

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two hands clasped together in a firm grip. The hands are silhouetted against a bright, clear sky with some light clouds. The lighting is from the upper right, creating a strong highlight on the right hand and casting the left hand into shadow. The overall mood is one of strength, support, and unity.

Making a Marriage

**with God's
Wisdom**

by Mike Harding

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My wife, Cris, and I are not credentialed marriage counselors. But with some wisdom from the Bible and some shared experience from other, more experienced couples and ministers, we have built a strong and happy marriage since 1994, and we are still going strong. As pastors, our first desire of course is to help people to experience an amazing relationship with God. But we also want to help people to be successful in every area of their daily lives. So, for the people that are wanting to get married, planning to get married, or trying to build a better marriage...and maybe looking for some good input, we offer the following thoughts, with our love.

Proactive Marriage-Building

In our church, we have several sayings or mottoes that we try to live by. One of those is this: "Discover Love. Love Boldly." We believe that God calls us to live a lifestyle that is first and foremost about discovering, receiving and experiencing His transforming love, and then generously pouring it out on other people. What does this mean when applied to marriage-building? Marriage almost always brings us a lot of challenges and a lot of problems. But the solution to the problems is not to try to change your partner or pressure your partner to do something that he or she does not want to do. The only real solution is to discover God's love for yourself personally, to be filled and satisfied and transformed by that love, and then to extravagantly pour out some of that love onto your husband or wife. Most people will not be genuinely changed by pressure or coercion or ultimatums or threats or nagging or any other negative force. Most likely, they will resent it and resist change even more. What genuinely changes most people is unconditional love freely given, followed by honest, open communication of needs, wants and feelings. In our experience, there are several important principles that we need to understand and internalize and apply consistently in order to build really good marriages.

Principle #1 - God Is Your Source for Love

The first principle for a happy marriage is that God needs to be your personal source for love. To not understand this is the cause for the almost immediate shipwreck of a lot of marriages. Two broken, needy, love-starved people enter into a marriage, each thinking that their partner is going to somehow be the reliable source for all of their love needs. Then it doesn't happen. Frustration, resentment and bitterness follow. Each of them enter into the relationship with empty love tanks, each wanting and needing to receive love, but each one not having enough love to give. They may genuinely try to love each other for a while, but the supply is too limited. It's like two cars that are out of gas on the side of the road. Two empty tanks cannot fill each other or satisfy each other's need.

The Bible says that God is love. It also says that God created us in His own image. If God created us, and God is love, then we were created for love. Our hearts were designed to receive love and to give love. Our need for love is real and legitimate! We are like cars that were manufactured by their maker, but they need a continual flow of good gasoline in order to keep functioning as they were designed. Likewise, we need a continual supply and flow of love in order to function in a healthy way. Our need for love is real and legitimate! But the human race in general is in a state of disconnection from God. So Jesus came to restore our connection to God - if we choose to receive it. People who come to God through faith in Christ receive a restored connection to God's heart. They can freely access God's heart and receive His love - as much as they want!

There is a general principle in the world that like attracts like. In relationships, this means that whole and healthy people tend to attract and find other whole and healthy people. It also means that broken and wounded people tend to attract and find each other also. Whole and healthy people have a much better shot at

a happy marriage. Broken, wounded and needy people have an enormous likelihood of ending up disappointed, frustrated and bitter in their marriages - unless they do one thing. They must recognize their need for a real source of love. And that source of love cannot be another person. (That usually just produces a second wrecked marriage.) The source of love must be God Himself - and as soon as possible!

If this describes you in any way, I encourage you to proactively start pursuing a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Tell God that your heart-tank is empty - or dangerously low - and that you need His love. Ask Him to fill your heart with His love. Attend a good church. Spend time in worship or prayer or Bible teaching, specifically for the purpose of saturating yourself with God's love. In our experience, transformation begins to happen quickly!

Principle #2 - Marriage Is a Ministry

The second principle for a happy marriage is to recognize that marriage is a ministry. Please understand: marriage IS NOT the solution to your love needs. If you enter into marriage with that idea stuck in your head, you are likely headed for a great big shipwreck! Marriage is a relationship where you may be called to give a lot more than you receive. It is not 50/50. It's not even 100/100. It's a ministry where you give, and give a lot. Marriage is a ministry. You are called to give love and support and encouragement and comfort to your spouse. You are called to help him or her become the greatest version of themselves they can possibly be. Well, if I'm called to give more than I receive in the relationship, where do I get all this love to give away? Where do I get my tank filled? First of all, from God!

