



LOVING
AND LEADING
YOUR
SPOUSE TO
CHRIST

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A Women's Ministries Resource

LOVING AND LEADING YOUR SPOUSE TO CHRIST

Today, we are going to talk about a subject that is very close to my heart. I was raised in a family where my mother was a fourth generation Seventh-day Adventist and my father was a non-believer. My mother's religion and her commitment to her church and to raising her children to accept the values that she believed to be eternal values were at the opposite ends of the pole from where my father lived his life.

His interests were focused on worldly pleasure: golf, sporting events, parties, and card games. None of which took place in the church. I have to smile when I look back as an adult and realize how very different my parents were. Not a few times have I asked myself the question: "How did they ever get together?" Better yet, "How did they stay together for 51 years until the time of my mother's death?"

I. THE PROBLEM

(SLIDE-1) A. *The Stages of Acceptance*

Dr. Nancy Bassham, director of Women's Ministries for the Far Eastern Division, was giving some encouragement to women in Japan where more than 80 percent of our membership is made up of women, many who are married to non-believing spouses. As Dr. Bassham lectured, she described five basic attitudes that a non-believing spouse might possess toward the religion of his or her believing spouse. This is the way she described the different levels of acceptance:

1. Hostile

The lowest level and the most difficult is the hostile attitude toward a spouse's religion.

2. Neutral

A neutral attitude: Do what you want to do; worship where you want to; it doesn't bother me; just leave me out of it.

3. Detached Interest

Moving on up the ladder is the detached interest. Occasionally, when the believing spouse mentions some church activities, some special program, something that was said in a sermon, there might be some noticeable interest—casual interest, often times. When a non-believer reaches this point, it is a sign that he is warming and moving in a positive direction.

4. Investigative Stage

Here the spouse begins to wonder and question their spouse's religion or perhaps another religious faiths. He or she begins to think about having a religious belief of his or her own. Hopefully, the spouse is contemplating joining their spouse in a shared religious experience.

The spouse may begin by asking questions, reading books, pamphlets or church papers without admitting to having done so. Also, they would become more relaxed in the presence of other Christians. Many times, when a non-believer reaches this stage of attitude with openness toward religious belief, then it is just a matter of time until they reach the fifth and final step of the ladder.

5. Decision Making Time!

Making a decision to join his or her partner in a shared spiritual commitment.

Perhaps, as you look at this ladder today, you can see your spouse in one of these stages of attitudes toward your religious faith. Even if you find them in that lower rung of the ladder, still hostile toward religion, you can see that it is a step-by-step process. Through prayer and applying some of the principles of this seminar, hopefully you will begin to see your spouse, at some time in the future, begin to take one step after another up the ladder that leads to a faith experience.

B. The Need

Today in our church we find that there are more and more women who are married to non-believing spouses who are seated in the pews of even our smallest churches in every part of the world. I was surprised to learn that between 80-84 percent of our members in countries like Korea and Japan are married to non-believing spouses. Other countries, too, I am sure, have an extremely high percentage of women who are married to non-believing spouses.

It was during my 1992 itinerary throughout the Far Eastern Division (now called Northern Asia-Pacific and Southern Asia-Pacific) when I really came to grips with the need to minister to women who often feel lonely and isolated in our churches because their marriage partner does not share their spiritual values.

Cynthia's Letter

I want to share some excerpts from a letter from Cynthia, published July 1, 1993 in the *Adventist Review*. Some of you will identify with Cynthia.

"For me, the worst time of the week is during the Sabbath hours. Although my spouse is wonderful, the children and I keep the Sabbath and he does not. This creates some difficult and tense moments. When the children want to watch TV on Friday nights, they say, 'But Dad is watching TV. Don't you think Dad will be in heaven?' Wow, do you have an answer?"

"People like me are being ignored and isolated in our church family...We quietly love the church and withstand the judgment of others. That moment when we open the front door of the church and see the welcome faces of friends there to greet us is powerful. Many of us slip in the back door or the side door so as not to be noticed. We want to be welcomed to church, but have been conditioned not to expect it."

"Most of the church members value us but would never invite us to their home...Adventist adults love to get together as couples and socialize. We are excluded—our husbands point this fact out at every opportunity."

"We envy the relationships with like believers. We even feel guilty because for whatever reason we have ended up with less than the 'ideal' Adventist home."

C. Family Tensions

Let's think about it for a few minutes. Think about those who are in the habit of getting up on Sabbath morning where the husband and wife work together to dress the children. If the children have grown and left the home or if they have no children, they have a pleasant morning of sharing breakfast and preparing to go to church together. They ride to church together. Once they arrive, they are greeted as a couple, and are seated as a couple to enjoy the service.

Now, let's look at the wife of a non-believer. She wakes in the morning to discover that her husband has a different set of plans. Perhaps he is going off to some sporting event or maybe he even wants to involve the children in an outing and she had planned that the children would be going to Sabbath School with her.

Immediately tension could arise. She is faced with a decision. Does she allow the children to go with their father on the fishing outing, or does she insist that they

attend Sabbath School with her? How does she deal with this situation and not alienate, not only her mate, but her children as well? The children may think that the fishing trip sounds a lot more exciting than Sabbath School.

What is a wise Christian woman to do? Let us say, for the purpose of illustration, that the children and her husband win out this time. They get into the truck and go on the fishing trip, and she gets into the car and heads for church.

All the time she is driving to church, her emotions are at a peak. She feels alone. She would like to be with her family. She feels guilty because the children are not going to be in church. She may feel angry because her husband won out! She feels hurt and frustrated because she is trapped in a situation that is far more challenging than she ever dreamed that it would be on the day that she said, "I do."

D. Communication Problems

(SLIDE-2) Wouldn't it be easy if good communication in tense times like the one that we just talked about were a given in every marriage? If good open communication were handed to us on our wedding day along with our marriage licenses and our wedding gifts from friends and relatives?

(SLIDE-3) Let us remember that effective communication consists of all three aspects: verbal, vocal and visual. What we say, what we do or even our tone of voice affects the message we are sending. Many of us communicate in ways that are misleading. This can be because we are afraid to say what's truly on our mind for fear of hurting the other person, or we just don't know how to communicate openly and honestly even when we try.

Why is it so hard to put aside the barriers and share what we are really thinking? Why is it so easy to get into a confrontational situation, especially when a home is divided by religion?

When I look back on my family, I have to smile now because every time the preacher came to our home, my father left. He either got very busy in the basement working on some project, or he went out to the garage. He went to the barn. He had to run an errand. He wanted to become as invisible as quickly as he could. Now, I realize that he was very uncomfortable. He didn't want to talk about religion. He didn't want to talk about his smoking habit. His sense of self-worth took a real plunge at the sound of the pastor's car in our driveway. So rather than confront these issues, he fled.

