

**Marriage is
for
Life not Death**

Martyn Shenstone

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***Special thanks to all my faithful partners
who have supported this ministry.***

***Every life that is changed by reading this
book, has been changed by you and
I working together.***

*And my God shall supply all your need according to
His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

*Now to our God and Father be glory forever and
ever. Amen.*

Philippians 4:19-20

Chapter 1

What is a Marriage?

Most marriage books are flawed. Why? Because they are marriage centred. By putting marriages before individuals we have compounded and accelerated the breakdown of families. Is there anything worse than a marriage break-up? Yes!

The break up of an individual.

A marriage is more than an agreement, it is a covenant between two people's bodies and souls. Marriage is not like a business agreement or partnership where only your financial assets are part of the deal. In a marriage you yourself are the deal. A marriage is not in any way separate from you. Trying to deal with marriage problems is a waste of time. Dealing with an individual's problems is the key to building a good marriage.

Marriages should not have to be held together by a resolute commitment to principles. A marriage should be the most natural and beautiful thing on the face of God's earth. Where these truths has been overlooked, marriages have outwardly lasted a little longer but inwardly continued to fall apart. It is my sincere belief that many Christian marriages fail because they are built upon the premise that as Christians, we should not get divorced. Hence, instead of doing the things in ourselves that need to be done to avert divorce, it's simply treated as something forbidden. Therefore the relentless slide towards divorce, which often starts before most people are even married is often left unchecked until it's too late!

The church has mostly failed to view marriage as something essentially about the characters of husbands and wives. Churches have enshrined marriage as a sacrament, a covenant and a spiritual union, all of which is true. However, in the final analysis, a marriage is about how Harry gets on with Sally and if they don't get on then usually it's all over.

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When God created marriage He didn't look down from heaven and only see a Sacrament or Holy Matrimony. No, He saw people living in a loving union. He said: "*A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh,*" Genesis 2:24. That's the catch you see. In a marriage you are supposed to become one and be joined with your spouse; There's a whole lot more there than a quick round of bed based activity. Becoming one with your spouse is all about sharing all that you are, with all that they are.

Religion has said that marriage is about commitment when the feelings subside. But what are these feelings that subside? The feelings are an expression of you - of your heart. If your feelings have subsided, then perhaps something about you has subsided or been pushed down.

The real problem with many marriages is that most people are incapable of real love because of the emotional mess that they are in. This is because they have not put receiving God's love first in their lives. They haven't been abiding in God's word, the Bible, and allowing it to truly change them. They aren't whole. The result is marriages that revolve around unfulfilled people, trying to find fulfilment, from other unfulfilled people. Every method is employed to try to be a good spouse, but in reality the expectations always outstrip the fulfilment given. There are no methods in relationships that bring wholeness to your soul.

What both spouses are is all that a marriage is. God is not some magical third person in a marriage who keeps everything together. If He was marriages would never fail. God keeps individuals whole and together as much as they allow Him, this in turn keeps their relationships together. God can only keep your marriage together as much as you allow Him to keep you whole and together.

If you will not yield to God's love with all your heart, then you can never be secure and together enough to love your spouse in a wholesome manner. You may genuinely love them but your fears (all character deficiencies are rooted in fear), will eventually drive you apart. This is why God has said in the what Jesus called the greatest commandment:

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You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:5

How do we do this? Simple, it is not difficult to be whole - it doesn't take years of counselling and deliverance meetings. In fact it may not take any at all. The ability to love and be whole comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. The scripture couldn't be more plain about it:

We love Him because He first loved us.

1 John 4:19

The way to receive God's love is to meditate in His word - the Bible and let the revelations of His love in it change you from the inside out. Only then will you be free to love both Him and others.

**Give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your eyes;
Keep them in the midst of your heart;
For they are life to those who find them,
And health to all their flesh.
Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the forces of life.**

Proverbs 4:20-23

How do you keep your heart? By keeping God's doorway to health and life, His word, in your heart by reading and giving attention to it. This is not difficult and does not require some great effort to become a better person, or endless hours of brutal self examination. If you keep putting the word before your eyes and in your heart by speaking it out of your mouth, it will gradually seep through your soul and into your spirit. You will be cleansed by its inherent healing properties. Eventually, everything about you will be gradually and effortlessly changed.

Chapter 2

The Foundation

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Psalm 11:3

This verse has been used many times to speak against any kind of divorce, separation or remarriage. The reasoning is very simple. Since marriage is a foundation of society, which Genesis 2:24 clearly shows it is...

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

...and if we abandon any of God's ordained foundations for society, of which Genesis 2:24 is irrefutably one, then we are always doing the wrong thing. Therefore, we should always oppose divorce as much as possible since God's foundations for our lives are the only ones which will work, and bring us true peace and fulfillment. End of argument?

But what came first, marriage or people? People. So what does the Bible say about people?

Then God said let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:26-7

This is the first and foremost foundation of society, not marriage. It comes before Genesis chapter two where marriage is instituted. Society is about people. God tells us that people were created like Him and in His image. Let me ask you a

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question. If God made you in His image are you not therefore supposed to live like Him? Are you supposed to live in fear or faith? In subjugation or freedom? Are you supposed to live broken or whole?

If you can grasp this principle, then the rest of the Bible will make sense to you, if not, then you will not be able to see the wood for the trees.