The Bible says in 1 John 4:19 that we love because God first loves us. This means that we come to genuinely love God because we receive His love for us first. We come to genuinely love ourselves - in a healthy way - because we receive God's love first. We come to genuinely love other people because we purposely fill our heart-tanks with God's love first. But we love people in different measures and with different priorities - legitimately so! After God, your spouse gets your biggest measure and highest priority of love. After your spouse, your children get your next-biggest measure and next-highest priority of love. After that comes friends and extended family and other people. But the source for all this love is God. If you develop a relationship with God where you are regularly filling your heart with His love and presence, you will be personally healed and fulfilled and transformed. Then you will live and minister to other people out of the overflow! Remember the order: God, spouse, children, then others.

So here's the cool thing. Is marriage and family just giving and giving, with no receiving? With no appreciation or fulfillment?

With no love in return? Absolutely not! When two people realize that they are called by God to fill their hearts with His love and to pour love out on each other as a ministry...well, what will that look like? That looks like a supernaturally happy marriage! Remember the principle: we love because He first loves us. If you apply that in your marriage and family and relationships - if you imitate God - if you begin to give love to people FIRST - if you take the lead - you will find that most people will soon begin to return the love to you just as extravagantly!

As a source of love, God never runs dry! Imagine gradually filling your marriage and your family and your home with overflowing love!

But I can hear the question now... What if my spouse doesn't want to understand this or live this lifestyle? The answer depends on whether you are already married or not.

If you are not yet married, make a commitment to yourself that you will not enter into a marriage that is one-sided. You will only say "I do" to another person who has demonstrated to you that he or she has a healthy love relationship with God first. We're not talking about perfection - just someone who has demonstrated that they are spiritually and emotionally ready for a healthy marriage.

So...what if you yourself are not ready for a healthy relationship yet? What if your heart needs to be filled and healed first? Go after that! Don't start looking for Prince Charming until you have become the Princess that your Prince Charming will want to be with. Don't start looking for your Princess until you become the Prince Charming that she deserves! Put God first in your heart. Remember, healthy people attract and find other healthy people. Broken people attract and find other broken people...and shipwrecks often follow!

But if you are already married, it's a lot trickier. If you take on the role of filling yourself with God's love and pouring it out on your spouse, you have a really decent chance that your spouse will begin to respond with real love to this new person they are married to. Your relationship will almost certainly get a lot better. He or she may even open their heart to God as well - you have a really decent chance!

What you do not have is a guarantee. What if Mr. (or Mrs.) Grumpy-pants has no intention of changing for you or for anyone else? Then you have to decide whether you want to be happy anyway. Can you? Yes. You still have to decide to find what your heart needs in your relationship with God first, and then with other family members or friends who are open to having healthy, two-way relationships. You will have to be the one to change the atmosphere in your home. Let your overflowing love and joy be greater than any source of negativity - meaning Mr. or Mrs. Grumpy-pants.

Principle #3 - The Emotional Bank Account

The third principle that I want to share with you is called the emotional bank account. Many years ago, I heard a pastor teach this idea. I don't remember who that pastor was, but the idea stuck with me for life - and it works. The concept is that relationships tend to work the same way your bank account works. But these are emotional bank accounts. Of course this is symbolic. The bank account represents the state of the relationship - good or bad. If you go to a bank to open an account, you must make a deposit. No deposit, no account! If you achieve a high balance, the account is in great shape. You are rich! If you have a low balance, the account is not healthy. You may be poor. The account goes up and down as you make deposits and withdrawals. If you make more deposits than withdrawals, you get richer and richer. If you make more withdrawals than deposits, you get poorer. If you get overdrawn, the bank will send you a warning. Then you must bring the balance out of the red and back into the black, or the bank at some point will unilaterally close the account. Relationship over!

