

## Chapter Nine

# ONE ON ONE: MARRIAGE



***“He who finds a wife finds what is good  
and receives favor from the Lord”*** (Proverbs 18:22).

When God created Adam, He placed the man in the Garden of Eden to enjoy fellowship with Him and to work. Adam was assigned to take care of the garden and to name the animals and birds. His life had purpose and meaning, but Adam alone of all creation had no partner *“according to [his] own kind”* (see Genesis 1). The man needed a *“helper suitable for him”* (see Genesis 2:18, emphasis added). The Hebrew word for helper, *ezer*, designates one who assists, especially in time of need. It is used most often in reference to God as the One Who meets the needs of Israel. Therefore from this reference point, a woman’s role as a “suitable helper” does not imply subordination. “She is the needed helper whom God supplies to end man’s loneliness and to work alongside him, not the junior assistant.”<sup>1</sup> Adam’s authority in the union was denoted by his *nam*ing of his wife “woman,” even as God had signified His authority over the heavens and earth by *nam*ing them “day,” “night,” “sky,” “land,” and “seas” (see Genesis 1:5-10). The woman that God created was *suitable* for Adam; she complemented those areas of his nature that were incomplete or lacking.

Government and sociological studies reveal the vast differences between the genders in terms of thought processes, perspectives, and emotional influences, as well as an array of physiological variants. According to Dr. Donald Joy, professor of human development and

family studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, the manner in which males and females process information in their brains is strikingly different. Women are able to immediately access past experiences from both hemispheres of the brain and come to speedy conclusions. Men, who differentiate strongly in either their analytical left hemisphere or affective, emotional right hemisphere, require more time to sort, analyze, and conclude. Couples who are unaware of these differences in approach to situations may experience frustration or irritation. “Why can’t my spouse see things my way?”, when God has actually “wired” them differently to make them mutually interdependent!<sup>2</sup>

This *need* for one another illustrates the dependence that members in the body of Christ have for one another in order to achieve wholeness. Too often individuals criticize one another for their unique methodology and approach, failing to appreciate the contrast that was designed by God. When unity is achieved in the body, God is certainly the Source!

Viewed in a Hebraic framework, marriage is a *pilgrimage together*, an individual and collective growth in the character of Jesus. Let the quality of your marriage be a physical representation of your relationship with Jesus. Make John’s words the hallmark of your marriage: “*No one has ever seen God; but if we **love each other**, God lives in us and **his love is made complete in us***” (1 John 4:12, emphasis added). Check Ephesians 5:33 for facets of a marriage which others can see has been impacted by the Lord: “*However, each one of you [husbands] must **love his wife** as he loves himself, and the wife must **respect her husband***” (emphasis added).

Respect and love in a marriage that displays Jesus can only be accomplished by permitting Him into your midst. Note also that God speaks directly to the husband regarding *his love*, and to the wife regarding *her respect*. He does not ask the spouses to remind one another of their particular responsibility! As a husband, you are coordinating your purposes with God’s when you consider in what ways you can become easier to respect. Similarly, as a wife, examine yourself through the eyes of the Spirit to determine how by His grace you can become easier to love. This is not an attempt to *earn* love and respect but an ongoing opportunity to be a willing and malleable vessel that testifies to the Potter’s touch as *He* changes you through His Spirit.

If you are presently married, how did you determine that your intended was God’s will for life partnership with you? Have you ever had doubts since then that you misread His will? Do you still have *hope* that God can revive and restore your relationship to the place He wants it to be?

The book of Hosea presents some marvelous insights into the character of God as the husband of His wife Israel. Israel had repeatedly committed *adultery*, a violation of the marriage covenant, with other gods as she departed from the Lord (see Hosea 1:2). Out of His love and desire to bring her to repentance, God brought upon Israel famine and ruin (see 2:9-13). When she repented out of desperation, Israel declared, “*I will go back to **my husband** as at first, for then I was better off than now*” (Hosea 2:7, emphasis added).

