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MAGAZINE

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Love is . . .

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Family matters!

For me, there is no safer place on earth than to be with my wife Marci. For 32 years we've shared our lives together. We loved each other when we married, and we love each other even more now. The best man at our wedding gave some sound advice: 'Just have fun.' We've had that alright – and more.

What's the foundation of a good marriage? Patience, understanding, good communication, forgiveness – yes, all of these and more: because in today's world there's many a pressure point on hard-working families. Work through the life cycle of a married couple:

- Just married, the first issue is housing. Do we rent or buy? Probably rent to begin with, and then purchase. That's how it used to be, but it's often not so easy these days.
- Children – do both parents work to remain financially stable? And who looks after the children while both parents work? A stay-at-home mother (or father) is a luxury these days.
- Health – never to be taken for granted in either parents or children. If just one member of the family has a lifelong medical condition, it affects all, one way or another.
- Work – there was a time when jobs in the marketplace were much more secure than today. The UK isn't suffering from high unemployment at present, but there's many a family living below the 'living wage'. The clearest evidence is the need for food banks.
- Parenting – getting it right! Introduce me to someone who does.
- And then there's grandparenting – evidence that you didn't get it so wrong after all, as you play on the floor with a young 2-year-old who thinks that Granny & Grandad are just the bee's knees!
- Then come the pressures of the autumn years. Health, mobility, finance and loneliness – in some cases all rolled into one – can be a huge challenge.

This edition of *Focus* recognises the pressures on marriage today – with some sound advice to sort them out. In addition to the usual items you'd expect to find, there are some new and recent pressures we need to consider. The first is 'gender identity' – how do we respond to it, even if we can't resolve it (pages 14-17)? The second is the problem of urban crime, and its ability to make families feel vulnerable and scared (pages 8-11).

It's clear that, when it comes down to it, marriages that work well contain a lot of love – love that puts the other person before our own interests. Turn the page and we're starting by considering again what 'love is'. It's our very firm belief that those ancient words from the Bible – which we use at weddings, often as a nice love poem – need to be read over and over again, right through the marriage life-cycle. 'Love knows no limit to its endurance . . .' (1 Corinthians 13:8, Phillips).

David Neal, Editor



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Focus MAGAZINE

Vol. 40, No. 4.
ISSN: 9771437920018-62

Editor: David Neal
Design: David Bell
Proof reader: Andrew Puckering
Subscriptions: **01476 591700**
Printed in the UK



Cover photo: ©SoiStock/iStockPhoto.com

Love is . . .

by Karen Holford

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Love is happy to wait for the other person, and to give them all the time they need. Love doesn't get frustrated, and love doesn't nag. Love waits for God to change the other person. *How will I show more patience towards my spouse, by letting God deal with my imperfections, while I show my unconditional and accepting love?*

Love thinks of new ways to be tender and affectionate towards the other person, and is mature enough to put their needs first. *How will I show kindness to my spouse, by putting their needs before my own desires?*

Love builds up the other person, rather than himself or herself. Love

'If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbal. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned, but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing.'

'This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience – it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.'

'Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails.'

'Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.'

(1 Corinthians 13:1-8, J. B. Phillips paraphrase.)



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Love thinks of new ways to be tender and affectionate towards the other person.

looks for ways to show the other person approval and honour, and to help them feel valued. Love boasts about the other person, and builds them up in front of friends, family, colleagues and children. Love

encourages the other person to reach goals and do well. *How will I build up my spouse, and help him or her to know their value in God's eyes and mine? How will I help my spouse towards his or her goals?*

Love is humble and is willing to do any job, however small, dirty or menial, to help the loved one. *What things will I do to support my spouse in his or her role? What things do I think are beneath me to do? Why do I think that, and how can I change my attitude?*

Love is polite and respectful, even in the everyday routines of life. Love tries not to do anything that causes offence to the loved one, or knowingly irritates or frustrates. Love is appreciative and grateful. *How will I be courteous towards my spouse, and live so that I don't offend him or annoy her? How will I show my love and appreciation for my spouse?*

Love finds ways to meet the other person's needs, and doesn't demand that its own needs are met first. *How can I discover my spouse's emotional and practical needs, and do all I can to meet them?*

Love takes a long time to become angry. It is slow to anger and quick to love. It believes the best things about other people, and looks for the good in what they say and do. Love deals with conflicts and differences in a gentle and mutual way. *How will I handle the next conflict with my spouse in a gentle and calm manner? How will I show that I believe the best about my spouse?*

Love is forgiving, and gracious, and doesn't hold grudges. Love also lives so that it doesn't take advantage of the forgiveness and grace of others.

How will I show forgiveness and grace towards my spouse when he or she makes a mistake?

This article is excerpted from *The Family Book: Creative ideas for families* by Karen Holford (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2004), pp. 77-79.

'Just be nice!'

by Gayle and Mike Tucker



Linda and I joke that the two of us have the secret to making marriage work. We look at Bob and Mike and say, 'It's simple. Just be nice!'

Marriage presenter and humorist Mark Gungor agrees. 'Be nice to the girl,' he says. So, is it really that simple? The fact is, there's a lot of wisdom in this little axiom: *Be nice!* You heard it over and over when you were growing up, in one form or another. It is the essence of the Golden Rule: 'Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.' *Just be nice.* It is the principle behind the proverb, 'A soft answer turns away wrath.' *Just be nice.* It is the common sense underlying the old saying, 'You'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.' *Just be nice!*

While there are many complexities in human relationships, we have the power to remove much of the unpleasant interaction that leads to bitterness and separation if we simply consider our words and actions in advance. Are we treating each other with kindness and respect? If not, how can we expect to have those things in return? . . .

For more than thirty years, John and Julie Gottman have been scientifically researching the factors that negatively affect married life and how to prevent them. No one doubts that they have achieved their objective because they and their colleagues from the University of Washington in Seattle have managed to predict

with more than ninety percent precision which couples will remain together and which will get divorced. In addition, eighty-six percent of the couples who have attended their seminars have 'achieved significant progress' in facing conflicts where they had reached an impasse.

Would you like to know how these two experts summarised their more than thirty years of research? Through two 'surprisingly simple' truths. In their opinion, happily married couples . . .

- *Behave like good friends:* they respect each other, show affection, *try* to understand the other's point of view, *pay a lot of attention* to what is happening in the life of the other person, and feel '*emotionally connected*'.
- *They manage their differences in a cordial and positive manner:* that is, they admit that problems in married life *are inevitable* and that *some* of those problems have no solution. Even more important, when they try to solve those that do, they work as a team, listen respectfully to the other person's points of view, and seek solutions that work for both parties.

Two simple truths, right? In fact, surprisingly simple! What if, as a spouse, you try to put them into practice, beginning right now?

This article is excerpted from *35 Secrets for Successful and Happy Marriages* by Gayle and Mike Tucker (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2017), pp. 59-61.

Are we treating each other with kindness and respect?





What are we missing?

Sajitha Forde-Ralph

There are so many great things about living in a booming metropolis like London – the food, the transport links, the architecture – but, of course, it also has its drawbacks, such as the high cost of living, inequality and,

frustratingly, the abundance of traffic. The worst thing, though, has to be the crime. There's no hiding from it. One would be hard pressed to find someone living in the capital who hasn't been directly impacted by a crime,

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or at least knows someone who has.

Sadly, knife crime has become commonplace.