In the same way that we are made in the image of God we are also supposed to be whole like Him. This is THE foundation that Psalm 11:3 refers to. If our personalities are crushed then we are weak, the foundation of our very existence, which is to be whole and live like God, is taken away. We are no longer living in God's image and likeness. What can we then do? We can do what most people do, act a lot but achieve very little because inwardly we are broken.

Marriage and every other commandment in the Bible are all subject to this foundation, which is the foundation of all creation. When the application of any commandment violates this foundation it becomes void. It begins achieving the very opposite of what it was given for - to uphold the foundation of everything - God making us in His image to be whole and live like Him. There are no exceptions to this, not even the Ten Commandments are more important. Let me prove this to you from the Bible itself.

In Luke 13:11-17 Jesus heals a woman who has been very ill for eighteen years and is severely bent over. The leader of the Synagogue (a place of worship for believers in Jesus time) where the miracle took place, objects because Jesus is working on the Sabbath. This is true, healing was considered a part of the ministry in the Old and New Testaments and therefore work. Matthew 10:8-10 even defines healing as a part of the work of the ministry for which one is eligible to be paid (not paid for healing per se, but paid to be a minister and minister healing to people).

The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest, but when Jesus worked on it by ministering healing to people and breaking the

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fifth commandment, the religious leaders of that day got really upset. Jesus answered by asking them what did they think that the whole point of the Sabbath was? He said,

...should not this woman be loosed on the Sabbath?

Luke 13:16

Jesus clearly worked from the presupposition that the fundamental purpose behind the Sabbath was something to do with freedom for people. That's why he said, "*should not this woman be loosed on the Sabbath?*" It's a bit like Jesus saying: '*What do you think Sabbaths are for anyway?*' To Jesus, it was obvious that everything God had done and spoken in the scriptures, was for people. To the Pharisees, this was an alien concept. To them laws were for keeping because they were laws from God and that was that. It never seemed to occur to them to ask why God gave a law or how it should be applied.

Allow me to explain. Marriage is supposed to be a blessing. Marriage was made for people and not the other way round. In Luke 13:11 Jesus unequivocally broke the 5th Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), by working on the Sabbath. In this situation Jesus gives us a revelation which should have been obvious to the religious leaders of the day, but one which they completely missed. Jesus was making the point that the most important thing in God's eyes is for people to be free and whole.

Not only that, but Jesus did not want this woman to be in bondage for even a few more hours!

Jesus could have healed the woman later that day in the evening after sunset, when according to a Jewish day, it was no longer the Sabbath. After all, she had been sick for eighteen years, what difference would another few hours make? But Jesus couldn't wait. For Jesus, the idea of upholding some semblance of religious conformity, by deferring the woman's healing for just a few more hours, was a complete non starter. Dealing with the woman's pain and suffering was His only and immediate concern. As soon as the bowed over woman was presented to Jesus, he healed her.

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This is why the religious leaders of the day hated Jesus. His love for people undermined everything that they stood for. Their so called 'faith' was founded in legislation and rules commonly dressed up as 'doing what's right.' There was no heart to it. Jesus' love exposed their insanely warped view of God as someone who made rules that had to be obeyed even if they killed you. The Pharisees only saw the letter of the law, not why it was created in the first place and how to handle it.

The religious leaders of Jesus' time had a mentality like someone running angrily out in front of an ambulance responding to an emergency call, rushing and weaving through traffic; they drag the driver out of the cab to make a citizens' arrest on them for breaking the speed limit. The same is true today in the church world. People are fleeing destructive marriages and many a religious person will 'arrest' them and sternly warn them that they must go back and do God's will, etc... But what does the Bible say? Jesus sums it up perfectly,

...the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'

Mark 2:27

It has to be the same with marriage. Marriage was made for man and not man for marriage. If your application of God's word does not result in someone being made whole, or kept free, then it's invalid. Jesus gave other examples to make the point as clear as possible, see Matthew 12.

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!" But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?... But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless."

Matthew 12:2-8

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Jesus' disciples had clearly broken the fifth commandment by gathering food on the Sabbath. Jesus emphatically made the point that the Law was given for a purpose. He gave the example that when King David and his men (see 1 Samuel 21: 5-6) were hungry after fleeing from their enemies, it was fine for them to eat the Showbread (ceremonial bread exclusively reserved for only priests to eat), rather than starve and be weakened and defeated by their enemies.

David and his men could have left the Showbread on the altar and been overrun. The Showbread would have stayed marvelously and religiously on the altar. The purpose of it being there in the first place, which was to communicate a truth to Israel about God, would have been pointless. David and all his men would have been dead and Israel would have been ruled by the Philistines.

Jesus lamented angrily in Luke 11:52 that the religious leaders of his day had taken away the *key of knowledge*. They were so focused on the letter of the Law that they forgot its meaning and purpose. They forgot the foundation – people, not rules and institutions. Spiritual knowledge is not simply gained by reading something and taking it at face value. It has to be unlocked, for which it needs a key. The key is hidden in it's purpose. The purpose, as with all of God's revelations to mankind, is to help us, not to enforce some kind of system of rules on us to the detriment of our well being. Marriage is no different. Marriage is important but it is not more important than we are.

Marriage was designed by God to bring freedom and wholeness, security and fulfillment, where it does not, it becomes invalid and those trapped in it are free to go. Let me ask you a question based on Luke 6:9 and 13:16. "Which is right, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? Should not a child of God, whom Satan has bound, think of it - for many years, be set free from their bonds?" It's that simple. Marriage is for Life not Death!

Chapter 3

Yes But...

