

Saving  
Marriage  
by Applying  
Biblical  
Wisdom



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Wisdom

Drs. Trevor and Edith  
**FRASER**

Benson Prigg, PhD. Editor



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## Foreword

TREVOR AND EDITH Fraser, in a most engaging way, address an extremely critical need in society—saving marriages. Today’s shocking statistics underscore the disturbing truth that marriage is on the critical list, if not life-support, and in need of extraordinary care.

In this book the Frasers apply biblical wisdom to address that need. With the lure of provocative titles, they use personal narrative and an array of relevant experiences to unpack and plainly illustrate biblical truths. While their 40 years of married life, as well as the experiences of others, are a helpful resource, they clearly indicate that the principles contained in the Bible, and their relationship to them, are the essential key.

Skillfully using the needle of biblical models and metaphor, they have woven a tapestry of biblical truth on marriage that deserves a central, featured place in every relationship. This book can serve as a wise preparation for

## Saving Marriage by Applying Biblical Wisdom

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marriage, as well as a useful tool to strengthen a marriage, or—as the title indicates—to save a marriage.

—**Benjamin F. Reaves, D.Min.**  
*Vice President of Mission and Ministries*  
*Adventist Health System*



## Introduction

TREVOR AND I were at church when the inspiration for this book occurred. I was talking with a young woman who, in the course of our conversation, looked at me and said, “You and your husband are the perfect match.”

“What does that mean?” I said.

She talked of her own failed marriage and the many marriages she had seen fall apart. Then she explained that our marriage worked because Trevor and I were the perfect match. As she continued, it became obvious that in her mind, being the perfect match was a matter of finding the “right person for you,” that marriages are about being connected with the perfect person. It did not seem to matter about being the perfect person. Somehow the implication was that we did not have problems. Things worked for us magically.

*The perfect match?* I thought. *Is that the case?*

Her remark caused me to ponder as I shared it with Trevor, and we talked for hours about this concept. This conversation led to many questions:

- Is marriage about being the perfect match?
- Do some marriages have an advantage over others?
- If we were the perfect match, does that mean we did not fight?
- Does being the perfect match mean that marriage is easy for us while others have a hard time?
- What makes our marriage work?
- What makes any marriage work?

These questions initiated a search for answers. We thought about our marriage—the good times and the bad times. We have been married for more than 40 years and experienced many difficulties in our relationships. But the Bible and our strong spiritual lifestyle have provided the foundation for our marriage. So we studied married couples in the Bible and numerous other sources. We read psychology books and articles and questioned couples in successful marriages. In the end, these sources provided us with rich insights on marital success. The book you are holding is the result of our endeavors.

You might wonder why we use the Bible as the lens for understanding modern marriages. It is our conviction that God created the institution of marriage in the garden of Eden and that He wrote a manual, the Bible, on preserving that relationship. Consequently, this chronicle of human events provides a resource for helping relationships today. We find valuable models and powerful metaphors for the family in the Scriptures. Biblical families and their journeys provide insights for dealing with our contemporary families. As we reflected on problems for marriages today—family feuds, intergenerational conflict, infidelity, betrayal, and domestic violence—we realized that each of these occurred within biblical families. So in this text we draw on biblical marriages to paint the picture and discover important

## Introduction

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principles; we also use modern psychology to provide additional insights and explanations.

Psychologists have stated that marital success is based on several factors such as healthy expectations, a realistic concept of love, the ability to communicate feelings, an understanding of gender differences, skills in conflict resolution and decision making, and common spiritual goals.<sup>1</sup> These are the factors couples need today to enhance their marriages. None of our research supported the perfect match theory. Unfortunately, many people who get married have the same unrealistic expectations as my young friend. These expectations lead to marital difficulties and cause high divorce rates.

What is the state of the family today? Here are some statistics that provide insight:

- About half of all marriages end in divorce.<sup>2</sup>
- One in three females has been sexually molested.<sup>3</sup>
- Forty percent of couples admit they lie to each other about financial items.<sup>4</sup>
- Sixty percent of men and 40 percent of women are involved in extramarital affairs.<sup>5</sup>

With such problems, some social thinkers have predicted the demise of marriage. This would have dire consequences for the family. Married people live longer,<sup>6</sup> are happier and are more successful in their careers and earn more than their unmarried counterparts.<sup>7</sup> So developing strategies to enhance marriage is necessary for both individual and family well-being.

The dire state of marriages today drives our interest. We have served as family life leaders and facilitators for more than 30 years. We have watched as increasing numbers of couples in our family, our church, and our neighborhood experience divorce. Though both of our parents were married

for more than 50 years, our children have few friends who can make a similar boast. As African Americans, we find this particularly troubling. For in the African American community divorce rates are higher than in society at large, and single mothers lead 68 percent of homes.<sup>8</sup> This trend has severe consequences for all communities and for society in general. These statistics increase our passion for helping families and couples.