Stephen Lawrence and Damilola Taylor have become household names over the last 30 years due to the extensive media coverage given to the tragic circumstances surrounding their untimely deaths. Thousands of other families also remain impacted by the various outcomes of knife crime.

The Metropolitan Police have recorded 6,676 offences in the London territory involving 'possession of article [sic] with blade or point' since October 2017. During that same time period, 73,891 'stop & searches' were performed by reason of 'weapons, point [sic] & blades'; and, of those, articles were found 8,216 (8.25%) times.¹

Families and communities are feeling fearful, vulnerable and puzzled.

I spoke with a few different people, one of whom was Sharon Williamson, an energetic, talented and vibrant matriarch who lives in south London. With the growing number of people who are entitled to call her 'Mum' or 'Nan', it seemed likely that she would have some insight into the emotions families are experiencing.

Warfare

'I have two sons, one daughter; ten grandsons, seven granddaughters; and four great-grandsons, six great-granddaughters. My husband died over nine years ago.

'I think knife crime is a result of gangs. Young males are disadvantaged in this society, so they are acting out. Quite a few of my grandboys are between 15 and 35, and I worry for them. Even if youth aren't in a gang, *they still have to deal with gangs*. They can't hang out in peace. Some are just 'bad eggs', but I think many get bullied into bad behaviour. It's like it's all gang initiation and warfare.'

Sharon and her 30-year-old granddaughter recounted a story of a teenager affiliated with their family who got beaten up by members of his social group for trying to attest to the good nature of another boy who had been an undeserving victim of theft by the same group

– they felt that the attacked should have sided with them about the theft.

'Unfortunately, it seems mainly to be black-on-black crime. Our youth don't seem to realise or care that their actions are magnified. Sure, crimes involving white youth occur, but I don't think they're reported as much.

'My grandchildren tell me that young people feel they need to protect and defend themselves.

'We had a small incident where one of my grandsons had used a boxcutter for something legitimate and still had it in his possession when he was stopped and searched later that day, which caused a bit of a stir.

'“Stop & search” isn't effective in my opinion. I mean, how are you choosing whom to stop?'

Sharon's granddaughter weighed in by saying, 'Knife crime should carry the same penalty as gun crimes, as the weapons are getting bigger and the attacks more violent. They just seem to be in and out of jail – quick time.

'All they are doing is trying to make a name for themselves and get respect. They get props for doing harm to others and then post videos of themselves boasting about what they've just done on Snapchat [and other social media platforms].

'They have easy access to knives; a lot of them come from within the home.'

Almost in despair, Sharon took a moment to ask some questions of her own, which resulted in her reeling off four of the five W-questions in quick succession like she was preparing for a quiz: 'What is the root cause? Why is it so rampant? What or who do they listen to? Where do they go? What influences their negativity?'

Then, with a sigh, she declared, 'I really don't know the reason; there's something we're missing.'

Fear, perplexity and eye contact

Sharon said, 'I feel vulnerable for my young males. I have this fear and sadness. I fear not just for mine; I fear for everyone. It's always someone's child.'

'Parents/carers worry that their young people will be in the wrong place at the wrong time.'

'It's frightening that you can't even talk to these kids because you never know how they're gonna react.'

Kathleen Tanoh, a mother of two, expressed how perplexing and mind-boggling these demonstrations of violence are; yet they linger at the forefront of the mind. She admitted that, upon hearing of the hospitalisation and subsequent death of a friend's young son, she immediately assumed it was knife-related, before taking a moment to wonder if the boy had suffered with a terminal illness or been in an accident. Unfortunately, her initial assumption was correct.

'It's about whom you know. And just don't make eye contact,' was the definitive and profound statement voiced by some teenagers I spoke to. When asked with whom not to make eye contact, they simply responded, 'You know a road man when you see one.'

These youth went on to share how easy it is to become a victim purely because of a passing association, such as appearing in a photo on social media alongside someone a would-be-attacker has a beef with. In high street and residential areas they regularly witness drug deals and heated exchanges of profanity and threats, but, for the sake of their safety, they have to act as passers-by with blinders on.

They incredulously mentioned SPAC Nation, the London church for reformed/reforming gang members, which has been the subject of a series of documentaries for BBC Three. They even disclosed that there is a whole genre of music that glorifies violence, called 'Drill', which they described as 'grime for gangsters', and they revealed the negative impact it's having on their peers.

Perhaps these revelations are plausible answers to some of Sharon's previously noted W-questions.

The great pretenders

'Our children are even greater pretenders than when I was a child!' professed Sharon. She

continued, 'Naughtiness isn't a new thing. Back in the day, when you knew you were doing something a bit bad, if you saw an adult (particularly if it was someone who knew your family) you stopped what you were doing and were polite, even if it was just lip service.'

'Flick and camp knives were allowed, and people used to use names for stabbing injuries like "telephone" if a guy had a cut along the side of his cheek, like where you would hold a telephone.'

'Gone are the days when you'd just have a little fisticuffs and get it over and done with.'

'Using a knife was just about letting a person know you could get close enough to reach them, usually in response to some disrespect towards an associate; but now kids are actually seeking to take life for no reason. It's not about backing it for your mates or family; it's every man for himself.'

'Youth are so aggressive and hostile now. It's like they are gladiators in an arena. Such a level of viciousness.'

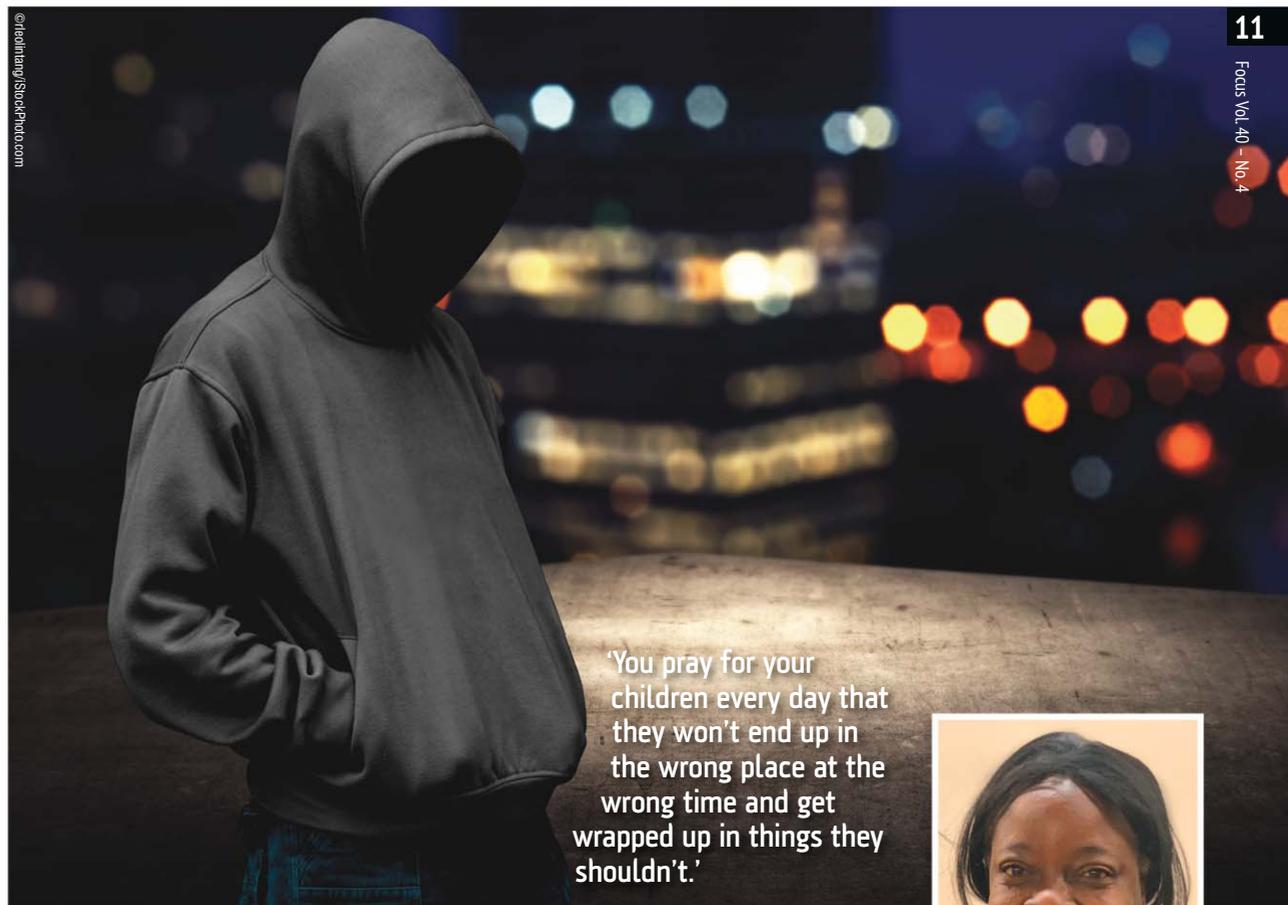
'Imagine how close you have to be to stab someone.'

