

understand what they were doing and how they were not keeping the covenant God had cut with Abraham.

So, looking at the story of Hosea, we see that we are not to despise the desert or our experiences in it. This is where we are prepared to become the Lord's bride, where our trials will become the jewels that adorn us for our wedding day, and ultimately, it will be our bridal bower; where we are married to the Lord. The desert should be a place we relish because the final desert is where we get betrothed! What person do you know who views an engagement or marriage as a time to mourn? NO! It is a time to look forward to and celebrate!

Are you looking forward to this day? If you are not, it is time to examine your heart as to why. I once heard a statement from a preacher I thought was very profound. He said, "If you fall in love with Jesus, you'll never fall." Jesus is the perfect husband! He doesn't disappoint us, He doesn't let us down. Fall in love with Jesus, bride! If you do, you'll never fall and you'll keep looking forward to the day when you join Jesus, forever!

Awaiting and looking for the [fulfillment, the realization of our] blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus, the Messiah, the Anointed One, Who gave Himself on our behalf that He might redeem us (purchase our freedom) from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people - to be peculiarly His own - [people who are] eager and enthusiastic about [living a life that is good and filled with] beneficial deeds. (Titus 2:13-14)

The entire process of desert experiences I have described brings us to this point - the point in which GOD becomes our husband and we become His bride, forever! These hard places are necessary to help to purify and transform us for eternity with our Savior, Lord, and King. Yet, we SOOO fight being in a place of silence, a place of desperation, a place of emptiness, but throughout the Scripture we see that God treasures these traits!

I heard Tommy Tenney speak not long ago. He made a statement that summed this principle up. He said that we like things full; full tummies, full bank accounts, full closets, etc. But GOD likes (and responds to) emptiness; empty lives, empty hearts, hearts desperate for answers. All of these bring a hunger to us and God responds to hunger!!

I think the person in the Bible who best displays this for us is Mary of Bethany. No matter where she shows up in scripture, she is always in the same place - at the feet of Jesus. She sits at His feet when Martha complains that Mary isn't helping, we are told in John 11:2 that it was she who anointed his feet with ointment and dries them with her hair. Are you desperate enough to stay at His feet? Are you seeking Him with everything you are? Are you clinging to Him, waiting for whatever He has for you?

This desire, to know Him above all else, is something that moves the heart of God. I believe that we too often focus on our circumstances, which eclipse our view of God or even worse, warp our view of Him.

When we are in a difficult place, we get so caught up in the problem that we can lose sight of the

bigger picture. Somehow we think our circumstances have rendered God powerless; that He is no longer in control, our circumstances are. Yet the word of God shows us over and over again that God IS in control, even when things look bad.

Even if we didn't have this assurance, why do we fear? Are we not clearly told that He is the God who brings GOOD out of EVIL?? So, if our circumstances are evil, God can still use them for His greater purpose, because our evil circumstances cannot "out-power" God!

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. (I John 4:4, emphasis mine)

Can we, DO we trust God? Do we REALLY believe that He is trustworthy? Do we REALLY believe He will keep us safe in the midst of adversity? Do we REALLY believe that we can rely on what He has said in His word and bound Himself to provide for us?

The Lord is my shepherd [to feed, guide and shield me]; I shall not lack. He makes me lie down in (fresh, tender) green pastures; He leads me beside the still and restful waters. He refreshes and restores my life - my self; He leads me in the paths of righteousness [uprightness and right standing with Him - not for my earning it, but] for His name's sake. Yes, though I walk through the [deep, sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I will fear or dread no evil; for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me. (Psalm 23: 1-4)

If we REALLY believe this, won't it change the way we walk through our days? Won't it change the way we live, interact - RE-act to those around us?

Another thought that can snag us is this: have you bought the lie that you have to DO something to get God's blessing? Yes, there is an obedience factor in the Christian life; we bear His name and are to strive to be like Him in all our ways. Yet, it does not take what we DO to gain God's approval. It took what Jesus DID to bring us into right relationship with God.

Not long ago, while doing a study on the book of Jude, I found something really interesting about this concept. Jude addresses his letter to "the called, the beloved, the kept" and he ends his letter telling these people that God can KEEP them from stumbling. When studying this passage, I found that the word "kept" here meant "an action in the past with results continuing into the present" AND that "the subject is acted UPON." This means that what Jesus did in the past keeps me TODAY!! So, it's NOT what I do, but what He DID! I was acted UPON! It is NOT up to me or you to DO what is necessary to gain God's approval or to make ourselves righteous. All we have to do is RECEIVE what has been DONE! That's ALL!!!

When things in our lives go awry, we have a few choices: to rail at the circumstances and wonder where God is, to think that we have to somehow manipulate or control the situation in order for it to be right, OR we can see that God is SOVEREIGN and is right there in the midst of our circumstances, working His will in our lives!

Behold God, my salvation! I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord God is my

strength and my song; yes, He has become my salvation. (Isaiah 12:2)

Let me ask you something. If we look at the life of Joseph, was he in sin? What was it that HE did to bring his brother's jealousy and hatred? (Just who gave him those dreams?) What did HE do to be accused of rape by Potiphar's wife? What did HE do (wrong) to be left in prison for two more years after correctly interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's baker and cup bearer? Joseph was innocent of many things, yet his life seemed out of control. Why? What had he done to deserve such a "fate"? What have YOU done to deserve your "fate?"

If Joseph focused on his circumstances, where do you think he would he have ended up? Where have you? If he had complained to God, complained to all who would listen, if he had railed against the situation in which he found himself through no design or plan of his own, how do you think his life would have played out? I think we would have had a greatly different story!

What we DO see is that Joseph did NOT complain. Scripture says these things of him while in Potiphar's house (Genesis 39)

And the Lord was with Joseph (v.2)

Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand (v.3)

...the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; (v. 5)

When tempted to sin by Potiphar's wife, Joseph responds:

How could I do this great evil, and sin against God? (v. 9)

Once he is in prison, Scripture records:

But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. (v. 21)

Do you think that only good things come when we do the right thing? Do you think that there are never trying times in doing right? To make this clearer, let me ask you this, was Joseph delivered from slavery and given a ticket home by doing RIGHT in Potiphar's house? Did his circumstances get better? Did he focus on his circumstances or did he focus on the GOD of his circumstances?

So, where are you? Have you been through hard times? Is your focus on the circumstances, or on the GOD of your circumstances?

I've learned that it does no good to focus on, rail against or fight my circumstances. Indeed, it's a waste of time. Nothing is accomplished, the enemy keeps me running in circles, I stay upset, I don't make my way out of the circumstances, and my home is in an uproar, so what's the point? Instead, I have found that it IS beneficial to get on my knees, focus on the Lord, magnify Him, knowing that no matter how out of control my life may seem, God is NOT out of control; to seek Him, and to get His perspective on my situation.

