

The Christian Family

by

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Troy, Michigan

United States of America

Preface

No one doubts that the American family is in trouble. Whereas in the 1940s, 90% of Americans lived in a family household, today only 72% do so.¹ It is well known that one out of two marriages end in divorce in American society at large, and the threats to the traditional family from a changing society are pushing evangelicals to respond. As of 1982, 10% of all mass-market and trade books published by evangelical publishing houses dealt with some aspect of the family.² The increase in evangelical family ministries, ranging from radio shows, such as, Dr. James Dobson's "Focus on the Family," to national seminars, such as, the "Family Life Conference" sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ International, further demonstrate the concern that evangelicals feel regarding the threats to the Christian family.

The threats to the Christian family are many. Wives and husbands are called to make a host of difficult adjustments. In ways and to degrees that were not demanded of our forebears, they must cope with:³

- Massive sociological change (agrarian to industrial; rural to urban; patriarchal to egalitarian)
- The shift to a technological environment (the machine, more than nature or other people, becomes the framework out of which life is lived)
- Social values reorientation (sexual revolution; role of women; meaning of the traditional family; social ethics; education for change)
- Vocational role shifting (production of parts rather than complete products; small business is swallowed up by big business; work is directed toward a standard of living rather than toward survival)
- Religious flux (eclecticism; pluralism; situational ethics; loss of biblical authority; subjective religious truth)
- Increased pressure toward sexual performance (technique takes precedence over relationship; attraction is more important than fidelity)

At the same time, husbands and wives must also meet the challenges that all families throughout history have had to meet, such as:

- Finance goals and attitudes

¹ B. Cutler, "Are You an 'Average' Person?" *The Reader's Digest* (Sept. 1989) 190.

² J. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 77.

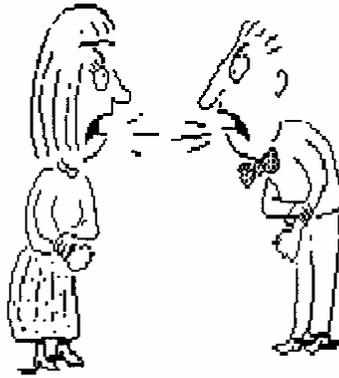
³ Staff, *Family Life Conference: A Weekend to Remember* (Little Rock, AR: Campus Crusade for Christ International, 1987) 17-22.

- Integration of feelings
- Sexual adaptation
- Roles in the family
- Art of communicating and expressing love

This manual seeks to address the biblical parameters of marriage and family life while at the same time taking account of the researches of psychologists and other professionals when they are compatible with biblical values. Interspersed periodically throughout the manual are “Impact Projects” for husbands and wives to work through together. May God grant us all the courage to love!

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YOUR SELF IMAGE

SPOUSE'S LIFESTYLE

Your self-image and your spouse's lifestyle meet head-on in marriage and contribute to any tendencies toward disintegration, such as:

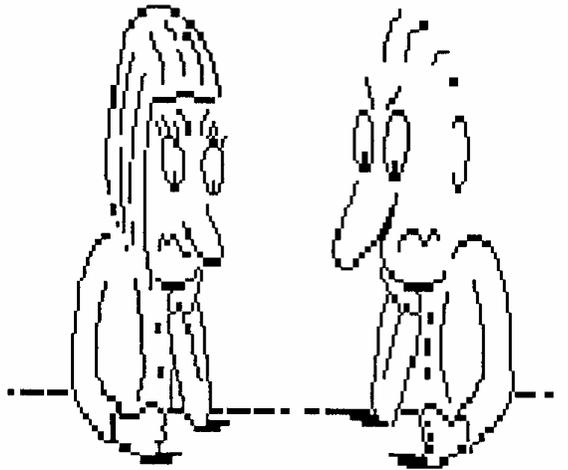
- INSECURITIES*
- INFERIORITIES*
- SUPERIORITIES*
- MISTRUST*



The common reaction between spouses is:

- INTOLERANCE*
- INCREASED DEMANDS*
- RIGIDITY*
- ISOLATION*

**The result is War
(either cold or hot)**



DIRECTION

?

In marital war, husbands and wives will usually take one of four directions. Sometimes they will change directions if what they are doing doesn't seem to work



Reconstruction
Attempt to change your spouse

Isolation
Withdrawal from the relationship

Divorce
Rupture of the relationship

Understanding
Tolerance and the liberty to be unique



Only one of these directions gives the freedom for altruistic love. All the others are characterized by self-love.

The Christian Family

“As God today adds his ‘Yes’ to your ‘Yes’, as he confirms your will with his will, and as he allows you, and approves of, your triumph and rejoicing and pride, he makes you at the same time instruments of his will and purpose both for yourselves and for others. In his unfathomable condescension God does add his ‘Yes’ to yours; but by doing so, he creates out of your love something quite new--the holy estate of matrimony.”⁴

Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1943

The Biblical Ideal of Marriage

‘Dearly beloved....we are gathered here....’ These familiar words or variations of them, based on the ceremony in the *Book of Common Prayer*⁵ are heard at most Protestant weddings. Marriage, family and home life properly begin with the joining by God of a man and a woman in marriage. Marriage is the single most important human relationship other than one’s spiritual relationship with God. Yet, as one optimist put it, it is the only game in town where both players can either win or lose. It does not demand perfection, but it must be given priority. Good marriages are not made in heaven; they are made on earth by two people who are committed to the person of Jesus Christ and to each other. The union is a dynamic tension in which two human beings, a man and a woman, each with different backgrounds, personalities, tastes, desires and goals, come together to become one so that in the union each can become more than either of them could ever have become as individuals. The ideal of true marital love is nowhere so strongly described as in the Song of Songs, the love that is “strong as death” (Song 8:6-7). Whence comes this ideal?

The Creation of Humans, Male and Female:

It will benefit us to observe carefully the divine record concerning the creation of the first humans. Theologically, the Genesis record sets the tone for our full understanding of maleness and femaleness as human categories. There are two creation narratives, and in both of them the important idea is communicated that humans were created for relationship.

⁴ D. Bonhoeffer, “A Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell,” *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 42-43.

⁵ The Book of Common Prayer (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1945) 300.

The Theology of the First Account (Ge. 1:26-27; cf. 5:1-2)

The Hebrew word *adam* (= human), derived from the word *adamah* (= soil), is generic. While often translated by the English equivalent “man,” it is not strictly a male word but primarily denotes a human being. There are two categories which belong to humankind, *zakar* (= male) and *n’qevah* (= female). Both are fully human, and both bear the image of God. This bisexuality of the human race reflects the capacity for relationship which exists within God’s own person. Whatever the divine image means, it cannot mean merely maleness.⁶ In fact, there are occasions in the Bible when feminine as well as masculine images of God are employed.⁷ Humans are social creatures, and the most intimate human relationship is between human mates who were created for each other. If Christian marriages are to be what God intended, women and men must realize that both categories are fully human and both fully participate in the divine image. There are no second-class citizens here, and being different does not imply inferiority or superiority.

In ancient societies, particularly those dominated by patriarchy, the differences between maleness and femaleness were automatically assumed to imply a hierarchy of value. Men were more important than women because they were different and physically stronger. Women frequently were devalued as the property of men.

In modern society, the attempt at true equality between men and women suffers another kind of distortion. The modern goal seems to be a flattening out of the sexes so that there is no such thing any longer as men and women. Unisexuality strikes against the heart of the biblical message as much as does male chauvinism. God made humans male and female. He made them for relationship. They both need each other. In the broader sense, the man could not truly be a man until there was a woman, and the woman could not truly be a woman until there was a man. Each can only find his/her definition when both exist.

⁶ I would suggest that the *imago Dei* consists of such things as:

- Personality/uniqueness
- Volition/freedom, the capacity for choice
- Transcendence over the environment
- Intelligence, the capacity for reason and knowledge
- Morality, the capacity for recognizing good and evil
- Aesthetics, the capacity for valuation
- Gregariousness, the capacity for communication, fellowship, and social integration
- Creativity, the urge to imagine, invent and produce
- Sensibility, the ability to feel pathos and joy as well as the whole gamut of human emotion
- Self-awareness and self-contemplation

⁷ In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, wisdom, which is part of the character of God and is described as assisting God in the creation (Pro. 8:22-31), is portrayed in the feminine gender.

The Theology of the Second Account (Ge. 2:7, 18, 20b-25)

As in the first account, the primary word used to designate the human which God created is the generic *adam* (2:5, 7-8, 15-16, 18-23, 25), rendered in the NIV as “man.”⁸ It is not until the actual creation of the counterpart that the biblical author uses the strictly male and female terms *ish* (= man) and *ishshah* (= woman). Observe the interplay of these words in the following translation:

Yahweh God constructed the rib which he took from the human [*adam*] into a woman [*ishshah*], and he brought her to the human [*adam*]. Then the human said: Finally! This is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh! To this person shall be called the name ‘woman’ [*ishshah*], because from man [*ish*] this person was taken.⁹

The woman was taken from the human’s side to demonstrate that she was truly part of him, not external to him. She was truly, as he said, “...bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh,” a complementary partner. This complementary character is further implicit in the expression “helper suitable for him” (2:18), or quite literally, “like his counterpart.”¹⁰ The tone here is more egalitarian than hierarchical. The two are to be side by side, not one behind the other. A suitable helper is not an unskilled worker or a subordinate, but rather, a full partner.

The need for human relationship in marriage is particularly emphasized in the statement that it was “not good” that the human should be alone (2:18). After no less than seven declarations in the first narrative about things that were very good (Ge. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), God finally says that something is not good--human isolation. The sense of the aloneness of the first human is heightened even more by his survey of the animal kingdom, each created with its own mate, and by the concluding statement that for the human no suitable counterpart was to be found (2:19-20).¹¹

⁸ In 2:20 the Masoretes have pointed the consonants so as to make the proper name Adam. This is unlikely to be correct, and in any case, the original Hebrew unpointed text is ambiguous, cf. E. Speiser, *Genesis [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) 18.

⁹ My translation

¹⁰ W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 226.

¹¹ Someone might well ask if the first human was a male inasmuch as in the New Testament there is the statement, “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Ti. 2:13), implying maleness. This implication cannot be denied, but it must still be conceded that it took the woman to give the man his definition and function. Apart from each other, even physiological characteristics have no precise meaning.

The First Wedding (Ge. 2:20b-25)

The first union of a man and a woman was performed by God himself, who, like the father of the bride, brought the woman to the man.¹² Adam's poetic and joyful response was emphatic. His expression, "This is now....," expresses joyous astonishment at the woman, well paraphrased in the *Living Bible* as: "This is it!" In the theology of the first marriage, the creation of the woman and the man out of one flesh directly corresponds to the bringing together of the man and the woman into one flesh in the marriage. God took the woman from the man so that "they must come together again and thus by destiny...belong to each other."¹³ In the Genesis account, this union is accompanied by a pronouncement and an observation which together provide the first divine comment on the nature of marriage, what has been called the four initial "musts" of marriage.¹⁴

Severance (a man will leave his father and mother)

There is a certain sadness to a wedding, because just as it signifies a joining it also signifies a disjoining, a breaking of the parent-child bond of dependence. Such a disjoining should not be taken to mean an abandoning of one's parents, but rather an ending of the dependence, security, financial support and supply of physical needs which parents have previously provided. Leaving father and mother is far more than a matter of geography. It is the psychological leaving home that is most important. It is not merely the moving away but the embarking on a whole new set of dependencies where the essence of life is no longer mom or dad, but husband and wife. It is a process of cutting ties in order to create new ones. Children who marry must leave; parents at the same time must let go!

Permanence (and be united to his wife)

The word "cleave" (KJV) means to join to someone in a permanent way. It describes permanent, committed faithfulness, and it is used of loyal commitments between humans and each other as well as between humans and God (Dt. 10:20; Ru. 1:14; 2 Sa. 20:2). It is captured by the Old English word "troth" as used traditionally in wedding ceremonies: "Therewith I pledge thee my troth."¹⁵

One of the important ways that the Bible describes marriage is as a covenant, a

¹² G. Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 84.

¹³ Rad, 85.

¹⁴ C. Swindoll, *Strike the Original Match* (Minneapolis: Word Wide Publications, 1980) 21.

¹⁵ D. Atkinson, *To Have and To Hold* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 83-84.

description that directly implies permanence. A covenant is a solemn promise made binding by an oath which may be either a verbal formula or a symbolic action. God's covenant with Israel was compared to a marriage in Isaiah (50:1). Jeremiah (3:1, 20). Ezekiel (16:8, 15, 32), Hosea (1:2-3; 2:2; 6:7; 8:1) and Malachi (2:14). Unfaithfulness in marriage is the breaking of a covenant (Pro. 2:16-17). Thus, it is no accident that the marriage vows which Christians take before God in a wedding are so constructed as to emphasize absolute fidelity (cf. Mk. 10:9). This fidelity involves:

- a) *Faithfulness to a vow*, that is, to one's choice affirmed before God regardless of circumstances
- b) *Faithfulness to a calling*, that is, to a divinely created partnership to be lived before God and open to God
- c) *Faithfulness to a person*, that is, to one's spouse as a life-partner and as a person worthy of partnership as opposed to fidelity only for the sake of sexual gratification, social prestige or the rest of the family
- d) *Faithfulness to a relationship*, that is, to a continuing development of communication, sharing, mutual respect, and growth through the often painful as well as joyful encounter of two persons face to face

In the wedding ceremony, there are several elements to the covenant-making process which together function as an oath before God. The ceremony begins with the acknowledgement of God ("we are gathered here in the presence of God"). To the statements of intent there is the verbal "I do" by the man and the woman, just as in a courtroom. Vows are repeated, and the physical exchange of rings and a kiss seal the covenant with external signs. All these are sure testimonies that the bridal couple fully intend to be united permanently.

Oneness (they will become one flesh)

The idea of becoming one flesh involves the joining of two spirits as well as two bodies. It points toward the entire union of the woman and the man in marriage, the act of filling and fulfilling each other in the partnership. While this phrase certainly includes the sexual union, it is not exhausted by it. Rather, "one flesh" denotes the closest possible personal relationship.¹⁶ Sexual intercourse is the act by which this relationship is expressed (1 Co. 6:15-17), an act which in the Old Testament is described as "knowing" each other. However, it also involves the whole body-personality of the two persons who have been joined. It involves the fulfilling of each other's needs, such as, affection, security, self-esteem, approval, belonging

¹⁶ Atkinson, 77ff.

and acceptance. Too often the effort to truly meet each other's needs erodes over the years.

It should equally be pointed out that unity in marriage is not uniformity. Becoming one flesh does not mean simply becoming alike. Rather, it means the acceptance of each other's uniqueness. It means mutual giving, listening, forgiving and belonging.¹⁷ People who marry often hold a preconceived fantasy of the ideal mate. After awhile, their fantasy and the person they have married begin to diverge sharply. They feel compelled to embark on a reconstruction project. The words "the two shall become one" becomes misconstrued to mean that "my spouse should become like me."¹⁸ Such a course will be disastrous. Instead, unity calls for a total unselfishness in which each seeks to fulfill the other.

Openness (they were naked and sensed no shame):

There is a childlike innocence that to some degree agrees with the observation of the biblical writer here. Infants and small toddlers are unembarrassed by nakedness, because they do not as yet know that they can be exploited. However, such innocence quickly turns to fear when they discover that their nakedness makes them vulnerable.

The nakedness of the man and the woman epitomized their complete intimacy on every level. Such intimacy implies the wonder and beauty of human sexuality, but it also implies the possibility of true intimacy without fear of exploitation. The statement that they sensed no shame is important, for shame is above all a social product. One cannot be ashamed when he or she is strictly alone. One is always ashamed before the eyes of another. The true intimacy of the primeval marriage was such that full openness did not lead to exploitation.

Physical intimacy cannot rightly be separated from personality intimacy. The sharing of a bed must be grounded upon one's commitment to a total sharing of life. Anything less becomes a form of exploitation. In this biblical passage, nakedness becomes a symbol for full intimacy—no hidden areas, no fears, no embarrassment. If there is truly a nakedness in marriage, an opening up to each other at the deepest levels, there must be full trust. Intimacy must never become a tool or a weapon. The breakdown of marriages often enough proceeds along the following lines:

- a) The refusal to be naked (open)
- b) The exploitation of openness, which breeds mistrust
- c) The resulting damage to communication

¹⁷ Swindoll, 32.

¹⁸ I. Tanner, *Loneliness: The Fear of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 92-93.

- d) The failure to meet needs
- e) The experience of shame before each other
- f) The exaltation and protection of the self
- g) Tragically, that which was one now becomes two!

Impact Project

Individual Section

10 Minutes

Setting : Stay together as a couple , but complete the following without interaction

Instruction: Rate how much the following adjustments and challenges are affecting your marriage

	None	Little	Some	Much	Results in my Marriage
Sociological Change					
Technology					
Social Values					
Vocation					
Religion					
Sex					
Finances					
Emotions					
Roles					
Communications					

Instruction: List what seem to be the similarities and differences between you and your spouse. Try to assess how these similarities or differences complement the partnership of marriage and how they can be creatively affirmed and accepted in each other.

Similarities

Differences

Effect

Interactive Section

20 Minutes

Setting : Stay together for interaction, Speak honestly, freely and with kindness

Instruction: Exchange impact project answer sheets. Read each response by your spouse aloud. Your spouse should do the same. Share and discuss your responses. Be sure to be considerate and teachable!

The Single Life

The single life is an area that does not receive a great deal of attention in the Bible. In the Old Testament, marriage is always the norm. Stories of unmarried persons often take the form of the hope and achievement of marriage, such as, the stories of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Ruth and Boaz, Esther, and the lovers in the Song. Women who were obliged to remain unmarried are depicted as suffering extreme loss (cf. Jg. 11:30-40). There may have been widows in Israel, but rarely any spinsters. Due to the casualties of war, women were often more numerous than men, and while not recommended, polygamy was at least tolerated. Celibacy was generally limited to those who through injury were unable to function sexually or who through violence or choice had become eunuchs (cf. Dt. 23:1).

In the New Testament, however, life as a single person receives somewhat more attention. In the first place, some rather important New Testament characters were unmarried, namely, Jesus, John the Baptist, and Paul. Thus, it is to the New Testament that one must turn to glean any theological information about the single life.

Categories of Single Persons

There are two primary passages in the New Testament which describe single categories. The first is in Jesus' discussion of marriage and divorce. Here, he describes three categories of eunuchs,¹⁹ those born impotent, those physically castrated,²⁰ and those who have chosen celibacy in order to perform what they perceive to be their responsibility toward the kingdom of God.

Paul, in his discussion of marriage and divorce in 1 Corinthians 7, uses three different words for single persons:

- *chara* (= widow)
- *parthenos* (= virgin)
- *agamos* (= one who is unmarried, either as a bachelor, spinster, widow, widower or divorced person)

¹⁹The word *eunouchos* quite literally means an emasculated male, but here Jesus is probably using it in the broader sense of an unmarried person.

²⁰Eunuchs in ancient times were usually castrated when they served in the women's quarters of a royal household. Sometimes such men were high officials (cf. Ge. 39:1; Ac. 8:27) though in the case of Potiphar the term "eunuch" may be merely an official title, since he was married, cf. C. Wolf, "Eunuch," *IDB* (1962) 179-180.

The Gift of Singleness

Both Jesus and Paul indicate that the ability to successfully live the single life is a special enablement from God. Jesus said it was for “the one who can accept it” (Mt. 19:12b), and Paul, while he does not enumerate it in any of his longer lists of *charismata* (= spiritual gifts), still uses the word *charisma* (= gift) in describing such a station in life (1 Co. 7:7). Paul is quite frank that for most people the life of the single person poses moral risks that make marriage the better alternative (1 Co. 7:8-9, 27-28). However, he recommends celibacy as a personal preference (1 Co. 7:7),²¹ and he advises unmarried persons, widows, and virgins to seriously consider living the single life (1 Co. 7:8, 25-26). His reasons are that the single life is preferable when life must be lived under certain crisis conditions (1 Co. 7:26-27),²² that the single life avoids the many problems of the married life (1 Co. 7:28b), that the single life is better suited to a full devotion to Christ without distraction (1 Co. 7:32-34) and that in the single life a person might well live a happier life (1 Co. 7:40).

That Paul himself was single is clear (1 Co. 9:5). It is not clear as to which specific category of single persons Paul belonged. He simply places himself with those who are “unmarried” (1 Co. 7:8), the most general category, and that might equally mean that he was a bachelor, a widower, or a divorcee. If he had been married previously, perhaps his wife left him at his conversion to Christianity. In any case, Paul considered himself to possess the gift of singleness.

