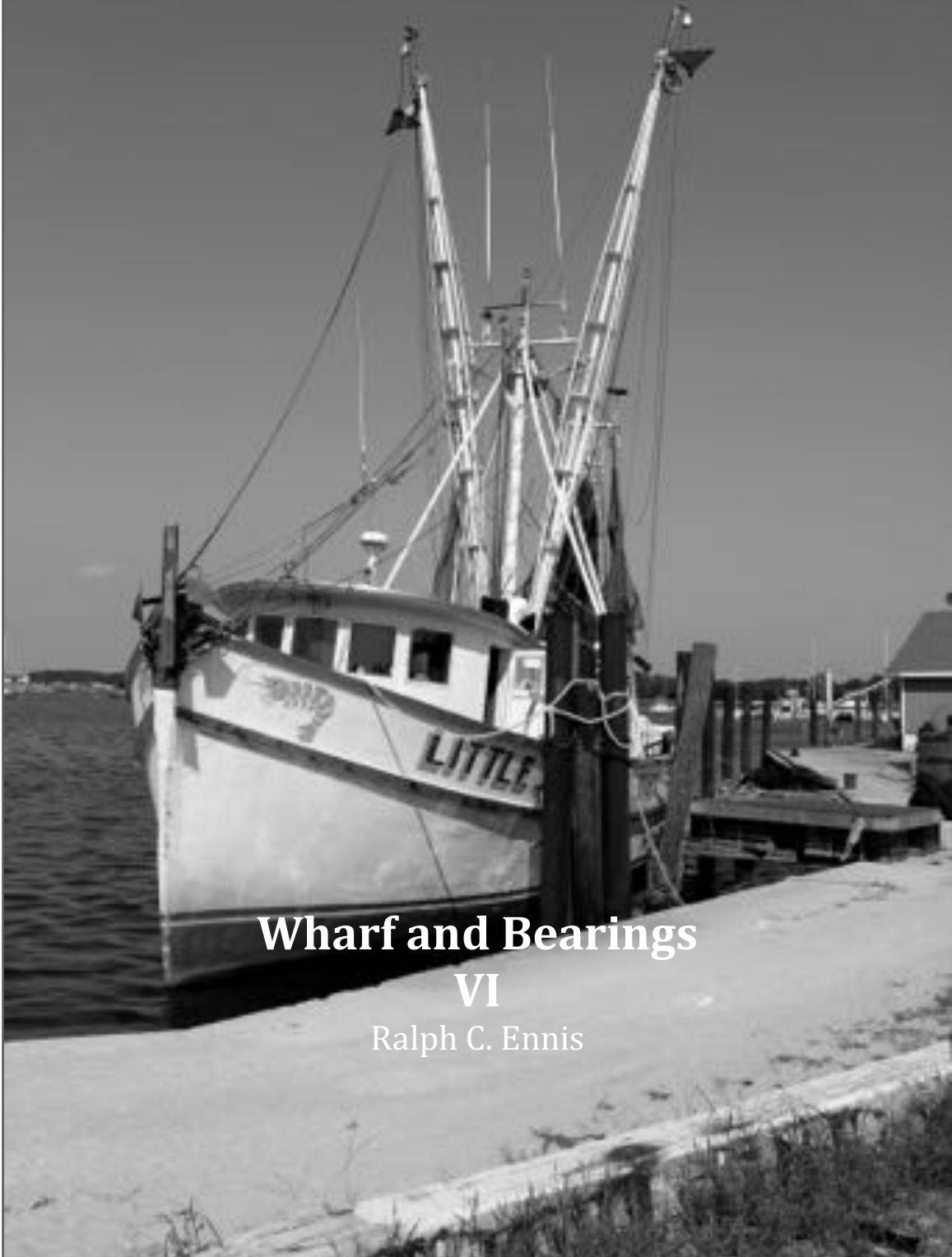


Essays on Oneness in Marriage



Wharf and Bearings

VI

Ralph C. Ennis

Wharf and Bearings VI

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Oneness in Marriage*

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Oneness in Marriage

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Introduction to WB Series

As land dwelling beings, when we are at sea, two thoughts are always in mind—even if in the back of our minds. Where's the wharf—a safe place to dock? What's my bearing—which direction am I going and will it in time get me to a safe wharf?

We all need safe places. Fundamentally, life is filled with uncertainties. Sometimes we feel in control or at minimal risk of danger, but that is always only temporary. Our common human experience inevitably involves risks of the unknown. And through death, not to be feared, we journey to an eternal wharf in Jesus.

We all need a bearing that will get us where we want to go while preserving the ability to plot a course to a safe place. We can play far from this wharf, but we desire home.

Wharf and Bearings Series, a collection of essays, poems and a short story, is intended to present a journey—my journey. I share it with the hope that it will give some guidance as you seek your bearings and wharf throughout your life.

At no time are these essays to be considered exhaustive, they are pathways I have taken to find wharf and bearings for me. And collectively, they represent “philosophical peace” for me.



I dedicate this series to my wife of 40 years (in 2013), our four children and their spouses and our 13+ grandchildren and the generations to follow! Here's an overview of the series:

Wharf and Bearings ONE:
Hope and Beholding the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings TWO:
Spirituality and the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings THREE:
Knowing, Beauty, Ethics and Reality

Wharf and Bearings FOUR:
Love, Longings, Success and Consequences

Wharf and Bearings FIVE:
Poems from the Soul

Wharf and Bearing SIX:
Oneness in Marriage

Wharf and Bearings SEVEN:
The Mind, Decisions and Artificial Intelligence

Wharf and Bearing EIGHT:
World View and Culture

Wharf and Bearing NINE:
Gospel Implications

Wharf and Bearing TEN:
Our Times and Futures

*"... we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power,
and the wonders He has done ..."
Psalm 78:4 -6*

Oneness: Success and Pathways

A “Big Hairy Problem”: how can two become one? What is a successful marriage and how can we have one?

Success in marriage comes at many levels. In our culture we normally judge a marriage to be successful if each partner is happy. The pursuit of happiness rules the day. And yet happiness is always transient. It never lasts; disappointments come and grief is a reality. In order to better seek and access success in marriage, we need to look at five view of success and then pursue limited success. Those four are: spiritual, psychological, sexual, sociological and economic.

Below are questions within those views for exploring success in marriage.

Spiritual View of Success

Are we experiencing intimacy with God in the midst of our relationship?
Is the mystery of the Bridegroom and bride metaphor an increasing reality to us?
Are we experiencing a deep sense of oneness in marriage made in heaven: two becoming one—in Christ?

Psychological View of Success in Marriage

Am I happy? Are we happy together?
Am I developing as a human being in this marriage?
Are my strengths appreciated and used in this relationship?
Are my weaknesses protected by my spouse?
Is my naked shame being healed?
Do we trust each other at a soul level?
Does my spouse know me like no one else?

Sexual View of Success

Are our sexual needs and desires met in a way that honors each other?
Are we growing in the meaning of sexuality as related to the jealous love of God?
Are we properly relating to others outside our marriage without becoming sexuality involved with them?

Sociological View of Success

Are our biological clocks in alarm mode?
Are our children protected by our loving committed relationship?
Are our children growing to be responsible citizens in the kingdom of God who are giving and receiving, strong-willed and submitted before God?
Are we engaging with our grandchildren in a manner that draws them closer to God and develops their humanity in a loving environment?
Is our family engaging in the broader society in a manner of the ways and truth of the Gospel?

Economic View of Success

Are we surviving and thriving financially together?
Can we pay our bills and save for the future?

Limited Success

Are we avoiding the idolatrous trap of wanting to be “god” to each other?

Are we dealing with the limits of our physical capacities as we journey toward a transition through death to eternal life?

Below are twenty-two pathways for a successful marriage. This is not a formula, but rather a few guidelines that we have experienced as we have sought to walk with God in the land of the living.

1. **UNION:** Christian marriage is a union of three – God, husband and wife. Learn the privilege of coming before the throne of grace together in prayer. Couples who pray together daily have an approximate divorce rate of 1:10,000.
2. **HUMILITY:** Humility is a key agenda of God for marriage. To say, “I’m wrong, I just don’t know where I’m wrong” is a great place for cultivating humility. Pride will wreck any marriage.
3. **JEALOUS LOVE:** Jealous love is the glue of marriage bonding. Godly jealousy involves delight, protection, mutual possessiveness and development. It is a jealousy *for*, not a jealousy *of* another.
4. **POWER and AUTHORITY:** God has given the husband more authority in the marriage as the head. And He seems to have given more power to the woman. Her powers of beauty, sexuality and relationship are often formable! This dynamic tension between authority and power lends itself to encourage both man and woman in the pursuit of humility.
5. **SEXUAL LOVE MAKING:** Sex is about jealous love as well as pleasure and procreation. To see the jealous love of God symbolically played out in marriage is a holy thing. Sex is about body-bonding. Our bodies need love. We are completed in this bond in a unique way.
6. **NO SECRETS and SHAME:** Shame and hiding are corrosive to marriages. The pathway forward is through no secrets between spouses and before God. Honesty with integrity that seeks relationships is a holy venture for marriage.
7. **MYSTERY OF INTIMACY:** Openness and union are the opportunity of marriage to provide healing for the soul. This is a true mystery before God. The mystery of marriage is to guide us into the mystery of God.
8. **KINDNESS:** As fallen people we need kindness and forgiveness. Constant criticism and judgment will erode most souls.
9. **FORGIVENESS:** It is a blessed thing to say, “I’m truly sorry I hurt you, please forgive me. I was wrong.” We all sin. And we need the humility to ask forgiveness from a heart that is truly grieved by one’s actions. How we handle sin and forgiveness will determine much in marriage.
10. **KIDS:** The best gift you can give your children is to love God and your spouse. This foundation of stability will bless your children through the generations. Children will grow and leave—that is their destiny. However, they are best formed within a family where the parents deeply love each other and God.

