



How to Have a Happy Marriage

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Marital happiness doesn't just happen. It comes as a result of applying certain basic principles that work in any culture or society.

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A HAPPY MARRIAGE IN AN UNHAPPY WORLD

A happy family. Does it exist? Or are happy families a relic from the past? Something you have only read about in books? Or seen in the movies?

In a world of unhappiness, is it really possible to have a good marriage?

Stop and think about it.

Count the happy families you personally know. If you are typical, you really don't know many truly happy families.

Tragic statistics on divorce have been tabulated, but there is no way to count the number of those who simply tough out unhappy marriages. Who for reasons of religion, money or children stay together, but long for a happier life.

Whether you have a near-model marriage or one that needs a little work, here are some positive ways to put happiness in your marriage and defy the statistics of marriages gone sour in an unhappy world.

Your Lover, Your Best Friend

One of the saddest spectacles to any marriage counselor is the many couples who are married, yet strangers to each other in their own homes.

They seem to share little in common. Each goes his or her own way, pausing only for occasional conversations. And those are often arguments about money, child rearing or sex.

One wonders how they ever got together in the first place.

But back in high school or college, they thought they fell in love. There was physical attraction. A whirlwind romance. Excitement. Marriage.

But after the honeymoon, when faced with the real life of work, a home and planning for children, a man and wife are sometimes worlds apart.

So, first of all, if you are not yet married, before you make that commitment, be sure you marry a person with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings. You should marry a person who will be your best friend.

If you are already married, and you can candidly admit that your mate is not your closest friend, you need to start building that friendship right now!

Friends share their most intimate thoughts and feelings. A friend is someone you turn to in time of need. And what better person is there for such intimacy than your mate?

Of course, we all need close friends to give help to or to receive help from. Usually a close friend of the same sex will be a relative, a friend from our school days, someone we work with or a neighbor.

But still, once you are married, there should be no person you are closer to than your husband or wife.

Sharing Spiritual Goals

Perhaps more than any other reason marriages are unhappy is the lack of understanding that marriage was designed and created by God.

From the creation of this present order of nature, laws instituted for the marital relationship have been in effect. Adherence to them ensures happiness. Ignored, God's broken laws take their toll.

When the apostle Peter wrote in the Greek Scriptures about marriage, he said husbands and wives are "heirs. . . of the gracious gift of life." He reminded husbands to think on this important spiritual truth "so that nothing will hinder your prayers" (1 Peter 3:7). Peter thus showed that even our personal relationship with God is affected by our marital relationships. Prayers can be hindered when we don't follow

God's laws and instructions about marriage. And marriages will most certainly be affected.

The spiritual depth of marriage was further demonstrated by Paul when he wrote: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery — but I am talking

about Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:31-32).

Human marriages should be a living type of the great spiritual relationship between Christ and his Church.

Marriage, then, goes beyond the physical. The most important ingredients in a happy marriage are spiritual in nature.

For example, the one word that best describes God is found in 1 John 4:8, "God is love."

Sounds so simple. But there is no greater word than love. And in that one word — love — is the real key to a happy marriage.

What is lacking in the unhappy marriages all over the world is love.

Yet the word *love* is most associated with marriage. Couples tell each other, "I love you." Most men and women probably really feel they do love their mates.

But many do not understand. Love is interpreted as a feeling or emotion toward a member of the opposite sex. That is often how many teenagers think they feel in the early years of dating.

Love, they think, is the feeling of excitement for that "special" person. Nevertheless, most young people experience that feeling of "love" three or four or even more times in their teens and early 20s!

After each experience they admit they did not really love the other person. It was just "puppy love." Or infatuation.

Unfortunately, many have not grasped that the love they

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think they have for their mates is the same insubstantial infatuation.

Real love has to include complete and total concern for the other person without regard to one's own feelings. It is not alone that excited feeling of physical attraction.

When a couple ties together the romantic attraction, the deep feeling of care for the other person and the sharing together of their time, emotions, feelings and concern, they are building the foundation for a truly happy marriage.

So, can you have a happy marriage in an unhappy world?

Yes. You certainly can.

And if you haven't been as happy as you want to be, start now to build the spiritual value of love into your marriage. In prayer, ask God to give you and your mate that kind of love reflected by God himself.

Then do those things together that will build happiness into your life. Make your mate not only your lover, but your best friend.

You will then defy the statistics and be among those who have found the way to a truly happy marriage.

WHEN THE KISSING BEGINS TO STOP

Thousands of articles have been written to try to steer people away from the pitfalls of divorce. But too many married couples with serious problems wind up calling it quits, anyway.

They didn't start out that way. Take a look at the average wedding picture. Husband and wife are beaming, their faces wreathed in big window smiles. They radiate happiness. "This is forever!"

What happened in just a few short months or years? The smiles are no longer there. Frustration and disappointment have set in. Trust has been replaced by suspicion. Each may suspect the other of infidelity. One partner may be planning divorce. The other may be considering desertion.

It didn't just happen for no reason. Marital miseries have a definite set of causes. But let's try to discover the one basic root cause.

What Caused the Breakup?

A couple divorces. They join the statistics. The children are plunged into a vortex of insecurity, left to face a harsh and cruel world in a one-parent family. Both the man and woman face major readjustments in their lives. What caused it all?

Was it sex? Or that Jack couldn't manage money or even hold a job for long? Was it a meddling mother-in-law? Or Joan

insisting on a job outside the home? Maybe they just didn't get on well together.

No sane person would deny that any one or all these things may have contributed. But the one root cause goes a lot deeper than any of these things.

Men and women saddled with bad marriages have one point in common. They have ignored some extremely good advice. That advice comes in just five little words: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:19).

But who is your neighbor? Isn't he or she the person next door? Co-workers on the job? Church brethren? Club members? Yes, all of these people and, in a broader sense, all of humanity are our neighbors. But often we forget the identity of our number one neighbor.

*T*alk to your mate with interest and concern. Lack of loving communication signals a failing marriage.

You've heard the old cliché, "Charity begins at home." Clichés are clichés simply because they're usually true. Our number one neighbor in a unique sense is our spouse — husband or wife.

The average person usually behaves in a courteous and civil manner toward friends and neighbors. If we are not careful, our spouse can be the only exception to the accepted rules of behavior.

A business client telephones a city executive on the job. The secretary buzzes his office and informs him that an important client is on the phone. No matter how rough he feels at the moment, he takes a deep breath, forces a smile and says, "Hello, how are you?" in a pleasant voice in an effort to show both interest and concern.

Another call comes through a few minutes later. "It's your wife," the secretary announces. "Oh, her again," he mutters under his breath. "OK, I'll take it this time," comes the reluctant answer. His wife does get through, but is uncer-

moniously greeted with "What is it this time?" — whether or not the comment may be justified.

This man forgot the identity of his number one neighbor. He behaves in a very courteous manner toward his clients and the big boss. He may even treat his employees with deference and decorum. But his wife? That's another matter altogether. The probable long-term result of such prolonged behavior toward his spouse? *Cancel another marriage!*

Such men don't even realize what they are doing. These husbands are not aware that they have been taking their wives for granted for a long time.

Bad marital habits can easily become ingrained. But human beings are capable of cultivating good habits as well as bad. Husbands can learn always to address their mates with obvious warmth and affection. They do it with work-mates all the time. If they don't learn how to converse with their spouses in more than a mere civil manner, they are courting disaster. It's as simple as that.

If you don't talk to your mate with interest and concern, your marriage is either in serious trouble or soon will be. Lack of loving, thoughtful communication is one of those tell-tale signs of a failing marriage.

The Woman's Responsibility

Up to now we have focused on the husband in marriage. But generally speaking, today's woman has an equal share of the blame when things go wrong in a marriage.

Historian W.E.H. Lecky, author of a classic study of Georgian England, once observed that "marriage gives either party an extraordinary power of injuring each other." Women have no idea how much pain they can inflict upon a man. A snide remark can cut through a man and injure him down to the core of his being.

Many a man delights in the role of protecting and supporting his woman. Because of the way societies in this world are structured, a man's income might not immediately cover all the household needs and luxuries. He may realize the problem and be working on a way to increase the family income. A wife who impatiently nags and complains about lack of income is injuring her mate more than she realizes.

