

Liberty University School of Divinity

**Starving Marriage:
Seven Recipes for Nourishing Intimacy**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
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in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by:

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ABSTRACT

Starving Marriage: Seven Recipes for Nourishing Intimacy

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Connecting with your spouse has become a demanding undertaking in a world full of commotion. Marriage relationships are bleeding to death because of the lack of time that couples spend together. Husbands and wives are starving themselves of the much-needed social, psychological, physical, and spiritual provisions that nourish a vigorous bond. The marriage relationship is difficult and often described as the most important earthly relationship that one can have. In this flawed world, the objective of marriage should be to strive to perfect the imperfection of two souls who have been joined by God to fulfill their mission of glorifying Christ, procreation, and intimate companionship. This thesis will validate the crucial need of couples partaking in purposeful alone time together daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly by providing seven relevant ways that will guarantee increased intimacy.

Abstract Length: 135

DEDICATION

This thesis could not have been possible without the many people who have supported me, prayed for me, and allowed me the time to work on this project. First, I want to thank Jesus Christ for his ultimate sacrifice so that I can forever be in His presence. To my wife, Amanda, for her sacrificial love, commitment to our kids, and unending desire to strengthen our marriage relationship. In the words of Tim McGraw, “better than I was, more than I am, and all of this happened by taking your hand, and who I am now is who I wanted to be, and now that we're together I'm stronger than ever, I'm happy and free, it's your love.” To my kids, Abi Grace, Isaac, and Zane, you are all an inspiration to me. Your love for God, life, and family truly amazes me. You light up my life. To my parents, thank you for raising me to follow my dreams and encouraging me to reach for the highest potential in life. To my siblings, your continued support and love has always been a steadfast pillar that has kept me going. To the many others who have entered my life and have guided me through this journey, I am truly grateful.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Marriage is not working. There are many barriers that married couples face in today's culture that prevent them from having a healthy intimate relationship. These barriers provide just enough venom to destroy a thriving marriage. Today's marriages are being demolished by diminishing values, secularized standards, and a lack of commitment to the relationship. It is dangerous to discuss authentic marriage relationships without a brief overview of the origin of marriage.

Biblically speaking, marriage is an institution created by God at the beginning of time. God designed marriage to provide "man" with a partner, "woman", that would help him, fulfill him, multiply him through child bearing, and support him through life. "Marriage has been established by the Creator; it is therefore not a humanly devised institution. It existed from the beginning, as Jesus himself defined the origin and essence of marriage in Matthew 19:4-6: "Haven't you read . . . that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."¹ Marriage is a significant part of God's plan for human beings. It is not simply a relationship based on conditions. It is a vow to God and each other. It is a lifelong

¹ Matt 19:4-6; unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from The English Standard Version Study Bible, 2008.

promise that is steadfast and endures the struggles throughout the journey of life.² As married couples live their life, they should grow closer to each other and God because of the constant investment that they have made in their relationship. This is mainly true for those with healthy relationships and can be a difficult task for couples who are facing troubles or various barriers in their relationship.

There are many barriers that avert marriages from becoming or maintaining their health. These obstructions include financial stress, communication issues, conflict resolution, lack of quality time together, fidelity or commitment concerns, no emotional support and intimacy, and finally physical or verbal abuse.³ Each one of these elements in marriage can easily throw relationships off course. Marriage is meant to be a relationship of two individuals that come together for one common goal. This does not mean that it will always be easy. Marriage is hard work and any couple can easily find themselves in one or more of these situations that can ultimately destroy the matrimony. As an active member of the marriage relationship, each person should commit to keeping themselves and their spouse accountable so that the relationship does not lose its focus. A lack of focus sends the relationship down a slippery slope with little or no traction. If one were to run an obstacle course race, there would be barriers that they must face before moving forward to the next part of the race. As each barrier is confronted, one must survey the barrier and conclude on how to successfully conquer that obstacle. Having

² Werner Gitt, "2.4 The Origin of Marriage (OB4)," *Answers in Genesis*, accessed June 28, 2012, <https://answersingenesis.org/family/marriage/24-the-origin-of-marriage-ob4/>.

³ Michigan State University Extension, *what are the Barriers in Marriage*, (Module 5 Part 2 (2009) Michigan State University Board of Trustees) accessed July 31, 2016, http://www.togetherwecan.fcs.msue.msu.edu/Portals/0/Module5/Part2/TWC_Module5_pt2.pdf.

this ability will strengthen the marriage bond and create a healthier relationship.

Remember the childhood saying, practice makes perfect. A disciplined relationship tends to daily train and recommit to the vows stated by each person to God in the wedding ceremony. These barriers can be simply defined as learning objectives along the journey of life and are usually the conduit for either starving the marriage or making sure that it is well fed.

Statement of Limitations

This thesis aims to create practices that will encourage and enable marriage relationships to find a new purpose that involves a deeper level of intimacy and closeness. Through an online survey to a variety of married couples, information will be gleaned to adequately assess the current phase of marriage relationships across the country. The inquiry will investigate current marital patterns, approaches to growth, and barriers that prevent true intimacy.

Married couples that have been married for varying years, from dissimilar socioeconomic backgrounds, different education levels, as well as from diverse faith belief systems will be analyzed in this thesis. Having distinguishable examples of marriages will help bring better results but still offer limitations due to the vast contrast or relationship styles that are represented within the culmination of human beings and their own eccentric ideas.

This research will not discuss same-sex marriages, which do not fall within the biblical definition of marriage. It will also not focus on difficult issues such as extreme mental illnesses, incest situations, and illegal concepts of marriage that other faiths prescribe better. The research will only look at typical relationships between one man

and one woman that face normal difficulties and barriers that were outlined in the statement of the problem.

Theoretical Basis

Genesis 1:27 states, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”⁴ With many similarities and differences, God created men and women in His own image. Males and females differ in some physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual aspects. There are obvious physical differences, beginning with the genitals. It sounds basic, but a man has a penis and testicles, whereas a woman has breasts and a vagina. These reproductive organs function in ways that makes the genders physically different. Men and women also have different size internal organs, including their stomachs, kidneys, and lungs, just to name a few.⁵

The amount of hormones in men and women is also different. Men have more testosterone than women, making them think about and desire sex more frequently. Other varying hormone levels play a major role in the other emotional, relational, and spiritual distinctions in men and women. Women tend to be more emotional than men. A woman is more likely to cry to express emotions and often better empathizes with others. In relationships, intimacy is also viewed differently; women want to be close, spend time together, please others, and feel appreciated. Men usually are more sexual than emotional in romantic relationships. There are times though when men can be extremely relational without any sexual intention. Insecurities, which women tend to

⁴ Gen 1:27

⁵ Clifford Penner and Joyce Penner, *The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 56.

have more of, can be a distraction from a spiritual relationship with Christ. Women can also be so “busy” with life that they “don’t have time” for God. On the other hand, men can sometimes be too prideful to seek dependence on a relationship with God.

All of these differences can have an impact on the marriage relationship, both positively and negatively. Differing sex drives and expectations can have a negative impact on the marriage; however, if talked about and understood, a couple can compromise and resolve these issues to move forward positively. Having different emotional needs and relational styles can cause a couple to clash. But this too can be worked through by communication and understanding. On a positive note, by being different emotionally and relationally, men and women can often balance each other out. The bible is clear that marriages should not be unequally yoked because it can lead to dysfunctional practices. While two Christians will always be on different spiritual journeys and levels, they should always be praying for and edifying one another. The goal of the marriage should be to grow closer to each other by growing closer to Christ.

Statement of Methodology

A survey of marriages from different locations, economic backgrounds, social levels, and spiritual foundations will help discover the need of more purposeful intimacy in marriage relationships. The data that is found in the research will drive the discussion and principles outlined by Scripture to determine ways to nourish intimacy among men and women who are married.

The first chapter is an introduction to the research project and will begin to address the issues that cause marriages to have a lack of togetherness or closeness. It will

offer published research that has suitable information to help overcome the idea of stale marriages.

The second chapter offers the results of the survey and applied research. This information will begin to build the foundation of the changes or application that can be made to create a more intimate marital environment. It will also reveal the state of marriage in today's self-absorbed society.

The third chapter defines four of the seven recipes that have the potential of energizing intimacy in marriage. It will name each principle and explain how it can transform these precious moments of closeness in the marriage relationship.

The fourth chapter provides the last three recipes and explains the connection with the first four recipes. It will also share some benefits of committing to the seven recipes to nourishing intimacy.

The fifth chapter is a synopsis of the entire project and will offer some concluding remarks. It will provide an overview of the research and provide possible routes that lead to a closer relationship with your spouse. It will also give reasons for why it may be helpful to continue the research on this topic of intimacy in marriage.

Review of Literature

Books

In the book, *His Needs Her Needs* by William F. Harley Jr., the main idea or purpose is taking steps to build an affair proof marriage. It identifies the ten most vital needs of men and women and shows husbands and wives how to satisfy those needs in

their spouses. The book begins with posing a question of how affair proof is your marriage. It recognizes that a man's needs are not the same as a woman's needs.⁶

In the book, *Sexperiment* by Ed and Lisa Young, the definition of sex is brought back to the confinements of a marriage relationship. In today's secular culture, sex has been turned into simply a self-fulfilling chore with whomever, whenever, and wherever you want to do it. It has almost become normal to experience sex outside of marriage rather than in a committed marriage relationship. This idea of sex in marriage being watered down led to the experiment called Sexperiment. Sexperiment is a journey for couples to reclaim a healthy biblical sex life that is creative, intentional, and regular. This sexual relationship is one that intersects the marriage relationship with God and proves that God's idea of sex in a marriage is more fulfilling than the fantasy sex that the world has created in this defunct culture.⁷

The Gift of Sex is a book written by husband and wife team, Clifford and Joyce Penner. Clifford is a clinical psychologist, and Joyce is a registered nurse. Together these two, who are internationally recognized sex therapists and educators, help couples understand the beautiful gift of sexuality that God has given us. Today's culture has such a misunderstanding of sex and sexuality. The Penners teach that sex is a total body experience involving the psychological, physical, and spiritual aspects of a person.⁸ This book not only provides an understanding of biblical sexuality but also teaches couples how to communicate about sex, resolve any differences, and enjoy each other intimately.

⁶ Willard F. Harley Jr. *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2011), 12.

⁷ Ed Young and Lisa Young. *Sexperiment: 7 Days to Lasting Intimacy with Your Spouse*. (New York: FaithWords, 2013), 6.

⁸ Penner, *The Gift of Sex*, 8.

Although the act of sex is reserved for married couples, the book *The Gift of Sex*, can be for any adult in any season of life. It could provide the single adult with a proper perspective of sex in order to be best prepared for the gift that God has given them to experience with their future spouse. But this book is extremely relevant for any married couple, whether they are newlyweds or have been married for years. *The Gift of Sex* helps couples understand their bodies, sexual differences and difficulties, and provides strategies to work through them.⁹

Married couples face conflict daily. It is inevitable to live in this sin-crazed world and not face some sort of conflict. It has been often said, “If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem.” Married couples should look at each problem that they face to become more productive and grow closer together.¹⁰ In the book, *Self-Centered Marriage*, the author, Hal Runkel, comes up with a model or formula that can help alleviate conflict in a married couple’s life. This formula will ensure a state of calmness for at least one of the people in the relationship. Both people can experience this low stress life if they practice the formula together. The formula contains four steps: calm down, grow up, get closer, and repeat.¹¹ It is that simple. This formula is not designed to change your spouse. It is a formula that will equip the individual to confront, discover, and reveal who they really are psychologically.

⁹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰ Hal Runkel, and Jenny Runkel, *The Self-Centered Marriage: the Revolutionary Screamfree Approach to Rebuilding Your We by Reclaiming Your I*. (New York: Random house, 2012), 8.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

Gary Chapman, in his book, *The Four Seasons of Marriage*, says “The most fundamental part of marriage is talking and listening.”¹² He goes on to say, “Oral communication is the foundation of all human culture. These abilities to speak and to listen allow us to pass ideas from one to another.” Chapman makes the challenge to married folks to learn how to listen empathetically. This type of listening puts your needs, desires, and opinions on the side and allows you to open up and begin to understand the position of your spouse. This will probably be a paradigm shift in your idea of communicating. This technique takes time to perfect, but will bring more love and compassion to the marriage. “Affirmation is a big step beyond merely withholding judgment. When you affirm your spouse verbally, you give him or her the freedom to have ideas that differ from your own and to have feelings that you would not have in a similar situation.”¹³ Affirming your spouse is paramount in great communication. As a marital unit, strong communication is vital to a lifelong healthy marriage.

In the book, *The Five Love Languages*, Gary Chapman outlines three essential ingredients to a quality activity. They are: at least one of you wants to do it, the other is willing to do it, and both of you know why you are doing it. These ingredients seem to be a pretty easy recipe for quality time. The hardest part of enjoying quality time is making the time to do it.¹⁴ Our lives are full of activities, job demands, and family happenings that we often neglect true quality time with the people around us. When

¹² Gary Chapman, *The 4 Seasons of Marriage: Secrets to a Lasting Marriage*, (Carl Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 110.

¹³ Ibid., 112.

¹⁴ Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010), 69.

quality time is not being met then the relationship can begin to deteriorate and eventually become nonexistent.

Kelly Simpson, author of the marriage curriculum, *Active Relationships*, says, “Nature appears to have a great investment in getting people together to create babies. But nature does not steer people to remain together.”¹⁵ It is stated that the biology of attraction that brings people together usually fades after some time. This fading of attraction usually comes with a lack of commitment and fidelity. Having the ability to love at a deep level for a long time involves great skill, effort, security, discipline, goodwill, and trust. These are not natural skills. These skills must be developed over time with persistence. Marriage relationships are meant to be a deeper level of love and understanding with a relentless connection. This level of trust and love contains mutual caring & giving, passion and a strong vow for a lifetime.

Tony Evans wrote a couple of small books called, *For Married Women Only* and *For Married Men Only*. They look at three simple principles for married men and women that outline biblical roles for the husband and wife.¹⁶ These books are easy to read and provide the reader with practical ways to connect with their spouse in a deeper, more intimate fashion.

John Piper, author, theologian, and pastor, wrote a book on marriage called, *This Momentary Marriage*. This book focuses on the biblical approach to marriage and how that works to fulfill the purpose and mission of God. He states, “Marriage is not mainly

¹⁵ Kelly Simpson, *Active Relationships* (Dallas, TX: Active Relationships Center, 2011), 142

¹⁶ Tony Evans, *For Married Women Only: Three Principles for Honoring Your Husband* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 45.

about prospering economically; it is mainly about displaying the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church.”¹⁷ This quote explains that marriage is simply a moment or part of our existence with Christ, and that if we place our relationship with our spouse secondary to our relationship with Christ, then we are positioned correctly in the eyes of God.

In the book, *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*, the authors William Cutrer and Sandra Glahn have blended the idea of sexual intimacy as both a spiritual connection with God as well as a human distinction that involves physical parts. This book affirms the concept that the only place for sexual authenticity is in the marriage relationship between a man and a woman.¹⁸

Henry Cloud and John Townsend author a book called, *Boundaries in Marriage*. This book helps sets some guidelines in marriage to ensure that the relationship will flourish. The book answers questions about certain boundaries, values, protection of intruders, and resolving conflict. The aim of the authors is to help couples understand choices that make or break loving relationships.¹⁹

Mark Gungor, author of the book, *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage*, strives to unlock the secrets to life, love, and marriage. His book is categorized into four parts that sets the stage, gives the laws of marriage, discusses sex talk, and concludes with till death do us part. This book is a serious effort to improve marriage intimacy by using

¹⁷ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 7.

¹⁸ William Cutrer, and Sandra Glahn, *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001), 10.

¹⁹ Henry Cloud and John Sims Townsend, *Boundaries in Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 11.

laughter and funny points to engage couples on real issues.²⁰

The book, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, by Les and Leslie Parrott, asks seven questions to ponder before and after you marry. These questions challenge the couples to really begin to understand what the marriage relationship entails and how they will cope with struggles and disappointments along the journey. This book is a practical self-guided premarital and marital counseling guide. It will encourage conversation and self-reflection as the marriage relationship begins flourishes.²¹

Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling is a guide to brief therapy for married couples. Everett L. Worthington offers a comprehensive manual for assisting couples that are dealing with issues, serious problems, and relational difficulties in a compassionate, effective, and brief method.²² The book uses easy to understand language as it explains theory and possible interventions for strengthening intimacy and relationships.

Journal Article

Michigan State University wrote an article about different barriers to a healthy marriage. The writing discusses several obstructions that could prevent a couple from having a vibrant healthy relationship. Some of them were communication, commitment, quality time together, emotional support & intimacy, and conflict resolution. The article

²⁰ Mark Gungor, *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage: Unlocking the Secrets to Life, Love, and Marriage* (New York: Atria Books, 2008), 12.

²¹ Les Parrott and Leslie L. Parrott. *Saving Your Marriage before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask before and After You Marry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 14.

²² Everett L. Worthington, *Hope-focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 21.

gives some creative ways to manage these areas and begin to develop a lasting relationship that practices closeness and longevity in marriage.²³

Theses

In his Doctor of Ministry thesis project, Richmond Laney related marriage to the same spiritual disciplines that Christians participate through their journey of faith. Laney explained the benefits of prayer, fasting, and journaling in a Christ follower's walk with God. His aim was to prove that those types of disciplinary actions in a marriage relationship could also reap benefits that would lead to stronger marriages and lesser divorces among the Christian population.²⁴

At Westminster Theological Seminary, Larry Thornton wrote a thesis called *A Biblical Approach to Establishing Marital Intimacy*.²⁵ His purpose was to create a marriage strengthening program that was grounded in the Word of God. The focus was to use the Bible and its principles as a viable base for marriage intimacy.

Biblical Foundation

The Word of God speaks highly of marriage relationships, as it should. There are many verses that describe what God intended for marriage to represent. These verses explain the barriers that protect the sacredness of the marriage relationship. Many of these verses relate to the intimacy shared between a man and woman. Hebrews 13:4

²³ Michigan State University Extension, *Barriers in Marriage*.

