

30 Days
to a
Better
Marriage

Andy Lockridge

INTRODUCTION

We have all heard the saying that practice makes perfect. No where is this more true than in a marriage.

Successful, fulfilling marriages don't just happen, they take lots of effort.

Unfortunately, most of us have never been taught the basics of how to make a marriage work.

The purpose of this book is to help you practice the steps to improving your marriage.

We offer you 30 steps, one for each day of the month.

Each day's guidelines are short so you can read them together as a couple.

Each day concludes with a suggestion on how to apply that day's principle to your marriage. We call it a MARRIAGE BOOSTER.

It is our belief that if you put these 30 principles to work over the next month, you will see significant growth in your marriage relationship.

Let us know what happens.

Andy and Nancy Lockridge



MARRIAGE IS A FOUR LETTER WORD

Most of us are familiar with the fairy tale, “Cinderella.” Cinderella marries Prince Charming and they live happily ever after.

Or do they? We really don’t know because we never get to see the rest of the story.

The problem is, when we get married, our wedding day is the fairy tale. As soon as we walk away as husband and wife, reality begins to set in. We quickly discover that this is indeed not a fairy tale.

Before we were married, Nancy had a roommate

who was engaged to be married to a young man. She overheard the conclusion to a rather heated discussion the two of them were having about their relationship. The young man said in a rather firm voice, “Marriage is a four letter word, Mary, WORK.”

Sadly, most of us have never been told that marriage is a four letter word: WORK. Without hard work by both the husband and wife, the marriage will not survive. After 32 years of marriage, Nancy and I are still hard at work. Will you join us for the next 29 days?

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MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Turn to your spouse and tell them that for the next 29 days, you will make a special effort to work hard on your marriage relationship.*

LEGAL SEPARATION

I distinctly remember the morning following my honeymoon night. I woke up, looked around and there was my new bride lying next to me in bed. Then I thought, "I don't feel any different than I did yesterday when I woke up." I realized right then that being married was not based on my feelings. It was up to me to start a new chapter in my life and that meant living as a married man, regardless of how I felt.

One of the problems in marriages is that the husband or wife (or both) fail to emotionally leave their parents or their single lifestyle. In some cases, they keep their same schedule and activities and fail to include their spouse. In other cases, they continue to go back to their parents

for sympathy and a listening ear. While it is not wrong to have activities that do not include your spouse and while it is not wrong to continue to value the advice or input of your parents, once you are married, your spouse should become your primary companion and confidant. Your marriage means that the two of you have both left what is in your past and you are now forging a new identity which includes you and your spouse. You have now become independent from your parents and your single lifestyle and dependent upon your spouse.

Marriage is an intentional decision to leave your parents and old lifestyle and start a new journey with your spouse.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *On a scale of one (least) to ten (most) how would you rate yourself on the following two questions. How would your spouse rate you?*

1. To what extent do you feel that you have emotionally left your parents?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. To what extent do you feel that you have emotionally left your single lifestyle behind?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

THE GLUE THAT HOLDS EVERYTHING TOGETHER

One of the best illustrations of marriage comes from a kindergarten activity.

Take some glue and two pieces of paper. Glue the two pieces of paper together. Wait 30 minutes and then try to separate the paper back into the two original pieces. It can't be done. Bits from one piece stick to the other. The two original pieces can never be reconstructed.

The two individuals in a marriage are like those two pieces of glued together paper. When we are single, we are independent and live in relative isolation. We are constantly thinking in terms of self preservation and what is important to me personally.

One of the goals in marriage is to move away from isolation and toward oneness with my spouse. To be married means to form a team; not to continue to live in isolation as an individual. Thus, in a marriage, as a couple, we are either growing toward one another in oneness or drifting apart from one another toward isolation. Needless to say, to drift apart from one another toward isolation will ultimately destroy your marriage relationship.

To grow toward oneness, I must work in cooperation, not competition, with my spouse. I need to see my spouse as my teammate, not as my enemy.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Look your spouse in the eye and say to them, "You are not my enemy."*

LET'S GET INTIMATE

There is a marriage symbol in an African country which is given to couples who get married there as a reminder of their marriage vows. It is a piece of wood, carved into a chain with the head of the husband on one side of the chain and the head of the wife on the opposite end of the chain. As you look closely at the carving with the heads on opposite ends, you realize that there is not a joint in the carving. It is one whole piece of wood fashioned into a symbol of the oneness or intimacy that a marriage is to represent.

This intimacy takes many forms. It is the sharing of a man and a woman's feelings and emotions, their hopes and their dreams, their joys and their sorrows. It is the sharing of their fears and failures, their hurts and pains, their material possessions or lack thereof. It the sharing of their bodies sexually, the sharing of their minds intellectually, and the sharing of their feelings emotionally. It is the sharing of past, present, and future. It is total and complete intimacy and it is done without any shame.

To be intimate, to be totally open and transparent, makes me vulnerable. What if my spouse doesn't like what I tell them or share with them? What

if they retaliate in a way that is negative rather than positive? That is the risk of being one. How I treat my spouse will eventually come back and affect me because we are one.

In this intimacy however, there can be great joy and reward. Someone once said that if someone knows everything about you, they will either become your best friend or your worst enemy. We have discussed yesterday that your spouse is not your enemy. Therefore, intimacy brings the joy and reward of deep friendship. It brings great freedom and unity in my relationship with my spouse. This results in a deeper understanding and appreciation of my partner. It puts me on the road to a deep and fulfilling relationship based on honesty, understanding, and acceptance.

Obviously, intimacy is not a onetime event. It is a lifelong process that takes you toward greater transparency and vulnerability. You are the only one whom you can change in a relationship; you can't change your spouse. But, what you do has an affect upon your spouse, so as you work at becoming more intimate; you will help move your relationship in that direction.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Identify one area of your" life where you could grow in intimacy with your spouse. Then identify one thing you could do today to move yourself forward in that area toward greater intimacy in your marriage. That may mean confession and asking for forgiveness for something in the past, or being willing to open up to your spouse about feelings that you have been hiding or, being more playful and free sexually, or allowing your spouse to have greater freedom financially. Whatever it is, realize that as you take this first step toward openness and transparency, there will be many more steps to follow. Keep growing together!*

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I (Andy) remember the first time I visited the Grand Canyon. I had heard and read about how vast and awesome the canyon was. Then, when I stood at the edge and saw that vast expanse dropping off in front of me and stretching for miles and miles on both the left and the right, I was struck by how much greater it was than I had ever imagined. It is the only time in my life that I can think of where the reality of the experience far exceeded all the hype leading up to it.