Underlying comfort

Kathleen and another parent both shared that they choose not to spend a great deal of time worrying about their children getting caught up in violence, because it would be all-consuming and overwhelming; rather, they continue to put their trust in God: 'You pray for your children every day that they won't end up in the wrong place at the wrong time and get wrapped up in things they shouldn't.'

Sharon believes, 'The Lord has been removed from institutions like schools. Organisations that are supposed to have preventative measures like police forces and youth groups don't have Him involved. There is

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'You pray for your children every day that they won't end up in the wrong place at the wrong time and get wrapped up in things they shouldn't.'



Sharon Williamson

no instruction of Jesus' admonition to be kind and loving to one another, and people *need* to be taught about the Lord: obviously, not in a forceful way.

'Even though we trust in God, we can't think that our children are immune – because they're not. We should try our best to know where our young people are and what they are doing.'

Having made a public commitment to the Lord two years ago, Sharon speaks of experiencing His miracles long before then. 'Coming to the Lord has softened my heart. I'm more thankful. There is an underlying comfort; I have to look to the Lord to comfort the heart in such adversities. As a parent, you do worry, but God will appeal to each of us in

different ways.

'I have to have hope, but I do take these burdens to the Lord with a heavy heart for all children, not just my own. This will not be an overnight fix. *Everyone* needs to pray. If you're praying, and I'm praying, and the next people down the road are praying, God will do something.'

*Metropolitan Police (2019): Search Volumes for Reporting Period: October 2017 to end September 2019 and Positive Outcomes for Reporting Period: October 2017 to end September 2019 – <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/stop-and-search-dashboard/> (accessed 24 October 2019)



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Loving in times of financial stress

by Gayle and Mike Tucker

If marriage is a shared life then we must share money and debt equally. Anything less than this is a prescription for disaster!

Possessiveness and selfishness are the *antithesis* of love. We share and share alike, both assets and liabilities. The attitude of sharing sends the message, 'We really are in this thing together.' Or, as Zig Ziglar put it, 'Many marriages would be better if the husband and the wife clearly understood that *they are on the same side.*'

Some years ago, Gayle and I had opportunity to test this concept in our marriage. We went through a time of extreme financial difficulty. The details of the story would take far too long to tell here, but suffice it to say that we were absolutely destroyed financially for a period of some fifteen years.

While neither of us was truly at fault for this difficulty, if someone really wanted to assign blame, the finger would be firmly pointed at me.

As you might imagine, our financial difficulties made everyday living far more stressful. Just being married and raising a family together is stressful enough, but doing so in the midst of a seemingly endless financial nightmare is beyond calculation. The stress is literally off the charts! . . .

And yet, through all the years of our financial difficulties, Gayle never once blamed me. She never attempted to distance herself from me or from ownership of the problems we

faced. I never felt condemned by her, no matter how bad things got (and I assure you, things got pretty bad).

We faced every crisis as a team. Every setback resulted in her reassurances of love and support. Every frustration was met as a team.

I'm a fan of team sports such as basketball and American football. And one of the things about team sports has to do with teamwork and a team identity. As my old school coach used to say, and as we also said to each other, 'There is no "I" in "team".' You see, it's not about you; it's about the team.

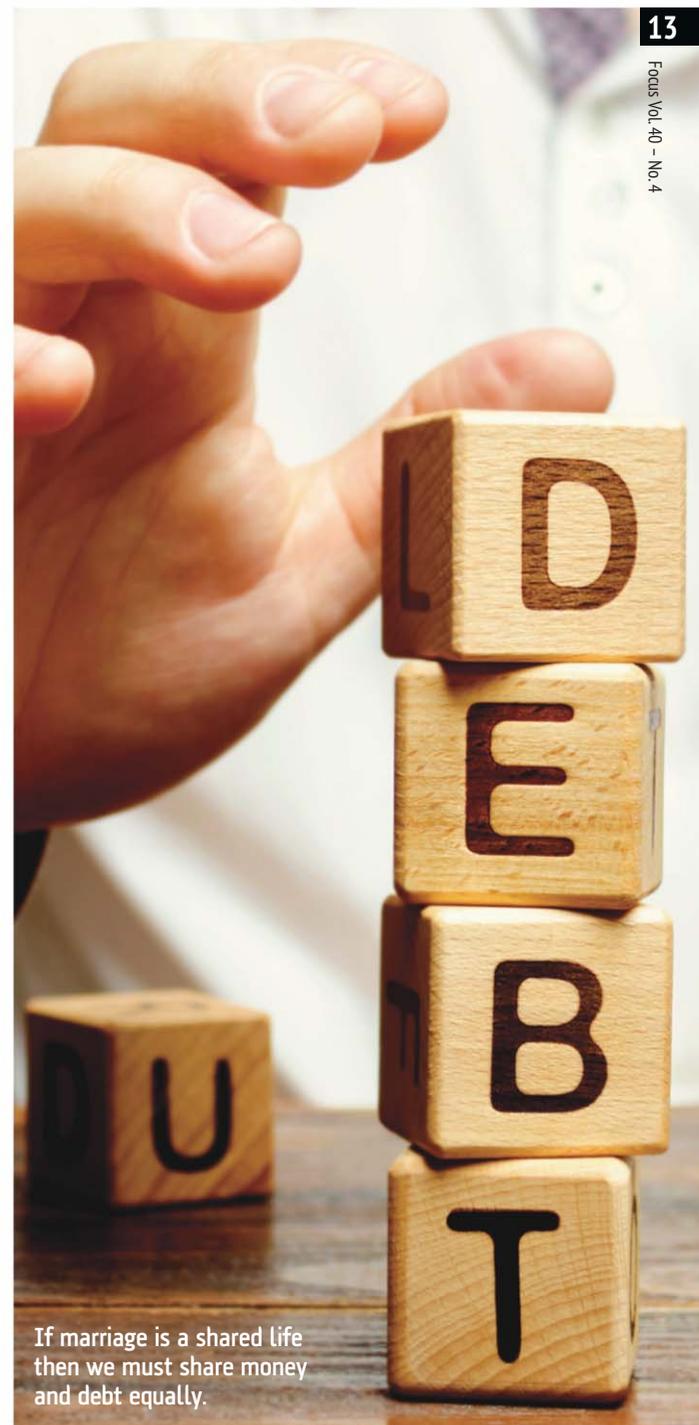
What this means is that in marriage *we win together, or we lose together.* We don't assess blame, and we don't take the credit. Everything is about the team.