We are driven not only by concern over general marriage trends, but also by the discovery that most of the states in the USA with the highest divorce rate are in the Bible belt. Except for Nevada, which has the highest rate, many of the states with high divorce rates are in the South.<sup>9</sup> In the Bible belt, couples are perceived to attend church, believe the Bible, and accept its principles—yet their marriages still experience difficulties, ending in discord or even divorce. How do we explain this? Should Christians avoid looking for solutions to marital problems and difficulties in scientific models, psychology approaches, sociological and behavioral constructs, and even educational models?

We believe a Bible-based approach could address the needs of couples throughout the United States—hence this book. Furthermore, because we are marriage and family counselors, in developing this book we combined biblical perspectives with sociological and psychological theory. We also drew upon our own personal experience. This combination of biblical context, psychological applications, and personal experience enabled us to address the complexities of marriage and the unsettled state of families in a postmodern world.

Our study in the Bible of Isaac and Rebekah's marriage provided us with a response to the concept of a perfect match. It was, after all, a marriage that began with prayer. Abraham's servant was commissioned to find the right wife for Isaac, and

his prayer was, “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham” (Gen. 24:12). God answered his prayer, and Rebekah seemed to be the perfect match for Isaac. Still this couple had difficulties because good marriages do not just happen. Requirements exist even for couples who are the perfect match.

Our personal experience and research has shown us that couples with more difficulties, even infidelity, could survive with the right strategies for marital success. Both David and Bathsheba’s marriage and Hosea and Gomer’s marriage support the need to develop the right approach to cultivating a marriage. The complexity of successful relationship building requires knowledge of male-female differences, differences in needs, and conflict-resolution skills. This book will address each of these topics.

Each chapter uses a biblical couple to teach a strategy for marital success. The book incorporates primary issues confronting couples in their marriages. Each chapter contains four distinct sections:

1. Begins with a Bible story as context
2. Explores the story and the struggles in this marriage
3. Ends with lessons and strategies from the couples
4. Provides a worksheet that encourages a couple’s communication and discussion

For the past twenty years we have conducted workshops for couples and families. We are committed to reducing divorce. Our seminars combine our marriage experience, educational preparation, and Bible principles to provide couples with solutions to withstand the vicissitudes of life. They support the concept of hard work and commitment to each other—not to being a perfect match. We believe all matches have the potential to survive.

We hope you will follow the suggestions and strategies this book provides. Follow-through is essential to success. Trevor and I belong to a gym, and every January the gym is packed with individuals who intend to work on their bodies. They have decided this year will be different. They are going to lose weight and exercise. So in January, we can barely find a parking space. The machines are all full. We have to wait in line to lift the weights. Unfortunately by March, it is back to the old gang. Those who start in January are gone. They have little follow-through.

Making a difference in your marriage requires follow-through; reading this book is not enough. You and your spouse will need to work diligently and consistently to incorporate these factors in your marriage. We hope you will continue to work on your marriage for the rest of your life, not just the next few weeks. We trust you are in this for the long haul.

We have some wishes for you as you read this book and complete the worksheets: Communicate with your spouse more, love each other more, increase your commitment to each other, and grow and be happy with the spouse of your youth. As the Bible says, “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Prov. 5:18). This is our wish for you, and our prayer for your marriage.

Unless noted, all scriptural passages come from the New International Version.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Baby, Where Did Our Love Go?

## Adam and Eve: Intimacy Lost and Recovered

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 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 2:21-25

### Introduction

**I** REMEMBER THE first time I saw Trevor. Young and debonair, he was sitting across from me in a Bible study class. I was home after my freshman year at college and wondered who this cute fellow was. He was new to our church, and I was unattached. Unfortunately, I thought he must be married as he was sitting next to a woman who

was also new. When introductions were made, I heard great news. They had different last names! He was stationed at Fort Knox and from New York City! My heart skipped a beat. For the rest of the Bible study, we looked at each other and smiled. He smiled at me. I smiled at him. As we exited the room, we had each worked out a strategy to meet personally. That casual meeting more than 42 years ago was the beginning of a great relationship.

Adam and Eve had a similar beginning with just one look. What a way to begin a marriage! The man sees the woman and goes, “Wow!” It was love at first sight. Here is a marriage that God put together. The man and woman had no baggage, no family-of-origin difficulties, and no concern with extramarital affairs. Though the biblical text alludes to leaving mother and father, this couple did not have in-law problems. They really were the perfect match, right?

Yet even for this first couple, marriage was a challenge. It spanned 900 years. During those many years, they experienced many of life’s complications: division and distrust, job loss, disappointment, the death of a child, and seeing the children and grandchildren grow up and leave home.

Today, the challenge to maintain a healthy, committed relationship over the life of a marriage is still difficult. According to Wilcox and Nock, the American family has experienced a revolution that involves women working outside the home, with the expectation that men will work more around and in the home. These complications require couples to negotiate on several levels. One is the increased expectation for emotional intimacy in the marriage while still balancing work and home obligations. Wives in the past who experienced intimacy in the marriage were happier even without gender equality.<sup>1</sup> This research suggests that long-lasting marriages have unique struggles, concerns and issues.