I remember many occasions when we wanted to bring visitors home from church for Sabbath lunch, but my mother never felt comfortable in doing so because she was never sure how my father would relate to these guests. He was not comfortable with Christians or Seventh-day Adventists. Sometimes Seventh-day Adventists were

not comfortable around him. Company for Sabbath dinner was something that just never happened as much as we would have liked.

Now, I know one of the real hurdles that kept my father from becoming a church member was his smoking habit. In my adult life, I realized that this was no minor issue. My father had started smoking at 13 years of age and the habit of nicotine was one that had a real strangle hold on him. I realize now that not being able to rid himself of his smoking habit was very damaging to his sense of self-worth. He was controlled by a little cigarette. This smoking habit prevented him from being involved in our church and from becoming a member of our church family. He felt as though he was caught up in a vicious circle.

I wish that some of the books and the tools that are available now could have been available to us as a family a few years ago. I think that the relationships between my mother and father and we children would have been a lot different, if we could have learned to communicate more openly about these issues. We all knew what was going on; but none of us were really comfortable in knowing how to deal with it.

I am happy to tell you now that after praying for our father and doing our best to witness and to love him into the church, after 45 years he became a baptized member and a very active member in our little church up in Michigan. So there is a very happy ending to our story. However, in those 45 years there was a lot of pain and misunderstandings and a lack of communication that could have been avoided if we would have understood how important good communication tools are in a family, especially in a family that is divided by religion.

II. COMMUNICATION SKILLS (SLIDE-4)

You might say, Rose, why are you talking about communication? What does communication have to do with winning your spouse to Christ?

I would like to suggest to you that if it is your goal to win your spouse to the Lord that the person that you are going to have to change is you. If you are willing to be changed, to be molded into the kind of person that God can use to reach your husband, then he, too, may be reached through your influence.

It is surprising that many times the things we do to win our husbands are the very things that may be pushing them away. Our motives are right, but our tactics can be wrong. So in the next few minutes that we have to share here together let's talk about some key issues in relationships that can make all the difference in the world whether or not you will have a positive influence on winning your spouse to the Lord.

A. Vulnerability

The bottom line is that in order to make your relationship work, you must be willing to make yourself more vulnerable. By vulnerability we mean the skill of becoming more real, open, self-disclosing, transparent, and honest in our communication.

In his book *Making Real Friends in a Phony World* Jim Conway says, "Being real includes being known by sharing your feelings, ideas, fears, doubts, and even your past experiences of failure and success. Sharing these, along with your hopes for the future, will build strong friendships."

If you are more serious about religion than your spouse, then it is critical for you to let your spouse know that you are still a real person with feelings, emotions, heartaches, victories, and losses in your life. If you feel that you do not share the same high level of interest in religion as your spouse, then it is important to communicate that. By doing this you will create a bond as a married couple that will be able to transcend these differences.

With two individuals who do not share the same religious beliefs, a strong, honest communication pattern is vital if your marriage is going to survive.

B. Attentive Listening

When we go to different women's meetings and give our seminar on communication skills, I ask: Why are you interested in this seminar?; What brought you here?; What do you want to learn from it?

I have discovered that many people want to learn better communication skills strictly in terms of getting their own point across in a more effective way. They say they've come because they want to learn how to communicate, how to send their own messages in no uncertain terms.

But I have to remind them that the vital key that keeps communication alive in marriage, in the work place, in the church family, or wherever, is not the vocal communication, but the attentive listening.

(SLIDE-4a & 4b) I am not talking about passive listening, but some active listening. When your spouse begins to share with you some point, and you are listening through the filter of your own perceptual set of values, all of your background, your previous experience, your personal insights all come to play as you attempt to sort out exactly what your spouse is saying to you. Only if you practice attentive listening—listening not only to words, but to body language and expressions—can you be fairly certain that you are getting the real point that he is trying to make.

C. Remove Blaming Barrier

Another point that I would like to mention early in this seminar is that in marriages where religion is a stress point, couples tend to blame a lot of other problems on their differences in religion. In reality, some of these other issues have nothing to do with the differences in religion. So it is very important that you learn to separate the two and don't use the differences in religion as a crutch in your marriage—a dumping place, for all differences or lack of understanding.

D. Gender Language Differences

At this point, I would like to spend a little time discussing that there are at least three basic areas in which men and women approach language differently.

My husband says that I speak in paragraphs and he speaks in sentences, because it takes me a lot longer to tell him something than it takes him to tell me the same thing. I take him on a word picture journey, whereas he simply states the facts. He is a choleric and I am a sanguine. We can't help ourselves. It is just a Godsend that we are not both sanguine because we would never get through our discussions!

Sometimes when we are riding along in the car, he'll ask me a question, and I'll take off on some paragraph. He will just be smiling at me, but I know that inside he is snapping his fingers and saying, "Let's get it out Rose. Just give me the facts." There is no doubt about it; we say the same thing very differently.

Let me give you three basic differences in hopes that it will help you to communicate better at home. Perhaps you will see yourself in some of these situations and recognize that maybe the difficulty has not been that you don't like each other, or that you don't want to talk with each other, but is the fact that you haven't recognized that genders communicate differently.

1. Attention Signals

Have you ever complained that your husband doesn't listen when you talk to him? Research shows us that men simply don't give the same kind of signals that women do to show that they are listening. When a man listens he might be concentrating on what his wife is saying, but he is not always nodding his head at the appropriate times or smiling or saying something like, "Oh, yes," or "I see what you mean." So the wife sometimes feels as if he is not really listening to her. While you might interpret this kind of reaction or lack of reaction to indicate disinterest, it might simply reflect a different kind of communication style.

2. Approaching the Subject

The second basic area in which men and women generally approach communication differently is the manner in which they approach the subject.

Women generally introduce a topic with a goal of discussing it with all the ramifications, then coming to some kind of mutual conclusion.

Men often look at it in terms of black and white. As a result, when a woman brings up a subject hoping to negotiate, the man might miss her cue, and answer her question based strictly on the information he has.

3. Role of Language

The third area of communication difference between the sexes involves the role of language.

(SLIDE-4c) We all know that from the time that we are little girls that we love to play together, share secrets, and whisper confidences. This is just part of being a little girl and part of being a woman. The glue that cements friendships for girls and for women is shared communication.

Boys, on the other hand, from the time that they are little and through their adult years, are content to do things with other men. They don't require a lot of verbalizing, sharing thoughts, and describing events. Just being together and sharing activities is a form of communication with which men are comfortable.