Watch how teams respond when things go wrong. If they start to assess blame, the team begins to fall apart. Championship teams have leaders who ensure that blame is not assessed. Post-game conferences are not about finger pointing, but about collective responsibility.

Marriage is the ultimate 'team sport'. It's all about the team. We are on the same side. We're in this together!

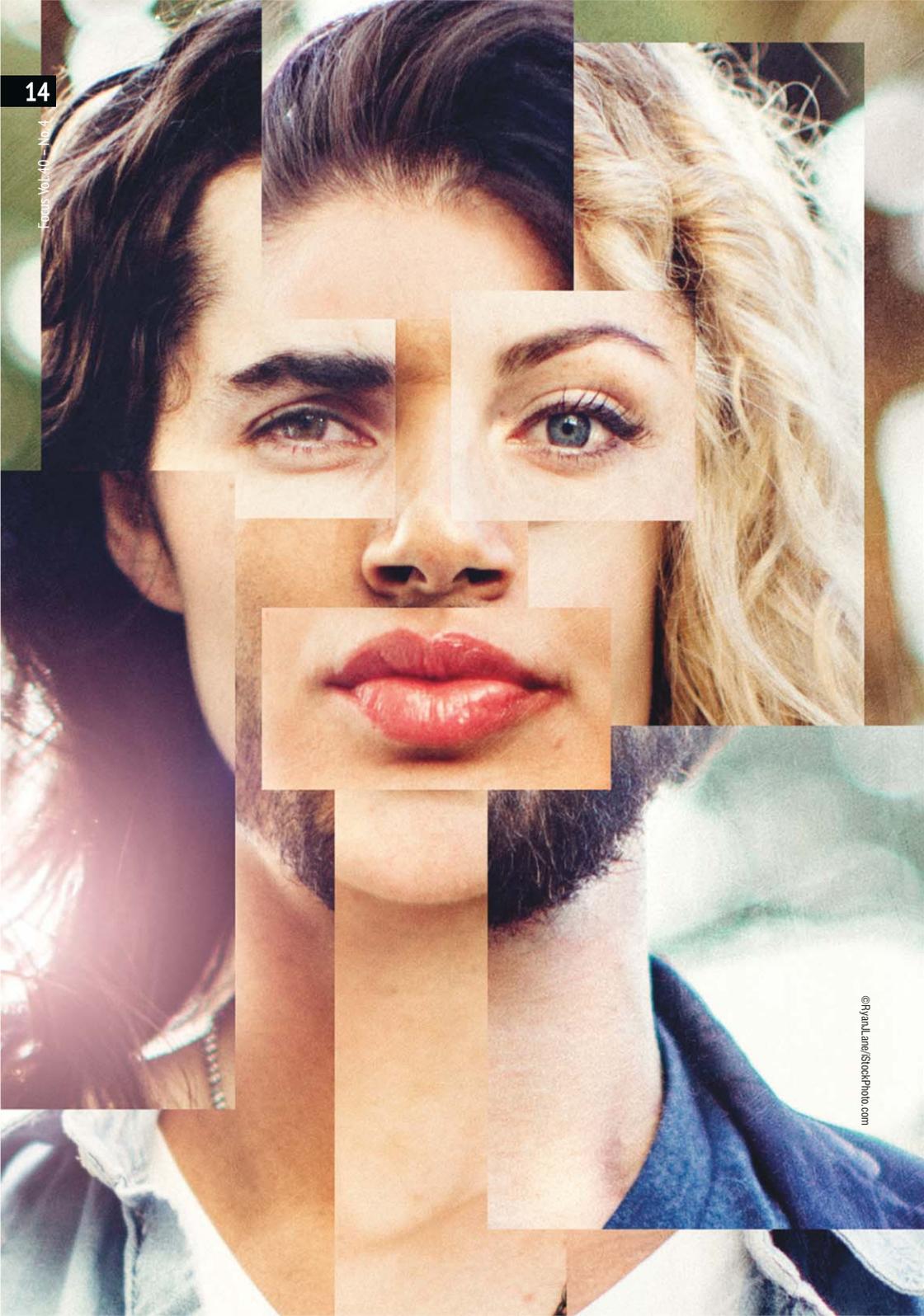
When you marry, the identity shifts from 'I' to 'we'. Possessions change from 'mine' to 'ours'. So do problems, debts, and liabilities. Marriage is a shared life.

This article is excerpted from *35 Secrets for Successful and Happy Marriages* by Gayle and Mike Tucker (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2017), pp. 33-35.



If marriage is a shared life then we must share money and debt equally.

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The transgender dilemma –

by Les Ackie

a question of personal identity

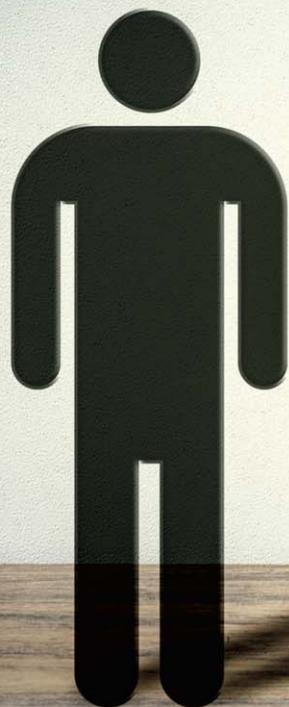
Former Olympic decathlete, Bruce Jenner's transition into Caitlyn Jenner in 2015, and the resulting reception of the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage, sparked major controversy. Many felt that Noah Galloway, an Iraq War double amputee who competes in extreme sports, was a more worthy recipient. While giving centre-stage to the issue of transgender, the award fuelled suspicion of a blatantly politically correct move to advance LGBTQ interests.

Featuring Emmy Award-winning transgender actress Laverne Cox on its cover, *Time* magazine described transgender as 'America's next civil rights frontier'. The fight to promote and mandate acceptance of transgender rights has, as one of its key tenets, the right to self-identification. However, far from being simply a matter of personal choice, adopting transgender ideology requires the reconstruction of society, enforced with legislative authority. It impacts how we educate children, access to healthcare, how government funding is allocated, where to incarcerate prisoners, military service, participation in sport, employment, access

to public facilities, census information, and so on. The implications of such changes are highlighted by the UK Government's proposals to modify the 2004 Gender Recognition Act, to make it easier for trans people to self-identify without the need for surgical transition or medical intervention.

A person is considered transgender if they identify with or express a gender identity that differs from the one which corresponds to their sex at birth. Health professionals associate transgender with a condition known as gender dysphoria, in which an individual suffers emotional distress due to an inability to reconcile their physical anatomy with their psychological gender identity.

