

Marriage vows are taken 'until death parts us'.

But when a 'marriage breakdown' happens, and one person leaves, and even enters into a marriage-type relationship with another person, what then? Is the original marriage still there?

This book is written by men and women who have been through the deep hurt and confusion of a marriage breakdown. At the time of writing, none of them has been reconciled to husband or wife. But each has come into a transforming experience of God's faithful and forgiving love. As a result, they know themselves to be called by God to be faithful in love to their estranged husband or wife, no matter what, and they tell of God's faithful love sustaining them in that.

One contributor writes: 'My marriage is not over; in fact I am now more actively and consciously involved in my marriage than I ever was before!'

'I know no book like it for the matters of which it treats . . . a volume of loving wisdom and honest sharing . . . a gift in these sad times when divorce is compounding itself at an alarming rate, not only in what we call secular society, but in churches all over the world.'

From the foreword by the Rev. Geoffrey Bingham



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Called to Faithfulness God at work in broken marriages



Edited by Greg John

*With contributions from
Divorced and Separated Christians*

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God at work in broken marriages

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FOREWORD

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Contents

Foreword	ix
Introduction	xi
1. Forgiveness and Hope	1
2. The Meaning of Marriage	29
3. What about the Children?	43
4. The Personal Call of Jesus	55
5. What's in It for Me?	68
6. Thoughts and Advice	77
7. A Healed Marriage	91
8. True Romance	96
Resources	125

Foreword

When I finished reading this book my first thought was, 'How authentic it is, how applicable to the present marriage break-up, divorce and remarriage scene it is, and how good to have this in hand to give folk in need!'

Marriage break-up is one of the most difficult experiences a person knows in his or her lifetime and it takes its toll sometimes even to the point of the person taking his or her own life. Those contributors who are going through the traumas of a fractured marriage, seemingly beyond repair, have come to a settled understanding of the truth of Scripture and the indissoluble nature of the marriage covenant. Such understanding has helped them to know how to face each phase and stage, often in pain and tears and deep suffering.

I know no book like it for the matters of which it treats. I trust it will make its way around the world and bring comfort as it speaks with love and authority on the way to understand the seeming tragedy which has taken place. The honest sharing of the painful events, the bewilderment that comes from time to time, and the writers' own failures, are not glossed over, but brought very helpfully to those who need genuine help that has no frills.

Introduction

It is a volume of loving wisdom and honest sharing. The studies on the biblical teaching regarding the nature of marriage come out of the writer's long research of the subject, are quite clear and simple, and will be convincing for those not caught up in a passion beyond their control, and no longer able to hear.

For many years I have been intimately involved with the issues of marriage, divorce and remarriage. I have written books on the subject and have counselled innumerable people involved in being married, finding marriage difficult, being divorced, or facing the possibility of a second, third or fourth marriage, and unable to make sense of any of these states of relationship. There are some excellent books on the whole subject, the best of which are named in the Resources section.

This is a book to read time and again, to absorb, to share with others its contents, to give, or to recommend. It is a gift in these sad times when divorce is compounding itself at an alarming rate, not only in what we call secular society, but in churches all over the world.

Geoffrey Bingham
2002

'I am now more happily married than I was before!'

These words came from a lively, intelligent, young woman in her mid-twenties, sitting opposite me in our lounge-room. She had just finished telling a group of us about what God had been doing in her life since her marriage crisis twelve months earlier.

But she had not been reunited with her husband. He had moved interstate with someone else, and she was left with two young children. Yet her experience of Jesus Christ in the midst of the pain, and her growth in the understanding of the nature of her marriage had been such that those words rang with conviction and joy. Here was a story that needed to be told!

There is a growing number of Christians around the world who are experiencing separation or divorce, but who are remaining faithful to their wedding vows and to their spouses. While they long for reconciliation, they are willing to face singleness for the rest of their lives if necessary.

I have been privileged to meet a number of these people, and though they all face many difficulties and

trials, they are among the most deeply joyful believers I have ever known.

This is quite astounding, as there is probably no greater emotional pain than that involved in marriage and family breakdown. Those who have been through the experience know that the sense of abandonment, rejection, anger, fear, guilt, depression, loneliness and shame can be overwhelming. It can feel like your insides are being ripped out. When adultery is involved, as it is in so many cases, the betrayal by the one you most loved and trusted is devastating, arousing an intensity of emotion you would not have thought possible. Your children and your wider family are terribly hurt, embarrassed, vulnerable and confused. Well-meaning friends try to understand and give advice, but are often unable to appreciate the enormity of what you are experiencing. Others feel the need to take sides, to apportion blame and fault, but you know in your heart that justifying yourself and criticising your spouse does nothing to lessen the pain.

Almost everyone assumes that if the marriage has reached this state, then it's over. If your spouse has deliberately chosen to leave you, and especially if he or she is with someone else, then the prevailing attitude is that you need to face reality and 'get on with your life'; meaning you should put the past behind you and begin thinking about the possibility of a new partner.

For sincere Christians who believed their marriages were 'till death parts us', it is a horribly confusing time. Wildly conflicting advice and contradictory opinions abound, all claiming the authority of Scripture.

Who is to be believed, and how can anyone make sensible decisions when their emotions are so intensely involved?

The main contributors to this book have all experienced that confusion, and at the time of writing are still separated or divorced from the one they married. They are Christian believers who would never have thought they could end up in this position. The lengths of their marriages range from five years to thirty years and they all have children. The time since their separation or divorce ranges from eleven months to eleven years. Their grappling with these issues is no academic exercise.

The Lord is bringing them through the turmoil to a place of inner peace, hope, joy and trust in Him. He is bringing them to a place of firm, covenant security in Jesus, calling them to remain faithful to their one-flesh mate, and enabling them to trust Him for the outcome, confident that His ways are best.

As most of the writers are trusting that their marriages will be restored and rebuilt in God's timing, names and some factual details have been altered to avoid any embarrassment to their families. Through brief personal stories, thoughts, observations and selections from journals, they share some of the wonderful truths and understandings about God, and about themselves, that have become so real to them and which may be of encouragement to others.

The issues of divorce and remarriage for Christians can be highly emotive and divisive, so this is not an attempt to argue a case in detail, or to answer the many

questions which can arise. Read this document as a sharing of good news by Christians facing the reality of these issues in their own lives, and in no way a treatise or a criticism of those who hold differing views.

The writers share how the Lord has given them:

- a sense of the seriousness of their own sin, and the overwhelming fullness of God's forgiveness and restoration of their relationship to Him;
- an enlarged, life-changing understanding of the place, purpose and meaning of marriage in the grand scheme of life, the universe and everything;
- an understanding that marriages are not man-made contracts, but God-joined covenants;
- the conviction that God's covenant relationship to humanity is an unconditional and self-giving bonding which we are intended to image in His creation;
- a willingness to depend on the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance, and thankfulness that He has stripped away everything else they were depending on;
- an enlarged experience of the reality of the Christian life and the truth of the Scriptures;
- a clear call to remain faithful to their marriage vows;
- a new understanding and appreciation of the role and calling of single people within the Christian community;
- a certainty that they are now more consciously participating in the reality of Marriage than they ever were before.

God hates divorce much more than we do, and the Scriptures assure us that reconciliation is at the heart of His action in the world. He wants the restoration of our marriages and our families.

When asked about divorce, Jesus spoke about the permanent nature of marriage. The reaction of His disciples was amazement, almost disbelief:

If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry!

Jesus replied, 'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it' (Matthew 19:10-12).

May the Lord lead many more disciples of Jesus to accept His call to a life which faithfully witnesses to His faithfulness. May it be that in the midst of the agony and confusion of the increasingly frequent breakdown of Christian marriages, it will be given to many more believers to renounce remarriage 'because of the kingdom of heaven'.

The Marriage Covenant

*I,, will have you as my husband/wife,
to live together, as God has ordained,
in the holy state of matrimony.*

*With all that I am and all that I have
I will love you, cherish you,
honour and protect you,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health.*

*With my body I give you dignity by forsaking all others;
I will be faithful to you, as long as we both shall live.*

*As God gives me grace,
I will go on loving you till death parts us,
with the love only He can give:
A love which is patient, and kind.
A love which does not envy, does not boast, is not proud.
A love which is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not provoked.
A love which keeps no record of wrongs.
A love which does not delight in evil but rejoices in the truth.
A love which always protects, always trusts.
A love which always hopes, always perseveres.
A love which never fails.*

*In the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

This is my solemn vow and promise.

Forgiveness and Hope

Matthew 18:21–35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

‘The servant fell on his knees before him. “Be patient with me,” he begged, “and I will pay back everything.”

‘The servant’s master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” he demanded.

‘His fellow-servant fell to his knees and begged him, “Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.”

‘But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the

other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.'

When marriages break up, there seems to be a drive in all involved, either directly or indirectly, to take sides, to apportion blame, to identify faults, to pronounce judgments, to justify themselves or the one with whom they are siding. And so many are quick to predict how things are going to turn out, usually leaving the most important player, God, out of the equation.

Forgiving the one who has given up on the marriage or caused the tearing apart of a family seems too much to ask. As well, the partner remaining is often consumed with regret and guilt for their own actions and omissions, for their own contributions to the marriage failure.

Jill, Jeff, Lesley and the others have had to face up to their own faults and shortcomings. The Lord has taught them to stop justifying themselves. He has given, or renewed in them, that essential experience of the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus Christ has dealt with their guilt once and for all through His death and resurrection.

How can anyone truly forgive the wrongs done to them? As Jesus shows us, if we know the Father's salvation and mercy in the face of our great guilt, how can we, how dare we, do anything but forgive? And will He not freely give the Spirit to enable us to do so (Luke 11:13)?

Project the prodigal son forward two thousand years and imagine his wife deciding she wants out of the marriage, taking her half of their joint possessions. Given the way his father had acted towards him, how would he now behave towards his wife?

As Christian believers the writers have tried to find the Lord's will in the midst of the mess, but they were not open to Him while they justified themselves or remained unforgiving. They struggled with emotions of anger and bitterness and self-pity, but have only found peace in the deep assurance that God the Father has forgiven them and has a glorious future for them. Their yearning now is for their spouses to know that same source of mercy and life, and to join them in the wonders He has prepared both in this life and the next.

Jill

The first few days I grieved as if my partner had died. The intense grief was similar to that which I experienced twenty years before when my mother died. However, it was as if the prayers of my friends carried me on a cushion. About ten days later I felt myself come

down to earth with a jolt, still aware of God's loving presence but very aware of the need to get on with caring for the three children and sixty-acre property: a time of realising I had extra responsibilities and an uncertain future.

Now I thank God for the many timely notes, phone calls and encouraging words of Scripture in those early weeks. Whenever I felt overwhelmed I would receive help from a cassette tape, a poem or a Bible verse to remind me that the Lord was in control of my life. Little by little, healing took place in my shattered emotions.

One activity that helped me through the first painful months after my husband left was to make a scrapbook of favourite Scriptures, lovely calendar pictures and poems and cards from loved ones (e.g. Psalm 31; Isaiah 54:1–8, 13, 17).

I would read through it and be motivated and inspired to go on.

Being rejected and hurt

My husband sent me a message of rejection which wounded me deeply but, thank God, I am not in idolatry to him.

Anytime we grant someone other than Jesus Christ the authority to tell us who we are, we have made that person God in our lives (Selwyn Hughes).

No-one else besides Jesus Christ has given up his life on my behalf. The Lord alone determines my

identity. He says, 'I love you. You are precious to me. You are worth the life of Jesus.'

The Selwyn Hughes seminar on 'Caring' greatly helped to replace a poor self-image with God's positive scriptures about me. I found these statements helpful:

Rejection and failure do not make me a less worthwhile person. God values me more than a million galaxies.

God loves me too much to let anything happen to me without providing me with the strength and power to handle it.

Deep hurt invariably causes a person to say, 'I will never hurt like that again. I will get close enough to people so they affirm me, but never close enough to get hurt again.' Self-protection is sin. God's way is to trust Him to take the hurt and hold me, no matter what. Nothing which arises is too hard for God to hold me in it.

Dear Lord,

This morning I knew such overwhelming aloneness; the longing for my husband, for physical comfort, to be loved, all combined with the aches of fever and the flu.

I wept, Lord.

Jesus, you must have known this ache of singleness. And yet your word comes to me—'complete in Him'. I am complete in you. I invite you into this empty place. Please fill the aching loneliness of my physical self, Lord.

Thank you for bringing this to the surface, a buried need. You alone can fill my need. You are the satisfier of all deep longings.

Letting go

It seemed I would just get through one difficult experience, only to be faced with a more challenging one. My daughter's choice to leave and live with her Dad required much soul searching on my part. Again I was assured of God's love for us all, and He enabled me to hand her back to Him; to release her as I had released my husband.

Finding help in times of crisis

Many crises came on the property. Firstly I dislocated my knee while repairing a fence on a very steep slope. After crying out to the Lord in my desperation, He healed me without needing the threatened operation. Then a local man came to fence the high areas and put his goats on the property to help control the weeds. Three times the water pipes or pumps failed. I did not respond well, but God taught me that no matter what happened He always had a solution. I had to learn to relax, praise Him, and see what He would do.

Trust is growing, little by little. I am learning that my Maker is my husband. He is caring for me as I ask Him and trust. When a huge shrub blew down, taking with it the water pipe and fence, I prayed. God sent two neighbours to help remove the shrub without me asking them.

I was waiting for a bank loan to come through to buy a home for my children and myself to live in. Living on

bank overdraft as we waited, and waited, I was very anxious. The morning the money came through, my purse was empty, the car almost out of fuel, we had little food, I had to mix milk powder for breakfast—and borrow the bus fare from my nine-year-old son.

One day in our new home, the children were all sick with a horrid virus. I was battling germs as well and couldn't get to church. My son vomited red cordial all over the new carpet and my doona cover. I wept as I cleaned it up. It all seemed too much to bear.

Financially I found that where I made my own decisions I was running short, but as I learned to wait for God to OK the spending there was enough. It was great to attend a seminar on 'Financial Freedom' and hear God's principles on tithing and giving taught in such a relevant way.

It has been a year of taking in much teaching and reading many books. The Bible says, 'Be anxious for nothing . . .' Gradually God is teaching me to rest in Him and trust Him.

Acknowledging my own failures

Reading *Spindles and the Bushfire* to my son at bedtime, a new thought came to me. Jesus loved me enough to take the blame for my sin. Do I love my husband enough to take (at least some) of the blame for the failed marriage? Yes.

If you love someone you will be loyal to him, no matter what the cost . . . and always stand your ground defending him (1 Corinthians 13:7, *Living Bible*).

When I prayed, 'Lord I am willing, please enable me', I felt release and lightness.

I prayed that I would see my husband as God sees him. That I would be able to look upon him in compassion. That I would love, honour and respect him, not based on his actions, but in obedience to God. And God has given me not only the grace and power to live that, but also the joy that goes with being in His perfect will.

Meeting the other woman

After a few weeks the children began to spend time with their Dad and his friend. I knew I had to forgive him and be willing to meet his friend. Many friends prayed me through that first meeting. Only God gave me grace to offer friendship in these circumstances, and He has wiped away all bitterness.

The other woman's birthday was approaching and the children wanted me to go and buy the gift they had decided to give her. I had a struggle with this one. It meant going and looking in specialty shops in a large shopping centre and using my precious time. God reminded me of a story I had read where a Christian businessman had been cheated out of a large sum of money by his accountant. God said to fire him and wipe out the debt. God then said to pay his removal expenses to a new city. He did, and experienced such release. The key is always: what is God asking you to do, as He looks into your heart? . . . I bought the gift.

Truly we have a great God! By His grace and through the prayers of others, I have been able to welcome my husband and his friend into this home and to be with my daughter in their home. A year ago I thought it absolutely impossible to be at the same public function with them. It was unthinkable. But recently I was given grace to attend a school function they were at, knowing the Lord my Maker is my husband. He is my strength and shield.

Two ladies in one week shared with me that they had been the 'other woman' in the past, who broke up a marriage. They shared the pain as they recalled the past, and I realised how hard it must be to forgive oneself.

I believe you are showing me, Lord, that while it is hard to show real forgiveness as the one sinned against, it is ten times harder to accept forgiveness, to walk in forgiveness, when you are the one who has sinned.

I felt convicted during a sermon that I was 'over-mothering' the children so they would prefer to be at home with me. I was wanting to hear things like, 'I don't want to go to Dad's this weekend'.

Prayer ministry followed in which I repented. I spoke out a forgiveness prayer to the other woman and released her to God for Him to work in her life. With tears I released pent-up grief, resentment, jealousy and fear. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit I felt light, with no burden to carry. Now I didn't have to try so hard. It was a victory.

A most difficult test

After a few years my husband and his partner decided to move interstate. Again I felt God's instructions to be sure I sent them off in love; no walls between us. I felt God was asking me to ask my husband and the other woman for forgiveness for the ways in which I had made their life difficult.

This was one of the most difficult tests I have ever gone through.

I fought God. I reasoned with Him. I cried, 'This is totally unjust!' But I could not deny God's gentle pressure.

I was so stirred up inside as I drove to collect the children from the last weekend visit before they moved. I was glad that all these weekend visits would finally be over—but I had to speak out these words in love.

My husband greeted me outside, so I had time alone to say, 'I love you, and I'm sorry for any ways I have made life difficult for you both'. We hugged warmly and I knew it was worth the pain.

I said, 'Tell your partner I'm sorry'—but he said, 'You know that is for you to do'.

'Oh Lord, help me.'

Somehow by God's grace I got the words out and we embraced; an absolute miracle. And the children were all watching. Who knows why I had to do this, or what went through their minds. I only know I was obedient and felt a lightness as we drove home.¹

¹ Editor's note: As with all personal stories, this should not be seen as a prescription for others to follow. For Jill, it was part of the Lord's way of showing her that He had brought her to a place of freedom from hurt and bitterness, and that He could enable her to love and keep no record of wrongs.

Jeff

The early months after separation were the worst and best days of my life. I was having to come to terms with the fact that my dear wife of three decades had rejected me for another man, but at the same time God was teaching me such wonders about His heart and His purposes.

When people would ask how I was going, I would say that sometimes the way I felt was expressed perfectly in the words of Lamentations 3:17–26:

I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.
So I say, 'My splendour is gone
and all that I had hoped from the LORD.'
I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.
Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him.'

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

‘It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.’
This became my theme song.

Dealing with the anger

One day anger against the other man was starting to well up within me, and I thumped the kitchen door violently. My daughter pointed me to Psalms 36 and 37, which contained much that was helpful, especially these words:

An oracle is within my heart
concerning the sinfulness of the wicked:
There is no fear of God
before his eyes.
For in his own eyes he flatters himself
too much to detect or hate his sin (Psalm 36:1-2).

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when men succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.
Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil (Psalm 37:7-8).

Those psalms spoke immediately to that anger, and it was gone.

I came to understand that most of my anger (overt and suppressed) over the years was because people were frustrating my plans, and especially when I thought that my plans were for their benefit.

Any anger against my spouse and the other party or against the circumstances I was left in, was ultimately anger against God for allowing these things to happen to me.

Through my reading and talking to others about the effects of adultery, I learned that the wayward spouse and the lover are also hurt by the experience. They almost always suffer from acute depression, often with thoughts of suicide.

Forgiving, not condoning

I learned that we need not wait for someone to repent before we forgive them, and that forgiving someone does not mean that we are condoning their behaviour.

In the early days, I could only speak to my wife in dour tones, as if I needed to let her know how wrong the situation was, and how sad I was. I seemed to think that if I was pleasant and cheery I would be giving the message that I thought everything was all right, that the marriage break-up was acceptable. Perhaps I was still holding it against her, or my heart still needed more healing from the Lord.

Then one day the feeling lifted, and I was able to relate in a much more pleasant manner. A change had taken place in me. There was a freedom from the hurt of the situation, a more settled security in God’s forgiveness, and an acceptance that I could not bring about a change of heart in my wife by being sorry for myself.

I still lapse back into brief periods of sadness, but not for long. I know I don't have to stay there.

Why has God allowed this?

I heard a very helpful tape by Martin Bleby of New Creation Teaching Ministry, on the Book of Job and the unintelligibility of his suffering. None of the answers given by his friends could calm his inner turmoil. He could be satisfied by nothing less than a personal encounter with God Himself. And in the end that is what he was given, but no answers.

Our souls will never be satisfied with any answers to our questions until they have found their rest in Him. Ask, seek, knock for a personal encounter with God Himself.

Tidy answers to the whole issue of suffering may not be possible for us in this life. Like a child who asks why, but who can't be answered in terms he can comprehend, a snuggle into the warm and loving embrace of the trusted parent is enough to calm the troubled heart and to silence the questions of the mind.

The Lord's strong medicine

I had been seeking to become more aware of myself and my behaviour over several years through reading many books and doing a self-development psychology-based course. I was gaining some understanding of my 'neuroses' and thought I was getting closer to finding the truth about myself.

One day the answer to 'the truth about myself' came in words which rose from a place deep within me. The words were, 'a sinner saved by grace'.

My heart responded with recognition. 'Yes! Yes! That's the truth about me! That makes sense of my life up to now. That is the basis for future growth.'

That affirmation of my spiritual state came at just the right time, because four days later the tragedy of an unexpected marriage separation was upon me.

Over the next few months, it became clear that God had worked a miraculous transformation in me. When someone enquired how I was coping, I found myself responding, 'I have peace in my heart and a clean conscience—and it doesn't get any better than that'.

I had prayed for many years for genuine experience and joy in my Christian life. I came to realise that through the trauma of the marriage breakdown, He was answering those prayers. God hasn't given up on our marriage—He is working on both of us.

The Lord is gracious to discipline us. We are so important to Him that He is willing to use strong medicine to cure us of our illusions about what will bring us peace and joy and satisfaction in life.

Extraction from unhealthy dependency

The process of being extracted from my wrongly focussed dependency on my wife's love and affection took some time, and involved intense emotional pain.

Some months later, it suddenly dawned on me, while gardening, that though my love for her was deeper than ever,

I didn't 'need' her in that wrong way any more. That is, God had actually answered my prayer to learn to love her in *His* way, with His agape love, a love which cherishes and gives with no eye to the returns. I was freed to love my wife for her own sake, irrespective of her response. I felt like ringing her up and saying excitedly, 'O my love, come home! I don't need you any more!'

Lesley

The wisest course in life—the one which will bring immediate peace, though not immediate pleasure—is to accept things as they are *immediately*, realising that if it is beyond one's ability to change it, then there is nothing else to be done but to put one's hand into the hand of God.

When I could accept that my life was going to be very different from how I planned, I was able to move forward instead of being stuck forever in grief, regret or longing for times past. And then I was able to pray that God would take my life and make it beautiful, useful and all He wanted it to be.

Lord,

I know that my life is going to be very different from how I planned. Please make it beautiful, Lord, and useful, and all You want it to be. I put myself entirely in Your hands. What else can I do?

Knowing forgiveness and love

I have no magic formula for how I have been able to forgive my husband and his girlfriend—not only forgive them, but also love them. (And by love I don't mean 'I-will-grit-my-teeth-and-be-nice-even-if-it-kills-me'. I mean *real* love—the sort that flows almost effortlessly when one can come in utter helplessness to the throne of God, and manifests itself in how I act and speak to them.)

There was no 'moment' that I went from unforgiveness to forgiveness. From the very beginning, however, there was a determination in my heart to forgive and to love. The next natural step forward from there was to pray from my very heart that God would give me the strength and the grace to carry it out, which of course He did.

And over time, it becomes a way of living—a rut, in the positive sense, formed as any other rut is formed, by repetition. Because of course there were times when I had to forgive over and again. But once I learned that it was not something I had to *try* and do, but something *God* would do *through* me if I let Him, the battle was won. (And believe me, this was not easy for someone who likes to do everything herself to make sure it gets done!)

Empathy for my husband

This is a little story I wrote to tell myself about my empathy for my husband:

You took me to a room filled with your treasures. You showed me things one by one, beautiful things, and soon I had been there so many times, I became careless as if they belonged to me. From time to time I would even drop something. I was so, so sorry, and you were so, so hurt. But after a while you began to say, 'It doesn't matter', because you loved me so.

But it did matter. And you saying that didn't help. It only made me more careless.

Until, one day, I went to open the door to your treasure room, and found it would not open. I could see you inside, and I wanted so much to come in, but I had broken too many of your beautiful things.

I came by every day until, finally, I stopped coming by so often. We rarely spoke of your treasure room after that. Every so often I would try the door, but it was still locked. And you were so very lonely with all those treasures, yet no-one to share them with.

Then, one day, you left your door ajar, yet it was not me who stumbled in. But at least it was someone. Someone to share your treasures with. Someone you hoped would be more careful with them than I had been. And because she was, when she tried the doors of other rooms, you did not so much mind to let her in.

Before we can stand at all, we need to be realistic in taking our share of the blame for any failure in our marriages.

Strange answers to prayer

God, in His infinite wisdom, seldom answers our prayers in the way *we* think He ought to. In the weeks

and months that followed my husband's revelation of his involvement with another woman, along with the pain and soul-searching, I began to realise that so many of my long-standing prayers were being answered. I had prayed for a love for my husband that was strong and true, regardless of his response—and God gave me the agape love I needed to love my husband when there *was* no response. I, who had lived my life almost entirely by my feelings, was learning to live by faith in God and by the *fact* of His word.

My walk with God, which had been shallow, my life which had seemed hollow was suddenly full of new meaning. My longing to do something significant for God was being fulfilled.

I would never have chosen this. Of all the things in my life, I would never have chosen this! But God knows that in our greatest weakness, there is opportunity for His greatest strength to be manifest.

Forgiving and loving the other woman

I used to imagine meeting the other woman, and what I would do. I prayed, 'When it comes to it, help me find it in my heart to forgive her. If I ever look her in the eye, may I do as Corrie Ten Boom did when she met the prison camp guard who beat her—she let God's love flow through her.' The funny thing is that when *we* forgive, *we* are healed.

This seed is what I thenceforth carried in my heart for her. Though obviously I had days when, if I had come face to face with her, I might have done

something which would not be edifying to put in print, they were feelings which passed. Beneath it all, the seed I had allowed God to plant grew into the love I now have for her, and the concern I have for her soul.

To whom shall we go?

In life, and perhaps right now in your marriage, you will suffer—but it is far better to suffer for doing right, because in such suffering, we are sustained by God’s grace (1 Peter 2:20 – 3:17).

Lord I admit I am struggling to wait only upon You, to press in to You and to delight myself fully in You. I need to remember Your goodness and Your desire to do me good, but also my absolute helplessness and Your sufficiency. You can see the whole picture—I cannot, therefore it would be folly not to trust You! Only You can work all things together for good. I can only mess it up!

Trusting God for supply

It was when I made the conscious decision to trust God with our finances that the miracles began! Never have we run out! Never have we gone without food or other necessities. As I conscientiously tithed, and spent wisely, He provided. Through the times when the maintenance money didn’t come, when I had a large sum stolen, when bills came all at once . . . there was always a

generous friend, social security arrears, even a refund from the motor registration department! And all when needed!

Faith begets faith

I think I came to a place where I believed that God *would* heal our marriage and I was to stand and wait for that as a natural outgrowth of God answering so many other prayers—for strength, or wisdom, or love. Faith begets faith. Answered prayer encourages the heart to think bigger than it has ever dared to. And the desire of my heart was to see my marriage healed! And the God whose grace had hitherto been sufficient and whose provision had been abundant had more than proved Himself able.

On the days when my faith was flagging, I put on a favourite song by the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson:

You can’t hurry my Lord.
 No, you’ve just gotta wait.
 You’ve got to trust Him
 And give Him time.
 No matter how long it takes,
 With God, you just can’t hurry.
 But He’ll be there, don’t you worry.
 He may not come when you want Him
 But He’s right on time.

Adam

When I first separated from my wife it was done as a trial period to give us both some time to get through some things. I stayed with my parents for a while. During that time I had an operation and suffered a relapse as well. God really brought me to my knees through this time. After about two months of separation, I rang my wife and asked her if I could come back now—she said no!! That absolutely floored me. So I went outside to the back of my parents' place and shouted out to God, 'What do I have to do! . . .' After I had said my piece to God and was totally emotionally and physically worn out, I sensed Him saying to me, 'Don't worry. I have everything under control.' That gave me an incredible peace.

Experiencing the pain

The pain was intense in the early days—I would sit for hours at my parents' place, just looking out the window. The marriage counsellor we were seeing suggested that I should get into a place where I could find God. I would go and sit by a creek in quietness, and soak in God's presence.

One time I was sitting there by a little waterfall. The Lord was showing me that as the water cascaded over the edge and onto a rock and it kept going on and on, so was His grace for me. He really encouraged me to draw from His grace. He re-emphasised this with me

one day when I was near a stagnant part of the creek. Without the flow of grace the water becomes horrible and stinks. (I didn't stay there long!) As I drew near to God any feelings of loneliness would go.

I had about six weeks off work to get myself together, and on my return several of my workmates encouraged and listened to me. I had occasions when I fell into self-pity. Primarily a lot of the self-pity was dealt with as the Lord healed my pain. A lot of that healing came through the church during times of worship and ministry (others praying for me). A lot of the time I was a blubbing wreck at church but that was the Holy Spirit working in me to heal me. The key for me is to take my eyes off myself and look to Him and to help others with problems and to be thankful for what I do have.

Facing my own faults

Since we have been apart, the Lord has shown me many things where I have fallen short: controlling and manipulating behaviour, seeking my wife for the security which only He could give, and my part in separating what God has joined together. He has brought me into situations with other people where they were doing to me the things I was doing to my wife. After having been made aware of these and repenting before God, I have said sorry to my wife and asked her forgiveness. There are still areas which the Lord is bringing to the surface.

Those who have had broken marriages will often advise me to get on with my life—I guess that often comes out of the fact that they are carrying around scars themselves. Church people are often unable to help but there are a lot who are sympathetic and encouraging. Thankfully too I have had some Christian friends who have confronted me on some issues—like the fact that I need to take responsibility for my behaviour. In the early days my parents were frustrated with being unable to help me with the emotions; they got upset too. I think both my parents and I have grown through the experience.

A word of hope

During a time of worship, I was praising the Lord with all my heart and He opened my eyes and drew them to a couple who were about six rows in front of me. They were arm in arm and I sensed the Lord saying to me, 'You are going to be like that'. So that was great—but there was more to come. About two weeks later the same thing happened except this time it was a couple arm in arm and with the other hands outstretched to Him in worship. He seemed to be saying to me, not only are you going to be together but you are going to be together spiritually.

Coping with rejection

I was having trouble coping with the whole situation—the feelings of rejection from my wife every time

I did something which I thought was kind. A friend told me I had to make a decision of the will—are you going to give up on your marriage or do you really want your marriage healed? I spent half an hour thinking about that and decided in my heart that I did want my marriage healed. I said that to the Lord. But I had this incredible sense that I didn't have the strength to do it, and told the Lord that He would have to give me the strength. I remember going for a walk after that with this incredible feeling of strength.

A year of personal growth

I would have to say the last year of my life has been the most eventful, exciting, painful, full year of my entire life.

The Lord has used my testimony to reach other people who have marriage problems. And He has given me a greater compassion for those who have marriage breakdowns. Whatever pain we go through the Lord will use for His glory. The experience has caused me to look at myself and brought me to repentance.

A word of advice—I have seen some who are in a similar position as me (Christians), who even after all that has happened are still blaming their partner for things. If we don't get to the place of personal responsibility, no matter what the other person has done, then we will never grow up. God has blessed me by placing people who challenged me about that in my path. (It was painful!) I see the hand of God in the whole time I have been separated.

I am more aware that the Christian life is all about living for others. Even though I am prone to fall into selfishness, my experience this year has been one of serving the Lord in various ways. I am more conscious of the need to bring a message of hope to a lost world. I am more tolerant, patient and respectful towards others now. As part of what I have been through I am aware of others' need for comfort and compassion, and also aware that there is hope for the future and that we need to be moving forward. I like people more than I used to.

Jim

Shortly after my wife announced that she was seeing another man and that she intended to leave, I observed in her a deep, dark, seething anger which permeated the whole house. It seemed that this was no ordinary anger and I had an inner sense that God was certainly in this matter.

What the Lord did in me was and is still very wonderful and very significant. He brought me to the end of my own resources. I was left in the house by myself, with our son under my care. I felt a deep sense of need and indeed a great, overwhelming desire to throw myself fully on my Father in Heaven (for the first time ever). I started prostrating myself on the floor next to my bed before going to sleep each night as the deep need to call on my Father came to me (that was at least

once each night, if not two or three times during the night as I awoke with the same need).

The first thing that came to me as I started to pray on the first night was something that I heard at a Sunday morning church meeting a few years before that I thought at the time was very significant. The speaker said words to the effect that to start our prayers with praise was the best thing we could do. So I did from that time on, and as time went by He filled me with joy in praising through prayer.

Judy

My marriage lasted for nearly thirty years. It had been a most painful and dominating situation to be in, but never did I think of leaving. I guess I knew, even then, that marriage is till death parts.

It was during the last ten years of the marriage that I came into an understanding of the way God loves and forgives me.

It was a moment that I will never forget, that turned my life around, and enabled me to love and forgive in the most painful of situations, as I saw my sin dealt with by Christ's action on the cross.

How could one not go out to love and forgive?

So for the last ten years before my husband left, I lived in the love and forgiveness that flows from the cross.

After my husband left me, I understood that God had set me free from the domination that I had been in. Free, yes, but never free to remarry. I know I have a husband in Christ who will never leave me.

Eleven years have passed and God has been my strength and my portion every day. Without fail He has provided for me, and His love has upheld me in the most difficult situations that divorce brings.

2

*The Meaning of Marriage***Matthew 19:1–12**

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'

'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female", and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh"? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'

'Why then,' they asked, 'did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?'

Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.'

The disciples said to him, 'If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.'

Jesus replied, 'Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.'

Can we understand who it is the Pharisees are talking to in Matthew 19? Here we have the True Bridegroom, standing before His Bride, for whom He had come to give Himself completely. In the face of her rejection He will go to the cross so that she may enter pure and spotless into the joy of the divine Marriage. And they want to know when they can divorce! No wonder He refuses to answer in their frame of reference. He points them to the realities of the kingdom of God.

In the face of widespread marriage breakdown, many Christians are coming to Jesus and asking, like those in this passage, 'Is it biblically permissible to divorce and to remarry?'

It is helpful to consider the three different motivations for asking the questions which are found in the Matthew 19 passage, and the different answers Jesus gives to each:

- Those seeking 'scriptural grounds' for divorce and for remarriage (the Pharisees);

- Those seeking guidance on how to compassionately shepherd and regulate the communities under their care in which people are divorcing and remarrying (Moses);
- Those whose desire is to follow Jesus regardless of the cost. Those with ears to hear and a heart to obey His call (the disciples of Jesus).

To the Pharisee, Jesus' answer is, 'If you had a scriptural understanding of what the nature of marriage is and what it signifies, you would not even ask such a question. Repent of your hardheartedness.'

To the disciples, He says, 'Be faithful to your covenant vows, truthfully reflecting my sacrificial covenant love for you. If necessary, choose to be a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.'

To the shepherd of souls, He answers, 'Encourage your people in the way of repentance and obedience and the love-life of my kingdom. The hard of heart may ever be among your people, so you may need to find appropriate ways of limiting the harm caused, and ways of showing compassion to the afflicted. But take care that your compassion is not twisted into condoning divorce and cheapening the image of my marriage to my people. The way you teach and act in the matters of marriage, divorce and remarriage will have profound effects on your witness to my covenant love, and on the stability of families for generations.'

A great many books have been written on the biblical teaching about divorce and remarriage, but we will

only have ears to hear what the Lord would say to us on this, or any other issue, when we have some grasp of how we are to fit in to God's agenda, rather than expecting Him to fit in to ours.

What a wonderfully renewed understanding of the depths and significance of Christian marriage has come to our writers. So many aspects of their difficult situations have become straightforward and clear in the light of the True Marriage.

Jim

After my wife left, I came across a number of cassette tapes in the kitchen cupboard that, I found out later, had been lent to my wife by a friend. All these tapes (from New Creation Teaching Ministry) were by Grant Thorpe, the pastor of the Coromandel Baptist Church, and he spoke on the following:

- Marriage as Covenant
- Marriage as Love
- Family Disputes and the Father's Peace
- Fearful for Nothing

I consumed them with relish and listened to the two on marriage at every opportunity, especially driving in the car. What I was hearing brought me to tears virtually every time I listened to them. I was sobbing deep, heaving sobs of joy as I was really hearing deep in my

spirit such wonderful and deep truths concerning what marriage is all about. I had never before experienced such a wonderful feeling.

Whilst I was experiencing this new-found wonder, my love for God and for my wife began to deepen and broaden. I found myself praising and thanking Him for showing me these wonderful truths and at the same time pleading with Him to reveal these things to my wife as well. I also became empowered to move out in grace and in His strength towards my wife and received an increasing sense of peace within my heart. Along with this came an assurance of His presence and that I was being led in the right way for the blessing of my family and to His glory. I also was convinced that God was doing a mighty work in my wife as well.

Finding my real 'soul-mate'

What followed my wife's departure was and still is a remarkable and merciful leading of the Lord to Himself—to come to know Him as He really is. In the very first nights of prayer I pleaded with Him to help me to show His love and grace to my wife as the gift of God that she is to me, in the midst of this new situation of anger, hate and accusation. I continued to attend the church meetings regularly, seeking to learn more and to establish my relationship with God as my first priority.

I could see that it was pointless going out on the horizontal and trying to woo my wife back by trying to impress her with my attempts to change my life. (She

had said that it was too late anyway as she had made up her mind and no change on my part for the better would make her come back.)

As I was gradually going through various books and tapes at home I was led to a book which became very significant for me at the time—*The Marriage Builder* by Lawrence J. Crabb Jr.

The most powerful thing that came across to me from that book then, and which has continued to undergird my thinking and actions since, is that our central source of ‘soul sustenance’ must be God Himself and not our husband or wife. It is too much of a burden to put on them and can, and indeed does, become in very essence an idolatry—an attempt to find fulfilment or fullness in life apart from God Himself. Indeed that focus replaces God as the source of our lives. This idolatry or dependency can turn back in on itself and actually stifle the relationship, so that the statement, ‘I can’t live without you’, often turns into, ‘I can’t live with you any more’.

Realising God’s purpose

I came to see the call to faithfulness in the wider context of the wonder of what God is calling every human being to be. That wonder is what came through to me. Jesus has brought us in His life to be in Christ as one with God, because He represented to us Man and God together in fullness of relationship. In the ultimate purpose of God we will be, in actuality and reality, one with Him through marriage to Christ.

If the wonder of that is in our heart then God is working in us and our only desire will be for that ultimate purpose.

Seeing the ‘big picture’

God has opened my mind to the ‘big picture’ about who He is (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), about the absolute fullness of His grace, and of His eternal purposes of love in creating Man (male–female) in His own image. In all this purposeful action He is preparing a Bride for the eternal Son. So in God joining man and woman in marriage He is witnessing to His creation His ultimate purpose in creating us.

Our marriages thus become an integral part of God’s continuing work in this creation towards this wonderful fulfilment in Jesus His Son. In this He is unswervingly faithful in covenant action towards us.

So, as His children, how can we not likewise in love be faithful for life towards our spouses whom God has given us. He has joined us together in a covenant arrangement for our good, for the good of our children, for the good of society, and most importantly for witnessing to and preparing us for the great marriage to come with His Son. It is He to whom we will be joined eternally, and all these things witness to the God of covenant love, who acts and commands according to the way *He* is.



Lesley

Curiously, I have found that inherent in my character there has always been a strong inclination to permanency and irrevocability in relationships. In my early teenage years I was fascinated by the relationship between David and Jonathan in the Bible, and by the very word ‘covenant’, and all that it meant.

My covenant with my husband began really, as a friendship covenant, before our marriage—with the exchange of vows and significant possessions, we pledged our unity with one another and God forever. Our marriage reinforced those already-made youthful vows, and although our relationship grew lukewarm, I never wavered in my commitment.

I was blessed to have never witnessed divorce—of my parents nor any close relatives, or even friends—and so it was never a word in my vocabulary, much less a thought in my mind. I was fortunate to have grown up just *knowing* that marriage was for life.

Taking this into account, the natural response for me when faced with the breakdown of my marriage was to stand, however long it took, and to believe for restoration. The thought of finding someone else was always abhorrent, and the idea of giving up unthinkable.

In the hustle and bustle of daily life, I may have done less than I could to ensure the health and vitality of our marriage, but when it came to the crunch, I took seriously the vows I had made, and there was no way I was going to try to get out of them, whatever the cost.

Learning to love my absent husband

One day I finally realised—‘How can I truly minister to my husband if I’m only staying with him for my sake?’ I need to know the meaning of True Love—not based on needing, but on giving. To base my love for my husband on him being God’s gift to me, on his worth in God’s eyes, on the meeting of *his* needs—not as a means to having my own needs met. And he can only be God’s gift to me if I release him back to God and put God first in my life!

So Lord—he is yours—please help me to leave him in Your hands. Please search my heart each day, that I may never place anything above You.

On that day I committed myself to my marriage, and committed *my* needs to God, trusting Him to fulfil them. I prayed:

Please Lord give me strength to believe and to act in love, even when I feel no love or compassion, and when there is no loving response—to give without counting the cost. To believe in the permanency of the commitment I have made—to know beyond all doubt that it is not Your will that our home should be broken. It would not further Your kingdom, so it cannot be!

And God has been faithful to answer me, and given me exceedingly abundantly more of all these things than I ever thought possible before!

Even if my feelings are all mixed up and I don't know which way to turn, I can ask, 'Lord, what would bring *You* glory?'

This is when God began to strip away my selfish motives, refining and purifying my love for my husband, and began to give me a glimpse of the bigger picture. I realised that I had tried to draw everything I needed from my husband and yet always came away empty. When I realised that *God* was my all, then I was free to give my all to Him and to my husband, fulfilling the role God gave me as a wife.

Jeff

In the weeks following our separation, wonderful truths about the meaning and significance of our marriages gripped me as I read *The Profound Mystery* by Geoffrey Bingham.² I saw that our human marriages are designed to be a dynamic image, within the creation, of the relationships between the Father, Son and Spirit, and most importantly the image of the relationship between Jesus (the True Bridegroom) and His elect (the True Bride).

I had a picture in my mind of three great intersecting, interlocking, intermingling spheres (the Three-Personed God), full of variety, wonder, purity,

² Geoffrey Bingham, *The Profound Mystery: Marriage Love, Divine and Human*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1995.

creativity, service, unity, love, honour, friendship and delight.

Out of the side of one of the spheres (the Son) there emerged a smaller sphere, a humanity designed with the capacity to 'partake of the Divine nature', created to be given in marriage to God the Son, to be 'one flesh' with Him, to enjoy His love, to serve, honour and enjoy Him and to be served, and honoured and enjoyed by Him for ever:

All things have been created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

Inside the smaller sphere I saw an image or replication of that grand picture. First a man, and then out of his side (and so one flesh with him) another creature was formed, designed with the capacity to relate intimately to him, made through him and for him, to serve, honour and enjoy him and to be served, honoured and enjoyed by him in the wonder of God's purposes for them in the creation.

The words of Jonathan Edwards summed it up:

There was, as it were, an eternal society or family in the Godhead, in the Trinity of persons. It seems to be God's design to admit the church into the divine family as his son's wife.³

My understanding of marriage (and all human relationships) was turned on its head! I saw that an

³ Quoted in Bingham, *The Profound Mystery*, p. 54.

understanding of the nature of God as revealed in the Scriptures is the starting point for understanding all of life and the way all relationships are designed to function.

I saw that I was part of that adulterous Bride which is the whole of the human race. Jesus the True Bridegroom had not given up because of my rejection, but had done whatever was necessary to redeem me. My covenant spouse may have rejected me, but that didn't mean I was now uninvolved in the dynamics of my marriage.

Four months after separation day, I had the opportunity to bring together and share something of what had broken through to me, when I was asked to be a replacement preacher for a tiny congregation. (I had not given a sermon for over 15 years.)

When I announced the topic was marriage, a ripple went around the group.

'We're all single women!' said someone with a giggle.
Don't tell me God doesn't have a sense of humour!

Jesus will not give up on me

Humanity was created to be the Bride of God the Son. As sinners we have steadfastly rejected that marriage, yet in the face of that rejection, Jesus has loved us, longed for us, sought us, given himself for us and our forgiveness, and kept the door ever open for reconciliation. The Jews rejected God their husband, time and time again, breaking the covenant, and

'marrying' foreign gods. Yet God has always actively worked towards reconciliation.

The door is never closed to restoration of our relationship to God while we live. It is never too late till we die. I am so thankful that Jesus did not give up on this proud sinner, and He never will.

Glimpsing heaven

In the midst of deep anguish I have been privileged to glimpse, in some small measure, the incomprehensible and amazing depth of God the Father's love for His people, and of Jesus the Son's love for His Bride, and the sacrifice and pain He is willing to go through to make a pure and spotless bride for Himself out of that great bunch of rebels that we are.

When these truths started to come clear to me, when the everlasting love and faithfulness of God toward me began to break through, how could I even think of closing the door to reconciliation with my dear wife while we both lived?

What wonders we have been caught up into! What mysteries have been revealed to us in the Scriptures! My marriage is not over—in fact, I am now more actively and consciously involved in my marriage than I ever was before!



Adam

I am in my second marriage and I have been convicted to confess that breaking the vows of my first marriage was a sin before God, based on what His word says. For others though, it is not my place to judge. All I can do is point them to the Scriptures, and leave the rest up to God:

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife (1 Corinthians 7:10–11).

Because of the hurt that they have gone through I would hope that I could show a compassionate attitude. I guess having gone through a remarriage I can see the pain of coming to terms with the biblical teaching about remarriage.

3

*What about the Children?***Matthew 19:13–15**

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

Our children form their first image of God from their parents. If we fail them by acting contrary to His nature, are we not hindering them, are we not leading the little ones astray?

Those in marital difficulty should seriously consider the short and long term negative impact on their children of giving up on their marriages, and the positive impact they could have by remaining faithful. That alone should be reason enough to put away thoughts of remarriage.

The best contribution we can make to a sense of security for our children and to the stability of their marriages is to remain faithful to our own, regardless

of what our spouses do. We should never underestimate the influence of example.

The following are extracts from the introduction to Judith Wallerstein's *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*:

Adult children of divorce are telling us loud and clear that their parents' anger at the time of the breakup is *not* what matters most. Unless there was violence or abuse or unremitting high conflict, they have dim memories of what transpired during this supposedly critical period . . . It's the many years living in a postdivorce or remarried family that count, according to this first generation to come of age and tell us their experience. It's feeling sad, lonely and angry during childhood. It's travelling on airplanes alone when you're seven to visit your parent. It's having no choice about how you spend your time and feeling like a second-class citizen compared with your friends in intact families who have some say about how they spend their weekends and their vacations. It's wondering whether you will have any financial help for college from your college-educated father, given that he has no legal obligation to pay. It's worrying about your mom and dad for years—will her new boyfriend stick around, will his new wife welcome you into her home? It's reaching adulthood with acute anxiety. Will you ever find a faithful woman to love you? Will you find a man you can trust? Or will your relationships fail just like your parents' did? And most tellingly, it's asking if you can protect your own child from having these same experiences in growing up.

Not one of the men or women from divorced families whose lives I report on in this book wanted their children to repeat their childhood experiences. Not one ever said, 'I want my children to live in two nests—or even two villas.' They envied friends who grew up in intact families. Their entire life stories belie the myths we've embraced.

Contrary to what we have long thought, the major impact of divorce does not occur during childhood or adolescence. Rather, it rises in adulthood as serious romantic relationships move center stage. When it comes time to choose a life mate and build a new family, the effects of divorce crescendo. A central finding to my research is that children identify not only with their mother and father as separate individuals but with the relationship between them. They carry the template of this relationship into adulthood and use it to seek the image of their new family. The absence of a good image negatively influences their search for love, intimacy, and commitment. Anxiety leads many into making bad choices in relationships, giving up hastily when problems arise, or avoiding relationships altogether.⁴

And from Michael and Marilyn Phillipps (University of the Family [formerly Marriage Ministries International]):

Children are the physical representation of the one-flesh union. Both parents have been poured into them and they cannot be separated out again. Each child feels the tearing within as parents try to neatly divide themselves from each other. It cannot be done. The child cannot be divided.

Solomon once faced two parents, both claiming to be the mother of the same baby. To determine which was the real parent, Solomon suggested that the child be cut in half. One woman thought this was a good plan, but the baby's real mother begged for her child's life. She did not want to see her baby divided.

We must stop dividing up our babies and calling it a solution. We must cease giving our children the falsehood that

⁴ Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslea, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, HarperCollins Publishers, Sydney, 2000, pp. xxv, xxix.

divorce solves anything. They know better. Their hearts cry out for their daddies and mommies. Whether they are two or twenty-two when their parents separate, they experience the very real pain of division.

Lesley

Whilst we await our family's restoration, the Lord has given me the grand commission 'to raise my daughters to be godly women'. Of course, this means my life must first be in line with God's word before I can impart it to my children (because Christian character is mostly caught, not taught).

The more I read about the far-reaching destruction throughout our society caused by the breakdown of relationships, the more strongly I feel about what I am doing. I cannot and do not want to back out of a fight for something so true and so important as a family which is as God intends it to be.

Believing He will equip me

This whole journey has helped me, as I have trusted God, and even when I have not, to believe more and more that He will never ask me to do anything for which He will not equip me. It is this that gives me the confidence to believe that I *can* raise my children to be godly—instead of giving up on them, expecting them to turn out as messed up products of a broken home.

And in turn, this new faith and trust in God and His promises carries me when times are tough. I can look back and am reminded—He came through for me before, and He will do it again.

When I fell apart, so did they

I have been blessed in that my children are young enough to not have been tainted yet by the cynicism of this modern world. My toddler, I suppose, is so young that she considers our situation normal—which, whilst not a good thing at all, at least saves her much pain and heartache. My older preschooler was terribly upset in the tense months preceding our separation. I found, after observation however, that the children's reactions were an exact mirror of my own. When I fell apart, so did they. But when I was able to find my peace and solace in the Lord, then I had something to give.

There were days (and many of them) when I felt I was drowning, that I had nothing to give—and the more I felt that way, the more that was true of me, until I felt I was unable to pull myself together. (I think this is what is referred to as a 'downward spiral'!)

At this point, one is very vulnerable to all sorts of Enemy garbage that would usually have no effect—be it thoughts of suicide or running away, or running off with someone else—completely irrational things, born of sheer panic and despair.

The important thing is that when I was OK the children were OK—which began a self-perpetuating positive circle. It was only calling out (however feebly) to

God that got me out of the pit each time. It was wonderful in a way to finally come to God without *any* self-effort and plead His help, to come without trying to tidy myself up first, because I simply couldn't do a thing any more!

Trusting the Good Shepherd

My daughter was afraid, and I felt to share with her about how Jesus is our Shepherd, and how a shepherd cared for his sheep in those times—giving his life if he had to.

She got out her story Bible and found the picture of the lost sheep. The shepherd was leaning dangerously over a cliff to rescue the lamb from a bush halfway down—very precarious. I said, 'Do you think it looks safe and easy for the shepherd?'

'Not really', she said.

'It doesn't, does it?'

Then she said the words that made me think—'But he has to'.

And He does, doesn't He? The Lord who made us has promised to care for us. Of course He is going to do all He can to keep us from harm, and draw us to Himself. He has to! For we are His!

Reading over this old journal entry, it spoke to me, not only of the Lord's faithfulness to us, but also of our need to provide a solid foundation for the lives of our children. In a world where people are 'doing their own thing', in the world of children who cannot understand why one of their own parents would 'just

go off', how important is it that there is someone in their life who, like the Good Shepherd, will risk all, give all, sacrifice all, that the little lambs might be safe?

I have read somewhere of Christ described as the 'still point in a turning world', and it is to this that we as standers and as parents are called when the world is falling down around our ears. Who knows what lasting impression our solidity, our standing firm in Christ will have on our children.

Of course He can, He's God!

My preschool girl would be an encouragement to any stander! Her comment regarding the answering of prayer is concise and to the point—'Of course He can, He's God!'—as if it were the most obvious thing in the world—which it ought to be!

I have cautioned her regarding talking too much about my stand outside of our home because, I explained, some people didn't understand. And it is awkward when some well-meaning, concerned person asks what you're going to say to your children if Daddy doesn't come home, when you told them God *would* do it.

On another day, my daughter and I were discussing Daddy's homecoming and she gave an incredulous laugh as she said, 'Some people *actually* don't think Daddy's coming home!' Oh, to have such faith!



Learning that I can't change my spouse

In our concern for our children, we may sometimes try to change our spouse, or pressure them to change. Whilst it is right to be concerned, it is not possible to change someone else's behaviour by force.

Something I have learned (which I wish I had known before!) is that dishonouring one's spouse by insinuating or openly telling them (or others) that they are a 'bad influence', contributes just as much to destroying one's family as their negative behaviour.

It took me a long time (and many mistakes) to learn that it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict—not mine! Mine is to love as Jesus does and to pray that the Holy Spirit is free to do His work in my spouse without me getting in the way.

Showing respect

I found that the way we speak to and about our husband or wife to anyone, but especially our children, will greatly affect their perception of that parent, and also of us. If you communicate disrespect, they will not only disrespect your spouse, but most likely you as well. It is difficult when your feelings may be very hurt, and it is another reason why forgiveness of your spouse and any others involved is crucial. Children (and most adults) can see straight through us when we say something we don't believe. It is important to resolve the issue of forgiveness before you will be able to love your spouse freely with God's agape love, and

treat them with respect and honour. The way your children will treat their prodigal mother or father very much depends on how *you* treat them.

Maintaining a sense of family

In our home, I make it clear to my daughters that whilst Daddy may not be here, he is still head of our household. Important decisions are taken to him rather than just being made by me, and if I know that he would disapprove of something or other, it is not allowed. (Ask God about this one—your spouse may not appreciate being asked to make decisions on your family's behalf! This is just how it is for us.)

I encourage my big girl to think of ways she can honour Daddy—sending a letter or a picture, sharing some sweets when she sees him, listening when he speaks and doing as he says. It has become a way of life for me, and has brought a stability into our home which otherwise may be lacking. Daddy is not 'gone and forgotten'. The toddler waves 'ni-night' to his photograph every evening before bed. I have taught her to say, 'Love you, Daddy!' It has been my way of keeping an absent father alive in the lives of my children, over a long time and a long distance.

The rewards come, and when they do it is sweet. Tucked up in bed the other night, my preschooler said with absolute joyous contentment, 'I wouldn't have such a happy life if I didn't have a dad like Dad'. To her, Daddy is still the most wonderful person in the world. As he should be!

Adam

My young son keeps asking me, ‘When are you going to come home Daddy?’ and I tell him that I miss him. My daughters have become withdrawn and don’t communicate. They all want me back. One day I broke down in front of my daughter and cried. I told her that I just didn’t know what to do. I suggested that we’d better pray, and I asked God for His help to bring us back together again—the Lord said to me, ‘Trust me’. A little later my daughter said that the Lord had spoken to her and said that it would have to be when Mummy was ready, and that I should be patient.

Learning about fatherhood

I think the best thing I can do as a father is to show my love for my wife in a consistent fashion. (This will involve me growing by spending time with my Father.) I should resist getting into any bitterness, recrimination, malice or rage, and instead show patience, gentleness and kind-heartedness to my wife. I should take on the role of a father and think of myself that way even though I am apart. When I have opportunity I should teach my children and show them by example the way in which a man should treat his wife. I should continue to take every opportunity I can towards my own personal growth. I should continue to pray for my children and believe that God does indeed have a good future for me and my family.

Judy

I had a daughter, who wasn’t a Christian, living at home at the time of the separation, and she had said to a friend, ‘I know there must be a God, because my Mum wouldn’t have been able to stand otherwise’.

That brought me great joy when I heard it and reminded me that it was part of the fruit of the travail of my soul.

Carly

My heart felt like it was being wrenched in two when I heard my mother’s voice on the phone.

‘I’ve left Dad.’

I was in my mid-twenties and working in another town when my parents’ separation seemingly came out of nowhere. The next few days were very difficult, and I approached my doctor to get some time off work. His words were not very comforting: ‘At least you’re not five years old or something’.

If I’ve learnt anything through this experience, it’s that marriage breakdown has a great effect on children, whether five or twenty-five years old.

I felt a deep sense of betrayal. I felt that I no longer knew my mother. But I was not without hope. A few days later, I came to read the parable of the prodigal son.

Jesus' words reminded me of the great faithfulness of the Father, and I saw my own father seeking to live in God's faithfulness. The son in the parable demands his inheritance from his father. Yet in the face of this rejection, the father gives generously to his son.

It was very freeing to join with Dad in giving Mum what we thought she might need. So now when we notice something missing from the family home, we can say, 'We gave that to Mum', rather than, 'Mum took that'. This lessens the temptation to feel bitter towards her.

A few months later, I spoke with a friend whose family was in a similar situation. He said he had become quite disillusioned and was uncertain of the value and meaning of marriage. This conversation helped me realise the great work God had done in my life.

As my father was coming to understand God's true intention for marriage, the Holy Spirit was revealing the same to me. I heard nothing new or different, but now it made so much more sense! More than that, I knew I actually believed it with all my heart.

In contrast to my friend, my experience of family breakdown has strengthened my view of marriage. I have come to value marriage as a high calling—creation's reflection of Jesus' love for His Bride.

My Dad's journey has encouraged me to have realistic expectations of marriage as well as high ideals. I know that if I do marry in the future, I will be much more prepared for the calling of marriage than I would have been without his example of faithfulness.

The Personal Call of Jesus

Matthew 19:16–26

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?'

'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.'

'Which ones?' the man enquired.

Jesus replied, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'

'All these I have kept,' the young man said. 'What do I still lack?'

Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, 'Who then can be saved?'

Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'

Jesus looked at him and loved him (Mark 10:21). Jesus could envisage what that young man could be, and the joy and fullness of life that awaited him if he would obey His call. The life that Jesus knew was the very life that the young man was seeking. Jesus told him what was needed, but the young man chose not to follow, being unwilling to forego earthly pleasures for heavenly ones.

Note that this was not an occasion to debate the reasonableness of Jesus' call on the man's life. There was no involved discussion about whether this instruction should apply to all believers, no debate about the impractical nature of it, or the unacceptable implications for the country's economy if everyone sold their possessions and followed itinerant preachers. The call was a personal one for that man at that time, but he was unwilling to surrender what he perceived to be his earthly security.

The writers believe their Lord has given a clear personal call to make themselves 'eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'. Emotions, debates, detailed textual studies, advice from others, exception clauses and practical difficulties fade into irrelevance when the Lord speaks to an individual believer. The only question which remains is that of obedience and faith.

The problem is that from the perspective of this world's values, the call to faithfulness in the face of divorce seems to be a call to hardship, deprivation and

loneliness. But if it is a call of Jesus, it is a call to *life*, true life in all its fullness, a call to participate in the divine love-life of the Father, the only place where true joy and wholeness is to be found. In the light of eternity, these momentary afflictions will seem as nothing.

Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, and no matter how bleak the prospects of a satisfying life in worldly terms, the Lord has a pathway for us which is much more satisfying than any we could plan for ourselves, especially if our plan involves moving outside of His precepts. He promises that the rewards of doing what is right, regardless of personal cost, will far outweigh any seeming deprivations we may suffer, and will store up for us a great weight of glory in the new heaven and the new earth that awaits us.

Whatever the situation, whatever the past, whatever your faults, whatever others have done, there is a way that Christ in you would walk, since He is, in effect, in your shoes. His is the way of righteousness, of inner peace, of joy in doing the Father's will. What circumstance would cause Jesus to become discouraged, or self-pitying, or despairing? Ask Jesus to live out His life in you and there will always be a way of joy in the midst of sorrows.



Adam

The enormity of the promise that I made before God when I married my wife is too great to forego. When I look through the Bible I see story after story where covenants are made. The story of David and Jonathan comes to mind. The covenant David made with him carried on to his descendant Mephibosheth (see 1 Samuel 20; 2 Samuel 9).

Mephibosheth was a member of the house of Saul, and probably hated David for taking the throne that his father Jonathan should have inherited, but David still honoured the covenant.

Giving up would be foolish, when everything else points to faithfulness to the Lord and His word. He clearly says in 1 Corinthians 7:11:

But if she does [separate], she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

There is also our eternal destiny to consider. Even if I don't manage to reconcile, the stand I am taking will have implications for my children. Apart from all of this I believe that God wants our reconciliation far more than I could imagine and will move heaven and earth to bring this about.

For me, my part is commitment:

- to prayer (with a prayer partner);
- to personal growth and change;
- to holiness and purity;
- to my marriage.

I believe the Lord has said to me that if I am constant and consistent with these things then He will bring healing to my marriage.

Some of the strategies the Lord has given me are:

- refuse to speak negatively about my marriage;
- speak and think well of my wife;
- avoid people who will not have faith in this area;
- bless her without seeking a reward;
- refuse to be intimidated by adverse conditions;
- love her (give of myself);
- pursue her with genuine love;
- be thankful;
- don't allow my feelings to be in control;
- let God's word be the final truth.

At times I am tempted to give up. This usually happens when things get hard. With God's strength and grace I can last for the rest of my life; in my strength probably about a few days. But praise God, His mighty power is at work in me!

Jeff

Many, many times I have asked the Lord for the reality of the life that Jesus lived, the inner joy and assurance, the experience of relationship with Him, knowing His guidance and walking in His ways. There must have

been something in my own pride hanging on, so deep that I couldn't (or wouldn't) even recognise it. But the Lord has graciously answered my prayers in a way I could never have guessed, and never have chosen.

This hymn by John Newton (who also wrote 'Amazing Grace') became very meaningful for me:

I asked the Lord, that I might grow,
In faith, and love, and ev'ry grace;
Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favoured hour,
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of the heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in ev'ry part.

Yea, more, with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I'd schemed,
Blasted my gourds and laid me low.

'Lord, why is this?' I trembling cried,
'Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?'
'Tis in this way,' the Lord replied,
'I answer prayer for grace and faith.

These inward trials I employ,
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st seek thy all in Me'
(John Newton, 1725-1807).

Running a disciplined race

Most days I would go for a run of several kilometres up the hill and back via a gully. One day I started to notice the usual paper and other rubbish which collects in such places. It had never concerned me before, but this day it did, and I felt a need to pick it up.

I came across a plastic shopping bag, and proceeded to fill it with papers. When that was full, I came across another bag, and gradually that was filled as well. Now part way along the gully, with both bags full, I came across not another shopping bag, but a large sack! Into the sack went the bags, and on I continued, not content to leave any rubbish spoiling the natural beauty of the surroundings. I arrived home with a stuffed sack on my back like Santa.

Many times since then, I have felt the need to remove rubbish from the route my run or walk takes me. (Locals must think I'm doing community service to work off traffic fines.)

The message was to clean up my life. Many sins and habits which I had been unaware of, or had allowed myself to indulge in, were no longer to be tolerated if I was to walk in the ways the Lord was leading. Sin dulls our spiritual hearing and muddies the waters of God's love which would flow through us.

The pain of remaining unforgiven

A number of experiences over these months have left a deep and lasting impression on me. One was the story of a work colleague who had succumbed to the advances of another married man who seemed to be the answer to the emotional needs her husband was not supplying. She left her husband, only to find the other man had decided to stay in his marriage.

After the worst eighteen months of her life, including a breakdown and temptations to suicide, she asked her husband if they could try to restore their marriage. His answer was, 'No, I don't love you any more'.

Another woman with two young children found that the new relationship she left her husband for only lasted eight weeks. She then approached her husband with a view to at least discussing the situation and the possibility of reconciliation, but the shutters were well and truly closed. There are no winners!

Imagine an alternative ending to Jesus' story of the prodigal son, in which the father says, 'No, you can't come back, even as a servant. I've adopted another young man to take your place.'

We would be horrified at the thought of ever giving up on our children when they hurt us and renounce their family ties, but the one-flesh bond between a husband and wife is in many ways stronger and more intimate than the relationship between parent and child. The couple has willingly covenanted together and God has joined them together.

If God has joined us, surely He will give us what is necessary to do what we promised; to love, to respect, to forgive, to give ourselves for the good of our mate for the rest of our lives. We may have failed dismally in this up to date, but God is waiting for us to throw ourselves on His mercy and say, 'I want to start now'.

These experiences made me wonder how many families would be restored if one spouse would hear the call of Christ to remain faithful and to never give up?

Jill

Two or three weeks into the separation, the church newsletter advertised the play of Hosea, to be held in a church thirty minutes away by car. I knew in my spirit I should go, for two reasons: the content of Hosea, and that this could be the area I would need to move into in the future.

Quite unexpectedly, my husband said he'd like to come and mind the children at night if I wanted to go out. Great!

So I went, and as the play unfolded I was so moved by Hosea 'buying back' his broken wife. God spoke clearly to my heart—'You must be willing to have your husband back'.

When I arrived home I shared a little with my husband. (I can't recall what I said, but I believe a seed was sown.) This was seven years before I heard of the

ministry of Covenant Keepers. (See the list of resources at the end of this book.)

I spent the following three years at Bible College, part-time. It was a time of spiritual growth and emotional healing. But the topic of divorce and remarriage was taught from the perspective that God's grace allows for mistakes and it's OK to remarry.

My spirit was so churned up as I sat and listened to remarried Christian couples give their testimony. It couldn't agree with what was in my heart—but as yet I had not met anyone who believed as I did.

Attraction to another man

There was a certain charismatic man to whom I felt an attraction. When, sometime later, I heard his wife had left him, I had much soul searching to do. I thank God that the man never spoke to me, so no friendship ever developed. In time he remarried.

On reflection I thank God for showing me that this stand of ten years is His doing, not mine, because I could have been tempted to give up on my marriage.



Lesley

Looking back over old journals, it was a long, hard few months where God relentlessly stripped away all earthly comforts, seeking to draw me only to Himself—to bring me to a place where I delighted most of all in Him. Though the road to this place is like passing through a searing fire that seemingly consumes all, it is the only way He can bring us to that place where He can give us the desires of our heart.

Finding peace

In considering what path to take, I always came back to the firm conviction (based on my experience) that only in God's perfect will would I find peace and joy—regardless of the cost. Anything less was unthinkable.

Without God the most pleasurable pleasure is meaningless, and yet with Him, even the darkest night is full of stars.

Please Lord,

Come and give me your peace to go on in the midst of the storm. Not the 'outward peace' that Satan promises if I go to the shore and get off the boat. I don't mind staying in the boat, though the storm rages all about it, so long as You are in the boat with me—for it is with You that I will find the peace that passes all understanding.

Please Lord, may I never give up on my marriage, or on following You.

Jesus

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26–33).

Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete (Luke 6:46–49).

*Paul*

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no-one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:14–21).

*What's in It for Me?***Matthew 19:27–30**

Peter answered him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?'

Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.'

Peter asks, 'What's in it for me?' And people wonder why anyone would turn their backs on what our society seems to hold up as that which gives meaning to life; that is, emotional and physical fulfilment in a sexual relationship with another person. So, what's in it for them?

Just look at what Jesus replies. For everything you have given up for His sake, He says you will receive back many times as much. Maybe not in the way you

think, maybe not more of the same thing that you give up, but you will receive the satisfaction and fulfilment you thought those things would bring you, and abundantly more than you would have had if you had hung onto them.

But wait! There's more! You also get, absolutely free—eternal life! Now there's an offer you can't refuse.

So what's in it for Peter, for our writers, and for all believers who give up worldly reward for the sake of the kingdom? In the light of the way of life Jesus calls us to, and the glorious eternity that awaits us, it's a silly question.

Can we in the Christian church teach and uphold the permanence of marriage among our people? Can we again affirm the calling of singleness? Can we begin to recognise the extent to which we have adopted the world's values and illusions? Can we stop thinking of our Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage as a hardship or as 'a condemnation to a life of loneliness'?

Rather, let us encourage our brothers and sisters in broken marriages to entrust themselves to their faithful Creator, and discover with joy that they too are *called to faithfulness*.

Lesley

I think what taught me to rely on God, stop looking at circumstances, and to see the eternal in all things, were

trials so searing and terrible in their relentlessness that I had no choice but to fling myself upon God's mercy. I learned to stop worrying about my needs by having them continually unmet. I sought treasures in heaven because all my earthly joys had fled. And I turned to God alone, because every other thing on earth had failed me. The fire that swept through my life at the time, took with it all the rubbish, and refined the vessel of my life. What a price to pay—but what treasure I have gained!

Times of soul-singing

Before these present trials, I used to have good times and bad times anyway. The difference now? At least now there is a point to the bad times! They aren't so much caused by my own stupidity and selfishness. I suffer with Him, and I also reign with Him. I am truly joyful, truly alive.

I know now that if I hold on through the bad times, God stretches me a little further, and I am that bit closer to His vision for me when I come out into the sunshine again. After all, nothing of lasting beauty was made without great pains being taken.

The times which make my soul sing as I recall them are those when the Lord enabled me to respond in love when I could have demanded fairness; when I was merciful when I could have demanded justice. To the world's way of thinking, that counts as loss, but in God's kingdom it is eternal gain.

I wonder if the delay in our restoration may be so that 'patience may have its perfect work'—that I be 'entire and complete, lacking nothing' (James 1:4).

If so, I rejoice that God should take such pains to refine me and make me the wife He wants me to be!

Remembering the old life

When I am sometimes tempted to wish all this had never happened, I remember the dead-life we were living, how I was so blind and so mean. Would I *really* have preferred to go on like that?

Lord,

Please always remind me that often it is through the painful circumstances in our lives that you bring us to the promised land you have had waiting for us all along.

Scriptures I have found very helpful:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Though the fig-tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights
(Habakkuk 3:17–19).

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up (Romans 15:1–2).

Jeff

When my wife left, I was given Psalm 103:

Praise the LORD, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Satisfies your desires? I thought, I'm a healthy red-blooded Australian male; I'm definitely going to have

desires that won't be satisfied! But I realised, as I had been learning over previous months, that my desires that needed satisfying were primarily relational and emotional, not physical, and that these needs were to be met in my relationship to God and in the body of Christ. I was to get involved with people, instead of being a pew-sitter.

Living with integrity

The more I talk to people who have moved away (I would never call it 'moved on') to new sexual relationships or blended families, the more I am convinced that the Lord's way is the way of least pain for everyone involved. Remaining faithful may not be a bed of roses (or a bed of anything for that matter), but it is living cleanly and with integrity.

An art lesson

During a visit to the Art Gallery, I was especially drawn to two paintings which, taken together, spoke a very powerful message.

The first was 'Forgiven', painted in 1899 by George Harcourt. It depicted a young man at the doorstep of his cottage. He had just come out to meet a young woman who was now on her knees, her arm raised in repentance, almost swooning. He was reaching down to her tenderly, his hand under her elbow. It was the wayward wife returning to her husband.

How this touched me. I stood gazing, imagining what it would be like in my case, thinking that perhaps this was a sign of our imminent reconciliation.

The other painting also depicted the reconciliation of a husband and wife; 'Hilda Welcomed', by Stanley Spencer (1953). It showed a woman being embraced tenderly by a man. Two children were hugging her legs. The accompanying explanatory notes revealed that the painting represents the artist and his daughters greeting his estranged wife on the day of judgment 'when the dead shall be raised'. Spencer had hoped to be reconciled with Hilda, but she died in 1950. That deflated my hopes a little!

The message was that I must keep my heart and my attitudes clean before God so as to be always ready should my dear wife return tomorrow, and at the same time live as though it could happen in many years' time, or possibly never. Exactly as we are often enjoined to think about the return of Christ; live as though it could be tomorrow and at the same time as though it will be a thousand years hence.

How long must I wait?

Those who determine to remain single and faithful to their marriage vows, regardless of what their spouses may do, are not noble (or foolish) martyrs, as some seem to think. They are just fulfilling the vows they made to God, relying on Him to sustain them:

Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfil them (Psalm 76:11).

People ask, 'How long are you going to wait?' The problem with the question is its assumption that the ultimate goal and justification for not remarrying is reconciliation. If that is the case, then when reconciliation seems impossible (say one's spouse marries again), the 'wait' would seem pointless.

But there is a great difference between *passively* waiting for marriage restoration, and *actively* remaining faithful as an expression of the faithfulness of God, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. That is a calling only death can end.

And we dare not think we can do it unaided; we need all the resources of Christ and His church for such an undertaking.

There are no guaranteed happy endings in this life, but there is certainly a guaranteed 'living happily ever after', following the great Marriage Feast of Jesus the Son of God with His Bride.

Dealing with despair

Despair means we think God has messed up or has lost control, or that He really doesn't want the best for us.

In obeying the precepts and commands of Scripture, we are not obeying an impersonal, cold law, but obeying a personal and loving God. Everything He asks us to do is direction in the way of life, not to deprive us of anything.

If I were to believe that this earthly life is all there is, I may have some justification for seeking another

partner. Against the odds, a new marriage may be successful, but at the end I will have had my reward. In the light of eternity, this life is but a passing shadow, the sufferings of which 'are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18).

6

Thoughts and Advice

Are our motives right for desiring our marriages healed? The Lord showed me once that 'when the motive is wrong, the stand is not strong'.

Do we desire our marriages healed for God's glory? Or do we just want to prove that we are right? Do we just want to stop hurting? If we know our motives are pure and if we go in love and humility, no man can take from us what God has put in our hearts; we need not have fear (Marilyn Conrad, Founder of Covenant Keepers).

Adam

The process of reconciliation is a matter of rebuilding trust. So any emotional outbursts should be avoided at all costs. If you are feeling upset about things in general, it is a good idea to stay away from your spouse. That is the time to go to the Lord and ask for His help.

Praying for my family

I pray that my wife will be brought to fullness—emotionally, spiritually, physically, mentally and financially—that she will be blessed and restored to the place of honour and respect alongside of me.

I pray for protection, that the Lord would bless my wife and my family, that we would be brought to unity and harmony, that the Lord would ‘Sanctify them by His truth’, that I would love them as the Lord loves me. I pray for the healing of my marriage. I pray that the Lord would soften my wife’s heart. I pray that each of my children would find a Godly Christian husband/wife, and that the Lord would be preparing that even now. I speak words like, ‘I love my wife and she loves me’ and, ‘My wife will be like a fruitful vine within my house. My children will be like olive shoots around my table’ (Psalm 128:3). I pray prayers stating, ‘Let no man separate what God has joined together’ and, ‘We are one flesh’.

As well as these prayers I thank the Lord for my wife and our children.

Getting on with my life

I am seeking God’s face and, as I do that, He guides me in the direction He wants me to go. This last year I have started with my church’s music group, witnessed to people over the internet, and taken opportunities to grow and tell people what the Lord has done for me. There is nothing more wonderful than what the Lord

has done in rescuing me from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of Light.

The best thing that the abandoned spouse can do is to get support from other Christian believers and spend time with the Lord. Verses which really helped in the early days were Romans 8:28–29:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

At a home group soon after it happened a man said to me wistfully, ‘There are bigger things involved with this than you could even imagine’.

I believe I need to get the balance right in my life; not get overly focussed on the healing of my marriage or not get overly focussed on ministry. I believe I will only get the right balance as I seek the Lord. In fact the verse, ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness’ (Matthew 6:33) is crucial.

The other thing which I think is highly significant is to work on the relationships where I am. Living with another Christian man who is also single, I seek to be a blessing in all I do.

As we develop Christian character where we are, we are making progress towards reconciliation. Even if we aren’t reconciled with our spouses, we become stronger people and more able to fulfil our calling. This is also a time for us to strengthen our relationships with our parents.

Jeff

Avoid contention

I was given some good advice; to beware of thinking I had the issues of divorce and remarriage all sewn up. Greater and more saintly minds than yours or mine have grappled with the practical difficulties involved for centuries. We can be content to testify to what God has done in our lives, and what He has called us to. We are not given any more responsibility than that. The Holy Spirit is the one who will convince, not our rational arguments. If a separated Christian brother or sister cannot accept this position, our call is not to judge or criticise, but to support, encourage and love them.

God never forces us to obedience:

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness (Jeremiah 31:3).

Then Jesus cried out, 'When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

'As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command

leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say' (John 12:44–50).

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.

And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:22–26).

Be firmly convinced in your own mind

You must come to a firm position on the matter of your continuing faithfulness while your thinking is not influenced by ulterior motives. That is, before you are attracted to the idea of a new partner.

Young people are advised to think seriously about the issues of purity in relationships long before they find themselves swept up in powerful emotions. It is often too late then to think clearly or to hear God's call, because our hearts and minds are already predisposed to hear only what we want to hear.

Single Christians who have committed themselves to purity know to avoid situations which could lead to compromise. They are not denying themselves, or playing the ascetic—they have the maturity to shun temporary pleasures (which they know will only turn

sour and reap an unwelcome harvest) for the greater joy, fulfilment and vocation God has for them in a pure marriage, or in a pure singleness.

Similarly for the separated spouse.

In some circumstances of marital breakdown, it may be that a Christian is given the choice of remaining single or seeking reconciliation:

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife (1 Corinthians 7:10, 11).

Be convinced in your own heart of what He is calling you to.

Be accountable

Have trusted Christian friends who will hold you to account, to encourage you when you become despondent. Confess your weaknesses. Don't hang on to secret sins, thinking you can handle them on your own. Being unwilling to share something even with a trusted friend or pastor may mean you really want to hang on to it.

You can expect misunderstanding, pity, testing, spiritual battle, temptation . . . You can almost predict with certainty that a wonderful person of the opposite sex will enter your life and seem like God's gift to you.

Give trusted others permission to challenge you at any time about the direction you are taking.

Never think you can live the life Jesus calls you to in your own strength. Your life must be one of weakness and dependency on Him:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:12-14).

Satan hates what you are doing and will use every opportunity to cause you to fall, and so compromise your witness. Beware! Avoid situations which could lead to romantic attachments being formed.

Trust that God knows what He's doing

It is God's mercy to bring us to repentance. Depending how stubborn and proud we are, that process may require stern measures. It may be that when things appear to be going very wrong, in fact things are going very right. God may be stripping away our defences to bring us to a point of being poor in spirit, to bring us, like the prodigal son, to our senses.



*Lesley**Self-pity*

Sometimes I was tempted to self-pity and to judge those around me whose problems were so much less difficult than my own. When I caught myself thinking like that, I prayed to God to make my spirit sweet, and to remove bitterness far from me. Self-pity and bitterness cloud our ability to see things from God's viewpoint, and stop the flow of His love in us. With these things in our lives, we cannot effectively love anyone.

So don't allow self-pity to take root! Choose carefully who you share your sorrows with. You want a confidant who will exhort you to righteousness, as well as being a comfort. It helps little to confide in friends who tell you how hard done by or noble you are, or what a crumb your spouse is—it would be like shovelling compost and fertiliser onto weeds! As we all know, the weeds grow well enough without any assistance!

This was actually a wonderful time for me to learn to die to myself, for when one has been grievously wronged, it is hard to give oneself a thought without feeling, 'But what about me?' Remember, Jesus is not called 'Wonderful Counsellor' for nothing! He will comfort and lead you in the way God would have you walk, when others around you may inadvertently encourage you to pity yourself, no doubt out of their genuine concern for your pain.

Attraction to someone else

If you are struggling with feeling attraction to someone other than your spouse, first take it to the Lord—He knows how real this thing is that you are going through, even if you feel you *should* be able to shake yourself loose. Fulfilment of our need to feel loved goes deep to the heart of everyone and it *is* difficult to deliberately tear oneself away.

If you have prayed and the feelings still seem to be there (this is how it has been for me), don't despair. Keep thanking the Lord for taking away those feelings:

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24).

Don't dwell on them, or how to get rid of them, or even feel bad for having them—look instead to Jesus. Draw your emotional fulfilment from Him—from loving Him and allowing Him to pour His love out on you as you pray and worship Him. In time, you will find He *is* meeting your heart needs, just as He promises:

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

It is amazing to see God in action, working good even from our sin and mistakes. Earlier in our marriage it was *I* who almost had an affair. I say 'almost' because that was the way I viewed these things at the time—after all, I never even reached the point of telling the other person how I felt and would not have, because I soon realised that what had begun as a platonic-romantic

attraction had burned out of control into a bushfire of complete emotional dependence! I was feeling needy of that ‘romantic feeling’ which had died in my marriage and that is how I felt towards this other person. Looking back I can see now that regardless of the fact that it never progressed any further than my infatuation, I was, nevertheless, being unfaithful to my husband.

Awful though it was at the time, that experience has helped me immensely. First it gave me complete *empathy* for my husband after he admitted his affair with a co-worker. Enough years had gone by that I could see my experience for what it was, and I knew how easily an emotional vacuum in one’s life can be suddenly and unexpectedly filled by an influx of feelings and how powerless one feels to do anything but go along with it.

Also, however, it has given me the knowledge I need to be cautious during my stand, of developing any wrong emotional attachments rather than allowing God to meet my needs. (In case you think I’m handling this perfectly, I will let you know that I *have* made mistakes in this area, and even as I write, I am busy ‘fleeing temptation’. For those of you going through the same, I acknowledge it *is* hard work!)

Advice? ‘Take captive every thought . . .’ I don’t mean the third or fourth thought. I mean the first one, that just ‘popped in’ seemingly on its own—we all know where that one came from! As you allow your thoughts to dwell in the pleasant feelings, the longing for more of the same feelings takes root in your heart.

The longer you allow this seemingly innocent thing to go on, the harder it will be to uproot when you come to your senses. There is an Eastern proverb which sums it up well—‘You can’t stop birds flying around your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair’. So I urge you, take captive every thought.

Next though, and equally important, is to take action, if it is in your power to do so. Don’t continually allow yourself to *be* in this situation of temptation. Weigh up how important it is, and take it to God in prayer. If it means changing jobs—or changing churches as I have done—it is worth it for the peace of mind. It is one less battle to fight when you already have other important battles going on.

Rekindling affection for your spouse

If you are standing and are blessed to have your spouse still living with you—however ‘dead’ your relationship—I write the next bit especially for you. (I don’t really recommend this for us standers currently living alone, except in small doses! I tried it and it drove me nuts for want of reciprocation!)

Look to your spouse. You may ‘feel’ nothing toward him or her. But I want you to decide to love anyway. Not just agape love—if you are standing then God has probably already given you that—but the whole spectrum of ‘loves’. It will take time (like all things of lasting value do!), but as you *dwell* on your spouse’s good qualities, things they do that you enjoy, the things you loved about them when you first met,

how wonderful they really are and not on how little they are meeting your emotional needs, you will one day wake up and find you are 'in love' again, and it will have been worth the wait.

I can't, but He can

This may include pressuring or manipulating your spouse, but also even, as happened to me, feeling that unless you prayed yourself blue in the face all day and half the night, to the detriment and neglect of your children and the rest of the planet, nothing would happen.

I needed to realise two things:

- There was absolutely nothing I could do to save my marriage;
- God, however, knew exactly what to do, and wanted to do it even more than I did.

When I could stop seeing God as a means to an end (it sounds awful, but there were desperate days when that's how it was!), and instead as the Greatest Friend of all, who was all I needed, the struggling and striving ceased.

By the way, I usually discovered that all those 'great ideas' I thought would sort things out—if not God-given—turned out disastrously!

Avoid trying to change your spouse, instead of accepting them as they are.

It was hard for me to accept my husband as he was, without feeling I was condoning his sin. It has given

me a deeper understanding of how God can love us while we are yet sinners.

Please Lord,

Use me in spite of my mistakes. As the Master Artist please transform my blunders into things of use and beauty—even as a potter takes a marred pot and mends it, or a painter transforms an unwanted streak or blob on his canvas into a flower or bird.

What comfort to know that You can undo the mischief caused by my mistakes—and not only mistakes made with the best of intentions, but also purposeful, wilful mistakes!

You never know

Here is a good quote for those who, however unpredictable life is, still seem to think they can predict (usually pessimistically) what will happen next!

Providence hath a thousand sundry doors for the deliverance of His own, when it is even come to a desperate case. Let us be faithful, and care for our own part, which is to suffer for Him; and lay Christ's part on Himself, and leave it there (George MacDonald).

Understanding takes time

We need to meet people where they are at—not where we are at, or where we think they should be at!

This is what it means to 'bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves' (Romans 15:1)

—because we didn't get where we are by magic! We were brought to understandings, step by step. Until we have the revelation ourselves, all the advice of others may mean nothing. You can't hurry understanding. God knows where people are at. Let Him guide you.

People want to know when I'll grow up. Say what you mean, people! You mean, when will I stop trusting people, stop believing, stop forgiving, stop having ideals, stop loving, stop knowing there is more to life than what you think? And I say, gladly, 'Never!' And I run out and climb the highest tree I can find!

***When caught between a rock and a hard place,
it's best to choose the Rock.***

A Healed Marriage

*(As told by Jenny Beasley at the Adelaide Covenant
Keepers group, December 10th 2001)*

It is truly a beautiful thing to know that whatever the trials we face in life, there is one Person who never leaves us or rejects us. But so often at those times in our lives when we need Him most, we turn our backs on Him, as I did.

To understand why I made the choices in my life, it may help to tell you a little about my early years. I was born into a very dysfunctional family, my father being an alcoholic and my mother having serious mental health issues. My mother was placed into an institution when I was very young, giving my father custody of six children. Due to my father's work commitments he would constantly palm us off to other people to live with, miles away sometimes. I never felt very secure because we never stayed in one place for very long. I think I went to about six primary schools before I was eight.

When I was seven my father decided he didn't want his children anymore and very quickly we became wards of the state. I lived in a girls' home until I was eighteen. I always remember having this deep need for family, and at the same time never really feeling loved. Its funny when you're young how you think time goes so slowly and you'll never get out of this rut. I vowed that when I had children they would never suffer the way I had.

When I was fifteen I was sent to a home where the housemother was a Salvationist. (Very strict I might add.) She instilled in the girls good morals and introduced me to Jesus Christ. I loved the Salvation Army, loved the fellowship and for the first time truly believed I belonged to something. I was getting some of that much longed for attention.

I actually knew Dale for about two years before we started dating and to me he was just one of the many youth in the church. I wouldn't say our courtship was that spectacular. For me it was always this need to please my partner, but at the same time in no way did I like to be told what to do. All my life I'd been ordered to do things; now was my turn to live.

Dale and I married on the 12th of January 1980. I thought my dearest wish had come true and I now had that family I so longed for. We were blessed with three wonderful children but when things should have been great something would spoil it—*my attitude*. I let my sisters constantly upset my life. They had their own sets of problems with alcohol and mental health issues and they made it quite clear that it was my

responsibility and Christian duty to help them, which I did. This put a strain on our marriage as I quite often felt I was being pulled in two directions.

Well, life went on and in 1988 Dale was offered a job in the RAAF. This was great, I could escape all my problems and at last I could be in charge of my own life. What a joke! My sister decided to follow.

It may be appropriate here to tell you that I was the most headstrong female and I don't know how Dale put up with me. I know I was very bitter about my childhood and I resented my parents very much. I would question Dale's love for me, needing constant reassurance that he did indeed love me, but not really being able to return that love. Of course everyone else was to blame!

I secured some good employment in 1991 and decided to leave the church and I suppose, turn my back on Christ. That was the beginning of my downfall. In 1993 Dale left the air force and we moved to Adelaide to live. We moved here and I moved out. I was free!

What a total fool I was to think you can turn your back on God and make a mockery of His rules for marriage. Things were OK for a while and I even had a couple of other relationships, which failed drastically, over the next few years. I know there was a point where I started to feel totally alone and tried to find solace in alcohol. Me, who would never be like my parents, was becoming exactly like them. This drinking almost destroyed my children. My sister had also become an alcoholic and her child was taken from her. History was repeating itself.

I had to change. I was offered a full-time job and got myself together somewhat. I worked for 18 months, then last December I received a phone call to say my sister was dying. Would this pain never end for me? My sister Judy was on life support and I had to make the decision to turn off the machine. She died and I think a large part of me died that day.

I became ill after that, emotionally that is. I gave up my job and turned back to the only person left who I thought cared at all; Dale. He invited me back to the family home until I decided what I wanted to do. I think I just wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. That was in March 2001.

I decided not to wither away but to heal. Dale has been with me every step of the way. There has been absolutely no pressure from him. I have been on a journey of self-discovery over the past twelve months. I have discovered that I didn't need to go searching for that family I so longed for. God had already supplied it. I was just too blind to see. But more importantly I have discovered our Heavenly Father. He has given me a peace that I can't explain. He has helped me learn from the mistakes I have made and showed me how to love. The greatest gift in all the world is to love and be loved.

Dale's love for me has been unfailing, his faith in God remaining firm. He never entered into other relationships and for many years lived with the hope that I would return to him. I am so thankful to him for not giving up on me and for giving me a hope for the future.

To those who are now in the position Dale was, I encourage you to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Hold firm to the belief that He will give you the strength to endure. I pray that each of your marriage partners will one day realise the precious gifts that God has given them in you and your children. I pray that you will be reunited with your loved ones and know that wonderful peace and contentment that Dale and I now share.

Have faith because we are living proof that God does work miracles.

(Jenny and Dale Beasley were remarried, after being divorced for seven years, on January 12th 2002, at the Noarlunga Salvation Army.)

*True Romance***Ephesians 5:25–32**

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.

The promise of romantic love

According to popular culture, what gives meaning and fulfilment to life is romantic love, with sex as its

high point. Romantic, sexual love is presented as the pinnacle of human experience; that which will satisfy our deepest longings to love and to be loved, to receive pleasure and emotional fulfilment. It is the implicit assumption of nearly every popular novel, film, or song.

Songs promise eternal love, undying commitment, complete giving and receiving. 'Our love will never die . . . I'll be yours forever . . . Be mine . . . I will never let you go . . . I want to lose myself in you . . . You're part of me . . .'

Despite all the evidence around us that it doesn't work out that way, it seems impossible to eradicate the idea that next time it *will* work out. Even after many love affairs which flame and die, deep in our beings is the certainty that somewhere there really is an undying love to which the yearning is pointing. The flush of love and emotion is too real to be prophetic only of an illusion:

Our sexuality is about more than our desire to be physically gratified—though it certainly holds that promise. It is the promise of an ultimate reality. It is the yearning for ultimate connections, for meaning, for love, for togetherness, for companionship, for forgiveness and for life beyond.⁵

Books on male–female relationships (I will use the term 'marriage') abound in secular and in Christian book shops, and many of them are helpful. Through

⁵ Michael Frost, *Longing for Love: Gender, Sexuality and Our Experience of God*, Albatross, Sutherland, 1996, p. 20.

reading and counselling we can learn to recognise our own selfish behaviours. We can come to realise the ways in which we are alienating our partners, or not meeting their needs, or failing to understand their perceptions of the relationship. Certainly, it is good to learn to conduct our relationships and especially our marriages in a conscious, deliberate and aware manner. It is essential that we learn to love our spouse, that we try to meet their needs, that we do good to them, that we are forgiving and accepting of their differences.

Eros is essentially self-seeking

But why do we lap up such books and courses? What is our underlying motivation? Ultimately it is so that we will receive the love we want; so that we will have our needs met by the other. It's enlightened self-interest, a sophisticated version of 'I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine'.

On this human level we will often go to great and sacrificial lengths in our expressions of love, but in the end if it is not reciprocated, or we feel we have no hope of getting anything back for our efforts, what happens? So often, that which we called 'true love' turns to hate, revenge, bitterness and vindictiveness.

In the end, we find it is not the love we yearned for in the depths of our beings. The love we thought we were expressing or receiving was not the love of 1 Corinthians 13—that love which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things—the love which never fails.

Why such unquenchable hope?

It is not by accident, or because of evolutionary impulses, that we look so hopefully to male–female relationships, and especially sexual relationships. We are wonderfully created in the image of God, and to understand ourselves we must look to the nature of God. All our yearnings for physical, emotional or spiritual nourishment and satisfaction, our constant desire for justice, our irresistible longing to be loved and to love; all these aspects of our nature are present precisely because we are made to be reflections and images of God Himself. All our longings and needs are meant to find their primary satisfaction and fulfilment in Him. When we look elsewhere, we will never find what we're looking for, and we will be committing what the Scriptures call idolatry; trying to satisfy those God-given yearnings with anything other than God Himself.

So what has marriage to do with the nature of God? If humanity is made in the image of God, why do men and women have the persistent urge to marry (in whatever form that may take) and have families?

It is because *God is a God who marries*.

The Trinitarian life of God

The God of the Scriptures is three Persons who are yet One. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit relate to one another in love, in giving, in honour, in delight, in friendship, in dynamic, total and full relationship:

For in the eternal sphere of the divine Essence, the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity live in inseparable, most perfect, and eternal communion with one another. It is the life of eternal and perfect knowledge, of a perfect entering into one another's life, of a perfect understanding of each other. In the divine economy there are no secrets. The Father never thinks or wills what the Son and the Holy Spirit do not think or will. It is a life of the most perfect love, in which the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity eternally find one another and are eternally united in the most perfect divine harmony in the bond of perfect union. Nowhere is there separation, nowhere disharmony in the divine life of friendship. And therefore God is in Himself most blessed. Therefore He is in Himself the Self-sufficient, Who has no need to be served by men's hands, to Whom no one can add anything, out of Whom and through Whom and unto Whom are all things, and Who has made all things for His own name's sake. And therefore He is also from eternity to eternity the covenant God in Himself, the architect of all covenant life. The life of the divine Trinity is a life of the most intimate communion of friendship.⁶

God is complete in Himself and so has no need of us. He creates because of the overflowing joy and love of the inner life of the Trinity. Unbelievably, He makes a creature with the capacity to enter into that divine life and to enjoy the intimacy and excitement and never-ending wonder of that life for ever. It is that communion of the Godhead that our yearnings are pointing to.

The great American preacher Jonathan Edwards spoke of the Triune God's relationship to His creation as the Original Marriage, as did Robert W. Jenson:

⁶ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 321.

To this I say, that the Son is the adequate communication of the Father's goodness . . . But yet the Son has also an inclination to communicate *himself*, in an image of his person that may partake of his happiness: and this was the end of the creation, even the communication of the happiness of the Son of God . . . Therefore the church is said to be the completeness of Christ (Edwards).

It is as and only as a factor in the plot of the triune God's inner life, that God has a need to overflow . . . (Jenson).

The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for his Son Jesus Christ, that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love . . . [H]eaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse (Edwards).

The church is *with* Christ the object of the triune love and so the purpose of creation (Jenson).⁷

Our participation in the Divine family

Hear in the words of Jesus the joy He knows in the Father, and His yearning for His people to be with Him, enjoying that communion forever:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world

⁷ Jonathan Edwards and Robert W. Jenson, quoted in Bingham, *The Profound Mystery*, p. 53.

know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them (John 17:20–26).

Again, Jonathan Edwards:

There was, [as] it were, an eternal society or family in the Godhead, in the Trinity of persons. It seems to be God's design to admit the church into the divine family as his son's wife.⁸

This idea is mind-blowing, and lifts the meaning of our marriages to a cosmic plane. Only poetry can come close to conveying the wonder of this Romance.

Romances

John of the Cross (1542–1591)

Romance 1: on the Gospel
Regarding the Most Blessed Trinity

In the beginning the Word
Was; He lived in God
And possessed in Him
His infinite happiness.

That same Word was God,
Who is the Beginning;
He was in the beginning
And had no beginning.

He was himself the Beginning
And therefore had no beginning.
The Word is called Son;
He was born of the Beginning

Who had always conceived Him
And was always conceiving Him,
Giving of His substance always
Yet always possessing it.

And thus the glory of the Son
Was the Father's glory,
And the Father possessed
All His glory in the Son.

⁸ Quoted in Bingham, *The Profound Mystery*, p. 54.

As the lover in the beloved
 Each lived in the other,
 And the Love that unites them
 Is one with them,

Their equal, excellent as
 The One and the Other:
 Three Persons, and one Beloved
 Among all three.

One love in them all
 Makes of them one Lover,
 And the Lover is the Beloved
 In whom each one lives.

For the being that the three possess
 Each of them possesses,
 And each of them loves
 Him who bears this being.

Each one is this being
 Which alone unites them
 Binding them deeply
 One beyond words.

Thus it is a boundless
 Love that unites them,
 For the three have one love
 Which is their essence;
 And the more love is one
 The more it is love.

Romance 2

*On the communication
 among the three Persons*

In that immense love
 Proceeding from the two
 The Father spoke words
 Of great affection to the Son,

Words of such profound delight
 That no one understood them;
 They were meant for the Son
 And He alone rejoiced in them.

What He heard
 Was this;
 My Son, only your
 Company contents Me,

And when something pleases Me
 I love that thing in You;
 He who resembles You most
 Satisfies Me most,

And he who is like You in nothing
 Will find nothing in Me.
 I am pleased with You alone
 O life of My life!

You are the light of My light,
 You are My wisdom,
 The image of My substance
 In Whom I am well pleased.

CALLED TO FAITHFULNESS

My Son, I will give Myself
To him who loves You,
And I will love him
With the same love I have for you,
Because he has loved
You Whom I love so.



TRUE ROMANCE

Romance 3
On Creation

My Son, I wish to give You
A bride who will love You.
Because of You she will deserve
To share our company,

And eat bread at Our table,
The same bread I eat;
That she may know the good
I have in such a Son;
And rejoice with Me
In Your grace and fullness.

I am very grateful, Father,
The Son answered;
I will show My brightness
To the bride You give Me.

So that by it she may see
How great My Father is,
And how I have received
My being from Your being.

I will hold her in My arms
And she will burn with Your love,
And with eternal delight
She will exalt Your goodness.



Romance 4
Creation (cont.)

Let it be done, then, said the Father,
 For Your love has deserved it;
 And by these words
 The world was created,

A palace for the bride
 Made with great wisdom
 And divided into rooms,
 One above, the other below.

The lower was furnished
 With infinite variety,
 While the higher was made beautiful
 With marvelous jewels,

That the bride might know
 The Bridegroom she had.
 The orders of angels
 Were placed in the higher,

But man was given
 The lower place
 For he was, in his being,
 A lesser thing.

And though beings and places
 Were divided in this way,
 Yet all form one
 Who is called the bride;

For love of the same Bridegroom
 Made one bride of them.
 Those higher ones possessed
 The Bridegroom in gladness,

The lower in hope, founded
 On the faith which He infused in them,
 Telling them: that one day
 He would exalt them,

And that He would lift them
 Up from their lowness
 So that no one
 Could mock it any more;

For He would make Himself
 Wholly like them,
 And He would come to them
 And dwell with them;

And God would be man
 And man would be God,
 And He would talk with them
 And eat and drink with them;

And He Himself would be
 With them continually
 Until the consummation
 Of this world,

When, joined, they would rejoice
 In eternal song;
 For He was the Head
 Of this bride of His

To Whom all the members
Of the just would be joined,
Who form the body of the bride.
He would take her

Tenderly in His arms
And there give her His love;
And when they were thus one,
He would lift her to the Father

Where God's very joy
Would be her joy.
For as the Father and the Son
And He who proceeds from them

Live in one another,
So it would be with the bride:
For, taken wholly into God,
She will live the life of God.



Romance 5
Creation (cont.)

By this bright hope
Which came to them from above
Their wearying labors
Were lightened;

But the drawn out waiting
And their growing desire
To rejoice with their Bridegroom
Wore on them continually.

So, with prayers
And sighs and suffering,
With tears and moanings
They asked night and day

That now He would determine
To grant them His company.
Some said: If only
This joy would come in my time!

Others: Come, Lord,
Send Him Whom You will send!
And others: Oh, if only these heavens
Would break, and with my own eyes

I could see Him descending;
Then I would stop my crying out.
Oh clouds, rain down from your height,
Earth needs you,

CALLED TO FAITHFULNESS

And let the earth open
That has borne us thorns,
Let it bring forth that flower
That would be its flowering.

Others said: what gladness
For him who is living then,
Who will be able to see God
With his own eyes,

And touch Him with his hand
And walk with Him
And enjoy the mysteries
Which He will then ordain.



TRUE ROMANCE

Romance 6
Creation (cont.)

In these and other prayers
A long time had passed;
But in the later years
Their fervour swelled and grew

When the aged Simeon
Burned with longing,
And begged God that he
Might see this day.

And so the Holy Spirit
Answering the good old man
Gave him His word
That he would not see death

Until he saw Life
Descending from the heights,
Until he took God Himself
Into his own hands
And holding Him in his arms,
Pressed Him to himself.



Romance 7
The Incarnation

Now that the time had come
When it would be good
To ransom the bride
Serving under the hard yoke

Of that law
Which Moses had given her,
The Father, with tender love,
Spoke in this way:

Now You see, Son, that Your bride
Was made in Your image,
And so far as she is like You
She will suit You well;

Yet she is different, in her flesh,
Which Your simple being does not have.
In perfect love
This law holds:

That the lover becomes
Like the one he loves;
For the greater their likeness
The greater their delight.

Surely Your bride's delight
Would greatly increase
Were she to see You like her,
In her own flesh.

My will is Yours,
The Son replied,
And My glory is
That Your will be Mine.

This is fitting, Father,
What You, the Most High, say;
For in this way
Your goodness will be the more seen,

Your great power will be seen
And Your justice and wisdom.
I will go and tell the world,
Spreading the word
Of Your beauty and sweetness
And of Your sovereignty.

I will go seek My bride
And take upon Myself
Her weariness and labors
In which she suffers so;

And that she may have life
I will die for her,
And, lifting her out of that deep,
I will restore her to You.



Romance 8
The Incarnation (cont.)

Then He called
 The archangel Gabriel
 And sent him to
 The virgin Mary,

At whose consent
 The mystery was wrought,
 In whom the Trinity
 Clothed the Word with flesh.

And though Three work this,
 It is wrought in the One:
 And the Word lived incarnate
 In the womb of Mary.

And He who had only a Father
 Now had a Mother too,
 But she was not like others
 Who conceive by man.

From her own flesh
 He received His flesh,
 So He is called
 Son of God and of man.



Romance 9
The Birth

When the time had come
 For Him to be born
 He went forth like the bridegroom
 From his bridal chamber,

Embracing His bride,
 Holding her in His arms,
 Whom the gracious Mother
 Laid in a manger

Among some animals
 That were there at that time.
 Men sang songs
 And angels melodies

Celebrating the marriage
 Of Two such as these.
 But God there in the manger
 Cried and moaned;

And these tears were jewels
 The bride brought to the wedding.
 The Mother gazed in sheer wonder
 On such an exchange:

In God, man's weeping,
 And in man, gladness,
 To the one and the other
 Things usually so strange.⁹

⁹ *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trs Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, ICS Publications, Washington, 1991, pp. 724–32.

Marriage from beginning to end

At the beginning of the Scriptures we have the first human marriage:

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 (Genesis 2:22–24).

And in Ephesians Paul tells us that the first marriage, and every marriage, is primarily about something far beyond what any husband or wife could ever imagine:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless . . .

'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25–27, 31, 32).

John the Baptist speaks of Jesus as the bridegroom:

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy

when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete (John 3:29).

Many comments and parables of Jesus reinforce this idea:

Jesus answered, 'How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast' (Matthew 9:15).

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (Matthew 22:2).

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1).

The fulfilment of all history is described in the Book of Revelation. We find that the great and wonderful event that all history is moving towards is a Marriage. The celebration of the union for eternity, of God and that vast crowd of redeemed humanity that He has prepared as a spotless bride:

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, 'Write: "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!"' And he added, 'These are the true words of God' (Revelation 19:6–9).

At this Marriage, it really will be ‘and they lived happily ever after’.

The meaning of marriage

So marriage does not find its primary meaning as a human institution. The relationship of God to His people in the Old Testament, and of Christ and His Bride (the church) in the New Testament, is depicted many times as a marriage or a betrothal.

This is not projecting upwards from earth to heaven, that is, using human marriage as an analogy to help us grasp the character of God’s covenant with us. On the contrary, God’s covenant with us is the true Marriage, the primary Marriage. Our marriages are to be images of that original Marriage, and to draw on that original for their sustenance.

Our marriages are only possible because of that Divine Marriage.

Marriage is prophetic

Hosea’s marriage was prophetic; speaking out God’s truth and pointing to His purposes. It was a very real and dynamic demonstration of the nature of Yahweh’s sacrificial and gracious love to His wife Israel. All earthly marriages are intended to be a prophetic demonstration of what God is about in the whole of history. This is built into the very fibre of our beings, and is an awesome calling.

The high calling of marriage is to be an image, within the created order, of the distinction and unity of the Trinity, and of the relationship between Christ and His church, of His total sacrificial giving and never-failing faithfulness.

Just as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet they are one, so the husband and wife are two distinct persons, yet they are ‘one flesh’. (Children are a very real representation of that one-flesh union. Both parents have been poured into them and they cannot be separated out again.)

The Son has covenanted with His Bride to bring her into the eternal wonder of the Trinity, and will stop at nothing to fulfil that promise, even to the point of sacrificing Himself for her. If we, as professed followers of Christ, behave in ways that do not reflect His self-giving love, then we are, in effect, telling lies about God. Our actions will speak louder than our words. As a friend put it, ‘Our proclamation of the gospel will only be as strong as our practice regarding marriage’.

Marriage within a Marriage

Any human marriage must be seen as a marriage within a Marriage.

Whether we are believers or not, married or unmarried, we are all caught up into that primary Marriage, as we are all part of the wayward bride for whom Christ went to the cross.

From within that eternal covenant we have the high calling and the resources to live out our life-long

marriage covenants, or to witness to that eternal covenant through our faithful honouring and respecting of the marriage bond, no matter what marital state we are called to.

Marriage is a serious business

God is married to His chosen people Israel, Christ is betrothed to be married to His church. This is why divorce is treated so seriously by God. 'I hate divorce' (Malachi 2:16).

It explains why Israel's idolatry and disobedience is portrayed as adultery, and why Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage is so radical.

The tragedy and pain of broken homes and marriages has touched or will touch many of us. In our consideration of the many difficult issues involved, as believers we must be on guard that our assessments are not based on the world's value systems—what are our 'rights', or what will bring happiness in this life, or what we or others 'deserve'.

We understandably want to be compassionate, and to help people avoid pain, difficulty or loneliness. But our first concern as disciples of Jesus must be obedience to His commands and instructions, and we know that He has clearly warned us about the costs in this life of such obedience.

Let us not forget, though, the promise of Jesus:

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive

a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

As God's people we are called to believe His word about the true nature and meaning of human marriages as images of and pointers to the Divine marriage, which is the goal and purpose of all creation. In the light of that revelation, let us consider how to be obedient to the Lord Jesus in whatever circumstance He has placed us.

Are we married? How are we to value and build our marriage relationship in the light of this high calling?

Are we unmarried? How do we now view our relationships with the opposite sex? In what ways do our behaviour and attitudes honour human marriage and thus the true Marriage?

Are we deserted or divorced? Does God ever give up on His wayward spouse? Would Christ ever divorce His Bride? Will He ever be unfaithful to us?

We are part of the wayward Bride

We have all fallen short. We have all placed our faith in anything but the faithful and compassionate Father who longs to share the joy and wonder of His being with us. We have all been idolatrous.

But we have been loved and wooed and won by Christ, the true Bridegroom. He gave himself up for us. He has made us holy. He has cleansed us 'by the washing with water by the word'. He is giving himself constantly for us and to us and He will present us as a

radiant Bride, 'without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, holy and blameless'.

Our marriage with Him will be consummated at the great marriage feast at the end of history. We will enter into the divine family, sharing in the eternal joy, and glory, and friendship and intimacy and love and dynamic and ever-varied wonder of the life of the three-personed God in the new heaven and the new earth. May we be gripped by the prospect of being and becoming 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

It is with this perspective before us that Christian believers should consider the issues of human marriage and the relationships between men and women. If we think and act with the world's wisdom, as though this brief life is all there is, we will find ourselves blatantly ignoring or explaining away the clear teaching of Jesus with regard to marriage and divorce, and indeed the entire thrust of God's relationship to His creation.

Our marriage covenants find their source and meaning at the very heart of God Himself. No wonder the evil powers are so bent on destroying them.

Resources

Books

Arnold, J. Christoph. *A Plea for Purity: Sex, Marriage and God*. Plough Publishing House of the Bruderhof Foundation, Farmington, 1996.

A wise spiritual guide on how and why to live a life of sexual purity, it puts sex into the larger context of creation, church, marriage and community. 'Simple and short, but deep, this is one of the best books on the subject' (J. I. Packer).

Bingham, Geoffrey C. *The Profound Mystery: Marriage Love, Divine and Human*. New Creation Publications Inc., Blackwood, 1995.

The Apostle Paul was sure that the reality of human marriage was far beyond what any couple could reasonably conceive or hope to dream; it is a prophetic symbol of the Divine-human union. This is the foundational understanding we need to inform our thinking about marriage, divorce and remarriage.

Bromiley, Geoffrey W. *God and Marriage*. T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1981.

A short (80 pages), easy to read theology of marriage. 'In my thinking this book is one of the finest and clearest we

have in English on the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage' (Geoffrey Bingham).

Chapman, Gary. *Hope for the Separated*. Moody Press, Chicago, 1996.

Encouraging and practical advice about how to cope with separation and work towards reconciliation. Not theological.

Cornes, Andrew. *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principle and Pastoral Practice*. Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2002.

Highly recommended. Cornes begins with a theology of marriage and singleness, examining all the significant Old Testament passages. He then discusses the implications of the biblical teaching on pastoral ministry in the local church, dealing with a host of real life questions in a practical way. '... a balanced combination of biblical scholarship and practical experience, prophetic witness and pastoral wisdom, courage and compassion, truth and love. It will, I predict, become indispensable reading for everybody who is anxious to develop a Christian Mind on these topics. It is thorough, clear, faithful, realistic and passionate' (Rev. Dr John Stott).

Cornes, Andrew. *Questions about Divorce and Remarriage*. Monarch Books, London, 1998.

A popular version of his *Divorce and Remarriage*. Directly answers 99 common questions, including the 'what if...' variety. The message is that Christ can support marriages that have almost collapsed, that He can forge a new, fulfilling life for those devastated by separation and divorce, and can bring positive hope where there seemed only anger and contempt. Highly recommended.

Crabb, Larry Jr. *The Marriage Builder: A Blueprint for Couples and Counsellors*. Strand Publishing, Sydney, 1997.

Psychologist Larry Crabb's thesis is that the deepest needs of human personality—security and significance—ultimately cannot be satisfied by a marriage partner. It requires turning to the Lord rather than to one's spouse, which frees both partners for soul oneness, a commitment to minister to the spouse's needs rather than manipulating to meet one's own needs.

Engelsma, David J. *Marriage, the Mystery of Christ and the Church: The Covenant-bond in Scripture and History*. Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grandville, 1998.

Uncompromisingly reaffirms the Early Church's teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage, and 'points out (regretfully) the error of the Reformers' teaching.' Section 2: 'A Brief History of the Church's Doctrine of Marriage' is very helpful.

Frost, Michael. *Longing for Love*. Albatross, Sutherland, 1996.

Subtitled 'Gender, Sexuality and our Experience of God'. A look at the complexity of our spirituality and sexuality and the depth of the character of God as detailed in the Bible, in the context of modern gender debates.

Hill, Craig. *Marriage: Covenant or Contract*. Family Foundations Publishing, Littleton, 1992.

Short and straightforward, by a pastor who eventually realised that, by agreeing to remarry people in his church,

he was 'participating in the destruction of our society, having a profound effect on future generations, and embracing values diametrically opposed to those of the Bible and the kingdom of God'.

Hill, Craig. *Help! My Spouse Wants Out*. Family Foundations Publishing, Littleton, 1995.

Uses biblical and current material to teach the values on which a lasting marriage can be built. Provides hope for personal healing and immediate help and advice for those with serious marital difficulties.

House, H. Wayne, ed. *Divorce and Remarriage: Four Christian Views*. IVP, Illinois, 1990.

Four writers outline their case and respond to that of the others. Helpful for understanding the different positions:

1. No divorce & no remarriage;
2. Divorce but no remarriage;
3. Divorce & remarriage for adultery or desertion;
4. Divorce & remarriage under a variety of circumstances.

Mason, Mike. *The Mystery of Marriage*. SPCK, London, 1997.

A lyrical and moving meditation on the miracle of married love, searching in depth its spiritual foundations and musing on the mysterious way in which marriage reveals something of the nature of heaven.

Plecker, Robert J. *Divorce and the Christian: What the Bible Teaches*. Tyndale House, Illinois, 1980.

Biblically faithful, and full of practical advice. Tackles common excuses and difficult cases forthrightly and compassionately. Helpful insight into how these matters might be handled pastorally.

Stanton, Glenn T. *Why Marriage Matters: Reasons to Believe in Marriage in a Postmodern Society*. Pinon Press, Colorado, 1997.

A strong, reasoned case for defending marriage in a society characterised by lack of commitment. A goldmine of research findings about why the institution of marriage is so important.

Steinkamp, Robert E. *Prodigals Do Come Home*. Covenant Marriages Ministry, Golden, 1990.

The first of a number of books available from Rejoice Ministries. Bob Steinkamp's own story of how God brought him back to his faithful wife after a three-year divorce. Encouraging advice for those whose spouse has left.

Thielicke, Helmut. *Sex, Theological Ethics*, vol. 3. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979.

Not light reading, but extremely helpful in clarifying the issues. See especially pp. 101-24 ('The Biblical Interpretation of Marriage') for a constant emphasis on the fact that Jesus' statements about divorce and remarriage appear in the context of a call to repentance and faithfulness, and not that of marriage legislation.

Wallerstein, Judith; Lewis, Julia; and Blakeslee, Sandra. *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*. HarperCollins Publishers, Sydney, 2000.

A unique long-term study of children of divorce, conducted over 25 years. Detailed narrative accounts of seven representative cases. This book challenges many popular beliefs and confronts us with the realities of divorce and its long-term impact on society.

Wenham, Gordon J. and Heth, William E. *Jesus and Divorce: The Problem with the Evangelical Consensus*. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1984.

A thorough and scholarly examination of the teaching of Jesus and Paul. Critical examination of the widely held view among evangelicals that allows remarriage after divorce on the grounds of immorality. Reinforces the position of the Early Church which permitted divorce but did not remarry those whose spouses were still living.

Helpful Ministries and Internet Sites

Covenant Keepers Inc.

<http://www.covenantkeepersinc.org>

Covenant Keepers Inc. is a ministry to local churches to give biblical instruction on separation, divorce and remarriage. Through regular home meetings, men and women who do not have the cooperation of their partner but who want to save their marriages, and are willing to do so alone, are taught the benefits of working toward reconciliation and restoration, instead of choosing divorce.

Australian Directors:
Andrew & Carol Munden
14 Hideaway Drive SALT ASH NSW 2318
Phone: (02) 4982 6777

Desiring God Ministries

<http://www.desiringgod.org>

A ministry which publishes the sermons and writings of Dr John Piper, Senior Pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis. A number of excellent articles and

sermons are available, including the church's position paper on divorce and remarriage.

New Creation Teaching Ministry Inc.

<http://www.newcreation.org.au>

A unique and wide-ranging faith ministry formed in 1973 to provide full-orbed biblical teaching and excellent resources to local churches. The teaching is not of the 'how to' variety, yet it is immensely practical because of its biblical world-view and intellectual integrity. Most of the teachers and authors are ordained clergy from a variety of denominations.

PO Box 403 Blackwood SA 5051
Phone: (08) 82701861, Fax: (08) 82704003

Purposeful Singleness Inc.

<http://www.singleness.org>

Dedicated to providing inspiration, encouragement, and support for Christian singles who may or may not feel called to singleness, but who desire to live purposeful lives for Jesus Christ.

Rejoice Ministries Inc.

<http://www.rejoiceministries.org>

Divorced after 19 years of marriage, Charlyne Steinkamp discovered that God hates divorce and that He can restore and rebuild marriages. She committed herself to love her prodigal spouse unconditionally, and to the glory of God, Bob and Charlyne were remarried to each other in 1987. The Steinkamps now minister His love, forgiveness and restoration to others with hurting marriages. Books, tapes and an encouraging daily email are available.

University of the Family (formerly Marriage Ministries International)

<http://learn4life.marriage.org>

A non-profit organisation ministering to marriages around the world in ninety countries and thirty languages. Their fundamental course for couples, 'Married for Life', is conducted in small groups in homes. Helpful tapes and books are available, as well as a pre-marriage course. Links to ministries which support and encourage separated Christians.