

Home Improvement

Enriching Values & Strengthening Relationships

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(Click on Audio files for additional lessons on the family and other Bible subjects)

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Brent combines a high level of training as a minister, counselor, and teacher. Since the early nineties, he has directed his efforts on marriage and family enrichment with a focus towards *preventing problems*. He believes that couples who commit themselves to God and to each other, and who are willing to learn to better communicate their love, can experience the fulfillment and intimacy that God intended for His people.

Brent also holds meetings on the following topics: Personal Evangelism 101, True Spirituality, Restoring the Vision and Spirit of New Testament Christianity, The Life of Christ, God/Man and the Cross.

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HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER

Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:2

INTRODUCTION

A. Key Foundational Principle

B. Definition:

1. Webster's: "High **respect** as to someone's worth or rank. Official dignity, to hold someone in **public esteem**, to give credit, fame, or glory."
2. Vine's: "Putting high value upon a person, esteeming them highly, includes financial support if needed" (I Timothy 5:3, 17).
 - a) Parents deserve honor simply because they are parents and God has put them in a position of authority over their children. If you have worthy parents that deserve respect it is a wonderful blessing, but if not, the command is still applicable!
 - b) A good example of this is how David treated Saul.

C. Honor is to be found everywhere – Romans 13:7

1. Wives & husbands – I Peter 3:5-6
2. Husbands & wives – I Peter 3:7
3. Citizens – "King" – I Peter 2:13-18
4. Young – elders – 1 Peter 5:5



D. Lack of Honor is age old problem. We must learn the lessons of history!

1. Greeks – Socrates 2400 yrs. ago! "*Children have bad manners, show disrespect to elders and love chatter in the place of exercise. They have become tyrants, not servants of the household; they contradict their parents, and tyrannize their teachers!*"
2. Job – Job 19:18, 30:8ff
3. Ancient Israel
 - a) Mocked Elisha – II Kings 2:23.
 - b) Reason for the fall – Isaiah 3:5, 30:1, 8-9.
 - c) Explains why it was the "*first commandment with promise.*" God knew if they did not honor their parents they would not honor Him and that they would violate the law, which would cause them to not live long upon the land which God had given them.

4. Top offenses in Public Schools – how times have changed!
 - a) 1940 – Talking, chewing gum, making noise, running, cutting in line, dress code violations, littering.
 - b) 1990 – Drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, assault.

I. PARENTS MUST CULTIVATE AN ATTITUDE OF RESPECT & HONOR

A. Do not allow nonverbal defiance. “The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out and the young eagles shall eat it.” Proverbs 30:17

1. “Fear every man his mother and father.” Leviticus 19:3
2. Watch tone of voice talking back!
3. Train children to say “Yes, Dad,” and “Yes, Mom,” not “What?”

B. Key principle: Discipline, attitudes and behaviors will take care of themselves.

II. HONORING PARENTS IS THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIETY

A. Placement in the Ten Commandments (#5) is significant. After one gets their relationship with God right then the very first step in getting along with your fellow man is to learn respect for authority at home.

B. If not, what about teachers, policemen, elders, marriage vows?

C. Ever known a vandal or delinquent who honored his/her parents?

D. If children are not taught to respect us (who they can see), how do we expect them to respect God (who they can’t see)?

III. NOT RESPECTING PARENTS IN THE O .T. WAS A CAPITAL OFFENSE

A. See Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Matthew 15:4.

B. Why? The punishment fits the crime! This is the reason why today we should save the most severe punishments for willful defiance!

C. Nave’s - Eight ways to dishonor parents:

- 1) **STUBBORNESS** - “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, that will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and, though they chasten him, will not hearken unto them; then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; and they shall say unto the elders of his city, ‘This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.’ And all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones: so shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee; and all Israel shall hear, and fear” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

- 2) LACK RESPECT - "Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deuteronomy 27:16)
- 3) DESPISING MOTHER – "A wise son maketh a glad father; But a foolish man despiseth his mother" (Proverbs 15:20)
- 4) CURSING FATHER – "There is a generation that curse their father, And bless not their mother" (Proverbs 30:11)
- 5) STRIFE IN THE HOUSEHOLD – "For the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house" (Micah 7:6)
- 6) FAILURE TO PROVIDE – "But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is Corban, that is to say, Given to God" (Mark 7:11)
- 7) BY DISOBEDIENCE – "For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Timothy 3:2)
- 8) BY STRIKING – "And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death" (Exodus 21:15)

D. What does it mean for today? God would approve of capital punishment for young adults thirteen and up (the age when the Jews considered someone accountable under the law).

CONCLUSION:

- A. Dishonor is a serious infraction – it is something we should focus on!**
- B. Remember we are not talking technical obedience, but attitude.**
- C. It is the parent's responsibility to teach. If they don't learn it from us, who will they learn it from?**

True Respect Can't Be Demanded, But Earned!

Live a righteous life!

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. One GOD
2. GOD is Spirit
3. GOD is Holy
4. GOD of Deliverance

RELATIONSHIP WITH MAN

5. Honor Father and Mother
6. Respect for Life
7. Respect for Marriage Vows
8. Respect for Others Property
9. Respect for TRUTH
10. Guard all Thoughts



SETTING PRIORITIES AND LIVING THE BALANCED LIFE

Introduction

- A. Regardless of how long you have been a Christian, I believe achieving proper balance is the most difficult on-going challenge. G. K. Chesterton was right when he said: "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it's been found difficult and therefore rarely tried."
- B. Jesus dealt with this question of "conflicting loyalties" in Luke 20:22-26.
 - 1. He made it clear it was not an "either/or" proposition, but one that fits together like a series of concentric circles. (Romans 13 :7)
 - 2. Ideally, God is the outer circle and everything else is in concert with His will. When this happens, our lives are in harmony.
- C. How is one to allot their time? When is "enough enough" in one area, because now it is time to move on to something else that is also important that demands my attention?
 - 1. In reality we are all *Christian jugglers*, trying to balance all of these different responsibilities and obligations. Most of us are stressed with too many balls up in the air.
 - 2. We need to make sure that God and our families are in their proper place.
 - 3. We need to recognize that everything we do has an "opportunity cost." Because we choose to do one thing, that automatically eliminates the opportunity to do everything else we might have done with that time.
 - 4. The tough choices are between "good, better, and best" and not just "bad and good."
- D. As we struggle with priorities we often have to fight against the pressure of "the tyranny of the trivial" that erodes away at our time and energies.
 - 1. We need to make sure we do not neglect the essential things (like prayer, Bible study and loving our spouse) because we are so busy doing the important things (paying our bills, cleaning the house, being a responsible employee, etc).
 - 2. Imagine you suddenly find out that in 15 minutes, a nuclear missile will land and kill you and everything within a 150 mile radius. What would your first thought be?
 - a. Oh no, I forgot to edge the grass or pay my bills? Hardly.
 - b. You'll be concerned about family, brethren, loved ones and if you have any sense at all, your own soul and whether or not you are ready to meet your maker.
 - 3. Crisis tends to help us put things into focus as to what really matters. My plea is this: DON'T WAIT FOR A CRISIS OR UNTIL, IT IS TOO LATE to put first things first!
- E. We must establish some basic priorities that will serve as a framework to aid in our struggle and help us not to "major in minors-or minor in majors."
 - 1. "The main thing is to make sure that the main thing is the main thing!"
 - 2. Peter Drucker: "The key is not doing things right, but making sure you are doing the right things! "
 - 3. Steven Covey: "We need to make sure we do not spend our lives climbing the ladder of success only to wake up one day and find we are leaning against the wrong wall."

THESIS: Examine the **FIVE BASIC PRIORITIES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.**

1. Remember the five P's: We must be the best **Person, Partner, Parent, Provider, Public servant**. Put this up on your mirror and do a "priority check regularly."
2. Being a priority does not necessarily mean you spend more time proportionally on one than the other. (You may spend eight hours sleeping and one hour eating, but that does not mean one is eight times more important than the other).

I. PUTTING GOD AND THE KINGDOM FIRST! (Best Person) (Matthew 6:33)

- A. Need to spend time in the word regularly. (John 6:35) Are we as diligent to feed our soul as our physical bodies? See Luke 4:4, Deuteronomy 8:3.
- B. Prayer must be a priority. True communing with God. (I Thessalonians 5 : 13)
 1. There is a difference between saying prayers, and praying. One is throwing up phrases to a stranger and the other is talking to a beneficent father and friend.
 2. I believe prayer, our most powerful tool for wisdom and perfection, is miserably neglected and pitifully underdeveloped.
 3. If we are not willing to give God fifteen minutes a day regularly, 1/96 of a 24-hour period, we are not serious about the Lordship of Jesus.
- C. Time for our own emotional and physical health. (I Timothy 4:8)
 1. If we are physical and emotional wrecks we are not able to serve others.
 2. Our bodies are Holy Temples. We need to practice good "temple maintenance."
 3. We need to be good stewards of our mental capacities as well. (Matthew 25)
 4. "What we are at birth is God's gift to us. What we make of ourselves throughout life (the kind of person we are at death) is our gift back to God."

II. TIME WITH OUR SPOUSE (Partner).

- A. This the relationship out of which a healthy, growing relationship with our children grows. There is a real danger in focusing in on the children and neglecting the marriage.
 1. Studies show: "The U-shaped curve of martial happiness." Typically the satisfaction with the marriage is high at the beginning, drops as the children come, and then begins to return once they stop demanding so much time and energy.
 2. A common trap of well-meaning committed women is to be **too much mother and not enough wife**. Make a conscious effort not to over-invest in the children and under-invest in the marriage!
 3. I love the poster of the little girl praying: "Dear God, please help Daddy and Mommy to love each other."
- B. The husband and wife have a responsibility to each other (Ephesians 5) and that needs to be first priority over the children.

III. TIME WITH CHILDREN (Parent)

- A. How tragic that our time and priorities sometimes hardly reflect that we have children. (Proverbs 1 8:29)
 1. The battle cry today is: "You can have it all!" A lucrative successful career and a passionate marriage and close, respectful children. My answer to that is: You may be able to have it all, but not at the same time. While children are under your care you to make choices. This applies to the Dad too. (Titus 2:4-5)

2. I heard of a well-known gospel preacher who canceled an evangelistic tour. People were shocked. His answer: "I have a teenage son that needed me. I share the responsibility for evangelizing the world with a great many people, but I am the only one that has the responsibility to be a father to that boy."
- B. We need to keep our priorities straight and cancel whatever needs to be canceled in order to spend time with our precious children while they are young.

