principles are just as applicable today as when it was written. Culture always changes. It reacts to what is going on, swinging like a pendulum from one extreme to the other. The philosophy of the world today says that women need to assert themselves in society, to be equal with men. Culture says it's payday for women, time to cash in on a little equality after being downtrodden for so long. There is a lot to be said for this, but some of it goes a little too far. It says in Colossians 2:8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." Christian women are not to be taken in with the extremes of the "women-coming-of-age" idea.

Let's clarify something very important on this issue. Women are just as intelligent as men. And I believe you would agree that women deserve to be paid as much as men for the same work. Women deserve the respect due them at home as well as in the work force. But in the context of marriage, the woman is to submit to her husband. Let me define the word "submit" for you. Submit means "to come up under". In this case it means to come up under your husband's authority in marriage. It doesn't mean you are less than, it just means that where God told the husband to sacrificially love his wife, the wife is to come up under her husband's authority. Ephesians 5:23 says the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. It doesn't mean he is more intelligent than the woman. It simply means that God chose the man to

lead the relationship. Somebody has to lead, and God has chosen the man. It's just what God has decided to do (1 Corinthians 11:3-12; 1 Timothy 2:12-15).

The philosophy of the world says that marriage is a fifty-fifty proposition. The wife is to give 50% and the husband is to give 50%. They both raise the kids equally. She cooks, he washes dishes. He mows and she cleans, etc. That arrangement usually works out well but when it comes to where "the buck stops", the Bible says God has designated that to the husband.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 it says, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." This is traditionally called "the chain of command." It says it plain and clear that the head of woman is man, the head of man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God (the Father). So according to God's word, the man is to be the leader in the family, and the woman is to come up under his authority. Does all this sound scary? Well, remember that the woman is not called to be a "modern woman" but a "godly Christian woman" who isn't conformed to this world (Romans 12:2) but obeys the word of God. We need to qualify this submission principle. First, it says to submit to your own husband "as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). In other words, when you come up under your husband's authority, see it as coming up under the Lord's authority. A Christian woman who loves Jesus will want to be pleasing to the Lord. So as you submit to your husband, you are submitting to Christ. This will change your attitude like nothing else!

Secondly, it says to be subject to your husband "in everything" (Ephesians 5:24). Not some things, but everything. Frightening? Well, I guess it would be if your husband were a difficult or lazy man. But it does say "everything". Women are usually so talented that the husband relies on her for everything. The wife is ordinarily capable in so many departments that the husband sometimes just coasts along on her energy and skills. In addition, there is the pressure in society for the man not to take his authority as the head of the relationship. So the man wimps out and sometimes goes to the extreme in order to avoid rocking the boat. It's time for men to get back to their God-given role as heads of their families. Too often we judge women for being so prominent in the relationship when the man is to be blamed for not taking the lead. Maybe he just doesn't know how to be a leader, and this is where the wife can encourage him.

As a wife, you can invite your husband to step up and take the lead. He might panic, but after awhile he will fill that void. Somebody has to lead and God says it's him. As you back off, he will step up. Let him make the decisions in the family and be the disciplinarian when he needs to be. As you back off of these important issues, he will go forward in the power of the Spirit to serve his family.

Women, let me tell you something from a man's viewpoint. A man likes to feel like a man. He thrives on respect (Ephesians 5:33). Many times he acts like a little boy but he really wants to fulfill his manhood. This is from God, and you can help him realize the will of God for his life. When he leads, he is fulfilled because he is ruling his home with loving authority. Don't worry about him getting a "head-trip". God has called him to take his rightful authority, not be authoritarian. If he gets bossy, then the Lord will bring him down a rung, you can count on that (1 Peter 5:5).

THE UNBELIEVING MAN

What do you do with a husband who is not a believer or with a husband who is a believer but in his heart the Lord is "resident", not "president"? There would be that tendency not to submit to

him because he isn't in the Lord. But 1 Peter 3:1 says to submit to a husband who is unbelieving. In fact it says you can win him to the Lord! How? By living the life of Jesus Christ around him.