If it's all that simple why is Jesus recorded as saying four times throughout the gospels, that whoever divorces his wife and remarries commits adultery? After all, how could Jesus make pronouncements like this if it is all right to legally divorce and remarry, even for the significant reasons already mentioned? So all this fancy foundation and wholeness stuff is all pie in the sky. Right? Actually no... look at these verses from the gospels on the subject, it is Jesus who is speaking in all of them:

Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except for sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Matthew 5:32

Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

Matthew 19:9

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.

Mark 10:11-12

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Luke 16:18

Well, after all that we may as well pack our bags and go home!

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Moreover, what is the strange assertion by Jesus in Matthew 5:32, that someone divorcing his wife *causes her* to commit adultery!?

If you have been divorced by your spouse and never remarried or had sexual relations with someone else, how on earth can you be guilty of adultery?!

According to what Jesus says in Matthew 5:32 dear Sally is sat at home, on her own and minding her own business, when her husband runs off with his secretary. Her husband then files for divorce and remarries his secretary, and lo and behold Sally is now guilty of adultery - and has never even left the house!!

Let's start with a small but incredibly significant translation error: "...*except for sexual immorality*" is incorrect and can easily be spotted by referring to a lexicon or by contrasting it with other translations. The Greek word here is *porneia*, it does not exclusively refer to physical sex although it obviously can include it. Most Bible translations do not read *sexual immorality* but rather *fornication*. Fornication is the gross indulgence of oneself by joining to someone (or something) to which you should not because it breaks an agreement or covenant. Jesus pointed out that sins like this really come from the heart.

But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5:28

Another unhelpful way these verses have been translated is by adding the word *commit*. In all four of the verses quoted on previous page in the original Greek there is no separate word for *commit*. For example in Matthew 5:32 the text literally reads: "*causes her to adultery*" and in Luke 16:18 the text reads: "*whoever marries a woman who is divorced from her husband causes her to adultery.*" By adding the word *commit* in the English translation we have added a weight of guilt on to the person referred to in conjunction with adultery, which would not have been understood in Jesus time like it is now. Adultery is much broader than sexual immorality.

Yes But...

The significance and effect of adultery in these scriptures appears to work in both spouses, regardless of fault. The misreading and partial mistranslation of these verses results in the assumption that anyone associated with adultery is automatically in the wrong because:

a.) We have added the word *commit*.

b.) We assume adultery is always and only a voluntary act of sexual immorality.

Surprisingly, this is not true. Adultery is way more than most people think it is; Adultery is not always wrong but always has a consequence. Adultery in itself, is not always a sin.

Let me explain. When a Muslim (from a Muslim perspective) renounces his faith in Mohammed and makes Jesus his Lord, he has spiritually committed adultery with Jesus against Mohammed. Now as Christians we think this is a good thing. From an Islamic point of view, this is the worst sin of all - apostasy. Comprehend?

What Jesus is saying will happen when someone divorces and or remarries, is that a covenant will be broken and that adultery will ensue – whether or not it was the result of, or will result in, sexual immorality - and regardless of whose fault it is.

That's what Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:32 when he says: "*But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except for sexual immorality (literally fornication or gross indulgence) causes her to adultery.*" Remember, the word *commit* is not in the Greek.

In the exception case of the wife already having committed sexual immorality or fornication, the husband does not cause the wife to adultery because she has already caused it herself in the first place. By giving this exception, Jesus makes it clear that a spouse cannot be guilty of causing adultery by filing for divorce, when their spouse has already committed some kind of fornication or gross indulgence in the first place.

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The act of breaking a covenant releases adultery in itself regardless of how the covenant is broken and whose fault it is. Adultery is not so much about joining to someone (or something). Joining is fine, it's called marriage. Adultery is about breaking away from who (or what) you are already joined to. Having a covenant broken against you by an unfaithful spouse is what puts you under the effects of that breaking, or adultery. Jesus literally says in Mark 10:11: *"whoever divorces his wife and marries another, causes adultery against her."*

Marriage is a form of covenant which has consequences if broken. Jesus is saying to those who divorce and remarry (see the next chapter for a better understanding of what constitutes a divorce); That they are breaking a covenant and that this also causes their spouse to experience the breaking effects of adultery even though they may not have committed sexual immorality.

Please hear me now! Adultery and divorce are not all about fault, blame and broken rules. Like all wrongdoing it is about the damaging effect it has on people. That's why any sin is a sin and for no other reason. Because it hurts people and thereby violates God's will for us. Too many people trivialise divorce by making it only something you are not allowed to do. This is thinking like a Pharisee, being more concerned about the breaking of a rule than whether or not someone has been hurt by it being broken.

The result of this legalistic approach is that people break rules and repent later thinking it's all over. It actually encourages trivial divorce. Certainly God as our loving Father always forgives us for our sins and failures, He would forgive us if we committed armed robbery and repented but we would still have the consequences of our actions to deal with. What we must grasp about divorce and adultery is that people get deeply hurt all round, regardless of whose moral fault it is.

Divorce always has a very deep and serious effect on your soul, regardless of moral fault, and regardless of whether or not it was right to separate.

Chapter 4

Who Divorces Who?

For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce.

Malachi 2:16

The Hebrew word for divorce literally reads "*putting away.*" It sums up what the heart of divorce is - it's where someone puts someone away. It's a horrible thing and God hates it because of the pain it causes to the person who is put away, and also the negative effect it has on the person doing it. According to Malachi 2:16 the person divorcing covers their garment with violence, or perhaps we could understand that to mean they abrade their soul and put a harshness in their character. If divorce is so terrible how can anyone ever get divorced, regardless of how bad things are in their relationship?