11. **MONEY:** Money buys opportunities but never security. Be careful how you approach money and never let it become an idol before God. Greed destroys the soul. Give as an act of worship. Use money to serve and provide opportunities for others' strengths to develop. Give, save, spend, invest and empower others—these are all worthy uses of money.
12. **WORK:** Marriage is a place of work and it takes work for marriage to succeed. And work is an expression of our humanity within the places that God calls us to. To be blessed with work is a very good thing. Both spouses need to work—at a distance or at home. As we work, our humanity is developed in ways that play can never do.
13. **RESPECT:** The respect of persons is key to a long-term relationship that has many changes of identities over the decades. Respect is both given and earned. We must respect others as created in the image of God. We must earn respect through faithful, loving, honest living.
14. **ARE WE OK:** Most days we might not have the time to spend in long discussions regarding the state of our marriage. However, we can always at any time ask "Are we ok?" And if the answer is "no" then we can find a time as soon as possible to unpack the issue before us. This daily simple question that touches the soul can proactively eliminate the build up of unresolved issues and toxic attitudes within a marriage.
15. **DEVELOPMENT:** Each year expect to grow and develop as a person and help your spouse do so. We are all people with much potential. Our strengths can flourish more. Hidden talents can surface in older years. We are more than the roles we currently fulfill. A wise marriage seeks to development these strengths of partners.
16. **PRECIOUS:** We all count someone to be precious. And we all wish to be precious to someone. God alone is The Precious One. And we are to be precious to one another in marriage. Find ways to communicate that your spouse is precious to you.
17. **IDENTITY:** We all have an identity. And it changes throughout marriage. Managing these changing identities is necessary for a life-long marriage. Don't expect to be marriage to the "same" person forever. Yes, be married to one person who changes—sometimes slowly and sometimes rapidly. For instance, when children enter our identities are layered to include Mom and Dad as well as husband and wife. This forces change that should be celebrated—even if also feared.
18. **SUBMIT and SACRIFICE:** After the Apostle Paul stated clearly that we are to submit to one another, he clarified the roles of husband and wife by linking submission and respecting as core focuses for the bride and loving and sacrifice as the bridegroom's focuses. (See Ephesians 5.) Submit and sacrifice are not words in vogue in today's world. However, they are essential to life-long marriages.
19. **BEAUTY and FUNCTION:** Both beauty and function have their place in marriage. And there is a function for beauty and functions that are beautiful. Giving time and money to cultivate efficient functions and beauty that inspires the soul are both worthy expenditures of time and money.
20. **ADVENTURE and PLEASURE:** To be pleased is a worthy goal but not the highest goal. To venture into the world for adventure is a worthy goal, but no the highest goal either.

However, to neglect adventure and pleasure can make for a pretty dry marriage. Cultivate mutually acceptable avenues for both.

21. **COMMITMENT:** Foremost in marriage is a covenantal vow—a life-long vow that is more than sticking it out but rather working it out. When, not if, the going gets rough and all pathways to a happy marriage are blocked, the commitment to fulfill one's vows to work it out come center stage. If both are committed to work it out and seek God in the midst, then through the refinery of pain, marriage works to draw us close to God, to transform us into the image of Christ and for two to become one!
22. **GAINS and LOSSES:** Every marriage has gains and losses. The gains are usually easy to live with as long as humility reigns. The losses of health, opportunities, children, friends, etc. are sometimes very difficult to absorb and adjust to. Every marriage has more pain within it than the couples would have prescribed for themselves. And yet in losses, God meets us in His redemptive ways. Submitting our hearts to Him in losses can build a marriage on a platform of beauty with God—that's a great gain.

This list is not formula but rather guidelines. Hopefully they can provide a pathway for success in Christian marriage between a man and a woman and with God.

Written 2013

Fighting with Rules in Marriage

The art of Christian marriage always involves the art of fighting. Two people—with fallen human natures—intimately entwined in life, cannot *not* fight. We have competing agendas and limited resources. We long for the other to be attuned to these needs and to at least help meet them in a timely manner.

Fights can destroy marriage, or they can help build them. We can choose to benefit from fights if we adopt foundational mindsets, avoid certain behaviors and form beneficial habits for fighting. This essay suggests some of those rules for fighting.

FOUNDATIONS

“Us” mentality

If we adopt a mentality that we are fighting for “us” rather than fighting for oneself and against the other, then much of what remains is obvious and doable by the grace of God. If, however, we choose to fight for ourselves in a win-loose game, we seldom achieve the oneness in marriage our souls long for. We either win-win for “us” or we loose-loose for “us.”

Dance of power and authority

In marriage we dance around power and authority. Who has the most power in marriage? Though most husbands are physically stronger than their wives, a case can be made that wife often has a persuasive power over the husband. Sometimes that power is her changing emotionality; sometimes it’s her beauty and sexuality; sometimes her effective words or charm or something else. Through these and other powers, she can influence the agenda and timing within a marriage. And her powers can be life giving to her husband. Husbands often see their wives’ power as bringing color and life into their worlds. However, she is not God, or “god’ to him.

On the other hand, the husband has a God-given position of headship—he is head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. In this role, he is to love and sacrifice for his bride. He is to benefit his wife at every turn with protection and provision. But he is not God, or “god’ to her.

When all is well in marriage, this balance of power and authority is designed to help both husband and wife embrace humility before each other and before God. When out of balance, fighting often ensues.

Mutual submission

The art of maintaining balance in marriage is often the willingness to mutually submit to each other’s strengths. In Ephesians 5:21 we are called to “submit to one another out of

reverence to Christ.” This submission requires a humility that is acquired and reinforced through mutual submission.

Justice with mercy

Often fights are about justice. We want things to be fair in life. We want our fair share without hurts and suffering. And when life or marriage isn’t fair, we can demand justice.

However, if we really reflect on justice, no thinking person wants justice before the Holy God. We want mercy. Thus in marriage we should seek justice with mercy. We each desperately require mercy every day; we each deeply need justice with mercy.

Welcoming God into our conflict

We do not fight alone. We are always in the presence of God. We need to recognize His presence; invite Him into our fights; submit to His rule in our lives. Christian marriage is always about three: God, husband and wife. God seeks to heal our hurts and bring mercy, love, humility and truth into souls. To exile God from our marriage fighting is to risk great harm to our three-way union.

AVOID

All or none mentality

Avoid speaking all or none words such as “you never” and “you always.” Such generalizations almost always have exceptions. And those exceptions can form a basis for going forward into better ways of relating.

Threats and ultimatums

Few people like to be threatened or presented with ultimatums. We want choices that dignify our being—not mandates for conforming to another’s will. Instead of threats, make appeals. Instead of ultimatums, make compromises. Seek peace rather than war or conquests.

Sarcasm

When we speak, we can use words to build up or destroy. Words are very powerful. To whip them around as tools of torment will rarely bring humility into a marriage. Sarcasm is an art form that can be amusing, but in marital fights it often brings out the worst in both parties.

Indirect talk

For some, direct talk can seem either unnecessary or offensive. And yet indirect talk can lead to increased misunderstanding and suspicion. The art of talking directly without being brutal is shaped by each person’s heart’s desire to fight “for us” rather than to win for oneself.

Attaching character

If a person lies, he/she lies. That does not constitute the character label of liar—unless we acknowledge that we all are liars before God and ourselves. In marriage, deal with behavior and allow the Holy Spirit of God to transform both spouses' character over time.

Physical abuse

Anger can swell when we fight. However, there is no justification for physical abuse by either the husband or wife. This includes physical intimation as well as actual hitting. However, if this kind of abuse has occurred, make every effort to ask for and to give forgiveness and to reestablish trust within the relationship—this will take time.

High volume

In the emotionality of fighting, shouting with words and/or gestures can feel appropriate—a release of energy. However, such releases seldom help the process unless the other continues to feel safe. High volumes can be intimidating. And intimidation does not foster a “fighting for us” mentality. Maintain safety for both spouses and adjust the volume appropriately.

Pay back

Some fights can linger. We may resolve them a little at a time. However, over this time period, we should directly avoid finding pay back mechanisms within and outside of marriage.

HABITS TO FORM

PRAY!

