

HAPPY CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES GLORIFY GOD

Lesson 1

SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGES DON'T JUST HAPPEN - THEY ARE CAUSED.

1. What do you expect from your marriage?

When I counsel young couples before a marriage ceremony, I usually ask them: "What do you expect from your marriage?" My question is often met with blank stares of amazement and then the response: "But we love each other!"

But marriage brings two people together who for almost a third of their lifetime were usually unknown to each other. They had different home backgrounds, different attitudes to life, and often, different ideas as to what they expected from marriage or what they really expected from their marriage partner.

These different ideas as to what each partner expects from the marriage is the cause of many frustrations. Each partner tries, often unconsciously, to change the other into the image he or she has created for the other partner. As a result there is an unconscious undercurrent of tension right at the start of a marriage, and is the cause of the little frustrations that often occur, e.g. the toothpaste tube: one partner always leaving the cap off, or squeezing the tube in the middle instead of from the bottom.

As a result, the other partner may inwardly be saying: "This is the way I am, don't try and change me."

Illustration: The comic series Peanuts. Lucy says: "I have a new ambition. When I get big, I'd like to be a baseball umpire." Charlie Brown asks: "What in the world makes you think you could be a good baseball umpire?" With head high Lucy replies: "Because I'm always right."

The partner who always thinks he or she is right will want to shape the other person into the mould of what he has always expected a wife to be.

Among Christians, tensions also arise as to differences in understanding the Biblical role of the husband and the wife. Some husbands dogmatically affirm that they are the head of the house and rule with stern authority - demanding complete obedience from wife and children.

Now if the wife grew up in a home where this was her father's position, it would normally not cause any problems in her marriage. **BUT** if the wife, for instance, grew up in a home where there was companionship and sharing between her father and mother, she will resent her husband's authoritarian and dominating attitude. Therefore, tensions are often caused through a misunderstanding and lack of clarity concerning the Biblical roles of the husband and the wife.

It is important that churches adequately prepare its youth for marriage by teaching the Word of God as it relates to the duties and privileges of husbands and wives. Couples also enter marriage with **fixed** ideas concerning the husband's duties and the wife's duties. Many men assume that it is alone their duty to manage the affairs of the home, control the finances, and that it is the wife's task to attend to home chores, the kitchen and the children. Whereas some women feel that **all** the duties and activities of the home should be shared together.

Illustration: Some homes are like a battlefield each month and when the accounts are coming in..., "What made you buy this?" OR, the wife and children deeply resenting the fact that the father spent money all on himself. **BUT**, if they had shared and discussed the purchasing of the non-regular items this could have been avoided.

Therefore, what do you expect from your marriage? Do you see your partner as he or she really is, or ideally, as you want them to be? This is important, because we can subsequently be ashamed of our partners and constantly be putting pressure on them in order to mould them into the image we want them to have before others.

Illustration: In group conferences, one family counsellor encourages married persons to describe, in writing, the characteristics of their partner that first attracted their attention. Then he asked them to write down what now causes the most difficulty in their marriage. He said that soon most of the group would be smiling, because they discovered that the qualities which first attracted them to each other are not the centre of much of their difficulty! E.g. A girl, wanting a strong masculine husband because her father had been such a man, may find that the same kind of man can be very stubborn and dominating. ("Growing in Oneness" — J.C. Howell)

2. Do you really understand your partner?

God in His infinite wisdom created men and women with different characteristics with the purpose that they would supplement one another. Read **Genesis 2:18**. Literally, the word "help meet" means "counterpart". Woman was created to complement man—to complete what was lacking in him. This is God's dual purpose for both partners!!

It is important to understand the differences in masculine and feminine thinking and traits. When women are confronted with issues and problems they are inclined to pay great attention to the little details, and often find it difficult to distinguish between the important and unimportant details. Men, on the other hand, tend not to look at the details, but at the issue as a whole. However, if not understood, this can lead to frustration and tension.

For example, when a husband asks his wife what he considers to be a straight-forward question, which he thinks requires a simple answer, his wife invariably goes into a long detailed explanation. Take the question: "Why were you late in meeting me today?" OR, if the wife should ask her husband: "How did the Bible Study go last night?" He might answer: "Fine." That is not what she wanted to know. She wants to know the details!

