

A GODLY HOME



*A Promise Keepers Canada
Devotional for Couples*



The Seven Promises



1. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to honour Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to pursue vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.
3. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to practice spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.
4. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to build strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values.
5. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to support the mission of his church by honouring and praying for his pastor and by actively giving his time and resources.
6. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to reach beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.
7. **A Promise Keeper is** committed to influence his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.



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*“Home is a comfort and home is a light,
A place to leave the darkness outside,
Home is a peaceful and ever full feeling
A place where a soul safely hides.*

*And being in a home should remind you that still
There’s a place that’s prepared just for you
And I think my home is just Heaven’s reflection
As long as my home’s here with you.”*

EXCERPT FROM “HOME” BY MICHAEL CARD

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Ken Taylor, Lead Pastor of Creekside Church in Waterloo, explores the questions “What does it mean to be married? What does it mean to be a couple instead of single?” www.creeksidechurch.ca

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Sheila Wray Gregoire is an author, speaker, columnist and mom. She also writes the column “What Women Want” in PK Canada’s SEVEN magazine and is a regular speaker at “Girl’s Night Out”. Sheila will discuss what it means to develop a godly sex life. www.sheilawraygregoire.com

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by Ken Taylor

1

THE MARRIAGE IDOL

There is good reason why the first two of the Ten Commandments are about idolatry. No matter what century we live in human beings are prone to worship idols. We can turn just about anything into a god.

Some people make marriage their idol.

They believe it is in marriage where they'll find personal value, their true meaning in life and the source for deep inner happiness.

But to expect these kinds of experiences from marriage is not only foolish it is idolatry.

Bow down to marriage and you soon discover a life of deep disappointment. Expecting your spouse and your kids to satisfy these needs is a longing no human or group of humans can ever meet.

Gary Thomas reminds us that, "Marriage isn't designed to make us happy, it's designed to make us holy."

Marriage is an intimate relationship God intended to use for a number of reasons in our lives including to shape us more into the image of Jesus. It is a place to learn patience, trust, communication, conflict resolution, love and a host of other character values. Marriage is more like a classroom than a castle. It is more a tool to grow and shape us than a trophy to be polished and adored.

Marriage makes a terrible idol. It was never intended to satisfy our deepest longings and give our lives deep meaning and purpose. That is something only God can do. And God alone is the only one worthy of worship.

Daily Reading: Exodus 20:3-4; Matthew 22:34-40

2

MARRIAGE MEANS LEAVING

Don't get married unless you can leave something far behind. Genesis 2:24 tells us, *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they two will become one flesh.”*

Notice the call to leaving? It is absolutely critical to marriage. No leaving ... no marriage. It is just that simple. But what are we to leave? How is a wedding ceremony a Leaving Celebration?

Leaving father and mother is a euphemism for leaving a certain way of life behind. In every culture marriage demands both partners leave something behind. That something is singleness. If you are going to be married then you need to leave singleness behind. To leave singleness behind means I commit to no longer thinking like a single. It means no longer dreaming like a single. It means no longer acting like a single. My life changes from an orbit around me, my and mine to a life that is all about we, us and ours.

A healthy marriage begins with leaving.

Is it possible that most, many, maybe all marriage problems can be traced back to one or both spouses thinking, dreaming and acting like they are single?

Reflect for a moment about you. Have you left your singleness behind? When there are tensions in the relationship is it because you are acting, dreaming, thinking, or feeling like a single?

What changes do you need to make to dream, think and act like the married person you committed to be?

Daily Reading: Genesis 2:24; Genesis 24:34-67

3

DON'T GO BACK

My friend led me way out into the woods to this fantastic swimming hole. When we got there we were standing on the top of a cliff, the water some 40 feet below. I was freaked. I don't like heights. Then he just stepped off the edge.

Heart racing, I shuffled my feet toward the lip of the overhang and he yelled at me. Called me every name in the book. Told me to be a man and jump. Well, I couldn't let that mental midget get the best of me, so I stepped off and screamed like a little girl all the way to the water.

That is called commitment!

One way of understanding commitment is to see it as not going back and asking the question again. To commit is about not going back and asking the "Do I" question again. You've made the decision. Now you live it out.

It's a bit like brushing your teeth. You don't get up every morning and go through the pros and cons of teeth brushing. You made a commitment a long time ago. You just do it.

Living out a marriage commitment is much the same. You don't go back and ask the wedding day question again. You live out what you chose to do however many years ago. It is a daily commitment to give yourself away for the good of that other person.

You said, "I do" and now all that's left is the "do".

Daily Reading: Psalm 37:5; 1 Kings 8:56-61

4

SO HOW'S YOUR ACTING?

Remember that special day? You were nervous and excited and expectant. Everyone was watching. Then the question came. You were asked to take a vow, make a pledge, hold to a commitment.

What were you promising?

It wasn't a promise to feel in love. That one might get broken before the honeymoon is over. You cannot promise feelings no matter how badly you want to.

It wasn't a promise to feel in love. It was a promise to act out love. You promised to follow the loving way no matter what it was you might feel in the future.

This is grown up love.

Dr. George Crane tells of a wife who came to him full of hatred toward her husband. "Before I divorce him I want to hurt him as much as I can." Dr. Crane suggested, "Go home. Think and act as if you really love your husband. Tell him how much he means to you. Admire all his good qualities. Be as kind, considerate, and generous as possible. Then tell him how much you hate him and that you're getting a divorce."

With revenge in her eyes she exclaimed, "Beautiful, beautiful! Will he ever be surprised!"

And she did it with enthusiasm. Acting "as if."

When she didn't return, Dr. Crane called. "Are you ready to go through with the divorce?"

“Never! I discovered I really do love him.” Her actions changed her feelings. The experiment became her experience.

Remember that you promised to act out love. How’s your acting?

Daily Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a



5

ONENESS

It's what every couple dreams about. You could easily define all the hopes and longings and dreams for your marriage with that single word.

Oneness.

It is rooted in the promise of Genesis 2:24 where we are told that in marriage **“they will become one flesh.”** “One flesh” looks back to the creation of Eve. For she came from Adam's body. They were literally made of the same flesh. And every marriage ceremony since theirs echoes back to the creation account and looks ahead with expectation to the personal experience of oneness each couple longs for.

Oneness.

God in his grace longs for couples, no matter their relationship to him, to experience oneness in marriage. He has designed marriage as a special place where couples can know intimate oneness physically, emotionally and in a number of other dimensions. Oneness is everyone's marital dream and it is God's dream for every marriage as well.