This restores the peace to my heart whether the situation changes immediately or not. AND change is much more likely to occur when I get with God, get His perspective on how I'm to proceed and move accordingly. Sometimes the change is just in me, but you know what? When that happens, the circumstances, or situation no longer derails me or makes me upset! I can move forward in that perfect, amazing peace of God!

And God's peace [be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, at peace] which transcends all understanding, shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:7)

So, which would you prefer, to stay in a tough place and complain and be miserable, or to access the Lord of all situations, comply with Him even if it means facing and/or changing something about yourself which may or may not be difficult, and getting relief? If what you are facing looks like something difficult, God promises to be there to give us the grace, strength and ability to do His will!

...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure. (Phil. 2:13)

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:6)

No matter what comes in life, God has NOT been dethroned, nor has He ceased to be God. But, He often has a different agenda than we do.

**For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are my ways higher than your ways,
And my thoughts higher than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)**

Our choice is whether we will magnify the Lord by focusing on Him and believing that He is sovereign and in control, or whether we will magnify our circumstances, remove our eyes from Him, and believe we must take control because we don't really trust God to take care of us. As Americans who value independence, we don't like to call it this, but it is sin.

We don't like difficult circumstances, we don't like the refiner's fire, we don't like the desert. But, if we are to become holy, sanctified vessels, set apart for the Lord's use, to become His betrothed bride, to have jewels in our crowns, then we must embrace these very things, so opposite to our human nature; emptiness for God to fill, desert walks of companionship and intimacy with God, fire to burn away our impurities, death in order to gain life eternal.

Footnotes

1. A More Excellent Way by Pastor Henry Wright
2. Hinds' Feet on High Places by Hannah Hurnard

Kitchen Korner

This section of our magazine is always a blast to collect! So many of you are faithful homemakers, keeping your kitchen HOT as you create beloved dishes that not only fill the tummies of your loved ones with healthy foods, but also create precious memories as you spend your time with your family. Thanks for sharing your favorites with me, MY FAMILY appreciates your ideas! Oh! Have a great recipe? Send it in! If we use it, we will extend your subscription by one more issue! Next issue, we are collecting recipes for great summer favorites! Recipes this month are excerpted from my newest book, A Cup of Tea??? If you would like more recipes and ideas like these check out this book! Oh! And have fun with these!

Let's Have Tea!

The Perfect Pot of Tea...

Have no idea how on earth to begin? Don't even know how to prepare a pot of tea? There are a few tips that make a very real difference in whether a cup of tea is just OK or really great! Let me help step-by-step...

- ♥ Warm your Teapot. I always rinse mine out anyway. Use warm water, let sit with the lid on while you prepare the tea. ("Tempers" the pot so it keeps the tea warmer AND protects the teapot from extreme temperature changes.)
- ♥ Prepare water. Rinse out your teakettle. Fill it with cool, fresh tap water. Bring to a boil.
- ♥ Prepare your Teapot. As water reaches boiling, empty out teapot. Add tea leaves; 1 teaspoonful per cup of tea being prepared and 1 extra teaspoonful for the pot. If using tea bags, use one bag less than the number of cups you will be making. For example, if your teapot holds 5 cups of water, use 4 tea bags OR 6 teaspoons of loose tea.
- ♥ As water reaches boiling, pour water into teapot immediately. Do not let the water "over-boil" or it will go flat.
- ♥ Let steep...put lid on teapot and cover with a tea cozy for 3-6 minutes, dependent upon how strong you like your tea. Small tea leaves take less time to steep than larger tea leaves. Stir once while steeping.
- ♥ Strain off leaves (or remove tea bags) and serve.

The Perfect CUP of Tea...

I probably break ALL of the rules of tea when I make a cup of tea the way I LIKE it! Here are some tips to help you make a cup of tea the way YOU like it!

When pouring a cup of tea, it is proper to ask whether the preference is strong or weak. Then, pour $\frac{3}{4}$ full for a strong cup of tea and $\frac{1}{2}$ full for a weaker cup of tea. This allows room for sugar, cream, or a bit of water for those preferring a weak cup of tea.

Add cream or milk and sugar after tea is poured and steeped. I usually add 1-2 teaspoons of sugar to my cup (depending on how big) and I leave about about 1/5 of the cup for my half-and-half. The color of my tea is usually a creamy brown. NICE! Give it a try!

Cranberry Tea...

This recipe is one of our family favorites! We pull this one out anytime that we have a "crowd" at our home for tea OR we just make up a batch to keep in the refrigerator so it is ready to warm for our daily tea time and family read alouds. Even your NON-tea drinkers will love this yummy tea!

Love, Cindy

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup instant tea
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground cloves
1 quart water
1 quart ginger ale
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 quart cranberry juice

Combine sugar, tea, cinnamon, cloves, water, and juices. Heat thoroughly, but do not boil...stirring occasionally. Add ginger ale before serving.

Always Perfect Cream Scones...

2 cups of flour
3 teaspoons baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream
2 beaten eggs

Sift flour and baking powder together. Cut in butter. Combine eggs and cream, add to dry ingredients. Pat to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thick. Cut into squares, triangles or circles. Sprinkle with sugar and bake at 375 degrees for about 20 minutes (or until lightly brown). Serve hot with any flavor jams or preserves, Devonshire cream, Orange Marmalade, honey, cinnamon and sugar, apple butter, or strawberry butter. Experiment until you find your favorite!

Tips for Making the Perfect Scone...

Scone...what is that? Pronounced like "lawn," scones are a delicacy that you simply MUST treat yourself to! Well, good scones that is! How do you bake great scones? Here are some quick tips...

- ♥ Always mix dry ingredients and liquid ingredients in separate bowls.
- ♥ When mixing dry and liquid ingredients do not over mix or over handle.
- ♥ Be careful not to over cook.
- ♥ Remember that your goal is tender, moist, flaky scones.
- ♥ Try several toppings! Fruit, jam, preserves, cream, curd, icing, etc.

Strawberry Butter...

I simply LOVE Strawberry Butter on my scones and bagels! This is easy. You will want a huge batch in your refrigerator at all times!

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup strawberries
2 to 3 tablespoons confectioner's sugar

When using a food processor: Cut butter into 6-8 pieces. Blend butter and strawberries. Add confectioner's sugar until mixture is smooth and evenly colored.

When mixing by hand: Mix butter and sugar first, then mash in strawberries until blended together.

Pecan Chicken Salad...

4 cups cooked and diced chicken breast
1 cup finely diced celery
3 tablespoons lemon juice
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup toasted crushed pecans

Combine and chill for 1 hour.

