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Your Christian Marriage Restoration Station ~ Your Marriage Is your First Ministry ~ Christian Marriage Network ~ Marriage Works!

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# Stay Connected

18 Meditations To Help You Build a Marriage That Works!

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# **Stay Connected:**

## **18 Meditations Celebrating National Marriage Week 2012**

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# Preface

A few years ago I, Kevin, heard author & pastor Andy Stanley say, “Our competition is not other churches; it’s anywhere else people could be on a Sunday morning.” Those words stuck with me, and became the catalyst for the eBook you’re reading.

When we started Marriage Works! almost three years ago, two things became apparent very quickly: 1) we were not the only marriage educators on the block, and 2) they were *not* our competition. Instead, we were competing against dysfunctional & unhealthy marriages. With our real competitor in focus, it became easy for us to partner with others who, like us, were fighting for healthy, loving, working, and lasting marriages and family relationships. This collaborative eBook is the product of that partnership.

It features the writings of 18 passionate marriage advocates who have dedicated themselves to educating, encouraging, and inspiring individuals and couples from all walks of life who seek to build a loving, lasting marriage.

As we celebrate National Marriage Week 2012, we encourage you to:

1. Accept this eBook as our gift
2. Read each entry repeatedly
3. Begin practicing what you read

No matter what shape your marriage is in, we believe it can get better. Here’s to this eBook being a step in that direction for you!

Standing for healthy, functional marriages ...

*Kevin & Cecilia Bullard*  
Marriage Works!



# What If?

**What if** your marriage was not mostly about your personal happiness?

**What if** the purpose of your marriage was simply to love your husband or wife?

**What if** love was your *only* motive? Not getting him or her to do what you want; not having your needs met; not even receiving their love in return.

**What if** this exact same kind of love was also your spouse's only motive?

Can you even imagine it?

- Intimacy would be more important than conformance to a set of desired or expected behaviors.
- There would be lots of lavish, unselfish giving, without pre-condition or the expectation of receiving something in return.
- You would take great delight in delighting each other. For each of you, your highest pleasure would be found in giving pleasure to the other.
- You would be able to love each other "*as if*" selfless love was actually already your true marriage paradigm, even when it appears not to be true.
- Your relationship would take priority over your rights.
- Your marriage would be filled with joy and peace. The atmosphere in your home would be charged with generosity, honor, grace and love. Can you imagine that?

**What if?**

# Truth Is Foundational

In marriages today, too many people are being deceived by the lies that they are being fed by culture. Lies that tell us what marriage should or shouldn't look like, what love should or shouldn't feel like, and what our commitment should or shouldn't require of us. Our culture has become a place that glorifies people who follow their heart, don't exhibit self-control and won't tell themselves 'no.' These deceptions we buy into affect how we see every aspect of our marriages. It is why we at Marriage Life Ministries believe it is crucial that we become deliberate in telling ourselves the truth.

[Proverbs 23:7](#) tells us, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." One of our favorite authors, A.W. Tozer, states, "Whatever you think about most will become the biggest thing in your life." Whatever we tell ourselves, whatever "tapes" we allow to play through our heart and mind every day are the things we will end up believing. And, we will end up behaving in accordance to what we believe. Why? Because thoughts affect feelings, and feelings affect actions. Conversely, actions affect feelings, and feelings affect thoughts.

Successful marriages consist of two people who are willing to do the work, press on past the tough times towards the good, remain faithful to their commitment, and love their spouse even when they don't feel like it. Successful marriages are ones that live by truth.

# Peanut Butter

Living in close quarters with another person brings to light many of our hilarious and annoying little quirks.

Each married couple has unique ways to work through these things. Our greatest success in this area is called, "Peanut Butter."

Peanut Butter's inception was when we were dating in college. Jake thought flirting consisted of tickling Melissa's neck and/or picking her up and spinning her around. Two things which happen to be actions that make her completely lose control. Kicking, swearing, drooling...you name it. It was not pretty. One time Jake spun Melissa around and when she tried to get away, she accidentally put two vertical scratches on each of his eyelids. When Jake closed his eyes the man looked like Voldemort. (You know with the red, slit-like snake eyes?)

Thus the phrase "Peanut Butter" was coined. It meant, "I am serious, you really need to stop what you're doing now." (To stop the tickling and so forth.)

