

# **MARRIAGE: A REVOLUTION AND A REVELATION**

*A supreme earthly test of discipleship*

By

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*<An unfinished, unedited, and previously unpublished draft.>*

## INTRODUCTION

There may be floods of tears in the first row on the left side of the church as the bride's mother watches her husband lead their daughter down the aisle--the sweet child to which she gave birth, now transformed into a vision of glory--and, alas, about to be given away! But is the *bride* dissolved in tears? Hardly. Her eyes are fixed on one man, her beloved, to whom she is about to surrender herself--till *death* they do part. Does she have the smallest inkling of what will be required of her as a wife? Does the thought of sacrifice cross her mind?

And he? What occupies his mind as he watches this slow procession? It is unlikely that he is pondering God's reasons for ordaining marriage: "For the procreation of children, for a remedy against sin, and for the mutual society, help, and comfort that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity--into which holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined," according to the Book of Common Prayer.

As the bride, with "undisturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy" moves down the aisle she is not sobbing, thinking of the sacrifices she will be required to make. Her thoughts are of the expulsive power of a new affection. Her eyes are fixed on that beloved man who waits with tingling anticipation, each filled with joy at the voluntary choice to surrender: *I want you and I want you to want me.*

Think of discipleship. A realistic view of marriage is not a sociological, historical, psychological, or sexual study but a theological mystery, which takes into account and is shaped by an understanding of its profound spiritual character as ordained by Christ--a total relinquishment of the self to another person. There are striking similarities between marriage and discipleship. Both involve a *revolution* and a *revelation*.

Do pastors who counsel engaged couples speak clearly to them of the meaning of the Cross? of self-abandonment?

One day as Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). At once they left their nets and followed Him. Did they know what they were in for?

1. Jesus began at once to teach His disciples. The sermon on the mountainside was His starting point which, although it was a bombardment of seemingly impossible requirements, nevertheless drew, in addition to the disciples, crowds who were amazed at His teaching, and saw that He taught as one who had authority beyond the teachers of the law.

Taking His chosen twelve, He demonstrated His supernatural power to heal the sick and the blind, to calm a storm, to raise the dead. He reminded the disciples that it is *enough* for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. They were warned not to be surprised if they should lose their lives for His sake--His faithful servant John the Baptist lost his head. Jesus himself must go to Jerusalem where He would suffer many things, and die. This was too much for Peter. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” He received a stinging reply: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:22,23).

Jesus, immediately after He had spoken so sternly to Peter, offered a gracious invitation. Note that He did not coerce. There were many other itinerant rabbis in Jesus’ day . A disciple could choose which he would follow.

Jesus’ invitation was meant, I believe, not only for the twelve but also for those throughout the world who love Him enough to do what He says. Discipleship to this day requires the acceptance of three conditions: “*If anyone would (wants to, will, wishes to) come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*” (Matt.16:24).

“I heard Him call, Come follow.

That was all.

My gold grew dim,

My soul went after Him.

Who would not follow

If they heard Him call?"

Gladly the disciples left their nets and followed Him. They could not know what this would ultimately cost. They had much to learn of *the glory of sacrifice*.

So have we who enter into marriage.

Chapter One

**Love Gives Up Itself**

Jesus Christ demonstrated the true meaning of love when He "*gave himself* for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14).

Years ago my college alumni magazine published the testimonies of four couples, all of whom had graduated from that (Christian) institution twenty years earlier. Each couple had been asked to describe their experience in marriage. A measure of happiness and a few trials were mentioned, but nary a word differentiated this couple from the world. There was no reference to the quality of love which should characterize a Christian marriage--"[Christ] died for all, that those who live should *no longer live for themselves*, but for him who died for them and was raised again" (II Cor. 5:15).

What a difference it would make if every bride and groom clearly understood from day *one* that marriage begins with a glad relinquishment of the self! The way to self-fulfillment, therefore, is self-giving love. One puts himself unreservedly at the service of another, for that other's sake. This is the bond that unites them (I John 2:5-7) "If anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did." This voluntary self-offering is divorce from privacy, a strange awareness of the "otherness" of the other. King Solomon describes it in his Songs of Songs: "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many

waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned” (Cant.8:6,7).

It is not surprising in today's "go with your feelings" atmosphere that some couples write what they suppose to be wedding vows, having little notion of the solemnity of the timeless words to the groom, "Wilt thou have this Woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?" (The Book of Common Prayer)

"The man shall answer: ' I will'".

To the woman the minister says, "Wilt thou have this Man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only to him, so long as ye both shall live?"

"The woman shall answer, ' I will'".

Following the question, "Who giveth this Woman to be married to this Man?" the pair clasp hands and the man says, "I, N. take thee, N. to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth."

This is not a private transaction. It ought never to be a mere concoction. It is public business as the couple joins the enterprise of the human race. A vow is a solemn promise made to God, an act by which one consecrates or devotes himself to some act, service, or condition. It is a promise of fidelity and a pledge of love. Seminars on marriage proliferate. Few offer a clear understanding of the hard biblical principles of day-by-day sacrifice and obedience, which will enable a couple to fulfil their wedding

vows. The vow is meant to create the couple, not the couple the vow.

At a wedding reception my husband and I were asked to give a few words to the bride and groom. To the young man, a dear friend of ours, I said "You married her because you love her. But from tomorrow on you must love her because you married her." Twenty-four hours or so later he may have reason to review that second sentence. The morning after can bring surprising revelations.

Love is a choice. I think C.S. Lewis said it is not the *victim* of my emotions but the *servant* of my will. The newlywed may suddenly find himself quaking at the tremendous responsibility he has willingly (or perhaps rashly?) taken upon himself. He thought that he had simply "fallen in love." Things seem to have suddenly become terribly complicated. How, he asks himself, did this happen? Is there a way out? Was he ready for this? He may then experience a blackness, a "dark night of the soul," convinced that he has made a disastrous move, the worst decision of his life. This is the time to turn to his Heavenly Father for help and assurance.

God has endowed each of us with emotion and will. We do not always differentiate between the two. Psalm 77 describes both. "I cried out to God for help. I cried out to God to hear me. . . at night I stretched out untiring hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned. . . I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit enquired: Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? . . . Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion? Then I thought, 'to this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High.' I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds."

If every couple who seriously aim at marriage would go to the foot of the Cross for divine direction it would be given, thus obviating the confusions, the chaos, and the

broken promises which seem to characterize so many of today's short-term marriages.

A man who has chosen to marry would do well to contemplate the fact that he marries a sinner. A woman, of course, does the same. There is nobody else to marry! How much is known about the respective spouse--this particular sinner, this man or woman, this husband or wife, this person about which one really knows very little indeed? It's possible that the woman is already scheming to "redecorate your home from the cellar to the dome, and then go on to the enthralling fun of overhauling *you!*" as Rex Harrison warned the friend who most earnestly desired to see him married.

G.K. Chesterton wrote, "[the opponents of vows] appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words--`free love`--as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. . . It is exactly this back-door, this sense of having a retreat behind us, that is, to our minds, the sterilizing spirit in modern pleasure. Everywhere there is the persistent and insane attempt to obtain pleasure without paying for it . . . Thus, in religion and morals, the decadent mystics say, 'Let us have the fragrance of sacred purity without the sorrow of self-restraint' . . . Thus, in love, the free-lovers say, 'Let us have the splendor of offering ourselves without the peril of committing ourselves; let us see whether one cannot commit suicide an unlimited number of times.'

"Emphatically it will not work. There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the aesthete; but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing."