As we together pray through our conflicts, we often find the humility to quickly resolve them. To neglect to pray before, after and even during conflict is a perilous thing.

Address issues promptly

Don't let the sun go down on your anger says the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:26. Work hard to work it out now.

Confront behavior

We all sin. We all rebel against God and His ways and purposes. We all are selfish, proud, lustful, greedy people. We inherited it from humanity's first parents.

So it comes as no surprise that our behavior in marriage isn't always pure, holy, loving, self-sacrificing, kind and truthful. We should in love confront each other's sinful behavior as well as our own. We should welcome God using our spouses to help us grow in Christlikeness—even when it hurts.

Listen with empathy

Listening is a tough skill. It's difficult to lay aside one's agenda within a fight to truly listen with empathy to our spouse. That takes discipline and practice year after year. Seek to hear what the other is saying about their inner lives. Listen and love.

Question motives carefully

It is one thing to observe behavior and another to judge motives. However, motives are key in the change of our character. Rather than accuse a spouse of bad motives, one might ask, "That really hurt me, what motivated you to do that?" Then listen carefully with empathy.

Look for one's own sin

In most marital fights both spouses are right and wrong—it's just a matter of percentages. Often one is 60-90% right while the other is 40-10% wrong. That means in almost every fight each has something to personally embrace and to grow from. Seek your "10%" error and you will often find the other will better be able to embrace their error as well. And sometimes the percentages will surprise you.

Forgive and forget

Fighting is about forgiving. We need to learn to forgive even as God has forgiven us. Marriage is a great playground for such learning. But God's forgiveness includes His inexplicable willingness to forget—to not continuously slap us with our prior sins as He seeks our good in transforming us into Christlikeness. And we should not throw into the faces of our spouses their previous sins after they have been resolved in mercy and truth.

Forbear and respect

Sometimes we just do not get it. We have blind spots that linger for decades in marriage and in relationships. We don't see how we miss and hurt others. At those points in our marriages, we need to offer forbearance and respect even as God forbears our blindness and respects our dignity in His image.

Return and make love

In marriage fighting often ends in loving making. After the wounds and healing from a fight, it is natural to reinforce our oneness with the preciousness of sexual union that solidifies our lifelong covenantal bond.

EXPECT

Expect benefit from conflict

We can expect to benefit from fighting well. Bad fighting can lead to deeper wounding. Fighting well can lead to deeper healing and oneness in marriage.

Heart revelations and intimacy

In the intensity of fighting, heart revelations are often made. We see more of our own hearts. We can grow closer. Our intimacy can deepen. Expect such wonderful benefits of fighting well within rules.

Spiritual transformation

We can expect that God is transforming us as we fight. Marriage is a playground for transformation. We see each other deeply. We can sharpen our edges as we confront and fight. We can embrace the pathway of humility and become more like Christ!

Intimacy with God

Marriage is a shadowland. We see in Christian marriage the true relationship God desire to have with His people. God is our Husband (Isaiah 54:5). As God has restored us to Himself, we can more deeply enjoy intimacy with Him even as we learn the art of fighting well in marriage and being restored to each other.

REFLECTION

How are you fighting in marriage? Are you growing in intimacy with each other? with God?

Written August 2013

**Masculine Musings on
Sacred Sexuality:**
*A Journey into the Beauty and
Jealousy of God*

An Invitation

You are invited to enter this writer's journey as he reflects on sacred sexuality. *Masculine Musings* is offered to the reader as one man's journey into mysteries that continue to unfold and are worthy of a lifetime of exploration. Please bring your imaginative soul with you as enter these writings.

Leaving

The road was predicable—at least to some. I had left the South of my youth looking for a life different from the heat, the nicety, the behind-your-back talking and the white-blackness of one's skin.

The trip West had been long, exciting and dull. My sight had explored the Appalachians and the Rockies, but my soul had only seen level ground. The same level ground I had longed to surrender.

I had gained much from the flat lands. I had an education. Mathematics flowed through my veins. Its beauty caressed my mind. My friends called this weird but I didn't care. Poetry was my pastime along with watercolors. Spirituality had blossomed early. Death, life, nature, beauty, simplicity and the eternal thoughts of more nourished my spirit to respect and embrace the ways of Jesus—though I was clueless of his wisdom. These I didn't so much leave behind me—I brought them with me. Much though, I left behind as baggage unnecessary for a pursuit of more.

I didn't describe the pursuit to my friends back home before my uneventful departure. They might not have understood. I don't think I understood. I told them I wanted to paint some different scenes this summer. Teaching non-Euclidian geometry afforded summers off. I didn't need to explain myself much more. But I knew there was more. I wanted more. Not that what I had was abhorrent. It was a good life – an incomplete life. All lives are that way in their 20's—so what?

Boredom. That was it. I hadn't named it yet. That was it. I wasn't down or up. I wasn't going left or diagonal, so I chose to go west. That was it. I chose to go. This was my decision. Not my parents, not my friends. All the decisions would be mine. That's what I wanted when I, Thomas L. Seymour, left Coastal North Carolina—to dispel boredom with un-entangled choices.

That was two months ago. All the decisions have been mine. I decided the route. I choose my meals. I talked to who I wanted too. I left. I went. I slept.

And now I'm bored again.

More

My antique Mustang came to a halt. Ford had failed me again or so it seemed. This time the transmission locked up and left me negotiating with a North Dakotan mechanic on my way home. I was glad to be in a town. The towing took 45 minutes and all we passed were some cows and distant farm tractors.

The good news was they could fix my car. The bad: it would take a week. Still I was fortunate and had come to believe that such interruptions would break my boredom and prolong my inevitable return to the fall semester. Besides, I had my watercolors.

After painting daily for four weeks, I had turned to a camera to preserve the continuous flow of my heart-mind-spirit impressions. I wanted memories. That I concluded early. Now in this small North Dakota farm town I would return to the poetry of the brush.

Soul boredom can be mastered with variety—if not by contentment—at an unexperienced level that I simply had come to call “more.” My friends had chided my inexperience as naivety and

stupidity. They would remind me that getting laid would solve my soul pursuit. Some had made it their sole pursuit, yet I saw the same boredom in their eyes. I simply wanted to try a different path. Theirs didn't seem the more I wanted.

Space

I always wondered what it would be like to be in space. In Temvick, North Dakota I found out. It's not exactly flat there, but you can see forever. Left, right or up—the space was mostly empty. Even the downward look brought little diversity to the experience.

Such a backward view of space, I would soon leave behind. For the variations of this space was infinitely accentuated by the unusual lack of difference. And so I felt my poetic, artistic and mathematical soul begin to merge with the faith I had acquired in a paradoxical Triune God of nature and purpose.

Teaching geometry gives one the opportunity to indulge in a mental worldview understood by few and appreciated by fewer. But for me it was a clarifying venture into the very nature of God. Last year I concluded that if one had only a belief in a Creator God one could clearly conclude two things about what this Deity liked. He, at a minimum, likes space and diversity because He sure created a lot of both.

And here I was in the midst of space sensually accentuated with nuances of diversity. The smells were different. Farmland always smells distinctly different from my classroom on Heights Street. The smell is not unfamiliar to me. It's just that the space is so pervasive, and the mixtures of odors so voluptuous.

Did I say voluptuous? That is a strange geometric word.

Strangeness

But then I am acquainted with strangeness. My friends use a different word for me. Affectionately they call me insightful - or sometimes weird. Just plain strange is ok. I don't run into many with my tastes in space and beauty.

The really strange thing to me is that I feel drawn to paint this space—its emptiness, its fullness, its smells, its pervasiveness and intrusiveness, its voluptuousness. Truly it has intruded into my soul or at least hinted that there exists a door into that soul-space.

Usually I would have simply said "Strange" and kept heading eastward. But today I'm stuck. It's been two days since my car was towed. I've already painted the town buildings. I've mystically embraced the uneventful train arrival and loading of grain. Now I must deal with this strangeness I feel as well as a busted transmission.

Another night in the local four-room motel should solve whatever ails me.

Space, Smells and Strangeness

I'm used to unusual things. They occur all the time in math, poetry, painting, in spirituality, in life.

But tonight my soul had a strange experience. Again at six, I went to the only diner in town which was built onto the motel. I ordered the last menu option I had previously neglected as well as my preferred drink for that time of the evening—a cold beer with salt and lime. (I know, a bit strange.)

When it arrived, it was attached to a true spatial rarity—Grace. In retrospect I think she just wanted to see for herself what kind of fool put lime in his beer and then only had one, for such was my ritual.

As I reached for my drink, I became very aware of the space between us. Where had she been these past three days? Had I been that taken with my own transmission to not notice?

Strangeness comes in many forms. This one was unfamiliar.

Now lest you go the road of my Southern friends who want me to just get laid, let me say more often than not strangeness and lustfulness and emptiness are usually my friends description of their last sexual encounter. I felt a strange moreness now.