IV. TIME WITH OUR VOCATION (Provider)

- A. It is important to be responsible here. (I Timothy 5:3)
- B. Too often we allow this to take precedent over being a Christian, Partner, and Parent.
 1. I fear sometimes we allow our jobs to dictate whether we worship God or not.
 2. In the Old Testament, if you missed the appointed day of worship (the Sabbath) for working, it was a capital crime. We need to take Sunday and our responsibility to worship God on His day more seriously than we sometimes do.
- C. We have wonderful opportunities to minister to others at work. We need to do a good job (Ecclesiastes 9: 10) so we can be a good example of a Christian and use that as a spring-board to reach others.

V. MINISTRY TO OTHERS. (Public servant)

- A. Do you want to do something for Jesus? Do for others! (Matthew 25:40, John 13)
- B. We are to love and serve others, but first we are to help God's family. (Galatians 6: 10)
- C. Obviously, we need to make it a priority to teach others the gospel. (Mark 16: 16)

Conclusion:

- A. The key is to remain balanced and not allow ourselves to become "a freak."
 1. Yes we need to study and pray, but on the other hand, there comes a time when we need to get off our knees, and our nose out of the book, and get busy about our father's business.
 2. On the other hand, one can spend so much time ministering to others that we neglect our own personal growth and study. Either extreme is wrong.
- B. This issue demands *constant reassessment*.**
- C. Wallace Hamilton tells the story of his son playing with an old phonograph and he and another boy punching a hole several inches off center and it creating a terrible sound (great dissonance). He motioned for them to stop. They put it back on center, put the needle down and it produced beautiful harmonious music.
 1. Likewise, if our lives are not centered properly, our lives meet with the same difficulty. A life not centered on God will be filled with disharmony.
 2. When our heart and life are centered on God, then we produce beautiful, harmonious music!
- D. We must put God and the family in its proper place and make sure it has proper priority. If that is not right, that must become your number one priority.
- E. I suggest in order to remind each other that your parting admonition become not "Take it easy" or "don't work too hard" - but "keep your priorities straight!"

WORK SHEET ON PRIORITIES

How can I achieve proper balance?
Where does my marriage fit in with everything else in my life?

Place the following five areas (A-E) in what you believe to be their proper order of importance (1-5). Be able to explain and defend your answer with scripture.

- _____ A. Job, profession. Provider/Professional
- _____ B. Children -- Parent
- _____ C. Personal Relationship with God Person
- _____ D. My Spouse (Marriage) Partner
- _____ E. Ministry to others (Teaching and Service) Public Servant

THINK OF THE 5 P'S:

I must first be the best P _____ I can be, then the best P _____, then the best P _____, then the best P _____, then P _____.

Consider placing the "5-P's" on a card on your mirror as a constant reminder.

How might our marriage (spouse) actually become too important? Is that possible? Consider I Tim 2: 11-15 and try to consider this passage as you answer. Come up with at least two Biblical examples and one modern day example of how a love/marriage relationship proved to be out of balance and actually a form of idolatry.

A. Two Bible Examples:

- a. _____
- b. _____

B. Modern Day Example: _____

What are the most likely areas in the top five priorities that can cause a marriage to suffer because it is not given proper priority? Discuss some of pitfalls that are especially common among well-meaning and devote men and women?

- A. What is a common problem among godly mothers?
- B. What is a common problem among ambitious men?
- C. What is a common problem/challenge for preachers?
- D. How can the above missed priorities be avoided?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS:

1. What do you see as the greatest cause of regret in later life?
2. What do you think your spouse would say if asked: "Aside from God, where do I fit in your list of priorities?"
3. Given the importance of priorities, what problems naturally arise if married to a non-Christian or an un-committed one?

CHALLENGE: Make a habit to make one of your common parting admonitions: "See you later, remember to keep your priorities straight!" (Heb 10:24) .

KEY CONCEPTS NECESSARY TO MAKE A MARRIAGE WORK!

The Love Bank

The Love bank explains how couples fall “in and out of love.’ This concept helps couples realize that almost everything they do affects their love for each other either positively or negatively. This awareness can set diligent couples on a course of action that will preserve their love and save their marriages.

Within each of us is a Love Bank that keeps track of the way each person treats us. Everyone we know has an account and the things they do either deposit or withdraw love units from their accounts. It's your emotions' way of encouraging you to be with those who make you happy. When you associate someone with good feelings, deposits are made into that person's account in your Love Bank. And when the Love Bank reaches a certain level of deposits (the romantic love threshold), the feeling of love is triggered. As long as your Love Bank balance remains above that threshold, you will experience the feeling of love. But when it falls below that threshold, you will lose that feeling. You will like anyone with a balance above zero, but you will only be in love with someone whose balance is above the love threshold.

However, your emotions do not simply encourage you to be with those who make you happy -- they also discourage you from being with those who make you unhappy. Whenever you associate someone with bad feelings, withdrawals are made in your Love Bank. And if you withdraw more than you deposit, your Love Bank balance can fall below zero. When that happens the Love Bank turns into the Hate Bank. You will dislike those with moderate negative balances, but if the balance falls below the hate threshold, you will hate the person.

Try living with a spouse you hate! Your emotions are doing everything they can to get you out of there -- and divorce is one of the most logical ways to escape.

Couples usually come for help when they are just about ready to throw in the towel. Their Love Banks have been losing love units so long that they are now deeply in the red. And their negative Love Bank accounts make them feel uncomfortable just being in the same room with each other. They cannot imagine surviving marriage for another year, let alone ever being in love again.

But it is possible! They can be shown how to help them fall in love with each other again. They can fall in love again if they **stop making Love Bank withdrawals, and start making Love Bank deposits.** The other concepts are designed to help couples keep each others love banks as full as possible!

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANT STAGES OF A RELATIONSHIP

Adapted from Willard Harley by Brent Hunter

Three stages: Intimacy, Conflict, & Withdrawal All who are married are in one of these three stages.

INTIMACY occurs when:

Each is meeting each other's needs. Each is avoiding causing unhappiness to the other. *As a result there is closeness-- Emotional Bonding in the marriage.* **Result: You drop your defenses and become more sensitive and open to each other so you can make deposits into your spouse's love bank!**

CONFLICT occurs when:

Each is meeting the other's needs at least to some degree. However, one or both causes unhappiness in the other = **A Love Buster(s) occurs!** Instead of leaving, you argue with your spouse about the pain and attempt some resolution! This does not mean your marriage is over...in fact conflict is inevitable, and it is healthy if done correctly! **The real danger is not discussing differences, but giving up and AVOIDING conflict, ie. go into WITHDRAWAL.** Be on guard, once you refuse to share your feelings passion dies!

WITHDRAWAL occurs when....

The pain of the conflict becomes so great you want out, you snap and as a coping mechanism one or both parties put up a WALL. .

Result: You become *emotionally disconnected. You are emotionally and spiritually divorced!* (Always a prelude to an actual divorce). Intimacy is abandoned.

This is Very Serious: Ironically, now there is little arguing and no feeling, "I don't love you any more!" is the refrain. Love bank is empty or withdrawn. If it gets too overdrawn, it turns to animosity. **Sadly, keeps out deposits as well as withdrawals! Solution: One must go through the painful process of working through the unresolved conflicts. One must identify each brick (offense) responsible for building the wall over time and get forgiveness! This is the reason why Paul's admonition of Ephesians 4:26 is so important.**

However, the wall of protection will not come down unless there is an atmosphere of SAFETY and TRUST. Love Busters must be dealt with first. New loving habits must replace the love busters. Once TRUST is re-established the wall can be brought down and deposits can be made into the love bank again. Once withdrawals are kept to a minimum, and deposits are made (ie. needs are met) then romantic love can be reborn!

ASSIGNMENT:

Go over "Symptoms of Emotional Divorce" and make sure the walls are down!! Talk over these concepts with your spouse and ponder how **Ephesians 5:31-33** and **I Corinthians 13:4-7** build intimacy.

SYMPTOMS OF SPIRITUAL DIVORCE

Symptoms of **spiritual divorce** are indicators that a **separation** is *developing* and needs to be confronted through dialogue. They are “*signs*” and are present at some time in every marriage. **Take about 20 minutes apiece for each to privately do this exercise then exchange your answers and discuss together.** Don't allow fear to prevent you from being open with each other.

Instructions:

- **Read through all the symptoms. Which symptoms are currently present** in your marriage? Place a check mark next to each one.
- Re-read those that are checked. Select **2 or 3 you feel most strongly about** right now.
- **Write and describe your feelings** about those 2 or 3. If time allows, continue on to the others checked.

1. Prolonged **moods of sadness** in our marriage and in the family
2. Feelings of **disillusionment, boredom, and emptiness**
3. **Dissatisfaction**
4. **Indifference** to each other's problems
5. Occasions of **coldness** in our relationship
6. **Avoiding or refusing sexual relationship**
7. No interest in things of the other – **lack of sensitivity**
8. Lack of **kindness, tenderness, and small courtesies**
9. **Failure to take time to think deeply**
10. Feelings of **insecurity and mutual distrust**
11. **More confidence in a third person** other than with each other
12. Lack of **dialogue and intimate communication**
13. Most **communication mechanical, routine, and surface**
14. Feelings of **being alone and not understood**
15. Frequent **bad humor and tension**
16. Feeling **used**
17. Frequent **quarrels**: in private, or in front of children or others
18. **Ridicule** of each other
19. **Superficial life and continuous escapes**, together or alone, such as liquor, drugs, TV, compulsive socializing
20. Attitude of **selfishness**
21. **Insults, rude words, and sarcasm**
22. **Avoidance of situations that deeply need attention**
23. Personal **relationship with God causing conflict**
24. Lack of **appreciation**
25. Lack or **loss of a sense of wonder**
26. Lack of **faith in love and marriage**
27. **Insensitive teasing**
28. **Nagging**
29. Lack of **planning things together**

WHO AM I?

I am your constant companion. I am your greatest helper or heaviest burden. I will push you onward or drag you down to failure. I am completely at your command. Half the things you do you might just as well turn over to me and I will be able to do them quickly and correctly.

I am easily managed --- you must merely be firm with me. Show me exactly how you want something done and after a few lessons I will do it automatically. I am the **servant of all great individuals and, alas, of all failures as well.** *Those who are great, I have made great. Those who are failures, I have made failures.*

I am not a machine, though I work with all the precision of a machine plus the intelligence of a human. *You may run me for profit or run me for ruin – it makes no difference to me.*

Take me, train me, be firm with me, and I will place the world at your feet. Be easy with me and I will destroy you.