All of us have had great expectations about something only to come away sadly disappointed. Nowhere can this be truer than in a marriage. Whether it is expectations about the wedding itself, expectations about the honeymoon, or expectations about life happily ever after, there are countless opportunities for your spouse to disappoint you, and disappoint you, they do!

One of the major issues that a couple must come to grips with in order to have a successful marriage is the issue of expectations. There were many times in our marriage when I had expectations of what Nancy should do or be, and she lived up to

very few of them. With my wife not living up to my expectations, what was I to do?

I realized that I had two choices at that point. I could get angry at her because she didn't live up to what was "ideal" in my mind, or I could surrender those expectations and view her as a gift who is in my life to enrich it, not to make me miserable. I decided to take the latter approach.

When we say our wedding vows, we say words like, "For richer or for poorer" and "in sickness and in health." Those phrases are not idle phrases. They are meant for us to realize that the role of our spouse is not to make me happy or to meet

my expectations. If, for example, our spouse comes down with a debilitating illness, we may need to be their caregiver for many years. That certainly was not what we expected when we said our marriage vows, but it is what we pledged to each other none the less. Those vows have nothing to do with our expectations for happiness, but they have everything to do with how I view my spouse.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Write down on a piece of paper all the expectations you have of your spouse. Now, tear that piece of paper to bits or shred it as a symbol that you are going to surrender all the expectations you have of your spouse and are going to view you spouse as a gift, bringing whatever they have, little or much, to your marriage relationship.*

TIME ALONE FOR TWO

When you first started dating, where did you go? What did you do? Wherever you went and whatever you did, I'll bet you spent some uninterrupted time together. In fact, you probably rearranged a lot of your other activities just to get that time together. That was one way that you got to know each other better. As you dated, you were applying a very important principle to your relationship: Relationships grow when you spend uninterrupted time together.

Guess what happens once you get married and you have to go to work each day. Or what happens when you start having children or you begin joining groups or organizations to get to know some other people? You stop spending uninterrupted time together; you stop dating. When you stop dating, your relationship stops growing.

Nancy and I have three children. From the time they were little (maybe 3 or 4 years old) I would take each family member out on a date night. We chose Friday night as our date night, so I dated Nancy on the first Friday of the month, the oldest child on the second Friday, the second oldest on the third Friday, etc.

The important thing was that at least once a month, Nancy and I got a babysitter and had a night alone together. No kids, no friends, no relatives, no phone; just the two of us alone for some uninterrupted time together. Sometimes, I planned the evening, sometimes Nancy did. Sometimes we just "winged it" on the spur of the moment. It really didn't matter. We were spending an uninterrupted evening together and that helped our relationship to grow. Remember?

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Discuss with your spouse when you can have a date night, at least once a month. Schedule it on your calendar as a priority before other activities start crowding in. Then, once it is scheduled, don't allow anything except an emergency to take its place in your schedule*

THE VALUE OF TEAMWORK

We have a good friend who played volleyball and ran track in high school. She told us the story of what it was like to participate on each of those high school teams. Her volleyball coach screamed and yelled at her for her mistakes and tried to shame her into performing better. The result was that she lost all confidence in her ability to play volleyball, ended up being benched, and still carries some of those wounds to this day. Her track coach, on the other hand, was an encourager and a morale booster. When she struggled, he would come alongside her, tell her how much she was needed on the team, and how she had what it took to win if she would just keep at it. As a result of her coach's encouragement, she excelled to become captain of the track team. She still enjoys running for exercise today.

As our friend told the story of the two teams, she related it to her marriage. Marriage is the ultimate team event and we can either feel "benched," as she did with her volleyball coach, or we can feel encouraged to keep trying, persevering through our struggles, as she did with her track coach. In our marriages, we sometimes do to our spouse what her volleyball coach did to her. When our spouse struggles, shows weaknesses, or faces

challenges, we shame them. We communicate to them that they are failing us. We want to "bench" them so that they know they aren't doing what we expect of them. Somehow we think that this will motivate them to perform better. Just like this tactic didn't work for her on the volleyball team, it doesn't work with our spouses either. The more we "bench" them with shame, the more incapable they become of operating at all as part of our team in our marriage. Just as a coach who continually shames a player, a spouse who continually shames their spouse, creates an environment of failure that destroys the team.

On the other hand, with our spouse we can take on a team mentality that operates as her track coach did. First and foremost, our spouse needs to know that they are the most valuable asset we have on our team. They bring skills to our team that we need and that betters us. When they struggle or fail, we should reaffirm our love for them. We should encourage them, rather than "benching" them with shame. We should stand by our teammate. By encouraging them, they will find strength to become the best team player they can be.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Ask your spouse to identify one area in which you can become a better team player in your marriage. Then, take their suggestion seriously and "practice" in that area so you become a better marriage team.*

DON'T LEAVE THE LID OFF THE PLAY DOH

I remember playing with Play Doh as a little boy. It was fun to take that soft, malleable clay-like material and make all kinds of shapes and figures. Then, one day, I left the lid off the can. When I came back to play with it a week or so later, I discovered that my Play Doh was now hard like a rock. It had lost its softness and instead of changing shape moment by moment in my hands, now it was hard and unmanageable. All I could do was throw it in the trash.

Yesterday, we discussed the importance of teamwork in a marriage. Today, we want to look at a major obstacle to teamwork in a marriage and that is “an unwillingness to forgive my spouse”. We can think of our heart as the “Play Doh” in our marriage. Our heart, like a new can of Play Doh, should be soft and responsive toward our spouse. We should be quick to love, quick to forgive, and quick to say, “I am sorry, please forgive me.”

Unfortunately, as time passes in our marriage, too often the lid gets left off the can of our heart. Anger, bitterness, and resentment creeps in and our heart response toward our spouse is no longer

soft and loving, but harsh and hardened. Words become biting, not gentle, and attitudes become adversarial, not cooperative. Instead of becoming our spouses’ biggest encourager and cheerleader, we become our spouses sparring partner and their biggest critic.

How do we reverse that trend? We reverse it by not holding grudges, by being quick to apologize and quick to forgive, by becoming an encourager, not an adversary.

