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## BUILDING BLOCKS TO A STRONG MARRIAGE

Society offers few answers to reverse the trends of marital unhappiness. But there are answers—in the most published book in history. With that confidence, RBC staff writer David Egner has written this booklet to summarize what the Bible says about marriage. It is our prayer that through the answers found in these pages, the love of many will be renewed and sustained.

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Managing Editor: David Sper

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## WHAT SOME PEOPLE ARE SAYING

**W**hen the honeymoon is over, many husbands and wives find themselves thinking and saying words they never expected to say. For example:

- *“I’m getting out. This isn’t the person I thought I was marrying. Life is too short for all of this pain. We’re no longer good for one another.”*
- *“We’ve tried everything. Nothing seems to work. He just insists on having everything his own way. It’s hopeless. The only thing to do is bail out.”*
- *“This is the third millennium. Marriage*

*doesn’t mean what it used to. A lot of people aren’t even bothering with a ceremony anymore. You try it; and if it doesn’t work, you leave it. It’s nothing to get moralistic about.”*

- *“Look at how high the divorce rate is. Everybody’s getting a divorce—even prominent church leaders. So why should I suffer through a bad marriage? There’s no need for me to be the exception.”*

**“Marriage isn’t so much finding the right person as being the right person.”**  
—Charlie Shedd

- *“Our marriage needs a little excitement. We’re too used to each other. Maybe if I have an affair,*

*it will put the spice back into our marriage.”*

- *“We’ve been going from counselor to counselor. I don’t know how much money we’ve spent. We even went to a preacher. Somebody must have the right formula for us. I guess we’ll just have to keep searching.”*
- *“I know our marriage will eventually work. Once I’ve had a few drinks, I can tolerate just about anything. It will help me make it until things get better.”*
- *“I guess I’m destined to a life of unhappiness. There’s nothing I can do about my marriage. Maybe when the children all leave home I’ll have the courage to get out. Until then, I’ll just have to pretend everything’s okay.”*

Divorce. Extramarital affairs. Counselors. Alcohol. Drugs. Resignation. These are just some of the ways people are trying to deal with troubled marriages. But most of the time, efforts to kill the pain make a bad situation worse.

***“God’s the One who can make you into the right kind of husband or wife—the kind that pleases Him.”***

There is another way—a better way. Even if you are ready to call a lawyer. Even if reconciliation seems hopeless. You can go to Someone who understands your heart and your trouble. He made marriage in the first place. He alone can offer you the inner strength you need so that you can take the first step.

## IT ALL BEGAN WITH GOD

**M**arriage was made in heaven. It all began in Paradise.

God saw that man's aloneness was not good, so He made him a "helper comparable to him." And when God brought the woman to him, the first marital relationship began. Adam and Eve shared the wonderful garden paradise God had created for them as husband and wife. Here is how the Bible says it all began:

*The Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."  
... 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.*

*Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man (Gen. 2:18,21-22).*

Eve was made to be Adam's "helper comparable." She is described with the English word *helper*, which doesn't express all that is poured into the Hebrew term. Sometimes it refers to someone who helps another find fulfillment. In one instance, it was used to tell of someone who came to the rescue of another.

***"The woman was brought to the man to fulfill him—to rescue him from his aloneness."***

On another occasion it was used of God Himself. It's an expression of honor

showing that Eve was brought to the man to complete him and to rescue him from his aloneness.

**“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’”**

**—Genesis 2:18**

As a *comparable* helper, Eve was Adam’s qualified, corresponding partner. God made her to be a suitable friend and companion to the man. She was, as Charles Swindoll described it, the “missing piece in the puzzle of his life.”

In that first relationship, our Creator gave us a realistic pattern that set a course for both the challenges and essentials of a healthy marriage.

The Genesis account of the beginning of marriage concludes with a statement that expresses four elements that should be part of every marriage (see Gen. 2:24-25). They are as follows:

• **A Cutting Off.**

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother.” The marital partners leave their parents.

• **A Bonding.** “And be joined to his wife.” The picture of the first marriage includes the idea of a gluing, a permanent bonding.

• **A Unity.** “And they shall become one flesh.” The two are to see themselves as one. The old family units are broken; a new one begins.

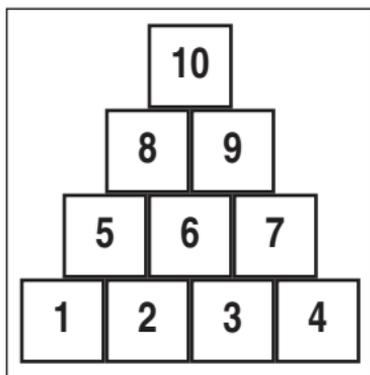
• **An Intimacy.** “And they were both naked . . . and were not ashamed.” Their absence of self-consciousness enabled them to enjoy one another and to meet each other’s needs without any sense of embarrassment or rejection.