In a marriage, in which so many things can lead to conflict because of a different perspective on religion, it's extremely crucial to recognize the differences in communication styles of men and women to prevent them from adding more fuel to the fire of the religious war in the home.

E. Temperament Differences

Many times the temperaments of each partner is different. You might be married to a strong choleric leader, but you are a more calm, collected phlegmatic. Or you might be the bubbly sanguine married to the more quiet, temperamental melancholy.

Whatever the temperament that you possess, it's important to remember to step out of your own limited perspective and to establish a way of looking at things and trying to see things through your spouse's eyes, to experience the situation as he or she might experience it.

Often it is easier for us to find a logical reason why our spouse should behave in a certain manner. It makes perfect sense to us. But our logic does not always provide us with a window into the feelings and the life experiences of our mate. Emotions are very real and they are not always subdued by reason and principle in the way that we would like to see them be.

As we have already discussed, the first step towards good communication is vulnerability, open communication, honesty.

III. HOW TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT (SLIDE-5)

Let's spend a little time talking about conflict and how to deal with differences. If you are living in a relationship where your religious values are a high priority and your church attendance and involvement are high priorities in your life and they are not for your husband, then you are bound to have conflict.

A. Deal With Differences On A Regular Basis

(SLIDE-5a) You need to deal with differences on a regular basis. You've got to find a way to work through that conflict so that your religious differences do not escalate into a religious war where everybody loses.

B. Talk About Taboo Subjects

In an article that I read in a health magazine, a Dr. Georgia Lanoil advised a couple from different religious backgrounds to "talk about taboo topics,". She states, "Often couples avoid subjects about which they think that they will disagree. This does not help them to avoid stress, it just produces closet conflict and silent misunderstandings."

I think that you will agree with me that there is great danger in having all of these negative feelings bottled up in one or both of the partners. If you want to love and lead your spouse to Christ, you can't allow these conflicts to build.

One day I was watching a television talk show hosted by Sally Jesse Raphael and her guests were marriage partners from different religious backgrounds. She began her show right up front with a strong statement, a truthful statement.

(SLIDE-5b) She said, "If you don't confront the issue of religion early on, it can become a time bomb that will go off later in marriage."

So, just as Georgia Lanoil counseled in the health magazine, talk about subjects; don't avoid the subjects where there is disagreement. It is very destructive to a relationship and certainly not an avenue of approach for leading your partner to Christ.

C. How to Keep Conflict from Building

I think that you will agree with me that every marriage has some conflict. We would like to talk about ten basic points that will help to keep conflict from building, and will help to keep your communication from falling into the pit of spiteful, intimidating conversation. Let's consider these ten brief points.

1. Choose your battles

(SLIDE-5c) I remember my mother saying to me something to the effect, *not to make a mountain out of a molehill!*

Sandra Doran's book *Every Time I Say Grace, We Fight* says that she remembers her father saying that, "It wasn't necessary to make every minor infraction a major cause for war." We smile at this, but it is very good counsel. In a marriage in which religion already offers enough differences to produce stress, it is vital that partners restrain from picking at the dissimilarities.

One Christian man whose wife later joined him in the church made this concession and he said, "Whenever possible, I did things the way that she wanted them done. If she wanted the bedroom painted blue, I painted it blue; if she wanted to go for an evening drive, I took her."

When Adly Campos advises spouses living with non-believers she refers to Paul's counsel in Ephesians 5:21,22, "submit to one another." She says, "He (Paul) urges the wife to submit to her husband "as to the Lord," for the husband is head of the wife. As priest of the family, he is the one responsible for the leadership in the home. The members look to him for economic support, spiritual direction, and social well-being. But if the non-believing husband fails in this, the believing wife should patiently and lovingly help him, supplying his deficiency in leadership."

If the believing spouse will submit as much as possible in areas where no religious principle is involved, the non-believing spouse will be more apt to accept it when the spouse takes over leadership in spiritual matters. So if in your marriage, you don't make every small difference a point of contention, you are more apt to be taken seriously when important issues come up for discussion.

2. Speak with “I” messages

Communication experts agree that it is far less threatening to express problems in terms of one’s own feelings rather than to accuse your partner of causing trouble.

For example: It is much more effective to say something like “I feel lonely on weekends when you spend so much time at the church,” rather than saying, “You never stay home on weekends; you always have to be over at the church doing something.”

Remember, communicating feelings is at the heart of a healthy marriage.

3. Be aware of your emotional investment in an issue

(SLIDE-5d) Be aware of your own emotional investment in an issue and decide whether or not you are ready to deal with it at the current time. Some issues are simply too hot to handle for a while.

This doesn’t mean that there will never be a time when you can confront them, but perhaps at the present time, it’s best to leave it alone. Remember, there is a difference between repressing a strong feeling or recognizing that feeling and deciding not to act on it at the present time. There is nothing emotionally unhealthy about the second choice.

4. Always show respect for your partner

Always show respect for your partner in any discussion that you have. One writer says that the respect that we have for each other in the difference of opinion is “the appreciation of the separateness of another individual.”

If we want to come closer to our mate, and hopefully, draw them closer to the Lord, we need to work together toward a fair marriage, where mutual respect and self-respect can grow and flourish.

By agreeing to disagree, couples are continually reminded how much they truly have in common. If you can openly communicate your areas of disagreement in a fair, sensitive, and courteous way, you will be reminded how much you have in common.

5. Attack the problems, not each other

(SLIDE-5e) If your spouse brings up a particular topic that he or she feels is significant, take a look at what their concerns are. Look at the situation from every side. Avoid non-constructive ways of dealing with the problem, such as becoming angry or lashing out or giving your strong opinion in a discourteous way.

Perhaps you could do a little brainstorming if there is a problem in which you can't agree. There are four basic steps to this process: state the problem, explore your options, evaluate the options, and make a decision.

- a. **State the problem.** Sit down at the table, you and your spouse, and invite the children if it is appropriate. Identify the problem you will be addressing. Tackle one problem at a time.
- b. **Explore your options.** Encourage everyone to suggest possible solutions to the problem. Write down every suggestion. Don't reject any suggestion or disregard any as inferior.
- c. **Evaluate the options.** After you have given all of your suggestions that you can think of, then begin with the evaluation stage. Certain suggestions will be ruled out, but one or two will emerge as possible creative solutions to the problem.
- d. **Make a decision.** Keep the emphasis on solving the problem, not on attacking each other.

6. Stay on the subject

Don't let yourself get side tracked into other issues or re-hash old family battles.

7. Avoid extreme statements

Sometimes when things have built up for a long time, in our desire to express everything that has been building up and get it out front and have it aired, we throw out broad generalities that sometimes open ourselves up for retaliation and a good fight. We want to avoid this.