Men are not won to the Lord by the wife nagging. A man will rebel when he feels preached at or pushed in a corner. He wants to act like a man and make his own decisions. He already has one mother, and all he needs now is a loving wife who gives him space to be himself. Peter says that if he doesn't become a believer by your sharing the word of God with him, then you are to back off verbally and win him by your actions. Why would he want to receive the Lord if you attack him with your Christianity? He isn't attracted to the wrath of God but the love of God who gives people "space to repent" (Revelation 2:21). So give your husband space and win him over by your godly conduct. This means that it might not be a good idea to be out at Bible study every night, neglecting your family and household. Women are to be "discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husband, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:5). Your assignment is to be patient (2 Peter 3:9) and to pray, pray, pray. Peter says they may be won by your chaste conduct accompanied by fear (1 Peter 3:2). Don't give up on your husband (Galatians 6:9). Claim the promises of God for him!

TRUE BEAUTY

Why am I talking about a woman's beauty in a handbook on marriage? You're right, I know nothing about it at all. But the Bible talks about the beauty of a woman in the context of marriage. It says in 1 Peter 3:3-4, "Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. What makes a woman beautiful? Cosmetics can do a lot to heighten a woman's beauty, but if you really want to shine . . . shine for Jesus! Proverbs 31:30 says, "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised." The Bible does not forbid the use of cosmetics, it just emphasizes that true beauty is of the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). A woman who fears the Lord knows that beauty is vain and that true beauty is an internal quality.

Did you know that the real you is of the heart? What you are on the inside? Peter calls it the "hidden person of the heart" (1 Peter 3:4). What's on the inside is imperishable, what's on the outside will sag and wrinkle with age. Peter highlights the qualities of a "gentle and quiet spirit". It doesn't mean you have to be a wallflower, but that you have the gentleness of Christ displayed in your femininity and the peaceful spirit that makes you glow for Jesus. I've never seen an unattractive woman who is in love with Jesus. I don't care how she feels about herself or how others might view her. She has something that is very precious in the sight of God. That's good news in a day and age when the fashion world emphasizes the outward person. God just laughs at all that and looks for a person whose heart is loyal to Him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

What does all this have to do with marriage? Well, the best thing you can add to your marriage is the character in Christ within you. The Bible says, "(Isaiah 40:8) The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever." The flower of your beauty will fade, but the word of God in you will stand forever. Do you spend just as much time in the word of God as you do putting yourself together in the morning? The answer to that question will reveal your priorities. The quality of your marriage is not dependent on your outward adorning but in the development of that hidden person of the heart. You're only getting older. With each year that passes you find more gray and wrinkles. You can try to fight it, but aging is inevitable and you are part of it. Am I depressing you? I hope not. I'm just trying to move your attention from the temporal to the eternal. You and your husband are getting older together. As you get older, gravity usually takes its course on the human body. And that's okay because you season together as a couple. If you

base your relationship on the outward self, your marriage will not last a lifetime. But as you groom your inner man, then your marriage will have a foundation that nothing can ever shake. That's why you must be in the word of God. Do you read the word daily? Are you involved not only at church on Sunday mornings but in a Bible study throughout the week? Do you fellowship with other sisters in the Lord? Do you have a "prayer partner", another sister in Christ you can pray with when you have a need? Do you make time throughout the day to go before the Lord in personal Bible reading and prayer? If you do, then you are adding not only to the quality of your walk with Christ, but also to your marriage.

ROLE MODELS

Who do you look up to? What is your ideal of a true woman? Is it some movie star? Is it some model in a glamour magazine? Is it some famous singer or athlete that you admire? We all have

people we look up to, but they are usually here today and gone tomorrow. That's the thing about our society's values, they are so fickle and transient along with the people that embody them. Peter says to make your model of womanhood not the contemporary women of the present, but the women of God of the past. It says in 1 Peter 3:5-6 that holy women in former times adorned themselves by being submissive to their own husbands. One is picked out of the crowd, and her name is Sarah. Peter says that she obeyed Abraham and called him "lord". She honored and respected her husband. He wasn't perfect, as the book of Genesis points out, but he loved the Lord, and Sarah came up under his authority. Peter encourages godly women to be daughters of Sarah and follow her example of respect toward her husband.

Women, we keep coming back to this "submission" word don't we? A big problem I see in marriage is that of the back seat husband and the front seat wife. God's plan is that both of you be in the front seat . . . with the husband at the steering wheel. I have heard testimony after testimony from women who stated they didn't even realize they were being unsubmitive until the Lord revealed it to them. Then as they backed off and let her husbands lead, their marriages started to take on a beautiful new quality. That's because this is God's role for marriage. The husband is to sacrificially love his wife and the wife is to be submissive to her husband. That's the word of God, and I can add nothing more to it or take away from it. God keeps it simple for us because He knows we would forget it if it was otherwise. We must return to biblical roles in marriage if we want to have a happy and fulfilled marriage in the Lord.

