

# The Joy of "One Flesh"

## Married sex is intended by God to be a beautiful part of life.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. Genesis 2:24-25

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral Hebrews 13: 4

Drink water from your own cistern,  
    running water from your own well.  
Should your springs overflow in the streets,  
    your streams of water in the public squares?  
Let them be yours alone,  
    never to be shared with strangers.  
May your fountain be blessed,  
    and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.  
A loving doe, a graceful deer—  
    may her breasts satisfy you always,  
    may you ever be captivated by her love.  
Proverbs 5:15-19

*Lover:* Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.

*Beloved:* I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk.

*Friends:* Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers. Song of Solomon 4:16-5:1

But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I Corinthians 7:2-5

**Three Christian Counsellors**, with much experience, have offered some suggestions to help a Christian couple shape their thinking concerning their lovemaking.

*"With the understanding that our marriage relationship portrays the truths of our relationship with God, we can become free as never before to express our love for our husband or wife fully through the dynamic opportunity of the sex act... Man has intercourse as a whole person. He of all creatures is the only one to use reason in choosing to have sexual relations... Husband and wife are the only creatures capable of gaining spiritual unity and a deeper knowledge of each other through the sexual relationship. ... Let us realize how the bodies of men and women are designed. Even in the sex act itself we are reminded that this is a relationship of persons, not just bodies, for it is no coincidence that man is the only creature of God's creation who relates sexually face to face.... There should be room in the sexual relationship for all parts of your personality to be expressed at one time or another. And all the while the expression of your own being meets the need of your mate."*

Wheat, Intended For Pleasure, pp. 18,19,142

## David Hocking Four Pleasure Principles from the Song of Solomon 4:12-5:1:

(David and Carole Hocking, Romantic Lovers, chapter 9.)

**1. Sexual pleasure is based on the attraction of the husband to his wife.** In this obviously erotic passage, the sexuality of the woman and its effects are highlighted in the imagery of the garden and fountain.

**2. Sexual pleasure is based on the attitude of the wife toward her husband's desire.** Now she says "awake" (16a) at the height of their sexual love and passion - She desires him greatly (16b), (She wants him and in a sense has let her passion and desire run uncontrolled within the security of his love and their marriage). She wants to give her sexuality to him, to let go and give herself completely and she wants him to enjoy himself. (16c).

**3. Sexual pleasure is based on the acceptance of sexual satisfaction and unity by both husband and wife.** (5:1) Both partners are enjoying their relationship and finding it satisfying. There is no limitation of sexual acts and practices, except that they be mutually enjoyed and not demanded of the other. Marital partners should be in agreement about what takes place in the bedroom. Mutual submission (1 Cor 7:1-5) is the principle.

**Two key questions:**

1. Is there anything I am currently doing that is offensive to you or you would rather not do?
2. Is there something you would like to do that we are not currently doing?

**4. Sexual pleasure is based on the approval of God.** (5:1b) Cf Hebr 13:4. *"When we discover the many intricate details of our bodies which provide so many intense, wonderful physical sensations for husbands and wives to enjoy together, we can be sure that He intended for us to experience full satisfaction in the marriage relationship...."*

Wheat, p. 17

## **G**ordon MacDonald **Ground Rules of Knowing**

(*Magnificent Marriage* pp. 154ff)

**1. Unreserved commitment** - "When there is "knowing", there is freedom to love differently, to experiment, to soar with the enjoyment of being close to one another's bodies." This commitment is both exclusive of all others, and unreserved in the giving of ourselves wholly to the other. 1 Cor 7:3-5

**2. The principle of acts of previous love (especially for the woman).** "Knowing" is an all day affair. This involves before-foreplay: planning, anticipating, preparing for lovemaking all day. The tenderness and reassurance of the husband and or wife's love creates the atmosphere for love-making. It is like the gradual climb up a mountain, where the ascent steadily overcoming the obstacles, makes the summit much more exhilarating.

