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Church and School**  
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## **Cultivation Your Marriage: Uncovering the Secrets**

*“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.” Song of Solomon 8:6-7*

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**National Marriage Week USA**  
*Let's Strengthen Marriage*

## **Sunday COMMITMENT:**

### **MORE THAN THE DEFINITE MAYBE**

*Song of Solomon 8:6-7 “Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”*

I remember playing the game, “Battle of the Sexes,” a simple board game where guys ask simple general knowledge questions of ladies. One of those questions, was to name the three parts of concrete - water, rock, and cement. While many know that, others struggle to describe the three things that make a loving relationship. Be sure to understand, there are many things that people will argue about building a strong marriage (just as some argue rock vs sand for concrete), but they all boil down to three areas - romance (emotional attraction), intimacy (relational friendship), and commitment (ongoing act of the will).

This commitment can be a powerful motivator when done right. Cortes, when on expedition found a land that needed to be conquered, watched the vacillating spirit of his men, and burned the boats (after killing the one who suggested they return to Spain). Now, I am not suggesting you set things on fire; rather, that you commit your time, energy, and money to building a healthy marriage. Be all in!

To foster the commitment needed in a strong and thriving marriage, we must consistently engage our will to choose to look for the good in one another. We need to “burn the boats” of our past and build what we need for tomorrow by working on today. Take time today to “burn the boats” so that your

commitments to Christ and your wife become the rock solid foundation for your marriage.



### **Marriage Points:**

- Make a list, just for you, of the most frustrating things about your marriage. Then burn the list!
- Make a list, just for you, of the things that you most appreciate about your wife. Focus on these!
- Ask your wife what she thinks was most important about your wedding vows (hint: you might want to remember what those are before you ask her this!)
- Spend time with your wife talking about what she wants most from your marriage. Take notes and prepare one thing to commit to working on.
- Download the “Love Nudge” app, take the quiz, and invite your wife into the app.

**Prayer** - Father, You reveal Your great love for us in the giving of Your own Son. Help me daily to give of myself so that my wife knows my love for her. Deepen and strengthen my commitment to her and to You as I live daily in Your grace and love. Amen.

## **Monday COMMUNICATION: MOVING TOWARD UNDERSTANDING**

*James 1:19 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”*

I love hearing stories about how couples met, and I have come to find a common thread in them - conversation. Talking until late hours, writing letters to one another, and not waiting to tell someone something is what friendship is really all about. The downfall of marriage, is that we often fail to nurture this friendship style communication amid all the “business” of marriage (bills to pay, functions to attend kids’ activities, chores that need to be done, oil that needs changing, oh and how this list goes on). In fact, when they say that hearing is the first thing to go as you get older (I feel like I should have typed that in all caps); then according to relationship research, friendship style communication is the first thing to go in marriage.

Today, work to regain this enjoyable aspect of conversation by listening to your wife. Ask her general, open ended questions (need help? Google “couple discussion questions” and stick with just a few. You will only get through a few!). Then, just listen. Make sure that you understand what your wife is sharing. Empathize (feel what she’s feeling), with what your wife shares. Affirm your wife in what she is sharing. Hear her as a friend, not as the guy who is going to fix it. Then, allow your intrigue in your wife to grow as you ask her more about life! After all, she is your best friend!

## Marriage Points:

- Watch “It’s Not about the Nail” on YouTube. Discuss times when either of you feel like this and remember the remedy when you do - listen.
- Take time to share about your day (hint: this is more than just “it was good.”).
- Make Tacos, or “Talk-Os”, together and do your discussion questions.
- Discuss what helps you to get into the right mindset to have these relational conversations that are not task focused (Goal: building your relationship).

**Prayer** - Gracious Lord, You sent Your Word in the Flesh to be in regular conversation with me. Help me build stronger communication with my wife as I daily pray to You and read Your Word for my life. Amen.



