

Love and Marriage Part IV Jerry Arnold

Father in Heaven, thank you for the beautiful reminder of trusting and obeying. We are here, Lord, and we want that type of an experience with you. We are praying that you will speak to us Lord. Speak to us through your word. Teach us your ways. Show us how we should be, who we are in you and what our potential may be. We pray that every heart here will be spoken to by your Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

As the story goes, the devil came to church one day, came walking right down the center aisle. As he did that, the people who saw him just kind of shrunk back from terror. The devil made his way all the way down to the very front and sat down next to a gentleman that was seated on the front row. The devil looked at him. The gentleman looked at the devil. The devil said, "Do you know who I am?" The man said, "Yes." The devil said, "Well, how come you are not afraid of me?" The man said, "Why should I be afraid of you? I've been married to your sister for 35 years." Now, ladies, we could say it the other way. It works either way. It could be a woman seated there. "I've been married to your brother for 35 years."

How is it that two people get excited about one another, so excited in fact, that they commit to one another for the rest of their lives. There's an attraction there. They love being with each other. They get married and over time 50% of those first marriages are going to break up, 60% of second marriages are going to break up. Then, of those who stay together, much of it is duty oriented. There are very few statistically actually happy marriages. People stay married, but sometimes it's just because of their Christian morals and expectations of family, culture and church. So they hang in there in the hopes that it is true, when Jesus said, there won't be marriage in heaven. They say, "Well, okay, good, it's worth waiting for."

It is not God's plan that we would enter into marriage and have the relationship deteriorate over time. It's His plan that it would grow and develop until 30, 40, 50 years into marriage we're actually happier than when we were first courting. We love that person more. We're closer to them. We are more intimate than we ever were before. How is it that this excitement can turn into such contention where people can hardly stand being around each other when before they couldn't stand being away? How does it happen? I will tell you, there are a thousand ways that it happens. But there is one foundational way from which everything builds as regards this.

I'm going to read a quote to you from a book called The Adventist Home. It's found on p. 179 in that book and I quote: "The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties though there will be much of this to do, but union with Christ. Picture a large circle from the edge of which are many lines, all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one other."

Picture that circle in your mind. Picture a wheel from a bicycle, spokes all coming to the center. As they get closer to the center, they get closer to one another. The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. All discord, all dissention, all of that is separation from Christ.

Today I want to teach you three simple areas from the Word of God of how to prevent that discord in your relationship. Some of you are not married. I want you to listen carefully because this applies a lot to you. You need to have these things going in your life now, and meet somebody else who has these things going in their life. Then together you can build a wonderful heaven here on earth called home. Those of you who are married already, I have good news for you. It's never too late, never too late to turn a difficult situation around. The three areas are simple but they are profound—the Bible, prayer and communication.

Let's begin with the Bible. II Kings 22. We'll read verses 1 & 2. It says, "Josiah was 8 years old when he became king. And he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of Adiah of Boscarth. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David. He did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." The chapter introduces us to Josiah. He's a young king. The next few verses from verse 3-7 will be his commission to some folks to go check out the temple and see what's going on, and make sure that the money is being paid to the people who are suppose to be repairing it. They are going to discover something in that temple.

Verse 8. Then Hilkiyah, the high priest, said to Shaphan, the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.' And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan and he read it. So Shaphan, the scribe, went to the king bringing the king word saying, 'Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hands of those who do the work who oversee the house of the Lord.' Then Shaphan, the scribe, showed the king saying, 'Hilkiyah, the priest, has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it before the king. Now it happened when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law that he tore his clothes," (a symbol of repentance.)

What is The Book of the Law? What was the Book of the Law for them back then? It was the Old Testament, and not even the entire Old Testament. It was the first five books, the Torah, the Pentateuch, the writings of Moses. That was their Bible. That was the totality of the Word of God back then. It was lost. It had been lost. Where was it hiding? It was hiding in church. And when they were looking for other things they found it, dusted the thing off, read it, read it to the king and the king said, "Whoa! We are way off course. We are destined for judgment from God because of the way we are living." And this young king so convicted by what he heard from the word of God began to set out a national revolution. From reading the scriptures he would call the nation together.

Look at chapter II Kings 23:3 “Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took their stand for the covenant.” Here you have the king. He says, “Look, we are so far adrift from where we’re supposed to be. The word of God says this is what we’re supposed to do. I’m making a covenant today. I’m going to follow the word of God.” And the whole of the people said, “We will too.”