²⁴ Richmond C. Laney, "Marriage as a Spiritual Discipline: Principles and Benefit." (D.Min. thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

²⁵ Larry R. Thornton, "A Biblical Approach to Establishing Marital Intimacy" (D.Min. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988).

says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.”²⁶ These are strong words that describe the high importance of the marriage bed. It is a revered place where a couple can share their deepest level of love for each other.

The Bible is clear about resolving conflict in all relationships of life. In Philippians 2:4, it says, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”²⁷ This verse offers a vivid description of not being self-centered. It tells us to look at those specific areas that we can help someone else.

Galatians 5:22-23 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”²⁸ This scripture continues the idea of omitting conflict from your life by urging people to be made up of love, control, and obedience.

As we look at a Biblical approach to stress and worry in life, Matthew 6:31-34 offers wisdom on the importance of not allowing daily life to bring about a high level of stress in our mind. “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”²⁹

²⁶ Heb 13:4

²⁷ Phil 2:4

²⁸ Gal 5:22-23

²⁹ Matt 6:31-34

The Bible is clear about how people are to communicate with each other. In Ephesians 5:2, the scripture says, “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”³⁰ This scripture allows us to see that listening is imperative to our relationships.

Ephesians 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”³¹ This verse radiates the importance of encouraging your spouse by using words that will build them up instead of words that cause destruction. Just imagine replacing all your cancerous words with words of affirmation and love.

The book of Ephesians in the Bible provides some good advice on making sure that as couples, you use each opportunity in life as a valuable time to grow closer to Christ and each other. It speaks of using your time wisely, in such a way that will bring favor to your marriage rather than using toxins of foolishness to contaminate the relationship. Ephesians 5:15-17 says, “Be very careful, then, how you live —not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”³² It is essential for married couples to maximize the time that has been given to them.

The Bible is clear when it comes to fidelity and sexual purity. First Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the

³⁰ Eph 5:2

³¹ Eph 4:29

³² Eph 5:15-17

body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”³³ This verse vividly translates God’s intentions on being pure and remaining pure as it relates to relationships.

Proverbs 18:22 says, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”³⁴ Marriage is a gift from the Lord. God knew that people needed to have someone to build a life together. This helps us to see the relationship that God desires from us.

First Corinthians 7:2, talks about the reason why each man and woman should find a suitable spouse to spend their life with while on Earth; “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”³⁵ This simply offers the valid point that remaining pure and committed to your spouse will help you to not be tempted to defile the marriage union.

Galatians 5:19-21 helps us to understand various struggles that humans deal with in this world of sin. “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”³⁶

Romans 12:17-21 continues this same theme and guides us to make the right decisions as we fight this spiritual battle, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live

³³ 1 Cor 6:18

³⁴ Prov 18:22

³⁵ 1 Cor 7:2

³⁶ Gen 5:19-21

peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”³⁷ This is a perfect example of how a spouse should respond to their partner. The main theme of this verse is love conquers all.

Another Bible verse that promotes the idea of unity and strength in marriage is Mark 10:9. It says, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”³⁸ This is a very popular verse in wedding ceremonies because it boldly speaks of the seriousness of the marriage covenant before God. This verse proves that a promise between a man and woman before God is a bond that cannot be broken no matter the circumstances that arise in life.

First John 4:7-8 enforces the concept of love in a relationship. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”³⁹ Love is a major part of our communion with God. It is also what brings people together as they commit to a journey of building each other up, raising a Godly family, and fulfilling the purpose of God in their lives.

Jeremiah 29:11 has always been an encouraging promise from God. It offers reassurance and a hope that cannot be found anywhere else. In a marriage relationship, this kind of hope is needed to cope with the most demanding moments and with God,

³⁷ Rom 12:17-21

³⁸ Mark 10:9

³⁹ 1 John 4:7-8

marriage can be productive & fulfilling even though there will be conflicts during the venture. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares The Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Jer 29:11

Chapter Two

Discovering the Right Ingredients

Revealing Selfishness

It is convincing that marriage relationships are not thriving in today's society. The once most valued and cherished human to human relationship has lost its hunger and has been cheapened to an association with conditions. The world that is focused on self has brought destructive ideas to a sacred relationship based on God's gift to mankind. When a couple is only concerned with meeting their own individual needs and not motivated to help each other, anger and selfishness begin to creep into the marriage bond. Gary Chapman, in the book, *The Other Side of Love*, offers some practical ways to handle anger in marriage. He says, "All married couples experience anger. Experiencing anger is not wrong. The tragedy is that thousands of couples have never learned how to process anger productively."⁴¹ When anger is exercised in marriage it can lead to disastrous situations that cause separation, divisiveness, and relationship deterioration. Chapman describes this type of marriage as a, "battlefield which will force them to never have a satisfying marriage."⁴² It is impossible to have uncontrolled anger towards someone and show love to them. These two emotions cannot coexist. Love seeks to improve the well-being of the spouse while anger seeks to hurt and destroy. Chapman continues his comments by outlining a six step strategy that has the potential to radically improve a marriage that is trapped in hatred. The steps are: acknowledging the reality of anger to yourself, recognizing the anger to each other, agree that verbal and physical explosions

⁴¹ Chapman, *The Other Side of Love*, 47.

⁴² Ibid., 51.

that attack the other person are not appropriate responses, agree to seek an explanation before passing judgment, agree to seek a resolution, and finally agree to affirm your love for each other.⁴³ Strategies like this have helped marriage relationships to increase their closeness, express their love and commitment, and continue to build that bond of intimacy as they journey through life. Gary Thomas, author of the book, *Sacred Marriage*, describes marriage among humans as yet another signpost pointing to God's own eternal, spiritual existence.⁴⁴ This definition transforms the scope of marriage toward a more intimate experience with God rather it being a relationship that simply meets our physical needs on earth. Gary and Betsy Ricucci said this about marriage, "A magnificent marriage begins not with knowing one another but with knowing God."⁴⁵ Marriage is a gift from God to humans that will ultimately bring Him glory. It is not self-seeking and is not just for our own interests. Marriage is another avenue to show Christ to the by living according to His higher calling and commitment in an intimate relationship that requires daily forgiveness and sacrifice.

Research Analysis

While researching marriage intimacy and conducting surveys, it has been revealed the need for husbands and wives to refocus their priorities in their relationship so that it aligns with God's plan for marriage. One of the questions that was asked to one hundred and seventy-two respondents gave them an option to check off certain characteristics that were often represented within their relationship. The attributes were centered on

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

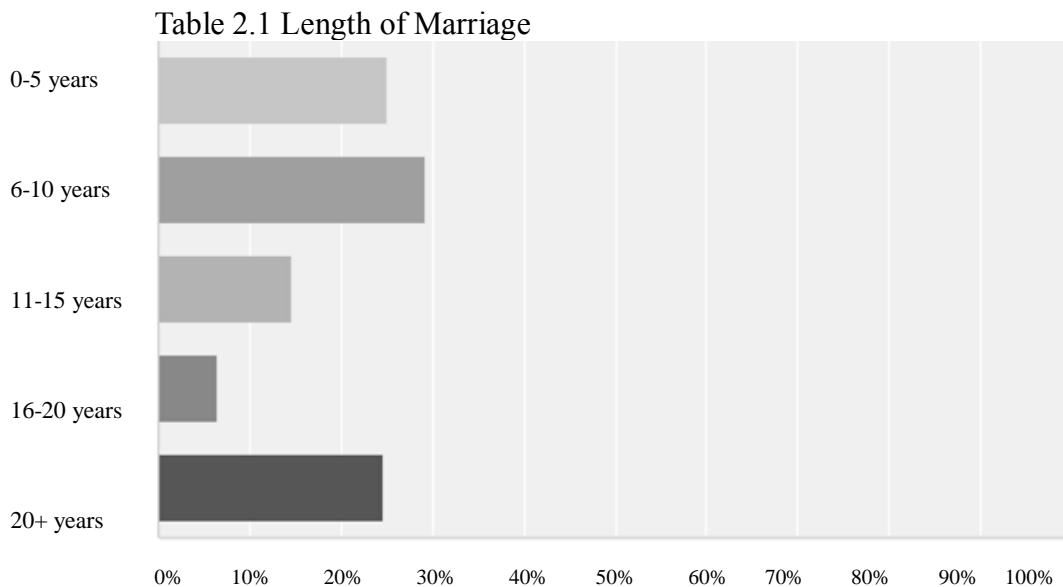
⁴⁴ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

intimacy as it is associated with their spirituality, emotional connection, and physical habits. There were over eighty percent of the respondents that stated they pay attention to their spouse's interests and hobbies, felt they could express their differing opinions, agree on their core values, say "I Love You" to one another often, and enjoy spending time in conversation with their spouse. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there were less than twenty percent of the relationships that stated they read the Bible together, agree that the husband leads the family spiritually, hold a grudge after asking for forgiveness, get distracted when their spouse is talking to them, struggle with pornography, sometimes finds sex boring, would like to try new things when having sex but is too embarrassed to ask his or her spouse, has difficulty reaching an orgasm, are too busy for sex, and sometimes do not feel sexually confident with their spouse. These results show, on average, that most couples connect regularly in an emotional and physical way, but often neglect the spiritual part of their relationship.

This survey was taken voluntarily by individuals who ranged from newly married to those who had been married for well over twenty years. Some of the marriages were close to the fifty-year mark. The following chart outlines the lengths of the marriage relationships from those who responded to this survey. It was interesting to see the majority of marriages were either fairly new marriages, those who have made it past five years, and the relationships that have hit the twenty-year mark. It is not known why there is an absence from the group that had been married between sixteen and twenty years. It is a good possibility that many of those marriages had ended due to the high rate of divorce in the United States that once claimed half of all marriages. In recent years, the divorce rate in the United States has declined to almost forty percent. This staggering

statistic proves that those who are coming from divorced families have realized the importance of staying together and not opting to divorce when things do not go as well as planned in the relationship.⁴⁶



It was interesting to notice the responses from the couples about how regularly they experience sex in their relationship. Out of the one hundred seventy-one respondents to this question, four said they have sex always which was described as at least once a day. This category brought the smallest amount of people. On the opposite end of the chart, the next group were those who responded as never having sex in their relationship. There were five individuals that stated this was their reality. Nine of the respondents noted that they rarely have sex, which was defined as once every few

⁴⁶ Alan Kazdan, *Marriage and Divorce* (American Psychological Association, 2000) accessed July 25, 2016. <http://www.apa.org/topics/divorce/>.

months. Seventeen people said that they experienced sex seldom or less than once a month. The following group was thirty-five individuals who had sex occasionally, or two to three times a month. There were forty-four people who experienced sex regularly or at least once a week. The largest number of respondents claimed to have sex often, which was described as several times per week. These results were encouraging, as it shows that couples are consistently connecting on a sexual level, whether it be once a month or several times a week.

Table 2.2 Occurrence of Sex

Answer Choices	Responses	
Always- at least once a day	2.34%	4
Often- several times per week	33.33%	57
Regularly- once per week	25.73%	44
Occasionally- 2-3 times per month	20.47%	35
Seldom- less than once a month	9.94%	17
Rarely- once every few months	5.26%	9
Never- "What is sex?"	2.92%	5
Total		171

Question number two from the survey asked how much time was spent as a couple on a normal work day. The results showed another positive connotation for marriages that were surveyed. Almost half of the responders, forty-seven percent to be exact, affirmed that they spend over an hour a day alone with their spouse. In this world of always being busy and having many activities, this is a very encouraging statistic. Twenty-six percent of the population said that they spend somewhere from thirty to sixty minutes with their spouse, while a little over ten percent spend ten minutes or less with their partner on an average work day. Part of connecting with your spouse intimately, includes quality time together every day. Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*, defines quality time as focused attention. "A key ingredient in giving your

spouse quality time is giving them focused attention, especially in this era of many distractions.”⁴⁷

Table 2.3 Daily Time with Spouse

Answer Choices	Responses	
None	2.34%	4
0-10 mins.	8.19%	14
11-30 mins.	15.79%	27
30-60 mins.	26.32%	45
Over an hour	47.37%	81
Total		171

After discovering the amount of time that couples spend together on a normal work day, the survey was divided by those who spent at least thirty minutes or more with their spouse and compared with those relationships that had less than thirty minutes a day of quality time spent together. This side by side assessment revealed a real contrast and established the necessity of quality time spent together as a married couple daily. From spiritual connections to emotional closeness to physical and sexual bonding, the results were vastly different depending on the amount of time that was invested each day for the couples. Those who had more than thirty minutes of worthwhile time together had higher percentages relating to spiritual intimacy. Those relationships were more apt to pray for and with their spouse, read their Bible together, had a comfort of talking about spiritual matters, and invited God into their relationship for change and transformation. Couples who devoted each day to have at least thirty minutes of quality time together were found to have a more effective spiritual leader in the husband, compared to the relationship who did not commit to having quality time together. These results are overwhelming as

⁴⁷ Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love That Lasts*, 59.

nineteen percent of wives claimed to be led spiritually by their husbands when they invested in quality time while only two percent of the couples who barely spent time together made it known that their husband was leading the family spiritually. Quality time together as a couple will nourish spiritual intimacy in a marriage. Marriages that negated the importance of spending time together are starving themselves of a consistent spiritual connection with God and each other.⁴⁸

Quality time not only increases the spiritual bond but also has a huge impact on the emotional stability of a marriage relationship. Again, couples that spend thirty minutes or more of valuable time together are more likely to have heightened intimacy in all areas of their relationship. As the survey answers are compared, it is easy to see the contrast between couples who have quality time and those who do not invest time each day with each other. Almost ninety-one percent of couples that spend time together pay attention to their spouse's interests and hobbies. Eighty-two percent of couples who completed this survey stated that they have support from their spouse in their personal interests. The sense of pride, freedom to express their individuality, agreeance on core values, and trust in their spouse during vulnerable times also resulted in high percentages. For the couples who did not spend quality time together, they saw a drastic drop in the emotional connection and interest in each other's individual lives. Those percentages were around the fifty percent mark instead of the higher eighty percent mark for couples that made quality time a priority. It is evident based on the results of the survey that couples who spend more time together daily are connected emotionally as well as

⁴⁸ Ibid., 60.

spiritually and have a stability or commitment that will outlast any issues that may arise within the relationship.

Quality time also affects the physical or sexual connection that couples have with each other as well. It is stated that couples who prioritize spending time together every day are more likely to say, “I love you” to one another, enjoy meaningful conversation, claim their spouse as their best friend, hold hands in public, and have learned how to deal with conflict. Nearly eighty percent of couples’ express appreciation for each other when quality time is spent together and only forty-two percent show appreciation when little time is spent together. The couples who do not see time together as an important factor on a daily basis scored higher on questions that asked about anger, holding grudges and forgiveness. Seventy-five percent of those couples made it known that they almost never go out for a date night or a weekend getaway with just the two of them. When it comes to the sexual part of their relationship, couples who do not spend time together ranked lower in areas of contentment and vulnerability during sexual intimacy. These couples rang in at less than fifty percent that actually laugh and have fun during sex, can locate the female g-spot, kiss more now than in the first year of marriage, has had improvements in their sex life over the past year, and includes variety in their sex life. These statistics only continue to prove the fact that quality time together on a daily basis can impact all areas of the relationship. The couples who lacked time together had higher percentages on questions such as the following; my spouse is not as interested in sex as I am, I struggle with pornography, sometimes I find sex boring, I rarely experience orgasm, sex is usually rushed, I am often too tired for sex, and sometimes I do not feel confident with my spouse. This analysis furthers the idea of how vital quality time is to a couple. It is

imperative to see that couples that starve themselves of time will inherently starve themselves of spiritual closeness, emotional stability, and sexual intimacy. These barriers can produce a stagnant relationship that is focused only on individual desires rather than psychological health. It is also proof that the relationship is not based on the purpose of marriage through the eyes of God.

One of the questions that was asked in this survey was “Briefly describe what intimacy in marriage means to you?” Just like the other questions, there were differing viewpoints based on how much quality time was spent in the relationship. Those who hardly had any to zero quality time had the following responses: “Intimacy is simply sex; I wish we were best friends but sometimes we do not like each other; time alone that is rare; having passion for each other; feeling loved and being trusted; I have never had it; not sure; he does not care about intimacy; feeling loved; it means closeness which is not common in my relationship; a closeness on all levels.”⁴⁹ A follow up question at the end of the survey was, “What is your top priority as a spouse?” Some of the answers were; “to provide for my wife and family; sex; to make my relationship with Jesus where it should be; to keep my family happy; balance; safety; to be the first priority to my spouse despite his practically non-existent relationship with God; my marriage is almost over so I do not know what the priority is; take care of the kids; meet my kids needs and then my husband’s needs; maintain; unconditional love; and biblically love my husband.”⁵⁰ These answers are somewhat depressing and reveal a disheartening fact once again about

⁴⁹ All interviews were anonymous; the names of the respondents are withheld by mutual agreement. July 15, 2016.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

couples spending time together. Those couples who lack significant time together each day tend to have more issues with intimacy on all levels compared to the couples who have a regular commitment to spending time together. The couples who invested time daily responded differently than those who did not make the effort to devote time to each other. As a reminder, the first question was, “Briefly describe what intimacy in marriage means to you?” The answers are: intimacy is “closeness in marriage that covers mental; emotional; physical; and sexual areas; connecting with your spouse on all levels; the special relationship with you and your spouse; being comfortable in the vulnerable; worshipping the Lord; oneness; God’s gift; more than sex; deeply knowing your spouse; comfort and completeness; love and trust; transparency; being comfortable one hundred percent of the time; meeting each other’s needs even at your sacrifice; being naked and unashamed; loyalty; both partners focused on God and allowing Him to direct our paths; putting the other person first; cuddling; having a great sex life and being in tune with each other’s spiritual life; respect without a public audience; and confidence in your relationship.”⁵¹ These answers are vastly different from those who do not spend much time together on a regular basis. It was evident that those who responded in this manner are truly expressing the close bond that they have with their spouse. The research revealed that these couples are practicing intimacy daily. It is not simply something that used to be there or something that they long for, but an active and component in their relationship even amid tough situations that life may bring in their journey. The follow up question asked each respondent, “What is your top priority as a spouse?” The answers were: “to share my life with my other half; provide; stability; love each other; stay

⁵¹ Ibid.

together for life; to be the spiritual leader of my home; helpmate so that we can accomplish more together; love my wife well in God's eyes; love God, trust; communicate; to make him happy; grow in my relationship with Christ; spouse first and kids second, faithfulness; love God, husband; and kids; to serve my spouse; be a source of love; seek God; make Christ the center of our marriage; to be best friends; to be my husband's rock; and to be a Godly example to my family."⁵² These answers depict relationships that are committed in engaging themselves to what a Godly marriage represents. They show strength, weakness, and a true reliance on God and their spouse. The research did not include perfect relationships, but it does include the ones who have committed themselves to having time alone with their spouse as a key factor in successful marriages. In order to not starve your relationship, it needs to be fed by allocating daily quality time that will enforce closeness and continue to realign the couple towards God's purpose for the marriage.