At the core of trans-affirming ideology is the argument that gender is a social construct. According to this view, gender is determined by how an individual feels, regardless of what sex they were 'assigned' at birth. Within LGBTQ ideology, some claim that gender is 'fluid' and exists on a spectrum on which people can identify anywhere they wish at any given time. Others accept the idea of a gender binary (male and female) but believe that trans people are



Bearing in mind that the highest level of prejudice tends to correlate with the lowest level of contact, we must appreciate that transgender people are just that: people. They are fellow strugglers on life's journey, who wrestle with challenges we will never face.

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simply 'trapped' in the wrong body.

These understandings of gender are at variance with the scientific view that sex is determined by our chromosomes, with gender being an outward expression of our biological sex. Men and women are defined as adults in whom every cell of their bodies, in normal development, exhibits either XY chromosomes (male) or XX chromosomes (female). Gender is identified by how the body in its normal, healthy state is organised for sexual reproduction by way of internal and external sexual organs.

While there are aspects of gender that are obviously learned, and therefore socially constructed, the problem is the view that gender is *only* a social construct. Such a view

contradicts the vast amount of scientific evidence that confirms fundamental differences between men and women. These differences are rooted in anatomy, physiology and psychology, which are programmed into, and influenced by, genetic make-up.

Opponents disagree sharply on whether transgender is a physical anomaly or a psychological condition. In 2012 and 2019 respectively, the American Psychiatric Association and the World Health Organisation declassified gender confusion as a psychological disorder. Gender identity disorder was replaced by gender dysphoria (GD). Opponents of the change claimed that the changes were bows to political pressure rather than being based on scientific

discovery. The ramifications of these declassifications are huge in terms of how gender dysphoria is treated. In the case of a psychological disorder, the mind is treated to fit bodily reality. In the case of dysphoria, the body is changed in order to fit the mind.

Treatment of gender dysphoria is particularly problematic with children. In the absence of any objective test, diagnosis is a subjective judgement. Based on the assumption that gender confusion is not a psychological disorder, standard intervention now involves social transitioning (3-4 years old), gender blockers (9-10 years old) and cross-sex hormones (from 16 years old) for children who persistently, insistently and consistently state that they are the 'wrong gender'. The fourth stage is the offer of gender reassignment surgery (after 18). It is argued that this amounts to social experimentation with the most vulnerable in society, with no proof of long-term success and much speculation about long-term harm. It is particularly concerning in light of research that indicates that the vast majority of gender dysphoric children will settle into the birth sex if allowed

to go through puberty with 'watchful waiting'.

Treatment of GD gives rise to apparent contradictions in addressing body dysmorphic conditions. For example, no medical professional in their right mind would recommend a calorie-controlled diet and liposuction for a child with anorexia nervosa, even though the child persistently, insistently and consistently states that they are obese. Consider also the cases of sufferers of bodily integrity identity disorder (BIID), where individuals desire the removal of healthy body parts because they self-identify as 'trans-able'. Should the medical profession treat their bodies to fit their psychological perception? If not, where is the distinction between BIID and GD?

If the logic is that the key determinant for personal identity is how we feel, as opposed to objective reality, how far does the rationale apply? How should we relate to the white woman who claims she is black; the fifty-two-year-old father of seven who identifies as a six-year-old girl; or the woman who had drain cleaner poured into her eyes because she believed she should have been born blind? If transgender is legitimate, why not trans-racial, trans-age, trans-species, and so on?

The suffering of trans people should never be minimised or belittled. Trans people often experience emotional and psychological turmoil, along with family members who struggle along with them. We should seek to understand the challenges faced by those who often wrestle for years with confusion and depression that in some instances results in suicidal thoughts and attempts at alarming rates. Our response needs to be considered, compassionate, proportionate and consistent with the principle of love. Bearing in mind that the highest level of prejudice tends to correlate with the lowest level of contact, we must appreciate that transgender people are just that: people. They are fellow strugglers on life's journey, who wrestle with challenges we will never face.

The transgender dilemma has no easy answer, because it has at its foundation the question of what it means to be human: a question that varies, dependent on the worldview to which we subscribe. A Christian worldview advocates a gender binary established in the first man and woman, created in the image of God. It recognises that our identity is inseparable from the personhood that the Creator God invested in us. We find our true identity when we discover it in Him. We are all subject to our human frailties in one form or another. Our restoration from our brokenness comes through the Saviour, Jesus, who, for our salvation, chose to live in a body that was not congruent with His identity. He offers us His sustaining grace, and He calls us to self-identify as His disciples: 'for in Him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28, NKJV).

Building a marriage to last

by Willie and Elaine Oliver

Building a successful marriage is like building a home. It requires a plan and commitment to a lot of hard work. We offer five essential building steps for a strong and healthy marriage.

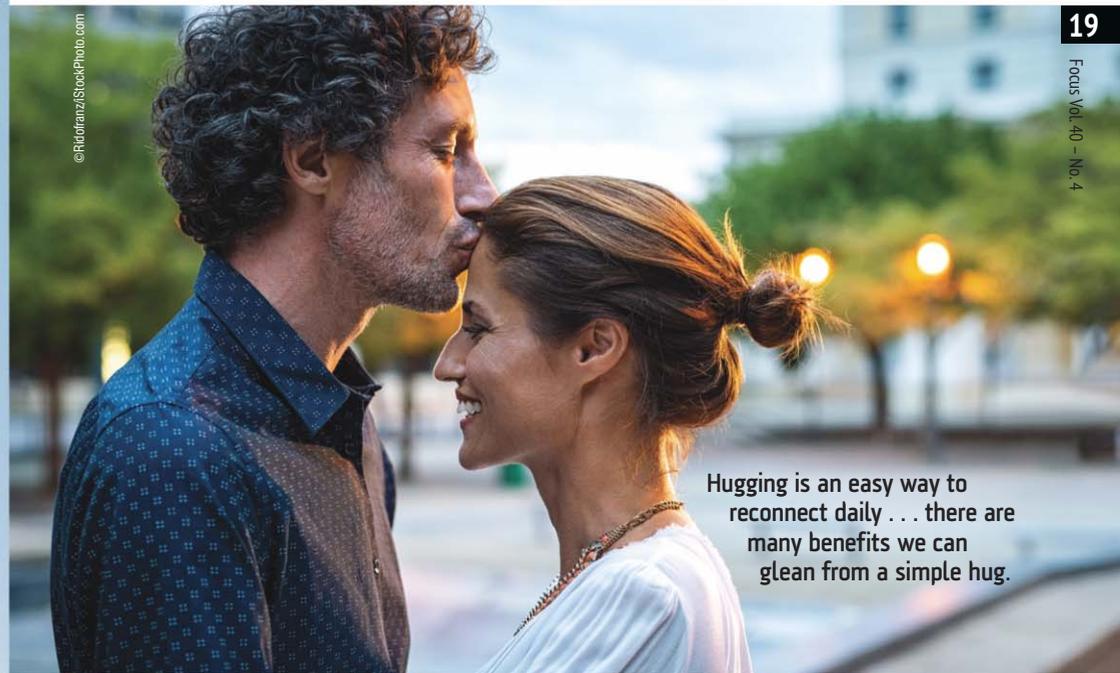
1. *Build your marriage on real love.* Real love requires understanding each other's needs and being willing to sometimes practise self-denial for the sake of the relationship. Real love requires much energy and sacrifice but keeps us determined to create the best marriage possible. . . .
2. *Accept each other's faults and*

imperfections. In marriage, we must learn to value each other and accept that we are not perfect. We are talking about having a marriage filled with grace. Grace is something that you give to someone even if they do not deserve it. So you give your kindness, patience, gentleness, and more: even when you do not feel like it. Why? Because at some point – even daily – your spouse will have to do the same for you.