Your attitude toward your spouse will determine how you respond to them. Think back over the past 24 hours. What has been your tone of voice toward your spouse? Has it been hard and critical or soft and gentle? If it has been hard and critical, then the “Play Doh” of your heart is hardening. If left to continue, many people get to the point where they throw their hardened marriage heart in the trash and then hope to start over with someone else. Unfortunately, the problem is not “someone else”. The problem is my hardened heart and that pattern will then continue again in that new relationship. Don’t let that happen to you.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Think back over the past 24 hours. Is there anything you need to apologize to your spouse for (harsh words, a critical spirit, anger, resentment, etc.)? Take a moment to apologize by saying to your spouse, “I am sorry for my Will you forgive me?” Then work at becoming your spouses’ biggest encourager and cheerleader each day.*

A CHICKEN OR A DUCK?

I once heard the story of five ducks and one chicken that lived on a farm. The ducks and the chicken were inseparable. Everywhere the ducks went, the chicken followed. Everything the ducks did, the chicken did.

Then, one day there was a very heavy rain. After the downpour, the ducks and the chicken ventured out of the barn to look around. In the middle of the yard was a huge puddle of water from the rain. The ducks excitedly jumped in and started swimming while the chicken jumped in and then jumped right back out. To its dismay, it didn't like the water. It was a chicken, not a duck.

Many couples enter marriage with a list of things about their spouse that they want to change. Unfortunately, just as you can't make a chicken into a duck, you can't make your spouse into something they are not. They are who they are and they will most likely always be that way.

That is why one of the keys to a better marriage is to accept your spouse the way they are. You will never change them so don't bother to try. You married your spouse because of who they are, the total package, both strengths and

weaknesses. They married you for who you are, the total package; both strengths and weaknesses. Rather than wishing your spouse was someone they are not, focus your attention on who they are. Their strengths will often compensate for your weaknesses and your strengths will often compensate for their weaknesses. Learn to appreciate each other and work together effectively as a team. That doesn't mean that you bury issues that bother you and never talk about them. It does mean that after you discuss those issues, you must accept your spouses' response and love and accept them whether they change or not; as long as those issues do not bring physical harm or abuse to either person in the relationship.

When you focus on what your spouse is not, you are living in a fantasy world. You are not looking at your spouse as they really are, but as you want them to be. As long as you choose to continue to not accept them as they are, your marriage relationship will not grow. You will only improve your marriage by giving your spouse love and acceptance. Your love and acceptance will free your spouse up to reach their fullest potential in life and it will free you up to make a positive contribution to your marriage relationship.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Write on a piece of paper the five things that bug you the most about your spouse. Then decide that you will never dwell on these things again. Shred that paper as an act of symbolically removing those thoughts from your life.*

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

It took me (Andy) over 20 years of marriage to learn how important it is to listen to my wife. I am a goal and task oriented person. Before I finish one task, I am already focused on the next one. That attitude carried over into my relationship with Nancy. When she would talk to me, I would be watching television or reading the newspaper or planning out my next project. I was communicating to her that she was not as important to me as all of those other activities.

She rightfully understood that if I was not looking her in the eyes, I was really not listening to her. The eyes are the windows to the soul and she could look in my eyes and tell that I was not there emotionally connecting with her.

I also had to learn to just be a listener; to listen without trying to offer advice or solve her problems; to listen without being judgmental. This goes against every fiber of my being, but it is essential that I give Nancy my ear and my

undivided attention if we are going to grow in our marriage relationship. To do that, we aim for 10 minutes each day that is uninterrupted listening time where we can each talk and we can each listen for five minutes to each other.

We often do that by going on walks together or by sitting down at the table or on the couch with a cup of coffee or tea. This was especially a challenge when our children were small. A good goal then was to have that listening time after we got them all in bed.

If you have ever been around a marine, it doesn't take long before you hear them say, "HUA". HUA stands for heard, understood, acknowledged. HUA is a great thing to remember in marriage. Our goal should be to hear what our spouse said, understand what they said, and acknowledge what they said. If we do that, we will truly communicate with them in a meaningful way.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Put down the newspaper, turn off the television, and unplug the phone. Find a place where the two of you can be alone for 10 minutes. Look each other in the eye and truly listen to each other. Try to practice this on a daily basis. If you travel out of town as I do, then call your spouse on the phone and listen and talk for at least 10 minutes each day (5 minutes for each of you).*

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DON'T AGREE?

I (Andy) got into a political discussion the other day with one of my relatives. We are good friends and get along well with each other. However, we have opposite views politically. My relative would state something he didn't like about the political candidate I favored. I would counter with something I didn't like about the candidate he favored. Then he countered me, and I countered him. Back and forth we went for about ten minutes. After those ten minutes, two things were very obvious.

First, there are two sides to every story. We each had our own views, but they were very different. Once I understood his viewpoint, I could see why he felt the way he did. Second, neither one of us were going to change the others' mind. We chuckled about it and decided to talk about something else.

Conflicts and disagreements are a natural and common part of all relationships, including marriage. Whenever you get two people together who are honest with each other, there will be disagreements. Many couples feel that if they have a conflict or disagreement that their marriage is

falling apart. In actuality, during a conflict or disagreement, your marriage is trying to grow, not fall apart.

In marriage, it is important that couples learn to agree to disagree. In fact, on most issues in which you disagree with your spouse, you will probably both be right. Given your viewpoint on the issue, you are right. Given your spouse's viewpoint on the issue, they are right. Given this situation, what is a couple to do?

Learn to compromise on issues that need resolution so your marriage can grow. Find a "happy medium" that you can both give on in certain areas so you can reach a unified consensus or resolution. On issues that don't require resolution or compromise, agree to disagree. After all, if you both agreed on everything, then one of you would be unnecessary! Learn to appreciate and value your spouse's viewpoint. Remember, you chose them from all the other people in the world to marry. You appreciated their opinions before you were married. You can learn to appreciate them even more now that you are married.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Identify an area of your marriage that causes disagreements. Discuss with your spouse whether or not that area needs resolution. If so, reach an agreeable compromise. What can you each give in on so you can reach a mutually agreeable solution? If the area does not need resolution, agree to disagree agreeably.*

REACH OUT AND TOUCH

I remember reading a book several years ago where the author stated that in order to be an emotionally well adjusted person; we need an average of 13 hugs per day. How many times have you hugged your spouse today? While I don't think there is anything magical in having 13 hugs a day rather than 12, I do think this brings out an important marriage principle. We need to touch our spouse in a gentle and loving way many times each day. There is a therapeutic, healing power in human touch.