## **Tuesday PEACE IN CONFLICT**

*Proverbs 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

*Romans 12:18 “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”*

In college, I loved going with friends to play paintball; and now, I love to play Nerf wars with my kids (Rachel gets shot from time to time too). I love all the aspects of this fun battle. I love getting to methodically seek and destroy when it is my turn to hunt down the other team. When it is my turn to hide, I love building up a bunker for full-surround protection. In the end, it is always a fun time when no one gets hurt.

Relationships often take this perspective as well. When we don't get our way or what we think we should have, we find ourselves in the midst of a fight. We draw up weapons (words, wills, and recollections) and engage in battle tactics. Some will seek and destroy, which in marriage leaves your spouse dead. Others will withdraw and build up a wall for protection. Either way, the game is afoot - the marital conflict carousel spins around. While conflict is a perfectly human reality, it doesn't have to follow these two patterns. (Statistically, happy and healthy marriages face the same amount of conflict as unhealthy marriages; what differs is how a couple deals with the conflict). We can have peace in conflict when we ASK. Assertively make a request (I would rather you hang up your wet towel in the morning). Keep your request Simple by limiting the issue to one event and topic without bringing up past wrongs which should have been forgiven (this implies that you remember that you promised not to hold it against your spouse). Remember to keep your tone and request Kind, just as you would want your

spouse to speak with you. To have peace in conflict, ASK - assertively make simple requests in kindness.



### **Marriage Points:**

- In conflict, do you tend to withdraw or seek and destroy? How about your wife?
- Think about your last conflict and how things might have changed if you chose a different response.
- Sit down with your wife and watch marriage videos from Trinity's YouTube and discuss.
- Spend an evening talking about dealing with conflict while preserving peace.
- Send a Love Nudge and update your love tank.

**Prayer** - O Prince of Peace, come to us when we find our relationships broken by selfishness and sin. Restore us again with Your forgiveness, and move us to grow in grace and love so that we live in peace with everyone. Amen.

## **Wednesday FIGHTING FOR ONE**

*Matthew 19:5 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?”*

*1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*



I love to play games, Card games, Athletic games, Board games. However, my favorite games involve teams. Rachel and I love to get together with other couples for a little loving competition. Guys against girls or couples facing off against couples. It provides some pretty funny jokes when done in a fun way (not that it ever goes awry or too far) that leaves everyone laughing. The fun ensues because together we have a common goal as to what we want the outcome to be - we both want to win as a team. This common goal keeps you on the same side and fighting for the same thing.

Marriage isn't always like those game nights. There are times when we forget what we are fighting for and that we are on the same team. Instead, we argue over things in life as if they were a rule change that we were not expecting. We take offense that someone isn't playing fair or has changed the goal that you were once fighting for. However, in the craziness of these arguments we often forget what we are fighting for - oneness in marriage. The rules haven't changed, we just haven't been able to "get" our way. Our spouse hasn't changed the goal, the game just provided a wrinkle in our lives. When you find yourself in these arguments, remember what you are fighting

for and always strive for the goal of growing together into the oneness of marriage.

### **Marriage Points:**

- Plan a couples game night and be sure you are on your wife's team.
- Set out today, to encourage your wife towards your common goals.
- Write a thank you card for your wife, sharing how encouraging she is for you in marriage.
- Spend time discussing your marriage goals and what can distract you from these things.
- Update your love tank in the Love Nudge app.

**Prayer** - Blessed Lord, You have created all things for our good, and yet, there are times that we focus on things rather than on You the giver of all. Help me focus on the goal of my marriage, which is to be holy as You are holy so that You are in all that I do. Amen.