# TEN BIBLICAL BUILDING BLOCKS

**W**hen God made marriage, He formed a lifelong relationship that was to find its strength and endurance in Him. Over time, He used the wisdom of His Word to teach husbands and wives how to be friends to their mates. In the process, He gave all of us an understanding of the essential building blocks to a strong marriage. They are:

1. Lifelong Commitment
2. Shared Identity
3. Absolute Faithfulness
4. Well-Defined Roles
5. Unreserved Love
6. Mutual Submission
7. Sexual Fulfillment
8. Open Communication
9. Tender Respect
10. Spiritual Companionship

As we think through these 10 building blocks,



remember that they are not man-made. They are given to us by God Himself. Because they are, you can know with certainty that when you and your mate follow them, you will have a marriage that is strong.

But perhaps your marital partner is at a different place than you are spiritually or refuses to accept the authority of the Bible. If your partner is willing to remain with you, this is your opportunity to show your mate the kind of husband or wife God can help you to be (1 Cor. 7:12-16). So don't put the booklet down. We sincerely believe it will help.

## **BUILDING BLOCK I:** **Lifelong Commitment**

1

The first biblical building block for a strong marriage is for the man and woman to make a lifelong commitment. The Scriptures make it clear that God's ideal for marriage is one man and one woman for a lifetime. With this kind of commitment in view, the Lord Jesus said:

*Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?"*

*So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate (Mt. 19:4-6).*

Then, in response to a question about divorce, Jesus continued:

*Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery (vv.8-9).*

Except for the serious exception of marital unfaithfulness, the marriage vow is a lifelong commitment—a vow to God and to each other that is not to be broken (see Eccl. 5:4-5). Marriage is for life.

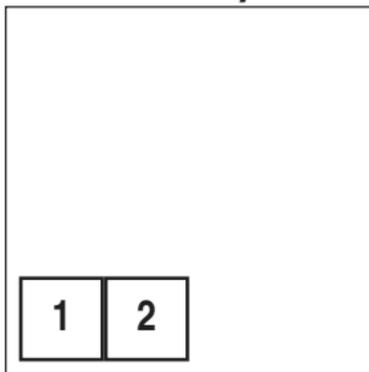
Consider the following

true story: A man and woman had been married only a year when she was diagnosed as a victim of multiple sclerosis. After thinking seriously about it, she told her husband she was “setting him free.” But he did not leave her. The tender care and love he showered on her made her remaining years happy and special. Why did he do it? “Because,” he said, “when I

***“The marriage vow is the expression of a lifelong commitment. ‘From this day forward’ extends throughout one’s lifetime.”***

vowed before God ‘for better or for worse’ and ‘in sickness and in health,’ I meant it. And God made both of us unbelievably happy as a result.”

## **BUILDING BLOCK 2: Shared Identity**



The second building block for a strong marriage is for husband and wife to see themselves as one. No longer is it a man living his life for himself and a woman living hers for herself. There is now a new union, a new family, a new unit. Adam expressed this shared identity when God brought him the woman. He 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 (Gen. 2:23).*

The next verse concludes with the words, “they shall become one flesh” (v.24).

But it's not always easy to live out that oneness in everyday life. This is because the husband and wife have different habits, different backgrounds, different parents, different education, different personalities, and different emotional scars.

***“The foundation of [oneness] is a mutual commitment to minister to one another’s personal needs.”***

***—Lawrence Crabb, Jr.***

Besides, Eve was not a clone of Adam. She was unique, as every human being is unique. She did not come off some assembly line. She was different, both physically and emotionally. She had different needs—needs Adam alone could satisfy. And she alone could satisfy Adam’s needs.

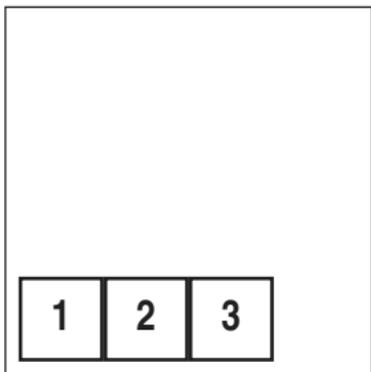
In marriage, a man and woman are brought into union. They become one, blending into each other’s lives. It’s once-for-all, yet it’s a process. Time, love, patience, and forgiveness are needed to bring the shared identity of marriage into maturity. And it has wonderful results. The man and woman are no longer alone. They are one, even at a time when:

- he’s in a motel room a thousand miles away.
- she’s in the pains of childbirth.
- he has just lost his job.
- she has discovered a mysterious lump.
- he has received a good promotion.
- she has been offered a new job.