I once heard about an orphanage in a third world country where babies were kept in cribs all day long. Because of a shortage of staff in the orphanage, the only human contact the babies had was for feeding and diaper changing. The

mortality rate in the orphanage was very high. Then someone got the idea to have people come into the orphanage and do nothing but hold the babies. Amazingly, the death rate dropped. There

is great value in gentle, loving touch.

Too often in our marriages, we don't realize the power we have when we touch our spouse. A kiss, a hug, a gentle touch on the shoulder as we pass by, walking hand in hand, all of these communicate love in a meaningful way. Obviously, the gentle touching and caressing that goes on in the sexual relationship is a key part of a marriage, but just as important each day are the non-sexual touches we give each other that say to our partner, "I love you, and you are important to me."

Several years ago, AT&T had a phone ad that urged people to "reach out and touch someone." Obviously when people placed those phone calls and touched someone, it was good for AT&T's business. Let me encourage you to reach out and touch your spouse in a gentle and loving way many times each day. It will be good for your marriage.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Give your spouse a hug or a kiss, or both!*

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Imagine for a moment that you received a phone call from the president of the United States and he wanted to come to your house for a visit. How would you feel and how would you react to him when he was in your home? Let's go a step further and assume that you didn't vote for him. Indeed, you don't really agree with him or support his views as president.

My guess is that even though you didn't vote for him, don't agree with him, and don't support his views, you would still treat him with respect. You would feel honored to have him in your home and you would go out of your way to make his visit pleasant. Why? Because his office (the presidency) commands respect whether you like him or not or agree with him or not.

Now let's relate this principle to our marriage. When we married our spouse, we felt they were the most important person in the world (even

more important than the president). While we dated, we thought about them constantly, couldn't imagine living without them, and hung on their every word. We gave them our undivided attention and respect. Now that we are married, they still deserve our respect.

There is an old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." One of the main reasons marriages fail is that couples stop treating each other with respect. In fact, scientific research confirms this. Dr. John Gottman, professor of psychology at the University of Washington led a research team that spent twenty years studying two thousand couples who had been married twenty to forty years to the same spouse. They all had one thing in common. Whenever they talked, they always had "a strong undercurrent of two basic ingredients: love and respect. These are the direct opposite of and antidote for-contempt, perhaps the most corrosive force in marriage."

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Take a moment to reflect upon the tone of voice you use when you speak to your spouse. Do you speak with a tone of love and respect? If not, you are undermining the foundation of your marriage. Decide that from now on, you will always speak to your spouse with an attitude of love and respect.*

Quote is from John Gottman, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994, p.61)

BACON AND EGGS

One morning, the chicken and the pig were discussing what they thought the farmer would have for breakfast that day. The pig said that the farmer liked eggs and the chicken replied that the farmer really liked bacon. “That’s easy enough for you to say,” responded the pig. “That would be a contribution from you, but it would mean total commitment from me.”

When it comes to making our marriage work, we need to be pigs and not chickens. A contribution to our marriage is not sufficient, we must bring total commitment. Anything less will lead to a subtle but constant chipping away at the foundation of our marriage, until it crumbles and falls in ruin.

I am sure that virtually every couple who gets married believes that their marriage will last “until death do us part.” They are so “in love” that they can’t imagine anything else. Eventually, however, the feelings of love diminish and the routines of being husband and wife sets in. Disagreements

surface, conflicts occur, and feelings of love are replaced by feelings of anger or even hatred.

What is a couple to do?

As we discussed on Day 11, conflicts and disagreements are a natural and common part of all relationships. When conflicts occur and the feelings of love disappear, it is important to remember that love is not a feeling, but a choice. I can continue to love my spouse whether I feel like it or not. I can choose to treat them with love and respect whether I feel like it or not. I can choose to move toward harmony and oneness with them whether I feel like it or not. Emotions follow actions, so, if I choose to be committed and act like I am committed to my spouse, my feelings will eventually follow. One way to act committed is to remove the word “divorce” from your vocabulary. When you act with commitment and speak with commitment, you will never again utter the word “divorce” in your conversation with your spouse.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Tell your spouse that divorce will never be an option that you will consider in your marriage relationship from this day forward.*

WHO'S NUMBER 1?

As a fan of our favorite sports team, each year we are hoping this will be the year that our team wins a championship. Regardless of the sport, we are hoping that this will be the year that we can truly say, "We are number one."

As a married person, one of the key questions you have to ask yourself is, "Who is number one in my marriage?" Or, to put it another way, "Who is more important in this relationship, me or my spouse?" This may seem like an easy question to answer, "I am of course." I would like to propose that the correct answer for a better marriage is, "My spouse is the most important person in this relationship." My spouse is number one.

All of us are by nature, selfish people. This self centeredness can get us in a lot of trouble. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that if I live as if I am the most important person in my marriage, and if my spouse lives as if he/she is the most important person, then our marriage is a continual power struggle.

For years, I (Andy) lived as if I was the most important person in our marriage. Nancy couldn't

plan anything that she wanted to do because she would always have to change her calendar to fit mine.

Our marriage revolved around the sports season. Don't bother me during Monday night football or the Saturday game of the week. With the coming of ESPN, I could watch sports 24 hours a day. My wife got the "leftovers" in my life.

For you, the issue may not be sports. It may be your work, fishing, car, or some other hobby. It may be your children, as important as they are. It really doesn't matter what the most important thing is in your marriage prior to this. From now on, the most important person in your marriage needs to be your spouse.

Until you start putting your spouse as number one, your marriage is going to struggle. The amazing thing is if you put your spouse as number one and live that way consistently, sooner or later, your spouse will reciprocate. You will eventually both try to "outdo" each other by serving one another and meeting each others needs. Then you will experience true marital harmony and joy.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Do one thing today for your spouse that you are sure will communicate to them that they are the most important thing in the world to you. If you are not sure what to do, ask them for suggestions.*

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Many years ago, I read the book, "Contact: The First Four Minutes" by Leonard Zunin. The premise of his book is that what two people communicate to each other in the first four minutes of contact will determine the future of that relationship. My dog was a great example of that principle.

Many of us have had a dog at some point in our lives. One of the things I enjoyed about my dog was the welcome I got when I came home. My dog would come running up to me and jump on me with its tail wagging furiously. Do you know how I responded to my dog? I would pet it, scratch it, play with it, and chase it. I would give it all kinds of positive attention. My dogs' enthusiastic greeting was rewarded with attention from me.

My dog was a master psychologist. My dog understood something that most husbands and wives don't. My dog understood that you can model the behavior you want to receive.

