

Introduction to Biblical Counseling

Traps to Avoid When Choosing a Mate

I. Introduction

A. Probably the most important decision you will make apart from choosing to confess Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, is the choice of a lifetime mate – a husband or wife.

B. Traps are dangerous. They are a device designed for catching rodents and animals. They spring shut suddenly resulting in death. A trap can be any stratagem used to catch a person unawares, often to their ultimate loss.

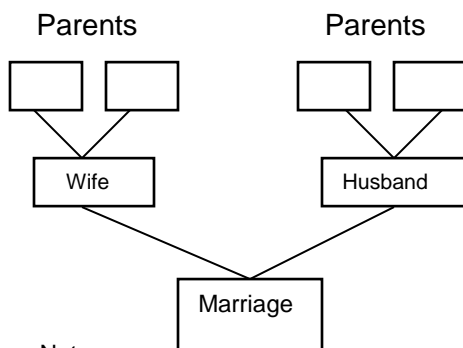
1. The bait for the animal trap is very luring, tasty and appealing.
2. Their desire for food blocks out the danger of the environment.
3. Your normal needs can bait a trap for your personal loss.

C. Selecting a mate is filled with potential traps that can have lifelong negative consequences.

1. Satan has many “traps”
 - a. Scripture calls them strategies, schemes, wiles designed to deceive and to destroy your future happiness and mutually fulfilling relationships.
 - 1) Ephesians 6:11, “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to (successfully) stand against the wiles of the devil.”

D. Many couples who go for counseling usually have many personal issues that do not have anything to do with their mate. They brought these issues into the marriage and now these issues affect the marriage. Current words, actions or attitudes in our mate can trigger a past painful memory.

1. Often the issues they are struggling with are generational or originated in their birth family.



- a. Issues like bitterness, anger, fear, temper, dependency, addictions, controllers, withdrawing, victims, helplessness.
 - 2. These negative issues may be playing out dysfunctional scripts or roles they learned in their birth family.
 - a. Ex. 20:5b, "Visiting (passing on) the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me."
 - b. Roles such as, the family hero, black sheep, troublemaker, peacemaker, fixer, pleaser, terrorist (anger), princess, scholar, failure, loser, compliant, rescuer, etc.
 - c. Each role reflects at least one dysfunctional aspect (role) of the birth family.
- E. No future marriage can ever be healthier than the emotional health and maturity of the least healthy potential partner.**
- 1. If you are strong and healthy and you fall into the trap of marrying someone who isn't, you are in for an unhappy marriage.
 - 2. Marriage was never designed to fix past hurts or make up for losses or disappointments.
 - a. No one's love will heal another's past pain. It may open the door to healing but they will need to deal with the past themselves. Again, it is not a marriage issue, but it can greatly affect the marriage. Usually correcting it will need to involve someone other than the mate. (Gal. 6:2) The mate can be an encourager and lend support, but it is not the responsibility of the spouse to fix their mate (Heb. 3:13; Rom. 12:18).
 - b. You cannot skip out on maturity by "marrying into it."
 - 3. A mature person is able to do all the things that an adult life and relationship requires: give and receive love, independent and self-sufficient, can live out their values honestly, is responsible, has self-confidence, deal with problems, live out their talents and gifts and have a life (Boundaries in Marriage, p. 86).
- F. Choosing a healthy mature mate has more to do with the eventual success of a marriage than anything else you can do combined after marriage.**
- 1. Red warning lights you see now in dating do not turn green after marriage.
 - a. It is a myth that you can change your mate after marriage. Change is in theirs and God's circle of responsibility. You may have an influence but not the power to change anyone.

- 1) Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;”
 - 2) Philippians 2:12-13, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.
2. What you ignored before marriage will always be standing at your door after marriage.
 - a. Often couples will admit they saw the negative characteristics before they were married but chose to ignore them or foolishly thought they could change them. The bait looked good but it was a relational trap...a painful one.
 - b. Many will put on mental “blindness” to avoid being distracted by the truth or reality. Blindness belongs on horses, not people.

G. It was God’s original design for two people in marriage to:

1. Be healthy or mature on the inside (spiritually, mentally, emotionally, core beliefs).
 - a. Know who you are. “Men and women who know themselves well stand an excellent chance of selecting a mate well suited to them. The opposite is also true. Those people who are largely unaware of their inner workings make a decision as if they’re spinning a roulette wheel – they cross their fingers and hope for the best” (Date...or Soul Mate? p. 40).
 - b. II Cor. 13:5, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”
2. Be healthy on the outside (behavior patterns, habits).
 - a. This is to be reflected in all aspects of their relationships.
 - b. Rom. 12:18, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”
3. Be purposefully directed by God’s Spirit and not emotions and passions.
 - a. Rom. 8:14, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”
4. Be in Fellowship with God by living in obedience to Him.
 - a. I John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

H. Originally, God made the first choice of marriage, Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:21-22).

1. Later, families made the mate selections.
 - a. The parents' maturity and life experience of what it took to make a marriage, plus knowing their child, helped them make a good choice.
 - b. This is seen in the selection process of a wife for Isaac.
 - 1) Gen. 24:3-4, "And I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; (4) but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac."

I. Today you have the primary responsibility for the choice of a mate. The three characteristics of adulthood are choice, responsibility and consequences. It is God who gives you the power of choice with good or bad.

1. A great marriage is more possible if you date wisely and choose wisely by avoiding the traps.
 - a. Many will state that ... A bad marriage is worse than no marriage unless you are controlled by fear of abandonment or being alone, then, you will stay in an abusive marriage without change.
 - b. One single person said, "I would rather be single and wish I was married, than be married and wish I was single."
2. Choosing the right mate begins with your decision to making the best choice possible – the choice that would glorify God and give you a good quality of life.
 - a. It takes hard work and patience during the "selection" process.
 - 1) Prov. 18:22, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord."
 - 2) Ps. 37:7a, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."
 - b. It will require some training, trust and a lot of guidance.
 - 1) Prov. 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean (depend) on your own understanding. (6) In all your ways (plans) acknowledge Him (factor Him in), and He will make your paths straight."
 - c. God is the only one who could justifiably control our decisions and yet He refrains from doing so.

J. This lifetime decision is worth all the effort you put into it now before you say, “I do.” Why? Because great marriages are made of hard work, not chance or luck.

