

CHAPTER 14

WISE PEOPLE REALISE THE HUGE IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE

*To the woman he said,
“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”*

Genesis 3:16 (ESV)

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

Colossians 3:18-19 (ESV)

¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Peter 3:1-7 (ESV)

A wise person is extremely careful about whom they marry. They go to great lengths to find a godly husband or wife.

After your decision to repent, believe and follow Jesus Christ, choosing the right husband or wife is by far the biggest decision of your life. The consequences that flow from choosing the right person, or the wrong one, are absolutely crucial and their importance would be difficult to overstate. Your spouse can make your life either a joy or a misery and cause you to become either a success or a failure in your career, your ministry and your walk as a disciple. Thus, it is essential that you choose wisely and that you do not base your decision solely on their looks but on their character as well:

*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout
is a beautiful woman without discretion.*

Proverbs 11:22 (ESV)

Therefore, before you consider marrying anyone, and preferably for many years before you even meet them, you should be praying for God to guide you towards the right person. Also ask Him to guide you away from everyone else, i.e. all those who would *not* be His choice for you. Likewise, parents should pray for their children to meet and marry the right person, and to avoid the wrong ones.

You can begin to pray for your children in that way from the very earliest time, ideally from before they are even born, not just when they become adults. What is more, you can also be praying for your

children's *future spouses*. Ask in the same way for them to be blessed, protected and helped to develop into a strong Christian. You can, likewise, begin to do this long before you know who they are.

That way, even while their identities are unknown, you can be supporting that future spouse in prayer, all through their own childhood, teens and early adulthood. Look at some of the things which God says about the vital importance of finding the right wife, but note that the same applies to a woman's need to find the right husband, because that is just as crucial:

***An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,
but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.***
Proverbs 12:4 (ESV)

***He who finds a wife finds a good thing
and obtains favor from the LORD.***
Proverbs 18:22 (ESV)

***House and wealth are inherited from fathers,
but a prudent wife is from the LORD.***
Proverbs 19:14 (ESV)

***It is better to live in a corner of the housetop
than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.***
Proverbs 21:9 (ESV)

***Better is a dinner of herbs where love is
than a fattened ox and hatred with it.***
Proverbs 15:17 (ESV)

***Better is a dry morsel with quiet
than a house full of feasting with strife.***
Proverbs 17:1 (ESV)

The first criterion in selecting a husband or wife is that they absolutely must be a Christian, *and a real one*. That is they must be genuinely born again and walking as a sincere and committed disciple, not just a nominal 'churchgoer', or someone who merely believes that God exists. Even the Devil himself believes that, but he would not make a great husband!

Paul makes it clear that it is vital to avoid marrying an unsaved person because, whatever other qualities they may have, they will never share your values, beliefs or priorities. Neither will they be with you in eternity, as they will be separated from you forever and go to the Lake of Fire, unless they later repent. However, you cannot assume that they will do that.

Even the Bible itself, let alone the '*Great Commission*' of making disciples, will mean nothing to them. Therefore, they won't cooperate with what God wants you to do, or be willing to walk on the same *narrow path* that you must spend your life walking on. More to the point, they will make it far harder *for you to do so*. An unsaved spouse will inevitably make your life a misery, render you ineffectual as a disciple, and even cause you to fall away completely. Indeed, such total apostasy often happens, which is one reason why Paul instructs us not to marry an unbeliever:

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 (ESV)

Despite what Paul said, many people persuade themselves that they are somehow an exception to the rule and that it would be alright for *them* to have a non-Christian boyfriend or girlfriend. They might even try to justify it on the basis that they will be better able to “*witness to them*”, as if dating was a form of evangelism. It most certainly isn’t, and should never be viewed as such, regardless of how anxious you might feel about finding a spouse, and no matter how much you have convinced yourself that they are the right one for you.

If you are convinced that God wants you to go out with a non-Christian so that you can lead them to Christ, then the simple fact is that you are deluding yourself. This self-deception tends to affect women, more so than men. They can become desperate, not least because the churches now contain a lot more women than men, especially in the younger age groups. It is also because finding a spouse occupies the average women’s thoughts far more than with the average young man, partly due to the ‘biological clock’ which puts a time limit on them having children, but also because a woman’s heart has been made by God with a deep longing for romantic love.

However, just as God doesn’t want you to marry a non-Christian, He doesn’t want you to go out with one either. This is hard to accept, especially for women, who now greatly outnumber men in the churches, but it is absolutely essential to wait until you meet a genuine Christian. He or she need not necessarily be a mature disciple when you first meet them. Indeed, it would be almost impossible for them to be such, especially as they are likely to be young. However, they would need to have become at least reasonably mature before you agree to marry them.

As an absolute minimum, they need to be clearly on an upward ‘flight path’, such that you know they are maturing, growing as a disciple, studying their Bible and actively involved in church. In short, they need to take Christianity seriously, have a genuine faith, and not be a mere ‘*churchgoer*’. That makes things very difficult today because so few people go to church at all. Even of those that do, a high percentage are just nominal Christians, not real ones, and they have no serious commitment to Jesus Christ. Indeed, many are largely indistinguishable from the unsaved world.

However, no matter how difficult it is to find a genuine Christian to marry, you still need to hold out for the real thing. Never allow yourself to compromise by settling for a non-Christian, or even a nominal Christian. I can categorically assure you that you would be far better off, and much happier, remaining single, *even for your whole life*, than if you were to marry anyone who is not a genuine and committed Christian, no matter how nice he or she might be. Being *nice* is not the issue. It is about whether they are *saved* and walking as a *genuine disciple*.

Therefore, to be able to choose the right person, you need to be willing, if need be, to remain single forever. If you find the prospect of permanent singleness so appalling that you rule it out as an option, then you are extremely likely to end up compromising. If so, then you would be headed for disaster, not only in your marriage, but in your entire walk as a disciple. It really is that serious. In fact, it would be difficult to over-state the seriousness of this warning.

What if two unbelievers live together, and even have children, but then one of them becomes a Christian?

