

Everyone longs to have a happy marriage; but the reality is often different. Not seldom after a few years the warmest feelings cool down. Our own and our partner's weaknesses become more apparent. Different personalities, character traits, views and preferences can lead to numerous arguments. Is it possible to revive a dead marriage? Yes! The Bible shows us how to love each other for a lifetime.

**Volker and Doris Lamaack** have been serving God as seamen's missionaries in the port of Hamburg, Germany since 1991. This is Volker's second

book, and he has also written five Bible-study correspondence courses and further Gospel material. Doris and Volker are members of the Seamen's Christian Friend Society and Port Ministries International.



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Volker Lamaack

How to have a happy marriage

Volker Lamaack

# How to have a happy marriage



How to revive a dead marriage  
and how to improve a good one

Seamen's Christian Friend Society Edition 8

Volker Lamaack

## **How to have a happy marriage**

## Seamen's Christian Friend Society Edition

Vol. 8

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**Volker Lamaack**

# **How to have a happy marriage**

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## Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to David Thomas (UK).

*Dear David, thank you so much for your countless hours and sacrifice to put this book into readable English. We never met in person and yet you were ready to invest so much energy in this project. May the Lord bless you for these efforts!*

Since 1991 I have been speaking to seafarers almost every day when I meet them on the ships in the port of Hamburg. Nevertheless, I lack personal experience in this job, as I have not worked as a sailor. Because of this it is all the more valuable, that 14 seafarers have made their testimonies available to me for publication in this book.

*Thank you for your honesty and the courage to write very personally about victories, defeats, and important insights you have gained in regard to your marriages. Your contribution to this book is extremely important!*

I am very grateful as well to my dear wife Doris for illustrating the book. With very different talents and gifts than I have, she serves God in our common ministry among seafarers.

*Darling, because of you our friend John, and his counsellor Jeff, this book has become much livelier. Thank you so much! And I praise God for bringing us together as a married couple. I love you my sweetheart!*

*It will still continue to be a challenge for me to better apply the knowledge that is written in this book to our marriage.*



## Endorsements

I have been a marriage officer and marriage counsellor for 20 years and have officiated in many marriages, since I was ordained as a Deacon. But reading this book, “How to have a happy marriage” did not just touch my heart, in fact it revived the true meaning of marriage and what God intended when He said, “This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.” (Genesis 2:24)

This book is a very good and helpful reference to seafarers who on many occasions find themselves lost and confused or have other problems in their marriages. The conversations between John and Jeff make it come alive and tangible because they are lively and full of emotions. The testimonies will help many seafarers to see that they are not alone in their marriage journey. The questions to think about after each chapter give room for meditation and decision-making on the way forward.

This book is a life-giving resource, which I term, “marriage revival manual”. It has a practical and authentic scenario, which helps the reader to be in touch with the reality and can help for proper decision-making. I, therefore, wish that every seafarer can have this book as a daily friend or companion.

*Fr. Bongani Xulu*  
Stella Maris Chaplain  
Port of Richards Bay  
Parish Priest St. Francis, Catholic Church

This book is filled with hope. Not unrealistic hope, but real hope even for seafarers and their marriages. Real hope because it points towards our real help: Jesus Christ. Therefore this book is not about behaviour modification, but it is about the deep renewal that happens by accepting Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Through Him and His Spirit we are changed to live with agape love (divine love). A love that will make you keep doing the right thing even when your spouse acts wrongly. This is the kind of love that can keep on forgiving.

Volker Lamaack shares many useful practical insights from the Bible, seafarers and experts in the field of marriage. You will be amazed to learn about some of the differences between men and women and about the way in which all of us differ in our love languages.

These are helpful insights; however it starts with you taking responsibility for your marriage. Do it with God's help and always keep on praying for your marriage, knowing that it is God's desire that it will succeed.

Remember, marriage is not only a commitment made before people, but also a solemn promise that you made to God. So do what it takes and start by reading and studying this hopeful book. I enjoyed reading it, it gave me new insight into my own marriage and I am sure it will bless yours.

*Chris Viljoen PhD*  
Port Chaplain  
Port of Durban  
Christian Seaman's Organisation

I am a Port Chaplain and I've been in the ministry for more than 11 years. I have had my own personal marital issues before, and unfortunately have suffered divorce.

As I was reading Volker Lamaack's book, I was drawn back to the past pain and heartache experienced by John and some seafarers. However, I was brought back to my joyful reality as I read Jeff's dialogue of encouragement, advice and hope.

Yes, marriage and life can be difficult and heart-breaking, but this incredible book and its heart-warming testimonies will revive your soul, drawing you closer to God and rekindling your love for your spouse.

My prayer today is that for each and every person who reads this book, it will be a testimony to the Lord's love and faithfulness.

*Mark Classen*  
Port Chaplain  
Port of Richards Bay  
The Mission To Seafarers

It was a pleasure to have had a chance to read this book "How to Have a Happy Marriage" before it was published. I highly recommend it to all seamen around the world, especially those encountering difficulties in their marriage.

This book was so amazing because it is a combination of marriage counselling, Bible verses and personal testimonies of many seamen. Most of the topics tackled by the main character in this book are almost identical to what I observed in my crew. Being a sailor for more than 30 years I

observed and experienced marital problems which resulted in separation or annulment.

Reading this book will help you realize that you need to adjust your attitude towards your partner, if you want to achieve a good relationship and have a good marriage. Thanks a lot to the author Volker Lamaack.

*Rogelio Daganta*

Master

Senator Crewing Manila Inc.

This book is a useful aid, especially for seafarers who are at sea with unsettled domestic issues on their minds. Here they are presented with tools to start working on the issues that trouble and negatively impact their lives. These principles could be applied for “good outcomes” in most interpersonal relationships and situations. Hopefully it will be distributed widely. I recommend reading it!

*Reverend Johan van Schalkwyk*

Port of Durban

International Sailors’ Society

Wow!, I just finished reading this book, “How to have a happy marriage”. It is full of practical stories that we all can relate to and tips on how to turn things around.

In this book, Volker Lamaack uses simple examples to illustrate areas of our marriage that we need to be made aware of. If you’re like me, one of the hardest things to admit is that I may actually be part of the problem, not just my spouse. (I know men, it is hard to admit). When we recognize we are part of the problem, we can focus on being part of the solution.

Since marriage is about giving and forgiving, God is the perfect example. A giving relationship is very important but also a forgiving relationship as we all make mistakes and need forgiveness.

This book has reminded me of the very real issues that sailors face in their lives, actually, that we each face in our lives, so I think it will help all those married or considering marriage.

Engineers know that you can have a perfect motor but without oil it will only last minutes. A marriage is similar, you and your spouse can be a perfect match but without love you start to create friction between each other, little things become big things and soon your marriage is destroyed.

This is why the Bible says in Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

A great saying I am reminded of is ‘If you want your wife to treat you like a King, treat her like a Queen’. A good relationship needs to be built on a good foundation. As this book reminds us, the Bible, the Word of God Himself, is the basis for this foundation. If we have not started building our lives on this, we can start now. Enjoy the book and see what God can do in your marriage.

*Ray Hanna*  
Senior Chaplain  
Port of Vancouver  
Lighthouse Harbour Ministries

We here at the Swiss Seamen’s Mission in Marseille have had the opportunity to read Volker Lamaack’s book “How to Have a Happy Marriage” before it goes to print. We whole-heartedly endorse his book, as we feel it will help seafarers to improve their marriages. Living for Jesus while away from one’s family is not easy. This book, based on the Bible, is filled with seamen’s testimonies and practical advice.

*Markus and Dorothy Pulfer*  
Port of Marseille  
Swiss Seamen’s Mission

I want to congratulate Volker Lamaack on his excellent book. His experience ministering to seafarers is evident in this very practical book.

Marriage is not easy and is not for weaklings! Build your marriage muscles by investing some time in this book. It is a tremendous resource for married couples and not just seafarers. It is particularly helpful for seafarers since it has real testimonials from seafarers who have gone through the marital issues addressed.

The book provides a biblical response for helping marriages in trouble or just needing a tune up. I believe that if both the husband and wife will go through this book together, that they will have the necessary tools to work on their marriage.

In addition to relevant stories, the book is built around a discussion between seafarers, so it is easy to read. The application points are further driven home with questions at the end of every chapter that help the

reader to reflect on what has been shared and how they can apply it to their marriage.

*Reverend Mark Wodka*

Director of Canaveral Port Ministry

CPM is member of NAMMA

(North American Maritime Ministry Association)

Volker Lamaack understands the challenges of a seafaring life. In a series of moving conversations he addresses perhaps one of the toughest challenges of travelling lives: marriage. He genuinely intends seafarers' marriages to be happy and lasting unions. To this end he uses fictional characters and real-life stories and combines these with learned wisdom and Biblical texts.

His characters identify as male, married, Christian, and Philippine, clearly the demographic that the author targets. The main character often refers to "our culture" as being Philippine. Thus the book will not have general application: it is on occasion critical of Western culture. As a result, cultural stereotypes emerge freely from the telling of the stories and are often accepted uncritically.

He immerses the reader in the on-board environment, which he knows all too well: multi-national and mixed gender crews, the complications of a multicultural galley and the male appetite for the doubtful pleasures of ports. Firmly situated within these settings, his characters engage in a series of matter-of-fact conversations, speak in the language of real seafarers, and use the Bible as regular people of faith would do. The book has the feel of eyewitness accounts to actual conversations, resulting in authentic pastoral care rather than a theology of Christian marriage.

Real people get to tell their life stories with frankness and honesty without fear of judgement nor condemnation. Respectful consideration is given to practical matters, such as reasons for divorce other than adultery. Advice given is textured and open-ended. The approach is common-sensical, the advice practical and supportive of conservative values. The metaphors and comparisons arising from the seafarers' world, are both simple and effective. Examples are at times shocking, but all too real. The questions at the end of chapters aid recall and enhance learning and strengthen resolve.

The complications of long-distance relationships and prolonged isolation are taken seriously for all parties affected. Answers are never offered as easy quick fixes nor guaranteed solutions. But the overriding message

is that there is always hope for healing, even of the most troubled marriage.

The leitmotif is simple: “Take responsibility: Doing this in life is fundamentally important.”

To achieve this, taking the initiative in reconstructing a troubled marriage is encouraged. In a moving passage, the resurrection of a failed marriage is said to have at its centre the grace of God. “Both partners must understand that the wife does not have to earn the love of her husband, nor the husband the respect of his wife... It is not a question of first demanding something from the partner before you accept your responsibility... [Accept responsibility] regardless of whether the partner always behaves correctly...” And elsewhere he says: “As for problems in marriages, it often needs patience in order to finally win the partner. But in some cases, a clear stop sign must be held up. Each situation must be judged for what it is. Much prayer for God’s understanding is necessary in order to make the right decision. He is able to change situations and also hearts. We should not underestimate the role of intense prayer.”

The power of prayer having been acknowledged, it is good that the author adds: “In difficult cases one should seek the advice of an experienced counsellor or a pastor.”

One does not have to agree with all the answers given here to understand the importance of the questions asked and the issues addressed. Volker Lamaack has achieved admirably what he has set out to do: To care pastorally for the fragile and criminally undervalued workforce of the maritime industry. The book is a credit to the chaplaincies that listen to seafarers’ pleas to be treated as fully human.