Our research found that the longevity of the relationship creates its own demands and that maintaining emotional intimacy is hard work. Recently, Trevor told me we had been so busy for the past three weeks, we had not even kissed! What a difference from that initial look across the room and those early days of constant contact. I was shocked and then recognized that we had not followed our own plans. We had been too busy for each other. Indeed, longevity has its challenges, and this seemed true even for Adam and Eve.

What were their unique challenges? What can modern couples learn from them? How does a marriage survive for many years? These are questions we will explore in this chapter. Adam and Eve faced issues related to emotional intimacy and its loss. One issue that confronted them, resulting in a need to adapt and change, was the role of stages or seasons of marriage. These challenges can prompt the question: Where did the love go?

Adam and Eve's story provides insight on intimacy and a relationship that was dynamic not static.

### **Adam and Eve: At the Beginning**

Unlike any other couple, Adam and Eve were created for each other. They were the perfect match. The Bible introduces this relationship in the first chapter: "Male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

First, God created Adam. Next, God gave Adam a responsibility: to name all of the animals, birds, and beasts. While God recognized Adam needed a helpmate, this responsibility brought Adam to the same conclusion because Adam realized he was alone. So God created Eve. He caused Adam to go to sleep, took a rib from his side and formed the woman, then brought her to him. When Adam saw her, he was ecstatic! He declared her "bone of

my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). Then he gave her a name—woman.

Their courtship and marriage has several unique features. It began with the first recorded surgery, and God performed it. This was the only time that life comes from a man. Then God, who orchestrated the surgery, performed the marriage. Adam and Eve came to their marriage with no emotional baggage, no extended family, and few outside distractions. Further, the Bible states they were both naked and not ashamed (Genesis 2:25). This nakedness implies a vulnerability to each other and an openness, which is essential for a healthy relationship.

Unlike today, they did not begin the marriage with guardedness and fear of pain. They did not have parents who failed to meet their needs, nor did they have classmates who teased or bullied them. These childhood difficulties often leave individuals with pain, vulnerability, and emotional baggage—all of which they take into the marriage. Adam and Eve did not have these difficulties. They entered their marriage willing to risk being vulnerable and willing to share with each other emotionally, intellectually, and physically. They were not guarded with walls of protection.

Several years ago, we attended the play *Fences* (Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Montgomery) by the Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson. We were so enthralled, for the full three hours it took us to drive home we discussed its implication for couples. The play is about Troy Maxson, a man whose personal pain transformed and destroyed many relationships. Troy was always building a fence and had this very famous line: “Fences can be used to keep people in or keep people out.”<sup>2</sup>

We have used this line frequently in our counseling. Once we counseled a couple whose relationship was filled with conflict. After a weekend of fighting, they came to

our office. During the session, they gave one answer to a question that revealed the power of emotional baggage.

Mary was sharing a remark that her husband Tom made and spoke of how painful it was. He protested, saying she took it the wrong way. She became teary-eyed and said he was just trying to hurt her. I (Edith) asked if she could remember feeling this type of pain before. She again became quiet and teary—and then discussed a time at school when the other kids had called her names and said things that made her feel really bad. The feelings from that event paralleled her feelings over her husband's remark. Tom was shocked. He immediately went over to her and apologized. He had not meant his remark as a put down, and he did not know about her childhood experience.

Similar conditions may be true of your marriage. You may enter the relationship with pain from home—where your needs were not met or where you were emotionally or physically abused. You may enter the marriage with pain from your relationships at school or with other peers. The same is true of your spouse. And, like Tom and Mary, you may not be aware of the other's pain. Adam and Eve, however, did not have emotional baggage.

The second unique aspect about Adam and Eve's marriage was the absence of extended family. In a recent conversation, a pastor of a large church bemoaned that mothers were so involved in the marriage of their children. Parents struggle with understanding how to divest their energies from their children's lives. (We will explore this pervasive problem in Chapter 9.) But neither Adam nor Eve had a mother-in-law or father-in-law who opposed their marriage. They had no siblings to contend with. Their marriage came with no history or pressure from extended family.

Finally, this couple had few outside distractions. Neither Adam nor Eve had an outside job; neither Adam nor Eve

had bowling team or church responsibilities. They did not have aging parents or adolescent children. They were not compelled to serve on the church board or be an usher.

Like many couples, Trevor and I find ourselves on numerous boards and several committees. We have aging mothers, family responsibilities, and a precious grandson. All these outside responsibilities take time we might otherwise use to enhance our relationship. This was not the problem for Adam and Eve.

In modern life, working together can create additional pressure for some couples. While Adam and Eve worked together in the garden, this did not seem to cause conflict. Instead, there they learned about nature and about each other. An integral emotional linkage and connection held them together. They were similar in background and origins. They had no vast differences. They had many commonalities, which make for a good relationship. They were linked by God at creation, by a shared rib, by proximity as the only humans in the garden, and by love. They were in love and always together.