Let me now deal with a situation which can also arise whereby a couple were both unbelievers when they got married, or when they began to live together as man and wife, even if they weren’t officially married, but then one of them becomes a Christian. What should the saved spouse do in that situation? Apostle Paul gives us the answer which is that, provided the unbelieving spouse is willing, then the believing spouse should stay with them and should not leave or divorce their unbelieving spouse:

¹⁰ *To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband*
¹¹ *(but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)—and that the husband should not divorce his wife.*

¹² To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace.

1 Corinthians 7:10-15 (RSV)

A situation exactly like this arose recently for me where a woman asked for my advice. She had been living with a man for 30 years and had had two children by him. However, they had never officially got married, in the eyes of the State, with an official wedding ceremony. The woman then became a believer and wanted to have a wedding ceremony so that she could be officially married. However, a particular leader then told her that she should not do this, on the basis that it would amount to her becoming “unequally yoked with an unbeliever”.

In fact, the leader went further than that and urged her to leave the man. The prospect of doing that appalled her, even though her common law ‘husband’ was not a Christian. It was at this point that she emailed me, via my website, seeking advice as to what to do and whether this leader was right in urging her to leave her children’s father. I responded by telling her about apostle Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15, as set out above, and said that she should *not* leave him, provided that he was willing to stay with her, which he was.

I also said that the leader in question was making a further mistake in that they were wrongly assuming that she was not married in God’s eyes, solely on the basis that she had never had a *wedding ceremony*. I told her that although an official wedding ceremony, where vows are publicly given and received, is entirely appropriate and should be done, their failure to do that during the last 30 years did not mean that they were unmarried, at least not in their case.

I explained that although the official wedding ceremony is very important, and very beneficial, it is not the decisive factor in determining whether a couple are married in God’s eyes. What really counts is the sexual act, or the ‘act of marriage’, whereby the man and woman are joined and become “one flesh”. So, having been living as man and wife for 30 years, and having raised a family, God plainly viewed them as a married couple and so Paul’s words applied to them, such that she should not leave the man who was, for all intents and purposes, her husband.

I therefore urged her, far from leaving him, to go ahead and have the very belated wedding ceremony which they both wanted but which the leader wrongly believed was forbidden by virtue of Paul’s words about being ‘unequally yoked’. The point is that those words apply in the case of a man and woman who are *not already married* in God’s eyes in the sense described above. Paul’s command therefore did not apply to her and so she should act as a *Christian wife* should act where she *already* has a non-Christian husband, rather than as a *single woman* should act who is only contemplating a *future* marriage to an unbeliever.

However, having said all that about the huge significance of the sexual act as being the ‘act of marriage’, I do not want to alarm or condemn those who have had a sexually sinful past, with one of more sexual partners, possibly a long list, prior to meeting their spouse. If that is your situation then, although it will have produced problems and complications, which may still persist even decades later, I believe you should stay with the man or woman that you are now married to.

In other words, although you may have been sexually joined to others in the past, which is highly regrettable, God can and will forgive and resolve such ‘messy’ situations. He can wash you “*white as snow*”, and cause all of your past sins, including sexual sins, to be cast into the sea and to be removed from you “*as far as the east is from the west*”. Therefore, the last thing that I want to do is to put anybody on a ‘guilt trip’, as they say. We are all sinners, with a lot to repent of and recover from, even

if we differ in the precise sins or types of sins that we have committed. Even so, the fact remains that past sexual relationships can cause very real problems, including demonic problems, and I examine those issues more fully in my Books 7 and 9.

Lastly, and for the avoidance of doubt, if there is anybody reading this who, for medical or other reasons is unable to consummate their marriage, I am *not* saying that they are not married in God's eyes. Of course they are. God is not only highly merciful and gracious, but also realistic and practical. So, if due to illness or injury that is your position, have no doubt that you are validly married.

The qualities which men need to look for in a wife

As well as being a genuine believer, we see in Proverbs chapter 31 the many other qualities which an excellent wife has, and which we should look for when deciding whom to marry. The woman of Proverbs 31 is godly, unselfish, virtuous, faithful, truthful, trustworthy, kind, industrious, respectful, God-fearing, caring, wise, enterprising, strong and dignified. She also gets involved in all sorts of useful and wholesome activities whilst, at the same time, honouring her husband and being submissive towards him:

- ¹⁰ *An excellent wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.*
- ¹¹ *The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.*
- ¹² *She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.*
- ¹³ *She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.*
- ¹⁴ *She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.*
- ¹⁵ *She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her household
and portions for her maidens.*
- ¹⁶ *She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.*
- ¹⁷ *She dresses herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.*
- ¹⁸ *She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.*
- ¹⁹ *She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.*
- ²⁰ *She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.*
- ²¹ *She is not afraid of snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.*
- ²² *She makes bed coverings for herself;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.*
- ²³ *Her husband is known in the gates
when he sits among the elders of the land.*
- ²⁴ *She makes linen garments and sells them;
she delivers sashes to the merchant.*
- ²⁵ *Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.*
- ²⁶ *She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*
- ²⁷ *She looks well to the ways of her household*

and does not eat the bread of idleness.
²⁸ *Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:*
²⁹ *“Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.”*
³⁰ *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*
³¹ *Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.*
Proverbs 31:10-31 (ESV)

The qualities a woman needs to look for in husband

The same points apply equally to choosing a husband. He too must be faithful, godly, true, hardworking, kind, caring, loyal, trustworthy, wise, strong, brave etc. However, in addition to all that, he must also be willing to *take the lead* in discipling and pastoring his family and in teaching them about God’s commands. That is because, in God’s eyes, both within the marriage and the family, the husband is the spiritual head. He will therefore be held accountable for the way his wife and children turn out.

Therefore, for the avoidance of doubt, the husband comes ahead of the pastor of the church, or even of its elders, if it is organised on more biblical lines. Those men have some authority within the church, but they have zero authority over the wife or the children. In those areas the husband is the leader, not them. I need to point that out because, especially in dysfunctional and abusive churches, the opposite is often taught by controlling and manipulative leaders.