*H. F. la Grange*

Former General Secretary of ICMA

Anyone who has maintained a long-distance relationship will understand the difficulties associated with daily life and that basic communication between the partners can become increasingly difficult and frustrating. For seafarers this is compounded when you factor in the remoteness of their locations and lack of WIFI and phone connections. A conversation that would normally occur within minutes or over the period of a day becomes protracted and may take many days or weeks to complete.

«How to have a happy marriage» provides good sound advice on how to relate to your spouse. The book uses testimonies of seafarers to bring to light problems and provide suggested solutions to the topics being dis-

cussed and challenges the reader to consider the other person's perspective in their relationship. A good book to read whether at sea or not, which helps men and women understand each other's perspectives.

*John Lowry*  
Project Manager  
Seamen's Christian Friend Society

A life at sea is tough, especially as contract lengths are getting longer. Being married is a blessing when the relationship is good, but issues in a marriage can cause conflict and when this happens, time away on a ship is more difficult. In this book, Volker uses real testimonies to help us look at behaviours that can improve our marriages. Placing God in the centre of any situation makes it better!

*Andrew Dakin*  
Executive Director  
Naval & Military Bible Society (Member of ICMA)



# Introduction

Everyone longs to have a happy marriage. When falling in love, one has no doubt that the relationship will succeed and hold together for a lifetime. But the reality is often different. After a few years the warmest feelings cool down. The partner's weaknesses come more clearly to the fore. Different personalities, character traits, views and preferences can lead to numerous arguments. Some marriages are like a battlefield on which one inflicts painful emotional injuries upon the other. In other cases the marriage works outwardly, but the couple just live side by side. They grow apart while love no longer plays a role in their relationship.

For seafarers, the challenge of achieving a successful marriage is even greater. They spend more time on board than with their family. Training courses often have to be attended during their short vacation, so that they have only a few weeks with their wives and children each year. It is true that modern communications make it possible to speak to the partner on a regular basis. However, this cannot replace time spent together.

Divorce numbers are increasing in many countries. But God thinks of marriage as a lifelong connection between a woman and a man. Is it possible as a married couple to live together in love and loyalty for 50 years or even more? Yes, certainly it is!

However, what should you do if your marriage is in crisis? – that there are constant arguments with emotional injuries, that there is a lot of boredom, that adultery has become an option or already happened.

We all went to school and learned a lot there. Then we completed a professional training, specialised in one discipline. But where do we learn how a marriage can succeed?

There is no guarantee that a marriage will work or that a bad marriage will get better. At least not if one of the partners is no longer interested in playing his or her part. Yet in very many cases it is possible for a dead marriage to be revived, to overcome serious problems and even to rekindle deep love again.

If we engage with God's word, it begins by questioning and transforming us. As a result, things change positively in many aspects of life, including marriage. Even if either spouse is unwilling to work on attitudes and behaviour, it is worth improving the relationship with God. It is basically good to have the Lord in our heart, both when we are doing well and in trouble. He wants us to mature spiritually and learn, like Him, to love unconditionally even a "difficult" spouse.

How should you read this book? Study it, and use a pen and notepad. Underline words and phrases that are important to you. Write down things that you specifically want to change or put into practice. It is particularly important with this topic that theoretical knowledge leads to practical action. If possible, read it again with your partner.

In a happy marriage the book can help to make it even more mature. As with many other subjects, we are lifelong learners.

In a difficult marital situation this book will provide you with important insights that can lead to major improvement. It is possible that the marriage will become more beautiful than ever before.

If you are in love, it makes sense to prepare for the marriage well in advance. These overwhelming feelings will pass sooner or later.

If you are unattached, in an eventual love affair this book will have helped you beforehand with important insights.

The author of this volume has written another book, several Bible study correspondence courses and Gospel material, available free. Contact him with orders, comments or questions. Here you can download the material free of charge: <https://bit.ly/SCFSbooks>.

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# CHAPTER I

## Will love ever end?

*Love never ends!*  
*1 Corinthians 13:8*



John was on the airplane, flying at about 10,500 metres. He had served now for fourteen years as a seaman on cargo ships; the last two contracts as 4th engineer and now for the first time as 3rd engineer. John considered the promotion as only a small challenge and luckily the pay would be better.

It was night-time and most of the other passengers were sleeping. However, John could not find any rest. Leaving home for a long contract always made him homesick but his present sadness was overwhelming. He had never before said goodbye to his wife Cora with a violent argument, as had happened this time. But for several years now there had been tensions between them, which were getting more and more intense.

John's thoughts wandered back to the time when he had started dating Cora. It was like heaven on earth and both were absolutely convinced, that their love would last a lifetime. They got married after just one year and God gave them two children. Raffy, their son, was already eleven and Deb-

by just three. The memory of their earlier married happiness brought tears to John's eyes.

The aircraft landed in Hamburg five hours later. A driver from the shipping agency took him to the vessel. It was just before 12 noon and the crew came to the mess-room for lunch. What a big surprise and joy, when suddenly Jeff, an old friend he knew from a contract five years before, entered. Jeff, now a 2<sup>nd</sup> engineer, was his fitter when John had been an oiler. They fell into each other's arms and almost forgot to eat because of their excitement.

On their last ship together, they had had many conversations about God and spiritual questions.\* Jeff had enormous knowledge of the Bible and was a dear friend, like a fatherly pastor to John. His impact upon John's life was tremendous, bringing him into a very close relationship with Jesus. Could his loyal friend also help him with his marital problems? In the evening after work they met in Jeff's cabin. After talking for a while about the most important events of the past few years, Jeff asked his friend:

**Jeff:** How are you doing? You look a little sad.

**John:** I could be very happy and satisfied because I was promoted to 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer, but I am bothered about my marriage.

**Jeff:** If you want, please tell me.

**John:** I have been just a few hours on board, and you are again my councillor. Isn't it strange? As if there hadn't been five years in between. But honestly speaking, I am very grateful, that I am not alone with my problems.

**Jeff:** What has happened?

**John:** Our farewell at the airport was a disaster, really a catastrophe. The truth is that our marriage has been getting worse for two years now. I think it started as a slow process and now I'm not sure that I still love Cora.

**Jeff:** But in the beginning your love was very deep, wasn't it?

**John:** Sure! When we started dating and during the first part of our marriage it was like heaven on earth. We spent as much time as possible together and never argued. If there were some small disagreements, it didn't end up that way. It was not difficult for one of us to give in. We showed mutual appreciation and each wanted to see the other being happy. There were no doubts about being faithful to each other and our marriage lasting a lifetime.

---

\* These events are recorded in the book "THE PRISON AT SEA", written by the author of this book. If you are interested, feel free to order it.

We observed other couples. Some of them obviously had great difficulties and they were constantly quarrelling. Other marriages seemed to work reasonably, but they looked bored. Everyone went about their daily routines and the fire of real love seemed to have gone out. We never thought that this could happen to our relationship; we were convinced that we would do much better.

Jeff, do you think that real love can slowly get lost?

**Jeff:** One of the most amazing passages in the Bible about the subject of love is written in 1 Corinthians 13. Please read the whole chapter and you will discover a plain answer to your question.

**John:** If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never ends! But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

**Jeff:** Did you notice the answer to your question?

**John:** Sure, verse 8: *Love never ends!* Do you think that we haven't loved each other enough?

**Jeff:** For a good answer, we must take a closer look. The Greek language\* gives different terms for love: One is "Eros", which means "sexual love". It is a passionate longing for someone, sexual desire and eroticism. Does Eros play an important role in a healthy marriage?

**John:** For sure!

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\* The New Testament was originally written in Greek.

**Jeff:** Another term means interpersonal love. The Bible then speaks of “Philia” when it comes to loving, being kind and concerned. This happens for instance among friends and between parents and their children. Do you think that Philia is also found in marriage?

**John:** Certainly!

**Jeff:** You are right! When the Bible speaks of “Agape”, it means divine love. The origin is in God himself and means an unconditional love, which is sacrificing itself and even includes enemies. John, do you think that Agape is part of most marriages?

**John:** Well, I am not fully convinced. Maybe humans are not capable of divine love.

**Jeff:** You are right. However, God still expects his people to exercise Agape.

**John:** This is not fair! How can He expect us to bear a greater burden than we are able?

**Jeff:** Remember what we discussed five years ago, when we were considering many spiritual questions.

**John:** Sorry, I forget.

**Jeff:** Please take your Bible and read 1 John 4:16.

**John:** God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

**Jeff:** What answer does this give to your objection that God is asking too much of us?

**John:** Now I understand! If God is love and if He lives in His children, they don’t need to exercise their own Agape. They can ask God to provide them with His Agape because He is Agape.

**Jeff:** You are right. Do you remember the greatest commandment?

**John:** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind ... and love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-38)

**Jeff:** Exactly! In Matthew 5:44 Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

In order to love God, every fellow-man and even our enemies, Agape is necessary. Human Philia is too weak, because it depends on people’s willingness, capacity and the circumstances. We usually tend to love those who love us and who are sympathetic to us. We can’t and we don’t want to love those who have a difficult character in our eyes or who have treated us badly.

**John:** The sad thing is that I even need God’s help to love Cora.

**Jeff:** Me too, because my resources of love are limited as well! John, do you think you loved each other at the beginning of your relationship with Agape love?

**John:** Of course, there's no doubt about it! I thought of her day and night and I wouldn't have denied her any desire.

**Jeff:** Brother, you were in love with each other. Billions have experienced this kind of love, even without knowing God. The state of being in love is not necessarily Agape.

**John:** Are you sure?

**Jeff:** One point is that this kind of love can still be driven by egoistic motives. In this phase people unconsciously do a lot to win the other person. They don't necessarily act selflessly.

**John:** I understand. You serve her in order to get her, not because you have in principle a servant's heart.

**Jeff:** This is true, at least sometimes! Another point is that a man in love doesn't see his partner realistically. Was your judgment about Cora correct when you were in love with her?

**John:** I fear not, because I saw only her positive side.

**Jeff:** Yes, but is your present perception of her true?

**John:** Probably not.

**Jeff:** You are right again! A man in love has no realistic picture of his partner. It is too positive, because he is wearing rose-tinted glasses. On the other hand, your present judgement is also wrong. In a marriage crisis, we run the risk of overemphasizing our partner's weaknesses.

I am convinced that back when you had fallen in love it was with amazing emotions. However, you've certainly noticed that most loving relationships start this way, but after some time always change.

**John:** I've got it! 1 Corinthians 13:8 talks about Agape and not of being in love.

**Jeff:** Yes, because the fallen in love condition is a wonderful experience, but it always ceases, usually before two years pass. There are at least two options: either those emotions will change over time to become true, deep Agape love, or it remains immature.

**John:** Obviously Cora and I weren't successfully taking the necessary steps to let Agape grow.

**Jeff:** Don't lose hope. It's never too late to let love grow if God is in our midst.

**John:** How do you know all these things?

**Jeff:** Well, maybe God gave me the gift of advising, but I also attended several seminars and read a few helpful books about marriage counselling. I'm no professional, though I've gained some knowledge and experience.