The problem is that we have missed the whole point from Malachi 2:16 of what divorce is and therefore who instigates it. We have assumed that because we can get a legal agreement to end a marriage, that this is in its entirety a divorce. This is not true. Let's delve a bit deeper. If you compete in a race and win a medal, is the medal the race? No, of course not. The medal is what you get for winning the race. If you get a certificate for an examination, what is the certificate? The certificate is proof of what happened in the examination hall, which in turn is evidence of what you were studying prior to the examination. It is the same with a legal divorce. The legal dissolution of a marriage, which we call a divorce, is an affirmation by a court that the real process of divorce has already taken place and that the marriage is irretrievable. The legal bit in the court is not the bit God hates - it's the heartbreaking bit that goes on for years before that, that God hates.

A legal divorce in itself cannot be wrong because even God says

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at one time He filed for a divorce:

**Then I saw that for all the cause which
backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I
had put her away and given her a certificate of
divorce...**

Jeremiah 3:8

One of our problems is that we fail to properly connect what happens in a marriage to the real divorcing process, and a consequential legal divorce. We often think that there are marriage problems, and then as a consequence of these, there is a subsequent and separate event known as 'a divorce', i.e. a visit to a court. Really, the problems and the actions of someone in a marriage are as much, if not more so, the actual divorce itself, rather than the legal affirmation of the end of the relationship. There are three parts to a divorce in the above scripture; the *backsliding*, the *adultery*, and the *putting away* with the legal certificate. Each is as much a part of the divorce process as the other and can in fact be enacted by either partner, in any combination.

The truth is that the person who actually files for a legal recognition of their marriage being over, may not be the person actually doing the real divorcing. Since God looks on the heart, this is how He sees it too. God doesn't look on ten years of abuse, whereby someone is effectively divorced but still legally married and say, "oh well that's too bad." But then when the abused spouse runs to freedom through a legal divorce, He gets really upset and says He hates it. No No No!

The bit God hates is where someone marries someone, lives with them and corrupts the marriage covenant (marriages are covenants, Malachi 2:14 and can be corrupted, Malachi 2:8). They put their spouse away for ten years, but still want to stay legally married to them so that they can keep the perks - like free sex or having the bills paid for them. This is a living divorce - the devil's ideal Christian marriage.

Essentially the words of Jesus are that someone should not file for a legal divorce, unless their partner releases adultery, i.e.

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breaks the marriage covenant, by indulging themselves in something that violates their relationship of trust and love with them as their spouse. This could be anything from the neighbour (even in a non sexual way), to a spirit of anger or even golf. How do you define the parameters?

As with all things to do with people's hearts you can't merely resort to hard and fast rules, you can only be led by God's Spirit from a foundation of God's word. For example you can't say, 'well my spouse indulged in anger 41.75% of the time so I think I should stay until that figure passes 56.03%, then I will leave and file for divorce.' The crossover point is when they indulge in anger so much that they effectively commit adultery against you with that spirit of anger; To such an extent that it breaks the covenant of love, trust and wholeness that is between you both. It breaks the marriage because it starts breaking you. This is adultery, this is a real divorce.

By the way, the other side of the coin may be that your spouse is overcome by anger towards you because you have spent several years diligently indulging yourself and committing adultery with the spirit of debt, regardless of all their warnings and pleadings. Filling up your credit cards with fashionable rubbish and effectively putting a wrecking ball to all the stability and harmony that your hard working spouse has been trying to build into your marriage. In exasperation at your breaking the covenant of love, by living more for things than for them, they may have eventually yielded to anger.

When you have had the marriage covenant broken against you by your spouses indulgence in something that leaves you genuinely unable to take any more without your wholeness being compromised, then it's over. You have reached the point where your marriage ceases to be valid because it has now become destructive and the opposite of what it was created for.

Because of our wrong thinking, by seeing divorce as an event which takes place in a moment in a court room, we think behavioural problems in a relationship are separate from a divorce. In fact your behaviour in relation to your spouse is only ever one of two things, your marriage in action or your

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divorce in action.

Certainly someone cannot have their spouse be angry at them one time and then claim they were effectively divorced by them, because their spouse indulged in a spirit of anger against them for 43 minutes. However, over a period of time repeated outbursts of anger, become more and more destructive and wear a person down. 'Ah but that's why we have God's grace.' No, God's grace is not to live under abuse, it is to overcome it. The thing is that as Christians we are not supposed to overcome our spouses, Jesus only said that we should overcome the world!

The trouble with an intimate relationship is that you cannot join yourself in a deep intimate way to your spouse, while they join themselves in a deep intimate way to anything and obviously to anyone else. It simply does not work. This is where many people violate their marriage vows and start an adulterous relationship - with whatever they are indulging in at the expense of their marriage relationship. They foolishly think that as long as they are not sleeping with the neighbour, then from God's point of view, their marriage is still as valid as the day of their wedding. They think that all they have to do is to improve their behaviour, which is seen as some kind of bonus for their spouse, at a later and more convenient time.

The big mistake that many people make, especially Christians, is to separate the validity of their marriage from their behaviour. People think that when they are married over here, so to speak, is their marriage agreement, and then over there, as it were, is their behaviour - which is important but not their actual marriage. For example, a woman who will not sleep with her husband for a protracted period of time and for no good reason, will still consider herself as married as on the day of her wedding. In reality she is in the process of divorcing her husband, and her marriage, as time goes by and she continues to refuse to be intimate with her husband, is gradually being eroded and crumbling away.