So, wherever there is a dispute or difference of view between the leaders of a church and a woman’s own husband, she should follow her husband, not them. The only exception to that would be if the husband was doing or saying something which is plainly sinful, or which clearly contradicts the Bible. Then she must follow her conscience. At any rate, this is what a Christian husband should do in his own walk as a disciple, and in the spiritual upbringing of his children, which he must take very seriously:

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children’s children—

Deuteronomy 4:9 (ESV)

Let us now look briefly at what the Bible has to say about what a good man is like, what he does, and how to identify him. Focusing carefully on such things will help you to see which men are likely to make good husbands and which are not. Consider these passages which describe a faithful, godly, wise and righteous man. Then *look* for such a man for yourself. Or, if you are already married, then help your husband to *become* such a man, by your ongoing prayer, encouragement and support, not just for a day or a week, but throughout your entire marriage, and also the courtship which precedes it:

*Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love,
but a faithful man who can find?*
Proverbs 20:6 (ESV)

*Better to be lowly and have a servant
than to play the great man and lack bread.*
Proverbs 12:9 (ESV)

¹*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,*

*nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
³He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Psalm 1:1-6 (ESV)

⁷ *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
 whose trust is the LORD.
⁸ He is like a tree planted by water,
 that sends out its roots by the stream,
 and does not fear when heat comes,
 for its leaves remain green,
 and is not anxious in the year of drought,
 for it does not cease to bear fruit.”*

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (ESV)

My own story of how I met, courted and married my wife.

I have emphasised the need to pray to find the right husband or wife and to carefully consider their character and lifestyle to assess whether they are godly enough for you to marry. However, I absolutely do *not* want to imply that romance and physical attraction play no part in choosing whom to marry. They certainly do, and they are *meant to*. God Himself ‘invented’ romance and He fully intends for it to be one of the things, *but not the only thing*, which guides us to the right person to marry.

It might assist if I tell my own story of how I came to meet my wife and how we ended up getting married. All of these ingredients that I speak of were involved, including physical and romantic attraction. I first met her when I was 19. I was then a brand new believer, only four months saved, and she was aged 18. We met at a prayer meeting. Some may not see that as an obvious place to find a wife but, actually, churches are by far the best place to be looking.

That is where Christians are most likely to congregate and to be in sufficiently large numbers to substantially increase the likelihood of you meeting single people of the right age and, above all, who are genuine believers. Thus you maximise your chances by looking there, rather than at work or school or, even worse, in pubs or nightclubs. Those last two are the worst possible places to seek to meet someone.

Things took an extremely unusual turn in that prayer meeting. As I sat opposite her, I heard a voice, which was audible only to me, saying *“That’s the person you are going to marry.”* This was only the second time, up to then, that anything like that had ever happened to me, though it has happened a handful of times since then. I was startled and bewildered and didn’t know what to make of it, or what to do about it. So, quite sensibly, I did nothing at all.

I just ‘parked’ it, and remembered it, but took no action. I didn’t see her again until several weeks later, when we met at a weekend retreat conference. That was when I spoke to her for the first time. We had not spoken to each other at the prayer meeting, as there had been no opportunity, or reason, to do so. Then two more years passed, during which we gradually got to know each other better, albeit at something of a distance. However, we did not go out together, even though my interest in her, and my attraction to her, steadily grew.

The first time we ever went out socially, although we still weren’t yet ‘going out’ together, was when we went to a theatre with a group of other students. We sat next to each other there for the first time. When we did, our hands accidentally touched, very briefly, and it was as if I had received an electric shock. I then suddenly realised how strongly I felt for her. She later told me that she had felt the same way and had had the very same ‘electric shock’ when our fingers touched. So, by this stage, I had:

- a) received a direct word from God which, I hasten to add, is *very unusual*, and cannot ordinarily be expected to happen. Neither should it ever be relied upon *by itself*, in the absence of all the other necessary factors.
- b) got to know her gradually, within a church context, and in the presence of others, for nearly two years, during which I had formed a high opinion of her character and godliness.
- c) realised that I felt a strong romantic and physical attraction to her or, in other words, that I had fallen in love with her.

By this stage I felt very serious about her, so I spoke to the leader of the student ministry that we were then part of and asked his advice about what to do and what he thought about her. My question came as no surprise to him. He had already noticed how interested I was in her and how I took every opportunity at meetings to talk to her and, in particular, to tease her. I had been doing all these things to such an extent that it was obvious to others how I felt, even though I had never asked her out.

His advice to me was that she was a young woman of real worth and godliness and seemed very suitable for me. Even so, he advised me to proceed slowly and carefully. At this stage I did not entirely take his advice, or I did so only for a short time, because I then asked her out and began what I would call ‘*courtship*’, rather than dating. I say that because we did not even start to ‘go out’ together until we were both serious about each other and saw marriage as a distinct possibility.

I told her that I loved her, and that I felt I would like to marry her. She said she loved me too, but she was rather startled by the mention of marriage at that early stage. So I began to court her, albeit seeing her only intermittently, because I then graduated and got a job elsewhere, whereas she remained a student for two more years. Then, after 12 months of courtship, we got engaged and, a year after that, we got married, the very week after she graduated.

That is what happened to us, but I am *not* saying it is typical, or that everyone should do the same as we did. Nevertheless, our story illustrates how one can go about finding and choosing a spouse, and it includes all of the different factors which are involved in making that vital decision. That process includes praying for guidance, assessing their character, taking advice, and getting to know them over a sufficiently long period of time, rather than rushing into it hastily.

Last but not least, it also involves seeing whether there is a real, and mutual, *romantic and physical* attraction. I want to emphasise those last two points because, although the world wrongly views them as the *only* criteria to go by, we must not make the opposite mistake of thinking that they don’t count at all. They absolutely do count. It is just that they aren’t the only things to go by when looking for a spouse.

A wise person is faithful to their future husband or wife, even before they ever meet them, and abstains from all sexual activity until their wedding night.