Ask yourself, "How can I make my point in a non-confrontational, courteous way so that my spouse will hear what I really want him to hear?"

8. Repeat what your partner has said

If you are having trouble getting through a discussion where there are a lot of deep feelings on both sides, try repeating what your partner has said before speaking again yourself. This gives a little time for cooling off.

You are asking your spouse, "Did I understand that you said, such and such? Is this how you feel?"

While you are giving this little cooling off period, you are having time to think of how you can respond in a way that will not escalate the tension.

Remember, you can't assume that you have your partner all figured out. I have been married to my husband for 34 years and sometimes he really surprises me. Just when I think that I know how he is thinking on a subject, or how he is going to respond, he may come at it from a different angle.

So don't second-guess your spouse's motives, their feelings, or their actions. Allow them to speak and share their feelings with you.

9. Not all conflict has to be resolved in mutual agreement

Don't feel that every discussion that evolves into some kind of conflict has to resolve into mutual agreement for it to be successful. There are some subjects upon which the two of you may never see eye-to-eye.

There are other ways of coping with differences that can ease the stress. One way would be to seek a trade-off. If it is important to you that your spouse attends a Christmas program at the church that your children will be participating in, then you will agree to accompany him on a skiing trip or an outing that means something special to him. Look for a way to trade off so that there can be a win-win situation.

10. Don't expect your partner to change immediately

Once you have aired your thoughts, don't expect your partner to change immediately. I remember growing up, that my father rarely was in the room when we had family worship, but now I know that he was listening to a lot of what was being said. Perhaps not willingly, but his mind and his heart were absorbing the messages of some of our little family worships.

I remember that one time my mother was shocked and even embarrassed as we stood in the check-out line at the supermarket and one of the men in the city said to my mother, "You know, your husband and I play cards together at the country club. I am so impressed at how well he knows his Bible."

My mother could hardly believe it. Was this man, this husband of hers, this father of mine, actually sitting in a lounge atmosphere consuming liquor, playing cards, gambling money we did not have as a family, talking about spiritual issues?

Have you ever thought that at times your husband was not hearing a word that you were saying, only to learn later that he was, when you heard him voicing some of the same points that you were making to someone else?

Sometimes simply having the opportunity to express how you feel on an issue that is important to you in a calm, non-confrontational atmosphere is as much as you can hope for. You can never tell what the results might be in the long run.

Conflict is not something that we should generate for the sake of conflict. Paul tells us in Romans 12:18 (NIV) that "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Yet we know that differences do arrive and it is impossible to avoid some confrontations. But when we face conflict remember the ten points that we have just gone over, and let them work for you in helping to deal with differences.

IV. WOONG YOUR SPOUSE TO THE LORD (SLIDE-6)

A. Always Consider Your Spouse's Feelings.

When we are trying to lead our husband into a warm, loving marriage relationship and at the same time create in him a desire to join you in a spiritual experience, we must be very careful in how we present him to our church family. It is easy to make him the outcast, the non-supportive, intolerant, even hostile person in our lives.

It is very easy to solicit sympathy from church members, but what does this do to the non-believing spouse? It just further alienates him from the very family that you want him to become a part of. Let me give you an illustration:

(SLIDE 6a) One day a pastor's wife was getting out of her car preparing to go into the church building when she saw the wife of one of the church members sitting in her car. She decided she would go over and tap on the window and speak to her. She knew the lady was not a member herself, but she always tried to be friendly to her whenever she had the opportunity to see her.

She approached the car and tapped lightly on the window. When the lady turned and rolled down the window the pastor's wife saw that she had been crying very hard.

The pastor's wife searched for words to say, she wasn't sure what was wrong, but she could tell that this man's wife was overcome with sadness.

She volunteered to take a drive with the lady. As they drove along, the pastor's wife listened as this non-believing wife poured out her heart.

She said, “You know, I can just see my husband at prayer meeting every week earnestly soliciting the prayers of everybody in the church for me, and I can see everybody nodding, sympathizing and supporting my husband—feeling sorry for him being married to me. I can almost hear him as he prays in front of these people asking God to touch my stony heart, to send the Holy Spirit to move me and to help me recognize my wrong ways.”

She continued, “I resent it so much that I don’t even want to see these people at this church.”

The pastor’s wife was stunned. She could really understand how this wife felt. The very prayers in behalf of his wife were prayers that were driving her further away and making her feel less valued, less accepted, and less understood.

We can’t allow ourselves to put our non-believing spouses into this kind of a box. If we are not careful the very avenue through which we hope to bring our spouse into the church family, may be the very means of closing the door to them.

B. Don’t Criticize Your Spouse Before the Church Members

It is true the Christian spouse has real needs—needs to share her struggles with other fellow Christians. However, we can’t allow opportunities to share become a platform on which the believing spouse, in the name of religion, is allowed to berate the other spouse because then it becomes little more than public criticism.

Even in the context of small prayer groups or prayer meetings, it is destructive to reduce marital tensions to black and white issues because we don’t know both sides of the coin. When non-Christian spouses become the culprit for all the problems in a marriage we must be very careful how we respond to this situation.

C. Avoid Stereotyping Your Spouse

Sometimes we stereotype the non-Christian. He is the non-believer, the non-Christian, the non-Adventist, and the non-church goer. We give him a stereotyped title and it becomes a symbol, not a person.

It is important for us to not label people. Labeling can result in pain. Let’s not label ourselves as the Christian spouse, the good person, the one with the best judgment, and the high moral values in life, while placing our husbands somewhere else down the ladder as a passive partner, the less holy of the two. Automatically, this begins to polarize a couple and a religious war heats up.

I don't know if you are familiar with Charles Cooley's theory called the "Looking Glass Theory." He says, "People act out the part that they perceive others to be projecting onto them." In other words, the more your spouse feels that you view him or her in a particular stereotype, the more he or she will probably act out the part. It is scary, isn't it?

D. Don't Judge Your Spouse

(SLIDE-6b) C. S. Lewis says, "Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good above all, that we are better than someone else, I think we may be sure that we are being acted on not by God, but by the devil."

Pretty strong words, aren't they? Although this is not particularly a comforting thought, it does bear some consideration. You might ask yourself, "Do I deep down consider myself to be better than my spouse and if so, how does this relate to my understanding of the Gospel?"

In an *Adventist Review* article, "How Do You Live Together When You Don't Worship Together?" Sandra Doran tells about a woman, married to an alcoholic. The woman gave the following testimony.

"It used to be that I would not drink—and would feel pious about it. Every time my husband asked me why I chose to refrain, I would get on my little soapbox. My attitude conveyed my message clearly—'You're a loser and I'm not.'"