**John:** I am very glad that we've met again!

**Jeff:** One of the helpful books I've read is *The Five Languages of Love*.<sup>1</sup> You can borrow it later from me. Gary Chapman, the author, speaks in chapter three about the "fallen in love" experience. Let me summarize some of his thoughts:

If a man has fallen in love he is convinced that his beloved is the most wonderful person who ever lived on earth. She seems to have almost no faults. And even if they have different opinions, they can easily solve any disagreement. Obvious facts, that he should pay attention to, seemingly play no role. For instance, that she has had several broken affairs before, that she is not able to get along with either her boss or her colleagues and that she has only a few friends. For a person who has not fallen in love, the alarm bells would ring loudly. But not for our man, because he is convinced that the previous partners of his beloved were all idiots and he will do much better.<sup>2</sup>

**John:** I had some of these feelings and thoughts about Cora in the beginning.

**Jeff:** This doesn't surprise me, because I used to be in that state with my wife Sarah. However, in such a state our brain isn't functioning normally. We refuse to recognize weaknesses in character and are unable to judge properly.

In addition, we humans are different from one another. When we are in love, we find our differences attractive and enriching. Later, they can disturb our everyday life.

**John:** You are right. I am rather a calm person and was very attracted to Cora's lively nature. Now I often feel frustrated by her loud, hectic and demanding behaviour.

**Jeff:** I suspect that Cora liked your quiet, balanced and constant approach.

**John:** Probably, but now when we have a quarrel, she accuses me of withdrawing instead of responding to what she says.

**Jeff:** The experience of being in love is wonderful, but firstly we need to understand that these feelings will gradually cease, and secondly, that our brain goes crazy. Because of this, experienced counsellors advise that we shouldn't get married too hastily, but only after finding good reasons for a lifelong relationship. For this task our brain must be working normally.

**John:** In summary, after the falling in love phase, Cora and I missed asking God for divine love.

**Jeff:** That's probably correct. Paul's statement about the never-ending love, written in 1 Corinthians 13:8, is certainly true, but it applies only to Agape and not to Eros, Philia or the condition of being in love.

**John:** I think I've messed everything up.

**Jeff:** Don't lose hope, because you aren't the first to improve himself by learning from his mistakes.

By the way, I have several sailors' testimonies of victories and failures in their marriages. If you want, I can give you one every now and then. We should be very grateful for their honest witnesses, because it isn't easy to talk about personal defeats. Those seamen give us the opportunity to learn from their good and bad experiences.

**John:** Sure, I would appreciate studying them in order to better myself.

**Jeff:** I suggest you start with the story of a Filipino captain. He wrote about his complicated family life, but God gave grace to positive changes and now he is even leading Bible groups on board.

### *Testimony of a Filipino captain*

I met my wife during college days at the Philippine Maritime Institute (PMI). We took part in Christian fellowships with our companions. After we graduated she worked in a brokerage and I joined a ship. I used to help my family financially and she her brother and sister. Then we decided to get married. I was a 3rd officer at that time, and we bought a house in a private subdivision.

Our quarrels started when my wife demanded that I should stop helping my nephews and nieces financially. I didn't listen to her, and even sent them to college. Then we had problems having a baby, so consulted fertility doctors and underwent medical treatment, but without success. Later we decided to adopt a baby girl, hoping that this would help our marriage and stop the quarrelling. But because of my wife's domineering attitude, nagging and blaming, our quarrels never stopped.

A few years later I found out that she was having an affair with her high school sweetheart. I separated from her, leaving our daughter with her. Later, I filed a case for the annulment of our marriage, but it was denied. Meanwhile, I got into relationships with a number of sexual partners and fell into drunkenness and an addiction to pornography.

Then my wife stopped seeing her lover and set up her own business. She started to talk to me, telling me sincerely that she didn't want to give me up. She asked me to give our marriage a second chance. She committed her life to Jesus again and to His service. However, I continued my bad lifestyle, even having a baby boy with another woman. She made my problems worse, demanding that I take responsibility for him on my own while she continued her way of life without any "baggage".

Later my mother died and until she was buried my wife comforted me, and we stayed together. I saw a great change in her behaviour. She even encouraged me to return to the Lord and I started attending church services together with my family.

By God's grace, I am now trying to live a life which is pleasant to the Lord by putting Him at the centre of our family. I was once a totally lost sinner, but now I am found again, receiving righteousness through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is He who has brought my family back together. If the Lord is the centre of our hearts, no matter how far away our families are and even during the darkest hours, He always gives us hope.

*“If you are silent, be silent out of love.  
If you speak, speak out of love.  
If you rebuke, rebuke for love.  
If you spare someone, spare for love.  
Let love be rooted in your heart  
and only good things can come out of it!”<sup>3</sup>  
Aurelius Augustinus*

### *Questions to think about*

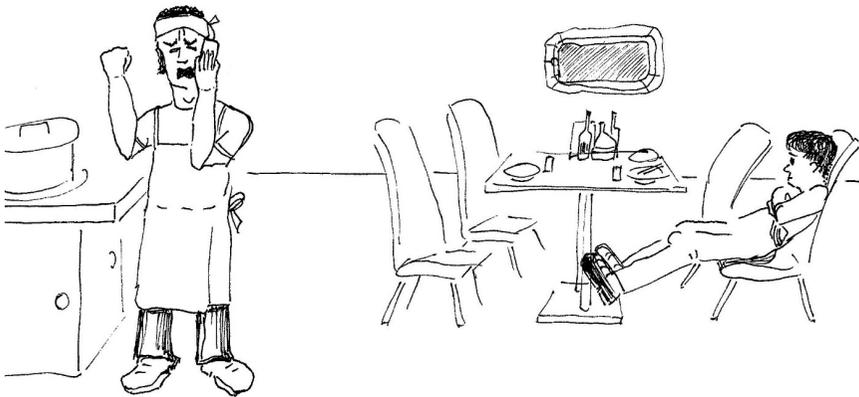
Here are some questions about what you have read. If you are not sure about an answer, just read the text again. You may also get in touch with the author of this book if you have further questions. Contact details are on the back cover.

- 1) What are the characteristics of:
  - a) Being in love; b) Eros; c) Philia; d) Agape?
- 2) What mistake can people make if they are in love?
- 3) Why is Agape the only love that is sure to last a lifetime?
- 4) What mistakes did the captain and his wife make in marriage and what good insights did they gain later?
- 5) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you want to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.

## CHAPTER 2

### Women and men use different codes

*Love does not dishonour others,  
it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered.  
1 Corinthians 13:5*



John had finished his dinner and was in the mess-room relaxing after his duty. The only other present person was Jack, the cook, obviously talking again to his wife Ella. Yesterday John had observed a similar conversation. Jack and Ella apparently had big marriage problems. They settled their conflicts noisily, even with the loudspeaker of the mobile at full volume. John thought of leaving but stayed out of curiosity because the pattern of their quarrels was similar to that of Cora and himself.

**Jack:** Why do you always say that I don't listen to you? I have called you almost every third day.

**Ella:** Yes, you have, but you don't care about my feelings.

**Jack:** That is not true at all. Day and night, I think about what I can do, so you don't always get upset.

**Ella:** I only get upset because you are so thoughtless.

**Jack:** Why are you permanently blaming me?

- Ella:** I'm not blaming you; I'm just telling you the truth.
- Jack:** The truth? You don't tell me the truth, you twist it!
- Ella:** You never listen properly.
- Jack:** I've told you many times that I listen to you very well. I always know in advance what you'll say next.
- Ella:** It is not enough just to hear the words; you should understand my emotions.
- Jack:** No man is able to understand a woman's feelings.
- Ella:** You men have no feelings at all. You always just want to be right.
- Jack:** I am right; at least most of the time!

Now John had heard enough, and he left the mess-room. The conversation was almost a copy of what he had listened to yesterday. The next phone call would probably be the same again. What made him most sad was that many of the arguments he had with his wife were like this scene. He went straight to Jeff's cabin.

- John:** Will the craziness of marriage never stop?
- Jeff:** Craziness of marriage! That's a funny expression. I guess I know what you mean by it.
- John:** It seems that in many marriages there are always the same discussions, always about identical conflicts. Accusations fly about differing views and character weaknesses. Everything turns in a circle and the longer it lasts, the faster it rotates. How can you stop this madness?
- Jeff:** A very good question! To get a change of attitude leading to a change in behaviour, many insights must be gained and put into practice, which takes time.
- John:** I recently read in an article that particularly in western countries, more and more people believe that there are no fundamental differences between women and men. What is your opinion?
- Jeff:** I am convinced that this view is wrong. God created women and men differently, which of course is good. A man falls in love with a woman because the female attracts him and vice versa. These differences do not exist only because girls and boys were brought up differently, but because God created them in distinctive ways.
- John:** Doesn't the upbringing of the child matter at all?
- Jeff:** Yes, of course it plays an important role. Nevertheless, the wise differences God has made between male and female must be considered. One of the reasons for the craziness of marriage is that this significant fact is not reflected enough.

**John:** I often don't understand why Cora attacks or criticizes me.

**Jeff:** That's the point. Your wife will probably say the same thing about you. There is a lack of mutual understanding of why the partner feels, thinks, judges, speaks and behaves differently. And because men and women are different from each other they often don't use the same codes when they want to express something. If neither partner is able to interpret the other's code, frustration is caused.

**John:** I'm afraid I haven't understood you.

**Jeff:** Let me give you an example: The telegraph was invented in the nineteenth century, making it possible to communicate over a long distance by using the Morse code. I am sure you know the Morse code for SOS.

**John:** Three times short, three times long, three times short.

**Jeff:** Correct! What was required for the signal SOS to be acted upon anywhere on the globe?

**John:** The code had to be unified worldwide.

**Jeff:** Exactly. For example, if your ship in Chinese waters is in distress and sends SOS, the Chinese must understand the code. If there were no global agreement and each country had its own system, there would be huge communication problems. Instead of "Save Our Souls", the Chinese coast guard might have understood: "Enjoy the sunset."

**John:** And what has this example to do with my marriage problems?

**Jeff:** Because men and women often feel, think, and speak differently, they occasionally use different codes when they express something to their partner. If the spouse has not learned to decode it, misunderstandings arise, which can lead to frustration and sometimes even to furious arguments.

**John:** Can you give me a practical example?

**Jeff:** You come home in the evening. Cora is frustrated because the children have been quarrelling for hours, the washing machine does not work, and she has not managed to cook the dinner on time. Cora sits down exhausted and tells you about her miserable day. Now you think that your chance has come: You give her some tips for bringing up children, look in the cupboard to get the instructions for fixing the washing machine and give her a long lecture on better time management.

Then Cora looks at you with big eyes, exclaims that you understand nothing and starts crying. You are frustrated about her negative reaction because you tried helping her as best you can. Finally, you leave the house irritated without saying goodbye and don't speak another word to her the whole evening.

**John:** You gave a good example. We have often had similar scenes at home, and it is obvious how complicated Cora is. I try to give solutions to her problems, and she reacts so negatively.

**Jeff:** What usually happens next?

**John:** Later, she accuses me of not understanding her and being a poor husband. Then I feel bad and unappreciated.

**Jeff:** Could it be that you both meant it well, but the situation still got out of control?

**John:** Maybe, but I don't know why!

**Jeff:** The answer is very simple. Neither of you understood the other's code. Listen: when Cora told you about her miserable day, she didn't do it to get advice from you. She may understand more about raising children than you do, she knows the place where the washing machine's instructions are located, and she is aware that she sometimes has trouble with time-management.