But believers have an ability to experience oneness at a level unbelievers simply cannot. Believers can be one spiritually.

Think of your marriage as a triangle. Let's put God at the top point and you and your spouse in each of the bottom corners. If both of you honour, worship, obey and walk with God you will move closer and closer up your side of the triangle toward God. And the closer you move toward God the closer you move toward each other.

Pursue intimacy with God and you will discover not only closeness with him but a greater oneness with the one you married.

Daily Reading: Ephesians 5:25-32; Song of Songs 8:6-7



6

IT'S HARD WORK

If there is one thing I've learned after 33 years of marriage it is this. Marriage is hard work!

You must be dedicated to it. You must make it a priority. You have to give it your all. If you don't work hard at your marriage your marriage will hardly work.

But the wonderful truth is that there's nothing else more rewarding than a healthy marriage. This is one of those deals where the return is always greater than the investment. And let's be honest here. There is nothing like a healthy marriage!

One of the rewards of a healthy marriage is joy. Imagine that.

Proverbs 5:18-19 describe it this way, **"... and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth... may you ever be intoxicated with her love."**

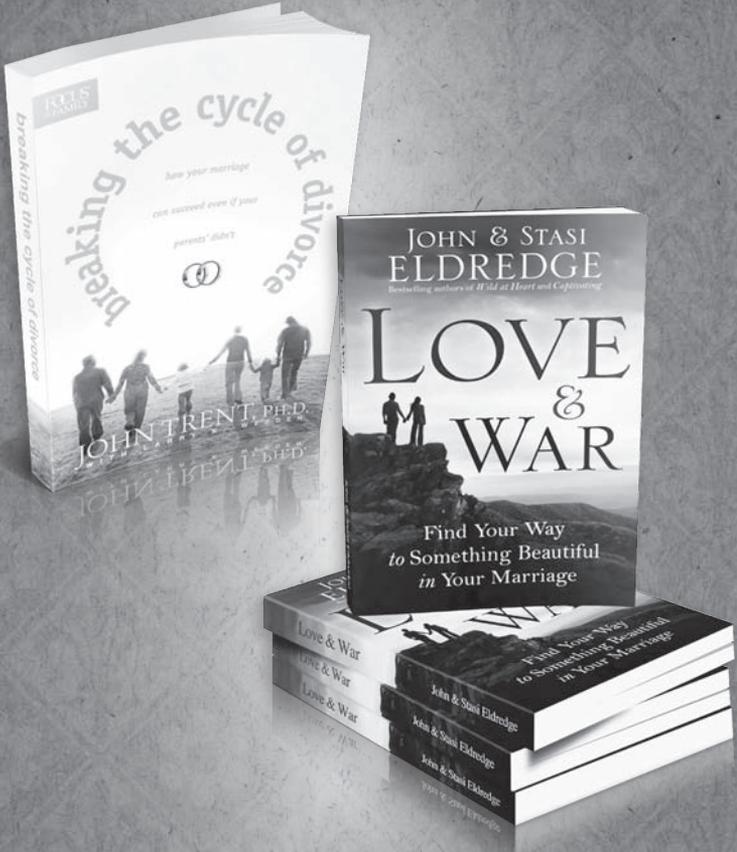
Catch the word "rejoice"? Sounds joyful, right? Notice too the word "intoxicated". The imagery here is one of a party. Healthy marriages are joy parties.

Want that kind of marriage? Here is the deal. It's up to you. It's up to both of you. You have to make the vital choice to work hard to make your marriage a place of joy. You can shape your marriage to be like a party or you make it resemble a funeral home. The choice is essentially up to you.

I like what Bill Bright once said, "As long as you're going to be married for the rest of your life you might as well enjoy it!"

Daily Reading: Ephesians 4:20-5:2

ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES



For these titles and other resources for couples visit

PromiseKeepers.ca

7

LISTENING

“...*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.*”

JAMES 1:19

Nobody was born a good listener. If you are able to focus on what your spouse is saying with curiosity and patience, it is because you have practiced the skill often enough for it to be second nature. It is vital in marriage because men and women approach conversation differently.

For women, there is a recreational quality to communication. Every activity, decision, relational experience and pursuit represents a new opportunity to talk. A young lady was mildly frustrated with her husband because he regularly interrupted her with solutions. She finally blurted out, “He thinks everything I bring up needs to be solved. He didn’t grow up with sisters so he doesn’t understand that sometimes women just like to talk about everything.”

Men, on the other hand, tend to approach communication efficiently. They identify the topic, say what is on their mind, make a decision, then close the conversation. When the interaction continues, they get confused because they can’t figure out what the point is.

These traits are not likely to change any time soon so learning how to listen is one of love’s essential pursuits. You can improve your listening skills by practicing the following:

Repeat key phrases—when you repeat an important thought with interest, your lover automatically feels permission to share more.

Every few minutes, *rephrase* what you have heard in your own words to see if you have been absorbing what your spouse has been sharing.

The Kitchen SECTION 2

by Bill and Pam Farrel

Regroup by handing the conversation back with a question such as, “Is that what you were trying to say?”

Reconnect. If you think you have a story that expresses a similar emotional experience recount it and ask, “Is your experience kind of like that?”

Good listening skills will not solve all your issues but it will keep you fascinated with the one you don’t fully understand but fits perfectly in your life.

Daily Reading: Proverbs 1:5; Proverbs 18:13; Proverbs 23:19; Luke 8:18





BODY LANGUAGE

“...do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit ... therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

Most of what you say, you say with your body. You have been given a powerful gift by being able to say more with your eyes, posture and hand motions than you could ever say with your words. In intimate conversation, the following activities help you draw your spouse to you over and over:

- Lean without going over the edge. When you lean comfortably toward your lover, you express interest and clearly state that you like being together. If you lean too far forward, too far back or look uncomfortable, your spouse will feel like you are trying too hard.
- The two second rule. Eye contact does more to express your intentions than any other activity. You can express sincere interest if you look in your lover’s eyes for about two seconds, look away briefly and then reengage for another two seconds. If you look too long, your partner will feel probed and will become self-conscious around you. If you look away sooner than two seconds or avoid eye contact, you will come across as guilty, embarrassed, insecure or just plain uninterested.
- Small audiences prefer small hand motions. If you wave your arms, react big to statements made by your spouse and emphasize your statements with big hand motions, your spouse will feel like you trying to intimidate to get your way. If, however, you reach out gently to one another, use small hand motions and keep an open posture, you can make your lover feel like the most important person in your life.