The Decision to Marry

In one sense, all persons must appeal for God’s grace to live the single life, at least until they are married. Persons who are single, while they are advised as to the advantages of the single life, are never forbidden to marry. In fact, to forbid marriage is demonic (1 Ti. 4:1-3). Marriage is normal, not sinful, and Paul does not hesitate to recommend it. Widows are free to remarry as long as they marry another believer (1 Co. 7:8-9). Virgins are also free to marry if they wish (1 Co. 7:28, 36), though in the culture of Paul’s time such a decision might have been affected by someone else’s influence.²³ Paul himself considered it his right to be married if he so desired (1 Co.

²¹ It is likely that the statement, “It is good for a man not to marry” (1 Co. 7:1), is not so much Paul’s own opinion but his restating of the behavioral code of certain ascetics in Corinth who were calling for forced celibacy, cf. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 66. If so, then the verse should be translated in such a way as to reflect this, i.e., “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, namely, ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman’...” (7:1, of. NEBmg).

²² Paul does not elaborate on the “present crisis” (1:26), but apparently it was severe.

²³ There is a problem in identifying exactly what is meant by “his virgin.” Paul’s readers doubtless understood, because he would have been writing out of a particular situation with which all were familiar. The modern reader, unfortunately, is faced with several options, the most popular of which are: 1) the father of the virgin daughter whose consent was necessary (so ASV, NASB, TCNT, JB), or 2) the male fiancée of the girl who might wish to postpone the marriage (so

9:5).

While Christians generally agree on the right of marriage for widows and persons who have never yet been married, there is sharp contention over the question of remarriage for a divorced person. This disagreement arises out of the gospel accounts of Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce as they are juxtaposed with Paul's teaching on the same subject. Since in our world the proportion of divorced persons is extremely high, it is appropriate to address the subject with careful interpretation, sensitivity toward divorced persons, and an appreciation of the dilemma which often faces the church.

The Prohibition of Divorce

There is no question that divorce is wrong. It breaks the creation pattern to which Jesus appealed when he quoted the Genesis account and added the dictum, "What God has joined let not man separate" (Mk. 10:6-9). Bluntly, God says in the Old Testament, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:16). In the New Testament, Jesus forbids divorce, and Paul says, "Are you married? Do not seek a divorce" (1 Co. 7:27).

Human Hardness of Heart

The biblical prohibition notwithstanding, it is only fair to point out that while divorce is wrong in that it breaks God's ideal for the marriage covenant, the law at Sinai assumed that divorce would in some cases occur, and it regulated remarriage after divorce (Dt. 24:1-4). When asked about this statute, Jesus said that the concession by Moses was due to human hardness of heart (Mk. 10:2-5; Mt. 19:7-8), a hardness that resulted from the entry of sin into the world, since divorce was not part of God's ideal in the creation of man and woman.²⁴ That this hardness of the human heart destroys marriages, both ancient and modern, is clear. Even God, who was symbolically married to Israel in the covenant, initiated divorce proceedings against his people for their infidelity (Je. 3:6-8).

RSV, NEB, TEV, Goodspeed).

²⁴ The background for the question posed to Jesus by the Pharisees resulted from a rabbinical dispute between two schools of Pharisaic thought. Both schools permitted divorce and remarriage, but the school of Shammai restricted divorce to gross indecency while the school of Hillel permitted divorce for any reason whatsoever, including improperly cooked food or a wayward eye, cf. D. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 411. It should be noted that divorce, while it could be initiated by a husband with or without the wife's consent, could not be initiated by the wife. Her husband could divorce her, but she could not divorce him, cf. W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 2:197. Thus, when the Pharisees called for a judgment by Jesus on the interpretation of the law, the answer is given in male-oriented terms.

The Biblical Passages Concerning Remarriage for Divorcees

The question of remarriage is complicated by the fact that it is not treated in precisely the same language in the various passages in the New Testament.

Mark and Luke: In both Mark and Luke, a simple reading seems to indicate that remarriage on any grounds is adultery (Mk. 10:10-12; Lk. 16:18). No exceptions are given. The statement is absolute.

Matthew: Matthew addresses the question of divorce and remarriage twice, and in both passages he describes a single exception in which a simple reading seems to indicate that divorce and remarriage is permissible on the grounds of sexual infidelity (Mt. 5:31-32; 19:9). No other exceptions are given.

Paul: Paul describes yet another exception in which divorce and remarriage seem to be permissible, that is, the situation in which if an unbelieving spouse deserts a believer (1 Co. 7:12-13, 15).²⁵ Furthermore, while Paul encourages the *agamos* (= unmarried person) to consider the advantages of the single life, he also says that it is better to marry than to live in sexual frustration (1 Co. 7:8-9). Unmarried persons can marry without sinning (1 Co. 7:27-28). Inasmuch as Paul seems to distinguish between the unmarried person and a virgin (1 Co. 7:27-28) and between the unmarried person and a widow (1 Co. 7:8), he may be using the term *agamos* (= the unmarried) to especially include divorced persons, since that is the other applicable category. If so, then Paul may be saying that while it is advisable for divorced persons not to remarry, it is permissible if they do so.

The Problem of Interpretation

Interpreting these passages has proved extremely difficult for Christians in the various eras. On the one hand, while all Christians agree that marriage *should not* be dissolved, in the Medieval Period some theologians argued that marriage *could not* be dissolved.²⁶ On the other hand, Thomas Cranmer, a leader in the English Reformation who was eventually burned as a martyr, proposed that divorce (and by implication remarriage) be permitted for reasons of adultery, malicious desertion, prolonged absence without news, attempts against the life of the spouse, and cruelty.²⁷ These views represent the extremes, and the tensions between them still exist.

²⁵ The phrase rendered in the NIV, “a believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances,” may be quite literally translated, “The brother or the sister has not been enslaved in such matters.” To say that someone is not enslaved means that they are not bound by the marriage but are free, and implicitly, they are free to remarry.

²⁶ D. Atkinson, “Divorce,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 323.

²⁷ Atkinson, 323.

Following are some general positions held in the modern church:

Remarriage Under No Circumstances

Using the passages in Mark and Luke as primary, Christians from this persuasion do not allow remarriage. They believe that Jesus abrogated the concession of Moses. They interpret the exception passages in Matthew and Paul as permitting divorce (or at least separation) but not remarriage. Remarriage for any reason constitutes adultery against the former spouse. Thus, divorce, if it is allowed at all, can never be more than legalized estrangement. This position assumes either implicitly or explicitly the indissolubility of marriage. Marriages may be annulled but not dissolved. This position is prevalent in the Roman Catholic church as well as in some Protestant churches.

Remarriage Under Two Circumstances

Using the exception clauses in Matthew and Paul, Christians from this persuasion allow divorce and remarriage only on the grounds of sexual infidelity or desertion by an unbeliever. They interpret that a divorce which occurs on permissible grounds implies the freedom for remarriage. Thus, marriage is dissoluble, but only under two circumstances. Remarriage is permissible under only these same two circumstances. Remarriage under any other conditions constitutes adultery against the first spouse.

Remarriage Under Other Circumstances

Christians from this persuasion view the teachings of Jesus as stating what *should* be in marriage. However, they interpret that Jesus' statements are not intended to be legislative *per se*, but that they are intended to reflect God's ideal. The exception clauses are given to demonstrate the obvious, that is, that due to the hardness of human hearts, there are some situations which by their very nature dissolve the marriage bond. Adultery and desertion are two obvious examples, but other circumstances might also apply, such as, life-threatening abuse, cruelty, and so forth. Remarriage after divorce, while not generally advisable, is permissible if reconciliation with the former spouse is not possible.

An Ethic Toward Divorce and Remarriage

The task of formulating an ethic toward divorce and remarriage, and the need to apply it consistently, is a most unenviable task, given the polarization over the issue in Christian ranks. Nevertheless, here are my personal thoughts on the issue:

- All divorce is wrong insofar as it mars God's ideal for the permanency of

marriage. While divorce may be the lesser of two evils, it is never right.²⁸ God is grieved by all human sin, and this includes divorce as well as other sins.

- While all divorce is sinful (including divorce covered under the exception clauses), divorce is also forgivable. There is an unpardonable sin, but divorce is not it. Because divorce is forgivable, divorced persons must not be treated as any less worthy of God's grace. Divorce is to be grieved over and repented of, but divorce should not restrict persons from the life of the church. The church is an institution for sinners, and while the church must not sacrifice God's ideal for permanency in marriage, it must still demonstrate compassion and forgiveness. Christians must not refuse to forgive something which God does forgive.
- Remarriage for divorced persons is to be discouraged. It is advisable only for those who are not able to live the single life. At the same time, while it is good to remain unmarried, it is unwise to live in sexual frustration and the temptation to sin. One who is divorced should not actively seek a new spouse, even though remarriage may be permissible. If remarriage is chosen, however, it must be chosen with a sense of true grief and repentance over the broken covenant of the first marriage and a determination that the covenant of the second marriage will not suffer the same tragic end. Remarriage must be seen as an arena of God's forgiveness and grace, not as an avenue through which one can disregard God's ideal.

Understanding Values, Roles and Responsibilities:

The ancient fallacy was that women were thought to be inferior to men. The modern fallacy is that equality in value between men and women must eliminate any distinction in their roles and responsibilities. The Bible seems to affirm both the equal value of women and men as well as a distinction between their roles.

Equal in Value (Ge. 1:27)²⁹

Humankind was created as a bisexual species with the male and female being made for each other. Before their Creator, they stand on equal footing, each of them made in the image of God. There is no value difference between women and men (Ga. 3:28). Neither may stand as though they were independent of the other, for

²⁸ This statement arises out of negative hierarchical ethics, that is, the view of ethics which holds that due to human limitation, fallenness, and the corruption of the world by the power of sin, some situations arise in which there is no right thing to do, only two wrong things. The lesser of the evils should be chosen.

²⁹ G. Carey, *I Believe in Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 135ff.

while Eve was formed from Adam, every male since that time has been born from a woman (1 Co.11:11-12)

The History of the Devaluation of Women

In the human fall something not only went astray between humans and God, something went astray between humans and each other, particularly between males and females. The Genesis record narrates the destruction of the equal value between men and women. Lamech, from the line of Cain, began the practice of polygamy, a form of sexual exploitation (Ge. 4:19). In the patriarchal society of the Old Testament, the devaluation of women is everywhere present. Wives were bought and paid for like property. Polygamy became common. The patriarch of the clan held the power of life and death over the woman, and she was expendable. Lot, for instance, offered the virginity of his two daughters to the homosexuals in Sodom to protect the rights of male strangers (Ge. 19). Judah treated his own daughter-in-law like a prostitute and then threatened to have her burned for prostitution (Ge. 38). The Levite from Dan exposed his wife to be raped by the men of Gibeah rather than protect her (Jg. 19). Jephthah burned his own daughter as a sacrifice to honor a rash vow (Jg. 11). These atrocities, justifiably called “texts of terror,” reflect the depravity of human sin.³⁰ Nowhere is there a divine sanction on such distorted values. By the time of Jesus, male Pharisees would find a couple caught in the act of adultery, but they would bring only the woman for public disgrace and the possibility of lynching (Jn. 8). Men could divorce their wives for every reason, regardless of how trivial, but women could not divorce their husbands for any reason.

The roots of this distortion can be found in the Genesis narrative of the first human sin (Ge. 3). It is a popular misconception that Eve was all alone when the snake tempted her. In reality, Adam was by her side during the whole scene.³¹ There is no indication of an outcry of warning from Adam’s lips. Rather, he became a full participant with his wife, and when they had sinned together, their eyes were opened. It is in this context that God’s statement comes, “Your craving will be toward your husband, but he shall domineer over you.”³²

Jesus and Women

It was not until the time of Jesus that any substantial change came. In a patriarchal society that was decidedly permeated with male chauvinism, Jesus’

³⁰ For an insightful exegesis of several passages reflecting the devaluation of women in the Old Testament period, see P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

³¹ The Hebrew expression *immah* (= with her) in 3:6 clearly states that she was not alone.

³² My own translation.

treatment of women was revolutionary.³³ He treated them as of equal value with men (Jn. 8:1-11), and he had no compunctions about conversing privately with women (Lk. 10:38-42) or about receiving from them gestures of deep friendship (Lk. 7:36-50; Jn. 12:1-7). It was no accident that a large crowd of women followed Jesus along the road to the cross (Lk. 23:37). It was to women that Christ first appeared to announce his victory over death (Mt. 28:8-10). It is doubtless correct that Jesus' openness to women was very closely related to his requirement for complete chastity (Mt. 5:28).³⁴

Different in Roles

While the equality of value between the male and the female is to be defended by Christians, Christians must also guard against the modern call for unisexuality. The roles of women and men are not identical. There is the obvious biological difference, inherent in the human race from the beginning, but there are also role differences to be maintained in the living of life.

Headship

Paul instructs that the husband is the head of the wife in the same way that Christ is the head of the church and God is the head of Christ (1 Co. 11:3; Ep. 5:23). Our understanding of this role ought not to be based on our modern knowledge of the human brain as the control center for the body, inasmuch as this was a notion unknown in the ancient world. In these passages, the idea of headship is probably to be understood as "source," that is, that because Eve was formed from Adam, man becomes the source of woman's existence.³⁵ Woman cannot exist on her own as independent from man anymore than Christ can exist as independent from God. Christ as the head of the church becomes the pattern for the husband as the head of the wife, a position which entails his action as savior and protector. To say that God was the head of Christ does not infer the inferiority of Christ to God, for Christ also participates fully in the divine nature (Phil. 2:5-6). Rather, Christ is the source (or head) of all things for the benefit of the church (Ep. 1:22). His fundamental attitude about his headship is humility and self-giving, not arrogance and selfishness (Phil. 2:4-8).

The Role of Mutual Submission (Ep. 5:21)

In the context of addressing the roles of husbands and wives, Paul gives a

³³ P. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 94ff.

³⁴ J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969) 376.

³⁵ F. Bruce, 103.

general admonition that there is to be a mutual submission, each to the other.³⁶ The word *hypotasso* (= submission) is an important one in Paul's letters.³⁷ Mutual submission means the practice of each one subordinating himself or herself to the other. It is a call for deference, a "willingness to serve, to learn, to be corrected, regardless of age, sex, class or any other division."³⁸ This sort of mutuality is parallel to Paul's other general injunctions for relationships between believers (cf. Ro. 15:3, 5-7; Ga. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12-17; Phil. 2:1-4). Such injunctions, if they apply to Christians at large, can hardly fail to apply to husbands and wives! Both husbands and wives must learn that each may have special wisdom in particular areas which the other lacks, and each should be willing to defer to the other for the sake of love.

The Role of Husbands Specifically:

The New Testament gives the role and responsibility of the husband as:

- One who saves and protects his wife (Ep. 5:23)
- One who loves his wife, even to the point of sacrificial death (Ep. 5:25)
- One who demonstrates his love by:
 - ✓ Providing for his wife even as he does for himself (Ep. 5:28-29, 33; 1 Ti. 5:8)
 - ✓ Refusing to be harsh toward her (Col. 3:19)
 - ✓ Exhibiting gracious sensitivity to her needs (1 Pe. 3:7)
 - ✓ Maintaining an attitude of courtesy and chivalry inasmuch as she has the more limited physical powers (1 Pe. 3:7)
 - ✓ Recognizing her equal status before God as a fellow-believer and heir of eternal life (1 Pe. 3:7)

The Role of Wives Specifically:

The New Testament gives to the wife a special responsibility for the home (1 Ti. 5:14; Tit. 2:3-5). The role and responsibility of the wife is that of one who out of love submits to her husband (Ep. 5:22, 24; Col. 3:18; 1 Pe. 3:5-6). If he is an unbeliever, her submission is all the more important, because it may very well be the

³⁶ The paragraph division is unclear in the older KJV, so that 5:21 was not always read in the context of that which followed it. However, the paragraph division in the RSV is to be preferred, a division which takes 5:21 as the first statement in the admonition of husband-wife relationships, cf. A. Wood, "Ephesians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 75.

³⁷ It appears some 24 times.

³⁸ F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) 154.

avenue to his eventual conversion (1 Pe. 3:1-2; cf. 1 Co. 7:16-17). Without attempting to soften this command in view of its modern unpopularity, it is still in order to point out that:

- Equality and submission are not mutually exclusive. In God's divine being, the Son is simultaneously equal to the Father (Jn. 5:18; Phil 2:6) and submissive to him (1 Co. 15:28).
- That the wife is called upon to be in submission to her husband in no way gives the husband license to dominate her. Her submissiveness, like that of believers who submit to their spiritual leaders, must be grounded on her confidence that her husband is acting in her best interests (1 Pe. 5:1-3; He. 13:17).
- Because the wife is to be in submission to her husband does not abrogate his responsibility to actively participate in mutual submission to her (Ep. 5:21).

In summary, neither the husband nor the wife should indulge themselves in the urge toward domination. The wife must not exploit her freedom in Christ, and the husband must not take advantage of his headship. Both are to submit to each other; both are to resist the will to power.

The Woman's Place -- Where Are You³⁹

In view of the modern debate over the woman's role in society and the home, each couple should seriously consider their own patterns of life and their own views as to each other's respective roles. Following are four general categories:

The Wife as Property

Here the wife has very few rights and privileges compared to those of the husband. In the words of one fundamentalist, "The Christian wife has no rights, she's a bonds slave."⁴⁰ The husband is the provider for the family, and the wife exists primarily to keep the home, do the necessary chores of cooking, laundry and housecleaning, take care of the children, and satisfy the sexual needs of her husband.

The Wife as Complement

Here the wife's rights have increased. Her marriage is still her central interest, and her husband is still the provider and maintains the authority. The wife is more than a chattel, however. She is the friend of her husband. Essentially, he is the achiever, and she plays a supporting role.

³⁹ W. Roberts and H. Wright, *Before You Say "I Do"* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1978) 38-39.

⁴⁰ E. Handford, *Me? Obey Him?* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 1972)51.

The Wife as Junior Partner

Here the wife's rights increase even more, because she is allowed to work outside the home for pay. Her main motive is to improve the family's lifestyle. She has more authority than a non-working wife, but her husband still holds the edge in decision-making.

Wife as Equal Partner

Here the wife and the husband share equal rights and responsibilities. Both contribute to the family income, both contribute to the upkeep of the home, and both are responsible for the rearing of the children. Decisions are made mutually, and either the wife or the husband, due to her/his respective expertise, wisdom or capability, holds the edge in decision-making.

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 10 MINUTES

Adapted from BEFORE YOU SAY 'I DO' by Roberts and Wright

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: In the left hand column, circle what you believe about role concepts in a marriage. Then in the right hand column, circle what you think your spouse will say in response to the same question.

- 1 = STRONGLY AGREE
 2 = MILDLY AGREE
 3 = NOT SURE
 4 = MILDLY DISAGREE
 5 = STRONGLY DISAGREE

My Response

How I Think My Spouse Will Respond

- | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A. The husband is the boss of the family. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B. The wife should not be employed outside the home. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | C. The husband should help regularly with the dishes. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | D. It is permissible for the wife to initiate love-making with her husband. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | E. The husband and wife should plan the budget and manage money matters together. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | F. Neither the husband nor the wife should purchase an item costing more than \$50 without consulting the other. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | G. The father is responsible for disciplining the kids. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | H. A wife who has special ability should have a career. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | I. It is the wife's responsibility to clean the house. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | J. The husband should take his wife out somewhere twice a month. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | K. The wife is just as responsible for the children's discipline as the husband. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | L. It is the husband's job to do the yard work. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | M. The mother should be the teacher of values to the kids. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | N. Children should be allowed to help plan family activities. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | O. Children develop better in a home with parents who are strict disciplinarians. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | P. Money that the wife earns is her money. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | Q. The husband should have at least one night a week out with his friends. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | R. The wife should be the one to cook meals. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | S. The husband's responsibility is to his job, and the wife's responsibility is to the home and to the children. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

INTERACTION SECTION | 20 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction. Speak honestly, freely, and with kindness.

INSTRUCTION: Discuss your views together. Try to resolve your differences.

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 5 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Consider the following scale. First check where you personally think that you and your spouse fit in the relativity of the different roles described. Then check where you feel that your spouse will place your relationship. Finally, note any particular effects, good or bad, which result from this role-relationship.

	I THINK		
	I SEE THE WIFE AS	MY SPOUSE SEES THE WIFE AS	EFFECT
PROPERTY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
COMPLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
JR. PARTNER	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
EQUAL PARTNER	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction. Speak honestly, freely, and with kindness.

INSTRUCTION: Share your responses as to the relativity of the different roles described above. Do you have a similar perspective? Do you feel that you are functioning in the role-relationships that you should? Why or why not? If you sense a need for change, how can this adjustment be made without disrupting your family life? If you think changes are in order, list 5 or more life adjustments that you would like to see occur. Discuss with each other whether these changes will be easy, difficult or impossible. How can you help each other to make such changes peacefully and for the benefit of both?

POSSIBLE CHANGES:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

EASY	MEDIUM	DIFFICULT	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Building Relationships

Marriage is the closest of all possible relationships, and like other relationships, this one must be developed. Tragically, couples often assume that the marriage relationship will simply “take care of itself” because of a common street address. Such a judgment is severely naive. Relationships take time, and if they are to grow, they must be given quality attention.