II. What are nine of the most common traps (strategies) to avoid in selecting a mate? (Prop: Flashing red light)

A. Trap #1 - Too fast! The decision to marry is made too fast (prop: big clock).

1. You are already in trouble when you decide to get married too quickly.
2. The pressure to marry quickly is usually based on one or more of the following basic belief fantasies. All of these are a trap for future relational pain and ultimate potential divorce.
 - a. “I will never fear being alone again.” Trap. Fear is one of the top reasons for a quick marriage. The primary fear is that of being alone or the fear of abandonment.
 - 1) Television personality, Oprah, tossed the car keys of her boyfriend into the toilet so he would not leave her.
 - 2) I John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”
 - b. “Marriage will make me perpetually happy.” Trap. This is based on a fairytale picture of marriage motivated by the desire to enter that fantasy land to be perpetually happy. Marriage is to be based on sacrifice, not selfishness.
 - 1) Eph. 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,”
 - 2) I Pet. 3:1, “Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,
 - c. “I have a need to be in control.”
 - 1) Because so many men are afraid to make a commitment, a woman can feel relieved to find a guy who is excited about marriage and family. The red warning light should start blinking when he jumps too soon and starts planning your future together when he may be clueless about who you really are (desires, dreams, gifts, talents, likes, dislikes, preferences or family heritage). It could mean he wants to wrap you up into a tight package that he can own (possess) and control. A woman could also attempt to do the same thing.
 - 2) You may have to take steps to slow things down. If he runs over you and your wishes now, you’re probably in trouble in the years ahead because

this pattern will continue. Your opinions, needs and preferences will probably be ignored.

- 3) If there is a guaranteed way to destroy trust and love control is it. Love must be given freely.
 - 4) We are told in Scripture (Gal. 5:23) to control ourselves, not people, places or things. Distinguish between management and control.
- d. "I have a strong desire to please another at the expense of my own feelings, desires, dreams or goals" trap.
- 1) Angry controllers usually marry compliant pleasers.
 - 2) Pleasers can't say "no" because of a fear of rejection.
 - 3) Pleasers tend to over function in a relationship.
 - 4) Pleasers get their value and worth from pleasing so they are highly motivated to start feeling good as soon as possible.
 - 5) The inability to say "no" is a red light worth acknowledging as a trap.
 - 6) Pleasers think they will be loved if they just perform right but they learn too late. Enough will never be enough.
- e. "I have a need to be needed" trap.
- 1) The need to be needed can be so strong that as soon as you meet another needy person you instantly bond out of fear and neediness, not love.
 - 2) The needy person quickly starts to drain the other person of time, energy, resources and emotions. They become high maintenance. They need to be calling, texting, face booking, all the time. They have an empty emotional bucket that can't be filled enough because there are holes in the bottom. They try to fill the emotional bucket from the outside in. Whereas, God wants to fill your inner needs from the inside out.
 - a) John 4:14, "but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."
 - 3) Often needy people marry rescuers and fixers who later get bored with the marriage because their mate does not need to be rescued or fixed anymore.
 - 4) Needy people are takers like a parasite and not givers. In time the needy mate drains the rescuer or fixer and the relationship disintegrates because they rarely give back.

- a) "He who loves the most, gives the most. He who loves the least, gives the least."
- 5) Needy people can become very codependent and will take the responsibility for another person's problems and not require that person to take responsibility for himself.
- f. "I can escape the pain of my present life" trap. (abusive home life)
 - 1) This pain can come from a difficult family environment characterized with a lot of arguing, fighting, yelling, conflict, physical and/or emotional abuse.
 - 2) Often in a quick marriage one source of pain is only exchanged for a deeper pain. It is not an escape, it's an exchange of more of the same.
- g. "I like the way they look" trap. True, there should be a mutual physical attraction.
 - 1) But if all the attraction is physical, the love is based on how this person makes me feel. That is why affairs are not based on love, but based on how the other person makes me feel. True, love does not seek its own interest at the expense of others.
 - a) I Cor. 13:5, "does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;"
 - 2) Our physiology tastes change over the years. If the attraction was primarily physical, one will need someone else later to recreate that same attraction and this becomes a set-up for an affair. This is one of the reasons for a midlife crisis.
 - a) In Venezuela the number one request for parents from their 16 year old daughters is for their parents to provide them with breast implants.
- h. "I need someone to take care of me" or "I can take care of them" trap.
 - 1) If you need to be taken care of like your parents did or attempted to do, that immature need will override all caution and you will quickly bond out of fear and marry a substitute "parent." The relationship will be characterized by a child-parent relationship instead of a husband-wife relationship. The primary caretaker will be the parent and the needy one will be the child.
 - 2) Often you will hear a wife say she has four kids, three under the age of ten and one over thirty. She has to be the responsible one. He is the least irresponsible one.
 - 3) Frequently younger women will marry older because they see security and stability in the men that they do not see in younger men. Marrying a

person older than you is not a moral issue. It can be an emotionally dysfunctional issue and result in unnecessary conflict.

- i. "I will always be loved" trap (like I'm not being loved now).
 - 1) With this deep need to be loved, anything anyone does for them is translated by the needy one as love when it could be control or manipulation.
 - 2) Now they can't wait to get that deep need met at any and all expense. All red lights are ignored with the hope they will turn green after they're married, then, snap! They are caught.
3. Quick decisions are usually full of fantasy (denial) and are short on reality (facts).
 - a. Fantasy says, "I love the way you make me feel." Reality says, "What happens when they stop making you feel good?" What is the basis of the relationship, emotions or commitment?
 - b. Reality says, "Look out, there are character flaws." You should ask yourself, "Can I live with them?" These are red lights that will not turn green after marriage.
4. Quick decision trap indicates that the "task" (hard work) of marriage is being seriously underestimated or just ignored.
 - a. Do both of you have the maturity and commitment to each other that it takes to make a marriage successful year in and year out and trust God for the strength and wisdom to do it?
 - b. Marriage was never designed as an opportunity to grow up. That is what youth and young adulthood is for.
 - 1) The childish things should be put away before marriage, not afterwards.
 - 2) I Cor. 13:11, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."
 - c. Maturity comes from experiencing many trials, temptations and testings as a youth and young adult.
 - 1) James 1:2-4, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
 - 2) I Peter 1:3-7