Love always means sacrifice--a transfiguring self-discipline, a far cry indeed from the Hollywood notion of love: "What the world needs is *love, love, love!*" meaning

what? Is it a mood, a feeling, a matter of temperament and upbringing, perhaps a mere sentiment or emotion, something you feel and fall into at first sight but can quickly fall out of, and never mind the devastations left behind? Eric Alexander of Glasgow once put it unforgettably to seventeen thousand students in Urbana, Illinois. Following his listing of God's definitions of love he emphasized that "*Love is not a glandular condition!*"

Marriage is perhaps the first opportunity really to know ourselves, our weaknesses and our capacities. We are not ready for such revelations. A very dear and uncommonly wise single friend, whose lover had suddenly changed his mind about marrying her, pointed out to me that a lifelong relationship should begin by *hiding in God*, strengthening our relationship with *Him*, knowing that He unconditionally loves us. "It is my desire to learn more of Him," she said, "to be less of a hindrance to let His living water flow. Your relationship can only grow if you unconditionally accept each other *as you are*, each with your gifts and your weaknesses. It's as simple as that, and therefore as difficult, even as impossible--but remember that Christ has accepted us! I think you tend to think and speak more about the other's faults and weaknesses. [She was right--I had been doing that.] Learn to speak appreciatively of each other before criticizing, trusting God that He surely has given each of you gifts, different ones, but equally important. Please forgive me if these words hurt. I speak out of deep concern for both of you. May He guide you and heal you and give you strength for each day. Your sister in Christ . . ."

Day by day, in the business of loving and living with another who is a part of ourselves and yet opposite, we discover much that has heretofore been hidden from our own eyes. It is a fire, a purging fire, and we must recognize and accept its action.

## Chapter Two

### **The Glory of Sacrifice**

"O Lord, Author and persuader of peace, love, and goodwill, soften our hard and steely hearts, warm our icy and frozen hearts, that we may be the true disciples of Jesus Christ. And give us grace even now to begin to show forth that heavenly life, wherein there is no disagreement nor hatred, but peace and love on all hands, one towards another. Amen." (Ludovicus Dives A.. 1578)

Hear what the New Testament says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him." These words from John 3:16, 17 are familiar to most of us, but perhaps we have overlooked their corollary, found in I John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ *laid down his life for us*. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."

That is the clear meaning of sacrifice--*deny, give up, relinquish, surrender*. Stop press! Pause over those four words. In the first flush of falling in love such simple words sound do-able enough. "I love this man/this woman! Here I am, all of me for you forever!"

No big deal. But things have a way of getting rather complicated rather soon. Is the suitor ready for a radical self-abandonment? Is the other ready also?

When certain peculiarities never noticed in courting days appear in the one you love, this is your opportunity to love unconditionally and sacrificially --which means *as Christ loves us*. When there is a disagreement, God is calling each to try to see the other's viewpoint who is to give in?

"We're both super-strong-willed!" one man declared (quite loudly). "I'm committed to a reformed Presbyterian interpretation of scripture, she to the Free Church interpretation. Our bickering and obvious dissatisfaction is hardly a worthy Christian

witness to our children. My wife refuses to change, and I refuse to change, so we'll live a life of misery instead. Isn't the Christian faith *wonderful*?"

What does it mean to speak of being "super-strong willed"? It is a common statement, but very wide of the mark, it seems to me. What we should recognize is that most of us are born plain old-fashioned *stubborn*. We need not dignify it by calling ourselves super-strong-willed or even strong-willed. True strength of will was demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Lord Jesus, having asked His Father if it were possible that the cup of suffering should pass by, He then surrendered with these words, "*Yet not as I will, but as you will.*" (Matt. 26:39). None of us would dare to imagine what it cost the Savior to accept that cup. None will ever be so tempted and tried. It is, however, in infinitely smaller and very likely *daily* tests which will reveal an earnestness to "Be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

In one of those daily tests a tennis player suddenly saw the light. The word submission had not been in her vocabulary, but she wrote, "This willful one is now playing successful tennis mixed doubles with her husband in team play and then driving home in the same car! My attitude was changed when I committed myself to doing exactly what Ben needed me to do on the court and then getting out of his way so that we could play out the points. God is faithful; Ben and I are better friends than ever!"

But the Bible is unequivocal: "Wives, submit to your husbands," "Husbands, love your wives" (Eph. 5:22). One man called my attention to the Apostle Paul's advice to Christian husbands: "He didn't say, 'Love your nice, sweet, complaisant wife,' but 'Love your wife,' *period!*, even if she's a second cousin of Jezebel and a linear descendant of the witch of Endor on her mother's side, *Sock it to 'em*, Lady--those cantankerous, unspiritual husbands!"

Such clear mandates are easily overlooked in the halcyon days of the honeymoon. Then, suddenly, it's all over. We may take a lesson from a dear old spinster

who taught me a good many things, at least one of which I've never forgotten: "We're none of us prize packages, Betty dear--just look for the essentials and *skip* the rest!"

Dr. Henry Krabbendam, in his paper: The Biblical Pattern of Preparation for Marriage writes, "In Genesis God shows that there is an irrepressible tendency in the husband to be irresponsible. It is practically the first thing that Adam displays after his rebellion against God. When asked whether he had eaten of the tree, he points the finger to his wife. . . God also shows that there is an irrepressible tendency in the wife to be dominating. God tells Eve, 'Your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.' The combination of Genesis 3:16, where this phrase occurs, and Genesis 4:7, removes beyond any doubt that God warns Eve that she has this tendency and Adam that he may not let it go unchecked."

"Oh, how many times we can most of us remember when we would gladly have made any compromise with our consciences, would gladly have made the most costly sacrifices to God, if He would only have excused us from this duty of *loving*, of which our nature seemed utterly incapable. It is far easier to feel kindly, to act kindly, toward those with whom we are seldom brought into contact, whose tempers and prejudices do not rub against ours, whose interests do not clash with ours, than to keep up an habitual steady, self-sacrificing love towards those whose weaknesses and faults are always forcing themselves upon us, and are stirring up our own. A man may pass good muster as a philanthropist who makes but a poor master to his servants [or his wife] or father to his children." (F.D. Maurice 1805-1872)

A woman whose husband is an alcoholic wrote, "A friend prays for me, then I go home and hug my husband even when his arms hang at his sides." That is unconditional love!

In his book, The Four Loves, C.S. Lewis writes, "God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing--or should we say 'seeing'? there are no tenses

in God--the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the mesial nerves, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time, for breath's sake, hitched up. If I may dare the biological image, God is a 'host' who deliberately creates His own parasites; causes us to be that we may exploit and 'take advantage of' Him. Herein is love. This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor of all loves."

Are we followers? Then we ought to lay down our lives for each other. Ponder those unequivocal words. Who has prepared us for this sort of thing? Who even broached the subject of "sacrifice"? The truth is that it is impossible to love deeply without sacrifice. What on earth does that mean to a newly married man or woman? A revolution? If I thought about it at all had I a clear understanding of the giving up of privacy, for instance? Perhaps I assumed that I could have my own way. What about unilateral decision-making, independence, time, space, name, geography, career, ambition?

Have I been conscious of making any realistic sacrifices at all? Has he sacrificed anything in particular for me? Or hasn't there been anything we could label sacrifice?

Who of us mere mortals can fathom, let alone practice day by day, sacrificial love? Yet that is precisely what we are called to do. "He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him" (I Thes. 5:10). Ponder that last clause. Think about it: waking or sleeping, the Lord himself deigns to live with *us*. A Christian marriage is built on sacrifice--each for the other. It is a lifelong NO to myself and YES to the other--a sublime and intimate union, a call to "spousal" love as defined by Christ and the Church. The husband represents Christ, the wife represents the Bride of Christ. What an awesome privilege for each of us! But it will cost.