**John:** But why did she react so negatively?

**Jeff:** What she needed in this situation was love, expressed by simply listening to her, hugging her and showing her deep appreciation for her huge efforts for the family. She didn't want a lecture from you. You are not her superior or teacher, but her husband.

**John:** I always thought that she should appreciate my counsel.

**Jeff:** Sometimes counselling is requested and needed. But in this situation what you meant to be support was not helpful in Cora's eyes.

**John:** But how do I know what she needs?

**Jeff:** You must learn to understand her code. The SOS code is uniform worldwide. However, the codes that people are using among themselves differ a lot. If you want to improve your marriage, one step to take is the challenge of learning Cora's code.

**John:** How can I do that?

**Jeff:** First of all, by experience. There is a simple rule: if you make an obvious mistake or treat Cora unfairly and she responds negatively, it is normal. Ask her to forgive you. However, if you mean well and do your best and she still reacts negatively, it may be because you have ignored or misunderstood her personal code, expressed in words and behaviour.

**John:** It will probably take time for me to interpret her code.

**Jeff:** Sure, it seems to be a lifelong task. But you can expect improvements.

Secondly, talk to each other and ask Cora why she felt annoyed. A healthy marriage is shown by speaking to each other a lot. Sometimes women and men say exactly the same thing but mean some-

thing completely different. I give you a simple example: a couple stand in front of their closet. Each makes the following statement: "I have nothing to wear". She wants to express her desire to buy some new clothes and is frustrated when he counters that the closet is full.

In using the same expression he means that there are no clean clothes to wear. It is an unspoken request to her to do laundry today. Everyone looks at the situation from their own perspective, with different needs and desires. Can you think of another example?

**John:** Jack and Ella's phone-call is a good one. Ella claimed that Jack wasn't listening to her. Jack replied that this was not true since he calls regularly. What Ella probably meant was that he was thoughtless because he didn't understand her concerns. Jack, on the other hand, had expected her to be grateful to him for calling her so often. She was frustrated because he didn't notice her feelings. He was angry because she obviously didn't appreciate the fact that he spent a lot of money on phone cards, which were sometimes difficult to get on board.

**Jeff:** You have observed and analysed this well. That women and men think and feel differently and use diverse codes is one thing. However, the question is, what leads to the "craziness of marriage"?

**John:** I have noticed that Jack and Ella not only misunderstood each other but always assumed bad motives.

**Jeff:** Right. What you have seen is important. Of course, this has very negative consequences for every relationship.

**John:** Because it deeply hurts the feelings.

**Jeff:** Discussing things at a factual level and having different opinions is okay and sometimes necessary. However, if feelings are affected because bad intentions are supposed, then a relationship is at great risk, at least it is if it happens often.

Recently you asked me if love can slowly be lost. Yes, it can. If motives are permanently brought into question, if bad intentions are often assumed, if the behaviour is disrespectful and cynical, if the desire is to win a battle against the partner, the love will die over time.

**John:** To know that women and men use different codes can help to reduce the risk of assuming that the partner has negative intentions.

**Jeff:** This is true. Many marriage problems happen because of mutual misunderstanding and not because of evil motives.

**John:** I wish I had known that before.

**Jeff:** There is another important point to consider: The craziness of marriage is characterised by the fact that it seems to rotate in a circle,

running faster and faster. The pattern of discussions is often similar. If a wheel moves quickly in the wrong direction, it doesn't help if you speed up even more. You have to slow it down and reverse the direction.

**John:** Sure, but what shall I do practically?

**Jeff:** An important point is that you don't in every case take Cora's statements literally but try to understand what she wants to express with her heart, how she deeply feels. Try to understand her code. If you react in the way you always did, the wheel will spin faster. There are several ways to apply the brake. What do you suggest?

**John:** I have no idea.

**Jeff:** For example, if Cora accuses you of not being sensitive, don't respond with a justification, a counter-attack, changing the subject or by leaving angrily without a word. Responding in this way is destructive and worsens the situation. Instead, you could tell her that she might be right, although it wasn't your intention to hurt her. It may even be a good thing to apologize.

**John:** Are you sure?

**Jeff:** If you accidentally kick someone on the foot, you would ask for pardon. Why shouldn't you do the same if you've unintentionally hurt someone mentally?

**John:** Certainly, I make mistakes, but why should I apologize? I am convinced that her mistakes outweigh mine.

**Jeff:** Cora probably thinks the same. It's not about whose mistakes are bigger, it's about someone taking the first step. If you do that, it is like braking hard and the spinning wheel of marriage craziness suddenly stops. If you surprise Cora by not defending yourself or not starting a counter-attack, the wheel will immediately turn slower. If you then ask for forgiveness, if you tell her that you love her despite the quarrels and that you desire to understand her better, the wheel will stop turning. Yes, even start moving slowly in the right direction.

**John:** But it should be fair! It's not only about my mistakes and my share in our marriage problems. Cora needs also to recognise her faults.

**Jeff:** The safest way to make sure she acknowledges her mistakes is when you take the first step. If you defend yourself, she will probably do the same. If you get loud, she will become even louder. If you start a counter-attack, hers is likely to be more violent. If you run away without a word, her anger at you will increase. However, if you signal to Cora that you desire to understand her, you will reach her heart, which will certainly change her negative attitude towards you. If you ask her to forgive you, it is likely that she will

start thinking about her share in the marriage difficulties. If she senses that you are trying to decrypt her code, it will most likely work miracles.

**John:** You demand a lot from me.

**Jeff:** Please turn again to 1 Corinthians 13 and read verses 4 to 8.

**John:** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

*It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never ends!*

**Jeff:** It's all about real love. If I love and consider what 1 Corinthians 13 says, I will realise that changes need to start with me. There are at least two reasons for this: first, there is only one person worldwide that I have unlimited influence over, namely me. I can change my behaviour even if my counterpart is not yet ready to think about her own mistakes. Second, it is generally good to take the first step. My willingness to recognise faults, to ask forgiveness, to consider the needs of the other and to change my attitude towards her usually works wonders.

**John:** I think it is typical of a man to think that arguments will achieve a positive result. However, in conflicts with the spouse, touching the heart seems to be a much better way to win her.

**Jeff:** Absolutely! By the way, here is another testimony of a seaman. Please read it later in your cabin and try to benefit from both his good and bad experiences. Good night and sleep well.

### *Testimony of a cook*

Our marriage has been a challenge for us from the start. I had wrong principles and wanted to escape my obligations to my parents through marriage. I desired a wife to meet my needs and take care of the house and our son. As a husband, I was insensitive to her, did not appreciate communication and hardly spent any quality time with my wife and son. The time on board was more important to me than at home and I rarely called my family. When I was under pressure, I easily lost my temper, shouted and blamed her. My behaviour and bad habits caused my wife to fall into deep depression, frustration, and anxiety. My behaviour also negatively affected the health of our son. Our life was characterised by wrong decisions and broken emotions.

I gave my life to Jesus nine years after our wedding. Only then did I realize that if I want to have a successful marriage, I have to follow God's principles. I brought all my bad decisions and conflicts to Jesus because He is the Lord of restoration. God taught me to see my wife from the divine perspective. She is a living spirit with a soul in a human body; a creation highly valued by God, and who needs His love and forgiveness, like me. My duty to the Lord is to commit my love and life to her. I even realised that the condition of my relationship with God would reflect on our marriage and family.

The Lord has blessed us with many physical and spiritual gifts. These include His love, salvation, grace, peace, and untiring work for our benefit.

*“The happiness of marriage does not depend so much on whether I have the right spouse, but whether I am the right spouse.”<sup>4</sup>*

*Arno Backhaus*

### *Questions to think about*

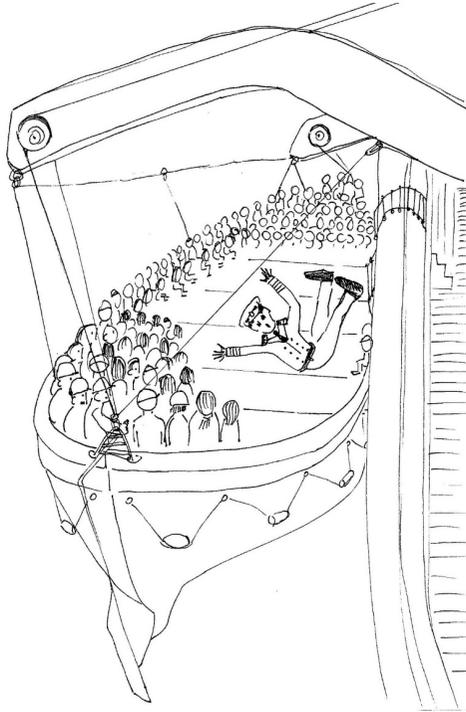
- 1) Why do men and women often use different codes when communicating with each other?
- 2) How can you improve your understanding of your partner's code? Think of some practical steps.
- 3) What are some of the points which can lead to the “circle of craziness of marriage”? How can you avoid them?
- 4) What do you learn from the cook's testimony?
- 5) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you want to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.

## CHAPTER 3

### Take responsibility for your marriage

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

*Ephesians 5:21*



John was sitting with Jeff in his cabin watching an old television report about the sinking of the cruise-ship Costa Concordia in 2012. The ship's captain Francesco Schettino is said to be responsible for the greatest catastrophe in the history of Italian shipping, and the careless killing of 32 people.

In the trial he was accused of approaching too close to an island, arranging for the ship's evacuation too late after contact with a rock, and then saving only himself, leaving the passengers to their outcome. He is said to have refused the Coast Guard's requests to return to the ship. Several unfortunate public statements made Schettino unpopular. He claimed that he did not intentionally leave the damaged ship, as he did, in view of the passengers, but instead "fell into a lifeboat". He did not see himself as the person chiefly responsible for the disaster. Only his officers, who had reacted wrongly to orders, were to blame.

**John:** The captain's behaviour was terrible.

**Jeff:** A good lesson in how not to live up to your responsibilities.

**John:** That is true.

**Jeff:** By the way, did you read the testimony from the cook?

**John:** Sure. The following sentence is important to me: "I realised that if I want to have a successful marriage, I have to follow God's principles. I brought all my bad decisions and conflicts to Jesus."

**Jeff:** After nine years of marriage, he finally took responsibility for his behaviour and changed his attitude.

**John:** I suggest that the subject of "taking responsibility" is very important in marriage.

**Jeff:** Absolutely.

**John:** By the way, we recently talked about the differences between women and men. Do they also have different roles and responsibilities in marriage?

**Jeff:** Ephesians 5:21-33 contain important statements on this question. We can now talk about some of them. Please read verse 21.

**John:** Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

**Jeff:** A little later Paul writes about the man's leadership responsibility in marriage. However, it is interesting that the apostle begins the section with this statement. Can you imagine why?

**John:** Since Paul speaks of mutual submission here, he certainly wants to emphasise that the man's leadership responsibility is not about rule and abuse of power. He is not the boss and she just the servant.

