

MARRIAGE

To Have and To Hold



June Hunt



HOPE
for the Heart

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JUNE HUNT



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Dear Friend,

Having counseled thousands of married couples over the years, I am often asked, “What one thing do you believe sabotages more marriages than anything else?” Before I tell you my answer, I invite you to consider *yours*. What would you say? Unforgiveness? Lack of communication? Mishandling of finances? While these can certainly cause grief in a marriage, my answer may surprise you: *unrealistic expectations!*

Ruth Bell Graham—late wife of the noted evangelist—amplifies the point: “I pity the married couple who expects too much from one another. It is a foolish woman who expects her husband to be to her that which only Jesus Christ Himself can be: ready to forgive, totally understanding, unendingly patient, invariably tender and loving, unfailing in every area, anticipating every need, and making more than adequate provision. Such expectations put a man under an impossible strain. The same goes for the man who expects too much from his wife.”¹

My own mother knew a great deal about dashed expectations in marriage. My father, who was twice Mother’s age when they wed, was also an adulterer. When asked about his frequent dalliances—which he made little effort to hide—dad would explain, “I’m not a Christian. I don’t need to live by Christian ethics.” Wounded to the core, Mother nevertheless tried valiantly to hide her tears. You see, to my father’s way of thinking, tears were “a sign of mental illness.” Mother had witnessed the

plight of my father's firstborn son from a previous marriage. Pronounced mentally ill, dad had the boy permanently institutionalized. Would Mother be next?

I simply adored my mother. A kinder, more gracious and supportive woman I have never known. Over the years, witnessing her pain and senseless victimization filled me with bitter anger and resentment toward my father. Until, one day, unable to contain my hatred, it boiled over like a roaring volcano: "How can you be so nice to him?" I demanded of my mother, spitting the words between clinched teeth. What mom said next is one of the most memorable lessons I've ever learned about marriage. "Oh honey, he doesn't know the Lord," she said. "If he knew the Lord, he wouldn't act that way."

At the time, the words served only to infuriate me all the more. But over the years, as my walk with Christ deepened, I began to see their profound wisdom. And not just for marriage, but for every key relationship in life. As I matured, the Lord allowed me to grasp it: My godly mother was explaining that God was calling her to look beyond the *faults* of her flawed husband ... to see his *need*.


What would happen if every husband and wife did the same? Instead of focusing on the fault—the injustice, the "you had no right to treat me this way"—what if you looked below the surface? What if you asked, "What are the deepest root issues that are motivating my spouse to treat me this way?" "Is there anything I can do, Lord, to minister to those needs?"

What if the Prayer of St. Francis became the prayer of every husband and wife?

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled,
as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.*

The Bible teaches that God created marriage to make husbands and wives *holy*, not just to make them *happy*.² May this book help you discover wedded holiness—and happiness—that will keep your marriage flourishing “for as long as you both shall live.”

Yours in the Lord’s hope,


June Hunt

MARRIAGE

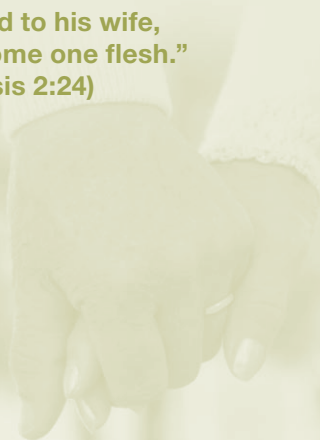
To Have and To Hold

“In the beginning God created the heavens and earth,” a paradise of breathless beauty spawned in His own heart and populated with all the animals, *“each according to its kind”* (Genesis 1:1, 24). God was pleased with His perfect creation and yet He desired something else ... something different ... something like no other to populate His new world.

Many people forget—or don’t even know—that our God is also the magnificent Creator of marriage. Unlike the creation of the animals, after forming the first man, the Lord fashions the first woman from the rib of the man! And then they become *one*, a living picture of God’s desire for the union of man and woman in marriage.

Thus, after the creation of Adam and Eve, the first mention of the husband and wife relationship bursts forth on the scene:

**“... a man leaves his father and mother
and is united to his wife,
and they become one flesh.”
(Genesis 2:24)**





DEFINITIONS

He may be a foremost voice on marriage and the family, but he's also the first to admit—there have been more than a few “flub-ups” along the way.

Jim Dobson is founder of both *Focus on the Family* and *Family Talk*, two nonprofit organizations committed to strengthening families through radio broadcasts, books, and conferences. He has been recognized by the United States Congress as a valued expert, having served on multiple government panels.

When it comes to marriage, Dr. Dobson says, “romantic love is the fuel that powers the female engine.”³ And, oh, does he learn this the hard way in his own life. On the day of his first major marital flub-up, he comes up short—he forgets it, he blows it, he ruins it!

**“If I am guilty—woe to me!”
(Job 10:15)**

WHAT IS God's Meaning of Marriage?

From the beginning, Jim and Shirley Dobson build their marriage on the solid foundation of biblical principles, including love and integrity—and their first Valentine's Day is sure to be unforgettable.

The atmosphere Shirley creates can't be more romantic: red candles glowing atop the table where

a heart-shaped cake—a delicious pink cake to be admired, then devoured—welcomes home her sweetheart. A small gift awaits Jim, along with a love note befitting the amorous day. His bride eagerly anticipates his arrival at any moment as she meticulously prepares a special meal of her very best dishes.