He will go out to do many powerful things. In verse 5 of chapter 23 it says, “... he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense. Verse 11. “... he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the Sun. If you go across to Verse 24 it says, “Moreover, Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritualists and the household gods and idols.” He, under the conviction of God, began to clean the place up and the whole nation was on the throes of a revival and getting back to serving God. Why? Because the word of God was read.

I do not know how it works, but I do know that it works. When we read the Bible, God speaks to us. When we read the Bible, we will be convicted about things in our lives we need to get rid of. There may be idols. There may be spiritualism. I don’t know what it is. But God will speak to us where we’re at. It is imperative in marriage that the couple read the word of God together. It will always keep them focused that they are to be serving God, and they don’t want in their home those things which shouldn’t be in their home.

Now some of you are thinking, “You know, Pastor Jerry, we’ve been married X number of years. It’s not our habit to read the Bible. In fact, when we do read the Bible we get in an argument.” It may be. I want to teach you how to take some steps towards having a good devotional life with your spouse. The steps are simple.

First of all, if it’s a little uncomfortable for you to read the Bible, go to a good Bible book store and buy a devotional book. Devotional books will have a text across the top of the page and then a story that explains the principle or the idea of that text. That is a wonderful way to begin. And what would be great is to begin the practice that in the morning before you head out into your busy day you would read that text and the story, offer a word of prayer of protection over each other and then go on your way. It will change your homes. It will set a tenor in your homes. God will speak to you through that process and miracles will take place. It’s guaranteed.

You may say, “But we’ve got children. We’ve heard about family worship, but it’s difficult. It’s hard to get everybody together.” I know all that. I know how difficult it is. I know how embarrassing it is not to have family worship when I should have. I want to tell you that if you have children, it’s especially easy to have family worship. In fact, I wish every family could have a 3 year old all the time. It’s just easy. You just plopp them on your lap. You read them the Bible story book or you read them a story about the Bible or some good devotional idea, and the whole family becomes better people because of that one little child that is there. That is not a hint Hannah that we need grandchildren.

But there are some awful nice sweatshirts that say, "I'm a great Grandfather." Call your children together and read a little devotional book with them, a story about the Bible, and offer a word of prayer.

Now ladies, you may actually be more inclined to do this than your husband. I want to teach you something here. It's very important that you don't embarrass the man, very important, because his personality may be such that he doesn't feel comfortable to call the family together for worship. It's okay for the woman to do it. I'm asking you to do it graciously, kindly and in a way that makes him the hero. You know how to do it. I've seen girls that are 5 years old who you think they've already been to that charm school. They already know how to wiggle men around their fingers. You know how to do it. You've got the guy one time. You know how to do that. God will bless you. In fact, the role of the wife, if you haven't figured it out yet, is you come up with the ideas, and then the hard thing is convincing him it was his idea. But that's the role of the wife.

So ladies, if the man of the house is not inclined to do this, you can do it. Do it in a gracious way that makes him a hero. "Daddy's going to read to us now" or whatever, but don't confront the guy. "You heathen pagan, aren't you going to lead the family in worship?" It won't work. He's not going to lead the family in worship. So be gracious and be kind. Don't play games. Don't do this subtle "I'm going to punish you quietly" type of thing where you say, "If this family is lost, it's your fault."

Let me ask you something. If you ladies were driving in the car with your husband and he was steering and had some medical problem, and all of a sudden he's in a daze and he let's go of that wheel, are you going to sit there and say, "It's your fault if we crash?" What are you going to do? You're going to reach over and grab the wheel and try to get that thing stopped and safe. Don't play games about this worship stuff.

Ladies, if you have it in your heart, and your husband isn't where you're at, it's all right. Gently get him there. Fellows, if you have it in your heart, and your wife doesn't have it in her heart, gently bring her on board. The key operative word is gently. But God will bless you, he will bless your relationships, he will bless your home if you will build an experience around reading your Bible together.

What about prayer? Look at Matt 6:6. It says, "But you, when you pray go into your room, and when you have shut your door pray to your father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." This is a powerful, powerful principle—praying privately, praying for God's blessing on you and your family and others in different situations. You do that privately and God rewards openly.