Chapter Three

**Salted with Fire**

Having grown up in a strong Christian home where our parents loved each other (my father simply *adored* my mother) I hoped that the Lord would give me a fine Christian husband. Not being what the young men that I knew seemed to be looking for, I feared my chances were rather slim. I had always been the tallest girl in my class, from kindergarten almost through college (there was one six-footer there). I was shy, I was a book worm, and when the rest of the students were screaming their heads off at the football game I was holed up in the library translating Thucydides. But my brother Dave, a wrestler, suggested rather strongly that I go to one of the wrestling matches. Why on earth would I want to do that--cringe to watch one man with his nose in another man's armpit? See my contortionist brother tied into knots by a more powerful opponent? How horrifying. But on second thought perhaps it was a nice thing for his older sister to do anyway so I screwed up my courage one Saturday night and went to the gym. Had to watch Dave's opponent throw him down. Up he got and went at it again. Can't say I enjoyed anything about that sort of gymnastics. I never went again, but Dave introduced me to the man he'd been tied up with. Jim Elliot was his name, champion wrestler of four states. Shortly before my graduation, Jim asked me to go for a walk. I was stunned as he confessed his love for me. If he had asked my father for advice he would have learned that a young man ought never to confess his love for a woman unless he is prepared immediately thereafter to say, "Will you marry me?" My four brothers knew that that was the proper way to propose.

It was five long years before Jim believed he had God's permission to ask me to marry him--five agonizingly long years for me, of course, but incomparably worth the wait. He had gone to work with his buddy Pete in the eastern jungle of Ecuador with a tribe of Indians called Quichuas. I went to the western jungle to join two British

missionary women who were working with the Colorado tribe.

When Jim believed God's time for marriage had come he traveled up over the Andes and down into the western jungle. He had one simple question: Will you marry me? I said yes. Like any new bride I was ecstatic. I had waited a long time. This gorgeous man was now mine--my very own husband--for just twenty-seven months. Did I know what would soon take place? I did not. He and four other missionary men were killed in Ecuador, South America, in 1956 by a tribe then called Aucas who believed that all outsiders were cannibals.

This is a book about marriage. Marriage is a wonderful thing

"Dear friends," wrote the apostle Peter (who was deeply acquainted with sorrows), "Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ" (I Peter 4:12,13).

*Do not be surprised!* Jim's death certainly seemed to me "something strange" but having grown up on missionary stories I well knew that many ended in violent death. John and Betty Stam (twenty-seven and twenty-eight), were young American missionaries to China. On December 6, 1934, John wrote, "My wife, baby and myself are today in the hands of the Communists in the city of Tsingteh. Their demand is twenty thousand dollars for our release. All our possessions and stores are in their hands, but we praise God for peace in our hearts and a meal tonight. . . He is able--a wonderful Friend in such a time." Hudson Taylor's daughter-in-law picks up the story: "Painfully bound with ropes, their hands behind them, they passed down the street where he was known to many, while the Reds shouted their ridicule and called the people to come and see the execution. Like their master they were led up a little hill outside the town. John was sharply ordered to kneel--the look of joy on his face, afterwards, told of the unseen Presence with them as his spirit was released. Betty was seen to quiver, but only for a moment. Bound as she was, she fell on her knees beside him. A quick command, the

flash of a sword which mercifully she did not see--and they were reunited--"Absent from the body, present with the Lord." That made an indelible impression on my nine-year-old mind.

There is an intriguing verse in Mark 9:49, "Everyone will be salted with fire." J.B. Phillips' translation is "Salt is a very good thing; but if it should lose its saltiness, what can you do to restore its flavor? You must have salt in yourselves, and live at peace with one another." The Jerusalem Bible puts it this way: "If salt has become insipid, how can you season it again?" Salt can be very fiery if it encounters a wound, but at the same time it may be wonderfully remedial. Perhaps this has something to do with learning the deep lessons of participation in the sufferings of Christ--which takes a lifetime--but what a promise is appended by Peter's words, "so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed"!

Did you solemnly promise before God and witnesses that you would "live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony?" Did you promise soberly and solemnly "to love, comfort, honor, and keep (him or) her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep only to (her or him), so long as ye both shall live?"

Thirteen years after Jim's death along came Addison Leitch, professor, philosopher, theologian. Our marriage of less than five years was idyllic. Cancer took him. So much for that, thought I, but God had yet another surprise for me--Lars Gren, a muscular Norwegian with a Southern graciousness acquired in Atlanta, who said to me one evening as we sat by a fire, "I want you for my wife." I had no answer ready that evening. I spent some weeks pondering and praying. Could God actually want me to have a third husband when dozens of women were asking me why He had never even given them a *date*? I asked counsel of friends whose godly wisdom I trusted.. None felt that I was making a mistake. A few weeks later the answer was clear: Yes to Lars.

Chapter Four

**Love is Very Patient**

A honeymooning couple may be so dazzled with love that they fail to notice peculiarities which will soon surprise them. The return from the honeymoon begins the knotty matters of the four b's-- bedroom, bathroom, breakfast and budget. They may be in for a painful jolt when they find that patience must do its perfect work. He wants the windows open at night, she wants them closed. He fires his towel over the rack from the other side of the bathroom. She wants towels neatly folded to show the monograms. He shoulders his way to the mirror to shave, can't fathom how she can take such ages with her hair. Alas. What revelations begin to surface! He's used to stretching his frame diagonally across the bed, which consigns her to a triangle. But, bless his heart, the next morning he helps her make the bed--his mother told him it's easy with two. Suppose he showers and she bathes--will there be enough hot water for both? Somebody must make the coffee. Will he/she make it "right"? He expects country ham, two eggs, grits and hot biscuits, while she somehow manages on a piece of dry toast. Then, within a short time, one of them discovers that the other has no idea whatsoever about the use of money--a major setback..

No wonder Rex Harrison (in *My Fair Lady*) sang "Let a woman in your life and your serenity is through! She'll redecorate your home from the cellar to the dome and then go on to the enthralling fun of overhauling you!"

Are you wishing you had a different set of peculiarities to live with? You begin to take stock of things. What blessings did you receive--perhaps eighty-percent of what you had hoped

for? Trust God then for the rest. Let patience have her perfect work.

A bridegroom chooses to marry a woman because he loves her. Now he must choose to *love* her because he *married* her. He ought to cherish this responsibility and thank God daily for His gift.

"O God who art Love, grant to Thy children to bear one another's burdens in perfect good will, that thy peace which passeth understanding may keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord." (The Book of Hours, 1865)

We had not been married many weeks when Lars said something that hurt me (which I've long since forgotten). We went to bed that night, I as far to my side as possible, he as far as his. Tears were running into my ears as I lay on my back waiting for him to apologize. Surely he would remember that the Bible says we are not to let the sun go down on our wrath. Surely he was summoning enough courage to ask my forgiveness. Taking myself by the scruff of the neck, as it were, I waited. At last it came--not a plea for forgiveness but a powerful snore. I was furious. It was all I could do to refrain from giving him a terrific jab in the ribs with my elbow.

In the mercy of God a still small voice broke through my anger--*Love gives up itself*. I knew then that I was every whit as sinful as my husband. I needed grace. I slid out of bed, tiptoed to another room and opened my Bible. Providentially "it fell" on that clear-as-crystal passage in I Corinthians 13:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts,

always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

Those were hard words to swallow. *But what about him?* I said to myself. The Spirit of God broke through my self-pitying armor, prompting me to replace the word *love* with my name:

“Elisabeth is patient, Elisabeth is kind. She does not envy, does not boast . . . keeps no record of wrongs.” I could go no further. Each statement was a lie, and God was speaking unequivocally.

Gerald Vann, in his beautiful book *THE DIVINE PITY*, writes, "Man is made to be filled to infinity. But for that he must walk as a child with God, he must be able to receive His life, he must know and love and serve Him; and all this is made difficult, and without God's restoring power impossible, because of the fact of sin. Sin destroys the child. Instead of the docility which makes love and therefore oneness possible, there is the pride of attempted autonomy, the will to be one's own master, which is the state of isolation from God" [Fontana Books, 1965, page 28].

