

And YHVH Elohim said, “It is not good, the man being alone. I will make a helper as his counterpart.” ...Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cling to his wife and the two of them shall become one flesh.

Bereshit (Genesis) 2:18,24

Not long ago, my parents celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. A distinguishing milestone for any married couple, it was particularly sweet in their case.

When my mother was nine years old, her mother died giving birth. Days later, her father succumbed to a heart attack at the funeral, leaving behind twelve orphans. My father’s parents divorced when he was five. Her family was nominally religious; his decidedly secular. They met as college students and wed a few months after graduation. No seasoned sociologist would have wagered much on the long-term success of their marriage, but they were determined and committed.

As an orphan, my mother had long felt a divine hand in her life. Over time, her desire to connect more directly with God grew. She began attending Shabbat services, read the Bible voraciously and koshered the house—well, everything but the garage and my father’s study.

My father, though he hardly shared my mother’s religious enthusiasm, accommodated her. Being, in his eyes, a self-made man, he had no use for such stuff. As he saw it,

Photo: University of Sidney Archive

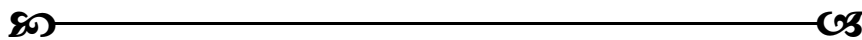
religion was mainly delusion, hypocrisy, mumbo-jumbo and the incessant whining for financial contributions. (And on the whole, he was right.)

This changed when, about twelve years into their marriage, my father had what would be classified as a nervous breakdown.

I will never forget the day he was taken away. One day, everything seemed normal. The next day, my father was gone. In his place was a shell in his exact likeness, except it was stunned and disheveled. It seemed a cyclone had caught him, thrashed him and emptied him of his soul. Whatever was that shattered creature now dwelling in his body, it knew not who I was, where we were, what day or month or year it was, nor did it even seem to know who it was. Before us was complete wreckage—physical, mental and emotional.

My father spent the next few months convalescing at a Veterans hospital. His job was history. The family finances were in shambles. Many of our relatives, especially on my father's side, braced themselves for my mother's exit. Far from leaving, she tenaciously nurtured a seemingly irrational assurance that this was the hand of God. She told us that this was part of his plan and that, just as he had restored Nebuchadnezzar, he would restore our father.

After having been completely dismantled overnight, his faculties being began returning very gradually. As he slowly emerged from the trauma and the ensuing fog, his utter dependency on God was deeply etched into his consciousness. Tentative in terms of confidence, yet determined in terms of duty, my father took on a new job and resumed his roles as husband and father. Though it would be years before he would feel reasonably whole again, he persevered—as did my mother. What these two, against all odds, bequeathed to their descendants is incalculable.



If there could be a complete discussion of marriage, it would certainly extend far beyond the scope of a brief article such as this. Yet, our emotional and social health, individually and collectively, is so dependent on state of our marriages, our value as a community and as an institution is negligible if we offer nothing in support of it.

Here we touch upon the most basic principles underlying the establishment and maintenance of a happy, resilient and successful marriage. (See also our article on Love.)

The Definition of Marriage

When a single man and a single woman voluntarily establish a sexual/domestic partnership in the absence of a prior such partnership, they are, for our purposes, married. A marriage is acknowledged in heaven without regard to any ecclesiastical, official any other institutional recognition of the same. The King of the Universe is not somehow constrained to the whims of mortals in this or any other regard. Whether a marriage is arranged or an elopement, it is the Heavenly court that rules.

Whether one has a Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Quaker or no wedding has no

bearing on the validity of a marriage in the eyes of Heaven. Neither does a certificate or license or written contract or the presence of an officiant or the acknowledgment of civil government. This is not to suggest that we consider weddings irrelevant. To the contrary, it is most appropriate that they be occasions of great notoriety and joy and that they reflect the profound gravity of a man and a woman coming together before God with its implications for future generations. However, as with all we commemorate, what goes on in our ceremony is driven by heavenly things, not vice versa.