We dealt earlier, in chapter 8, with the issue of sexual sin, both before and outside of marriage, and the terrible damage it does. The fact that sex is a gift which God has *only* given to married couples, and *only after* they are married, used to be widely accepted, even amongst non-Christians. It was a part of Western culture, due to our strong Christian heritage. Now, it is not even widely accepted within churches, let alone secular society, due to the spread of worldliness and apostasy. Tragically, therefore, many married couples, even in churches, have already been sexually active beforehand.

Very often this sin was committed not only with their future spouse, but with others too, sometimes many others. One of the reasons for this is that the vital importance of total faithfulness during marriage, and complete abstinence beforehand, is not being taught in our churches today. Many leaders feel they have lost the ‘culture war’ and see no chance of persuading their congregations, especially the younger ones, to live by God’s standards and to reject the world’s. So they just give up and don’t even try.

Other leaders are afraid of criticism and controversy, or they fear that people would leave their church, if they were to teach faithfully what the Bible says. So those leaders don’t bother either, out of sheer cowardice. Therefore, most leaders today either compromise in what they teach, or they say nothing at all. They then abdicate their responsibility and let people find their own way which, unsurprisingly, is usually the world’s way. This is a crucial issue, not only in terms of disobedience to God, but also in the damage caused to marriages, families, churches and communities by marital unfaithfulness.

Therefore leaders must teach straightforwardly, and without any compromise, what God’s commands are concerning sex and marriage. Congregations must also ask their leaders to teach on it. Then God’s standards must be explained, no matter how much controversy arises, and even if nobody listens. It is a matter of integrity and obedience to God’s Word. Therefore, for the avoidance of doubt, let me state the biblical position clearly and unmistakably. God’s will is that every person, both men and women, must:

- a) abstain from all sexual activity prior to their wedding night, even if they are engaged
- b) have sex only with their husband or wife and nobody else
- c) once they are married, remain totally faithful to each other, have no eyes for any other person at all, and avoid any sexual activity whatsoever with anyone other than their spouse
- d) avoid even thinking of sexual activity with others, whether in their imagination, or by pornography, or by having a ‘roving eye’ which looks lustfully at the people they see

It really is as simple as that, even if those around us don’t agree, and think that the Bible is old fashioned, unrealistic or ridiculous, as many of them do. Indeed, even within churches, many people think all of those things. You therefore have a clear choice to make between accepting God’s standards and commands on sex and marriage, or following the values and practices of the unsaved world. I assure you that you will not regret it if you choose to obey God in these ways, whereas you certainly will regret it, at least in the end, if you don’t.

I am not only speaking of the Day of Judgment, but also of the terrible damage and misery that marital unfaithfulness causes here and now, in this life. It creates suspicion, distrust, discord and divorce, which then, in turn, produce broken families, with children living apart from one parent. You only have to look at the explosion in the number of divorces in the UK since the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ of the 1960s to see the truth of this. No serious person can deny that what we now have is creating unhappiness and social damage on a huge scale.

Yet, at least in the UK, divorce and broken families were a rarity before the 1970s, which proves that it does not have to be that way. We could choose to be different. Promiscuity has not made anyone

happy. All it has ever done is to cause enormous damage, thereby proving the wisdom of God's commands. The things He requires of us are not just arbitrary rules and restrictions with no basis in logic. They are entirely for our benefit, because we are hugely better off, in every way, if we approach sex and marriage in the way God tells us to, rather than as the world does.

Be pure and chaste before marriage and also dress modestly.

You can be faithful to your spouse even before you ever meet them. If you are unmarried it is your duty to keep yourself pure and to wait patiently for the husband or wife that God will one day give you. You might be a teenager, or a university student, or at the start of your career, but you have not yet found a spouse, or a fiancé/fiancée, or even a boyfriend or girlfriend. Or you could be much older, but still be single. It makes no difference. Your clear duty is to be faithful to that unknown person, whom you have not yet met, but whom God may have in store for you.

Your future husband or wife could now be at another school or university, or working in some other company, or attending some other church. Therefore, they are entirely real. You simply have not met him/her yet. Even though you don't yet know their name, you can still be faithful to them now *by waiting for them*. You can ask God to help you to remain faithful to them and also to help your future spouse to stay faithful to you, even before they know who you are, because they are in the same position. You would not want him or her to be unfaithful to you, merely because they don't yet know who *you* are.

Then, once you do meet the person and enter into courtship as a preparation for marriage, you must still avoid all sin and continue to be utterly faithful to each other, and also to God. That means you must abstain from *all* sexual activity, whether partial or complete. Do not allow *any* compromise, either on your part or your future spouse's part, however slight or infrequent it may be. Take care even to avoid situations which could potentially create *temptation* or provide any *opportunity* for sin.

It is wise therefore, wherever possible, to go out together with others, or to public places. In particular, avoid being alone together late at night, especially in bedrooms, or in any other such situation which increases the chances of temptation for either of you. The woman in particular needs to be vigilant. She must also dress modestly at all times, firstly because that is right, but also to avoid causing the man to stumble. I say that because men are primarily aroused through their *eyes*, which is precisely why the pornographic industry, and advertisers, do what they do.

The Devil and his demons understand men very well and know how best to get them to fall. So, as a Christian woman, your task is to work *against* that, not to make it even more difficult for men. Your duty is to assist your future spouse, and also all the other men who see you, to remain chaste and untempted. I wonder when I see some younger women in churches, and the suggestive way in which they dress, whom do they think they are they dressing for and why? What audience do they have in mind? Whom are they trying to impress or attract?

One thing is quite certain. If a woman seeks to attract a man by dressing or acting suggestively, she is in great danger of attracting the wrong man, whom God never intended for her. At the same time she will be repelling the *right man*, whom He *did* intend for her. How tragic is that? However, the man also needs to exercise great care and self-control and to remove himself from potentially compromising situations. He cannot just leave it to the woman to 'fight him off' or expect her to take sole responsibility for them avoiding sin as a couple.