WHO AM I?

I AM HABIT.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING THE RIGHT HABITS

Paul told Timothy, **“Exercise yourself** unto godliness” (I Timothy 4:7). Solomon advises: “Make level the path of thy feet, and let **all thy ways be established**” (Proverbs 4: 26). And again “Commit thy works unto the Lord and **thy purposes will be established**” (Proverbs 16:3). Are your **“ways established”** so that you are **habitually** an excellent husband or wife?

It has been said, **“Men make the habits and habits make the men!”** Indeed, they primarily determine whether a marriage succeeds or fails! Instincts are behavioral patterns that we are born with, while **habits are patterns that we learn.** Both of them tend to **be repeated again and again almost effortlessly.**

GOOD HABITS ARE THE KEY TO MAKING LOVE BANK DEPOSITS!

Obviously, it's our behavior that makes deposits and withdrawals from Love Banks, and our instincts and habits make up most of our behavior.

Consequently, it is imperative to know how to create the right habits because once they are learned; **deposits are made repeatedly and almost effortlessly!**

CONQUERING BAD HABITS IS THE KEY TO AVOIDING WITHDRAWALS.

Unfortunately, many of our habits, such as angry outbursts, contribute to Love Bank withdrawals. Since they are repeated so often, they play a very important role in the annihilation of Love Bank accounts. **If we**

are to stop Love Bank withdrawals, we must somehow stop destructive habits in their tracks. Instincts are harder to stop than habits, but they can both be avoided and retrained.

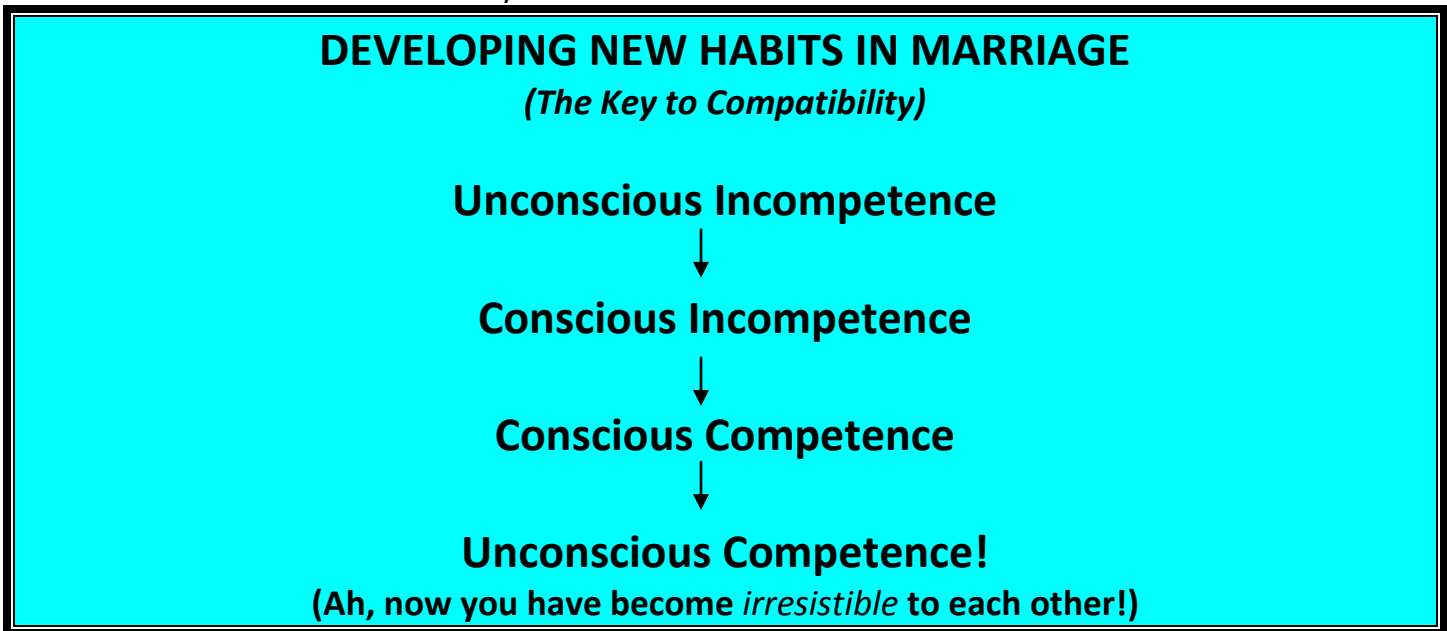
The Key: Focus on our spouse. Communicate and learn what your spouse needs and then develop new habits accordingly. Why don't we consistently do things that make deposits in our spouse's love bank? Most of the time it is not *intentional* that we *fail to care* (make deposits) or protect (make withdrawals) we just **don't realize what we are doing**. We don't understand these concepts, we aren't taught them, so we do what comes *natural* and makes *us* feel good or comfortable and just *react*, rather than focus on our spouse and being the Christian husband or wife God has called us to be! Learning to meet your spouse's needs means learning to do the things that make *him/her* feel good. Further, you must learn to feel good about doing new things in order to make your spouse feel good about you doing them!

Bottom line: We must communicate clearly

My care for my husband/wife makes him/her be **in love with me**. My spouse's care for me makes me be **in love with him/her**. By both parties *communicating* what their **top emotional needs** are and communicating how they would like them to be met we can keep the Love Bank full. By clearly communicating what **makes withdrawals** we can learn to avoid them!

By each spouse **carefully rating** their **most important needs** and expressing how they would like for them to be met, and **rating the most damaging and painful "love busters"** in the relationship you can find out what you need to be doing (or stop doing) to be happily married! Then you have to go about the prayerful and disciplined process of developing new habits which do a better job of caring for and protecting your spouse!

The chart below will explain the process you must go through on your way to becoming irresistible to your spouse! We will start with stopping love busters first because they do the most damage and if not checked will build a wall between the two of you and can cause emotional withdrawal.



UNDERSTANDING LOVE BUSTERS

Define: A **destructive marital habit**, or love buster, is a **repeated behavior of a spouse that causes the other to be unhappy (withdraw love units!)**

An act that makes your spouse unhappy will happen on occasion. But a habit that **destroys love units multiplies the damage**. It is **repeated over and over**. Single acts of inconsideration do not usually destroy romantic love. When such acts are repeated and become predictable, however, love suffers the greatest loss.

One must get rid of these FIRST. .if you are going to *rekindle the romance in your marriage* and keep it burning with a strong flame. What follows are **FIVE KEY Love Busters**, six if you include **Independent Behavior**. (Making important decisions which affect your spouse without their knowledge). Most of these love busters violate passages such as “in honor prefer one another”(Romans 12:10). “Look out not for our own interests but instead each of you for the interest of others” (Philippians 2:4). “Honor the woman” (I Peter 3:7). “Submit to one another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21) and countless violations of what true love really is from I Corinthians 13: 4-8.

I. **Angry Outbursts** – anger is used as a way to punish or get back at the other person. Usually includes yelling, and harshness. Always creates *disrespect*.

II. **Disrespectful Judgments**- imposing a system of values on the other person in a way that does not value their opinion. This type of behavior is viewed as condescending. It almost always is seen as rude and arrogant, and degrading..

III. **Annoying Behavior**--doing something that irritates the other party consistently. Typically, women are more easily annoyed by men then men are by women.

IV. **Selfish demands**--Threats, lectures, and manipulation which builds resentment and causes great discomfort. Love does not “insist on its own way” (I Cor 13: 5) but this love buster does just that!

V. **Dishonesty**—withholding or being deceitful and dishonest with your spouse. This may be the worst love buster because it breaks down trust!!

RULE OF HONESTY

Reveal to your spouse as much information about yourself as you know: your thoughts, feelings, habits, likes, dislikes, personal history, daily activities, and plans for the future

When these go unchecked. **Romantic love is the victim** No matter how hard you try to make deposits into the other person=s accounts, if a wall is up due to one or more of these being present, you will be unsuccessful and frustrated at the lack of responsiveness on the part of the other person.

Be on guard. A few major withdrawals can undo scores of deposits!! Only when the threat of pain has been overcome do couples lower their defenses and permit deposits of love units.

EXAMPLES OF LOVE BUSTERS IN SCRIPTURE:

Job's wife: "Curse God and die" (Job 2:1-9)! - **Angry outburst, disrespectful judgment.**

Delilah pressured Samson daily until his soul was vexed (Judges 16:15-16). **Selfish demand**

Jacob deceived Isaac (Genesis 27:1-13). **Dishonesty!** "Rising up in the morning with a loud voice is like vinegar in the eye." (Proverbs 27:14) **Annoying behavior.**

Once you start looking for "love busters" in the Bible, you will begin seeing them everywhere. You will see that they created tremendous havoc everywhere they appear. Don't go home with them, but with God's help "crucify them" as a "work of the flesh" and be determined to be rid of them as you strive to become more Christ-like!

RATING EACH OTHERS LOVE BUSTERS:

Below is a sheet designed for you to rate your spouse's love busters. Which ones hurt the most and cause you the greatest unpleasantness? **Remember:** As you see your spouse's form and listen to their explanation, if you act negatively to your spouse's comments, you will prevent growth and stifle communication. Whether you think it is accurate or not, if he or she feels this way, you **must deal with the feeling and not be defensive.** This is critical information to know and understand about how you are perceived by your spouse so encourage them to be totally open and honest with you about their perceptions. **Learning new habits is hard** but these six tips will help!

SIX TIPS TO OVERCOMING LOVE BUSTERS:

1. **Be committed** to overcoming them. Understand it will take time. (Takes at least eight weeks to form a new habit)
2. **Do one at a time...**the one rated highest by spouse should be first to overcome. Can't try to do too much at once or you will feel overwhelmed.
3. **Identify why you do what you do**, identify what triggers it and commit to avoid things that lead up to the behavior.
4. **Develop alternative behaviors** which will be a righteous substitute for the bad habit.
5. **Ask your mate for a periodic evaluation weekly.** Discuss honestly how you are doing better, and give positive feedback and all so as needed appropriate reminders.. In many cases it will be two steps forward, one step backwards. That is okay as long as you are making *consistent progress*. Don't give up! The new habit at the end will be worth it!
6. **Pray both privately and together regularly** and ask God for strength to overcome, not give up, and help "your ways to establish" according to His will!

RATING OF HIS "LOVE BUSTERS."