We do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in this state of marital bliss, but one day they became separated. One Christian writer suggests that Eve wandered unconsciously from Adam's side while working in the Garden,<sup>3</sup> and she found herself near the tree, confronted by a talking serpent. Amazed, Eve was drawn to the phenomenon. Before she realized it, she was first talking with the serpent and then eating the fruit. Either Adam was occupied with something else or he was emotionally distant from her. The Bible implies he was there, but he is not engaged in Eve's conversation the serpent. Thrilled with her discovery, she shares the fruit with him. Whatever occurred between the two, in the end Adam took and ate the fruit. As a result, he

changed the course of history—including the chemistry of the marital relationship.

This event transformed the couple, distancing them from each other. The Bible states, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked” (Genesis 3:7). Until then both had been naked and unashamed. Now they were suddenly ashamed of their nakedness and afraid of God, so they hid. Their conversation with God turned into a blame game, which further distanced them and increased their loss of intimacy. Adam blamed God, talking about “the woman you put here.” Then Eve blamed the serpent: “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12-13). This blaming seems so different from Adam’s first remarks about Eve—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

What happened to the first couple? What led to the loss of intimacy and the confrontation at the tree? Where did the love go? The Bible doesn’t answer specifically, but our understanding of relationships allows us to reflect on some lessons drawn from their experience.

### **Marital Difficulties for Adam and Eve: Role of Stages in Marriage**

Three basic difficulties confronted this biblical couple and transformed their level of connection:

1. Unawareness that marriage is dynamic and not static, that marriage has stages and seasons
2. Loss of intimacy in the marriage by building fences
3. Failure to develop a mutual decision-making process. An exploration of each of these problems reveals their impact on the marriage.

According to Bader and Pearson, most marriages go through stages of development; marriages evolve and change.<sup>4</sup> Each stage has specific tasks for the couple to master before their relationship can transition to the next stage. But during a transition between stages, conflict and division may occur.

The stages are:

- Togetherness
- Reality
- Accommodation
- Transformation

### *Togetherness*

In the first stage of marriage, the couple's task is to understand each other and how they are alike. They try hard to please each other and make an effort to spend time together. Inseparable, Adam and Eve wandered around the garden together. Perhaps they played games like hide and seek. As the only two humans, they had no problems with in-laws, nor did they have problems with Adam wanting to hang out with the boys. They were never apart. When a couple is in this first stage, maintaining the relationship is their primary goal; they will do anything to ensure the survival of the relationship—which they believe means being always together and not being different.<sup>5</sup> These couples are uncomfortable with differences and ignore personal identities to work on developing a couple identity.

We think of Paula and Tony, a couple we counseled—two people deeply in love and so passionately intertwined with each other that they worked together on projects such as remodeling their handyman special home. In their professional lives, they had similar jobs. They were almost always

together at various functions and seemed so uniquely matched that their intimate friends would remark they were really close. They attended Paula's church together even though Tony was not a member. He wanted to share the experience. He was committed to his marriage and found it important that they share many wholesome situations regularly. After some effort, they were able to complete the work on their starter home. Such togetherness is typical of this stage. Some couples remain in this stage only a few months, while other couples like Tony and Paul stay in it longer.

What causes a transition from one stage to another? Usually something happens in the relationship. An event triggers a need or desire for a different type of relationship. The couple wants a different pattern of interaction. They focus less on "couple identity" and more on a need to establish an individual identity. In the search for a couple identity, individual needs and desires are less important. As the couple shifts to the next stage, they focus less on how they are alike and look more at how they are different. They find themselves wondering if they can love each other yet have different interests. They begin wondering about how much differentiation is acceptable without threatening the marriage.

Because these are questions most couples ponder, it is likely the first couple did too. When did Adam ask the question? When did Eve ponder the need for differentiation? We do not know. But Adam and Eve began distancing from each other. This suggests that though closely bonded at creation, there came a time when—for whatever reason—they began to be attracted to different events or circumstances. Perhaps Adam and Eve began to disconnect and focus on their own personal identities. They began to go their separate ways. Perhaps Adam was busy with the animals. Maybe he loved to watch them lope through the garden, and their interaction

fascinated him. Maybe Eve was concerned with the birds, the trees, and the flowers. There is no biblical explanation for what happened, but we suspect differentiation occurred slowly.

The same phenomenon happens today with recently married couples. Though at first they may spend an extraordinary amount of time together and are enamored with each other, eventually there comes the change and couples move to another stage. Patricia and Gregory Kuhlman call this the reality stage.<sup>6</sup>

### *Reality*

The couple may begin to develop other interests based on their own sense of self. This pattern reflects the couple moving into another stage of marital development. The couple sometimes begins to focus on careers or on buying a house. Perhaps one of them is working two jobs and the other is going to school. For many couples, the arrival of children causes the differentiation and separation. Some begin to feel the spark has left their relationship—a factor some couples often misinterpret and some find frightening.<sup>7</sup> We have seen many couples come into counseling at this stage of marriage than any other. Usually one partner is uncomfortable with the changes.