5. The risk of marital failure is greatly reduced by longer periods of dating provided it is a time to get to know each other mentally, emotionally and spiritually, not physically.
 - a. Sexual activity before marriage blocks the task of learning in the other three areas.
 - 1) You will not spend most of your 24 hours each week day having sex in bed.
 - b. The need to get to know the other person mentally, emotionally and spiritually is one of the excuses given for living together before marriage which includes sexual rebellion against God.
 - 1) The heart belief, "I can always end this relationship if things get tough," carries over into marriage that if it does not work out, "I can always get out" which will involve a lot of pain both for you and your children.
 - 2) One set of parents told their daughter that they will not pay for the wedding unless they live together for a year. They did. Later he became a full blown alcoholic and they are now divorced.
 - c. The fear of divorce can bond a couple in a pseudo "marriage" with the goal of seeing if they can live together. The sad part is that the dating ends, the mating begins and the seeds of destruction have already been sown up to at least a 50% probability.
6. The Arab and Israeli conflict today is a result of Abraham's failure to wait on God to provide a son through his wife Sarah.
 - a. (Add)Abraham became the father of Ishmael through Sarah's servant but when God provided His child, Isaac, his mother Sarah rejected Ishmael.
 - b. The Arabs, descendants of Ishmael (whose mother was an Egyptian), have hated the Jews, descendants of Isaac from that time on (Gen. 21:8-13). Islam has rewritten history and states for example that Ishmael, not Isaac, was offered up by Abraham. This may be an effort to address their perceived inferiority.
7. In a study of 51 middle aged wives, a strong correlation was found between length of the dating and marriage satisfaction.
8. Longer periods of dating provide more experience in seeing potential trouble spots in a relationship and correct them.

B. Trap # 2 - Too young trap (prop: bib and pacifier).

1. You may already be in trouble when you decide to marry at a young age.

- a. ill.: Shelia married Mike when she was 19. She didn't know who she was or what she wanted. Several years later she was disillusioned and felt stuck, trapped. She thought he was going to take care of her like a parent. His responsibility was to make her happy. Their basis of love was how the other made each other feel. Love is a choice, a decision. Jesus said, "If you love me keep My commandments" – not make me feel loved (John 14:15). These misconceptions have been corrected in their lives. Now Mike and Shelia mentor other couples.
2. If you want to eliminate one of the most prevalent causes of marriage failure, take seriously the need to wait until you have accomplished at least two tasks:
 - a. Develop your own identity (who you really are) and understand who you are in Christ, including your spiritual gifts.
 - 1) You are a different person at 18 than you are at 25.
 - a) Even your food likes and dislikes change.
 - 2) How can you select a marriage partner who is best for you if you do not know who you are?
 - 3) In youth you are exploring who you are and what you want to be.
 - a) 72% of all college students change their majors.
 - 4) In youth it is easier to conform to what others want you to be and not be who God made you to be.
 - a) Conformity to others is designed to get acceptance and approval and avoid rejection.
 - 5) When you choose a mate based on the grown up you, the choice will be as good ten to twenty years later as it is now.
 - a) Sadly, 30 years old is the new 21 years old standard of maturity.
 - 6) The task of understanding your own identity could be incomplete until your mid-twenties.
 - b. Determine what your life goal is (educationally, spiritually, vocationally, ministry, family).
 - 1) This is usually not really clear until your mid-twenties.
 - a) One mate wanted to go into ministry but the other did not. Now they have to live with regret.

- 2) Before mid-twenties you may not have defined these goals and your needs.
- 3) You may not have learned to be independent instead of dependent and have not gained enough life experience to make mature decisions.
 - a) One recent study indicated most stable marriages have a starting date between ages 25-28 years.
3. One indication of maturity is when you are confronted by someone with a different opinion than yours you are able to:
 - a. Maintain mutual respect in the light of those differences.
 - b. You do not feel threatened by the absence of agreement because you are secure about your opinions (Fighting For, p. 298).
 - c. We grow when someone who loves us “wounds” us by telling us painful truths we need to hear. It requires responsibility from each other by telling the truth and not giving in to each other’s immaturity (Boundaries in Marriage, p. 96).

C. Trap # 3 - Too eager to be married trap. One or both persons are attempting to fix something that is broken in themselves or someone else (prop: nurse’s cap, stethoscope, white gown or shirt).

1. Key questions: Why am I in a hurry to get married? What am I attempting to avoid by getting married right now (loneliness, responsibility, loss of the catch, never have another chance, painful home life)? What am I attempting to cover up (an emotion of fear, guilt for sexual involvement, pregnancy, inferiority or lack of confidence)? What am I attempting to prevent (life of loneliness, having to grow up and be responsible, pregnancy from a lack of sexual control)? Do I have a fear of being left behind? “I don’t want the train to leave me.” In Mexico girls will say, “I don’t want to be left to put new covers on old Bibles.”
 - a. Passion often temporarily covers personal pain. Then when the passion reduces, the stuffed pain that was temporarily overridden resurfaces.
 - 1) You cannot have enough sex to ultimately hide pain.
 - b. One or both may be looking for a way to reduce pain in their life through the trap of a quick fix relationship.
 - 1) You may think getting married will make you feel safe, secure, loved, wanted, all the time. That is fantasy. Marriage is work.
 - 2) You want babies thinking they will “love” you unconditionally but they grow up and leave you as God designed it.
 - a) One wife hated her husband because he had a vasectomy after their fifth child. She admitted she only felt loved by babies.