Therefore, each partner should realise that the other has different characteristics and cannot be expected to respond in the same way as he or she does.

In addition, men and women have different concepts of logic. We often hear it said that men are more **logical** while women are more **intuitive**. The man decides after thinking about an issue. The woman decides because she feels that this is the right decision.

Illustration: A woman may remark: "I don't like your friend." "Why?" "I don't know. There is just something about him that I don't like." This can be very frustrating to the husband, especially when his wife is usually right!

Men and women also differ in the matter of **self-assurance**. In our culture it is expected of men that they manifest self-assurance, whereas it is expected of women that they should not be self-assertive, or confident in making decisions.

A wife usually likes to ask her husband's opinion when she makes decisions. To a husband these decisions may seem trivial and unimportant and he may become impatient and tell her to do as she pleases. **BUT** this kind of attitude often causes tension because the message that is conveyed to the wife is that her husband is not interested in her or in her problem. She needs assurance, and she wants his interest and advice even though she may decide to do the opposite to what he suggested. This often leads to further frustration on the part of the husband. This life of self-assurance is also seen in the question many wives ask their husbands each night: "Dear, do you still love me?"

3. Other areas of tensions

a) Married couples can spend years together and never really communicate with one another. They talk to one another but don't really understand what the other is saying. (We will deal with this subject in the next two Lessons.)

b) As Christians, our relationships to others should always include forgiveness - **Ephesians 4:32**. But this is so often forgotten in Christian marriages. There is instead: the harsh word, the sarcastic comment, the unthinking action that hurts. And it is so easy for the offended partner to withdraw in a huff - get the sulks and not speak to the - other partner for days.

When forgiveness is sought, the offended party will agree to forgive - although it is often obvious that it has not been forgotten - at the first opportunity it is thrown back at the other partner.

BUT to forgive as a Christian is to forgive as God has forgiven us in Christ. In Christian marriage we must constantly remind ourselves of what true forgiveness really consists. We are all human; we all make mistakes and are constantly in the position where we need to be forgiven. This involves an understanding attitude

between husband and wife - the understanding that **neither** of them are perfect partners and constantly need each other's forgiveness!

c) Forgiving each other in Christ also means **accepting** one another fully and completely in Christ. A major problem in Christian marriage is that one partner often expects the other to think as he thinks or to be more like he expects the other to be. Therefore, they judge and criticize instead of accepting one another as they are.

Read **Ephesians 5:25-27**. Christ accepts us with all our failings and imperfections - and this is the kind of acceptance husbands and wives should show to one another. This is a product of Christian love! It is a love that understands - that is concerned - that forgives and accepts. This is basic to a successful marriage!!! It unites a couple spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically.

4. Building a Christian marriage.

Marriage is a process - a process in which couples can continue to experience **growth in oneness** as they keep on working out solutions to misunderstandings and conflicts so that they can give themselves freely to one another.

Some people enter marriage with personality problems still unsolved, which makes it difficult for them to adjust to the process of **building** a marriage. They often expect marriage to be an answer to their needs. When they find that they cannot just take but must give of themselves as well they become frustrated and quarrelsome.

Therefore, to build a marriage the following **three tasks** are important:

a) To develop self-identity.

This involves breaking the ties of dependency upon parents and becoming a partner in a new entity - a union of one-flesh (**Genesis 2:23-24**). In this union each partner must accept themselves as a person in their own right - capable of loving and worthy to receive love!!!

So often a partner, particularly a wife, will become an insignificant echo of the husband because of her feelings of personal worthlessness. Marriage must be a continual, two-way communication system. If the one partner cannot communicate as a person in his or her own right, then the marriage cannot grow and develop!!!

b) To establish a new attitude towards the other partner.

There can be no **self-centeredness** in this growth in one-ness. Each must develop an attitude which values the other person even when his own needs are not being met. It means growing from "I" and "me" to "you" and "we." Selfishness can destroy a marriage!!

The one-flesh of marriage is designed by God to be a **total sharing**!!! This is what love means. Read what *H.S. Sullivan* says, "When the satisfaction or the security of

another person becomes as significant to one as is one's own satisfaction or security, then the state of love exists." This is the kind of love God demands of husbands: "Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies." (**Ephesians 5:28**)

Love will reveal itself in the areas of:

(i) **Empathy.** For example, the ability to put yourself in the other person's situation in order to understand what he is feeling. When there is an understanding of the feelings of the other partner, a foundation for a successful marriage is established.