Over the years Peanut Butter has been handy in other ways. We've used it in fights as a way of grabbing the other person's attention. When you're stuck arguing and both people can only focus on their own emotions, having a phrase like Peanut Butter can be a great way to say, "Hey look I really need you to pay attention to what I am saying right now, it's really important."

Peanut Butter can be one of the many creative ways that spouses find to make living together bearable and enjoyable.

# A Man's Role

Men make or break a marriage. God designed us to be the spiritual leaders of our families, to be a guide that trusts in and relies on the Holy Spirit through all life events. Men need maturity in their walk with Christ to have a foundation that a family can be built upon.

A man who is mature in Christ has forgiven those who have hurt him, has developed a skill or expertise to produce a stable income, and is attracted to a woman's spirit rather than her looks. A man like this is free from his past, can provide stability, and understands the beauty of virtuous qualities. He knows how to treat a woman with tenderness. This type of maturity is what a woman can trust and allow herself to be vulnerable to.

All too often young people get married with none of those marks. They marry based upon emotion or infatuation, there is no real honeymoon since they have been having sex since they started dating, and within five years their selfish expectations have gone unmet and they head for divorce.

Men, there is hope in Christ. Even if your marriage didn't begin in the holiest of ways, Jesus can make all things new. First, it takes a change of heart and a commitment to follow through with your vows. Turn off the TV, spend time with your wife and engage in meaningful conversation. Put God first, honor your wife, and you will see your marriage begin to thrive.



# More Fulfillment

## WHAT IF I TOLD YOU...

that wives could experience more **fulfillment** in marriage?

Chances are, depending on your situation, your response might be excitement or disbelief.

If you're in a state of disbelief, hang in there with me because I understand how you feel.

Just 19 when I said, "I do", I was ignorant about how to grow my marriage. Our pre-marriage counseling consisted of one two-hour meeting with my pastor and that wasn't enough to prepare me for the emotional, spiritual, and verbal abuse my husband doled out on a regular basis. The abuse produced pain and grief, and I could think of little else than surviving. Hope for our future crumbled.

But God had a different plan for my future. Over time, I made **3 CRITICAL DECISIONS**.

1. I turned to **God** when I realized my efforts to heal and grow my marriage weren't enough.
2. Reading **God's Word**, I found out what He wanted to say to me about my role in our marriage and found many verses which helped me reverse negative behavioral patterns in my life. I left the business of changing Tom up to God.
3. I began sharing with godly **mentors** who encouraged me and helped me personalize the wisdom I found in the Bible to my specific marriage.

**Three critical decisions transformed my life and marriage and they offer you more *fulfillment* in yours.**

# One Flesh

When marriage starts on cloud nine we think, “This is easy.” Reality doesn’t take long to set in. Intimacy is difficult. Every marriage has rocky times. When we are in the middle of those times; feeling alone, abandoned and lost, we would give almost anything to escape. However, it is through these incredibly hard times that God molds two people into one flesh. When you are eventually able look back on those rocky times, you will know in an instant that you would go through it all over again to have the one flesh relationship that has developed.

If you are currently in the middle of rocks and hills, keep going! Grab your spouse’s hand and forge onward! Hold fast to each other! As the two of you cling to Jesus and each other He will see you through and light a path for you!

Don’t give up, don’t give in and don’t be deceived into believing that just because the terrain behind you was smoother, that it was a better time and place in your marriage!

The journey to intimacy is hard and wonderful. But the journey is vital! A Biblical one flesh marriage, described in Ephesians 5 is forged by two people growing intimately through the journey of life together! To be completely known, to be in a place of intimacy with our spouse is all a part of God’s beautiful plan of marriage. Be willing to journey together over the rocks and hills and muck! You won’t be sorry you did!

THE  
*Five* Love  
Languages



**Would you go to Denmark and speak Latin? Probably not. How about Spanish in Germany? Umm, no. While you might get away with speaking English in France, you'd be better off speaking French to ensure you communicated effectively with the residents.**

Studies have shown that you and your spouse both speak your own special “love language.” This particular language represents how you most feel loved.

[Take this FREE assessment](#) to discover your love language, and encourage your spouse to do the same. Then, together, begin speaking one another's love language so you both can love each other in the way that is most meaningful.

## Commit 2 Fight

Marriage is always work, but it's the best work ever. One thing we've learned is that we have to work to constantly improve our relationship, and change takes time. But too often, we give up. Too soon, we stop trying. But we encourage you to fight for an extraordinary marriage—not just an “okay” marriage or a “good enough” marriage.