**Jeff:** You are right. Please read verse 25.

**John:** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Jeff, about which church did Paul talk?

**Jeff:** Not any particular organisation. While the apostle lived, there was no nationwide or worldwide organised church, but only local Christian fellowships, as here in Ephesus. Paul spoke of believers who belong to Jesus. It is not about denominations.

Have you noticed how remarkable his statement is?

**John:** The measure of a husband's love for his wife is Jesus' love for us. Paul meant certainly the Agape love.

**Jeff:** Yes, it requires that you should love Cora and I Sarah actually unconditionally. Can you imagine this?

**John:** When I first dated Cora and was in love with her – certainly yes! But after years of quarrelling, debating and misunderstanding, I fear not anymore.

**Jeff:** What was the greatest expression of Jesus' love for us?

**John:** Innocent as He was, He gave His life in order to save us.

**Jeff:** That's the standard! Although captain Francesco Schettino had caused the ship's stranding, he abandoned his passengers and "fell" into a lifeboat to save himself. Later he blamed others for the disaster. We husbands need a completely different attitude. Our task is to learn to love unconditionally and take responsibility for our wife and family. If necessary, we must be ready to save our wife's life, even if we perish doing so.

**John:** Loving unconditionally is a huge challenge. How can you love when the partner does not seem lovable anymore and feelings disappear?

**Jeff:** There are a few things to consider. First, I am convinced that God sometimes gives us tasks that we cannot cope with. Can you imagine why?

**John:** So that we understand that we can't do it alone but need His help.

**Jeff:** You are right. Second: Jesus demonstrated His love by dying for us sinners. Are sinners lovable?

**John:** Rather not.

**Jeff:** Please read Matthew 5:46-48, in which Jesus gives His disciples an important lecture.

**John:** "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

**Jeff:** There is a different standard for us as children of God than for people who do not belong to Jesus. This should not surprise us since we belong to God's kingdom.

**Third: Love can be connected to feelings, which is of course nice, but it doesn't have to be.** God's commandment is that we love everyone, including those we dislike, even our enemies. Positive feelings hardly matter in those cases.

**John:** I remember that we have already talked about it.

**Jeff:** Fourthly, with regard to our spouse, the goal is of course to refresh deep feelings of love. I am convinced that this is possible. After all, we once had great emotions towards our partner, and they can be renewed.

**John:** How?

**Jeff:** There are concrete reasons why love has cooled down. When we recognize the causes and work on them, feelings usually come back over time. It is even possible that they will become deeper and more mature than before.

Where does the ever faster-spinning wheel of marriage craziness get the energy to keep in motion?

**John:** If you constantly misunderstand or ignore you partner's code.

**Jeff:** Yes, this is one possible reason. Failure to decrypt the code causes frustration for the spouse and often triggers bad words and negative behaviour. What else?

**John:** It includes not taking statements in every case literally but trying to understand what the partner wants to express, what the feelings are.

**Jeff:** Good.

**John:** If motives are permanently in question, if bad intentions are assumed, if behaviour is disrespectful, cynical, and bitter, positive feelings are destroyed.

**Jeff:** Correct.

**John:** If the desire is to win a battle against the partner instead of winning the heart.

**Jeff:** Absolutely. Can you think of anything else?

**John:** If you don't admit your mistakes, but act as Captain Schettino did.

**Jeff:** That means?

**John:** If you don't take responsibility for your sins, justify yourself and instead blame your spouse.

**Jeff:** Correct. I would like to add another point: Each of us behaves in ways which irritates our partner. I don't talk about sins, but about habits and character traits. In some cases, you know exactly what disturbs your spouse, but have no desire to change. Although it would be possible without much effort, you don't do it, out of either pride or carelessness. You insist on your right to do so or to be so. You point out that your partner also behaves in difficult ways, and refuse to play your part.

**John:** Taking the first step seems to be one of the ways to achieve improvements.

**Jeff:** Yes, or even several first steps until the partner reacts positively. One step is often not enough. But of course, for every destination you want to reach, you have to start with step number one. Reviving a

marriage is usually like a marathon, not a sprint. You shouldn't give up quickly; patience and perseverance are necessary.

**John:** I understand. In the beginning of a process of change it is not about strong feelings, but about making up your mind to do what is necessary.

**Jeff:** Yes, we talk about making decisions. And you know what? – It's exactly what the Bible calls love. Love is also expressed by doing or refraining from doing something good for the partner, something our spouse loves or benefits from, even if there are no strong feelings at the moment. It means taking responsibility for the success or restoration of the marriage.

Certainly, both partners should be concerned for their marriage. However, because of his leadership responsibility, the husband in particular should begin the process of change if necessary.

**John:** Like in the military. The commandant shouts first: stop, then: turn left and march in a new direction.

**Jeff:** No John, not at all like the military. The husband does not shout commands, but sets the new direction by leading the way, by setting a good example.

**John:** It was just a joke. However, are you sure that changes will always be possible?

**Jeff:** Not all the time, but often. There are sometimes very difficult situations, such as violence against the partner or children, sexual abuse, or when mental sickness is involved, or permanent marital unfaithfulness or various forms of addiction, for example alcohol, intoxicants, or gambling. In these cases, professional help is necessary. But we are talking now about millions of marriages that are not going well, but where big positive changes are possible. As I said, often one must just take the first step.

**John:** I understand.

**Jeff:** As already said, the ever faster-spinning wheel of marriage craziness is characterised by the fact that the same patterns of behaviour always occur: the same arguments, aggressive verbal exchanges, accusations, blame shifting and other destructive reactions. Remember the two telephone calls between Ella and Jack you have heard. Can you imagine what the beginning of a turn could be?

**John:** Probably if one of the two does not react as usual.

**Jeff:** Yes, and how else?

**John:** If one partner does not respond to an attack with a counter-attack, to a bad word with an insult, or to a misunderstanding with an accusation.

**Jeff:** Exactly! That would be great, but it's not enough. One should not only avoid negative reactions, but consciously bring about a positive turn. Can you think of examples?

**John:** For instance, if a partner answers an attack with "I understand darling, that I hurt or misunderstood you. That was not my intention. Please forgive and help me to do better next time."

**Jeff:** That will surprise the partner because suddenly the reaction is completely different, namely positive. Can you think of another example?

**John:** "I am aware that our marriage has been in crisis for a long time, but I wholeheartedly desire a change, because I still love you. What can I do to make things better?"

**Jeff:** Very good suggestion! It is always helpful to ask the partner's opinion instead of always trying to express your own view. And then of course it is important to listen carefully and to show that you value the other's opinion, even if you don't yet fully understand or completely agree. It may be tempting immediately to comment or question, or to justify yourself. But you should avoid that. It is about showing your spouse that you want to work honestly on yourself. This is surprising, because up to now you have always required changes from the other.

Any other idea for a helpful reaction?

**John:** If you have committed particular sins, you should ask your partner for forgiveness.

**Jeff:** Yes. How does that help to slow down the wheel of marriage craziness?

**John:** You do something unexpected again. Instead of justifying your mistakes and sins, you admit them and ask for pardon. Instead of pointing out the other's faults, you drop your pride and take the first step.

**Jeff:** Again, a very good suggestion. Turning away pride and making yourself vulnerable often has a great positive impact. Instead of attacking the other, you make yourself defenceless.

How does this reveal leadership responsibility that you as a man should exercise? After all, you make yourself vulnerable and you don't look like someone who sets the direction.

**John:** I am not sure. Shouldn't a leader appear strong?

**Jeff:** Sometimes yes, but sometimes seeming weak is the real strength. Think of an example where Jesus, the Lord of Lords, looked weak.

**John:** When he took on a slave's service and washed His disciples' feet.

**Jeff:** And how did he show leadership responsibility and set the direction?

**John:** Afterwards, He said that He had given them an example to follow.

**Jeff:** Correct. A good leader sets the direction by explaining it so that everyone can understand it. A better leader motivates his people through his words and enables them to fully achieve the goal. An excellent leader is characterised by the fact that he also sets, whenever possible, a good example.

Another model of where Jesus showed great strength through apparent weakness and thereby set the direction is found in Philipians 2:5-11. Please read this text.

**John:** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Jeff:** A victory through both humble and strong leadership.

Do you know the movie “Fireproof – never leave your partner behind”?

**John:** Not yet.

**Jeff:** It sets a great example of how changing attitude and behaviour can not only save a marriage but also rekindle true love. Let me give you a summary:

Married couple Caleb, a fire captain, and Catherine, a hospital administrator, are experiencing marital difficulties. At work, Caleb underlines the importance of never leaving one’s partner behind, but at home he and Catherine argue constantly. Catherine accuses Caleb of being selfish because he puts his desire for a \$24,000 boat before paying for her mother’s medical equipment and bills. She is also frustrated about his habitual viewing of internet pornography. Caleb feels unappreciated and undervalued. Their constant arguing reaches a point where Catherine demands a divorce, to which Caleb agrees.

Caleb’s best friend, Michael, and his father John, persuade him to suspend divorce proceedings. His father gets him to try “The Love Dare”, a 40-day challenge for improving one’s marriage by changing the way one treats one’s spouse. It is about taking one small step

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\* <http://www.kendrickbrotherscatalogue.com/fireproof>

every day by doing something positive for your partner. Caleb agrees, though he decides not to tell Catherine. At the hospital where she works, Catherine has been openly flirting with Dr. Gavin.

Caleb begins “The Love Dare” half-heartedly, viewing the tasks as more of a checklist, while nurses at Catherine’s hospital warn her not to trust him, as they think he is trying to get a better divorce settlement. With encouragement from his father and Michael, Caleb continues, though Catherine rejects his affections and grows closer to Dr. Keller. Finding Catherine unmoved, Caleb is comforted by his father. Caleb gets injured on the job and goes to the hospital where his wife works. While treating him, Dr. Keller discovers that Catherine is married and Caleb is her spouse; nevertheless, he continues to offer her his affections.

Caleb continues “The Love Dare” with renewed faith, even destroying the home computer to distance himself from pornographic addictions and temptations. However, Catherine gives him an envelope with a petition for divorce, at which Caleb is heartbroken.

Then Catherine discovers that her mother’s medical equipment costs have been paid anonymously and believes it was Dr. Keller, bringing them even closer.

Catherine confronts Caleb after discovering his “Love Dare” journal, and he tells her that he has completed the challenge but is still following its guidelines. Catherine says she needs time to reconsider the divorce. She later discovers that Caleb used his savings to pay for her mother’s medical equipment; and out of the total cost of \$24,000, Dr. Keller had donated only \$300. Moved by Caleb’s selflessness, Catherine is reconciled with him. Caleb discovers that his mother, whom he has treated poorly, had completed “The Love Dare” for his father, rather than vice versa as Caleb had originally thought. The film ends with Caleb and Catherine renewing their wedding vows.<sup>5</sup>

**John:** I would like to watch this movie.

**Jeff:** Maybe you should, and afterwards for a second time with Cora.

It is particularly impressive that Caleb, not at the beginning but later, took great efforts to win Catherine back. He had to endure a long period of frustration when Catherine didn’t trust his motives and kept rejecting his efforts. But his not giving up and fighting for Catherine and their marriage led to a change.

It is also important to notice that Caleb turned to Jesus through the testimonies of his parents and friend Michael. They also struggled in prayer to preserve the marriage, which the Lord finally heard. This is certainly very important as well. It is God’s desire that

marriages succeed. Ask him daily to improve your relationship and to give you wisdom and perseverance.