The two are one.

Although they are distinct persons with vast differences, they have agreed to walk the path of life as one. They have a shared identity.

## **BUILDING BLOCK 3:** **Absolute Faithfulness**



Not only is marriage a lifelong commitment of two people who have a shared identity, it also calls for total fidelity on the part of the husband and the wife. They are to be true to each other. The Bible gives no ground on this issue. The man is to be faithful to his wife; she to him.

The writer of Proverbs cautioned:

*Can a man take fire  
to his bosom, and his  
clothes not be burned?  
Can one walk on hot  
coals, and his feet not be  
seared? So is he who goes  
in to his neighbor's wife;*

*whoever touches her  
shall not be innocent  
(6:27-29).*

The Bible is uncompromising in its demand for sexual faithfulness. Paul told Titus to have the older women instruct the younger women in the church “to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste” (2:4-5). As a woman enters a marriage relationship, she is to be committed to giving herself only to her husband.

For our good and God’s honor, adultery is strictly forbidden in the Bible. The seventh commandment given on Sinai was, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14). Jesus mentioned this commandment in His conversation with the rich young ruler (Mt. 19:18). And Paul named adultery first in his list of the sins of the flesh (Gal. 5:19).

Marital faithfulness is

the fulfillment of the vow made before God and man during the wedding ceremony: “And to you I pledge my faithfulness.”

One writer said:

This is how we must love one another, with a vowed love that is not dependent on happiness nor any of the external hallmarks of success. Where is such love to begin if it does not begin with the one closest to us, the life’s partner whom we have chosen out of all the other people in the world as the apple of our eye? (Mike Mason, *The Mystery Of Marriage*, p.106).

Here are some implications of absolute faithfulness—the third biblical building block of marriage:

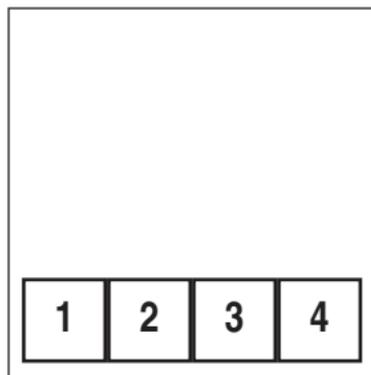
- We will save our hearts for each other.
- We will keep our

promise of loyalty.

- We will not seek comfort from a competitor.
- We will let no one come between us.
- We will realize we are not our own.

By today’s standards, absolute faithfulness “isn’t natural.” Of course not—not in a fallen world. But for our first parents in Paradise, it was as natural as could be. And today it will be part of every marriage that is strong and successful.

## **BUILDING BLOCK 4: Well-Defined Roles**



Today’s society has made an all-out assault on

marriage. And one of its attacks is on the traditional roles within the family. The wife is being told that since she has the same rights as her husband, she doesn't have to submit to anybody. Pressure is being put on the husband to take care of himself and not to worry about her. As a result, husbands and wives need direction. They need answers to basic questions about their specific roles.

Those answers are found in the Bible. And when they are expressed in love, they reflect the wisdom of God.

### ***The Husband's Role.***

The Bible says that the husband is the head of the wife. Paul wrote:

*I want you to know that the head of every . . . woman is man, and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3).*

*The husband is head of the wife (Eph. 5:23).*

While this principle is

one of the most misquoted and misused principles in Scripture, it doesn't need to be. Biblical leadership is not dictatorial or blindly self-serving. Before God, this headship is:

- to be provided in love (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19).
- to follow the example of Christ's love for the church (Eph. 5:25).
- to be done with understanding (1 Pet. 3:7).
- to be done without bitterness (Col. 3:19).
- to equal his love for his own body (Eph. 5:28).

Marital headship does not mean that the husband is superior. The same verse that says the man is head of the woman also says that God is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). And we know They are equal in nature. Both are fully God.

The husband's headship is functional. It helps the marriage work. When

understood and expressed in the spirit of Christ, it provides a servant role. Headship carries with it great responsibility. The husband is to provide loving, understanding, self-sacrificing, patient, God-honoring leadership.

**The Wife's Role.** The woman is instructed in the Bible to submit thoughtfully and wisely to the leadership of her husband:

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord (Eph. 5:22; cp. Col. 3:18).*

*Likewise you wives, be submissive to your own husbands (1 Pet. 3:1).*

*Admonish the young women . . . to be . . . obedient to their own husbands (Ti. 2:4-5).*

God made man and woman to come together in a fulfilling, satisfying relationship. He made Adam first (1 Tim. 2:13), and He made him to be

head (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). Adam was to use his physical strength and his spiritual responsibilities for the good of Eve; Eve was to be ready to help Adam fulfill his God-given role and responsibilities (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:8-9).