The Nature of Love

It almost goes without saying that the fundamental bond of marriage as it was meant to be is love. To put it in the poetic metaphor of the Old Testament, marriage thrives under the “banner of love” (Song 2:4). However, the word “love” in modern English has been trivialized so that it is necessary to observe it more closely in its biblical framework. Biblical love is far more than “a feeling you feel when you get a feeling that you’ve never felt before.”

Love in the Old Testament

There are several important words for love in the Old Testament among which two are especially important here:

- a) *Ahabah* (= unconditional love):⁴¹ This word, sometimes understood as “election-love,” is important because it describes the sort of love that chooses a relationship without conditions, as for instance, in the way Yahweh chose Israel (Dt. 7:7-8; 10:15; Ho. 9:4-5). Its motivation is strictly the will or the nature of the lover.
- b) *Hesed* (= covenant-love):⁴² This word describes love which is conditional upon there being a covenant. It refers to the loyalty, steadfastness and faithfulness which both parties in a covenant should observe toward each other. It often refers to God’s covenant-love which will never fail (Ps. 136). Interestingly enough, this word is usually associated with the verb ‘*asah* (= to do). Love is something which one acts out in life rather than an emotion which one feels.

In these Old Testament words are defined two significant aspects of love in a marriage. One is the unconditional love of a lover who of his/her own free will chooses to love (as Jacob loved Rachel, Ge. 29:20), and the other is the covenantal

⁴¹ N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 167-182; *TDOT* (1974) I .99-118.

⁴² Snaith, 118-166.

love which is faithful to the marriage covenant after it is established (Ho. 2:19). Both aspects of love are especially characteristic of Yahweh's relationship with Israel, his Old Testament wife. He chose her in election-love, and he remained faithful to her in covenant-love.

Love in the New Testament:⁴³

In the Greek language there are also several words for love, the three most important being:

- a) *Phileo* (= general attraction) : This is the broadest word, and it embraces the meanings of attraction, affection, friendship and companionship.
- b) *Eros* (= passionate love): This is the love that desires to possess, and forgetting all reason, drives its way to ecstasy. It is the love that seeks sensual, erotic expression. While not found in the New Testament, it is implied in the passages that encourage normal sexual relationships.
- c) *Agape* (= self-giving love): While this word for the Greeks was often synonymous with *phileo*, in the New Testament it becomes especially descriptive of the love which God shows toward humans and which humans in turn are to show toward each other (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Paul's great description of this kind of love shows that it is self-giving and altruistic (1 Co. 13).

Together, the Old Testament and New Testament vocabulary of love provides a sound understanding for the foundation of the marriage relationship. Love in marriage, in one way or another, encompasses all these ideas. Love is the choice of a mate. It is steadfast and loyal commitment to another person and to the vows which were made to that person before God. It includes friendship and companionship as well as the erotic and sexual expression of union. Above all, it is a self-giving altruism that each spouse should demonstrate toward the other (1 Pe. 4:8).

Self-Image

The state of marriage is a sphere where the adjustment and growth of one's self-identity takes place. A person's self-image, that is, how a person perceives himself or herself, affects the way he/she thinks, feels, looks and acts. It further affects the relationship between spouses and family members, not to mention one's relationship with God. The "I am" will always determine the "I can."⁴⁴

⁴³ *NIDNTT* (1976) II.538-551; *BAG* (1979) 859.

⁴⁴ R. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 70.

Self-Rejection⁴⁵

A serious barrier to building a successful relationship with one's spouse is self-rejection. A sampling of self-rejection symptoms may be seen in:

- a) Excessive shyness and withdrawal
- b) Excessive self-criticism
- c) An aversion to intimacy
- d) Constant negative dialogue
- e) Consistent tendency toward affectations
- f) An inferiority complex
- g) Misplaced priorities

A husband with a poor self-image will have great difficulty in providing leadership in the home. A wife with a poor self-image will be unable to fully share in family responsibilities with her husband. In either case, the spouse with a poor self-image will be reluctant to communicate thoughts and express opinions, because he/she feels unworthy and that his/her opinions are not worthwhile. Neither mate is able to really know the other, and they cannot discern or meet each other's needs.

Self-Inflation

At the opposite pole from self-rejection is self-inflation. Symptoms of such unlimited self-optimism may be:

- a) Lack of patience
- b) Perfectionism
- c) A superiority complex
- d) Extravagance
- e) Grandiose schemes
- f) Overbearing attitudes
- g) Unreasonableness
- h) Petty self-criticism

The husband who harbors an inflated self-image may be harsh and unyielding, making it difficult for his wife to offer leadership and/or suggestions and creating an unwillingness on her part to fulfill her responsibilities cheerfully. The wife with an inflated self-image will refuse to follow her husband's leadership. She thinks that

⁴⁵ Staff, *God's Design for the Family: Husbands & Wives* (Colorado Springs, CO: NayPress, 1980) 1.12; B. Gothard, *Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts* (1975).

“following” somehow lowers her. It may also be noted that many of the symptoms of self-inflation may equally be symptoms of self-rejection, such as perfectionism, extravagance, grandiose schemes, etc.

Biblical Self-Esteem⁴⁶

Proper self-esteem and self-acceptance must be grounded in three biblical concepts:

- a) **“I am very special” (Ps. 139:13-16):** If God made me like I am, then I must take care to appreciate how God has made me. To know that I am very special is not the same thing as self-inflation. To reject how God has made me is to devalue God as the Creator.
- b) **“I am deeply fallen (Ro. 3:23):** Awareness of my failure to measure up to God’s glory will control my tendency to make unwise comparisons (2 Co.10:12; Ga. 6:4-5).
- c) **“I am loved” (Ro. 5:6-8):** Knowing that God loves me in spite of my fallenness saves me from despair and self-hate. I cannot reject someone God has accepted, even myself!

Distorted Self-Images and Partner-Images⁴⁷

If a self-image is how a person perceives himself or herself, a partner-image is how a person perceives his/her spouse. To attempt to exhaust all the self-images and partner-images in marriage would be unnecessarily lengthy. Three models which are fairly common, however, are worth examining:

The Parental Model

In this type of marriage, one of the partners sees him/herself as a kind of parent to the other spouse. This may be a mother-son marriage, that is, a marriage in which the wife sees her husband as a child and a son, or it may be a father-daughter marriage, that is, a marriage in which the husband sees his wife as a child and a daughter.

Mother-Son Marriages

How does this circumstance arise? On the one hand, the husband may decline to make decisions, may refuse to take initiative, and in general may refrain from

⁴⁶ B. Narramore and B. Counts, *Freedom from Guilt* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1974) 44-51.

⁴⁷ E. Jabay, *Search for Identity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967) 104-128.

leadership and responsibility. On the other hand, the wife may think that her husband is intellectually inferior and/or incapable of making sound judgments. Into this perceived vacuum rushes the wife who feels obligated to make up for her husband's weakness or ineptitude by grabbing a role he should be playing. She may believe that she has no alternative but to parent her husband. A biblical example seems to be the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kg. 21:1-16).

Father-Daughter Marriages

Here the wife may default in her mutual authority and responsibility with her husband and may play the role of helplessness in the face of life's decisions. Alternately, her husband may perceive her as immature, inadequate or incapable. In either case, he attempts to parent her, because he believes her to be unable to fulfill her proper role.

The Power Model

In this sort of marriage, one of the spouses has the mind and will of a dictator. The dictator spouse is often characterized by such things as:

- a) Commands and orders
- b) Threats
- c) Tongue-lashings
- d) Manipulation
- e) Disregard for the personhood of the other
- f) Anger
- g) A self-image of omniscience
- h) Legalism
- i) Demand for obedience
- j) Will-to-power exhibited in psychological pressure, guilt-building and/or physical abuse
- k) Master-slave relationship

Worker Model

In this model, the spouse sees his or her primary role in marriage as being responsible to the respective tasks at hand. For the husband, he may become so absorbed in his vocation that he fails to give priority to his wife. For the wife, she may become absorbed in her work, whether at home or elsewhere, and fail to give priority to her husband.

In either case, the worker-spouse has failed to realize that marriage is first of

all a relationship with another person. When the personal quality of the relationship is placed lower in importance than the role-tasks involved, the marriage has descended to the worker model.

Understanding Temperaments⁴⁸

Temperament may be described as a person's tendency toward certain emotional and mental responses, physical reactions and moods. Different attempts have been made to categorize people according to their temperaments, and one such effort, with roots that go back through Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to Hippocrates (460-370 BC), gives four basic categories, largely based on the observation of and reflection about human behavior.

The Sanguine Temperament

Actors, Salesmen, Speakers

Strengths - Gregarious, Outgoing, Enthusiastic, Warm, Personable, Friendly, Compassionate, Carefree

Weaknesses - Weak-willed, Unstable, Undisciplined, Restless, Undependable, Egocentric, Loud, Exaggerates, Fearful

The Choleric Temperament

Producers, Builders, Leaders

Strengths - Strong-willed, Determined, Independent, Optimistic, Practical, Productive, Decisive, Leader, Confident

Weaknesses - Angry, Cruel, Sarcastic, Domineering, Inconsiderate, Proud, Self-sufficient, Unemotional, Crafty

The Melancholy Temperament

Artists, Musicians, Inventors, Philosophers, Professors

Strengths - Gifted, Analytical, Sensitive, Perfectionist, Aesthetic, Idealistic, Loyal, Self-sacrificing

Weaknesses - Self-centered, Moody, Negative, Theoretical, Impractical, Unsociable, Critical, Revengeful, Rigid

⁴⁸T. LaHaye, *Transformed Temperaments* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1973) 9-29.

The Phlegmatic Temperament

Diplomats, Accountants, Teachers, Technicians

Strengths - Calm, Easy-going, Dependable, Efficient, Conservative, Practical, Leader, Diplomat, Humorous

Weaknesses - Stingy, Fearful, Indecisive, Spectator, Self-Protective, Selfish, Unmotivated

It is important that a person has some idea of his or her own temperament and also the temperament of his/her spouse if that person is to have a sound marriage relationship. In exploring the above model for temperaments, some cautions are in order:

- No one is characterized by a single temperament. Most people have a mix of two or even three temperaments, so it is improper to attempt some rigid categorization of either yourself or your spouse.
- This model for analyzing temperaments, since it is the product of general observation, will not necessarily fit everyone or even anyone perfectly. It is a model for assisting each other in analyzing your relationships, self-perceptions and perceptions of each other. It is not an absolute tool even though it is a useful tool.
- It would be unethical to judge another person's temperament and then criticize them because of the weaknesses associated with it. First, your perception might be inaccurate, and second, even if you are correct, you are in no position to set yourself up as a master of values.
- Any analysis of a temperament, whether it is your own or that of your spouse, should always be done with the motive of trying to better understand each other so as to build a more loving relationship. Mutual understanding and mutual compassion is the goal, not judgments of worth or worthiness.
- One should not use his/her perceived temperament as an excuse for avoiding responsibility. The appeal to the "I can't help myself, this is simply my temperament" excuse in order to avoid making constructive changes in lifestyles is merely a spiritual "cop-out."

An interesting biblical application of this model can be seen in four biblical characters who each seem to be dominant in one of the four temperaments.⁴⁹ Can you see how these four categories apply to the following biblical characters? (Remember, three of the four were married!)

Peter, the sanguine

Paul, the choleric

Moses, the melancholy

Abraham, the phlegmatic

⁴⁹ LaHaye, 30-131.

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: As a private exercise, rate your spouse according to each of the following symptoms. Circle the appropriate number.

- 1 = NOT AT ALL CHARACTERISTIC
 2 = MILDLY CHARACTERISTIC
 3 = NOT SURE
 4 = GENERALLY CHARACTERISTIC
 5 = ALWAYS CHARACTERISTIC

- 1 2 3 4 5 1. Gives frequent commands and orders
 1 2 3 4 5 2. Delivers threats as to what will happen if something does not occur in a certain way
 1 2 3 4 5 3. Seems very awkward around other people and prefers to avoid social events
 1 2 3 4 5 4. Seems to treat me more as an object than as a person
 1 2 3 4 5 5. Frequently comes up with wild ideas that have very little chance of any practical success
 1 2 3 4 5 6. Constantly puts himself/herself down
 1 2 3 4 5 7. Seems to become angry over things that do not really matter
 1 2 3 4 5 8. Always thinks he/she knows what is right; my ideas never count
 1 2 3 4 5 9. Seems frequently preoccupied with tasks that are unimportant
 1 2 3 4 5 10. Treats me like a subordinator rather than a partner
 1 2 3 4 5 11. Treats me like I am a child and I don't know what's best
 1 2 3 4 5 12. Depends upon me for everything
 1 2 3 4 5 13. Frequently raises his/her voice at me
 1 2 3 4 5 14. In his/her opinion, I can never do anything right
 1 2 3 4 5 15. Becomes frustrated with me when I do not learn quickly enough
 1 2 3 4 5 16. Verbally "chews me out"
 1 2 3 4 5 17. Often calls me to account for petty things
 1 2 3 4 5 18. Seems to be more concerned about the job than the family
 1 2 3 4 5 19. Wants to spend money on him/herself but not on the rest of us
 1 2 3 4 5 20. Only spends personal time with me when he/she wants sex
 1 2 3 4 5 21. Makes me feel guilty and inadequate when I disagree with him/her
 1 2 3 4 5 22. Frequently complains about me, the kids, our home, the job, and life

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Exchange questionnaires with your spouse, and discuss your responses honestly, freely and with an openness to hear the other person. Read back over the symptoms of self-rejection, self-inflation, distorted self-images and distorted partner images. How can you help each other in these vital areas? Are you receptive to the idea that you may need to change? How best can you go about it?

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Each of you should check off what you deem to be the various elements that make up your spouse's temperament. (You might want to try it for yourself as well.)

STRENGTHS

- Gregarious
- Outgoing
- Enthusiastic
- Warm
- Personable
- Friendly
- Compassionate
- Carefree

- WEAKNESSES**
- Weak-willed
 - Unstable
 - Undisciplined
 - Restless
 - Undependable
 - Egocentric
 - Loud
 - Exaggerates
 - Fearful

- Angry
- Sarcastic
- Domineering
- Cruel
- Inconsiderate
- Proud
- Self-sufficient
- Unemotional
- Crafty

- Strong-willed
- Determined
- Independent
- Optimistic
- Practical
- Productive
- Decisive
- Confident

**ACTORS
SALESMEN
SPEAKERS
SANGUINE**

**PRODUCERS
BUILDERS
LEADERS
CHOLERIC**

**MELANCHOLY
ARTISTS
MUSICIANS
INVENTORS
PHILOSOPHERS**

**PHLEGMATIC
DIPLOMATS
ACCOUNTANTS
TEACHERS
TECHNICIANS**

- Gifted
- Analytical
- Sensitive
- Perfectionist
- Aesthetic
- Idealistic
- Loyal
- Self-sacrificing

- WEAKNESSES**
- Self-centered
 - Moody
 - Negative
 - Theoretical
 - Impractical
 - Unsociable
 - Critical
 - Rigid

- Stingy
- Fearful
- Indecisive
- Spectator
- Self-protective
- Selfish
- Unmotivated

- Calm
- Easy-going
- Dependable
- Efficient
- Conservative
- Practical
- Diplomat
- Humorous

WEAKNESSES

STRENGTHS

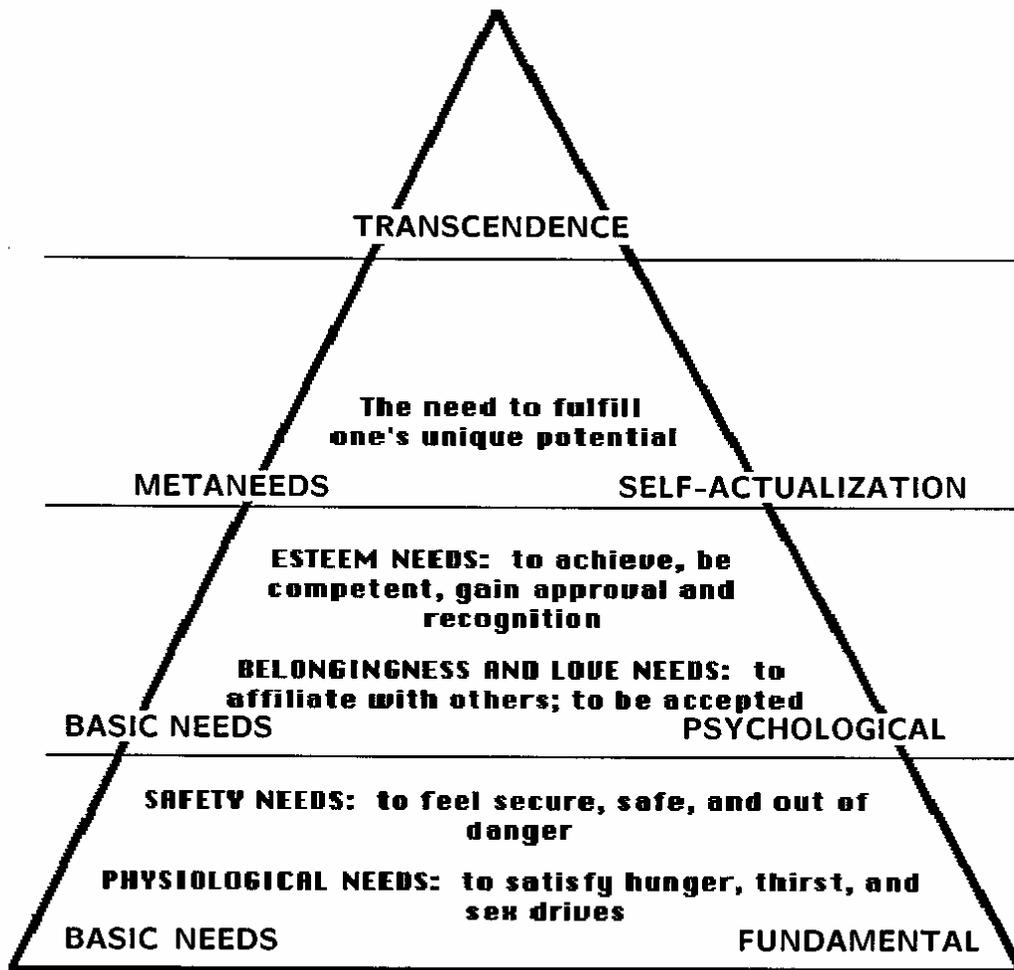
INTERACTION SECTION 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Exchange your evaluations with your spouse. Discuss your answers and how you can help each other to overcome weaknesses and maintain strengths.

Meeting Needs

An important aspect of building relationships is responding to the felt needs of one's spouse. The idea of a "felt need" is important, because it is all too easy to evade responsibility by saying, "But you don't really *need* such and such." A "felt need" is one which is not just a matter of subsistence but a matter of personal fulfillment. If spouses are to love each other as their own bodies (Ep. 5:28), then felt needs cannot be ignored.



MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

According to Maslow, fundamental needs must be satisfied before a person is free to progress to psychological needs, and these in turn must be satisfied before a person can turn to self-actualization needs. Spiritual needs, however, are often sought at any level without respect toward the hierarchy, depending upon how deeply the person believes in the concept of God.

A Hierarchical Concept of Human Needs⁵⁰

Abraham Maslow, an important personality theorist, has explored the area of human needs in a hierarchical model. His theory may be helpful in guiding one to a better understanding of human needs.

Diversity of Human Needs

Maslow identified two primary groups of human needs, basic needs and metaneeds.

Basic Needs

Basic needs are physiological and psychological. They include:

<u>Physiological Needs</u>	<u>Psychological Needs</u>
Water	Affection
Food	Security
Sleep	Self-esteem
Shelter	Achievement
Safety	Approval/acceptance
Sex	Belonging
	Social recognition
	Freedom

When basic needs are not met, the person who senses his or her deficiency will attempt to make up for the lack. In the realm of psychological needs, a continued deficiency will result in maladjustments and behavioral distortions.

Metaneeds

What Maslow has called metaneeds (transcending needs) has to do with creativity and self-actualization; it has to do with someone becoming the kind of person that he or she envisions as a result of their personal value system. Metaneeds include such things as:

- Justice
- Goodness

⁵⁰ J. Braun, D. Linder and I. Asimov, *Psychology Today: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Random House, 1979) 374-375, 434-436.

- Beauty
- Order
- Unity
- Realization of personal potential

When metaneeds are not met, the person who senses his or her deficiency may experience alienation, anguish, apathy or cynicism.

Transcendence

More recently, Maslow has added a need for transcendence, that is, the need to be involved in things higher than self-interest and self-accruing activities. This additional category includes what Christians often call spiritual needs.