"But I've changed my attitude now. I'm not so self-righteous. When he asks me why I don't drink, I merely tell him it doesn't taste good to me anymore. And he no longer becomes angry about it. In fact, we are even finding that we can laugh over our differences."

I think that the most important thing that we must recognize when we categorize people is that none of us has the ability to process all the things that have gone into another person's life and then to be able to deduce where he or she should be at a particular time in her/his life. We may feel that we know a lot about our spouse, about his background, his life experience, his psychological make-up, but we may have to remind ourselves that we can never stand in the place of God judging someone else for his choices. This is why I am glad that God is my judge.

E. Do Not Attack Your Spouse's Beliefs

Sandra Doran, while working on her Master's thesis in Communication, said that she ran across a very interesting article that discussed what happened when people feel that their beliefs and practices are under attack. She said that the researchers have concluded that when people believe something strongly, they set up a sort of mental barrier, which goes into operation when they feel they are under attack. Consequently,

the harder you try to force a point, the more you criticize the other person's belief, you are actually causing them to cling to what they consider important.

So why criticize? It brings dissension to a marriage. It destroys self-worth and it doesn't work anyway! As one writer puts it: Criticism never changes anyone for the better and only puts miles of emotional distance between a husband and a wife who may be secretly longing for closeness.

F. Remember You Are a Wife; Not His Mother

In some relationships the woman takes too strong a role. She is not a wife, not a lover, not a friend or companion, but a mother! The marriage is more like a parent-child relationship in which the wife plays the role of a disapproving mother whose boy can never do anything right.

Over and over she says such things, as, "If only Tom would be converted, if he would only join the church, then everything would be alright. If he would stop all of his bad habits then our marriage could work." And on and on.

C. S. Lewis in his book *Christian Behavior* gave an illustration about a schoolboy who was asked to describe God and he replied, "Oh, God is the sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then he tries to stop it." I wonder how many non-believing spouses see their Christian spouses in this way?

Trying to play conscience for someone else is like trying to be an umpire for a baseball game in an adjoining field. You can't make it work. You miss a lot of signals.

G. Use Warmth Instead Of Force

In a children's story by *Aesop*, there's a story that I always enjoyed as a little girl. The story is about three characters: the sun, the wind, and a man who was walking along the road.

As the man was making his journey the two elements of nature discussed the cloak that he was wearing that flapped loosely about his frame.

"I bet I could get that hood off his shoulders," boasted the wind.

Not to be outdone, the sun responded, "I don't think so, but I'm sure that I can."

The contest began and the wind sucked in all of the forces of nature and let forth a stream of breath whipping the leaves from the trees and stripping the loose grass from the road side. The man just pulled his coat tighter around him and determined not to lose it.

Next it was the sun's turn. Smiling in all of his radiance, he came forward with a full measure of his warmth and concentrated his rays on the figure of the man.

Immediately the man responded with one spontaneous tug and the cloak was off. The man continued his journey down the road, his shoulders free of the heavy woolen burden.

Remember, when an issue is forced through coercion and criticism, it never, never works. But in an atmosphere of warmth, people are free to make the kind of decision that would best enable them to undertake their journey.

H. Be Courteous to Your Spouse

There was a young couple that was in the early stages of their marriage. The wife was a practicing Christian, a caring, loving Christian young woman. The man had been raised a Christian, but he had strayed from his values and was really making a strong effort to put out of his mind the values that he had been taught and the need to be part of a religious family.

The harder he worked at this, the more discouraged and actually depressed he became. He began smoking and became a chain smoker. Many times he would spend his lunch hour sitting out in the hallway under a stairwell smoking one cigarette after another and getting more and more depressed.

His wife didn't nag at him, but just tried to say encouraging things to him and to give him a lot of warmth and support when he was at home.

This helped to lift Ted from his depression and one day he announced that he was going to attend the church he had attended as a boy. This wasn't the church that his wife belonged to. It was a different denomination.

She could have told him that the church didn't teach truth and it didn't do this and it didn't do that, but she was a wise woman. She encouraged her husband to go and he did. Being back with his friends and hearing the encouraging messages from the pulpit helped him to turn away from his depression and to look more positively on his future.

Today he is a member of his wife's church as are their two children. I attribute it largely to the fact that his wife, Christy, was so patient and sensitive. She looked at him from a heart full of genuine love and respect. She believed that he was a good person and that he would be open to more truth if he could find his way back to God initially. I think that we have to be open to this as well.

I. Check Your Attitudes

I travel a lot for the church and most of my meetings involve women. I talk with many women who are married to non-believing spouses and it's very interesting to me because some of them actually enjoy the relationship. They say that their life is a little more daring and that their husband makes more money because he works on Sabbath. Thus they have more money to spend and they are able to live a different lifestyle.

In some ways they are actually encouraging their husband to continue in the present way. Some strongly religious women married to persons whose concern for spiritual matters is minimal admit that part of the initial attraction was because of a certain carefree attitude and lack of seriousness on the part of their mate. They admire their carefree, lighthearted, come-what-may approach to life.

J. Make Your Spouse Feel Valued and Loved

(SLIDE-6c) If we want to woo our husbands to us and to the Lord, then we must make them feel valued. I like the illustration that I shared with you earlier where the man said one of the ways he felt that he had won his wife to Christ was by trying to do for her everything that she wanted, of course, within reason. He said, "If she wants her bedroom blue, then I make it blue. If she wants to go for a drive, then I take her for one."

It's hard to resist love. It's very hard to resist someone who is putting you first. It is very hard not to admire someone who is unselfish and attentive to your needs above their own wishes. This is one of the real keys in getting close to the husband's heart. It creates a climate for spiritual growth.

Remember, ladies, you must be sincere. You can't woo your husband in an insincere manner, with the idea of getting him into the baptismal tank. It will be phony and he will recognize it to be phony. You must first come to love your husband and to nurture and care for him and be courteous to him and try to understand his deepest feelings and goals for his life.

Once he understands how important he is to you and how you value him as a person, as a good person, then he will be open to listen to those issues that are important to you in your life. It's just that simple. But it isn't easy; it's an ongoing course continuing to build up your relationship.

An Eight-Cow Woman

There is a film shown at Marriage Enrichment seminars in North America called *Johnny Lingo*. In the plot of this story a young man comes to the islands to find a wife. All of the islanders are whispering and speculating on who he is going to choose from among the female population of this little island. Johnny Lingo is a handsome, eligible bachelor in the finest sense of the word and he is wealthy to boot.