CHILDREN

(Psalms 127:3-5) Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. {4} Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. {5} Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

(Ephesians 6:4) And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

(Deuteronomy 6:6-7) "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. {7} "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

CHILDREN ARE A BLESSING

I used to hear my mother say to other parents not to endure their children but to enjoy them! That's how Solomon viewed children in Psalm 127:3-6. He said children are a heritage from the Lord and are His reward. He then went on to say that a man is happy if he has a quiver full of them. The world today sees children as a low priority. Children are aborted and children are abused. Children are also de-valued by our society. Look at the salary of a school teacher in comparison with other vocations. Look at how many children are in daycare all day. And look at how they are left to fend for themselves in an ungodly world that is preying upon their innocence.

Divorce, feminism, and the economy has done so much to ruin our family values. Parents think divorce is the answer to their problems, but it's just the beginning of their children's. The worldly woman thinks she can have it all . . . career, the gym, hobbies, a husband, and then the children. And that's just about where the children lie in preference. Then there is the economy which puts such a strain on the family that mom has to go off to work which all goes back to the children getting the bum end of the stick. No wonder we don't enjoy our children. We have given so much to everything and everybody else that all the kids get is the fried and crispy leftovers. Solomon says children are a gift from God but a frazzled parent sometimes sees them as a necessary obligation. Children deserve much more than that, and so do parents.

It's time for Christian couples to do some serious thinking and praying to see if their values line up with God's word. Let me go further and share my convictions concerning family priorities. There is a serious need for mom to be at home raising her children as her number one priority. Titus 2:4-5 says, "that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, {5} to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. A woman might say, "But what about work? We need the money and I've got to have a life outside the home raising kids all day!" Well, the Lord said He would provide all your needs (Philippians 4:19). The problem is we are so materialistic that we want the large home, nice furnishings, a fine car, cushy vacations, etc., and we place something else like money over children. And the issue about being bored at home all day with children? Children are not a bummer, they're a blessing. Yes, they will try you to no end, but you don't have your children forever. Raising young children is the hardest thing in the world, but you will never regret it. You will regret, however, having worked too much and not spending time with your kids.

Does that mean a woman can never work? Not by any means. Proverbs 31:10-31 talks about the virtuous woman. She made money but she maintained proper priorities. Everything she did was for her family and not for her own status, esteem, or personal fulfillment. Children must always come first. A job while the kids are in school or a job working at home is not a problem until it becomes one. Once it becomes draining on family relationships, then adjustments must be made and the adjustments must always be in favor of the family.

I remember the days when my wife and I worked before we had children. We had no financial concerns of which to speak. Then when Cheryl was expecting our first child, we bought a home and she quit working to raise our daughter. That meant more expenditures and less income to meet them! Those were the tough days! I was working three jobs and we were barely scraping by. Then when things were scarcely improving, we had our second child! I did my own house and car repairs, Cheryl cut coupons and made gifts for Christmas and birthdays. We would decline invitations to go out to eat because we couldn't even afford a Coke at McDonald's! We trusted God for everything, and He provided beautifully all our needs . . . at times miraculously!

Our children were the number one priority of our lives, and we would gladly drive older cars and shop at the “basement” stores because children are a reward from the Lord. We were not going to overlook a precious gift from God that was only on loan to us for a short time.

DISCIPLINE IS NOT PUNISHMENT

Now if children are a gift from the Lord, then He is going to show us how we should raise them. What follows will be the strength, wisdom, and courage to do so. Paul said in Ephesians 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Children are very precious and fragile. We are to bring them up without provoking them to wrath. Sometimes we are hard on our children and have unfair expectations for them. They get frustrated and angry. Then we end up paying for it by their unyielding attitude. So we end up threatening them and punishing them. This is not God’s intent. Paul says to “bring them up” which means to “nourish tenderly”. Have you ever tried to grow an African violet? Talk about nourishing tenderly! I’ve never once been successful with them. I either over or under water them. I fail to give them their proper nutrients and additives. I go to pluck off a bug and end up pulling off a leaf or two. They turn brown on me and end up dying. Even more than a plant, children need so much love, care, and attention.

