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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**

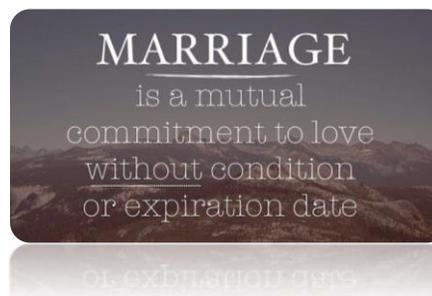
*But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Ruth 1:16 -"*

Our family recently attended a gathering with friends including a variety of age groups. One of the invited members was a young man, age 22. His mom let us know that he was a "definite maybe" regarding his presence. I laughed out loud...the commitment in "definite maybe" was pretty questionable. In the January Trinity newsletter publication, we had a series entitled "Promises Made, Promises Kept." Each of the stories were spoken from the hearts of the authors - memories treasured and lives changed by the promises recorded. If you are taking the time to read devotions this National Marriage Week, it is likely your life has been changed and shaped by the promise you have made and kept in marriage. Perhaps the Ruth verse above reminds you of the promises you and your spouse have made. Think back to your wedding day. In the marriage service, the pastor reminds the bride and groom that this covenant is "not to be entered into lightly." Fast-forward: this promise is much harder to keep than originally expected and the firm pledge to commitment can grow wearied without regular care and investment. So when you arrived at the altar that day, how committed were you? Have you "burned the boats"? In 1519, Hernán Cortés set sail to Veracruz, Mexico with his crew. Upon arrival, Cortés' men became weary and scared, with hopes of turning back home to their old way of life. As legend has it, Cortés had the men burn their boats, leaving no option but to press on! Their ability to retreat to their previous way of life was gone; their safety net had been removed. Along

the journey of marriage, there are forks in the road where it is time to “burn the boats” of the old ways and press on. There are times to cleave to your husband, speak well of him, encourage him, meet his needs, pray for him, leave behind your own certain selfish ways and chart the new territory ahead as a team. If you reflect upon your wedding ceremony, it is likely that you said, “I do” and not, “it’s a definite maybe.” Take some time to think back on the memories that have kept you moving forward and find ways to create more.

### **Marriage Points:**

- What was the most important part of your wedding vows? Review your wedding album and reminisce.
- What do you love about your marriage?
- What things do you and your husband see that demonstrate you have “burned the boats” and are committed?
- What was the most difficult part about “burning the boats”?
- Watch a movie together - *The Song, Up, The Notebook, Shall We Dance, Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner.*
- Play Battleship or another fun game.



**Prayer** - Lord Jesus, when we think about the concept of commitment, there is no one who has been more faithful to the promises spoken than You. Lord, you promised to come to the earth and give Your life as a willing sacrifice, the ultimate commitment. May we, as wives, live lives that are full of sacrificial love, “all in,” point of no return, “burn the boats” love for the man You gave each one of us, so that our lives reflect Your love. Guide us, our compass. Amen.

## Monday COMMUNICATION: MOVING TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING

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

“The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” George Bernard Shaw.

We are so blessed to gather each

Wednesday night at Trinity Lutheran for Journey - our midweek education time.

Pastor Henderson has had a wonderful idea to have community style fellowship meals for which I am so very grateful. A number of families gather for the evening and everyone brings a little and in “Stone Soup” style, together we feed the masses. Recently, we had Grilled Cheese and Tomato Soup (yum!). Pastor said to me, “let’s do it like last

time and just get what we need on a plate.” (note: this might not be word for word, but close) Sounds simple enough. Next note: “last time” we did this gathering, I was there for part of it, but then I left to go coach soccer practice, so I was not present for the full meal - important piece to the story. Back to the current setting, I took what he said and started asking all the children what they wanted to have - what type of cheese, what bread, etc and I wrote it on a plate so it was useful to the chef, just as he had requested. I could sense something was wrong, but I could not quite identify what it was in the moment and did not think that the fellowship hall kitchen was the right place to have a discussion about what was not quite right, so we moved along until it came time for an adult order of grilled cheese where the adult wrote her name on her plate and what type of cheese, bread, etc she desired. OHHHHH, so each person should write what he or she wants on his/her own plate rather than me tallying an order for everyone...like they did last time...when I left I missed that part. Sigh. Communication. Sometimes we think we understand, but we completely misunderstood. Sometimes we think we delivered clear communication, but the