Marriage is for Life

For the married woman has been bound by law to the living husband. However, if the husband dies, she is set free from the law of the husband. Thus, if the husband is living, she will be called an adulteress if she becomes another man's. Yet, if the husband dies, she is free from the law, her then not to be an adulteress by becoming another man's.

Romans 7:2-3

Whatever the Creator has joined together, man is unable to separate.

Matityahu (Matthew) 19:6

Careless perceptions spawned by the sexual revolution carry no weight in the divine reality. Whether we call it a domestic partnership or give it some other label, a marriage, without regard to culture or creed, is irrevocable, broken only by death. We must, therefore, prepare for it and enter into it with the greatest of care or not at all.

Marriage is a covenant (Malachi 2:14). A covenant is a contract that is binding on the successors to the original agreement—in this case, the children.

The temporal dividends of a strong and happy marriage are, considerable. Far beyond the personal satisfaction they afford, marriages form the core of stable, happy families in which our young develop mental and emotional fitness. Such families are, in turn, the foundation of stable, healthy communities.

Malachi reveals yet far greater implications of marriage, informing us that it is the union by which God creates his seed—his offspring (ch. 2:15).

We should expect that any institution so pivotal as marriage should have the attention of the adversary and that it should be subjected to a brilliant campaign of destruction. A discussion of marriage must, therefore, address both the strategies of success and those of the destructive forces.

True Love - What it Is; Where it Originates

Where marriage is concerned, romantic love is wonderful and exhilarating and altogether good. However, it is neither fulfilling nor complete of itself. To thrive over the long term, a couple needs also a deeper love.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:18

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I loved you. Greater love has no one than this: that one should lay down his life for his friends.

Yochanan (John) 15:12-13

Though laying down our life can be a singular act of mortal sacrifice, for most of us, it involves putting others first on a daily basis.

If there is, therefore, any exhortation in Messiah, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any tender mercies and compassion, fulfill you my joy, being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through rivalry or through conceit, but in humility, each counting others excelling himself; each of you not just looking to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which is also in Messiah Yahoshua,

Philippians 2:1-5

This deeper love is not the selfish hunger that seeks to be gratified. This is the unselfish desire for another's well-being, acted upon to achieve that goal. Such love does not originate within us. On our own, we are as Paul describes himself:

For I know that within me, that is in my flesh, dwells no good. For to will is present to me, but to accomplish the virtuous, I do not find. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Yahoshua Meshiach our Master!

Romans 7:18,24-25

For we also once were senseless, disobedient, being led astray, slaving for various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our savior toward man appeared, not by works in righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy, he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the holy spirit, which he poured out on us richly through Yahoshua Moshiach our savior;

Titus 3:3-6

The heart is devious above all things and desperately weak. Who can discern it?

Yirmayahu (Jeremiah) 17:9

On our own, we are all about self-preservation, consumed with satisfying one appetite

after another in endless succession. That is, of ourselves, what we bring to life and to every relationship. On our own, the best we can achieve is through ulterior motives.

To impart something better into our relationships, we must draw from another source; not from an inanimate source, but from our companionship with our heavenly Father and his firstborn Son.

Do not err, my beloved brothers; every act of good giving and every perfect gift is from above, descending from the Father of Lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning.

Ya'akov (James) 1:16-17

The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love.

1Yochanan (John) 4:8,16

If we can face what we really are without God, cultivate close companionship with him, and, through his spirit, impart his qualities into our relationships, that is love. The extent to which both parties can do this in marriage will determine the long-term intimacy and the success of that marriage.

Those of us who, from our formative, childhood years, are taught the truth about what we are, who God is and what he desires for us have a tremendous advantage. We can use this understanding to examine ourselves honestly instead of under some delusion. We can impart what we draw from God into all our relationships. Knowing this on an intellectual level is one matter; implementing it is another. With time and effort, we acquire the skills necessary to establish and nurture healthy relationships.

The best environment to learn all of this is in the home, from parents who are dedicated husband and wife, paired for life. When the time comes for actual implementation, close partnership with God is the foundation of successful marriage.

