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HAPPILY MARRIED EVERYDAY FOR LIFE

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”
[Gen. 2:25]

In the lesson on “Let God choose your spouse” [Vol. 2, No. 14: 3 June 2001], we came to the important conclusion that we need faith to go into a marriage. However, to sustain it takes much more than that because “faith without works is dead” [James 2:26].

Marriage is the closest that you can get to somebody else long term. At school, dorm room mates come and go. At home, children, brothers and sisters grow up and move out. But, in marriage, you remain there! You live together, sleep together, eat together, do so many other things together. Getting out of it because you are bored has its spiritual dangers because God says that divorce will hurt your relationship with Him. Yet, you don't want to be sentenced to life imprisonment by contracting into an unhappy relationship! Right now, there are some couples who are passing through “hell”. They have remained married because of the children or their religious or cultural convictions or social standing. Some are by all definitions “separated” or “divorced” even when they are still under the same roof, sleeping in different rooms, or having not had marital relations for years. But is that what God wants you to bear for life?

In Gen. 2:25, we are told, “and they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Now, in the English language, there are two related words, “naked” and “nude.” Nudity is a natural state; it refers to a natural state of never having worn clothes. That is why those who want that kind of lifestyle go to “nude camps.” To be naked, on the other hand, is to remove your clothes when the general habit is to wear them, such as when you remove your clothes to have a bath. When Peter removed his outer garment while fishing, he was described as naked [Jn 21:7]. However, blind people don't see naked people! When Adam and his wife walked with God, they were said to be naked but they were not ashamed. In other words, they entered the relationship by faith, not by sight. They did not see each other's weaknesses but God's presence. But, the moment they took off their eyes from God to trust their own judgments and decisions (i.e., walking by sight), they discovered that they were naked and started to cover up! [Gen. 3:7]. The same man who had called his wife “the bone of my bones and the flesh of my flesh” [Gen. 2:23] began to blame her for his fall [Gen. 3:12].

In today's lesson, we are going to find out how to build the kind of marriage in which you and your spouse are both “naked” and yet you are not ashamed. If that will make you happily married everyday for life, what else do you want? It is not easy but it is possible.

1. To faith add love

When a young lawyer, a Pharisee, asked Jesus to tell him what was the greatest commandment in the law, He replied:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind ... [and] Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself [Matt. 22:37-38]

Your closest neighbour (if you are married) is your spouse and the love you should have for him/her is derived from your love for God because we are made in His image and likeness. Accordingly, that love has to be multi-dimensional for we are spirit, soul and body, all in one [1 Thes. 5:23]. So, you and your spouse can express your love for each other with your hide (i.e., body), *and* with your head (i.e., mind) *and* with your heart (i.e., soul/spirit). The three forms are summarized in the chart below.

WAYS OF EXPRESSING LOVE IN MARRIAGE			
<i>Mode of sharing love</i>	With the <u>Hide</u> (body)	With the <u>Head</u>	With the <u>Heart</u>
<i>Manifestation</i>	Lust [Infatuation at best]	Logic	Affection
<i>Marital needs addressed</i>	Potency- ability to make love and babies	Ability to provide for/support a family	Ability to meet emotional and spiritual needs
<i>Enhanced by</i>	Physical attraction: looks, grooming, staying healthy/young-looking	Communication/ sharing/openness; Dependability: friendliness, trustworthiness	Show of affection: expressed love, fidelity, caring, selflessness; Forgiving; Shared cultural/religious values with respect to sex, marriage, family planning/having children, worship, etc.
<i>Threatened by</i>	Temporary incapacity, e.g., monthly period, illness, loss of libido, impotence, physical distance; Poor personal hygiene Promiscuity Aging	Arbitrariness Closed-mindedness Shortsightedness Selfishness Pride	Affectation (pretence, hypocrisy) Not God-fearing

Love with the body

This is the only aspect of love behaviour that humans share with animals, and it manifests as lust. You don't need affection to make love; otherwise, prostitutes would be out of business! Also, you don't need affection to make babies, otherwise, animals would be barren! However, only humans add intimacy, especially where infatuation (i.e., an intense, usually transitory, fondness or admiration) has developed. That is what we mistakenly call love.

Animals cannot show affection to their partners because they have no souls. They cannot even marry because they don't need to. They make love only during the mating season. That is why the males move from one female on heat to another. In the case of human beings, females are on heat most of the time! Therefore, we have no mating season and males can afford to be faithful to one female and vice versa. That is why God has given us the ability to show affection, such as kissing, touching, exchange of gifts, sharing of domestic chores and child care, etc

Physical love is enhanced by natural looks [**Song of Solomon 4:1**], grooming (such as clothes, hairstyles, perfumes, etc), and personal hygiene [**Song of Solomon 4:9-10**]. The desire to stay healthy (through regular exercises and good eating/drinking habits) or stay young looking is also directed at enhancing physical love. However, it can be threatened by temporary incapacity due, for example, to the wife's monthly period or the man's impotence, or illness. Poor personal hygiene is a major killer of libido (sex drive). Physical separation or career pursuit can encourage unfaithfulness and also hurt the quality and frequency of physical love. Finally, aging is unavoidable. Sooner than you think, all you may be able to do is shake hands and wish each other sound sleep! [**1 Kgs 1:1-4**]

If all that your marriage can offer you is physical love, it will not last. Nevertheless, without it, the marriage will also not last! A satisfying physical love life provides an enabling environment for other levels of love to thrive.

Love with the head

The critical decisions in marriage, such as the number and spacing of children, career direction, family budgeting, children's education, extended family obligations, etc., require careful and critical analysis, like a builder planning a house or a king preparing for war [**Lk 14:28-31**]. A couple should be able to sit down and analyze such issues dispassionately and seek solutions because God has given us the spirit of power, love and a sound mind [**2 Tim. 1:7**].

If properly cultivated, love with the head enables you and your spouse to resolve differences each time you quarrel, build trust, friendship and dependability, and maintain an open relationship. It enables you to enhance each other's career and

social status instead of one party growing bigger while the other remains stagnant or diminished.

Unfortunately, God gave a few people heads, the rest He covered with hair, as a popular saying goes! Because of selfishness or pride or mistrust, many couples miss the companionship and friendship that shared decision-making and responsibility sharing can breed. Also, using logical reasoning can help you to weigh the future implications of your current actions, which can act as a good check on your misguided use of lust.

Love with the heart

“I love you with all my heart” is a popular statement but what does it mean? Certainly, it cannot be the heart that pumps blood! It is a spiritual statement and it refers to the heart of the soul (the spirit being in man). Here lies the seat of emotion and show of affection. Without it, our physical love is worse than that of animals.

As we said earlier, it is God that has given us the ability to show affection, such as kissing, touching, exchange of gifts, sharing of domestic chores and childcare, etc. Therefore, in order to enhance our ability to love with the heart, we need to be God-fearing. Then, we can forgive each other when we offend, worship together and raise the children in the fear of the Lord [Prov. 22: 6]. The only danger here is affectation, i.e., pretence or hypocrisy, such as faking spirituality to cover up a hidden life of sin and deceit. Be yourself and learn to learn from each other for, by your fruits, you will be known [Matt. 7:20]

2. Striking a balance

In the chart below, I have laid out your love needs against those of your spouse. Let us begin with an important assumption: ***in a successful (happy) marriage, there are no rights or privileges, only responsibilities.*** So, don't deceive yourself with the notion that you are supposed to get so-and-so from your spouse, and because he/she is not forthcoming, you can't be blamed for what follows. Rather, your attitude should be: ***what am I going to do today to make my spouse happier, better, more loving, more caring, etc?*** Your spouse should also ask himself/herself that question each day and both of you will go about all that day to answer it!

As we have seen earlier, the seat of human love, as distinct from lust that we share with animals, is the heart. ***No matter our circumstances (rich or poor, sick or healthy, young or old, happy or sad), we should show affection to our spouses and vice versa [c1, c2 in the chart below]. Express your love in words and touch. Share your thoughts, fears and plans. Pray together. Forgive and forget when you are offended and avoid offending. Remain ever faithful.*** These must be constant in the relationship.

Then, as circumstances permit, you can bring in appropriate doses of physical love [a1, a2] and friendship/companionship/"business" partnership [b1, b2]. If your spouse has travelled or ill or in her monthly period, or both of you have chosen to fast for spiritual purposes for a short time [1 Cor. 7:5], the deprived party should avoid adultery [Prov. 6:20- 35; Prov. 7: 12-19]. Instead, he/she should practise continence by offering the body as a *living sacrifice* [Rom. 12:1]. Express your "long distance" love to your spouse by phone, e-mail, cards, flowers, gifts, etc. When your mind wanders and you begin to apply logical analysis and extrapolations to your spouse's actions/attitudes, don't conform to the world. Instead be transformed by the *renewing of your mind* [Rom. 12:2]. Then, on a daily basis, you will be able to use your marriage to prove *what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God* [Rom. 12:2]. Continuous compatibility follows and a happy marriage is the result. That is represented by the [a1, a2 ↔ c1, c2 ↔ b1, b2] diagonal in the chart below.

3. Conclusion

Let's recap what we have said so far:

- (a) Your husband has left his father and mother so as to cling to you [Gen. 2:24], or your wife has also left her people for the same purpose [Gen. 31:14-15]. So, two of you have now become one flesh (a compound, not a mixture!) [Gen. 2:24]. It is both a physical and spiritual union.
- (b) God says that it is a perpetual union because He put it together, not man [Matt. 19:6]. How can you break up what you cannot separate? So, learn to confess that divorce is out of the question and that the marriage *must* succeed. Pray without ceasing for God's guidance for the family.
- (c) Since you are spirit, soul and body, learn to love your closest neighbour, your spouse, with all three of them. If you can't love whom you see how can you love God that you can't see? [1 Jn 4:20] Use your mind to control your lust and your heart to love only one spouse. Then, you will be able to learn to strike a balance.
- (d) No matter your circumstances, your show of affection and fear of God must always be there. If body contact is not feasible for a season, learn to be faithful to each other by both parties offering your bodies as a living sacrifice. If you are building your careers or you have no material means, both of you should cultivate faith and hope in God by renewing your minds.
- (e) Make daily deposits of love, goodwill and affection in your spouse's "bank account" for those who follow after righteousness and mercy shall find life, righteousness and honour [Prov. 22:21]. Make a conscious effort to know each other better each new day: likes and dislikes, moods, etc. Strive to avoid what upsets him/her and to stress those things which they love/appreciate. Work to enhance each other's worth, publicly and privately.
- (f) Make your marriage a total relationship. Make your spouse your best friend, confidant, lover.
- (g) The devil will never give up trying to break you up because you are the foundation of the Church [Eph. 5: 31-32]. Therefore, always pray for the success

of your marriage. During the first 10 years, rebuke barrenness or unwanted pregnancies. Ask for God's guidance in career or business, and rebuke anxiety. During the second decade, the temptation to look out or make it by hook or crook is very strong, as the children make progress through secondary school and college. Fast and pray hard. During the third decade and thereafter, pray for your good health and your children/grandchildren's protection. Then, enjoy your second honeymoon!

Always remember that your body and your mind are very prone to carnal persuasions and your heart can be easily troubled. But, if your mind is stayed on God and you trust Him, He will keep you in perfect peace [Is. 26:3]. He will give you the desire of your heart: *a happy married life everyday for life.*

STRIKING A BALANCE FOR DAILY LIVING				
	YOUR SPOUSE'S LOVE NEEDS			
	<i>MODE</i>	<i>BODY</i> [a2]	<i>HEART</i> [c2]	<i>HEAD</i> [b2]
YOUR LOVE NEEDS	<i>BODY</i> [a1]	Æ [a1 , a2]		
	<i>HEART</i> [c1]		♥ [c1 , c2]	
	<i>HEAD</i> [b1]			\$ [b1 , b2]