The Hierarchical Character of Needs

The reason needs are organized into a hierarchy is that certain needs must be satisfied before a person can progress to the next level. For instance, extreme hunger and thirst will preempt psychological needs. Similarly, a person who is continually trying to find social acceptance will usually not give much attention to justice and beauty or be free to create scholarly or artistic works. In general, fundamental needs must be met before proper attention can be given to psychological needs, and psychological needs must be met before proper attention can be given to self-actualization needs. Observe carefully the diagram on the previous page which illustrates the hierarchical concept of these needs.

Need Differences Between Men and Women⁵¹

Men and women are each complex in their own way, and the needs that each have seem to be partly learned and partly inherent. Because of their different need levels, spouses often confuse each other. Patterns of behavior that are learned from childhood contribute to this confusion. For instance, males in our society are brought up to be goal-oriented, competitive and independent. They like concrete projects based on hard facts where their independence is not jeopardized. The little boy plays ball; he is out to win. When the game is over, he is through. He does not continue to give attention to the bat and ball; he puts them away until next time. Females, on the other hand, play with dolls. They learn to be nurturing. The little girl talks to her doll, puts it to bed, dresses it and wakes it up. She is concerned that the doll is happy. Her

⁵¹ M. Shaevitz, "Why Men Confuse the Women They Love," *Reader's Digest* (November 1987) 65-70; I. Reher, "Childhood Games Make Men Losers at Intimacy" *Detroit Free Press* (Oct.11, 1984) B3.

life develops in a relational way, different than that of the little boy.

As each continues to grow, each carry these patterns into later life. In adolescence, the girl calls upon her friends in order to share elation, anger, disappointment or fear. The boy calls upon his friends in order to do something together. The boy eventually grows into a goal-oriented young man. The girl eventually grows into a relational person for whom intimacy is a priority.

In courtship, the young man views the young lady as another goal. He courts her with enthusiasm in order to win her. The young lady sees this courtship as relational. If and when she accepts his offer for marriage, she expects the relationship to continue. It rarely does. The man who was so attentive in courtship becomes disinterested in marriage. For him, the goal of courtship is over, and he is not attuned to her needs for an ongoing relationship. He often turns back to his career where he can set and achieve one goal after another. The woman, for her part, becomes frustrated. Why is the relationship falling apart? Instead of more intimacy, there is less. He does not seem able to “open up,” so she turns to her friends and the female members of her family for intimacy and relationship.

On the sexual level, the wife needs time for relationship *before* a sexual encounter. She needs to feel a part of a larger relational process. The husband, on the other hand, approaches sex in the same goal-oriented way that he treats the rest of life. He becomes frustrated because his wife is reluctant, a reluctance he perceives as rejection. She becomes frustrated because all he seems to want is sex.

Evaluating Needs

If husbands and wives are to truly meet each other's needs, then they must do a better job of communicating about their respective needs. One of the heaviest strains on a marriage is the frequent inability of spouses to share with each other their felt needs until a breaking point is reached. Only by communicating felt needs to each other can there be a starting point toward growth. Husbands and wives must not fall into the error of thinking, “My spouse ought to know what my needs are.” Felt needs vary from individual to individual, so the sharing of these needs is essential!

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Every person who gets married carries with him/her certain expectations which have been derived from parents, personal values, school, society, books, and so forth. Take the time to write fourteen expectations that you have in marriage.

Expectations:

	C	S	N
1) _____	_____	_____	_____
2) _____	_____	_____	_____
3) _____	_____	_____	_____
4) _____	_____	_____	_____
5) _____	_____	_____	_____
6) _____	_____	_____	_____
7) _____	_____	_____	_____
8) _____	_____	_____	_____
9) _____	_____	_____	_____
10) _____	_____	_____	_____
11) _____	_____	_____	_____
12) _____	_____	_____	_____
13) _____	_____	_____	_____
14) _____	_____	_____	_____

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTIONS: Share your expectations with your spouse, and in the columns to the right, have your spouse put a check in the column which best indicates how she/he feels about these expectations. Discuss your evaluations together.

C = CINCH
S = SWEAT
N = NO WAY

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 5 MINUTES

Adapted from L. and N. Christianson, *THE CHRISTIAN COUPLE* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1977) 50-51.

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Within the following humorous progression, spouses should try to decide where they think they are in terms of meeting each other's physiological needs. (Be sure to understand that the following scenario is symbolic of the full range of physiological needs, not just health.)

**I think we
are here**

THE SEVEN AGES OF A MARRIED COLD

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| ___ YEAR ONE | "Sugar Dumpling, I'm worried about my baby! You've got a bad sniffle. I'm putting you in the hospital for a general check-up and a good rest. I know the food's lousy, but I'll bring your meals in from Rossini's. I've already got it arranged." |
| ___ YEAR TWO | "Listen, Darling, I don't like the sound of that cough, and I've called Doc Miller for an appointment on Tuesday. Now you go to bed like a good kid." |
| ___ YEAR THREE | "Maybe you'd better lie down, Honey; nothing like a little rest when you feel bummed. I'll bring you something to eat. Let's see, where d'we keep the chicken noodle soup?" |
| ___ YEAR FOUR | "Look, Dear, be sensible. After you finish up around the house, you'd better hit the sack!" |
| ___ YEAR FIVE | "Why don't you go get yourself a couple of aspirin?" |
| ___ YEAR SIX | "If you'd just gargle or something, instead of sitting around and barking like a seal!" |
| ___ YEAR SEVEN | "For Peter's sake, stop sneezing! What are you trying to do, give me pneumonia?" |

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Discuss what physiological needs each of you sense. How can each spouse help the other to be fulfilled in a physiological way?

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INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 10 MINUTES

Adapted from F. Ruch, *PSYCHOLOGY AND LIFE*, 6th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1963) 161.

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Using the following scale, evaluate your psychological needs.

- 5 = A VERY DEEP NEED
- 4 = A MODERATE TO STRONG NEED
- 3 = NEUTRAL
- 2 = A MILD NEED
- 1 = NOT PERCEIVED AS A NEED

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 1. SECURITY: The need to be free from fear and anxiety in one's social sphere and position |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 2. AFFECTION: The need to feel loved and appreciated for what one is as a person as well as for what one can give |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 3. SELF-ESTEEM: The need to feel needed, wanted and significant to one's associates |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 4. APPROVAL: The need to be accepted by others; the need to belong to a social group |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 5. ACHIEVEMENT: The need to do one's best, to be successful, to accomplish tasks requiring skill and effort |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 6. DEFERENCE: The need to get suggestions from others, to find out what others think |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 7. ORDER: The need to keep things neat and orderly, to make advance plans |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 8. EXHIBITION: The need to say clever and witty things; to have others notice and comment upon one's appearance |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 9. FREEDOM: The need to be able to come and go as desired, to say what one thinks about things |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 10. AFFILIATION: The need to be loyal to friends, to participate in friendly groups, to form attachments, to share |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 11. NURTURANCE: The need to help friends when they are in trouble, to treat others with kindness |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 12. CHANGE: The need to do new things, to travel, to meet new people, to have novelty in daily routine |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | 13. ENDURANCE: The need to keep at a job until it is finished, to work hard at a task, to finish a single job before starting another one |

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction

INSTRUCTION: Share your psychological needs with your spouse. Discuss how each of you can better assist the other to have these needs met in life.

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTIONS: Using the following scale, evaluate your self-actualization. The following are descriptions which are generally true of self-actualized persons. How would you rate yourself?

- 1 = FULLY SELF-ACTUALIZED
- 2 = WELL ON MY WAY
- 3 = NEEDS SOME IMPROVEMENT
- 4 = VERY WEAK

SELF-ACTUALIZED PERSONS ARE:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1 2 3 4 | 1. Realistically oriented |
| 1 2 3 4 | 2. Able to accept themselves, other people, and the natural world |
| 1 2 3 4 | 3. Able to express a great deal of spontaneity |
| 1 2 3 4 | 4. More problem-centered than self-centered |
| 1 2 3 4 | 5. Able to maintain an air of detachment and a need for privacy |
| 1 2 3 4 | 6. Autonomous and independent |
| 1 2 3 4 | 7. Able to appreciate other people in fresh rather than in
stereo-typed ways |
| 1 2 3 4 | 8. Apt to have had profound spiritual experiences, both religious
as well as non-religious in character |
| 1 2 3 4 | 9. Able to identify with human kind as a whole |
| 1 2 3 4 | 10. Able to maintain intimate relationships with a few specially
loved people, relationships that are profound and deep
rather than superficial |
| 1 2 3 4 | 11. Able to personalize and internalize their values rather than
have them set by their peers |
| 1 2 3 4 | 12. Able to avoid confusing methods with results |
| 1 2 3 4 | 13. Able to maintain a philosophical humor which is not hostile |
| 1 2 3 4 | 14. Creative, and able to express creativity |
| 1 2 3 4 | 15. Able to resist conformity to the status quo of culture |
| 1 2 3 4 | 16. Able to transcend their environment rather than merely cope
with it |

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Share your self-actualization evaluations with your spouse. Discuss how you can help each other to reach the maximum level of self-actualization.

The Primacy of Communication

All relationships are developed through communication. Healthy communication between a wife and a husband will result in deeper enjoyment, a greater ability to resolved conflicts, and a greater understanding of mutual responsibilities. At the outset, it is necessary to point out that communication is a dynamic process which involves both verbal and nonverbal factors. Every message has at least three vehicles by which one person transfers ideas to another person:⁵²

Actual Spoken Content - about 7%

Voice Tone - about 38%

Nonverbal Transfer - about 55%

Sometimes confusing messages are sent because the above factors seem to contradict each other in an actual communication situation. The speaker says, "I want to....," but his/her tone or posture suggests, "I would really rather...." He/she says, "I'm sorry," but other nonverbal factors indicate that he/she is not sorry at all, only angry and aggressive.

Communication as a Process

Consider the dynamics of the communication process:

*General Factors*⁵³

The communication process involves four general factors:

- Speakers and listeners (husband and wife)
- Situation (physical setting, attitude toward self, attitude toward spouse, life-context)
- Message (what the speaker conveys)
- Channel (the three vehicles mentioned above)

Interrelational Factors

The communication process is further affected by the various steps which make up the process:

- What the speaker thinks
- What the speaker says

⁵² A. Metowbian, *Silent Messages* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1971) 42-44 (as quoted in Roberts and Wright, 54)

⁵³ A. Monroe and D. Ehninger, *Principles of Speech Communication*, 7th Brief Ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1975) 3-15.

- What the speaker thinks he/she says
- What the listener hears
- What the listener thinks he/she hears
- What the listener understands
- What the listener wishes to respond
- What the listener says in response
- What the listener thinks he/she says in response

From here, the chain repeats itself. Because these steps are taken so rapidly and without conscious thought, people often fail to realize that real communication (the accurate transfer of ideas to another individual) can begin to break down at any of these points, or even more likely, confusing messages can be sent. In fact, real communication breakdown can begin between points “a” and “b” before the listener has even fully heard the message.

Nonverbal Communication

As noted above, the nonverbal side of communication transfers a greater message than even the words of the speaker. Nonverbal communication involves posture and body position, body movement, and gestures made with hands, arms head, shoulders, as well as facial expressions.⁵⁴ The more intimate a relationship, the more communication is possible in nonverbal ways which may or may not accompany verbal expressions.

Voice Tone

Voice tone is an element which is difficult to assess, especially because each of us hear our own voices somewhat differently than others hear us. We have all experienced the strange sound of our own voices on an audio-tape. Voice stress is picked up almost immediately by a listener, and it may convey anger, grief, frustration, bitterness, in short, the entire gamut of human emotions. If you are not aware of your own voice tone, you may wish to record some of your conversations. Play them back and pay attention to your voice tone, your voice stress, and what it communicates and implies in addition to the actual content of your words.

Biblical Guidelines for Communication

The Bible does not concentrate on the communication of spouses *per se*, but it does have a great deal to say about communication in general, especially in the

⁵⁴ Monroe and Ehninger, 65-76.

Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. What applies in a broad sense to communication certainly applies in the more narrow sense to communication between spouses. The following are some important biblical emphases in the communication process.

Source of Words

A person's words will eventually reveal his/her true character (Pr. 4:23-24; Mt. 12:34; Lk. 6:45).

Power of Words

Words are powerful symbols which produce good or bad effects (Pr. 10:20; 12:18, 25; 15:23; 16:27; 18:8, 21; 25:11; Ja. 3:1-9).

Importance of Truthfulness

It is not only important to speak truthfully, but it is equally important to speak with right motives (Pr. 12:17; 14:5; 24:26; 26:23-26, 28; 28:23; Ep. 4:15, 25).

Power of Nonverbal Communication

To offer the excuse, "But I didn't say such and such," does not necessarily mean that you did not communicate it. It should be remembered that it is a mark of deceitfulness to communicate something nonverbally and then to deny that you did so because you did not frame it into exact words (Pr. 6:12-14; 10:10; 16:30). On the other hand, nonverbal communication can be positive and upbuilding (Pr. 15:30).

Importance of Listening

Half the communication process is listening. The Bible encourages restraint in speaking so as to improve one's ability to listen (Pr. 10:19; 13:3; 17:27-28; 18:13; 29:20; Ec. 7:9; Ja. 1:19). One of the most difficult times to listen is when one is listening to correction, but the wise person will hear it just the same (Pr. 17:10; 19:20; 25:12; 27:5-6).

Often people develop poor listening habits which hinder communication. Some of them are:⁵⁵

- Private Planning (being engrossed in your own thoughts)
- Self-debating (carrying on a private argument about the soundness or worth of what is being said)
- Yielding to Distractions (noises, uncomfortable conditions, etc.)

⁵⁵ Monroe and Ehniger, 22-24.

- Premature Dismissal (rejecting something before you've heard it through)
- Hearing Only Isolated Points (listening for the “bits and pieces” or only for the things which interest you)
- Emotional Rejection (responding emotionally to certain words or ideas so that you reject everything without giving it a fair hearing)
- Biased Listening (allowing what you hear to be colored by prejudices, stereotypes, and presuppositions)
- Dogmatism (being closed-minded; exhibiting mental tunnel vision)

Need for Building Your Spouse's Self-Esteem

One of the best ways to build your spouse's self-esteem is by open, positive communication (Pr. 10:11, 21; 15:4; 16:24; Ep. 4:29).

Cruciality of Forming Right Responses

All of us experience times when we wish we could retract our words. The Bible stresses the importance of responses which are fitting (Pr. 10:32), gentle (Pr. 15:1; 25:15), considered (Pr. 15:28), made without argument (Pr. 21:9; Ep. 4:26-27) and gracious (Col. 4:6).

The Necessity of Keeping a Trust

The relationships between a wife and husband will be seriously marred if either breaks confidence by speaking to others too freely of their spouse's private concerns (Pr. 11:12-13; 17:9).

Ways to Improve Communication⁵⁶

The following common sense principles are a balanced summary of ways to improve your communication:

1. Don't assume you know—ask.
2. Provide an open, permissive, accepting atmosphere.
3. Use compliments freely.
4. Pray for each other, and do it together.
5. Be willing to disagree, but in a gentle way.
6. Concentrate on being a good listener.
7. Build up your mate's self-esteem.

⁵⁶ Staff writers, *Husbands & Wives: God's Design for the Family* (Colorado Springs, CO: NayPress, 1980) 27-28, 31-32.

8. Seek more to understand than to be understood. (i.e., “I’m not sure I understand. Could you explain it for me again?”)
9. When you are wrong or have sinned against your mate, admit it and ask forgiveness. Put it into words: “Will you forgive me?”, and “Yes, I forgive you.”

Levels of Communication

Read the following descriptions of five levels of communication.⁵⁷

Clichés

This type of talk is very safe, i.e., “How are you?” “Fine.” “How’s the dog?” “Where have you been?” “I like your dress.”

Reporting Facts

In this kind of talk, we are content to tell others what someone else has said, but we offer no personal information on these facts. We share gossip and little narratives and make necessary plans, but we do not commit ourselves as to how we feel about it, i.e., “The paper boy is late again,” “We only have \$50.00 left in the budget this month,” “Saturday we have to go to the school play.”

Personal Ideas and Judgments

Deeper communication begins here. The spouse is willing to step out of solitary confinement and the comfort zone and risk telling some of his/her ideas and decisions, i.e., “I think every man should learn how to change a diaper.” “I favor such and such a political candidate.” “I really think Mr. Smith ought to....” However, she/he is still cautious. If what is said is not easily accepted, he/she will retreat.

Personal Feelings and Emotions

At this level, the person shares how she/he feels about facts, ideas and judgments. His/her underlying feelings are revealed. To truly share with another person, one must move to the level of feelings, i.e., “I like to take a nap when it is raining like this.” “I feel really depressed today.” “I like it when you....” “I really resent Mrs. Jones when she....”

⁵⁷ J. Powell, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1969) 54-62 (adapted by both Roberts and Wright, 56 and the staff writers of *God’s Design for the Family*, 27-28)

Open, Honest Sharing on a Deep, Personal Level

This is the most difficult level to achieve, because it involves the greatest risk, the risk of being rejected. “I don’t think I’ve been leading properly in our home. Could we talk about it? I’d like to know your thoughts.” However, all vital relationships have this kind of sharing and this level of trust, though there will be times when even in the best of relationships this level of communication may not be as complete as it could be.

Cognitive/Emotional Communication⁵⁸

Some persons communicate on a more cognitive (thinking) level in which they prefer to deal with factual data. They like to talk about such topics as sports, the stock market, money, houses, jobs, and so forth, keeping the subject of conversation out of the emotional area. Usually they are quite uncomfortable dealing with issues that elicit feelings, especially unpleasant feelings such as anger. Consequently, they avoid talking about subjects that involve love, fear and/or anger. Such persons have difficulty being warm and supportive to their spouses.

Others communicate more on the emotional (feeling) level. They tire easily of purely factual data and feel a need to share feelings, especially with their spouses. They feel that the atmosphere between husband and wife must be as free as possible from unpleasant feelings like tension, anger and resentment. So, of course, they want to talk about these emotional things, resolve conflicts with their spouses, clear the air, and keep things pleasant between them.

Rarely is anyone completely cognitive or completely emotional. Most persons have some kind of balance between the two modes.

⁵⁸Roberts and Wright, 57.

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 10 MINUTES

Adapted from Roberts and Wright, *BEFORE YOU SAY 'I DO'* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1978) 54.

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTIONS: How would you typically communicate to your spouse in the following situations? After some honest self-examination, formulate answers and jot them down.

SITUATIONAL CONTEXTS:

- 1) It's Saturday. Your spouse asks you to shop for something, but you really don't want to go. You say. . . .
- 2) You are trying to watch your favorite television program, but your spouse is continually interrupting and asking you questions. The program is at the crucial part, and you don't want to miss it. You say. . . .
- 3) You are describing to your spouse the most exciting event of the day. Right in the middle of it, your spouse yawns and says, "I think I'll go get a cup of coffee." You say. . . .
- 4) Your spouse serves you breakfast. You notice that the bacon is overcooked, which you don't like. The toast is served lightly toasted with fresh butter, which is exactly like you like it. You say. . . .
- 5) After dinner, your spouse asks you if you would do the dishes tonight since he/she is so tired. You, too, are tired and were looking forward to relaxing. Usually you both do the dishes together. You say. . . .
- 6) You have just had an argument with one of the children, and you realize that you were wrong. It is not easy to apologize to family members, and sometimes they seem to "rub it in." You say. . . .

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTIONS: After you have formulated your answers, exchange your questionnaires and answers with your spouse. How does he/she respond? Does he/she agree with the way that you have indicated you might respond?

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 5 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.

INSTRUCTIONS: Reread the section on Cognitive/Emotional Communication. On the diagram below, indicate by the letters A, B, and C where you think you are, where you think your spouse is, and where you think your spouse might place you.

A = WHERE YOU THINK YOU ARE

B = WHERE YOU THINK YOUR SPOUSE IS

C = WHERE YOU THINK YOUR SPOUSE MIGHT PLACE YOU

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Emotional

Cognitive

INTERACTION SECTION | 5 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTIONS: Discuss your evaluations with your spouse. How do your respective styles of communication compare? Does your spouse perceive your communication style in the same way that you do? Should either of you be more balanced, and if so, how could this be achieved?

INTERACTION SECTION | 10 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, and complete the following.

INSTRUCTION: Check any statements below which express recurring problems on your part in your husband-wife communications. Then frankly discuss them with your spouse. Why do these tendencies seem to occur? What can be done to improve the communication quality?

- 1) I can't seem to find the right words to express what I want to say.
- 2) I'm afraid that exposing myself will result in rejection.
- 3) I'm not convinced that it will help any to try to talk.
- 4) I often don't talk because I'm afraid my opinion will be taken wrongly.
- 5) I'm usually too angry to talk.
- 6) Speaking up about things only seems to make the situation worse.
- 7) I talk too much and don't give my spouse a chance to speak.
- 8) I lack good communication with God.
- 9) I often try to hide the truth.
- 10) My communication is often defensive.
- 11) I frequently bring up the failures of the past.
- 12) My actions don't match what I say.
- 13) I don't really listen very well.
- 14) I tease my spouse too much.