Proper Decorum Between Unmarried Members of the Opposite Sex

Contrary to popular opinion and practice, marriages and sexual relationships are not disposable. Once a sexual/domestic relationship is entered into, there is no turning back the clock to a prior state. The stark implications of sexual carelessness are well known in the holy community:

A mamzer (one born of certain prohibited sexual unions) shall not enter into the assembly of YHVH, even to the tenth generation none of his shall enter into the assembly of YHVH.

D'varim (Deuteronomy) 23:2

Young people who understand the gravity of this reality are circumspect about their relationships with those of the opposite sex.

How we treat members of the opposite sex is dictated by our view of them. In this regard, Paul advised Timothy to treat “the older women as mothers, younger ones as sisters, in all purity.” [1Timothy 5:2] The extent to which men accomplish this has immeasurable bearing on the success of their relationships.

Relationships are mind-to-mind, and ours must always to reflect a respect for the thoughts and emotions of others. If any relationship is to reflect this fact, it is marriage.

Likewise, men, dwelling together according to knowledge, as with a more delicate vessel, bestowing honor to the woman, as truly being co-heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers not be cut off.

And, finally, be all of one mind, sympathetic, loving as brothers, tenderhearted, friendly . . .

1Kefa (Peter) 3:7-8

The extent of this likemindedness comes into sharper focus with Malachi’s fascinating statement, “And did he not make one . . . and why the one?” (ch. 2:15) Elsewhere in the Bible, we read of the husband and wife becoming “one flesh.” Here, the oneness goes beyond the flesh. It had better, since the deterioration of our mortal bodies is a given.

At the same time, relationships are not merely a cerebral exercise. What begins in our thoughts and attitudes about one another must be reflected in and bolstered by our behavior.

For men, Yahoshua gave a crucial preemptive strategy in this regard:

I say to you, everyone looking at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matityahu 5:28

Women are to cooperate in this arena:

I desire . . . the women to adorn themselves in appropriate clothing, with modesty and sensibility.

1Timothy 2:8-9

In I Corinthians 7:1, Paul wrote “. . . it is good for a man not to touch a woman . . .” Some, unfamiliar with Jewish culture in this regard, will assert that this phrase was written by the Corinthians to Paul and that he was responding to their statement. However, this stance remains very much alive in Judaism and other communities today. Take for example the following excerpt from Gila Manolson’s book, *Magic Touch*,

Judaism, always an astute observer of the human scene, believes that men and women who are not close relatives should be extremely reserved about expressing affection for one another through touch. In short, Judaism says:

unless you're married to each other, don't.¹

As stated, this hardly suggests a hands-off approach between parents and grandparents and their children or between siblings. However, in the holy community, there are real boundaries in the realm of physical contact between the sexes, and they are not limited to outright, sexual contact.

Most moderns will scoff at such an approach. Societies, having shed any strictures in this regard, have lost their grip on non-sexual decorum between the genders, passively watching specific, accepted boundaries slide into oblivion. The absence of rules has left young people, in particular, unprotected. In addition, it is making it very difficult for the courts to differentiate between cases of consensual sex and rape.

Manolson's book goes on to explain in detail the power of touch, and the profound benefits of limiting it. She gives contemporary words to what has been policy in her community for thousands of years. We find a very curious affirmation of what she writes from an unexpected quarter.

Eric and Leslie Ludy grew up and remain in evangelical Christianity where no such policy of "shomer negiah," as it's called, exists. As the Ludys attest, evangelical youth are not generally asking if they can touch their romantic partners, but how intimately.

In *When God Writes Your Love Story*,² Eric's description of how he arrived at his own, personal view of romantic touching, as distinct from that of his community, is fascinating. Drifting off from a conversation with some college buddies about, among other topics, girls, into his own musings, he imagines what his future wife is doing on this particular Friday night. Is she, too, dreaming of her life-long partner, or is she being groped at this moment by her latest casual flame? Finding the latter thought revolting, Eric then asks young men to imagine their future wives can, from an unseen vantage point, watch their every move. How would a girl feel about observing her future husband kiss or caress another young woman?