In Paula and Tony's marriage, change brought discomfort. Since they could not have kids of their own, they decided to adopt. The first child was disabled and required more of Paula's time. The foster care agency had two children from the same home, so it wanted to keep them together. The agency asked Paula and Tony to consider keeping both. They agreed, and this may have been the unraveling of their closely-knit union. Soon Paula had little time for Tony, so he started going to events on his own and working more on

activities that excluded Paula. Eventually their relationship became similar to that of their many friends—people living in the same house but not connecting with each other.

When a couple reaches the reality stage, it can be disconcerting. This can be the seed of conflict and confusion, especially because each partner may react differently. One partner often wants to remain in the earlier stage of connectedness and fears the other's need to pursue his or her own issues and identity.<sup>8</sup> One partner may feel free, while the other feels abandoned.

Most marriages go through four stages, but the reality stage is the most treacherous. In contrast to the honeymoon stage, in the reality stage sex becomes routine, and alienation and negativity increase. The spark is gone from the marriage. The couple must do something—have a plan or work hard to address this stage's concerns, one of which is the loss of intimacy. This loss requires couples to renew their relationship, manage the differences, and develop tools for addressing the conflict.

### *Accommodation*

Couples who develop strategies to move from the reality stage transition into the accommodation stage.<sup>10</sup> Here partners learn conflict resolution skills; as in card games, they learn when to “hold them and when to fold them.” Some issues are not worth fighting about, a few issues will never be resolved, and others require you to go along with your partner. In the accommodation stage, the couple learns these valuable lessons.

### *Transformation*

The natural progression after successful accommodation is the transformation stage<sup>11</sup> as the couple returns to

enjoying the benefits of a marriage, and their intimacy needs are met. The couple has developed a couple identity that allows for an individual identity for each partner. Both the marriage and the partners are transformed by the relationship. Profound intimacy occurs, and the couple shares the ups and downs of marital life.

Understanding the pattern of relationship development raises some interesting questions:

- Does distance always mean a loss of intimacy?
- Does the reality stage mean a couple is not closely bonded?
- Could Adam and Eve have had differences and still been intimate?
- Did Adam's and Eve unique concerns mean a loss of intimacy in the marriage?

These questions lead us to explore two marital difficulties that Adam and Eve and many couples today face: loss of intimacy and lack of a mutual decision-making apparatus.

### **Marital Difficulty: Loss of Intimacy**

The loss of intimacy is one of the major marital problems confronting couples. According to Dr. Rubin, intimacy is the drive for physical union and emotional and intellectual bonding with your spouse.<sup>12</sup> Loss of intimacy refers to the loss of love, lack of attention to your partner's need, and a deficit of affection.

Researchers blame the lack of intimacy more than interpersonal conflict for marital difficulties—since all couples experience interpersonal conflict. Research indicates this loss of affection and validation causes an

increase in hostility and conflict. According to Dr. David Ferguson, couples need to maintain intimacy emotionally, physically, and spiritually.<sup>13</sup> Few couples can maintain all three levels of intimacy, but successful transitioning from one stage to another requires these types of intimacy. Early in the marriage, physical intimacy is important; however, in the reality and accommodation stages, one of the primary issues is developing emotional and spiritual intimacy.

Emotional and spiritual intimacy require couples to become vulnerable and open with each other. In our counseling sessions, we often have couples who seem distant from each other and unable to connect. One tool we use to understand this distance is to help the couple develop a metaphor for their relationship. We ask them to describe their distance in physical terms. “Is the distance between you a wall, fence, or door?” These metaphors help us understand the emotional distance between them. One couple said there was a glass wall between them, another couple told us there was a barbed wire fence, and another couple spoke of a high wall built of cement blocks. Each metaphor reveals the lack of emotional and spiritual intimacy in the relationship. This distance causes conflict because of unmet emotional needs.

One pattern that many couples with unmet emotional needs develop is the interactional process of pursuing and distancing.<sup>14</sup> One partner, the pursuer, tends to believe the couple can stay close only by remaining in the earlier honeymoon stage. Pursuers, however, frequently marry someone who needs emotional space—a distancer. John Gray partially depicts this pattern in his discussion about men needing to go into their cave and spend time alone.<sup>15</sup> This cave time is essential for coping with stress. While people typically assume that men need this distance, some females like emotional space

too. In the case of our biblical couple, it seems that Eve was the distancer and Adam was the pursuer.

Spouses who are distancers love to pursue their own interests. In their minds, the distance is about pursuing an individual identity and getting their needs met. In the Bible story, it seems that Eve distanced herself and found herself alone at the tree because we hear no conversation involving Adam. If he was present, he was apparently not engaged or aware.

Unfortunately, this pattern has different meanings to each of the partners. While the distancer needs to have emotional space from the pursuer for reflection or pursuing a goal, the pursuer is uncomfortable with that space. The emotional distance makes the pursuer feel abandoned. Instead of working together to find a couple solution, each partner is trying to meet emotional needs individually.<sup>16</sup>

Distancing is not always detrimental to a relationship; people can use it as time for reflection and development. When an individual is stressed, one option is to retreat into the “cave of the mind” and focus on the problem. For some people, problems are best solved alone in the cave. Once the problem is solved, the distancer can come out and share the resolution of the problem with the spouse.