Use your body today to say, “I love being on life’s journey with you.”

Daily Reading: Luke 11:34-36; Matthew 5:36-37

9

TONE OF VOICE

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” PROVERBS 15:1

Next to your body language, your tone of voice will do more good or more damage than anything else. A harsh tone of voice makes your spouse feel like he or she is hugging a porcupine. A gentle tone warms up the heart like a crackling fire. Effective tone of voice in intimate relationships includes:

- End like a rollercoaster. When your tone slows down and trails off at the end of a sentence, it communicates sincerity. If your voice rises at the end of your sentences, you will come across like a salesman rather than a friend. Try saying, “I love being around you,” twice. The first time, make sure the volume and inflection of your voice goes up at the end of the sentence. The second time, consciously soften your voice as you finish.
- Choose a tone that matches the situation. If your house is on fire and you calmly say, “Hey, honey, the house is currently on fire and I think it would be a good idea if we work our way to the door,” you will sound disconnected and unrealistic. In the same way, if you shout and use panic tones while you say, “I love you so much,” you will be unapproachable even though you are trying to connect.
- Defend your defensiveness. Most of our verbal mistakes happen when we get defensive. You may be prone to sarcasm, verbal attacks, outbursts of anger or murmuring which drive wedges in your most important relationships. Disciplining yourself to slowly count to three before you say anything will give you just enough time to decide what you want to say rather than continually react.

Tone up your conversations before others tune you out.

Daily Reading: Romans 15:5-6; Genesis 42:7-12; Colossians 3:19;
Proverbs 25:15; Ephesians 4:2

10

MONEY—MOTIVATION (expression of the heart)

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” MATTHEW 6:21

Why do we argue so much about money? Even though we are intelligent, responsible, experienced people, couples who love each other deeply often get very upset with each other when it comes to their finances. One of the primary reasons is that we are all emotional about money. In its most simple form, people approach money in order to gain one of four outcomes:

Authority. These are the people who love to be in charge. They believe their ideas are correct and value a cooperative environment, which means they create the environment and you cooperate with it. They see money as a way to get things done or harness opportunities.

Attention. These are the people who live to create memories and experiences for others to enhance their lives. They love to plan parties, pass on gifts and pay for lunch to make other people’s lives better.

Admiration. These are the people who love to simplify things when it comes to money. They don’t like unnecessary stress so they avoid financial risks. They value relationships over processes so they like budgets to be simple and easy to manage.

Accuracy. These are the people who love budgets. They create them with care and believe they represent a solid commitment. Once the budget is done, they gain comfort from sticking to it line by line. When the budget is overrun, confusion sets in since it feels like their hard work has been disregarded.

Unless you married someone with the same primary motivation as you (and chances are you did not), every financial decision creates the potential for conflict. For instance, I (Bill) like the admiration that comes from simple financial processes. Pam loves the attention she can give and receive during memory building activities. It is hard to keep things simple when you are trying to inspire the whole world!

Daily Reading: Matthew 6:19-21; Hebrews 13:5; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Timothy 6:6-10



11

CONFLICT—SOLVE

“... *You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.*” JAMES 4:2

Nobody I know got married so they could be in conflict. And yet, disagreements and quarrels are a common experience for modern couples. A plan to SOLVE your confrontations can help you contain your intense reactions to each other.

Seek God first. Conflicts are always flooded with emotion. Any emotional energy you can offload to your Savior will help.

Open the conversation. The first part of any argument is usually just blowing off steam. Very few people are good at putting the issue on the table clearly with their first comments because we all try to gauge the climate before we get vulnerable. Assume the first few minutes is just the cool down period.

Look for the real issue. Marriage is the most intimate, intense and connected relationship on earth. Since everything in your life is tied to this one person, your marriage tends to bring your fears and insecurities to the surface. Of course, we don't admit this. Instead, we blame each other for the conditions in life and look for ways to change one another. Almost all of our arguments are caused by my (Bill) feeling like I have been left out of a decision and my (Pam) being afraid to fail.

Verify options. Once you have identified the real issue, you will recognize a number of possible responses. It often helps just seeing the options before you have to make a decision.

Evolve into an answer. Sometimes conflict arises because there is no immediate solution. A special needs child cannot be “fixed.” A financial reversal cannot just be taken care of. In these cases, your relationship and the shared memories of life are the glue that holds you together.

When the solution isn't obvious, SOLVE your conflicts.

Daily Reading: James 4:1-3; Proverbs 26:21; Proverbs 18:14



12

JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT

“... may you rejoice in the wife of your youth ... may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love.” PROVERBS 5:18-19

Marriage is supposed to be fun. Rejoice ... satisfy you always ... intoxicated with her love. We were designed to laugh together, play together, rejoice together and live with fond memories. Then life gets in the way of living. As time goes by, we spend more and more time talking about raising kids, bills, time schedules and chores. Recent studies, however, confirm that one of the best predictors of marital success is the friendship between a husband and wife

One place to start is talking around the kitchen table. If you plan to talk about fun things, you will talk about fun things. Over the next few days, set up times to visit and share your answers to the following questions:

“If you were to describe your spouse as a vehicle, what type of vehicle would he or she be and why?”

“If you described your love relationship with the title of a movie, what movie would you choose and why?”

“Of the vacations we have shared, which one is your favorite?”

“What are your favorite bumper stickers?”

“If you could be a superhero, which one would you want to be? What is the first thing you would do as that superhero?”