So...when you meet someone for the first time, you make an emotional deposit to hopefully open an account. You say something nice. You listen to them. You ask polite questions. You shake hands...or whatever the situation calls for. If you want to pursue a relationship with someone, it must be by mutual agreement. You make plans. You make a date! You make deposits as you say and do things that enrich the relationship. There are a thousand ways to make deposits: you lend a hand, you encourage, you give a kind word, you listen, you make a promise and keep the promise, you make a commitment and keep the commitment, you give of your time and your affection, etc. You also make withdrawals throughout the relationship. There are also a thousand ways to make a withdrawal: you ask for a big favor when it's not convenient, you break a promise, you hurt

their feelings, you ignore them, you don't really listen when they need to talk, you criticize, etc. If you don't treat people well...if your account gets too low...or if you make another big withdrawal when your balance was already low, the relationship gets overdrawn. The person may let you know that you need to fix the relationship, and soon! Or they may just unilaterally close the account and walk away...without ever telling you why.

If you think about it, virtually everything you say or do in a relationship is either a deposit or a withdrawal. Your relationships are either getting richer or poorer. Whether you know it or not, whether you are wise or ignorant, the emotional bank account is either working for you or against you. Knowledge is power. If God is your source of love, and you make lots of love deposits into the hearts of your spouse and children and loved ones, you will become very rich in your relationships.

Principle #4 - Men's Needs and Women's Needs Are Different

Men and women usually enter into marriage only vaguely aware that there are differences in the way that each other thinks. They have figured out that, sure, there are some differences, but it can't be that big of a deal, right? We want the same things - we just have different plumbing, right? Wrong. It's a huge deal. Even after years of living together, most couples are only beginning to suspect the depth of the differences. But even after those many years, most couples don't necessarily ascribe their conflicts to gender differences. Each person in the marriage simply comes to the conclusion that they married a crazy person! There's an old joke that in marriage, our problems are mostly psychological: one of us is logical, and one of us is psycho! Which is which? It's all relative - which gender are you? The truth is that there are major differences between men's and women's minds. And there are not just differences in the way we think. There are also fundamental differences in what we need from a relationship - in what we need to feel happy and fulfilled.

Of course, there is a lot of overlap, which is probably why so much confusion exists. Much of what we want and need and think is the same. But there are consistent differences. For starters, men tend to be more task-oriented, while women tend to be more relationship-oriented. Men tend to measure their success by their accomplishments. Women tend to measure their success by their relationships. Sure, there is overlap. But the tendency is there.

A man's fundamental (and secret) question is: "Do I have what it takes? Do I have what it takes to conquer, to accomplish, to protect, and to provide?" That's why little boys build ramps for their bikes and measure how high they can get off the ground before they crash into a pile of broken bicycles and broken bones. And they feel good about it! That's why blockbuster movies for men have a male hero that performs mind-blowing physical feats

while he unflinchingly defeats every enemy that would threaten his woman or his family or his country. If this is a man's secret question, it's also a man's secret fear: "Maybe I don't have what it takes. Maybe I don't measure up." A man that is struggling with this question is usually an unhappy man.

A woman's fundamental (and secret) question is: "Am I desirable? Will I be wanted and loved and appreciated? Will I have the relationships that I dream about?" That's why little girls still play house and try to recruit little boys to play house with them. That's why blockbuster movies for women have a female lead (even if she is a modern action hero) that is the object of some handsome man's affection - a man whose only driving thought is to win her heart and to devote himself to her and to spend his life making her feel loved and appreciated! That's why advertisers know that they can make a ton of money marketing a product if they can convince women that this product will make them just a little more desirable. If this is a woman's secret question, it is also her secret fear: "Maybe I am not desirable. Maybe no one will want me or love me or appreciate me." A woman that is struggling with this question is usually an unhappy woman.

There is actually a biblical precedent to all this. In the story of creation, in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, God gave Adam a task - to tend and keep the garden - before He gave Adam a relationship. And God gave Eve a relationship - as Adam's beloved wife - before He gave her the task of bringing forth children. Yup, there it is! It's hard-wired into us!

Most importantly, men and women need very different things from their marriage relationship in order to feel happy and fulfilled. These needs are directly related to the task orientation vs. relationship orientation of men and women. ***I'll be direct and to the point: men have a greater need to feel respected, and women have a greater need to feel loved.*** They may not consciously recognize it or admit it, but it's deep and it's real.

This principle is also found in the Bible. In Ephesians 5:33, the apostle Paul sums up a discussion of marriage with this advice: "Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." The obvious question is, if men's and women's needs are completely the same, why would he give different instructions to men and women to be successful in their marriages? Why wouldn't he just say, "Husbands and wives, be sure to love each other"?

The answer is that men and women are wired differently. A man has a deep need to feel respected. A woman has a deep need to feel loved. God wired us that way.