Every time we create false expectations for our spouse, every time we keep score for past mistakes, we are chipping away at the foundation of marriage. And then, we're surprised when it crumbles over a simple argument, like folding the towels (incorrectly) or leaving a dish in the sink.

The root of any argument is simple: Person A didn't perform the way Person B expected him or her to perform.

Sometimes, the degree of hurt or anger varies based on the force of the formula—based on the importance of “his expectation” or “her way.”

The problem is not that we hurt each other. In fact, this is inevitable. The problem is how we deal with broken expectation, disappointment, and hurt. The problem is how we communicate those feelings to one another. And the problem, especially, is how we resolve the issue altogether.

Too often the result is divorce, separation, or ambivalence. But when we learn to communicate effectively, and especially, when we learn to forgive, to let go, and to move forward, our marriages move from ordinary to extraordinary.

# Is It Really Incompatibility?

When our spouse acts or thinks differently from us, sometimes we begin to question compatibility. We think, “This person is not really like me, and sometimes I wonder if he or she is right for me.” Compatibility is certainly a necessary component to evaluate when choosing a life partner, but are differences always an issue of incompatibility?

Have you considered that perhaps your mate is not incompatible with you, but is *complementary* to you. The right person for you will have things in common with you, but will also be different from you in some ways. In a complementary relationship, a couple's differences are there for greater purpose. Your mate's divine differences enhance who you are by bringing skills and

perspectives to the relationship that would otherwise be lacking.

***Complement:** something that fills up, completes, or makes perfect; one of two mutually completing parts; counterpart. ~ Merriam-Webster*

Your spouse is your counterpart. You both bring mutually beneficial aspects to the marriage. Pause and think about how your mate complements you. How does he or she enhance you? What unique attributes do they bring to your relationship? Once you identify how your mate helps to complete your relationship, perhaps you can begin appreciating your differences and rather than despising them? Differences do not necessarily mean incompatibility.

# Prayer, Patience, & Persistence

As much as we would love to tell you that marriage is this blissful time in our lives when everything goes right with the world, we cannot tell a lie. It's not...at least not always. Marriage takes work and plenty of it but it is worth it. It is a living breathing organism that is growing each day and must be nourished in order to grow. There is compromise and sometimes sacrifice and you won't always agree but you must learn to agree to disagree if it is going to work. Prayer, patience, and persistence are key to a successful marriage.

You need prayer to ask God for help to do what you cannot do on your own. Then patience is what you need while God works on you and/or your spouse in the meantime. And finally persistence to continue to go back to God in prayer and to persistently go to your spouse when you need clarity or understanding in a loving way. Only God knows our hearts so it's ok to lovingly share your heart with your spouse. ☺

Smile and enjoy the journey of winning each day! Be encouraged.

# Swinging Marriages

*Trust.* It is foundational to everything that makes marriage-life strong and lifelong. Couples who treasure and nurture it are certain to have a better experience in every area of their relationship from communication to parenting to sexual intimacy. Conversely, when trust is compromised, most every area of the marriage will reflect the deficit.

In the context of marriage, trust is best defined as *a degree of belief that one's spouse is consistently acting in the best interest of the marriage.* In other words, mates perceive each other's words and actions in light of what they assume of each other's motivations. Their degree of trust drives whether husbands and wives assume the best of one another or less of each other.

Marital trust doesn't need to be unqualified or unconditional. The most trusting mates pause occasionally to challenge one another to provide more transparency about their thinking or intentions. Couples who cultivate a healthy environment of trust find that developing mutual transparency is rewarded with increased intimacy—*“show me yours and I'll show you mine.”*

In the end, every marriage experience hinges on how deeply and exclusively one shares with their mate. And how deeply and exclusively one shares with their mate hinges on how much one trusts him or her. The quality of every marriage swings on trust!

# Working Together

My wife and I believe that when God said, “It is not good that man be alone,” He was primarily thinking about procreation and raising children. Did you notice that the privilege of bearing children was given to Adam and Eve exclusively and jointly, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” ([Genesis 1:28](#)).

Knowing that we have an obligation to bring up godly offspring, we work as a tag team to create the right atmosphere for modeling Christian living in our marriage.

Our motto is “Jesus Christ according to us.” Although our children participate in the activities in our local Church, we do not substitute those activities with ours. They know that I am their resident pastor while my wife is the co-pastor.