Another important factor in relationships is communication. If this is done well then it could lead to increased understanding and overall contentment within the marriage. Everett Worthington, in his book, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, explains the need for communication between couples. Talking and listening is a way to show love and promote love in a relationship. Couples should become more aware of their communication patterns and realign them so that it renders love toward each other. Communication should be positive, a time for sharing and encouraging, and a growth period toward deeper intimacy.⁵³ Question number four on the survey asked couples to

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Worthington, *Hope-focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 149.

rate certain parts of their relationship from one to ten. One was defined as non-existent and ten was described as wonderful. There were four topics that could be rated on this question of the survey. The first was to rate your communication with your spouse. The results compared between men and women were almost identical on average. Both the husbands and wives were satisfied with their communication as a couple. When the scale was broken down by individual ratings, it showed that women rated their communication higher than men. The wives showed over sixteen percent as having wonderful communication while the husbands rated their relationship at six percent in the wonderful category. These results are compelling especially with the known fact that most women enjoy conversation more than most men. This is not true in every case but has been proven for most couples. The second topic on this question that couples were able to rate was their closeness and cohesion which is an essential part to communicating. For the women, their highest percentage was at the top of the scale, which was twenty-six percent saying their cohesion was wonderful with their spouse. The men, however, rated themselves just below the wonderful mark at nineteen percent. The next topic on this sliding scale was rating their happiness within the marriage. Overall, both men and women claimed that they were happy as it was rated highest for both groups. The final topic for this specific question asked the couples to rate their sexual relationship which again has a major part in communication as a couple. This time, there were over six percent of men who stated that their sexual relationship was non-existent. The women topped the charts again by stating that their sexual relationship is wonderful. These differing responses reveal communication as an issue when it relates to the couple's sexual intimacy. Men are more likely to want more from their spouse in the physical

arena while women are looking for emotional support that often comes with good communication, empathy, and psychological understanding.

Table 2.4 Men Rate the Marriage

	Non-Existent	1	2	3	4	Satisfied	6	7	8	9	Wonderful	Total	Weighted Average
Click how you would rate your communication with your spouse	4.03% 5	1.61% 2	5.65% 7	6.45% 8	6.45% 8	8.87% 11	4.84% 6	13.71% 17	13.71% 17	18.55% 23	16.13% 20	124	6.65
Click how you would rate your cohesion/closeness with your spouse	2.42% 3	2.42% 3	3.23% 4	5.65% 7	7.26% 9	8.06% 10	4.03% 5	6.45% 8	16.13% 20	17.74% 22	26.61% 33	124	7.19
Click how you would rate your happiness with your spouse	0.81% 1	2.42% 3	4.03% 5	3.23% 4	7.26% 9	4.84% 6	2.42% 3	8.87% 11	8.06% 10	17.74% 22	40.32% 50	124	7.77
Click how you would rate your sexual relationship with your spouse	2.42% 3	5.65% 7	6.45% 8	7.26% 9	8.06% 10	9.68% 12	1.61% 2	12.90% 16	12.10% 15	16.94% 21	16.94% 21	124	6.40

Table 2.5 Women Rate the Marriage

	Non-Existent	1	2	3	4	Satisfied	6	7	8	9	Wonderful	Total	Weighted Average
Click how you would rate your communication with your spouse	2.17% 1	0% 0	0% 0	6.52% 3	6.52% 3	8.70% 4	19.57% 9	21.74% 10	23.91% 11	4.35% 2	6.52% 3	46	6.54
Click how you would rate your cohesion/closeness with your spouse	2.17% 1	0% 0	2.17% 1	6.52% 3	6.52% 3	8.70% 4	8.7% 4	17.39% 8	15.22% 7	19.57% 9	13.04% 6	46	6.96
Click how you would rate your happiness with your spouse	2.17% 1	0% 0	2.17% 1	0% 0	8.70% 4	2.17% 1	4.35% 2	13.04% 6	23.91% 11	19.57% 9	23.91% 11	46	7.74
Click how you would rate your sexual relationship with your spouse	6.52% 3	2.17% 1	2.17% 1	8.70% 4	13.04% 6	6.52% 3	6.52% 3	15.22% 7	15.22% 7	10.87% 5	13.04% 6	46	6.13

As research is being analyzed, it is apparent that communication is a key ingredient to nourishing intimacy. Question six of the marriage intimacy survey has an option for respondents to click on activities that apply to them. The answers were compared between husbands and wives and once again revealed the difference in communication and actions between males and females. More wives claimed to start fights while more husbands stated that they end the fight. The men had the highest percentages on soothing hurt and angry feelings as well as initiating love-making. The women rose to the top about suggesting recreational activities and promoting warmth and

affection. Both husbands and wives were around the sixty-seven to sixty-nine mark when it came to initiating a discussion of ideas. This result portrays the desire of both the men and women in marriages to communicate better ways to accomplish goals without conflict. Although there were some equal numbers for both men and women in this question, the wives were fifteen percent more capable with starting discussions in order for change to occur in the relationship. This revealed the passion inside of women to make things work instead of bailing out or giving up in the relationship. Two wives to one husband showed that they request alone time with their spouse which reinforces the idea that women are committed to the relationship and desire a deeper level of intimacy with their husbands. When it came to certain activities such as cooking, cleaning, putting kids to bed, negotiating with schools, paying the bills, grocery shopping, maintaining contact with mutual friends, and organizing family outings, the wives were overwhelmingly completing these tasks over their husbands. The husbands ranked high in activities such as home repairs, yard work, driving on trips, negotiating with credit agencies, and leading the family in spiritual life. This realization can be a product of good communication because it displays the fact that each person in the marriage relationship has tasks that they accomplish to keep the family operating daily. If these tasks were all on the husband or all on the wife's responsibility, then it could propose a communication breakdown and lack of intimacy issue because there would not be balance in their family unit. It was very encouraging to see the husband rank high as the spiritual leader because it demonstrates what God intended for marriages to include some sense of spiritual growth present in the relationship. Ephesians chapter five verse twenty-six through twenty-eight clearly explains the concept of husbands leading their wives on

this spiritual journey, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”⁵⁴

As the data was received and compared based on how many years that the couple had been married, it exposed some of the reality of different stages of marriages. For those couples who had been married five years or less, eleven to fifteen years, and sixteen to twenty years exemplified higher stress levels based on the conflict aspect of their marriage. For these two groups, there was a higher percentage of fights being started by the husband and wife. The other two groups, six to ten years married and the over twenty years in a relationship had lower percentages when it came to conflict. As far as ending fights and soothing hurt feelings, there was a downward slope as the marriage relationship went up in years, which may show some maturity and growth in the couple or could be an “I don’t care anymore” attitude. It is also interesting to note that the two groups (0-5 years and 11-15 years married) that had higher percentages in conflict also had higher percentages when it came to initiating sex and having an active physical relationship. That statistic was not true for the couples who had been married for sixteen to twenty years. It could be concluded that couples who face strong conflict also have the potential of having stronger physical relationships as it pertains to sex. Sex could be the relief or reprieve from the constant conflict. It is what the world calls “make-up sex”.

⁵⁴ Eph 5:26-28

This does not totally mean that the relationship is stronger because they can face conflict and have sex. It could be a product of a starving marriage rather a sign of a well-nourished relationship. The charts below show the sexual activity of the couples based on how long they have been in the relationship.

Table 2.6 Occurrence of Sex for Marriages 0-5 years

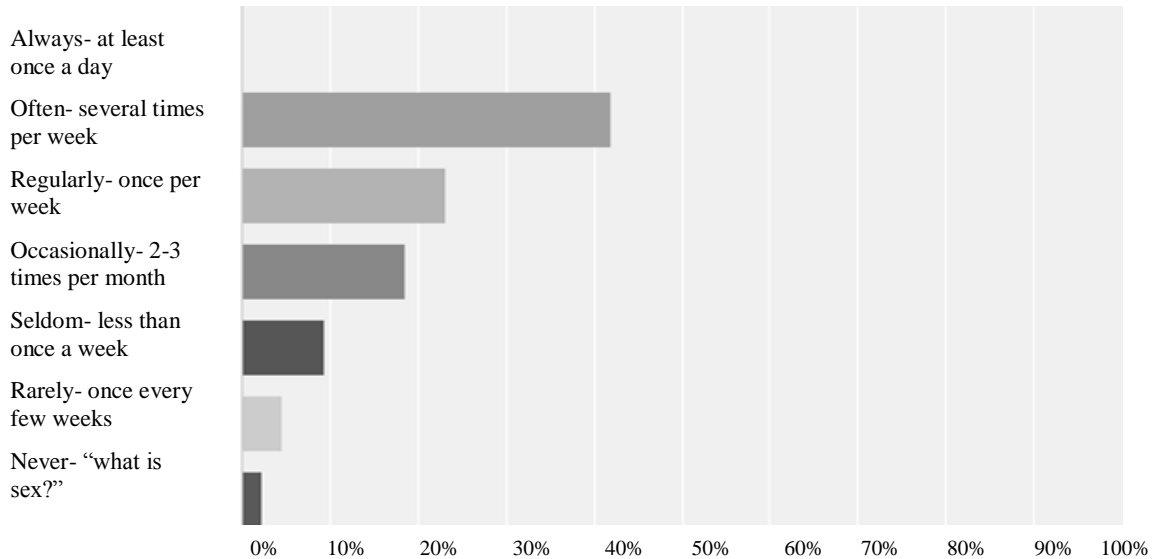


Table 2.7 Occurrence of Sex for Marriages 6-10 years

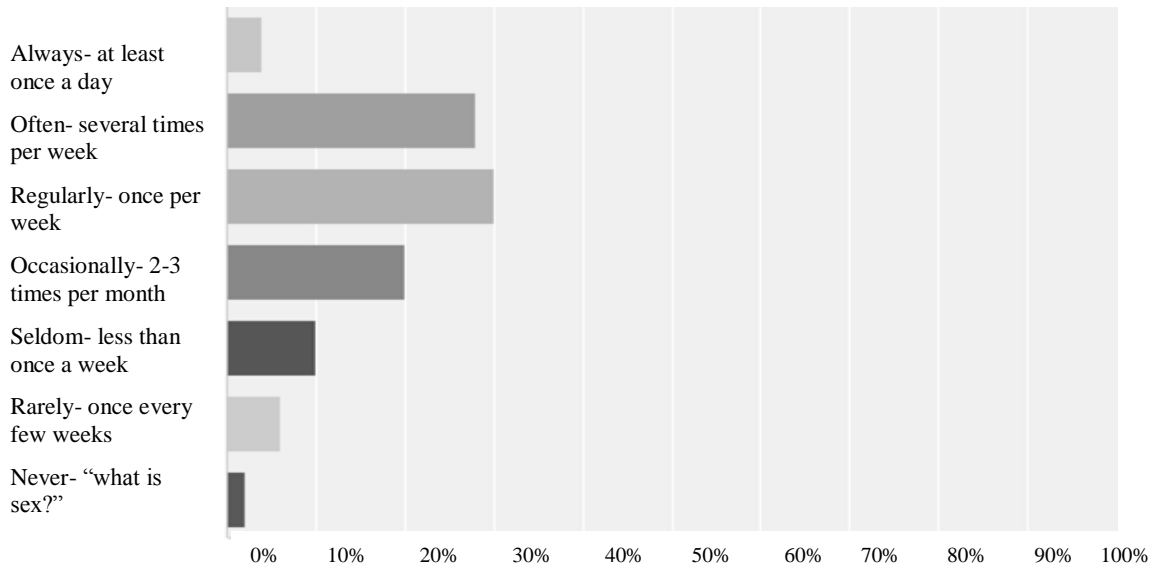


Table 2.8 Occurrence of Sex for Marriages 11-15 years

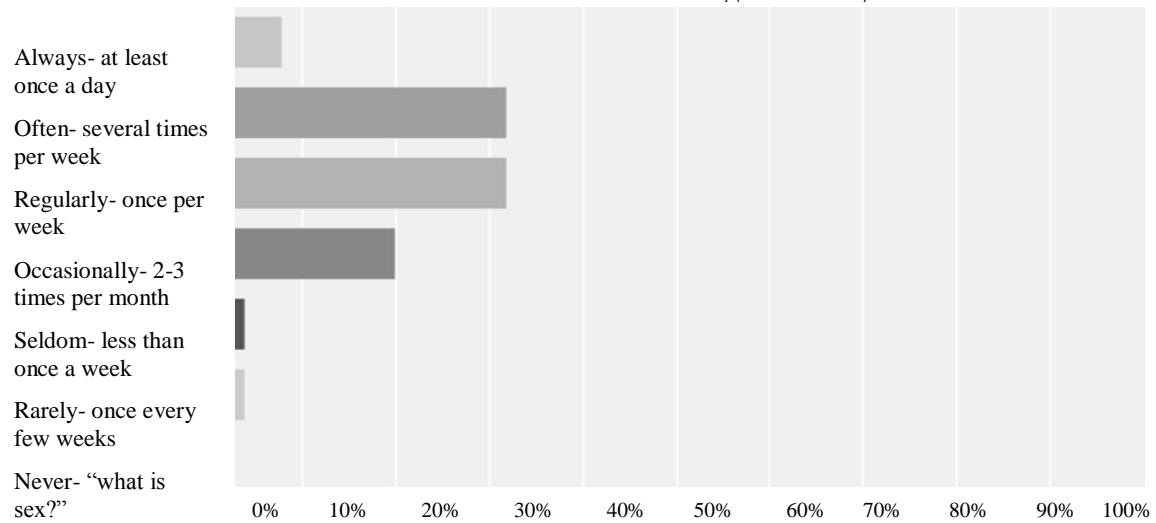


Table 2.9 Occurrence of Sex for Marriages 16-20 years

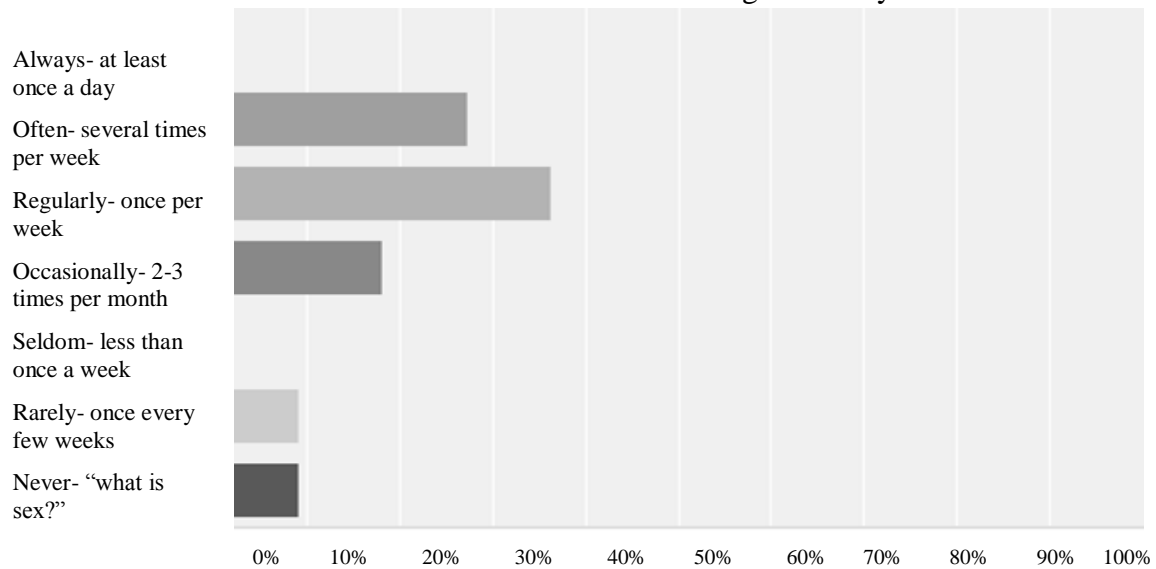
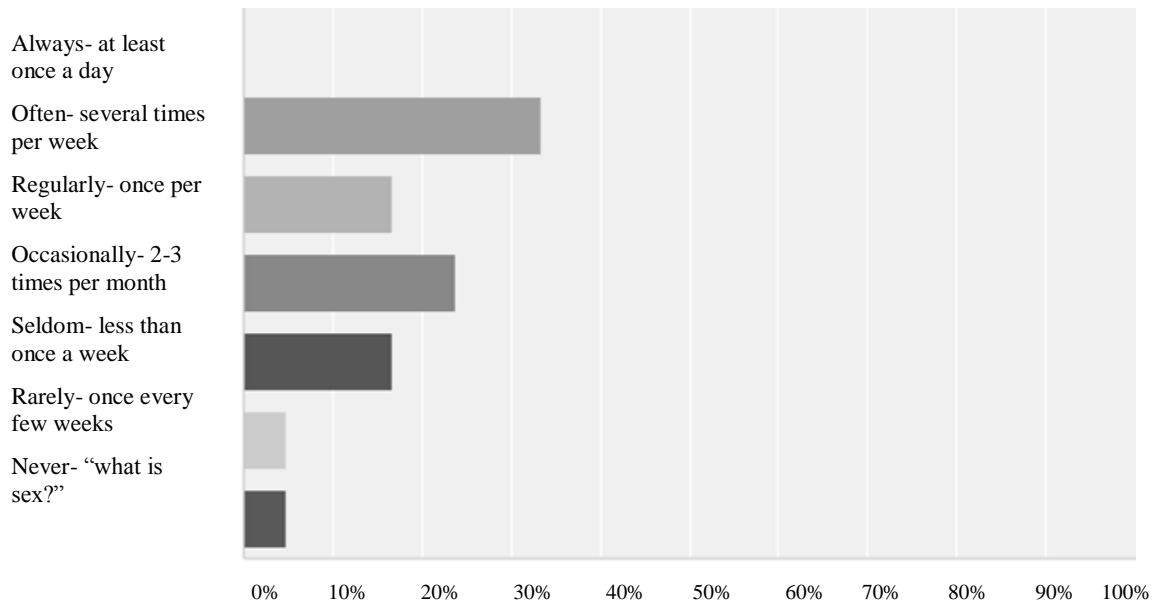