Nevertheless, the story of Adam and Eve conveys that distancing brings risks. Too much or too frequent drifting can lead to a loss of intimacy. This marital difficulty became an important issue for Adam and Eve. A second, related marital difficulty also became evident in Adam and Eve’s relationship. This couple lacked the know-how to make major decisions. A quick review of the biblical story supports this observation.

## **Marital Difficulty: Lack of Mutual Decision-making Apparatus**

Once Eve reached the tree and was in conversation with the serpent, she had to make a major decision: eat the fruit or obey God. She was faced with uncertainty. She had to make a choice, but she had never before had to make a major decision. She had no framework for making such a big choice. In a marriage, some decisions can be made unilaterally, but others require the input from both spouses. The decision at the tree was not a time for solo choices. The couple needed to discuss it together, but they had not developed a process for making major decisions. How do couples make major decisions? What is the pattern they need to develop for good decision making?

At the tree, Eve was mesmerized by the serpent. There were at least three options she could have chosen. She could have consulted with her husband, since the decision affected them both. She could have waited and said she need more time to think. Or she could have consulted God since He met with them at the end of each day.

Unfortunately, she did not consult with her husband. She did not deliberate on this decision. She did not receive any input through prayer and study. She did not wait to talk with God. She naively made the decision herself because she believed the serpent. Without a structure to guide her choices, she was vulnerable to the serpent's suggestion.

Couples need a mechanism for decision making in their marriage. This mechanism would help couples settle on which decisions they can make independently and which they should make as a couple. It would provide structure to help with decision making, reduce vulnerability, and enhance couple communication.

We learned this the hard way. Once we had some extra money but did not discuss how to spend it. I (Edith) assumed we were going to buy an item for the house, such as bedspreads or curtains. Trevor had different thoughts. Rather than discuss how best to use the funds, we independently plotted how to spend this money. Imagine my surprise when the item purchased with the money was a used personal computer. This was not a mutual decision; it was a unilateral decision. Unfortunately, it also was not a good decision, and we still laugh at this computer, which we have never been able to use. At the time, this incident increased tension in the family. Ultimately, it led us to develop a policy for decision making, which we will discuss in the next section.

### Lessons for Reflection

We've considered the marriage of Adam and Eve—what happened to the first lovers and their love. So what can we learn from this first couple? How can they provide love and support for marriages today? There are at least four lessons we can learn from this couple:

1. Recognize all marriages have stages and seasons.
2. Work to keep intimacy in the marriage by communicating.
3. Develop an effective strategy for making major decisions.
4. Do not let adversity ruin your marriage.

#### *1. Recognize all marriages have stages and seasons.*

Marriages are dynamic, not static. Relationships require that we change because circumstances change—whether one experiences 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, or foreclosure. Such

changes affect our relationships. Couples do not remain in the honeymoon stage for fifty years. We become parents, we get older, and we experience grief and loss. Each new factor can affect our marriage and nudge us into different stages in our relationship. Marriages are not static.

In good marriages, couples work together through the various stages. Each stage has its challenges and struggles. Successful progression through the stages requires communication, commitment to each other, and hard work.

A good relationship does not just happen; it takes hard work. Though we recognize that good education doesn't just happen, and that becoming physically fit requires effort, often we think developing good relationships is spontaneous. Instead, a good relationship requires effort and a commitment to each other and the marriage.

Since Adam and Eve's marriage spanned 900 years, it reveals the challenges of marital stages. Think about this couple—they experienced banishment from the garden, increased toil and pain, difficult children, the death of a child, the exile of a child, and generations of children who ignored the patriarchs' advice. None of these difficulties ended their relationship. This first couple continued to grow and develop through the stages of marriages. They learned that all of these tribulations can be resolved if God is the foundation of the marriage. Divorce was not an option for their marriage, and it should not be an option in ours.

Author Elizabeth Marquardt's recent ground-breaking research on divorce reveals that two-thirds of divorces in America occur because the couples drift apart.<sup>17</sup> While these marriages have low levels of conflict, there has been a loss of intimacy. Instead of fighting, these couples just wander apart. Couples allow life's difficulties to divide and separate them, and they fail to support, nurture, and encourage their relationship. Later they wonder, Where did our love go?

These marriages could be saved with counseling, marital attention, and couples' retreats.

Another technique that can help save marriages is to develop a relationship with a mentoring couple. The mentors give the other couple insights and suggestions. They meet regularly, and the mentoring couple is available to assist with problem solving and providing tips from their marital experience. These mentors can help the couple learn to develop the necessary tools for going through the stages of marriage. One of these tools is learning to improve communication.

### *2. Develop tools to enhance spiritual intimacy through communication in all stages.*

Couples need to develop ways to improve intimacy in all three areas: spiritual, emotional, and physical. We suggest couples begin with spiritual intimacy—making God an essential component of your day. For Christian couples, this means developing a pattern of worship as a couple. Worship is an essential ingredient in each stage of marriage.