*"Love, in essence, is that deliberate act of giving one's self to another other so that the other person constantly receives enjoyment. Love gives, and love's richest reward comes when the object of love responds to the gift of one's self. If a man and wife so give themselves for each other, each will have a sense of completeness and contentment. Not only that! the conditions have then become right for building a love relationship which will bring to the marriage all the richly delightful feelings of being in love."*

*"Conveying the attitude of concern for her builds the right atmosphere for satisfaction in sex.*

*....Building an atmosphere of caring and romance is a sign of true love on the part of the husband."*

Wheat, p. 37

*"Remember, always, that stirring the imagination helps bring about the most response in both men and women."*

Wheat, p. 76.

**3. The necessity of clear accounts** - no unresolved tensions or actions between them. Even small irritants may build up into barriers to "knowing". And, ironically, making up (confession and forgiveness) is great fun.

*"Despite the claims of some sex manuals, a couple cannot separate sex from the rest of the marriage, perfecting it and then isolating it, as it were, in an airtight compartment to be used when desired. Everything that happens in a marriage has its effect upon the lovemaking experience."*

Wheat, p. 21

**4. The principle of privacy** - both in the actual lovemaking, and also in not sharing those private moments and confidences with others. *"Knowing" can only occur in secret between two."*

**5. The commitment to fully please the other.**

They must communicate and talk about what pleases. This takes time and deliberate effort to discover needs, feelings and desires. It also means communicating when you are pleased and being "pleasable".

*"The union of marriage frees the couple to enjoy their bodies in whatever ways are most pleasing, provided that both are pleased. Without restrictions (other than selfish acts which hurt the partner or evoke distaste), the couple should feel free to experiment and to "know" each other in the most intimate sense possible. Love involves close bodily contact and the pleasure of seeing, touching, and enjoying with all the senses. Let this be your guide in love play."*

Wheat, p. 75

"You will find a unique joy in using all the skill you possess to bring pleasure to your marriage partner. On fact every physical union should be an exciting contest to see which partner can outplease the other." Wheat, p. 28

**6. The principle of balance** - We will always be different, with different desires and sexual drives and appetites. "It is almost impossible for us to fully understand our differences. We can only pursue balance. Balance begins when we accept one another, not for what we think they should be, but for what they are." This requires sensitivity and self-discipline, and giving, even when we may not receive in return.

## **E**d Wheat, M.D, **The dynamics of marital lovemaking:**

*Intended for Pleasure* by Ed Wheat

**First, the sexual relationship is meant to be full of life, rich in emotion, and ever-changing within the security of the marriage commitment.**

"What keeps the relationship vital and moving is a joyous pattern of mutual response, the kind we see pictured in the ever-changing relationship of Solomon and his bride in Song of Solomon . . . . As long as we are committed to each other, we need not fear the constant change within marriage, the ebb and flow of the relationship of two lovers, for it is a sign of life."  
Wheat, p. 140, 141.

**"Second, there is no fixed part for each mate to play within the sexual experience...."**

"She has the equal privilege of initiating the act of love and of offering her own imaginative style of pleasure to the total relationship. Each must be truly himself or herself in this particular area of the marriage, with neither locked into a role which must be played again and again.... Together each can give the emotional sustenance which the other requires. **In such a relationship, fantasized sex will be discarded as something outgrown, as much less than the real thing.**" Wheat, p. 141

**"Third, a lighthearted approach to lovemaking in marriage is important.**

"Sex with your partner is far more than recreation, of course, but it is that as well: the best, the most relaxing, renewing recreation known to man, and God planned that too." Wheat, p. 142

**"Fourth, the sexual relationship between husband and wife offers the unique opportunity to care for and be responsible for another human being in the most complete sense possible.**

"...self-worth...best begins with the sensitive appreciation of the other partner in the love relationship, and it continues to be nurtured there."  
Wheat, p. 142