Table 2.10 Occurrence of Sex for Marriages 20+ years



Intimacy involves more than just sex and conflict resolution. Couples that were married five years or less expressed a low percentage of having a spiritual leader in the relationship. Only twenty-five percent of those couples claim to live out their relationship in a spiritual manner. Forty-four percent of the six to ten year marriages and eleven to fifteen year marriages engaged in spiritual leadership and activity within their relationship. There was slight decline for the marriages that had lasted to the twenty year or more mark. They only had thirty-three percent of them who had someone to lead the relationship in a spiritual way. The shocking figure was the marriages that were in the sixteen to twenty-year mark. Only twenty-seven percent of them claimed to be leading their family in a spiritual fashion. When it came to practicing various spiritual disciplines such as praying for and with your spouse, reading the Bible together, being comfortable sharing what God is teaching you with your spouse, and inviting God to help during times of conflict, the marriages that had been married the longest were seemingly

stronger. This statistic could prove the very reason why these marriages have lasted through the test of time and through the battles and blessings that we all receive in this journey of life. The twenty plus year marriages also claimed to be happier than those who were married less than that. The relationship that had been committed to each other in marriage for sixteen to twenty years had a major decrease in physical connections, sexual confidence, spiritual growth, intellectual maturity, and other areas. These relationships seem to be struggling with balancing work, overtime, kids and their activities, the busyness of life, and a multitude of other distractions. This could be the worst time frame of maintaining a marriage due to the high stress environment and trying to continue to parent, make financial obligations, and have the time to connect with your spouse. Research reveals that if most couples could work through this difficult period of marriage, then they may see more encouraging days as the kids move out of the house, begin planning for retirement, and have more time to focus on building the relationship.

Marriages go through seasons. These seasons can be compared to the natural seasons on earth. The four seasons were created by certain inevitable changes that occur as the earth turns on its axis and revolves around the sun. In similar ways, married couples face life changes and their response to those changes create different seasons within the relationship.⁵⁵ Birth, death, depression, moving, staying, vacations, jobs, weight gain and loss, financial issues, moods, children, habits, hobbies, sex, aging bodies, and many other circumstances and conditions can impact the marriage relationship. These influences if handled properly will keep the marriage in a spring and summer season. When the response is harsh, conflicting, and not agreeable with your spouse,

⁵⁵ Chapman, *The Four Seasons of Marriage: Secrets to a Lasting Marriage*, 6.

then the marriage can easily find its way into the cold months of autumn of winter. Gary Chapman, author of the book, *The Four Seasons of Marriage*, clarifies the idea of couples facing different seasons throughout their marriage. Chapman's thesis provides an apt analogy for the changes that occur in relationships. His claim is that the "interweaving of our emotions, attitudes, and actions creates the quality of our relationship in the various seasons of marriage."⁵⁶ These different seasons may cause conflict and could result in a lack of intimacy as couples grow old together. The challenge is renewing, strengthening, and revitalizing intimacy in marriage. The next chapter will begin to discuss and explain useful methods that will help marriages enhance their relationship as they bring it back to God's original design and place an emphasis on the best practices that will transform the cohesion and closeness in their marriage.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 61.

Chapter Three

Feeding the Hunger

Recipe One- The Purpose of Marriage: “The Wedding Cake”

White Almond Wedding Cake

Ingredients

- 1 (18.25 ounce) package white cake mix
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup white sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/3 cups water
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 egg whites

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C). Grease and flour an 11x13 inch cake pan.
2. Stir together the white cake mix, flour, sugar, and salt in a large bowl until well mixed. Pour in the water, sour cream, vegetable oil, almond and vanilla extracts, and egg whites, and beat with an electric mix on low until all the ingredients are mixed and moistened but some lumps still remain, 4 minutes.
3. Pour the batter into the prepared cake pan, and bake in the preheated oven until the top is a light golden brown and a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out clean, about 25 minutes. Allow to cool before frosting.

57

The cutting of the wedding cake is a rich custom that can be traced back to the Ancient Romans. It is a simple task abounding in tradition, symbolism, and purpose. In modern times, this ceremony has become one of the classic elements at a wedding reception. Not only does it simply provide a great photography opportunity, but it also symbolizes the beginning of a relationship that should last a lifetime. It is a public announcement that God has brought these two people together for a given purpose and

⁵⁷ “Almond Wedding Cake,” www.allrecipes.com, accessed September 15, 2016, www.allrecipes.com/recipe/176581/white-almond-cake/.

will guide them through their journey in life. Most cake cutting ceremonies will include the newlyweds holding the knife together cutting the cake and sharing that first piece with each other.⁵⁸ The wedding cake itself is usually very expensive and made with quality ingredients with spectacular detail. This is a representation of the new relationship between the bride and groom as they have been maturing and developing individually the years prior to their coming together on their wedding day. Most wedding cakes are frosted with white icing to symbolize the purity, gentleness, and innocence of the new relationship. The layers to the cake or the stacking of smaller cakes, represent fertility and the legacy that these newlyweds will leave in this world as they build their family. The ritual of cutting the first piece together is one of the couple's first tasks and demonstrates their commitment to each other. The ceremonial act of cutting the cake is usually done with the new bride holding the knife and the new husband laying his hand on top which shows the support that each other will have as they journey through life. They work together to slice through all the layers signifying the continuity of the relationship. After the cake has been cut, the groom will feed his bride a piece of the cake and vice versa symbolizing their sacrificial service in providing for each other. The hope during this whole process is that the couple will experience a blessed relationship through God as they continue to meaningfully give their all to Him and live out the purpose of their marriage as it was intended to be at the creation of this institution.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ "All about Cutting the Cake," *www.theknot.com*, accessed August 26, 2016, <https://www.theknot.com/content/cutting-the-cake>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Marriage is an institution designed by God and has an incredible purpose of helping us to connect with our creator. In the first book of the Bible, the Lord outlines the origin of this relationship and the reasons why it is so important. Genesis, chapter two says, “Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”⁶⁰ It is clear based on the Word of God that it was important for God to provide a helper for man. The helper was called “woman” and was essentially created from one of man’s ribs. This design connected both the man and woman in a way different than any other creature on Earth. Man was created in God’s image and His desire is to connect with people. This same yearning is built into the creation of humans. God knew that it would be easier for humans to understand His love for us if there was a similar relationship and interaction between man and woman. Ed Wheat, an author, doctor, and sex therapist, realized this truth throughout his years of helping married couples: it is God’s will in every marriage that the couple love each other with an absorbing spiritual, emotional, and physical attraction that continues to grow throughout their lifetime together.⁶¹ In other words, Dr. Wheat was simply stating that married couples have a purpose from God to live an

⁶⁰ Genesis 2

⁶¹ Wheat, *Love Life for Every Married Couple*, 2.

intimate full life together that is glorifying to God, meaningful, and one that leaves a legacy for others to follow. He continues his theme in defining the purpose of marriage by explaining the truth that all married couples have the possibility of developing this love relationship in their marriage because it is in direct harmony with God's perfect design for man to have a help meet.⁶² Only a relationship that understands this reality of marriage can obtain the fulfilling outcome of a life full of experience, joy, and assurance that was planned at the beginning of creation.

Ed Wheat concluded through his studies that there are six facts or truths about marriage that must be present to define the relationship as a married couple based on the unchanging Word of God. The first idea is that a married couple must be one male and one female. There are no other ways to describe a marriage relationship if you base it on the founder of the institution itself.⁶³ The second truth is that marriage was designed by God to meet the first problem of humanity which was loneliness. God knew that man needed someone that was like him but not like him and that could provide companionship like no other part of the creation. Women complete the marriage puzzle by providing the necessary protection, support, and intimate relationship that allows both the husband and wife to succeed as individuals and as a married couple in the eyes of God.⁶⁴ The third fact is that marriage was planned and decreed to bring happiness, not misery. The relationship between a husband and wife is so special that there is no other relationship like it on earth. It brings emotions and feelings to intimate levels and creates a lifelong

⁶² Ibid., 3.

⁶³ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17.

bond that could never be duplicated. Marriage is meant to bring joy and happiness out of people instead of work, despair, and sadness.⁶⁵ The fourth aspect of marriage is that it must begin with a leaving of all other relationships to establish a permanent relationship between one man and one woman. This concept has proven itself as the only logical means to define marriage. Biblically, there are no other forms of marriage. This one relationship must be prioritized in such a way that it never competes with any other relationship that one may have. This commitment to each other was part of God's original design.⁶⁶ The fifth truth about marriage is that it requires an inseparable joining of husband and wife throughout their lifetime. Couples are commanded to leave and "cleave". The meaning of that word should have been translated as stick together, adhere to, or cement together. It is a lifetime bond that continues to get stronger as time goes by. The husband and wife both have the responsibility to strengthen and tighten that bond as they journey through life together.⁶⁷ The final and sixth factor that must be a part of marriage is a oneness in the fullest possible sense, including intimate physical union without shame. Sexual intercourse physically merges two people together into one mind, body, and spirit. This closeness is meant to be experience with your spouse only. God's original design did not allow for any perversion, homosexual acts, adultery, or any other promiscuity. His purpose for a satisfying marriage included a man and woman who dedicated their life to each other and to God in all areas of their relationship including sex.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 26.

It is evident that marriage is not simply a fad or something that people do as they get older but it is a purposeful relationship between a man and woman who have committed themselves to God and each other for a lifetime. This relationship was created by God in order that men and women would have a helper or supporter through life, a friend to rely on, a partner to build a family, and voice of reason in times of trouble. Marriage was part of God's perfect design at the creation of the world and is still part of His plan that allows humans to experience His love and grace as they maneuver their way through a sin-filled environment. As couples are forced to manage their relationship in this fallen world, it is vital that they constantly focus and refocus their priorities in such a way that realigns them with God's standards of living. Marriage is hard with God and can be impossible without God. Healthy marriages or happy couples tend to take on certain characteristics that unsuccessful relationships do not possess. The couples that seem to be happier have healthy expectations of marriage, a realistic concept of love, a positive outlook on life, the ability to communicate their feelings, an understanding and acceptance of their gender differences, the ability to settle arguments, and a common spiritual foundation.⁶⁹ These physiognomies can easily set the tone of the relationship and build a strong foundation that every relationship needs to be successful and debunk some marital myths that most relationships believe to be true as they begin their marital journey. Les and Leslie Parrott outline a few marital myths that couples must dismantle to have a fruitful marriage. These myths are couples expecting the same things from marriage, believing every good thing in marriage will get better and every bad thing in

⁶⁹ Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage before It Starts: Seven Questions to Ask before and After You Marry*, 15

the relationship will disappear, and finally their spouse will make them whole. All couples believe some of these myths to inherent truth as they begin their marriage. The challenge is for couples to discover God's purpose and not allow these myths to clog their understanding of the meaning of marriage. If married couples can patiently work together to discredit these false ways of thinking and invest in the biblical foundation of marriage then they will see heightened success and be able to meet all the challenges that relationships face in this world full of sin, despair, and obstacles.⁷⁰ Their mindset will be focused more on solutions rather than the problems that are affecting their relationship. Great communication is a key ingredient to building that strong bond and fulfilling the purpose that God had created for marriage.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 33.

Recipe Two- Correct Communication: “The Walking Taco”

The Walking Taco

Ingredients

- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1 (1 ounce) package taco seasoning mix
- 4 (2.5 ounce) packages corn chips
- 2 cups shredded lettuce
- 1 chopped fresh tomato
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1/3 cup salsa
- 1/2 cup sour cream

Directions

1. Place ground beef in a large skillet. Cook and stir over medium heat until browned. Drain excess oil. Mix in the taco seasoning and prepare according to the directions on the package.
2. With the bags unopened, gently crush the corn chips. Snip the corners off the bags using scissors and slit open the bags along the side edge. Spoon equal amounts of the beef mixture, lettuce, tomato, Cheddar cheese, salsa and sour cream into the bags on top of the crushed chips.
3. Serve in the bag and eat using a fork.

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The walking taco is a perfect recipe for people who live busy lives but still need to eat. This concept allows one to eat a home cooked meal while still participating in their extracurricular activities that keep them away from a traditional sit down dinner. It is a meal that offers great flavor, flexibility, and is simple to make. It gives people the option of accomplishing two tasks at once. While eating meals at home around a table is the best scenario, one can rest assure that this meal will provide the hearty nutrients needed to sustain a busy lifestyle that is always on the go.

Couples are busier than ever. They are challenged to manage work schedules, children’s activities, and many other tasks from a variety of sources. This demanding lifestyle sometimes leaves little time for married couples to communicate in a traditional

⁷¹ “The Walking Taco”, www.allrecipes.com, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/20852/taco-in-a-bag/>.

setting. Just like the walking taco is another way to accomplish eating and doing other activities at the same time, couples can communicate while they are enjoying life together. This includes extracurricular activities, parenting, and working.

Communication should be based on love, not be just a dialogue or expression of one's opinion. Engaging in communication that builds on love will increase the value that each person has on the other. Their focus now becomes on understanding their spouse rather than articulating their own attitude toward the topic of discussion.⁷² Marriages that have learned to increase their value toward their spouse with healthy communication patterns have experienced easy understanding, a focus on positive attributes of the relationship, elevated listening skills that are respectful, the ability to express their feelings and desires, and make time for quality communication. Those who do not possess these qualities create an atmosphere that contains angry outbursts, judgment, annoying behavior, selfishness, and dishonesty.⁷³ The important aspect of communication is not the scheduled task of conversation but rather displaying an attitude of love and empathy toward each other. As stated previously, communication can happen anywhere and is not always during a traditional sit down encounter. With this being true, couples will have to learn how to connect with each other in all situations because life will not slow down and wait for someone to learn effective communication. Speaking and listening is only one portion of active communication. There must be some other forms of communication that allow couples to unite and comprehend each other's thoughts, feelings, ambitions,

⁷² Worthington, *Hope-focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*, 149.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 151.

goals, sensations, desires, and affirmations as they experience daily life in a busy world of expectations.⁷⁴

Communication could be defined as always expressing love and if needed use words. This concept delivers a twist to the idea of communicating because it demands an absence of words which is usually present when people think about communication. Communication is difficult and can be some of the most stressful times of a marriage relationship, especially if it deals with conflict. Communication involves a variety of verbal and nonverbal actions as well as individuals that have differing point of views and perspectives. These dynamics can create a problematic situation when couples are trying to dialogue on some heavy life changing topics. There are times when one spouse may say one thing but the other spouse hears something completely different. This complex exchange can deliver excruciating pain to a relationship. Having the ability to clearly communicate takes time and practice. Effective communication is a skill that requires training, intention, and endurance.⁷⁵ Mark Gungor, author of *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage*, defines communication as the fresh, breathable air of a relationship. He also says that without communication skills, couples suffocate under the stress of unrealized expectations. Communication is sometimes seen as a task as easy as sex; just do it. The reality is that communication is a skill that is practiced repeatedly throughout the entire marriage relationship. It is a lifetime of understanding and discovering that will keep marriages focused as they trudge through the muddy waters of conflict resolution and

⁷⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁷⁵ Gungor, *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage: Unlocking the Secrets to Life, Love, and Marriage*, 62.

accepting each other's point of views and differences. Talking to your spouse and growing with them through that dialogue can be one of the greatest parts of your marriage. The more couple's experience effective communication the more understanding and love they will have for each other which will only nourish their intimacy.⁷⁶

Communication does not always have to be serious and focus around challenging areas of the relationship. Communicating should be fun, relaxing, and enjoyable. Many couples remember their early days when they engaged in playful talk, flirting, and staying up all hours of the night just talking. Communication during the beginning of a relationship seems to flow as easy as water down a river. It was probably effortless and there were so many topics to talk about.⁷⁷ These young, full of life relationships displayed a spark that seemed would never be distinguished. As time goes by, married couples begin to fall into a routine or rut where the once flaming fire of communication becomes a little flame in the wind soon to be blown out. Conversation became tiring, predictable, and somewhat stale. Talks quickly went from dreams, desires, plans, and promises to short meaningless answers. Believe it or not, communication in marriage is directly connected to a couple's sex life. If communication is bad, then it is likely that their sexual intimacy is a rare act in their relationship as well. Humans were created to communicate and be social. Conversation in marriage is a huge part of connecting and building intimacy within a relationship. If the verbal and nonverbal communication is not happening throughout the day, week, or month, then it is very likely that the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁷ Young, *Sexperiment: 7 Days to Lasting Intimacy with Your Spouse*, 139.

relationship is breaking down in other areas as well. Communication is similar to gas in a car. The fuel allows the engine to run and move the car to the destination. If communication is lacking in marriage, then the relationship has no chance in growing or arriving at its destination.⁷⁸ Ed Young, a pastor and author, says “The right words at the right time can really make a difference. It is a priceless gift of great value.”⁷⁹ The Bible also offers some great advice on communication. James 1:19 says, “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”⁸⁰ This verse substantiates the idea that communication is more than just useless words exchanged in a dialogue. It is a listening with purpose conversation where understanding and love is expressed. Ephesians 4:29 continues this theme by stating, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”⁸¹ The Bible is clear when it comes to communicating and having the ability to use it as a gift to encourage others, especially those people that are in an intimate relationship, called marriage. Even though there are times when couples fail at communicating or lose the fluidity of conversations, it is never too late to transform a marriage by obtaining skills that make talking fun, like the good old days.