In fact, I believe that God will actually hold the man primarily, though not solely, responsible for this. It is he who will have the role of leadership when the marriage begins and the time of courtship is his chance to develop that leadership role prior to the wedding. The best way he can do that is by leading the woman towards godliness and purity and away from sin. However, the man in particular has another

duty, which may be very difficult for him, especially if he is young and surrounded by worldly companions at school or university.

He needs to make it clear to everyone who knows him that he is *not* sleeping with his girlfriend or fiancée and that *nothing at all* is happening sexually. That is difficult for young men today because there is ferocious peer pressure to conform to the world's standards on sex. Therefore, a young man who does what is right, and who *lets it be known that he is doing right*, is likely to be savagely ridiculed and despised by other young men. That is, admittedly, a high price to pay, but it must be paid nonetheless. In short, he must allow his own reputation to be harmed, in the warped minds of those worldly young men, in order to protect the reputation of the young woman he hopes to marry.

Many young men find this peer pressure intensely intimidating and are therefore afraid to be open about the fact that they are waiting for marriage because they fear being mocked for it. I don't pretend that it is easy, but it is still right and necessary. Moreover, it is good practice for the man in learning how to reject this world's values and standards and to defy its expectations. That is very useful because that same young man will need to be brave enough to stand apart from the crowd in many other ways too as he goes on into his career and also into any ministry that God gives him.

Having found the right husband or wife, a wise person then works very hard at making their marriage a success. They put their spouse ahead of everyone, and everything, except God.

We have seen how vital it is to take great care in choosing the right husband or wife, and not to rush into it. However, your task of building a strong marriage does not end there. Succeeding in your marriage is a lifelong job and, after your walk as a disciple, it is your biggest priority. It comes ahead of you career, your ministry, and even your children. That fact ought to be obvious, but, sadly, it very often isn't. Many couples, even if they are mature Christians, do not realise:

- a) how important their marriage is in God's eyes,
- b) that it comes ahead of all other things except God
- c) that marriage has to be worked at consistently and that it does not succeed automatically, but requires ongoing effort and sacrifice

If this has not been how you have viewed your marriage to date, then adjust your priorities today and greatly increase your efforts. Begin to treat your husband or wife as God intends you to, and indeed as you promised you would in the vows you made on your wedding day, whether or not you realised their full significance at the time. The best thing a man can do for his children, after following God with all his heart and soul, is to love his wife, their mother.

The same is equally true of the wife. The children need to see her honouring and respecting her husband, their father. For one thing, the success or failure of their own marriages, and also of their families, may depend on the example they see you setting. God and your spouse must therefore be put into their correct places, as priorities number one and two in your life – and in that order. Then all the other priorities, including children, career and ministry, will automatically find their right places beneath them in the 'hierarchy'.

If so, then they will be handled properly. But if your career, children, or ministry are ever put ahead of your husband or wife, then everything will end up going wrong and not being what it was meant to be. There is not space in this book to look in full detail at how to make marriage a success, but I do hope to write a whole book on that one subject in due course. For now, however, I would simply make the following brief points:

Some guidelines for how to build a successful marriage

1. Honour your husband or wife in every way you can. Never do or say anything either to them, or about them, that would diminish them in their own eyes, or in the eyes of others, especially your children. In particular, never belittle them, not even in jest. It is your role to build them up, and never to tear them down, especially when you are with others.
2. Remember that cruel, bitter, hurtful words, once said, cannot be unsaid and can be very hard for your spouse to forget, such that they can still be causing damage, even years later. Therefore, stop and think before you speak and take great care what you say, no matter how angry or upset you may be at that moment. Your anger may fade, but the memory of your rash words in your spouse's mind may not.
3. Also, take note of the fact that, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, everything that has been said in secret, including every harsh word or false accusation, will be "*shouted from the rooftops*", for everyone to hear. Once you stop to reflect on it for a moment, you will realise that it will have to be broadcast like that, so that justice can be done, and the truth can be made known. Therefore, think much more carefully about what you say, both to and about your spouse:

² Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Luke 12:2-3 (RSV)

For nothing is hid that shall not be made manifest, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.

Luke 8:17 (RSV)

³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Matthew 12:36-37 (RSV)

4. Forgive often and keep no record of wrongs. Of all the people in your life, your spouse is likely to be the one that you need to forgive most often, probably daily, for the simple reason that you are with them daily and on the most intimate level. They are also the one person with whom your unforgiveness would be most destructive, both to you and to them.
5. If you are the husband, then be willing to lead, and to take responsibility, not only for protecting your wife and family, but for being their spiritual guide, counsellor and pastor. That is what God wants, but vast numbers of husbands and fathers today are abdicating and not operating as the leader at all. They leave it to their wives to lead, not only in the family, but in the church as well. This is something for which husbands will be held accountable at the Judgment Seat. Therefore, let the reality of that impending judgment sink in and cause you to tremble and let that apprehension affect how you act now.
6. If you are the wife, then not only allow, but encourage, your husband to take the lead. Also, be willing to submit and to follow him, and make it easy for him to lead. Even if he makes mistakes, as he inevitably will, your patience, respect and support, together with your advice and input, will help him to learn from them. He will then become a better leader to you, and your children, as the years go by. Likewise, the wife will also be held accountable, at the Judgment Seat, for how she behaved as a wife and how she treated her husband. Again, the anticipation of being judged on that awesome day should cause every wife to quake with fear, which is exactly what is meant by 'the fear of the LORD'.