- 3) Marriage never fixes what is broken in life.
2. Eagerness to get married can blind your reality of the facts both now and/or later.
 - a. Emotions are not subject to truth or reality if there is immaturity, financial instability or lack of vocational preparation.
 - b. Some women will marry a financially irresponsible man just to have a man around the home and are willing to support him.
 3. Getting caught up in the emotional excitement of wedding and honeymoon fantasies prevents one from considering the long term realities of the commitment of life after the honeymoon.
 - a. Heightened emotions can hide and even prevent an anticipated future responsibility or relational conflict and the pain that follows.
 4. If you find a person who is emotionally healthy, you will eliminate close to 75% of the cause of divorce.
- D. Trap # 4 - To please someone else trap - mom, dad, boyfriend, peer group etc. (prop: hand-cuffs, teen girl handcuffed to mom).**
1. Some youth establish their whole identity out of their need to make everyone happy.
 - a. They confuse pleasing with love.
 - b. Often a compliant pleaser meets and marries an angry controller.
 - 1) The compliant pleaser ends up walking on egg shells all of their life to prevent the angry person from demonstrating his anger.
 - 2) They have a lie in their heart belief system that it is their responsibility to control the anger of their mate or parents.
 2. Refuse to make a mate selection based on what someone else thinks or feels especially if the counsel is not based on Scripture.
 - a. Other people are not you and they do not have to live with the decision nor be accountable to God for that decision.
 - 1) 2 Cor. 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad."
 - b. Choose to be led by the Spirit of God, not from pressure to please others.

- 1) Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."
- c. Select godly counsel.
- 1) Proverbs 12:15, "The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel *is* wise."
 - 2) Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to counsel and receive instruction that you may be wise in your latter days."
3. Refuse to make the choice of a mate to please or make someone else happy. In time you will become bitter at that person. Seek only to please the Lord.
 - a. Col. 3:17, "And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."
 - b. One unsaved father urged his daughter to marry an unbeliever with no job skills because he (the father) married his wife who was a Christian. Yet, his wife said she has been lonely for years in their marriage.
 4. It is dangerous to make a bad decision to make someone else happy or to get someone else's approval out of fear of their rejection and abandonment.
 5. Stuffing your own needs now will only cause them to resurface later accompanied by a lot of anger.
 - a. The past needs that are not met always seem to be present.
 6. Choose to make decisions based on how God has made you and what you need to compliment and balance you (Psalm 139:1-16 – meditate on these verses).
 - a. What are your gifts and talents (Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 12:1-11)?
 - b. What are your legitimate needs?
 - c. What are your dreams?
 - d. What are your God given goals?
 - e. Project: make your 10/10 list. List the ten things you feel you want in a mate, the must haves. Then list 10 things you do not want in a mate – what you refuse to live with (non-negotiable).
 - 1) Those ten things you cannot live with are your warning red lights which never turn green after the marriage. They are the traps.

E. Trap # 5 - Too narrow of life experience base trap (prop: hammer, tools).

1. Have you spent enough time together in a variety of situations and circumstances to be able to really know each other?
 - a. ill.: Linda and Chuck worked in day camps and church work for three years before they got married and were able to view each other in many real life situations.

2. People who are “in love” often do not want to be bothered with “problem talk.” They just want to be happy and have fun (fantasy plus denial). They will avoid the issue so they do not need to feel and can avoid dealing with certain responsibilities and motives.
 - a. Conflict and the process of working it out is the basis of intimacy which results in deeper understanding of each other.
 - b. Problems reveal needs that should be addressed, worked through and met in a healthy way before you say, “I do.”
 - 1) “If I never had a problem, I wouldn’t know that He could solve them, I wouldn’t know what faith in God could do” (Andrea Crouch).
 - c. Conflicts before marriage and how you process them will reveal each other’s conflict resolution styles (how you resolve conflict, tools you use) so that you can correct them for a better future.

3. You need time together in all possible situations to see how the other responds and if you can or want to live with that response pattern.
 - a. It is important to see how the emotion of anger is handled.
 - 1) The single most direct influence you can have on your future children is how you manage anger.
 - 2) Anger is the most destructive emotion in a relationship
 - a) Proverbs 14:17, “A quick-tempered *man* acts foolishly, And a man of wicked intentions is hated.”
 - b) Proverbs 16:32, “*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*”
 - c) Proverbs 19:11, “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.”
 - d) Proverbs 21:19, “Better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.”
 - e) Proverbs 22:24, “Make no friendship (marriage) with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go (to the altar).”

- b. There are at least seven unhealthy uses of anger.
 - 1) To change another's behavior (That's God's responsibility)
 - 2) To control another person (That's the Holy Spirit's responsibility)
 - 3) To manipulate someone
 - 4) To avoid negative emotions (fear and guilt will shift to anger)
 - 5) To avoid responsibility
 - 6) To remove an obstacle
 - 7) To exact revenge (payback)

- 4. It is a general rule that the more appropriate life experiences you have together the better your chances are to avoid hidden surprises in the future. There will be enough of those later.

- 5. Life experiences do not include sexual experiences. Sex outside of marriage is sin. Sexual sin does not produce healthy marriages.
 - a. Gal. 5:19, "Now the works of the flesh (selfishness) are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness."
 - 1) "Fornication" – sex before marriage.

- 6. If you are having sex before marriage, you are ultimately threatening your own happiness and marital satisfaction. The research couldn't be more clear:
 - a. A national study of over 1,800 married couples indicated that the probability of getting a divorce was twice as high for couples who had cohabited prior to marriage and was related to lower levels of subsequent marital interaction and higher levels of marital disagreement and instability.
 - b. A study of 3,884 Canadian women indicated that women who had sex before marriage were 50% more likely to get a divorce than women who had not had sex before marriage. Of those who did, 35% could be expected to divorce within 15 years of marriage compared to only 19% among those who had not had sex prior to marriage.
 - c. A study of 4,300 Swedish women ages 20-44 indicated that those who had sex before marriage had divorce rates that were 80% higher than women who had not had sex before marriage.
 - d. A study using a nationally representative sample of 1,235 women ages 20-37 indicated that married women who had sex prior to marriage were 3.3 times more likely to have sex with someone other than their husband than married women who had not had sex prior to marriage. Single women who did were 1.7 times more likely to have a secondary sex partner than single women who did not live with their partners.

- 7. So, if you are living with someone outside of marriage, I strongly suggest you move out and start over. The two of you may still make it work, but if you can't

make it work outside of marriage without being sexually active, odds are that the marriage will soon fall apart anyway (Leman, pp. 17-19).

- a. In Colombia, living together is called “Free Union.” When you make a list of all the normal experiences for a “free union,” they are the same as a married union. Therefore the “free” means “I’m free to leave you any time I please,” the ultimate pain of abandonment and loss of security.
8. People whose relationship is only based on sex are doomed to fail. Why? Most of life is not spent in bed. Plus, they are mutual users, not givers.
 - a. Contented couples attribute only 15-20% of their happiness to a pleasing sex life but unhappy mates ascribe 50-70% of their distress to sexual problems.
 - b. Why? Because typically it is the first thing affected when a relationship falters (Hold Me, p. 186).