It is sad that this point must be made but marriage relationships should look more like friendship than fighting. If couples focused their communication on growing their friendship with each other and spending time together rather than fighting over personal

⁷⁸ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁰ Jas 1:19

⁸¹ Eph 4:29

wants and desires, then they would probably have healthier discussions and happier lives. Couples who are friends tend to know each other intimately while those who fight are more apt to live stressful lives. The idea of building a friendship with your spouse creates an atmosphere that is developed with the other person in mind. Couples will begin to figure out each other's likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes, and dreams. This communication style brings value to the relationship and allows each partner to express affection in little ways and big ways on a more consistent basis. A friendship way of talking will also guide the relationship to want to spend quality time together, which deepens the intimate connection.⁸²

⁸² John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (London: Orion, 2004), 15.

Recipe Three- Quality Time: “Homemade Bread”

Homemade Bread

Ingredients

- 1 package active dry yeast
- 2 ¼ cups of warm water
- 3 tablespoons of sugar
- 1 tablespoon of salt
- 2 tablespoons canola oil

Directions

1. In a large bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water. Add the sugar, salt, oil and 3 cups flour. Beat until smooth. Stir in enough remaining flour, 1/2 cup at a time, to form a soft dough.
2. Turn onto a floured surface; knead until smooth and elastic, about 8-10 minutes. Place in a greased bowl, turning once to grease the top. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled, about 1-1/2 hours.
3. Punch dough down. Turn onto a lightly floured surface; divide dough in half. Shape each into a loaf. Place in two greased 9x5-in. loaf pans. Cover and let rise until doubled, about 30-45 minutes.
4. Bake at 375° for 30-35 minutes or until golden brown and bread sounds hollow when tapped. Remove from pans to wire racks to cool. Yield: 2 loaves (16 slices each).

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Baking bread at home is a long tedious task that is far more difficult than simply purchasing a loaf of bread at the local grocery store. It is time consuming. It requires the right ingredients. There is a process of trial and error to bake the right loaf that offers the right taste. There is a certain amount of work and accuracy involved and it takes time to make a quality item for consumption. Baking bread at home is planned, purposed, and engaging. There is also a great reward from the investment of time that is put forth in the creation of the bread. There are apparent health benefits because it cuts down on the preservative intake, is often substantially cheaper, and more nutritious. Homemade bread is tastier than store bough bread as well. Store bought bread is primarily made to stay

⁸³ “Basic Homemade Bread Recipe”, www.tasteofhome.com, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/basic-homemade-bread>.

fresh longer, which lowers the quality of the substance. It is full of preservatives and additional yeast to create air bubbles that allow it to stay fresh a little bit longer than homemade bread. This process removes many of the nutrients that are bountiful in homemade breads.⁸⁴ Most people purchase store bought bread because of the abundance of bread in stores all around them. It is convenient, cheap, and gets the job done. The problem with that thought pattern is that people are eating more chemicals rather than true natural ingredients. Bread making has become a lost art because of the modern fast paced lifestyle that many people live. It is simply easier to buy something that is already made even if there is a sacrifice in nutrients. The reality is that making bread at home is not really that difficult at all. It just takes practice, some effort, and natural ingredients. With this winning combination, quality homemade bread will be life changer that will forever transform the idea of giving in to convenience or taking the time to invest in something more worthwhile.⁸⁵

Quality time in marriage is a lot like baking bread at home. It is hard, takes time and sacrifice but the benefits outweigh the convenience of eliminating it from a couple's daily routine. Young couples devote a lot of energy toward time together. They go on dates, hang out together, and make memories through a variety of experiences. Quality time to young couples is a vital part to them building their relationship. As time goes on, married couples tend to fall into "grownup" roles that almost force them into losing the

⁸⁴ Trent Hamm, "The Simple Dollar Homemade Bread: Cheap, Delicious, Healthy, and Easier Than You Think," accessed September 6, 2016 <http://www.thesimpledollar.com/homemade-bread-cheap-delicious-healthy-and-easier-than-you-think/>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

quality time that was once so prevalent in the relationship.⁸⁶ Pastor and author, Craig Groeschel and his wife Amy, describe quality time in marriage as simply having fun together. “Unfortunately, too many people see fun in marriage as a luxury. We don’t have time for fun anymore. We don’t have money or time for silly dates because we’re too busy trying to make a living.” Many married couples have fallen into the trap that quality time disappears when careers start or especially when children begin to invade all the “extra” time that couples once shared together. Fun in marriage cannot be just a luxury or a past tense, but a necessity. Marriages will not last if there is not any time being purposed for enjoyment, relationship building, and just hanging out. Those are the times where stress is reduced, couples are engaged in each other, and precious memories are being made. Life cannot be an excuse for eliminating quality time in a marriage relationship. Relationships feed off social interaction and connection. Marriage relationships require bonding outside of raising kids, working jobs, and keeping up with daily schedules. A relationship without fun can simply be defined as a business arrangement and is a prime example of what a starving marriage represents.⁸⁷

Quality time in marriage can be many different things. It can be a date night at a restaurant, a walk together, checking out old photos, talking about the future, listening to music together, cuddling, dancing, and countless other interactive activities. The most important ingredient to achieving quality time is having focused attention. This happens when both people are totally concentrated on the moment that is being shared together

⁸⁶ Craig Groeschel and Amy Groeschel, *From This Day Forward: Five Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 83.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 85.

rather than any other distraction.⁸⁸ It is not texting, watching television, being under the same roof but in different rooms, or not being in tune with what the other one is doing. Focused attention is exactly what the phrase says it is; it is a fixated, engrossed, and attentive devotion to your spouse. It is an on purpose gathering of two souls to just be with each other. It is not a staring contest. It can include an activity that stimulates the brain and aids in emotional connection. Quality time together is playing a board game, exercising together, or zip lining through a forest. The activity is not as important as the content of the time spent together. The important part is undivided attention toward each other. That is what makes quality time so significant and flexible. It does not matter what your interests are, all couples are able to spend time together doing something that they love to do.

Not only does quality time include focused attention but it also should include quality conversation. This type of conversation includes words of affirmation, sharing thoughts and feelings, telling desires and dreams, and reliving memories.⁸⁹ This dialogue is not about solving problems or issues within the relationship but more about understanding the thoughts and feelings from the other side of the relationship and getting to know him or her better. Some ways to accomplish this are maintaining eye contact, remove all distractions, listen for feelings that are being shared, and observe body language. Through these practical ways of better understanding, it helps to keep couples attentive, shows the other person that you care about this relationship, offers

⁸⁸ Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love That Lasts*, 59.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 60.

clarity and acceptance, and reveals feelings that others may be having about the marriage or life in general.⁹⁰

Another great tool to spending quality time together is learning to talk. Talking and walking is one of those milestones that toddlers accomplish at a small age. It is part of growing and part of learning. The amount of words that are heard, learned, and repeated by young kids happens at amazing rates. It seems simple to have the ability talking. Talking is not just repeating words that have been said. Learning to talk as a married couple takes years of practice, quality time together, and a level of intimacy. Talking can be destructive and bring hard feelings, thoughts, and expressions toward people. Learning to use words appropriately and share what you are feeling is not as easy as saying “Mama” or “Dada” as young baby. The ability to voice emotions accurately without causing pain takes time and is a requirement for obtaining a healthy marriage. Although, much of this section seems to be about communication rather than quality time, it is the right conversation that enhances the time spent together. If a couple is spending time together in paradise but are not able to effectively communicate and understand each other, then the outcome will probably be a failed attempt of quality time. This practice is directly related to previous paragraphs that focused on enjoying each other as a couple. It would not be beneficial to waste quality time with poor communication. Poor communication includes those who like to hog the conversation and those who have absolutely nothing to say. If the goal is to have quality time together then it may take some quality conversation to make it valuable.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁹¹ Ibid., 67.

Every marriage conference, relationship focused event, sermon on marriage, and book about marriage always has at least one theme in common. That primary theme highlights the importance of a “date night”. A date night is simply time set a part for fun and to enjoy some quality time together. It is essentially quality time. Quality time includes focused attention, quality conversation, and learning to talk. The final ingredient to enforce this dedicated time together is quality activities. Some examples of these activities have already been made known in prior sentences. Again, there is no right or wrong activity. It can be cruising through the Caribbean on a ship for a week or ten minutes of conversation while enjoying a cup of coffee or anything in between.

The significant parts of quality activities should include the following three elements as spelled out by Gary Chapman, author of *The Five Love Languages*. They are at least one person wants to do it, the other person is willing to do it, and both people know why it is being done.⁹² If these components are part of the recipe then it create memorable moments for the couple. Quality time spent doing engaging activities will only add to the many memories a couple will have throughout their journey. No one wants to age and look back on life with only memories of working and completing daily tasks. God designed humans to get married in order that they enjoy each other through valuable time growing closer together and expressing their love intimately. Ecclesiastes 9:9 says, “Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and toil at which you toil under the sun.”⁹³ This invaluable piece of wisdom from Scripture commands people to

⁹² Ibid., 69.

⁹³ Eccl 9:9.

enjoy their spouse and to create a life of memories through quality time as a couple. Proverbs 5:18 continues this concept by reassuring couples of the importance of enjoying their husband or wife, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth”.⁹⁴ Not only is quality time vital to the relationship to survive but it is essential for the relationship to thrive. Quality time spent together as a married couple is a foundational pillar to all marriages. Every couple can look back and vividly depict their dating days. It is when they received a glimpse of each other’s beauty.⁹⁵ It is the time that they could not get enough of each other. It is the part of their relationship where the butterflies were fluttering and the fireworks were forever bursting. It was a raw time of investigating, exploring, surveying, and learning. Dating revealed insecurities, brought out laughter, and secured commitment. It was special. It was life changing as it led to the proposal and eventually the wedding that began the marriage journey. Those were the days, but the great thing is that they can still be the days presently and in the future. Marriage does not prohibit couples from enjoying time together; couples proscribe to that logic and ban all fun activities because of work and daily routines. Couples who desire their hunger to be fulfilled can resist starvation and begin to reignite the fire of fun in their relationship. All it takes is engaging in quality time together and investing oneself to a deeper level of emotional vulnerability and intimacy.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Prov 5:18.

⁹⁵ Groeschel, *From This Day Forward: Five Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage*, 85.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 86.

Recipe Four- Enjoying Sex: “Steaming Mocha Cocoa”

Steaming Mocha Cocoa

Ingredients

2 cups of milk
2 tablespoons of cocoa
2 tablespoons of brown sugar
1 tablespoon of ground coffee
1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

Directions

1. Heat all ingredients in a small saucepan and whisk until steaming.
2. Strain and pour into two mugs.
3. Enjoy with your spouse.

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A steaming mocha cocoa is a perfect hot beverage that combines the rich creaminess of milk with just the right amount of cocoa. Brown sugar and vanilla extract give this drink a boost in flavorful ecstasy. The ground coffee adds just enough caffeine to vitalize anyone who is feeling sluggish. This coffee infusion is delightful to the tongue and compliments any breakfast item, dessert, or just about anything that you desire to eat. It is a special hot drink exclusively designed for a special time. It is not an everyday morning cup of Joe that is tasteless and boring. A steaming mocha cocoa is an explicit drink that has deep layers of excitement, pleasure, and satisfaction. It brings new levels of enjoyment to the average coffee consumer.

Sex in marriage can be likened to a steaming mocha cocoa. It is exciting, enjoyable, and an essential ingredient of marriage. Sex is a gift from God given to a man and a woman who have committed themselves to each other and God in matrimony. Clifford and Joyce Penner, authors of the book, *The Gift of Sex*, defined sex as “a precious gift to be stored carefully and not allowed to tarnish until it is shared with a

⁹⁷ “Steaming Mocha Cocoa”, [www.food.com](http://www.food.com/recipe/steaming-mocha-cocoa-279911), accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.food.com/recipe/steaming-mocha-cocoa-279911>.

special person.”⁹⁸ Today’s society has cheapened the value of sex to simply an inexpensive plastic piece of jewelry. The Bible clearly designated sex for marriage and is a direct portrayal of God’s intimate relationship with humans. As couples get married and open the gift of sex, it takes their relationship to a deeper level of intimacy. This level of closeness was created to only happen with one person. It is a lifetime commitment to the God ordained relationship that honors, cherishes, and protects the one that you chose to marry.⁹⁹ Sex was created by God for married couples to enjoy each other in a vulnerable naked state as well as to procreate. Sexuality is not part of our sinful nature. Although many people have taken sex and used it in sinful ways, the original intent was to relish in each other’s sexuality as a married couple. It was a perfect and beautiful example of God’s creation and gift to mankind.¹⁰⁰ Because God created sex for pleasure in marriage, it should be encouraged and expected. Sex in a marital setting should enhance a couple’s spirituality as they are directly participating in a God created act. Just like money, pride, and many other things can be used for evil, sex, if not done in accordance with God’s design can become a disaster in life. Sex is a huge responsibility and it takes mature individuals to make sure that it is not misused. Proverbs 15:18-19 says, “Let your fountains be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you always; be exhilarated always with her love.”¹⁰¹ The Bible is clear on God’s purpose for sex. It is

⁹⁸ Penner, *The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment*, 19.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰¹ Prov 5:18-19

permissible to find pleasure in sex within the confinements of marriage. Couples do not have to be ashamed of their sexuality.¹⁰² It is a nourishing ingredient to marriage intimacy and allows couples to connect with each other in ways that they do not connect with other people.

There are typically three meals to each day and seven days to each week. In that week, a person usually has twenty-one meals. It is probably safe to say that some of those meals were fantastic and some of them were boring. Food is food, but great food is exceptional. Marriages can exist with little to no sex. It is not a requirement to have sex in marriage relationships. Couples are still considered married even without sex. Just like eating tasteless food is still fulfilling the hunger of appetite. Great food enhances the eating experience. It offers mind blowing flavors and memories that last a longtime. People remember good meals because it made an impact in their lives. Sex in marriage creates that same colorful picture. It enriches intimacy and creates an environment of flirting, laughter, closeness, exposure, and fun. Sex removes daily stress and allows couples to reconnect.¹⁰³ Dr. Kevin Leman, a sex psychologist, says, “A fulfilling sex life is one of the most powerful marital glues a couple can have.” He continues his remarks by stating, “A sexually fulfilled man will normally be a better father and a better employee. A sexually fulfilled woman will have less stress and more joy in her life. Sex is vitally important to a healthy marriage.”¹⁰⁴ Although sex is not a requirement of

¹⁰² Penner, *The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment*, 29.

¹⁰³ Kevin Leman, *Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), 44.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

marriage, Dr. Leman's research has proved that marriages that engage in sexual intimacy in a fulfilling way have had more successful and healthier marriages. Sex can be seen as the ingredient in marriage that is connected and intertwined with every other part of the relationship. It brings the couple together and deepens their love, their spirituality, and their overall intimacy.

There are inherent benefits to a healthy sex life for married couples. For wives, a sexually fulfilled husband will do anything for you.¹⁰⁵ When wives meet their husband's sexual needs then the husbands are more likely to meet the needs of the wives. It is also a biblical mandate to meet the sexual needs in a marriage relationship. First Corinthians 7:3-5 says, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."¹⁰⁶ This verse is not meant to give control or to enslave someone in the relationship. It is simply stating that sexual intimacy is a powerful element in a marriage and should not be deprived or used as a bargaining tool because of the danger that could result. Couples who do not regularly experience sex will lead to great temptation that could derail their faithfulness as a couple. Some other benefits of a sexually fulfilled husband are that he will have high morale, be more successful at work, and begin to appreciate the important things in

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Cor 7:3-5 .

life.¹⁰⁷ These benefits come because men see sex as a need to thrive in their relationship. When that need is being met, then they are satisfied with the relationship and want to provide that same type of satisfaction by meeting the needs of their wife and children, whatever they may be. Wives can also benefit from a healthy sexual relationship in marriage. Women, may tend to not be as aggressive initiating sex but there are some needs that wives would like to see met. It could be that she needs a relaxing bath, massage, or night away. When these types of needs are being met by the husband then the wife is more willing to meet the needs of the husband.¹⁰⁸ This essential agreement should not be about one person winning or losing but more about both people in the relationship meeting the needs of the other person. Instead of creating an atmosphere that is grounded on competition, married couples should build a foundation of looking at the interests of the other person over themselves. Husbands, who pursue their wife outside of the bedroom will enlighten their wife's sexual responsiveness and begin to see a heightened physical and emotional bond as it relates to their connectivity and sexual intimacy.¹⁰⁹

Ed Young, pastor of Fellowship Church and author of *Sexperiment*, designed an experiment to help create lasting intimacy in marriage. The premise of the experiment is for married couples to have sex once a day for seven days. Young called this intentional intimacy. It is having sex to strengthen the marriage. Committing to having sex for seven days as a couple will reveal emotions, feelings, and thoughts about the relationship.

¹⁰⁷ Leman, *Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 58.