7. If you are the husband, then love your wife and be sensitive, nurturing, patient and kind. Also make it your aim to be romantic. Don't ever underestimate the importance of romance, as so many foolish husbands do, even within the Church. As I said, every woman has been created by God with a deep need for romantic love. He made them that way *on purpose*, not by accident. Therefore, to withhold that from them is a form of abuse which will damage them and make them embittered and unhappy.
8. The most usual response from a woman who is starved of love is to begin to rebel against her husband's leadership. A woman won't follow a man, or meet his need to be respected by her, if he doesn't meet *her need* for love, including romantic love. At least she will not do it for long. Therefore, wise up and become a romantic type, even if it does not come naturally to you, such that you have to work at it in the beginning.
9. At the same time, if you are the wife, then *respect* your husband. It is interesting that apostle Paul never tells the wife to *love* her husband. He knows she will already do so automatically, because God has programmed that into her. At the same time, Paul never tells the man to respect his wife, as he knew that it is love, not respect, that women yearn for. Conversely, it is respect, not love, that men yearn for. Nevertheless, very few husbands ever get such respect today, partly due to the rise of misguided 'feminism', which makes a virtue out of belittling men, as if doing so somehow elevates women. In fact, it only degrades them. Feminism is an unbiblical set of beliefs and values which has brought only damage and misery in its wake. Indeed, it is a 'doctrine of demons' which was intentionally designed to harm family life.
10. Therefore, many wives make the mistake of focusing on trying to *love* their husbands, when it is actually her *respect* that he most craves. At the same time, many men do a lot of other things for their wives, including respecting them, when it is actually *love* that they really want, but are not getting. Discovering that husbands and wives are so completely different in these ways, *and that they crave for entirely different things*, will help you to provide what is actually most needed by your spouse. Then you can stop misguidedly trying to give him or her what *you* want, when that is not what *he or she* wants. Here is a very important passage in which Paul addresses these issues:

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5:22-33 (ESV)

11. Never waste a single moment in anger, bitterness or resentment. Do all you can to forgive offences willingly and to end arguments quickly. My wife and I have been very successful in this way, although it took us many years. When we were a young couple, arguments would be frequent and could last for hours or even days. They could also be quickly reignited. But, over the years, we have both made a concerted effort to make arguments fewer and shorter and with ever wider gaps in between. As a result, they are now only very occasional and last only minutes, or even seconds, before they are resolved. That reduction in conflict won't occur by itself. It has to be *made to happen* by a mutual determination to practice ongoing forgiveness and self-control and always to honour each other.

12. Always remember that your husband or wife is a *sinner*, with a *flesh nature*, and that that is what you are dealing with. But remember also that the very same is true of *you*, and is what your spouse has to put up with. Even if God gives you an excellent spouse, they are probably not yet wise, but only simple at best. That is almost certainly true when you first get married. God is not likely to provide you with the woman in Proverbs 31 on your wedding day, already fully prepared earlier by Him, and having no need to grow or mature. And, if you are a woman, He is even less likely to provide you with apostle Paul for a husband.
13. Therefore, even if you are both sincere and committed Christians when you marry, the likelihood is that you are both simple, not wise, and that both of you still have a lot to learn. Therefore, be realistic about what you are, what your spouse is, and how much you each need to change. Then be patient with each other as that task of changing goes along. Never forget that you and your spouse have not yet even been fully sanctified, let alone glorified. That state of perfection will only occur when we die.
14. Remember also that one of your roles as a husband or wife is to help your spouse to *become* what God wants them to be, but which they currently are not. Moreover, I believe that at the Judgment Seat we shall each be held accountable, at least in part, for how our spouse ends up, not just for what we do ourselves. That is, *we* are partly responsible for how well *they* do and for whether they grow and mature spiritually and become a strong, solid disciple and bear fruit. Thus, there is no point in you bewailing the fact that your spouse has faults, sins and weaknesses, when one of the very reasons why God put your spouse with you was so that *you* could assist God in *His* objective of helping your spouse to change and mature.
15. Therefore, your job is to help your spouse to become everything that God wants them to be and to bear the fruit that He wants them to produce. Thus, if you were to try to criticise your spouse on the Day of Judgment in order to justify your own actions, Jesus might well say to you, "*But I consider you to be partly responsible for his/her spiritual condition. Therefore, the fact that he/she continued to behave in that way, or failed to overcome that weakness is, at least in part, your fault.*" Let the prospect of having that said to you sober you.
16. To complain about your spouse's faults, sins and deficiencies would be like a gardener, having been appointed to tend a garden, moaning that it needs several things doing to it, plus regular upkeep. The employer, like God, might then say "*Isn't that what I employed you to do?*" In other words, why would he appoint you to tend a perfect garden, which requires no work, and which is already exactly as he wants it to be? That ideal state of affairs is meant to be the end result of *your* ministry as a spouse and also, of course, of God's own sanctifying work in your spouse's life. It is not the current position, and is certainly never the starting point, but it is what you are meant to be trying to bring about in your spouse's life.
17. One of the very reasons why God put you together was to *help each other to become* what each of you are meant to be and for each of you to fulfil your potential. God therefore wants you to work alongside Him, assisting Him in His larger and wider project of sanctifying and maturing each of you. A partial role in that process has been delegated to you by God. You need to realise that you have that duty and take it seriously. However, it is important to distinguish between how *God* wants your spouse to change and how *you* might want them to change. This is a particular problem for wives, many of whom marry their husband with the private aim of changing him.
18. That may sound like what I have just been advocating, but it isn't. It is only *God's* plans, intentions and agenda for change that need to be pursued, *not yours*, however right you might consider yourself to be about what your spouse ought to be, do and think. Therefore, instead of working out what *you* think is wrong with your spouse, setting your own objectives for them, and trying to make yourself the agent of change, just cooperate with what God is doing. To alter the previous analogy, you should act like a junior gardener, following and abiding by the plans of the 'Head Gardener', not seeking to superimpose your own plans onto His, let alone in place of His.

19. Therefore, each spouse should seek to discover God’s general plans for the development of their own character and their own sanctification. They should also seek to find out what God’s specific plans and intentions are for their spouse in terms of career, ministry, personal fulfilment and any other unique activities or goals that God intends for them. These will be identified as you go along by way of God’s specific guidance. However, they will often be revealed by looking at your individual gifts and interests, plus any yearnings that each of you may have, which could indicate that God is calling you into certain jobs or ministries.
20. As these are discovered, and as it becomes clearer what God is calling each of you to do or be, seek to support that process rather than to dictate matters or take over. This too is part of the overall process of change or growth. But it has to be about what *God* wants for your spouse, not what *you* think they should be or do, or how *you* think he or she should change.
21. Thus, if your spouse has a dream of becoming something in particular, and if God seems to be in that, and to be confirming it, then you need to give all the help and encouragement you can to help your spouse to fulfil their calling. Again, this must not be done manipulatively, in order to fulfil your own personal goals for your spouse, but only to help them to fulfil *God’s goals* for them.
22. The wife needs to realise, and must try hard to remember, that it is her job to *tell her husband* what she is thinking or feeling and not expect him to be a mind reader. Many wives think to themselves, “*If my husband really loved me he would already know that I am feeling XYZ and would not need to be told.*” Once you pause for a moment to consider it, the absurdity of that statement becomes apparent. However, partly due to demonic whispering, it is not apparent to a lot of women and it therefore causes a great deal of needless grief. So, if you think or feel something, then *say it*, in very clear, simple words, and as graciously as you can.