Too often in a marriage, spouses forget this principle. We forget that one of the basic lessons

we learn in life is to treat others as we want to be treated. Coupled with that, we tend to forget the principle we learned on Day 3, that my spouse is not my enemy. When something goes wrong, instead of modeling love and kindness, many spouses think in terms of revenge. They spend their time thinking of how they are going to get even or pay their spouse back for some perceived offense. They need to go back and learn a lesson from their dog.

How would you like your spouse to act or treat you? Picture that in your mind and then begin to model that for them. Be a living, breathing demonstration each day of how you want to be treated. If you practice this principle faithfully over a period of time, you will be surprised at the positive response you will get from your spouse. Just as your dog can win you over to playing with them by their loving greeting each time they see you, so you can win your spouse over by giving them a loving greeting each time you see them. If your spouse is a good hearted person (and most spouses are), then they will begin to respond back to you in the fashion with which they have been treated.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Make a decision that from now on, you will greet your spouse warmly (hug, kiss, etc.) when you see each other again after being apart for a few hours.*

THE POWER OF YOUR WORDS

I once heard the story of a couple who had been married for many years. They were having marital problems and went to see a marriage counselor. The wife told the counselor that she didn't feel loved. The counselor asked the husband, "Do you love your wife?" "Of course I do," the husband replied. "I told her I loved her 25 years ago when we got married and nothing has changed since then. If it does, I will tell her".

That story illustrates one of the key ingredients in a marriage: good, positive communication. We communicate both by what we say and by what we don't say. While the husband in the story above told his wife that he loved her on their wedding day, his wife needed to hear him say that on a daily basis. In fact, in a marriage, spouses need to hear not just "I love you", but they both need to hear positive and encouraging words from their spouse each day.

I'm sure that each of us can think of married couples we know that we are embarrassed to be around because of how negatively they speak about their partner. These are not happy couples and they will not be happy until they learn to speak positive, encouraging words to each other. Everyone has good points and bad points, strengths and weaknesses. We need to learn to focus on the positive strengths of our spouse and tell them daily how much we appreciate those qualities.

As I look back over my life, I remember the confidence and pride I felt whenever people praised me and said positive things about me. I also remember the rejection and shame I felt when someone said something negative about me. Our spouse should be our best friend. Let's make sure we build them up and encourage them each day by what we say.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Say to your spouse, "I love you" at least once each day.*

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

If you have been faithfully reading each day's principle and faithfully applying the marriage booster each day, it might be dawning on you that much of the marriage relationship involves clear communication. However, clear communication can be challenging. There are six different things that happen in any conversation

1. What I said
2. What you said
3. What I thought I said
4. What I thought you said
5. What you thought I said
6. What you thought you said

When you think about the fact that these six things are happening simultaneously in every conversation between husbands and wives, you can begin to understand that problems in communication can and do occur regularly. How do we reduce these misunderstandings? Here are three concepts that have worked well for Nancy and me.

First, make sure you are talking with each other in the same room. Often, in our busyness, we try

to carry on a conversation with our spouse while we rush from room to room in the house. That is not a good recipe for effective communication.

Second, look your spouse in the eye as you talk to them. Eye contact communicates love and undivided attention. It is sure to result in deeper understanding and communication.

Third, use "I" messages instead of "you" messages. "I" messages state what I think or what I feel. They give a window for my spouse to gaze deeper into my life. Examples: "I would like to go out on a date with you on Friday night." "I feel that I need some uninterrupted time with you."

Contrast this to "you" messages which can be judgmental or accusing. Examples: "You don't seem interested in spending time together." "You are working more hours lately and aren't around much."

The goal of clear communication in a marriage is a challenge, but applying these three concepts will help you grow in your ability to communicate clearly with your spouse.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Identify which of the three concepts mentioned above you need to work on to improve your ability to communicate clearly with your spouse. Identify one thing you can do today to improve your communication in that area.*

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

When Nancy and I were dating, we couldn't get over how much alike we were. We enjoyed doing things together and became best friends. Then we got married. The longer we are married, the more obvious it becomes how different we really are. Those differences have created conflict, and we have had to learn that because something (or someone) is different, that doesn't make it wrong. It just makes it different. We have discovered that those differences actually complement us and make us better as individuals as well as stronger as a couple.

In addition to the obvious outward physical differences between men and women, there are many other differences as well.

- Women are usually more personal than men. Women focus on relationships; men tend to focus on goals and activities. Women find their identity in their relationships. Men find their identity in their work.
- When angry, women tend to be more verbal and men tend to be more physical.

- Women have a lower metabolism than men. Men and women differ in their chromosomes, cells, hormones, brains, skeletal structure, blood, and in the size of their kidneys, liver, stomach, appendix, and lungs.
- In speech, women use three to four times as many words per day than men.
- Women catch subliminal messages quicker and more accurately than men.
- Men tend to be more analytical and logical. Women tend to be more emotional and more in tune with their feelings.

What does all this mean? It means that being a woman or being a man is not wrong, it is just different. When acknowledged, valued, and appreciated, those differences can be used to complement each other. Working together, you become a well rounded team that will protect you, as a couple, from bad judgment and "blind spots" and potential errors in decision making.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *List three ways you differ from your spouse. Share with your spouse how those differences complete you and make you a better person.*

AS CERTAIN AS DEATH AND TAXES

Back in day 5, we mentioned that the danger with expectations is that they set you up for disappointment. In this chapter, we are going to discuss something in marriage that is as certain as death and taxes: problems. If you are married, you will experience problems and conflict with your spouse. In fact, problems are a typical part of marriage. You can expect them. As someone once said, "If two people agree on everything, then one of them is unnecessary." So, since both of you are necessary in your marriage, expect problems and disagreements.

As we mentioned in day 19, when Nancy and I first got married, we thought we were alike in many areas, and indeed we were. The longer we are together however, the more we recognize that we are two very different people. In fact, in almost every area of life, we see things differently.

You can look at the husband and wife as the flip sides of a coin. The coin is one coin, but it has two different sides, a heads and a tails. Take away one of those sides and it wouldn't be a coin. Take away one of the spouse's perspectives and it wouldn't be a marriage.

One of the problems we have in marriage is that we don't appreciate the flip side of the coin. We tend to see things only from our perspective and that produces conflicts and problems. The great thing about problems in a marriage is that they can be approached for the greater common good of the relationship. As both husband and wife listen to each other and seek to understand each others viewpoint, they can craft a solution to the problem that leads them into a deeper relationship. Your differences really become the strengths that cement your relationship together in a deeper way.