Note that God did not respond as an arrogant wronged party; He did not demand a “pound of flesh” for Israel’s transgressions. Instead He determined, “*I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert,*” away from distractions and responsibilities so

that she could focus intently on their relationship, “*and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards*”— in the desert, where grapes normally do not grow and would thus be totally unanticipated!—“*and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope*” (2:14,15).

In this situation of infidelity and repentance, God becomes the model of mercy and forgiveness in the context of a marital covenant between Himself and His people. He gives hope to His beloved when she knows she deserves nothing but wrath. What a picture of intimacy and true love! What an eye-opener for you to contemplate your relationship to God as the Bride of Christ in such personal terms!

God continues the marriage theme in Hosea: “*In that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master’. I will betroth you to me forever; I will **betroth you** in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will **betroth you** in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord. I will **plant her for myself** in the land; I will **show my love** to the one I called ‘Not my loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not my people,’ ‘You are **my people**’; and they will say, ‘You are my God’” (2:16,19,20,23, emphasis added).*

Why would God go to such great lengths in His Word to open His heart to His people as a Husband bereaved by the most devastating of sins, adultery? Is He not indicating that marriage is more than a coming together of a man and woman in relationship but also a covenant illustration of the sanctity of that union in His sight?

The words that Hosea chooses, *prostitution, adultery, unfaithfulness*, take on even greater significance if we allow our first love for God to deteriorate due to *any* type of distraction. How incumbent it is on us to reflect in the physical, earthly realm of marriage the reality of our devotion to our Groom, Christ. The devotion of the heart that God seeks from His people is poignantly described by Rabbi Menachem Mendel:

“A bridegroom might under the bridal canopy repeat to the bride ‘You are betrothed’ a hundred times. If however he does not add the [Hebrew word] *li*, ‘[You are betrothed] **to me**,’ then it is as if he had said nothing. The entire wedding with all its preparations are worthless. The crucial point is *li*—to me. All of scholarship [is] worthless and all of worship is futile if they do not penetrate my bones. Essential is *li*.<sup>3</sup>

How long-suffering, forgiving, and merciful God expects us to be in relation to the spouse to whom we are joined in covenant. How needy we are of His grace to be able to do so! Although our current culture portrays marriage as a disposable option to other lifestyles, God presents an image of permanency and sanctity as the model for married followers of Christ. Does this require circumcision of the heart and total yieldedness to God’s sovereignty through the Holy Spirit? Absolutely! Does the reality of struggling with our sin nature also demonstrate the necessity of our relationship to others in the body of Christ for strengthening, admonishment, and encouragement (not to mention prayer and fasting!)? Most assuredly!!

Because marriage is analogous to Christ’s relationship with the Church (see Ephesians 5:22-33), Satan has focused special attention on keeping Christian marriages from exemplifying the loving radiance of Jesus. In this “atomistic” culture where people are so disconnected from the context of their relationships,

even marriage can resemble two parallel existences similar to railroad tracks. A few common concerns, such as the children, pets, or maintenance chores, may act as rail ties that connect a couple's lives periodically. They do not, however, see themselves as *one* in the sight of God. In the current Western culture the enemy has kept wives and husbands at bay from the support of the mentoring relationships the Bible calls for, relationships that are nearly non-existent in our churches today. Satan has won this battle. His tactic? Pressure on couples to *make it on their own*.

## **Mentors: The Wisdom of the Wise**

***“They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green”*** (Psalm 92:14).

We mentioned earlier that the Hebraic people did not expect a married couple to make it on their own. Marriages, like individuals, thirst for the mentoring of older people with wisdom and experience. Too much worldly emphasis has influenced couples to either “gut it out or get out of it.” God is restoring the same kind of community support that so greatly strengthened the relationships in the early Church. This support includes *home fellowships*, which will be discussed more fully in Chapters 11 and 12, and *mentoring*.