An old lady wrote to tell me that she was given the privilege of helping a woman, new in the Christian faith, to learn patience. The younger woman had begged her husband not to carry around in his wallet a certain picture which she found offensive--a small thing, but she was bothered by it. He refused to comply.

“Silently seeking God’s wisdom,” the older lady told me, “I prayed: Lord, Your words, by Your Spirit--wisdom! And of course it came. I asked my friend if her husband was away. She said he was, for two days. By the leading of the Spirit I told her to go home, get out his socks and shoes, wash all the socks, even iron them! Take out the laces of his shoes, wash them, hang them to dry, then polish and brush his shoes real good. Well, as she told me later, ‘Oh, I was sure you would be wise enough to give me some nice advice.’ So nevertheless, much against her will, she put the socks on the line, the shoelaces on the back of the chair, and was on her knees on a newspaper, polishing those shoes!

“Her husband came home early. She said she was so embarrassed she wanted to just crawl under anything. He laughed, saying ‘What on earth are you doing?’ My dear lady said, ‘I’m polishing your shoes, Honey.’ He fell on his knees in front of her. He became the bridegroom he had never been and their lives in Christ are still growing in gladness!”

A likely story? Without a doubt the lady who counseled the younger one had had many a lesson in patience, learning that “tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope” (Romans 5:3). Perhaps the young wife expected a “spiritual” solution, some means of convincing her husband that he was in the wrong. Her friend’s advice must have come as a great surprise--such a ridiculous remedy--ironing socks! Washing shoelaces! What could *that* accomplish?

The patience of love! God moves in mysterious ways--ways so foreign to the world’s methods of getting what we suppose is good for us. If only we would hear His words, “No good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (Ps. 84:11).

“Love is not rude” (I Cor. 15:5). Perhaps there are still enough "stars in their eyes" to forestall a foolish argument at that moment--maybe things will get better. Do they?

Chapter Five

**A Lifelong Yes**

We are all born selfish. The newborn in the crib can raise a high-decibel-level shriek meaning (quite unmistakably) NO! He has no idea of anything but his own wants. The universe revolves around him and him alone. How well I remember, when my daughter Valerie was born in the home of Nate and Marj Saint. We were sitting at the dinner table, I having done all that could be done just then for that exigent child, yet she was howling piteously in a nearby bedroom. Nate's second son had been born in the same room only a month before. Nate smiled kindly at me and remarked, "It's a good thing God gave newborns powerful vocal organs, otherwise they'd all be starved to death! Don't worry about it, Betty," he said, "She's your first." Many adults seem never to have left the crib. *Amor amicitiae* is Latin for authentic love, that is, wishing well to the beloved for the beloved's sake. Its opposite, *amor concupiscentiae*, is desirous love, the wish to possess and control another for one's own benefit. It takes most of us many years to relinquish our personal wants and to develop the *intention of unity* and *concern for the good of the other*. Without that development any marriage is on exceedingly shaky ground.

"Self-preoccupation, self-broodings, self-interest, self-love--these are the reasons why you go jarring against your fellows. Turn your eyes off yourself, look up, and out! There are men, your brothers, and women, your sisters; they have needs that you can aid. Listen for their confidences; keep your heart wide open to their calls, and your hands alert for their service. Learn to give, and not to take; to drown your own hungry wants in the happiness of lending yourself to fulfil the interests of those nearest or dearest. Look up and out, from this narrow, cabined self of yours, and you will jar no longer; you will fret no more, you will provoke no more; but you will, to your own glad surprise, find the

secret of 'the meekness and the gentleness of Jesus' and the fruits of the Spirit will all bud and blossom from out of your life." (Henry Scott Holland).

The apostle Paul (unmarried so far as we know) understood human failings. He writes in Romans 15: 1-3, 5,6 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up, for even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' . . . May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus."

This is a daily task, especially when "my neighbor" is now my spouse. There is work to be done, sacrifices to be made, and a high price to pay. It is a good thing to understand that the happily married are not merely "lucky." One couple, recognizing how easy it is in a marriage to destroy that spirit of unity, decided to pray together each morning for their church, their family, and others. His prayer was, "Thank you, God, for a loving and caring wife who keeps her eyes fixed on You. Help me always to honor and protect her in every way." Her prayer was this, "Thank you, God, for a loving husband. Help me to have an obedient and submissive spirit toward him." In her letter to me she confessed that she did not always find it easy to do that, since she was married to a sinner (there is nothing *else* to marry!) with failings like her own, but she recognized the directive set forth in Holy Scripture. "I am assured that graces will come and a holiness of life will be mine through this submission and obedience towards my husband. This is not an easy calling for me. It is a challenge, but it is one I am learning truly to love. We are always better off in choosing God's mysterious ways than our own, no matter how logical our arguments may appear to be."

Jesus warns us not to seek the approval of men. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." To have peace one must forget himself. To forget himself one must walk in truth. To walk in truth one must love God and his neighbor.

Oswald Chambers in MY UTMOST FOR HIS HIGHEST said, "If we have ever had a glimpse of what we are like in the sight of God, we shall never say, 'Oh, I am so unworthy!' because we shall know we are, beyond the possibility of stating it. As long as we are not quite sure that we are unworthy, God will keep narrowing us in until He gets us alone. Wherever there is any element of pride or of conceit, Jesus cannot expound a thing." But what if the "chemistry" just doesn't happen to *be* there? What if the problems don't go away? An unselfish spirit will enable a man or a woman to allow the Lord to touch him or her in the deepest parts, always remembering that we live in a fallen world, a world saturated with sin, yet a world that is redeemable because of the precious blood of Jesus. His cleansing power is always available. Warmed by His love and grace we may be enabled to become vulnerable in a way not dreamed of as long as we are focusing merely on ourselves

How then can we defend the notion that we "owe it to *ourselves*" to rise in the world, to seek self-satisfaction, or distinction? Back to the Bible again! God's word is "Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not" (Jeremiah 45:5). Amy Carmichael, when offered a royal reward for her many years of service in India, graciously declined. She could not imagine her Lord Jesus receiving any reward other than His Father's.

Marriage is an opportunity to accept Jesus' call to discipleship: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matt. 16:25) The denial of self is the most difficult task assigned us. If, by His grace, we succeed in that, we may then be ready to take up the cross and follow.

Chapter Six

**Ten Practical Advices for a perfect Christian Family Life**

St. John Chrysostom (Greek church father, 345?-407)

1. Whenever you give your wife advice, always begin by telling her how much you love her. Nothing will persuade her so well to admit the wisdom of your words as her assurance that you are speaking to her with sincere affection.
2. Show her that you value her company and prefer being at home to being out.
3. Esteem her in the presence of your friends and children.
4. If she ever does anything foolish advise her patiently.
5. Prefer her before all others both for her beauty and her discernment--praise her. She will in this way be persuaded to listen to none that are outside but to disregard all the world except for you.
6. If you are overtaken by poverty, remember Peter and Paul, who were more honored than kings or rich men, though they spent their lives in hunger and thirst.
7. Remind one another that nothing in life is to be feared except offending God.
8. Remove from her soul this notion of 'mine' and 'yours.' If she says the word 'mine,' ask her 'What things do you call yours? I honestly don't know what you mean, for my part, I have nothing of my own. How can you speak of 'mine' when everything is yours?'
9. Never call her by her name alone, but with terms of endearment, honor and love. If you honor her, she won't need honor from others. She won't desire praise from others if she enjoys the praise that comes from you.
10. Pray together at home, and when you come back, let each ask the other the meaning of the readings and the prayers. Teach her to fear God and all other good things will flow from this one lesson as from a fountain and your house will be filled with ten thousand blessings. If we seek the things that are perfect, the secondary things will flow. The Lord says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things

*Marriage: A Revolution and a Revelation*, by Elisabeth Elliot

shall be added to you" Matt. 6:33).