Dressing:

1 cup mayonnaise
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sour cream
1/2 -1 teaspoon salt
White pepper to taste
1 teaspoon dry mustard

Mix dressing ingredients and combine with chicken mixture. Serve on a lettuce leaf with other tea goodies!

Sweet Pinwheels...

12 ounces cream cheese

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup confectioner's sugar
1-10 ounce box frozen strawberries, drained
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon strawberry extract
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecans, finely chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh grated coconut

In a large bowl, mix cream cheese, confectioner's sugar, and strawberry extract. Add pecans, coconut, strawberries. Mix completely. Spread mixture on fresh, thin white bread. Roll and wrap with waxed paper. Chill until firm in a refrigerator. Slice into pinwheels. Serve.

Pretty Tea Party Sandwiches...

Flavored cream cheese (We LOVE strawberry and pineapple!)
Thinly sliced white bread or thinly sliced wheat bread

Cut edges off of bread. Spread cream cheese on bread. Slice sandwiches in squares or triangles or cut with large cookie cutters. To create a pretty sandwich tray, use a variety of bread or flavors of cream cheese.

Frozen Fruit Delight...

This is one of our family favorites! My only warning is BEWARE! These are addictive! AND they are so easy to make ahead that you can easily make up a bunch, leave them in the freezer for those days that you MUST have one! Sounds like a great excuse to just make (and EAT!) a whole batch today!

1 can strawberry pie filling
1 large carton Cool Whip
1 large can crushed pineapples, drained
1 can condensed milk
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup broken pecans

Mix together all ingredients. Put in a large container and freeze. Remove from freezer shortly before serving time to thaw slightly. Serve while still frozen. Substitute: cherry pie filling and 1 cup of pecans for a completely different taste. May be frozen in foil liners in muffin pans.
Perfect for tea parties! Easy to make ahead! Makes 17-18.

*These recipes are all excerpted from our new book **A Cup of Tea???** Whether you are already addicted to tea OR you are catching the "tea mania," you will love this book!*

A Letter To A Newlywed... From Danny and Lucia Claborn

This "article" has a bit of a story behind it. Lucia was sharing with me a while back about the precious "gift" that her church was preparing as a bridal gift for a young couple in their congregation. Each of the members were writing a "letter" to the couple. This letter SO blessed me that I begged for it to be added to this issue (isn't it perfect?). I know you will enjoy Danny and Lucia's wisdom. PS! Harold and I are the couple on the right!

Dear John and Jenyne,

What a blessed time in your lives! Everything is fresh and new with your relationship, as your two lives intertwine to become one. We encourage you to write down all of your sweetie's positive qualities while they are still fresh and vibrant. If [when] the challenges come and things are not quite as "fresh" as they are now, this will be a good reminder of each other's strengths and positive attributes. John, your strengths will cover Jenyne's weaknesses, and Jenyne, your strengths will cover John's weaknesses. That's part of God's plan, too. Jenyne, although the world tells us women we are to compete with men in every area, God says you are not made to compete with John but to complete him. So, be understanding of each other's differences and realize God has put you together to build-up and encourage each other to overcome these weaknesses.

As you encourage each other with the Word of God, add to this, two sets of simple words, that at time may be hard to get off the tip of your tongue, but have mighty results when you say them "first!!" Danny has always been such a wonderful example for me in this area. He always says, "I love you!" and "I'm sorry" knowing he is totally right and I'm in error. He's shown me much unconditional love and I believe it has broken down walls for both of us. It's the "unconditional" that speaks volumes to one's heart.

Learn each other's Love Language (*The Five Love Languages: How to Express Commitment to Your Mate* by Gary Chapman) early in your marriage so you can avoid needless error and have a more fulfilling relationship. God put you together to enjoy each other totally. Keep your intimate times exciting yourself than your spouse! Make time for play as it will keep you young and relieve stress. Don't let life get in a rut.

As the blending process of your lives begins; be reminded that you are not in this marriage alone. The Holy Spirit is your Helper and He will lead you and be with you every step you take. As you set goals for your marriage and your individual goals, ask Him to lead you where He wants you to go and into the things He wants you to do including the personal (alone/hobby) time you both require to strengthen your relationship. Keep your vision (dreams) alive after you write them down and by talking about them. As time passes, don't let your dreams slide into some drawer and then forget about them. (Habakkuk 2: 2-3)

When God blesses your marriage with children, remember they are in your home for a brief time and after a few short years, it will be back to just the two of you. Continue to build your relationship through dates and quality time with each other so you will not grow apart during the intense parenting years.

Study the Bible and pray together as well as alone. Laugh a lot together and, of course, more at yourself than your spouse! Make time for play as it will keep you young and relieve stress. Don't let life get in a rut.

Pamper yourself often as this show you love and respect yourself, enabling you to pour out of yourself onto your spouse. Honor each other with your actions and words. Submit to each other, and follow your heart. Remember the Christian heritage and legacy your parents have given you for it is phenomenal!!

God's richest blessings! ("to bless" means "to empower; to prosper." When you couple that definition of blessing with the dictionary definition of "prosper" as "to thrive; to experience favorable circumstances; to flourish; to turn out well," you wind up with the word, "bless" meaning: to empower to thrive, experience favorable circumstances, flourish and turn out well.)

Best Wishes,
Danny and Lucia Claborn

Marriage...It's A Covenant Thing!

By Cindy Rushton

Ever wondered just what is this marriage thing all about? Does it seem like marriage is just the "thing" to do? Have you ever sat back, looked at your spouse and thought, "Hey...why did we do this? What IS the point?"

Well, honestly, I have to tell you that from the time I was a little, bitty girl I have always had one desire, one real passion. You have guessed it! I wanted to be married to my knight-in-shining armor! I wanted to wear the flowing white lace dress...look into the sunset to see him riding on a white horse to grab me up and whisk me into the sunset...and live happily ever after with my white picket fence around my little sweet cottage (I am not into damp castles!) surrounded by tulips! Oh, and did I find my knight! Well, State Trooper! Hehe!

So, what happened as I found my man? Boy met girl. Girl found her prince (riding around the mall with his top down on his little cute convertible MG IN DECEMBER). We rode off into the cold December air. Then, life happened!

Where are you? What is your story? Think back to the days before you found your sweetheart. What was it like? What was your first thought? Did you have ANY idea that your romance would take all of the twists and turns that it has undergone through the years?

I am sitting here typing this article as we celebrate our Sixteenth Wedding Anniversary. Actually, yesterday was the big day, but we have decided to milk this celebration for a few more days (maybe the whole year!). When asked by my dearest darling WHAT I would just LOVE to do for my special day, I knew immediately! Go away...get a hotel room (around a coffee shop!)...and read...and write...and smooch! Hehe! (That is part of the anniversary thing!) So, as I sit here in my dream life, the children watching the history channel, Harold immersed in an *Aero-Trader Magazine*, my heart is full as I think back over the last 16 years and dream about the next 116 years.