In light of the biblically Hebraic importance of older people as mentors in our lives, study these statements by Robert Hicks in *The Masculine Journey*. (The statements below made about men can also pertain to the relationship between older and younger women.)

In almost every field today the concept of mentoring is being discussed. It is as if a major corrective move is now taking place in business, industry, and educational circles...[Mentoring] holds true in any kind of relationship where an older man seeks to invest his life in younger men...[T]he mentor contributes several things: a brain to pick on, a shoulder to cry on, and an occasional kick in the pants...[T]he mentor cares for the younger man in the totality of his life and wants to see him become successful in life.

I believe this is the greatest need in the church today. So many younger men in our churches need to hear the voices of older men in some context besides church business meetings. They need the one-on-one, the life experience, the realism of what life was like for them at the same age. Without this mentoring, men either “go it alone” or go it with others who don't know what they are doing!<sup>4</sup>

Examine Proverbs 20:24: *“A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?”* Most older believers “have made enough mistakes to be useful” to younger men and women. The older person has probably experienced first-hand the crisis or confusion a younger person is facing and can comfort and exhort with his or her silver-refined wisdom. How sad that the ignorance, pride, or insecurity of a younger struggler could keep him or her from seeking out a mentor in time of need.

We cannot overemphasize the importance of older people being “involved” in the lives of their family and spiritual community. The Word tells us, “*Children’s children are a crown to the aged*” (Proverbs 17:6). How the grandchildren turn out in life is a true reflection of the grandparent’s parenting of their own children. The values and beliefs that really sank into the hearts of the children of one generation will be reflected in the manner in which they then raise *their* children. Grandparents, stay personally and prayerfully involved with the guidance and training of your children and grandchildren until you die. It is never too late to help make your crown, your grandchildren, more glorious! Mentoring throughout life is biblical. The detrimental loss of the influence of older people is primarily a post-World War II phenomenon. We truly believe that God can use wholehearted believers to undo this tragedy.

In the midst of so much family disintegration, it is perhaps not so unrealistic to consider households of combined generations. Some families are being thrust into this position by job loss or marital breakdown. Others are foregoing nursing homes for their aging parents and making room in their own homes. The proposal to combine households with parents and adult children reflects the Hebraic view of *mishpachah*: family based on spiritual unity as well as on bloodlines. Currently one in three unmarried adults between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-five live with their parents, as do one in eight divorced adults. Obviously major adjustments are required on the emotional as well as the physical plane for both parties.

Many live with bitterness toward their parents and/or children. Followers of Christ must confront this painful sin through the power of the Holy Spirit and seek forgiveness (see Matthew 5:23,24). Regrettably, as the church as well as American society have experienced in the past two generations, the isolation and self-centered independence of the Greek influence have wreaked havoc with our children’s sense of stability and security.

If you cannot possibly imagine yourself reestablishing contact with parents against whom you hold strong feelings, seek counsel from others in the body. They can join you in prayer to understand how much you have been forgiven at the Cross and how God’s grace enables His children to forgive those who have hurt them. Pray for the healing that only Jesus can give in order that you may become an instrument of reconciliation if He so directs. Then pray for His timing and opportunity to humbly seek forgiveness for the unChristlike attitudes you have been governed by.

The authors have concluded from research in economics and business that the current concept of retirement encourages older people to abandon family responsibilities when they reach a certain age. A national plan for retirement first began in Germany following World War I. Facing hyper-inflation, the government needed a way to convince people to save their money rather than spend it. They developed the idea of “saving for retirement,” choosing the age of sixty-five for job severance. This age was chosen because actuarial tables indicated that only one per cent of the population would live beyond that age. (They neglected to tell the populace that ninety-nine per cent of them probably would not live to collect their savings.) Over the decades, saving toward a compulsory retirement age has become standard in most industrialized nations, even as longevity has risen dramatically throughout the world.