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The dynamics are for each to explore, experience, and develop into harmony as near perfection as possible. They will include spontaneity of life, freedom of expression, expectancy of pleasure, sensitivity in caring, and yieldedness leading to completion. But precisely how they will manifest themselves no one else can say. So those who would understand the sexual relationship in marriage must experience it the way it was intended to be - spontaneous, free, enjoyable, renewing, and more filled with meanings than words could ever tell. Wheat, p. 143

# Celebrating Forgiveness

From *Men and Women: Enjoying the Difference*, by Larry Crabb, pp. 103-116

*"We may indeed through introspection grow to despise and hate ourselves, but God is greater and more generous than our petty selves and He is far more truly loving and understanding than we can imagine. I am quite certain that He does not want us to waste any time raking over our sins. He wants us to accept His forgiveness and walk forward confidently in His strength."*  
J. B. Phillips

As I thought about writing this book, I planned to tackle questions about masculinity and femininity right away. I began reading with an intuitive conviction that the differences between men and women run deep and that partners in the best marriages enjoy these differences. My background reading included material from both the egalitarian and traditional camps. As I became better acquainted with both perspectives, I became increasingly concerned that neither side was dealing adequately with the loathsome and deeply entrenched problem of self-centeredness, the thing that interferes with getting along more than either refusing to fit into roles or refusing to break out of them.

The traditional camp is often heard as favoring a military-style arrangement in which submissive wives do what they're told by decisive men. I did not want to write a book that encouraged men and women to squeeze into clearly defined roles with no thought of freely becoming and warmly giving all that God designed them to be and to give.

It is much too easy to maintain order in relationships at the expense of passion. Order in everything, including marriage, is necessary and good, but biblical order *promotes* rather than *dampens* our enjoyment of one another. And it does so by drawing on our commitment to give who we are for the sake of the other.

I therefore felt cautious about emphasizing sex-related roles that encourage conformity to a standard more than opportunities to uniquely love.

I struggled, too, with the egalitarian alternative to hierarchical order in marriage. I sympathized with the substance (though not always the tone) of this camp's fierce insistence that male supremacy and female servility represent a damaging distortion of biblical data, but I was bothered by the understanding of freedom that seemed implicit in much of its literature. \*

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\* Donald Bloesch sums up my viewpoint well. He says that, according to feminist theology, God "enables both men and women to realize their full potential as sons and daughters of a new age in which sexual differences are no longer a barrier to . . . spiritual leadership." *Feminist theology*, Bloesch continues, mirrors "the new wave of democratic egalitarianism that seeks to eradicate all hierarchy in human relationships" (Donald Bloesch, *Freedom for Obedience* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987], 266-67).

Christian feminists seem to begin with an anti-authority bias that defines hierarchy in human relationships as bad in itself rather than regarding an *improper use* of authority as bad. Because men and women are equally human and equally valuable, they argue, the idea of male authority over females is demeaning to women and inconsistent with the equal status of both sexes before God. The important thing is to become more aware of your dignity and to express it more fully. A marriage between equals, they teach, will build on a foundation of mutually recognized and honored dignity.

The egalitarian idea of freedom seems to shift the focus *away from* living according to divine plan *toward* realizing personal potential. The difference in these two conceptions of freedom is enormous. The former directly confronts selfishness, the latter treats it as a secondary problem.

The first order of business, in egalitarian thinking, is to come alive with the dignity of equal personhood. Defining freedom in terms of realized human potential recasts God as a divine enabler, dedicated to helping us push back the limits of personal boundaries and more fully enjoy our humanness. His identity as sovereign Lord and gracious Redeemer becomes vague, still acknowledged as foundational, perhaps, but no longer continually relevant to our most pressing concerns.

More personally, the emphasis on marriage as a partnership between equals left me strangely unwarmed. Certainly my wife, Rachael, is a person of equal value, but more important, she is enjoyably different. Learning to express our differences with the other's well-being in mind seems a far warmer ambition than asserting mutual equality. Something wonderfully possible between husband and wife seems to be missing in the egalitarian framework.