We began this marriage thing much like so many of you. We think it is safe to assume that all along the way we have made the very same mistakes that many of you have made alongside of us in your own marriages. We never wanted hard times, disagreements, differences and we don't think that any couple ever wants those chapters in their love stories. In fact, we think that all newlyweds have a tendency to begin this adventure with rose-colored-glasses snugly in tact. When the tough times hit, we were shocked, unprepared, and even disillusioned; most of us are. I think this began with us back at the beginning...

My Story...

I have to tell you that MY story began way back eons ago. Well, as long as I can remember I have loved love! My earliest memories relate to dreaming about love! As a little girl, I remember our long trips to Texas to see my Grandparents. Now, this was BEFORE car seat-belt laws (An important fact since I am now married to the greatest State Trooper in Alabama. YES! I am partial!

But, also, he would even give me a ticket now if he found something illegal!)... I remember sitting on my knees in the seat, looking out the back window at the BIG TEXAS skies, dreaming about what MY husband would be like one day! I have always been "in love" with love and the whole idea of romance.

As I began dating (more on that in a minute!), I remember time and time again that those I dated simply did not match up to MY girlhood dreams! (Just for their side, I am POSITIVE that I did not match up to theirs either!) I was not being an unpleasant idealist, but they just did not match up!

I remember going to my pastor in desperation as a 17-year-old over the fact that I was about in despair looking high and low for my prince to come! (Can you just imagine how he must have laughed??) I poured out my heart about my desire to be a godly wife and mother, and about my disappointment in the *options* out there. I remember his exhortation as if it were yesterday. He exhorted me to be faithful to God and that I could REST knowing that God had a very good plan for me. He challenged me to wait patiently because although he (Harold) may not come across my path that day or the next or even the next week or next month...that he COULD come across my path any day or week or month... AND HE DID!

Oh! Beloved! I was so in need of him! My whole life was so empty and lonely without him. The moment my eyes met his—I KNEW! Each moment I was with him, I KNEW again and again! I was finally complete! The rest is history...our history. Our very own love story.

So, exactly what was the problem? As I look back over my teen years, I lost my focus. I was so pre-occupied with trying to make sure that God did not forget to help me find a husband OR to make sure that I gave Him all the "help" I could in the process! (EEK! There is NOTHING, I do repeat NOTHING, worse than Cindy Rushton trying to give God a hand! No comments please!) In the meantime, I lost a lot of good time that I could have been actually accomplishing something worthwhile, but I only played the game that is "expected" to be common with teens.

Plain and simple, my life was not preparation for marriage. It was practice for divorce. I learned how to begin and end any relationship without it touching my heart. I learned nothing about God's plan for the godly marriage (which could have made Harold's life a bit easier in those early years!). Instead, I was pre-occupied with my looks...my schedule...and who the lucky guy would be who would be my prince charming!

Don't be smug here! There is a part of all of us that wants to step in and DO something, just anything to make things happen. At the minimum, we at least want to give a little help! This begins when we are first realizing that "need" for our spouse and does not end at the altar. I don't know about you, but I have been very guilty of "helping" God in many detrimental areas of my marriage from convicting Harold of his sins (REALLY! I knew them all instantly and never forgot them!) to trying to control all areas of life to make our marriage work (Did I mention ALL areas??). There is nothing more than exhausting and frustrating. Of course, this is not God's plan for marriage before or after we say "I do." He wants for us to rest, wait upon Him, and trust Him for His perfect plan. However, what is our tendency? We want to "work" and help him. This is not the only area of life we try to give Him a helping hand. For example, we want to *work* for our salvation, instead of

accepting the free gift of salvation that results from God's covenant sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. God's covenant was His commitment to do all necessary to make salvation available and a FINISHED, completed gift. He does not need for us to do ANYTHING. It is all done, finished, completed and ready for us to access as a free gift!

Marriage is the same way. It is a Covenant thing too! We want to shop around and comparison shop for the perfect guy, who holds the perfect life with the cute cottage and white picket fence so we can live happily ever after. Marriage sets in, we get to know *more* about our spouse than we cared to know, and as the differences mount, the irreconcilable differences become more than we can handle, divorce court statistic we become. Oh, there are many that will not go to the divorce courts...they just live boringly, empty ever after!

God has a completely different plan. His plan is for a one woman/one man relationship. One woman in covenant with one man for life. A woman designed as the other half, the completer for her man. One man designed as the other half, the completer for his woman. Each bringing their strengths into the relationship to join as two puzzle pieces in those weak areas for the other. Each remaining separate entities but joining together as one to expand one another in preparation for God's high calling for them. Each being that satisfaction for those needs that cannot be met anywhere else. Leaving our parents, our homes, our past lives...joining together like glue, cement...becoming one entity indissoluble this side of death. One flesh, passionate for one another for life. More on that in a bit...first, let's go back to Genesis!

It All Began in The Garden...

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam, gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Genesis 2: 18-25

I told you earlier that I would come back to share about "dating" and subsequently God's awesome plan for marriage. Let's look at what we can glean from this passage about the bringing together of a covenant marriage...

- ♥ **Adam had NOTHING to do with it! Eve had nothing to do with it!** Yep! You read right! There was no shopping around. No comparison shopping to find the best deal. No trying out a few models to see which would work best. God gave them a free gift. Talk about an awesome gift!
- ♥ **Adam SLEPT while God created and prepared Eve perfectly for him!** Asleep...totally

resting with God. There was no insomnia...no fretting...no "helping" God! Can you imagine the trust that Adam had in God? He did not give God a list of eligibles to choose from. He did not set out to find someone in panic that God did not have a plan for Him or as if God would not do it. He laid back, went to sleep, and trusted God with the results. And, God was faithful!

- ♥ **God did it! He did it ALL!** Not only did God provide. He provided ALL that Adam needed! He KNEW exactly what Adam would need and He provided MORE than Adam could have ever wanted. In fact, in the next verse (23), Adam declared the perfection in God's provision. He declared that God's gift was SO HIM that she was the *"bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man."* She was a part of him. The part that had been missing. He had rested, slept, while God did it... while God did ALL necessary to prepare and bring his wife, his helper, to him!