Most of the talk centers on the woman that Johnny has selected and how many cows he is going to be willing to pay for this woman. Some of the island women can't understand why this handsome, wealthy man chose Mahana. In their eyes Mahana is just an outcast, a slip of a woman with low self-esteem and a face that is ravaged by despair, stress, and tension in her life. She laughs little, but rather she is somber and quiet and walks hunched over from a lack of self-esteem. Surely, he will not pay more than one cow for such a woman.

The married women on the island chat back and forth over the price of cows and the number of cows that were given in exchange for their hand in marriage. Some of them gloat over the fact that three cows were given and one woman even boasts of having had five cows paid for her dowry.

(SLIDE-6d) Finally the day arrives when the wedding is to take place and Johnny Lingo enters the village, driving cattle down the grassy path to Mahana's house. All the people run out of their houses and look as Johnny Lingo leads the cows down the street. They count: one, two, three cows bawling and screaming as they come down the dusty road. They count: four, five, six cows. Then another group of black and white cows come following in the dust. Can you believe it: seven, eight cows?! Never in the history of the village has such a high value been put on a single woman. Mahana? Such a tiny little waif of a woman.

When the newly married couple goes skimming across the bay in their canoe, the village people are just buzzing. They can't imagine what Johnny Lingo saw in little, skinny Mahana. Why was he willing to give eight cows for his woman?

The story moves to a climax when the honeymoon is over and several weeks later. Tan, laughing, wealthy Johnny Lingo with rippling strong muscles climbs out of the canoe and beside him is Mahana. Not dumpy little Mahana. No! She is poised, confident, stunning, and yes, she is even beautiful!

Once again the men and women of the village are baffled. Again questions are asked as the women buzz, "Why did he choose her?"

Then Johnny summed up the whole story when he says, "I wanted it to be known all over this entire village that when Mahana was to be married that eight cows were given in exchange for her hand. Whenever the women gather in little groups and whisper over their washing and whenever men toss remarks to one another across the wind, I want it to be known that my Mahana is a eight cow woman!"

It's a simple parable, isn't it? The point is obvious. The more value you put on a person, the more esteem you attach to their person, the more these individuals will blossom with a natural grace and talent previously buried in the souls of their own disillusionment. That, in its essence, is true courtesy. In Philippians 4:8, the Bible writer says, "If anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

This kind of counsel is at its richest when it's applied to the context of our marriages and to the one with whom we have chosen to spend our life. Remember, there is a lot of censure in the world where we live. It's a cruel, cold world with irate motorists blowing horns, insecure fellow workers seeking to cut us down with words and deception. Apparent friends withdraw their support when their own needs are met. The home needs to be a place where we can offer our mate a release from the tension, a haven from a heartless world.

K. Put Your Spouse's Needs Above Your Own

Your spouse is an individual worthy of respect and the simple offerings of human kindness and concern. He was worthy enough that God sent His only Son, that had he been the only one who needed the death of Jesus to obtain his salvation, then God would have died for your spouse.

The experience is told of a young man who came home from work sick one day and just made it into the house. He dropped down onto the couch, took some Tylenol and a glass of cold water, and just passed out on the couch burning with fever and aching all over. He couldn't wait for his wife to get home from work.

All of a sudden he heard her car coming and he thought, "Oh, this is great. She is going to come in and pamper me a little bit. She will do something to relieve the miserable way I'm feeling."

But it was not to be. His wife, June, walked into the house and said, "What are you doing home?" She hardly paused to take a look at him, let alone to listen to his sad tale. She marched directly across the room and began to call a long list of prayer partners and committee members from the church, and left her sick husband to lie on the couch longing for her ministry.

He said, "June is so hung up with her religion that she calls this one and she calls that one and I can't take it any longer. The church comes first in this marriage and I come at least second and sometimes further down the ladder."

As women seeking to woo our husbands to ourselves, but more importantly to Jesus Christ, we have to remember that real love puts our own needs on hold and responds to the needs of our mate. Not endlessly, and unilaterally, but often enough to make them feel real love. In fact we feel more in love ourselves when we give to our partner than when we are on the receiving end. Do you agree with me? I know that's true in my case.

L. Don't Try to Change Your Spouse

Let's remind ourselves that God gave us free will and we shouldn't try to take that from another person.

In an article in *Today's Christian Woman*, October 1993, Judy Bodmer tells about her efforts to try and change her husband. She wrote: "No matter how much evidence I gathered, I couldn't do it. I had to learn that's God's job. After I gave this responsibility back to God, I stopped nagging my husband.... When I stopped keeping track of his wrongs and started to communicate my feelings more effectively, the tension between us began to disappear. And you know what? My husband has grown and changed in ways I never imagined."

M. Find Suitable Weekend Activities to Do Together

Sandra Doran writes in the August 5, 1993 *Adventist Review*: "It is vitally important that spouses plan some activity together on a regular basis over the weekend. It might seem impossible but don't give up."

"Find something you can do together that both of you can look forward to.... Just make a commitment and follow through on it. A little creative effort and planning can result in a reversal of the mind-set that causes you to dread the weekends before the week is even half over. And such an effort might reap rewards in your marriage even after the weekend is over."

Here are a few suggestions for weekend activities to help improve relations with your non-believing spouse:

- 1. Plan to eat out Saturday night or for Sunday brunch.**
- 2. Attend a concert together.**
- 3. Plan a family picnic and nature walk.**
- 4. Arrange for a camping trip with a Christian couple or couples.**
- 5. Go hiking or horseback riding.**
- 6. Participate in a sport he enjoys on Sunday.**

V. CHILDREN IN A DIVIDED HOME

Section five deals with children in a marriage split by differing religious views. This was an area of conflict in my own personal home, especially when it came to Christian education. My father was not willing for us to leave home at the age of 14 and go to a boarding academy so that we could have a Christian education. We lived in a small town and there was no church school. Our first church school came when we were freshmen in academy. My mother worked very hard at two jobs and was determined that we would have a Christian education. I am confident today that it is because of her determination that I am a Seventh-day Adventist.

My father didn't understand the importance of my leaving home, because he sincerely missed us, and didn't recognize the necessity of making the sacrifice of being separated one from another, but he allowed us to go. He stayed in a neutral position on that subject and I was able to have a Christian education and find a Christian mate.

I thank the Lord for that. I have thanked him many times and I have thanked both of my parents long before my father was a baptized member of the church. I thanked him on a number of occasions for making that sacrifice and allowing me to leave home to gain a Christian education, even though it was against his wishes and he would have chosen to have me do otherwise.

When children come into the family where there are religious differences, then life can get very complicated. There are many issues that couples need to work through. The church going partner may ask, "How can I teach my child standards that are different from my husband's without giving the message that daddy is bad? How can I encourage my children to go to church when daddy is offering a day at the park?"