The very heart of marriage is intimacy and the fullest expression of that is in lovemaking. To arbitrarily call a halt to

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the one thing that you should do when you are married, and you the one thing you should not do when you are not, is to effectively start nullifying your marriage. Obviously the same principle of marriage erosion applies in a multitude of other scenarios which can be caused by either spouse.

You can't break your relationship with your spouse and somehow remain magically married to them. This is like the cartoon character that walks out off a cliff on air and back again and only falls later when they realise the bridge is gone. It is an absurdity. When the bridge is gone you are falling. It's only a matter of time until you hit the ground. Your marriage *is* your relationship with your spouse.

Marriage is like an onion, it consists of all the layers of your personality that interact with your spouse. If you take them away, layer by layer, over a period of time you will have a piece of paper but not a marriage.

Marriage is a covenant based on relational behaviour which has to be kept by both sides and exists for a purpose. When we invalidate the purpose and foundation of God's plan for marriage, we invalidate the marriage itself. The commandment about the Sabbath quoted in Luke chapter 13 did not exist in isolation to the well being of the bowed over woman. Her plight actually superseded it!

When it is made this simple, everything fits into place. God is not obsessed with marriage at the expense of your well being. If a marriage becomes a place that facilitates emotional or physical abuse, enforced involuntary celibacy or the absence of real affection and friendship, it becomes a prison. Jesus did not come to bring us a prison regime. He came to bring us life not death.

Chapter 5

Remarriage - Perpetual Adultery?

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

John 4:17-18

On his travels Jesus meets a Samaritan woman who is alone in the middle of the day at a place known as Jacob's Well (John 4:6). Jesus is tired and asks the woman to draw some water for him. This initiates a conversation between them about thirsting for and finding living water. Midway into the conversation Jesus asks the woman to fetch her husband. It was considered culturally inappropriate for a man to talk with a woman beyond a brief exchange, without her husband present. The woman was not dressed as a widow otherwise Jesus would not have asked her to fetch her husband.

The woman's reply that she has no husband, while not dressed as a widow and clearly too old to have not yet married for the first time, is in fact a remarkable admission that something is out of place in her life. She has already had an engaging conversation with Jesus and instead of pretending her husband is busy at home, she chooses to open up to Jesus. Jesus, as he always does when someone begins to open up to him, goes straight to the heart of the matter. He commends her for telling the truth and being open with him, moreover he tells her things about herself that he couldn't possibly have known except by the Spirit of God.

Jesus tells her that it is true that she has no husband and that she has actually been married five times. He also says that she has now given up on marriage and is living with someone. What Jesus says reveals a very important truth. Remarriage is recognised by God and is not perpetual adultery.

Remarriage – Perpetual Adultery?

“...you have had five husbands...”

John 4:18

Jesus recognises all five of the Samaritan woman's marriages. Jesus does not say to the woman: *'you had a husband and after that you lived in adultery with five more men, including the one you are with now, who is not your husband.'* No. Jesus recognises that each of the five men she married were her husband and that the man she was with at the time, to whom she was not married, was not her husband. If Jesus did not recognise remarriage and counted it as adultery, he would not have made any distinction between the woman's second to fifth husbands and the man she was currently living with.

Some people assert that when someone remarries, that they and their new spouse are in a perpetual state of adultery. Moreover, because the adultery is perpetual, i.e. it goes on as long as they are sleeping with the person they think is their new spouse, they are an unrepentant adulterer; And so they must break off their new invalid relationship and remain single, or go back to their original spouse. This is simply not true.

I want to reinforce the truth; If you remarry you are not living in perpetual adultery. You cannot be, otherwise Jesus would not have told the woman at Jacob's Well in John 4 that she had had five husbands. He would have told her she had had one and to go back to her first husband, or to remain single and that the other four were all adulterous affairs. But Jesus did not do this, he called all the Samaritan woman's five spouses *husbands*.

It has been said that John 4:1-18 is an invalid example of Jesus recognising remarriage because the Samaritan woman could have been widowed five times. However the context is compelling that she was not a widow because she was not wearing the clothing of a widow otherwise Jesus would not have asked her to fetch her husband.

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”

John 4:16

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Jesus asked the woman to fetch her husband but the woman said that she had no husband, not that her husband was dead.

The woman answered and said, "I have no husband."

John 4:17

Jesus commends her for telling the truth about not having a husband, which by way of her circumstances in the cultural setting of the day was a tacit admission of living with someone. Something for which she risked at worst being stoned to death and at best social ostracism; Which is why she was alone at the well in the hottest part of the day and not there when everyone else went to collect water in the cool of the morning. Jesus also gets some divine insight that the woman has actually had five husbands.

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

John 4:17-18

Spoke truly about what? Pause for thought. Jesus commends the woman for speaking truly and saying that she has no husband because she is living with someone and in the middle of this mentions her previous five husbands? Why on earth would Jesus mention her previous five husbands if they were simply men she had married who had previously died? Jesus mentions the five husbands in between saying: "*you have well said,*" and "*in that you spoke truly,*" because these broken relationships are also part of the woman's ongoing problems.

Jesus commends the woman for opening the door to admitting that the man she was currently with was not her husband, because after five divorces she had given up on marriage. Jesus was not commending her for admitting that she had been widowed five times. There is nothing morally commendable about admitting that someone is dead! If Jesus' conversation with this woman was only about her living with someone she was not married to and thirsting for living water, why mention

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five dead husbands? What would they have had to do with anything?