Neither traditionalists nor egalitarians adequately highlight the central problem of self-centeredness in marriage. Fitting into roles can provoke self-serving conformity, and affirming equal value can encourage self-serving assertiveness. And when we lightly regard the stubborn sin of selfishness, when either obedient conformity of asserted dignity seems an adequate solution to our relationship problems, then we will not properly value the deep work of God in forgiving our selfishness and changing us into giving people.

## THE PERVASIVENESS OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS

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When I grasp even feebly the subtle and stubborn pervasiveness with which, even during a casual conversation, I selfishly arrange for my own well-being, then God's command to re-direct my energies to promoting someone else's welfare is overwhelming. It requires a change in the most firmly rooted parts of my nature. Trying to obey his command in its fullness is like a paralytic attempting to stand or a lung cancer victim working hard to not cough.

When I reflect on what God tells me to do, I must immediately admit defeat. I'm just not good enough to meet his standards. When I face how naturally self-centered I am, the goal of obedience seems hopelessly beyond reach. To ask God for further opportunities for self-expression would be monstrously inappropriate. I am reduced to needing first forgiveness, then help to obey.

All clear thinking about relationships between men and women depends on a growing awareness of how wrongly committed we are to looking after ourselves, an awareness that makes forgiveness in Christ the central and most relished fact about life. Gratitude for the ongoing reality of forgiveness is the soil in which a desire to live as we were designed grows and develops. Or, to put the same thought another way, realizing that we never mature beyond our need of forgiving grace is the basis of all our maturing.

Nothing is more basic to Christian living than our celebration of this forgiveness. There is far more to ponder and appreciate than forgiveness; other truths about Christ can inflame us with passion to know him better. But nothing must ever be allowed to replace our gratitude for redemption.

And other-centered relating, the most crucial element in building a marriage, will develop only where husbands and wives value forgiveness as the most necessary element in their lives. This central point can be emphasized first by defining a *good* relationship, and then by describing what I mean by celebrating forgiveness.

### DEFINING A GOOD RELATIONSHIP

Most of us are at least vaguely aware that *things* don't bring us lasting happiness. Experience has taught us (or is trying to) that the good feelings generated by a new dress, a trip to the Orient, a house on the beach, dinner at the Ritz Carlton, or a promotion to vice president are neither deep nor lasting.

The simple truth is that true happiness cannot exist apart from personal relationship. At some level, we all know this. But if we have never tasted real joy through another person, we may find ourselves addicted to good feelings and miserably enslaved to shallow pleasures.

For too many, however, the relationships that are supposed to bring the most happiness serve up the worst misery. Tensions with parents, frustrations with children, and angry distance between spouses sometimes make shallow pleasure seem preferable.

Because family relationships are sometimes more painful than satisfying, many people manage to find someone outside of their family with whom time together feels good. Lonely wives talk at length with special women friends. Frustrated husbands enjoy golf with a good buddy, and meaningful relationships with someone of the opposite sex often develop. We want to feel connected with somebody, to share with someone who understands and cares, to be with someone who lets us go off duty and relax. *It feels so good to enjoy who we are in someone else's presence.*

And when we are with that someone, it is entirely natural to think of this relationship as good. But notice how the word *good* gets defined: a good relationship, in this natural way of thinking, is one that provides us with whatever we need to feel happy. Using this definition, a happily married couple could call their relationship good for precisely the same reason adulterous lovers might value theirs. In both situations, people feel good about themselves in the presence of another.

Something is clearly wrong with a definition of good relationships that can be claimed by both committed spouses and immoral roommates.

Part of the problem with our understanding of what makes a relationship good is that we start with the wrong data. Finding couples who seem to be happy and looking at their relationships to sort out the ingredients for successful relating is risky. A fallen world filled with deceived people who often feel good for wrong reasons is no place to do our research. We may as well formulate moral principles by - studying the mating habits of animals.