Resolving Conflicts

Conflicts in marriage are the natural result of the union of two people with varying opinions, values, philosophies and methods. Whether these variations are treated as creative tensions or irreconcilable differences goes a long way toward determining whether a marriage is devastating or developmental. The fact that God distinguished male and female from one flesh into two individuals so that they might be brought back together again seems to infer that creative tension and personal development is a divine ideal.

General Factors Affecting Aggressive Behavior⁵⁹

It will be well to briefly survey the three most common explanations for aggressive behavior.

- *The Biological Explanation:* Explains aggression as instinctive and inborn, or in some cases, as the result of genetic abnormalities
- *The Social Learning Explanation:* Explains aggression as a behavior learned from parents, learned by observing others, and learned by seeing role models in the media (especially television and films)
- *The Situational Explanation:* Defines aggression as the result of unbearably difficult circumstances. Such circumstances and behavioral aggression are cause and effect factors. Frustration (interference with reaching goals), hurt (either physical or emotional), and fear (anticipating that one will be hurt) all lead to aggressive behavior.

While it is likely that none of the above factors are complete explanations in themselves, all of them contribute toward aggression to greater or lesser degrees. The balance between the various factors may vary from individual to individual.

The Moment of Truth for Spouses:⁶⁰

It is generally true that couples fight more after they are married than before. A major reason seems to be that during the courtship stage each person seeks to avoid conflict and rejection, and each one strives to put his/her “best foot forward.” Before marriage, one is a volunteer; afterwards, she/he is a draftee. Before marriage, one’s strong likes and dislikes are kept hidden or at least subdued. After marriage, they are defended with full vigor. Before marriage, one spouse may set the other on a pedestal of personal esteem and importance. After marriage, each one gives to the other their

⁵⁹ Braun, Linder and Asimov, 624-631.

⁶⁰ C. Swindol, *Strike the Original Match* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1980) 101.

nasty job descriptions. The transition from queen to maid or king to servant is traumatic. Before marriage, each partner carefully grooms himself/herself; after marriage, the slide begins. In summary, a major cause for marriage conflict is the discrepancy between the premarriage packaging and the postmarriage product.

People who marry generally have a preconceived fantasy of what an ideal mate should be like. In courtship, each of them believe that they have found a match between real life and what they fantasize about. After marriage, the wife/husband begins to discover that the person he/she has married will start to sharply diverge from the image of the fantasy. At that point, the usual response is to begin work on a massive reconstruction project. The words of the ceremony, “The two shall become one,” are misconstrued to mean that one’s mate must become like the fantasy. Such attempts to mold each other into a preconceived image is arrogance on our part and an insult to our partner. It also becomes a cause of aggressive behavior.⁶¹

It is not uncommon for marriages to pass through three stages, an enchantment stage (popularly called the “honeymoon stage”), a disenchantment stage (popularly referred to as “when the honeymoon is over”) and a maturity stage.⁶² Many couples have the false expectation that their marriage will progress smoothly, onward and upward, without any major upheavals or adjustments. When the inevitable upheavals and adjustments occur, aggression is the common response. Consider carefully the diagram on the following page which describes the three stages of marriage and some words and ideas that go along with these stages.

⁶¹ I. Tanner, *Loneliness: The Fear of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 92-93 (as quoted in Roberts and Wright, 9).

⁶² P. Welter, *Family Problems and Predicaments* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1977) 101 (as quoted in Roberts and Wright, 25)

The Three Stages of Marriage



THE HONEYMOON

ON CLOUD NINE
 PERFECT
 JUST RIGHT
 FOREVER
 INFATUATED
 IDOLIZE
 NUMB
 FASCINATED
 CHARMED
 CAPTIVATED
 ECSTASY
 THRILLED
 PREOCCUPIED
 WE'VE ARRIVED



THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

UPSET
 TERRIBLE
 ABSOLUTELY WRONG
 I QUIT
 HURT
 PUT DOWN
 SPLINTERED
 IRRITATED
 WRETCHED
 BURDENED
 UNCOMFORTABLE
 BITTER
 TRAPPED
 WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT



GROWING UP!

FEET ON THE GROUND
 I NEED YOU
 HOW DO YOU SEE IT?
 LET'S WORK IT OUT
 I'LL HELP YOU
 ENCOURAGE
 WHOLE
 REFRESHED
 THANKFUL
 FREE
 COMFORTABLE
 FRIENDLY
 GROWING
 TOGETHER, WE CAN
 MAKE IT

Try to decide where your own marriage is in terms of these stages. What can you, as an individual, do to avoid going through the full trauma of the middle stage? What can you do as a couple? If you should enter the middle stage (where most marriages fail), how will you cope?

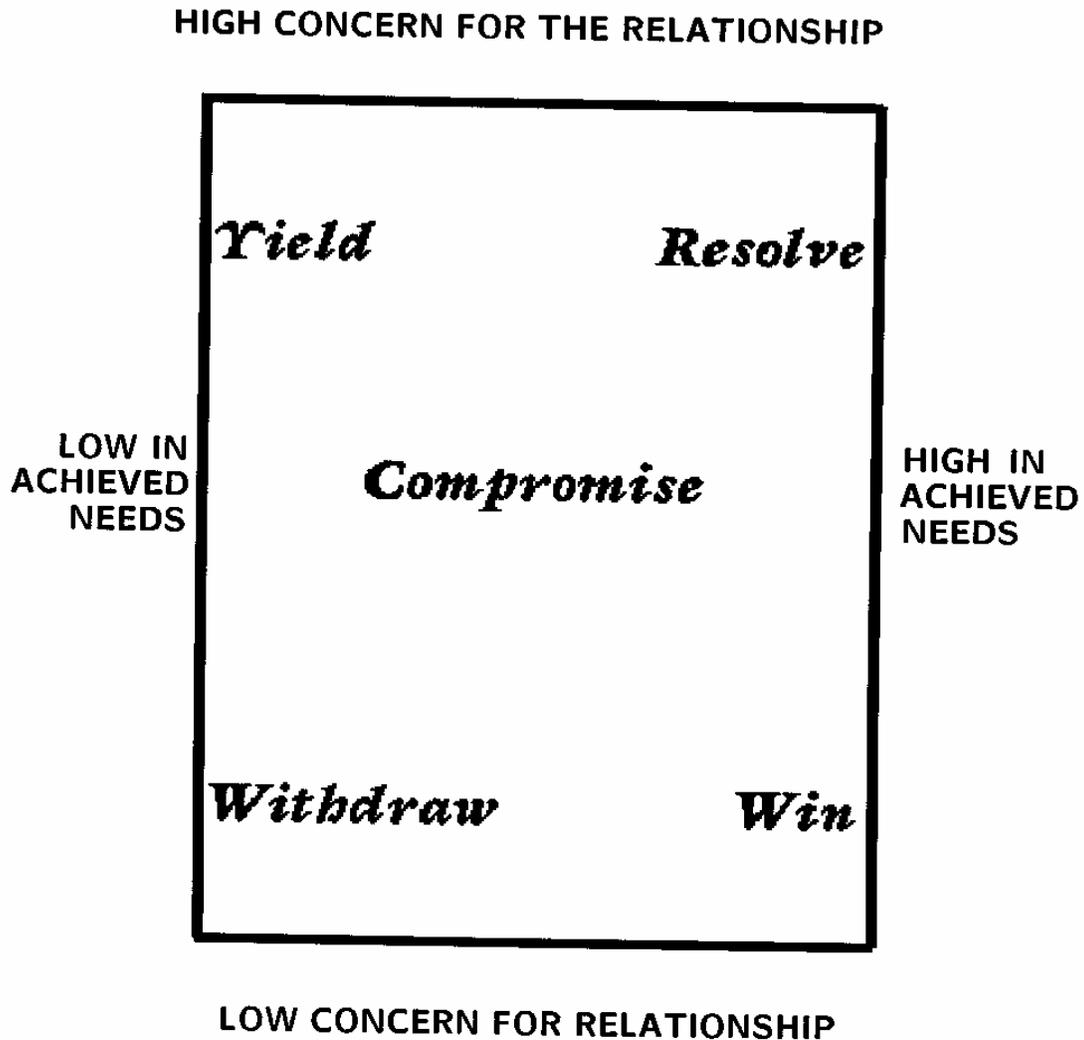
Unfair Weapons

Spouses generally develop certain “weapons” which they use in their conflicts. How many of the following “Weapons” do you and/or your spouse use?

How to Fight Dirty⁶³

1. Be a Spy Be sure to watch your partner. Look for shortcomings. Gather information to be used later on as your ammunition.
2. Time Your Attack: Remember to attack your mate when his/her defenses are weakest. Winning occurs when one spouse is in the stronger position.
3. Use a Shotgun Approach: Don't limit yourself to the issue at hand. Attack family, friends, and past failings. Point out how much you have suffered.
4. Tease: Smile and act friendly, and then if your spouse becomes angry you can always say, “Just kidding!”
5. Use Overkill: Anger and resentment bottled up too long will come out somewhere. Overkill is the use of ammunition too powerful for the issue at hand.
6. Be a Martyr: Become depressed and ill. Mope around, act sad, give in, but in doing so be sure that your mate recognizes the sacrifices you have made. This can make your mate feel guilty and punish him/her at the same time.
7. Become a Spouse Analyzer and Labeler: Read some books so you can use terms such as neurotic, alcoholic, shrew, and sex maniac.
8. Don't Listen: Proceed on the assumption that you are right. Use the time while your mate is talking to plan your own attack—after all, what he/she says can't be too important.
9. Don't Communicate Clearly: Never give your mate a chance to know what's really bothering you. Don't give your mate any unnecessary advantage in knowing what is wrong. After all, if your spouse loves you, he/she should know what's wrong.
10. Insist on Making Up at Once: This can be a subtle, effective way to continue fighting. Some people need time to handle feelings. If you insist on making up at once, the fight you're trying to avoid can be rekindled immediately.

⁶³ L. Costantini, “Society Consists of Repetition,” *The Weekly Post* (October 7, 1987, Auburn Heights, Michigan) 1, as taken from G. T. Leville.



Fighting Fair⁶⁴

In contrast, notice how the New Testament directs believers to deal with anger and establishes “rules” for a fair fight (Ep. 4:25-32):

1. Keep it honest (vs. 25).
2. Keep it under control (vs. 26a).
3. Keep it from lingering (vs. 26b-27).
4. Keep it mutual, that is, make sure both spouses do their share in resolving the conflict (vs. 28).

⁶⁴Swindoll, 102.

5. Keep it tactful (vs. 29).
6. Keep it private (vs. 31).
7. Finish it with love, that is, when it's over, clean up the mess (vs. 32).

As a final suggestion, observe the “don'ts” in resolving conflicts.⁶⁵ Don't wait for your mate to apologize; don't refuse to be the first to give in. Don't keep bringing it up and not allowing the conflict to end. Don't attack the person rather than the conflict (which amounts to character assassination) . Don't walk out, killing the possibility of resolution.

Styles of Conflict Resolution⁶⁶

Each of us, depending upon our temperament, mood, and learned behavior, have developed different methods for resolving conflicts. Most of our methods fall under one or more of the five styles described below. It is important not only to know what causes conflicts but also how you and your spouse tend to respond to conflicts. Select which of the following styles most nearly describes your standard response to conflict with your spouse. Discuss with each other what are the advantages and disadvantages to each approach.

Withdraw

If you have a tendency to view conflict as a hopeless inevitability which you can do little to control, you may not even try. You may withdraw physically by leaving the scene, or you may withdraw psychologically. This approach to conflict has the lowest value, because the person gives up on meeting the goals as well as on developing the relationship. The relationship is turned off.

Win

If you feel that you must look after your own interests or if your self-concept is threatened in a conflict, you strive to win. No matter what the cost, you follow your compulsion to win! Domination is usually reflected in this style; personal relationships take second place. This method achieves the goals, but it sacrifices the relationship. In a family, personal relationships are just as important or even more important than the goals.

⁶⁵ Staff writers, *God's Design*, 54.

⁶⁶ J. Fairfield, *When You Don't Agree* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press) 33-34, 231 (as quoted in Roberts and Wright, 61).

Yield

You may prefer to “give in so that you can get along.” You don’t like it, but rather than risk a confrontation, you choose this path. The relationship is maintained, but at the expense of one’s goals and personhood.

Compromise

This style is to “give a little to get a little.” You may find that it is important to let up on some of your demands or ideas in order to help the other person give in a little. You don’t want to win all the time, nor do you want your spouse to win all the time. This approach attempts to work out some of the needs. However, the bargaining involved may mean that one must alter or abandon his/her own values.

Resolve

Here the situation, attitude and/or behavior is changed by open and direct communication. This approach is the best, because it has the strongest concern for the relationship as well as a high level of achieved needs.

Some people may employ more than one method, depending upon the circumstances. A common combination of two methods, for instance, is the win-withdraw kind of person. Such a person may initially seek to win, but if it appears that she/he will not succeed, he/she may choose to withdraw altogether.

The Bible and Conflict Resolution

The Bible has a good deal to say about conflict resolution, particularly the use of anger.

Special Sources of Conflict

In addition to the psychological factors which stimulate aggression, the Bible suggests underlying motivations for aggression, and these factors affect marriages.

- a) Differences in the strength of faith (Ro. 14:1f.)
- b) Failings of those who are weak in faith (Ro.15:1)
- c) Selfishness, ambition and conceit (Phil. 2:3-4)
- d) Personal desires (Ja. 4:1-3)
- e) Refusal to hear the other person’s perspective (Pro. 18:17)
- f) Jealousy (1 Co. 3:1-3)
- g) A quarrelsome nature (Pr. 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15-16)

Handling Anger

The Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament warns against the folly of a quick temper (Pr. 14:29; 16:32). Venting one's anger is the response of fools (Pr. 29:11). Instead, one must practice self-control, patience and the gentle response (Pr. 15:1; 19:11; cf. Mt. 5:43-44). The lack of self-control leads to self-destruction (Pr. 25:28). In the New Testament there are clear directions that personal vengeance is not the Christian way (Ro. 12:19, 21). Anger and its associated responses are to be put away (Ga. 5:16-23; Ep. 4:32; 1 Pe. 3:9). Anger may not always be sin, but excessive or uncontrolled anger which lingers is certainly sin (Ep. 4:26)

Those Minor Irritations

There is a saying in the Song of Songs about "little foxes that spoil the vines" 2:15, KJV). Interpreters do not agree on just what symbolism might be intended here, but the imagery of little animals which gnaw on the lower stems of the grapevines just above the roots so that the vines are killed, or which burrow in the soft soil around the roots to the same effect, is certainly apt enough to describe the minor irritations that tend to erode a relationship. The Bible does not directly address these marital irritations, but it does address the general fact that humans tend to irritate each other in the course of life. It encourages believers to put up with what they consider to be the failings of each other and to avoid the attitude which always seeks to please oneself (Ro. 15:1). Genuine love hides a multitude of offenses (1 Pe. 4:8; cf. Pro. 10:12)! The Christian response to irritation is to be humble, patient and gentle, bearing with one another in love (Ep. 4:2). Putting up with each other's faults out of a forgiving heart is only appropriate, since Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13).

Impact Project

INDIVIDUAL SECTION | 5 MINUTES

Adapted from GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY: BOOK 1 (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1980) 47, 49.

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, but complete the following without interaction.
INSTRUCTIONS: Circle your responses to the following statements and discuss them with your spouse.

- AGREE/DISAGREE* 1) Conflicts are always caused by differences between husbands and wives.
- AGREE/DISAGREE* 2) Conflict is an important element in the personal growth of a husband and wife.
- AGREE/DISAGREE* 3) Conflicts are not always accompanied by arguments.
- AGREE/DISAGREE* 4) Unresolved conflicts usually become "problems" in a marriage.
- AGREE/DISAGREE* 5) Each time an old conflict resurfaces without a resolution, the "problem" becomes more acute.

INTERACTION SECTION | 5 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together for interaction.

INSTRUCTION: Discuss your responses to the above questions with your spouse. Also, reread the section on styles of handling conflict (withdraw, win, compromise, yield or resolve). What style(s) do you use? What style(s) does your spouse use? Should either of you change, and if so, how?

INTERACTION SECTION | 5 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple.

INSTRUCTIONS: Rate each of the following items so as to indicate their significance as a source of marital conflict within your own marriage. Feel free to discuss some of your own unique sources of conflict as well.

N = NEVER PRODUCES CONFLICT
 S = SOMETIMES PRODUCES CONFLICT
 O = OFTEN PRODUCES CONFLICT

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Unwillingness to Communicate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unfulfilled Ne | <input type="checkbox"/> Sarcasm or Demeaning Remarks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Difficulties | <input type="checkbox"/> Making False Assumptions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Busy Schedule | <input type="checkbox"/> Jumping to Conclusions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Background | <input type="checkbox"/> Inflexibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relatives | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritating Habits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unrealistic Expectationas | <input type="checkbox"/> Tactlessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nagging | |

WRITE-IN _____

WRITE-IN _____

Sexual Intimacy

Human sexuality has become a major focus of attention in modern culture, especially since the Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Unfortunately, Christians have often been given rather bad press as though they had conspired to deprive western civilization of its sexual rights. To be sure, Christians believe that human sexuality should be treated within a moral framework based upon the Bible. However, it is a serious misconception that Victorian prudery and sexual ignorance is a direct product of and encouraged by the Bible. Rather, it is more accurate to say that it was professing Christians who were too uninformed about their own Scriptures and too susceptible to non-Christian notions of asceticism that have contributed to the idea that sex is unworthy or unholy.

The following study is not intended to be a course in sex education, a compendium of sexual ethics, nor a digest of sexual problems. Rather, it is hoped that a careful examination of the Bible will produce a wholesome appreciation of the divine affirmation of sexual intimacy between spouses. Sex was created by God, and it is good!

Sex as God's Good Creation

Human sexuality was not only created by God, it in some way reflects the image of God. Though we do not know precisely how, the maleness and femaleness of the human race corresponds to the multi-dimensional nature of God (Ge. 1:26-27). God, even apart from his creatures, is in some sense in fellowship with Himself (cf. Jn. 17:24), and humankind is also created for fellowship.⁶⁷ This intimacy of relationship is the setting for human sexuality.⁶⁸ Therefore, it should come as no surprise to find intimacy without shame as the divine ideal (Ge. 2:24-25; Mt. 19:4-6; Ep. 5:31).

The Sexual Implications of the Fall

Even though human sexuality is God's good creation, it is especially susceptible to exploitation by fallen men and women. Thus, when Adam and Eve succumbed to disobedience, they both immediately realized their vulnerability to each other (Ge. 3:6-7, 10-12). It is important to understand that the fall did not make human sexuality evil. It only opened the door for human sexuality, which is the most intimate of human relationships, to become distorted by evil.

⁶⁷ P. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 35.

⁶⁸ G. Carey, *I Believe in Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 136.

The Biblical Affirmation of Sexuality Within the Covenant of Marriage

The covenant of marriage is the setting in which human sexuality once again achieves intimacy without shame.

The Old Testament Description

The sexual act of marriage in the Old Testament is appropriately described as “knowing” one’s spouse. The Hebrew verb *yada’* (= to know) is used for sexual intercourse, and as such, it conveys very well the complete personal union of the husband and wife in thorough physical intimacy (cf. Ge. 4:1).⁶⁹ Sexual intimacy within the marriage covenant is not merely for procreation but for uninhibited enjoyment (Pr. 5:15-19). Isaac’s timing may have been inappropriate when caressing Rebekah (RSV, “fondling”), but there is no indication that his actions were in themselves inappropriate (Ge. 26:8). The Song of Songs, to be taken up later, is an enthusiastic “yes” to the beauty of human sexuality.

The New Testament Description

The New Testament is equally specific in its affirmation of human sexuality. Sexual intercourse is proper within the domain of marriage (He. 13:4). The expression *koite* (= marriage bed) is a Greek euphemism for sexual intercourse and/or seminal emission, and it is related to our English word coitus.⁷⁰ Spouses should share their bodies with each other. Failure to do so constitutes defrauding (1 Co. 7:3-5). Marriage is the proper field within which to express sexual passion (1 Co. 7:9). In fact, anyone who forbids marriage on the grounds of asceticism is rejecting the good creation of God (1 Ti. 4:1-4).

The Song of Songs

An entire book of the Bible is devoted to the celebration of human love between a woman and a man. This book, read by the Jews annually at Passover, describes in utter frankness the romance and sexual gratification that are morally proper as God’s creation-gifts. The title *shi’r ha-shi’rim* (= song of songs) is the Hebrew way of framing a superlative, and syntactically, it means the song that is above all other songs;⁷¹ it is the best and most beautiful of songs. (Compare the expression “Holy of Holies” and “King of Kings.”) Without surveying the variety of interpretive approaches to the book, which are many,⁷² one may still say with

⁶⁹ D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967) 74.