(ii) **Trust.** For example, the willingness to rely upon the honesty of the other person. Trust strengthens marriage – and a person who is trusted will want to prove himself trustworthy. Read **Proverbs 31:10-11**. When trust is shattered it is difficult for love to survive.

c) Growing in grace together.

God expects us as His children to grow spiritually in our Christian lives. Spiritual growth results in changes to the glory of God in a Christian's life. The same holds true for marriage!!! As both partners grow spiritually so their "oneness" in marriage will grow. Theirs will become a shared faith and a shared life. Read **1 Peter 3:7** — because they share a living faith they will come more and more to share all facets of their life together - their joys and their sorrows, their hopes and their defeats.

A shared life will provide the husband and the wife with the security to face all crises - it will enable them to cultivate forgiving love - it will strengthen them to face the future with hope and assurance!!! But the Christian life can also be an area of conflict. For example, one of the partners can become so involved in the Church life and work that he or she neglects the other partner and the children. It cannot be to God's glory that the Church and home should be in conflict.

d) Growing into true oneness.

Many Christians are uncomfortable with the fact that they are sexual beings.

But, a Christian couple is privileged to approach their sexual relationship - and all that it communicates - with an understanding of what the Holy Bible teaches about the sexual relationship in marriage.

When the Holy Bible speaks of "one flesh" it refers to an exclusive relationship which sex makes possible - a relationship in which two persons become one in the most intimate bond. Therefore sex is a **uniting force** in marriage.

As a gift from God, sex is a means for the fulfillment of a divine purpose. Because the whole personality is sacred, every function that is involved in living is sacred.

Marriage is a sacred calling, and sex is a sacred gift within that calling. As a gift from God, sex is holy and good. Within its purpose in marriage, sex brings a sense of freedom and fulfillment, joy and wellbeing, a happy spirit moved by love.

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Sex in marriage is capable of communicating meanings of love, commitment, tenderness and beauty. It establishes and nourishes the union of two people. Two people enrich the sharing of their whole personality through sharing the secret of an intimate union. They bring to each other an offering meant for no other, a precious gift of each self, kept for the other.

It is true to say: Sex needs marriage and marriage needs sex!!! It can express the quality of love that exists in the marriage relationship.

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Lesson 2

TWO STRANGERS LIVING IN THE SAME HOUSE.

The time may come in any marriage when the husband or the wife may suddenly come to the awesome realization that they are really strangers to one another. They share the same house but they really live in different worlds. They don't really understand one another and whenever they try to talk about a subject they end up arguing. With the result that as each partner builds up resentment against the other—the gap between them grows.

The problem is one of **communication** - which is the most prevalent cause of conflict and breakdown in marriage. Communication is basic to living with others. It can be the cause of either making or breaking a person. Many of us can recall seeing a quiet, withdrawn personality suddenly become outgoing and friendly after marriage because of a loving, trustful relationship of communication. Unhappily, we have also seen lovely personalities become withdrawn and unhappy after marriage, showing a breakdown in meaningful communication. In marriage, two people do not bring into marriage a ready-made ability to communicate. This is something that is continually cultivated through all the experiences of a shared life.

1. Communication in courtship.

In courtship there is really very little true communication because the couple in love develops a special language of their own - a language of pet names, words with special meanings to them - and a relationship of feelings and emotions. All is very sweet and simple because when they talk together it is about themselves and their love.

Therefore, after marriage it comes as quite a shock when they both realize that the other is very human. The husband, who thought that his beloved was the only girl of her kind in the world, now sees this unique girl washing the dishes, putting her hair into curlers, etc. He very soon realizes that she is very much like any other woman. The same happens to the wife when she sees all the shortcomings in the man she literally worshipped.

Once they feel disappointed in marriage they begin to lose confidence in each other and they soon come to the position where there is very little to talk about.

The emotion of courtship cannot last forever, but in its place a new kind of communication must take place — a communication of understanding, sympathy and mutual sharing and adjustment.