A man's fundamental (and secret) question is: "Do I have what it takes to conquer, to accomplish, to protect, and to provide?" A woman's fundamental (and secret) question is: "Am I desirable? Will I be loved and appreciated?" Therefore, in their marriage relationship, a man needs his wife to help make him feel that the answer to his question is "YES!" And a woman needs her husband to help make her feel that the answer to her question is "YES!"

A man needs respect from his wife the same way he needs oxygen. If he is feeling disrespected by his wife, he will go into a fight or flight response. This means that he will either want to get away from her, or he will want to get aggressive and force her to respect him. He may withdraw himself emotionally and build an imaginary wall between himself and his wife, or he may become hostile and confrontational. Both responses are terrible, but if he feels that she is stepping on the hose of his oxygen supply, he's going to do something to fix it! A lot of men recognize that becoming hostile towards their wives is unacceptable, so they choose flight - they choose to withdraw into a bubble where she can't get in.

A woman needs love from her husband the same way she needs oxygen. If she is feeling unloved and unappreciated, she will often go into what men call "nag" mode. She will approach him again and again in different ways looking for the love response she wants. She may ask him probing questions. She may flirt. She may try to make him jealous. She may even try to provoke him to anger! But she won't usually be direct and straightforward about what she really wants. (Because then it wouldn't count! She wants it to be his idea!) A woman looking for the love response from her husband can be very, very persistent. But if she feels that she is not getting the oxygen that she needs, her attempts to provoke the love reaction she wants from him can become increasingly desperate - until she finally gives up.

When a husband and wife get stuck in this loop of withdrawing or being confrontational or nagging or provoking, I call it the rejection cycle. It may have started a long time ago with some very small offense that neither husband or wife even remembers. Maybe she felt ignored and unloved by him. So instead of dealing with it in an honest and constructive way, she decided to give him a taste of his own medicine. Or maybe he felt disrespected by her. So he decided to dish it back to her and teach her a lesson. One rejection is answered by another rejection. Then she feels more unloved. Then he feels more disrespected. If it goes on uncorrected, it can end up in a loveless marriage or a bitter divorce.

Maybe you have not gotten yourselves into a rejection cycle. Maybe you don't need to heal a dysfunctional marriage. Maybe your relationship is pretty good, and you just want to strengthen your marriage and proactively make it the best it can be. Awesome! One of the greatest proactive things a man can do is to continue to romance his wife. One of the greatest proactive things a woman can do is to make her husband feel respected as a man.

Men are not naturally romantic - except when they are first trying to win their lady's heart. Remember, men are more task-oriented! They want to get the job done! Once the task is accomplished, most men instantly become less romantic. There's an old joke that best expresses this. A woman kept asking her husband, "How come you never tell me that you love me? I want you to tell me that you love me!" Exasperated, the man finally snapped, "I told you that I love you twenty-five years ago when I married you. If I ever change my mind, I'll let you know!" But this fictional man didn't understand that his wife needs to feel loved every day - the same way she needs to breathe oxygen every day. If a man wants to proactively strengthen his connection with his wife, he needs to continue to romance her as if he were still trying to win her heart anew every day. He needs to make her feel desired and loved for who she is, and appreciated for all she does. He needs to spend time with her, face to face, talking and listening and deepening their connection. She needs that and deserves that! After all, she said yes to his proposal to be his companion for the rest of her life! A husband needs to give her the answer to her fundamental (and secret) question: "Am I desirable? Will I be loved and appreciated?" He needs to make her feel that the answer, day after day, is, "YES! Yes, I desire you. Yes, I love you. Yes, I appreciate you."

One of the greatest proactive things a woman can do to instantly improve her marriage is to make her husband feel respected as a man - and as the leader of the family. He is not called to be a dictator, but he is called to be a leader. Neither is he called to be a passive back-seat passenger in his own marriage. He is called by God to be the leader to his family. Deep inside he knows it, even if he is messing it up by being either too forceful or too weak. But a wife who proactively makes him feel respected is providing him with the oxygen he needs to become the man he is called to be. It's perfectly OK to present differences of opinion and differences of perspective in a marriage, but she must make him feel that

ultimately she will have confidence in his ability to lead his family. She should never cause him to feel dishonored or ridiculed, especially in front of other people. Any differences of opinion should be worked out in private. A wife needs to give him the answer to his fundamental (and secret) question: "Do I have what it takes to conquer, to accomplish, to protect, and to provide?" She needs to help him feel that the answer, day after day, is, "Yes! I believe in you. I have confidence in you, and I respect you."