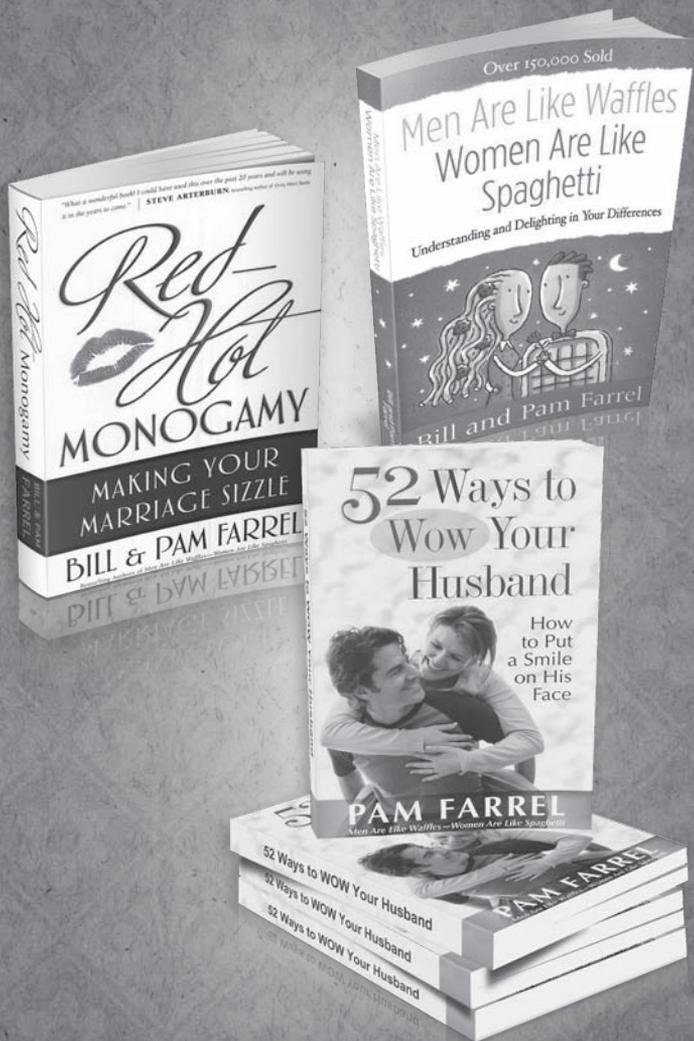
These are all questions you don't need to talk about—and that is exactly the point. We have to talk about our responsibilities, but we bond to each more effectively when we laugh together. It has been shown that laughing actually produces oxytocin, the bonding chemical in humans that links you to your spouse in intercourse and bonds a mom to her family in child-birth and breast-feeding. Cultivating conversations that are fun, therefore, consistently attaches you to one another and simply keeps you in love.

Daily Reading: Proverbs 5:15-19; Ecclesiastes 9:9; Romans 12:14-16; 1 Corinthians 12:24b-26; Philipians 4:4



ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES

from Bill and Pam Farrel



For these titles and other resources for couples visit

PromiseKeepers.ca

KNOW YOUR SPOUSE

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”

PSALM 139:23

Do you remember sitting in church as a child and giggling at the verse: “And Adam knew his wife Eve, and she conceived.”

He KNEW her. RIGHT. We figured the translators were just trying to distract us from the racy stuff.

But what if there was actually some truth to that translation? The Hebrew word used in Genesis 4 for sex—“to know”—is the same Hebrew word used in Scripture for how God longs to know us, and how we long for Him. God created this longing for deep intimacy for Him and describes sexual intimacy in the same way.

Our culture doesn’t understand that, because intimacy and sex can’t go together unless commitment and sex also go together. When any two people can have sex, sex becomes only about the physical. But that’s not how God designed it. Sex unites us in three ways: it feels great physically; it cements our relationship; and it forms a deep, spiritual connection.

Unfortunately, too often Christians mirror the world, thinking about sex merely in terms of physical pleasure. Don’t get me wrong; physical fireworks are amazing but they’re more likely to happen when there’s a deep spiritual intimacy, too.

Most couples have had sex. Far too few have actually made love. The next time you join together, can you make love to say “I love you”, and not just “I want you”? Be vulnerable together. Be completely open with each other. That’s the recipe for a truly intimate sexual life.

Daily Reading: Psalm 139:1-6; Genesis 2:18-24

14

VERY GOOD

“God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.” GENESIS 1:31

In one episode of the seventies sitcom *WKRP in Cincinnati*, perennial loser Herb Tarlek explains his wife’s sexual perspective: “My wife thinks sex is a reward,” he says. “Better mow the grass, Herbie, or no num nums tonight, uh-huh-uh-huh.”

God created sex to be “very good”—it feels awesome physically; it draws us closer together; and it develops a deep spiritual bond. Yet for many couples sex is not a “very good” part of their relationship. It’s become a weapon, a tool for selfishness, or a source of tension.

Ask yourself this: does my attitude towards sex reflect God’s approval of it? If you are withholding sex out of anger, or bitterness, or even just plain exhaustion, then your priorities aren’t right. Carve out time, and energy, for sex.

Now maybe sex is difficult because you haven’t learned how to make it feel great yet. Most couples don’t hit their sex groove until well after the first decade of marriage. If you haven’t hit that groove yet, buy some Christian sex guides and read them together. Make it your own fun research project.

Or perhaps sex isn’t very good because your past is intruding. Past porn use, or former relationships, or abuse make freedom in the bedroom difficult. Don’t get stuck here. Seek out counselling, go to prayer, and deal with these things.

It’s God’s intention for you that sex be wonderful. Can you both thank God for sex tonight, and see it as a blessing He’s given you? If you aren’t experiencing that blessing right now, decide together to believe in faith that it can get better. And then move forward, believing His perspective on sex is right.

Daily Reading: Song of Solomon 7:6-13; Psalm 106:1-3

15

PUCKER UP

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth...” SONG OF SOLOMON 1:3

Before we were married, my husband and I kissed. A lot. It was all we figured we were allowed to do, and so we made full use of it.

Then we wed and kissing fell by the wayside. We were allowed to do more, after all, so lip locking didn't have quite the prominence it once did. But even more than that, sex was a big source of tension in our early years of marriage. Keith seemed to want it all the time, and I found this a major burden. And since he believed all affection must lead somewhere, I became leery of kissing. Why put a down payment on something you may not want to buy later?

When God decided to put a book about sex into the Bible, though, He didn't open it with the couple disrobing, or jumping into bed, or even commenting on each other's appearance. He opened with a kiss. The kiss is the doorway to intimacy. And so kissing is vitally important—even when you are “allowed” to do more stuff!

Don't let your marriage become a kissing-free zone. Men, kissing does not have to lead anywhere. She will feel sexier and more in the mood if she's allowed to “sizzle” throughout the day. And women, don't be so worried that you won't want to make love tonight that you stop kissing altogether. If you do, then you give up one of your best tools for igniting your libido—and for feeling close to your husband.

So take this challenge: everyday this week, kiss for at least fifteen seconds. And see how much more fun you have!

Daily Reading: Song of Solomon 2:4-7; Song of Solomon 4:9-11

16

THE BEAUTY

"You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you." SONG OF SOLOMON 4:7

Barbie's measurements, if she were life-sized, would be 44-12-22. She's a mutant.