### THE ONLY EXAMPLE OF PERFECT RELATING

To understand what good relationship is we need to consider the only example of perfect relating: God. It is legitimate to question how the three Persons of the Godhead manage to get along so well. Certainly they never quarrel. We never read of the Spirit getting jealous of the Son's top billing. When they met in committee to discuss creation, no decision had to be tabled due to bickering over what should be created first or who would do what.

If it's true that two's company and three's a crowd, one might expect that in all the years they've been together some trouble would have developed. Most couples can't make it through their first night without fussing about something.

Such talk, of course, is nonsense and, if I were serious, blasphemous. But it does point up that relationships within the Trinity are very different from ours. Their way of relating is so radically right that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, in some mysterious but profoundly meaningful way, can be regarded as one.

But what does their manner of relating have to do with developing a definition of good relationships among mere mortals?

Just before he died, our Lord was reflecting on the closeness he enjoyed with his Father. Perhaps he was prompted by the recent memory of James and John's jockeying for position among the twelve, or of Peter's pledging superior loyalty when things got tough. He turned his eyes upward and with a heart filled with joy and longing said, "I pray also for those who will believe in me... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20—21).

In that prayer, our Lord set before us the standard for measuring a good relationship. Theologian D. Broughton Knox expressed it this way: "The doctrine of the trinity tells us that ultimate reality is personal relationship" . . . and that "..... the characteristic of true relationship is other-person-centeredness."<sup>1</sup>

Consider just a few samples of Trinitarian relating. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35). He shows him all that he does (John 5:20). The Son in response always does what pleases the Father (John 8:29), and his obedience springs from his love for his Father (John 14:31). The Spirit is self-effacing. He does not speak of himself, but he takes the things of the Son and shows them to believers. He glorifies Christ (John 16:13~14).

Beginning with the data of divine relationships rather than our experiences with each other, we can come close to defining a good relationship. A good relationship is one in which *each member willingly she has to give to the well-being of the other*. In such a relationship, the highest criterion for deciding what to do at any moment is a person's understanding before God of what would be the greatest service he or she can offer to the other.

When *good* is thus defined, the focus put where it belongs, on the *giving* of self rather than either the *development* of self or the *conformity* of self to imposed standards. Neither self-expression nor fitting into roles are the marks of a good relationship.

Thinking about a good relationship in this way provides real comfort and hope to godly folks married to difficult spouses. If, for example, a husband devotes himself to actively loving his angry wife, then regardless of her indifference to his care and her continued hardness, we can fairly say that *his relationship*

*to her* (or his style of relating to her) satisfies the definition of "good."

*Her relationship to him*, of course, is bad, and similarly *their relationship with each other* cannot be called good. But the faithful spouse experiences both *joy* in remaining true to ultimate goodness and *sorrow* in enduring cold rejection, the sorrow our Lord feels at every moment. Surely this is an example of sharing in the fellowship of his suffering, a welcome opportunity for someone who can say, more than anything else, "I want to know Christ" (Phil 3: 10)

Good relating to others, defined as Other-centeredness after the pattern of the Trinity, is the core fruit of Christian living. All Bible study that gets at what God is saying will have some impact on how we relate. If it doesn't, then we are simply gaining knowledge that puffs up.

Whatever conclusions we reach about the uniqueness of men and women they should relate to each other must reflect, above all else, a passionate determination to do something for the other in response to what God has done for them. This is the mark of good relating.

#### WHAT IT MEANS TO CELEBRATE FORGIVENESS

Clearly, if I am to learn what it means to be a godly man, I must do something about my natural tendency to worry more about me than about you. I earlier suggested that the relentless standards of God can expose myself-centeredness as inexcusably wrong but that only an appreciation of the kindness of God would draw me to repentance and lead to real change. I now want to take that discussion a step further and talk about the celebration of God's kindness as the basis for continuing growth in other-centeredness.

I have made it clear, I trust, that self-centeredness is not simply a wrong turn that can be easily corrected. Shifting from a primary concern for me to a primary concern for you never happens naturally, nor do I have the power to make it happen by sheer effort. If I am to be transformed into a person who more and more values my life as an opportunity for service, then grace will have to impact me so strongly that it shatters my self-commitment and replaces it with genuine concern for others.