2. When communication fails in marriage.

It comes as a shock for a Christian couple to find that all is not going well with their marriage, because they may have grown up with the conviction that Christian marriages cannot fail. And they were convinced that theirs would not fail.

For a wife her marriage is largely her whole life, especially with the coming of children. For the husband, his work takes more and more of his time and interest. To add to the problem, men always feel that they must be self-sufficient, because this is what is expected of them. Therefore for a man to have to admit that he cannot cope with communication problems in his marriage poses a threat to his identity as a male. Therefore, when the wife tries to seek help in saving or improving a marriage, the husband will resent such interference to his domain.

A further complicating factor can be the influence of another woman in the life of the husband. Usually it is his secretary or another woman in the office. The husband sees her at her best, and also as an understanding person and the one who has the same interests in the place of business as he has. When things are not going well at home, the husband may be misled to thinking that this woman is far more understanding and much easier to communicate with.

Therefore, the husband and wife almost live in two worlds.

The greatest security for any marriage is the development of real communication that will satisfy the deep inner needs of both partners!!! If these deep inner needs are met failure need never be feared.

3. Loneliness in life and marriage.

One of the desperate agonies of our time is loneliness. It is a mounting problem in our impersonal technological age. And the tragedy that two people can live alongside each other and still be lonely!!! God created woman to fulfill this need in both man's life and hers. Read **Genesis 2:18-24**. Milton wrote: "Loneliness is the first thing God's eye named as not good..."

A rabbinical comment declares: "The man is restless while he misses the rib that was taken out of his side, and the woman is restless until she gets under the man's arm from whence she was taken." For loneliness to be bridged in marriage there must be communication – an open, real sharing. As the years pass so our personalities change, and unless there is constant communication, these changes will cause even greater loneliness. As a husband once said to me: "This isn't the same girl I married."

4. Are we really listening?

Communication is not just talking. How many times do a husband and wife have to say to one another: "But, you weren't listening!" WHY? Because married couples assume that they know what the other partner is going to say. OR, they have heard that story before. OR, they don't think it is important. And so, over the years, barriers are erected which block communication.

Therefore, communication must be **learned** in marriage!!!

The first thing to learn is to be a **good listener**. This requires self-discipline!!!

Active listening changes both the listener and the speaker.

Illustration: A wife who has had to become aggressive just to get her husband to listen to her will become less authoritarian when her husband begins to be a good, sincere listener.

NOW a positive relationship can be built because each will show genuine interest in the other **as a person**.

LOVE, primarily, is giving, not receiving!!! Giving of ourselves!!! Therefore, giving attention is giving love! When we stop listening, we stop loving!

When two people fall in love they give more than normal attention to one another. Love **cares** - therefore love **listens!** Unless two people each listen to each other a loving relationship cannot grow between them.

Illustration: Reuel Howe writes: "In the act of love, for instance, one listens with every sense of ear, eye, taste, and touch in order to participate in the mystery of the other. Love is the attempt to see what is in the other person, to know him wholly."

Creative listening will also produce **empathy**. This means the experience of feeling someone else's feelings as our own. A husband and wife can know the deep companionship of understanding the other partner's feelings. Next time you have an **argument** with your partner, just stop for a moment and understand her feelings. You will find your anger dying down because you will feel for her and not want to hurt back. **Therefore**, how well do you really listen to your partner? Do you really understand the deeper feelings of your partner's life because you are sharing her inner thoughts and feelings? Are you building up **empathy**?

5. Barriers to listening.

a) Switching off.

Without being aware of it, one partner may switch-off when the other is talking. This can easily become a habit. It means that we hear only what we want to hear.

b) The chronic interrupter.

Nothing can so effectively stifle communication as the chronic interrupter. The other partner will usually lose patience and immediately end the conversation.

c) Assuming what the other will say.

Sometimes one of the partners will express this by saying: "I know just what you are going to say, so don't bother." Here is a case of "familiarity breeds contempt." When

both partners take for granted that they know exactly what the other is going to say there is very little possibility for change. **BUT** it is a mistake to assume that people cannot change. As Christians we should know that God can and does change us!!!

d) Crossed lines.

Often partners read into words meanings that were not intended. Does this happen in your marriage? For example, a wife may mention that she is tired after all the housework. The husband hears her correctly, but the message he receives is: "So she thinks I am not providing for her by getting her a servant."