Consider the following scenario: A young man crashes his own car and is subsequently confronted about it by an older wiser friend. The friend says to him, "You know you have gone through five cars before this and now you have crashed this one." What is the point of mentioning the previous five cars unless he crashed them too?

When Jesus tells the woman that she is not married to the man she is living with, it is in direct conjunction with mentioning her previous five husbands. In the Greek it reads exactly like this:

"...five husbands you have had and now he whom you have is not your husband..."

John 4:18

The two subjects are indelibly linked. The woman is emotionally a tragic mess. Her series of broken relationships were perhaps not all her fault but clearly after five husbands something wasn't adding up. Jesus wanted the woman to open up about her life. He wanted to get to the root of her problems; And what were they? She was thirsting for the water of life, waiting for the Messiah who would tell her all things.

She certainly needed some explanations! She had been trying to drink from a dry religious well all her life and was desperately wanting to find love and wholeness. She knew and believed a Messiah was coming and one thing about him she was looking forward to was that he would tell her all things - doubtless including where she went wrong with her relationships.

**The woman said to Him, "I know that the Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ).
"When He comes, He will tell us all things."
Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."**

John 4:25-26

Marriage is the gift of God to man and woman. If you are not

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married then it is a good thing to be married. If you were married before and for whatever reasons are divorced, then you are now not married - so you fit the bill of someone who can be married, i.e. you are presently unmarried. If you are divorced and therefore single, it is not a sin to remarry. The Bible says so.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned.

1 Corinthians 7:27-28

The Apostle Paul plainly says that if you are *loosed from a wife*, i.e. divorced, then it is not a sin to remarry. The preceding part of the verse says that if you are married, do not seek a divorce, and if you are divorced do not seek a wife. Why?

But even if you do marry, you have not sinned... nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh...

1 Corinthian 7:28

Paul is warning people about the reality of divorce and remarriage. Some people think divorce and remarriage is the answer to all their problems, it is not. As mentioned in chapter two, a legal divorce is a legitimate way of escape from a marriage that is doing more harm than good. Divorce is not the path to happiness. If you divorce and remarry, life will not be a piece of cake. Divorce and remarriage create a whole new set of challenges in life. For starters you may well be called an adulterer, your children will have serious adjustments to make and some religious people will treat you as spiritually deficient.

There are some who say that Paul refers to something other than remarriage in 1 Corinthians 7:28. In this case the Apostle Paul is supposedly not referring to someone who is divorced and remarries, but rather to someone who is engaged, breaks off the engagement and then gets married for the first time. They correctly assert that the Greek words for *man* and *husband*, and *woman* and *wife*, are interchangeable. Therefore

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they say that the correct meaning of 1 Corinthians 7:27 is communicating that if you have broken off an engagement and then subsequently marry, you have not sinned. This is ridiculous. When has it ever been considered a sin to get married for the first time or to break off an engagement?

Some also assert that since Paul says in this passage: "*Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife,*" that this should be taken as an imperative and prohibitive command, to never divorce or never remarry - even though Paul clearly says in the very next verse that it is not a sin if you do remarry. That's fine as long as you take the next verse after that literally as well...

But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none...

1 Corinthians 7:29

Ever heard that preached as a literal and imperative command?

Paul's words are not an imperative command to not marry or remarry, or to literally live as single when you are already married, they are advice on focus – *do not seek* is what he said. What then do we seek?

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Matthew 6:33-34

When other people seek your condemnation, ignore them, move on and seek first the Kingdom of God and all the good things you need will be added to you.

**If You Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?**

Psalms 130:3

Chapter 6

Living Together

Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

John 4:17-18

Some people think that living together is a form of marriage and that if you are sincerely committed to one another, that this makes it a valid marriage. The answer to this is simple:

If you are not married then you are not really committed to one another. Therefore you are not really married.

One of you is likely to be more committed than the other and therefore sooner or later, one of you is going to get a nasty shock. This is why living together is wrong, because people get hurt. But don't people get hurt in marriage too? Yes they do however if someone is willing to marry you, it is indisputably one thing – it is a sign that they are willing to be more committed to you than if they only live with you. Marriage is the *most* secure and stable way you can be joined to someone in a relationship.

In the passage above Jesus clearly differentiates between marriage and living together. He does not treat them as the same thing. Why? Because they are not the same thing. Living together is very often founded on self serving convenience and fear. Marriage, on the other hand, while never perfect in this life and still with its risks, is at least always founded upon less convenience and fear than living together. Clearly there are exceptions, like people marrying for immigration purposes, but I am not talking about special exceptions here, I am talking about normal voluntary marriage.

Living Together

Most people who are living with someone are trying to be married. They may not want to be married, they may not even believe in marriage, nevertheless they are still trying to be married.

What do I mean? Well, who lives with someone so that they can split up with them and be hurt? No one of course. Why? Because all normal people living together seek security and love. In other words, they are trying to replicate what a marriage provides but in a living together relationship. "But in a marriage you are not free." Yes and No. In a marriage, as I have laboured to show all through this book, you are free and your personal freedom and wholeness is never ever secondary to your marriage. You are free to legally divorce to maintain your wholeness. Subsequent to divorce you are free to remarry and to lead a normal life. When you live with someone, you are also free – free to be dumped at any time.

Remember: If you are just a girlfriend or boyfriend then that's exactly what you are - just a "friend."