The vital importance of “leaving and cleaving”

This is a more complex issue, and takes longer to explain, so I will deal with it under its own heading. When a couple get married they must both leave their parents behind and cleave to their new husband or wife, not just in terms of the house they live in, but in every sense. Moses says this in Genesis in regard to the man, but it also applies to the wife:

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.
Genesis 2:24 (RSV)

Instead of this, in many marriages, one spouse or the other, or even both, are still tied to their parents and to their opinions, beliefs and ways of operating. They may also allow their parents to ‘speak into their marriage’ and to make critical comments about their spouse. A wise parent won’t do that anyway, but a foolish or wicked one will, and it can be very damaging and can badly undermine trust. Therefore, keep your parents out of your marriage and don’t betray your spouse by discussing private details about them with your parents or by complaining about them. Also, don’t insist on maintaining your parents’ traditions or habits or on doing things their way. Find your own way, together, between the two of you.

You must also exclude from the marriage any previous boyfriend or girlfriend, or even a previous spouse if you are widowed. This is a rarer problem, but it still happens. Many people still remain partially attached, in their minds, emotions and spirit, to a previous boyfriend/girlfriend or a deceased spouse. If that is so in your case you need to repent of it and to end that relationship completely, even inside your own mind, so that you are 100% committed to your spouse and to nobody else. That is why the wedding ceremony contains the vital words “... *and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him (her) so long as you both shall live*”.

You both need to absolutely rule out all consideration of divorce, so that, no matter how upset or angry you may be, it is simply not an option

In the past, when society's attitude to marriage was more biblical, there was a widespread assumption, even amongst non-Christians, that divorce was socially unacceptable and, therefore, not an option. Indeed, until relatively recently historically, it was not even legal to get divorced except on very narrow grounds, most notably adultery, and, even then, there was a high burden of proof. So, in those days, which persisted until the 1960s, it was part of our culture that you *don't* get divorced.

That operated as a powerful constraint and the expectations of the community, or 'peer pressure', caused people to try much harder with their marriages so as to work things out and also to 'tough it out', and endure the problems while doing so. However, those cultural expectations and constraints crumbled away steadily during the 1970s and 1980s until, by the 1990s, divorce had become not only socially acceptable, but even an expectation.

At any rate it is now considered to be entirely possible that a marriage might end in divorce, not only by the friends and relatives, but by the couple themselves. Therefore, very many people enter into marriage with the thought, even if it is only at the back of their mind, that if the marriage 'doesn't work out', then divorce will at least provide a way of escape from it. Then they can start again with someone else, almost as if they were treating this marriage as a 'dummy run', or training exercise, from which they can learn lessons ready for the next time.

I can remember a young woman who was part of the same intake with me when I joined the police in 1983. She was getting married and was planning her wedding and she said to one of the other WPCs, "*I give it five years*". She meant that her *own expectation* was that the marriage would probably only last five years and would then, in her opinion, be likely to end in divorce. Moreover, she felt no shame or stigma about that, so much so that she was willing to say it openly. It hardly needs to be said that any marriage is doomed to fail if it is entered into with that attitude, even if it isn't said out loud.

That WPC was unusual in terms of her willingness to express her thoughts out loud, but not particularly unusual in having them. Such attitudes are increasingly common, even if they are only latent, unspoken and buried deep in people's minds. The problem is that marriage is difficult, whoever you are. Thus, even if apostle Paul was to marry the woman from Proverbs 31, they would still have their difficult times, at least at the beginning, until they learn how to succeed at marriage.

So, if you want your marriage to last for life, and to be happy, then enter into it with a rock solid inner conviction that, however hard it may be, and whatever problems have to be overcome, divorce is *simply not an option for you*. Even if you did not enter your marriage with that resolve, adopt it now, belatedly, and change your attitude. You need to burn your boats, as the Vikings were reputed to do, so that the soldiers knew there was no way back and that they must therefore conquer or die. That knowledge affected the way they fought and increased their determination.

If you don't have this immovable inner resolve, which is, after all, only what you promised on your wedding day, then you are likely to buckle and give in when the pressures mount, as they inevitably will. You need to have it firmly imprinted into your mind, in bold capital letters, and in a very large font, that this marriage is *for life* and that there is *no way out of it*. Then, when you are in the middle of a row, or are feeling angry, bitter, hurt or resentful, it will affect the way you conduct yourself and also what you say.

Instead of lashing out with cruel, wounding words or complaining to your friends, or, even worse, ringing a lawyer to discuss a potential divorce, you will say to yourself, "*This is the person I will be with for the rest of our lives and so I have got to find a way to resolve this*". No matter what has been said or done, and no matter how angry you feel, and whether you are in the right or the wrong, the recollection that you are bound together for life will bring you back from the brink of saying or doing something unwise.

Instead, you will force yourself to find some way to forgive, or to repent or apologise, or to change your own conduct, or to be patient with your spouse's conduct. Anything is possible to those who know they have no alternative and no way out. It is remarkable what a difference it makes to accept that fact because "necessity is the mother of invention" in marriage as well as in science and industry. It enables you to find a way forward somehow, as our parents' and grandparents' generations recognised, but which our own generation doesn't.