F. Trap # 6 - Unrealistic expectations trap (prop: crown and towel).

1. One of the biggest sources of conflict is in the roles trap we expect each other to fulfill. Expectations are rules one adult makes for another. One mate thinks they are playing soccer. The other mate thinks they are playing hockey. If they do not agree on the same “sport” and same rules, no one enjoys the game. (II Tim. 2:5, “And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.”)
 - a. He may think he is the head of the house and she is to serve him like a slave. His wish is her command (the macho man).
 - 1) This is a perversion of God’s servant/leader role in Scripture.
 - 2) Jesus was God but served man.
 - a) Phil. 2:5-8, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (8) Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”
 - b) The man thinks he is entitled to wear the crown and she is to wear the towel. Jesus reversed this belief and put a towel around His waist and washed the disciple’s feet.
 - (1) John 13:3-5, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. ⁵ After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.”

- (2) Mark 10:45, “The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.”
- b. She may think that is her role is just a pleaser but she will become bitter later because enough is never enough.
 - 1) Technically, both spouses are to please each other.
 - a) I Cor. 7:3-5).
 - c. She may think she needs to control him out of her own fear of failure or abandonment. That is a picture of a child in an adult body that needs to grow up.
 - 1) She may think only her or his happiness is important.
 - d. In a balanced relationship, he is to wear both the crown and towel and be the head servant – to meet the needs of both the wife and children. In reality he is a slave, not a lord.
 - 1) Eph. 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”
 - 2) It is her responsibility to respect and to admire him which is his most basic need (Eph. 5:33).
2. A big expectation deception trap is that all the things I don’t like about a prospective mate, I expect to change (or the mate will change) after the wedding (arrogant fantasy).
 - a. Review: red warning lights do not turn green after marriage.
 - b. Change is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, not you.
 - 1) Phil. 2:13, “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”
 3. Do not expect your love will fix someone else’s woundedness. That is a family of origin issue, not a marriage issue and therefore must be dealt with on an individual basis, not by marriage counseling.
 - a. Unresolved family of origin issues will continue to cause conflict in the marriage if not resolved. This can be seen in the frequency of in-law issues.
 - 1) If a woman was abandoned by her father or was an adulterer, she will fear that her husband will leave her in time or have an affair.
 - 2) She will either be controlling or very dependent.

- 3) If a man was never nurtured by his mother he may expect his wife to replace or make up for that lack. It can be a set-up for a career in affairs and/or pornography.
- b. These conflicts based on unrealistic expectations are long term and generational and need to be identified and working through to freedom.
 - 1) Exodus 20:5, "you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,"
4. It is a relational disaster waiting to happen to expect that present love by itself can fix long term past issues.
 - a. Love certainly can be a resource to face the reality of the problems. But love in and of itself will not solve a conflict, but it can give us the energy, motivation and environment to use our biblical tools to work out our problems. Love can conquer a lot, but the more there is to conquer, the greater the risk of failure (Fighting for, p. 286).
 - b. Love can provide endless comfort in time of pain and pleasure in time of need.
 - 1) Ultimately, our primary source of comfort is from the Holy Spirit.
 - a) 2 Cor. 1:4, "Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."
 - 2) The demands of life will reduce your opportunities for endless pleasure.
 - a) ill.: Babies and child rearing, jobs, home repairs and church involvement can drain a lot of energy.
5. It is delusional, unrealistic thinking that marriage can save us from facing ourselves, our aloneness, and our pain.
 - a. Denial will ultimately fail as a protector. Using marriage as a means of denial will ultimately fail you. The still small voice will someday turn into a scream.
 - b. Aloneness or fear of abandonment will ultimately lead to controlling behaviors based on fear. That fear will drive out the love.
 - 1) Mature love drives out fear and strong fear drives out love.
 - 2) I John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

- c. Marital passion can only mask personal pain so long. In time the pain must be faced and healed before the love can be genuinely experienced.
6. It is a false expectation trap that you are not going to face difficulties even if you seem to do most everything right in your marriage.
- a. Jesus did everything right and faced many difficulties and was ultimately killed.
 - b. Life is full of circumstances that are out of our control. We call them trials.
 - 1) James 1:2-4, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (4) But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."
7. As a believer you have at least five benefits in dealing with life's problems.
- a. Tools (specific scripture or principles from scripture)
 - 1) 2 Pet. 1:3, "Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."
 - 2) 2 Tim. 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."
 - b. Power to use the tools.
 - 1) Phil. 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
 - 2) If one is unsaved, they do not have this power or even the desire to use these tools.
 - c. Training to use the tools (through trials, tests, temptations, afflictions and life experience).
 - 1) Luke 22:31, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat."
 - d. Support (from brothers and sisters in Christ .while using the tools.)
 - 1) Gal. 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."
 - e. Reward for using the tools.
 - 1) 2 Cor. 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done whether good or bad."

2) 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

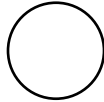
8. Expect a lot of stress making a new relationship work.
 - a. This kind of stress is healthy stress so expect it and grow through it.
 - b. It galvanizes relationships. The Apostle Paul experienced this with Jesus
 - 1) Phil. 3:10, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."
9. Successful marriages require a lot of hard work. To expect anything different is to set your marriage up for trouble.
 - a. ill.: Mrs. Missouri sat in shock when she finally realized that marriage took work to rebuild a marriage from past affairs.
10. Choose to identify realistic expectations of each other and adjust them because God only gives grace for the truth or reality.
 - a. John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth (reality)."
11. Expect to enjoy your similarities and adjust to each others' differences.
 - a. For couples, any similarities (values, goals, expectations) you have are like money in the bank. Any differences are like debts you owe. Every difference requires an enormous amount of hard work to manage and this will take away the energy needed to keep a marriage thriving.
 - b. Studies have shown that couples who have stayed together for fifty years have a shared relationship vision that includes personal dreams and goals for the future (Fighting for, 292).