This initial train of thought led Eric Ludy to be circumspect about his behavior with young women, to put a tight rein on his natural inclinations. He resolved to do nothing with a girl that would offend his future spouse, whomever and wherever she was.

There is a certain beauty in the Ludys' reflections and conclusions, their having arrived rather spontaneously and individually on certain godly principles about romantic relationships. Being led in the heart with no external (human, that is) pressure, they readily took ownership of constraints foreign to them and made a new set of values and responsibilities their personal approach.

At the same time, one must acknowledge that the initial basis Eric's revelation was

¹The Magic Touch, Gila Manolson, p. 21, Targum Press, Jerusalem, 1999

²When God Writes Your Love Story, Eric & Leslie Ludy, pp. 99-100, 104-105, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, 2004

entirely selfish. In addition, in adopting higher standards, new and fresh to them, the Ludys regrettably take aim at standards of behavior when cultivated as community policy. In two sections entitled, "Its Not About a Formula" and "Rules, Rules, Rules!," they undermine the very values they promote by condemning rules and formulas for human behavior.

In truth, the Bible is full of rules and formulas by which we can lead incredibly fulfilling lives, avoid countless heartaches and walk the path to an eternal place in God's family. And in the process of walking that path together, we are expected to teach, to encourage and to exhort one another to pursue the most excellent way. Only because of the rules and formulas are we not relegated to a life of experimentation, while those closest to us watch passively with every appearance of indifference.

A real problem the Ludys correctly identify is the failure of individuals to make high standards their own and to cultivate their own, personal relationship with God. However, it is not the rules and formulas themselves at fault, but either the spurning of them on the one hand, or reliance on them absent the essential, close relationship with God on the other.

...the mind of the flesh is enmity toward God; for it is not being subjected to the law of God, for neither can it be. And those being in the flesh are not able to please God. However, you are not in flesh, but in spirit, since the spirit of God dwells in you.

Romans 8:7-9

We need to be aware that our default is hostility to God and his rules. There may be a certain exhilaration in reinventing the wheel, but it is no way to choreograph the interplay between many. By this, we do not suggest mapping every step, stripping all our autonomy. That would be futile. On the other hand, people—especially young people—can thrive in an environment where they have a reasonably good sense of what behavior to expect of others, as well as of themselves. Absent that, we grow accustomed to expecting the worst of people.

For a whole community to promote high moral standards successfully, parents must be lovingly engaged with their children, nurturing, setting a good example, emphasizing the positive benefits of the standards. A primarily austere approach will practically guarantee a bitter reaction to the ways and values of the prior generation.

While it is encouraging to see those such as Eric Ludy arrive at a better way, his revelation spawned initially from nothing more than pure jealousy. Ultimately, we must be motivated by more than that.

Young people need the opportunity for healthy interaction unfettered with the pressures and expectations brought on by touching. They also need to take encouragement from the fact that there are others like them who share their values in this regard. It is their elders' responsibility to foster such an environment, administering coherent, consistent policy in a positive, nurturing way.

This fostering role is the responsibility of parents and communities. It entails organizing

a variety of social activities in which boys and girls and young men and women can mingle in groups. It is in these group settings that individuals learn to interact with a wide variety of people outside the family. Such events enable and encourage the establishment of a variety of healthy acquaintances and friendships with members of both genders, while coupling imposes a romantic element, too often prematurely.

It is crucial to note that such social events involve the parents as well as the whole cross-section of the community. This affords parents the opportunity to observe how their young interact with others so they can guide them in general and, when appropriate, in their courtships.

While this approach was once the norm, it contrasts sharply with currently prevailing practice. Today, social activities are overwhelmingly segregated by age groups. Young people most often are left to navigate their own way through their peer relationships, their parents being largely oblivious, detached and ignorant. At best, events for young people might have chaperones, but those of other age groups, including parents, are not participants in such events—a state too often mirroring life itself.