*If your marriage is like this, your perfection will rival the holiest of Monks.*

[From the book on Marriage and Family Life, by Saint John Chrysostom, Greek church father, 345?- 407]

Chapter Seven

**The Nature of Love**

Is it a mood, a feeling, a mere matter of temperament or upbringing? Would we call it a sentiment, an emotion? Perhaps none of the above. A Scottish preacher named Eric Alexander once pointed out to seventeen thousand college students that *love* is most emphatically not a glandular condition!

Solomon, a man who knew a great deal about a great many things, wrote, "Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned." How many of us ever pause to wonder about the nature of that unfathomable love? God so *loved* that He *gave*.

"To love is to relinquish the freedom of the untouched heart," says Romano Guardini, "to become chained to the beloved not by necessity but precisely by love. Love is *fate*--loving man, God has allowed man's fate to touch His heart."

As I look back on my happy childhood I realize that the word *love* was not often spoken, yet daily the *nature* of love was demonstrated between our parents. Each evening when Daddy came home from his office in Philadelphia at *The Sunday School Times* we would hear the squeak of the front door, followed by his perfect imitation of a chickadee's call. Mother, usually in the kitchen at that time, would give her less-than-perfect chickadee's reply. Daddy took off his hat, and kissed Mother. The nature of their love was visual. We knew that all was well. Supper would soon be on the table, followed by the reading of a passage of scripture or Daily Light. Then it was bedtime for the younger ones. When we were small we were always tucked into bed by either father or mother who would sing a hymn with us and pray before the light was turned out. I especially loved "Jesus, Tender Shepherd, hear me,

Bless Thy little lamb tonight.  
Through the darkness be Thou near me,  
Keep me safe till morning light."

These homely rituals shaped our lives. As small children we often sat on Mother's lap in the afternoon as she rocked us and sang hymns such as "Trust and Obey" or "Count Your Blessings." If we wanted "Go Tell Aunt Nancy the Old Gray Goose is Dead," or "Matilda Told Such Awful Lies!" she sang them for us too. We did not realize that we were wrapped in love.

Very much aware of the foolishness of young people entering adolescence, Mother counseled me in no uncertain terms when I was about thirteen: "Never chase boys! *Always* keep them at arm's length! "I listened. I pondered. I followed her advice. How wonderfully it simplified things for me! Not that I was pursued by boys at that age, not at all, but as I reached fifteen or sixteen I discovered that Mother's wisdom greatly simplified things for me.

In my old age I have many opportunities to speak to young people who, in today's world, have been sold a horrifying bill of goods: *If it feels good, do it*. So I "sock it to 'em"-- *keep your hands off, keep your clothes on, and stay out of bed* (until, of course, they're married). It is astonishing how often I'm given a standing ovation, but my heart breaks for those who wish with all their hearts that someone had shown them *the love of God* in I Corinthians 6:18-20--"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. therefore honor God with your body."

Our father told each of my four brothers, "Never tell a woman you love her until you are prepared to follow that statement immediately with, 'Will you marry me?'" -- a tough assignment. No doubt some of my brothers worried, agonized, wondered--to ask

or not to ask? Where? When? What to say? What will *she* say? How do I pop the question?

Our parents prayed earnestly for each of us six children, beseeching the Lord especially to give us godly spouses if it was His will that we marry. Their prayers were answered.

In those days no one had ever called us "teen-agers"--a word coined, I believe, by President Roosevelt. Alas for the chaos that followed! Seven wild years granted to so many children between thirteen and nineteen, bewildered parents listening to secular psychologists who assured them that their offspring would grow up some day. Note that age twelve is the watershed for a Jewish boy. He is required then to take responsibility. It is worth pondering how the boy Jesus, age twelve, was found sitting in the temple, confounding the experts in the law. "Ah," we may say, "but He was Jesus." Is it for nothing that the Jewish Bar Mitzva requires boys of twelve to accept responsibility? It is the transition from boyhood to manhood, from the halcyon days of irresponsibility to sober acceptance of adulthood.

How many Christian parents note that serious parting? When the boy has had twelve years to be a child is it not high time for him to accept adult responsibility in the home? Surely he knows the rules of the house by that time.

The mother of two girls and one boy wrote to ask me if it was o.k. to have her son wash dishes. The girls had been doing it routinely, but occasionally grumbled that their brother should take his turn. The mother felt strongly that it would be good for him to do so but he argued that that was "girls' work..." "Am I wrong?" she asked me. Of course I hastened to suggest that the time might come when he would need to find his own place to live. How simple life can be when routines are established. What a mess a man's apartment can be if he has had no coaching in housework!

Chapter Eight

**He Doesn't Share**

As I sat at the book table following a seminar a lady cut through the line, dropped a letter in my lap, said, "You can read this if you want to, or just throw it away," and quickly disappeared. I hardly had time to see her face, but of course I read her letter and my heart went out to her. She said she is a committed Christian, Sunday School superintendant, witness to neighbors and friends, seamstress, homemaker, mother of three. The story she told is not a new one:

"I read the Scripture and try to be obedient and disciplined in mind (memorization, studying at university, etc.) and body.

"I am far from perfect. Please, can you help me to understand what I must do? I do not love or respect my husband."

She described him--Christian, church elder, honor graduate, successful businessman.

"We appear to be the ideal couple but I am dreadfully unhappy in our thirty-year marriage."

She went on. "Bill is emotionally crippled since his unhappy childhood and does not share intimately, though I have loved him for years and years and years--Bill himself will tell you I was the model wife and homemaker. But my hurt is so deep."

June might be mistaken in her diagnosis. Is his not sharing really the result of emotional crippling? It might or might not be something that can be changed. On the other hand, Bill may be quite an ordinary man, with an ordinary man's preferences. Before he and June were born things were simple. Drastic changes have taken place. All too often nowadays when the breadwinner comes home he flips on the Boob Tube. TV is allowed to dominate supertime and wipe out valuable time with the family. Not many men, it seems, are eager to "share intimately." Lots of women love to. "Women talk

about everything," I heard a Christian psychiatrist say, "While men don't talk about much of anything. They just tell stories." Women talk about feelings, about abstract things, "deep" things, spiritual things. Men often shy away from such discussions, suddenly remember they have to see a guy about something, make a phone call, or fall asleep.

Can anything be done about this disparity?

My answer is not that of a psychiatrist or professional counsellor, but that of an ordinary woman whose husband doesn't talk about all the things I'd like to talk about either. I offer what has helped me when any hard question arises: look first at the perspectives of Scripture and of human history (which are often one and the same). The apostle Paul said, "Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. You trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for he has promised this and will do what he says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you can bear up patiently against it." (I Cor. 10:13,14, Living Bible)

The temptations in June's situation are first to be critical of Bill, then to be angry, then to accuse. Accusations lead to arguments which achieve nothing. Both retreat into sullen silence, communication stops altogether, and the end result is as she describes: she doesn't love him anymore.

For a wife to decide she doesn't love her husband is a desperate measure. Does it really have to be that bad? The situation is new to her, but it's not new to humanity, and certainly it's not new to God. His promise is there in the Book--a promise for help and strength. "I will never leave you or forsake you." But we have to come to Him and ask, in humility, acknowledging our helplessness and our utter dependence on Him.

June has asked. But what sort of answer does she expect?

It is doubtful that women have ever, until the past four to six decades, expected so much from their spouses. For thousands of years expectations of husbands and wives for their spouses were fairly simple and well-defined. Recently they have become very

complicated. While marriage seminars and books and tapes and couples' weekends have undoubtedly done much good, it is my hunch that they may have done some serious damage too, in raising expectations beyond all reason. I wonder if June is (I wonder if I am) asking of a man more than he can give?