⁷⁰ BAG (1979) 440.

⁷¹ O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 485.

⁷² R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 1052ff.

candidness that the author celebrates the purity and dignity of human love, a fact that has not always been sufficiently stressed.⁷³ (One Christian, Theodore of Mopseustia, was condemned as a heretic in AD 553 because he thought that the book was to be taken at face value.)⁷⁴ Nevertheless, modern scholars almost without exception concur that the book should indeed be taken at face value. It may mean more than that, but it does not mean less. As one Christian counselor has expressed, “The idea that God designed our sex organs for our enjoyment comes almost as a surprise to some people.”⁷⁵

General Observations for Reading the Song⁷⁶

The Song of Songs is a love poem such as was not uncommon in the various cultures of the ancient Near East. It is constructed primarily out of the lyrical conversations of the male and female lovers. In the older versions (such as the KJV), the conversations were difficult to follow inasmuch as the gender of the first and second person English pronouns are indistinguishable, a problem not so acute in the Hebrew language. Modern versions are very helpful here. The NIV effectively distinguishes the speakers by the headings *Lover* (for the male), *Beloved* (for the female) and *Friends* (for others). Special characteristics of the Song may be seen in:

Elaborate Descriptions of Physical Beauty:

Highly erotic (though never obscene) language is common. Often, physical beauty is associated with imagery drawn from flora and fauna (1:9, 15; 2:1-3, 8-9, etc.). The utter candidness with which the lovers describe each other is full of tenderness, sensuousness and consummate imagery (4:1-5; 5:10-16; 6:4-7; 7:1-6). The full range of bodily parts are beautiful and worthy of description including:

- *The Head* (5:11; 7:5):
 - ✓ Cheeks (1:10; 5:13)
 - ✓ Face (2:14)
 - ✓ Nose (7:4; see note on complexion)
 - ✓ Eyes (1:15; 4:1, 9; 5:12; 6:5; 7:4)
 - ✓ Teeth (4:2; 6:6)
 - ✓ Lips and mouth (4:3, 11; 5:13, 16; 7:9)

⁷³ E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 336.

⁷⁴ Harrison, 1054.

⁷⁵ T. and B. LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 11.

⁷⁶ G. Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984) 37ff.

- ✓ Temples (4:3; 6:7; see note on complexion)
- ✓ Hair (4:1; 5:11; 6:5; 7:5)
- ✓ Complexion (1:5-6; 4:3; 5:10; 6:7; 7:4; the allusions to pomegranates and the tower of Lebanon probably have to do with skin color.⁷⁷)
- *The Body* (7:7):
 - ✓ Neck (4:4; 7:4)
 - ✓ Breasts (4:4; 7:3, 7-8; 8:10)
 - ✓ Body (Heb. = trunk; 5:14)
 - ✓ Navel (7:2)⁷⁸
 - ✓ Waist (Heb. = lower abdomen; 7:2)
- *The Appendages*:
 - ✓ Arms (5:14)
 - ✓ Hands and fingers (5:5)
 - ✓ Thighs (Heb. word refers to the fleshy upper thighs where the legs join the pelvis; 7:1)⁷⁹
 - ✓ Legs (Heb. word here is different than the previous one; 5:15)
 - ✓ Feet (7:1)

Descriptions of the Enjoyment of the Senses

Sexual intimacy involves the interplay of all of the five senses, and the Song describes this interplay at length.

- Seeing (4:9, the idea of being “stolen” or “ravished”, as in the RSV, carries the connotation of arousing or exciting one’s passion;⁸⁰ 6:5, the same idea is given where inviting glances “drive me wild.”⁸¹)
- Touching (1:13; 2:6; 7:7-9; 8:3; see further under kissing and embracing.)
- Tasting (2:3; 4:11, 16; 5:1, 16; 7:9; 8:2; see further under kissing and embracing.)
- Smelling (1:3, 12; 4:16; 7:8, 14; see further under perfume.)

⁷⁷ Carr, 116, 159.

⁷⁸ See the translation and discussion of 7:2 in M. Pope, *Song of Songs* [AB] (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977) 593, 615, 617-618.

⁷⁹ Carr, 156.

⁸⁰ Carr, 120.

⁸¹ Pope, 551 (bc. cit.).

- Hearing (2:14; 8:13)

Kissing and Embracing

The physical gestures of human love are universal, or nearly so. Special attention is given in the Song to kissing. Some references are direct (1:2; 8:1) while others are metaphorical (4:11a; 5:16; 7:9). Embracing and fondling of the body are also mentioned (7:7-8). The description of the left hand being under the head suggests that the lovers are lying down and that the right hand is used for caressing (2:6; 8:3).⁸²

Accoutrements

Clothing and adornment, like physical gestures, are almost universally recognized in the language of love. Elsewhere the Old Testament shows that elaborate clothing and jewelry were appropriate symbols of love and marriage (Ge. 24:52-53; Ps. 45:13-14; Eze. 16:10-11, 13).⁸³

The Song speaks of:

- Earrings (1:10a, 11)
- Necklaces (1:10b; 4:4, 9)
- Veils (4:3; 6:7)
- Sandals (7:1)

Perfumes

Perfumes, also, are valuable as a sensuous element in human love-making. Besides the general references (1:3, 12; 4:10-11, 16), the Song mentions:

- Myrrh (1:13; 3:6; 4:6, 14; 5:1, 5)
- Incense (3:6; 4:6, 14)
- Henna (1:14; 4:13)
- Nard (4:13-14)
- Saffron, Calamus, Cinnamon and Aloes (4:14)

Aphrodisiacs

Raisins, apples and mandrakes were highly erotic symbols in the ancient world

⁸² Carr, 93; F. Delitzsch, *Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M. Easton (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 45.

⁸³ It may be noted that Psalm 45 is a royal wedding psalm, probably written to celebrate the royal weddings of the Davidic kings in David's dynasty, cf. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1-72)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 346.

and thought to excite sexual desire (2:5; 7:13; cf. Ge. 30:14-16)⁸⁴

Springtime

Spring is another virtually universal symbol for love's season of the year (2:10-13; 7:12). The reference to doves is no doubt associated with the normal animal matings as well as the fertility of the vegetation which occurs in spring.

Special Settings

The setting for love-making is important, and in the Song, a variety of scenes for rendezvous are envisioned:

- A private room (1:4, 17; 3:4; 8:2)
- A green bed (1:16; this reference is probably not simply to the color of a bed-covering; rather, the Heb. word refers to the luxuriant foliage of trees in general and suggests either that the love bed was under a canopy of leaves in a garden⁸⁵ or the bedroom was strewn with luxurious plants.⁸⁶)
- A private dinner (2:4)
- A secluded valley (4:8)
- A nut orchard (6:11-12)
- In the country (7:10-11; note that some translators prefer the translation "henna bushes" instead of "villages," so NEB.)
- A vineyard (7:12)
- The desert (8:5a)
- Under an apple tree (8:5b)
- At night (2:17; 4:6)

Furthermore, a repeated theme is the setting of a garden (see below).

Special Vocabulary

Family terms, such as "sister" (4:9-10, 12; 5:1-2) and "brother" (8:1) do not indicate that the lovers were siblings. Such language is frequent in love poetry and denotes intimacy and high regard.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Carr, 92-93.

⁸⁵ Carr, 38-39.

⁸⁶ Carr, 86-87.

⁸⁷ Pope, 359-360.

Emotional Anxiety

It almost goes without saying that the Song is replete with emotional responsiveness. Worth mentioning are the specific descriptions of the emotional anxiety associated with the “seek/find” themes (1:7-8; 3:1-4; 5:4-8).

*The Garden Motif*⁸⁸

The garden, orchard or vineyard references which appear repeatedly in the Song (some 20 times) are double entendres. They not only envision a rural setting for love-making, they also are highly colored symbols recalling the blessing of God upon the man and the woman in Eden (Ge. 2:8, 21-25) and representing the sexual charm of the Lover and the Beloved (1:6, 14; 2:3, 16; 4:12--5:1; 6:2-3; 7:8; 8:12).

A Time for Love-Making

The true union of lovers is something that must be offered by each. It is important that the lovers are ready to wholeheartedly give themselves to each other (2:17; 3:5; 8:4).

Nostalgia and Innovation (7:13)

Certain gestures, settings, accoutrements, scents, and so forth become favorite elements in the love-making of the couple. They are the things “old” that recall all the previous delights. At the same time, the experimentation with things “new” keeps the relationship fresh and exciting.

The Place of Marriage in the Song

Sexual sin is painted in the darkest colors in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Pr. 2:16-18; 5:1-14). Only within marriage may lovers express themselves in uninhibited union. Thus, it is important to understand that while the Song of Songs is explicit, it is by no means risqué. What the Song describes is not seduction, but it is the love freely given and freely received (8:12; 2:16; 4:16; 6:3; 7:10; 8:6-7). The references to “wedding” and “bride” are not merely incidental (3:11; 4:8, 9, 10, 11, 12). It is possible that the whole section including 3:6--5:1 describes the wedding and the marriage consummation.⁸⁹

The Mutual Initiative of the Lovers⁹⁰

One very remarkable aspect of the Song is the description it gives of the

⁸⁸ Carr, 55-60.

⁸⁹ Delitzsch, 60ff.

⁹⁰ Carr, 54.

freedom of both the male and the female to express themselves in their love. Traditionally, at least, the male has been the aggressor while the female has been reluctant and sometimes victimized. In the Song, the woman is not at all reticent. Nearly twice as many verses are from her lips as from his. She is as much the pursuer as the pursued (3:1-4; 8:1-2, 5b). She is as ardent and as forthright as he (1:16; 4:16; 7:9b-13)!

In summary, one may conclude by agreeing with Cliff and Joyce Penner: “The Bible endorses the concept of sexual pleasure and assumes a healthy passion. Read the Song of Solomon; it contains some of the most beautiful and erotic poetry ever written...obviously, these passages don’t encourage us to hold back our passionate feelings! Yet many people come to the sexual experience with the feeling, ‘I can’t really let go.’ ‘It’s not right for me to feel that strongly.’ ‘I couldn’t face God again.’ ‘Nice girls don’t behave that way.’ Yet as we understand God’s message, it is his intention for us to enjoy the sexual experience and to let our feelings flow freely.”⁹¹

⁹¹ C. and J. Penner, *The Gift of Sex* (Waco, TX: Word, 1981) 45.

Impact Project

INTERACTION SECTION | 20 MINUTES

Adapted from H. Miles, *SEXUAL HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967) 24.

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, and complete the following with discussion.

INSTRUCTIONS: All of us are affected by our past. Many attitudes we hold about sexual intimacy were formed and developed from our parents. The attitudes that our parents conveyed about their bodies, bodily pleasure and/or affectionate gestures have helped to shape our own thinking. Furthermore, the social influence and peer thinking within which we were reared has contributed to our perspective, not to mention the weight of our church setting. Two extreme philosophies regarding sexual intimacy may be described as:

EROTICISM: According to erotic philosophy, there are no moral or spiritual absolutes. The body is of greatest consequence, and the highest good is to be found in satisfying one's own physical appetites.

ASCETICISM: The ascetic philosophy maintains that anything which satisfies the body is evil. That which is physical should not be enjoyable. Sensual desire and sexual expression are therefore evil and destitute of spiritual value. Sex is considered to be a purely utilitarian function for the procreation of the human race.

- 1) As you were growing up, what was the prevailing philosophy in your social circles regarding sex?
 Very Ascetic *Mildly Ascetic* *Mildly Erotic* *Very Erotic*
- 2) Which category describes your own family's attitudes toward discussing sex as you were growing up?
 Closed *Discreet* *Open* *Indiscreet*
- 3) Which, if either, of the ascetic or erotic philosophies has had the greatest influence on your present feelings about sex?
- 4) Without asking your spouse, which of the two philosophies do you think has had the greatest influence on his/her present feelings about sex? Now, discuss your answers together.
- 5) What was the first question about sex that you can remember asking your parents? How did they respond?
- 6) When do you first remember recognizing that you were a sexual creature, and how did you respond to this self-awareness?
- 7) From what source (parents, friends, books) did you first learn the basic facts (or rumors) about reproduction? Can you remember anything about how you felt when you received this information?
- 8) When you were growing up, did you have anyone with whom you felt comfortable when talking about your questions concerning sex? Who was it? What made this person easy to talk to?
- 9) What are two things that your spouse does that especially pleases or satisfies you during sexual relations?
- 10) What is one thing your spouse does in your sexual relations that you do not particularly enjoy?
- 11) Are you open to either the husband or the wife initiating sexual relations?
- 12) When (time of day/week) do you most like to have sexual relations?

Is There Love After Marriage?

Almost no one is foolish enough to imagine that he automatically deserves great success in any field of activity; yet almost everyone believes that he automatically deserves success in marriage.

Sydney J. Harris

This question, the title of an essay by John Drescher,⁹² hits the target squarely. Far too many Christian couples remain together because of Christian “law” rather than because of loving relationships. For many, even Christian law is not sufficient to hold them close. A successful marriage is never automatic, but rather, it is the product of hard work. Real love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person. The handling of marriage cannot always be thought out in advance. Often one must feel her/his way along, slowly, gently and in the dark. Ultimately, marriage is an institution for sinners. It is an institution composed of two unique, divine creations, both of whom have received gifts that need nourishment in order to bloom. Wise partners hang on to each other with open hands so that neither suffocates in submission.⁹³ When marriage is seen in this light, then the ideals of Scripture will be fulfilled (Pr. 18:22; Ho. 2:14-16).

Marriage in America

In the United States, there were 2,438,000 marriages and 1,219,000 divorces in 1981. This year is more-or-less typical of most years. Statistically, it means that American marriages are only about 50% successful using only the raw data of legal contracts.⁹⁴ If one appeals to the broader concern of loving relationships, American marriages are even less successful. By 1987 about 45% of American homes were headed by single parents, most of them women, as compared with about 25% in 1960.⁹⁵ Other factors also affect the American concept of marriage, such as, the fact that both women and men are marrying, on the average, about three years later in life than in the 1950s and that 22% of all American births in the United

⁹² J. Hunt, ed., *Being A Loving Wife* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 125.

⁹³ H. Wright, “Premarital Counseling and Enrichment,” *Syllabus* (n.p., n.d.).

⁹⁴ “Annual Summary of Births, Marriages and Divorces: United States,” *Monthly Vital Statistics Report*, vol. 30, no. 13 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics).

⁹⁵ D. Schoenbrun, “Would You Trade Today for Life in the ‘50s?,” *Parade Magazine* (December 6, 1987) 12.

States are out-of-wedlock births (as opposed to 4.5% in 1955). A baby is born to a teenager every two minutes in the USA. In 1986, for the first time in USA history, the majority of professional jobs were held by women, according to the Labor Department. Life expectancy today, about 75 years, is more than five years longer than in the Eisenhower era.⁹⁶ All these factors affect our general attitudes toward marriage as well as the state of individual marriages.

There are generally two times when marriages disintegrate completely...

... *in the early years*, when the man is seeking to find and establish his identity in his work, while the woman seeks to find and establish intimacy in her marriage. The tension becomes unbearable and the differences irreconcilable.

... *in the middle years*, after the children have left home, and the roles of the husband and wife tend to be reversed. The man has now found his identity in his work and seeks for intimacy, while the woman is struggling to find her identity now that her motherhood role has waned. Again the tension mounts.

The Love that is Strong as Death (Song 8:6-7)

The ideal for ongoing mutual love between husbands and wives (Ep. 5:25-28) is one which is affected by a multitude of factors. Besides the ones mentioned in previous lessons, the following areas are also significant.

The Extended Family

Marriage usually involves six people rather than just two, a husband and wife and two sets of parents. The dynamics of such a relationship involve:

*Leaving Home Psychologically*⁹⁷

The command to “leave father and mother” (Ge. 2:24) must not be defined only in terms of physical proximity. It is more important to leave home psychologically. Individuals who do not leave home psychologically often get tangled up in family problems. They tend to look for a spouse who will continue parenting them by meeting their emotional and physical needs. Such people will usually develop more physical and psychosomatic problems than others. Research on

⁹⁶ Schoenbrun, 13.

⁹⁷ Wright, *Syllabus*, 4.

psychosomatic illnesses indicates that people who as adults are still emotionally entangled with their families of origin are physically sick more frequently than those who are more independent. Unfortunately, even parents sometimes encourage their adult children to remain dependent on them. The parents do not really want their child to leave home, and so they foster, whether consciously or unconsciously, a psychological dependency.

Family Traditions

Another factor is the interaction between the married couple and each of their sets of parents. What kind of expectations are there for inter-family involvement? What holiday traditions are expected? How close can one safely be in terms of geography? In terms of ideas? These questions must be addressed if one's marriage is not to be adversely affected by the in-laws.

In-laws or Outlaws

The relationship between your immediate family and your in-laws can go in several directions. It may be strained, as was the relationship between Esau and his parents over the fact that Esau married a wife who was not acceptable to them (Ge. 26:34-35). This strain created a situation of favoritism toward Jacob, the other son (Ge. 27). It may be close so that valuable advice can be exchanged (Ex. 18:13-27), perhaps so close that deep loyalties can be formed (Ru. 1:15-18). However the relationship develops, if it is to be a good one, it must be nourished like all other relationships.

Possibly the greatest hindrance to sound in-law relationships is the problem of dependency -- either the nuclear family tends to still depend upon their parents or else the parents attempt to preserve the dependency of their married children. Dependency may be financial, emotional, psychological, and/or geographical. Sometimes the best thing that can happen is for married children to move away geographically from their parents for a time in order to reinforce their independence. Yet even here, with the means of instant communication available, dependencies can remain. The test of good in-law relationships is the delicate balance between respect and love on the one hand and independence on the other.

Another sensitive aspect is the fact that the children will have developed different values than those of their parents. This is a natural part of being a mature individual. In-laws often have great difficulty accepting the decisions of their married children, especially when those decisions fly in the face of their own values. They may become meddlesome or taciturn. The married children, for their part, sometimes have a tendency to reject outright the values of their parents, failing to remember that it is always in order to respect the feelings of others, even when one does not agree

with them.

At the very worst, in-laws can attempt to drive a wedge between the husband and the wife, usually taking the side of their own child and increasing the alienation from his/her spouse. But as the sage advice says as given by George's parents in Thornton Wilder's classic play *Our Town*, "Everyone has a right to their own trouble!"

Interplay of Power and Intimacy⁹⁸

The balance of power in a marriage seriously affects the levels of intimacy and closeness that the couple can experience. If the power balance is:

More or Less Equal.... where both spouses are competent and see each other that way, then deep levels of intimacy and closeness can develop.

Dominant-Submissive.... where one spouse prevails and there is little open conflict, then each can come to resent the other's role without realizing how they have contributed to the disintegration of their relationship. Here, deep levels of intimacy are generally avoided.

Warfare.... where there is constant and open conflict, then deep levels of intimacy are impossible.

Fused.... where there is a sticky "we-ness", then each spouse loses his or her individual identity. Power is shared, but at a great expense. Deep levels of intimacy are unstable and conditional.

Romantic Communication⁹⁹

Dry-rot in a marriage sets in because married couples assume too much; they assume that love will grow without nourishment and cultivation. If half the sentiment expressed during courtship continued after marriage, few marriages would dry up and die. Such expression of romantic sentiment is especially important for men to realize, since they are most often the culprits who gradually cut off romance after marriage. Loving words, gestures, tones of voice, and acts of touching (in non-sexual ways) are extremely important in the nourishment of love.

Mid-Life Crisis

There are primarily two emotionally traumatizing periods of life for men which have to do with aging, and three for women. Both men and women experience the disorienting and confusing period of adolescence when they reach puberty. Their

⁹⁸ Wright, *Syllabus*, 13.

⁹⁹ Drescher, 125.

bodies are changing, their psychological moods vary widely, and they have difficulty with self-identity and social relationships. Many men and women also experience what is popularly called “mid-life crisis.”¹⁰⁰ For women, this period usually occurs in the mid-30s, while for men it usually occurs in their late 30s or early 40s. Finally, women also experience a third traumatizing period, usually in their late 40s or early 50s, in which their bodies once again adjust after they pass the normal period for child-bearing, and they again experience tremendous emotional stress.¹⁰¹

Mid-Life Crisis for Men¹⁰²

A primary cause of mid-life crisis is stress. Pressure from work, family, and society produce a sense of frustration, feelings of inadequacy, extreme mental fatigue, and deep depression. The man in mid-life finds that his body is changing with age and his sexual capacity is decreasing. He tends to grumble about everything in life, his kids, his wife, his job, his house, politics and taxes—in short, life has gone sour. Often enough, he develops an anti-social behavior to his former friends and suffers an identity crisis not unlike the one he experienced as a teenager: Who am I? What is really important? What do I want my life to mean? In mid-life crisis, he may drift into infidelity and desertion with regard to his marriage.¹⁰³ He instinctively awakens to the reality that he is mortal and finite, and this awakening tempts him to seek an escape. He may develop an alcohol or chemical dependency, a liaison with a younger woman, and/or a penchant for dressing or behaving in new and seemingly strange ways.