Many women are fortunate in that even though their husbands may not be practicing Christians, they do believe in God and they want their children to be taught good moral lessons. In most cases they will not put up a big fight if the children attend Sabbath school and even church school.

But you ask, what is a parent to do when the value systems conflict, when there is a power struggle with religion at its core? Where do you turn for answers? I am sure that you agree that there is no simple formula. However, there are some definite principles that can help provide understanding in this struggle.

(SLIDE-7) Let me give you seven of them:

1. *Understand the child's stage of spiritual development.* First and foremost, understand the stage of development that your children are in and don't expect more than is reasonable from them in terms of religion. If you do, then this will put undue stress on the children. Expectations often arise that are not compatible with their emotional and intellectual development. Don't make your children the focus of your disagreement, by expressing your views and lifestyle in hopes of winning out.

When children are young and in the preschool stage, they can't handle specific doctrine, but they will respond readily to colorful stories, puzzles, images, and felts.

Mothers can have a great influence in helping the children to be able to understand and visualize the characters and stories of the Bible.

2. *Accept the fact that your children are the product of two parents.* Like it or not, your kids are going to be exposed to the value system of your spouse. In the final analysis we must accept the blessings inherent in individuality and choices. So it is really critical that in our responsibility to raise God-fearing children that we resist the urge to shelter them from all thinking that differs from our own, and particularly from that of our spouse. Such an attempt to do this will only be futile and will convey the message that you may be insecure in your own belief. Look for values on which you can agree.

Find something of mutuality and agree with it. Agree on some element of your shared philosophy or on religion and child-raising that is shared

by each of you. This kind of agreement will help to bond you and your husband and the child together, at least in a small sense of a spiritual unit. Perhaps, it will be in moral values such as fairness, honesty, and courtesy.

3. *Accept the fact that some issues will never be resolved.* Accept the fact that there are some issues of child raising that you and your spouse will never resolve.

4. *Be aware that you are modeling your message.* You are modeling the effects of the message you preach. If your children view you as secure and happy, they will ultimately deduce that your value system has offered meaning and significance to your life and may do the same for them.

5. *The ultimate goal of child raising is self-control.* Remember that the ultimate goal of child raising is self-control and self-discipline.

James Dobson, a popular author and speaker on family topics, said, "Parents should introduce their children to discipline and self-control by the use of external influences when they are young. By being required to behave responsibly, the child gains valuable experience in controlling his own impulses and resources. When he grows into the teen years the transfer of responsibility is made year-by-year from the shoulders of the parent to the child. He is no longer forced to do it, but he has learned to during his earlier years."

6. *Accept young adults unconditionally, in spite of choices of lifestyle they have made.* When children enter young adulthood and have decided on a value system, accept them unconditionally. An individual will never be won to anyone's faith and encouraged into a more positive lifestyle, by feeling shame or alienation.

The reality of having raised a child who has decided to reject your values is very painful. I meet many people who suffer with a lot of guilt from this. The tendency can be to take it out on your children—to communicate disfavor in every possible way in conversations and opportunities to be together. These kinds of attitudes will only put distance between you and your children and remove any possibility of restoration, of bringing them to a spiritual closeness.

VI. COMMITMENT TO MAKING MARRIAGE WORK (SLIDE-8)

This section deals with commitment in making marriage work. Think about it. Have you undergone a change in your own life in the area of religion? If you answered “yes” then put yourself in your spouse’s shoes for a minute. What do you think he feels when he is confronted with a whole new value system in the person that he is married to? To hang on despite this change is what commitment is all about. It’s not easy!

A. Show Your Spouse Agape Love

The Bible talks about agape love that is unchanging, unconditional, inexhaustible, generous beyond measure, and most wonderfully kind. If we are going to have a long-term commitment in a relationship, then we have to have agape love.

One author suggests that we begin by evaluating our own approach to love and ask ourselves whether we love our mate unconditionally. That’s a good question, isn’t it? It’s also a scary question.

What are your true motives? Is your love based on behavior and performance? Or is it constant despite changes and undesirable traits in your partner.

Unconditional love is crucial to woo your husband close to you and to really understand his deepest feelings and to bring him to the place where he desires to have this kind of love relationship with Jesus Christ. Unconditional love is crucial because it is actually the deepest longing of the human heart.

We all want to be loved unconditionally. We all need to be loved, not because we are attractive, or because we keep a good house, or we bring home a good pay check, or we put good food on the table, but simply we all need unconditional love because we are who we are.

When we feel that we are being loved for some external reason, then there is always reason for doubt or insecurity. If I don’t continue to measure up, or to keep the house clean, or to earn enough money to keep her in a nice enough house, then his or her affections will be cut off. How many people have reached adult life with a really poor self-worth because they are still trying to earn someone’s love.

Agape love is different. It is deep and caring. It is devoted, not because of, but in spite of all these things. By loving unconditionally we surround our spouse with a shelter of warmth and with a light that will fortify him for all of his struggles in life.

How do you think this man is going to feel about you if you are the source of strength that fortifies him for all the struggles of life? When he goes out the door in the morning to his job, whom do you think he is going to be thinking about? What do you think it is that is going to draw him back to open that door again that evening after a hard day's work? It's you. It's that partner. It's that unconditional lover whose eyes light up and whose arms open up and who draws this tired soul back into the warmth of his home.

Jesus gives this perfect example to us because this is what He does for us. We're sent out into the world, we're battered about, we're misunderstood, we have our toys taken away from us, our hearts are broken, and our families are splintered. But Jesus says, "Someday I am going to take you home. I am going to open up my arms and I am going to hold you close and I am going to look into your eyes and you are going to say that it is all worthwhile because You, my Lord, You loved me unconditionally. You loved me when I was living in the pig town. You loved me when I had my back turned to You. You loved me when my wife loved You, but I had no interest in You. You loved me with agape love. It was through the relationship with my spouse that I got a little taste of unconditional love."

Yes, commitment in a marriage between two persons with different religious perspectives means loving each other whether or not you agree with each other, whether or not you support the same value system, whether or not you pray to the same god. It means seeing each other as individuals worthy of respect, accepting each other for who you are, giving yourself with no ulterior motive.

B. A Life-Long Religious Battle Is Not Necessary

In her book *Every Time I Say Grace We Fight*, Sandra Finley Doran writes, "A story tells about Mr. Adams, an elderly man who was near the point of death, oxygen strapped to his face and propped up in a hospital bed. His wife was seated across the room in a chair and the pastor was also there to visit Mr. Adams.

"The pastor shouted in a loud voice, hoping that Mr. Adams could still hear him and asked, 'Are you ready for Jesus to come?'