It is easy for one person in the marriage to deny sex to the other person. It is more difficult to commit to a plan and stick with it for seven days no matter the attitudes, struggles, and concerns that may arise during the experiment.¹¹⁰ This test does not come with a one hundred percent guarantee to fix all the issues in the relationship but it will set up a foundation of reconnection as a couple. Sex in marriage is not purely a physical act. It is also a mental and emotional connection for the couple. The things that happen outside the bedroom directly impact the things that happen inside of the bedroom. Taking a week to change the action in the bedroom will launch a transformation in intimacy for the marriage. Ed Young reinforces this point by using descriptive words to paint the picture of truth; “sex is a mental thing before it’s a genital thing. It’s between your ears long before it’s ever between your legs.”¹¹¹ Sexperiment has the connotation that it is only physically-centered around performing sex for each other and not a challenge to increase intimacy. If completed accordingly, this experiment can revolutionize marriages by reigniting the fires of passion in a stale relationship and fulfilling the hunger that many starving relationships have when not consecutively engaging in the God given gift of sex.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Young, *Sexperiment: 7 Days to Lasting Intimacy with Your Spouse*, 6.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 7.

¹¹² Ibid., 31.

Chapter Four

Fulfilling the Appetite

Recipe Five- Dealing with Conflict: “Eggs Benedict”

Eggs Benedict

Ingredients

3 whole English muffins
3 slices Canadian bacon
3 whole eggs and the yolks
2 sticks butter
1 whole lemon, juiced
Cayenne pepper to taste

Directions

1. Bring a pot of water to boil
2. Place a few English muffin halves and an equal number of Canadian bacon slices on a cookie sheet and lightly butter the English muffins
3. Cook the English muffins until they are very lightly golden
4. Poach eggs by stirring boiling water with large spoon
5. Crack open eggs and insert into turning boiling water
6. Cook eggs for 2-3 minutes
7. Melt 2 sticks butter in a small saucepan (without burning it)
8. Separate the eggs and place them into a blender
9. Turn the blender on low allowing the yolks to combine
10. Add the melted butter to the blender very slowly
11. After adding the butter, immediately squeeze lemon juice into the blender
12. Add cayenne pepper to the mixture to your taste
13. Place the English muffins on the plate, face up
14. Place a slice of Canadian bacon on each half
15. Place the egg on top of the bacon and then generously top with Hollandaise sauce
16. Enjoy!

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It is widely known that one of the most difficult breakfast items to cook is eggs benedict. This dish has an origin that is disputed amongst four different viewpoints. The first from a Wall Street stock broker named Lemuel Benedict, who was suffering from a hangover, wandered in the Waldorf Hotel and ordered the components of this meal. The

¹¹³ “Eggs Benedict,” [www.thepioneerwoman.com](http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/eggs_benedict/), accessed September 15, 2016, http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/eggs_benedict/.

order was later tweaked and added to the menu of the restaurant.¹¹⁴ Another possible origin is from Commodore E.C. Benedict, a banker and yachtsman, who died in 1920. This story says that the recipe was given to his brother and later to the son of a woman. This man, named Montgomery, reproduced the recipe and had it published in a New York newspaper. The third story of the meal, eggs benedict, came from a lady named, Mabel C. Butler of Vineyard Haven, Massachusetts. She corrected the New York newspaper and told that the recipe originated from Mrs. Le Grand Benedict, who came up with the meal after asking the maître d' hotel of any new items at the restaurant during the turn of the twentieth century. The fourth and final potential source of eggs benedict is suggested in Elizabeth David's *French Provincial Cooking*, where she describes a traditional French named oafs Benedictine, consisting of brandied spread on triangles of fried bread. A poached egg is then set on top and secured with hollandaise. There is a mystery when it comes to the origin of this popular breakfast item but one thing is for sure is that it is very troublesome to make and usually takes a lot of practice and patience to produce a quality product.¹¹⁵

A successful eggs benedict requires precision and fastidiousness orchestration. There are multiple components that all need special attention and must be ready at the exact time to ensure a well-made dish. It is an item that entails careful consideration, patient efforts, and a self-determined dedication that will outlast repetitive fails. If this is the attitude that is put forth during the preparation of this meal, then it will help safeguard

¹¹⁴ Mirella S. Patzer, "The History of Eggs Benedict," *History and Women Blog* (December 1, 2009), accessed September 26, 2016, <http://www.historyandwomen.com/2009/12/history-of-eggs-benedict.html>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

a delicious traditional dish at your fingertips within just a few minutes. Conflict resolution in marriage can be compared to overcoming the obstacles in making a successful dish of eggs benedict for breakfast. The problems, solutions, and ability to move forward are directly related to attitude, commitment, patience and endurance in the marriage relationship.

Marriages face issues daily. Some of those issues are easy to overcome while others seem to be very high mountain tops that are near impossible to climb. Conflict in marriage is not just a possibility for a relationship; it is a reality in all marriage relationships. Conflict usually happens when outside intruders invade the sacredness of the marriage relationship. These intruders can creep into a marriage union and prowl around looking to destroy a secure bond. They are imposters and interlopers disguised as things such as work, kids, hobbies, interests, television, other family members, church, internet, financial involvement, friends, addiction, affairs, and many other temptations and pressures in life.¹¹⁶ It is crazy to think that these not so bad things in our life can cause such devastation in a deeply connected relationship. The truth is that many of these day to day activities or relationships that exist outside of the marriage relationship can in fact interrupt the couple's commitment to each other. If someone is so highly invested in work that it steals time away from their spouse, then the intruder of job or success is invading the sacred relationship. Nothing should come in between the love of a husband and wife. That goes for careers, money, family, extracurricular activities, religious gatherings, and even kids.¹¹⁷ If any of these items become more important than the actual

¹¹⁶ Cloud, *Boundaries in Marriage*, 146.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 146.

relationship then damage will begin and ultimately there will be complete annihilation of the marriage unless protective measures are put in place to halt the destructiveness.

Those relationships that have prioritized their time and effort into protecting against intruders will see the benefit as conflict arises. Henry Cloud, author of the book, *Boundaries in Marriage*, said “A marriage is only as strong as what it costs to protect it.”¹¹⁸ This is a solid statement that proves that the right investment in the relationship will defend or safeguard against outside threats. This boundary line offers security for possible terrorizations that could put the relationship on a track to starving itself from not having the ability to combat daily conflict. Marriage requires a love that is vulnerable, safe, and protected. This love deepens intimacy between the couple and helps create a warm safe environment that discusses issues that are impacting the relationship.¹¹⁹

Bringing other people into this safe place is not protecting it from destruction. Forsaking others and focusing on the most important earthly relationship will help alleviate additional problems with the conflict. Dealing with conflict in marriage is hard work and involves more than just simply living life together. It should be a conscious effort and dedication to preserving the sacred relationship. Some of that hard work includes having to say no to other activities and people to shelter the marriage relationship from any potential storms.¹²⁰

When dealing with conflict, it can be categorized into one of six major forms. They are sin of one spouse, immaturity, hurt feelings, conflicting desires, desires versus

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 147.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 148.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 149.

needs, and known problems versus unknown problems.¹²¹ Each one of these conflicts has the potential of being overcome if the couple can distinguish which conflict they are facing.

The sin of one spouse conflict is easy to comprehend because it obviously involves one person in the relationship dealing with a sin in their life. It could be sexual, anger, loss of self-control, bad attitude, impatience, substance abuse, lying, and many other conceivable sins. When a couple is faced with this type of conflict, it is imperative that the spouse without the sin replicates God's attitude toward sin, which is grace. The spouse without the sin issue should be loving, caring, and committed to helping their better half get control of the problem. Having the ability to empathize with your spouse during this type of conflict will only deepen your love for him or her.¹²² There should be a sacrifice of self-mentality that focuses on strengthening the spouse who is hurting. This is not easy but it is doable. While expressing grace during the time of conflict, it is okay to take a hard stance against the sin that violated the trust and values of the relationship.¹²³ In the end, the act of humility with a rigid stance on the sin will exemplify love and forgiveness and ultimately nourish the intimacy of the relationship. Performing the opposite action of showing no support, love, and commitment will only lead to a starving marriage that is destined for separation.

The second type of conflict that couples face is immaturity. Falling in love and dating someone is undeniably different than living with someone in a marriage

¹²¹ Ibid., 170.

¹²² Ibid., 171.

¹²³ Ibid., 173.

relationship. Marriage reveals shortcomings, emotions, and vulnerabilities of each spouse.¹²⁴ Many couples get married unaware of these characteristics of their spouse and usually discover them in the first year of marriage. There are six ways to help overcome this challenge or conflict in a marriage relationship. Spouses need to accept reality and realize that both people have shortcomings in their life. The shortcomings are not a detriment to the relationship but more of an opportunity for growth. It gives the couple something to work on. The next step to resolving the immaturity conflict in marriage is to communicate support to each other. Judgment, nagging, and resentment does not help the relationship. However, communicating encouragement and support can be very beneficial to the marriage. The third step is facing the issues or real problems. Couples need to be clear and direct when it comes to their problems. They must declare the issues with understanding so that progression in the relationship can happen. The fourth way to battle shortcomings in the marriage union is to own the problems. Being defensive or stonewalling the other person will prevent conflict resolution. If there is a problem in the relationship, then take ownership of it. The fifth step is getting a plan together to deal with the difficulty. If one or both spouses need counseling to work it out, then create a plan and execute it. The best way to deal with conflict is finding resolution instead of ignoring the elephant in the room.¹²⁵ The final step is to make it mutual. On the wedding day, a man and a woman came together as one and entered a covenant with God. This contract or agreement was a commitment to each other forever. There is no reason to separate because of conflict or problems in the relationship. Successful conflict resolution

¹²⁴ Ibid., 176.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 178.

makes the shortcomings or immaturity a couple problem and not an individual problem. This mentality reassures the commitment and support that each person agreed to when they wed. Growth happens together.¹²⁶

The third type of conflict that married couples face is hurt feelings that are no one's fault. This conflict is present in most relationships and usually happens when one person says or does something unknowingly that offends the other person. The event that emerged is a familiar pattern that involves a hurt person that communicates their grief, the accuser gets defensive, they argue each other's sides, they walk away alienated, and the problem never gets solved. This form of conflict has become the norm for many marriages. There is this idea that yelling or strong communication and walking away is enough to clear the air. This method only brings destruction to the relationship and overtime will isolate each person resulting in division instead of unity.¹²⁷ True conflict resolution for this issue includes the ability to learn how to deal with the hurt that is felt even when no one caused it purposely. Some ways to accomplish this resolution is acknowledging the hurt, communicating effectively, empathizing as a couple, identifying the bad patterns, thinking about healing, and guarding against arguing over the issue.¹²⁸ This method can reduce the anger and bring about growth and nourishment in the relationship.

The fourth type of conflict that couples encounter is conflicting desires. There are apparent differences in marriages. One person likes this and the other person likes that.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 179.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 180.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 183.

Those differences are what attracted you two in the first place. It is not a relationship killer but rather a relationship builder. Sometimes those differences that couples have can compose conflict in the relational bond. As in the other conflicts, there are ways to alleviate this clash as a couple. First, it is a good idea to not to moralize the distinctions or desires. One person's point of view is not more important than the other persons. Preferences are not laws set in stone; they are simply predilections. Another way to aid in this conflict is to empathize and understand the desires of each other. This will strengthen the relationship and help to continue the process of learning more about each other.¹²⁹ An additional way to have resolution in this type of conflict is to meet the needs and desires of the other person. When one of the spouse's needs are met, then the next time the other person's needs can be met. Again, maintaining a "we" attitude instead of an "I" attitude will keep the focus on the union rather than the individual's distinction. Although each person's unique desires are important, it is better to agree on some desires that both people want to experience through their relationship to ensure a closer connection and revitalizing affection.¹³⁰

The fifth conflict that marriages face is the desires of one person versus the needs of the relationship. This type of conflict is when one person wants or desires something specifically for them which will take away from the needs of the relationship. These type of arguments or fights do not have a clear solution. All people want some of their own needs met no matter what stage of life they are in. Marriages also require certain needs to help sustain the relationship. The marriage needs should always be priority because two

¹²⁹ Ibid., 184.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 187.

people uniting as one means that there were some sacrifices to their individual rights.¹³¹ Although the relationship is primary, it is also beneficial to please each other's desire on occasion because it will certainly boost the morale of the couple. The most important part of meeting each other's needs and desires as well as the necessities of the marriage is to maintain balance while doing so. Supporting the needs of the spouse with excitement can only improve intimacy and closeness in the relationship. If this conflict can be overcome with this type of action then there will be growth within the relationship and both people will in turn be satisfied.

The final conflict that marriages face is known versus unknown problems. Denial in a relationship has proven to be destructive. It is when a person knows that they are wrong but continues to deny having a problem. That is bad denial. Another way denial can be defined is when someone is unaware of the things that are affecting the relationship. One spouse in the marital relationship may know more about the other one than they do themselves. This is because living with someone and giving your all to them will reveal certain character traits that people do not realize that they have when living alone. Known problems are easy to see and are usually talked about openly. When a couple recognizes a problem, and places a plan forth to fix the issue, then they are being productive to solve the conflict. In other cases, the problem is unknown, which makes it more difficult to find a solution. In these situations, spouses need to agree that they have the right to openly share a problem or potential issue with the other person to reveal the bad behavior. This is usually uncomfortable, vulnerable, and confrontational but can be accomplished with tact and delicacy. Conflict is hard and messy but there are

¹³¹ Ibid., 190.

appropriate ways that couples can deal with conflict and find solutions that will improve the intimacy in the marriage.

Resolving conflict does not always have to be a yelling contest or loud debate that usually ends in someone becoming angry and hurt. Conflict resolution can be easy, effective, and a part of daily life as a couple. It has already been stated that conflict is part of life and relationships. Marriages will face all kinds of conflict but the stronger relationships have a resilient plan on how to deal with the conflict. When attempting to handle conflict, a person needs to understand the issue and have a plan to deal with it. It seems like an easy feat but can be complicated depending on the attitude of the couple.¹³² One strategy for working through conflict involves observation, confrontation, ownership, repentance, involvement in the process, and reexamination. These steps offer the couple that is dealing with problems a way to effectively manage the issue. They must observe and discover what is causing the struggle. Once the problem is brought to light then there should be a time of confrontation and discussion that makes the problem known. The next step is to take ownership of the problem as well as apologize and repent. After forgiving the partner through involving each other in the process, there should be a time of reexamination that includes listening, understanding, and reflecting on the resolved conflict. These steps are easy, especially when both people in the relationship are in agreeance and appreciate the process of working through an issue.¹³³

There are other times during or types of relationship where one person does not easily agree with the process. This type of conflict resolution may have some resistance

¹³² Ibid., 195.

¹³³ Ibid., 198.

but does not mean that it will be unsuccessful. In these situations, one or both partners in the marriage are dealing with personal issues that restrict them from dealing with a problem and setting boundaries. The personal issues include empathetic failure, irresponsibility, inability to receive limits, control of others, and denial of imperfection, retaliation, and transference.¹³⁴ When a couple has the inability to resolve conflict successfully then they will need to start examining their relationship and trying to figure out what happened to their passion for each other. This will take some soul connection exercises that encourage the couple to seek out their love for each other. There also must be some growth and ownership within the relationship. During this step, the couple will look at areas that they need to grow and become the partner that God designed them to be. It will include some rediscovery and enlightenment.¹³⁵ The next step is identifying the specific issue and making steps to correct the problem. This is not an overnight process. It will take time readjusting to a new normal. It is a growth process that will alleviate stress and reduce future conflict. After starting this growth process, couples need to love and validate each other, which will lead to good change and more patience. Again, the process is to reset the relationship back to obtaining boundary lines, accountability, and forgiveness.¹³⁶ Once the reset course has been completed and the couple is noticing progression in the relationship, then they will be fit to resolve conflict using the steps in the previous paragraph. Remember, conflict can kill a relationship if not resolved appropriately. On the complete opposite and more positive side, conflict

¹³⁴ Ibid., 213.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 218.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 224.

resolution can benefit the relationship as it provides more understanding, growth, and a deeper level of intimacy. Marriage will starve with unresolved conflict, but can be well nourished when conflict is confronted and dealt with in an honest manner.

Recipe Six- A Time to Commit: “Lasagna”

Lasagna

Ingredients

- 1 ½ pound ground beef
- 1 pound breakfast sausage
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cans whole tomatoes
- 2 cans tomato paste
- 4 tablespoons dry parsley
- 2 tablespoons dried basil
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 3 cups low fat cottage cheese
- 2 whole beaten eggs
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 1 pound sliced mozzarella cheese
- 1 package lasagna noodles

Directions

1. Bring a pot of water to boil
2. In a large saucepan, combine ground beef, sausage, and garlic. Cook until brown on medium high heat and drain half the fat.
3. Add tomatoes, tomato paste, parsley, basil, and salt. Let simmer for 45 minutes.
4. In a medium bowl, mix cottage cheese, beaten eggs, parmesan, parsley, and salt. Stir together well and set aside.
5. Cook lasagna.
6. Arrange four lasagna noodles in the bottom of a baking pan, overlap if necessary. Spoon half the cottage cheese mixture over the noodles and spread evenly. Cover cottage cheese with a layer of mozzarella cheese. Spoon a little less than half the meat/ sauce mixture over the top.
7. Repeat, ending with meat mixture and top with parmesan.
8. Enjoy.

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Lasagna is one of those comfort foods that many families across the globe enjoy together for special events or for just a nightly dinner option. Lasagna combines a flat pasta with meat, sauce, and cheese. It is a relatively easy dish to cook but delivers a taste that is unforgettable. This meal will satisfy humans of all ages from kids to grandparents.

¹³⁷ “The Best Lasagna Ever,” www.thepioneerwoman.com, accessed September 15, 2016, http://thepioneerwoman.com/cooking/the_best_lasagn/.

It is usually a favorite for many families. Lasagna can also be viewed as a complex recipe as it requires a layering process during the preparation of the meal. These layers build on each other and create the remarkable flavor of the dish. Cooking this meal will take some careful preparation and consideration. One would want to make sure that they had all the right ingredients. They would also want to ensure that there is enough time set aside to make this meal as it can be time consuming to create this wonderful delicacy. After these considerations have been pondered, then it will be appropriate to move forward with cooking the meal. Basically, there must be some commitment involved if a family decides to eat lasagna that night for dinner. This is not a microwaveable quick fix dinner option. It is a well thought out and pre-planned event. The preparer will have to have done their homework to make this meal a true success.