Illustration: Eric Berne: Husband: "Dear, where are my cuff links?" The logical answer would be: "I haven't seen them but I'll help you look." But if she has had a hard day and is feeling grumpy, she'll shout out: "Where you left them!"

Where there is openness and honesty between couples there will be no need to listen **defensively.**

e) Talking at one another.

One way of blocking communication is to develop the attitude of talking at a person. It is in fact a way of scolding or commanding a person.

Illustration: No one likes to be talked at. If a wife should be late in meeting her husband, and the first thing he says is: "You could have been here on time, but you don't care about my feelings." Even though the wife had a valid reason for being late, being talked at in this manner will be resentful, and they will both be on a collision course.

CONCLUSION

Every married couple must realize that any breakdown in communication is caused by emotional factors!!! They have not learned to honestly share their feelings!!! They have not been willing to share their **real self** with their life-partner!!!

Our feelings are like our fingerprints - they are unique to ourselves. To know one another we must know our feelings. Only then will we understand each other's ideas, wants, intentions and preferences. When couples are not willing to share their **real self** with their partner it will result in the further avoidance of really dealing with the problems that arise from such a lack of communication - until both become defensive - their suspicions are easily aroused and a general lack of trust will pervade the marriage.

When couples move towards a more open, honest relationship of sharing their **real selves**, communication will begin and come alive!!! A shared life becomes exciting once again. For Christian couples to **pretend** that all is well is dishonouring to their Lord, and it must affect their work and service for the Lord.

But the Lord forgives - and married couples learn through this forgiveness experience

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that they can and must forgive one another and help one another to openness and sharing.

Marriage grows and matures when both partners are willing to really listen!!! Through listening we can see the real person our partner is as they disclose themselves as they really are. To block this self-disclosure, even unintentionally, is to cause the greatest hurt a person can experience – the hurt of being rejected when they have exposed their deepest feelings to the one they love and trust!!!

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Lesson 3

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE - UNHOLY DEADLOCK?

A Christian home is a home where Christ lives!!! It is not a list of do's and don'ts - but a life. It is not a routine - but a reality. It is a home pervaded by Christian attitudes. **BUT** too often Christian attitudes are absent in Christian homes, with the result that it becomes in fact an "Unholy deadlock."

We have seen that the critical issue is that of communication!!! In the previous chapter we saw the need for a proper attitude to **listening. NOW** we will deal with the other aspect of communication: **speaking.**

We are not just referring to "talking" - but actually sharing and understanding. This is what communication is.

Illustration: The story is told of an old farmer in Vermont who, one spring evening sat long and silently on the porch with his wife of fifty years, then suddenly blurted out: "Sometimes when I think of what you've meant to me all these years, it's all I can do to keep from telling you." - Yes, but he had kept from telling her for 50 years!!! And are we not all guilty of failing in similar ways?

Illustration: In a recent sociological study conducted by Cornell University it was concluded that the more time husbands and wives spent talking with each other, the more likely they are to report a high level of marital satisfaction.

1. When silence is ominous.

When there is a communication breakdown in marriage, silence can be ominous, if not disastrous. Silence may be a sign that there is hostility and tension between the couple.

How can a relationship grow when the most important form of communication is held to a minimum? Therefore, remember the next time you use the "no speaks" or "cold shoulder" treatment you are not going to make things any easier for yourself, but you are helping to create a hostile atmosphere. It will also show that you have an illogical argument that you know you cannot honestly defend.

2. When communication breaks down.

There is no quicker way for holy wedlock to become unholy deadlock than for communication lines to break down.

When our talking ends in disagreement or antagonism or conflict — the result will be confusion, misunderstanding and arguments. As someone once said: "Some people

see eye to eye only when they are glaring at one another."

This does not mean that all quarrelling is unhealthy. Sometimes a quarrel may clear the air and release pent-up emotions. It also may really bring the message home to the other partner. If couples respect and trust one another a quarrel may in fact strengthen their relationship.

BUT behaving disagreeably is something else and will never produce communication and change — it will, in fact, make the other partner more stubborn and resistant and lead to a dead end.

The important rule should apply whenever quarrels arise: "**Stay friends!**" and "**Avoid side issues**".