You can't go sobbing to anyone that after you chose to become a girlfriend you were treated like a girlfriend and dumped like a girlfriend. You chose the *free* relationship and you got it. So what's the problem? The problem is that you joined your soul to your boyfriend by sleeping with him but when he got bored with your body and moved on, you had the emotional pain and trauma of a divorce. It was exactly this that God was trying to save you from when He commanded you not to do such things in the first place. But that's not the end...

After splitting up from living with someone you have lost the uniqueness of an intimate relationship, in a way far more pervasive than if you slipped up and had sex with someone after some party (obviously this is far from good either but right now I'm not talking about that). Your heart is harder because you have been hurt from the break up of an intimate relationship. Consequently you are in a worse position for your next relationship – be it marriage or another living together session. You don't give yourself so wholeheartedly to the next person because of the wounds and mistrust from the first failed

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relationship; And so your life begins a slow but sure spiral into less and less fulfilling relationships. You are gradually broken down over and over again until you decide that so called *serious relationships* are a waste of time and that you will henceforth just be a casual girlfriend or boyfriend. You gradually become more and more calloused (note I didn't say you become *meaner* or *evil*) and end up trusting no one. You probably get drunk frequently, take drugs and generally try harder to have a *good time* while duly wrecking yourself.

You become like someone who keeps jumping off a roof and hurting themselves but persists because they like the feeling of freedom, as they fly through the air before they hit the ground. Eventually you become an invalid. Somewhere down the line you have to get a grip and stop. You have to meet Jesus.

The woman at the well in John 4 was a believer, she was a Samaritan, they were not pagans or heathens, they were a splinter group from Judaism. Samaritans believed in Moses and the Prophets and as the woman clearly said in John 4:25 they were waiting for the Messiah. But her life was a mess. She had been married five times, given up on that and then started living with someone. The problem with her was not marriage or even living with someone. The problem with her was that she was emotionally and spiritually thirsty and was trying to have her thirst quenched through relationships with men. I can honestly tell you as a man that this is definitely not too bright.

Only when you abide in God's presence, by hanging out with Him, being totally real with Him and allowing the spiritual power inherent within His word – the Bible, to change you by reading and speaking it over yourself; Only then will you and your relationships become whole. Until that time you can either live in an endless succession of relational disasters or stay on the same emotional level as you are now and get used to living with crutches.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife (*not girlfriend*), and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

Chapter 7

The Biggest Marriage Myth - God can do a Miracle

People seem to like miracles. I think it's because they imagine miracles as a way of getting things done for them without any real effort on their part. A sort of Christian equivalent of winning a lottery.

The last thing you need if your marriage is in trouble is a miracle, otherwise after that miracle has worn off you're going to need another one and then another and so on. In fact you won't be you any more, you'll just be this person who keeps miraculously loving someone you can't stand the sight of, communicate with, or bear the thought of going to bed with. That's not a marriage between sane human beings.

To sort out your marriage you need to make your heart soft and pliable in God's hands and so does your spouse. If either of you won't genuinely do that, forget it. You may wish to forbear for a few more years, until you are completely emotionally destroyed (or you have emotionally destroyed your spouse). This won't achieve anything except to reduce your ability to be whole enough to carry God's anointing, to fulfil whatever His call is for your life. The English have an expression for this kind of futility, it's called *flogging a dead horse*. The church calls it various things like: *allowing God time to move, being patient* and *submitting*. But God doesn't have any miracles that stop you or your spouse being yourselves.

Marriage is the most intimate and intense of all relationships. Many people are simply not able to cope with it. The reason for this is that they are not really willing to change within themselves. Most people fundamentally do not change. People adapt but they seldom have a crisis of the heart before the Lord, one where they really yield and let Him alter the way they

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are. Of course after it's too late they run around crying and sobbing, claiming that they want to change, but there are two appraisals of this.

First, why didn't the person concerned notice that their spouse was slowly slipping away from them in the first place? Because they didn't really care as long as they were still there to give them what they wanted. And because none of their prayers were ever: *Lord I yield my heart to you and if there's anything about me that needs to change let me know and give me the strength to do it.* They were probably more like: *I'm sorry I did this, that and the other and please get me a new car.*

Second, it may be too late! When romantic love is broken and a crushed spirit is the result, God can't simply fix it like a broken leg because it is about the very innermost sacred parts of you. The true wonder of creation is the human spirit and its ability to create through decision making. For God to alter the centre of your will, even if you ask Him to, is for Him to deny what He created you as - a person. Asking God to make you want something that you really don't want is an invalid prayer. Either you choose to want it or you don't.

None of this is on the same level as *being a good Christian* and loving your cantankerous neighbour - they wind you up, you may want to blow up their garden shed or poison their endlessly barking dog but really you know you should love them and bless them. This is nothing in the Universe like having to love someone in a marriage relationship. Marriage is not about a few apologies and overlooking mowed daffodils.

The slow and sometimes imperceptible destruction of someone's personality is not always easy to detect. This is why everyone is so surprised when one Sunday morning they find out that 'so and so,' has *just ran off with* the piano player. Nobody just runs off with anybody. It takes a long time to drain away a person's strength to carry on - until one day they flip. This scenario is often the case with Christians who are loathe to mention how they feel for risk of being branded selfish. Such people are often unhelpfully reminded that love is patient and kind, etc. But 1 Corinthians 13 does not tell us that *love is*

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emotionally suicidal. As Christians with God's Spirit in us we have His grace to forbear and forgive, but His grace is not there to anaesthetise our emotional destruction, any more than God's provision for our healing, is there to enable us to keep hitting our thumb with a hammer.