Just like preparing for lasagna, relationships require commitment. It is impossible to have an enjoyable long lasting marriage relationship without some level of commitment. Katherine Anne Porter was quoted saying this about marriage commitment, “It is very hard to be entirely faithful, even to things, ideas, above all, persons one loves. There is no such thing as perfect faithfulness any more than there is perfect love or perfect beauty. But it is fun trying.”¹³⁸ Second Thessalonians chapter three verse five says, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance.”¹³⁹ The theme in both quotes is that there is no perfect commitment. No one person in a relationship can expect perfection. Commitment is not about performing flawlessly, but it is about determination and longevity. Commitment is a permanent

¹³⁸ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 103.

¹³⁹ 2 Thess 3:5.

fixation on endurance. It is for better and worse, in sickness and health. Commitment is an obligated promise no matter the circumstances.

Marriage can be defined by using the word perseverance which is the maintenance of a long-term relationship.¹⁴⁰ Committed couples that can literally last a lifetime will reap the benefits of their endurance. They will see exponential intimacy and a closer walk with God. The marriage relationship is a journey that requires time to develop and deepen. It is not just a three to four-year fling. True intimacy in marriage may take as long as ten to fifteen years to cultivate. It is a commitment that necessitates patience, stamina, fortitude, and time. It is the opposite of what the culture expresses as truth. The world speaks to relationships as temporary and self-satisfying, while the Bible promotes commitment, togetherness, and a faithful battle to remaining true to God and the relationship. As relationships go vigorously through various stages and seasons of life, they will not last without a conscience and willingness by both people in the relationship to stick it out during the trying times of life. When others quit, committed couples keep going.

The idea of persistence stems from a spiritual origin that is founded in the idea of eternity. If there were no belief in forever then it would not make sense to be committed to someone for a long period of time.¹⁴¹ In essence, commitment in relationships are based on God's perfect design. God created humanity to exist on earth so that He could have a relationship with people who expressed their commitment and love to Him. Commitment in relationships is a God ordained habit in which marriages should model

¹⁴⁰ Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, 107.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

their efforts after. Therefore, Christian endurance is based on the idea that there is another life, commonly known as heaven, which is eternal and for which this world is preparation. The coming world is so wonderful that it motivates couples to make sacrifices on earth to obtain riches in the after-life. If couples share this mindset of eternity, then it will be easier to continue committing to a hard relationship rather quickly bailing out to receive fast relief. This commitment concept is birthed through a spiritual foundation rather than a fading sense of infatuation with a person of the opposite sex which will prove to be more meaningful.¹⁴²

First Corinthians thirteen verses seven and eight offer a vivid picture of determined love. It says, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”¹⁴³ Stating this verse and actually living it out is two completely different modes of ability. It is simple to just proclaim a standard to live by. It is challenging to stay true to that word and purposely fulfill the vow.¹⁴⁴ Marriage commitment includes hard work and determination. Pursuing a Godly-sized commitment in marriage is expressing love, intention, and tenacity. This is the kind of steadfastness that is required in developing a strong intimate relationship. The book, *The Love Dare*, is a forty-day challenge for married couples to participate in together to strengthen the commitment and intimacy in their relationship. The book uses a daily Bible verse and challenge to transform marriages. Day One presents Ephesians four verse two; “Be

¹⁴² Ibid., 110.

¹⁴³ 1 Cor 13:7-8.

¹⁴⁴ Alex and Stephen Kendrick, *The Love Dare* (rev. ed. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2013), 1.

completely humble and gentle; be patient bearing with one another in love.”¹⁴⁵ The book then dares the couples to model that verse by being patient with their spouse and by not using any negative talk for that day. This process day in and day out begins to transform the usual habits of self-absorption to focusing on living with your spouse’s interest in mind. It creates an atmosphere of true commitment.¹⁴⁶ Some of the other days focus on kindness, thoughtfulness, making good impressions, unconditional love, and not being jealous. Day twelve’s theme is letting others win. This concept goes against every possible rule that the world offers. We are taught at a young age to win, be the best, and not back down. Philippians two verse four states, “Do not merely look out for your own interests, but also for the interests of others.”¹⁴⁷ What an incredible lesson to learn in marriage. This verse teaches individuals to begin to look at the welfare of others over their own. If couples practiced this, then there would be some strong dedicated marriages setting the example for everyone to see.

Commitment in marriage is increasingly more about meeting the needs of the other person in the relationship and less about one’s own selfish desires. The love dare continues by challenging couples to fight fair, enjoy each other’s company, be honorable, and promote intimacy. It is impossible to have intimacy in marriage without commitment. Commitment fuels intimacy. Intimacy is the biggest fire and fear in marriage. If intimacy and commitment levels are high in relationships, then the relationship is on fire. If the levels are low, then fear begins to creep into the minds of

¹⁴⁵ Eph 4:2.

¹⁴⁶ Kendrick, *The Love Dare*, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Phil 2:4.

the people involved in the relationship. Fear can destroy a marriage while a fiery marriage can live on because of the close connection and freedom in the reliance of the commitment.¹⁴⁸ If couples feel close then there is a good chance that commitment and intimacy is high on the priority list. Intimacy can be defined as being fully known and fully loved. To obtain this status, one would have to have a deep commitment to the relationship that outweighs any problem, difficulty, or uncertain seasons in the marriage journey.

The beginning of this chapter spoke about commitment not being perfect. We live in a world of temptation and sin. With love and a desire to build a lasting relationship with someone, couples can overcome any calamity, even when intimacy has been compromised.¹⁴⁹ A loving commitment to reestablishing intimacy is worth the value of the treasure of memories that go along with a forever minded marriage relationship. The challenges in this book continue as it expounds love as understanding, impossible without God, satisfaction in God, faithful, and the opposite of lust. First John chapter two verse seventeen describes lust as something that is wasting away with the world, “The world is passing away and its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”¹⁵⁰ Lust is in direct competition with love and commitment. It always wants more. It promotes compromise over faithfulness. It is a misguided thirst for satisfaction and gratification that only God can fulfill. People try to meet their own needs by leaning on lust instead of God’s love. In marriage, these types of actions draw

¹⁴⁸ Kendrick, *The Love Dare*, 81.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 83.

¹⁵⁰ 1 John 2:17.

divisive lines in the relationship. Commitment will begin to sink as the waves of lust rises.¹⁵¹ Lust will redirect God's purpose in a marriage to selfishness which will lead to a starved marriage that needs nourishment. As couples set their eyes and stomachs toward fulfilling an appetite of love and commitment then they will at the same time be removing the temptation of lust that offer a false sense of fulfillment. Feasting on God's word and His intentions for marriage will provide the right nutrients to form a healthy bond and intimate cohesion.¹⁵²

The love dare challenge continues its track to marital commitment and promotion of love by transforming relationships in the areas of forgiveness, sacrificial love, unity, completeness, godliness, accountability, and endurance. These challenges relate to marriage completeness, which gives support for the need of an intimate committed relationship that lasts a lifetime. Humans were made to procreate, communicate, and provide a team that raises another generation of people. This was part of God's plan. Commitment in marriage is needed to create this erudition of unity and completeness. It is not simply a coexistence as a couple but more of an effectiveness multiplier as a solid unit. Having the ability to come together for a common goal in marriage is the purest form of commitment. It confirms the love and intimacy that is faithfully being practiced throughout the journey of the marriage. This type of teamwork is necessary for a healthy relationship that successfully helps each other and develops other humans to replicate those fruitful actions.¹⁵³ Commitment is the glue that binds the relationship

¹⁵¹ Kendrick, *The Love Dare*, 117.

¹⁵² Ibid., 118.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 163.

together and allows it to run as smooth as God purposed it even amongst the trials of this life.

Recipe Seven- Raising Kids: “Make Your Own Pizza”

Homemade Pizza

Ingredients

1 ½ cups warm water
1 package yeast
3 ½ cups bread flour
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon sugar

Directions

1. Place the warm water in a large bowl and sprinkle in the yeast. Let it stand for five minutes.
2. Mix in the flour, salt, sugar, and olive oil. Knead the dough until it is smooth.
3. Place the dough in a warm place to rise double its size.
4. Preheat oven to 450 degrees
5. Split dough into halves and create the pizza crust
6. Top the crust with desired toppings (pizza sauce, cheese, meat, and veggies)
7. Bake pizza for 10-15 mins or until cheese is melted.
8. Enjoy!

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Homemade pizza has become a family favorite for many families across the world. It is a meal that everyone enjoys making as well as eating. Some families have set aside a night of the week as pizza night. The excitement and anticipation of pizza night is felt from the kids to the parents. It creates a fun environment and the expectation is to just simply relax and enjoy each other’s company around the dinner table. It is a winner meal for kids and adults alike. Pizza is enjoyable because of the ingredients that are combined to create the deliciousness that satisfies the taste buds of the tongue. “Make your own pizza night” is a no fail option for dinner and allows kids to be a part of

¹⁵⁴ “Homemade Pizza”, www.simplyrecipes.com, accessed September 15, 2016, http://www.simplyrecipes.com/recipes/homemade_pizza/.

the dinner process. They get to choose the ingredients for their pizza. They are involved in the development of their meal which allows them to take ownership of the finished product. This concept of being a part of the process gives them responsibility and teaches them that there is a reward for hard work and dedication.

Making homemade pizza can be an illustration of parents raising kids. Pizza always begins with a strong foundation. The crust must be prepared in a way that will not tear or be spread too thin. It takes precision and discipline to create pizza crust that will not burn or be too doughy. After the foundation is ready, a sauce is placed on the crust. The sauce is the glue that holds the toppings onto the pizza. The toppings are unique to whoever is eating the pizza. Some like pepperoni, ham, chicken, pineapple, banana peppers, or a variety of other meats and vegetables. Just as the pizza is different based on the personality or taste of the person eating it, kids also have their own individuality that makes them uniquely designed by God. After the toppings are on the pizza, cheese is spread across the top to unify the pizza and serve as a protective barrier on the surface of the pizza. As children grow and develop through the years, parents can mold and train their kids to fulfill the purpose of God in their life. They also model what that looks like so that when it is time to go off to college or a career, the now grown up kids have that safe barrier that has locked in their individual uniqueness and made them who they are today.

Parenting is a huge part of marriage as it is the reproducing part of a family. A great marriage can replicate that example as they rightly raise kids. A strong commitment to a marital relationship will show itself in the kids that are raised in that type of atmosphere. Just like marriages should have boundaries, there are also margins

for raising kids. In the book, *Boundaries with Kids*, Henry Cloud points out three main functions or roles of a parent. They are guardian, manager, and source.¹⁵⁵ A guardian is defined as someone who is legally responsible for a child and, in that capacity protects, and preserves the child. The guardian of the child ensures a safe environment for them by making sure they know right from wrong, teaching them that there are outcomes to every action, and allowing them to safely explore without getting into much danger. A guardian looks after the well-being of the child in its care. This person will set appropriate boundaries that guard the child from dangers within themselves, dangers in the outside world, inappropriate freedoms, evil actions, and their own tendency to remain dependent upon someone else. The greatest characteristic of the guardian role as a parent is setting limits and enforcing those limits so that the child will learn and develop without reckless undefined living standards.¹⁵⁶ The second function of raising kids is manager. As a manager, parents can make sure goals are reached and expectations are met. Managers provide the discipline needed to help the child develop into the man or woman that they should be. The manager style of parenting helps set boundary lines that will control limits, help the child take ownership, and teach responsibility of their life choices. This function works best when both people in the marriage are unified in vision and are committed to following through with the process. The final role of parenting is source. This function provides the right resources to enforce healthy development. It provides the basic needs of humans, such as, food, shelter, and water. This role of parenting also provides the child with wisdom, support, spiritual growth, love, and

¹⁵⁵ Henry Cloud and John Sims Townsend. *Boundaries with Kids: How Healthy Choices Grow Healthy Children*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 19

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 20.

knowledge to reach their greatest potential in life. Strong marriages that are sourcing their children with all the right stuff to help them mature and produce people that will eventually have strong relationships with others and their future spouses. A marriage relationship that feeds their own hunger will only help their children to be more productive people in society. Kids need to see what a great relationship looks like and the best place for them to comprehend this reality is through the lens of family life and experiencing the loving forgiveness and commitment of their parents living it out day by day.¹⁵⁷

Raising kids can be stressful and at times impossible especially when the marriage is starving and has a lack of intimacy and purpose. Many marriages face the dilemma that the relationship priority must end when kids enter the picture. According to Hal Runkel, author of the book, *Scream Free Parenting*, he says that the greatest thing that you can do for your kids is to learn to focus on yourself.¹⁵⁸ Parenting is not entirely about kids, it is about the parents. Today's culture has brainwashed married couples into believing parenting means sacrificing self for the sake of the kids. This faulty way of thinking will leave married couples starved of the nutrients that are needed for a healthy family balance. A fundamental affirmation in this book confirms God's original design with dealing with humankind. His efforts are to love humans and to act out of His own integrity. God is not a controller or someone who manipulates power to regulate certain outcomes in life. God is a creator, provider, and sustainer. Parenting should look a lot

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹⁵⁸ Hal Edward Runkel, *Screamfree Parenting: The Revolutionary Approach to Raising Your Kids by Keeping Your Cool* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook Press, 2007), 11.

like how God cares for mankind.¹⁵⁹ The problem that faces parenting skills mainly stems from unhealthy marital relationships. Emotional reactivity can be a damaging factor and worst enemy when it comes to having strong healthy relationships. If one cannot contain their emotions, then it can produce destructive parenting styles and unbalanced children. One way to battle this issue is learning to control the things that are controllable. In relationships, the only person that can be controlled is the person that is doing the controlling. In other words, as spouses and parents, there needs to be a calming of the emotional knee jerking reactions that cause damage in a relationship.

Influential people have learned how to manage these emotional outbursts in such a way that is not affected by outside sources.¹⁶⁰ Galatians 5:22-25 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” These verses help explain the spiritual struggle with the secular world. God is desiring that people live by the Spirit of God and not by the passions and desires of the flesh. If relationships are based on people who live by the spirit, then the controlling of the emotional outbursts become something that is easier to obtain. The focus is not on parents being responsible for all the children’s actions; it is now the parents who are responsible for how they behave regardless of the behavior of the kids. This concept, again, confirms the reality that having the ability to control oneself is the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 17.

best option for parenting and building healthy relationships because it cares for the individual which results in a greater more intimate bond between the spouse and child.¹⁶¹

Parenting should be viewed as a growth process. It is not simply something that you can perfect when a baby is born. Parenting is difficult and requires some demanding days and growing pains. These growing pains are the struggle of overcoming the overwhelming change of having the pressure to not only worry about oneself but now there is a focus on another human being that is different from the marriage relationship.¹⁶² Difficult situations with kids help develop the relationship between parents and kids and spouses. It is a challenge with an opportunity for growth. When married couples choose to grow through parenting, it shows a renewed focus on them and not just the children.¹⁶³ Children have a way to subtly add stress and anxiety in the life of the parents. Whether it be doing something dangerous or bravely facing unimaginable situations. This anxiety that is caused during these experiences can deepen parenting skills through placing them in a vulnerable state. It is there that couples can grow as they unite in the desperation of the moment. Family relationships have the potential of being the source of great pain that eventually leads to growth and deeper levels of intimacy. Those relationships that are the closest, living under the same roof, are more likely to be the origin of the hurt that cause the anxiety and progression as a person. The important

¹⁶¹ Runkel, *Screamfree Parenting*, 24.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 45.

part of this process is using the pain, anxiety, and obstacles as an avenue to build new behaviors that are helpful rather than detrimental.¹⁶⁴

There are apparent benefits of growing as a person, spouse, and parent. These benefits include overcoming challenges, dealing with overwhelming situations, and learning to control emotions in hard areas of life. No one who is married or has kids should believe the false pretense that they have arrived or are all grown up. It is vital to continue the personal growth process so that the marriage relationship will be stronger and the connection with the children will also continue to grow.¹⁶⁵ Part of this process of growing necessitates self-care, self-love, and self-acceptance. It is impossible to lead a healthy vibrant family life without first tending to personal needs. Jesus clearly knew this concept and led His disciples away in Mark chapter six verses thirty-one and thirty-two; “The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves.”¹⁶⁶ Jesus was teaching his team that they could not take care of others needs appropriately unless they themselves were caring for their emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. This is a direct practical application that can be used today in marriage and parenting. It is vital to the health of all parties involved; the spouse, the person, and the children.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶⁶ Mark 6:31-32.

¹⁶⁷ Runkel, *Screamfree Parenting*, 197.

French monk, Bernard of Clairvaux, struggled with the idea of balancing self-love with other relationships. He wrote his research in a document called *The Four Degrees of Love*. It was originally meant to show balance for love of self and love for God but it can be used for parenting and marriage relationships as well. The first degree of love is loving oneself for self's sake or for personal benefit. This level of love is the beginning stage of personal growth as a human being. There must be some sense of self-care before moving to the other levels of love. It is much like a baby crying out to have its own needs taken care of before others. The second degree of love is loving others for self's benefit. This level of love is action toward others mainly because it validates a sense of self-worth. It really has no benefit for the other person. The third degree of love is loving others for their sake. It is a more sacrificial love that focuses on others and not as much on the benefits that it brings to self. The problem with this level of love is that it can be disastrous for the one expressing love because it will drain them of anything and everything that they have. There should be a balance where both people in the relationship benefit from the love. The final and fourth degree of love as explained by Bernard Clairvaux is loving self for the benefit of others. This level of love is the best option for relating to God, spouse, and children. It has an idea that taking care of self will ultimately be a value to others because there is an opportunity for wholeness, fullness, and a greater potential of being healthy all around.¹⁶⁸ It allows for people to be validated through their love for God and themselves, that they no longer need others to authenticate their worth. It does not mean that one no longer needs other people in their life but it does mean that personal growth and health is dependent upon one's own plan of

¹⁶⁸ Bernard Clairvaux, *Four Degrees of Love*, 2016, accessed October 20, 2016 <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/bernard/>.

self-care. It is okay to love yourself so much so that it benefits the people around you instead of being a weight for others to carry. When it comes to parenting and marriage relationships, the goal is to reach this level of love and health so that the spouse and children are cared for in unsurmountable ways.