## Thursday NURTURING SACRIFICE

*Philippians 2:4 "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

Marriage and love are much like a tender young plant that will continue to grow and mature. Some will grow while being neglected and allowed to be left to themselves to reveal a wild and seemingly untamable "mature" plant. However, others will be tended and cared for so that they are sculpted into a work of art as they grow into maturity. Unless you have been nurturing your marriage relationship well, I would imagine all of us feel a little overgrown and at times left to ourselves. Therefore, it might be time to trim out a few stray branches and be tethered to Christ so that we grow right and true. Nurturing sacrifice can serve as powerful pruning shears that will lop off the branches of selfish ambition, self seeking pride, and self-delusion that grow out of our sinful nature and seek to choke out all our relationships - especially marriage. While it is easy to say that all the things you do are for your wife and family, are they really? Now don't get me wrong, it is not wrong to do things for yourself as long as these things are tethered to Christ who knows the intentions of our heart. It is Christ who calls us out of our sinful selfishness and invites us to love by laying down our lives for our spouse - which is the role of husband according to Ephesians 5:21-33. Allow Him to make



your relationship new through you, His new creation, as He aligns your ambitions and loves so that they reflect Him.

### **Marriage Points:**

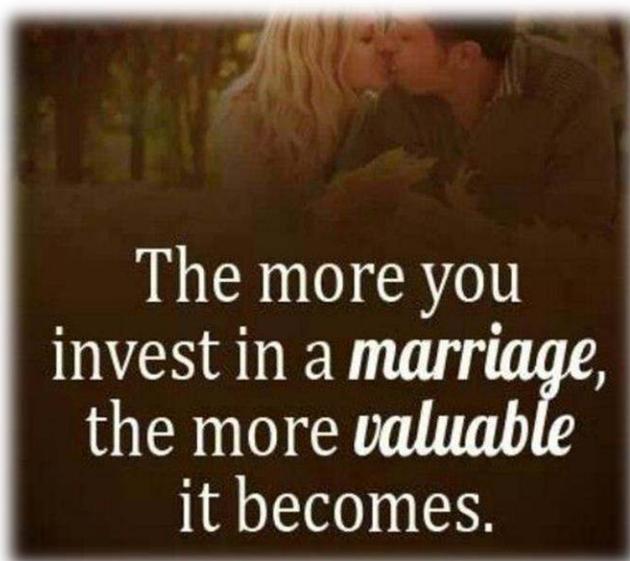
- Consider all your hobbies. Which are really important to you, and which ones are the stray branches of selfishness? Plan for a little pruning.
- Talk to your wife and discuss where she needs more time and attention.
- Ask your wife to prepare a list of ways she would like to be nourished in marriage, then get to work.
- Sacrifice of your time and attention and look to your wife's interests by putting ways to nourish your marriage into each of the 12 months of the year (or be really bold and do one a week).
- Set a goal in the Love Nudge app that fits with your wife's love language.
- Complete a goal and select another goal in the Love Nudge app.

**Prayer** - Lord Jesus Christ, You reveal that there is no greater love than when You laid down Your life for me. Help me to live this kind of love for my spouse as I give of myself for her. Amen.

## Friday ENDURING LOVE

*Colossians 3:17* “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

I love to decompress after a full or difficult day. For me, a go to decompression tool is watching television. Really, it is just watching “The Office.” It is a stupid show that has a lot of real life funny to it, that is just my opinion. However, this “go to” state of decompressing can very quickly get in the way of what God has called me to do which is invest in my spouse and my family. There are times I find myself in the same place as Adam, standing next to his wife and failing to protect her and certainly not providing for her. Apathy wins out in the name of my need for decompressing. If we are honest with ourselves, we know that our needs often trump the needs of those closest to us. My brothers this should not be!



So today, seek to invest in your spouse. Open yourself up to spend time doing something that you know will communicate romance and love for your wife. If you don't know what that is, and are too afraid to ask or admit it, invest time. Taking the time to talk with your spouse or do something that is

important to her. Spending a little money wisely to communicate your enduring love. Try going out of your way to exert extra effort so that the burden is lifted off of your

spouse. Invest in a little romance for your wife; invest your time, money, and effort to reveal your enduring love for her.