**John:** Caleb had taken responsibility for being a poor and selfish husband by asking forgiveness from both God and Catherine. And he had taken responsibility for the preservation of their marriage, having fought with great efforts despite setbacks over a long period, unlike Captain Schettino.

**Jeff:** Of course, you cannot compare the two cases, except that it is about taking responsibility. Doing this in life is fundamentally important, but it is particularly true in marriage. After all, marriage is sacred because a promise to be faithful is made before God and people, by which a lifelong covenant is established.

Here is another testimony of a sailor from my folder. See you tomorrow.

### *Testimony of Danilo, a Filipino sailor*

My wife is my best friend! She was my classmate during college. We had the same courses and after graduating we worked for the same company. She knew my past girlfriends and I asked for her advice when I sought a new relationship. I shared with her my frustrations, problems, breakups, and a lot more and she was always there for me.

I pleaded with God to give me the right partner, but it always ended up in heartbreak. Finally, I decided to stop looking and pursuing. I concluded that it is better to wait patiently for God's perfect timing, instead of exhausting myself.

I shared the Gospel with my friend and invited her to attend our church services with me. She gladly accepted my invitation and turned to Christ eventually. We even joined the music ministry. At that time we were just buddies, until one of our colleagues advised me to take care of her if she was my friend. This removed a cover from my eyes, and I was able to appreciate her character. I discovered her true beauty, kindness and cheerfulness. When I courted her, she accepted me, and we got married.

Once, my friends invited us into their apartment. Not mindful of my words, I made a critical observation about my wife. Though she heard it, she did not react or burst into anger, but kept calm. I concluded that everything was okay. But when we were alone, she cried. She told me that it's not right to criticise her in front of my friends. Again, I saw her true personality: caring, wise and selfless. She didn't want to blame me in front of my buddies, yet I put her into that position. She said that if

there's a problem between us, we must talk and pray about it. I promised her that I would not do it again.

Then I decided to work as a sailor. The early days were particularly difficult, because my colleagues didn't treat me well and my wife was not there to comfort, hug and love me. However, I did not worry about myself, but about my wife and kids at home. During that time, when the internet was not yet available, we expected letters when we got into port, or looked for a telephone booth. Then again, I learned how hardworking, trustworthy, faithful, and wise she was. I had left her alone and she had to take on both motherly and fatherly responsibility for our three children in addition to her regular work in the office. She even put many pictures of me on the walls of our apartment, so that the kids, while growing up, were always able to see my face. She told them about me and why I needed to work on board. She explained my expectations about their behaviour during my absence. My wife trained them to pray for me before sleep. She encouraged them to write notes and draw pictures in order to e-mail them to me.

I spent a lot of money to communicate with my family because I saw the importance of being with my wife and children. I kept the fire between my wife and me burning by expressing my love and acknowledging her affection towards me. The more years we spend together, the more I see how wonderful my wife is. I truly thank God for her. We are a happy and blessed family, despite the hardships and family problems we have encountered. This is not because we deserve it, but because of God's grace.

Never think that because you earn more money than your wife you can put her down. Don't underestimate her because she is a woman. Give your spouse importance and express your appreciation. Let her express her feelings and ideas, and make decisions together. She must be your partner, and deserves respect. The more you suppress her, the worse your relationship becomes. We should treat our spouse as Jesus treats the church, even being willing to die for His people.

In our marriage, we put Jesus in the centre of our relationship. It's like a triangle: one line represents Jesus, the others the two of us. If only my wife and I are attached, we are weak. But if we connect God to one end of each, we form a triangle, which is much stronger and leaves no open end. Whatever the hardship, problem or situation may be, we can get through it, because of Jesus.

*"We often have little influence on what happens to us,  
but we certainly have a choice of what happens within us."*

*Evelyn Underhill*

*Questions to think about*

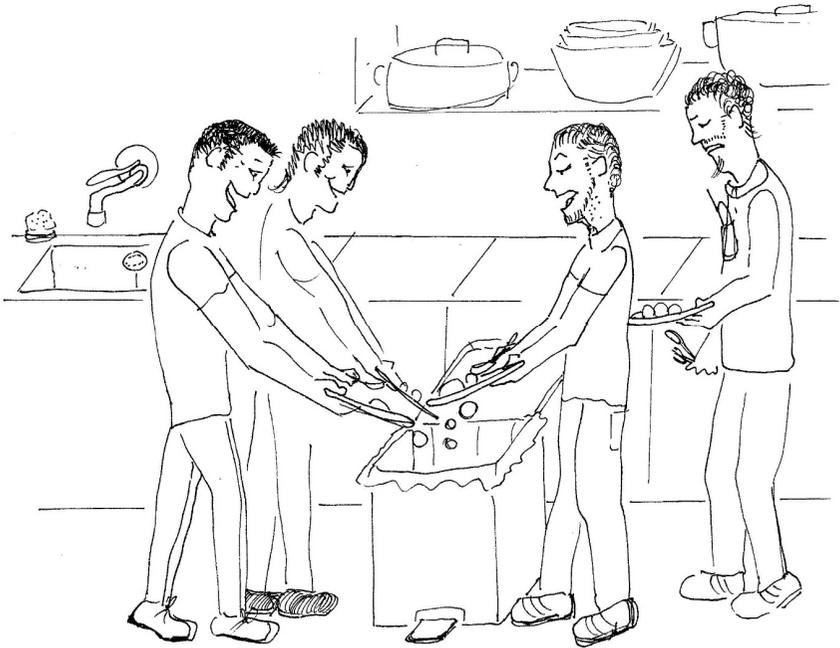
- 1) Think about examples of how positive leadership responsibility can be exercised in marriage.
- 2) Loving unconditionally is a huge challenge. How can you love when the partner does not seem lovable anymore and the feelings have disappeared?
- 3) What impressed you about Danilo's testimony?
- 4) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you want to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.



## CHAPTER 4

### Love and respect

*Better to live in a desert  
than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife.  
Proverbs 21:19*



The position of a chief cook on board is not easy, because many people like to complain about food. Usually nowadays meals for several different nationalities have to be prepared. Even ships with large crews often have only one mess-man to assist the cook. The budget is limited, but extra portions are sometimes demanded. For long voyages provisions must be carefully calculated.

Their new cook Jose had been on board for only three weeks. It was his first ship in this position after sailing as a steward. Everyone soon noticed that he was a friendly man, but a bit shy and insecure.

John observed that Richard, the bosun, had a lot of fun unsettling Jose. He also managed to persuade some other crew members to join him making Jose the target of their common bad attacks. Jose was trying hard to do his job well, but not always successfully; after all, he was still inexperienced. On one occasion the lunch break had begun but it was ten minutes before the meal was ready. Another time he had over-salted the soup. On each occasion Richard complained loudly so that everyone could hear, and got amusement from Jose's embarrassed apologies. He often criticised the food without cause.

One day Richard and his companions agreed upon a particularly dirty behaviour. Seven of them each filled his plate, took only one bite, and acted as if he were about to vomit. Then they took their full dishes, emptied them into the garbage-bin, and left the room complaining loudly. You could hear them laughing while going up to their cabins. John later found Jose in the galley in tears and could hardly comfort him. Afterwards he went to Jeff's cabin.

**Jeff:** I will talk to Richard about his behaviour tomorrow and, if he is stubborn, even with the captain.

**John:** I don't understand why he is so cruel. We should all respect each other.

**Jeff:** To be respected is important for everyone; by the way, also in marriage.

**John:** Sure.

**Jeff:** Recently I read in an article that research has shown that it is especially important in the eyes of husbands that their wives respect them.

**John:** Isn't it important to women as well?

**Jeff:** Of course, it is also significant for them. Even so, if you ask wives whether it is more important for them to be loved totally or to be unconditionally respected, most will say that love is more essential to them. On the other hand, the majority of men would choose respect, although love still has a high priority.

**John:** Does this have to do with the natural differences between man and woman?

**Jeff:** I think so. It is also what God says in the Bible. He commanded husbands to love their wives as Christ loved his church. He loves sinners unconditionally. Jesus did so even by sacrificing His life for their

sakes. In the same way husbands should love their wives whether they sometimes consider it difficult or not. If they do, they will satisfy their wife's most important need, which is certainly necessary for a healthy marriage.

**John:** Interesting. Does God also require wives to meet their husband's most important need to feel respected?

**Jeff:** Guess what? - read Ephesians 5:33.

**John:** However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

**Jeff:** As the husband must love his wife, even if he believes that she does not deserve it, the wife must respect her husband under all circumstances. We have already mentioned the reason, namely ...

**John:** ... to meet each other's greatest need.

**Jeff:** Exactly. By the way, this is one of the reasons for major problems in some marriages. The partners make their love or their respect dependent on conditions: he makes his love dependent on her behaviour and she makes her respect dependent on his conduct. But if we would always obey God's instructions, lots of marriage problems would not exist.

Unfortunately, there are voices, particularly in western society, that tell wives: "Don't show your husbands too much respect, because they don't deserve it. They treat you badly and abuse you. If you give them your little finger, they demand your whole arm."

That may be true of a small number of men, but when it comes to the majority, it is certainly not. A husband of general goodwill will serve his wife and, if necessary, die for her. It is interesting to note that the Bible does not expect wives to give up their lives for their husbands.

**John:** Where does the Bible speak of a husband's leadership responsibility?

**Jeff:** Just a few verses before. Please read Ephesians 5:21-24.

**John:** Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

**Jeff:** We have already spoken about the point that husbands should certainly not exercise a hard rule over their wives. Therefore, the passage begins by demanding mutual submission. The man should not exercise power but take responsibility for both marriage and family. Leadership with a humble heart is required, as Jesus exercised it. A husband who loves his wife as Christ loved the church will always

keep an eye on her needs and, if possible, meet them and serve her. When some husbands use this Bible word to justify their abuse of power, taking advantage of their physical superiority, they oppose God's will.

**John:** I understand. A marriage is not a company with a boss who issues commands, or a military unit in which a superior shouts orders. Are there any other Bible passages about love and respect?

**Jeff:** Sure. Please read Colossians 3:19.

**John:** Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Women are certainly worried that some men could take advantage of their position to misuse their authority. Here the Bible clearly says it must not happen.

**Jeff:** 1. Peter 3:7 tells husbands how to treat their wives.

**John:** Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

**Jeff:** Men should treat their wives with respect as well. Prayer plays an important role in a Christian marriage. How should a couple become one in prayer before God if the husband dominates his wife?

Another instruction to wives is given in 1. Peter 3:1.

**John:** Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives.

**Jeff:** A disrespectful wife will hardly be able to win her unbelieving husband for Jesus. Likewise, husbands should realise that lack of love can be a huge hindrance to their unbelieving wives' coming to trust in Jesus.

Perhaps you know the following saying: "As you shout into the forest, it echoes out again." It is important for both partners to understand that each one's behaviour will cause a corresponding echo. When a husband feels disrespected, he finds it especially difficult to love his wife. This is probably one reason why the woman was given the command to respect her husband. And when a woman feels unloved, it is particularly difficult for her to respect him. Husbands were certainly given the command to love their wives for this very purpose. If everyone gives partners what they need, a positive response is likely.