Golden Rule in Marriage

"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). Surely no one in his or her right mind disagrees with that principle. Probably your mate is the last person you think of in this connection.

Things go wrong at the office. You have cost the company a small sum by missing an obvious error in a major printing of company brochures. Your workmate who normally cross-checks your work was called out of town on an emergency. To say that your boss is unhappy is the proverbial understatement. How do you expect to be treated when you arrive home? With consideration, empathy, even sympathy? Of course! Maybe your wife won't mention that the lawn is long overdue for a mowing. That is the way men expect to be treated by their wives.

But is that the way they treat their wives when things go wrong at home? That day the bread didn't rise. The bathroom was flooded. She dropped a piece of the best china and the kids have been impossible. And your lovely wife coped with all these "minor" disasters without calling you once. When you arrive at the front door, she's at the end of her tether. How do you treat her in these circumstances?

Do you step in and get the children to bed yourself? Do you offer to dry the dishes that particular evening? Do you console your spouse? Do you treat her the way you expect to be treated? Do you love your neighbor — your wife — as yourself?

And do you women respect your husbands as much as you do your own selves?

Seventy Times Seven

Peter asked Jesus Christ how many times he had to forgive his brother and then threw out the number seven. "Many times seven" came the unhesitating answer (see Matthew 18:22). In other words, unlimited forgiveness. It is doubtful a brother or neighbor or friend will sin against any of us as many times as some spouses do. We spend a tremendous amount of time with our mates.

The average husband or wife is likely to hear, "I'm awful-

ly sorry, dear." The question is this: Does he mean it and does she mean it? If so, you should forgive your mate without a moment's hesitation. Unspoken grudges can ruin a marriage. Learn how to forgive your mate!

A marriage is likely to collect some skeletons. Don't dig one out every time you have an argument with your spouse. That *isn't* real forgiveness. Let the matter rest!

When the Kissing Begins to Stop

It has been suggested, and with much accuracy, that intimacy is the essence of marriage. Intimacy, however, is so much more than just sexual intercourse. A knowing glance between two people in love. A squeeze of the hand just at the right moment. Taking a walk in the park together with nary a word spoken. Tea and toast for two after the children have been put to bed. All these things, and many more, make up the intimate marital relationship.

Have the cares of this life crowded these things out of your marriage? You don't take the time to kiss anymore. You don't bother to sneak up behind your husband and kiss him like you used to do. The children seem to take up all your time and there's nothing left over for your husband. You nearly always have a headache at bedtime. Then your marriage is in trouble!

If you don't express any intimacy toward your mate during the day, don't expect things to work out at bedtime. They won't!

What happens during the day is probably more important than what happens at night. Physical intimacies should just be a loving climax to the little intimacies that began from the moment you woke up and kissed your mate good morning.

WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT YOUR SEX LIFE

The commandment against adultery is short and to the point. God says merely, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). But this commandment goes far beyond the mere surface or limited technical meaning of the word *adultery*, meaning sex with someone other than a person's own husband or wife.

Christ clearly expands the meaning in Matthew 5:27-28: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Here, Christ expands the commandment to include not merely the act of physical adultery, but sexual lust.

Thus we see that the commandment, which at first glance may seem like a mere legal prohibition against one type of improper sexual activity, includes under its umbrella, both in principle and by application from other texts, a prohibition against misuse of sex in every form.

But the real point of God's commandment against adultery even goes further than this.

The point of the commandment is not limited to protecting one's physical body or biological reproductive machinery, though the modern curse of sexual diseases would certainly be eliminated if everyone had been obeying this law. No, the law's purpose is to protect our minds — our thoughts and our attitudes.

Satan the Author of Adultery

God is the author of sex. He is the one who made the human body, and he is the one who designed sex as a pleasure bond between a legally married husband and wife in the privacy of their own home.

But it is Satan the devil and his wrong attitudes that injected the attitude of faithlessness and adultery into the human society.

We are not told specifically how Satan did this — what words he may have used or his method of implanting wrong attitudes — but we do read that Adam and Eve's pure motives were definitely tainted by their eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden:

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Genesis 3:6-7).

Adam and Eve covered themselves out of a newly found sense of shame, which resulted from Satan's influence on them.

It is from Satan that humans get their evil “heart.” And it is from this evil heart that humans get their propensity for sexual sin (Matthew 15:19).

Pornography by Degree

Perhaps most of us would not be fooled by obvious pornography.

Not as obvious as open, notorious pornography is what we might call “pornography by degree.” That is, those forms of influence that Satan uses more commonly to cause the minds of men and women to stray from the pure, giving relationship of sex in marriage, into lust.

One example of this is found in some modern styles of dress. Today, women and men alike have been brainwashed to misuse clothing purposely to try to entice each other's looks by constantly dressing in a seductive and sensual way.

People do this, no doubt, in order to satisfy their vanity, to enjoy the luxury of having others find them exciting or sensual.

But, while it's true that God made women so that they are naturally sexually appealing to men, he did not intend that they parade themselves in such a way as to intentionally excite sexual desire from strangers who pass by.

The alluring look is not the look that a man or woman should strive to reach — not outside the privacy of his or her own home, that is. For an example of proof, examine 1 Timothy 2:9, which admonishes women in particular to “dress modestly, with decency and propriety.” Dress should be appropriate for the occasion and should exemplify discretion, balance and moderation, whether it be

God designed sex as a pleasure bond between husband and wife. Satan injected faithlessness and adultery.

swim wear, evening wear, casual dress or whatever.

Intentional seducing of the eye clearly transgresses God's command that we “flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

A man or woman who blatantly displays the charms intended by God as reserved for a marriage partner can hardly be said to be fleeing from sexual immorality. Take heed: Those who dress and act in this manner are breaking the spirit of the Seventh Commandment. God will not hold them guiltless.

Numerous other techniques of Satan fall under the category of “pornography by degree.” These include the use of blatant sex in advertising and the inevitable sex themes and scenes in entertainment. All these things, in one way or another, help to mold the attitudes of people and hence the thoughts and consequent actions of all of us. The bombardment is torrential.

Pornography by Deceit

Still another of Satan's methods of deceiving the world about sex might be called "pornography by deceit." Included in this category are areas that on the surface may not appear to be sex-related at all, but in reality are laced with illicit, lustful actions and attitudes.

One good illustration of this category is music. Some songs — whether rock, country, pop or easy listening — may be pleasant ballads or humorous anecdotes. But, more and more, the underlying message of many of these songs is sex — anywhere, at any time, with anybody.

And remember, this music is on your home stereo or your car radio, and in the restaurants in which you eat. Your children do their homework by it and unconsciously imbibe the message of sexual promiscuity that these songs proclaim. This music affects your society, your family, your children — *and you*. Your attitudes, thoughts, moods and sexual point of view and outlook are manipulated by this type of thing.

Another type of "pornography by deceit" is the example set by the people around us — including sometimes, sad to say, our friends and relatives, who simply traffic in all types of illicit sexual practices. As we see them literally romping from wife to lover and back, or as we view major sports figures, political people or entertainment personalities hopping from partner to partner — always with impunity and an implication that what they are doing is fun — our values become affected. We, if we are not careful, can become deceived by the outward, temporary "pleasure" of promiscuity and decide that such actions "aren't that bad after all."

But such actions *are* "that bad." The devastation of families left in the wake of such activities is causing disgrace and heartache for which our society is paying the price in terms of true happiness.

And God does not wink or laugh at such antics: "Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of

prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife" (Jeremiah 5:7-8).

Protect Yourself

How can you protect yourself in a war in which the enemy — Satan — has so monopolized extensively the weaponry (the media and other forces)? Is there a reasonable defense to such an overall barrage of high-powered sexual bombardment?

Yes, there is. And the first step in your defense is this: Recognize the evil that promiscuity inflicts upon society and can inflict upon you. Contemplate the subtle methods Satan has used to push his perilous perversions upon all peoples. Develop a revulsion for allowing your mind to be manipulated by Satan.

Guard the door of your mind. Sex sin, like all sins, begins in the mind (James 1:14-15). The place to stop sin is at the point where we are tempted. All sin, and especially sexual sin, gains allure if we harbor it. It begins to snowball and gains strength until we allow ourselves to sin in our mind or even in our actions.