We introduced our children to a loving and faithful God as the overriding incentive to fellowship with Him. Next, we taught them about God, as the great provider and the powerful protector of the family. Finally, our children were encouraged to believe in the awesome power of his resurrection.

Couples who are in fellowship with God are indirectly modeling their relationship with God to their Children. That’s what Abraham did to earn God’s respect. “For I have known him in other that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord” ([Genesis 18:19](#)). May and I often wonder whether we have done enough to earn that respect, too.



# Compromise & Sacrifice

I learned very early in my Marriage that *Compromise & Sacrifice* are important elements. We were married in June and my Husband left for Medical School in August. We lived apart for two years only seeing one another on weekends and holiday breaks. Why you ask? *Compromise & Sacrifice*.

His Grandfather needed a caregiver and due to his age did not want to move. Marriage is more than blissful happiness. Marriage is a *labor of love*. You will face situations ranging from financial issues, family matters, career goals, or even personal goals that will require *Compromise & Sacrifice*.

The biggest factor of overcoming these obstacles and agreeing to compromise is effective communication. Let down your defensive attitude and put yourself into your spouse's shoes.

There were times I just wanted to live with my husband during those two years. I cried and was very upset at times. However, I knew that I would want my own Grandparents taken care of as well and that it was the best thing for everyone. *Agree to listen, agree to compromise, and most importantly agree to follow through!*

The sacrifice may seem unbearable at times but with patience I learned that all things work for the good. When you compromise and sacrifice for the betterment of your marriage your marriage will benefit. Your relationship will strengthen and give you a new dimension of Love. *Love truly endures all things. Pray together and Seek God together if you are seeking your Loving Lasting Marriage.*

# I'm sorry ...

There are times when we feel like our mate's apology is insincere, and is being given just to appease us. We may feel this way because each of us has our own apology language. Therefore, we're apt to feel that our spouse's apology is most sincere when it is delivered in a way that we'd deliver the apology ourselves



What type of apology do you prefer? How about your spouse?

This [FREE assessment](#) will lead you and your spouse to discover your unique apology language. Take it today to connect with one another on a deeper level!

# Attitude to Forgive

“Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude.” — Martin Luther King Jr.

With 17 years of marriage, we have had our share of ups and downs, and the only thing that keeps us sane is the power of forgiveness on both ends. No couple is perfect, but perfect love encompasses forgiveness. It is what permits the couple to experience an unfailing love. Forgiveness allows us to give and receive compassion when mistakes or hurts are imposed.

However, our attitude about forgiveness is what often keeps us from making this act a part of our daily living. You see living in unforgiveness takes a lot of work. Being in a constant state of how could you, what were you thinking, you will pay for that, and giving the silent treatment takes a lot of effort. Our attitude of unforgiveness affects every part of our life and especially our marriage. Constantly dwelling on the hurt and pain puts you in an offensive frame of mind. Conversely, permitting your attitude to be one of constant forgiveness allows for seeds of hope, compassion, healing, and the ultimate prize of a better marriage to materialize. Forgiveness does not condone the act that caused the pain; forgiveness condones the action of love that will cover the pain.

As we continue to live and grow, mistakes will be made and forgiveness will be in order. Live in the constant attitude of forgiveness and freedom, and watch your marriage flourish.

# Emotional Closeness

The recipe for lasting love.

1. Know, celebrate and share the emotions under your automatic or triggered response.

There are two types of emotions, reactive and primary. Emotions are fast. We are moved by threat into a reactive stance before we even think about it. Learning your primary emotion and how to share your inner world will help you learn to emotionally connect.

Primary emotions are slow and vulnerable. They hide under fast, reactive emotion. Reactive emotion feels hot or hard. When we hide soft, vulnerable feelings and needs in close relationships we can't create close emotional connection. Emotional connection is the glue for close relationships. Emotional connection creates and maintains stability.

When you're triggered the reactive emotion hides your vulnerability. If you slow down to learn about your vulnerable emotions under the reactivity and share those feelings, you will grow as a person and your relationship will get stronger. We think if we hide our vulnerability we'll be perceived as stronger and more lovable. The opposite feels true. It's really hard to be close to someone who's vulnerable feelings are hidden under reactivity. The more we expose vulnerability the closer, and stronger, we become.