Paul says children should be brought up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Children need a lot of training, and we need lots of patience. We train our children by first of all modeling a godly lifestyle for them. Then they can receive our corrective discipline. Have you ever heard the phrase, “rules without relationship equals rebellion”? It’s true, isn’t it? If our kids don’t respect us, it might be that we haven’t earned their respect. Respect doesn’t automatically come with the title of “parent”. It comes from having a loving relationship with them. Only then can we be worthy of the respect of our children.

The other end of the spectrum is the tendency not to discipline our children at all. Proverbs 22:15 says, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him.” The best thing you can do for your children is to say “no” to them. God says “no” to me much of the time, and I have to learn that my Father knows best! Children must learn the same from us. By saying “no” you are teaching your child how to be a disciple of Christ. Look at what Jesus said to those who were interested in following Him, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24) . Disciple means “ a learned one”, and our children learn through discipline. They learn that some behavior is appropriate and some behavior is not. We instill godly values in them so they might know the difference between right and wrong. Then they can then know how to make right choices out in the world. Self-denial is not a common virtue in our society, but we must teach it to our children. We have to learn as parents that sometimes the most loving thing to say to our children is “no” and stick to our word and not cave in to our children’s persistent nagging. You will then be preparing your child to follow Christ and be one of His own disciples.

God has made it simple for the husband. God give him one admonition and that is to sacrificially love his wife (Ephesians 5:25). To the wife also the will of God is laid out so simply. God says to submit to your husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Now to children he says to “obey your parents” (Ephesians 6:1-3) Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. {2} “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: {3} “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.” Children are to obey their parents in the Lord, meaning as unto the Lord. Then Paul quotes one of the Ten Commandments. Paul goes on to explain the advantage of obeying parents. He says if you do so, then you will have a long life filled with

blessing from the Lord. This all goes back to obedience, saying “yes” to parents when told what to do, as unto Christ.

Parents, we must teach our children obedience. Children are born cute and cuddly but we must remember they are sinners, harboring foolishness in their hearts (Proverbs 22:15). They will try us and test us but we must hold them to obedience. When we do, we are teaching them how to obey God. God is the highest authority and has imposed all authority on earth (Romans 13:1). We teach our children how to obey God by obeying us. When they do what we ask them to do, then they are being trained to say “yes” to God. If we keep this perspective in our training of children, then discipline takes on a new and higher meaning. This will motivate us to motivate our children. Our kids are on loan to us for eighteen years, after which we will want them to continue in a committed relationship with Christ. What a job we have as parents!

The best tool we have as parents is the word of God! Don't be taken in by the passing fads regarding the raising of children. Get into the word of God, read it every day, and God will show you how to raise a child of any age. Deuteronomy 6:6 says that God's word is to be in our hearts. Then in verse 7, it says to teach the word diligently to your children. Do you teach the word of God to your children? Do you talk of the wonderful words of scripture as you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up? The best parenting book is the Bible! Read it, and pass it on to your children.

I love the concept of the family altar. As parents, you can bring your family to the family altar everyday. Make it a habit to read the Bible and pray together everyday. You will reap so much benefit from this simple act that you won't ever want to miss it. When our children were young they loved to have the illustrated Bible read to them at night and then have a prayer as they were tucked into bed. As our children got older we switched to the after-dinner time as the family altar. After we eat, and before we go about our evening, we take turns reading scripture. Then we all go around the table and say a prayer. This brings us close to the Lord and to each other and sets such a wonderful tone of togetherness and joy in our home. The peace of God rules over our habitation when we seek the Lord together as a family. This way the word of God is in our heart and we are teaching His words diligently to our children. Then when a problem comes our way, we have scripture to which we can refer. We can claim God's promises for any situation that arises in our family. Happy are the people who are in such a state; Happy are the people whose God is the LORD! (Psalms 144:15).

MARRIAGE BUILDERS

There are many things that are tearing down marriages in our society today. We need to learn as believers how to let God build up our marriages. Unfortunately, many marriages are not happy and fulfilled ones. There are many reasons why this is so, but what we want to focus on is what constitutes a blessed marriage. I believe if a couple applies the following scriptural principles, they will reap a harvest of blessings in their marriage (Galatians 6:7-10). God's word works in all areas of our life, especially in marriage. Let's look at some marriage builders:

PRIORITIES

(Matthew 6:33) "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

A priority is something that comes first in importance. What is the most important thing in your life? Is it a nice home? Is it that promotion? Is it the dream trip to Hawaii? Jesus said to seek first the kingdom of God! Do you seek God's kingdom first in your life? Or are you seeking to build your own kingdom down here on earth? Jesus taught us in Matthew chapter 6 that we were to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. That we are to serve God, not mammon (money). Is Jesus the number one passion in your life? When you need a car, do you seek God first or do you impulsively run down to the car dealership? When you are under stress, do you run to Jesus or do you head for the refrigerator or the mall?! Jesus said we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). Nothing should ever take the place of the Lord in our lives. He deserves the chief place in our hearts. The number one priority in our lives should be to love the Lord and seek to serve Him all our days.