So do not permit yourself the luxury of even a "little" lust. For a "little" lust is the match that lights the fire of sexual promiscuity, which burns the bonds of matrimony into ashes.

God Forgives

God plainly states that our sex sins are grievous in his sight. "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure [i.e. from extramarital sex], for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4).

Fidelity and sexual purity are, clearly, what God requires. But it is true, unfortunately, that in the lives of many who read this, Satan will have already struck.

The good news is that we can be forgiven of our past sins — even our sex sins — if we repent — stop sinning and start doing what is right. And we can have the power of God's Holy Spirit to help accomplish this (Acts 5:32).

Remember the story of the "woman caught in adultery"? "Jesus straightened up and asked her, 'Woman, where are

they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin' " (John 8:3, 10-11).

Good advice, and the advice that all of us must take if we are to learn the lesson of fidelity, and strengthen the bonds of marriage.

WHEN MARRIAGES GO SOUR — ATTITUDES THAT SWEETEN

IS YOUR marriage as happy as you want it to be? Here are vital ways to improve and heal damaged relationships between mates!

God established immutable spiritual laws regulating happiness and love in marriage as in all human relationships. Breaking these dynamic living laws guarantees marital unhappiness and misery.

The Husband-Wife Relationship

God created humans male and female. And for an incredible transcendent potential, little realized. He created woman to be a helper and companion to man (Genesis 2:18). Few today realize God ordained that man should be the head of the home and properly lead his wife. But emphatically not as an overbearing master.

It is vital to understand two important facets of the husband-wife relationship. One, a husband, as captain of a two-person team, must call the signals. But, on the other hand, there must be teamwork. Where opinions, ideas and preferences differ they must be wisely, lovingly discussed on a basis of equality. For a husband and wife are, indeed, heirs together of the grace and kingdom of God (1 Peter 3:7).

Damaged marital relationships cannot be restored if marriage partners forget the structure of government God

ordained in marriage. Society is trying to play a game with 50-50 marriages; it doesn't solve problems — it compounds them.

The husband should be the leader in a marriage, but neither the husband nor the wife should act in ways that antagonize each other. The husband should learn to take the lead in resolving differences and encouraging cooperation.

Isn't it time you learned or recaptured the loving and healing marital values and attitudes?

What are the wonderful attitudes that lead mates to build each other up instead of tearing each other down? How should mates approach each other to heal the wounds of misunderstandings and past mistakes?

How should mates communicate feelings and needs to each other so both partners can start to tackle their problems and difficulties in a constructive way?

There is a way! Now is the time to try anew to improve or, possibly, to save your marriage by expressing these healing attitudes!

What are they?

Express Appreciation

Damaged marital relationships need a positive first step in the right direction. Somebody has to step forth first and break harmful patterns of communication.

Before you married, you saw qualities that you appreciated in your mate. Undoubtedly you expressed your admiration and appreciation of these qualities many times and in many ways to the one you loved. But in marriage so many make the big mistake of failing to continue to express appreciation for the small things — or even the big things — provided by their mates. Even good marriages can slowly sour and die because husbands and wives take each other's labors and efforts for granted.

What good qualities do you appreciate in your mate now?

To this you should not immediately reply, "But he (or she) has all these bad qualities and habits that bother me!" Right now focus your mind on your mate's good qualities. List them in your mind. Write them down to impress your mind if you have to. It's important to recognize good qualities in a mate or in your marriage even if those qualities

seem to be only a few now. Are you thankful for those qualities? Have you recently told your mate you appreciate them in him or her?

If you're a wife, maybe your husband is not as considerate or affectionate as you would like, but he's a good provider of physical necessities. Have you told him you appreciate his efforts and energy to provide for the family?

If you're a husband, maybe you feel your wife is not handling her part of the budget as thriftily as she could. These are difficult times for all. Have you told her you appreciate her efforts to do the best she knows how under the circumstances? Have you encouraged her, not harangued her, about handling her expenditures? Have you commended her for her care of the children perhaps,

or her housekeeping, or possibly the added income she provides?

There isn't a human being alive who doesn't want to receive appreciation. That is a universal principle. Unfortunately, many make the mistake of constantly putting the focus on negative things or problems about a person. Eventually everything in life begins to appear totally negative.

Lack of expressing appreciation for good things causes one to lose touch with the reality of any good in another. Many mates destroy their marriage out of ingratitude. Marriage counselors see this problem all the time.

The Scriptures teach us the principle of expressing appreciation, "always giving thanks . . . for everything" (Ephesians 5:20).

You want to be appreciated? Then express genuine appreciation to your mate — or to any other person for that matter.

If you are consistent at expressing appreciation where it

***E**ven good marriages can slowly sour and die because husbands and wives take each other's efforts for granted.*

is due (and it is due even for small things others do for us), there will be a remarkable response. Maybe expressing appreciation won't solve all your marital problems, but it is a positive first step to improve and heal wounded marital relationships and communications.

Jesus taught us the critical overall principle in all right living: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Give Honor and Respect

It may seem difficult at times of heated differences of views or opinions, but every human wants to be shown honor and respect. Differences of opinion are not an excuse to drop respect.

What happens when husbands and wives fail to show respect and honor to each other — or to any other person? An automatic wall of suspicion is created. Others are more easily hurt, more touchy, when we must point out their mistakes. They are less receptive to even constructive correction. Many disrespected, unappreciated persons start imagining wrongs and insults when none are intended or exist.

God commands us in all of our human relationships, "Show proper respect to everyone" (1 Peter 2:17). Yes, even if a person does not always express right character!

Why? Because respect breeds respect! Disrespect inflames bad feelings. It makes a good situation bad and a bad situation worse.

Remember, your mate is a person who willingly gave up many personal options and freedoms to marry you. Have you shown honor and respect to your mate for taking on the challenge of marriage and family responsibilities? Or living with all your imperfections? Treat your mate with dignity and, chances are, he or she will want to rise to a higher level of respect for you!

Be Forgiving

The attitude, I'll never forgive you for that! is the surest way for wounds and hurts in marriage never to heal. An unmerciful, unforgiving attitude leads to discouragement and

depression. It inflames tension and strife. It hardens discord and hate.

How many mates have the habit of dredging up past mistakes — in private or public — to embarrass or put down a mate? That's being unmerciful and unforgiving. It reopens old wounds.

You, of course, want mercy and forgiveness for your shortcomings. You don't want them repeated again and again. Then be willing to show the wonderful attitude of mercy and forgiveness to another. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," Christ tells us in Luke 6:36.

You and your mate are imperfect human beings in an imperfect world. So when you're wrong, why not simply say, "I'm sorry." You'll soon be hearing it in return!

Many mates realize, after much suffering, that they have had immature ideas of what real love is, of what marriage should be. Why not admit shortcomings? Take up the challenge of growing in right love and maturity together.

If an abusive mate asks for forgiveness, be willing to give it. If we fail to apply the living law of mercy and forgiveness when it should be applied, we guarantee that past mistakes and shortcomings will destroy a marriage. One who shows no mercy or forgiveness will not have his or her mistakes and sins forgiven either (Matthew 18:35).

Of course, physical abuse must stop if a marital relationship is to survive. Outside counseling may be required.

Be Helpful and Constructive

One of the United States' leading divorce and family law attorneys was asked what is the single biggest reason couples split up. He said, "No. 1 is the inability to talk honestly with each other, bare their souls and treat each other as their best friend."

You want your feelings, needs and opinions to be heard and considered? So does your mate!

Many mates develop the habit of putting down their mate's feelings, opinions and desires. But how do you stop this vicious, degrading and damaging cycle? Quietly sit down together. Make outgoing love your aim.

"Love is kind," reveals 1 Corinthians 13:4. The J.B. Phillips

translation makes it even clearer: "Love . . . looks for a way of being constructive." Be constructive. Work on a positive solution to a problem instead of destroying or putting down your mate when a problem arises.

Talk, listen to your mate. "Love does not insist on its own way" (1 Corinthians 13:5, Revised Standard Version). "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak," commands the apostle James (James 1:19). How often do mates cause enormous marital problems because they disobey this command?