With all the unrealistic and photo-shopped bodies women see everyday, it's no wonder we are so sensitive about our appearance. We have an innate desire to be "The Beauty", the one who is pursued. And yet we also have this innate insecurity that we never measure up. Even the woman in Song of Solomon was insecure; one of the first things she says about herself is a criticism: "Do not gaze at me because I am dark" (1:6). And when women don't feel attractive, it's hard for us to get in the mood. Our libido is linked to feeling desired. If we don't believe we could be desired, we all too easily shut down.

Now saying "we can't have sex because I feel fat" isn't a good strategy for marital bliss, so women need to rise above this. Embrace the body you have. Dress to flatter your figure, no matter the size. Get a nice haircut. Apply lipstick occasionally. Treat yourself as The Beauty, and you will feel more like it.

But men, you play a vital role in our self-esteem. Solomon told his love "there is no flaw in you". Say the same to your bride. Don't compare her to other women. "Let her breasts satisfy you at all times"—even if gravity has taken its toll. She needs to feel beautiful. Show her that she is. Keep your eyes only on her. No porn. No watching naked scenes in movies. No glancing at women walking by. Honour your wife with your eyes—and tell her, everyday, that to you, she is beautiful.

Daily Reading: Song of Solomon 1:15-17; Proverbs 5:15-23.

17

FREEDOM IN THE BEDROOM

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.” 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

If an alien were sent on a recon mission to earth, and judged our culture by the magazines in the checkout line, he'd conclude that one of our biggest problems was that we didn't know how to have sex right. Think of all the headlines like “10 Tricks That Will Make His Toes Curl” that scream out every week. Our culture is obsessed with trying new things in bed.

Now God says that freedom should characterize the Christian life, and so within a marriage, most things you do sexually are perfectly fine. Many Christians worry that new positions or new ways to touch or kiss may cross a line, but the marriage bed is undefiled. Fun is good!

Yet this verse tells us that there is a balance. Let's make sure that in exercising that freedom we don't inadvertently mimic our culture's distorted view of sex. Not everything we do is beneficial, especially if it makes sex only about the physical, and not about a spiritual connection.

Many couples would benefit from changing things up in the bedroom from time to time. Not every encounter, after all, has to have great spiritual significance; a quick interlude is awesome. But the sexual relationship as a whole should not be so focused on the physical that you lose out on becoming more vulnerable, more intimate, more one.

Ask yourselves: are we living out our freedom in the bedroom? And are we living out that freedom in a way that's beneficial? Great sex doesn't need batteries. It just needs love, commitment, and laughter.

Daily Reading: Ephesians 5:6-20

18

SEX IS A CIRCLE

“His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.”

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:3-4

At the end of the movie *The Proposal*, when the couple finally professes their love, Ryan Reynolds grasps Sandra Bullock’s head and pulls her towards him in a kiss. Every woman watching that melts. There is something about a man’s hand on the back of your head that reels us in. It’s protection, intimacy, and gentleness all rolled up into one.

Song of Solomon understood that: “His left arm is under my head.” But the passage doesn’t stop there. With his other hand, he embraces her, he touches her, he explores her, he’s passionate with her. Intimacy and Passion together. Sounds good so far.

Then the passage says this: do not awaken love too early. Both aspects have to be present: you can’t have intimacy until you’re ready for passion, or passion until you’re ready for intimacy, or sex gets distorted.

Men and women have different approaches to sex. Men make love to feel loved; women need to feel loved to make love. For men, sex is the connection. For women, the connection is the doorway to sex.

Men, your challenge is to listen to her heart before your hands wander. Talk to her in the evening so she can share what’s on her mind. Open up and tell her what’s on your heart.

Women, your challenge is to realize that it will always be easier for him to give that affection to you if you also give passion to him.

Sex is a circle; the more we give what the other needs, the more we get back what we need. Intimacy and Passion flow together. But if you wait for the other to make the first move, you may find that real love in your marriage is never awakened.

Daily Reading: Colossians 3:12-17; Philippians 2:1-5



ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES



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WHY YOUR LOVE MATTERS: RELATIONSHIP TEAMWORK

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” EPHESIANS 5:21

Perhaps the greatest gift you can give your children is to teach them how a man loves and cherishes his wife and how a woman loves and respects her husband. This is best learned by modeling and observation. Your son is watching to see how a man acts toward his wife—to see how he should treat the women in his life and how he should expect to be treated by a woman. Your daughter is watching to see how she should be regarded by her future boyfriends and husband. She is also watching to see how a woman loves, respects, and relates to a man.

Author Ken Canfield says, “They’re watching you ... Your sons, however subconsciously, are asking the question: What does it mean to be a husband? They are also trying to figure out who these creatures called women are, and they are looking to you to see how you perceive them and what respect you give to them. Your daughters also have their eye on you. To submit to another in the mystery of marriage can be a fearful thing; your daughters are asking themselves how well their mother fared in the deal.”

As the primary role models for our children our actions speak louder than our words. By loving, cherishing, respecting, and encouraging your spouse, you are teaching your children the joy and blessings of a godly marriage. You are also giving them hope that love and marriage can still (even in a hopeless world) last a lifetime.

Daily Reading: Ephesians 5:21-33

20

WHY YOUR MARRIAGE MATTERS: PARENTING TOGETHER

“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” ECCLESIASTES 4:12

A man’s wife is his greatest asset as a father. She can garner him respect from his children far beyond what he can on his own. Her intuitive abilities also allow him insight into his children’s emotional needs that he likely is clueless without.

Likewise a woman’s husband is her greatest asset as a mother. His assumed position of authority (in children’s minds) allows him the power to make sure his children honor their mother. He has the ability to see a long-range vision of the future which allows his wife to focus on mothering her children in ways that meet their most urgent day-to-day needs. His authoritarian style works well with her more nurturing style. His love tends to be performance-based while hers is unconditional, each meeting specific needs of their children and providing examples that form a well-rounded, healthy individual.

Together, as a husband and wife team, you are far greater than then your individual parts. Use that ability to work together to raise healthy, happy children. Remember, parenting children is often an “us against them” game and you need to work together on the same page with the same agenda as your spouse. Perhaps the biggest struggle of broken or blended families is when separate spouse’s have differing agendas and perspectives on life—it sends mixed messages to children.

Daily Reading: Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

21

WHY YOUR PRAYERS MATTER: SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

“Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” DEUTERONOMY 11:19

Part of our role as leaders of our families is to be spiritual mentors for our children. It’s a responsibility I felt least adequate to fulfill when I accepted Christ into my life. But God is more interested in what you can become than what you are now. I found that my children (and wife) willingly followed my lead into spiritual growth—no matter how pathetic my efforts as a teacher and guide. The important thing was that I tried.