The wonderful thing about grace is that you cannot earn it or buy it. And, as the giver of grace, you get to offer love and acceptance as a gift to your spouse. Grace in marriage



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Hugging is an easy way to reconnect daily . . . there are many benefits we can glean from a simple hug.

creates an atmosphere that goes beyond guilt and shame and sets the stage for growth and renewed commitment in the relationship.

3. *Listen to each other.* A large body of marriage research literature suggests most relationships experience distress because of the lack of effective communication. If married people, and people in general, learnt to communicate better, they would have much more understanding between them and a basis for a stronger and healthier relationship. . . .
4. *Forgive often.* . . . Forgiveness paves the way for healing and reconciliation in every relationship. In marriage, both individuals will inevitably hurt one another. When we forgive, we give up our perceived right to punish or retaliate for the wrong that has been done to us. When we fail to forgive, bitterness and resentment increase in the relationship. Forgiveness releases us from these feelings. Forgiveness in essence is for the forgiver more than the forgiven.
5. *Hug more.* Most couples can hardly wait to

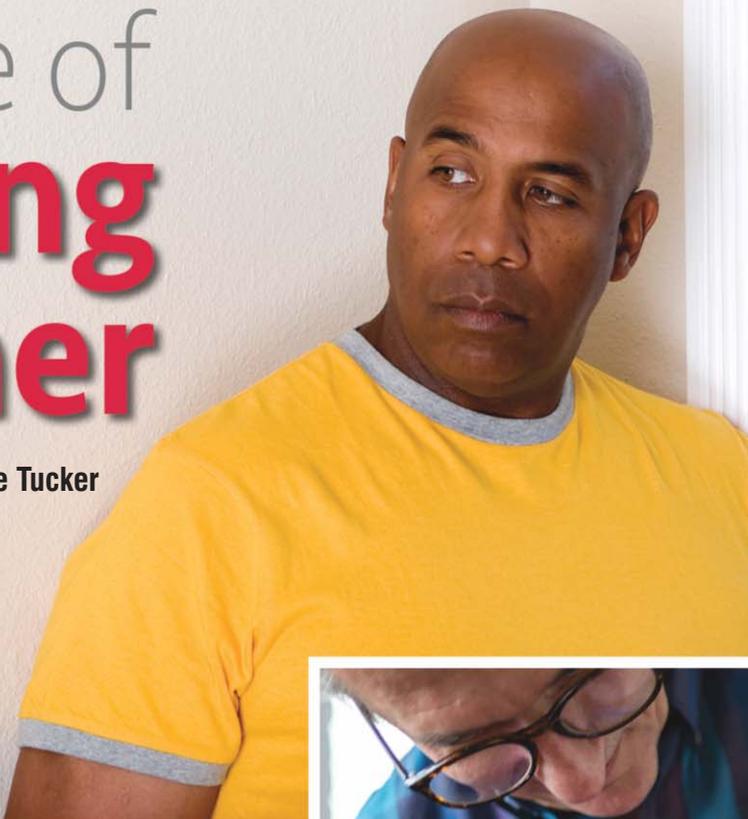
get married to enjoy the physical benefits of marriage: but, as daily life takes over and the giddiness wears off, we forget to do the things we did at first. Hugging is an easy way to reconnect daily. When we hug or touch each other, the hormone oxytocin is released. Oxytocin is the hormone that increases our bond to another person; it also lowers blood pressure and reduces stress: so there are many benefits we can glean from a simple hug. We encourage couples to hug for a minute each morning before parting from each other, and every evening when they are reunited. . . .

If you are willing to integrate these building blocks into your marriage, you will build a marriage that will weather the storms of life. Although all marriages will experience distress at some time or another, they do not need to dissolve when trials come.

This article is excerpted from *Hope for Today's Families* by Willie and Elaine Oliver (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2018), pp. 87-92.

The importance of reasoning together

by Gayle and Mike Tucker



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Therefore, it is important that couples possess problem-solving skills. There are a number of excellent models for solving problems as a couple. Gayle and I teach one such model in our marriage seminars, but there are many more that are just as good. Decide on a model that works for you, and use it. Don't allow problems to colour your opinion of your mate. Your spouse is not the problem, and your marriage is not the problem. The problem is simply a circumstance of life that the two of you will solve together.

So remember to keep the focus on concerns and issues, and not on personalities. Practise the language of reconciliation and love.

This article is excerpted from *35 Secrets for Successful and Happy Marriages* by Gayle and Mike Tucker (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2017), pp. 130-132.

When you and your spouse face a difficult issue, the tendency is to see your spouse as *the problem*. Every time you look at your spouse, you see the problem that stands between you, so it seems as though your mate must be the problem.

What would happen if you were able to change your view so that you no longer saw your spouse as the problem? *What if the problem, instead of being a person, were just 'a thing' that the two of you were going to solve?* This change of perspective makes a world of difference.

To solve any problem you must keep your focus on the issue itself, and not on the other individual. *Your spouse is not the problem.* Your spouse is your teammate – a person you love and admire – while the problem is only a

circumstance of life that the two of you will solve together.

When couples focus on personalities rather than concerns or issues, they tend to engage in personal attacks. Their language becomes accusatory. They begin to make 'you statements' such as, 'You make me so angry,' or, 'You always do your best to hurt me,' or, 'You are such a jerk!' This is the language of warfare, not love.

When you focus on the problem, you begin to make 'I statements'. 'I feel sad when this happens,' or, 'I am frightened when we are angry with each other,' or, 'I'm sorry I hurt your feelings.' This is the *language of reconciliation and love*.

Every couple has problems. Difficult issues and concerns invade every relationship.



Your spouse is not the problem. Your spouse is your teammate - a person you love and admire.

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Communicating with grace

by Willie and Elaine Oliver

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If you want your family relationships to be healthy and positive, it is important to learn to communicate with grace.

When we say *grace*, we are talking about the spiritual concept that refers to the unmerited favour and love freely given by God to humans. Grace is something we do not deserve. Just as God forgives our shortcomings even when we do not deserve to be forgiven, to communicate with grace means to speak with someone in a way they do not deserve.

The Old Testament says, in Proverbs 25:11 (NKJV), 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.'

This is how families can create a life of peace and happiness together, by using words

as precious gifts of gold and silver that they can give to each other every day, even when a loved one may not deserve it. Can you think of someone in your family with whom you need to use grace in your communication? This is an easy question for most of us to respond to because a large percentage of the world's population have a relative they have a difficult relationship with. . . .

Dr Stephen R. Covey presents the concept of 'being proactive' for effective communication. This idea encourages people to live within what he calls their 'Circle of Control', rather than living in what he calls their 'Circle of No Control'. When you live in your Circle of Control, you spend most of your time controlling the only person you can really

control – yourself. This is the opposite of living most of your life in your Circle of No Control, which is where people spend most of their time trying to control others. People who are proactive live their lives in their Circle of Control and are more likely to communicate grace than individuals who spend their lives in their Circle of No Control.

The truth is that you cannot control your spouse. . . . You truly can only control yourself. So when someone says something to you that isn't very nice, rather than using your energy trying to change them, it is much more profitable to use that time developing your response of peace and grace. . . .