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger," admonishes Proverbs 15:1. Next time, before being so quick to lash back or respond to your mate, stop. Ask yourself, "Is what I'm going to say helpful and constructive to solving the problem, or am I really trying to get back and put him/her down?"

When a mate tries to be positive and constructive about the situation, it encourages the other mate to do the same.

But whatever steps you take, don't forget to strive to apply the attitudes that help and heal in marriage!

"We're a Team!"

A healthy, loving husband-wife relationship is not a master-slave relationship. It is not a mother-son or father-daughter relationship. It is a sharing, complementing relationship where each mate recognizes the God-ordained role of the other and contributes talents and energies for the good of the marriage. It is a union in which each mate expresses appreciation of the other's contribution. Lasting marital happiness requires team effort.

One of the newer tragic trends is the growing concept or pressure to go your own way — or, as some express it, "do your own thing" or "find yourself" — even if it means forsaking a mate, children or family responsibilities.

It's when two mates realize they need and complement each other that they draw close and grow to respect and love each other. The Chinese have a saying that describes it, "One hand washes the other."

What a wonderful, healing attitude to have in marriage! "My love, we're a team — to share the joys of life together,

to conquer the difficulties and challenges of life together!"

Millions are paying painful mental, emotional and physical penalties for rejecting or ignoring God's revealed instructions about sex and marriage. True love is the way of giving, sharing, helping, uplifting, being constructive, being encouraging. It is the opposite of the way of taking, of adultery, of selfishness, of hurting others and being unmerciful. Those are Satan's ways and attitudes. They produce evil and suffering in human lives and marriages.

So let us not forget. God commanded a man to properly guide his wife (Genesis 3:16). Women *these* days are increasingly dominating over weak and ineffectual men (Isaiah 3:12). God allows both men and women to reap the penalty for forsaking their proper roles (verses 16-25).

God's Word teaches that a husband is the head of his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3), that man was not created for the woman, but the woman for man (verses 7 and 9). God commands men to love their wives. And wives to respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:33). Note how simply but beautifully the Bible expresses the truly loving, healing attitudes that are to be expressed between husbands and wives:

"Husbands . . . be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. Finally . . . live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love . . . be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:7-9).

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. . . . As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:21-25).

Why is it so important for mates to live this way? "He who loves his wife loves himself" (verse 28). Men who misuse their wives, or wives who rail against their husbands, damage and destroy themselves and their own happiness!

By contrast, God's way to marital peace is: "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (verse 33).

Isn't it time you admitted any wrong attitudes toward your mate? Isn't it time you sought God's forgiveness and help to express right attitudes and actions in your marriage?

Let the Holy Spirit fill you with the love that produces marital happiness and healing. Express appreciation to your mate. Give honor and respect. Be merciful and forgiving. Be helpful and constructive. Live as a team, with each respecting the other's God-given role.

A BALANCED FAMILY BUDGET

Budgeting! Many husbands and wives, it seems, get uncomfortable when anyone mentions this touchy subject. Some are convinced they make too little money to budget. Others think they have no head for figures and can't make a budget work.

So, for most people, money matters continue year by year to be a frightful experience!

But money problems are not necessary — even for you.

Let's look at the principles of budgeting revealed in the Bible, and learn how to overcome money troubles once and for all. First, here are four keys of finance. They are essential before any budget can be put into operation:

Make budgeting a family project. Get everyone involved. Of course, the husband as head of the family should take the lead in planning and sticking to a budget. But the counsel and cooperation of family members is necessary.

If you are a husband, remember that you and your wife are "heirs . . . of the gracious gift of life" (1 Peter 3:7). By all means consult your wife on how the family income is spent. Perhaps she has more time or skill than you to devote to record keeping, or to the mechanical process of writing the checks to pay the bills. At the least, your wife should be aware of what is happening, so she can offer wise counsel and be able to handle the job if anything should happen to you.

Children, too, need to develop the right attitude toward finances. They can learn about budgeting, saving and getting the best value for their money. This includes making wise purchases and not spending money frivolously — and even developing the good habit of tithing.

Buy quality. The cheapest is not always the best. Often, those who always choose the cheapest develop personalities that reflect this point of character. We tend to act differently when using something expensive.

When making purchases, realize that many “bargains” are not always what they seem to be. Shop wisely. Evaluate an item by more than price alone. In the way it will affect you psychologically, an item of slightly higher price may be a far better investment.

Save. A big source of misery in family money matters is the habit of living without a savings. Some are convinced that saving is out of the question for them. But most people would not be in the trouble they are in had they only learned to practice this law of finances earlier.

Proverbs 6:6-8 tells us to learn from the ant, which “stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.” In other words, it has a savings of food to tide it over the rough spots and the winter.

Even if you are in financial difficulties, you need to begin saving money. You need not save much at first, just enough to develop the habit. Later, when you have gotten out of trouble, you will have established the pattern in your life. Many people live so close to the edge that just one extra bill pushes them over the edge into financial oblivion. How good it would be to have enough savings to pay that one bill you did not anticipate. It is easy to have it if you will just start putting a small amount away from each of your future paychecks.

Avoid credit buying. Just as some think it is impossible to save, some are convinced they cannot get along without charge accounts. If you think that, then you must get along without them, or you will not enjoy financial happiness.

Despite how much you are presently tied to revolving interest payments, you need to start getting away from them. It may take some time to break their stranglehold, but it will

be worth it to your peace of mind. Solomon wrote, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). Start today to have the strength of character to wait until you can save the cash. It costs much more to pay the interest on borrowed money than it would to save the money ahead of time. Avoid spending sprees.

A big source of misery in family money matters is the habit of living without savings set aside.

Almost every charge account is set up on a minimum monthly charge. Yet when you have cash, you not only save the carrying charges, but can often buy at a discount.

Of course, in certain cases today credit buying has become almost a necessity. The principle to follow, however, is that credit purchases should be made for necessities only — such as a car or home. Never should you buy luxuries on credit. Television

sets, sporting goods and hobby supplies should be paid for in cash. It is usually these items that give people trouble in credit buying. It just seems so easy to buy the extras now and delay the payment until later. Don't fall into this trap.

Credit cards should not be used on major purchases where you are forced to carry the payment beyond the initial billing period. In other words, don't charge anything that you can't pay for completely when the bill first comes. Interest rates are so high on credit-card purchases that you will end up paying much more for the items than if you had simply paid cash.

How to Set It Up

Make a comprehensive list of all debts and expenses you ordinarily have over a period of time. Include overdue, current and future obligations — everything it will take to run your family for some time to come.

If the longest period you go between bills is a year, such

as insurance or taxes, then your list will have to cover a year. If, however, the longest time between any bills is three months, then your list need only cover three months.

Whatever the time, put down all expenses, regular or irregular, that you know you will have during this period. This includes money spent on recreation, odds and ends and the continuing expenses of rent, food and utilities.

Next, adjust every bill to the length of time between your paychecks. If, for example, you are paid twice a month, then monthly bills will have to be divided in half and weekly bills doubled. A yearly bill should be divided into 24 parts.

Now, make a new list of these adjusted parts (i.e., one-half monthly car payment, two weekly food bills, one-twenty-fourth property tax). This list is central to the budget. If you have included every expense, it will tell you exactly how to spend each check; every one will be spent the same way. In other words, each time you get a check, this list will tell you exactly how much to put away for each future expense, so that you will have precisely what you will need to pay the bills as they arrive.

By saving a standard amount for each bill from each check, the worry of budgeting disappears. Your list of standard amounts automatically tells you how to do the job. Once properly set up, this budget needs only occasional thought, as contrasted with the constant headache of fitting each individual bill into the money on hand. What's more, with this budget you are not forgetting any items or wasting any money.

The greatest blessing is the freedom this budget gives you when you spend the money. If you have carefully and faithfully set aside the money from each check to pay each

Divide your income into definite sections so that every check is spent automatically on part of every bill.

bill, you will be able to spend it with the reassuring knowledge that it was intended for that purpose — even recreation and some luxuries. But curb that desire for annual luxury vacations and accompanying restaurant meals!

So often, families actually make enough money to be able to enjoy certain extras. But without such a budget, few enjoy what they have. They may spend the money on these specialties, but always feel guilty doing so. Had they wisely divided their income into standard segments and included an amount from each check for special extras, they would be able to have these luxuries with a clear conscience.