Many Pastors mistakenly think that their spiritual duty is to keep troubled married couples together. Well it is, and it isn't. The Pastor's first priority is to keep individuals themselves together. Someone being broken will inevitably split from their spouse anyway, they will then probably go through a string of further crazy relationships, with very little moral restraint - because of how smashed their emotions are from hanging on to the bitter end in their first relationship.

If we as Christians would come out of our religious dream world and counsel newly weds and troubled couples that divorce is an option because it happens! It happens, because as Jesus said in Matthew 19:8, some people are hard hearted. If we counselled people to realise that their actions will always have a consequence, then there would be a lot less marriage break up.

I vividly remember talking to one man about his wife and marriage problems. I could see that she was reaching breaking point with him - she couldn't take any more. I questioned him about his anger, which I knew was the main problem. He acknowledged that he got angry sometimes and casually wafted his hand, as though a small fly was buzzing near him and said, "*but it's not a problem.*" What he was really and mistakenly saying was that he didn't think his anger was a problem that was related to the continuation of his marriage. I tried to warn him that if he hurt his wife any further he would destroy their marriage permanently, in a way that could not be easily fixed. He looked at me bemused and said God would keep them together. His wife left him three weeks later.

What was the problem? He didn't really care. He unwittingly thought that marriage was a gift from God that gave him some kind of spiritual diplomatic immunity to abuse someone for the rest of their lives and deny them true love. To this man, his marriage was not how he and his wife got on, it was a holy

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sacrament that his wife was supposed to continue participating in with him, regardless of how he treated her.

No. Your marriage is you and your spouse. Stop seeing it as some fanciful holy thing from God and see it as how you are treating your spouse - who is a holy child of God.

God didn't give you a marriage as much as he gave you a person. Marriage, instigated by God, is a public declaration between you and your spouse about how you are hence forth going to relate to one another. It is a boundary guide to those on the outside, and a reminder to you on the inside, of what you promised to be to your spouse.

The reason many people never wise up and change is because they think that just because their spouse is a Christian, they can never leave them. They may admit that they have a problem but can't seem to make the connection between their behaviour and the validity of their marriage. To them, marriage is a kind of sacrament that exists in isolation to their behaviour; Hence they often do nothing to change their behaviour and end up losing their marriage anyway.

Chapter 8

Marriage in the Light of Eternity

If the foundations are destroyed what can the righteous do?

Psalm 11:3

Marriage is a foundation of society but it is not *the* foundation. In Genesis 2:24 God institutes marriage between a man and a woman and yet before that something much more important than marriage was created - people. The foundation of all creation is found in Genesis 1:26-28. It is people. God makes man and woman in His own image and like Him. It follows that if we are made in the image of God, then the image of our lives is also supposed to be a reflection of God's existence. We don't build an aeroplane and expect it to function only as a car. The truth here is very simple. We are supposed to live and be whole like God; Our wholeness and well being are *the* foundation of society.

Because of what Adam did in the garden of Eden, all of humanity after him was born without the strength that Adam and Eve originally had. Consequently, as we have grown up we have been weak and often made poor choices. We have all at one time or another in our lives violated our conscience. This is what sin is and we have all done it. But there is hope. God saw humanity's weakness as soon as Adam fell and started on a rescue plan. He sent Jesus.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly

Romans 5:6

The Bible says in Matthew 18:11 that Jesus came to the earth to "*save that which was lost.*" That means all of us. By exercising our will and believing in Jesus and saying out loud in prayer that 'Jesus is our Lord,' we open the door of our hearts

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to him and our soul is saved. God's Spirit fuses with ours and we become a new kind of person. We may look the same on the outside and we still have our personalities but we gradually start changing from the inside out as we yield to God's love.

Our overriding purpose in life is first and foremost to bring other people to make Jesus their Lord too. Marriage is not more important than that.

We are not supposed to keep the lid on the can of a broken marriage while neglecting our purpose in building God's kingdom on earth. God is not interested in preserving marriages in which people are being broken down.

The book of Daniel says:

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:3

It does not say: Those who fed their selfish spouses wants, who used all their emotional energy up surviving their mood swings, who spent their whole life maintaining appearances, shall shine like stars forever...

Just because you don't feel happy every day, it doesn't mean you need a divorce to fix it. Divorces don't fix things – they cause hurt and pain all round.

The Bible tells us that the only valid grounds for divorce are if your marriage is truly breaking you down.

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If you want to know God, pray this prayer:

Dear God in Heaven

I am sorry that I have been so wrong about you. Now I see from the Bible that you never wanted me, or anyone else, to shed even a single tear.

I have made many poor choices. Please forgive me.

Thank you that you sent Jesus your Son to pay for all my sins and that you raised him from the dead to give me new life.

I have decided to follow you and I now say out loud –

Jesus is my Lord!

Thank you for giving me a new heart. I will always be real with You and myself. Thank you that you have only good things in store for me.

Amen

If you have prayed this prayer from your heart, you are now a Christian!

God said in the Bible: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus also said: "Whoever comes to me, I will never cast away." Whatever challenges you may face, always remember that God never rejects you, and that He is not the cause of unfair things in your life. Rise above them.

Ask God to guide you everyday. Read the Bible and ask God to help you understand it. Check out: www.martynshenstone.com

Yours

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