When someone says something to us we don't like, we tend to respond quickly and in a

similar manner. However, to communicate with grace – to respond in a way they do not deserve – you need to be proactive, to live in your Circle of Control, to *pause*, so that you have time to catch your breath before saying something that will cause equal pain or make things worse. In that space – before your response – you also need to *think* about what you should not say and what you should say to make things better. Finally, you need to *choose* the correct response. The correct response is the one that will calm things down rather than adding fuel to the fire. This is what it means to use words as gifts of gold and silver.

This article is excerpted from *Hope for Today's Families* by Willie and Elaine Oliver (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2018), pp. 64-67.



The Lamb and forgiveness

by Jeffrey Brown

John Gottman has identified what he calls *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*: 1) Maintain a love map. 2) Foster fondness and admiration. 3) Turn towards instead of away. 4) Accept your partner's influence. 5) Solve solvable conflicts. 6) Cope with unresolvable conflicts. 7) Create shared meaning.

Gottman's research led him to conclude that the most destructive elements of a marriage are criticism, contempt, defensiveness and 'stonewalling'. The idea of the love map is for people to be aware of their partner's dreams and fears. With this awareness, couples can navigate roadblocks without creating 'emotional gridlock'. I respect the findings of Dr Gottman's Family Research Laboratory in Seattle, Washington, but there are some things which science can't quantify. . . .

The 'Love Lab' missed the divine element of forgiveness. That's what the Lamb is all about. John said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29, NKJV.) Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34, NKJV.)

The significance of the Lamb is forgiveness. A couple were celebrating their golden wedding anniversary. Somebody asked the wife, what was their secret? She answered, 'On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our

marriage, I would *always* overlook. I figured I could live with at least ten!' When she was asked which faults she had written down, she replied, 'I never did get around to listing them. Instead, every time he did something that made me mad, I'd simply say to myself, "Lucky for him, it's one of the ten!"' She got it right. Paul says, 'Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong.' (1 Corinthians 13:5, The Living Bible.)

Lamb power can forgive broken promises, broken dreams, broken hearts, a mistake, a fault, a slip of the memory, a slip in the behaviour – yes, even an affair. . . .

George Roemisch says in his poem, *Forgiveness*: 'Forgiveness is the fragrance of the violet which still clings fast to the heel that crushed it.' It is the one thing that still stands when everything else is fallen. Forgiveness is not forgetting. Forgiveness is not pretending. Forgiveness is not a feeling. Forgiveness is not bringing up the past. Forgiveness is not demanding change before we forgive. Forgiveness is rare because it is hard. Forgiveness is costly and substitutional. That's why it took the life of the Lamb. . . .

Right now God may be calling you to forgive someone who does not deserve it. And somehow you just can't bring yourself to do it. Agony aunt 'Dear Abby' says, 'Only the brave know how to forgive. A coward never forgives. It is not his nature.' So go ahead, and recall the words of that old hymn, 'There is power, power, wonder-working power, in the precious blood of the Lamb.'

Don't let your past ruin your future

by Jeffrey and Pattiejean Brown

Past events have left some of us scarred. We find it difficult to completely trust ourselves to another; we may not even know what trust means. . . . We hold back and settle for something less risky; but the risk of letting go – the real ‘falling’ in love – is the only path to complete fulfilment inside or outside of marriage. Says Leo Buscaglia, ‘A life of love is one of continual growth, where the doors and windows of experience are always open to the wonder and magic that life offers. To love is to risk living fully.’

You are now in the

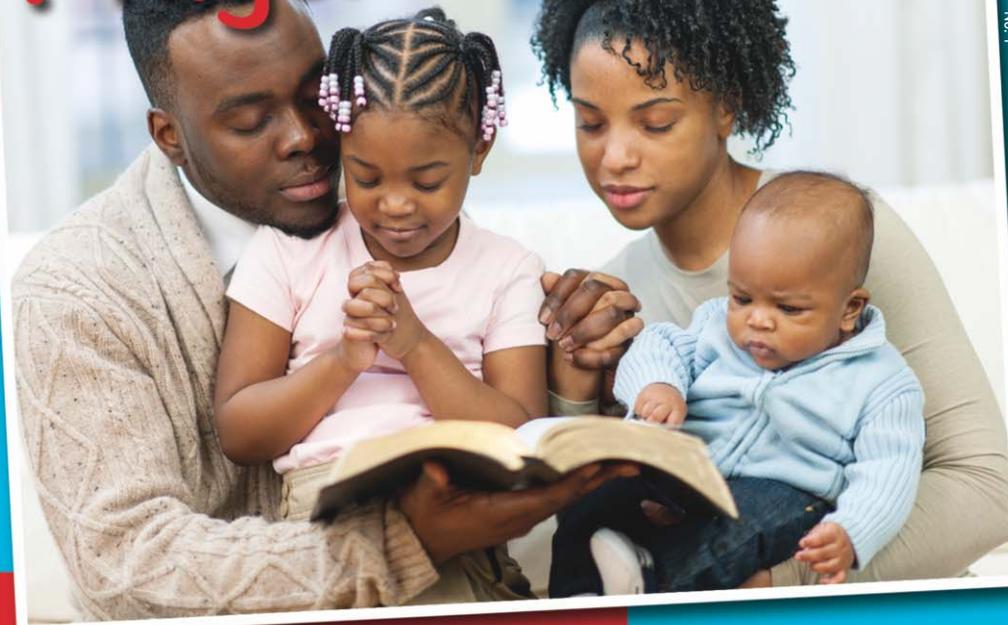
driving seat. You are not a helpless victim of your inheritance. Your past does not have to determine your future. Your history does not have to become your destiny. No matter how dysfunctional your family tree, you can draw a line in the sand and declare, ‘This destructive family system is going to end with me.’

When you began your relationship, you were affected by the root system. In summer love, you must now enrich the root system. What you do, how you live, is influencing the next generation.

This article is excerpted from *Love Seasons: Finding love in unlikely places* by Jeffrey and Pattiejean Brown (Grantham, England: The Stanborough Press Ltd., 2014), p. 55.



Prayer matters



A prayer for the family

Father, from whom every family receives its true name, I pray for all the members of my family:
for those who are growing up,
that they may increase in wisdom and love;
for those facing changes,
that they may meet them with hope;
for those who are weak,
that they may find strength;
for those with heavy burdens,
that they may carry them lightly;
for those who are old and frail,
that they may grow in faith.

From *More Everyday Prayers*

‘There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.’
1 John 4:18, NIV

‘Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.’
Colossians 3:13, NIV

A prayer for marriage

God,
You are the source of love, and You join us together in the miracle of friendship, marriage and family life.

Let faithfulness, freshness and unselfishness fill the deep relationships we cherish, and be a sign to the nations that this is the way You love the world in Jesus Christ our Lord.

From *Further Everyday Prayers*

Stop it before it starts!

by John Elliot

Quick – think back to the last heated discussion you had with your significant other. What was it about?

I'm willing to bet it was over something trivial. Half of the couples in Britain have argued over the temperature of their homes, according to a survey quoted in the *Independent*.¹ Granted, the survey was conducted by a heating company, so maybe that's not surprising; however, other fights couples routinely have, according to the *Telegraph*, can be over fashion, interior design, and recycling.² Fights over the appropriate time to do routine chores, or over how to clean or vacuum the floor, are not unheard of.

It's quite common, after having such an argument, to ask yourself: *How on earth did we get so worked up about something so insignificant?* . . . and then something actually important comes along, like the children's

safety or household debt, and raises tensions by another order of magnitude.