Mid-Life Crisis for Women¹⁰⁴

Mid-life crisis for women is analogous to that of men. They also address deep questions of self-identity: Who am I? Do I like what I am doing? Is what I am doing important? The woman’s role as mother has changed in that the children are now in school and she has more time for herself, especially if she is not in the job market.

¹⁰⁰ There is still some debate among psychologists over the nature of adult midlife, cf. J. Stevens-Long, *Adult Life: Developmental Processes* (California: Mayfield, 1979) 252ff. However, increasingly the evidence is mounting in favor of a distinct psychological phenomenon called “mid-life crisis.”

¹⁰¹ A helpful discussion of menopause, especially for husbands who are trying to understand their wives or for wives who are trying to understand themselves, is the short chapter entitled “Menstrual and Physiological Problems” in J. Dobson, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1975) 143-156.

¹⁰² J. Conway, *Men in Mid-Life Crisis* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook, 1978).

¹⁰³ According to some studies, in the middle years of the 1970s about 100,000 middle-aged men left home every year, and in some years, even more women than men, cf. Stevens-Long, 253.

¹⁰⁴ A brief but helpful discussion of women in mid-life crisis is the chapter “Bewildered at Thirty-five”, cf. Conway, 157ff.

This extra time, however, tends to be used for introspection. She begins to feel left out, unimportant, insignificant, and trapped. She engages in criticism, becomes apathetic about domestic responsibilities, resents the roles which society and her husband have created for her, and simultaneously wishes to left alone and to be free. She reads the telltale signs of aging which are powerfully reinforced by the American media as it hucksters its products through young, attractive females. In this crisis, she also seeks escape in many of the same ways as men, such as, chemical dependency, an affair, and/or a tendency to challenge her family with the announcement, "It's time I had a little fun, too!" In addition, if she has not recently had to work in the job market, she may decide to return.

Surviving Mid-Life

At least one factor is in the favor of most couples, and that is that if their ages are approximately the same, they will pass through their crises at different points. First, the wife will encounter her mid-life crisis before her husband hits his, and if he is sensitive, he will be able to help her weather the storm. By the time she has discovered a stronger self, she will be able to help him through his mid-life crisis. And when he has passed through the crucible successfully, he will be able to help her through menopause.

For marriages, perhaps the single most important thing is to be aware of such-crises. Men who are insensitive to their wives, or women who are insensitive to their husbands, will not be able to give the care and understanding necessary to negotiate such troubled waters unscathed. The husband or wife who blames his/her spouse because life patterns are changing is unrealistic and susceptible to even greater trouble. In mid-life crisis, both are extremely vulnerable to extra-marital affairs or other kinds of escape techniques, he because he needs to sense that he is still young, and she because she craves understanding and intimacy.

Impact Project

INTERACTION SECTION | 20 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, and complete the following with discussion.

INSTRUCTIONS: Discuss together the following questions. You may wish to design some questions of your own for discussion as well. Be creative!

- 1) Was there a change in the quality of our communication from our engagement period to our first year of marriage and thereafter?
- 2) Are we as good communicators as we thought we were?
- 3) What are the most serious challenges to on-going communication for us?
- 4) What do either of us do or say to encourage (or discourage) our desire to actively communicate?
- 5) How do we handle arguments and disagreements?
- 6) What was the most memorable part of our wedding?
- 7) How have we resolved differences with our in-laws?
- 8) How are we different in temperament, background, ability or other areas?
Given these circumstances, how can we complement each other?
- 9) How have our backgrounds meshed to form our sexual adjustments as a married couple?
- 10) How have our ideas regarding sex changed from our preconceptions before we were married to our perceptions now?
- 11) How important is sex to each of us?
- 12) What are ways in which we can keep romance alive in our relationship?
- 13) How has our relationship to Christ affected our relationship to each other?
- 14) How do we or how can we encourage each other's spiritual life?
- 15) Of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23, which of them have been most important to each of us in our relationship?
- 16) How old are we, and what might this mean in terms of mid-life crises? Are we experiencing any crisis now, and if so, what challenges does it present? How can we help each other?

INTERACTION SECTION | ON-GOING

SETTING: A quiet time when you and your spouse can be alone without interruption.

INSTRUCTIONS: Following is a project which husbands and wives might wish to take on as a way of exploring their current relationship and deepening it into the future. Buy a book of short statements (1-3 pages each) or a book of poems or essays on loving communication. Take turns on alternate days reading a selection aloud to your spouse. Any of the books listed below are excellent for starters.

- J. R. Borge, **FORTY WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU** (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978).
 J. Hunt, ed., **RAISING A JOYFUL FAMILY** (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
 J. Hunt, ed., **BEING A LOVING WIFE** (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
 T. Miller, ed., **BEING A CARING FATHER** (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

Parental Goals and Expectations

It is not enough to say that a happy family begins with a Christian mother and father. One needs to ask: What kind of a Christian mother and father?

Gladys Hunt

One of the most familiar maxims in the Bible is Proverbs 22:6. For many, this bit of wisdom is interpreted to be a cosmic guarantee that if they take their family to church, their children will all grow up to be Christians. However, Proverbs also reminds the reader that even the best training cannot guarantee that one's children will make the best choices. Acceptance of instruction on the part of the child is equally important (Pr. 2:1ff.). The child might be too opinionated to learn (Pr. 13:1; 17:21). A good home may produce lazy and irresponsible children (Pr. 10:5; 29:3). Children can choose rebellion (Pr. 15:20; 20:20; 30:11, 17), wastefulness (Pr. 28:24) and rejection (Pr. 29:15) as well as the good path. Sometimes parents may be at fault (Pr. 29:15), but ultimately each child must give his or her own consent before being led astray (Pr. 1:10).

It is important to remember that Proverbs, like all wisdom literature, is a book of generalisms, not promises. Each maxim is based upon observations and reflections regarding life. In Proverbs, the *nabal* (= fool) is not necessarily a person with a deficient intelligence quotient, but rather, a person who is morally and spiritually insensitive. The fool is more a person who is godless rather than brainless.¹⁰⁵

This brings us back to Proverbs 22:6. The imperative verb *hanak* (= train) is used in the Old Testament with regard to houses, and it means “to begin, initiate or inaugurate.”¹⁰⁶ The importance of goals, therefore, is self-evident. Furthermore, the expression *piy dar'ko* (= according to his way) has to do with the potentialities and gifts of the child. All children are not the same, and the manner of training should be appropriate to the nature of the child.

Setting Goals

The word “goals” conjures up all sorts of images, many of them vocational or cultural, so it is important to define carefully what is meant. Primarily, goals which are of first importance are *not* having to do with vocations, cultural expectations,

¹⁰⁵ W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 225.

¹⁰⁶ Harris, Archer and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) 1.693.

social classifications or mannerisms, though these are by no means insignificant. The goals of first importance are relational: they have to do not with the question, “What do I want my child to be?,” and the even more important question, “What kind of parent do I myself want to be?” If parents are to be the pride of their children (Pr. 17:6), then such goals are extremely important.

Relational Goals¹⁰⁷

Consider carefully the following relational goals.

Communication

Communication is not merely a matter of words. Even fools are known for talking frequently (Pr. 10:8; 17:28). Rather, communication is a message given and received, whether verbal or nonverbal. It is a two-way street with parents and children both contributing. Ideas, values and emotions are all important messages to be communicated (Dt. 6:4-7).

The first few chapters of Proverbs were written in the style of a father counseling his son. Notice the tenderness, the time and the subject matter involved in the imparting of wisdom (1:1-4, 8, 10, 15; 2:1ff.; 3:1-2, 11-12, 21; 4:1-13, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1-5, 20; 7:1) . Sometimes parents wait to begin the communication process until their children are old enough to discuss things on an adult level. This is far too late!

Consistency

The “do as I say not do as I do” philosophy will never work well. The biblical example of David is a tragic example (2 Sa. 11:2-5, 14-15; 13:1, 10-14, 21, 28-29). A parent who is undisciplined can hardly expect his or her children to be responsible individuals. Children are great observers and imitators. They learn as much and many times even more by what they see their parents do rather than by what they hear their parents say. In counseling with adult problems which have their roots in parent-child relationships, it is relatively rare for people to remember things that their parents said; it is quite frequent for them to remember things that their parents did.

Presence

There is no substitute for being there. Long business hours, working mothers and traveling fathers are dangerous factors. Refusing to climb the economic ladder or postponing other personal goals which are time-consuming in order to be with your children may be an important alternative to their well-being.

¹⁰⁷ The following goals are adapted from Gladys Hunt, “Guidelines to Happy Families,” *Raising A Joyful Family*, ed. Jeanne Hunt (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 10ff.

Acceptance

Acceptance is an attitude and a climate. Too often, acceptance is only given if a child conforms to a parental ideal (cf. Ge. 25:27-28). Acceptance must not be based only on agreement. The father of the prodigal showed acceptance *before* he knew of his son's change of heart (Lk. 15:20)!

Respect

Respect and acceptance are closely related. The parent who does not give respect will usually not get it. Paul uses three important verbs in order to warn parents against behavior that lacks respect, *parorgizo* (= to make angry) , *erethizo* (= to arouse or irritate) , and *athymeo* (= to lose heart), and he counsels them to use caution (Ep. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

Priorities

Parents frequently fail to distinguish between the trivial and the crucial by making everything a crucial issue of obedience. Children should be given the latitude to discuss issues and make decisions so that they get some experience in establishing priorities in a safe environment. Being an example is very important here, for priorities are most often "caught", not merely "taught".

Submission to Authority

A parent's attitude toward civil law, school authorities, employers, the church, and all other structures of authority become models for children to follow. The most convincing evidence to a child of the reality of Christian faith is to see both father and mother living under the lordship of Jesus Christ (Lk. 7:1-10).

Discipline

Discipline is not the same thing as retaliation. Instead, it is tough love (He. 12:4-11). Parents are responsible to be firm but loving. The lack of discipline leads to tragedy in both morals and in character (1 Sa. 2:12, 22-24, 27-29; 3:11-14).

Responsibility

Privilege and responsibility go together. Children will never be responsible if they are not expected to be responsible and given the freedom to be responsible. The home should be the place where a child can fail without disastrous consequences and can be afforded another opportunity. It is where the child "practices" being responsible.

Impact Project

INTERACTION SECTION | 20 MINUTES

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, and complete the following.

INSTRUCTIONS: With your spouse, create nine specific ways, one for each of the goals in the foregoing chapter, in which you can make progress toward improving your parent-child relationship. Write them down, and during a quiet time with the family, share them with your children.

1) We intend to communicate better by . . .

2) We intend to be more consistent by . . .

3) We intend to spend more time together by . . .

4) We intend to accept our child(ren) better by . . .

5) We intend to show respect to our child(ren) by . . .

6) We intend to establish better priorities by . . .

7) We intend to demonstrate a better attitude toward authority by . . .

8) We intend to be firm, but loving, by . . .

9) We intend to teach privilege and responsibility by . . .

Child Development¹⁰⁸

In order to better understand the growing-up process, it will be helpful to survey some of the major categories and transitions in child development. Luke 2:52 provides an appropriate model of development from the adolescent years of Jesus. He grew intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially.

Two Factors Affecting Development

Scientists recognize that there are two factors that directly affect the process of human development, *hereditary factors* and *environmental factors*. Hereditary factors influence human development with respect to physical form, behavioral capacities and the rate of physical maturation. On the one hand, genetic factors provide certain limits while on the other the environment may either accelerate or retard the child's development within these limits. The genes are the chemical instructional code for the development and maintenance of a living organism. Every organism has a genetically programmed timetable for physical maturation. Generally speaking, environment can be controlled, while genetics may not.¹⁰⁹ Five of every one hundred children have some kind of genetic defect. Three of every one hundred children are mentally retarded.¹¹⁰

It is important for parents to realize that their goal is to provide the best possible environment for the development of their child *within that child's limitations*. Much heartache and distortion has resulted from parents who attempted to force their child beyond his or her own capacity.

Sensitive Periods of Development

A sensitive period is a time in which a child is susceptible to certain kinds of environmental influences. The same influence, either before or after this period, will not have the same impact. The readiness of the child depends upon genetically guided environmental influences. For instance, the optimal period for rapid language

¹⁰⁸ The scientific data is drawn from J. Braun, D. Linder and I. Asimov, *Psychology Today* (New York: Random House, 1979); J. Baker and G. Allen, *The Study of Biology*, 4th ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1982)

¹⁰⁹ It may be noted, however, that genetic engineering is progressing at a staggering rate so that we are moving ever closer to the real possibility of genetic manipulation on a very wide scale indeed. This technological progress has potential for correcting genetic defects, but it also raises deeply disturbing ethical questions. For a look at the ethical issues of genetic engineering, see J. Kerby Anderson, *Genetic Engineering* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982)

¹¹⁰ D. Hampton, "Blessed Are the Retarded," *Raising A Joyful Family*, ed. J. Hunt (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 64.

development is approximately between 2 and 13 years of age. Some scientists believe that social and emotional development have sensitive periods, also. (Babies seem to have an innate drive to establish a love-relationship with a mother.) Other developments include reflexes and motor skills, sensory and perceptual abilities, and cognitive, social and moral developments. This developmental pattern was recognized even in ancient times, as in for instance, the special child foretold by Isaiah who was described in terms of his periods of moral and language development (Is. 7:14-16; 8:3-4).

Even in the animal world these sensitive periods of development are apparent. Studies of bird songs, for instance, have shown that for some species, exposure to their species-specific bird songs is necessary if such singing behavior is to occur in its mature form. Similarly, goslings “imprint” a mother-image toward the first moving object they encounter within a few hours after hatching.

Intellectual Development

Jean Piaget, Swiss psychologist, points out four major periods of intellectual development. It will be helpful to briefly scan these periods to better understand how a child’s mind progresses.

Sensorimotor Period (years 1-2)

In this period the child learns to act in the world—to get along practically within it. He/she develops the perception that objects have an independent existence apart from himself/herself. He/she learns that disappearing objects still exist.

Preoperational Period (preschool)

In this phase the child learns to think about objects which are not directly in front of him/her. This is representational thinking. For instance, a child may imitate someone else’s actions a long time after he/she has seen them. He/she looks at problematic situations and learns to mentally solve the problem. The child begins to play make-believe. He/she begins to use language (audio symbols) to represent concrete objects.

Concrete Operational Period (years 5-10)

At this time the child begins to reason in logical patterns. He/she develops the concept of conservation (coordinating thoughts about length and width) and the ability to classify (analyzing concrete objects and categorizing them into sub-classes). He/she can recognize dogs of different shapes and colors as still belonging to the general category of “dog.” He/she can begin to understand concepts like “taller” and “more,” whereas preschoolers generally cannot do this.

Formal Operational Period (adolescence)

Here, children begin to carry out systematic tests to prove or disprove possible explanations. They develop the ability to experiment systematically, to consider hypotheses, and to understand abstract principles.

Knowing the general stages of intellectual development can save a parent from expecting too much of his/her child too soon.

Social Development

Psychologists have by no means mastered the intricate factors that combine to produce human personality. However, their different studies have given to us some important insights into the process.

Three Important Perspectives

Biological

A child's temperament, that is, his/her patterns of response, activity and mood, can be seen very soon after birth. A baby's temperament will have a significant effect on the treatment it receives from parents and others. What one inherits biologically affects the experiences one has in life.

Cognitive

A child's processes of thinking, reasoning and role-modeling loom large in his/her personality development. Children construct schemes for knowing their social world. At early ages, they begin with simple recognition of familiar persons. Later, they "take roles," that is, they learn to see the world from the perspective of someone else by playing make-believe. During adolescence, when they develop a capacity for reasoning, they begin to question beliefs and teachings of parents and to formulate their own value systems. Though not identical, intellectual development and values development are related.

Behavioral

Patterns of behavior are learned and established through reinforcement, punishment, imitation, and the repetition of choices.

Stages of Social Development

Infancy

The most important social development of this stage centers around the phenomenon of *attachment*, that is, the emotional bond between the infant and its

main caregiver. This involves the interplay of nurture and security. When children are deprived of the opportunities to form strong emotional bonds, especially by extended separation from the mother, they exhibit agitation, protest, withdrawal and then indiscriminate social responsiveness. Later in life, they have difficulty in forming deep relationships.

The “terrible twos” is the period when the infant begins to desire autonomy as it sees itself distinct from others.

Childhood

The transition into childhood (at approximately 18-24 months) marks a change not only for the child but also for the parents. The parental role of nurturing lessens and the role of discipline increases. The parent seeks to instill his or her values in the child. Gender roles are shaped. Though biologically boys and girls exhibit temperament differences very early in life, generally neither can identify themselves as male or female until about two and a half years of age or older. In the childhood stage, sex-typed behaviors are shaped by the parents and others who reinforce behavior that is consistent with the child’s gender role and who provide gender role models to follow.

Adolescence

Adolescence begins with puberty (capacity for sexual reproduction) and is the transition between childhood and adulthood. The adolescent stage centers around the child’s establishment of his/her own identity. In the early teens, the adolescent is still very much dependent on his/her parents. Ten years later, he/she is generally able to provide for himself/herself. In between, the maturing child “finds” himself/herself.

Sometimes adolescents attempt to determine who they are by temporarily trying out different roles. Physical, sexual and social demands often produce internal conflicts for the adolescent. These conflicts are increased by growth spurts and pressures from the educational system to excel academically and to begin considering a life vocation. It is important that adolescents develop some sense of continuity between what they were in the past and what they will become in the future. By the time a young person arrives at college age, he/she will be at one of four levels with respect to identity achievement:

- Identity Achievement..., strong commitment to an occupation and ideology (this is the parental goal)
- Identity Search..., still attempting to resolve the identity crisis (if the child is here, show patience and understanding)
- Parental Absorption..., strong commitment to parents’ values and choice

of careers for them (this is still a dependent state)

- Identity Drift... uncommitted and unconcerned (try to avoid this state)

Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg, a well-known psychologist, has traced the developmental changes in children's conceptions of morality. Virtually without exception, moral development follows a pattern of stages with each succeeding stage growing out of and including the previous one. (Consider carefully the chart on the following page.)

The Moral Goal of Child-Rearing

Obviously, the highest level of moral reasoning is found in the final stage, a stage which children cannot reach and which adults rarely reach. The wise parent seeks to help his/her child advance in moral development without expecting of him/her levels of moral response beyond his/her capacity. It is very important for parents to be aware that moral development is not automatic! Some adults have never left Substage 1. It is also important to be aware that the stages of moral development apply not only to the moral expectations of society but also to the moral principles of the Judeo-Christian faith. Probably few believers are able to internalize the moral principles of the Bible at the level of Substage 6. As children advance in age, parents should deal with them in ways that encourage them to perform on higher moral levels.

Biblical Examples

While Kohlberg's theory of moral development is certainly not based on theology, examples that fit his categories of moral decision-making are not difficult to find in the Bible:

- ♦ Substage 1: Saul's disobedience (1 Sa. 13:7-12)
The man with one talent (Mt. 25:18,24-25)
- ♦ Substage 2: Adam and Eve's disobedience (Ge. 3:6)
Achan's theft (Jos. 7:19-21)
- ♦ Substage 3: Saul's sparing of Agag (1 Sa. 15:3, 9, 13-26)
Ananias and Sapphira's gift (Ac. 5:1-4)
- ♦ Substage 4: Pharisaic legalism (Mt. 23:23-24)
Jephthah's rash vow (Jg. 11:30-40)
- ♦ Substage 5: Peter's defense of Jesus (Jn. 13:37-38; 18:10-11)
Paul's vow (Ac. 21:20-26)
- ♦ Substage 6: Abraham on Moriah (Ge. 22:1-14)
Jesus and the sabbath (Mt. 12:9-14)

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

AGE 7-10	PRECONVENTIONAL STAGE: "Good" and "bad" = pleasure or pain
	<p>Substage 1: <i>Obedience orientation (the child makes moral decisions in order to avoid punishment)</i></p> <p>Substage 2: <i>Marketplace orientation (the child makes moral decisions in order to be rewarded)</i></p>
AGE 13 and Up	CONVENTIONAL STAGE: "Good" and "bad" = meeting or failing to meet the expectations of the family, group or society
	<p>Substage 3: <i>"Good boy/good girl" orientation (the child makes moral decisions in order to gain approval or to avoid disapproval by others, whether real or imagined; such approval may be sought in parents, teachers, the extended family, or peers)</i></p> <p>Substage 4: <i>"Law and Order" orientation (the child makes moral decisions in order to gain honor or to avoid dishonor from the civil law or other institutions of power; behavior is controlled by "the rules")</i></p>
AGE ?	POSTCONVENTIONAL STAGE: "Good" and "bad" = decision-making on the basis of internalized values that are one's own apart from the authority of groups and/or one's participation in groups
	<p>Substage 5: <i>Social contract orientation (the person makes moral decisions in order to maintain social balance and self-respect; a primary concern is what is best for society as a whole rather than merely one's own personal preferences)</i></p> <p>Substage 6: <i>Internalized ethics orientation (the person makes moral decisions based on his/her own standards of conscience, regardless of the consequences)</i></p>

Parent/Child Responsibilities and Relationships

Relationships between parents and children are surely just as important as relationships between spouses. Most of the things applicable to couples are also applicable to parents and children in the area of building relationships, including mutual respect and love, a healthy self-image (and the image you might project upon the child), temperament, meeting needs, communicating, and so forth. However, there are some special areas of concern which particularly apply to the parent/child relationship which are different than in a husband/wife relationship:

Basic Responsibilities of Children

The 5th commandment in the Decalogue calls for honor from children toward parents, and this probably included not only an attitude of young children to parents in terms of obedience and respect, but also of adult children to aged parents in terms of support, care and deference (Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16).¹¹¹ That parents were sometimes mistreated is evident in certain wisdom passages (Pro. 19:26; 28:24). Severe penalties were exacted under the Mosaic covenant for severe mistreatment of parents (Ex. 21:15, 17; Dt. 21:18-21). While this latter harshness is not carried over into the New Testament, it is clear that the early church assumed that moral directives for children were still appropriate (Ep. 6:1-3). The fact that the child is to honor *both* father and mother implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between parents. Honor and obedience go together (Col. 3:20). Probably the very best role model for a child's obedience is the obedience of Jesus the Son of God (Lk. 2:49-51; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38).