The best (and easiest) way I found to spiritually lead my family was through prayer. While praying in front of our children can initially be intimidating for some, it is a powerful example and teaches our children the humility of being accountable to a higher authority than ourselves. It also teaches them a model of faith much more powerful than anything we tell them. Sometimes the only thing a parent *can* do is pray for their children. Become a prayer warrior for your family—it will save them from many situations when you can’t be there to protect them.

Pray for your children every day—a husband and wife’s prayers are powerful together. Pray for their spiritual, emotional, physical, and psychological health and safety. Pray God would bring healthy mentors and good friends into their lives. Pray for their sexual purity. Pray for their future spouse (and their parents). Pray for wisdom and discernment. And pray for your child’s decision-making. My wife prayed daily that our children would get “caught.” She knew that they *would* make mistakes and poor choices, but if they got caught the first time, it would prevent them from continuing. Our children were continually baffled that they got caught whenever they strayed from the path.

Daily Reading: Deuteronomy 11: 16-21

22

WHY FATHERS MATTER: PRIEST-LIKE BLESSINGS

“He took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.”

MARK 10:16

My daughter and I were recently blessed to be asked to speak at a father-daughter conference. The goal of the weekend was to help the fathers understand how important they are in the lives of their daughters, and how to foster a healthy connection with their daughters as they become young women. We also wanted to help the daughters recognize their need for a healthy relationship with their fathers and the consequences in their lives when that doesn't happen. Finally, we wanted to help facilitate reconciliation between fathers and daughters who were struggling or had past wounds.

As the teenage girls arrived their body language strongly suggested that they did not want to be there, and many of them were actually cold and distant toward their fathers. The dads, of course, appeared a bit anxious and nervous. But as the day progressed and the speakers and workshops broke down those barriers, we began to see fathers and daughters talking, sitting closer to one another, and even laughing and hugging each other.

The event culminated in a “father blessing” of the daughters. I knelt in front of my daughter on stage and prayerfully offered my blessing to her publicly, stating that I loved her, I was proud of her, and asking God to bestow his blessings upon her. Kelsey then tearfully accepted my blessing and responded with gratitude and thankfulness for me being her father.

To then watch as each father knelt and blessed his daughter was a powerful and emotional experience. It was too much for one previously sullen young girl who threw her arms around her father, buried her face in his chest, and sobbed, “Oh

Daddy, I love you so much!” Many fathers and daughters were in tearful embraces as we concluded the day’s activities.

Even though my daughter and I had a close relationship before this event, I truly believe that my publicly proclaiming a blessing over her changed and deepened our relationship. She appears much calmer around me now—more confident in my love for her. Even though I told over the years that I loved her, my willingness to risk public humiliation to prove it must have somehow cemented it in her soul.

You don’t need to attend a father-daughter event to bless your children. You can do it every day by speaking a blessing over them. God has given fathers the ability through their words and actions to bless the lives of their children. When you speak into their hearts all the things you love and cherish about them, you fill their souls with nourishment they will live on for the rest of their lives.

Daily Reading: Mark 10: 13-16



23

WHY YOUR PARTNER MATTERS: LOVING YOUR SPOUSE

“Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

1 CORINTHIANS 13:7

Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade, said, “If a woman is beautiful in her teens and twenties, it’s because God made her that way. But after she’s married and the years pass, if she’s still beautiful when she’s fifty, sixty, and seventy years old, it’s because of the way her husband treats her. So men, take another look at your wife. If for some reason she is dowdy and glum and depressed and discouraged, look in the mirror, and see who is the major contributor to her looks. Then cultivate her with love. Before long that dull countenance will become radiant and filled with joy.”

Tell your wife you love her every day, and spend time praising her for her good attributes. Tell her you appreciate her when she does something for you. Don’t just comment when she disappoints you. Look for opportunities to use the power God has given you to lift her up to be the maximum woman God intended her to be—it’s probably the most profitable investment you can make with your time. You will never out-love your wife. Women are like faith. For each small mustard seed of faith you generate, God returns to you in blessings hundreds fold. So too, a woman returns her husband’s mustard seeds of love a hundred fold.

Finally, pray together—at meals, in front of your children, over your children at night. Let your kids see you pray alone and together. Want to leave a lasting legacy for your children? Pray with their mother. Not only is prayer the most intimate thing you can do with someone, but Pastor Will Davis Jr. cites a study that shows while 50% of the marriages in this country end in divorce, only 1% of couples who pray together consistently get divorced. That’s a legacy that all children need.

Daily Reading: 1 Corinthians 13

24

**WHY YOUR RELATIONSHIP MATTERS:
THE EMPTY NEST**

"If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned."