But maybe you are already in the rejection cycle. Maybe you have already stored up years of hurt and bitterness and distrust. There is a way out of this downward spiral, if you really want it. Let's talk about the rejection cycle.

Principle #5 - The Rejection Cycle, and How to Overcome It

You are in the rejection cycle if your marriage feels like a contest where someone has to win and someone has to lose. You are in the rejection cycle if you both feel like you are living behind defensive walls of distrust. You are in the rejection cycle if you both feel unloved and disrespected, and you continue to punish each other emotionally for the way you each feel. But you can reverse this train wreck if you each still harbor some desire to regain what was lost.

The only time I would not recommend that someone try to heal a troubled marriage is if there is any kind of abuse - either physical or sexual or emotional or verbal. Abuse should never be tolerated, and abused spouses should take any viable option to protect themselves or their children from any further abuse. But assuming that we are talking about a rejection cycle rather than abuse, it is always worth trying to heal the marriage.

Ideally, you both come to the decision at the same time, and you both commit to take whatever steps are necessary to heal the damaged connection. But in reality, it rarely works that way. Usually, one of you will have to take the lead. One of you will have to step out in faith and initiate the healing process...with no real guarantee of success.

How do you do it? There are some very specific steps you can take to begin the healing.

(1) First of all, make a sincere effort to connect with God as your source of love. Your love tank - your emotional bank account - is already dangerously low or overdrawn - so you will need to look to God to supply your love needs for quite a while. Also, accept the idea that marriage is a ministry to your spouse, and you're going to be giving a lot of unconditional love - maybe for quite a

while - before you can reasonably expect to receive much in return. Ask God to fill you with His love for your own needs, and also ask Him to give you a strong love for your spouse that comes from God's heart more than it comes from your own heart. That's the first big challenge. If you are the husband, make up your mind that you are going to show your wife a lot of consideration and appreciation, even when she may still distrust you and feel angry towards you. If you are the wife, make up your mind that you are going to purposely make your husband feel respected for who he is, even if - for a while - he shows only distrust or anger in return. It's tough, but you can do it.

(2) The next step is to make a very objective assessment of the ways that you have hurt or disappointed your spouse. For the moment, don't concern yourself at all with how they may have hurt you. Just be honest - with yourself first - about any way that you have made your spouse feel unloved or disrespected or rejected in any significant way. Now tell your spouse that you are aware of how deeply you have hurt him or her. Acknowledge in some detail the ways that you have caused them pain or hurt or distrust. Specific is good! Then tell your spouse that you are very sorry, and ask them to forgive you. Don't point out any of their failings in the relationship. Don't make this about you. Just make it about bringing healing to them. And don't insist or demand that they forgive you. Humbly allow them to decide if and when they will forgive you. It's tough, but you can do it.

What are you doing? Before a seriously infected wound can heal, you usually have to open up the wound and clean out the infection. Only then can you bandage it and start the actual healing process. Confessing your failings in the relationship may be one of the hardest and most humbling things you ever do, but you are trying to clean out the infection so the real healing can begin. You are also going first and setting the precedent. You are taking the initiative and the risk, which is a very powerful thing to

do. Your chances are very good that your spouse may soon be asking you for forgiveness as well...but give it a little time.

(3) At this point, you will also need to forgive your spouse. The Bible urges us to let go of our anger and forgive one another, because God has already forgiven us in Christ. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Why should we forgive? Resentment and anger are like poison that continues to flow through our system. Resentment and anger motivate us to try to get even, to get revenge, maybe to teach them a lesson. Before we forgive, we are keeping score of every hurt and every offense. We are keeping a detailed record in our heart and mind and looking for ways to get even. We are looking for ways to strike back. But each time we strike back, we poison the relationship more and more. We increase the distance between us. The only way to get the poison out of our system is to forgive - truly forgive - every hurt and every offense and every disappointment. The only way to interrupt the cycle of striking back and getting even is to forgive - truly forgive - and stop keeping score. We choose to erase the record and stop keeping score.