- ♥ **Adam had no complaints with God's choice!** Now mind you, Eve was a WOMAN. Do not think that she and Adam were anything special. Men and women are created with differences. Not to give them a nice reason for divorce court, but so they may come together blending their strengths and weaknesses into a complete entity, one flesh. As we travel with our ministry, I would say that the primary complaint that is expressed about discontentment and conflict in marriage results from simple male and female differences. I have seen it in my own marriage. When we "expect" one another to do things or see things the way we would do or see them, inevitably there is conflict. We each have strengths and we each have weaknesses. Usually, my greatest strengths are Harold's greatest weaknesses, talk about aggravating, especially when it is SO easy for ME! Well, it is aggravating until I realize that his greatest strengths are in the areas of my most blaring weaknesses. We have differences, but those differences are designed to interlock with one another for the glory of God. Adam saw this woman as his Completer, all that was lacking. There were no complaints with what God provided because he KNEW it was all that he needed!

- ♥ **Adam and Eve had NO regrets plaguing their marriage or marriage bed!** Now...think of the beauty here! The standards in our society are down, down low, down so low that very few experience God's best. Although this may be very, very difficult, I want for you to really look at what God did here. Our society rationalizes and ignores the plan God has designed for bringing couples together. Now, I have to preface this by saying that the moment my eyes met Harold's WAS NOT as he and I awoke in the midst of the Garden of Eden. I had stood a guy up for a date, then went out to "cruise" around town, there he was! Oh, there he was out "cruisin" around town with a car full of teenagers. We were BOTH on the prowl! Neither of us wanted to miss the other, so we both tried for years to find each other...just IN CASE God was asleep and expecting us to help ourselves!

Contrast this with what we are seeing in our children as they willingly embrace this passage. Our son actually brought it to our attention that Adam was **asleep** while God prepared his wife. There were no regrets because the relationship was totally pure and each of them totally trusted God. There were no regrets because their hearts were completely in tact, in contrast to the bits that are commonly torn off bit by bit by pre-marital and extra-marital relationships. Adam and Eve were able to give one another their WHOLE

heart, with no regrets.

Inevitably someone out there is thinking, "*But Cindy, there was only ONE option! There were no other men and women!*" This is where I want to take you back to my testimony, there was only ONE option...no other men could satisfy me...Harold was created with a plan that was thought up from the very foundation of the world, by our Covenant God to be MY man. Ask him, his testimony is the same. He looked high and low. He was met by the same awesome truth, there was only ONE option, no other women could satisfy! In the meantime, we both had regrets! There is a better plan! Sleep...trust God...watch for His provision! It will bring true satisfaction with no regrets!

- ♥ **God's best was perfect, absolutely perfect!** Is this not completely awesome? God DOES have something to say about marriage and our marriage partner. He has a perfect plan. His plan is not dependent upon us, well, except that we do have a choice of whether we listen, sleep, and embrace his perfect plan!
- ♥ **The covenant of marriage is forever, unbreakable.** Even in the following chapters when Adam and Eve make very poor choices resulting in much conflict in their marriage, their marriage was not dissolvable. One other aspect of a covenant is that as flesh was cut or broke, the blood sealed the covenant. The shedding of blood was symbolic in meaning, "*If I do not keep my word, may the same thing happen to me as has happened to this animal.*" Hummm, what does that mean? Well, what happened to the animal? It had to die...it was cut into...burned up...lost its life...sounds like a few dissolved marriages, huh?

The only Biblical parting of the way after the covenant of marriage is through death. In original manuscripts, the only cause for divorcement was if it was found upon the marriage union that the partner was guilty of fornication. Modern translations have sadly changed the word from "fornication" to "immorality," which leaves us with a watered down excuse for divorce. Even the common belief that adultery is a valid reason for dissolving the union between man and wife is not completely correct. According to the Law in Scripture, the man and woman caught in adultery were to be put to DEATH...hummm...till death do us part??? The offended spouse in Scripture was offered one more solution, forgiveness, but never the option of divorce.

I believe that this is crucial for us to understand to the depths of our soul. Our society has rationalized sin. There is no dissolving of a union once two become one. This is the danger of pre-marital and extra-marital sex. The heart, soul, and body become intertwined. Covenant begins, This is where it gets simply awesome!

First, *marriage is God's plan.* If you go back again to Genesis, God had a plan in motion. He wanted for marriage to serve man and woman as a means toward intimacy, friendship, companionship, and mutual ministry together. I love that He said, "***It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.***" It is NOT GOD for us to be alone. Our enemy knows this and wages war on our relationships. He hits us hard with anything that can breed isolation, resentment, bitterness, anger, jealousy, and strife. Only as we embrace the preciousness of our relationship, looking for ways to minister to one another and nurture our marriage relationship, will we truly ex-

perience the fullness of God's plan.

What do I mean? Marriage is very, very precious. If we have lost that flame or never found it in the first place, it is probably because of the fierce battle waging against the godly home. God wants for us to come to Him and allow Him to teach us how precious marriage is. God wants for us to come to Him to learn how to LOVE our spouse completely. He wants for us to bring all of our "hang-ups" and hang them up on the cross that His Son died upon for those very sins. Then, He wants for us to step up to the call as co-heirs. It is vital.

In this passage, there are several key phrases that hold the keys to a marriage by God's design.

- ♥ ***It is not good that the man should be alone.*** Marriage is God's special plan for bringing us companionship. God's perfect plan is for us to minister to one another through intimate and exclusive companionship.
- ♥ ***I will make him a help meet for him.*** Marriage is God's means for "completing" man (and woman). The Hebrew words "help meet" really expand God's plan for marriage. **Help** in its verb form means "to aid or supply that which the individual cannot provide for himself... conveys the idea of aiding someone in need... to help, protect, or aid, succor or fence about...helper" **Webster's 1828 Dictionary** defines **helper** as... "one who helps (gives assistance, strength, promotes, delivers from difficulties or distress, advances a purpose, relieves, contributes strength or means,) aids or assists, furnishes or administers a remedy, one who supplies with anything wanted." **Meet** is from the Hebrew word meaning "opposite... part opposite, counterpart, other side... according to opposite of him, meaning that she will complement and correspond to him, she is to be equal to and adequate for the man...means to surround (Goes along with Jeremiah 31:22...revolve around, surround or border about on every side), protect, to relieve, to bring deliverance, to join together, to encourage, to lend strength, to assist, to help in time of need, adapts to, to help out of prison." Isn't this cute? Sure excites me as I think of how perfect we are together. Just too cute!
- ♥ ***Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother...*** Marriage is where a man and woman "pick up the baton" to run life's race together. This requires leaving our childhood families, our identities before marriage, our dependence upon our parents, our independence (singleness) prior to marriage, our past—even with its accomplishments and failures (even SIN!), ...cutting the cord and joining to one another. This one key could revolutionize so many marriages. It could set them free to sizzle! It could bring the freedom that many marriages need in order to be all that God wants. However, this is often the hardest part of marriage for many. We, like Lot's wife, tend to walk away from the altar looking back. We walk away from the marriage altar without severing the ties to our past that bind and eventually choke out the abundant life God has in mind for our marriages. As a result, we are unable to fully cleave together and become one. Oh, that is the next point...
- ♥ ***And shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh...*** Read this one thinking that this only meant cuddling up to make love? Whereas this is one part of marriage, there is an even greater meaning to this phrase too. The word **cleave** means "to cement,