In a final note regarding proper decorum between unmarried members of the opposite sex, we consider Paul's admonition, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

So far as holy disciples are concerned, married men and women are not together with others of the opposite sex to whom they are not married (parents and children excepted). For example, they do not meet alone behind closed doors nor work together where none others are present. They do not dine together without a third party. They form no collaborations as a couple. They place the broadest margin between themselves and any vortex that would, in fact or impression, remotely compete with or threaten their marital trust and fidelity.

Nothing is to be compared with two newlyweds who come together, free of the memories of prior trysts, free of guilt, free of doubt. Nothing is to be compared with a lifetime shared thereafter, in passionate, uncompromising, steadfast devotion to the death. Making this happen very much involves the sum of our various mixed-gender relationships as well as the singular one with the love of our life.

Courtship

When we wed, we do not simply marry an individual. We enter the family of our partner, however close or remote. For better and for worse, we inherit by proximity much of what our partner has inherited by blood and by conditioning.

Sage advice to young people and their parents is to scrutinize the parents and siblings of anyone in whom they are interested. How do they interact with one another? How do they meet challenges?

So far as providing a positive example of a courtship goes, the Bible is quite lean and sparse on details. The most complete account we have is that of Ruth and Bo'az. Her being a foreigner who cut ties with her own culture, Bo'az had little, if any, opportunity

to meet her family. What every courtship needs and what these two did have was the opportunity to spend time a significant amount of time in close proximity, observing one another at work. Ruth learned firsthand how Bo'az treated his staff and managed his affairs. Bo'az observed Ruth's industry, her devotion to Na'omi and her devotion to YHVH. A courtship spent only in leisure is a blind and foolhardy introduction.

Life is not all about entertaining ourselves and seeking comfort. How does that person of interest handle pressure, depravation, discomfort, criticism, failure, loss? There will be plenty of these after marriage. Are they considerate and kind when it's not expedient? These things we learn only with adequate time and a variety of shared experiences, working as well as playing together.

Though rarely observed in western culture, the erusin or betrothal, an arrangement provided for in the Torah and attested to throughout the Bible, is highly instructive.³

The erusin was much more than a modern engagement. It was entered into with its own ceremony, at which the bride was given her ketuvah—the marriage contract. Once formalized, the couple were reckoned as husband and wife, yet they were not permitted to live together nor to have intimate, physical contact. The Torah attests to the couple's new status when it differentiates between the penalty of sexual impropriety involving a betrothed individual verses one not betrothed. The former, being adultery, incurred the death penalty. We also observe this arrangement in place in the account of Yosef and Miriam prior to Yahoshua's birth.

There is a subtle, yet profoundly crucial message in the way scripture broaches betrothals. The message is this: Emotional intimacy should be established by couples well before physical, sexual intimacy, but emotional intimacy should also be reserved for couples who are prepared for a lifelong commitment to one another.

The value of a commitment such as betrothal is lost on promiscuous modern society. In large part, only remnants remain of its conception of a couple's "point of no return"—a conception preoccupied with and limited to physical contact. Yet the need for and power of emotional bonding remains, becoming a loose cannon in a loose environment.

This is as true for married couples as it is for singles. In marriage, emotional intimacy must be cultivated continuously. Outside marriage, "emotional infidelity," as M. Gary Neuman calls it, is to be given a wide margin.⁴

Though there were betrothals in which the parties remained largely strangers to one another, the ideal erusin provided an opportunity for the couple to forge the special and unique emotional connection well ahead of the sexual one. It is crucial, therefore, that we reserve our closest emotional male/female bond to our spouse—from both sides of the wedding horizon. The growing emotional connection in a romance—the one so

³אֵרוּסִין (erusin) is derived from the biblical verb אָרַשׁ (aras) which is to betroth.

⁴Emotional Infidelity: How to Affair-Proof Your Marriage and 10 Other Secrets to a Great Relationship, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2002

traumatic to break—is of profound concern to God, as it should be to us.

We encourage and provide opportunities for young people to socialize and work together in groups of their peers rather than as couples. In this way, they can get acquainted with a variety of people and enjoy the most freedom from the pressures inherent in early coupling.