But so often we're moved by lesser things than grace. A simple illustration will explain. I wrote most of this book during an extended stay in England. During this time Rachael and I had the opportunity to see several plays in London theaters. At different moments we laughed, we cried, we felt excited, we were saddened, we became enraged. We were struck, as we often are after being well entertained, how mere human fiction or well-performed music can move us more deeply than divine drama.

Somehow we manage to miss the breath-taking reality of the Christian story. The truth of that drama should be more incredibly and wonderfully shocking than the most imaginative ending to a mystery ever thought up by Agatha Christie.

But when it isn't, when our commitment to self centeredness remains lodged in a part of our souls that nothing has yet disturbed, our efforts to be good to one another feel like programmed hypocrisy, choices that we sometimes make out of a sense of duty, rather than out of a passionate desire to be more loving. We may wish the gospel moved us more, but we have to admit that we sometimes respond with more passion to a good play than to a good sermon.

And God's work in us is thwarted when we fail to catch the excitement of what he's doing in our lives.

Yet the gospel, the good news of forgiveness, more than anything else, is worth celebrating Biblical Christianity, like good drama, tells a story, a true one, that catches us off guard with its utterly surprising ending. And, as in the best mystery novels, when the surprise ending is revealed, it becomes wonderfully obvious in a way that still staggers and thrills.

As the biblical drama begins, God is introduced as a benevolent Creator, kindly and personally involved with the man and woman he created. But in a moment of bizarre and wicked insanity the man and woman turn away from God to follow someone deceitful and self-serving.

From this beginning, the story proceeds to expose the insolent stupidity of this decision to rebel against God. It details all the misery and trouble this choice brought into the lives of the man and woman, as well as into the lives of their descendants, who consistently follow in their first parents' foolish footsteps.

Again and again, God calls them back to himself, but they never come to stay. The narrative makes clear that God is no indulgent grandfather who does little else than patiently sigh over his grandchildren's misbehavior. He is rather a holy judge, who declares that his people's insolence is a capital offense, a heinous crime worthy of death.

There seems no doubt that God will end history by banishing his rebellious creatures into eternal darkness — into community with their hateful master, where self-centeredness reigns supreme. But just as the gavel descends, the Judge stops the proceedings. His stern countenance relaxes into a smile. He now uncorks the Big Surprise.

"I forgive you," he declares. "The blood of my Son covers everything you've done wrong. More than that, it covers every natural urge within you to do wrong. You are fully forgiven. Welcome into the relationship you were designed to enjoy but could never find. Your job is simply to admit you're wrong, to

place your confidence in my Son's blood, and to accept my invitation to get to know me better. Everything else is up to me."

That's the story. And when a sinner understands what has happened, he is stunned. Swiss theologian Emil Brunner has said, "Forgiveness is the very opposite of anything which can be taken for granted. Nothing is less obvious than forgiveness."

It's one thing, of course, to write about forgiveness with words designed to provoke the stunned reaction we are supposed to feel. *It's quite another thing to actually be stunned.*

I wonder if the drama of redemption sometimes seems commonplace because we tend to move too quickly from the reality of self-centeredness to questions that we find more compelling precisely because we are self-centered. Do we react to the gospel with only casual appreciation because we concern ourselves with Christian living in a way that reduces issues of sin and grace to merely an historical foundation, an act of kindness a loving parent did years ago?

Is it possible that the energy with which we study the biblical text to develop and defend our views on marital relating is more self-oriented than God-pursuing? Could we really be so deceived that the passion we feel as we articulate and promote whatever we're persuaded the Bible teaches springs more from personal bias than from the Spirit's guidance?

When we lose touch with the continuing reality of our selfishness, then forgiveness becomes something that it is good of God to do, like the newspaper carrier's making sure the morning edition lands under the porch roof on a rainy day. We feel moved enough to remember his kindness with a generous tip the next time he collects.