G. Trap # 7 - Failure to address significant personality or behavioral problems trap (prop: dark glasses, mask).

1. Most personal and behavior problems rooted in the birth family are passed on from generation to generation.
 - a. Ex. 20:5-6, "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (6) but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

2. If there are questions about your future partner's behavior or personality, you may ask yourself if you are willing to spend the rest of your life dealing with these problems (ie., pride, control, anger, selfishness, jealousy, immorality).
 - a. Personality traits (disorders) will repeat themselves in many situations, not just once or twice over a long period of time. They also get reproduced in the children.
 - b. Especially with drugs, alcohol and lack of sexual integrity (porn), it is important that you make absolutely sure that these problems have been worked out biblically well in advance of the marriage. Do not just accept promises.
 - 1) It's important that the prospective mate develop a track record of processing and healing which is the only way to build trust.
 - 2) Forgiveness is to be granted but trust must be earned and this takes time.
3. Failure to work out these issues before you marry will result in two things.
 - a. Loss of leverage for change after you marry.
 - 1) What incentive do they have for change?
 - 2) Often a mate will say, "I do" then say, "I'm done."
 - b. The stress of marriage will tend to magnify the personality problems and make them more difficult to manage over time.
4. Do not, under any circumstances, move ahead with marriage until significant personal problems have been addressed and overcome with a track record.
 - a. The temporary pleasure of living in denial will fade in the presence of relational pain over the long haul.
5. A character disorder is the result of significant behavioral or emotional problems.
 - a. At the center of a character disorder is a poorly developed conscience (does not distinguish right from wrong in the heart belief system).
 - b. They behave out of their own desires and impulses, very selfish, narcissistic. They feel very entitled.
 - c. They pay little attention to how their actions may affect you or others.
 - d. They will get their own perceived needs met even if it means hurting you in some way.
 - e. They lie, cheat, exaggerate, exploit others, rewrite history, blame shift and control, especially by anger, jealousy or over-protection.

- f. If you encounter anyone who has a character disorder, run for the nearest exit, prepare to hurt or sign up for pain.
- g. He will shrink his personal responsibilities and magnify her responsibilities. Most everything will be perceived by him as, "It's always her fault."



Her responsibilities



His responsibilities

- 6. What are the warning flags that could spell an abusive relationship down the road?
 - a. Does he speak disrespectfully about former relationship partners?
 - b. Does he demonstrate disrespectful behavior toward you?
 - 1) Disrespect is the soil of abuse.
 - 2) Does he put you down and belittle your opinions?
 - 3) Is he rude to you in front of people?
 - 4) Is he cutting or sarcastic?
 - c. Does he do favors for you that you do not want or put on a show of generosity that makes you uncomfortable?
 - d. Is he controlling?
 - e. Is he possessive?
 - 1) Jealousy is one of the sure signs that abuse is down the road.
 - 2) Possessiveness masquerades as love. This is ownership not love.
 - f. Does he blame everything he does on to you or someone else?
 - g. Is he self-centered? This is highly resistant to change.
 - h. Does he use and/or abuse alcohol or drugs?
 - i. Does he pressure you for sex?
 - 1) Failure to respect your wishes or feelings regarding sex speaks loudly of exploitation which in turn goes with abuse.

- 2) It is a clear sign that he views women as sex objects rather than human beings.
 - 3) If he says you need to have sex with him to prove you really love and care for him, send him packing. He is a user and abuser!
- j. Does he intimidate (scare) you when he's angry? You should be on the alert for any of the following behavior.
- 1) He gets too close to you when he's angry, puts a finger in your face, pokes you, pushes you, blocks your way, or restrains you.
 - 2) He tells you that he is "just trying to make you listen."
 - 3) He raises a fist, towers over you, shouts you down or behaves in any other way that makes you flinch or feel afraid.
 - 4) He makes vaguely threatening comments, such as, "You don't want to see me mad" or "You don't know who you're messing with."
 - 5) He drives recklessly or speeds up when he's angry.
 - 6) He punches walls or kicks doors.
 - 7) He throws things around, even if they don't hit you.
- k. Does he have double standards, one for you and one for himself?
- l. Does he have negative attitudes toward women?
- m. Does he treat you differently around other people (Jekyll/Hyde)? (Why does He Do That? Lundy Bancroft, pp. 114-122).
7. In contrast, you will always love the person who keeps you feeling the best about yourself instead of themselves. Look for the person who sparkles when you are together – makes you feel great about yourself.
- a. Heb. 3:13, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."
 - b. 1 Peter 3:7, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

H. Trap # 8 - Minimize the spiritual aspects of the relationship trap.

1. The spiritual part of the person includes the essence of the inner person, the very core of life (Fighting for Your Marriage, p. 284). It contains their heart belief system.

2. Many studies have indicated that a religious (spiritual) base has a very favorable influence on the marriage relationship. This favorable impact includes the following (Fighting for Your Marriage, p. 287):
 - a. More satisfaction
 - b. Less likely to divorce
 - c. Lower levels of conflict
 - d. Higher level of commitment
 - e. View divorce as wrong
 - f. Motivated to work on problems
 - g. More likely to sacrifice for each other
 - h. More identity as a team
 - i. Greater sexual contentment
 - j. Easier to talk about sex
 - k. Greater edge in keeping marriage strong
3. Research also consistently shows that partners from different religions are much more likely to divorce (Fighting for Your Marriage, p. 286). Problems later arise for two reasons:
 - a. People tend to get more religious with age so what looked unimportant early in the marriage can become more of an issue with age.
 - b. With the birth of children couples are faced with a host of decisions about how the children should be raised. At this point one's own past religious upbringing can become critical:
 - 1) Circumcision
 - 2) Baptism, when and how
 - 3) Religious holidays
 - 4) Religious schooling
 - 5) Confirmation, dedication
 - 6) Discipline
 - 7) Devotions
4. Common excuses for overlooking the need Biblical, spiritual maturity before marriage.