bond, glue, or cling." The phrase **become one flesh** means "to share all you are, to expand, to be known for, to be known as, to make more complete." Even the word **one** is neat in this context. It means "alike, comfortable, together, inseparable, united, stuck together." Want another key to marriage by God's design? This is crucial! Cleaving and becoming one must begin immediately upon leaving. However, it does not happen fully at the altar...or on the honeymoon...or even after 25 years. In fact, there is a continual process that must be led by the Holy Spirit, surrendered to the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5, we find that marriage is a call to be a "picture" of the relationship between Christ and the church. This is indeed the mystery that the Bible states it is. It is beyond words how a godly marriage "pictures" through-and-through the intimate relationship that we can have spiritually as we become one with Christ. God uses marriage as not only a "picture" of Christ and the Church, but also as a testimony of how HE desires to have intimacy with us. He is certainly not a distant God. He wants to be intimate with us—talking with us, spending time with us, courting us, building special memories, walking alongside of us through the good and bad, becoming one with us so HE and I (and you!) are expanded to become all that He has planned for us to become, on and on! When we see a great marriage, we see a "picture" of the intimacy that we can have in our spiritual lives with our Bridegroom. We see the satisfaction that is available through covenant. Too awesome!

Speaking of covenant, we find in Malachi 2 why the marriage covenant is so important to God. The marriage covenant is a picture of God's work to make us one and to bring us a godly heritage through godly offspring. When we break our vows, we give the picture that there are limits to love...that there is no hope...that there are conditions to love and acceptance. None of these are a reflection of God and His divine love for us. We may get pre-occupied along the way, yet He is always there at any moment's need. We may have other "lovers" along the way, yet He chooses to take us back even before we completely give them up. We may sin to the point that we despair; yet His grace is never limited. He always gives us hope! We may want to come to Him perfect and "fixed" before we "meet" Him, but He comes to us beckoning us to come as we are, asking us to draw from the well of His unconditional, overflowing love and acceptance for us. When we break our vows, we give the world a different picture of relationships. However, when we keep our vows, we offer a true picture of God's plan for relationships. We begin the godly heritage that brings forth godly offspring and continues offering the world a message of God's plan to offer the ultimate soul satisfaction to each and every one of us.

Sure, there are many, many other passages about what marriage is all about. Study. Seek to learn about the abundance that can be yours in this covenant thing!

So, So Sweet...

As for the past 16 years of our marriage, we had no idea what God had in store for us. It is neat how God brought us together and has kept us together. Even though God had brought us to the point that (although wide awake, suffering from insomnia while waiting for God to bring Harold across my path) He could bring Harold and I together, I really had no idea of the permanency or the awesomeness! I had no idea that we were walking in God's eternal plan for both of us. I had no idea it could be THIS GOOD!

Looking back and ahead on this anniversary weekend, the sweetness and the satisfaction that God has brought us through marriage has come as a gift from God. So many of our hard times have not been because marriage does not work. Rather, it has been as *we* have gotten in the way. There have been so many times that we (actually I-Cindy) have done marriage the HARD way, not doing and cherishing marriage as such a precious covenant thing!

We have had those struggles of leaving, cleaving, and becoming one. There is just so much involved (as you can see) in that process and so much to always maintain. We have struggled with the differences that make us perfect together, yet that are so hard to understand and accept in our day-to-day journey together! We have found how REAL communication woes can be. (Still have not got that one down...glad we have another year to work on that! Ha!) We have both struggled with helping each other with our personal battles with our flesh and spirit AND with our personal battle with each other's flesh and spirit! WHEW! We have had the babies in bed with us (Now we tell them that we drool—teens do not like old people drool! It is not really a lie. I still drool over my prince!) and the demands of life that take our time away from our marriage and friendship. We have battled isolation, loneliness (I am a Trooper's wife!), anger, expectations, forgiveness, and even submission (Yep, guess who had a hard time with this one!). Struggles. Yes, we have had them. But, that is not all!

Marriage has brought us a fullness of becoming who we are meant to be. In our marriage, we have been blessed to learn the preciousness of intimacy between man and woman. We have been able to have the opportunity of building one another up, spurring one another on, pouring into one another. When times were the most trying, we have been able to see how God can give us a determination to continue through the yucky stuff...a forgiveness for the most vile of offenses...a courage to keep on when we are the most exhausted and weary in this journey with each other. We have seen that God can take completely different people and make them daily "become" one.

So, what is this marriage thing? Is it what we expected? Heavens no! It is so much better! It is so worth it all! It is worth the good times and the bad. It is worth the joy and the grief. It has been worth plodding through those tough times. It has been worth every time we have stayed up all night working out our differences. When I look back, I admit that if I had known marriage was all of this, I would have been a scaredy cat--scared of the power of a godly marriage!! But, I also admit that when I look back, I would more than do this thing again. Marriage is priceless. Thank God marriage is forever. And, want to know something else? We are even more in love today, 16 years into this "Sweet" adventure than we were on that day this became *a covenant thing!*

A Wise Woman Builds...

By Cindy Rushton

"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands." Proverbs 14:1

Last week we "broke ground" on our building project. We are "building on" to our house, but this is not "personal." I needed a new building with offices and storage for our ministry. The last two years we have leased a warehouse in town. Our prayer request for our ministry was to build our own building before the lease was up. Well, we are so thrilled that indeed our goals were also GOD's plan! So, we are now plugging away on our building...on our very own property!

It is so hard to believe that this time has flown by so fast! In fact, only eight years ago, we began building the first part of our home. We built a modest little cedar cabin on top of Huckleberry Hill. I still love how precious and quaint it is. Since I love the "country" décor, our home is full of baskets, hearts, quilts, linens, teacups, teapots...getting a picture? I have loved the cozyness of our home. Now, I am "adapting" to the changes and the growth that comes from expanding, growing, building!

Isn't this what the Bible says we are to be about? Proverbs 14:1 says...

"Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands."

As much as I have to PURPOSE to continue to grow, change, build, I still find myself preferring to keep things cozy, the same! Yet, the Bible seems to point toward building, especially if we want to be "wise."

This home that we physically live in is constantly in need of expansion and continual growth. Trust me, with two teens AND a home business, we needed to "grow" years ago!