After God, our families should naturally be the next priority in our lives. We believe this conceptually but many times fail to implement it practically. With such a high priority on our families, everything else will have to take rear seat. That includes overworking, our hobbies and interests, our activities, our friendships, and sometimes even our ministry. Since our families are so important, we will do anything to preserve the bond of our relationship. This priority is put into effect at our dinner table.

We believe the dinner hour is the most important hour of the day. This is when we are all together eating and communicating about the events of the day. It's a wonderful time of good food and family fun as we talk lightheartedly after a busy day and get caught up on all the happenings of each person. Our dinner is at a stated time, and all must be there. I've got to quit my work in time, my wife keeps an eye on the clock and knows when to start cooking, and the kids need to be home and done with their chores. That's a priority. And if the phone rings during the dinner hour (which it usually does), we let it go on to the answering machine. Family comes first.

After God and family, comes our jobs and then our ministries. It's a simple priority plan but something that easily gets out of order because of the complexities of life that constantly challenge us. It seems I am forever re-establishing my priorities because so many things are vying for my attention. But I can't let those things be a dictator over me. I have the power through the Lord to tell them where they fit in. They must fit in with the priorities God has set for me.

TOGETHERNESS

(Colossians 3:14) But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

If we make our marriage and family a high priority, then we know we not only should spend time together, but we will want to spend time together. We live in a busy world, and we must choose to shut out the clamor so we can invest in what is most important in life . . . each other! A relationship must be nurtured if it's going to grow. There is that tendency to cool off after being married for awhile. We get busy and gain our interest and excitement in other things instead of each other. We've got to return to the simplicity of being together and undistracted and enjoying it! Remember when you were dating and couldn't wait to be together? You'd spend hours and hours basking in your love for each other. Oh, but then life slowly became routine and the boil went down to a simmer. How pitiful!! What a rip-off from Satan! (John 10:10). We've got to get back to enjoying each other's presence. That is the love which is the bond for a growing and maturing marriage.

My wife and I were at a restaurant the other day and we noticed a couple sitting at a table across the way who never spoke one word to each other. They just kept eating and staring off into the distance. How sad it was to see. God has given my wife and I such a beautiful bond in His love and we are grateful for it. We always have so much to talk about and enjoy keeping caught up with each other. God has worked in our lives, and we give Him the glory. We could be like that silent couple if not for the grace of God.

It's too bad that couples stop dating. What usually happens is that kids come along and you just kind of give up working on the dating aspect of marriage because you just get so busy raising a family. My wife and I have spent some good money on our babysitters because we know it is worth the investment in our marriage. Sometimes when we could not get a babysitter (or afford one!), we would get the kids down early and just enjoy a nice evening together at home. At other times, God would provide ways for us to get out and have a great time together doing something fun. The devil loves a bored couple because that's when he can start driving a wedge in between them. God is a God of creativity, and He wants to keep our relationships fresh and alive.

What about children? What's the greatest thing you can do for your kids? Buy them a present? Give them extra money for allowance? Send them off to Disneyland for the day? All these things children would enjoy but what they would appreciate the most is time you spend with them. And not just quality time, but quantity time. Don't buy the myth that your relationship can survive on quality time. Quality time here and there won't cut it. What you need is a quantity of quality time! If you can't provide that then you are too busy and your priorities are out of order. You need a major shift in your values.

Men love to feel important in their jobs, but one day your job will be over and where will your kids be? They will be all grown up and won't have time for you! The time you invest in them now is the most important. They grow up fast. Adults spell love L-O-V-E. Kids spell love T-I-M-E! Talk with them. Play with them. Read to them. Do simple things together like walking the dog together in the park. When they become teenagers, don't pull back because they have their own friends and social network. Keep involved in your children's lives and be there for them when they need you. Assure them that you will do anything for them. Let them know that they are more important than a clean house or the next business deal. Marriage and family are more than "survivalism," they are a process of bonding together in God's love. There is no greater experience on earth than to be a part of a family where the members love each other and love to spend time with each other.