- a. I can convert him/her after we are married.
 - 1) Sorry, only God can do that (I Cor. 3:6).
 - b. At least he knows a lot about the Bible (but is not saved).
 - 1) So do demons (James 2:19).
 - c. He is willing to come to church.
 - 1) Sleeping in a garage will not make you an automobile.
 - 2) Good words or works do not save anyone (Titus 3:5).
 - d. He treats me better than the Christian guys.
 - 1) Sadly that is often the case.
 - 2) But just because there are hypocrites it does not mean there are no genuine options out there.
 - 3) Marrying a spiritually dead man is a poor excuse for not holding out for a “live” one (Eph. 2:1,2).
 - 4) Marriage is the bonding of two people. Marrying a “dead” person does not result in a lively relationship.
 - a) Ephesians 2:1,5, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),”
5. God has clearly commanded believers not to be unequally yoked with non believers.
- a. 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”
 - b. Why?
 - 1) You have nothing that is important in common.
 - 2) You lose the basis for friendship.
 - 3) You work in the light the unsaved in darkness. This results in you both living in darkness.

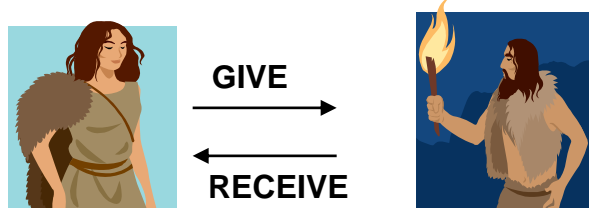
I. Trap #9 - Failure to establish fair communication rules before marriage trap. Here are 12 basic communication rules that can improve relationships.

1. Choose to communicate in a healthy way.
2. Stop interrupting, start listening.
3. Stop name calling, start encouraging.
4. Stop issue hopping, start focusing.
5. Acknowledge each other's perspective.
6. Mirror back what you heard.
7. Stop outbursts of anger, start controlling yourself.
8. Stop pushing hot buttons, start focusing.
9. Stop showing signs of disgust, start accepting.
10. Stop withdrawing, start connecting.
11. Stop walking away, start reassuring.
12. Stop inappropriate physical contact, start caring.

(Note: For more complete outline on Fair Communication Rules, visit our website at www.help4living.org under Training)

III. Distinguish between love bond and fear bond relationships.

A. God designed you to give and to receive love.



1. Give love.
 - a. John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

1) The hallmark of believers is not their theology; it's their relationships.

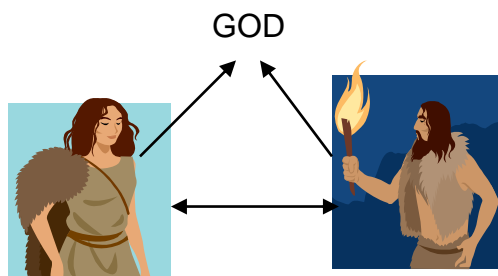
Receive love.

- b. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

- c. I John 4:7, “Beloved, let us love one another for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

B. God designed you to have a relationship with Him and with others.

1. I John 1:7, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”



C. In the marital relationship, God designed the couple to ultimately bond deeply and permanently in love (like Willhold glue).

1. That is why couples are to leave their family of origin and be joined (bonded) together in love.
 - a. Gen. 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”
 - b. Matt. 19:6, “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. So therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.”
2. This bonding is to look like they are one body (flesh) functioning in harmony in love like two boards glued together.
 - a. I Peter 3:8, 9, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another, love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9) not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit blessing.”
3. These love bonds are to be the foundation upon which mature relationships are based and built.
 - a. Eph. 5:33, “Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

D. But since sin entered into the world and into relationships, another bonding agent came into play, namely, the bonding of fear. Love bonds and fear bonds are incompatible. They are mutually exclusive.

1. After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid themselves because their relationship with God went from love to fear of rejection.

- a. Gen. 3:8, "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."
 - b. From this point on many relationships were based on withholding or hiding from each other.
2. Adam then turned on Eve and blamed her for his sin to protect himself. It became a fear bond, not a love bond.
 - a. Gen. 3:12, "Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'"
 - b. Distancing began by blaming the other person for one's own behavior.
- E. Now at least two kinds of bonding agents characterize relationships, love bonds or fear bonds.**

Love Bonds

1. Characterized by truth, closeness, intimacy (of heart and spirit), joy, peace, perseverance (high emotional pain threshold) and genuine giving.
2. Bond out of genuine desire to be with each other to give; not to take.
3. When you move closer you get to know each other better, when apart you are blessed with the memory of each other.
4. You are safe to share both positive and negative feelings. The relationship is strengthened by this sharing.
5. Encourages each other to act like themselves as God created them to be.
6. Truth and honesty (openness) pervades the relationship.
7. Increases growth and maturity as they live out of their heart.
8. Excited to be with each other because of the special closeness they share.
9. Love drives away fear (I John 4: 18) therefore you feel safe.
10. Love bonds hold everything together in unity (Col. 3:14).

Fear Bonds

1. Characterized by deceit (games), emotional pain (from past wounds), humiliation (put downs), shame, guilt (real / false), fear of rejection, abandonment and other losses.
2. Bond is driven by a desire to avoid negative feelings (anesthetic) or pain of loneliness. One is a taker, not a giver.
3. When you move closer it gets scary so you avoid closeness. The farther away you get, the scarier it gets so you have to manipulate the relationship to get closeness.
4. You cannot share both positive and negative feelings. It feels like the bond is strengthened by 1) avoiding negative or positive feelings, 2) and by only looking for positive feelings. But you are not allowed to express genuine feelings (or share or trust).
Dysfunction - Don't: Feel ~ Share ~ Trust
5. Discourages you from acting like you were designed to be – yourself out of fear of rejection.
6. Deceit, quarrels (fights) and pretending are required to maintain the relationship.
7. Restricts and stunts growth keeping people from finding their genuine hearts (perpetually immature).
8. Fearful anxiety builds as they anticipate being with each other (egg walkers).
9. Fear drives away love, therefore you feel insecure.
10. Fear tends to unravel all parts of the relationship

Love Bonds

11. Does not attempt to control the emotions of the other and does not take the ultimate responsibility for them. They walk on the security of thick ice.

12. Guided by healthy goals we desire.

13. You feel content, energized, secure, and confident after being together.

14. You know who you are in Christ and you act like God designed you to act like yourself (know your identity).

15. Experiences love and freedom.

16. Does not attempt to read minds.

17. Allows others to own their own feelings.

18. Open to share.

19. Laid back and free.

Fear Bonds

11. Seeks to control and manipulate the emotions of others and take personal responsibility for the feelings of others. They walk insecurely on thin ice.