A woman who does not find joy in helping a man provide loving, thoughtful leadership in the home is doing so to her own harm. Even though she might find it difficult to accept even good initiatives from her husband, she needs to show that her ultimate confidence and trust is in God Himself.

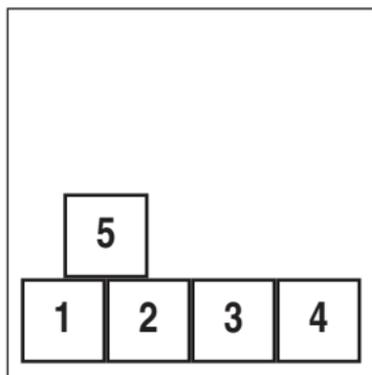
Marriage has its best opportunity when both husband and wife accept their roles. It's a functional necessity—a necessity exemplified within the Godhead itself. Consider these words of Christ: "My Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28). Yet He also

said, “I and My Father are one” (Jn. 10:30).

Jesus came to earth to carry out in exact detail the will and plan of the Father. Although He was equal to the Father, He submitted Himself to the Father’s leading.

This relationship within the Godhead is the pattern that provides a background for understanding heaven’s pattern for marriage.

## **BUILDING BLOCK 5: Unreserved Love**



The fifth building block for a strong marriage is love—genuine, heartfelt, through-thick-and-thin, till-death-us-do-part love. A husband and

wife are to love each other with the kind of unreserved love that leads them to honor each other, to esteem each other, to consider each other’s welfare above their own, and to stay by each other’s side through the highs and lows and the ups and downs that come in every married life.

The *husband* was told specifically in the Bible to love his wife. Paul said it succinctly in Colossians 3:19, “Husbands, love your wives” (see also Eph. 5:25).

The *wife* also is expected to love her husband. You will remember, for example, that the older women of Crete were told to instruct the younger women to “love their husbands” (Ti. 2:4).

The love between a husband and wife that grows through the years of marriage does not happen automatically with the saying of the vows or the giving of a ring. It must be

worked at! True, many wonderful and deep feelings are experienced by a couple who court, fall in love, and marry. As time goes on, however, they learn that love has a deeper and more practical dimension than the romantic aspect. They discover that they have to work at loving each other.

The biblical pattern for Christian love is spelled out in 1 Corinthians 13. Although the love defined in these familiar verses is true of all relationships, it may be especially applied to marriage. Think about the practical ways the elements of love seen in verses 4-8 apply to a husband/wife relationship:

- *love is patient*, enduring his absentmindedness over and over again.
- *love is kind*, helping with the housework when she's had a hard day.
- *love does not envy* his important position at

work or the praise she gets for her kindness.

- *love does not boast* about getting the bigger paycheck or making fewer mistakes.
- *love is not proud* but admits that she may be right about what's wrong with the car.
- *love is not rude*, for it speaks to her respectfully in private as well as in public.
- *love is not self-seeking*, but it looks for an opportunity to be of help to the other.
- *love is not easily angered* and doesn't even raise its voice when she does.
- *love keeps no record of wrongs* and doesn't raise issues when it's time to move on.
- *love does not delight in evil* and does not pressure the partner into wrong behavior.
- *love rejoices with the truth* by facing

reality and changing accordingly.

- *love always protects*, without resorting to bitter, sarcastic criticism.
- *love always trusts*, believing that our real security is in the Lord.
- *love always hopes*, holding to the shared dreams when his job is phased out.
- *love always perseveres*, growing even stronger in adversity and stress.
- *love never fails*, though youth, health, and vigor fade away.

“But wait a minute,” you say. “I’m doing my part, but my partner is not doing his. Do you expect me to keep loving him when he doesn’t love me in return?”

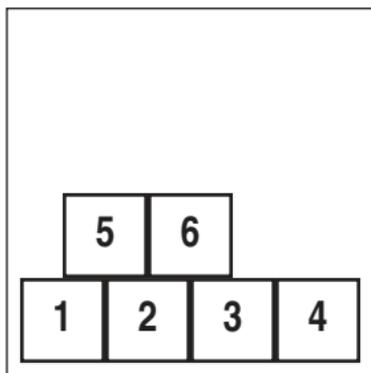
Disillusioned husband or wife, this love can change your life. It may not change your mate, but it will give him every reason to realize that you are still there for him. These principles of

love aren’t given just to make marriage work. They are given to us by a wise heavenly Father who, above all, wants us to be in right relationship to Him.