### **Marriage Points:**

- Take time to cook for, or with your wife, and try a new recipe.
- Go over the top and make a special dessert together (need help? Watch a YouTube step-by-step video).
- Take extra time in conversations and talk about the day. Ask her what she liked, or didn't like, about the meal.
- Invest your effort today by doing all of her household jobs and leave her a love note so she knows why you did them.
- Talk with your wife about how she would like to use the Love Nudge app as you continue to grow together.

**Prayer** - Father, You continually pour out Your grace into my life. Help me pour myself into my wife so that I show her the enduring love that You desire for her. Amen.

## **Saturday FELLOWSHIP**

*1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:7,13 “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”*

In the movie, “Forrest Gump,” we get the often quoted line, we go together “like peas and carrots.” You and your wife go together just like that; however, couples are not intended to face the ups and downs of life alone. If you and your wife are like “peas and carrots,” where is the rest of your meal. Who do you go to for support in the difficult times? Who comes to you for the struggles they are facing in order to get Godly advice? It is time we build out the full meal in order to get the God intended nourishment from marriage.

Consider meeting with one other couple, or be bold and develop a small group of couples, to nourish and encourage one another. Talk about: who was in your wedding party? Are you still connected to them? Who has been a good influence on your marriage? Who do you look up to or go to for advice? What has been the most difficult part of marriage? As you build these relationships only share what you are comfortable sharing. Reminisce about the memorable things of marriage together and allow this fellowship of friends nurture your curiosity (not competition) as you continue to grow in marriage. Discuss how your life together can bless others with the special components of your love, after all you do have a great love story that continues to grow through the blessings from God!

## Marriage Points:

- Plan a night with other couples.
- Identify couples that you are comfortable sharing with like “peas and carrots.”
- Consider mentoring another couple who recently married, or one that can mentor you.
- Reminisce about your marriage in a special evening together.
- Update your love tank and send your wife a message about how she fills your love tank.

**Prayer** - Lord of all Love, as You reveal the greatest love in history in Jesus Christ, help us to find our vital roles in sharing and living this great love story You have given us. Amen.



## **Sunday BUILDING FAMILY**

*Deuteronomy 6:6-7 “These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”*

You have made it this far on this blessed journey called marriage, but what you really are doing is living inside family as God designed it. In the creation account Genesis reveals that God designed us to live in this relationship that we call family and at the center of family is marriage. You have worked hard to have a strong foundation for your marriage, which God in turn uses as the strong building blocks for expanding family from the marriage couple and passing it on to the children. When the foundation of the family, the marriage, is strong and stable it is able to build up and withstand great things and now that you have this strong foundation, keep building. Just as Moses gathered all the households, the clans, and all the tribes of Israel together, be sure that your family gathers together. Discuss what the household of faith is to look like and what values you desire to live by. Discuss how growing in Christ is really directed at growing closer together as His family. Plan how and when to consistently do family devotions, weekly Bible study and worship, and focus on living as a family for Jesus. Discuss what this family for Jesus should look like and what might need to change. Then walk together as you grow in His grace learning His truth in order to serve others and bear witness to the greatness of our God’s love for us!

## **Marriage Points:**

- Gather adult children together and confess your shortcomings as parents. Ask your children how you might grow closer together.
- Gather your children together and discuss what they want from family and how together you might develop a vision for living as a family for Jesus.
- Plan out regular time with your family so that you build up a healthy home.
- Create a regular family meeting where you can talk about the vision you have for your family and practice real communication as you walk together in faith.

**Prayer** - Kind Father, You have made us Your children in Holy Baptism. You listen to us when we come to You in prayer and direct us to live according to Your Holy Word. Help us grow together as family so that we live lives that are worthy of your Holy Name. Amen.



# How To Use This Devotional

*This devotional is intended to be read by men (and only men, sorry ladies) who desire to understand their marriage relationship better and bless their wife as they live as the men God has called them to be. Each day will consist of a bible verse, a devotional reading, a concluding prayer, and action steps to build your VISION of Marriage.*



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