How do we do that? We grow in our marriage by learning to compromise. For Nancy and me, compromising involves four steps. (1) Clearly define the problem (2) Listen to each other's viewpoint (3) Seek to understand each other's viewpoint (4) Identify a mutually agreeably compromise. When we follow these steps, we can "solve" our problem in a way that both of us can live with. That moves us forward in a unified and harmonious way so that our marriage can grow and mature.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *What is one "problem" area in your marriage that is a concern to you? What compromise can you reach in that area that will be mutually agreeably to both of you?*

SEXUAL DIFFERENCES

On day 19, we talked about the differences between men and women. One of the areas in which those differences manifest themselves the most is in the sexual relationship. For example, when it comes to sex, men tend to be physically oriented; women tend to be emotionally and relationally oriented. Men are stimulated by the sight of a woman's body; women are stimulated more by the person, their attitude, words, and touch. Men need sex to feel respected and to be physically needed. Women need to feel secure and emotionally needed in order to enjoy sexual intimacy.

Men have more testosterone which makes them more assertive sexually. They are quickly aroused and difficult to distract. Their orgasm is shorter, more intense, and is a physical release. Women, on the other hand, have more estrogen which makes them have less of a desire to pursue or initiate sex. It takes them much longer to become aroused and they are more easily distracted. Their orgasm is longer, more in depth, and more emotionally oriented.

Someone once said that when it comes to sex, men are like a light switch. Flip the switch on and they are ready to go, flip the switch again and they are off. Women are like an iron, they warm up slowly, retain that heat longer, and "cool off" more slowly.

What does this mean for a marriage? For the husband, it means that you need to create an environment in your home where your wife feels emotionally loved during the day. "Warm her up" by the words you say, the gentle way you touch her, and the little ways you help her out around the house.

For the wife, realize that a lack of sexual responsiveness can cause your husband to feel that you reject him or don't respect him. Even though you may be tired and worn out by the demands of work and children and marriage, recognize that you both need to make your sexual relationship a priority, not only to meet each others needs, but to continue to build and deepen your own relationship together.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Husbands: What steps can you take to connect more emotionally with your wife throughout the day? Wives: What steps can you take to be more responsive to your husband or to initiate sex in your relationship?*

FOR RICHER OR POORER

One of the most explosive issues in marriage is money. One of the reasons for that is our differences. In terms of money, those differences are often reflected in our values. Opposites attract, so often in a marriage, one spouse is a financial risk taker, and the other desires security and safety. One sees money as something to spend, and the other sees money as something to save. Many years ago, when we were in our early years of marriage, Nancy's father said to me, "People tend to spend according to their income." Nancy's father had been poor at one point in his life and then had become vice president of a company. He had learned to be content with what he had, regardless of his income. That, really, is the key to handling finances within your marriage.

As a couple, you need to learn to live within your means. You need to learn to control your money rather than letting your money control you.

How do you do that? The first step is to work together on setting a monthly budget that you

can both agree to live with. To do that, you need to do two things. First, identify your monthly income. List out on paper all of your income and its sources for each month. Second, identify how much you are spending each month. You cannot survive financially if you spend more than you take in. To set your budget for the first time, you will each need a pocket-sized notebook that you can carry around daily. Write down everything you each purchase and what it costs. Because some expenses are seasonal (Christmas, vacations, birthdays, etc.) you will need to keep track of all expenses for at least three to four months. Then arrange the expenses in categories (food, rent/mortgage, gas, medical, car insurance, etc.) and determine what you need to budget monthly in each area. If you are spending more than you are earning, you have two options: (1) Increase your income or (2) Decrease your spending. Once you get a budget set, you can adjust it every six months or so as needed or as your financial situation changes.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *If at the end of the month, you find you are struggling to meet your financial obligations, then identify one area where you both agree to cut spending so you can live more within your means. If you are living within your means, it is still good to go through the exercise above so you can evaluate whether your spending habits mirror your life goals.*

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN

Nancy and I have been married for over thirty years. During those thirty years, we have seen many couples get married. We have seen many couples get divorced. We have watched many couples raise their children and then have seen their marriage disintegrate seemingly before their eyes when their children grow up and leave home and they face the “empty nest.” Why is that?

One reason is that couples often forget their marriage vows. When you get married, you pledge to love your spouse until you die. Unfortunately, many things happen before you die. For many couples, that includes having children. Once children are born into the family, they often become the center of your life together.

That little baby is dependent upon you for 24 hours a day. You hold them, love them, feed them, and change them. You watch their every move. All of this is good and right and natural, but it is important as a couple to remember your marriage vows.

You are married to your spouse, not to your child. You are to raise that child for eighteen years, and then release them. You are to hold onto your spouse forever.

Therefore, your child(ren) should never become more important than your spouse in your long term relationship. This is very difficult. That is why I say “your long term relationship.” Initially, with a new baby, a couple may have to work very hard to make time for each other. There may be times or seasons of a marriage where it seems like the children take priority, and they probably will. That is when it is important to help each other think long term. In eighteen years, when this child is grown and leaves our home, what will you have? You will still have each other. So, you must make sure that “the empty nest” doesn’t drive all the birds away. That is when it is time to snuggle down “in the nest” together and enjoy each other for the rest of your lives.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Discuss how you can help each other keep the role of your children in proper perspective so you can continue to put your marriage relationship first.*

INLAWS OR OUTLAWS?

Most of us are familiar with the television show, “I Love Raymond.” It follows the relationship of a husband and wife who live next door to the husband’s parents. It shows the interaction between a married couple and their in-laws, who as the series goes on, act more like outlaws.

In-law relationships are a thorn in the side of many marriages. Mother-in-law jokes didn’t come about in a vacuum. They exist because this is a very real problem that, if not addressed, can split a marriage apart.

As we discussed on Day 2, one of the most important steps in building your marriage is that you leave your single lifestyle (that includes your parents) and become dependent upon your spouse. If necessary, that means moving a healthy distance away from both sets of parents. What is a healthy distance? Whatever distance is necessary so you can be dependent upon your spouse. For some couples, that might mean next door, for others, that might mean an hour away, for others, that might mean a state or two away.