Well, of course, if she has prayed about it, God could change him. That would be a miracle, and I'm not sure any of us has a *right* to expect a miracle. Please don't misunderstand. I believe in a God who works miracles--*sometimes*, and according to His own sovereign will and inscrutable wisdom. I don't doubt for a moment that God could change Bill before suppertime tonight if He wanted to, but I think the passage quoted above points to another kind of answer. God does not by any means always solve the problem or remove it or even make it easy. But He has faithfully promised His help and His never-failing presence.

Let's assume that June has prayed faithfully, pleaded earnestly, and tried every way in the world to draw him out of his incommunicative shell. What makes June extremely unhappy might not faze another woman, but never mind that. The Lord knows the frame of each of us, our hopes and disappointments, and He has promised that our suffering will one day turn into glory if we'll respond to it in faith and obedience. First, we can rest assured that the situation in which we find ourselves (and nowhere else) is the very place where God wants to meet us. It is here that we will grow into the likeness of Christ. So this means that the suffering itself is not meaningless, it is not "for nothing." It is an element in God's loving purpose.

St. Francis de Sales said "Accustom yourself to unreasonableness and injustice! God sees these things far better than you do, *and permits them!*"

LOVE, according to scripture, is *to will another's good*. Love is not merely liking the pleasure others give us. It is not treating them as a means to our satisfaction--this would be to put ourselves in the place of God. Love is obedience to Him who *is* love. It is not a mood or a preference or an emotion. It is not "feeling good about" somebody. It

is a command. Therefore it requires our will, and our conscious action. Obedience is always possible. We must will to do God's will, and then He promises to help us.

All of us are in some ways crippled or deformed. We are not whole men or women. So every spouse discovers the limitations of wife or husband and must learn to love in spite of those. It is a commitment that should be made daily, in one way or another. Your unhappiness, June, I believe springs not from your husband's failures and limitations, but from your failure to accept him. He is God's gift to you. All God's gifts are meant to be received with both hands (YES, LORD!) and with thanksgiving (THANK YOU, LORD!).

You had certain expectations of what a husband ought to be and do for his wife, some of them realistic, some unrealistic. So has every wife. No husband ever succeeds in fully meeting them. A wise friend of mine said that when she quit expecting anything from her husband her marriage improved. In an advice column I saw a letter from a happy wife who was fed up with all the complaints that columnist had received about husbands. "My husband comes home from work and sits down in front of the TV with a beer. He doesn't share, he doesn't tell me his deepest feelings, he doesn't understand me. But he bought our house, he pays the bills, he loves our kids, every now and then he pinches my fanny. I'm glad I've got him!"

Take a lesson from that woman. Make a list of the useful things your husband *does* do. Think of how much better off you are than the singles who think marriage would solve all their problems. You could tell them a thing or two: marriage introduces a few problems singles never have. But the fact remains: *you* have a husband. You have three grown children. That means you have four of the greatest gifts God gives to humankind.

To live means to love. To love means to give yourself for others. To give yourself means to lay yourself open to suffering. To suffer--if you do so in the close company of Christ--means ultimately to reign with Him. You have the perfect chance to do all of the above, without too much temptation to do it only for what you'll get out of it here and now.

Give God thanks for this man. God perfectly understands his past, his inability (or unwillingness) to share intimately, and his refusal to accept responsibility. That's between Bill and God. God isn't going to hold you responsible for what Bill didn't do. You are not, in other words, his moral custodian. That isn't your job. That's God's. Your job is to love your man. Keep on doing everything you'd do if you were madly in love with him. Work at it. Do it cheerfully, as unto the Lord. Maybe the Lord will change both of you through this. Maybe He won't. But when you see His face I think He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord!" It will be worth it then. (I'm pretty sure you'll find out, long before then, that it's worth it *now*--if you do it with thanksgiving and gladness, as unto the Lord.)

One last thing: you say it's hard to face the years to come without a "normal" marriage. When it comes right down to it, can we be sure we know what's normal? Do we know, for example, how much "intimate sharing" Jacob and Rachel or Zechariah and Elisabeth enjoyed? Thousands of women live just as you do. Whatever the case, you need not, you *must* not face the years to come. "Do not worry about tomorrow," Jesus said, "for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). All you have to do is to take His yoke for a single day. When you rise tomorrow morning, kneel down in a quiet place and thank Him for a new day, a new

beginning (with the same old husband!). Ask for His help as you place yourself and Bill with your works, joys, and sufferings into the Lord's hands. Learn of Him who is gentle and humble in heart (Matthew 11:28,29) and find--surely you *will* find--that His burden is light. He who bore His own cross alone bears always the heavier end of the cross He lays on us.

## Chapter Nine

### **Angry at God?**

Have you ever found yourself angry at God? The honeymoon seems to have been only a dream. Things have changed. What did you receive when you said "I do"? Might you say that it was perhaps eighty percent of what you had hoped for? A certain amount of time has elapsed. You are at home. It's time to go to bed, so you are lying next to the man who, before the wedding, seemed to be the most wonderful man in the world who is now snoring away in the darkness as you toss and turn, discovering bitterness in your heart toward him. He certainly has no business sleeping so peacefully while you're tied in knots. Is he not aware of your sighing? Has he no compassion? Is God withholding from you something you feel entitled to? The Bible says "Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared" (Proverbs 22:24,25). But you had had no clue that the marvelous man who had wooed you could be very angry indeed.

In Henry Krabbendam's **Biblical Pattern of Preparation for Marriage** he writes, "In this book God shows, first of all, that there is an irrepressible tendency in the husband to be irresponsible. It is practically the first thing that Adam displays after his rebellion against God. When asked whether he had eaten of the tree, he points the finger to his wife Eve. "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate" (see Genesis 3:12). This irrepressible tendency to be irresponsible, however, does not stop with Adam. It is noticeable in Abraham. Upon his arrival in Canaan he encounters a famine. Without being directed by God, he decides to move to

Egypt. Immediately he runs into trouble. He must choose between sacrificing the honor of his wife or running the risk of losing his life. He chooses the former!"

How long does it take after the honeymoon for a couple to discover that not everything is sweetness and light?

"I thought I was marrying a Christian *man*, but now, fourteen years later, there is no evidence whatsoever of Christian growth. He does manage to go to church with the children and me but I am burned out. I had assumed that he would take responsibility, but he has not come through spiritually, financially, sexually. He leaves decision-making entirely up to me. He is like a 'good boy' who is pleasing his mother. He hasn't really grown up. I have to check on him to see if his work is done or his bills paid. I've learned that I can't be submissive to 'silly putty'!" It is well at such a time to remember that you chose to marry this person because you *loved* him. Now is the time to choose deliberately to *love* him because you *married* him. You vowed to remain with him "till death us do part." That is a serious vow in the presence of witnesses and of course there seem always to be surprises of which we had had no clues.

Remember that you marry a sinner--*there isn't anything else to marry!* Men are fallible and sinful, and so are we women. It takes a great deal of the grace of God for any of us to manage to live together, year in and year out, in harmony, peace, and love.

"We have argued over so many things," writes a correspondent, "and I often feel so alone. God has really been near me and shown me love in special ways-- when I have asked and when I have not. I have been hurt so much by my husband and I know I hurt him too. We differ in our ways of handling conflict. I need to leave the situation and think and pray, but he wants to talk right away. We end up in arguments over the littlest

things. Our first thanksgiving was horrible and we did not talk the entire weekend!! Our families noticed.

"In the midst of it we said the meanest things and I called him a jerk! He said he hated me and wanted a divorce!! So much of his frustration is taken out on me. It's the most pain I have ever experienced, but I have become numb."

There *is* a Savior--a loving Heavenly Father to whom nothing is a surprise.