SERVANTHOOD

(Matthew 20:28) "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Right priorities mean that you put your family first. Togetherness means you are enjoying each other's presence together. But once you have a spirit of togetherness then servanthood is the key to enjoying it. The world says marriage is a 50/50 proposition. Wrong! It's giving 100% to each other by out-serving each other. This does not mean we are slaves to each other. No . . . we are free in Jesus to serve one another (Galatians 5:13). If you want a happy marriage, you've got to serve your mate. Servanthood is also for the whole family. The husband serves the wife and the kids. The wife serves her husband and her kids. The kids serve each other and their parents. You serve each other because you love each other and you are family. The family is the context for all social learning outside the home.

Jesus modeled servanthood in John 13. After dinner, he washed the disciples' dirty feet. The disciples couldn't believe the Messiah would do such a humbling and menial task. But Jesus said that they were to follow His example. That means that we are to live "other-centered," not self-centered lives. Philippians 2:3-4 says, Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. {4} Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. I am to not live for myself and my needs. But this does not sadden me because I will find true joy in giving and in serving others (Acts 20:35). If we could put this into practice in our homes, just imagine the joy, peace, and harmony there would be!

This means that after a hard day at work I am to go home and serve my family! (2 Samuel 6:20) Then David returned to bless his household. Sound like drudgery and slavery? Not if I pray in the car on the way home and commit to the Lord the day behind me and pray about the rest of the day ahead of me. I know my wife needs help around the house and the kids need their diapers changed or have questions about their homework. Maybe I've got to help tidy up a bit, run to the store for milk, or just listen to my wife talk about her day. That is serving my family. It is not a ball and chain to me, it's a privilege to have such a wonderful wife and family that God has entrusted to me. With joy I can serve them, and I will trust God for the time that I need to get my things done. In fact, the Lord always goes before us and works things out if we just trust Him.

STORMS OF LIFE

(Matthew 7:24-27) "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: {25} "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. {26} "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: {27} "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

It's hard for an engaged or newlywed couple to ever imagine how their marriage will be tested by the storms of life. You tend to be in dreamland at this beginning stage and that's the way it's supposed to be! But we also have to be prepared for the storms of life when they come. Notice how I said when they come, not if they come! The traditional wedding vows state that you will be faithful to your spouse: "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health." Little did I know that my marriage would be tested in all of these areas! But if love is never tested, can it really be termed true love? How do I know if I really love my wife if I am just relying on feelings for her? The Bible says nothing about love being a feeling. It is a choice. There are times in marriage when you will be sorely tried and the feeling will not be there. This is when we "choose" to love with God's agape love (1 Corinthians 13). So if your "better" turns into "worse", your "richer" turns into "poorer", and your "health" turns into "sickness", it won't destroy your marriage because you knew the storms of life would be coming and that God's love would overcome any obstacles (Song of Solomon 8:7).

The Bible says Jesus is the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). When we build our marriage on the Rock then we will survive the storms of life. The Lord is stronger than the storm and His firm foundation will hold us up. If we build our marriages on the sand (the things of the world, our own feelings, etc.), then the storms of life have us beat.

Prayer is the key to keeping your marriage on the Rock. Praying together as a couple is one way the devil is defeated and the battle is won. You see, the Bible says that the battles we face in life

belong to the Lord. We don't have to fight, God will do the work. Read the following important scriptures and be blessed with these wonderful promises (Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 2 Chronicles 20:15; Exodus 14:13-14).

My wife and I pray when things get tough, when we are confused, or when we sense the devil is at work in our relationship or in the family situation we are facing. It can become a spiritual battle at times and that's when we need to realize we are no longer facing personalities anymore, but principalities. How we need to use that offensive weapon of prayer (Ephesians 6:18). Sometimes my flesh resists this doorway to victory but if I go against my prideful tendencies and lay out the situation before the Lord, things start to turn around for the better, and God gets all the glory! In fact, the Lord might allow some of these trials to get our attention. Maybe things have been going so well that we haven't been calling on the name of the Lord. Well, now God's got my attention, and I need to humble myself, go to my wife, reach for her hands and go to the throne of God with her. Then we will be on the Rock and the storms can beat and beat against us but we will not falter because the Lord will hold us up. Satan just cannot win when God is in the center (1 John 4:4).