The gospel message of Christ is the message of forgiveness. That is the reason for the cross. Mankind's relationship with God was damaged and lost. But God values relationships. He loves us. He didn't want to throw away the relationship. He wanted to restore and heal the relationship. The only way He could make that possible was to die in our place, to pay for our sins on the cross in the person of Jesus Christ. The people that believe in that reconciliation and accept that reconciliation by faith are the people that actually experience that reconciliation.

If we value our marriage relationship, if we want to restore and heal the marriage, forgiveness is the only way to begin that process. Forgiveness cleanses our hearts from bitterness and removes the need to continually get even and strike back. So if

you are the one taking the lead in trying to heal your marriage, forgive your spouse from your heart.

How do we forgive? In my experience, I believe it is most effective to speak it out loud. Say, "I forgive him." "I forgive her." Also, be as specific as you can. Forgive your spouse for the specific hurts and disappointments and offenses, and for the way that each of those things caused you pain or anger. You may feel that your spouse does not deserve forgiveness. Technically, none of us deserves forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift that we choose to give someone with the possibility and hope of restoring a relationship. It is an act of the will. It is a gift of grace, not of merit. The blessing is that, while we are forgiving someone for the hurt they caused us, we are cleansing ourselves from poison and allowing God's healing love to flow into us more freely.

Should you say, "I forgive you," to your spouse? If they ask you for forgiveness, then definitely yes. If they have not asked yet, you should say, "I forgive you," if you think that it would help them to hear that. However, if saying, "I forgive you" would come across as self-righteous in any way, then don't say it. Just show it.

If you are the one taking the lead in healing the relationship, you may have to forgive over and over for quite a while. You may have to walk in forgiveness almost daily. It's tough, but you can do it. You have to bring an end to the cycle of keeping score and striking back. You have to let any fresh offense roll off of you like water off a duck's back!

What else can you do to heal the rejection cycle? If you are now getting your love need met from God, and if you have confessed your offenses and asked forgiveness of your spouse, and if you are walking in daily forgiveness toward your spouse, there is one more thing you need to do.

(4) Begin to proactively show consideration and love and appreciation to your wife. Begin to proactively show respect and honor and love to your husband. Purposely begin to make deposits into the emotional bank account that you have with them. Persevere. Don't give up or react negatively if you don't get the response that you want for quite a while. If the emotional bank account was seriously in the red, it will take a while to get the balance back in the black. When the subject comes up, continue to acknowledge your desire for forgiveness for the hurts that you caused - without bringing up any hurts that they have caused. Just let them bring up their own faults when they feel ready and safe to do so. Continue to show forgiveness even in the face of fresh hurts or resistance. You are doing something very powerful. By faith and grace, you are ending the cycle of withdrawals from the emotional bank account, and you are making continual deposits. You are continuing to receive your love from God and to unconditionally give love to your spouse as a ministry. By faith, you are seeing the relationship as it can be and as it will be. By faith and grace, you are empowering that dream to become a reality.

Your chances are very good that your spouse will soon begin responding to your love and respect and forgiveness. Someone who consistently treats you nice is pretty hard to resist! Your spouse will likely begin acknowledging how he or she has hurt you, and asking for your forgiveness. Your spouse will likely begin to return the love and kindness that you have been showing.

As your spouse begins walking in forgiveness towards you also, and letting go of anger, you can begin talking about your real desires and needs in this relationship. You can unravel how you got in this condition, and talk about how to make sure it doesn't happen again. You can revive your dreams and hopes for the future. Healing is in process!

Remember the principles for a strong and happy marriage. The same principles that will heal a damaged marriage will continue to protect and strengthen your marriage for life. God is your source of love. Always look to God first as your source of love. Then, go pour out some of that love on your spouse. Marriage is a ministry. Be ready and willing to give a lot more than you receive. Help your spouse to become the greatest version of themselves that they can possibly become. Be aware of the emotional bank account. Make lots of deposits, big and small. Avoid withdrawals as much as possible. Acknowledge when you hurt each other in any way, and ask forgiveness quickly. Be quick to forgive each other. Let little offenses go immediately. Communicate straightforwardly about the problems and issues that really matter. Resolve, and forgive. Understand the differences in a man's needs and a woman's needs. Proactively give your wife the oxygen she needs in the relationship. Romance her. Show her that she is desirable. Give her your love for who she is and your appreciation for all she does. Proactively give your husband the oxygen he needs in the relationship. Show him respect. Make him feel that you believe in him and admire him and love him. With these principles, you *can* build a supernaturally blessed and happy marriage!