So learn the lesson. Divide your income into definite sections so that every check is spent automatically on part of every bill. The blessings are beyond belief.

What to Include

Your list of expenses must be complete. This is especially true if your income is low or you are deeply in debt. Here are a few items that must be included in all budgets:

Clothing. This is a sore spot for some families. They may manage to get what they need, but only at great pains to the budget. Clothing is a long-term need, and some forget that they will need money to buy clothes. When the time comes, it becomes a painful matter of squeezing out money here and there. Why not just save a little from each check? You do not need to spend it immediately, but when you need it, it will be there.

Entertainment. Many families feel they cannot afford entertainment. To them it is an unnecessary expense. But entertainment is a necessity for a balanced family. Many of us would be overwhelmed with the happiness that can come simply by setting a small amount away each check for entertainment.

Pocket money. It seems minor, but incidental items can do more damage to a budget than you might expect. You probably would be surprised if you knew how much money you spend on small, everyday personal items.

This division of the budget may not need to be large, but if you do not include it, this one small point can wreck all your other efforts.

Begin Now

One last point needs to be mentioned. It is a little advice on how to get started. Perhaps you feel you are already so far behind in your finances that you cannot even begin on such a budget. But it is for just such a person that this has been written. The very reason to start on this budget is to overcome the problem you now think is stopping you!

Such a budget cannot work immediately for anyone near the financial cliff. Frankly, it may take several months to get fully on the scheme. The more months that pass, however, the closer you will come to being where you want to be. And the character developed in this process cannot be valued monetarily.

So the thing for you to do is begin now. Even if you have to run all your accounts in the red for months, you need to set up the plan immediately. If you cannot do what you write on your list, you will at least be able to develop the habit of learning what you should be doing.

Frankly, though, if you will set up your ideal budget right away despite your troubles, realistically including all current bills, repayments of loans and mortgages, future expenses and all the other needs, you will be surprised just how often you actually can begin to fulfill the amounts you have planned to put aside from each check. Even though you can only set aside half of one bill the first month, you will be half a month's bill ahead for the next month. And eventually you will find yourself enjoying the blessings of family financial stability.

SO YOU'VE DECIDED TO HAVE CHILDREN

There is no greater opportunity to share than when a married couple decide to add to their family and have a child.

There is also no greater family responsibility!

Having children doesn't require a great deal of expertise. But becoming *qualified* parents does. Millions of people have become fathers and mothers. But many of those millions do not know how to be parents.

So let's talk about the awesome responsibility of becoming a parent. Whether planning the first or fifth child, one should know the joys and the responsibilities that accompany the arrival of a new family member.

There is a great deal of confusion in the world today about family planning. Because of ignorance and superstition — even erroneous religious beliefs — many do not know whether or how to plan for children.

Then and Now

For thousands of years, as human societies developed and populated the earth, families could have as many children as they desired. In fact, large families were actually desirable, since human labor was essential to development.

By the middle of the 1800s, world population had finally reached one billion. But in the next 130 years it skyrocketed

eted to five billion. With the population explosion have come increased poverty, hunger, unemployment, crime and war.

Population alone has not caused this, but sheer numbers of people have been partly responsible for the condition of the world we live in today.

It certainly seems like a good time to take a long, hard look at the value of family planning.

God Is Planning His Family

Perhaps the most important point to address is the spiritual issue. Does the Bible prohibit family planning? Does God require married couples to have as many children as possible during the child-bearing years?

Looking at family planning from God's perspective is essential.

One Bible passage that perhaps summarizes family planning best is Ephesians 3:14-15: "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name."

When he created Adam and Eve, God set in motion the process whereby, in the course of time and according to his plan, his family could be expanded.

But all at once?

No.

God the Father determined in advance to bring children into his family, and in what order. He then sent Jesus Christ to be his firstborn Son. But Christ was to be the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15).

Without doubt, God is planning an extremely large family. But the point is, he *is* planning.

And so should we. But the desire to have children should be evaluated in light of not only the burgeoning world population, but of a family's ability to provide and care for children.

So just as God is planning his family, we should be planning ours. A young couple may decide to wait three or four or more years before having their first child to be better prepared for that child.

They then may decide to have two or three or four or whatever number they feel best. But a couple should plan to

have only those children that they can properly care for, nurture and give their time to.

Children should not be just numbers in a group, but individuals who are planned and loved by both parents.

But Why Sex?

If the planning and spacing of children is proper in God's eyes, some then wonder why God created human sexuality. Many have believed sexual relations are solely for the purpose of human reproduction.

But that is not so. There is a deep and even more important reason why God created male and female.

Human reproduction is made possible through sex. But even before the human reproductive process, God made men and women to share the greatest of all attributes — love — and to share it, in part, through sex in marriage.

Here's what Paul wrote about the marital relationship: "Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2-3).

To speak plainly, Paul tells married couples they must fulfill their sexual responsibilities to each other — not for procreation, but as an act of outgoing love and concern, and to avoid the temptation of sexual immorality.

God designed into us the desire to care and share with each other through the sexual relationship in marriage. The culmination of affection and attention to each other is expressed in the sexual relationship.

To violate that sacred relationship is so awful that God has labeled it sin! Two of the Ten Commandments deal with the subject (Exodus 20:14, 17).

Many have believed sexual relations are solely for the purpose of human reproduction.

But in marriage, and only between partners in marriage, sex is pure, clean and desirable. It is, first and foremost, designed to draw and hold a husband and wife God has bound together in love.

And Then Come Children

And then, through that expression of affection and love, children are produced. But they should be wanted, loved and planned for, just as God is adding members to his family.

That's the way it ought to be, at least.

The first act of sharing is love. The result of that love is a husband and wife devoted to each other, caring for each other, sharing with each other.

If husbands and wives became parents in that environment of sharing love, they would truly plan for their children. They would plan how many, and plan to give them all the love and time humanly possible. This is the ultimate expression of love and sharing.

It would be a different world if such were the case.

Use Wisdom in Planning

With God's example to follow, married couples should plan their own families. But in family planning there are many factors to consider.

In times past, families tended to be quite large, especially farm families. Children all grew up working and contributing to the farm before setting out on their own.

Then times changed. The Great Depression of the 1930s made life much more difficult. In those trying times, many new families were smaller than families at the turn of the century.

Then came World War II. It produced a terrible loss of life — especially of young men. The post-war years saw what has come to be known as a "baby boom." Since then, world population has skyrocketed.

Some of the great concerns today are overpopulation, overcrowded cities, food shortages, housing problems and how to employ the teeming millions who now need to earn a living and support their own families.

It seems a wise time to consider smaller families. With

the economic and political problems of our age, that certainly may be a wise course of action in family planning.

To bring a child into the world and provide his or her living and education is no small task. Better to do it right with one, two or three children than have 10 or a dozen children and not be able to properly provide for them.

Childbirth — the Beginning of New Life

Of all the thrills one might have in a lifetime, none can compare to the joy and marvel of childbirth.

The joy of new life, of reproducing ourselves, is unexplainable. It ought to be shared as husband and wife, though some cultures consider this taboo.

When a mother brings a new life into the world, the husband should be there sharing every moment. Through the pains of childbirth, the love and emotion of husband and wife should be shared in touch and words. There is no other moment like the birth of a child.

Some years ago, it was often difficult for husbands to participate in the birth of their children. For some strange reason, hospitals thought men should not be present. Mothers were hauled away to a room with the doctor in hospital garb and mask. Strange nurses and attendants hovered nearby. And at the very time she needed her husband the most, she went through this experience alone.

Fortunately, many in the medical profession have seen the value — even the necessity — of having the husband present. Now birthing centers are commonplace in much of the developed world. Husbands and wives plan for childbirth together by attending classes, seeing films and listening to doctors and midwives explain the marvels of human birth and the joy of being together.

Of all the thrills one might have in a lifetime, none can compare to the joy and marvel of childbirth.

And that, at last, is the way it ought to be. Bringing new life into the world should be the greatest sharing experience of all.

Child Rearing Is Sharing, Too

Somewhere along the line this modern society has taken many wrong turns. The mistaken idea has developed that Dad should go out and earn the living and leave the children to Mom.