What happens if it isn’t possible to move away and in-law relationships are a problem? Then it is up to both husband and wife to discuss the issue thoroughly (see Day 19 for guidelines) and to work in unity as a team in reaching a compromise (see Day 11) that you can both live with. Sometimes that may mean that you have to

“put your foot down” and confront one or both sets of parents. It is up to you as a couple to protect and safeguard your relationship against anything that would tear it apart. Sometimes, sadly, that includes well meaning parents. You may have to confront them in a loving but firm way more than once so your parents understand that your spouse is now the most important person in your life (see Day 15).

Sometimes, in-law relationships can be improved by working at improving that relationship. For instance, one of the things that I do in my relationship with Nancy’s parents is telling them how grateful I am for them raising such a wonderful woman. I tell them that I am the one who gets to enjoy the benefits of their many years of work as a parent. I also try to build relationships with my son-in-law and daughter-in-law by writing them letters each year that I give to them on their birthdays. In that letter, I reflect back over the year and mention positive things that I have seen in their life over the past year in terms of their personal growth and success as a person. I keep a file on each of my children and children-in-law that I keep notes on as I observe positive things in their life and then refer to that file to help me compose the letter each year. Obviously, this takes some work and effort on my part. I feel it pays off handsomely in the relationships that I have with my in-laws.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Evaluate your in-law relationships on a scale from 1 to 10 with one being very poor and 10 being very good. Discuss what steps you can agree to take to move that relationship up a notch or two toward being very good.*

MARRIAGE LESSONS FROM A PILOT

In his book, *Your Attitude: Key to Success*, John Maxwell writes about going for an airplane ride with a pilot friend of his. As they were flying, he asked his friend about one particular gauge on the instrument panel. His friend told him that the gauge was an attitude indicator. Airplanes have an attitude which, in flying, means the position of the aircraft in relation to the horizon. When the aircraft is climbing, it has a nose high attitude because the nose is pointed above the horizon. A nose down attitude means the plane is diving. His pilot friend then explained that the performance of the airplane depends on its attitude; it is necessary to change the attitude in order to change the performance.

The application to life and to our marriage should be very obvious. If our attitude is up (positive), our marriage will be positively affected. If our attitude is down (negative), our marriage will be negatively affected.

I once heard the story of a woman who went to see a marriage counselor. She told the counselor

that her marriage was in shambles, there was no hope, and she was filing for divorce. The counselor asked if she would be willing to do a project for one week before continuing forward with the divorce. She agreed.

The counselor asked her to list three things she liked about her husband. After listing three things, he told her to give thanks every day for those three things that were positive in her husband's life. The counselor told her to focus on those three things for a week instead of focusing on the negative things in her husband's life.

After a week, the wife returned to see the marriage counselor. "Have you decided to go ahead with the divorce?" he asked. "Oh no," she replied, "I am so in love with my husband, I couldn't possibly think of divorcing him."

What changed during the week? Her attitude! Her attitude went from nose down (negative) to nose up (positive), and the performance of her marriage followed.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *List three things about your spouse that you are thankful for. Share these with your spouse.*

PERSONAL CONTENTMENT

When I (Andy) was in high school, my body began reacting to something. I don't know if I had an allergic reaction to something or if I was reacting to the stress of being a teenager, but I began to develop boils on my body. I got boils in all kinds of strange places, on my arm, in my armpit, and one I particularly remember, on my nose. Not only was it on my nose, it was BIG! I would sit in class at school, look down at my nose, and there I would see that boil. It looked like it was bigger than my nose!

Naturally, I became very self-conscious. I felt that whenever anyone looked at me, all they could see was my boil. After a few weeks, the boil went away. Obviously, the memories are still with me.

All of us have something in our lives that we would like to change. It may be something physical. We may feel that we are too short, too tall, too heavy, or too thin. It may be that we would like to change our personality and be more outgoing, or maybe we would like to be a better athlete, musician, or student. Maybe we would like to change our past and not have the memories and scars of past mistakes, failures, or

experiences.

One thing I have learned over the years is that my attitude toward myself has a profound influence on the relationships around me. If I am focused on myself and my problems or inadequacies, I will be incapable of building a strong marriage or any other relationship. Contentment with myself and my life's circumstances will bring contentment in my marriage. If I am not content with myself, I will never be content in my marriage.

A major mistake that people make in marriage is that they expect their spouse to make them happy or to bring them fulfillment. No one else can make me happy. Nothing else can bring me fulfillment. Personal contentment comes from within; it does not come from another person. My spouse cannot and most likely, will not make me happy. Don't expect them to try. The unchangeable parts of my life, (physical features, my past, etc.) are part of what makes me a special and unique person. Learn to see those parts of my life as part of the total picture of who I am that makes me unique.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Do a personal inventory. Ask yourself, "Is there anything about myself or my life that I would change if I could?" If I identify something that I can change, then take steps to change it. If it is something that is unchangeable (physical features, past, etc.) then accept that this area is a part of my life that makes me unique as a person and give thanks for it.*

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LIFE

As I think back over the time that Nancy and I dated before we were married, one of the things that stands out to me is how much fun we had together. It seemed like each time we got together, we did something different. Each date brought new opportunities to learn about each other. Back on Day 6, we talked about the importance of dating after you are married and spending time alone together as a couple. Today we want to expand that and talk about the importance of fun and spontaneity in a marriage.

For many couples, life after the wedding day soon settles into a routine, and a boring one at that. Things get pretty predictable and the surprise element that was so much a part of the dating experience vanishes.

Since opposites attract, usually one of the spouses enjoys fun and spontaneity and the other prefers the routine and familiar. In order to keep your marriage fun and exciting, you need to think

of and discuss ways in which you can have fun together.

Over the years, we have discussed what we each feel are fun things to do. We each made a list of those activities or experiences, compared lists, and then made it a priority to spend time together doing those things we both enjoyed. Our list has included things like camping, sightseeing, playing tennis, going to ballgames, etc. We have made it a point to schedule those activities in on a regular basis so we can continue to have fun together.

One of the best words of advice I ever received on marriage was from Nancy's brother in-law who stated, "Most partners in a marriage take things far too seriously. Couples should not take everything the other one says or does so personally. Enjoy each other and have fun together." That was sound advice and is a great recipe for building a strong marriage.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *As individuals, take a pen and paper and make a list of fun things you like to do. Now compare lists. Find the one or two areas you agree on in terms of fun and schedule that activity into your relationship on a regular basis. If you don't agree on anything, discuss what you can do together that you would both enjoy, and then do it!*

TURN, TURN, TURN

When I (Andy) was in high school, I participated in athletics. I was in a small high school, so I had the opportunity to be on several different teams, depending upon the season. In the fall, I played football and ran for the cross country track team. In the winter, I played basketball. In the spring, I played baseball and ran on the track team. Each of those team experiences left me with special memories of the time and effort we put in to try to be successful. Those experiences gave us a sense of camaraderie that I still remember to this day.