*“The goal of communication in marriage isn’t agreement it is understanding.”*  
- Glen Sharkey

message still was not received. Does this happen in your marriage? Pastor did a great session with the kids a few months back where he defined communication as “moving towards understanding.” He spent time explaining to them that we needed to listen, empathize, and affirm. This process does not mean that we agree on all topics, but it does help us to function in a way that Jesus interacted with the people as he walked on earth and helps us to keep moving toward understanding. You might think you are communicating clearly, but we all have opportunities to learn and grow. We must operate from a heart of service, humility, and listening. May we be quick to hear, slow to speak, and always operating in the love of Christ.

### **Marriage Points:**

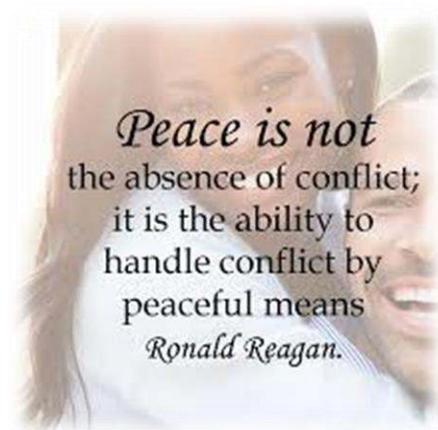
- What is the last conversation you had with your husband where you really listened to what he wanted to share?
- Typically, women have A LOT more words than men - are you missing something he would like to communicate? Move toward understanding him!
- Watch the YouTube clip, “It’s Not about the Nail”; Skit Guys (online) - Marriage Promise Video, variety of FANTASTIC videos.
- Have a meal, dessert, or drink together and ask “Would you Rather” Questions.
- Pick a topic he enjoys and ask him about it, and move toward understanding.

**Prayer** - Oh Listener of all, we are humbled by the innumerable voices You have listened to for all ages and how You love each one. You created us to not be alone and to have fellowship with one another, but since sin entered this world, relationships require communication, patience, and sacrifice. May our hearts be still and our ears be attentive to what You would have us learn today. May we move toward understanding with the one You gave us to love. Help us to be quick to listen, and slow to speak. Amen.

## Tuesday PEACE IN CONFLICT

*Proverbs 15:1,4 - A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger...A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

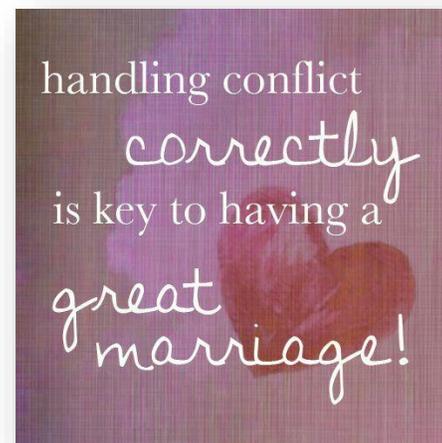
What moments in your lifetime can you recall memories of peace in your heart? Holding a newborn baby? Going to bed at night after a successful event? Seeing everyone in your household get along? Knowing you have helped fill your husband's Love Tank? Take the time to reflect again, what memories stir up flashbacks of conflict? You can FEEL the difference internally - peace vs. unrest. There are reports that most marriages experience the same quantity of conflict, but how the conflict is handled impacts the outcome on the marriage. Dr. Paul Chappell, author of *Making Home Work* and *Striving Together* Publications, found these 5 common causes of conflict within the marriage boundaries: **1. Selfishness**—often conflict is caused because we care more about ourselves than we do about the other person or the relationship—at least at that moment. **2. Pride**—makes us unwilling to admit when we are wrong or to acknowledge another person's point of view. Rather than apologizing, we defend our behavior. **3. Pettiness**—Some things really are too small to argue about. Pathological pettiness turns every disagreement into right versus wrong, with one person having to be proven right. This is usually rooted in selfishness and pride. **4. Fear and insecurity**—When someone who has been hurt feels a conflict coming on, often they withdraw to avoid it, rather than engaging in resolution. Unfortunately, problems left unsolved or with only surface solutions usually fester. The increasing tension from what could have been solved grows larger, which, in turn, makes an insecure or fearful person even less likely to be willing to deal with it. **5. Satanic attack**—There can be no doubt that marriage faces enemies that are designed and empowered by Satan himself. Because marriage is a picture of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32), Satan hates it and wants to destroy it. Every time a Christian family is broken, the testimony of Christ is harmed. Every time a couple lets conflict grow between them, their own walk with the Lord is harmed. If unhealthy root causes are allowed to remain without being addressed, the