Why do we do it? Why have pointless fights with those we love? How do they start? And how can we live with each other in harmony and peace?

The topic is not the topic

One of the things I've learnt since becoming a father is how to deal with toddler tantrums. An experienced parent knows that a toddler absolutely must be kept well hydrated, must get sufficient rest and enough exercise, and should under no circumstances be allowed to get too hungry. Toddlers also need a set routine in life (which provides them with stability),

while also having enough variety, enough mental stimulation and social interactions, to prevent them from getting bored. Above all, they need to know how much you love them.

If one or more of these basic needs is not met, the toddler becomes gradually more and more irritable, until finally – *meltdown!* This can come in the middle of the supermarket, or in the car, or at mealtime or bedtime – exactly when you don't need it.

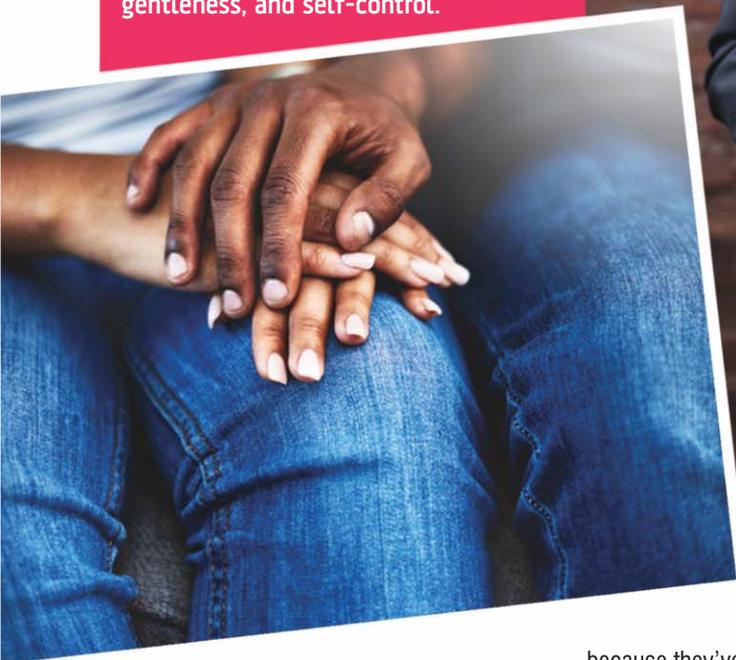
What does this have to do with couples' rows? you may

be asking. Well, bear with me. You see, what's true of toddlers is also true of *us*.

You think your wife was speaking insensitively to you when she got back from work, and you're right. That could be, however, because she had a terrible night's sleep; had to commute an hour to work in heavy traffic; put up with unreasonable demands from an unknowledgeable boss; and then arrived home after 7. She's exhausted. Her 'get up and go' has 'got up and gone'. Consequently, her patience has left the building, and she takes out her frustration on you. Is it fair? No. But understanding why she's acting that way – that it's not about you, and that the thing she's criticising you for is probably not the real reason she's angry – can help you to give a

Your partner is *not* the enemy. It's the daily challenges of life that are the problem - and you must face them *together*.

Forgiveness, love, patience – wait, there are other excellent virtues that can help save your relationship too. There's joy, and peace, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control.



'soft answer' that will 'turn away wrath' (Proverbs 15:1).

Let's take another example – your husband is acting illogically. Well, yes, he is. Please be understanding, though – he's had to cope with the kids acting up all day, and the little one refused to take his nap, and he's worried about his uncle's health, and his own, and yours too (because he cares about you), and he's so busy doing the chores that he didn't have time to eat because he's sorting out your dirty laundry and he hasn't had some water since breakfast. Of course he's not quite *compos mentis*. It's fully to be expected. All this means that the issue you're discussing so angrily is probably not the *real* reason you're angry. You're just taking out the aggregate of a million-and-one frustrations on each other

because they've finally mounted up to more than you can handle. Your partner is *not* the enemy. It's the daily challenges of life that are the problem – and you must face them *together*.

... and that's OK!

Really, it's OK to be tired, and frustrated, and hungry. That is not a sin. Jesus also got tired and hungry, as we do. He even became angry sometimes, too. He was fully human, as well as fully divine. The Bible says that He was tempted in every way just like we are – yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). This means that *He understands*. He knows how difficult things are for you to manage, how you're struggling to cope. He is patient with us, and we should be patient with each other.

We too need to understand our own and each other's feelings, wants and needs, and

should try to meet them before they get out of control – just like with a toddler. Make sure you stay hydrated. Try to get to bed in good time to allow you a decent sleep. It's good that you're trying to lose weight, but don't starve yourself to the point where you become irritable and angry. Maybe go jogging with your friends sometimes. Granted, taking care of your physical needs might not miraculously stop every argument, but you might have noticed that arguments come more frequently when your needs are not being met – if so, watching your levels of hydration, rest, blood sugar and so on may help.

Above all, meet each other's needs by showing love to each other – it's even a commandment of God (John 13:34). Give each other a hug now and then. Respond to each other's texts and emails,

and show each other that you value and appreciate and respect each other and your contributions to the family. Don't be afraid to praise each other when appropriate. Sometimes your partner's self-esteem could use a boost . . .

... but don't be proud

You know what kills a relationship and destroys a marriage? Pride does. Refusal to admit that you were wrong and she was right does. Maintaining a superior, self-righteous, arrogant, 'holier-than-thou' attitude does. Unforgiveness does.

Think back to the argument you just had. Maybe your partner actually had a point? Thinking back on it, maybe you *do* spend too much time watching TV? Maybe it wouldn't kill you to iron your own shirts, or take the bin out, or do the washing up, or take some time off

work to help look after the kids? Maybe you *did* embarrass him at the golf club. Maybe he *does* know how to cook a casserole better than you.

So you realise you've made a mistake. You've damaged your relationship and hurt your partner's feelings, maybe needlessly. Go up to her and tell her. Tell her you're sorry. Say that you'll do better next time, and mean it.

Yes, it might sting a little to admit that you were wrong – but honesty demands it. Your relationship needs it. Your husband needs to hear it. Value your marriage, and be the first to apologise; to give him a hug; to say, 'Please forgive me for the way I acted just then – I love you, and I always will.'

And you must be willing to forgive, too. Christ even prayed for those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). While we were still His enemies, He died for us (Romans 5:8). Don't stay on your high horse – come down off it and embrace your partner. Yes, she did wrong; yes, he hurt your feelings. No, it wasn't right, or good; and yes, the other party does deserve to be punished. But sometimes what the other person deserves is not what they need. And sometimes giving the other person what they deserve is not what we need either. We need to offer each other forgiveness, as much for our own sake as for theirs.

Forgiveness, love, patience – wait, there are other excellent virtues that can help save your relationship too. There's joy, and peace, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and gentleness, and self-control. These are all what the Bible calls 'the fruit of the Spirit' – the result of *genuinely* knowing God and allowing Him to live in your heart (Galatians 5:22, 23). Imagine what a marriage would look like if both partners were filled with these lovely character traits. Imagine how you and your partner could be. Do you want to be like this? Not many people are. But this, the Bible tells us, is what it means to truly know Jesus.

It's worth thinking about, isn't it?

¹<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/heating-temperature-couples-argument-home-air-conditioning-winter-study-results-a8665201.html>

²<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/relationships/10680984/Five-stupid-things-all-couples-argue-about.html>



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