It is our job as a wife to encourage, build up, and help our husband in every way possible. Perhaps you have concluded that he has not really grown up. He may have decided that *you* need to grow up! I know of no more effective way of helping than by honest, earnest and solitary prayer. That is where you must begin--and continue.

"He just sits around," says one worried wife--"I resent it!" Many working men come home and immediately turn on the television. This may be a disappointment to you and the children who have been eagerly awaiting Daddy's coming home, but you must remember that he is probably as tired as you are, if not more so. Why not draw up a list of good things about your man. Does he work hard to "bring home the bacon"? Do you, from time to time, thank him for that? Have you entreated the Lord to teach you how to bless this man, how to grow in grace and to make you daily a better lover? The Lord will enable you to keep a quiet heart as you learn to love the man to whom you said "I will."

One way of helping him is to refrain from taking on things which are really his manly prerogative. We women are sometimes prone to act as mother to our husbands. It is not uncommon for a man to continue to cling to his own mother, forgetting the solemn vow, "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's

ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?" The man then answers with two very loaded words: *I will*.

Explain to this man of yours (if he willing to listen) that it is your sincere desire to be the wife he wants you to be. Quietly submit to him as head of the house. If he is bored by such conversations and finds TV much more interesting, try to arrange such discussions (if it's necessary to have them at all!) at a more opportune time. There are many times when what we need to do is simply to keep a quiet heart.

No husband is perfect, none quite live up to our dreams (nor do we women). Start thanking God for the man He gave you. "He that receives you receives Me," Jesus said. God's gift in this wife or this husband was chosen by "His magnificently varied grace." He is the Father of Lights. Every good gift is from above. Marriage is one of His greatest earthly gifts--for solace, comfort, companionship, help.

"But what if my wife/husband doesn't do that for me? Isn't meeting my needs?" These suggestions often come from that old serpent the devil. Forget about *my* needs. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "He who receives you receives the one who sent me" (Matt. 10:40).

Someone asked if I was "mad at God" because He took from me two greatly-loved husbands (one at the hands of jungle Indians, the other by cancer). Of course I grieved. We wives were devastated, of course, when we knew that our five husbands had been speared.

The passage in Isaiah 50:7 was one I had memorized years before when I heard a missionary repeat those stunning lines, "The Lord God will help me. Therefore shall I

not be confounded. Therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."

Whenever we are tormented with a wrong emotion, whether it be anger, self-pity (which is *satanic*), jealousy, any emotion which hinders our trust in the Lord, it is well to kneel, lift up our hands and say, "Lord, here is this anger. In the name of Jesus Christ, I surrender it to Your authority. By Your grace I will not take it back." It is amazing how a simple little act can calm our hearts when we ask in sincerity. God hears prayers like that and loves to answer them. Of course our adversary the devil will be quick to suggest that "that really didn't work, God is not listening, you're a hypocrite, a fake," etc. Resort to what you know is true:

God is my heavenly *Father*. He loves me with an everlasting love. The proof of that is the Cross. I John 3:16 says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." As the old hymn (When I Survey the Wondrous Cross) says, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." Having sung that beautiful hymn is it possible then to be angry with God?

Our Father wants nothing but the best for any of us, and only *He* knows what that is, for He is the all-wise, the Omniscient. Even an earthly father wants the best for his child, but does not always know what that is.

God knows not only what we need but when we need it. When He withholds from us the one thing we feel sure would make us happy, let's remember His promise that He will meet *all* our needs, "according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). In other words, if we don't have it, we don't need it--*now*. Perhaps He will give it next

week, but that does not indicate indifference, forgetfulness, or poor timing. His timing is always perfect.

Resentment makes us vulnerable to Satan who is called the Destroyer. Think what a dangerous position we put ourselves in if we are angry with God. Is there anywhere else for us to turn? In heaven or on earth there is no other safe refuge. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear" (Psalm 46:1,2). He is the Ruler of all. He's got the whole world in His hands. Shall we deliberately reject such a Refuge?

We have only this present moment. God does not often give us previews of coming attractions. But I can look over many decades, remembering how worried I sometimes was, how bewildered because of things God had permitted to happen, but now I see them all as a golden chain of mercies, gifts from a merciful Father who, like the father Jesus described, would never give his son a snake if he asked for a fish. What looks to us like a good thing might actually ruin us. How thankful I am for God's withholdings and for His unfailing faithfulness. Now, as I look forward to what may be left of my future, I think of Whittier's lines:

"I know not where His islands lift their fronded palms in air,

I only know I cannot drift beyond His love and care."

I do not want to miss "islands" whose beauty I never dreamed of in those anxious times. I want to be able honestly to say, "Father, I trust You. Forgive me for being so foolish as to imagine that You have made a mistake. Help me to receive grace to keep a quiet heart, sure that I am, in this very moment, held in the Everlasting Arms."

Chapter Ten

**See Christ in Your Husband**

Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." He also said, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me" Matt. 40:45.

Here is perhaps one of the most difficult but also most transforming truths for a wife to grasp. She lives with a fallible human being three hundred and sixty-five days a year (and so does he!). Her husband does not always act like Christ (nor does she). Yet the Bible gives clear instructions to both (Ephesians 5:24,28), and these instructions seem impossible. The husband is to love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife is to respect (reverence) her husband. Let's remember that what is impossible with men is possible with God, and He has never issued a command which He will not enable us to fulfill. the question is, Will we choose to obey?

Because I receive so many more letters from wives than from husbands, I will leave the "But what about him?" to God and try to address the difficulties we wives face. What is the wife to do if he is being disobedient in any way to what God says? I am very grateful for the shining testimonies of several who have found love, joy, and peace by following the clear word of scripture. Their marriages, once difficult, have been totally transformed. Might we who earnestly desire that God's will be gladly obeyed in our home, trust God to help us toward that transformation? He will, I believe, if we begin with Jesus' three conditions for discipleship:

1. Give up your right to yourself (a scary thought!)
2. Take up the Cross (which means suffering)

3. Follow (a daily obedience).

Once having made up our minds to be disciples, we may then study the specific teaching on marriage.

1. What are the respective "roles" of husband and wife? Look first at Ephesians 5:22-33. The husband represents Christ as He is head of the church. The wife represents the church, the bride of Christ. This means that she is assigned a subordinate position (one which the world despises). "As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands *in everything*" (vs. 24). Subordination is not inferiority. It is divine, drawn from the very nature of God. The Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ, Christ witnesses to the Father (and in obedience to His Father, He was willing to made "a little lower than the angels"--that is, a mere man!). P.T. Forsyth wrote, "Without the spirit of subordination there is no true piety, no manly nobility and no womanly charm." Such a concept is vehemently opposed by the world today, but if we insist on equality we refuse the divine order which brings harmony.

2. But what shall we wives do if the husband is disobedient to the Word? Peter answers the question (I Peter 3:1,2), "Wives, *in the same way* (referring to Jesus' response to insults, suffering, and injustice in the previous chapter) be submissive to your husbands, so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over *without words*, by the behavior of their wives when they see the purity and reverence of your lives." Is it easy for you to keep silent? It isn't for me!

One of my friends has cheered me greatly by her own testimony. She wanted, above all, to know Christ, "and the power of His resurrection and fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10,11). She offers this suggestion: When your husband comes home,

say to yourself, "Christ returns! Practice readiness!" When he is hungry or thirsty, give to him as if he were Christ, remembering that it is Christ whom he represents. What a privilege we have to minister to Him, just as the women of the New Testament did! If he is disobedient to the Word in any way, don't get headaches trying to be quiet. Put an imaginary blanket over his face--to "cover a multitude of sins" and not bring them to mind.