relationship will weaken over time. Do you battle some of these root causes of conflict? Pray that you recognize where you can grow. It is not your job to change your spouse, it is your job to change you. We all have room to grow! May there be a gentle answer today and the tree of life in your home.

### **Marriage Points:**

- Do you tend to be a Fighter or Flighter? How does that impact your marriage?
- Who is someone you know who handles conflict in a healthy way? What about them makes this noticeable?
- When your next conflict arises, recognize what you can do differently.
- Watch a classic romance movie set during a wartime in which the couple argues a lot. Ask each other what the main characters' hot buttons or pop-ups are. *Gone with the Wind, Casablanca, The Patriot.*
- Discuss how you have grown over your time together with regard to conflict. Remember a time where you handled conflict in a healthy way together.



**Prayer** - Jesus in Your inspired Word in the book of John, You told Your people, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." Our world is full of trouble, but You leave us peace. May we leave our selfishness, pride, pettiness, fear, and insecurity at the foot of Your cross and as You protect us from evil, may we seek Your will and Your way in our relationships. Help me today, Lord Jesus, to find peace in conflict with my husband, to Your glory. Amen.

## **Wednesday TEAMWORK: FIGHTING FOR ONE**

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

In a recent article, “Google Says The Best Teams Have These 5 Things”, Google analyzed data from executives, team leads, and team members to determine the key dynamics of what makes a successful team.

Here are the 5 qualities that make a great team according to the results from Google: Psychological Safety, Dependability, Structure and Clarity, Meaning, and Impact. How can we take these workplace success strategies and apply them to the home? Psychological Safety: “You can ask for help without fear of retribution or adverse impact to your reputation. Team members feel comfortable asking questions and sharing opinions, which can lead to healthy debate and help the team thrive.” Do we create an environment within our marriage where we are comfortable asking questions and sharing opinions? If we encourage one another and build each other up, that certainly improves our ability to respond to one another, rather than belittling and nagging.

Encouraging one another can also assist in our development of Meaning (feeling like you have purpose) and Impact (seeing that you made a difference) in our spousal relationship and family. Take the time to remind one another of the little things: a thoughtful text, a trip to the grocery store, trash taken out, snow shoveled, oil changed, whatever it might be that makes your team function, it takes BOTH of you. And though we might feel like there are certain things we want done “our way” because it is the “right way,” perhaps that is causing more tension than teamwork - might be worth evaluating. It is humbling to ask a widow or widower who was married for a significant number of years what parts of the team are missed the most once a spouse is gone. In the midst of the daily trials, may we not forget the value of our teammate. Dependability: Reliability and trust - do you trust your spouse and are you trustworthy? What sorts of choices improve trustworthiness between you both? Structure and Clarity: “When teams have structure and clarity, there are specific and clear performance standards and directives for the team to work and achieve. With these inputs, team members understand their function,

purpose, expectations and performance objectives.” Sounds like an owner’s manual, yes, but see how it fits your life. If you think about it, you and your spouse have a fine dance that you have created over time. You know what it means when he acts certain ways, what particular gestures mean, how he has grown, how he has struggled...you have roles, often unwritten, but clear still. Thank God for the teammate you have and be the best teammate you can be in return. Remember, you are fighting for a UNITED team, not a divided one.