But he also rewards family prayer. Look at Acts chapter 10. You'll have a short story; well we're going to make it short today. It actually uses up quite a bit of scripture, the story of Cornelius. "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always." This is a picture of a man, he's a Gentile, he's a roman officer, he's from Italy and he's there in

Caesarea. He's known for being a good man, but he's also known for praying with his household. The entire household is involved in praying for one another. This man is so honored by God that God sends an angel to talk to Peter and sends Peter to this man's house. and when Peter comes and speaks to this household, the entire family is saved. The entire family accepts Christ as their Savior. It is imperative to create an environment where your children hear their names offered in prayer.

I want to share with you the power of prayer in a relationship. Sometimes it's hard to share with your spouse what you really feel about them, how much you care. Some guys are just flowered tongued fellows. I'm not. And it's hard to share. Here's what I've learned. If you kneel down with your wife and you pray to God, and you start to tell God how much you appreciate the wife that He has given you, trust me fellows she'll be listening. And she knows you're not going to lie to God. Right?

Here's another thing that works. There have been times that I've been human, and I've acted like it. I've been sinful, and I needed to ask Karen for forgiveness, and I have found that by praying together and asking God for forgiveness and asking God to give her forgiveness for me, it is incredible how open and honest it is that you can be in that environment. For me, and I know for others, it is easier in that environment than it is to not be in the presence of God doing that. Hearts will be knit together in an environment of prayer.

Last week I told you if you came back this week I would teach you how to win an argument without arguing. Many of you are here, and you've been arguing all week as to how he's going to do that. I want you to turn to Matthew 1. I will read just the beginnings of a story that is very familiar to you and quite seasonal. Mary is pregnant (verse 18). "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: after his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Sprit. Then Joseph her husband (who's actually her fiancé) being a just man and not wanting to make her a public example was minded to put her away secretly."

Now here's what's happening in the background. Mary hears that her relative Elizabeth is pregnant. So she goes and spends time with her. Elizabeth lives in a different town. When Mary comes back it's probably 3 or 6 months later, and she comes back pregnant. She's been gone to a different town. She comes back. We don't know how she tells Joseph. We don't know if she comes skipping into the wood shop, "Hey Joseph, guess what? This is so exciting." We don't know how she tells him. But at some point she tells Joseph she is pregnant. Now Joseph adds two plus two, "... been gone for 3-6 months, been in another town, comes back pregnant, wasn't me, I'm done with you. I'm not going to have that kind of woman in my home. I'm not going to be associated with it. I don't want to make a public spectacle of you, but we are done." He puts her away privately.

Now to make matters worse in Joseph's perspective, Mary has the audacity to mock him by saying, "Hey, by the way it's God's baby." Now, how do you prove that ladies? How would you prove that? You cannot prove that. There's no argument. There is no DNA

testing that they could do. There is no way she can convince Joseph of her situation. But what she says is true. It is God's baby.

So what does she do? She leaves. She goes home. How many of you think she slept that night? She doesn't sleep. The Bible doesn't tell us what she did, but I know what she did and so do you. She spent the night praying. Her life is an absolute train wreck right now. She can't explain anything to anybody. Nobody's going to believe her. She's just about as innocent as can be. Yet here is all this trouble that has come upon her. What does she do? She prays. And in the context of praying and helplessness, "Lord I can't convince this guy, I can't change his mind, I don't know what to do." While she is praying all night Joseph is home, and God sends an angel. Joseph has a dream and that angel says, "She's right. You marry her, and you take care of her, and you take care of that baby."

Now here is the power of prayer in marriage. Many times you're going to be right, it's true. You're just going to be right and the other person's going to be wrong. Do you know what we have a tendency to do when we know we're right? Get loud. We even get louder if we're a little insecure about how well we know we're right. In fact, usually the less convinced we are we're right the more emotional we get, and arguments ensue.

Now here's how God wants you deal with that situation. Just pray about it. Let God work on the heart of your spouse. Give them the freedom to come to it. It's possible to be right but to be very wrong in the way that we are right. We have to remember that there are certain principles at work in the human heart. One of those principles is simply this—the freedom to choose. Jesus died on Calvary to preserve your freedom to choose. That is something we know intuitively. We know the one dignity we have on this sin scarred world is that we can choose. We can choose to be saved. We can choose to be lost. That dignity of choice is so powerful within us, that it can be illustrated in a simple illustration as to how powerful it is.