Men's and Women's Roles in Marriage

In addition to being provided with sound strategies and a healthy environment, the young need to understand and prepare for their roles in marriage. Fundamentally, this entails drawing the income necessary to sustain the household, then managing the household itself. The array of demands will draw on all the aptitudes and skills both husband and wife have to offer.

Men

Let him labor, working what is good with the hands, that he may have something to give to the one that has need.

Ephesians 4:28

If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially his family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1 Timothy 5:8

Barring some serious disability, it is the husband's responsibility to procure the bulk of the family income from without and the wife's responsibility to manage the household and its resources. It is crucial to recognize that what the husband provides for his family is more than merely monetary and material, though that does occupy the greater portion of our waking hours.

And fathers, do not provoke your children, but nurture them in the discipline and instruction of the Master.

Ephesians 6:4

And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. And you shall teach them to your sons, and shall speak of them as you sit in your house, and as you walk in the way, and as you are lying down, and as you are rising up.

When your son asks you hereafter, saying, "What are the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which YHVH your God has commanded you?" Then you shall say to your son, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and YHVH brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And YHVH gave signs and great and grievous wonders on Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on all his household, before our eyes. And he has brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land which he had sworn to our fathers. And

YHVH commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear YHVH our God for our good forever, to keep us alive, as today. And it shall be righteousness for us when we take heed to do all this commandment before YHVH our God, as he has commanded us.”

D’varim (Deuteronomy) 6:6-7,20-25

Women

Train the young women to be diligent, lovers of husbands, lovers of children, discreet, pure, keepers at home, good, subject to their own husbands.

Titus 2:4-5

Though many discount the role of the homemaker, the saying, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” is well-taken. When a woman becomes a mother, her responsibilities are both vital and expansive.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 31:10-31 provides a wonderful description of the exemplary woman. She, too, enters into commerce and draws income from it, though she does so primarily from the home, where she presides over her paramount duties.

Who can find a woman of accomplishment? For her value is far above jewels.

The heart of her husband trusts in her, that he has no lack of gain.

She deals good with him and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax and she works with her hands with delight.

She is like the merchant ships—she brings in her food from afar.

She also rises while it is yet night and gives game to her household and a portion to her maidens.

She has examined a field and takes it; she plants a vineyard from the fruit of her hands.

She has girded her loins with strength and has made her arms strong.

She tastes whether her gain is good. Her lamp goes not out by night.

She has sent forth her hands on the distaff and her hands have held the spindle.

She spreads out her hands to the poor; yes, she stretches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

She makes herself ornamental coverings; her clothing is bleached linen and purple.

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits with the elders of the land.

She makes fine linen garments, and sells, and she delivers girdles to the merchant.

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she shall rejoice at the day to come.

She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue.
She oversees the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, for he praises her:
Many are the daughters who act with success, but you excel them all!
Grace may be deceitful, and beauty passing, but a woman who fears YHVH, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates.

Together

Distinct though their roles be, often in different arenas, the husband and wife are not independent agents, but a team. Individuals, vary tremendously in their personalities and aptitudes, men from other men, women from other women, in addition to the real gender differences. Thus, beyond the basics identified above, each couple does well to divide the various responsibilities according to their particular combination of assets. For example, in some marriages, the man has greater financial aptitude than the woman; in other households, the opposite is true. One party will likely be more sociable than the other. Successful couples integrate their skills and capitalize on the best each brings to their union.

This integration does not happen effortlessly or overnight. Young couples will offend and disappoint one another under the best circumstances. Yet the very challenge of forging a new life together, of sharing the rigorous experience and accomplishment will reinforce the relationship.

As important as it is to coordinate our roles and capitalize on our assets in marriage, we could be describing little more than a well-tuned machine—unless we have mutual affection.

Let your fountains be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. She is a loving deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts satisfy you every time, and always be ravished in her love.

Mishlei (Proverbs) 5:18-19

Relish life with the woman whom thou love all the days of your ephemeral life which he hath given thee under the sun.