This was important in our marriage. On our wedding night, the first thing we did was to establish spiritual intimacy. I (Trevor) suggested two features that were essential for our marriage. The first was daily worship. I suggested we have worship every day—and that we begin and end the day in prayer. This has been our custom for the past 41 years. The second principle that framed our marriage is found in the Bible: “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26 KJV). We have tried to resolve issues before we go to bed, though this principle has been harder to keep.

Worship should frame each day, which means a couple begins the day with prayer and worship together. While

mornings are often hectic, couples need to at least begin the day with prayer together.

How do you begin the worship process in the marriage? Here are some suggestions we have found helpful:

- Select a short, inspirational worship thought for reading and discussion. There are numerous devotional books for couples. The readings usually take less than five minutes
- Have couple prayer; it is an intimate time between the couple and God. You can hold hands, or even hug, as you pray.
- Remember each other in prayer throughout the day.
- At the end of the day, come together again for prayer and worship.
- Select a book you both can read and discuss at evening worship. This is a time for couples to reflect on tools to enhance their marital relationships

The end of the chapter lists some books which you might consider reading. There are books that focus on male-female differences, on communication, and on stages and seasons of a marriage—to name a few. Worship not only enhances spiritual intimacy, but also provides tools for improved communication, since worship is a time for talking and connecting.

Emotional intimacy is enhanced by improved communication. At times, distancing will occur in our relationship. It is when we stop talking with each other that distancing becomes a problem. Find time for talking, really talking to each other. Go beyond talking about who will stop at the the grocery store, which team won the game, how your mother is doing, or what is happening in the news. Find time to talk about your relationship and how it is doing. This requires

that you delegate time for each other—time to connect and talk about your marriage. Just as your job has weekly or monthly staff meetings, you and your spouse need regularly designated times to talk about your relationship.

Time for reflection, assessment, and planning for the marriage is essential. In the early years of our marriage, we set aside times when we would stop and talk about it. These intimate talks usually occurred on a date night, and one of us would pose the question, “How is our marriage doing? What is going good? What needs to improve?” While these conversations would at times make us uncomfortable, they enhanced our relationship.

Clifford and Joyce Penner suggest this formula for intimacy: 15 minutes a day of really talking and ending with a passionate kiss; one night a week for couples to date, talk, and be affectionate with each other; one day a month for couple time; and one weekend a quarter.<sup>18</sup> Couples need to arrange time for each other, or they will get too busy.

In our marriage, we try to accomplish this in several ways. Daily we have worship, which ends with a kiss. We try to eat at least one meal together and chat. We walk together once a week for about two hours, during which we talk and share with each other. We have a bi-monthly family staff meeting where we discuss finances, scheduling, or other family issues. Finally, we go on a couples retreat at least once a year and usually have an annual vacation together.

All these are ways to arrange couple time together. Still, sometimes we get too busy to find time for each other. Our experience supports that you have to schedule couple time, just as you schedule any other activity. Otherwise, various responsibilities will keep you from having time for each other. If you count on it being occasional or spontaneous, you will give each other only leftover time. It must be intentional.

Unfortunately, too many couples talk only when there is tension. This is not the most effective way to progress through the stages of marriage or to strengthen marital communication. Learning to communicate regularly and effectively reduces arguments and tension. Regularly scheduled conversations create a partnership, companionship, and friendship. Remember, Eve was created to be Adam's companion; a good marriage is based on being each other's companion and soul mate. The story of Adam and Eve is one of partnership with God and with each other.

### *3. Develop effective strategy for making major decisions.*

One way to enhance communication and reduce tension is to learn to make major decisions. Adam and Eve did not have an effective strategy for making major decisions; it can create problems for your marriage also.

We remember a young couple, Darryl and Sarah, who were excited about expecting their first child after being married for two years. They had many financial challenges, but had tried to develop a cash-only and pay-as-you-go policy. One day while Sarah was shopping, she saw an unbelievable sale on baby items. They were 50 to 75 percent off, and the sale was ending that day. Sarah was ecstatic to find more than \$500 worth of much-needed baby items for only \$250. Because it was a sale and she needed to purchase the items that day, she charged everything. She brought the items home and could not wait to share this information with Darryl. Imagine her surprise when he told her to return them all! She was furious, and the couple went to bed without speaking to each other. She felt she had saved the family money. He felt she had violated their cash-only and pay-as-you-go policy. What Darryl and Sarah needed was a policy for making decisions and making major purchases.

How do you develop a policy for decision making? There should be several steps. The couple should meet during a regularly scheduled family meeting and develop a decision-making policy. Begin the meeting with prayer. Decide when unilateral decisions can be made and when dual decisions are necessary. This policy could be applied to expenditures like Darryl and Sarah's, but it also would have been useful for decisions like Adam and Eve's. Any decision that would affect both parties should be a mutual decision.