Yes, it’s hard to love when all the love seems to be flowing one way. It’s hard when you’re the only one doing the giving, the sacrificing, the holding on. It’s hard when your partner’s ego or pride or selfishness keeps your love from being returned. You’ve tried talking about it but nothing happens. You’re ready to throw in the towel.

If you’re thinking like that, it might help you to think about the Lord Jesus suffering for us. If anyone ever had a reason to stop loving, He did. But He loved us without reservation, even to the point of dying on the cross in our behalf. That is the kind of love we are to have.

## BUILDING BLOCK 6: Mutual Submission



Some Bible interpreters have made much of the fact that wives are told in the Bible to submit to their husbands. In stressing the woman's responsibility, however, they fail to see that the passage in Ephesians 5 is prefaced by the following important words:

*Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, . . . submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:18,21).*

These verses were written to the entire community of Christ. They were penned

almost 2,000 years ago by the apostle Paul who went on to apply the principle of mutual submission to several relationships. Not surprisingly, he saw that the first relationship needing this kind of mutual spirit was marriage.

Submission and love go together. We know that God is love, but how do we know He loves us? Because with great humility and submission, Christ went to the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

In a Christian marriage, husband and wife, because they love God, are submitted to what the will of God is for them. They are in a process of letting go of themselves and submitting to God and to each other. Having the "mind of Christ" produces mutual submission. While there are countless ways of expressing this attitude it at least means:

- Marriage is give and take—not just take.

- Marriage is often very difficult.
- Marriage is rising above self-absorption.
- Marriage is being a servant.
- Marriage is seeing when it is loving to give in.
- Marriage is helping when she's tired.
- Marriage is caring about each others hurts.

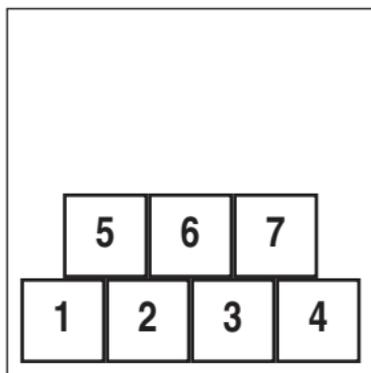
So, what does this mean? It may mean that a wife needs to see routine chores as something that is not “beneath her.” In heaven’s eyes, she is far more than the family maid.

But it also means that a husband is not to view his house as his castle, and all of its inhabitants, including his wife, as his subjects. Rather, having the mind of Christ, he is to see it as the place where he has the best opportunity of all to humble himself—to be a servant.

After all, in every life situation—including the

home—that’s what followers of Christ are to be. Mutual submission is an important building block that will make a marriage work!

## **BUILDING BLOCK 7: Sexual Fulfillment**



In the garden paradise where it all began, Adam and Eve shared a wonderful intimacy: “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). Furthermore, the command to replenish the earth came *before* the fall. Intimacy and mutual physical fulfillment, therefore, have always been part of the husband-wife relationship.

The husband and wife are to find sexual fulfillment in each other. The Bible gives the following perspectives:

***It Is Protective.*** The husband and wife are to reserve this special intimacy for each other, and they are to give it freely. Paul wrote, “Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband” (1 Cor. 7:2).

No one needs to tell us that we are living in a sexually promiscuous age. There are few restraints. From billboards to television to magazines, relationships are being sexualized.

A husband and wife who maintain intimacy are helping to protect each other from a sexually obsessed society. They protect their own faithfulness.

***It Is Enjoyable.*** After delivering a stern warning

about prostitution, the wise author of Proverbs wrote these words to young husbands:

***“Thinking correctly about marital intimacy lays the groundwork for enjoying it fully.”***

—Charles Swindoll

*Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love (5:15-19).*

The sexual aspect of marriage is not a necessary evil to be endured for the purpose of procreation. It was designed by God to bring continuing pleasure—an intimate, exhilarating, renewing part of the husband-wife relationship.

**It Is Expected.** When a man and woman come together in marriage, each has a right to expect sexual fulfillment from the other.

Paul wrote:

*Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does (1 Cor. 7:3-4).*

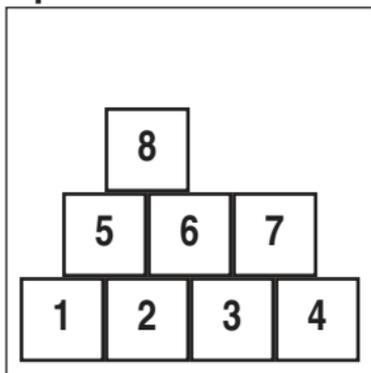
Paul went on to say that if one marital partner decides to abstain, it is first to be agreed upon with the

other. Furthermore, the time of abstinence is to be brief.

*Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Cor. 7:5).*

Mutual sexual enjoyment is an important part of marriage. Marital sexual experience that is motivated by love is not evil. It must not be made more important than it is; nor should it be minimized. It is part of the overall picture—an intimate part of the shared identity of the man and woman who come together as husband and wife.

## BUILDING BLOCK 8: Open Communication



In a survey taken a few years ago, the Family Services Association discovered that 87 percent of husbands and wives interviewed said that the main problem in their marriages was communication. The percentage would probably be the same in Christian marriages. The wife is frustrated because she can't get her husband to talk. The husband doesn't feel it does any good because his wife has already made up her mind anyway.

Here are some of the reasons husbands and

wives do not communicate effectively:

- They take each other for granted.
- They want to avoid a confrontation.
- They are obsessed with their own interests.
- They feel that they are being manipulated.
- They are too hurried to take the time.
- They don't want to hurt the other person.

For a marriage to be strong, however, the barriers to communication must be broken down. And one way to accomplish that is to follow the example of Christ. You will remember that husbands were instructed to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Two aspects of the Savior's relationship to the church could be applied to marriage.

***Christ Is The Great Communicator.*** He is the living Word of God

(Jn. 1:1-4). He came to make God known by word and by example. He revealed the will and character of God to man.

Christ is also involved in a continuing process of communicating with the church. He is seated in heaven, inviting us to “come boldly to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16) to tell God what is on our hearts and to let Him know our needs.

How can Christ’s example of communication with His church apply to a marriage?

- Husbands need to talk to their wives.
- Wives need to talk to their husbands.
- Both should feel free to respond honestly.
- Every problem should be talked through.
- Opportunities for talking should be valued.

Without open and healthy communication, it will be hard for a marriage to be successful.

### ***Christ Is The Head.***

Colossians 1:18 says that Christ is “the head of the body, the church.” A head must be in touch with all parts of the body for it to function smoothly. Through the nervous system, it sends and receives information. It tells the finger when to move; it is told when the finger feels pain. If communication is missing, the body cannot function as one.

The same is true of a marriage. The man, as head of the home, needs to communicate with his wife. And she in turn needs to be free to communicate with him. Unless there is two-way communication, as between Christ and His own, the marriage will experience difficulty.

Psychologist Paul Tournier made this observation about marital communication:

No doubt they [a

husband and wife] do talk about everything, but it is all objective, all about facts and ideas, which is what a man is interested in. For a woman, real dialogue means talking about her feelings—her own feelings. But even more importantly, about her husband's feelings, which she wants to understand, but which he does not know how to explain ("Listening To Her," *Family Life Today*, Nov. 1982, p.26).

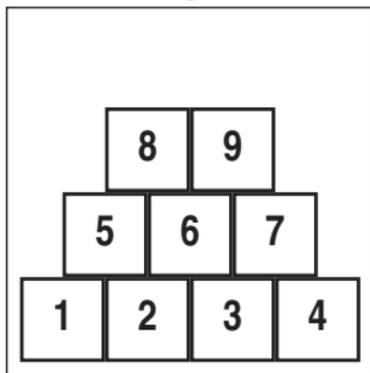
What can you do if you feel your mate is not listening? Here are four suggestions:

- Tell of your need to communicate.
- Don't rehash old conversations.
- Start on the fact level.
- Move on to the feeling and conviction levels.

It's hard to converse honestly on all levels, but

it's worth the pain and effort. Open communication is an essential building block of marriage!

## **BUILDING BLOCK 9: Tender Respect**



Sometimes marital partners are like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In public they are considerate, forgiving, patient, and sweet-tempered. But once they are behind the closed doors of their own home, they turn ill-tempered, surly, and unforgiving. Their mates only wish they could be treated the way their partner treats others.

In Ephesians 4:31-32 the apostle Paul wrote:

*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.*

This passage certainly applies to husbands and wives in a marriage relationship. Speaking to wives, Paul said, “Let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Eph. 5:33). Peter told wives to be submissive to their husbands and even to pattern their behavior after Sarah, who “obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Pet. 3:1,5-6)—a picture of her respect for him.

Peter then spoke to husbands in verse 7 and advocated that they respect their wives as well. He gave three instructions:

1. *“Dwell with [your wife] with understanding.”*

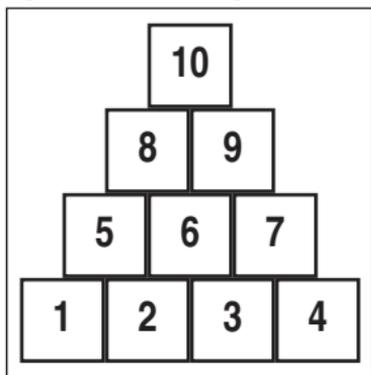
He was saying, “Know your wife well so that you can respect her feelings.” A husband needs to make this his goal. He should know what pleases and comforts her, and also what hurts and angers her. This special understanding can then be used in building her up rather than tearing her down.

2. *“Giving honor . . . as to the weaker vessel.”* If a man is going to move five containers and he knows one of them is more fragile than the others, he will handle that one more carefully. This is how a husband should treat his wife. He should give her special honor and respect. Husband, buy your wife gifts, send her flowers, remember her birthday, take her special places.

3. *“As being heirs together of the grace of life.”* The gifts of life are not only the husband’s to enjoy.

They are given by God equally to both, and they should be shared together. A man must respect his wife and not rob the joy of life God created her to have.

## **BUILDING BLOCK 10: Spiritual Companionship**



Finally, and perhaps most important, a Christian husband and wife should see themselves as spiritual companions. They are making a spiritual journey through life together, walking hand in hand as children of God toward the wonderful eternity with God that awaits them. What a difference it makes when a marriage has a godly

husband and a dedicated wife! No one can measure how much they help each other spiritually as they travel life's road together.

The spiritual dimension was included in the passages about marriage we've been discussing. Speaking to husbands about their wives, Paul said:

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies (Eph. 5:25-28).*

There is to be a purifying, cleansing dimension to the marriage. Just as the church

is made pure because of Jesus Christ, so the wife should be made better by her relationship to her husband.

And how is that accomplished? The same way Christ helped the church: He loved it and gave Himself for it. Love and sacrifice—these set a marriage apart and make possible a true spiritual companionship.

Peter also mentioned the spiritual dimension in his passage on marriage. He closed it by saying, “that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). As the husband understands his wife, giving her honor and seeing her as a joint-heir of the grace of life, he will be able to pray with power. If he does not, Peter says, his prayers will be “hindered.” He will lose the easy freedom of unhindered prayer.

Here are some qualities

that will be present in a marriage where husband and wife are spiritual companions:

- They both worship the same God.
- They both seek to do the will of God.
- They are both accountable to Christ.
- They raise their children together.
- They pray for each other.
- They encourage each other’s faith.

As a husband and wife draw closer to the Lord through prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, and submission to Christ, they will also draw closer to each other. This relationship may be visualized as a triangle. As the husband and wife draw closer to God, they will also grow closer to each other in a relationship that pleases God.

# FIVE FACTS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Pastors and marriage counselors repeatedly hear husbands and wives make statements that are not true. Here are five facts about marriage that are often disputed by marital partners under stress.

## 1. You *aren't* married to the wrong person.

Sometimes it doesn't take very long before the wife begins to wonder if she married the right guy, or the husband begins to think he made a mistake. This often happens in that period of adjustment while idealistic expectations for marriage are being brought into line with reality.

- You find out she hates to cook.
- You find out he has no mechanical ability.
- You each learn that the

other can be stubborn, easily hurt, depressed, or angry.

- You have different views about finances.

So you begin to tell yourself that you married the wrong person. But that's no longer an issue. You made a lifelong commitment. Now your responsibility before God, except in extreme cases of unfaithfulness, is to stay with the one you have married (Mt. 19:4-9; 1 Cor. 7:10-14).

## 2. His failure to lead *isn't* your excuse.

"Well," the young woman said emphatically, "if he would only lead the way he's supposed to, we could work things out. But he won't, so I have to make the decisions. Then he criticizes them. I can't stand it any longer."

She's right about one thing. Her husband should be taking more loving, thoughtful initiative.

He should be taking the lead, especially in spiritual matters.

Even so, his failure to lead is no excuse for her disobedience. Her responsibility before the Lord still calls for her to be a loving, spiritual woman of growing inner beauty (1 Pet. 3:1-6). If she uses what she sees as his failure to lead as an excuse for her own poor behavior, she is failing every bit as much as he is.

**3. Her failure to submit *isn't* your excuse.** Some husbands have a built-in excuse for every shortcoming or failure—they blame their wives.

- “She’s always so pious. She corrects me every time I try to lead family devotions. It’s her fault we don’t have them anymore.”
- “She had to have this house. I went ahead with it because I knew it would please her. It’s her

fault we’re having financial trouble.”

When a man starts talking like this, he’s refusing to accept his own responsibility in the family decision-making process. True, she did provide input. Perhaps she was insistent. But that’s not your excuse. You have to stop blaming her and begin to do what’s right before God.

**4. Sex *isn't* all he thinks about.**

Sometimes a hard-working, busy wife begins to think that all her husband is interested in is having his sexual desires met. This perception may become especially pronounced if any of the following circumstances are true:

- He spends too much time in his work.
- She doesn’t have his help around the house.
- He ignores the needs of the children.
- Their schedule is full.

While it's true that he may need an honest reminder that his wife barely has the energy to keep up with her work, it also may be true that she sometimes doesn't bother with her husband's sexual interest. In many cases, both need to do some adjusting. She needs to give him the benefit of the doubt and also talk to him about her needs. Some couples need to plan a regular evening together or, if finances allow, a few days away without the children.

### **5. Appearance *isn't* all she thinks about.**

A fifth fact about marriage is that many women do think about more than aesthetics. But some husbands don't believe it. They argue:

- “She always wants to buy something new for the house.”
- “It takes her too long to pick out a dress.”

- “She insists that the kitchen cupboards need restaining. They look fine to me!”
- “It takes her forever to get ready to go anywhere. And then we're always late!”
- “She loves to shop and spend my hard-earned money on little knickknacks and doodads.”

It's true that many women are more interested in appearances than their husbands. And Peter did speak bluntly to women about the danger of putting too much emphasis on looking good on the outside when they should be paying attention to the “hidden person of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4).

But let's face it, men. We do need our wives to help us. Some of us *are* slobs. If we're honest, we'll admit we're glad for their attention to detail.

# CHECKLIST FOR HUSBANDS

**H**usbands, now that you've read what the Bible teaches about your role and responsibilities in marriage, take a moment to evaluate yourself. Rate yourself by circling the appropriate number: 5—excellent; 4—very good; 3—good; 2—poor; 1—failing.

- I see myself as having left father and mother and as bonded to my wife. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I see my wife as one with me in every phase of my life. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I do my best to be faithful to her in thought as well as in deed. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I provide my wife the kind of loving leadership Christ gives the church. *1 2 3 4 5*

- I often sacrifice my interests for my wife's well-being. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I often tell her that I love her and do little things to show it. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I'm concerned about her feelings, and I listen when she talks about them. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I try to say something nice to my wife every day and don't go to sleep angry. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I do not use my wife's shortcomings as excuses for my own failures. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I talk about spiritual matters with her, and I often pray for her and with her. *1 2 3 4 5*

Now have your wife evaluate you. Be open to areas that need improvement.

# CHECKLIST FOR WIVES

**W**ives, now that you've read what the Bible teaches about your role and responsibilities in marriage, you might want to stop and evaluate how you are doing. Rate yourself by circling the appropriate number: 5—excellent; 4—very good; 3—good; 2—poor; 1—failing.

- I do not let myself think that I have married the wrong person.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
- I have left my father and mother and share identity with my husband. *1 2 3 4 5*
- I am committed to making our marriage last until one of us dies.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
- I do not use sexual fulfillment as a weapon

to get my own way.

*1 2 3 4 5*

- I am willing to submit to my husband's responsibility of headship.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
  - I feel that inner beauty is more important than physical attractiveness.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
  - I show respect for my husband in my attitudes and my actions.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
  - I do little things for him that I know will please him. *1 2 3 4 5*
  - I don't use my husband's short-comings as an excuse for my failures.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
  - I see myself as my husband's spiritual companion, and I pray for him and with him.  
*1 2 3 4 5*
- Now ask your husband to rate you in these areas and compare notes. Be honest, and be open to improvement.

# TAKING THE FIRST STEP

**F**or a marriage to be as God designed it, both partners need to be right with Him. He created marriage in part because He saw that it wasn't good for man to be alone.

Is your marriage a good one? If there are serious, unresolved problems, is it because you have been trying to make it on your own? If so, let me urge you to turn back to your Creator and Savior. Admit that you've made a mess of things and that you can't live without Him. Turn from your pride and stubborn independence. Confess your wrongs to God. Ask Him to help you build into your marriage the 10 biblical building blocks we've named in this booklet. And let your spouse know what you have done—even if you have to be

broken in spirit to start anew.

If you're not a child of God, the first step is to know what Christ did for you. The starting place for a healthy marriage experience begins with your own personal relationship to Him. To know His forgiveness, you need to agree with Him about your sin, admit that you can't save yourself, and then believe that Christ died in your place to take the penalty for your sin and then rose from the dead to prove it. Read the wonderful promise of John 3:16 and claim it for yourself:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

When you believe in Him, you'll have taken the first step in finding the kind of relationship you've been looking for.

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