*Zack Friedman is Founder & CEO of Make Lemonade, a personal finance comparison site. (Jan 28, 2019) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackfriedman/2019/01/28/google-says-the-best-teams-have-these-5-things/#d2d05025a302>*

### **Marriage Points:**

- What are some of your favorite memories about when you were a great team?
- Mention this cutesy quote and see his response: “A snowflake is one of God’s most fragile creations, but look what they can do when they stick together.”
- Play a game where you are on the same team, do the dishes together, ask a mentor couple what about their teamwork works well.
- Do an activity together that you enjoy together.
- Plan something for the near future together that you enjoy together.
- Make a thank you card for your spouse - handmade! (leave it on his pillow)

**Prayer** -Holy Trinity, You are the most functional team to exist, give us your wisdom! I thank You that You have blessed me with a teammate to navigate through this lifetime. Lord, relationships are work, but You know that and You still took time to make them a priority. Please help me notice the strengths of my husband and honor him for those wonderful gifts to our team. Help me to notice when I can grow as a teammate and when I can support. Each day is a gift that You give me, each breath a blessing, help me to thank You for each one and encourage my teammate. Amen.

## Thursday **NOURISHING SACRIFICE**

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

Sacrifice. If you are participating in the reading the Bible program the church is working through, you recently finished the book of Leviticus. Biblical sacrifice is such a vivid picture of the surrender of something for the sake of something else. Marriage requires **DAILY** sacrifice! Maybe the car was just about out of gas and he filled it up but didn't complain. Perhaps the baby is up for the 5th time that evening, but your husband has a big day tomorrow, so you will get up again and choose to be thankful rather than bitter. Maybe the dog threw up on the floor and one of you needs to get the creature outside and the other one needs to start sanitizing (maybe a little too personal!). Perhaps the years are advancing in your lives and he needs you to be his full time caretaker. Oh goodness, relationships require sacrifice, but we are called to be living sacrifices, looking not only to our own interests, but to the interests of others. If your husband could do anything for a day, what would it be? Is there something he needs from you? This is not meant to be a "you scratch my back and I will scratch yours" sacrifice, where you expect something in return, nor are you being asked to play the martyr in your great sacrifice; but rather to love and meet a need with a heart of joy and expect **NOTHING** in return. The Tuesday morning Women's Group is currently reading a book called *Listen, Love, Repeat* by Karen Ehman. Karen calls us to "live alert" in our daily lives and listen for heart drops...little things offered by the souls around us that are meaningful to the individual. What "heart drops" does your husband reveal? Would he like to play a game together? Is he craving physical intimacy? Does he just want to sit next to you and watch a movie? Is there an act of service that would mean so much to him if you were to act? What aspects of life make him nourished and not depleted? Find something today that you can do that shows he is a priority and meet his need.



## Marriage Points:

- Name a time when you remember a sacrifice he made for you and tell him how thankful you were.
- Have your spouse answer the statement: “I feel loved when you...”
- Give a massage - foot, calf, other; put phones away for the evening; does he have a physical need?
- Is there a gift that would mean something special to him?
- Download the “Love Nudge” App

**Prayer** - Jesus our Savior, no one knows Sacrifice more than You. You looked for opportunities when others needed You and You were fully present in those moments. You laid down Your life. May we as wives, see the needs of our husbands and sacrifice to meet them even when it seems difficult. Amen.



## **Friday ENDURING & INVESTING: WHERE DO YOUR 24 HOURS GO?**

*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.*

How do you spend your time? Quilting, cooking, sleeping, TV, reading, working, researching, cleaning, Facebook, driving, praying, purchasing, educating, playing, gardening, loving? Our time is a precious gift from our Lord and Savior and we are each given the same amount - how are you led to use it? Each of us finds motivation and inspiration in very different ways. As years go by, it is incredible to see how truly diverse the body of Christ is and how differently we are all called to serve. However, within our marriages, we are all called to serve our spouse, and that requires...OUR TIME! In a financial world, the hope with an investment would be to place money into an investment and watch it grow. Our relationships are similar - we invest our time and watch our relationship grow. Yes, we all need it to be based on the dynamics of our relationship varied by the love languages we all speak (Gary Chapman - The Five Love Languages, which you can take if you download the Love Nudge app), but our memories, our moments, logged away and pondered up in our hearts involve our time. Where do you make time that is meaningful for you and your spouse? Much like you need preventative care to maintain your health, regular oil changes to keep your car running, weekly church to keep your spirit uplifted, time with your friends to stay connected, filter changes to keep your furnace working, you need regularly invested time with your spouse to stay connected! Without regular maintenance and investment, you find separation, distance, and brokenness. Oftentimes we trust that in marriage, our spouse will be there, AFTER we get through all the other things, but if we don't invest now, there will be no after. OR, if we have two fantastic faithful people and we do make it to the "after" we find we have nothing in common anymore because we did not "check in" to do the maintenance we should have been doing along the way. Statistically, peak divorce years are Year 1, 7, 20, 40 -