Was the moreness I felt real or simply imagined or hoped for in my illusionary world? I hadn't been thinking of an event-encounter with femininity since that bad experience in California—all she wanted was a Southern footnote in her gossip channels. There goes my analytical mind again. Is there no space within that analysis has not explored? Is that what this waitress, whose nametag completed the fabric of her dress, had created ... an illusion?

Presence

But how does one meet someone in Temvick? Are the rules Southern rules? I didn't even notice if she had a ring. All I saw was her and her expression. All I heard was her politeness with an undertoned "Here's your beer." I'm familiar with undertones.

Does this encounter justify a move forward? "Who are you anyway? You bring strangeness to my boredom and I wish to explore your space with the painting and poetry of my mind ... or is it my soul you have touched?" Since such wordage wouldn't be looked upon favorably in Southern etiquette, I forego it here also—but barely on the inside.

Others might rush into this space. For confidence can tread where confused awe distances itself. I choose the latter. "Choose" may give me way too much credit. Rather I left that night bewildered that such an encounter would rattle me so deeply. It was this deep rattle I wanted not to deconstruct but to wrap my soul around—or was my soul being wrapped with her presence.

Presence that was it! Her presence had been accentuated by her perfume. It wafted around me with speed and effect. No. Her presence had presented itself clear through her geometry-muting dress. Or was it the pleasantness of her movements through the discrete space she transcended?

Now my mind can understand this phenomenon ... and control my response! Is that what I want?

Lust precedes mind. The fullness of her breasts revealed themselves despite the stubbornness of a dress cut not to reveal much at all. The clarity of her form came more through the mental urge to imagine her legs gracefully and invitingly crossed and pointing toward my unidirectional horny mind.

Been there, done that before. Lust only eats empty space and thus enlarging the awareness of it. I could fulfill lust alone in my motel room or in the ways of my friends. The results seemed the same—emptiness, not moreness.

I return to the memory of her presence ... at night, alone, staring upward ... and notice less emptiness in this spacious North Dakotan place.

Risk

There comes a time in a man's life that he must risk his masculinity. Rejection strikes a hard and definite blow – every time. Some deny its potency and simply act as though they don't hurt. They attempt the conquering game. They risk only the rejection of their male part, not their male soul.

Others shrink back and wait for a woman to initiate the dance—which in fact they often do, not with word but with the nuances of their presence. In the short run this seems both safe and efficient. In the long run the female seems to doubt the man's masculinity and her desirableness. If she wasn't worth the risk, what happens when her sexual powers wane in pregnancy or by age or by the sheer duties of motherhood? Will he risk the pursuit of her feminine soul then?

And so I'm left with confusion. I'm in Temvick. My car is sick but healing. School begins in three weeks. I've yet to find moreness. My painting and poetry will give me memories. And lo the geometry of my mind is in an utter state of chaos.

So I do what every confused male does. I distance myself to gather either my mind to understand and leave with dignity or my courage to pursue. Space is everywhere in this countryside. But distance is hard without a car. A car, a lonely road, those are my preferred tools to collect my mind and my courage.

The nearest park is at the end of town four blocks from my room. It's a nice park, even without a car. The small hills, the open field, the trees planted by the river—all intended to create a reprieve for people looking for more.

There were other options. A church was up the street, but institutional spirituality seldom satisfied me. A bar in the middle of town was an option. People don't have to change to enter there. But I saw no moreness coming out of that place. And I had already walked all the streets of the town. I don't know why I hadn't explored the park yet. Maybe I had reserved it for such a time of confusion.

It was not so much that I wanted to risk it all and throw away all my previous joys and pursuits. I liked my way of life, my mental and spiritual world. I even had grown fond of my emptiness and took pleasure in exploring it in poetry, painting and mental shapings.

I wasn't looking to risk that kind of loss. It was something different and deep down. It seemed to be linked to all the rest. My soulness was at stake my masculine soul.

By the time I reached the park my masculine soul was in full view of my mind, spirituality, heart ... and her glance!

Dancing Glances

Her face turned my way as I entered the park. Then back.

My masculine soul searched desperately for a place to hide. But retreat was hard to secure at such short notice. Now I have only choices. Do I continue on my path in her direction or turn left or right? To turn and run is out of the question, though not out of mind.

I will to go straight until she looks elsewhere and gives the silent uninvited cue that will solve this whole mess. She neither gazes nor rejects—only well-timed glances continue to draw me forward. A mixture of signals, enough not for my mind to understand and yet enough for my masculine soul to pursue—or be drawn to.

In like fashion, I glance about too ... as if to only casually notice her, yet my feet go forward acutely aware of our dancing glances.

Words

The distance closes but the space is beginning to open more as I find myself a few feet from her blanket and her book, looking at her ringless finger.

Now the risk must take the form of words. A small risk but a substantial one: “Hi. I saw you the other night at the restaurant” overcomes the words swelling in my heart— “What do you think of me? I don’t know what to think of you? But you have aroused not only my lust but also my soul pursuit of moreness? Who are you? Shall we play awhile—or dance in the terror of uncertainty?”

Without effort she casually engages in conversation. Mostly through questions about my Southernness, she learns far more about me than I do of her. The words come and go. But the space of the words seems to mingle and stick deep somewhere inside me.

In a while she asks if I would like to see the rest of the park pointing to a trail well used on the way to the prized river dock. I understand the hinted rejection and express no outward disappointment. “Yes, I’d better look around now.” Half turned and half disappointed ... she rises and offers to show me her park and her river.

My heart jumps. Is this moreness? I can’t help but think where does this footpath lead? No words forthcoming.

Another

It happened so quickly I can’t even parse the moment. One would think that a new acquaintance could not invade ones soul so quickly or deeply. But Henry made it clear to me.

Henry was seated on a bench around bend three of our walk. Henry was minding his own business. Henry was probably a nice guy—if I had met him first.

Seeing the two of us walking, Henry called out to Grace. His intentions were obvious. He was a friend. Everyone knew everyone. So it was in Temvick. But Henry felt like talking. After twenty minutes we left to finish our walk. In those lost twenty minutes, I began to experience the entry points of jealousy.

Shared spaced and jealous space: the mixture of the two is inwardly tumultuous. But did she think so also?

Damn you Henry. Thank you Henry—I think.

Detained

One can change one's plans if one wants to. And so I detained myself.

Two weeks later I returned to North Carolina with her full name, Grace Ann Reynolds, a photograph, an address, and a phone number. All my other memory devices seem to have become extra baggage.

And yes, an invitation to return someday to her hometown. And so I will, after penned thoughts and electronically spoken words, shorten the distance between us.

Addresses

Did I say I got her address? That was an understatement. She was home for the summer working in her parent's restaurant and would return to nursing school in Virginia. I got both of her addresses!

So beginning the school term took on a new twist. Teaching geometry with moreness perceived became an adventure in spatial exploration unimagined before. As I spoke of dimensions and distances, I dreamed on returning to Richmond on a weekend in the not too distant future. My body remained in the classroom. My heart, my soul and my imagination transcended the distance to place her presence close to the moreness in which I am being transformed.

This fiction written 2003; Updated 2005

Moreness Commitments

Moreness, the pursuit of a full, healthy, imaginative, self-giving, open soul with a sacred sexuality Christian marriage, requires commitments to habits. Without them the promise of more fades into disappointment, despair and eventual disillusionment. An unwavering commitment to moreness habits is a worth the journey!

Expressing

There comes a time in the pursuit of soul moreness that the prior means of exploration cease to be adequate and one ventures into the unknown.

A kiss is such an event. Not the everyday sort of kiss. Or the sneaked kiss. Or the kiss of lust. These I had all enjoyed. But the kiss of the soul goes far beyond such previous events or is it a continuum? For us it came after dinner one evening.

Walking alone the boardwalk after a day trip to Virginia Beach. Wait. Isn't this all wrong! Why have we waited so long to kiss? It doesn't seem natural? The urge to kiss had been present for a long time. I guess since that day in the Temvick park. I would have enjoyed wrapping my arms around her and feeling the tenderness of her lips and the warmth of her mouth. It would have rocked my world then. Why have I waited so long? Have I been so dishonest with my feelings, with my heart, with my sexuality? Was it fear of rejection that froze me in my place? Did she give no signs that a kiss would be welcomed? Was I that undesirable to her?

Now I'm left with questions of my manhood. Doesn't a real man press forward until received or rejected? Was I too afraid to risk? Why didn't she just kiss me first? Was she being honest with her passions? Were we just morally constricted or something? Such ramblings have no relevance without clarity of that kiss.

The dinner was excellent. The passion-tensions between us forbade us eat it all. The walk was on the sands. The moon was visible. The area was mostly deserted but a few were in sight. The wrapping of my arms around her waist was a beginning. Her body came without hesitation. Her eyes looked into my face as one surrendering and conquering simultaneously. I knew she was mine and that I was hers. Possessiveness, passion, and freedom can all be expressed in the eyes and with the tenderness of the lips.

Yes, it was the tenderness of her lips that so surprised me. Surrender can be expressed that way. A surrender of the soul for moreness. A surrender to the authority of my presence and my forwardness. A surrender of the body and the heart for moreness. A surrender of sexuality that expresses spirituality and joins with a Creator of such mysteries. Yet the power of this lingering kiss was as surprising as its surrender. Power can explode the mind as well as the senses. It can awaken the soul to moreness never perceived prior to.