Rate the categories of Love Busters that you feel contribute to your marital unhappiness. In the space provided in front of each love buster, write a number from 1-5 that ranks its relative contribution to your unhappiness. Write a 1 before the Love Buster that causes you the greatest unhappiness, a 2 before the one causing the next great unhappiness, and so on until you have ranked all five. Add others in the space below if they apply. There is also space at the bottom for others that do not fit in one of these categories.

_____ **ANGRY OUTBURSTS**

_____ **DISRESPECTFUL JUDGMENTS**

_____ **ANNOYING BEHAVIOUS**

_____ **SELFISH DEMANDS**

_____ **DISHONESTY**

RATING OF HER 'LOVE BUSTERS'

The rating of the five basic categories of Love Busters is listed below. There is also space for you to add other categories of Love Busters that you feel contribute to your marital unhappiness. In the space provided in front of each love buster, write a number from 1-5 that ranks its relative contribution to your unhappiness. Write a 1 before the Love Buster that causes you the greatest unhappiness, a 2 before the one causing the next great unhappiness, and so on until you have ranked all five. List additional ones in the space below if needed. Share with your spouse and talk openly about them.

_____ **ANGRY OUTBURSTS**

_____ **DISRESPECTFUL JUDGMENTS**

_____ **ANNOYING BEHAVIORS**

_____ **SELFISH DEMANDS**

_____ **DISHONESTY**

The Ten Most Important Emotional Needs

How can you deposit love units into each other's Love Banks the fastest? You **must meet each other's most important emotional needs**. You and your spouse fell in love with each other because you made each other very happy, and you made each other happy because you met some of each other's important emotional needs. **The only way you and your spouse will stay in love is to keep meeting those needs**. Even when the feeling of love begins to fade, or when it's gone entirely, it's not necessarily gone for good. **It can be recovered whenever you both go back to making large Love Bank deposits**.

To be sure you know what each other's most important emotional needs are use the sheet below and rate them according to their importance for you and your spouse. **Then, learn to meet the needs that are rated the highest in a way that is fulfilling to your spouse and enjoyable for you, too**.

It's likely that you and your spouse do not prioritize your needs in the same order of importance. **A highly important need for you may not be as important to your spouse**. So you may find yourself trying to meet needs that seem unimportant to you. But your spouse depends on you to meet those needs, and **it's the most effective and efficient ways for you to make large deposits in the love bank!**

RATING OF HER EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Ten basic emotional needs are listed below. There is space for you to add other emotional needs that you feel are essential to your happiness. To help you identify your *most* important emotional needs, you will rate each one in order of importance to you.

In the space provided in front of each need, write a number from 1 to 10 that ranks the need's importance to your happiness. Write a 1 before the most important need, a 2 before the next most important, and so on until you have ranked all ten. **Then your mate will need to focus on your top five immediately and work at becoming an expert at meeting them**.

If you have trouble ranking these needs, imagine that you were to have *only one* need met in your marriage. Which would you pick, knowing that all the others would go unmet? That need should be 1. If only two needs would be met, what would your second selection be? Which five needs, when met, would be the most important to you?

Please be aware that if your mate is good at meeting one or more of your needs, you may take that need(s) for granted and instead focus on areas of weakness. Be careful not to allow this to skew your ranking of what is most important to you. Also factor in how you would feel if some of your partner's strengths suddenly became a weakness.

_____ Admiration

_____ Affection

_____ Attractiveness of Spouse

_____ Conversation

_____ Domestic Support

_____ Family Commitment

_____ Financial Support

_____ Honesty and Openness

_____ Recreational Companionship

_____ Sexual Fulfillment

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_____ Domestic Support

_____ Sexual Fulfillment

REMEMBER:

As you meet your spouse's needs, your spouse will be more compelled to meet yours. As you meet your spouse's needs, you will find that the action of doing so makes you love him/her even more!!

TEN RULES FOR A GOOD CLEAN FIGHT

Resolving Conflicts in Marriage

By Brent Hunter

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Introduction

A. Two ideas to remember about hostility:

1. It is natural. Motion (growth) requires some friction.

a. Marriages are made in heaven, but so are *thunder and lightening storms!*

b. Marriage is similar to the merging of two great rivers

1) Merging into ONE two different lives, backgrounds, habits, etc.

2) Trying to share the same time, space & resources

3) What happens when rivers merge together – RAPIDS! WHITE WATER.

4) It is only natural that the blending of lives together will produce some friction, disagreements and conflicts.

2. Since it is inevitable, you must agree to settle differences “agreeably.” **It is the #1 interpersonal skill necessary for long-term marital stability, so make sure you master it!**

B. Handled properly conflict can be a good thing. Learn to view “*fight*s” not as tragedies, but opportunities!

1. Venting personal frustrations through lips which have learned how to do so can serve a wonderful purpose.

2. Skill and self-control can turn potentially destructive squabbles into “*fair fights*” which solve problems and yield positive results!

3. Remember: The secret to a good marriage is not finding the right person, but *learning to fight well with the person you have found!*

Rule #1—BE DRIVEN BY LOVE!

A. This is the **one principle** from which all the others spring (we’re laying the foundation). Husbands and wives are to love each other, **Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4.**

1. That means more than just having warm feelings of affection for each other. It means I always want to act in their best interest – always seeking their good and never doing anything to hurt them.

2. It’s not just an emotion; love is a decision to behave in a certain way. When Paul defined love, he described it as **a way of behaving**, I Corinthians 13:4ff.

3. If we want to manage conflict well, then we need to be sure that our actions are **always driven by love**, I must never do anything thing to hurt. I should always be acting in the best interest of my spouse.

a. Love needs to be the atmosphere that fills our homes and pulses through our marriage conflicts.

b. Before we speak or act, we need to ask, “Am I acting with love?”

c. Folks, that’s not just a good idea, that’s what God demands.

B. Now, the other principles spring from this one. If you want to act with love, then before you can address a conflict, you first need to...

Rule #2 -- DO YOUR THING TO COOL OFF! (Ephesians 4:26; Proverbs 29:8, 30:33, 17:27)

- A. Never be ashamed of anger--it is natural, not sinful. The only thing you need to regret is handling it badly. Proverbs 29:22 "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression."
- B. Since you are literally in a state of **intoxication** when your "*fuse is lit*," reduce the emotional state before a discussion begins.
 - 1. "*There is more hope for a fool than a man of quick temper.*" Proverbs 29:20
 - 2. "*...and a wrathful man stirreth up contention.*" Prov 15:18
 - 3. **IF YOU ARGUE WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY, YOU'RE APT TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE!**
- C. If we are driven by love, we will do whatever it takes to cool off FIRST!
 - 1. Engage in some physical activity
 - 2. Go for a walk
 - 3. Take a hot bath
 - 4. Pray alone--it calms the spirit so you can see the situation more clearly.
- D. The key here is this: **Rule our passions, rather than allowing our passions to rule us!**
 - 1. Proverbs 16:32 "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, then he who captures a city."
 - 2. **No one likes living with a volcano** – we must cool off and get anger under control.
- D. Afterwards, you may just decide to forget the whole thing! (Proverbs 17:9, 19:11)

If not, proceed to Rule #3!

Rule #3--ARGUE WITH THE RIGHT PERSON (Proverbs 3:30, 25:9)

- A. Remember to express frustration/anger toward the person you are really angry with and **not some innocent party**.
 - 1. Be honest. Husbands, how many times are you angry and frustrated at something at work, and the poor wife suddenly can't do anything right?
 - 2. Similarly, wives can be frustrated after dealing with the kids all day and consequently are ready for war as soon as their husbands come in the door?
 - 3. We all do it – and it is grossly unfair!
Prov 3:30 "Do not accuse a man for no reason – when he has done you no harm!"
- B. Beating up on innocent third parties is called "*dumping*."
 - 1. **Dumping is cruel**, it allows you to **escape** the real person or issue, and **resolves nothing**. It only makes matters worse!
 - 2. So, have the courage to **make sure** you are bringing your complaint to the right person.

Rule #4--ARGUE ABOUT THE RIGHT THING (Proverbs 15:7, 28)

- A. Seems obvious too, but how many marriage conflicts are really about an **unspoken agenda**? Many arguments are fought about the **wrong subjects**.
 - 1. Exodus Husband criticizes his wife's housekeeping when the real complaint is a lack of intimacy in the relationship!
 - 2. Exodus Wife criticizes her husband's tardiness when the real issue is she is feeling neglected?
 - 3. We must be **in touch with our feelings** and ask, "*Am I really angry because of this or is it something else?*"
 - 4. Sometimes our arguments solve nothing because we are not talking about the right thing.
 - 5. A good indication of a hidden agenda is when **OUR ANGER IS OUT OF PROPORTION TO THE OFFENSE**.

B. The issue here is one of Honesty, Ephesians 4:25.

1. We must learn to be upfront about our frustrations and stop working with a hidden agenda.
2. Not only is it dishonest and unfair, but arguing about the wrong thing does nothing to solve the problem!
3. John 8:32 Jesus said: *"The truth will set you FREE."* You will not have an *authentic* successful marriage unless you are honest.

Rule #5--ARGUE AT THE RIGHT TIME (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Proverbs 25:8)

- A. Both must agree the time is right before beginning. Something as simple as timing can make a big difference in how we resolve our marriage conflicts.
- B. Here are some times ***not*** to argue:
 1. **In front of company.** To do so is *degrading. Violates trust.*
 2. **When there is not enough time to finish.** Have you ever found yourself in the middle of big argument right before company arrives or it is time to go to services?
 3. **When either party is hungry or tired**
 4. **Just as one or both spouses comes home from work**
 - a. 80% of marital fights occur between 5-6 pm
 - b. Instead of celebrating being together, we dump on each other. That is a bad time.
 - c. Good rule of thumb: Do not discuss problems until **after** dinner.

Rule #6--DON'T BE HISTORICAL (Ephesians 4:26)

- A. Man complains, "My wife always gets historical." Amused, his friend replied, "I think you mean hysterical." "No, I mean historical," he said. When we argue she reminds me of everything I've ever done wrong."
 1. Why do we drag up the past? Often we are losing an argument so past blunders are brought up in order to gain some advantage.
 2. Example: "I might be wrong now, but you are just as guilty." This moves us in the wrong direction!
- B. Be committed to **not bring up past fights.**
 1. *"He that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends."* Proverbs 17:9
 2. Bringing up items that you thought were resolved **breeds mistrust** and a **lack of confidence** in the relationship.
- C. The real issue is one of **FORGIVENESS.** Ephesians 4:31-32
 1. Once an argument is resolved, it is to be **buried and never resurrected.** Don't bury the hatchet with the handle left sticking out of the ground.
 2. Before ending an argument, make sure it is closed for both parties.
 - a. If it's not, don't drop it until it is resolved.
 - b. But when it is finished, then **both must agree is over.** Period.
 3. Paul said that in true love, I Corinthians 13:5 one does not *"Take into account a wrong suffered."* Love means we stop keeping the books.