I have a pen. Picture this pen laying on the floor in any couples living room. There sits the couple, man and wife. They are seated on the couch. They look down. There is the pen. One of them, doesn't matter which one, starts to reach down to pick up that pen. They get halfway down and the other one says, "Honey pick up that pen." In most cases the person will draw back. Why? They had chosen to do it already but midstream the other person stole the choice away and actually enslaved them to an action. And they said "No, I'm not doing it." They back away. This is a principle that we have to understand in relationships. Even if you're right, you've got to let the other one come to it with dignity. It has to be their choice to believe it, and to understand it and to accept it. And Mary, helpless as she was, committed the whole thing to God and God took care of it.

So the next time that you're right, you know you're right, but you can't convince the other one, you don't have to get loud, you don't have to get excited. You don't have to do any of that. Truth carries its own weight. Truth is the commodity of heaven. Truth comes from heaven. Truth is associated with Jesus. If it's true, God will work on your behalf. He'll change their ideas. He'll change their thoughts for you. They'll come to it

and you can just sit back. You never want to say this. "Well, you finally got there. I always knew it." No, you get excited for them. "Wow, yea, I think you're right. I've seen it the same way too." And you encourage one another in the Lord. Prayer. Prayer is so very powerful.

What about the home where you have a believer and an unbeliever? Prayer is even more necessary. The principles in the scriptures are that you win other people by your deeds; not by your arguments. How many of you would like to eat fish eyeballs? I don't want to. I understand they are considered quite delicious by Eskimos. But I don't want to do that. But suppose somebody's convinced that we should do that. But we don't really want to. But every time you're around that person they say, "Hey, have you tried the eyeballs yet?" What will your tendency be? What do you want to do? Stay away from that person. Why? You're tired of hearing about eyeballs. In fact, all you have to do is look at them and you see eyeballs. "Oh man, they're going to say it at some time."

Listen, I know some people, very sincere who think they are doing right in serving God, but their adult children don't even want to go to their house anymore, because they know every time they go there's going to be some lecture at some point at some time. Mom and Dad are going to say something about church. Right? You get tired of hearing that. If you are married to an unbeliever, live a godly life. Let that be the witness. You don't have to say a word.

In fact, you can look to the story of Joseph. Joseph never says to Potipher, "Man you've got the wrong God, Buddy. This whole nation's wrong. Let me tell you about the God of Abraham, and Isaac and my father Jacob." You don't see that anywhere. He's not there doing an evangelistic series. He's in a circumstance. And he says, "Look, I'm here, I'm going to serve God. I'm going to be as faithful and do the best I can. Potipher discerns that God has His hand of blessing of Joseph and he says, "I want in on that." So if you're married to an unbeliever, that's your pattern. You will live your life. You don't argue your life. Let your life argue for you.

Communication. II Samuel 6. Every family therapist that I've ever talked to says that one of the destructive natures of relationships is bad communication. And it's usually not that they aren't speaking anymore, although that happens. Usually what happens is they are saying a lot of things, but they are not saying them in a very kind way. And they are certainly not being listened to.

In II Samuel 6 you have an interesting story in verse 13. It says, "And so it was when those bearing the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep." This is talking about David. "Then David danced before the Lord with all his might, and David was wearing a linen ephod. David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through the window and saw King David leaping and whirling with all his might before the Lord. She despised him in her heart."

Well David's going to dismiss the crowd and he's going to give them meat and cakes of raisins and bread. And they are all going to go home and he's going to go home. Michal is one of his wives. In verse 20 it says, "David returned to bless his household. And Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out to meet David and said." Notice how she says this. "How glorious was the king of Israel uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself." Did she say it that way? No, she's squirting venom. She's got acid, sarcasm, and condemnation. It's just there. She's hateful in her speech, but she communicates. Do you know David rebukes her and she will live the rest of her life as a widow in his house? She communicated, but she was condemning him in her speech.

There's another story. The story's about Abigail. You remember it. Nabal is a wealthy man. He's shearing his sheep. It's a time of harvest, and everything's exciting and plenty. David sends some of his men and asks for some provisions. And this guy says "No, they are slaves that have escaped their master's all around this country. I'm not giving you a thing." David is so mad. He's got 600 men. He takes 400 of them armed. Two hundred stay back with the stuff. He's riding down on the house of Nabal. He's going to kill every living male there.