Qohelet (Ecclesiastes) 9:9

Let the husband give due kindness to the wife, and likewise the wife also to the husband. The wife does not have total authority of her own body, but the husband. And likewise also the husband does not have total authority over his own body, but the wife. Do not deprive one another, unless by agreement for a time, that you may be free for fasting and prayer.

And come together again, that the Satan may not tempt you through your incontinence.

1 Co 7:3-5

. . . having been subject to one another in the fear of God.

Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Master, because a husband is head of the wife, as also Messiah is head of the assembly, and he is the Savior of the body. But even as the assembly is subject to Messiah, so also the wives to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Messiah also loved the assembly and gave himself up on its behalf, that he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the washing of the water in the word, that he might present it to himself as the glorious assembly, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such things, but that it be holy and without blemish. So, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies, (he loving his wife loves himself), for then no one hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as also the Master the assembly.

Ephesians 5:21-29

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy spirit in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? You were purchased with a price. So glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are of God.

1 Corinthians 6:19

The scriptures quoted above express one of the most central principles underpinning successful marriages—servitude. We are God’s property and we exist to be of service to others. Once married, husbands and wives both need to relinquish considerable autonomy and to carefully craft a common will. It is prudent to contemplate what it would be like to be the servant of a person of romantic interest. Giving such a prospect advance consideration will greatly affect our choice of a partner and the adjustment to the partnership.

Proclaiming these Values and their Practice

As already stated, the best place to learn the principles and techniques intrinsic to healthy marriages is in a healthy home. However, no household is perfect and many parents, despite their desire, lack the familiarity and the skills to properly guide their children. Supporting families in this regard is an essential role of the congregation and its leadership.

So the overseer (supervisor or “paqid”) must be blameless, husband of one woman, temperate, sensible, well-ordered, hospitable, apt at teaching; not a drunkard, not a contentious one, not money-loving, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not avaricious; ruling his own house well, having children in subjection with all respect. If, however, anyone does not know how to rule his own house, how will he care for a congregation of God?

He should not be a novice, lest being puffed up he may fall into the devil's judgment.

In addition, he must also have a good witness from those outside, that he not fall into reproach and into a snare of the devil.

Similarly, deacons (attendant or "sharat") are to be reverent, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy of ill gain, having the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

And also let these be tested first, then let them serve, being without reproach. Likewise, women are to be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

Let deacons be husbands of one woman, ruling their own houses and children well.

1 Timothy 3:2-12

For this cause I left you in Crete, that you might set in order the things lacking and appoint elders (zaken) in every city, as I ordered you:

If anyone is above reproach, husband of one wife woman, having faithful children, not in accusation of loose behavior, or disobedient—for the overseer must be above reproach as a steward of God—not self-pleasing, not prone to anger, not given to wine, not a quarreler, not greedy of ill gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, discreet, just, holy, temperate, clinging to the faithful word according to the teaching, that he may be able both to encourage by sound doctrine and to convict the ones contradicting.

Titus 1:5-9

Paul makes it crystal clear that congregational leaders must be exemplary parents. When this instruction is followed, those families struggling with their relationships get effective guidance and support from those with the knowledge, experience and skill able to provide it. Where this instruction is ignored, congregations are socially dysfunctional collectively, as are the overwhelming majority of their constituent families. Unable to focus messages on healthy relationships (both due to instructor incompetence and/or an aversion to offending the dysfunctional), teaching is relegated to technicalities, to the superficial and to vague abstractions.

Marriage is the arrangement by which the children of God come into being. It is the nucleus of the family which, in turn, is the fundamental building block of the congregation and of society. Laying the groundwork for its success is worth all we can invest, for the present and for future generations.

When people look forward to marriage, they do well to anticipate and prepare for filling its roles appropriately. Failure to do so will strain their relationships and create dysfunctions that will burden others as well as themselves. Success, on the other hand, will be enjoyed abundantly not only by the couple and their children, but by the

community at large and the generations to follow.



Photo: Ioannis Tokaris