When couples say to you: "We never disagree" - then you can be sure that neither of them is making any meaningful contribution to real interaction and communication. They have settled down to a second rate marriage.

3. The conflict of selfish lives.

Very soon after the marriage it is often the case that the two persons discover that each ultimately loves **himself** more than the other partner. Here is a source of severe marital conflict. Because a person who is **self-centered** before marriage will not want to change after marriage. The problem is magnified when two strong-willed persons marry. They **both** want to possess the other for selfish purposes.

Illustration: Ernest Havemann writes: "Go ahead and quarrel all you like, but remember one thing. You cannot win; the best you can hope for is a tie."

The trouble with most quarrels is the attempt by each partner to **change** the life of the other.

For example, a husband wants to change his wife's interest in watching TV or her long telephone conversation. For another example, the wife wants to make her husband into a good conversationalist, or, get him to remember birthdays and anniversaries.

Mature couples learn to live with the idiosyncrasies and ways of their partners **without** quarrelling - learning not to be self-centered.

4. Small hurts add up to big hurts.

Someone once said: "The grave of love is excavated with little digs." Little criticisms may seem very small to the person making them, but can come over as severe criticisms to the one receiving them. For example, criticism about the wife's weight - or the way she keeps house. Little digs lead to resentment - and soon the whole thing is out of hand. **Sarcasm** and **ridicule** also apply here. These are common means of "getting at" the other partner. They never achieve anything constructive but only build up resentment in the person hurt.

5. What if your marriage is not perfect?

In the USA, V.W. had an advertisement showing the Beetle with a flat tyre. The caption read: "Nobody's perfect."

We all agree that nothing is perfect in this world, but we behave as though we expect marriage to be perfect!

Channing Pollock wrote: "Marriage suffers most from our regarding it as a failure whenever it falls below a perfect score."

The advertising media has conditioned us to want perfect figures, perfect complexions or perfect happiness - this all can be ours, they say - **IF** we only had the right product or formula.

Many marriage books tell us that we can have a marriage of perfect togetherness. **BUT** even though we are Christians we must learn to communicate with one another as imperfect human beings!!!

Therefore, when couples discover that their marriage is not perfect they give up trying to go on with the marriage. In their desire to have a perfect marriage, both partners become critical - blaming the other for the lack of perfection. Making impossible demands of one another - and missing the warmth and companionship of two lives growing together in spite of their weaknesses!

If couples think their marriage is not perfect they eventually are overcome with guilt that they are **living a lie** in the Church family, because their marriage is not perfect like the other marriages in the Church (they think).

They often withdraw from an active ministry in the Church and consequently their spiritual lives also suffer. They also sometimes feel that God has **cheated** them. They often think: "Am I, as a Christian, not entitled to a perfect marriage like the other Christians in our Church?"

It is a fact that some couples become jealous in thinking that God has given to other families what He has not given to them.

BUT in this attitude we destroy that love which is the basis for building a satisfactory relationship with our partner! When we really understand that we have been accepted by God, **purely by His grace**, and in spite of our imperfections - we will also accept our partners as the objects of God's grace — and together joyfully love and communicate - sharing our lives in growing together.

6. Confession and forgiveness.

How many times a day do we have occasion, either to **resent** or to **forgive** the actions of our marriage partner?

Our emotional health and the strength of our marriage depend upon our attitude towards the person who offends us. We **grow** or we wither, depending upon our ability to forgive and to be reconciled.

BUT living with an unforgiving spirit can cause emotional and spiritual destruction!!! In **Matthew 6:12** Christ taught: "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:32** - "and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" - here we are told **HOW** God in Christ forgave us: freely and unconditionally!!!

The Lord Jesus exposed our natural inclinations when someone offends us. We do not only feel resentment, but we respond vindictively toward the one who has hurt us. Our **pride** makes us hurt back!!!

Because we allow an unforgiving spirit to enter our marriage, we find it difficult to accept our partners as they really are!

IS THIS NOT due to the fact that we have not really accepted and understood God's perfect forgiveness?

a) Forgiveness is not the same as tolerance.

This is shown of some, who when they are hurt, to say: "I will just forget what he did." By trying to forget they are just showing their unwillingness to face the cost of true forgiveness.