Raising kids is an incredible challenge, joy, and responsibility. It is an extension of the marriage relationship. It is the product of two people fervently in love and that are striving to set the example for others. With all its goodness, there are struggles, hardships, and some of the most stressful times in life. The amazing thing about parenting is the truth that God is leading and helping all along the way. Raising kids successfully is not trying to reach perfection, but it is a purposeful intent in building a strong intimate foundation in the marriage relationship, which will set the tone and groundwork for the children in that family.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Starving is the most extreme form of malnutrition. It is a severe deficiency in the number of calories needed to maintain human life. Those who are starving have a great potential of permanent organ damage and death. Starving happens when there is an imbalance of energy intake over energy expenditure.¹⁶⁹ There are three phases of starvation that a person goes through when they are experiencing a lack of continuous food or energy. During the first phase, blood glucose levels are maintained through the production glucose from proteins and fats stored in the body. This process provides energy to fuel the body at low energy levels. The second phase, which may last several weeks, the body uses fatty acids as the main energy source. The proteins that are not essential for survival are used up first during this phase. During the third phase, a person's fat reserves are depleted and protein is beginning to be used to fuel the body. At this point the body is experiencing extreme lack of nutrients and is likely to die from a heart attack due to severe electrolyte imbalances.¹⁷⁰

Starving is an extreme devastation and a horrible way to die. Marriages can experience these same phases as they begin to have a lack of the right nutrients to keep it balanced. Marriage relationships require food or nourishment to maintain healthy levels. Much of this project has focused on the needed vitamin boosters that can prevent such a tragedy in a couple's married life. It is vital to marriage relationships that couples put into practice the necessary recipes that will strengthen the relationship and prevent it

¹⁶⁹ Thomas C. Weiss, "The Phases of Starvation," accessed: October 24, 2016, www.disabled-world.com/fitness/starving.php.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

from reaching any phase of starvation. Great marriages can find themselves in a dangerous place if they are careless enough to not maintain the levels of health that the relationship desires, that God has purposed, and the amount of intimacy that is essential to a vibrant marriage. Starving relationships are not something that just happens overnight. It is a process that takes time and is usually not recognized until it is getting to dire circumstances. It is imperative that couples realize the symptoms and warning signs that will lead the relationship down a path that may be impossible to resurface toward a healthier place. Preventing starvation in marriage can be the best antidote as it keeps a relentless watch on growth, intimacy, and love. Starving marriages can have hope to survive but if a relationship gets to the final phase of starvation then there may be no time left to rehabilitate the relationship. A nourished relationship is incapable of reaching the imbalance state that will lead to starvation.

Those marriages that represent energized intimacy and closeness have certain disciplines, characteristics and a bond that cannot be broken. These relationships have structured themselves in such a way that no matter what circumstance or situation that comes their way, they will absolutely overcome the obstacle because of the steadfastness and enduring attitude that has been built into their marriage. These traits are realizing the original purpose of marriage, using appropriate communication, spending quality time together, enjoying sex, dealing with conflict in positive ways, being wholeheartedly committed to the relationship, and raising the next generation of Godly people.

Marriage is a created institution that was meant to be a fun-loving connection between a man and a woman as they journey through life and accomplish the purpose that God has for them. It has been abundantly clear that God designed marriage for

humans so that they can enjoy life together as they serve Him and create a legacy through raising godly productive kids. The most intriguing part of this marriage relationship is how couples enjoy their life together. John Gottman, author and marriage therapist, suggests the truth is that happy marriages are based on a deep friendship. It is a mutual respect and enjoyment of each other's company.¹⁷¹ The relationships that were found to be happiest had behaviors that were far different than the average couples and the relationships that were famished. The satisfied marriages expressed a fondness toward each other, they knew each other's likes and dislikes, and they depicted a deep interest in the hopes and dreams of their spouse. It was a level of closeness that was very intimate and uplifting. One of the most important lessons that can be gleaned from these happy marriages is the extreme focus on positivity. These relationships have a heavy emphasis on being optimistic no matter the circumstance. This disciplined way of thinking and operating gives room for each person in the marriage to give their spouse the benefit of the doubt in times of negativity. Gottman calls this technique or pattern in these marriages "positive override".¹⁷² His aim is to equip couples with this approach so that the effort is placed more on the friendship rather than the fight. Marriages will face troubled times; that is a fact of life. The purpose of marriage is not simply trying to win an argument over some minimal issue but overwhelmingly creating a positive and God centered environment. It is more about building a lifetime bond of togetherness that supports each other's opinions, dreams, and aspirations. If the people in the relationship

¹⁷¹ Gottman and Silver, *Seven Principles*, 19.

¹⁷² Ibid., 21.

are only concerned with winning the next discussion then it becomes more of a competition and not an intimate purposeful lifelong journey that God intended it to be.¹⁷³

Practicing the positive override approach outlined by Gottman is not just a thought based technique, but entails the entire marriage relationship. Communication can be a very effective way to implement the positivity and friendship role in the marriage. Relationships cannot exist without some form of communication. There must be a dialogue, either verbal or nonverbal, to sustain a relationship. If one is not communicating with the other then it will be very difficult to have sort of meaningful life together. When communication begins to not exist, the marriage begins to fall into a state of hunger. Although communication is helpful and needed, it can also be detrimental to the relationship if it is not influenced by positive remarks. If it is the goal to be or become best friends in the marriage then it happens from a constant ability to stay positive. Reviving communication through positive thoughts and feelings will enhance the fondness and intimacy of the relationship. When couples come together and share their optimistic feelings and their reasons why they cherish the relationship, it provides a fanning of the love flame that will burn out any negative ideas or conflict, and overshadow obstacles within the relationship. The point of effective communication is to continue to build a strong relationship that has a desire to love, grow, and outlast any problem that could be faced in their journey. Communication is a powerful tool that could change the trajectory of a relationship if it is used in a positive friendship based way that promotes an energized state of intimacy.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 23.

Intimacy is nourished when couples spend gratifying time together. As married couples engage in quality time together, plan meaningful opportunities to connect, and daily carve out time to be with each other, it stimulates affection, creates emotional bonds, and deepens intimacy. This positive linking shapes the relationship and starts to eliminate any reason for negative connotations. Again, the idea is to build a friendship, not start a fight. These actions will make regular deposits to the emotional bank account. As that account grows, the relationship will be able to withstand the stresses of life during rough times.¹⁷⁴ Another benefit from an emotional bank account that is full is that it is the key to long lasting romance. If each person in the relationship is adding to the other's emotional account then they will be more likely to enjoy quality time together whether it is a walk after dinner, a specified date night, or a trip to the Caribbean. The daily deposits add value to the special times in the relationship which has potential to lead to a more enjoyable sex life.¹⁷⁵

Setting the relationship on a path of positive override establishes a course that is harder to get knocked off even when trials invade the marriage. Positive thinking leads to positive feelings and communication, which leads to quality time together, and a level of intimacy that is unimaginable. Marriage does not always have to be a relationship where both people agree one hundred percent of the time. Great marriages find the balance of developing a culture where the individual's interests, dreams, and needs are met as they flexibly mesh their shared visions. As this model progresses, it allows for an environment where intimacy is important and a priority. Sexual intercourse is a way that

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

committed couples express their vulnerability and shared philosophy as a couple. It is an action that stems from day to day closeness. Having the ability to enjoy sex as a married couple is not simply a physical act. It is more of the emotional connection, spiritual integration, positive outlook, and daily sacrifice to serve each other.¹⁷⁶ The more a couple can have a shared meaning, the deeper and more fulfilled the relationship becomes. The direct benefit of this intimate relationship is a renewed sense of belonging, ability to combat conflict, and a forever growing friendship that lasts a lifetime.

Conflict can be devastating to an unhealthy unhappy marriage. A small disagreement can create a destructive force that puts the relationship on a glide path to starvation. This is a pure example of a marriage that has not directly and purposefully set the mindset on positivity and friendship. Many couples suffer from not adequately dealing with conflict or not preparing themselves for conflicts to arise. This foolish act of unpreparedness can be central to havoc in a relationship. On the opposite side of things, marriages that have equipped themselves to face conflict head on with the right attitude make room for growth along the journey. The fundamental theme for these couples are not the issue itself but more of how can they grow closer together as they make a pact to overcome the obstacle. So, even in complex encounters, healthy marriages have the right tools to emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and physically counterattack any problem that comes their way. Couples will face issues all throughout their marriage and they will come in forms that are solvable and unsolvable. Part of an energized happy marriage is easily discovering which problems they can fix and which ones they can come up with a best solution scenario. Once this is realized, the couple handles the easy fix problems

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 244.

and then begin to tackle the solution based situation. The goal is to do this together as a friendship without making the problem some sort of dissention between each other.¹⁷⁷ An easy way to accomplish this is by following Dr. Gottman's model for resolving conflict. The five steps are to soften your startup, learn to make and receive repair attempts, soothe yourself and each other, compromise, and be tolerant of each other's faults. These steps have proven to work because it does not require special training or skills.¹⁷⁸ These are things that come naturally when humans interact. The problem is that with most intimate relationships, people get so comfortable that they lose their ability to respect and honor the other person. Controlling conflict and solving problems can be the biggest prompter for a heightened sense of intimacy. Married couples who understand this are more likely to have a committed, healthy, and vibrant relationship.

Marriage commitment is easy once the relationship is aligned appropriately. If the other principles are followed and applied to the relationship then the mindset will have the strong foundation to make the commitment last. Small steps toward finding the right path of life are vital to intimacy, growth, and friendship. By taking the small steps toward a healthy relationship, couples will slowly be turning away from reaching a starving marriage situation. In many cases, spending thirty minutes per day together radically changed the depth of the marriage relationship. That little bit of time each day together will build momentum and intensify the bond. These quality times together include leaving the house for the day with a word of encouragement, hug, and a kiss, having stress reducing conversations, communicating appreciation and admiration, being

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 158.

affectionate, and planning and executing date nights. These easy to do activities will enforce the strong connection and keep the commitment to the marriage energetic. Couples who look forward to seeing each other at the end of a work day and have connected throughout the day show evidence of a committed relationship. These very important tasks will pay more dividends and benefit the relationship more than anything else. The idea is to relate to each other as daily life happens. Overtime, the friendship will grow, positive thoughts will invade the minds of the couple, intimacy is intensified, and commitment is verified.¹⁷⁹ Another method of strengthening the commitment levels is by lowering the super elevated expectations that many have for their spouse. Relationships reach starving situations because the expectation is near perfection. If couples would reset their expectation to meet reality, then their happiness will be more authentic to actuality and not fantasy life.¹⁸⁰ Forgiveness has much to do with commitment. In many faiths, forgiveness is a foundational concept. When forgiveness is sought after and given it makes way for true commitment and recommitment. Forgiveness in marriage is an ongoing activity where both spouses can ask for it and offer it. This allows the guilt, shame, and remorse to be removed so that the positive thinking, friendship building, and intimate nourishing can take place to continue the commitment that was made on the wedding day. Forgiveness also opens the door for thanksgiving. It is so easy to be thankful and appreciate someone when the anger, resentment, and hatred has been removed. The marriage relationship is more about building the intimate friendship than harboring rage that leads to dissatisfaction, starving, and ultimately

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 260.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 262.

separation.¹⁸¹ A strong commitment to the relationship and to each other will help a couple outlast any obstacles, challenges, and problems that they will face in their marriage journey including life stress, sickness, and parenting.

Raising kids is a bombastic feat and a life changer for married couples. Kids change the demeanor of a marriage relationship. An added person to the family creates new priorities, challenges, and excitement. Transitioning from couple-hood to parenthood is seismic in its very nature. It is a total change of thinking, doing, and living that affects the couple's relationship in a huge way. The reasons for the change in the marriage has a lot to do with lack of sleep, feeling overwhelmed, the responsibility of caring for a child, juggling parenting with the role of a spouse, financial stress, and other time consuming activities.¹⁸²

Just like any obstacle that marriages face, having and raising kids ought to be a joint effort. The intimate friendship that has been maturing in the relationship can help drive the very important obligation of raising children. Using the positive override method, couples can habitually energize positive reinforcement as they come together to raise their kids. Some ways to continue to build the friendship relationship while also parenting is to not exclude Dad from baby care, let Dad be the baby's playmate to give Mom some much needed rest, carve out time for the marriage without the baby, be sensitive to each other's needs, and continue to support each other when tough times occur.¹⁸³ It has been stated previously that marriage is difficult; it is increasingly challenging when there is a third human being involved in the relationship. Even though

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 266.

¹⁸² Ibid., 211.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 216.

the struggle is real it does not mean that the marriage will lead to starvation mode.

Couples can continue to grow their relationship while they are raising their children to be productive participants in this world of chaos. The most important part to having a healthy relationship is making and taking the time to invest in each other so that when the kids are grown and moved out, the couple will still have that tight deep friendship that will last a lifetime.

Although this world is full of sin and obstacles that prevent people from having a perfect marriage, it does not mean that there are not ways to build a lasting intimate relationship. Couples have more resources in today's culture to help them reach a strong and productive marriage than ever before. There are many recipes that can feed the hunger of starving marriages and bring them back to nourishment. Being that a marriage is the most important human to human relationship on earth, there should be a priority in building the relationship, nurturing it, and maintaining the progress that has been made. As two imperfect souls come together in wedding bliss, they have the opportunity and obligation from God to strive for perfection by fulfilling their mission of glorifying Christ, procreation, and intimate companionship. This can only be done by meeting the crucial need of couples partaking in purposeful alone time together daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly for the sole purpose of guaranteeing a well-nourished intimate marriage. This proposed brief counseling manual may assist couples as they seek to improve their marriages and feed the hunger that seeks to bring famine to their relationship.

Appendix A

Survey Questions

Marriage Intimacy Online Survey

1. How long have you been married? Circle One

0- 5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 20+ years

**2. How much alone time do you spend with your spouse on a “normal work day”?
Circle One**

None 0-10 mins. 11-30 mins. 30-60 mins. Over an hour

3. Check all the following statements that apply to you:

Spiritual Intimacy

- ☐ I pray regularly throughout the day for my spouse.
- ☐ We pray together regularly.
- ☐ We read/study the Bible together.
- ☐ I am comfortable sharing with my spouse what God is teaching me.
- ☐ For Wives only: My husband actively leads me spiritually.
- ☐ For Husbands only: I take my role as spiritual leader of my wife/family seriously.
- ☐ During times of conflict, we pray together inviting God to help each of us change.

Intellectual Intimacy

- ☐ I pay attention to my spouse's interests and hobbies.
- ☐ I feel that my spouse supports me in my personal interests.
- ☐ My spouse and I try to learn more about what we believe and think on a lot of topics.
- ☐ My spouse's choice of interests and hobbies make me feel proud of him/her.
- ☐ I feel free to express my opinion even though my spouse may disagree with me.
- ☐ We agree on what our core values and beliefs are.
- ☐ Because of our commitment to one another, I can fully trust my spouse and allow myself to be vulnerable to him/her.

Emotional Intimacy

- ☐ I feel cherished and cared for by my spouse.
- ☐ My spouse and I enjoy romancing one another.
- ☐ We say “I love you” to one another often.
- ☐ My spouse and I spend quality time together almost every day.
- ☐ I enjoy spending time in conversation with my spouse.
- ☐ My spouse is my very best friend!
- ☐ We have learned how to handle conflict with one another.
- ☐ My spouse rarely interrupts me when I'm talking.

- ## Sexual Intimacy

- 4. On a scale of 1 to 10, circle how you would rate your communication with your spouse.**

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, circle how you would rate your cohesion/ closeness with your spouse.

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6. On a scale of 1 to 10, circle how you would rate your happiness with your spouse.

1 -----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9----- 10
Non-Existent Satisfied Wonderful!

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, circle how you would rate your sexual relationship with your spouse.

1 -----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9----- 10
Non-Existent Satisfied Wonderful!

8. On average, how often do you and your spouse have sex?

- ☐ “Always”: at least once a day
- ☐ Often: several times per week
- ☐ Regularly: once per week
- ☐ Occasionally: 2 or 3 times per month
- ☐ Seldom: less than once per month
- ☐ Rarely: “we go without sex for months at a time”
- ☐ Never. “what is sex”

9. Who usually does the following tasks? Circle One

- Starts the fight or ends the fight (Husband or Wife)
- Soothes hurt and angry feelings (Husband or Wife)
- Initiates love-making (Husband or Wife)
- Suggests recreational activities (Husband or Wife)
- Promotes warmth and affection (Husband or Wife)
- Initiates discussion of ideas (Husband or Wife)
- Starts the discussion of problems so that change can occur (Husband or Wife)
- Requests time alone excluding the partner (Husband or Wife)

10. Who usually does the following tasks?

- Cooking meals (Husband or Wife)
- Cleaning the house (Husband or Wife)
- Home repairs (Husband or Wife)
- Driving on trips (Husband or Wife)
- Putting kids to bed (Husband or Wife)
- Negotiating with schools (Husband or Wife)
- Negotiating with bank or credit agencies (Husband or Wife)
- Paying bills (Husband or Wife)
- Maintaining contact with mutual friends (Husband or Wife)
- Garden chores (Husband or Wife)
- Grocery shopping (Husband or Wife)
- Organizing family outings (Husband or Wife)
- Leading the family in spiritual life (Husband or Wife)

11. Briefly describe what intimacy in marriage means to you?

Appendix B

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

7/12/2016

Richard Todd Daniel

IRB Approval 2566.071216: Starving Marriage: Seven Recipes for Energizing Intimacy

Dear Richard Todd Daniel,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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