"Mr. Adams just looked very solemnly at the wall and the pastor spoke even louder and said, 'Mr. Adams, are you ready for Jesus to come?'

"Mr. Adams' wife sat in a chair by the window, her hands mechanically clutched the straps of an old worn purse. In the bed to her right lay a man, her husband, propped up on three pillows with his white hair long and unruly with his blue eyes blazing with a power that formed a startling contrast to the weak old frame that housed them.

"To the right of the bed stood the pastor, bending over close to the ragged old profile holding both of the old gentleman's hands in his own, still pleading for a response.

"A change flashed over the old man's face, expressionless at first, but lingering, and suddenly the eyes were like fire, softening to rest on some hotly raging controversy that was inside him. The old man said nothing, yet the relaxing of his face suggested something stronger than any amount of words could have possibly conveyed to the pastor. The pastor noticed the change and stopped talking. For a brief moment the room was still, caught it seems between the spinning of two worlds.

"The woman at the window had not sensed the nuance of the look, the perception in the eyes. In an instant she was by the bed assuming a role that she had played for 50 years, the role of her husband's mother.

"'John,' she said, 'you have to give your life to Jesus. All these years, I've been begging and pleading for you to throw out your cigarettes, to stop your drinking, your cursing and swearing, all these years, John.'"

"The moment was gone. He hardened his profile that was etched with over a half a century of marriage. John turned and faced the other side of the room in stony silence. If religion meant submission to the dictates of this woman who had never been a lover, never been a wife, but had tried to be a harsh mother, if that's what it meant, the satisfaction of 'I told you so' blazing in the righteous features across her face, if it meant admitting every argument, every disagreement that had been fought over his non-Christian stance, then he would leave the world with no part of it."

At the funeral, Mrs. Adams sat clutching her bag and midway through the service she broke down and began to cry. She cried the tears of 50 years of marriage of desperately fighting for the soul of another, always hoping, always praying, but never winning. The battle was over and he was no closer to home. Taking the arm of a friend, she summoned the dignity to arise and make her way slowly out of the church into the waiting car.

Converting a spouse is to some a life-long battle, a religious war, the stuff of which every argument is made, the very purpose for another's existence. Doggedly, such husbands and wives persist in a relationship, progressing only in their increased determination to win out over the other. While such a power struggle may be a bit extreme, it is often present under the surface to a greater or lesser degree when spouses do not share the same religious convictions.

C. Examine Your Reasons For Wanting Your Husband's Conversion

If you desire that your spouse change his religious outlook, think about it for a moment. What are the underlying reasons for your wish? Some women live in the false belief that if their husband were to join the church, all of the problems in their marriage would be solved.

One lady confessed, "It has taken me a while to realize that during all the years that I worked to win Gary to the church, I believed that his conversion would solve all of our troubles. If only Gary were converted, our marriage would be better. If only Gary were a Christian, the kids would listen and mind. We'd argue less. Now that it has happened, I find that the paper tiger has been destroyed. There is nothing to blame all of the problems of my marriage on now, but I must settle one issue at a time."

Converting one's spouse does not guarantee marital bliss. Neither will it guarantee that the individual that you are yoked with will mirror all of your opinions and ideas.

VII. PUTTING THINGS INTO PERSPECTIVE

On this last section we will focus on putting things into perspective. When my mother died after 51 years of marriage, she had a rather well worn little plaque propped up on her dresser. After we had taken her body from the room to the morgue, and I was cleaning up things in her room at home, I picked up that little plaque and with tears streaming down my face, I read it for about the 200th time. It goes like this:

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

In a marriage where religion is not a shared experience, these words take on special significance.

(SLIDE-9) A. Accept The Things You Cannot Change

If you are married to a non-believing spouse, you need to accept the fact:

- 1. You are married to an individual whose basic philosophy of life does not match yours at the present time.**

2. **The difference of religious commitment between the two of you is no easier for your spouse to accept than it is for you.**
3. **Every marriage has its challenges, whether both spouses are Christian or not.**
4. **That ultimately each person is responsible for his or her own spiritual decision.**
5. **There will always be pluses and minuses in every relationship and resolve to focus on the pluses.**

In an article entitled "Happily Ever After," it says that we need to come to terms with our marriages and why they are worth the ups and downs. The author says that what saves the relationship is that the plus column is fuller than the minus column. That's what keeps two people committed to each other. The point is that we can always find the negatives if we look for them, but the positives are there, too.

6. **That working at a marriage is much easier than terminating one.**
Pat Conroy wrote about his own personal divorce in *Atlanta* magazine and said, "I find it hard to believe how many people are getting divorced, how many submit to such extraordinary pain, for there are no clean divorces. Divorces should be conducted in slaughterhouses or surgical wards. In my case, I think it would have been easier if Barbara had died. I would have been gallant at her funeral and shed real tears. That would have been far easier than staring across the table and telling each other that it is over. It is a killing thing to look at the mother of my children and know that we would not be together for the rest of our lives. It was terrifying to say good-bye, to reject a part of my whole history."

(SLIDE-9a) Remember, terminating a marriage relationship is like unweaving a thick rope, fiber by fiber. The process is painful and tiring. When you are finished you are left with nothing more than a shapeless mass of dry straw. It is far easier to put one's energy into repairing and rebuilding the torn strands than to unravel the whole mass.

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 should give encouragement to the believing spouse. "Being married to an unbeliever is a challenge that can be met successfully only with God's help. If the believing spouse stays by the side of the unbeliever, perhaps the latter can be won to the Lord. And children need both parents to guide their formation and development. It may take many years, but in time the Lord will reach your spouse. Have faith, have patience, and have confidence in God." (Adly Campos)

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can.*

(SLIDE-9b) B. Have Courage To Change The Things You Can

Let me ask you a question: What things can be changed in your relationship as it stands now? Here are some suggestions:

- **You can change the stereotype of being married to a non-believer.**
- **You can change the mind-set that puts you in charge of your spouse's religious decisions.**
- **You can change the tendency for postponing marital happiness until some future time when your spouse agrees to baptism.**
- **You can change the attitude that your way of looking at things is always right and admit that you can gain from listening to your non-Christian husband.**
- **You can change the image you may have constructed for your spouse that shows a lack of respect for him.**

(SLIDE-9c) It is not easy, this marriage between individuals whose religious outlooks are different, but something that requires extra work takes on an extra value. There's something highly treasured about that which is not easily gained.

"Marriage is more like an airplane than a rock. You have to commit the thing to flight, and then it creaks and groans. And keeping it airborne depends entirely on attitude. Working at it, though, we can fly forever. Only she/he and I will know how hard it has been, or how worthwhile." (Michael Gant, quoted in San Diego's *Union*.)



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