Therefore, let that solemn vow, which you took on your wedding day, profoundly affect the way you handle all conflict resolution. When there is an argument, let that vow cause you to humble yourself, to control your tongue, to make the first move, to be the first to say sorry, to be quick to forgive and slow to blame, and even slower to accuse. Let the whole conversation be conducted within the rigid framework of the acceptance that this is the person you have got to be with for life, through thick and thin, in good times and bad, in sickness and health and so on.

Let that knowledge affect every part of your thinking, speech, attitudes, actions *and reactions*. I stress that last word because many believe that if they have been wronged, then they are free to do as they wish in return. That is not so. We are still under a duty to control ourselves, and especially to control our tongues, whether we are right or wrong, and whatever wrong has been done to us.

Many of the problems we face in marriage are caused, or increased by, demonic interference and sabotage.

The demons are active in undermining, deceiving and discouraging us in every aspect of our lives, including our marriage, thereby adding yet further to our difficulties. They are also involved in our churches. Indeed, they will operate wherever we will allow them to do so, even if we are trying to prevent them, because they are determined and persistent enemies, as well as being highly skilled, with nearly 6000 years of experience in opposing and deceiving human beings.

Communication is not fully effective, even at the best of times. Perhaps 20-50% of what is said between husband and wife is either not heard at all, or is misheard, misunderstood, or wrongly remembered. This is already the case, quite apart from what the demons do in addition, seeking to make the position even worse. There may be a number of reasons for that ineffectiveness in communications, including:

- a) poor listening skills to begin with and a failure to give focused, undivided attention
- b) the hearer trying to think of what they might want to say in reply, while the other is still speaking, rather than concentrating 100% on genuinely *listening* to what is being said, without any regard to how to reply or getting ready to defend or justify him or her self
- c) the hearer's own pent up 'reservoir' of anger, bitterness and resentment about past events which have never been properly forgiven. These are then brought back 'out of the cupboard', whenever an argument arises, to be used as ready-made ammunition with which to hit back. Or past grievances are silently nursed in the hearer's own mind, even while their spouse is speaking, thus creating another distraction and further reducing their ability to listen.

There may well be other factors too, which will vary from couple to couple. However, on top of all those ordinary problems, there will also be the intervention of demons, whispering into your mind, and also into your spouse's mind, to intensify the existing confusion, misunderstanding and tension, and to create yet more. This makes it even harder to listen to or understand each other because each spouse's flesh nature is revved up and agitated by the demons' whisperings.

That causes each spouse to over-react, or to react badly, and then to inflame the situation yet further by making unhelpful, unkind, unnecessary comments. But they might never have said those things at all were it not for the demon's intervention. Amongst the couples I have counselled such outbursts and

loss of temper tend to be more common on the wife's part, although husbands can certainly do it too. A far more common response from the husband, however, is to become silent and withdrawn, to give up on conversation, and become generally uncommunicative. Both reactions are damaging and the demons know that.

Therefore, they are actively involved *on both sides*, seeking to make use of the wife's sinful flesh nature, usually to get her to lose her temper while, at the same time, seeking to use the husband's flesh by getting him to go silent and to withdraw. Ideally, the demons want to get him to give up on communication altogether, especially with difficult or sensitive topics. The demons want each person to lean even more in whatever direction their sinful flesh nature is already causing them to lean. The demons' aim is to maximise the intensity and duration of the dispute and to add to each spouse's 'reservoir' of bitterness and the perceived 'record of wrongs' done to them.

In addition to that, some of the arguments that couples have are over things that the other spouse never meant, or even that they never actually said at all. They were, in fact, whispered into the hearer's mind by a demon. They can very easily deceive you into taking their whisperings on board, as if they were your own thoughts. In that way the demon can create false memories in your mind as to what your spouse said, or what you wrongly thought they meant, and thereby cause you to become more angry, bitter and resentful than you would otherwise have been.

They can do all this by whispering into your mind but with the words being heard by you, in your head, *in your own voice and accent, as if you had thought it yourself*. They will also use the pronoun 'I', rather than 'you', so that you assume it to be your own thought. They know very well that if they whispered into your mind in the second person, saying "You... ..", then you would immediately realise that that was not your own thought and that someone else was somehow speaking to you.

However, they can do even better than that in that they can also speak to *you* by imitating the voice of your *spouse*, i.e. while he or she is speaking. When demons do this they carefully ensure that their whispering is heard, in your mind, *as if it was your spouse's voice*, which they can imitate just as skilfully as they can imitate your voice. They will go about it the opposite way round this time by ensuring that it is said in the second person, rather than the first person, i.e. saying "you", not "I", so as not to give the game away.

In this way, couples can sometimes be absolutely convinced that they heard the other one say XYZ, while the other insists they never said it at all and is at a loss to understand how their spouse can have been so utterly mistaken. They are both then likely to blame the other and to assume that the other is being either dishonest or hysterical.

The demon would never go so far as to try to plant such thoughts at any length, i.e. saying whole sentences as if they were from your spouse. It would be hard for them to get away with that. But if their interjections are short, and come in the midst of heated arguments, they can be much harder to detect. That way you are more likely to fall for it, especially if it is just a single familiar buzz word or phrase, which you have come to find intolerable, and which the demons know will provoke an explosive reaction because it has become like a red rag to a bull to you.

However, the good news is that no matter how long you have been married, and whether you are doing badly or well, and even if you are both at your wits end, it really is possible to turn it all around. In fact, that can actually be done quite easily *if you are both* willing to work at it, and to keep doing so for long enough. But even if it is only you who can see where the marriage is going wrong, and only you who is willing to change, success can still be achieved. It will just take longer. But your spouse will eventually join in, and begin to change, if you are willing to go first and to lead the way, for a while, all by yourself.

Therefore, be willing to be the first to change, the first to apologise, and the first to exercise self-control, even if for weeks, months, or even years, your spouse doesn't join in with you. Keep at it for

as long as it takes until they do. Never put a deadline on it or the demons will simply make sure that your spouse does not respond to you within that stated time period. Therefore, make it completely open-ended and keep going *“for as long as you both shall live”*, as you vowed on your wedding day. If you do that then you will find that things come right in the end.