In the physical realm I believe that we can put off growth a lot easier, even with teens, than we ever can in the spiritual realm! In the building of our spiritual home, our real legacy, we must constantly build... grow...expand... touch up... revise... or we will find our home in shambles in just a very short time! Things just don't stay the same way. There is constant need for "maintenance." There is always something that needs work. At times, as hard as we try, there must be a "gutting" and rebuilding in the midst of the rubbish left behind!

Deciding to "build" a house may be an option. "Building on" to the house to expand and grow may be an option. However, when we look at the home that we are building here in our family life, there are no options. We sure can't "rent" a godly home! We can't even "buy" a godly home! We are thrust into building. We have the constant pulls of the strain to continue the project even when we are totally worn out! There is NO closing day! We must grow or a lack of growth results in damage that can ultimately pluck down the home bit-by-bit, until we find ourselves in the midst of brokenness...

shambles...rubbish!

I really don't think that a woman ever begins her marriage or childbearing with the goal of being "the foolish" woman who plucks her home "down with her own hands." I have never met a woman with a heart bent on destruction of her family or home. I just don't think that there is one woman created with a heart's desire set on ruining or tearing apart her home. Rather, I believe that part of who we all are as women can be described in Genesis as what many call "the curse." Yes, Genesis 3: 16b...

"Yet your desire and craving will be for your husband..."

I believe we ALL have a desire deep, deep down to be a godly wife...a godly mother...a godly woman. I believe that we all have somewhere down underneath all of "the stuff" that crowds out our hearts a deep DESIRE to build a godly home.

My earliest remembrances of my childhood are from our long, long trips to Texas to see my grandparents! I can almost see myself looking out of the back window of our car at the gorgeous Texas skies, with the biggest stars in the world (I have been educated in Astronomy, but the stars ARE still bigger in Texas! EVERYTHING is bigger in Texas!). I remember dreamily wishing and thinking of my beloved "prince" that would one day come to whisk me away to be his queen! Oh, I soooo wanted to know and see and love Harold Rushton, even when I did not know his name... what he looked like... what his voice sounded like! I desired to be a good wife, a good mother, and to have a godly home!

Even as I look back over all of the memorabilia and journals from my High School years, I see that my goals, my wishes, my dreams were all surrounding a deep desire and craving to be a godly wife and mother and to help build a godly home!

I think all women want to build a home. A happy home. I think we all have a deep desire to build our home! I think we all have dreams! I think we can almost see it...feel it...and even smell it from the time we are little girls holding on to our baby dolls!

Then, life happens! The building project begins. The work goes on...and on...and on! Decisions must be made... and made QUICK!

Building a home "spiritually" often brings out so much in our character, as much as building the physical dwelling we call our house! It also quickly shows our experience, or in my case, inexperience! Yep...if you saw how I began as a wife, mommy and maker of my home, you would think that the two experiences mirrored one another!

Building a home is an adventure whether you are talking about the physical dwelling or the atmosphere and relationships that we lovingly call home. A **home** just does not come easy! There is much time and effort that goes into building it properly. There is much that building a home costs in time and hidden costs! There are always special memories to treasure and horrible memories that you would rather forget! There are just so many dynamics that make it all easy or rather difficult...but often we do not learn the easy way until we are in the midst of the demands

(or in my experience, AFTER I am past the demands!)

So, we want to be like the wise woman. We want to **build** our home. We do not want to tear it down with our own hands! But how shall we then build?? I would say that there are three areas that make a whole world of difference! Let's take a look...

Build Relationships...

"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."
Genesis 2:18

Have you asked yourself what God is all about? I mean, has it ever crossed your mind that there has to be some plan for man? Can we know such things?

I believe that we can. I believe if we go back to the beginning and look at the complete unfolding of God's history with man, we can see one underlying theme...relationships! First, of all, God created man for relationship between God and man. Then, we see creation of woman because **"It is not good that the man should be alone..."** Then, we see the fall, the first ramifications affected relationships. Then, as we come on down history, we constantly see God revealing **WHO** He is to man. Then, the ultimate sacrifice, all of sin paid for in full by God so man could once again have a relationship with God and others. Oh, and don't forget the end..."**And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.** (Revelation 21: 2-3) True communion! Relationships!

Yes. The main thing is relationships! If we are going to build our home, the first place to begin is with the foundation! The foundation must be built upon relationships or the home will not stand!

Relationship with God

Our relationship with God is primary! Without personal redemption...without life surrendered completely to Him, we find that nothing else works out. We can't be godly wives, godly mothers, or godly mentors without first being godly!

When there are problems and our homes seem to be falling to pieces...we seem to be plucking down our home with our own hands, we need to look at our relationship with God. Do we know Him? Do we have an understanding of Him, His ways, and what He has to say? Are we developing a passionate relationship with Him? Are we responding properly to Him? If these things are out of order, all else will crumble around us.

Commit to God anew! Commit to get to know Him! Commit to get to know His heart! Commit to get to know His names! Commit to know His Ways! Commit to find out what He says about every area of life! Commit to live totally for Him! A relationship with Him will give you the foundation needed to weather any storm of life and to stand till the end!

Relationship with Your Husband

**“The woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman;
but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman;
but the woman for the man.” 1 Corinthians 11: 7-9**

I have gone through entire years of focusing on different roles that I must fulfill to the detriment of my main calling—to be a wife! I remember the first year of homeschooling my children. As the last days of the school-year rolled around I realized that in my enthusiasm of turning my heart back home toward my children and really enjoying motherhood to the fullest, I had not nurtured my marriage as I should have! Ever found yourself like this?

There are so many different facets of womanhood. It is so easy to get so wrapped up in one area that we lose sight of all of the others! Our main calling as women is to the awesome role as a helpmeet for our husbands. We are to bring glory to our husbands so they may in turn bring glory to God. Isn't this beautiful? We are those hidden women who reflect all of the glory back to our husbands...who build up our husbands and promote THEM...who do all that we do to help them subdue and have dominion over the world!

Where there is a beautiful marriage, all else falls into place. Two become one. There is security and stability in the lives of the children. There is a ministry to the world. This is the means that there is glory reflected from the family and the marriage. In turn, this glory goes to God. Others see God's perfect plan for man and woman! There is hope. There is abundant life!

The catch here is that beautiful marriages do not just happen. It takes work! It takes commitment! It takes priority!

Want a great marriage? Don't hold anything back! Give your all...all your gifts, talents, bents, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom! Be a real helper to your husband! Give him assistance during the tough times. Protect his heart and his name. Step in the gap and pray hedges of protection around him in all that he sets forth to do. Adapt yourself and your whole life to him—to God's plan for him. Be his best friend!

Die to your ways and your ideas and your plans! Decide now that you will live your whole life as your husband's chief support. Be the one who gives him that respect that he needs. Be the one who knows all that he is and yet still admires him more than even his little 2-year-old boy! Be the one who loves him unconditionally, enough to give up all life could possibly offer you to build him up! Die to all you had in mind for your life and commit to promote him.