To save for the future is biblical: *“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest”* (Proverbs 6:6,7). But this concept has become grossly distorted in the United States. Rather than an admonition to save for old age, “retirement” has become a withdrawal from family responsibilities, a relocation to the “sun belt”, a pleasure-oriented senior citizen culture.

This destructive “retirement system” has not only uprooted older women from helping the younger women (see Titus 2:4,5) but has also fostered the very life of self-indulgence the Bible warns against: *“But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives”* (1 Timothy 5:6). An ever-increasing number of lonely senior ladies exist without purpose in convalescent homes and cavernous old homesteads. Because some have forsaken their God-given responsibility to younger women, has God permitted them to be treated as *“dead even while she lives”*? It is not too late to change this situation.

Has God placed older men and women in your networks of relationship? Some may be your own relatives. Others may be acquaintances who would love to be surrogate family members. Pray for eyes to see those to whom He has given access, then follow up on His lead with a visit or call. Not only will you be inviting them to sense a new purpose and meaning in life, but you will be reaping an extended family for yourself and for your children.

## The Husband

***“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers”*** (1 Peter 3:7)

Husbands who are inconsiderate of their wives not only hurt their spouse but hinder their own ability to communicate with God. How men need to be sensitive to any loss of vitality in their relationship with the Lord! Ephesians 5:25-27 reveals an important duty of the husband in his home: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, **cleansing her** by the washing with water **through the word**, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”* (emphasis added).

The statement *“cleansing her by the washing with water through the word”* indicates a vital role for a husband in his wife’s spiritual development. “Word” in this passage is *rhema*, not *logos*. The husband is not being enjoined in this passage to teach his wife the *logos*, that is, the Bible. His responsibility is far more than that. He is to bring to light the *application* of the truths of God, the *rhema*, to her life. As the priest in his home, he is commanded to uphold God’s will and to teach his wife and family. (This will be discussed more fully under “The Government of the Home,” below.)

As mentioned earlier, part of the restoration of the early Church’s vitality includes the return of the older mentoring sages. God has ordained that mature men of wisdom provide counsel for husbands. Our culture puts great strain on men to “know everything

about everything”, but the Lord doesn’t expect a husband to be all-knowing. He wants a man to trust in the wise counsel and leadership of older men. *“Older men [are] to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance”*(Titus 2:2). Satan knows that men are changed more through personal contact with role models than by any formal teaching. He will do everything to keep younger men away from the sages so that temperate and self-controlled behavior will not be passed along. Even congregations are often subdivided into age-related, homogeneous groupings that shield the generations from close contact with each other.

Congregations should seriously examine the isolation of young men from access to older men, and encourage or even provide opportunity for them to gather *informally* to share their concerns and bear one another’s burdens. Men who find themselves *talked at* by lecturers in church settings (the abstract Greek approach) are really hungering for the rabbinical example of role modeling and the Hebraic experiential approach. Jesus taught with parables and stories because men are more responsive to a pictorial, affective approach. This is why men so often “swap stories” when they get together. They can visualize the situation and relive it with the person sharing it. Men who have no outlet to express their feelings and burdens often lack inner tranquillity and self-control. Could this be contributing to our nation’s rampant family and spousal abuse?

Examine the relationships you currently have with other men in your extended family, your worship community, your social activities, your workplace. Who among these have you called on for encouragement or counsel? Are there any older sages among these men? If not, stop and pray that God would reveal to you those men with whom you can load-bear on a deeper level. Then approach them with the prospect. Be prepared to offer creative alternatives for meeting times, such as early morning before work or opportunities when the two families can meet and you two men can take a walk for awhile. Any perceived inconvenience will quickly be dispelled as you form a bond of trust and accountability.

## The Wife

***“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husband so that, if any of them do not believe in the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives”*** (1 Peter 3:1,2).