each monumental years along the marriage journey! At 20 years, the kids are gone and you find you don't know each other anymore because you have not been maintaining and investing. At 40 years, you are back in the home together and it is much more difficult than expected. Invest in your marriage today, and see what the Lord has in store!

### **Marriage Points:**

- What do you enjoy doing with your time? How has that changed over years?
- What could you and your spouse do together TODAY?
- Cook a meal together - something you have never tried.
- Buy or make a dessert, put on comfy clothes and feed each other! ... or whatever is better for the two of you!
- Try something together that could make you laugh!!

**Prayer** - Creator of TIME, each one of us are limited to 24 hours per day, no more and no less. Our energy varies, our priorities differ, our lives are different, but our time is the same. Lord, we pray that our time today includes our partner, our teammate, the one You gave us to walk this journey alongside. Please open a door, give us a moment, so that we can praise You and Your greatness and enjoy one another. You are so good. Amen.





## **Saturday FELLOWSHIP: BE WITH OTHERS**

*1 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.*

Perhaps you are able to walk through this lifetime with very little struggle in the world of comparison, competition, and covetousness, but throughout different seasons of life, that is not the same story for everyone. Media portrays perfection, women who appear to have it all: success, beauty, wealth, lovely homes, ideal family structure, you name the unrealistic whatever it is to catch your attention, and it seems available and...you want it. But as those spiritual roots grow deeper, you realize, "I am who God made me to be" and all those distractions will not win, but instead, there are opportunities out there all around. There are stories from which I can learn, His people from which I can gain perspective. Thanks be to God for others!! Just think, every single person in your day today has a different story regarding what they have encountered. Each one has had different discussions, different meals, different stories, different experiences and they all shape the individual through the individual mind. Wow! How does God do it?! That includes your husband. Who did he interact with today? How did he process those interactions based on who God made him to be? Together, you will develop a story, but that is happening all around us each and every day. There are stories we are missing all around us, so take the time to get to know some other people a little better and get their story! We challenge you to find a couple and spend some time with them. Perhaps you can even form a small group and get to know a few couples on a more intimate level. We can be mentors, mentees, and peers because God has created fellowship and the Body of Christ and so many opportunities to GROW! Faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is LOVE!

## **Marriage Points:**

- Plan a night with other couples - Questions to ask while out with another couple:
  - Who was in your wedding party? Are you still close to them?
  - Who or what has influenced your marriage the most?
  - What's one piece of marriage advice you can give?  
What has been the toughest time in your marriage that you feel comfortable talking about?
  - Tell us your love story: how did you meet, what did your proposal look like, your wedding, honeymoon tales, married years?
- What sorts of things are you willing to share? Different perspectives on the same event?
- Consider going on double dates with other couples at least 3 times a year! (they don't have to be your best friends, a chance to get to know other people and learn from them!) - do a hike, trip to a museum, somewhere you can talk to learn and glean! There are a variety of options for couple dates, which type do you want to cultivate: mentor, peer, mentee?

**Prayer** - God, You quickly determined in Your created order that it was not good for man to be alone. We ache for time alone and yet we long to not be lonely. Lord, we are created in Your image and so we are meant to be connected souls, not isolated. Thank You for the MANY stories all around us each day. As we come to the end of a week focused on our marriages to the wonderful spouses You have given to our lives, may we also notice others around us. Help us to learn, grow, and seek You in all we say and do. Direct us to seek another couple or multiple couples in the near future to sharpen one another. Please bless us with fellowship in order to strengthen our union. Amen.

## Sunday **BUILDING FAMILY**

*“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.”*

*Deuteronomy 6:6-7*

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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