SONG OF SONGS 8:7

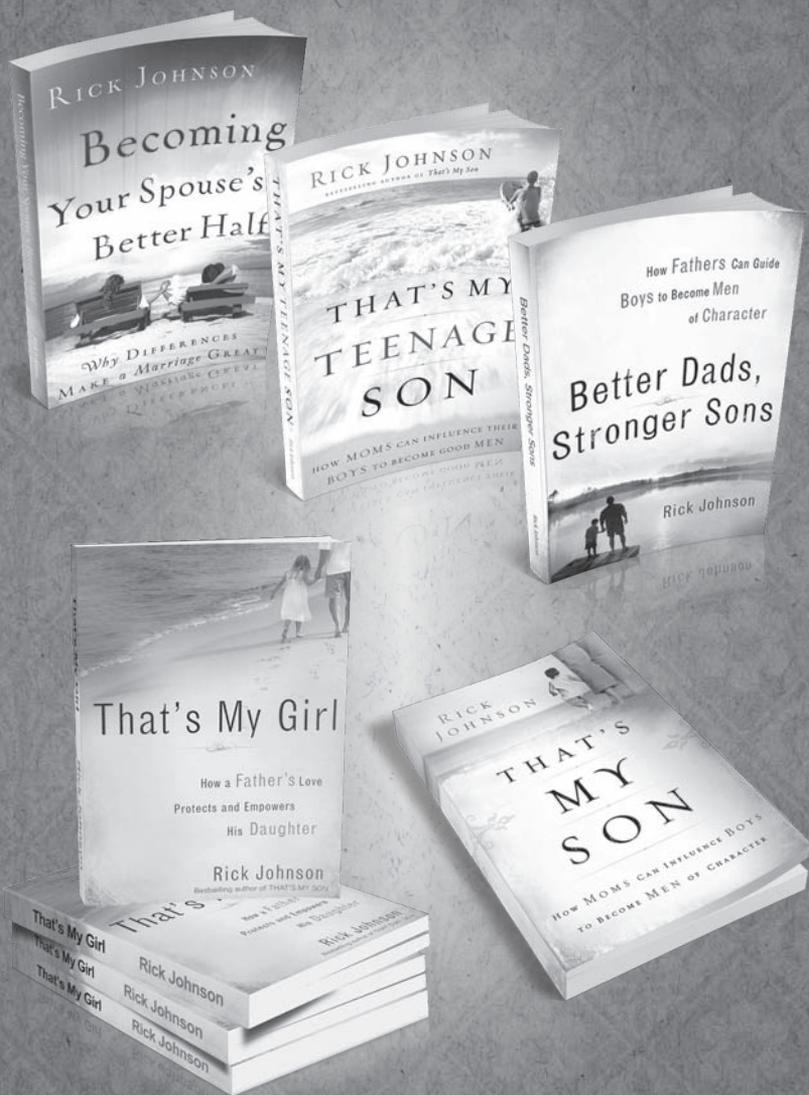
Finally, what about couples who do not have children or who's kids have grown up and moved away? Does your marriage still matter? Maybe more than ever! I came to the recognition this year that after 30 years of marriage, our marriage was not about us anymore. The truth is that if Suzanne and I were to divorce it would be very painful for each of us and our adult children would probably be wounded. It would leave a poor legacy for them and generations of our family. But of maybe more significance would be the effect on all the people who have watched our marriage over the past three decades. Friends and relatives; the young couples we have given pre-marital counseling with over the years; the young people we have coached and had in our home; the families whose lives have been impacted by my books, camps, or workshops; and those who struggle and look to us as models; would all be devastated by our marriage failure. Suzanne and I both came from very dysfunctional home lives. The fact that we have grown and persevered to overcome the odds and broken generational cycles to have a successful marriage provides hope to others in those circumstances. Studies show that young people today virtually have no hope that marriage and love are achievable life-long goals. Our model is an inspiration to them as well. If our marriage were to crumble, the devastating effects would radiate outward like the ripples of a pond after a pebble has been dropped into it.

Take time to nurture your marriage. Date your spouse, pray together, find a ministry to work at together, and find new and exciting activities to do together. Your marriage is too important to let rust and stagnate if for no other reason than because other people are watching you and depending on you.

Daily Reading: Song of Songs 8: 6-7

ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES

from Rick Johnson



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WHO IS YOUR NEIGHBOUR?

“Therefore go and make disciples...” MATTHEW 28:19

The Front Porch is an awesome place to observe the world around us. However, God did not call us to observe our neighbours but to love them as ourselves, and that requires more than passive observation. Neighbourhoods have changed so much since I was a small boy. Children used to play outside in front of houses, and my brother and I were seldom home until meal time, after which we would quickly escape again until dark. People felt safe and often sat on their front porch, interacting with the rest of the people in the neighbourhood as they walked by. Conversations became relationships, relationships became friendships, friendships became opportunities to “love our neighbours as ourselves,” and love became meaningful actions that expressed to the world around us that Jesus is real.

As Christian couples, some of the greatest opportunities we will ever have to care for those around us will come from these Front Porch experiences, as we begin to see the Front Porch as an opportunity. It’s a place where relationships with those God has ordained us to care for can begin in our neighbourhoods.

Go Deeper: What are your neighbours’ names? If you don’t know, how are you going to get from the Front Porch to find out?

Daily Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

26

A READY ANSWER

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” 1 PETER 3:15

Several years ago, my wife informed me that she had found the recreation property of our dreams. I had been unaware we were looking for the recreation property of our dreams, but 4 days later I owned a park model trailer on Gleniffer Lake alongside 600 similar trailers. It was there I rediscovered the concept of the Front Porch. I think it’s Rick Warren who says the garage door opener has all but killed our neighbourhoods. We now have the ability to hit a button, drive inside the garage, close the door and literally never have to speak to anyone around us.

But not at Gleniffer Lake. We sit on our deck outside our trailer and have conversation after conversation with people we slowly but surely get to know. We hear about their kids, we listen to them as they confide to us about their jobs, and as they get to know us, about their marriages. And we discover a mission field, a vast opportunity to care and minister to literally hundreds of people. 1 Peter gives us the secret to how to do this Front Porch Ministry well. In telling us to give an answer to the question for our reason of Hope, the implication is that there is a way to live our lives that will cause people to ask the question. People are much more receptive to our answers when they have asked the question, “Why do you have so much hope?”

Go Deeper: Now that you’ve learned your neighbours’ names, what are some ways that you and your spouse can become “ambassadors” of hope and earn the right to be heard, so those around you that God has called you to care for have opportunity to ask the question?

Daily Reading: 1 Peter 3:8-18

27

SALT OF THE EARTH

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” MATTHEW 5: 13

Our call to flavour, light and preserve, salt light are two essentials to life, especially in the ancient world. Salt was more than just a spice for seasoning—it was used to preserve; it effected change.

Now I have to confess that I have something of a first-love relationship with salt. My wife has tried everything to break up this romance. She hides it, but I find it. She changes it from table salt to sea salt and somehow I end up with table salt. Janice is an awesome cook, who is visibly shaken when the first thing I do to her culinary masterpiece is pour salt on it without tasting it first. The point is I know about salt, and frankly the stuff is really no use to anyone in the salt shaker adding flavour and being an agent of change to itself. It's only useful when you get it out of the salt shaker and onto things that needs flavour.

The same is true for us, and this is again where the Front Porch is such an awesome place of ministry. It's a place of contact with a world, a platform of welcome that needs us to be that agent of change. In a world where we have an ever-expanding neighbourhood, the front porch is where we have to get out of the salt shaker (the church) and increasingly find meaningful ways to fulfill this awesome call of God to people in our neighbourhoods, our schools and our work places. And as you've already heard from me... at our places where we recreate.

Go Deeper: Where has God called you to be salt, and agent of change?

Daily Reading: Matthew 5: 13-16

JESUS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” JOHN 1:14

In the Message version of the Bible it says that in Jesus, God ‘became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood’ (John 1:14). That’s about the best definition of the incarnation that I’m aware of. Jesus continues to move into our neighbourhoods today, but he does so through you.