Part of the problem is that we feel the *reality of our wounds* more than the *fact of our sin*. We therefore react with more passion to those things that restore a sense of personal wholeness than to our redemption.

How wrong of us to dedicate our energy to becoming whole. History is filled with the lives of godly men and women who managed to bless others in the midst of unrelieved personal struggles that left them feeling anything but whole.

Everything we do has a deeply personal agenda. And that agenda is shaped by our determination to survive in a world that hurts and offends us. Sanctification includes abandoning every agenda that aims toward recovering or enhancing our own intactness, and pursuing God not with our wholeness but with his glory in view, and pursuing him with the confidence that he will satisfy every longing of our hearts.

To progress in true holiness, we need to cultivate a continuing sensitivity to self-centeredness that makes gratitude to a forgiving God far more real than an eagerness to see others agree with our views. When the place of women in the church and home becomes more divisive than puzzling, when the passion we feel as we discuss our views is more concerned with intensely convincing than with warmly blessing, then it is time to look away from our arguments to the motives beneath them. And if we look honestly and deeply, we will find self-serving agendas that make forgiveness seem less vital to our souls' well-being than progress toward a desired end.

Nothing is wrong, of course, in doing what we can to resolve our battles with depression and self-doubt, but it is wrong to shift our focus *away from* celebrating forgiveness by living other-centered lives *to* finding a path to personal healing. We exist for God; he does not exist for us. We must keep our attention riveted on the core issues of the gospel.

If the beginning of the gospel is the message of judgment (see Romans 1:1—3:20), then the heart of the gospel is the wonder of forgiveness. When sin is realized and the gospel embraced, then forgiveness is celebrated. We need not artificially induce a joyful mood. Even when the confusion and heartaches of life shake us badly and we feel more like weeping or lashing out than singing (and those seasons come often on the path to maturity), forgiveness serves as our anchor.

As we celebrate forgiveness, sometimes with singing and sometimes with a determined awareness of its centrality in our life, other-centeredness develops. It is the Spirit's work. The growing realization, against everything we naturally think, that our selfishness, more than our hurt, is an obstacle to joy creates the momentum for giving up self-serving agendas and for going about the business of living with the well-being of others in view. The center of the gospel, unsurprisingly, is the center of all growth in becoming like Christ.

I have suggested that the beginning of the gospel is the message of judgment and that the core of the gospel is forgiveness through Christ's shed blood.

Although it is not my purpose in this book, I want to make clear that there is more to the good news of Christ than the reality of forgiveness. When God forgives a sinner, he welcomes him into a relationship that includes a wealth of blessing: union with Christ; an indwelling Holy Spirit; the advocacy of a Great High Priest; a new heart that desires to please God, delights in his Word, and loves his people. The list goes on and on.

At the time of our redemption, we became a new creation, complete with an identity that frees us to relate as sons and daughters of God because Christ is now in us, the hope of glory

(Col. 1:27). When our Lord prayed for his own, he asked his Father to sanctify all who would follow him by the truth (John 17:17). Certainly that truth extends beyond the central truth of forgiveness.

The message of redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14), is the foundation of our relationship with God, but it ushers us into further truths about God and our relationship with him that we must grasp if we are to progress in purity.

I would not want my emphasis on forgiveness to suggest that nothing more needs to be understood in our walk toward holy living. Perhaps I can summarize my thinking this way: first the law, then forgiveness, and then the riches of Christ that free us to walk more and more worthily of our calling.

Self-centered living is the real culprit in marriages with other-centered living is the answer. Understanding how badly we need forgiveness and celebrating its rich availability moves us in the right direction.

# Marital Intimacy Inventory

## Worksheet #11

Rate each item from 0 - 5 in terms of degree of development needed/desired.  
"0" indicating no need or desire for further development and "5" meaning much need or development.