Such was our kiss. Slowly we felt the tenderness of each other's lips. Passionately we gave of our souls. Without hesitation we opened to the other for now was the time, not before. The wetness of her tongue exploring mine, the softness of her arms rounded my neck. The urgency within my hands to explore more yet withholding to allow our souls to soak in the intoxicating mixtures of the kiss to our souls. The lingering continued as a mingling – far more than a lusting.

Expressing our souls with kisses was a venture we returned to often. The passion-tensions that had restricted our eating had found an outlet far more satisfying and yet foreknowing a deepening to come.

That night I returned to poetry to help my mind label this mutually enjoyed space.

Word Habits

A person's word is one thing. A person's living word is another. I can speak a word of intention to her. And as soon as it leaves my mouth distance surrounds it. I am distanced from my very own words. "I love you. Will you marry me? I vow to never leave or forsake you and to always cherish you till death separates us for goodness."

As these words separate from my lips, a space enters and an opportunity presents itself. What will I choose to fill this space? What moreness is needed? Is it not the moreness of living words?

Living words are forthcoming. They spring from the ongoing moment. They speak discretely, as separate and unique, and yet firmly pressed upon each other so as to feel continuous to me and to her.

Speaking words are alive. They surround the soul, the heart, the spirit—they invade the mind frequently limited by the brain's ability to attend. And so I give you my words, my living words—I am loving you till death separates the spirit from the body and my mind and soul are transformed into a mysterious beyond. Let us seal our living loving with the "I do" words before our community of friends and family—and before the Triune God Who Authored "two become one" in mysterious beauty wrapped with jealous love.

Thank you my love! My masculine risk-taking has been worthwhile. And has just begun.

Loving Making

To fill one's lips with honey. To have the limits of satisfaction flung past one's wildest imagination. To ride the waves of swollen pleasures. To dive beneath the covers of shame awareness. To untie the last string and gaze fully with hope and mutually blissful obsession. To surface with the smell of desires. To kiss without reservation and fill one's mind with the full presence of the desired. To take assessment of one's soul and to find markedly more there. To find that even God shares delight in our unobstructed jealous passion. Such are the hopes of loving making, of lovemaking.

Such hopes are within reach of the coming decades of commitments. The commitment to play under the moonlight, and daylight. Such hopes are always within the reach of the mercy of God—the life Giver for humanity.

Sensuality and Sensitivity

The dilemma of body and spirit is easy for the mind to grasp, difficult for the body and heart to manage, but resolved within the soul. Lust and love co-exist in unlocked passion surrounded with

protective jealousy restrained from its over-possessiveness. Does that seem obtuse—it is. But love making will follow some course.

That said, my eyes still see what they see. The space before me is possessed by the most marvelous of creatures! The lines swirl my mind and stir my desires. Desires to move forward, to caress, to kiss, to go quickly, to go slowly, to return often, to never forget, to be captivated yet freed! Still more confusing is her inability to perceive what I so deeply experience—her effect on me.

Lust would have me climb the hills and grab without consideration—to think only of my pleasure, not of our joint passion for body-soul union.

Love would have me consider the lifetime journey and act accordingly with all the sensitivity I can muster and more required. Unlocked passion surrounded with protective jealousy frees my heart to mix action with reflection, sensuality with sensitivity, and captivation without addiction.

And so I climb to the hills and take hold of the fruits and drink till the very fabric of my masculine soul has been merged with my mind and heart and spirit! But not without considering and nurturing the mystery of her feminine journey in parallel. Will I ever understand more deeply her reflections? Is not our merging a mingling?

Appreciation Habits

There are so many ways to appreciate my lover. Those natural ways I love appreciating her and those learned ways that deeply connect to her receiving. And the intersect of these two spaces. If there were no intersection, I doubt we would have ever begun our dance. Yet it is the management of the intersect that keeps us wildly experiencing moreness across the decades.

I love to write her poetry. She loves receiving it. I love buying her flowers. She loves receiving very fresh flowers. I love kissing her gently. She loves being kissed when in the mood. I love to travel some. She loves traveling afar.

She loves talking well into the night. I enjoy our dialogues anytime and especially before ten at night. She loves doing things together such as housework and shopping. I enjoy those things and watching TV together—sports and science fiction.

The lists of behaviors can be detailed but the heart of appreciation is at the core. For if we ever ceased to appreciate our differences and relish in our commonalities, the well springs within us would dry the moreness flowing between us. I can learn to show appreciation by many, creative means. I seem to feel it in only a few ways.

And so it was the morning I awoke before her. To gaze at her still and peaceful body asleep with her own private thoughts is the unguarded time for appreciation or contempt. Asleep she cannot read the nuances of my nonverbal signs. She cannot defend or influence. It is at that time I am most affronted with the power of appreciation and the destruction of contempt.

Silently I watch. I feel the vulnerability of our hearts' connections as I face the reality of my soul response to the one I profess to and indeed love. In the innocence of her sleep, any unappreciative thoughts can flourish or be dealt with.

In the innocence of her sleep the appreciativeness of my soul can swell to implore her to rise and dance! Shall I allow myself to be overcome by her sleep or by her wakeful caressing dance or both?

Gift Habits

Little gifts, large gifts. Gifts of time. Precious gifts. Spatial-temporal gifts wrapped with jealous love—these are the gifts for my beloved. Yet unexpected gifts are often the most fun to give and to receive. A gift is a thought. A thought is a gift. Extravagant gift giving need not break the budget.

Anticipation Habits

Trips are long and short and all the in-between concepts of time. Space does alter our perception of time. The space created between lovers' arms and the smells of a distant generic hotel bedroom distorts my view of time passing. A week can seem as three!

And yet such is the intoxicating power of anticipation. Space can distort time and heighten anticipation. But there are so many ways to heighten anticipation. One can pursue it as an art form.

A note left. A scent. A voice mail. A brushing public touch. A look. A silent encoded message from anticipations previously fulfilled.

Moreness can start in the mind. Even my bored mind. Or my busy mind. I can choose to anticipate. Or I can choose to ignore the power of anticipation and suffer the neglect of it.

So today I choose to anticipate. I need not wait for her initiative or response. To crank the gears of anticipation is not a foolish past-time but rather an act of moreness!

And so this very moment the delights of anticipation can rock my mind, swell my passions and expand the moreness of connection of our souls.

Remembrance Habits

To remember the first glance ... the first kiss ... the first letter ... the first dance on the beach ... the first touch of our souls.

Our world neglects the benefits of remembrances. The future, the cutting edge, the newness—such twists our souls from the deepen joys of the past. Yes, to live our love in the past would be a waste. But to live our love without the past would be a neglect too big to bear.

Pains can scare us from returning to the past. But the golden bits of passion and possibilities that were shattered there can be retrieved if care is taken.

Pleasures line our past. To retrieve these lines is to deepen their joys. And such is the remembrance of our mountain passes. Let us return often and perceive that which is only for us to perceive!

Togetherness Habits

Our lives are filled—with jobs and money, with babies and friends, cars and maintenance, and thoughts and imaginations, and the garbage, shoes and food.

Ordinary things make the vast majority of our time. But to embrace the habit of togetherness is to wrench meaning from the claws of ordinary boredom. It is the habit of togetherness that can bring the ordinary into the world of moreness.

And such is our garbage collections. To approach this waste without togetherness in mind is to neglect both the blessings of its amassment and the possibility of thankfulness. Waste is what is left after the precious is extracted. Can the precious surface without waste collecting? Can we not enter the thankfulness of waste collected together? For in such, our souls can be enlarged. Neither the precious bits kept or the waste extracted can rob us of the moreness of simply doing it together!

Tenderness Habits

What is tenderness? Is it not the time that I simply placed my hands upon the softness of your face? Is it not the time that you crawled into my lap and kissed me slowly? Is it not the time that we cried over the pains we had caused each other—and entered a space called forgiveness?

Tenderness of soul is not a gender difference. Is it not within the purview of being human, yet not limited to it? Cannot the tenderness of the lions and elephants and kittens reveal its beauty and moreness also?

To gaze into the eyes of a little puppy and see the tenderness God has sprinkled throughout creation is to question, “Does not God have a heart of tenderness?” Will the pursuit of tenderness lead me away from or toward more life?

And yet tenderness neglected can so easily damaged in our relationship. The pains of misses and defenses hurt the tenderness between us. Will the healed wound tissue be as tender as the original? Only with a relentless pursuit of tenderness can one remain tender or be tenderizing from scars.

Come my love into the tenderness of my soul for you! Seize this tenderness for yourself. Lay in it with all of your naked beauty and risk a thorn or two. For even those can be kneaded into softness with tenderness. We can mold what we encourage over decades—and if not, tenderness can still reign.

Initiative Habits

Who goes first? Is leadership always the act of the first? Are we locked into the winning-losing game with the sequence of initiative?

Today I initiate to pursue you. That is my choice everyday. But to initiate love requires giving and receiving. Or so it would seem.

Has not even God left Himself with the possibility of His delight in us initiating toward Him in the love dance of worship?

So I initiate to dance with you in my mind, in mutual pursuits, between the sheets, with words and the look of my eyes. And as we play together your initiative thrills my soul. The balance of initiations may vary from year to year but the joint aspect of them always creates the possibility of more!

Touching Habits

The pressures of the sex thing as prescribed by images in our culture often malign the habit of touching. Hot, rules-breaking, acrobatic sex seems the preferred. But is not the habit of soul touching missed in such an image?

Can I miss your soul with acrobatics? Can you touch the depths of my creative soul-touching in the rules-breaking picture of heat?

A touch in the night. Gentle fingers tripping the spine with a commonality of route and the extraordinary thing of commitment, can it not arouse more than the flesh? Doesn't the soul rise and dance and exhilarate with mere creative, playful lingering touches. The combinations are numerous. The mathematics of touch far exhausts the culturally preferred images of heat as does embedded infinities exhaust the abstractions of the mind.

Settings Habits

Is it strange that God should delight in us delighting in each other? Is it strange that God would delight in His created works? Is it strange that God would place His first couple within the beauty of a garden to enhance all such delightments? Is it not strange that God gave us flowers with their perfumes?

Sure our resources are limited—that is a condition of all humankind in every economic system. But the shared settings of the universe are for all to enjoy. Cannot we all share the beauty of a sunset over an ocean or the mountains? Who possesses these things so as to deny their possibility to others?

Our settings through the years have been both meager and astonishingly exquisite. Who can deny us the beauty of nature, even within an apartment with secondhand furniture?

And yet to enhance settings is to deal at the level of intended design. Did not the first couple enhance their union by tending to the beauty of the garden? Then let us not neglect our settings but find soul moreness there as well.

You, my love, are the master of the candle. With such a simple creation you have been able to change the entire ambience of an attic room. The smells stir the mind. The dim light highlights your swaying figure. The flicking flame speaks of anticipation. You are the master of settings and I adore you for it! With pale light you can entice my heart and deliver it softly into moreness.

Lingering Habits

To not linger longer in the effects of our present love would be to rush the experience of a ballet or gourmet dinner.

The effect you have on me this moment is pleasuring. It is comforting. It is mysterious. It is pain exposing and possibly healing as humility permeates us both. It is past the realm of plausibility and into the symbols of otherworldliness. It is fulfilling, intoxicating. And it reveals the holes within me.

Such effects I can run to and from within a matter of moments. You set fear and peace within me simultaneously! Lingering in these effects are the present awareness of our moreness.

Authority and Power Habits

Do we not dance the dance of power and authority? The reality of joint decisions demand us to. To decide is to enter these domains.

If we only decide to buy a curtain rod, we enter the dance. If we face the joys and demands of childrearing, we must dance with coordination for their sakes.

If we are we, then we dance with power and authority. If we fail to call it what it is, we can be destroyed by these. If we play without humility, they will destroy us.

It is not so much that we both have both but rather to what degree and when and to whom goes the balance. Is it not the woman that more powerfully impacts the man? Is it not her that even gives life to humanity? Cannot with one purposeful wink of the eye, she drag a male into her world of expectations? Who has the balance of power? To recognize such power is to be humbled in its presence. The power of feminine beauty has been at play from the first couple till today. Does not this power usually eclipse male brute force or even the creativity of masculinity?

To be "we" is to decide. To stay "we" is to admit the world of authority. For it is not if but when diverse perspectives will intersect and enough time to go down one road. Negotiations between power and authority are the playground of humility and pride. Shall I crush you with my authority? Shall you crush me with your power? The landscapes of moreness are decimated with such deaths!

Let us pursue the beauty, the dignity, the pleasure and the wholeness of humility as we dance the undeniable dance of power and authority!

Imagination Habits

The mind can be an awful-wonderful place to go. Its labyrinths are twisting, stimulating, exhausting, exhilarating and untamable yet guidable. Sometimes body passions push the imagination on to greater heights. At other times imagination drives the body into sheer fervor. At no time should imagination be underestimated or neglected.

One only poorly enriches moreness without giving time and effort to the glorious work of imagination—or should I say the glorious play! For the mind can play, if given a chance.

And so it has been our habit. We pull the sheets over our outside world and enter a world beyond, a world of secret languages. A world that when finished can be resurrected in full public without the knowledge of others.

No Secrets Habits

The human soul longs to be without secrets and fears the same. A hope of mingled moreness is complete and continuous nudity of the soul—in full gaze, in complete acceptance.

But its hard work to get and remain nude. The clothes of choice often include half-masks and deep eye shadow to cover the shame we feel for being human and experiencing the abuses of humanity. The distance between the good we conceive and our voyeurism of evil—of our perfection imaginations and our imperfect realities—can reduce the opportunity for meaningful conversation to cultural words of politeness such as “I’m fine. Are you OK?” or to angry outburst that seek to hid the fear of stripping again.

The habit of no secrets, concerning not every detail of the day, but every emotionally significant dream, action-response or imagination of the past-present-future, is simply too difficult to achieve and too promising not to pursue—for naked souls swimming in a pool of acceptance delights the senses, heals the wounds and bonds the dependencies of our hearts with the tender beyondness of God. No secrets habits aren’t cheap and aren’t to be cheapened by the public telling of mutually possessed secrets.

Tolerance Habits

If only we never screwed up. If only we never lost sight of the mystery of each other. If only we never failed to tolerate our differences and behold them with awe. If only we never were selfish. If only humanity wasn’t so flawed. But that is not our reality.

The ordinary and the exceptional day brings to the surface our predilection to see only our side of things, to see later a very different side of things, to never see a third side of things. And so forgiveness, tolerance and mercy must enter our moreness often. Without these tolerance habits the brutality of our humanity can smash us as delicate stained glass. There are no perfect unions ... only cloudy imaginations of ideality ... as are these.

Spatial-Sacred Habits

Space seems everywhere—empty space and filled space. The sacred is somewhere, or so it seems. Can it be that sacred space exists within the moreness of sexuality? Or where else would God not inhabit?

We are in the image of God. Such a statement gives justification to the good humanity can imagine. It can also reveal our desperation to create a god in our own likeness. Trust is required to settle in either camp. I choose the former.

What part of a Triune God would we not then perceive if He had not created us sexual beings in His image? We would pale to embrace that He is a Jealous God—and that He jealousy loves us. His jealousy is loving, tender, possessive without domination, protective without smothering, freeing without abandonment. Does not the symbolic relationship of male-female marriage over a lifetime commitment follow in the shadow of God's jealous love for His people?

The spatial-sacred habit lingers in the knowledge and the presence of a Triune God Who is nearby and Who causes moreness of the soul to spring to life through His jealous love.

Habits of Commitment to Risk Loving

How come offering one's authentic masculine or feminine soul is so difficult? Why is the soul so fragile in the nude? A reflective response includes mystery, shame and the sheer terror of unilateral rejection and abandonment. The commitment to love is the glue to moreness conceived. The commitment to risk loving is the antidote to seal that glue.

Honoring Singleness Habits

This seems very strange. Why honor singleness? Isn't that the empty space we seek to run from?

We all start out single. Some never leave this space. Some return to it. We all leave this world in the singleness of our individual soul. To mock singleness would be to mock the journey of moreness – its starting point, its earth ending point, and the many times in between when singleness of soul is evident.

Moreness is not the elimination of singleness. It is an identity transformation that allows two to become one and still be two at various degrees throughout life. The flexible geometry of identity allows morphing of moreness. To practice the habit of singleness is to refrain from the temptation to consume the other for selfish benefit. It is to humbly surrender the lust to be complete. It is to submit to the power of dependency while honoring the Creator Who alone can enter those spaces. To neglect the honor of singleness is to flirt with arrogance with its disastrous endgame.

Cautions Habits

The pursuit of moreness comes with cautions.

We should be cautious in how we define enough. Failure to define enough has wrecked many! Be cautious in how we handle not enough. In time the revelations from not enough may become enough. Be cautious to manage distractions and attractions. Both can provoke jealousy' possessive claim and derailed many. Be cautious to interplay sensuality and sensitivity and not to confuse the two as the same. And be cautious to not let pain and pleasure command the rules of the dance!

An Epilogue

To kiss and hug and wait for life-long commitments is no seeming formula for success or moreness. But is it not in delayed hindsight?

The paradox of caution and abandonment of passion seems like all other paradoxes—a contradiction at first—a mystery with intuitive correctness upon reflection. Yet, a shift in dimensional thinking may make the paradox evident. Thus, the riddle of “*to penetrate is not to separate but to surround and to be surrounded by*” is unfolded as one leaves Euclidean space and enters more exotic geometric systems of identity. Thus, to wait is moreness not stupidity or lack of courage when one leaves two-dimensional sensuous spaces and adds the dimension of life-long pursuit of sensitivity to soulful spaces. And thus, both paradoxes become the same to those who play with riddles and explore the beauty and jealousy of God symbolically played out in sacred sexuality.

But just as many are familiar with ‘the sum of three angles is 180 degrees in an Euclidean triangle’ and unfamiliar with ‘the sum of three angles in a spherical triangle is more than 180 degrees’, so sensuous pleasure has eclipsed the moreness of symbolic meanings in the consciousness of many ... but still it can be intuitively perceived.

But remember the difference between performance standards and ideals. Performance standards demand performance. Ideals, of which these musings are, point our souls higher with the hope of ascending as a process. To confuse the difference will bring unnecessary consternation.

Come join this dance of moreness that is both protected and affronted by jealousy! The journey is not always popularized, but join in nonetheless—to the grave and joyous benefit of your sacred soul.

Written in 2003; Updated 2005

Poems of Oneness

Kisses

“Enjoy,
drink deeply my love,
know the unraveling of
passions!
Enjoy the thrills of
kisses!”

A simple kiss
a lingering kiss
the kisses of the heart!
Feel the sensuous
longing of your lips!
Wanting kissing
lightly,
passionately,
sincerely,
jealously,
ravenously,
playfully!
Enjoy the
kisses
which mingle our
souls!

Feel the ache
of your lips
as they long for mine -
and all I offer you
and you to me.

The joy of the
simple kiss
is enough to
invigorate and frustrate
wild passions of the
soul
and captivate the
fixations of the
mind!

And let us abstain
from time to time
daring to neglect the
the lips

yet all the while
aware of the possibilities -
the thirsty anticipation
of their reunion!

Come,
let me kiss you with
this moment!
Awakening and arousing you
with the love of my lips
my darling!

Come let's celebrate
what God has
envisioned us to
enjoy in mystery!

Banquet Choices

I walk into a banquet hall
 The smell of foods fore greets me.
My eyes perk up to look around
 And see what fragrances bid me.

A joy to behold this array of nourishment
 Its smells and sights intrigues me.
Not a random table on display
 But a beautifully created feast.

The room is inviting, the guests have arrived
 We now must wait to be seated.
I ask for a table for two nestled by the fountain
 Quiet, moonlit and with reposing music.

The waiter hands me a paper list
 Somewhat to my surprise.
I know already its best this way
 But still the thoughts arrest me.

The list is long
 And quite detailed.
The flavors and textures
 Described eloquently.

I linger for what seems years
 To choose my portion for nibbling.
But then I see an instructive note
 Which calms and upsets me.

For there in big bold type the words:
Choose only one: No mixing!
For mixing is poisonous to the soul!

A contraband on appetites?
My soul a bit outraged.
Surely I could judge my limits
Fools only eat indiscriminately.

Yet still I'm enticed
And surely I know myself.
Why can't I nibble on just a few portions
When I can not but smell them all.

But no the waiter has come
The choice is at hand.
His firm eyes speak clearly
Choose only one: No Mixing!

Intently I narrow my choices
And there before my eyes.
I see a choice so plainly mine
I feel foolish to have lingered.

He writes my choice upon his pad
My choice: the apple of my eye.
And with a quick wink I know he, who knows all these dishes,
Considers my choice well pleasing.

The wait for my selection seems
Long and somewhat confusing.
My appetite grows stronger
Its satisfaction is soon beginning.

Then up she walks before me
Where she's been I do not know.
She sits so elegantly with beauty
A smile that entangles my heart.

The waiter stands by our table
And hands out our order slips.
He smiles with great delight
And pleased to have served us.

Our hands tremble with fear and anticipation
As we unfold the papers.
With great delight, relief and heightened expectations
We read our choice among the many is ...
each other to enjoy!

At the bottom of our card reads this admonition:
Choose only one: No mixing!
For mixing is poisonous to the soul!
“Eat, O friends, and drink what you have chosen
Satisfy your appetite, you lovers—
Whom I have chosen.”

Caressing Appreciations

My words caress you
as magnificent and glorious
Yet they cannot proclaim you.

My eyes caress you
as beautiful and gracious
Yet they cannot encircle you.

My kisses caress you
as sweet and adorable
Yet they cannot satisfy you.

My touches caress you
as awesome and feminine
Yet they can only herald you.

My soul is aflame by you
as priceless and unfathomable
With which I appreciate you
with all that I am.

Rising Over There

As the sun rises
and I attend to body chores,
I miss the sight
of yours - yet know
the afternoon shines
across the freshness
of your smile
elsewhere in this world.

As the day star streams
overhead and I attend
to the urgencies of jobs,

I miss the radiant beams
of your feminine-spirit
which graces someplace
a different time.

When the sky and land
unite under dark covers
and the night lights
sparkle in the heavens—
As my thoughts and heart
merge, pushing aside the
anesthetizing
obsessions of this generation,
I long for you
and you're not here
but rather rising over there.

When I turn
during the night watches
and find emptiness,
I shape the space
with your body-soul dimensions,
but already yours is in
full movement—
dancing as you go.

Each travel day the cycle
repeats and grows
as soul, spirit and
body heightens expectations of
living and loving
under the same sun time
together.

Every long day
our God touches
us deeply through
this time-distance separation
and continues the miracle
of His delight in our union.

I missed you—
welcome home!

Hammock

She lays serene
Absorbed with beauty.

I beheld
Lines flowing
Soft and powerful
My heart pounded.
Trusting, receiving
The honor and pleasure
My eyes doth lavish.
Pierced through
Beyond separateness
My soul responds
loudly.

Such pitiful words
These lips do construct.
I beheld, I honored
I sorrowed, I rejoiced unspeakably!

Without and With You

I missed you
 but was afraid to say it
 lest the void that you leave
 be seen as too big.

I need you
 but not for life to sustain
 and yet for the warmth
 and joy you bring to my heart.

I wanted you
 but not to control you
 rather to be together and
 do things - to bum around.

I desired you
 but not for lust to strip you of dignity
 but rather to honor you as the only woman
 I choose to desire
 because you are utterly
 desirable to me.

Come,
 Let us enjoy life together
 with its pains, pleasures, toils, and passions
 For without togetherness
 life would fail to reach the peaks which draw
 mysterious God-planted wonders
 from our souls.

Steel Tenderness

Tenderness
 can seem so feminine
That the conceived world of maleness
 is excluded.

Yet the soul of every boy
 is shaped by the tenderness
 of his mother.

Does the manhood passage mandate
 this exclusion?
Is tenderness only the luxury of babes
 and the desire of female psyches?

Tender strength
 Tender fortitude
 Tender firmness
 Tenderness of soul
 Wrapped in a steel
 Will.

Cannot we
 negotiate the grounds
 of feminine and masculine
 tenderness
 that satisfy both?
Are not God's tender mercies
 encased in His jealous heart
 for both genders?

Choices Revisited

There lies
 my new bought violin
Virgin instrument of
 wood and strings.
I will draw from it
 what it alone cannot create.
It will reveal in me
 a pleasure of beauty
I cannot begin to
 imagine.
And yet it has no choice.
Such beauty-pleasure

pales to our union!

To will to pleasure and be
refused is dishonor.
To pleasure where uninvited
is to shame.
To pursue pleasure and be welcomed
with delay is anticipation.
To chose to pleasure and to
beckon is to enter the oft unexplored
world of beauty-pleasure.

In turns we can masterfully
play each other.
Rising and flowing music to the
beat of our hearts.
Each as the violin
Each as the musician
Each resonating pleasure in the other
Each breaking open new worlds within our souls.

God gave us this choice.
The choice is ours.

Scenery

What communicates love?
What enhances it?
Does not pale moonlight?

What stymies love?
What shuts down its flow?
Does not rotting fish by the pale moonlight?

Where then will we labor in love?

Dawn's Dusk

Sunlight and darkness cannot co-exit
yet they can dance amidst
Merging and submitting at
dawn and dusk with
a beauty all its own.

And so is the dance of our body-souls.

Desire for respect is accomplished
by the power of your embrace.
Longing for embrace is satisfied
by the dignity of my respect.
We thirst for both.

Yet fear often double robs us.

To trust your embrace is to
lay my soul naked.
As to the hammer's power
for splitting the fruit of the nut.
Will you shatter my shell only
or rupture my heart as well?

To quiet the terror of my soul
is a far greater struggle
Than to surrender my body
for your pleasure.

To surrender the desires of my soul alone
is more easy
Than to trust you to set free
the passions of my body-soul.

The decision is ours
we can choose to dance
Only fears of shame block our steps.

I beseech you gentle, willful woman
with your embrace which can destroy or embolden
Give me my dignity and enjoy
freely exploring my body-soul
thus revealing what I cannot otherwise know.

And with pleasure I'll catch you -
your deepest dream
and nightmare fulfilled.
With honor I'll cherish you
the queen of all queens!
May the depths of your longings
explode as a
newborn masterpiece
revealing your glorious beauty.

Come lover! Let's dance at
dawn's dusk
Mutually merging and submitting our body-souls
for we know sunlight and darkness also will come.

Love beyond Requirements

If God required
 perfection
He would fail us all
 and choose the angels
 to pour out His highest love.

If God preferred
 certain imperfections over others
He might have chosen the fallen angels
 to demonstrate His highest love.

If God demanded
 His pleasure to be met
He might never bothered with a universe
 or else destroyed it all at the slightest displeasure
Yet God lavishes His love on us
 because He chooses.

If I require
 perfection in a woman
I would fail all women
 and live in hypocrisy.
To idealize and then demand perfection
 is destructive arrogance.

If I now prefer
 another woman's imperfections over yours
I might choose her to love.
To consider other women is folly
 and no love at all.

If I demand
 my needs and pleasures to be met
I might never have bothered to marry
 or else destroy the unique soul and
 individuality of my lover by
 conforming her to my pleasure and needs.
To demand my pleasure is self-absorption
 and lack of faith in God
 to be God.

By God's grace and power
 I choose you
To lavish my love with

an open heart.
I love you because the Lover God—
He has authored love for you
And united us together by His
mighty and mysterious workings
for His glory.

Please forgive me
for my imperfections
as your lover through the years.

Choosing Swords

Choose the power to
ravish,
Or
The beauty to
overwhelm with awe.

Both swords can
slay cultures
and lovers.
Or
Choose the two edged sword
of power and beauty.

Use with the joint glories of
holiness and creativity.
Else
You may damage
yourself,
us, and
others as well.

Sexual Diversity, Christian Ideals and Symbols

Our times and futures are intrinsically wrapped up in the human freedom to define and express our sexuality. Sex is a big deal in every generation. However, in today's world we have unique power to define our sexuality and manage the consequences of our sexual behaviors. We have birth controls, hormone therapies and sex altering surgeries that were unavailable to previous civilizations.

From heterosexuality to homosexuality to bisexuality to bestiality—we like options that bring forth pleasure. From a humanistic worldview of freedom, power and happiness, all expressions of sexuality *should* be, not only permitted, but championed. Pleasure demands to be expressed and experienced. Though preferences may arise, all forms of consensual pleasure should at least be considered if not explored. In this line of reasoning, bisexuality seems the most “logical” expression of sexuality across the human experience. Fundamentally, sexuality is a pleasuring of the body. That which touches and pleasures should not be denied. It's only “logical and natural” to enjoy diverse pleasures. Bisexuality seems to best fit the logic of pleasure. Heterosexuality and homosexuality are thus preferences at individual levels.

As homosexuality comes directly into the public consciousness, we need to see that some people are more prone to this expression than to heterosexuality. There are probably many explanations for these inclinations. Early socialization to homosexual acceptance, genetics, hormones in our food chain, pharmaceutical side effects, chemical interactions—these might help explain the seeming increase of homosexual lifestyles. However, homosexuality has been part of human history for millennia.

In time, group orgies and bestiality may surface as an alternate but acceptable means for pleasuring oneself and others. And in time and far beyond current pornographic experiences, virtual 3-D interactive and pharmaceutical assisted sex might become the hot spot of sexual experiences with those who would otherwise be unattainable or unavailable for physical contact. Thus, the logic of pleasure extends to the fringes of our imaginations.

In the face of this pleasure dynamic for multi-varied sexual expression, the Christian ideal of *heterosexual, lifelong, monogamous marriage* seems more than antiquated—it feels like a violation of our civil right to the pursuit of happiness. It feels like hate speech to non-practitioners of such limitations on the body.

However, for the Christian, sexual ideals are rooted in a symbolism of our relationship with the Triune God. We believe God is the jealous Lover of our souls. His love is jealous—not permissive. And yet His jealousy is pure, without the over possessiveness of human envy/jealousy. He is jealous *for* us, not jealous *of* us.

In His jealous love, the Triune God calls us into the high honor of being the “Bride of Christ.” We are not to be lowly servants, but a glorious bride. *We are called to be monogamous with our God*—all idols are rejections of His authority and power and of His loving pursuit of us.

In Scripture, God has symbolically linked this high calling with the union of a man and woman in marriage. *He calls us to lifelong marriages for He offers us an eternal position as bride.* He calls us to reject unfaithfulness even as He has called us into a covenantal—not contractual—relationship.

And we are called to be heterosexual. This sensitivity to symbolic meanings is understood in the idea that God is “Other” to us humans. And as “male” and “female” are “other” to each other, *our heterosexuality affirms our faith that our Supreme Other calls us to Himself.*

Furthermore, the symbolism of “other” might even be viewed as a twisted support for bestiality. When shame turns to shamelessness and Biblical symbolism is not a viable mindset, then bestiality can become a preference for pleasure. The prophet Jeremiah dealt with people in his nation who had lost the capacity to “blush” (Jeremiah 6:15). And God used images of bestiality to call the people back to Himself (Ezekiel 23:20,21). God seeks people who have turned far from His ways and His revealed meanings for sexuality.

However, the reality of human experience and worship of God is clear—we do it imperfectly and God is still calling us out of His jealous love. We must take comfort in His patience. We must take warning in His jealousy.

We must not give up the symbols of our sexuality—the ideal of heterosexual, lifelong, monogamous marriage that points us into the heart and ways of the Triune God. From this basic symbolism, the notion of male headship in marriage is also evident. Christ is the Head of the church and the husband is the head of the wife.

Increasingly within society, sexuality is defined and projected without Christian symbolism. Since our world deeply values happiness, power and freedom, it should come as no surprise that sensuality—the freedom to explore our bodily senses for pleasure, including sexual pleasures—is and will increasingly rule the day. This is no cultural tide. It is a tsunami that has come ashore. There is no return until sexual sensuality plays itself out. That may take many decades.

So how should Christians live within this hyper-sexuality culture? First, we, as followers of Christ, must affirm our commitment to *heterosexual, lifelong, monogamous marriage with headship* as a symbol of our ideal relationship with God. Grow into the intimacy of that relationship. Celebrate marriage as a marriage couple or as a single. The epidemic of divorce among Christians has eroded our platform for speaking about the symbolism of marriage. We must learn to be faithful in marriage and in worship.

Second, understand that sexual diversity is “reasonable” given certain assumptions of freedom, power and happiness. Therefore, let the results of these assumptions play out in society. The days of institutionalization of heterosexuality are almost over. Some Christians are still called to fight for the Christian definition of marriage. They must fight legally with love—even if it is perceived differently. Sexual restraint laws in a highly sexualized culture (starting with early childhood socialization of sensual sexuality) will inevitably fail to be passed or enforced. Even as legal mandates for male-female marriage are eroding in the social conscience, we need a different way to call people to God through the symbol of sexuality that links His jealous love to their souls’ longings. Both by example, by speech and through the arts, we need to lift high the Christian ideal and symbolism of marriage that calls us into worship of the Triune God.

Third, acknowledge the longings of your soul and body and go to God for ultimate fulfillment—even as immediate needs go unfulfilled in both marriage and in singleness. Our sexual longings are real, but they need not define us. God alone is our Definer.

Fourth, in the church, leaders must hold dearly to these Christian ideals and symbols of sexuality. We must not ordain those who would suggest that these symbols, these meanings of sexuality, have no relevance and that our longings for love should overdrive the jealous Love of God.

Fifth and finally, learn to love those different from us. Learn to communicate God's kindness and patience to all human beings with a humble belief in God Who has established behavioral ideals and symbols to call us to Himself in purity and without idols. And do not expect or demand others to agree with Christian ideals and symbols before they have tasted the reality of Christ as Savior, Master, Friend and Bridegroom.

July 2013

Also in Wharf and Bearing X

Our Story across the Decades

*Part of our story, as we told it to a leaders' group in 2012,
is on two audio files – total 86 minutes.*

*Ralph and Jen story – part 1
Ralph and Jen story – part 2*

Resources to Explore

CONNECT BIBLE STUDIES

GOD: Connecting with His Outrageous Love
IDENTITY: Becoming Who God Says I Am
SOUL: Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions
RELATIONSHIPS: Bringing Jesus into My World
LIFE: Thriving a Complex World
FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame

IMAGE-BASED

The New Me
Searching the Ordinary for Meanings
Grapplings: Why Do People Suffer So Much?

BOOKS

The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom
Worth a Thousand Words: The Power of Images to Transform Hearts

INVENTORIES

Breakthru: Discovering My Spiritual Gifts
Breakthru: Discovering My Primary Roles

For the above resources see:

www.ralphennis.com

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Ralph and Jennifer Ennis have served with The Navigators since 1975. They have ministered at Princeton University, Richmond Community, Glen Eyrie Leadership Development Institute, The CoMission in Russia, and in Raleigh, NC. In 2006 Jennifer co-founded JourneyMates, a ministry to help people grow in intimacy with the Triune God through Scripture, silence and solitude.

Unless otherwise noted, the essays of the WB Series have been written by Ralph. However, each work was crafted in the context our marriage relationship and with the editorial benefit of Jen's perspectives and unique abilities.

In 2018 Ralph and Jennifer celebrated 45 years of marriage. They have four married children and 15 grandchildren.



Our web sites:

www.journeymates.org
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