Contribute to his growth, his enlargement, his excellence! Patiently nurture him and encourage him to develop interests (Bible Study, SWAT team, Metal Detecting, Sailing, Email...He needs down time too!) that will help him to re-fuel, re-charge, and become strong. Be the one to affirm him and his manhood—get excited about his leadership, his masculinity, his sexuality, his work! Reassure any insecurities! Be the one who believes in him—inspire him to greatness! Have the vision for all God wants to do in his life! Encourage him! Be his teammate as he works toward that calling! Relieve him where he needs relief—where can you come alongside to help him??

See a weakness? Pray. Fast. Encourage them. Cry out to God. Make it easier, any way you can, to help them succeed! Love them in their weakness! Be joyful and positive, always uplifting and encouraging! Let God supply your needs, not your husband, things will relax...you may change your heart!

Decide now to pour yourself into your husband! Build your marriage! Let the little things go so that you have time to get to know your husband...so you will have time to minister to him in little ways! Take that time for the relationship and you will find that all else will fall into place!

Relationship With Your Children

Let the world pass on...they are only little for a little while! There is only a little while to minister to their little hearts! Only a little while to teach them about who God is. Only a little while for you to instill a vision for all that God wants to do in their lives! Only a little while for you to light a fire in their soul that will give them a passion to be great...to step up to the call! Treasure every moment! Grab every second!

As I look at my children, this year has been a year that they look completely different than they did even six months ago, but definitely than they looked a year ago! They are growing up so very fast! My son now looks like the guy I dated and married all of those years ago. My daughter even wears MY shoes now! The moments are fleeting! I want to make the most of every single moment with them!

In fact, a couple of years ago, I was simply minding my own business, having my quiet time when God whispered a few questions to me: "What can you do today to make the most of your time with your children?" "If this were the last day you had with your children, what would you do today?" "What can you do today to treasure every moment? To grab every second?" "What holds you back?"

Oh, I want to be sure that I have no regrets when they are grown and leave this chapter of their lives! As I look back over the years so far, I do not regret one "tickle time," or any of the "giggly giggles." I would not take back one tea time, much less any of the hours that we have snuggled up to read together. I have no regrets over any of the snuggly cuddle-cuddle times (except that there have still not been enough of them!). I would not change one moment of watching them play at the park...or roll around in the yard "fightin' them yankees" (sorry, he has nothing against all of you from "up North," he just loves the SOUTH!)...or dress up and "go back in time" to live with people from long ago...or seeing the "light-bulb" go on. Not one moment! I don't even begrudge one messed up bathroom filled with toilet tissue...or baby powder...or bubbles...or even vaseline (now, it would NOT be funny for my 12 or 15-year-olds to check me on this one!).

Now, I do have a few things that I would love to erase...delete...re-do! Oh, like the moments that I just lost it! The building frustrations during those first couple of school years when MY son did not fall in love with writing—professionally! (Yep, I know he was only 6...I said it was a regret!) I wish I had known that those monotonous Phonics lessons were great memory moments—I might have been seizing them instead of getting frustrated that they took SO long! Oh, and I wish I had just known that they would finally be potty-trained, learn to read, quit wearing baseball caps

and camoflaug, and learn their multiplication tables!

My only prayer during these last few years in this season of our life is that I CAN indeed make the most of time with these precious gifts from God! I pray that I can keep on the "front page" of my mind that each day is to be seized, it will never be here again!

It is so easy to get too busy to build relationships with those that mean the most, especially our children. Only a few days after they are born, we get tired and begin to have the "new" wearing off. It is so hard to remember that these moments are truly numbered! Other things can be left undone, but the children DO grow up! And much too quick! We could be "great" at everything we set our hands upon, but failure at truly knowing our children and helping them to KNOW us can never be repaired! Truly a "wise woman" will purpose to build those relationships with her little ones...and big ones too!!

Build Memories

"And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, And command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according unto the number of the tribes of the children of Israel: That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over ordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever. And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, as the LORD spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, and carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day." Joshua 4: 1-9

What do you think of when you think of home? What gives you that cozy feeling? Is it the smells drifting from the oven in the kitchen into the very crevices of your bedroom?? What about those family stories that you heard over and over and over? What about those bedtime stories and late night talks all cuddled up in Momma and Daddy's bed? Could we go on and on?

God knows that one of the things that build a strong home is building memories. The memories built are much like the walls, roof, and well, even the decorations of the godly home. They are vital!

Memories give us identity—our OWN identity! We find our story! Memories give us security...they

provide us with the anchor that holds us when the sea is raging. The tie the cords that are really never, ever cut! Memories give us strength...they remind us that we made it through other trials and we can keep on, keeping on through this one! Memories pull it all together! Our home can have relationships...our home can have structure...our home can have direction, but without memories we lose the tie that binds!

If you want a strong home, build your home by tying strings, strong cords, with your family. Make the effort to establish your family traditions and rituals...bedtime stories, tea, long discussions, walks in the woods, read alouds, adventures, family stories, prayer journals. Work together...in and around the home... in ministry... in business. Take time for fun! Oh, never forget that one! Make effort to have fun!

The memories that you build in these days are the things that fill your home with **"pleasant and precious riches."** They are the stones that your children will come back to use in teaching their children about priorities, about commitment, about life, about marriage, about the ties that bind. Pick up the stones and leave them for your children...they will be the memorials that will reach out for generations to come!

Build Your Influence

"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited."

Isaiah 54: 1-3

Want a ministry? Want to build influence??? Look again at Isaiah 54: 1-3. How does it say that we are to build our greatest ministry? Where do we pour our energy? Yes. Isaiah 54 says that we are to "enlarge the place of our tent." Our single-hearted devotion to our OWN "tent" bears the most fruit. We are doing the most important and valuable ministry on earth as we minister in our own homes!

Trying to "bear" forth, whether children or a ministry is exhausting. The wise woman is the woman who is happy to "be barren" in her works. She gives up trying to create her own ministry. She stops working to build her own influence. And, the most remarkable things that we find is that this wise woman is the one who actually bears more fruit! Does this perplex you? God's ways are certainly not our ways...His are much more powerful!

God's plan for the home is for the woman to be content "in her own tent!" She is to "enlarge the place of her tent" not to enlarge the church... or a ministry... or a business... or her name! Real satisfaction comes to the wise woman from her fruit. Her contentment comes from ministering to those that are in her sphere of influence. Oh, not influence out there in "the great big world." Her influence is focused within her "tent!" It is God Who brings the increase. It is God Who uses her to influence and impact lives! He brings fruitfulness on all sides and influences countless people