Abigail hears about it, Nabal's wife. She loads the donkey with cakes of raisins and bread and different meats. She meets him on the road. When you read the story in chapter 25 of 1 Samuel, she gets off her donkey, and she bows her head and very humbly tells the story. She says, "You know David, for years God has avenged you of your enemies." She goes on to graciously point out that her husband deserves to die, but lay the blame upon her. Had she known they had come she would have given provisions for them and they wouldn't be in this nasty situation. You know what David does? David feels the sword melting right from his hand. It drops to the ground, if you will. Later, he'll make her his wife. But in that story he thanks her because her communication was kind enough, gentle enough, humble enough that he heard what she was saying and recognized it as the voice of God and stopped him from committing murder.

Here's how most people communicate in marriage. It is gunfight at the OK Corral. It goes like this. He sticks his head up from behind a rock, "Pow, pow, pow, pow, pow." Then he takes a breath and when he's taking a breath she sticks her head up from behind a rock, "Pow, pow, pow, pow, pow." When she leans down to reload her gun he's at it again. Bullets are flying all over. They are shooting here and there and nobody's listening because we're all concerned about what we're going to say next. It's not that there aren't words going around. They are bouncing off the wall and ricocheting rocks and you're ducking and everything like that. It's we're not hearing one another.

Now I want to tell you something. This is extremely important what I'm going to share right now. Most marriages are one honest conversation away from being healed, one honest conversation. I'll tell you why we don't have that honest conversation. It's hurtful. Not because the person is mean, necessarily. It's just the fact that if I am hurting my wife in some way, it's demonstrating an inadequacy in my life. I don't want to deal with my inadequacies. I don't mind dealing with hers. In fact, I know those. And I'm

avoiding knowing mine. But the way I am is hurtful to her. And in the honest conversation I am going to have to hear my inadequacies. I don't want to hear that. But if I will hear that and realize she already knows about them and still loves me, she's just trying to deal with them, all of a sudden I begin to realize this is the person I can be heart to heart with. Most of us don't want that conversation because it's painful. So we get defensive and we push it back on the other one. We become manipulative and self-centered.

So let me share with you how to heal your home, one conversation that will heal your home. If you came here to church just gritting your teeth, and snarling at each other and snapping and stuff like that, I want to teach you how to be in each others arms tonight saying, "Oh baby, where have you been?" Sit on the couch. Let the lady go first. Let her speak. Fellows don't flinch, don't blink, don't interrupt. You listen, I mean listen. Listen to what she's saying, not your defense. Listen to what she's saying. And when she's done talking, then you tell her what she said. And ladies, don't you say a word, you listen, don't flinch, don't winch, don't think about what you're going to do. You just listen. And when he is done, then you share with him, "No that's not quite what I was saying. What I was saying is this." When that guy can finally tell you what you told him, you have for the first time for a long time communicated. Then you work it the other way.

I guarantee you by the authority of the word of God and all my experience in the ministry that most of you are far, far closer to one another than you ever dreamed. You just haven't been listening to one other. There's a reason why you were attracted to each other to begin with. That is still there. It may be that the coals seem like they are out. But they're not. And if you will listen to her and if you will listen to him and you will communicate where you're really at, that will create intimacy. And you will ask God for forgiveness, and you will ask each other for forgiveness, and your home will be what the Lord wants it to be. Two hearts filled with the love of Christ can never be far apart.

I want you to picture a wheel or a circle with lines coming to the center. I don't know where you're at. First of all let's look at our relationship with Jesus. If Jesus is at the center of that circle, are we moving closer to that circle or are we moving away? If you are married, let's look at that circle as your home, as your marriage. Are you two drawing individually closer to Jesus and consequently closer to one another or are you going in different directions? Today we can arrest that by a decision. We can ask Jesus into our hearts. We can ask Him to be our Savior. We can ask Him to do a work that only He can do. Not only will He heal us individually, He can heal our marriages. We can have the type of home He really, really wants for us.

So today, I'm asking you to make a decision, if you are single, that you'll be the type of person that God will bless with another person, and if you're married, that you will be the type of person in marriage that God can bless the other person through. Would you like Jesus to be your Savior? If you would I'm going to ask you to stand right where you're at.

Father in Heaven, we ask for Jesus to come into our hearts. We pray that He will heal us personally and that He will heal our homes. Help us to be grounded in Your Word, spend time praying and a lot of time listening. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.