Basic Responsibilities of Parents

Biblical role models for parents are to be found in several places in Scripture. Paul, for instance, exemplifies the model parent in his evangelism ethics (2 Co. 12:14-15; 1 Th. 2:7, 11-12). Specific commands are given to fathers (Ep.6:4; Col. 3:21) and to mothers (Tit. 2:3-4). In addition to these injunctions, it is well to remember that children learn by imitation as well as by instruction. A parent's respect toward outside authority will more than likely have an effect on the child's sense of respect for parental authority (cf. Ro. 13:1-2; He. 13:17).

Being Fair

"Fairness" is very often interpreted to mean "sameness," but this definition is probably not the best. Fairness has to do with impartiality, that is, an absence of favoritism or prejudice in making a judgment or in showing love and attention. Because children are different in needs and temperament, fairness often requires individual treatment which is not the same for one child as for another. However, there is often a fine line of difference between treating children individually and acting unfairly. Parents must be sure to treat all children with equal love if not equal action. Showing favoritism will inevitably lead to trouble (e.g., Ge.25:28; 37:2-5).

Childhood Stress

Children face unique kinds of stress which are related to their growing

¹¹¹ J. Hyatt, *Exodus [NCB]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 213.

independence from parents, to their academic and social expectations at school, to their struggle to determine self-identity, and to the agonies of their changing bodies. If their homes are broken and/or if both parents work, this adds another kind of stress. According to psychologist Antoinette Saunders of Chicago, 7 million children come home to empty houses. Children are increasingly diagnosed with ulcers and migraines, serious depression, and suicidal tendencies. The child as a carefree person is becoming only a modern caricature of reality.

There are ways in which you can assist your children in handling stress.¹¹² It is of great importance that children like themselves -- that parents convince their children that they are worth liking. If the child regularly hears “maybe tomorrow” (the disengaged parent) or “I’m too upset to talk to you” (the inadequate parent) or “because I said so” (the demanding parent) or “you’d better let me help you” (the overprotective parent) or “you dummy” (the critical parent), then the child will have difficulty accepting himself/herself. There are three fundamental ways in which parents can “validate” their children:

- *Listen:* When parents nod and say, “Uh huh,” while having no idea as to what has just been said, children are rarely fooled. When a parent really listens to a child it demonstrates that he/she takes the child seriously. Parents need not immediately assume that the child is asking for advice; children may simply want sympathy or the opportunity to try out a solution they came up with on their own.
- *Touch:* Hugging and touching our children shows that we like them and that they feel good to us.
- *Enjoy:* Giggling with our kids, good-natured teasing (that is not pushed too far), and the seeking out of our son or daughter’s company shows that they are fun to be with. Don’t neglect the important “goodnights” at the end of the day and the important “goodbyes” when the child is leaving for school. Direct verbal expressions of “I love you,” accompanied by hugs, are worth their weight in gold!

Avoiding Abnormal Social Development¹¹³

Abnormal social developments are often the result of unfulfilled expectations. In normal speech, it is almost impossible to avoid raising expectations. Often simple

¹¹² A. Saunders and B. Remsberg, *The Stress-Proof Child* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston).

¹¹³ B. Gothard, “Authority and Responsibility,” *Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts/Syllabus* (Oak Brook, IL: Institute in BYC, 1975) 2-4.

encouragement, wishful desires, and speculations are taken as promises by children. Following is a common pattern of abnormal social development that results from unfulfilled expectations and a wounded spirit.

A Child's Unfulfilled Expectations

SYMPTOM	PARENT'S RESPONSE	CHILD'S RESPONSE
Communication Breakdown	Tendency to overlook the symptoms as temporary	A wounded spirit
Ungratefulness	Tendency to compare the easy life of the child with the hardships of one's own past life	Alienation of affection
Stubbornness	Tendency to coax the child to obey	Rejection of authority
Open Rebellion	Tendency to increase demands and to tighten regulations	Establishes self-authority
Wrong Friends	Tendency to begin a "Family FBI"	Finds compatibility in the rebellion of friends
Defensiveness concerning choices and actions	Tendency to compare present morality with past morality	Seeks fulfillment of sensual desires
Condemnation of others	Tendency toward self-justification	Deep sense of guilt
Frivolity and/or depression	Shocked, desperate, grieved, and frustrated	Thoughts of self destruction

The problems of the above behavioral distortions are frequently projected beyond childhood into adult relationships. Family conflicts are carried over into relationships with fellow-workers, adult friendships, and one's married life. The way a girl responded to her father as a child and a teenager will often become the way she responds to her husband in adult life. The way a boy treated his mother as a child and a teenager tends to become the way he will treat his wife as an adult.

Expressing Love

Though parents are no longer priests for their children as in ancient times, the empathetic qualifications of priesthood are worth incorporating into the parent/child

relationship (He. 5:2-3). The qualities of love which should exist between fellow Christians should also be characteristic of parents and their children (cf. 1 Co. 13:4-7). Far too many parents limit their expressions of love to primarily material provisions (i.e., “My child has no reason to question my love—look what I have given to him/her!”) While material provisions may indeed be one way of expressing love, material things, as impersonal objects, are superficial and are by no means the deepest way of expressing affection. What children are really asking for and what they really need is summed up in the following points:¹¹⁴

1. “Love me --I need you!”
2. “Respect me --I am an individual!”
3. “Trust me --I must learn to make my own decisions!”
4. “Accept me -- even though at the moment you can’t agree with my ideas!”
5. “Forgive me -- and then let’s forget it!”
6. “Listen to me --I may just have had a good idea!”
7. “Be honest with me --tell it like it is”
8. “Teach me of Christ --by *your* everyday life!”

In expressing love, parents must find a balance between:¹¹⁵

- Providing authority while allowing proper freedom
- Providing correction and discipline while giving encouragement and showing acceptance
- Providing personal guidance while allowing for growth in responsibility and initiative

Finally, and perhaps most important, parents must verbally express their love to their children --and do it often!

The Generation Gap¹¹⁶

Somewhere in the teenage years there develops what is popularly called the “generation gap,” an extra relational distance between parents and children. More properly, this phenomena has to do with communication failure more than with generational differences. Three things affect this situation. First, the teenager is no

¹¹⁴ E. Jackson, “Dear Dad and Mom,” *Raising a Joyful Family*, ed. J. Hunt (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 70-75.

¹¹⁵ Staff, *Parents and Children: God’s Design for the Family* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1980) 33-34.

¹¹⁶ R. Zuck, “Bringing Down the Parent-Teen Wall,” *Being A Caring Father*, ed. T. Miller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 82-85.

longer a child. He/she is making that awkward transition from dependence to independence. Parents must begin to “let go” without letting go completely. Second, teenagers are sorting through the differences in value systems between the standards of their parents, their church, their peers, their teachers, and society at large. Wise parents will discuss and measure values together with their children, not merely impose them. Third, parents as well as teens are making adjustments. (Parents have never had to live with teenagers before!)

Following are some suggestions for bridging the gap:

1. Set the example yourself for both values and communication.
2. Do not withdraw controls altogether nor stifle freedom altogether.
3. Be firm, loving and fair.
4. Listen!
5. Talk with your teenagers (to talk *with* is not the same thing as to talk down).
6. Be interested without being nosy.
7. Develop “familyship” (do things together that *they* want to do).
8. Maintain regular family worship (take your children to church, don’t just send them)
9. Keep on praying and trusting in God’s help.
10. Remember, the disease of teenage-itus is temporary!

Asking Forgiveness

Parents are at best imperfect; no one questions that fact. However, parents sometimes feel obliged to present the image of perfection to their children. In seeking to maintain this image, parents display arrogance and hypocrisy. Instead, they ought to frankly admit their mistakes if their mistakes have injured the child. Forgiveness is in order to be asked and given!

Corporeal Discipline

One of the most controversial subjects in parent/child relationships concerns the methods of child discipline, particularly spanking. On the one hand corporeal punishment, at least for the Dr. Spock generation, has been frowned upon as primitive and unnecessary. On the other hand, the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament clearly endorses corporeal punishment (cf. Pr. 10:13; 13:24; 19:18; 20:30; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17).

The Christian parent is often torn between the biblical advice concerning spanking and the terrible reality of battered children. Some Christians wish to

relegate spanking to the primitivism of an ancient culture which has no relevance for the modern world. Other Christians use the passages in the Old Testament to justify their frightful abuse of their children. Fortunately, there is a humane balance between the extremes of child abuse and anarchy.

It is first of all important to read the biblical passages regarding spanking in the context of Wisdom Literature. Wisdom Literature is not law, and the person who views the passages on corporeal punishment as though they were mandates is pressing the literature beyond its intended use.¹¹⁷ Rather than apodictic, wisdom literature attempts to provide an intuitive insight into life, its dangers and its joys.¹¹⁸ The Proverbs do give wisdom which is endorsed by God so long as one keeps in mind the limitations of Wisdom Literature and the fact that such literature deals in generalisms, not absolutes.

Spanking is not a miracle tool. It may be effective with some children and ineffective with others. If a parent chooses to use spanking as a method of discipline, several things must be kept in mind. First, remember that spanking operates at the lowest level of motivation with regard to Kohlberg's theory of moral development. While the motivation toward good behavior based on the threat of pain may very well be quite appropriate for children at relatively young ages, it becomes inappropriate when children are capable of being motivated at a deeper level. Second, in view of the increasing awareness of child abuse, a parent must be highly self-critical about the use of pain as a method of behavioral modification. Spanking a child must not be retaliatory. It should not be done in anger. It should not physically injure the child (bruises, welts). It should be followed by concrete expressions of love. The use of an independent object (like a switch) instead of the hand (which may cause either physical or psychological damage) is preferable.¹¹⁹

If a parent decides not to use spanking as a method of discipline, some other effective measure must be adopted that is appropriate to the child's level of moral development. Mutual discussion and agreement between the mother and father concerning the methods of discipline and punishment is important. If parents are divided concerning the methods of discipline, their differences will undercut their effectiveness.

¹¹⁷ W.Mouser, Jr., *Walking in Wisdom: Studying the Proverbs of Solomon* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983) 13-14.

¹¹⁸ W.Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 192.

¹¹⁹ A very sane and Christian approach to child discipline, including spanking, may be found in J. Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970).

Preparing Your Child for Adulthood

In the truest sense of the word, the job description for parents is to work themselves out of a job. It is to prepare their children for a life of self-sufficiency in society, not excluding, of course, their dependence upon God. The following areas are important in this process.

Discipline (Pro. 19:18; 29:17)¹²⁰

Abundant love does not make discipline unnecessary; it only makes it palatable. The idea that affection is enough by itself results in social disaster. If parents are to reach their bigger goal of training a child to be self-disciplined, self-controlled, and respectful of others, they must understand that love and discipline are to be balanced. Love without discipline or discipline without love are unbalanced extremes. Both extremes lead to behavioral and psychological distortions.

Work

Dr. James Dobson is quite correct in saying that the proper time to disarm the teenage time-bomb is 12 years before it arrives.¹²¹ Much adolescent behavior is the culmination of patterns developed in the early years. It is important, therefore, to begin the training for responsibility early. Household chores are important, because children are members of the family who share its benefits, because it is important for a child to be involved so as to develop a sense of responsibility toward helping the home function, and because the jobs must be done. Chores should be geared toward the age level of the child, as in:¹²²

- Preschool Age - Put away toys, empty wastebaskets, bring in mail, sweep porch, run errands in home, put away papers and magazines, etc.
- Grade School Age - Set up or clear the table, wash or wipe dishes, iron flatwork, wash windows (inside), make beds, rake leaves, sweep out the garage, shovel light snow, use the vacuum cleaner, etc.
- High School Age - Put up storm windows, help with younger children, mow lawn, shovel heavy snow, paint, make simple home repairs, mend clothes, prepare entire meal, etc.

Be sure not to succumb to easy “cop-outs” like, “You won’t be able to do it right”, or “I can do it more quickly.” Children are not perfect, and they lose interest

¹²⁰ J., Dobson, “Dare to Discipline,” *Being A Caring Father*, ed. T. Miller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 36ff.

¹²¹ Dobson, *Being*, 41.

¹²² J. Eicholz, “Children Deserve Chores,” *Raising A Joyful Family*, ed. J. Hunt (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 118.

quickly, but you owe it to them to give them room to develop.

There is a caution to be added about payment. If all household work is on the basis of remuneration, the child will not learn responsibility; he/she only learns to work for a material reward.¹²³ On the other hand, chores that are beyond the immediate welfare of the family unit may very well be worth paying for, particularly because they teach the child the relationship between work and profit.

School work is a prime arena in which to develop either responsibility or irresponsibility. Parents should be aware not only if their children are doing their homework, but *how* they are doing it.

Leisure

Children should learn discipline in leisure time, also. Sports, TV time and extra-curricular school activities should be *planned* events, with both parents and children discussing when and how much. Parents should plan on leisure times which the whole family can enjoy together. There is no harm and much good in allowing children to help plan vacations responsibly, both in terms of activities and budgeting.

Special attention should be given to the subject of television, since it is such a pervasive media and since the average American family spends so much time watching it.¹²⁴

Exposure and Effects

The average child sees 11,000 TV murders by age 14. Violent behavior on TV may cause aggressive behavior in children, and horror is psychologically damaging. Since children ape what they see and hear, they often do not distinguish between the real and the unreal, the violent and the non-violent, the bad and the good behavior. They become confused, and some have been hospitalized after trying to imitate TV characters. Also, kids eat too much junk food while watching TV, and they do not get enough exercise.

Long-Range Effects

Some of the effects of over-exposure to TV are long-lasting. Children who watch late night TV programming do not complete their homework, are sleepy the next day in school, and have a shorter attention span than normal. Their reading skills do not develop, and they do not learn necessary social skills by playing with friends. Two or more TV sets splits up the family, and family life is sacrificed. Remember,

¹²³ K. Leman, *Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revel, 1984) 50ff.

¹²⁴ The following statistics and suggestions were all taken from a brochure for parents published and distributed by the Troy, Michigan Public School District.

children need “time out”—a quiet time to think so that they will have better mental health.

What Can Parents Do?

Read to your children, or encourage them to read for the same amount of time they watch TV. Encourage the kids to finish their homework *before* watching TV. Plan enjoyable mental and physical activities, both indoors and outdoors. Do not use the TV as a babysitter; and help your kids to learn to entertain themselves. Avoid excessive or violent TV viewing in your home, and always remember, there is another choice—*turn the set off!*

In working toward controlling your TV, insist on a limit to TV time, and make it stick. Discuss what is real as opposed to what is unreal. Explain how violence can be harmful, how real people can be hurt. Provide adequate lighting in the TV area. Watch for symptoms of tiredness, listlessness, glassy eyes, trance-like states—all signs of poor health or too much TV. Talk about ways problems could have been solved other than the way they were solved in the TV story. Make meals a family event, and do not eat them in front of the TV set. Choose your food carefully, not according to what TV characters eat.

Finally, watch TV with your children. Help them select the right TV programs by checking the TV listings in advance. Try to watch programs that are fair in their treatment of people and that are not violent or too sophisticated in content. Plan *with* your children what shows they can watch, even when you intend to be away from home. Be aware of public television and its special programming, especially programming geared to children.

Decision-Making

As a child grows older, he/she becomes increasingly responsible for decision-making. As in other areas, such as house chores, the opportunity for the child to make decisions on his or her own must be geared toward the maturity and age level of the child. Too often, children are given no latitude to make decisions until it is time to leave home, and then they must make all sorts of decisions without any practice! The home should be a place where decision-making can be practiced before the consequences are so grim.

Sex Education

Sexual awareness and sexual exploration are normal in children. Usually by the age of 3 or 4 the child thinks of himself/herself as a boy or a girl.¹²⁵ Children begin

¹²⁵ Braun, Linder and Asimov, 382.

learning gender roles, they discover their own genitalia, and they gradually begin to ask questions. The responses which parents make to these early signs of sexual awareness will often set the tone for the child's sexual future. Following are some "rules of thumb:"

1. Sex education should proceed at the approximate rate of sexual awareness and question-asking.
2. At an early age, children very naturally wish to touch their own bodies. Give them guidelines that explain that it is permissible to touch themselves, but that they should not touch other people's bodies.
3. Don't panic if you catch your child "playing doctor." (About 95% of women and men admit to "playing doctor" when very small.¹²⁶) Simply take your child aside, explain that his/her curiosity is natural, and caution him/her about touching the bodies of others. Explain that you will get a book to help answer questions, and then set aside a time to do so.¹²⁷
4. Most schools announce in advance if and when they will cover sex education materials. There is often a previewing opportunity for parents. Take advantage of it, but don't *depend* on the school system for sex education and sexual values. *You* should be the first source for your child's sex education.
5. Pace your child's sex education to his/her physical, social and emotional development. Sex education should be a process over a period of years, not a one time session.

Spiritual Development (Ps. 78:1-8; 2 Ti. 3:14-15)

The spiritual development of your child *must not* be left to the church and the church's educational agencies. Your home is the center for spiritual development. This means that you should practice devotions with your children, including prayer, Bible-reading and discussion of spiritual things. If you read a passage, discuss it with your child so as to stimulate his/her interest in God's Word. Spend time discussing spiritual values in a non-confrontational setting. Pray with and for your child. The church should be the supplement, not the main source, for your child's spiritual development.

¹²⁶ Leman, 167.

¹²⁷ Two helpful books for children are: Sidonie Gruenberg, *The Wonderful Story of How You Were Born* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday) and Grace Ketterman, *How to Teach Your Child About Sex* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell).

Leaving Home

The last stage of parenting, at least in the sense of child-rearing, is the process of emptying the nest. All the previous stages lead up to this finale. Ideally, you should be preparing your child for financial, social and psychological independence. The “hanging on/letting go” tension is probably as difficult for the parent as it is for the child.

Impact Project

INTERACTION SECTION | 20 MINUTES

Adapted from PARENTS AND CHILDREN: GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1980) 78-79.

SETTING: Stay together as a couple, and complete the following.

INSTRUCTIONS: The following suggested areas of training will help to focus on the goal of preparing your child(ren) to leave home. With your spouse, examine each topic and age category carefully. Discuss together how you intend to accomplish your goal.

Selected Topics for Training

Birth to Age 6	Ages 6 - 12	Ages 12 - 20
MENTAL Honesty Speech and other self-expression Basic reading skills	MENTAL Determination Alertness Appreciation for reading Good study habits	MENTAL Wisdom Discernment Financial understanding -- budgeting, saving, giving
PHYSICAL Coordination Children's games Cleanliness Neatness	PHYSICAL Hobbies & sports Good eating habits Cleanliness Neatness Sexual knowledge	PHYSICAL Endurance Driving a car Sexual control Good habits in physical health
SPIRITUAL Reverence Obedience & honor to parents Discipline Forgiveness Faith Truth	SPIRITUAL Self-control Joyfulness Honesty Understanding the gospel Appreciation for devotional time	SPIRITUAL Diligence Love Faith Knowing God's will Confidence in God Appreciation for devotional time Understanding the Bible Overcoming Temptation
SOCIAL Playing with others Fairness Attentiveness Contentment Gratefulness Security Meekness	SOCIAL Patience Dependability Punctuality Compassion Thoughtfulness Responsibility Accountability	SOCIAL Sincerity Generosity Humility Relating to the opposite sex Appearance Serving others