MONEY

(Matthew 6:19-21) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; {20} "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. {21} "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also....(Matthew 6:24) "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon....(Matthew 6:31-33) "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' {32} "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. {33} "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

(Romans 13:8) Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

(2 Corinthians 9:6-8) But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. {7} So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. {8} And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

(Philippians 4:19) And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Money is what couples seem to argue about the most. The arguments often stem from not having enough money or the misuse of money. Money is not the root of all evil, but the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). We live in a greedy society and covetousness can affect believers as well. The Lord said He would supply all our needs, not our greeds! Christians are to be content with what they have (1 Timothy 6:6-8) and to trust God for all their needs. Jesus said not to worry about anything but instead trust God for everything (Matthew 6:19-34). If the Lord takes care of the birds and the flowers, He will take care of us. He says repeatedly not to worry about providing for your life. The Bible says that the just shall live by faith (Habakkuk

2:4). The world is hassled by finances, but the child of God can be at peace knowing the Lord is in control of his life. God said he would meet every need, but there are three things we need to do on our end. These three things are: To work hard, to stay out of debt, and to tithe.

It says in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." Working is not part of the curse of Adam. The curse is working by the sweat of our brow. Adam worked before the fall ever occurred (Genesis 2:15, 3:17-19). It says man should be occupied all day (Psalm 104:23) and be tired at night (Ecclesiastes 5:12) and that he should provide for his family as a believer (1 Timothy 5:8). Work is a place to demonstrate our faith in Jesus Christ (Titus 2:9-10) and to contribute to the world in service (Acts 20:35). We labor together with the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:9) and in His strength each day (Deuteronomy 33:25). If we are working hard and doing our best then God will do the rest. God honors a hard-working provider!

I never saw my father at home during the day. He was hard at work providing for his family. There was a time when he worked three jobs just to keep food on the table and clothes on our backs. He worked hard and came home tired to spend time with his family. My brothers and I had a good role model. We have all worked hard getting through college and working in our careers and ministries, and that hard work has paid off (Galatians 6:9). We don't expect a hand out from the government or from any person. We know the law of cause and effect. We know that if we work hard then we've done our part, and God will provide for our every need.

Besides hard work there is the discipline of staying out of debt. The average family credit card debt is astronomical, way out of orbit. How sad that we are now serving our creditors rather than God (Proverbs 22:7). God said He would provide for our needs (Philippians 4:19), so why are we using credit cards? Credit is such a temptation and has trapped so many people. Whatever happened to the old-fashioned concept of saving up and then making a purchase? Sadly, we want it all now, so we mortgage our futures for that instant gratification. Proverbs 22:3 says, "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on are punished."

Any credit counselor will tell you that credit is okay if you can pay it off when the bill comes. Let's say you forgot your checkbook at home and you find yourself at a store with two impatient and hungry children. You get trapped in the checkout line so you use your credit card. Well, the prudent thing would be to go home, give the kids a snack, and write a check to your credit lender, attaching it to your credit receipt. Then when the bill comes you have the money and you have stayed current in your expenditures. It's called living within your income! It's a tried-and-proven method that will save you a lot of pain down the road.

Let's say you come across something that you've been wanting for a long, long time. You don't have enough cash but you tell yourself you just have to have this thing. What should you do? Well, have you prayed about it? Are you being rash? Do you need to be wise and go home and sleep on it? Do you have the money in your savings account? If not, then that's a "red-flag" against making the purchase. The fruit of the Spirit is patience (Galatians 5:22-23), and if God wants you to have it, He will provide the money for it before the purchase, not after. A house is a wise investment because it's usually an appreciating item. Things like cars, refrigerators, and stereos are depreciating items so it's best to save for those or buy them used. How can God provide for our needs if we are not living within the limits He has set for us? And if those credit cards keep stumbling us, then we need to remove the source of temptation by cutting them up (Matthew 5:30). That's called "plastic surgery!" How many stories I could tell of God's marvelous provision for our financial needs without using credit. How exciting it is to live by faith! That way you see the power and love of God for you and then He gets all the credit!!

After hard work and living within our means, we are to be givers. The Bible says a lot about tithing (Malachi 3:10; 2 Corinthians 8-9, to name a few). Tithe means tenth. In the Old Testament they gave the tithe to the priests in the temple. In the New Testament we are still called upon to give a portion of our money to the Lord's work. We are not bound to the tithe, but if the law said to tithe, I wonder what grace would say? We are free as believers to give bountifully to the cause of Christ.