It always takes slowing down to get under the hard or hot reactive emotion to find the hidden one. With practice, this can become a fast process. In the beginning it takes effort to figure out the hidden sensitivity beneath your hot/hard reaction. However, hidden emotions are treasures; if you find and share them, you will have a rich and healthy relationship.

## 3 Surefire Marriage Destroyers

There are some common actions that can surely mess up a marriage and we are all guilty of doing some of them at some point in time in our marriage.

Knowing what NOT to do can provide as much information or insight as what to do.

1. **Care more about yourself and your own needs over your spouse's.** If you think marriage is about how much your spouse can do for you, you will find yourself a very lonely person. Your spouse is married to you because of the way you make him/her feel and when you remove that behavior and start focusing on yourself and your needs more than how you make your spouse feel, you're doomed.
2. **Point out all the things your spouse does wrong (wrong in your opinion, that is).**  
When your spouse feels like everything he or she does isn't good enough, what's going to happen? They will stop trying!

The more they feel like a failure in your eyes, you are pushing him/her right to the next person that will make them feel good about themselves.

3. **You think everything should be your way or the highway.** Married couples come from two different upbringings with two different sets of values and beliefs in what life and marriage should be like. Merging these two sets of values together can be a challenge and when you think everything should be done your way, and don't consider the way your spouse wants to do things, you'll be the person left to do everything your way all right!

The 3 points mentioned here aren't God's intention for marriage. If you're guilty of doing these, stop. You don't want to destroy your marriage do you?

# Long-Suffering

One of the fruits of the spirit is long-suffering, according to [Galatians 5:22-23](#). Long-Suffering is defined as one patiently enduring wrongs or difficulties; the quality or capacity of being patient; to endure something with calmness; the ability to willingly accept or tolerate delay or hardship.

Today's society has become impatient in our marriages. Marriage is challenging because you have two individuals from different backgrounds, experiences, educational levels budgeting, each with varying ideas on how to raise children, while attempting to become one-minded. But at the sign of trouble, we quickly try to bail-out, quit and throw in the towel. We treat marriage like a broken device, such as a cell phone or computer. Instead of trying to fix it, we replace it for a newer version.

For many of us we repeat the vows in excitement on our wedding day without making a commitment to the vows, e.g., for better or for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health, till death do us part. Commitment is doing what you said you would do long after the honeymoon phase is gone.

Divorce has become our first option instead of our last or no option. And the bible tells us that God hates divorce ([Malachi 2:16](#)).

My challenge to you today is to have a mind-set to stay committed to your marriage and to have more patience with your spouse, because God is patient with us and all of our flaws.

# Stay Connected

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Christian couples are increasingly using social networks everyday to communicate with friends and family. Connecting with others online also provides a unique opportunity to encourage others and share the Good News.

While the early apostles such as Paul traveled extensively to strange lands introducing the word of God, the Internet allows Christians to directly minister to others globally and fellowship with one another beyond race, nationality or income with the stroke of a computer key.

The Christian Marriage Network (CMN) was created to promote positive, Christian marriages

globally and to bring Christian couples together in a community which supports strong relationships. Couples can create their own pages, blogs, upload videos and music and create their own network communities within CMN.

Recent studies highlight that one out of every two marriages today ends in divorce or separation with Facebook use growing as a leading cause or contributor. CMN offers couples a fresh and positive way to connect themselves with other like-minded Christians. So during Marriage Week, let's continue to support each other and in the words of the CMN tagline, "Stay Connected!"

# Water Into Wine

The unfortunate norm in marriage is for spouses to start out hot and passionate towards one another, then slowly become cold and apathetic. This happens for a myriad of reasons including boredom, children, busyness, career changes, unresolved conflict, self-absorption, etc.

What if, however, husbands and wives became better with time [instead of stale]? Is that possible? With Christ, yes, it is.

In [John 2:1-11](#) we're given the account of Jesus turning up to 180 gallons of water into wine at a wedding reception. When the reception director tasted the wine, he remarked to the groom, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine.

But you have kept the good wine until now." Obviously, Jesus was the one responsible for the wine tasting better later than it did earlier.

What would happen if you allowed Jesus to turn your weary, watered-down marital acts into something special, better, and sweeter than before? How would your spouse respond if all the sudden you had a renewed vigor to serve and be the All-Star spouse you committed to be when you married? How would your marriage be better if you and Jesus partnered so he could work a miracle in your marriage?

Offer God what you currently have, then submit to him as he turns your marriage water into wine.



# Notes

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