In her submission a wife is really yielding to the Lordship of Jesus, Who has set her husband in authority over her. Women need to seek out older women for counsel and wisdom. Nobody expects a young wife to know everything. “[Older women] *can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God*” (Titus 2:4,5).

The relationship between older and younger women is critical. Satan knows that the wisdom passed along in this relationship will keep the Word of God from being maligned. He will do everything to *prevent* these relationships from occurring within the church. There are a million excuses for how you can’t possibly fit another thing into your life.

However, reprioritizing for the sake of harmony in your home is worth any inconvenience when God reveals to you the woman or women who desire to be in a mentoring relationship with you!

Do you have some cherished woman friends whom you recognize in your spirit to be mature women of God? Ask them to share with you their life lessons that touch your present needs, both their successes and failures, and to identify which biblical principles were applied or missed. Then pray about a woman God may reveal to you who is either newer in the faith or earlier in her life pilgrimage who would be blessed to have *you* as her mentor and friend! We have a friend in her twenties who was pleasantly surprised when a younger woman in her congregation shyly approached her to ask if she would disciple her. Our friend had never considered herself to be an “older woman,” but since she herself was being mentored by some older women in her congregation’s care group, she felt pleased to be able to pass along the lessons she was learning and to nurture a new friend as well!

***“The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands  
the foolish one tears hers down”*** (Proverbs 14:1).

Despite the current prevalence of wives and mothers in the workplace, the home still represents the heart of a woman’s influence. Hebraic believers recognized the woman’s great worth as she raised godly children and maintained *shalom bayit*, the peace of the home. In biblical times the *family* rather than the individual was the basic unit of society. Women as well as men were always seen in conjunction with others. For a woman specifically, connectedness came through her husband or her father, the ones God had raised up to provide for and protect her. If her husband died while she was still young, a woman was counseled to remarry so that she not eat of the bread of idleness and gossip: *“Therefore, I would rather the young widows get married, have children and take charge of their homes, so as to give the opposition no occasion for slandering us”*(1 Timothy 5:14, Jewish New Testament).<sup>5</sup>

So treasured was the home that on each weekly Sabbath celebration the wife was extolled by her husband through his reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 (actually, in Jesus’s time, the husband sang it to her!). The truths from those verses were a reminder of the parameters of womanly godliness in the home and the dependent relationship of the spouses with each other. If there was disharmony between the spouses, the situation needed to be amended before the Proverbs selection was read so that hypocrisy would not discolor the Sabbath.

Because marriage was considered a sacred trust rather than a legal obligation, the husband recognized that his wife was *consecrated* to him, set apart for a special relationship. How different the contemporary view of the marriage covenant would be if Christians grasped the significance of both the *covenant* and the *consecration* involved!

As the Holy Spirit guides your husband, he may want to read Proverbs 31:10-31 to you while your children are present. Such expressive appreciation not only affirms your worth to your family but sets before you aspirations of godliness that the Spirit can accomplish in you by grace!



## The Government of the Home

***“The women added, ‘When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?’”*** (Jeremiah 44:19).

The wives referred to in Jeremiah’s quote, above, excused their sin with the defense that their husbands were well aware of their idol worship. Over our years at the retreat center, one of the most common difficulties that married men confessed was an inability to differ with or correct their wives. One method of non-confrontation found the husband playing ignorant. Even the most loving of them admitted that it took great courage to confront his wife or to voice a different view than hers. Yet the Lord’s warning applies to those who feel ignorance is excusable: *“If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?”* (Proverbs 24:12).

On women’s retreats the vast majority of married women would confess control mechanisms that they used on their husbands and families. Sadly, one of the side effects of control is that the children are raised in an atmosphere of duplicity. As they grow, the children observe the unchecked wrongful attitudes and behavior of their mother as she secretly does things “behind the back” of their father. (Obviously, control can also characterize the father and produce the same results.) This too agitates the children. They respond with fear, alienation, rebellion, or withdrawal, carrying within them a distorted view of parental authority and of the authority position in general.