- \_\_\_ 1. **COMMITMENT INTIMACY:** A sense of being "for" each other; trust; investment in the on-going growth of the relationship, etc.
- \_\_\_ 2. **EMOTIONAL INTIMACY:** Sharing of significant meanings and feelings; the touching of the innermost selves of two human beings.
- \_\_\_ 3. **SEXUAL INTIMACY:** Sensual -emotional satisfaction; the experience of sharing, pleasure, fun, and self-abandon in the merging of two persons, etc.
- \_\_\_ 4. **INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY:** Sharing the world of ideas; reading, discussing, studying, etc.
- \_\_\_ 5. **AESTHETIC INTIMACY:** Sharing experiences of beauty - music, nature, art, theater, dance, movies; etc.
- \_\_\_ 6. **CREATIVE INTIMACY:** Sharing in the acts of creating together; parenting and other ventures; mutually feeding each other so that each can realize his/her potentialities as a person; etc.
- \_\_\_ 7. **RECREATIONAL INTIMACY:** Relating in experiences of fun and play, etc.
- \_\_\_ 8. **WORK INTIMACY:** The closeness of sharing common tasks, such as maintaining a house and yard, raising a family, earning a living, etc.
- \_\_\_ 9. **CRISIS INTIMACY:** Closeness in coping with problems and pain; standing together in the major and minor tragedies of life, etc.
- \_\_\_ 10. **SERVICE INTIMACY:** Shared dedication to a common cause or value beyond the marriage, etc.
- \_\_\_ 11. **SPIRITUAL INTIMACY:** Sharing life meanings, faith, forgiveness, expressions of worship, awe, wonder, etc.
- \_\_\_ 12. **COMMUNICATION INTIMACY:** Shared vulnerability through mutual self-disclosure, receptive listening, acceptance, and feedback, etc.
- \_\_\_ 13. **CONFLICT INTIMACY:** facing and working through differences to creative resolution and increased closeness, etc.
- \_\_\_ 14. **INTIMACY AND AUTONOMY:** Respect for the natural rhythm of intimacy and aloneness, accepting each other's needs for privacy and solitude, etc

## Improving Sexual Intimacy - Some Suggestions from Gary Smalley

- \* **Both Partners:** Talk More. Take the initiative. Take time to enjoy the experience. Be Creative. Pay attention to the atmosphere in which you will make love. Express your desire.
- \* **For men:** Be Romantic. Take time with foreplay. Make yourself sexy.
- \* **For women:** Understand his sexual needs. Find out what he really enjoys. Make yourself sexy.

# Sexual Relationship Inventory

Worksheet #11a

Rate each item from 0 - 5 in terms of degree of development needed/desired.  
"0" indicating no need or desire for further development and "5" much need for development.

- \_\_\_ 1. Talking openly with each other about our sexual relationship.
- \_\_\_ 2. Giving each other affectionate touching in everyday living, not only as a means of leading up to intercourse.
- \_\_\_ 3. Creating and varying the setting, time and atmosphere for lovemaking..
- \_\_\_ 4. Having sufficient privacy for lovemaking.
- \_\_\_ 5. Prolonged caressing and body stimulation before intercourse.
- \_\_\_ 6. Letting each other know what is pleasurable and asking for what we want.
- \_\_\_ 7. Experiencing lovemaking as a time of carefree play and fun.
- \_\_\_ 8. Freely expressing feelings during lovemaking.
- \_\_\_ 9. Seeing your lovemaking as good, holy and blessed by God.
- \_\_\_ 10. Caressing and fondling the genital organs..
- \_\_\_ 11. Achieving a satisfactory climax.
- \_\_\_ 12. Having orgasm by various means such as using hands or mouth.
- \_\_\_ 13. Experiencing emotional or spiritual vulnerability in lovemaking.
- \_\_\_ 14. Frequency of intercourse..
- \_\_\_ 15. Respecting and working through differences in levels and timing of sexual desire.
- \_\_\_ 16. Expressing love, tenderness and affection after intercourse.
- \_\_\_ 17. Other dimensions important to me: