



STRENGTHENING

YOUR

MARRIAGE

WAYNE A. MACK

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P U B L I S H I N G

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FOREWORD

In fulfillment of his doctoral program at Westminster Theological Seminary, Wayne Mack developed this outstanding practical volume. I have had the privilege and pleasure to monitor the efforts that he has put into the preparation of the material over the last two years, and I know that his work has been thorough. Beyond that, it is biblical.

Pastors, you will find that both the biblical studies and the personal exercises included will be useful to you in counseling with married couples in your church as well as in pre-marital counseling.

Surely, your own marriage can be strengthened, too. One way to begin to use this book is to work through it with your wife.

As you know, there are many books purporting to offer help in doing marriage counseling. And, as you also know quite well, there are only a few that deliver the goods. Usually what they provide is far less than that concrete, practical, how-to information that you really need to initiate and bring about scriptural change. This book is unique at this very point. You and your counselee (even on his own) can use it.

Dr. Mack has produced a volume to which you will turn again and again. Buy it; it belongs on your shelf!

—JAY E. ADAMS

INTRODUCTION

One plus one equals one may not be an accurate mathematical concept, but it is an accurate description of God's intention for the marriage relationship. That this is an accurate description of God's purpose for the marriage relationship is revealed in the creation account itself. Scripture says, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become *one flesh*" (Gen. 2:24).

Years of experience as a pastor and counselor have convinced me that many marriages are far below the biblical norm. Even many Christians are not experiencing the oneness in their marriages that God says they should have. These marriages are not providing the satisfaction that God intended them to bring. Nor are they the testimony for Christ that God wants them to be (Eph. 5:29–32).

This particular manual has been designed as a tool for developing true unity in the marriage relationship. The material is like a ladder or stairway, each unit being based upon and related to every other unit, with the goal of all the material being that of true unity or oneness in marriage.

Every unit has a teaching section which is presented in amplified outline form. Main points are italicized for the purpose of easy recognition and recall. Scripture references are given and it is hoped that you will study them to discover for yourself God's way of becoming truly one. Study questions and practical exercises also form

a part of every unit. These study questions and exercises are not simply busy work. They are designed to provide the basis for practical, specific, personalized research and direction which will result in the development of greater unity in your marriage.

Scripture says, "In all labor there is profit" (Prov. 14:23), and nowhere is this more true than in the marriage relationship. Good, God-honoring marriages do not just happen. They are the result of dedicated, diligent, consistent prayer and work on the part of both husband and wife.

In this manual I call you to work—to work on the most important human relationship in your life. What I am going to ask you to do will not be easy. Time, effort, serious thought, painful examination, and honest evaluation will be required. But I guarantee you that your prayerful efforts will be richly rewarded.

Already the substance of this manual has been implemented by many people. The result has been that good marriages have been made better, sour marriages have become sweet, and God's name has been manifestly glorified. My hope and prayer is that our great God would use this manual to promote greater oneness in your marriage so that you may experience greater happiness and that His goodness, power, and glory may be more fully manifested.

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GOD'S PURPOSE FOR MARRIAGE

In this unit God's blueprint for marriage in Genesis 2:18–25 is considered. The concepts of leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh are presented and explained. Suggested reading and study questions to be completed by both the husband and the wife are included.

- A. As far as I know there is only one statement about marriage that God includes four times in the Bible.
 1. He makes it in Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:7–8, and Ephesians 5:31. The statement is, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."
 2. God makes this same statement about marriage four times.
 - a. He makes it once in the Old Testament and three times in the New Testament.
 - b. He makes it once before man fell into sin and three times after man fell into sin.
 3. This statement contains God's marital purpose for perfect man and for sinful man. This statement contains God's all-time blueprint for a good marriage.

- B. A good blueprint is just as necessary for a good marriage as it is for a building project.
 - 1. Today, there are many unhappy, unfulfilling marriages not only among non-Christians but also among Christians.
 - 2. This unhappiness is caused to a large extent by the failure of people to pay attention to God's blueprint for marriage.
 - 3. What then is God's blueprint for marriage? What does God's kind of marriage involve?
- I. God's blueprint for marriage directs husbands and wives to leave their fathers and mothers.
 - A. What does it mean to leave your parents?
 - 1. Well, it certainly does not mean that you abandon or utterly forsake them. (Compare Exod. 20:12; Mark 7:9–13; 1 Tim. 5:8.)
 - 2. Nor does it mean that you must make a great geographical move. Living too close to parents at the beginning of a marriage may make it more difficult to leave, but it is possible to leave your father and mother and still live next door. Conversely, it is possible to live a thousand miles away from your parents and not leave them. In fact, you may not have left your parents even though they are dead.
 - B. To leave your parents means that your relationship to your parents must be radically changed.
 - 1. It means that you establish an adult relationship with them.
 - 2. It means that you must be more concerned about your mate's ideas, opinions, and practices than those of your parents.
 - 3. It means that you must not be slavishly dependent on your parents for affection, approval, assistance, and counsel.
 - 4. It means that you must eliminate any bad attitudes toward your parents, or you will be tied emotionally to them regardless of how far you move from them.

5. It means that you must stop trying to change your mate simply because your parents do not like him the way he is.
 6. *It means that you make the husband and wife relationship your priority human relationship.*
 - a. Yes, you should be concerned about being a good son/daughter—or mother/father, but you should be more concerned about being a good husband/wife than about being a good son/daughter or father/mother. *Children do not need indulgent parents who continually neglect each other. They need parents who will demonstrate how to face and solve problems. They need parents who will show them how to be good husbands and wives; how to relate to other people.*
 - b. If you are parents, your goal should be to prepare your children to leave, not to stay. Your life must not be wrapped around them or you may make them emotional cripples.
 - c. You should be preparing yourselves for the day when your children leave by cultivating common interests, by learning to do things together, and by deepening your friendship with each other.
 - d. When your children have married, you must not try to run their lives. You must allow the young husband to be the head of his home, to make decisions for himself, to look to his wife, not you, as his primary responsibility and helper. You must encourage your daughter to depend upon her husband, not you, for guidance, help, companionship, and affection.
- II. God's blueprint for marriage directs husbands and wives to cleave to one another.
- A. In our day many young couples seem to marry with the thought that if their marriage does not work out they can always get a divorce.

1. When they marry, they vow to be faithful until death, but under their breath they add, "unless our problems are too great."
 2. Indeed, some suggest that we should renew our marriage license every year even as we do our automobile license. Others suggest that we forget about the hassle of having to get a marriage license or going through a marriage ceremony.
 3. For them, marriage is a matter of convenience, of chance, and may be very temporary. It all depends on how the cards fall out.
- B. But God says, "No, that's not the way I planned it. I planned marriage to be a permanent relationship. I want the husband and wife to cleave to one another" (Mark 10:7–9).
1. Marriage, then, is not a matter of blind chance, but deliberate choice.
 2. It is not merely a matter of convenience, but obedience.
 3. It is not a matter of how the cards fall out, but of how much you are willing and determined to work at it.
- C. A good marriage is based more on commitment than feeling or animal attraction.
1. According to Malachi 2:14 and Proverbs 2:17, marriage is an irrevocable covenant or contract to which we are bound.
 2. Therefore, when two people get married they promise that they will be faithful to each other regardless of what happens.
 - a. The wife promises that she will be faithful even if the husband is afflicted with bulges, baldness, bunions, and bifocals; even if he loses his health, his wealth, his job, his charm; even if someone more exciting comes along.
 - b. The husband promises to be faithful even if the wife loses her beauty and appeal; even if she is not as neat

and tidy or as submissive as he would like her to be; even if she does not satisfy his sexual desires completely; even if she spends money foolishly or is a terrible cook.

- c. Marriage means that a husband and wife enter into a relationship for which they accept full responsibility and in which they commit themselves to each other regardless of what problems arise.

D. In many ways getting married is like becoming a Christian.

1. When a person becomes a Christian, he leaves his former way of life, his self-righteousness, his own efforts to save himself, and turns to Christ, who died in the place and stead of sinners.
2. In this act of turning to Christ, he commits himself to Christ. The very essence of saving faith is a personal commitment to Christ in which a person promises to trust Christ faithfully and completely and to serve Christ faithfully and diligently, regardless of how he feels or what problems arise. (Compare Rom. 10:9–10; Acts 16:31; Phil. 3:7–8; 1 Thess. 1:9–10.)
3. Just so, *God's kind of marriage involves a total and irrevocable commitment of two people to each other.*
 - a. God's kind of marriage involves cleaving to one another in sickness and health, poverty and wealth, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, good times and bad times, agreements and disagreements.
 - b. God's kind of marriage means that people know that they must face problems, discuss them, seek God's help in them, resolve them rather than run from them, because there is no way out. They are committed to one another for life. They must cleave to one another today and tomorrow, as long as they both shall live.

III. God's blueprint for marriage involves one flesh.

- A. At its most elementary level, this is referring to sexual relations or physical union.
 - 1. Consider 1 Corinthians 6:16.
 - 2. Within the bounds of marriage, sexual relations are holy, good, and beautiful, but if they are entered into apart from the "leaving and cleaving" they are ugly, degrading, and sinful. (Study Heb. 13:4.)
- B. But becoming one flesh involves more than the marriage act.
 - 1. Indeed, the marriage act is the symbol or culmination of a more complete oneness, of a total giving of yourself to another person. Consequently, if the more complete oneness is not a reality, sexual relations lose their meaning.
 - 2. One definition of marriage that I really like is: *Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing of the total person with another person until death.*
 - a. God's intention is that when two people get married they should share everything—their bodies, their possessions, their insights, their ideas, their abilities, their problems, their successes, their sufferings, their failures, etc.
 - b. *A husband and wife are a team* and whatever each of them does must be for the sake of the other person, or at least it must not be to the detriment of the other person. Each must be *as* concerned about the other person's needs as he is about his own (Eph. 5:28; Prov. 31:12, 27).
 - c. Husbands and wives are no more two, but one flesh. And this one flesh concept must manifest itself in practical, tangible, demonstrable ways. God does not intend it to be merely an abstract concept or idealistic theory, but a concrete reality. Total intimacy and deep unity are part of God's blueprint for a good marriage.

3. Total intimacy and deep unity, however, do not mean total uniformity or sameness.
 - a. My body is made up of many different parts. My hands do not do the work of my feet. My heart does not do the work of my liver.
 - b. There is great diversity in my body and yet there is unity. The parts of my body look different and even act differently, but when normal each part works for the benefit of the other parts, or at least one part does not deliberately try to hurt the other parts.
 - c. Similarly, husbands and wives may be very different in some respects, but they must not allow their differences to hinder their unity because God's purpose in marriage is total unity.
- C. But you know as well as I do that total oneness is not easily achieved.
1. Certainly the basic hindrance to the achievement of oneness is our sinfulness.
 - a. In Genesis 2:25, immediately after God spoke of the husband/wife becoming one flesh, the Scripture says, "And the man and his wife were *both naked* and *were not ashamed*."
 - b. The nakedness of Adam and Eve is not a recommendation of public nudity. This happened before there were any other people around. Adam was the only human being who saw Eve naked, and Eve was the only person who saw Adam naked!
 2. And furthermore, this happened before they had sinned. After they sinned we read that "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." As soon as sin entered the picture, they began to cover up.

- a. This attempt to cover up was certainly an evidence of their awareness of their sinfulness before God. Immediately and foolishly, they tried to hide their sin from God.
 - b. Still further, this “covering up” symbolized an attempt to hide from each other. When sin entered the picture, their openness, transparency, and total oneness were destroyed.
3. And just as sin entered and hindered the oneness of Adam and Eve, so our sinfulness is still the great barrier to marital oneness today.
- a. Sometimes marital oneness is destroyed by the sin of selfishness.
 - b. Sometimes it is marred by the sin of pride.
 - c. Sometimes it is broken by the sin of bitterness or ingratitude or stubbornness or unwholesome speech or neglect or impatience or harshness or cruelty.
 - d. It was sin that destroyed the total oneness of Adam and Eve, and it is sin that destroys the oneness of husbands and wives today.
4. *That brings us to our need of Jesus Christ.*
- a. First of all, *we need Jesus Christ to bring us into a right relationship with God.* (Compare Rom. 3:10–23; Isa. 59:2; Col. 1:21–23; Eph. 1:7; 2:13–21; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:18.)
 - b. But *not only do we need Jesus Christ to bring us into a right relationship with God, we also need Jesus Christ to help us to be rightly related to each other.* Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy the barriers that exist between man and man as well as between man and God. He breaks down the barriers that exist between men. He abolishes the enmity and makes men one in Himself (Eph. 2:14–16; Gal. 3:28). He alone can take a sinful, selfish man and woman and enable them to leave father and mother, cleave to one another, and become one flesh.

- c. If therefore you are going to experience the total oneness that God says is essential to a good marriage, you need to come to Jesus Christ. He breaks down barriers. He destroys middle walls that divide. He cleanses from sin. He breaks the power of reigning sin. He sets the prisoner free. He gives men the Holy Spirit, who produces in them the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He gives them the Holy Spirit, who enables sinful men and women to leave father and mother, to cleave to one another, and to become one flesh.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

- Adams, Jay. *Christian Living in the Home*. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1973, chapter 4.
- Brown, Florence. *A Biblical View of the Sexes*. Wilmington, Del.: Christian Training Inc., 1971, chapter 1.
- Gangel, Kenneth. *The Family First*. Minneapolis: His International Service, 1972, chapter 2.
- Getz, Gene. *The Christian Home in a Changing World*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1972, chapter 2.
- Strauss, Richard L. *Marriage Is for Love*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, chapter 9.

DISCUSSION AND STUDY QUESTIONS

God's Blueprint for Marriage

To be completed by husband and wife together.

A. Study Genesis 2:18–25.

1. Who originated the marriage institution?
-

2. What are the purposes of marriage? Why did God originate marriage? (Compare Gen. 1:28; 2:18; Eph. 5:22–32.)
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
3. In what ways is marriage “good”? (Gen. 2:18; Heb. 13:4).
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. What is a help-meet? _____
5. What does the word “help-meet” suggest about the man and the woman?
 - a. The man _____
 - b. The woman _____
6. According to Genesis 2:24, what is the primary human relationship in life?

7. What does leaving mother and father involve?

8. What do the words “shall cleave” suggest?

9. What do the words “they shall be one flesh” signify?

10. List some of the things that married people must do to promote and manifest this oneness.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____

11. What are some of the barriers to deep oneness?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____

12. Discuss your marriage in terms of leaving and cleaving and oneness.

- a. Have you really left your parents? In what ways is your marriage relationship being adversely affected because you are following your parents' example of handling stress, facing problems, reacting to people, etc.? Is your spouse the number one human being in your life? Ask him what he thinks.
- b. Are you really committed (cleaving) to your mate? How do you react to your mate's weaknesses, failures, needs, and problems? Does your treatment of your mate depend upon his performance? Must he earn your affection and approval? Ask him what he thinks.

c. How would you rate the intimacy or sharing level of your marriage? Total? Partial? Very little? Is there anything you are afraid to share with each other? Do you think mostly in terms of "me" and "him" or "we"? Discuss the level of your spiritual, intellectual, emotional, sexual, recreational, financial, parental, communicational, occupational, aesthetic, and creative oneness. Where is your oneness weak, and where is it strong? How will you improve the weak areas?

13. Evaluate your own marriage. What do you like about your marriage as it is now? Strengths? What do you dislike? Weaknesses?

Likes-Strengths

Dislikes-Weaknesses

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| a. _____ | a. _____ |
| b. _____ | b. _____ |
| c. _____ | c. _____ |
| d. _____ | d. _____ |
| e. _____ | e. _____ |
| f. _____ | f. _____ |
| g. _____ | g. _____ |
| h. _____ | h. _____ |
| i. _____ | i. _____ |

14. What are some worthwhile goals for your marriage?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____

15. Make a list of things that ought to be avoided if a good marriage relationship is to be maintained.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____
- f. _____
- g. _____
- h. _____
- i. _____
- j. _____

16. In one sentence (one word, if possible) describe your marriage.

B. Study Matthew 5:31–32 and 19:1–9 to discover how permanent the marriage relationship is.

1. What does Matthew 19:6 indicate about the permanency of the marriage relationship?

2. Apart from death (Rom. 7:1–4), what do the aforementioned passages state as the only grounds for divorce?

3. List several implications that emerge from the fact that marriage is a permanent relationship.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____