**John:** And if both refuse to show the partner the necessary respect and love, then it is to be expected that the craziness of marriage will spin faster again. The refusal of a husband to love his wife will hinder her

wish to respect him. If he feels less respected, it will result in less love, which again leads to less respect ... It's like a downward spiral.

**Jeff:** Some wives wonder whether their husband loves them nearly as much as they love him. If he seems unloving to her, she reacts negatively. In her eyes, he needs to become more sensitive and caring. Unfortunately, women often try to get their husbands to love them more through complaints and criticism, but that turns out to be fruitless. As a result, the husband does not feel respected. So he decides to get his wife to be more respectful by behaving lovelessly. Of course this is also useless.

**John:** It gets crazy when we do the same thing over and over again, even though it doesn't do any good. But that's exactly what often happens in marriages. I know that from my own experience.

I suspect that some wives refuse to accept the husband's responsibility for leadership in marriage because they are afraid of not being equally valued.

**Jeff:** It's not about the question of value at all. In God's eyes, all people are equally valuable. Nevertheless, the Bible says that citizens of a country should submit to their authorities, workers to their employers, members of a Christian fellowship to their leaders and children to their parents.

Please read Galatians 3:27-29.

**John:** For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**Jeff:** Do you understand what Paul points out and how to interpret this passage?

**John:** In belonging to the Kingdom of God, our origin, gender, and other points do not matter at all. Everyone who believes and is baptised is God's child.

**Jeff:** This is true. Everyone's worth is equal and there are no differences in what Jesus has promised to his followers. However, the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife differ.

The wife wants to be valued by her husband like a princess. She wants to be the most important person of all to him. The prince goes to battle for the princess and not the other way around. She longs to be honoured, respected, and valued as his precious counterpart.

According to the biblical order, the husband can be seen as "the first among equals". This means for example, that he is the first to be called upon to take care and protect the family and, if necessary, to

give up his life. In a sinking ship, when the lifeboats are let into the water, it is not without reason that the command is given: "Women and children first!"

Her respect and regard motivates him not because he is arrogant, but because God created him that way. A man with good will and a clear mind knows that his role is not a privilege but an obligation. On the other hand, the woman longs to be the most important person to her husband. Nothing inspires her more than that. This is not self-centred; God put it in her nature.

**John:** Honestly, when Cora treats me disrespectfully, blaming me, constantly contradicting, and using words that hurt me, I feel she doesn't deserve my full love.

**Jeff:** Certainly it is necessary to talk about wrong behaviour on both sides. Another day we can discuss the question of how to act correctly, when the spouse obviously doesn't. But this is a big subject; for it we need more time.

However, both partners must understand that the wife does not have to earn the love of her husband, nor the husband the respect of his wife. In your job you earn your salary through hard work. But this does not apply to a marriage. It is not a question of first demanding something from the partner before you accept your responsibility. As discussed recently, if both are willing to take the right steps, behaving as the Bible demands, regardless of whether the partner always behaves correctly, the wheel of marriage craziness will not start running.

**John:** What if only one partner is willing to behave properly?

**Jeff:** Then he or she should start doing it. Yes, it can even mean that many first steps have to be taken. The partner's wrong behaviour should not cause a right-thinking Christian to act falsely as well. The whole thing is not just about the spouse, but also about Jesus. Obeying Him is not conditional.

**John:** But then one of the partners could take advantage of the other. Think of Richard; his disrespectful behaviour cannot be accepted. Far less should it happen in marriage.

**Jeff:** You are right. Not only does he lack respect, but oppresses and motivates others to do the same. As I have said before, I will talk to him tomorrow.

As for problems in marriages, patience is often needed in order to finally win the partner. But in some cases, a clear stop sign must be held up. Each situation must be judged for what it is. Much prayer for God's understanding is necessary in order to make the right decision. He is able to change situations and also hearts. We should not

underestimate the role of intense prayer.

In difficult cases one should seek the advice of an experienced counsellor or a pastor. But we'd better talk about the complicated situations another time. It's late, and tomorrow duty starts early. Here is another testimony from a seaman. It is from a bosun, seemingly with a better character than Richard's. Tell me later what you've picked up, and sleep well.

*Testimony of Bryan de Leon, a bosun from the Philippines*

I have been at sea for 19 years. At the age of 23 we got married. We have a happy marriage, though we have experienced challenges, ups and downs. When I am on vacation with my family, we spend time with each other, especially at meals, during trips and while we are praying together.

My wife did a good job raising up our kids, even though she was still working as a nurse. When I am on board, I keep in close contact with my family. In the early years by writing letters and now through the internet. Being connected in real time is a big help to us seafarers. Then I tell my children to behave well and to pray always.

To have a happy marriage is a gift. When my wife is sometimes upset, I try to comfort her as soon as possible. Marriage is sacred in God's eyes. I always tried to be faithful to my wife when I was at sea, and also when going ashore. Faith is most important. In addition, trusting my wife and loving each other in good and bad times. Negative things should be left behind and not bother our relationship for long, because each new day gives new opportunities.

I sometimes tell my wife that we can argue about anything, but not about money, because it is nothing, just material. It is important that we love and understand each other. Money comes and goes, and we shouldn't do the same thing as many seafarers do, arguing over money questions with their spouses all the time.

I also try to be a good husband in order to be a model for my sons, so that they can follow my example. I ask God to give each of them a good wife. In summary, I want to say that in marriage, communication with your wife is important, also prayer and really loving and supporting each other.

*"A wife who respects her husband doesn't become his doormat.*

*On the contrary, he's rolling out the red carpet for her."<sup>6</sup>*

*Emmerson Eggerichs*

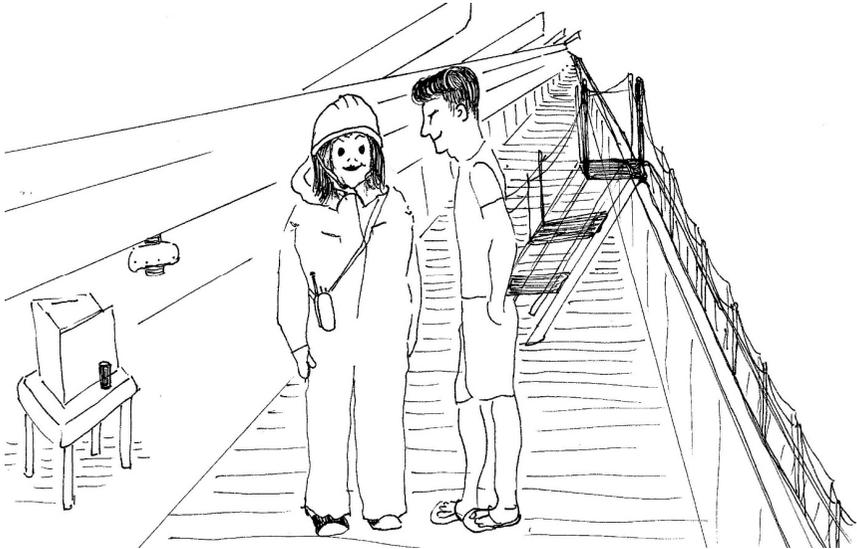
*Questions to think about*

- 1) How should husbands exercise their leadership responsibility in marriage? What attitude of heart is necessary to do it in the right way?
- 2) How do you apply the saying “as you shout into the forest, it echoes out again” to the expression of love and respect between wife and husband?
- 3) What do you learn from Bryan de Leon’s testimony?
- 4) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you want to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.

## CHAPTER 5

### Lifelong loyalty

*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.  
Job 31:1*



Laura, their new deck cadet, had been on board for a few weeks now. It was the first time that John had had a female colleague on board. She was 25 years old and had a pretty confident personality. She didn't seem to mind being the only woman among 19 men. Laura liked to laugh, talked a lot, and had a lively nature. It was interesting to observe that the atmosphere on board changed. The tone became less harsh and some of the crew members did not go straight to their cabin to chat on the internet after lunch. If Laura stayed seated, they were no longer in a hurry and obviously enjoyed her presence. Instead of going to bed early in the evening or playing computer games alone, they preferred joining karaoke events that took place quite often now. Laura had a good voice and a great show talent.

John didn't want to admit it, but he liked Laura. What a difference from Cora's behaviour. She often criticised him, while Laura showed him appreciation even for small things. When he told Cora about his work, she didn't express interest because of her little technical understanding. Laura was completely different: she asked many questions and John was proud to explain the function of the equipment in the engine room. For a long time Cora hadn't shown him much respect for what he knew and could do. Instead she kept complaining for all kinds of reasons, which seemed unimportant in his eyes; unlike Laura, who looked at him with shining eyes when talking to her.

One evening in the port of Rotterdam, Laura was on duty at the gangway from 6 p.m. to midnight. John came on deck to talk to her a little. Both were surprised when her relief arrived. Six hours had passed in a flash.

Next evening Jeff knocked on John's cabin door.

**Jeff:** Hi John, can I come in?

**John:** Sure, I have time. Everything okay?

**Jeff:** Laura is a great woman, right?

**John:** Yeah, why do you say that?

**Jeff:** Would you mind if I read you a passage from this book? It is a true story.

**John:** Why not?

**Jeff:** Robertson McQuilkin gave up his position as President of Columbia International University after 20 years because his wife had Alzheimer's disease. The sickness was so advanced that she could not cope with it if he left the house, even if it were for only a few hours. She always thought he had disappeared and went to look for him.

McQuilkin knew that he had to step down from his position in the University, because his wife needed him around the clock. On the one hand, the decision was not easy for him. On the other hand, it wasn't difficult after all. He said: "The decision had actually been made 42 years earlier, when I had promised Muriel to take care of her in illness and in health, until death us do part. I want to be a man who keeps his word and I am also interested in fairness. My wife has cared for me so devotedly over the 42 years that I would still be in her debt even if I cared for her for the next 40 years.

While I witness her brave decline into forgetfulness, Muriel remains the joy of my life. Every day I see signs of what kind of person she is, the wife I have always loved."<sup>7</sup>

**John:** This is certainly a touching story. But what are you telling me?

**Jeff:** I think that you know the answer.

**John:** Jeff, come on, there is nothing between Laura and me. We have just talked, which is certainly not sinful.

**Jeff:** Six hours until midnight. The next morning we departed at 2 a.m. You didn't have one hour of sleep.

**John:** Jeff, it happened just one time. Don't make a drama out of it. No touch, no kiss, nothing!

**Jeff:** Unfaithfulness begins in the heart and appears harmless at first. When your marriage is in crisis, you have to be extra watchful. Please read Genesis 4:7 where God warns Cain.

**John:** "... if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Jeff, Cain was about to murder his brother. I have nothing to do with this story.

**Jeff:** Stop your excuses! You know very well that I don't think you are in danger of murdering someone, but rather that the temptation of adultery is knocking at your door.

**John:** You're exaggerating.

**Jeff:** I am sure you know Matthew 5:27-28 where Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Adultery doesn't just happen when you jump into bed with a girl; it starts much earlier. You like Laura very much, that can easily be seen by anyone watching you. By the way, it's no surprise, because she is indeed an attractive woman. However, you are married.

Can you tell me what most people do when they plan to sin or when sin has been already committed?