Mutual decisions will take more effort for discussion and exploration. Your spouse may need time to think about it, so allow for reflection time. While the decision is mutual, it should not be forced on your spouse. Each person's position should be valued and validated. Listen to your spouse's point of view and try to view the situation from his or her perspective. Then mutually decide on a policy that reflects insight from you both.

This policy provides the framework for making future decisions. Thus when confronted with a decision about a purchase, a new job, or a visit by friends, the response would be the same. "I will need to check with my spouse. We decided to have mutual decision making in cases like these, so I will get back to you." In each case, the couple would defer decision making until they can have a family meeting.

In Darryl and Sarah's case, a spending limit for unilateral decision making could be developed. Some couples will decide that any item under \$100 could be decided individually, while any amount over that requires a family meeting. Using this model, Sarah would need to call Darryl at work to discuss the sale and try to get a decision. Or she would invite him to meet her at the store and see the great prices for himself. But if the timing was not good for Darryl, this couple may have to forgo the sale and wait for a joint decision on baby clothes.

In mutual decision making you are following the biblical principle to “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21). Had Eve and Adam followed this pattern, Eve would have invited Adam to come and talk with the serpent with her. They would have discussed the serpent’s offer and together would have made a wiser choice. Ellen White, a Christian writer, states that Adam was not deceived and knew the consequences of his decision.<sup>19</sup> Thus, had he been invited to participate in the discussion, his insight would have resulted in a better decision. The process for decision making needs to be established in a home before one’s partner is talking to a serpent in the tree or is in a store with baby clothes on sale.

#### *4. No matter the harmony or disharmony, all marriages will have adversity and disappointments.*

Adam and Eve teach us that even in a marriage arranged by God with a honeymoon in the Garden of Eden, one should expect adversity and disappointment. While we will explore this concept in later chapters, here are some important factors to remember:

- You and your spouse will approach adversity and disappointments differently. Your gender, family history, culture, and temperament affect how you will face adversity and disappointments.
- The difference in reaction may cause dissension in your relationship. An event that makes you so sad you want to stay home may make your spouse angry enough to want to go out and fight the injustice. Such diametrically different responses can increase tensions in the marriage.

In December 1989, I (Edith) got a call that changed my life. My father, after being married for 51 years, had died. Earlier that year, I had invited my parents to come to the college where I teach to share information about growing old gracefully and the role of marriage and elderly. The students were excited, and the session had great interaction. Someone from the school's technology center even taped the class. One of first things I did the day I learned of Dad's death was to get that tape. I took it home and watched it over and over. My husband also wanted to see this tape, so I left it in the VCR for him. Unfortunately, he forgot to remove it, and the class session was accidentally taped over. When I learned the tape of Dad was lost, at first I was sad but then I was furious at my husband. It felt like I had again lost my father. I was angry with Trevor and distant for about six months.

Adversity can have a major impact on a marriage. Difficult times may make you feel more vulnerable and thus increase your need for autonomy and power. These struggles for control will also increase tension in the marriage.

Despite these difficulties, trust and commitment to each other can produce resilience and fortify the relationship. Difficult times can actually increase your intimacy and closeness. This is evident in Adam and Eve's marriage, which survived events that included a son's murder. The survival of this marriage offers important lessons for all couples.

The story of Adam and Eve tells us that marriages can survive as they go through stages when intimacy is disrupted and lost. Making mutual decisions is important for all marriages. Through communication, prayer, and faith, couples can reconnect and restore their relationship. This is a story of hope and promise of a better day for all couples who put their faith in God and in each other.

**Suggested Books to Read Together:**

*Gender Differences*

John Gray, 1993, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*

Emerson Eggerich, 2004, *Love and Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs*

William Harley, 2001, *His Needs, Her Needs*

Deborah Tannen, 2001 *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*

*Communication*

Doyle Barnett, 1995, *20 Communication Tips for Couples: A 30-Minute Guide to a Better Relationship Stages/Seasons of Marriage*

Gary Chapman, 2004, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*

Gary Chapman, 2007, *The Four Seasons of Marriage*

Gary Chapman, 1995; H. Norman Wright, 2000, *Communication: Key to your Marriage: A Practical Guide to Creating a Happy Fulfilling Relationship*

Rita Demarri and Sari Harrar, 2006, *7 Stages of Marriage: Laughter, Intimacy and Passion Today, Tomorrow and Forever*

Les Parrot and Leslie Parrot, 1995, *Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts*

## WHERE DID OUR LOVE GO?

### Personal Reflections

**Text: Genesis 2:21-25**

1. How would you define intimacy? How would you differentiate between sex and intimacy?

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2. What role did intimacy play in your family of origin? Who did you feel you connected to? How did your family's intimacy affect your marriage?

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3. Why is true marital intimacy difficult to obtain?

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## Baby, Where Did Our Love Go?

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4. Reflect on the stages of marriage. Now reflect on how relevant these stages of development are to your marriage. Which stage best describes your marriage? Which stage would your spouse say best describes your marriage?

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5. Discuss with your spouse ways to enhance your marriage and move it to another stage of development.

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6. List the strategies you plan to use to enrich and enhance your marriage.

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