While it is true that husbands usually provide the major source of economic support for the family, it is not true that wives and mothers are solely responsible for the children.

Research has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that parental love, care and touching — from fathers as well as mothers — are vital to the well-being of a child.

Psychologists have discovered what they ought to have known all along. The personality and temperament of a child is firmly established in the first few years of life. If there is ever a time when parents ought to spend the most time and effort with their children, it is during these precious early years.

And that does not mean Mom alone. Fathers have an equal responsibility in the care of babies and children. After all, what is wrong with a father changing diapers, rocking the baby to sleep and sitting up when the baby is sick?

Having babies is indeed the ultimate sharing.

“JUST” A HOMEMAKER?

A young homemaker summarized the problem many women face when they choose to stay home and be housewives. She wrote: “I am continually asked if I work. When I reply that no, I don’t have a job to which I go each morning, a look of incredulity almost always spreads across the person’s face, and then comes that inevitable question, ‘What on earth do you *do* all day?’ ”

Some people apparently think that homemakers often sit around all day watching television, never bothering to get dressed or to get their hair out of curlers.

What about it? Does any woman have cause to be ashamed if she is “just” a homemaker?

God did not create women as some sort of afterthought — a last minute “Whoops! I almost forgot.” The creation of women was an integral part of God’s plan. Humanity was not complete with the creation of the male only (Genesis 2:18). So God made Eve, from the rib of Adam, to be his perfect companion and complete spiritual equal.

To make the human family, which pictures God’s family, complete — to provide it with proper depth and to create the total environment — God established family life. Male and female. Marriage. Children. Breadwinner and homemaker. They all fit together.

In this lifetime, we may develop great physical skills. We

might run faster, jump higher, play music or sing better than anyone else. But do these physical accomplishments mean anything in the spirit world? If an athlete develops the skill to jump 7 feet 8 inches, will he or she be special in the resurrection?

No. Not because he or she could jump high in this physical life. All those who will be glorified in the resurrection will be able to jump 7 feet 8 inches and much more with ease. Acquiring eternal life does not depend on how much we train ourselves in a physical way. The development of a Godlike nature — is what carries over to spirit life.

An athlete may improve his or her physical skills through hours of hard work and self-discipline. A musician must also work and discipline himself or herself to become proficient. Doing the best we can in any aspect of life is part of what God expects of us (Ecclesiastes 9:10). And both sexes have exactly the same opportunities in this regard. The day-to-day events of life constantly provide opportunities to become more like Jesus Christ. From our decision to get up in the morning through the decisions we make all day to our decision to retire at night, Christ should be formed in us. Whether we are male or female has little to do with the outcome.

The Homemaker Stereotype

Western society has increasingly cast the homemaker as a wet mop. She is pictured as a haggard, unattractive drudge with her hair in curlers, a broom in her hand and several screaming brats around her.

On the other hand, society idolizes the chic, modern career businesswoman. Up at the crack of dawn, she dresses like a fashion model, prepares a hearty breakfast for her family and drives the kids off to school. She puts in a full day at her office, comes home to a house full of girls (she is a Girl Scout den mother) and somehow has a piping hot dinner on the table by 7. At the same time, she gives her husband all the attention and encouragement he needs, and, through all this, a radiant, cheerful smile beams from her face.

Where such a modern wonder woman exists is a mystery. But we have been made to believe that this is what a woman should be.

No one ever said mopping floors was fun. Cleaning the toilet bowl is not a tremendous challenge. Soaking a tubful of dirty diapers really doesn't make the day. And many a mother, wife and homemaker who devotes her full time to taking care of the home might wonder what a hot stove, dirty floor or unmade bed have to do with being a Christian.

But the effective management of the home has just as much to do with learning to be like Christ as any other management job any other person could have. Running a home is in many respects like managing a corporation. Let's look at the similarities.

The Executive Homemaker

We think of several things when we hear the word *executive*. Somehow that word smacks of success. We think of tall buildings, suites of offices, financial wealth. We visualize top-level managers living in exclusive suburbs and driving late-model cars larger and more expensive than the rest of us can afford. We see them in our mind's eye, making decisions, talking on the telephone, holding important meetings, going to lunch at the best restaurants.

And we are tempted to think of how well qualified they are — how much more important than we are. But are the jobs really that different? What are some of the things executives do?

One area is that of time scheduling. Effective executives know how to get things done. They make sure the business meets its deadlines. They have to deliver as promised.

Executives make multiple decisions daily, and these decisions have to be the best and wisest possible.

Executives spend a lot of time solving problems. With all businesses, things can go wrong. Problems can arise over money, personnel, equipment or a dozen other items.

An executive is responsible for the morale as well as the safety and training of the people employed by the company.

And then executives have to delegate. No one person can do it all. The effective executive knows how to give tasks to others who can handle the job.

These are only a few of the things most commonly asso-

ciated with executives. But what does this have to do with housewives?

Much! Read Proverbs 31:10-31! These verses describe an ideal executive manager, a person who scheduled time, made decisions, solved problems, was responsible over others and delegated work — and was highly successful at it. Who was this person? A homemaker — the noble wife (or virtuous woman in the King James Version)!

The writer probably knew one or more women who were setting examples such as he described. The virtuous woman made a profession of caring for her household the best way possible — she was much more than the false image society has of housewives today. "Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate" (verse 31). There it is. Her outstanding example was recorded for posterity in God's Word.

An effective homemaker employs every one of the tools of effective management. Frankly, when you understand the job of the homemaker — the wife and mother — you might wonder if it does not present one of the greatest of all opportunities for skill development.

If you are a man, have you ever stopped to think about how much a wife — a homemaker — has to do? Running a smooth-flowing household takes skills similar to those of a corporate president.

The Homemaker's Job

A homemaker is responsible for making many decisions and solving problems. Let's say your family is struggling with inflated food costs (who isn't struggling just to keep up?). In many cases, the homemaker is responsible for the food budget. In order to feed the family well, she checks the sales, perhaps buying vegetables at one store, bread at another, coffee down the street and beef somewhere else.

But she has to be an efficiency expert as well. She has to consider the cost of gasoline to get to all the stores and the time it takes to shop. Decisions have to be made. If she really is an effective executive, she will get the shopping done at the best prices and get other things done, too.

Then there is delegation. Not doing it all yourself is the name of the game. Many a harried homemaker cleans up after the kids, makes all the beds, washes all the clothes. Somehow she just never gets around to delegating these jobs to the children.

Some students go to college not even knowing how to make a bed. Mom always did it for them. Some students do not know how to operate washers and dryers. And many do not know how to put in an honest, full day's work.

Not only is the mother who does it all alone making life much harder for herself, she is doing her children a great injustice. One of a parent's major responsibilities is to teach his or her children how to work.

Delegate! That means teaching the children to do

the dishes, wash and iron their clothes and make their beds. Children should learn to cook, shop, repair things and help in every part of home life. So Mom is a teacher as well.

Appreciate the Wife's Role

The woman who decides to be a homemaker is choosing as high an occupation as it is possible to choose. No executive, great financier, famous entertainer or sports personality has a greater calling or profession. It's time we all realized that.

God has not established an elitist system of "better" jobs and "lesser" jobs. God does not look down on the janitor, laborer, farmer or homemaker, while favoring the doctor, lawyer or banker. But, partially because of the modern feminist movement, the role of homemaker has been relegated to practically the bottom rung on the ladder of respect in this age. Women have been made to feel that if they are not in the battle for top executive jobs in the professions, they

There is no greater calling for a woman than to be a homemaker — a full-time wife and mother.

are not fulfilling their potential and aren't worth much.

It just isn't true! There is no greater calling for a woman than to be a homemaker — a full-time wife and mother. *No greater calling!*

That statement may not win a popularity contest with the women's liberation movement, but that remains the truth. On the other hand, neither should men try to subordinate and suppress women — keep them "barefoot and pregnant" — while men go out and play the big shots. God's Word is clear about the roles of men and women. They are both made in the image of God and are equal (Genesis 1:27), and in marriage each has particular responsibilities (Ephesians 5:21-33). Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (verse 25), and that includes *appreciating* them — treating them with proper respect, "as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

Many wives hold college degrees and are extremely capable women. But when they marry, they begin to devote all their talents and efforts to being homemakers — wives and mothers. It takes their full time to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. Pleasing God — and nothing else matters! — is a question of attitude. A homemaker can become Christlike and serve God just as well as anyone else in any other situation in this life.

THE PROVERBS 31 HUSBAND

WHAT MAN wouldn't want a wonderful wife like the woman described in chapter 31 of the biblical book of Proverbs? But what kind of man deserves such a woman?

She is capable, yet submissive to her husband. She is intelligent, yet clothed with humility.

Men have read this chapter of the Bible and longingly wondered if such a woman has ever lived.

But few men have ever stopped to ponder what kind of man deserves such a woman. They may fantasize about how wonderful it would be to be married to this vision of true womanhood, but they have probably never analyzed whether they would be worthy of her.

Do you think the proverbial macho, domineering, male-chauvinist type really deserves the woman depicted in Proverbs 31?

Or how about the lily-livered, weak-kneed mouse? Could such an introvert ever achieve happiness and properly lead the capable woman of Proverbs 31?

Men, it's high time to stop worrying about where this wonderful wife is and become far more concerned about becoming a Proverbs 31 *husband*.

In fact, if there were more Proverbs 31 husbands, there would be more Proverbs 31 wives!

What kind of husband would it take to lead, love, provide for and protect this woman we read about in Proverbs? At first, you might think of a dominant, prominent, self-confident man whose wife is seen but seldom heard. But that's not how this woman is depicted.

The Proverbs 31 woman is capable. Confident. Heard as well as seen. Respected. Known. She knows how to fit into the culture of her society — and those of other societies.

Any man married to a woman this proficient and loving does not hide her in a tent. He shouts her praises for all to hear — he wants the world to know that the epitome of femininity, grace and talent is personified in his wonderful wife.

Let's take a fresh look at Proverbs 31, this time to see what kind of man leads and provides for the Proverbs 31 woman.

A Successful Man

Certainly, whoever the Proverbs 31 woman was, she has provided the finest example for every woman to emulate.

But Solomon, the author of most of the Proverbs, did not have a wife like this. Among his many wives and concubines, it is doubtful that there was a woman of this kind of love and wisdom. Solomon probably didn't even know any one of his wives well enough to write such a complimentary chapter. The Proverbs 31 woman — and the Proverbs 31 husband — remain buried in anonymity. We just don't know who they were.

But this woman does seem practically perfect. And the man? Well, we may not have given much attention to him. But he himself must have been a person of ability, outgoing concern and wisdom.

Hidden between the lines of the verses in Proverbs 31 we see a man who must have provided a better-than-average living for his family. Read verse 23:

“Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.” The husband of Proverbs 31 was respected in the community. He sat with the wise of the city and possessed wisdom and ability. In developing nations today, he might be the village

headman. He earned the respect of his peers as well as that of his wife and family.

The family achieved a measure of financial success. Notice verse 15: "She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls." The woman described in this verse is full of diligence and zeal, rising before the rest of her family to help prepare them for the day.

But have you ever noticed that this household has, to put it in modern paraphrase, full-time hired help? Read it again: "and portions for her servant girls"; that would include "mechanical servants" — household appliances — today.

This family's success has made it possible for help to be provided for the wife, which, in turn, makes it possible

for the wife to achieve her maximum potential. The Proverbs 31 wife is not constantly "barefoot and pregnant."

The Proverbs 31 husband provides an environment in which his wife can reach her full capabilities.

A Person of Service

More than one man who has browbeat his wife has prided himself in having discovered Proverbs 31:15. "Get up woman," he slurs sleepily. "Why can't you rise up like that Proverbs 31 woman?"

Certainly, Proverbs 31 shows a diligent wife responding to the needs of her household. She does rise early and she does have everything ready to make the beginning of the day enjoyable for everyone, including the live-in help her husband has provided. It seems some men selfishly feel the woman should be up early in the morning getting all the chores done in addition to providing the nourishing breakfast the family needs for a proper start.

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Monetary wealth did not go to this woman's head. She had not become lazy merely because servants had been provided. In fact, she felt a responsibility to everyone in the household, including the hired help.

But part of her responsibilities must have included outlining duties and projects for her servants throughout the day. She was responsible for the household organization.

There is yet another hint of the family's financial stability in verse 21: "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet." Garments of substantial quality are here depicted. This family had no fear of the bitter colds of winter. The Proverbs 31 woman purchased quality garments or made them with her own hands.

Throughout this inspiring chapter we find that this woman is constantly a person of service. Notice verse 20: "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy."

She is a woman of accomplishment. Her family is provided with the finest quality clothing and food. She has servants. She also has time available, and she uses her time to the best possible advantage — not whiling away countless hours, glued to a television screen keeping up with the latest intrigue and drama of soap operas. And she spends much of her time in service.

You see, she and her husband have both developed their potentials to help and serve in addition to taking care of their own family's needs.

Mutual Trust and Respect

One of the most vital elements in a successful marriage is trust and respect. The Proverbs 31 husband — please note it — totally trusts his wife.

How many women today have received the respect and trust they deserve? Greed, jealousy, mistrust and a host of wrong emotions dominate many marriages.

How does the Proverbs 31 husband regard his wife in this area? Read it in verses 11 and 12: "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."

Trust and respect are a two-way street. The wife's con-

duct certainly must be worthy of respect. But it is the husband who must give the trust.

And how about a word of praise now and then?

As the book of Proverbs states, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

How is this for a word aptly spoken? "Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her" (Proverbs 31:28). How about it, husbands? When was the last time you said, "Honey, that was a super job"? When was the last time you complimented your wife on a well-cooked meal? Or a clean and neat house? Or the extra time she spent helping a sick neighbor?

Unfortunately, most of the time, the good deeds and hard work go unnoticed — certainly uncomplimented.

If you were a man, would you like a Proverbs 31 wife? Then, first, you must be a Proverbs 31 husband!

Trust, respect and praise for your wife — these are important qualities of the Proverbs 31 husband.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR MATE WILL NOT!

HAVE YOU ever thought about leaving your mate because he — or she — refuses to fulfill his — or her — family responsibilities? What is a person supposed to do when a mate will not?

The answer is simple and effective: YOU do when your mate will not!

Why Divorce?

Divorce destroys lives. It reaches in and tears apart the very heart and soul of a family. Some people, in the depths of the pain and suffering of an unhappy marriage, naturally feel it is better to break up rather than to continue living in misery. Although it may seem like the quick and easy way out of problems, it is the beginning of a whole new set of problems.

Two generations ago divorce was a disgrace — now it is a statistical race. Of course, couples once stayed together and endured the pain and difficulties that accompany a bad marriage.

Through good times and bad times they tried to stay together, to raise their children together and, in spite of the many hurts and tears, to hope for a marriage that would take them through the golden years to the twilight of their lives. It often didn't work. And there were reasons.

Today, people have little tolerance for pain and suffering in marriage. At the least little problem, the threat of divorce is wheeled out. Our society has made divorce an easy option — a parachute out of marital problems.

But is divorce really that parachute?

Think About the Children

What a pity that grown-ups often fail to consider the children. The children of a divorced couple go through pain — emotional, mental and even physical pain.

Parents — when you are more than one — are the child's whole world. When you break up, you are breaking up the world of your child. You are shattering your child's emotional security. The child feels abandoned, frightened and insecure about the future. A child's loyalty is torn between two parents who think they love that child very much.

You need to think about the hurt you inflict upon your children in your quest to get out of the "hurt" you feel in your

marriage. Is your happiness more important than that of your children? After all, they did not make you get married — they did not ask to be born. But now they are asking you to give them a whole family to grow up in. And it is still in your power to give them the whole family they desire and need.

Children are half of you and half of your mate, and they need both of you to reach their full potential. Fractured families produce fractured

children. Alone after a divorce, you cannot give them what they need — you cannot be both father and mother.

Now you may be thinking, Isn't it better for my children to live with me in peace than with both of us in war?

That's not necessarily so!

Research now shows that, except in cases of child abuse,

The mate who strives to do right has a special influence over the other mate by his or her positive actions.

children are better off in a home of discord where both parents live than in a divorced home with one parent. According to Archibald Hart, a clinical psychologist and author of the book *Children of Divorce*, fewer than 10 percent of children surveyed felt that the divorce of their parents helped their lives. In fact, it generally made their lives worse.

Even if you do not have children to think about, will divorce make your life happier? Probably not. Why not? Because you may be half of the problem and you cannot divorce yourself from yourself! Think about that one for a while. You still must live with yourself.

Divorce can exact a great and long-lasting emotional and physical toll. Those who divorce are experiencing higher rates of mental disorders, heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure and cirrhosis of the liver than those who tough it out. But why even tough it out when there is still a better solution?

Why You Should Stay

They say it takes two to make a marriage, but we say it takes only one to save a marriage! If you stay, the chances are great that you can save your marriage in spite of what your mate does or does not do.

Two wrongs do not make a right, but one right can make a marriage. Let us get some marriage counseling from Paul. "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her" (1 Corinthians 7:12). Even the children in such families, Paul says in verse 14, are benefited when one mate is striving to live rightly even if the other doesn't yet see the importance of doing so.

The mate who is striving to do what is right has a special influence over the other mate. How? By his or her positive actions. If you do what is right in marriage, it influences your mate positively. It is possible for God to use your example to turn your mate around. But if you leave there is no hope!

So stay, and let the power of your example turn your marriage around. Peter said that "if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives [or husbands], when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1-2).

You can turn that lemon into the sweetest lemonade you ever tasted. As frustrated and hopeless as you may feel right now, with the help of God, your marriage can be happier than you dreamed possible. Many troubled marriages, of course, need the assistance of a qualified spiritual counselor. Don't neglect to seek such help if necessary.

Make a Commitment!

Commitment is the foundation of a successful marriage. Even though your mate may not be as committed as you are, your commitment is needed to power you through the difficult times. Times when everything you do is interpreted by your mate as being wrong — when with all your heart you are trying to please.

Commitments are made on your knees before God. He will give the power to DO when your mate will not. Go to God — talk to him — make a commitment to him that you will stay with your marriage — to work with your marriage until you achieve success.

This commitment will motivate you, and give you a positive frame of mind. You know where you are going, and you have the confidence of knowing that God is for you. And, as Paul said, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

The next thing you need to do is face the reality of marriage. Come out of the fantasy world of Hollywood romance. Come into the real world of marriage where real people through hard work and perseverance build real marriages that last. Be realistic about marriage.

Marriage was not intended to be like a bowl of peaches and cream, but like a bed of roses. We are talking about a real bed of roses — the kind with beautiful, sweet-smelling flowers and sharp, painful thorns. Marriage was meant to have anniversaries and adversities — for it is through overcoming adversities that we grow and learn.

Look at marriage as an institution of higher learning whose founder and chancellor is Almighty God. When he brought the first couple into his institution, he gave them the goal to achieve total oneness through learning from each other and a lot of hard work (Genesis 2:24). In the process

(through the curriculum of marriage), they — and others since — would learn many lessons and have many tests.

The goal of God's institution of marriage is to teach husbands and wives the supreme lesson of the universe: oneness through selflessness.

Love is the secret of true happiness, and marriage is the foremost place to learn it. The deeper you learn that supreme lesson of giving — yes, even the hard part of giving when your mate will not — the more you will grow and the happier you will be.

Happiness Is...

Your happiness is not dependent on what your mate or anyone else does or does not do. It is dependent on what you do. Love is giving, and giving (what you do) produces happiness. Jesus Christ said, "It is more blessed [happy] to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). So take charge of your happiness by giving love instead of looking to get and becoming unhappy when your mate does not give it to you. When you give, you control your own happiness — you can become as happy as you are willing to give. Go ahead and do it — it works!

Happiness is you fulfilling your role. Husbands, you were created to lead the family, being provider, protector, chief server and lover. You were designed for these wonderful responsibilities. This is why Paul said, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

When you love, you become happy. Even if your wife does not appreciate your loving leadership, you still will be happy because you are doing what God created you to do. You were made to lovingly lead a woman, and when you do it with God's way of giving and seeking her best interests, you will be fulfilled and happy.

So what do you do when your wife will not? You do — you do yourself a favor — you fulfill your role. Love your wife!

Women, God designed you to function in a role that produces happiness. When God made the woman, he said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suit-

able for him" (Genesis 2:18). God created your mind to be responsive to your husband, to willingly surrender your *self* to him (Ephesians 5:22).

That may not be easy for you to do, especially if your husband is not a loving leader. But the beauty of God's way is that your happiness depends on what you do. If you fulfill your role in love to your husband — helping him, responding positively to him, submitting and surrendering to him, you will make yourself happy.

Accept Each Other

You could be making yourself frustrated and unhappy. How? By trying to make your mate over into your image, and that is impossible!

A long time ago (even before you married), you formed a fanciful idea about what you wanted your mate to be like. Maybe you still have expectations that your mate will someday fulfill your dreams. Forget it — it will not happen! Your unrealistic expectations will only produce frustrations in your marriage.

Expecting your mate to be what you want is selfishness, and selfishness always leads to unhappiness. Think about this: You are probably not what your mate always dreamed of, either. So stop putting this unnecessary pressure on yourself or on your mate.

Accept your mate the way he — or she — is, the good and the bad. How do you do that?

Accept your mate by concentrating on the good points. There is something of quality about everybody. You were able to see those good points before you married. Well, they are still there. All you have to do is look beyond yourself and you will see them.

Actively praise your mate for the good points. Build your mate up in the eyes of others, and he or she will grow in esteem in your own eyes. This kind of affirmative action will make your mate feel good and make you feel good.

Do Good for Evil

But what do you do when your mate does you wrong? What do you do when that "fight-back" response wells up

inside you? You must do something, because you are about to explode. But what do you do?

Do what Jesus Christ said to do: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). When you do it out of an attitude of genuine love, it works miracles. What are those miracles?

First of all, you help yourself get rid of the stress and frustration. Love is the greatest stress releaser there is in human conflict. Giving good for evil transforms your negative energy into positive energy. It makes you feel good in spite of the abuse you may be receiving.

Doing good for evil gives you a shot of happy medicine that is able to cure your marital blues. You will not need sedatives and tranquilizers.

When your mate rails against you with harsh words, still the troubled waters by saying soft and pleasant things. And let us add, saying it at the right time is also important. Sometimes doing good is saying nothing while your mate is angry.

In these situations it is best to let any anger be vented before you say a word. Later, when the atmosphere has cooled down, you can say the pleasant and sweet words that produce peace. If you do this you will be amazed at how "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

This miracle even has the power to transform your mate's whole approach toward you. He or she may be accustomed to having you argue and fight back. By

changing the way you react, you begin to change the way your mate acts toward you. Doing good for evil will help your mate realize that it is a new ball game.

A husband will have to change the way he pitches, because the wife is not hitting back anymore. So why should he continue to pitch when nobody is hitting? Why should he

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ness, and selfishness
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continue to fight when there is nobody to fight with? It gets boring fighting with yourself.

By doing good for evil you control how the game is played, and how your marriage is lived. In the past when you did evil for evil, it was harder for your mate to see his or her wrong because you blinded your mate by your wrong. Feeling the sting of your response, your mate felt justified in reacting.

As we noted previously, Peter wrote, "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives" (1 Peter 3:1-2). There is power in a good example!

And do not forget the positive effect your doing good for evil will have on your children. By your good example you are building a proper way of give in them. You are doing what they will need to be doing later. You are teaching them how to get along with people — the only way that leads to real peace.

Now you may be thinking: How do I know all of this will work in my marriage? What if I do all of this and my mate just uses it to take advantage of me?

You are forgetting about the all-powerful God, who has unique ways of helping you like nobody else can. God can equalize the situation — if you have him working for you.

Remember this, that no matter what your mate does or does not do, your happiness depends on what you do — how much you give. It is based on God's supernatural law of love, and Almighty God stands in back of it and guarantees it. It works!

You may feel that it is unfair for you to do good while your mate gets away with evil. Listen to what the apostle Paul says: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7).

Nobody gets away with anything. God is the great equalizer. He settles all accounts, and for the good of all concerned.

So, ask God for the patience and perseverance to continue doing when your mate will not.

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