By just trying to suppress hurts we are making forgiveness more difficult. As Christians we must make reconciliation - we must learn what forgiveness costs in the marriage relationship if love is to grow.

b) Forgiveness does not demand guarantees.

*When a husband or wife says: "I'll forgive you IF you promise never to do that again" — that is a conditional forgiveness!!! — It is a **DEAL**. BUT it is not Christian forgiveness!!! Christian forgiveness **risks all** as it forgives and trusts!!!*

c) Forgiveness has nothing to do with justice.

If a person is determined to stand by his rights - he cannot forgive!!! Justice must give way to **mercy**.

The forgiveness which Jesus taught and showed goes beyond reason and justice - it is love, healing, and restoring. It is the Christian attitude of reaching out to soothe conflict and hurt.

d) Forgiveness is something we feel.

It is something we feel, whether we give forgiveness or are forgiven!!! If we are the one who receives forgiveness - we feel the pain of having to be forgiven by the one we hurt - we also feel the additional anguish we cause the person who must forgive. He who forgives must also enter into the pain and humiliation of the one he must forgive.

One cannot say: "I forgive you, though I don't feel forgiving love towards you." A person cannot truly forgive unless he feels forgiving love!

Forgiving love from God led His Son to Calvary!!! He shared our suffering in forgiving us!!!

When both partners feel the common pain of forgiving and being forgiven - then they are drawn together in true reconciliation. They are also bound together in a new joy and release.

Therefore Christian husbands and wives forgive one another on one basis only - not how they feel - but as God has commanded us to forgive!!! An unforgiving spirit can poison the whole personality, making one an impossible person to live with. It cuts us off from God and from our partner and it destroys love.

To say: "I'll forgive, but I can't forget" is really to say: "I can't really forgive."

Our Lord made it clear that we cannot hold forgiveness over the head of the forgiven one. We are to blot it out altogether with the grace God supplies.

It is in the atmosphere of forgiving love that husband and wife can afford to be themselves with no pretence - and nothing hidden.

*The kindest and the happiest pair,
Will find occasion to forbear,
And something every day they live,
To pity and perhaps to forgive.*

- William Cowper -

SOUND ADVICE TO CHRISTIAN COUPLES FROM MATTHEW HENRY.

Matthew Henry wrote the following account of one aspect of the life of his parents, and drew his own conclusions from it. He said: "My parents constantly prayed together morning and evening, and never, if they were together at home or abroad, was it intermitted: and, from my father's own experience of the benefit of this practice, he would take all opportunities to recommend it to those in that relation, as conducing very much to the comfort of it, and their furtherance in that which he would often say is the great duty of yoke-fellows, and that is to do all they can to help one another to heaven. He would say that this duty of husbands and wives praying together is intimated by Peter in 1 Peter 3:7, where couples are exhorted to live as the heirs of the grace of life, that their prayers, especially their prayers together, be

not hindered: that nothing may be done to hinder them from praying together, nor to hinder them in it, nor to spoil the success of their prayers. This sanctifies the relation, and fetches in a blessing on it, makes the comforts of it more sweet, and the cares and crosses of it more easy, and is an excellent means of preserving and increasing love in the relation. Many to whom my father had recommended the practice of this duty have blessed God for him and for his advice concerning it."

MARRIAGE COVENANT

WE, the undersigned, _____ (Husband) and _____ (Wife)

HEREBY PLEDGE to one another before **GOD**, to:

1. Read the Holy Bible and pray together daily unless circumstances make that practically impossible.
2. Worship together with God's people as part of the body of Christ weekly as we are able.
3. Not let the sun go down on our wrath.
4. Engage in active Christian service together.
5. After God, to put each other first, above any other relationships, including any children we may raise.
6. To raise the children God may give us, with His will.
7. Solicit immediate pastoral assistance when we face marital difficulties we cannot handle ourselves.
8. Celebrate our union each year at the time of our anniversary with a Thanksgiving Ceremony, either in our home or in some other mutually acceptable place.

WE UNDERTAKE all the above, and trust **GOD** to **SEAL** this COVENANT with:

1. Exceptional marital happiness.
2. The ability to glorify Him in it.
3. Divine preservation of the union until death parts us.

SIGNED AT CRISWELL TABERNACLE, Singapore on _____ in the year of our Lord **2011**.

(Husband)

(Wife)