I was taught as a new believer to honor God with my money. I have never suffered for it. To the contrary, I have been blessed every time. There have been times when we have been tempted not to tithe because of the accumulation of bills and obligations. But the Lord has been our strength and we have learned that sometimes you have to give until it hurts (2 Samuel 24:24). God loves sacrificial giving (Hebrews 13:16), and it's one way to prove that we love Him and trust Him. My money is not my own. Everything I have belongs to the Lord. As I give to Him, He will see to it that I have everything I need so I can keep giving! (2 Corinthians 9:8).

My wife and I are in full agreement about these three principles. They are from scripture and they work! God provides for all of our needs and even some of our wants! As a loving heavenly Father, He will not only test us, but He will also provide for us and sometimes even spoil us! He is so good!!

THE BEDROOM

(Hebrews 13:4) Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

God has provided sex not only for procreation (Genesis 1:28) but also for recreation (Song of Solomon; Hebrews 13:4). Couples have that wonderful experience of enjoying each other emotionally and physically in sexual love. It bonds the marriage together. That's why God made the drive so strong. Couples need to have regular times of expressing love to each other (1 Corinthians 7:5). Schedules need to be maintained so that busyness and fatigue will be minimized so you can enjoy a relaxed time of intimate pleasure.

When Adam saw Eve for the first time, she stole his heart away (Genesis 2:22-23). This is the way it should be between a man and a woman in marriage. Look at what it says in Proverbs 5:19-20, "As a loving deer and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; And always be enraptured with her love. {20} For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, And be embraced in the arms of a seductress?" Having a good sex life will be a preventive against fornication and adultery (Hebrews 13:4).

The Bible says to dwell with your wife according to knowledge (1 Peter 3:7). A man needs to know that a woman has to be romanced before she will be in the mood for lovemaking. Like the old saying says, "Sex begins in the kitchen." As you help your wife around the house and with the kids, then she will feel honored and cared for. She will also get things off her mind so she can be focused when it comes to you. As she is warmed up in the kitchen, then she needs to be warmed up in the bedroom. Take time with your wife and don't expect her to get aroused as quickly as you. God made her different and she can teach you a lot about the value of true love before consummation. Women respond to soft words and tender advances. This prolongs the bedroom engagement so that the experience will not be perfunctory but special.

Just as a man needs to know how a woman is different, so a woman needs to know how a man is different in the physical, sexual realm. Men get aroused by sight instantly! Don't worry, your man is not an animal, though at times he might act like one! You can teach him a lot about the essence of love. You can lovingly guide him as to your needs and responses. You can tame that "tiger" if you are patient and accept the way he is. He is stimulated all day by women around him and the ads and billboards he sees, so sometimes when he gets home he might be in that "ready" mood. Don't despise him or the way he is naturally. Most women can't believe how much sex is on the mind of their men! The man cannot be faulted for the sexual drive God has instilled in him. You must serve his needs or he will have trouble in the flesh. Don't just put up with the man, enjoy him in and outside of bed. Sex wasn't made just for the woman to put up with but for both of you to enjoy!

A special note to the man: Make purity the number one priority in your sexual life. There is a scripture that I want to share

with you that we all as men must claim. It's in Job 31:1, and it says, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" Have you made a covenant with your eyes that you will not look upon any woman but your wife? You know the first look is free but the second one you have to pay for! There is nothing wrong with noticing beauty in another woman, but don't go the next step into lustful desire. The Lord sees it and will hold you accountable (Matthew 5:27-28). Save all your love and passion for the one you made a vow to at the marriage altar. Don't let lust control your life; it will destroy you, your marriage, and your witness for Christ. It's an uncontrollable fire that will keep on burning and consuming you. Your wife deserves your undivided loyalty and affection. Let her know that she's the only one. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).

CONCLUSION

There is no greater area to learn the command of Christ to love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34) than in marriage. Loving your mate so much that you would lay down your life for your beloved (John 15:13). Learning to love your life partner with God's agape love (1 Corinthians 13) will provide you with a glorious marriage and will make you the envy of the town! May the Lord bless your marriage as you apply His word to your life and family. May your marriage be a living example of the love of Christ and the church. May the Lord bless and keep your marriage in His mighty power, knowing that no one is able to snatch you or your marriage or your family out of your Heavenly Father's hands! (John 10:28-29).