Try to see Christ in this man you live with, even though he may be acting in a less-than-Christlike way. Rest on this: "you married women should adapt yourselves to your husbands, so that even if they do not obey the Word of God they may be won to God without any word being spoken, simply by seeing the pure and reverent behavior of you, their wives" (I Peter 3:1,2). Verse six refers to the example of Sarah, whose husband Abraham asked her to do some foolish things, yet she obeyed him, called him her master, and did not "give way to hysterical fears."

We give ourselves many excuses for failure to comply with our husband's wishes. Often it is merely that we prefer something else and are unwilling to surrender our preferences. A more serious objection is fear that our husbands' decisions will be unwise and perhaps even disastrous. This is our opportunity to go to our knees, ask for direction, trust God in the man He has given you.

My friend says, "If the disobedience is an unkind or harsh attitude, instead of pulling away, nursing wounds, say to the Lord, 'You, Father, have put this upon me, it's from Your dear hand, Your appointed trial for me right now, and I accept it with joy.'" She quotes Amy Carmichael's motto, *In acceptance lieth peace*, and George MacDonald's *DIARY OF AN OLD SOUL*.

"But Thou art making me, I thank Thee, Sire.

What thou hast done and doest, Thou knows't well.

And I will help Thee; gently in Thy fire\

I will lie burning; on thy potter's wheel.

I will whirl patient, though my brain should reel.

Thy grace shall be enough the grief to quell,

And growing strength perfect through weakness dire."

Beware, however, of a "martyr complex" which leads to that terrible temptation of our enemy the devil called *self-pity*. If we get down on our knees and offer up our sufferings to Christ, He knows just what to do with them, "for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Beware, also, of "But what about me? Why am I the one who always has to give in?" That question cloaks a critical spirit. Love aims always at unity and at the good of the other. Note Colossians 3:12-14: "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, cloth yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts,

always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (never *gives up*)" (I Corinthians 13:4-8).

Spend more time thanking God for your husband than you do in criticizing him. Pray for him earnestly and daily, asking the Lord to help you to practice the self-giving, sacrificial love He showed us on the Cross--accepting the terrible injustice as the Father's will. Treat him exactly as you would wish to treat Christ if He came into your home.

Can we do this? No, not by ourselves. But we are not alone. God speaks peace to our souls: "Do not fear, for I am with you," He says, "Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand . . . Do not be afraid, O worm Jacob, O little [Elisabeth?] for I myself will help you" (Isaiah 41:10,14). TRUST AND OBEY!

Chapter Eleven

**IF ONLY**

Most of those who read a book like this one are, I suppose, Bible readers. It is not difficult, however, to know the Lord's Prayer and perhaps many familiar passages by heart without giving a great deal of thought to the treasures of scripture. Christ lives in us and with us, in the same room, and yet we do not know Him. The apostles lived intimately with the Lord Jesus, walked and talked and ate with Him, yet failed truly to know Him. To Philip He said, "Have I been so long time with you and yet you have not known Me?"

Andrew Murray, missionary in Africa many years ago, drew up some rules for himself (and perhaps for those with whom he worked). I believe these rules will be helpful to all who seek to follow the Lord:

1. He brought me here, it is by His will I am in this strait place: in that fact I will rest.
2. He will keep me here in His love and give me grace to behave as His child.
3. He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.
4. In His good time He can bring me out again--how and when He knows.

"Let me say I am here:

- 1) by God's appointment
- 2) in His keeping
- 3) under His training

4) for His time

As I was reviewing those rules I thought of them as wonderfully apropos for a married woman. If she were to memorize Murray's rules and review them from time to time she might be spared a good many difficulties and surprises.

How long does it take for a woman to truly know her husband? The Lord in His inscrutable wisdom has given me three husbands--the first, Jim Elliot, was killed by jungle Indians, the second, Addison Leitch, died of cancer, and as I write my husband, Lars, is strong and well. But do I know him after more than twenty-five years?

It is a fact that very often it is those with whom we live that we know least. It is just as easy to grow to know someone less and less through living in the same room as it is to know him more and more.

A woman writes. "I'm sure you must have spoken on emotional availability, but how does one deal with lack of it? I am a housewife and mother. My husband is a hard worker and good provider but he lacks natural affection for me, says he loves me now and then, but doesn't show it in our day-to-day living. We have talked about it, but not lately. I have told him that I need him emotionally. His response has been, 'Well, I'm sorry, but I can't do anything about it.' I suggested some things that were not taken to heart, so I tried really hard to give him more of me (totally). It seems the more I gave, the more he took and the less he gave. Then I tried the exact opposite to show him how it felt to be emotionally unavailable. I couldn't tell if he ever noticed, so I ended up being more miserable than before.

"We have been married five years. What can I do? I would be glad if he tried but it is his unwillingness to be here for me that really hurts. Right now I am fifty pounds overweight."

Many "if only's" come to me in the mail--"If only I weren't married to him," or "If only I had married *so-and-so* instead of ..." or "if only I were single again!"

"I'm married to a very nice man who I love very much and I tell him so every day, but I cannot control my loneliness. Tom works from three p.m. to one or two o'clock in the morning, so he gets out of bed around eleven o'clock, then he goes down to the barn and takes care of his animals. He returns, gets himself ready, reads his Bible, gets his lunchbox, maybe eats again and leaves. So, after all this, with the baby yelling, I pout or become infuriated, depending on my mood. I need to be honest with you --I want him to *notice* me! I feel like a three-year-old who keeps talking but everybody is too busy to listen. I'm about to lie down on the floor and kick my feet!"

A very different attitude is revealed in the following letter. "I've learned to handle my marriage and my husband by *praying* instead of filing complaints that fall on defensive (if not deaf) ears. The Lord is more than able and willing to meet the needs I wrongly thought my husband should fill, and while I was never a nagger, I have learned how effective it is to pray and tell the Lord my 'husband troubles,' and let Him intercede for me."

Such letters--and they are many--remind us that we are sinners. Let us not forget that God wants to help us. He knows all about it. Nothing takes Him by surprise.

"O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my

lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord" (Psalm 139:1-4).

Ponder the following statements:

1. You marry a sinner. So does everybody else--there isn't anything else to marry! All men are fallible and sinful, and so are all of us women! Therefore, not surprisingly, it takes a great deal of the grace of God for any of us to manage to live together in harmony, peace, and love.

2. It is your job as a wife to encourage, build up, and help your husband in every way that you possibly can. I know of no more effective way of helping than by prayer. That is where you must begin--and *continue*.

3. Perhaps you are correct that your husband has not really grown up. The more mature and womanly you are spiritually, the more you can help him to grow and become a true man of God. That is what God wants him to be, so when you pray for that, you are praying within the will of God. One way of helping his growth in grace is to refrain from taking over things which are clearly his responsibility. As his wife you may at times venture a suggestion which your husband will be glad to accept, but we must be careful not to dictate what he should do. Most of us are tempted to act, at times, like a mother hen to her chicks. Sometimes it may be helpful, at other times counterproductive..

4. Let your husband know that it is your sincere desire to be the very best wife that you can be. Tell him (if he is in a mood to hear!) you want to be the kind of wife *he* wants you to be-- willing to submit to him. Acknowledge straightforwardly to him your own failings. Our submission is not meant to be grudging but glad--as the Church submits to Christ, her head. None of us can do this alone--we need God's help every day.

5. Your disappointment in yourself for choosing a poor husband springs partly from pride. No husband is perfect, none lives up to all of our dreams! Start thanking God for this man, God's gift to you, and praying that the Lord will show you ways to make his job as pleasant as you possibly can.

6. God does not want you to be "burned out." He has promised in I Corinthians 10:13 that none of us will ever be tempted beyond our powers to endure. God will keep that promise if you will simply trust Him. Frustration, confusion, and disappointment do not come from God, but from the enemy who cannot bear to see two people in love and harmony. That enemy is working every day to destroy every marriage he possibly can. Don't let him do it! Stand with God for your husband, not with Satan against him.