- Out of fear “I have to do everything I possibly can to make this relationship survive.”
- “I can’t stand to have anyone angry at me.”
- “I can’t let anyone see my weaknesses or faults.”

12. Guided by a desire to avoid a disaster, blow up we fear.

13. You feel anxious, tense, confused or drained after being together.

14. You are clueless who you are in Christ and you have little idea how to act like your true self in Christ. (You are clueless about your identity. You feel lost.)

15. Experiences neediness and fear.

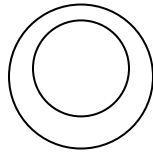
16. Have to guess what the other person is thinking or feeling and then anticipate how not to upset them.

17. Attempts to tell or be told how to feel

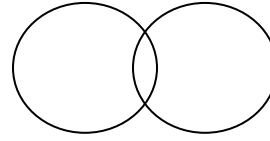
18. Shuts down so that others have to guess what they think or feel.

19. Uptight and controlled (or being controlled). Control is never done out of faith, it is always done out of fear.

F. Love and fear bond relationships



FEAR



LOVE

(Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You, p. 28.)

IV. The Ring (A high school girl's story about her preparation for a future marriage that took place thirteen years later)

The Ring

By Michelle Lynch Peterson

The two enjoyed each other's company and had even gone on quite a few dates but this time there was something different. The unexpected but anticipated was going to happen. As they chatted quietly in the dimly lit restaurant, the man reached into his pocket and pulled out a small black velvet box. He slid it across the table towards the young girl as her eyes lit up and sparkled. She knew what it was! Slowly she lifted the soft velvet lid and gazed inside at the small gold ring with three special words inscribed on it. The girl had long since been ready to make this commitment and now the ring was a visible reminder of that promise. The man across the table with graying hair had known the girl her whole life because he was not a youthful fiancé... but my father. The ring's delicate inscription didn't stand for a commitment between a girl and her newly revealed fiancé, but a promise between God and me committing myself to a life of purity. The inscription simply read, "**True Love Waits.**" Those three special words have had and still have a profound meaning on my life and have shaped who I am as a person.

All throughout the Bible God has used tangible things to represent spiritual realities. One such instance can be found in the story of Noah's Ark. God sent the rainbow as a visible reminder promising that he'd never destroy the earth with a flood again. The ring I wear at seventeen is my visible reminder of the promise I made to God, as well as my future husband, when I was only thirteen. This isn't just a piece of jewelry I wear on my wedding-ring finger as a fashion statement, but a personal reminder that I'm valuable enough to save myself for the one I'll spend the rest of my life with.

There's nothing magical or powerful about this ordinary gold band. The ring itself doesn't keep me from doing anything I shouldn't do. It is because of Philippians 4:13 which says, "I can do all things through Him (Christ) who gives me strength," even the strength to say "no" to temptation. There are, of course, those reasons we've all heard as to why we shouldn't have sex before marriage: pregnancies, abortions, diseases, etc. Yes, those are very substantial reasons to abstain, but for me the drive goes even deeper. When I think of all that Christ has done for me personally, including His death on the cross, I can't help but think the least I can do is honor Him with my body. I believe I Corinthians 6:13, 18-20 says it best: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord...All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple...You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

Believe it or not, God actually created sex to be enjoyed within the confines of marriage. There is a reason He said to wait. So, for me, it's not fear of the consequences that I've chosen abstinence, but the anticipation of enjoying God's gift to the fullest. I want the satisfaction of someday looking at my husband and knowing that I've waited just for him and that he, too, waited just for me. On that special wedding day as I come down the aisle in a pure white dress, I'll remove my "True Love Waits" ring and replace it with a new "True Love *Waited*" wedding band. I hope to begin a family heirloom by passing my purity ring on to my daughter and then to her daughter.

As I sit here another scene comes to my mind: I see a young couple in the corner of a small restaurant with the warm glow of the flickering candlelight reflecting the smiles and laughter as the two enjoy each other's company. The nervous young man reaches into his coat pocket and slowly draws out a small velvet box then slowly gets down on one knee. The candlelight catches a twinkle, possibly a teardrop, as the young lady gazes at the soft velvet gift and tries to stifle a quiet gasp. She knows what it is... for she has *waited!*

V. Michelle Lynch Peterson's wedding and ring vows based upon the ring story written thirteen years before the wedding.

Michelle's Wedding Vow

Greg, today I make a lifelong and irrevocable commitment to grow in my relationship with God and to grow in my love for you. I know that I cannot truly and completely love you if my relationship with Jesus Christ is not the top priority. Therefore, I commit to spend time with the Lord, lift you up in prayer and find ways to encourage you in your personal walk with our Savior.

I commit myself to be your helpmate in ministry and find ways to come along side of you as support. I recognize that it is not the easiest thing for me to "let go" of the reigns of independence and control, but I want you to know that I submit to you as the God-ordained head of the household. Just as it was when we started this relationship 2 years ago, the "ball is in your court." I put myself under your godly leadership and decision-making. I will seek to encourage you both publicly and privately.

I give myself wholeheartedly to share an exclusive intimacy with you alone, forsaking all others. Today, I unashamedly give you my trust, a precious and fragile treasure, knowing that you are seeking to serve God, who is the only sure foundation amidst sinking sand. I want you to know that I love you dearly and deeply but I also know that the love I have for you today will pail in comparison to the love we will grow into as we learn more facets of something so beautifully complex.

This is my vow to you: to love you, respect you and be with you for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health; from this day forward until death do us part. To God be the glory!

Michelle's Ring Vow

Greg, I have worn this purity ring with the inscription "True Love Waits" since my dad presented it to me on my 13th birthday. I purposely wore it on my wedding finger as a visual reminder, not only to myself, but for anyone who saw it that I might share with them the commitment I made to God, my family and my future husband that I would

remain sexually pure until my wedding day. Even though the engagement ring replaced it on my wedding finger for the last nine months, it was still proudly worn on my right hand as a constant reminder of the commitment I made almost 13 years ago. I'll admit that the wait has been hard and especially after we knew we were headed towards marriage, but I also knew that the Lord commanded purity for a reason and so it must be worth the wait.

Greg, today, I give you my "True Love Waits" ring with all of my heart and place on your finger a wedding band that has inscribed on the inside "True Love Waited". By God's grace, with this ring I give myself wholeheartedly to you.

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