How does this relate to marriage? A marriage is a team (see Day 7) and like any team, a husband and a wife grow in unity when they have a common goal to

work toward and each make sacrifices to meet that goal just as an athlete does.

What goals do you have in your marriage? What are your dreams? What are the values that you are willing to sacrifice for to achieve together?

A goal or a purpose can be anything. It can be saving money to buy a house, trying to have a baby, deciding to adopt a child, taking a family vacation, helping to stamp out poverty, or picking up litter along the roadside. Goals can be big or small.

In the 1960's, the rock group called "The Byrds" had a hit song called, "Turn, turn, turn." The chorus went, "to everything- turn, turn, turn; there is a season turn, turn, turn; and a time for every purpose under heaven." Life has its seasons and so do marriages. As your marriage matures, your goals and purposes will change.

The important thing is that you as a couple continue to communicate clearly on your goals and work toward them together as a team. As you do that effectively, you will celebrate the joy of being part of a winning marriage team. You will have a "championship" marriage, and that is cause for celebration!

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *What are your values, dreams, etc. that can provide your marriage with a sense of purpose or direction? Discuss with your spouse what each of you feel would be a good purpose or goal for your marriage at this point in time.*

GROWING: TOGETHER OR APART?

One of the common problem areas in a marriage is that couples don't grow together. I have listened to many discouraged spouses who tell me that they have "outgrown" their partner. Sometimes the husband feels he is continuing to learn and grow while the wife is not. Sometimes it is the wife who is learning and growing and can't get the husband away from the television.

Opposites attract so it is likely that one of you has a greater tendency to learn and grow, and your partner doesn't. It is also very likely that you differ in your interests and in the areas you would like to grow in. What should a couple do? Discuss and compromise. See growing together as a lifelong process, not as a one time project.

When our kids were young, Nancy and I read and discussed books on child raising and discipline. We also did a lot of camping together as a family during those years because we felt that those trips would be a good learning experience for our whole family.

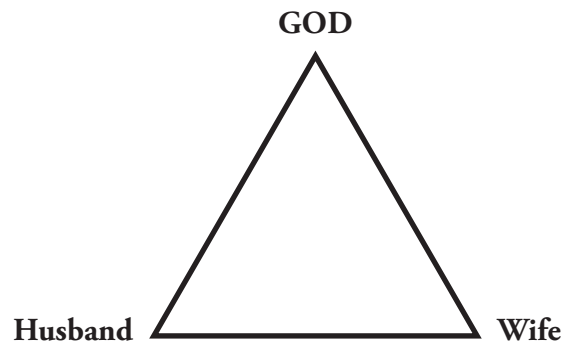
When our kids were older, we took dance lessons together, knowing that those lessons would probably come in handy at their wedding receptions (which they did). We discussed ways and took steps in which we could make our new son-or daughter-in-law feel welcome and a vital part of our family.

We have made a concerted effort to grow together in our marriage. For over thirty years, we have been reading books, listening to tapes, and attending marriage conferences together.

Why do we do that? We do that because, as a couple, we do not stay on a plateau in our relationship. We are either growing closer together or growing farther apart. Sometimes, Nancy comes up with the ideas for growth; sometimes I do. It really doesn't matter. The important thing is that you both grow together. It is a lot of fun and it makes for a much better marriage.

MARRIAGE BOOSTER: *Discuss what hobbies/projects/activities you each enjoy or would like to do. What is one (maybe even a new one) that you both would be willing to do together? Make plans and set calendar dates so you can grow together in that area.*

A THREE-SOME MAKES A MARRIAGE BETTER



It is Day 30, and we have saved the best for last. A three-some really spices up a marriage when that third person is God. In his book, [I Married You](#), Walter Trobisch illustrates the marriage relationship by using a triangle.

At the base of the triangle, are the husband and wife, one at each angle. As they live their separate lives, they may or may not connect. However, as they each turn their focus toward God, at the top of the triangle, and begin to live and pursue Him, they each start moving up their side of the triangle until they meet at the top in God. As they pursue Him, they grow toward unity as a couple. As individuals, there is nothing that is strong enough to unify us or bind us together on our own. Pascal, the French scientist once stated, "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of men and women that only God can fill." Only God can unify our marriage and that comes as both husband and wife seek Him wholeheartedly.

Where are each of you today in relationship to God? Is God the focus of your life, or have you let other things such as you, a job, money, or something else become the focus of your life?

Take a moment to pray and ask God to come into your life and marriage and become the focus of all you do. You might want to pray a prayer similar to this:

Dear God,

I confess that I have been the center and focus of my life. I have let my needs, wants, and desires consume my thinking. Instead of being concerned about what You want for my life and marriage, I have concentrated on myself. Please forgive me for my selfishness and self centeredness. I acknowledge that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for my selfishness. I know God, that You are the designer of marriage, and I want to follow your blueprint for a successful marriage. Today, I surrender myself to You and ask You for strength and courage to begin to live out your plan and purpose in both my life and my marriage each day. Thank you, in advance, for the help You will give me to do that. Amen

NOW WHAT?

We recently took a trip back to the Midwest to visit relatives. We flew into Chicago, rented a car, and then drove through five states over a two-week period. As we planned our trip, we got on our computer and used Mapquest to map out our driving directions.

Could we have made the trip without consulting a map? Probably. Would we have gotten lost or made some wrong turns? Probably. So, to make good use of our time and to keep our marriage relationship healthy, we consulted a map.

There is a map for marriage. The map was put together by the One who came up with the idea for marriage in the first place: God. God has a design, or map, to make your marriage successful. You have been following it for the last 30 days. As you can see, it does work. The guidelines and topics that you have been working on for the last 30 days come straight from the Bible, God's road map for marriage.

Now, the choice is yours. Do you go back to "mapping" your marriage journey on your own, or do you continue to build on the progress you have made over the past 30 days by continuing to follow God's marriage map?

If you would like to continue to work at your marriage, we have some great resources to help you take the next steps. Just e-mail us at walockridge@yahoo.com and tell us that you have completed your 30 days to a better marriage. Then mention that you would like to keep working at your marriage and we will be back in touch with some additional resources.

Journeying with you toward a better marriage,

Andy and Nancy Lockridge
walockridge@yahoo.com

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