In their first year of marriage, what could be more romantic than she being his Valentine and he being hers? On this romantic evening, there's just one glitch—Jim hasn't planned anything special because he doesn't even realize it is Valentine's Day!⁴ Unfortunately, rather than receiving the expression of love her heart hopes for, Shirley feels the pain firsthand of this verse:

**“Hope deferred makes the heart sick.”
(Proverbs 13:12)**

- ▶ **Marriage** covenant is a binding agreement between a man and a woman who are legally and spiritually joined together as husband and wife.

Jesus says of the husband/wife relationship, *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate”* (Matthew 19:6).

- ▶ **Marriage** ceremony refers to the rite of joining a man and a woman in wedlock.⁵

WHAT IS God's View of the Marriage Covenant?

What Jim has planned for the day is a date with books and journals at a nearby library, where he spends about 10 hours on February 14—Valentine's Day.

Hungry and totally forgetting how special this day is, he grabs a hamburger at a restaurant and then decides to stop and visit his parents. Mom greets him with a big slice of apple pie, so now in Jim's mind there certainly isn't any reason to be in a hurry to go home. He later remembers—"that sealed my doom."⁶

Eventually he unlocks the front door around 10:00 p.m. and anything but romance fills the air. It's good that Jim and Shirley are totally committed to their marriage covenant, especially in the midst of unfulfilled expectations.

The concept of covenant is threaded throughout the Old and New Testaments, weaving a tapestry of steadfast love and loyalty between God and His people. The marriage vows mirror that same faithful devotion, expressing a lifetime commitment between two people and God.

The Bible says ...

**"But the steadfast love of the LORD
is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him ...
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments."
(Psalm 103:17-18 ESV)**

The Covenant Commitment

In biblical times, a covenant vow was binding and unbreakable. God made the marriage commitment to be a sacred covenant, a lifetime promise, a permanent pledge—“till death do we part.”

1. The marriage covenant is not just between two people, but between two people *and* God.

- Covenants in the Old Testament were mutually binding agreements confirmed by an oath in God’s name. The Hebrew word *beriyth*, used over 280 times in the Old Testament, is most often translated “covenant,” which means “a binding agreement.”⁷

“On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land ...’” (Genesis 15:18).

- If you are a covenant maker, your covenant is also with the Lord. Christian marriage ceremonies traditionally include the words of Jesus: “... *what God has joined together, let no one separate*” (Mark 10:9).

2. The marriage covenant requires self-sacrifice and a commitment till death.

- God initiated covenants with people and refused to forsake them.

“... they rejected my laws ... Yet in spite of this ... I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them” (Leviticus 26:43–44).

- If you are a covenant keeper, you will refuse to forsake your marriage covenant.

“May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18).

3. **The marriage covenant** holds each person singly responsible to demonstrate a covenant of love and loyalty, even if the mate does not respond accordingly.

- Covenants require covenant makers to “die to self” through a willingness to make difficult personal sacrifices.

“As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Romans 12:18).

- Covenants can be based on the desires of one person or of many people.

“... the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant” (Malachi 2:14).

4. **The marriage covenant** keepers realize that keeping a lifetime commitment is a continual process of submitting their will to God, allowing Him to develop the character of Christ in them.

- As a covenant keeper, you are empowered by Christ (indwelling each believer) to remain faithful to your commitments.

“I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the

Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).

- Only the Lord promises us His power to be covenant keepers.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3–4).

WHAT IS God’s Order for Marriage?

Jim and Shirley’s marriage is normally a model of God’s four-point plan for the marital relationship, but the Valentine’s Day fiasco does put the couple to the test.

Jim arrives home to a dark and deathly quiet apartment. Half-burned candles display dried up drips, and stale food lays heaped on pretty dishes. Jim’s thoughts begin to race ... what have I forgotten? And then suddenly he sees red and white decorations on the table. He exclaims something that countless men (and women) who have forgotten Valentine’s Day blurt out—“Oh no!”⁸

Here he just spent Valentine’s evening with his mom—eating pie! Of course it’s an accident, yet Jim will now be eating humble pie.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Philippians 2:3–4)

God’s Four-Point Plan for Marriage⁹

GENESIS 2:24–25

► Separation

“A man leaves his father and mother ...” (v. 24).

Both the husband and wife leave the authority of their parents and become a separate family unit. In marriage, the loyalty to a parent should never be stronger than the loyalty to a spouse.

► Bonding

“... and is united to his wife ...” (v. 24).

By an act of the will, bonding is a mental commitment to have a faithful, permanent relationship with a spouse regardless of whatever difficulties may arise.

► Oneness

“... they become one flesh” (v. 24).

Physical oneness is the consummation of sexual closeness. However, to achieve a lasting physical, emotional, and spiritual oneness, both spouses should look for ways to please, build up, and encourage the other. This can be accomplished by openly asking what is pleasurable and meaningful and by taking the time to enjoy one another.

► Intimacy

“... they felt no shame” (v. 25).

Emotional intimacy is encouraged when a married couple seek to be vulnerable and transparent. They honestly share with one another their feelings of frustration and failure, happiness and hopefulness, as well as their deepest disappointments and desires.

Spiritual intimacy is achieved when spouses continue to reveal to one another their innermost needs, confess their struggles to one another, pray for each other, and share what God is personally doing in their individual lives.

Rejected by In-Laws

QUESTION: “My parents have rejected my wife ever since we’ve been married. They don’t include her in family functions. I go without her to weddings, birthdays, and graduations. How can I get my parents to accept her?”

ANSWER: As her husband, you are called to love your wife sacrificially as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). A tangible way to express your love for her is through actions that convey that you value and cherish her and are willing to “lay your life down” for her. Until now, you have been accepting of your parents’ hurtful choice to exclude your wife from family functions.

For your parents to accept your wife, they need a motivating “reason” to accept her. Presently they have no motivation because no consequences have been attached to their failure to accept her. As long as you