Perhaps you are in a marriage marred by dominant control or subtle manipulation. You may even be at the point of hopelessness that your relationship could ever become more Christlike. Take heart from these encouraging words from author and counselor Lois Mowday:

We need to accept the enormity of our problem. And, with aggressive determination, we need to accept the enormity of our God...He takes broken hearts and hard hearts and restores them. He takes broken lives and makes them whole in fantastic, unforeseeable ways. He takes our shattered dreams and replaces them with new contentment. The ingredients He needs to accomplish these miracles in our lives are repentance, forgiveness, commitment, a decision to put Him first, lives yielded to Him in the middle of excruciating pain, and time.<sup>6</sup>

We cannot say enough concerning the many Christian families that are suffering severe consequences due to the paucity of older women offering themselves as friends and mentors to younger wives and mothers. Are you willing to choose to trust God to work in your spouse’s life as well as in your own as you earnestly seek Him in prayer? And for your own well-being as well as that of your family, are you willing to prayerfully seek out an older woman as a spiritual mentor? If you are an older woman, are you willing to make yourself available to guide and encourage a needy younger woman?

***“He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)”*** (1 Timothy 3:4,5).

Leadership traits of an elder [Hebrew *zaken*], the gray-haired man of both the synagogue and early Church, were learned over time. The primary “school” for development of character was a man’s home: *“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”* (1 Corinthians 11:3). His home leadership was developed in *cooperative relationship* with his wife and was recognized by how he raised his children. Because of the noble character of his wife, this man could join with other elders: *“Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land”* (Proverbs 31:23).

The Hebraic elder was a leader of influence in his community, a shaper of public opinion and a civic leader who was not afraid to dissent. The elders at the city gate made decisions for the entire community. The resolutions they handed down revealed the *halakhah*, the way in which the principles laid down in the Scriptures were to be enacted. Today there is such a great need for mature men of God to be role models of integrity for other men who desire to grow as Christlike leaders: *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The writer of Hebrews stipulates that the aftermath of a person’s life is an essential prerequisite for heeding his teachings: *“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. **Consider the outcome** of their way of life and **imitate their faith**. Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:7,8, emphasis added). The reminder that *“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever”* follows on the heels of *“imitate their way of life.”* This is the Holy Spirit’s admonition for the apostles and for all subsequent church leaders: Follow Jesus’s example of servanthood. Avoid systems that are so impersonal that you cannot individually know or imitate the life of those in leadership. For his welfare and for yours, no leader should become a sacerdotal, a high priest/intermediary, between God and a congregation.

Would you want for your children a teacher who “had all the facts straight” but whose personal moral life was a shambles? We are our brother’s keeper, not to condemn but to come alongside to turn with love toward an obedient and trusting relationship with Christ. Recognize that those in spiritual leadership will come under increased spiritual attack as they impact lives for the glory of God. Have you committed to pray regularly and specifically for the particular needs and families of your spiritual leaders and mentors?

***“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.  
And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.  
Only let us live up to what we have already attained”*** (Philippians 3:15,16).

While we were living in Israel Mike overheard two men in our neighborhood having a heated debate. Our Jewish host Bert asked if he thought that the relationship was being jeopardized by the strong disagreement. Mike certainly thought that the men couldn’t

walk away as friends after such intense shouting. Bert replied, "That is the way it is with Gentiles. Whenever they disagree they become alienated and estranged from each other. That isn't so with Jewish people. Our *relationships* are more important than the issues we may disagree with." We were deeply convicted by Bert's observation. We also realized how greatly married couples need to treasure their relationship and not become divided over issues: *"He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends"* (Proverbs 17:9).

Have you noticed the incredible increase of intolerance for interpersonal differences permeating both our society and the church as well? People are walking away from each other over trivial matters. This intolerance is destroying marriages, families, and friendships. The Greek/Gentile tendency is to take an adversarial approach to disagreements and react personally when others differ with you, to the point that your mutual affections are often alienated. The Greek influence of win/lose, right/wrong depreciates your relational joy and focuses on the outcome of the decision. From this vantage point, someone must be the winner, someone the loser.

Believers fail to recognize that differences exist because *we are different*. Besides gender, personality, and background, spiritual gifting may cause us to perceive situations differently. A person who is an exhorter will want to see the steps taken that will immediately bring about resolution, while a person with a mercy gift may avoid facing a difficult issue out of concern for the other's feelings. Rather than trying to persuade the other person to agree with our view, let us more consistently heed Paul's admonition to let God make the point of discussion clear (see Philippians 3:15).

In Acts 15:36-41, Paul and Barnabas argued over whether to take Mark with them on their next missionary trip: *"They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus"* (v. 39). Even though a *"sharp disagreement"* had occurred, it did not rupture their relationship in the way that many Gentiles read into this event. Remember that it had been Barnabas who had courageously made contact with Paul after his conversion when everyone else was still fearful of him: *"When he [Paul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus"* (Acts 9:26,27).

When that disagreement arose, the church at Antioch put the matter into the hands of God: *"But Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord"* (v. 40). It is doubtful that Barnabas denounced Paul to young Mark, for Mark later joined Paul in his ministry: *"My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him)"* (Colossians 4:10); *"Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry"* (2 Timothy 4:11).

In another situation, Paul, in a remarkable act of courage, had to confront Peter: *"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was in the wrong"* (Galatians 2:11). Paul expressed the intense emotions that such encounters cost him: *"I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling"* (1 Corinthians 2:3). Throughout the Scriptures the ability to confront an issue while maintaining the relation-

ship is seen as the pattern of God's people with each other: *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault"* (Matthew 18:15); *"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift"* (Matthew 5:23,24).

Isn't this a major weakness in our relationships? By not loving one another enough to recognize and confront our differences, we knock the blossom off relationships that were meant to glorify the Father. We are so afraid to confront issues on which we disagree that we allow feelings of woundedness or bitterness to fester. Underlying tension and apprehension become the hallmark between us. Commitment and true fellowship require belonging to one another vulnerably, warts and all.

The authors believe that God expects, and possibly even brings about, differing opinions in marriages and other close relationships. As with other things in life that we value dearly, we might hold on tightly to our opinions and beliefs with strong conviction. But by His grace and the teachings in His Word, God expects us to work through these differences whenever possible. We must learn how to *confront with love*.

***"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense"*** (Proverbs 19:11).

Most communication differences or issues between spouses or others in relationship can be resolved if the conflict is viewed as a point of difference between the parties, *i.e.*, *"We have a problem"* not *"You have a problem."* If your home seems filled with disorder, squabbling children, and frantic schedules, don't accuse your spouse of gross mismanagement or your children of blatant rebellion. Instead, define the nature of the problem: Too many activities? Late nights? Unrealistic expectations of orderliness? Too little cooperation? Once the problem has been defined, then set out possible solutions to achieve the goal. In this case it might be harmony in the home, or task delegation, or elimination of certain outside activities. Focus on identifying and solving the problematic issue rather than on changing your mate's personality!

We in Christ are also in each other as members of His body. We must permit our differences to be spoken with the emotional intensity with which they are held without feeling threatened by the emotions expressed. (Keep in mind, however, that *self-control* is a fruit of the Spirit that evidences His work: *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"* (Proverbs 15:1). The stoic approach that the western church inherited from the Greek philosophers frowns on any display of strong emotion.

Emotional expression is biblical, however, as long as it is not aimed as a weapon at anyone: *"Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing"* (Proverbs 12:18). Many men in particular are caught in the stoic trap. They hold in their emotions for so long that when they finally do release feelings, they often express them destructively. If we grasp our biblically Hebraic roots—that *relationships* are more important than *issues*—our faith can trust that in all differences *"God will make it plain."*