Rule #7 – DON'T RAISE YOUR VOICE.

A. That is tough if increasing the decibel level is how you grew up! To some, a fight isn't a fight without some yelling!

1. Truth is, loudness does not make things better; and it does not communicate love. In fact, it's often when we start getting louder that hurtful things come out of our mouth.
2. Yelling at someone is *disrespectful and degrading*. It certainly is not the golden rule.
3. Harsh, loud words are **not consistent with the love that should drive our actions**. Paul said that love leads us to be "kind," (I Corinthians 13.4).

B. **Listen to Solomon:** Proverbs 15:1, "***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.***"

1. Here is the key: "Lower your voice one octave, rather than raising it two."
2. Make a point as the heat goes up in a discussion, to take the volume down.

Rule #8--AVOID NAME CALLING (Proverbs 14:22, 27:4)

A. There is no excuse for hurling insults or profane names at loved ones.

1. Abusing intimacy and resorting to "*knife twisting*" are especially harmful.
2. Thoughtless names (labels) puncture deeply and are remembered for years.

B. Three reasons why personal verbal assaults are so destructive:

1. They throw an argument off-track and does not lead to a resolution.
2. They focus attention on the mate, not on solving the problem.
3. They hurt the relationship and **ruin mutual respect**.

C. Three suggestions:

1. Tackle the problem, not the person.
2. Replace "**you**" statements with "**I**" statements. (Instead of "*You lazy bum!*" say, "*I feel you're not working as hard as you could.*")
3. Be determined to only use words that edify! Ephesians 4:29 "Let no unwholesome words proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so it will give grace to those who hear."

D. Insults, sarcasm, filthy and profane names are sometimes used with our spouse that we would never even consider using with anyone else!

1. We should treat our families the best, not the worst!
2. I Corinthians 13 tells us love is patient, kind, does not act unbecomingly.

E. Name calling is counter-productive because it often creates a problem that is bigger than the original problem that provoked the argument!

1. Careless insults can create pain for years to come. How absurd!
2. Solomon in Proverbs 12:8 "There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."
3. Words are powerful. If we want to manage our conflicts well, we must use words that edify!

Rule #9--AVOID "STAMP-SAVING" (Proverbs 10:18)

- A. Some save up grievances like stamps, waiting until the book is full to cash it in.
 - 1. Exodus Unloading other complaints in rapid succession during an argument over something else.
 - 2. Be sure to only discuss one disagreement at a time.
- B. Don't let things build up! Foster the type of relationship where you can express irritations as they occur.
- C. Stamp-saving...
 - 1. Overwhelms the poor mate who is bombarded with so much all at once.
 - 2. Is disconcerting to the one who discovers that true feelings weren't revealed earlier.
 - 3. Breeds both a lack of trust as well as confidence.
- D. **The cure:**
 - 1. Express displeasure at the earliest convenient time.
 - 2. Mention it next time it occurs (if a recurring fault), and not during an argument about something else or choose to forget it forever!

Rule #10: Don't Focus on Winning. (Ephesians 5:21) "Submit yourselves one to the other in the fear of Christ."

- A. If we're not careful, our marriage conflicts can take on a life of their own.
 - 1. The focus can become **winning the argument rather than reaching a resolution.**
 - 2. When that happens, *everything changes.*
 - a. We begin to use every trick in the book so we can win.
 - b. We refuse to admit any wrong or acknowledge any validity in what the other person is saying, less we give them some advantage.
 - c. We begin to pick a part every little detail of what is said, i.e. "I don't forget to take out the trash all the time; I did once last year!"
 - d. The conversation begins to be dotted with challenges, i.e. "prove it" or "give me one example when I did that."
 - 3. When we reach that point, **no one will come out a winner.** We may win the battle, but ultimately lose the war...and the "good will" and mutual respect we both need and desire for a good relationship.
- B. What we need to remember is that marriage is a **cooperative enterprise.**
 - 1. If my goal is to **win and get my way**, then I'm going to make my spouse miserable.
 - 2. The goal should be to **reach a solution that will please God** and that both of us can live with. A good marriage provides for some "give and take."
 - 3. I've got to be unselfish and take into account the needs of my spouse as we try to work this out, **Philippians 2:3-4.**
 - 4. In **I Corinthians 13:5 Paul says that love "does not seek its own."**
 - 5. We need to accept our share of the blame and never resort to threats or give ultimatums. We certainly should never use sex or money as weapon.
 - 6. We need to reach a conclusion that if possible will suit both, not just one.

To do otherwise may help us win more arguments, but in the end, **we'll lose the war – and perhaps our marriage too!**

CONCLUSION:

- A. Take these home and make a pact to live by God's rules when managing conflicts. B. Mature partners know that differences are not wrong. Conflicts can be worked out fairly, amiably, and lovingly.
- C. Both must be honest so a wall of silence will not be built and drive them apart.
- D. Marriage run by God's principles can be a little bit of Paradise left to bless both man and woman in a sinful world. Remember: "*Marriages are made in heaven, but the maintenance contract must be maintained on earth.*"
- F. God has the answers for our every need; do you rely and depend upon Him for help?

TURNING PAST FAILURES INTO PRESENT SUCCESSES

“Replication or Repudiation plus Responsibility”

By Brent Hunter

Introduction

- A. Jonathan Edwards\Max Duke comparison: *“In the early 1700s, two men developed distinct reputations for themselves—one was Jonathan Edwards, a man of integrity, refinement and Christian character, and the other was Max Duke, a well-known criminal. During the last two hundred years, their descendants have been traced. In Jonathan Edward’s line of descendants are 13 college presidents, 200 preachers, 60 prominent leaders, 90 physicians, 32 authors, 6 professionals and 300 farmers. On the other hand, Max Duke’s descendants include 90 prostitutes, 100 criminals, 145 confirmed drunkards, 300 delinquents, and 285 who contracted various evil social diseases.”*
 - 1. It is **amazing** -- the effect of one person’s influence!
 - 2. The Ten Commandments establish this principle. (Exodus 20:4-5)
- B. It is easiest to simply blend in, BUT we are **free moral agents!**
 - 1. We can **replicate** (repeat)
 - 2. We can **repudiate** (consciously choose NOT to repeat)
 - 3. We can be **responsible** (make the right choices)
- C. THESIS: I. Replication -- powerful!
 - II. Repudiation -- pit falls!
 - III. Responsibility -- key!

I. REPLICATION

- A. Background and overview
 - 1. Each of us has 2 families:
 - a. A family of *orientation*
 - b. A family of *outcome*
 - 2. How we respond to ‘a’ determines ‘b’:
 - a. We either *replicate* -- repeat
 - b. Or we *repudiate* -- change
- B. We see the overwhelming strength of replication...
 - 1. In **MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES!**
 - 2. It is *easier* to replicate\repeat what you are used to than to change.
- C. It’s so influential that we **often repeat even things we hated while growing up!**
 - 1. Paul’s struggle: *“For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practice.”* Romans 7:19
 - a. Exodus Divorce tends to be contagious
 - b. Exodus Child abuse is often carried out by those abused
 - 2. Abraham *lied* (half truth), Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob & Esau
 - 3. There is amazing comfort in **familiarity** -- even if it’s painful.

- D. The children of Israel came out of Egypt.
 - 1. They left bitter bondage. (Exodus 1:11, 13-14)
 - 2. They wanted to return – but why? (Numbers 11:5)
 - 3. Their fixation on the **past** destroyed the possibility of a **better future**.
- E. **We tend to raise our children EXACTLY THE WAY WE WERE RAISED.**
 - 1. Small wonder Ecclesiastes 6:11 says, "*Wisdom is good for an inheritance...*"
 - 2. And the psalmist says, "*...more to be desired than fine gold.*"

II. REPUDIATION

- A. "*We are all affected by our past, but we are **not prisoners of it**.*"
 - 1. "*Repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance.*" Acts 26:20
 - 2. Overcoming sinful habits is not easy! BUT IT IS A **MATTER OF CHOICE!!**
- B. **Major pitfall: the tendency to over-react (extremes)!**
 - 1. Illustration: Corinth first refused to withdraw from someone that they should have; and then to correct it, they refused to accept him back into fellowship as they should have! This is a typical example of repudiation.
 - 2. Illustration: the children of Israel
 - a. 1st generation -- **zealous!**
 - b. 2nd generation -- **apathetic!**
 - c. 3rd generation – **rebellious!**

(They "*forsook Jehovah!*"! They decided to be independent of their parents by repudiating too much. -- Judges 2:12)

III. RESPONSIBILITY

- A. Learn from the past -- **make choices, NOT EXCUSES!**
 - 1. Adam and Eve – With their first sin, both tried to blame the other.
 - 2. Today no one seems responsible for his own actions.
- B. **Don't blame your parents!**
 - 1. Ezekiel said, "*The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.*" That generation used this excuse. But God replied, "*This saying will be heard NO MORE!*" Ezekiel 18:2-4
 - 2. See attached handout ("*Don't Blame Your Parents*")
- C. What makes a man or woman great? Those who have the courage and character to repudiate bad parenting and make the right choices!
 - 1. Hezekiah's father was a very wicked king.
 - 2. Abraham's father was an idolater.
 - 3. Gideon's father was an idolater.
 - 4. Jephthah's mother was a harlot, yet he became a mighty man. (Judges 11)

CONCLUSION:

- A. Replicate the good...Repudiate the bad! (II Corinthians 5:10)
- B. We must all STOP MAKING EXCUSES & BE RESPONSIBLE!
- C. Repent! With God's help, be a Hezekiah, a Gideon, or a Jephthah.
- D. Do the 3-part assignment attached. It is never too late to increase your insight and turn things around.
- E. "*Too many of us lose our peace of mind and security by allowing us to be nailed on a cross between two thieves. On the one side is the thief of regrets over the past, and on the other, fear of the future.*" Turn to God, receive forgiveness, put regrets behind you, and with His power take your past failures and transform them into present successes!

ASSIGNMENT TO APPLY PRINCIPLES

THREE PARTS:

Spend some time thinking seriously about these 3 items. Then on a separate sheet of paper write out your answers. Be as specific and thorough as possible.

I. Think about what things you *liked* about your upbringing and would like to **replicate or repeat**.

II. Think about and list the things you would like to *repudiate* and **take responsibility to change**.

III. Discuss how you will avoid the tendency to **over-react and simply go from one extreme to the other**.

This assignment is especially effective when done at a **young age**. I have felt very good about the results achieved when given to 18-19 year olds who have **only been out of their family of orientation** for a **short while**. They are able to **think clearly about what they would like** in their **new families of outcome** before they begin to **repeat or replicate bad habits**.

However, it is **never too late** to increase one's awareness in this area and with God's help become a **"transition person."** **Negative traits stop by choice** with this type of person and successive generations are spared the **negative consequences** of the bad traits being passed down to their descendants.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if each generation analyzed its past and decided to improve its family so that every generation got better and better instead of just repeated over and over the mistakes of the past?

You can be a part of making this happen!

DON'T BLAME YOUR PARENTS

by Jacob H. Conn, M.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Johns Hopkins University Medical School.

The unsuccessful, the unhappy at various periods in history have blamed their plight on numerous things -- fate, the gods, demons, innate cussedness, or heredity. Today it is the fashion to hold one's parents accountable for every flaw, from plain laziness to mental illness: "I can't save money because my parents never taught me economy." "I'm a hypochondriac because my mother fussed so much about my health when I was little." "In childhood I wasn't permitted to think for myself."

A woman I know actually blamed her parents for her unattractive appearance. Asked why she didn't wave her hair, powder her nose, or occasionally get a new hat, she answered plaintively, "When I was a child Mother always told me I wasn't good looking." It did not occur to her that as an adult it was up to her, and nobody else, to make the most of her looks.



The current notion is that little children are emotionally fragile, that you can wreck a child's whole future by loving him too little or too much, by teaching him the facts of life too late or too soon, by being too strict or too indulgent. Such half-baked misinterpretations of the importance of the formative years ignore the fact that most human beings are blessed with an inner strength. Actually, the average child is as tough psychologically as he is physically. Just as the body repels germs and viruses, so the mind has similar immunities and resistances to the unwise or unkind doing of parents.

History is full of examples of men and women who had unhappy childhoods and yet made a success of their lives. John Stuart Mill became a great philosopher and led a harmonious married life despite a father who never praised him, never allowed him to associate with other children, and relentlessly forced him to study night after night. Beethoven's ne'er-do-well father drove and exploited him shamelessly. Florence Nightingale's parents hemmed her in by all the restrictions that went with Victorian gentility and bitterly opposed her going into nursing.

Ordinary mortals likewise have the capacity to build worthwhile lives despite a past full of psychological handicaps. I do not deny that "parental rejection" or "over-domination" may genuinely handicap some individuals. But a human being is not a machine that once set rolling in the wrong direction is unable to change its course. The essence of maturity or "adjustment" is to make the most of yourself with whatever you have, which includes your physique, your mental endowments, your social opportunities, and your parents.

Almost daily in my practice I see patients who blame their failure to meet life on their parents instead of on themselves. A fearful, immature spinster wept that she "couldn't leave Mother." Yet her mother told me: "Doctor, I wish to goodness you'd help her, so that she'd go and get married." Nothing tied this woman to her mother's apron strings but knots of her own making.

"No wonder I'm the way I am," a seriously depressed man said to me. "Look!" He pulled from his pocket a yellowed newspaper clipping that told of his parents' double suicide twenty years before. He admitted that he had carried the clipping all those years. The heart of his problem was not the shocking memory but his compulsion to dwell on it. Contrary to popular notion, mental illness or neuroticism is not caused by an event but by the way a person reacts to it. A disturbing incident is only the match which sets off the firecracker; it's the gunpowder within the cracker which actually causes the explosion. It is good old-fashioned character -- a compound of inherited tendencies and our ability to tolerate disappointments -- that determines whether we withstand childhood tragedies or whether they

down us all our lives.

If it were true that what happens during childhood fixes us once and for all, everybody would be neurotic. Certain events in childhood are genuinely upsetting, among them weaning and a new baby in the family. But the normal individual outgrows his baby shoes.

The great majority of normal, healthy-minded youngsters manage, without special help, to cope matter-of-factly with their parents' antics. Just try to spoil a child who has such innate common sense that he doesn't need or want to be spoiled! Or try to dominate the average three-year-old. Children who do not have the neurotic need to be dependent will not be dominated. Maybe they react with tantrums. Maybe they argue. Maybe they are sullenly silent. But whatever the technique for maintaining their integrity, "Mom-ism" won't and can't wreck them.

The psychiatrist's job does not consist -- as many of my patients think -- of breaking apart a person's past so that he can lay his failings, weaknesses, and peculiarities right at his parents' door. All that a psychiatrist can do is to lead the patient to face the truth about his own wish to be dominated or sheltered or what not, and help him take a stand by himself. Once that point is reached, his past life matters very little. As Dr. Franz Alexander, a distinguished Chicago psychoanalyst put it, "The patient is suffering not so much from memories as from the incapacity to deal with the actual problems of the moment."

A single experience in adult life can so change human beings that it is sheer nonsense to maintain that their natures were immutably determined years before by what their parents said or did to them. A short illness turned St. Francis of Assisi from a frivolous, extravagant young man into a devout ascetic. Gay young blades marry and become serious and responsible husbands; gadabout young wives turn into settled stay-at-homes after the birth of a baby. The human organism is a going, changing concern, with the motives of the present its propelling force.

Too many of us with shortcomings are interested in asking, "How did it start?" Too few ask themselves, "Why do I keep it up"? A person must first make the frank self-admission, "I am worrisome -- or thriftless, or hypochondriac, or irresponsible -- because it suits some purpose of my own to be that way."

The cliché, "There are no problem children, only problem parents", is as extreme and fallacious a swing of the pendulum as the idea that all children were imps of Satan. Even a little child can be responsible for his own bad upbringing, for it takes two to make an emotional bargain. When a father is too authoritarian it may well be that he is so because the child craves being bossed. When a mother prolongs treating Junior like a baby it may be because she responds to his own need for protection. Children are not mere lumps of clay which adults mold. In the parent-child relationship, as in marriage, one personality modifies and plays upon another.

Parents can set the stage for the drama of their children's lives. They can supply inspiring or uninspiring examples of conduct, which will influence basic mental, physical, and spiritual growth. But acceptance or rejection of the background they give is a matter of the child's individual character.

PREDICTORS OF MARITAL SUCCESS: MARKS OF A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

Introduction

- A. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:13-16), yet divorce has rapidly become the norm in our society.
 - 1. The dismal state of today's families is similar to that of first-century families, when, as Seneca describes, people would "marry to divorce, and then divorce in order to remarry." Sociologists call the current state of affairs (no pun intended) "serial polygamy."
 - 2. Since the 1960s' "no fault" divorce laws were enacted, *individual self-expression* and *self-esteem* have become more important than *self-control* and *the welfare of others*. For example, a 1997 survey found that 57% believe that divorce is acceptable for reasons including *the fading of romantic feelings* and *communication problems between spouses*.
- B. This change in attitudes has devastated the family and resulted in all types of social ills.
 - 1. *The average marriage in America now only lasts seven years!*
 - 2. Recently, it was reported that 30% of all divorces occurred within the first two years of marriage.
- C. Divorce has injured the church as well.
- D. The idea that "Divorce is no big deal; it happens all the time," is dangerous. **IT IS A BIG DEAL. GOD HATES IT AND SO MUST WE. The good news is that IN MOST CASES, DIVORCE CAN BE AVOIDED.**

Summary:

- 1. **Why God Hates Divorce**
- 2. **Our Response**
- 3. **Marks of a Successful Marriage**

I. WHY GOD HATES DIVORCE

- A. Divorce is a violation of **His eternal covenant** (Matthew 19:6). Even when God allows divorce, He still hates it, since no divorce can occur without sin.
- B. **God loves children.** Children need the security of a good marriage to ensure their spiritual and mental health.
 - 1. Immediately after his strict commandments about Divorce/Remarriage, Jesus makes His famous statement, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." I believe His concern for children is one reason He hates unwarranted divorce (Matthew 19:9, 14).
 - 2. **Research had found that divorce hurts children for their entire lives.**
 - a. One headline reads: "Study Reveals Deep Scars of Divorce: Children Pay Price into Adulthood."
 - b. Barbara Defoe Whitehead concludes, "Children from disrupted families have a harder time achieving intimacy in a relationship, forming a stable marriage, or even holding a steady job. Contrary to popular belief, many children do not bounce back after divorce and remarriage. Difficulties associated with the family breakup often persist 20, 30, even 40 years into adulthood."

C. **Divorce hurts adults as well.**

1. Divorcing is very painful. It is like a premature death.
 - a. One in four describes divorce as a “nightmare.”
 - b. Only one in seven says it was a relatively painless, smooth transition.
 - c. Divorced physicians, for example, are thirteen times more likely to commit suicide than married physicians.

D. **Divorce divides.** God’s plans always bring peace, not factions (I Corinthians 14:33).

E. **Divorce decreases one’s ability to have a successful subsequent marriage.**

1. Dr. Chapman reports, “Second marriages have a 66% chance of divorce, third marriages a 75% chance, and fourth marriages a 90% chance.”
2. All the emotional baggage of a previous marriage is like a “third partner.”

II. OUR RESPONSE

A. As God’s children we desire to *become like Him*. We need to hate divorce and so align our values with His.

B. Rather than spreading guilt by condemnation, we need to **minister** to the divorced, *love* those who have been harmed by divorce, equip them with God’s principles, and *help them rebuild their lives*.

1. Damaged marriages and families can rebuild and prosper. Jeremiah 32:27: “Is there anything too hard for Jehovah?” Jeremiah 32:17: “Ah Lord Jehovah, thou hath made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm, **there is nothing too hard for Jehovah.**” **With God there is HOPE!**
2. Forgiveness and healing are God’s specialties! But God can only heal broken hearts when we give him *all* the pieces.

C. We must practice **prevention** in our own marriages so that we will avoid divorce and stale and unfulfilling marriages. Neither a failed marriage (in which an unhappy couple stays together) nor a divorce (an ended marriage) gives God glory.

D. We need to be *wise and diligent* to teach our young people **PREVENTION**.

1. *It is much easier to build a child than to repair an adult!* **It is much easier to make cautious and prudent choices during courting and the early years of marriage than it is to try to pick up the pieces later.** In this lesson, we will focus on our young people and those who are teaching them.
2. Young people can take proactive measures *during* courtship that will significantly increase their likelihood of creating a successful marriage. Why not be smart and act to *put the odds in your favor*?
3. If your marriage is to succeed, *you must plan to succeed. You cannot afford to go with the flow, doing what most people do. One day you are sure to wake up and find that you are just another statistic* (Matthew 7:13-14).

E. **Understand your own situation.**

1. Divorce is similar to an automobile accident. As every insurer knows, some accidents are unavoidable. The best drivers can come to grief due to mechanical failures, road hazards, or another driver’s error. On the other hand, some drivers are accident-prone, such as young males, those who drink and drive, those who drive souped-up sports cars, and insurance

companies charge higher premiums for those who have higher accident rates. Similarly, some are **divorce-prone**. Certain traits, age, family background, education, income, attitude toward marriage, faith in God, etc., affect how high of a “premium” one would pay.

2. The key to success is not the national average, but, given your choices and circumstances, what *your* chances of getting a divorce are.
- F. **This is our mission.** The task demands much in a culture that treats divorce lightly and in which the stigma of divorce is almost totally eroded. Yet take heart! we can succeed with God’s help.
1. The divorce rate among the Romans during the first couple of centuries was exponential, and yet this was the time of the church’s greatest growth. Christian families set an example that the Romans admired; even the harshest critics would exclaim: “*Behold, what marriages and families they have.*”
 2. May it be so with us as we strive to restore not just NT DOCTRINE BUT ALSO NT RELATIONSHIPS.

III. PREDICTORS OF A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

(Information primarily comes from *Building a Successful Marriage* by Landis and *Marriage and Families New Problems, New Opportunities* by Havemann and Lehtinen)

Although each does not involve clear moral choices, the following criteria, if followed, will prove to be the path of wisdom. Couples following all of these steps can go to the altar with over a 95% chance of being successfully married!

A. **HAD PREMARITAL CONFIDENCE:** “Commit your works unto Jehovah and your purposes will be established” (Proverbs 16:3).

1. **Never go to the altar with *any* doubts.** Don’t let pressure from family or friends cloud your reasoning or cause you to ignore “red flags.” Don’t let fear of being alone or of losing someone you care about cause you to make a life time vow with someone whom you have doubts. *It is better to walk away in honor or even call off a wedding than to walk down the aisle less than thrilled.*
 2. **94% of those who reported long-term success in marriages said they went to the altar with total confidence.** Only 6% who had needed intensive counseling or eventually divorced said they saw no sign of impending troubles while dating.
 3. Don’t be naïve. **PROBLEMS DON’T GO AWAY; THEY ALMOST ALWAYS WORSEN ONCE YOU ARE MARRIED.**
 4. What will enable you to have confidence? **TIME.** Time is your best friend here. You have the rest of your life to be married; so **DO NOT ALLOW ANYONE TO RUSH YOU!** “Do not be anxious for the morrow. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matthew 6:34).
- B. **DATED TWO YEARS OR MORE:** “For everything there is a season. [...] He hath made everything beautiful in its own time” (Ecclesiastes 3:1; 11).
1. In our culture, people select mates through dating, which is in many ways a flawed system. “The best date does not necessarily make the best mate.”
 2. It is important not to short-circuit the mate-selection process by getting married too soon.
 - a. Dr. James Dobson reports, “One-half of all couples who date into the second year break up sometime during that second year.” What happens if you get married after a year? *You are stuck with someone whom, once you got to know better, you would not have chosen to marry.* You will either divorce, or stay married but feel cheated.
 - b. If you want **PREMARITAL CONFIDENCE**, date a minimum of two years, spending quality time with each other and each other’s families.

- C. **SOUGHT THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS:** “In a multitude of counselors a thing shall be established [...]” (Proverbs 15:22).
1. Happy couples understand that one “marries” not only the spouse but the spouse’s family! You will need their support. Listen to their advice, and let it help you avoid mistakes.
 2. Women: **give your parents veto power.** Do not become emotionally involved with someone until you are sure that your parents, especially your father, who is to give you away, approves.
 - a. The old custom of “asking for the daughter’s hand in marriage from the father” resulted from the wisdom and perception of centuries of experience, and it should be heeded. Those cultures that still practice this custom have drastically lower divorce rates.
 - b. “Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise).” (Ephesians 6:2).
 3. **RED FLAG: If your best friends and parents** are concerned or not sure about a perspective mate, they probably see things you don’t. Be careful in the early stages of courtship. Love can be blind.
- D. **MARRIED IN A FORMAL WEDDING RATHER THAN ELOPING.**
1. When you elope, you rob yourself and other families of precious memories.
 2. You also lose the bond, participation and support of family and friends, which are vital to your marriage. “Woe to him who is alone when he falleth and does not have another to pick him up!” (Ecclesiastes 4:10).
 3. Eloping usually includes a Justice of the Peace instead of a preacher, who takes marrying seriously and would help the couple write their own vows.
 4. You set a negative example by eloping. Is that what you want for your children?
- E. **HAD A FORMAL ENGAGEMENT RATHER THAN AN “UNDERSTANDING.”**
1. Our society has become casual, treating sober, eternal, and sacred things lightly.
 - a. In America, **only 1 out of 3 engagements end in marriage.** Apparently, engagement does not mean “Yes,” but “Maybe, if I don’t change my mind between now and then.”
 - b. Many couples talk about getting married “someday.” Without a formal proposal with its definite “Yes” or “No” followed by acceptance of a ring as an identifiable event, the commitment and emotional bond is lessened.
 2. My Dad used to advise (and he was right), **“LONG COURTSHIPS; SHORT ENGAGEMENTS.”** I recommend a courtship period of at least two years and an engagement not exceeding six months. It is very hard to maintain purity for longer than six months.
- F. **PRESERVED PURITY UNTIL MARRIAGE:** “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4).
1. Stand at the altar and be able to say: *“Then I was in his eyes as one that found peace”*(Song of Solomon 8:10). This relationship creates a strong bond when it is shared exclusively between spouses. Don’t destroy how special the honeymoon is supposed to be!
 - a. Sexual relations outside of marriage foster guilt and embarrassment as a negative long-term memory. As a thing so special and intimate, it ought to bring a positive bond and memory that is special because only the two of you have shared it.
 - b. If a couple does not wait until marriage, the wife will later distrust the husband. If he could not practice self-control with her, how can she trust him with other women?
 2. **COHABITATION IS A MISERABLE FAILURE.** The idea sounds valid on the surface. Living together before marriage would allow one to “test” another for compatibility.
 - a. In a 1995 survey, 60% of men and 50% of women said they believed cohabitation morally acceptable. They are **WRONG.**

- b. Living together is **not** a “**trial marriage**” because it is not based upon commitment as is marriage. It is nothing more than having **a glorified sexual roommate**. It cheapens sex and harms the relationship.

G. SHARED VALUES, ESPECIALLY SHARED FAITH

1. Decide you will to marry a **Christian** or you will not marry! **It might be said that if one marries a child of the devil, he suddenly has Satan for a father-in-law!!** Marrying ungodly women turned the heart of the wisest man who ever lived away from God. How much more may it be so with you? **“Be not deceived.”**
2. The ***International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*** reported that regular church attendance is the most critical factor in marital stability. A 1990s survey of 3,300 men found:
 - a. Men who switched partners most often were those with no religious convictions.
 - b. The rate of cohabitation before marriage is **seven times higher among people who seldom or never attend religious services**. This find is significant, because couples who live together before marriage experience higher divorce rates. “My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you” (Proverbs 3:1-2).
 - c. In *Letters to Karen*, Charlie Shedd notes that
 - (1) 1 in 54 who attend church regularly together end in divorce.
 - (2) 1 in 500 who pray together regularly end in divorce. Shedd comments, “*The kind of homes we need most are the kind of homes where two lives are being drawn together by a holy love greater than their own.*”

H. UNDERWENT PREMARITAL COUNSELING

1. The Prepare/Enrich Test can gauge with an 85% accuracy whether a couple will be happily married, unhappily married, or likely to divorce. I advise all couples considering marriage to take this test as they evaluate their future together.
2. *“To fail to prepare is to plan to fail.”*

I. MARRIED AFTER THEIR TEENAGE YEARS

1. 40% of married teens live in poverty.
2. Teens’ chance of divorce is twice as high than those over twenty.

J. MARRIED WITHIN THE SAME RACE/ETHNIC GROUP

1. The occurrence of interracial marriages four times higher now than twenty years ago.
2. Yet such marriages are still risky. On average they face double the risk of divorce.

K. CAME FROM STABLE HOMES

1. “Divorce is contagious.”
2. If both spouses are from divorced homes, they have an 80% chance divorcing.

L. GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE

1. Those who graduate stay together more often than those who have dropped out of school.
2. The key is not the education as much as the character quality of “sticktuitiveness.”

M. ESTABLISHED THE HUSBAND AS THE PRIMARY PROVIDER

1. There are three times as many divorces among those in lowest income brackets than in the middle and upper brackets.
2. As a man's ability to be a breadwinner increases, his risk of divorce decreases dramatically.
3. For women, the opposite is true. Those working wives with the highest levels of income have unusually high divorce rates.
 - a. She is less dependent on the husband and also less motivated to work things out.
 - b. Having a wife work is difficult on a man's sense of masculinity.
 - c. "When young children are at home, when the wife works full-time, the chances of divorce double" (Willard Harley). The stress of juggling job and domestic responsibilities often takes a toll on the marriage.

N. WERE MENTALLY STABLE AND FREE FROM ADDICTIONS

1. Neither partner should be a substance abuser, an alcoholic, or have psychological problems for which he has not sought help. Such lack of control poisons a relationship.
2. You must avoid the person who will make your life miserable.

O. WERE WILLING TO SEEK HELP EARLY

1. When both spouses seek counseling as soon as problems develop, they increased their chance of success to 87%.
2. No one has shame in getting assistance for unresolved physical problems. Why should one have shame in getting assistance with unresolved relationship problems?

CONCLUSION:

- A. Those who are married are *happier on average than any other group – divorced, widowed, or single.* God knew what was best!! But marriage takes work and good planning!
- B. The good news is that people have begun to view marriage with more godly attitudes and seeing it as more of a commitment.
 1. It is worth being careful and counting the cost before jumping in!
 2. J. P. Getty, the great financier, once said, "I would gladly trade my fortune for a happy marriage"!
- C. Let's stop the parade of those who come to God with the pieces of a broken marriage and family, broken vows, and broken hearts. Let's make it our mission to provide a way to not only make divorce less likely, but make marriages better.