The Front Porch is an awesome place to manifest this incarnational ministry to the world, and for the most part it really only requires a visible presence. Jesus told us very clearly in Luke 8:16 “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light.”

However, there is a problem: we live in a world of almost complete compromise where we live in the same houses, dress in the same clothes and look and often talk and live exactly the same as everyone around us. If we aren't careful, we tend to just blend in. Part of the call to Front Porch ministry is that your light needs to be visible.

Now, we love our place at the lake. But when we bought it, the foliage was so overgrown that you could hardly even tell there was a front porch. The large trees around the deck were overgrown, and we now were responsible for an 8-foot-tall lilac bush hedge that blocked any kind of interaction with passers-by. The previous owners liked it that way; it gave them privacy. My 2nd weekend at the recreation property, I cut that hedge down to about 3 and a half feet tall. Now when Janice and I sit on our Front Porch we can make eye contact and chat with everyone, and people stop and talk and we hear their stories, and they hear ours. And sometimes we get to be the salt and light that God has called us to be in our community.

In Calgary where I live, the average height of a fence has gone from about 3 feet high in the 50's to 6 feet high today. We call them "privacy fences", and they run for miles in our subdivisions. You need a ladder to talk to your neighbour. But the Front Porch is still open and a place to build meaningful relationships and learn to care for those around you that God would have you be light for.

Go Deeper: What are the obstacles or hedges in your life or at your home that need to be knocked down in order to be the ministers of light in your neighbourhood that God would have you to be?

Daily Reading: John 1:1-18

29

CALL TO JUSTICE

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” JAMES 1:27

If I had to pick just one verse, that verse would be Micah 6:8. God answers the question most of us have asked, “God, what is it you desire of me anyway”? In verse 8 we read God’s reply, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Whenever I lose my way as to what God desires, I come back to this verse. God has a call on all of our lives to be a people of justice and mercy; what an amazing opportunity in our Front Porch ministries! Justice and mercy are really where ministry takes place, and as a couple you need to come to terms with how to make your home a place where all this takes place. But verse 8 also gives us one of the great secrets of successfully ministering as a couple. Learn to walk humbly in the presence of God.

Why is that so important? Because if you begin to live out justice and mercy in your lives as a couple, the opportunities to do the ministry of Christ that will come your way will be so overwhelming at times, all you’ve got is God. That’s where real ministry takes place. It is a complete submission to the sovereign call of God in your lives that goes beyond the circumstances and becomes an expression of a deep faith that simply says yes to God.

Go Deeper: What does the call to justice look like for you as a couple? What does mercy look like as part of your Front Porch ministry, and how are you and your spouse going to ensure that you walk humbly in the presence of God?

Daily Reading: James 1:19-27

30

MODELLING MERCY

“The LORD’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.” PSALM 103:17-18

Right now in Canada, a staggering number of young people raised in church turn 18, leave the home and simply walk away. Some do so because they really don’t “get it” anymore and have been going through the motions to please their parents and others. They have no desire to be a part of an institution that seems to be doing very little.

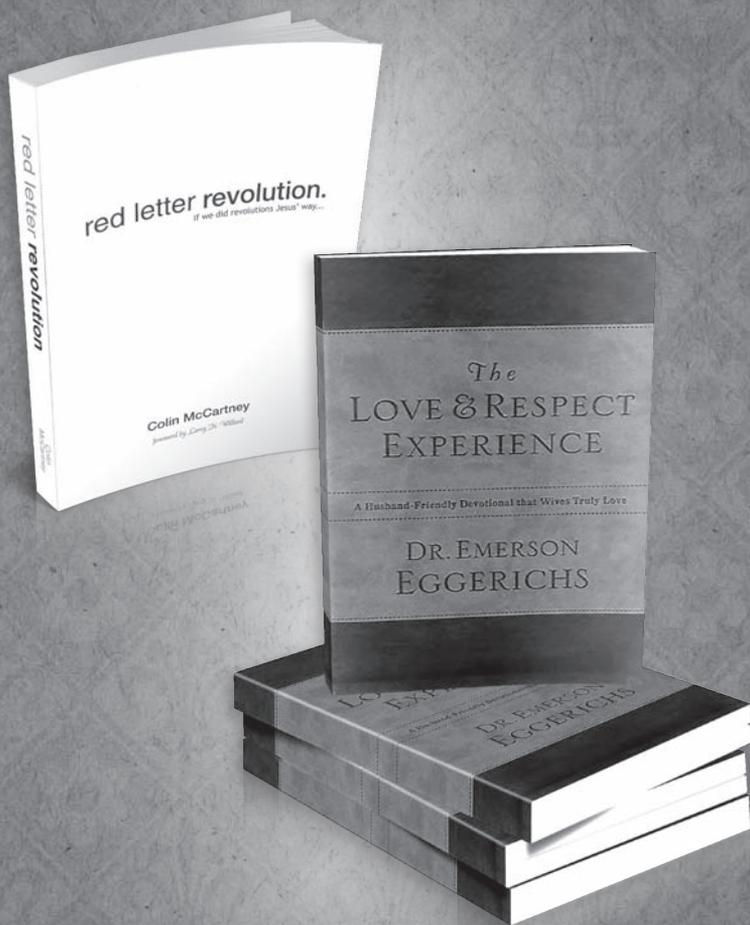
Your most important role in Front Porch ministry is modeling for your children a faith that is expressed in actions towards others. However, your children cannot be ignored in that ministry. Couples all across this country are learning that you must find ways to include your children in the ministry of Christ.

To do this well, you will need to go beyond your Church walls and local neighbourhood. This year during Christmas I saw a Christmas miracle, where 125 members of my church came down to The Mustard Seed in Calgary and brought with them all the fixings required to make sandwiches. They made hundreds of sandwiches, and then went out into the downtown core - parents, grandparents and children as young as 3 years old. As families, they took those sandwiches and handed them out to the poor. I was in tears as I saw a small 3 year old girl hand a bag she had decorated to a homeless man and tell him that Jesus loved him. I wonder how that experience will shape that little girl’s life as she learns to be a caregiver early, and that the Gospel is an action.

Go Deeper: What creative “out of the box” ways can you as a couple begin to give your children opportunity to touch the world around them for Christ? What ways can you as a family do these things together and become a model for other families?

Daily Reading: Psalm 103

ADDITIONAL READING RESOURCES



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PROMISE KEEPERS CANADA

would like to thank the following authors for building into marriages and equipping couples across this country through this devotional.



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