PRESCRIPTION FOR THE B.E.S.T. MARRIAGE

Presented by Brent Hunter

Intro.

- A. A recent poll found that 62% of married couples reported their marriages less than desirable. Seventy five percent reported they thought their marriage was in a rut.
- B. It appears that the Righteous Brothers song “You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling” has unfortunately, become the theme song for too many marriages.
- C. What is the prescription necessary to cure the ailments that plague so many marriages? I believe it is simple and four fold in nature. If you want the B.E.S.T. marriage each of these important medicines must be applied:
 - 1. **Blessing**
 - 2. **Edifying**
 - 3. **Sharing**
 - 4. **Touching**

Ingredient #1: BLESSING.

- A. Blessing (Gk. Eulogia) is actually a combination of two Greek words:
 - a. Eu = well and Logos = word. Literally means “speaking well to or about another.”
- B. Jesus modeled this for us.
 - a. “When He was reviled, He did not revile in return” (I Peter 2:23) but instead prayed that the Father would bless and forgive them!
 - b. He commanded: “**Bless those who curse you**, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Lk 6:28-29).
- C. The Apostles modeled this for us. “**Being reviled, we bless**; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed; we entreat” (I Corinthians 4:12-13). See also Romans 12:17.
- D. Marriage is to be a blessing. The Key is: Bless and be a Blessing!
 - a. The worthy woman will “open her mouth with wisdom and the law of kindness is on her tongue” (Proverbs 31:27) even when she is upset with her husband or feels provoked.
 - b. The Godly man will have the same attitude. “What is desirable in a man is his kindness” (Proverbs 19:22).
 - c. Important principle: **Respond to a curse with a blessing** (Romans 12:14)! Must not “bless our Lord and Father, and with the same tongue curse men” (See James 3:9-11).
- E. How can we and do we most effectively bless others?
 - a. By the words we speak (Proverbs 25:11).
 - b. By learning when to be silent (Proverbs 11:12-13).

- F. Three ways to bless:
 - a. By being kind, not as a duty but as a “gift of blessing.”
 - b. By expressing appreciation. Notice the good and express verbally your thankfulness.
 - c. By calling God’s favor upon him/her in prayer. How much do you pray for and with your partner?
 - d.
- G. Summary: Bless your marriage through good words, kind actions, thankful appreciation, and intercessory prayer. A good place to begin is with Num 6:24-27, the priestly benediction.

II. Ingredient #2: EDIFICATION

- A. Literally = “To build up.” Be each other’s cheerleader!
- B. Elizabeth Barrett Browning spoke to this in her love poem, “Let Me Count The Ways.”
 - 1. She said the more she loved, the bigger person she became.
 - 2. “Make my love larger to enlarge my worth.” This is the beauty of edification, it enlarges our hearts!
- C. Root word for edification: “A hearth or fireplace.”
 - 1. To the ancients the hearth was the center of activity in the home and brought forth warmth and light, togetherness and physical sustenance.
 - 2. What the hearth was to the physical body, the marriage relationship should be for the soul!
- D. Three golden strands of edification which are interwoven together:
 - 1. Personal encouragement
 - 2. Inner strength
 - 3. Peace and harmony (I Peter 3:9-12).
- E. Bible is filled with admonitions concerning edifying one another:
 - 1. “Eagerly pursue what makes for harmony and the edification of one another” (Romans 14:19).
 - 2. “Make it a practice to please your neighbor for his good, to edify and strengthen him” (Romans 15:2).
 - 3. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (I Thessalonians 5:11).
 - 4. “Love builds up (edifies)” (I Corinthians 8:1)!
- F. How does the husband edify?
 - 1. Husbands should nourish emotionally by giving sincere praise. He should “nourish and cherish” his wife (Ephesians 5).
 - 2. Be genuine. Provide specific and generous compliments.
 - 3. Practice the Philippians 4:8 process with your wife.
 - 4. Before you speak? Will this build up? Encourage? Make for peace?

G. How does the wife edify?

1. By being responsive, especially with her eyes and smile.
2. Showing respect (Ephesians 5:33). She is the beneficiary when she does this well and enhances his sense of manhood.

III. Ingredient #3: SHARING

A. In order to have unity, oneness, and intimacy in marriage as outlined in Gen 2:24-25 one must learn to share!

1. Sharing involves a willingness to blend your will with the will of your mate.
2. True love is not so much looking into each other's eyes as much as learning to look in the same direction! So look for mutual goals!

B. "An intimate long term marriage is not the involuntary result of fleeting emotion but the creation of time and will." Dr. WH Auden.

1. Intimacy begins when two people deliberately share the same world, time, interests, activities, feelings, thoughts, goals, ideals.
2. "Both must communicate experiences, dreams, fears, and secrets." Dr. Ed Wheat.

C. When was the last time as a couple you shared a laugh and really had fun? Went on a date? Prayed together?

D. Good marriages maintain some individuality. Allow "spaces in your togetherness," but at the same time truly share your lives together!

1. What must be avoided at all cost is separation.
2. "Two ships passing in the night" is a recipe for disaster.
3. Sharing involves these four areas:
 - a. **Common ground** – things you share now.
 - b. **Separate ground** – separate interests. Can you bridge this gap?
 - c. **New ground for one** – can one party develop enthusiasm for their partner's interest?
 - d. **New ground for both** – what new absorbing interests can you both develop together as you grow. Be creative!

IV. Ingredient #4: TOUCHING.

A. The importance of the caring touch of another human being is often ignored.

B. Biblical examples of touching:

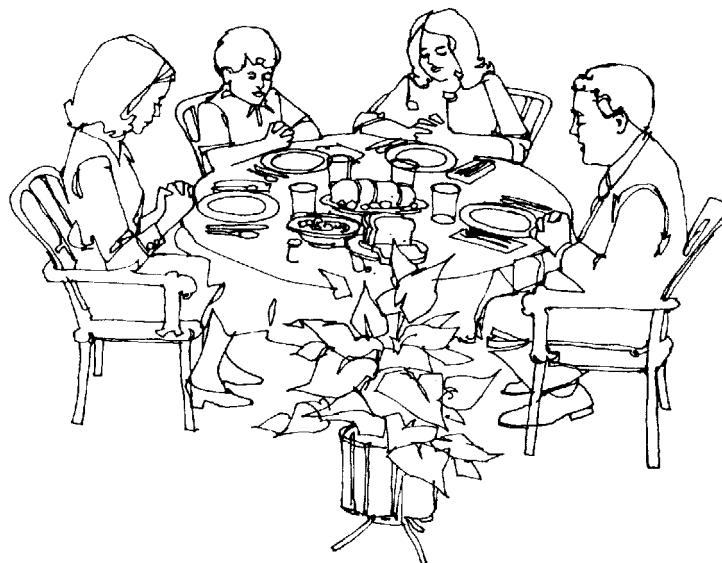
1. Jesus laid his hands on the children that came to Him (Matthew 19: 13-15).
2. Jesus "put forth His hand and touched" a leper (Matthew 8:2-3)!
3. Brethren are to be "kindly affectionate one to the other" (Romans 12:10).

C. Benefits of touching:

1. Learning to touch each other joyfully in non-sexual ways is absolutely essential to build emotional intimacy.
2. Touching a woman affectionately kindles a flame in her heart and establishes a good emotional climate of warmth and love in the home."
3. A tender touch says: "I care."
4. A UCLA study found touch blesses us by:
 - a. Raising the hemoglobin in our blood and thereby increasing the body's ability to heal.
 - b. Lowering blood pressure
 - c. Increasing our life span and energy level.
 - d. Making people more positive about life!
5. Most couples need eight to ten meaningful touches a day.
6. Are you providing and receiving the touch you both need in your marriage?

Conclusion:

- A. Put these four ingredients into your marriage and you will find your marriage will not fall into a rut, but will thrive and fulfill your heart's desire!
- B. The key is to follow God's prescription and trust the great physician throughout the process!



REFERENCES:

I highly recommend any of Willard Harley's books. Especially recommended are: *His Needs, Her Needs, Love Busters, Fall in Love, Stay in Love, and I Promise*. For further details go to the excellent website: www.marriagebuilders.com.

You will also find hundreds of audio files and scores of lessons on marriage and family that I have done while at Oldham woods at www.oldhamwoodschurch.com, Click on "audio files." I have compiled a revised summary of Harley's work that I use with couples. You can download it as a word doc off of the Oldham Wood's church home page.

NOTE: Be aware that Willard Harley does not quote the Bible though he uses many Biblical principles. His material is very practical and works! However, be careful. He does not believe that the man is the head of the house or in Biblical submission. This is subtle but it comes out in some of his principles and applications. Also, he does not discuss meeting spiritual needs. A huge omission! Like any book, read his carefully and of course reject anything that does not square 100% with scripture.

My favorite book for men is: "If Only He Knew." by Gary Smalley. It is a classic that explains to a man how he can best love his life from her view point like Christ loves the church.

My favorite book for women is: "Creative Counterpart" by Linda Dillow.

The **Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts** by Gary Chapman is also excellent. I

I also highly recommend: "**Love and Respect**" (The Love she most desires, the Respect he desperately needs) by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs. This book is published by Focus on the Family and is very practical and biblically based.

"**Love life for every married couple**" by Dr. Ed. Wheat is an easy read and has great Biblically based material in it that is good for both the husband and the wife.

Dr. John Gray's famous book: "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus" has some very good insights. I especially like the chapters on "How to communicate difficult feelings" and "How to write a love letter!" Really helpful practical material.

Two books on the sexual relationship that are very good and tastefully done are "The Act of Marriage" by Tim LaHaye, 'The Act of Marriage after 40' updated by Tim LaHaye, and "Intended for Pleasure" by Dr. Ed Wheat.

"**Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families**" by Dr. Steven Covey is very practical and character building!

"**Marriage Fitness**" by Mort Fertel. "**Four Steps to Building and Maintaining Phenomenal Love.**" Unique concepts very different from standard counseling techniques. Quick ways to begin to reconnect without focusing on the current problems. Author believes if you can reconnect first, then you will have the desire to work on the problems and many will go away on their own. Very practical. Especially useful as a new approach when other "traditional approaches" have failed.

Most of these books can be found cheaply at Amazon.com and are available in paperback and in used condition. No need to spend a small fortune to acquire excellent resources and helps in this vital area!