**John:** I guess, usually people start with excuses. Probably, reasons are given that explain the behaviour.

**Jeff:** Self-justification is another good expression. Many justify themselves and indeed, they often find excellent reasons that sound entirely plausible.

Can you tell me possible motives that McQuilkin could have given for not taking care of his wife?

**John:** For example, that he had many important responsibilities as a President of the university. His knowledge and experience would still be needed.

**Jeff:** Correct, and such thoughts would be absolutely understandable. Nevertheless, he decided in favour of his wife. Any other point?

**John:** Maybe that he had the right to enjoy his life. Taking care of his wife 24 hours a day would hardly leave him the freedom to pursue his own interests and desires.

**Jeff:** Very good, because that's a typical argument. "I need my liberty. I deserve to have fun!", for example. But notice that no reason is ever given in the Bible for the right to put one's own interest first. In other words: this right is simply taken for granted and certainly not God-given. Usually the Lord is not even asked.

How did McQuilkin justify his decision to serve his wife instead of pursuing his own interests?

**John:** **First** with his wedding promise to be faithful to her in good times and bad. He wanted to keep his word even after 42 years.

The **second** reason was fairness. After attending him for so many years, his wife deserved his care.

**Third**, that he still loved his wife as much as he had loved her so many years before.

**Jeff:** The Alzheimer's disease had certainly changed Muriel's nature a lot. Yet he still saw so much of what he had liked her for when they had fallen in love. Surely, he noticed a lot of little things, which had become very precious to him. Instead of focusing on what was no longer working or what negative changes had taken place, he was grateful for the many years together and for the time they still had. God's commandment to be faithful to one's spouse is not even mentioned but of course assumed.

**John:** The attitude and behaviour of McQuilkin show great maturity.

**Jeff:** Absolutely. What reasons do you notice and what is typical for an immature person?

**John:** Immature people are likely to have little patience for enduring a difficult situation, especially if it lasts a long time. McQuilkin was ready to go the whole distance.

**Jeff:** Correct. What else?

**John:** Immature people ask what is good for themselves. They want quick satisfaction of their wishes and desires. McQuilkin rather saw the needs of his wife.

**Jeff:** Good. Anything else?

**John:** Immature people make thoughtless remarks and give quick promises. It was important for him to stay true to his marriage vow even after 42 years.

**Jeff:** True. Any other ideas?

**John:** Immature people lack clarity about what is really important, what actually matters. Mature persons have an inner compass, values, which they would not be willing to compromise.

**Jeff:** How did this point become visible in McQuilkin's life?

**John:** Perhaps this compass is particularly clear when one has to choose between two important or good options. In his case he had to choose between his position as a director and the care of his wife. Many would have said that his task at the university was more significant. His compass, however, was pointing the other way.

**Jeff:** Yes. It's remarkable that his decision was made 42 years before, when his wife and he made a covenant. Being loyal to your partner when you're freshly in love and the sun is shining doesn't show any character qualities. But it becomes visible when the path is stony and the valley that has to be travelled is long and dark.

**John:** An immature person can be controlled by quick impulses. A decision is often made in favour of what appears to be urgent. But that is not always identical with what really matters.

**Jeff:** You are absolutely right. An ability to distinguish between what only seems urgent and what is really important is a significant quality.

Let's talk about marital faithfulness because it matters especially in God's eyes. We have already thought about the fact that unfaithfulness begins in the mind, in the imagination. One question: we both surely agree that pornography consumption is not good. Why, actually? After all, sexuality is a good gift from God. Why shouldn't we watch such films anyway?

**John:** Perhaps because according to the Bible the practice of sexuality belongs in marriage.

**Jeff:** This is true. What do you think about the objection that sexuality in pornography is not practised, only observed.

**John:** You told me before that sin starts in the mind, in our fantasy.

**Jeff:** And what does pornography have to do with marital unfaithfulness?

**John:** You enjoy sex in your fantasy, however not with your spouse. Sex is disconnected from loving your wife. It is a form of selfishness as it is all about one's own satisfaction.

**Jeff:** Correct. Men are created by God that way, that they can be quickly sexually stimulated by the sight of a naked woman. This is a simple fact and not yet evil. However, the devil can use it to lead us to sin. Therefore, men especially need to be watchful at this point.

**John:** Is it sin in your eyes to imagine having sex with your wife?

**Jeff:** I don't think so.

**John:** Do you think that some women also watch pornography?

**Jeff:** Yes, for sure, but it is a bigger problem among men, because they are triggered quickly by their eyes. Men can enjoy sex without love or sympathy more easily than women. This is also possible with women, but they usually need the knowledge of being loved more.

**John:** Are believers also involved in pornography?

**Jeff:** Yes, not a few are struggling with this temptation.

By the way, there is an area where women, more than men, are at risk of being unfaithful to their spouse in their imagination. Some women enjoy romantic love movies. Watching such films doesn't have to lead to sin, but it is possible. Some women desire from their handsome movie stars what they don't get from their husbands. They are strongly attracted by his tenderness, charm, looks, politeness, and the way he treats the beloved girl. In the fantasy they feel themselves in the caring arms of their television hero. That, too, can be called marital unfaithfulness in imagination. Not one's own husband, but someone else is longed for.

After all, these movies and soaps are fiction and do not reflect real life. No marriage is all about romantic evenings at a campfire or boating on a beautiful lake with tender violin music.

In summary we can conclude: Men should never watch porn movies as they stimulate them sexually in general. When it comes to romantic films, which some women enjoy watching, it depends: they can be led to unfaithfulness in fantasy but don't have to be in reality.

**John:** Another question: why is God against divorce? After all, you can part with a good friend if you no longer understand each other without committing a sin.

**Jeff:** The most important reason is that you have made a covenant. A covenant has an important meaning in human terms, but much more so with God. The Lord has made some covenants in the Old Testament: for example, with Noah, Abraham, Moses on Mount Sinai, and David. The most important, however, was given through Jesus. We remember this covenant especially when we take communion together. Please read 1 Corinthians 11: 23-25:

**John:** "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

**Jeff:** Why is the Lord a God of covenants?

**John:** Maybe because it is an important quality of God to be faithful, that one can rely on His word.

**Jeff:** Yes, God is faithful and very concerned for our faithfulness. If you enter into a covenant, both partners know the conditions and agree-

ments. Breaking a covenant is far more serious than disregarding a word that is spoken quickly.

**John:** Can it be said that we made our most important covenant when we became Christians? Next in importance is the marriage covenant.

**Jeff:** Yes, and it is always God who establishes the covenant. Therefore, they are sacred, and we would do well to respect them very much. Please read Matthew 5:31-32.

**John:** “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

Does the Bible give any other reasons for divorce beside marital unfaithfulness?

**Jeff:** A good question. Jesus only mentions this reason here. But Bible teachers interpret the Scripture in a way that includes other very serious things. Such as, for example, the physical or mental well-being of the wife or children being threatened. This could be the case if physical or sexual violence is involved. But since marriage is sacred, a break must be for weighty reasons. Just to say that they don’t love each other anymore or that they often have arguments and misunderstandings is certainly not enough. In these cases, efforts must be made to improve the marriage, if necessary with a counsellor’s assistance?

Coming back to your marital problems, they are definitely not serious enough for a divorce. We’ve already talked about a few things you can do to improve your relationship with Cora. What are the insights you have gained and what could be your next steps.

**John: First:** The wheel of marriage craziness needs to be stopped by not reacting with the same wrong pattern of behaviour over and over again. I could for example surprise Cora by reacting sympathetically to an accusation from her, or by asking her to apologise.

**Second:** It is important to note that men and women often use different codes when communicating. It is essential for me to decrypt Cora’s code to find out what she really wants to express.

**Third:** Someone has to take the first step to bring forth a change. Often many first steps are necessary before the partner is ready to play his or her part better. I definitely need patience and endurance.

**Fourth:** God created women that way, that the most important thing for her is to be loved unconditionally. However, for men it is more important to be respected. They have the ultimate responsi-

bility in their family even if it costs them their lives. My challenge could be to show Cora my love and understanding, even if her respect is missing.

**Fifth:** We are unable to love with the divine Agape love unless we ask God for it.

**Sixth:** The whole process of renewal needs a lot of prayer. I should start praying for my whole family daily.

**Seventh:** Faithfulness in marriage is very important because a sacred covenant is involved. I should not forget the touching testimony of McQuilkin.

**Eighths:** Marital unfaithfulness begins in thoughts and can lead to wrong actions. Those who have already said goodbye to their marriage can no longer sincerely work to improve it again, because the heart is divided.

**Jeff:** What could be a practical step for you right now?

**John:** I guess you mean keeping a little more distant from Laura?

**Jeff:** Sure, but not only physically; also in your imagination.

By the way, here is another testimony of a sailor for you to read.

### *Testimony of Egbert*

How I met my wife and along the way experienced a happy marriage in life:

I was aboard a container vessel in Piraeus, Greece. There I had a conversation with my sister on the phone. She told me that a friend of hers was visiting our home. My sister made a comment that maybe she could become my wife.

I planned to call “my future wife”, but said to myself that if she hangs up or I don’t like her voice, we are maybe not meant for each other. However, the conversation made me happy.

One night I dreamt that we would get married and stay in our province. That she would become a schoolteacher, have a baby after 5 years and that I would be promoted rapidly.

I told her about my dream and my feelings for her even though we had not yet met each other in person. She expressed surprise and shock and told me that it would be too fast. I asked her to wait for me as I would have my vacation soon. She told me about her schedule, joining a passenger vessel on which she worked. On the day she departed from the airport I spent time talking with her. When I asked her if she loved me, she replied “YES”!

One day the ship she worked on docked in Manila. When I saw her, I carried and hugged her, even having tears in my eyes. After one month of seeing each other we decided to get married. She became a private school teacher and lived with my parents. After 3 years of marriage we were blessed with a baby boy and my promotion as a master in only six years was very fast.

Later on, my wife begged me to live separately from my parents, but I disagreed. When I was on board, she moved to live on her own at our property with a small house. I realised that my wife had supported many of my decisions, even though I never asked for her opinion. I understood that I had to change my behaviour before it was too late.

As the years passed, I discovered that having a happy marriage is quite simple. Being content, living a natural life, not expecting too much from my wife, and appreciating what she can and cannot do.

She gave me a son and raised him. It wasn't easy since he has an Asperger's syndrome. Her sacrifice was exceptional, because she had to do everything alone; our son seldom had a father figure present because of my job. It's important never to forget my wife's birthday or our wedding anniversary. I tell her often how beautiful she is.

Sometimes if we have a quarrel, I think about the beginning of our story and how we met; then we're ok. It is helpful to recall the saying: "HAPPY WIFE, HAPPY LIFE". Make your wife always happy!

*"Love has to be learned but hate doesn't need instruction."*

*Katherine Ann Porter*

### *Questions to think about*

- 1) What makes a mature person?
- 2) Why is pornography a sin?
- 3) Why is the Lord a God of covenants? What does this mean for the marriage covenant?
- 4) What do you learn from Egbert's testimony?
- 5) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you want to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.



## CHAPTER 6

### Your spouse or your parents?

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

*Genesis 2:24*



John had taken a shower after finishing the night shift. Suddenly he remembered that he had left his diary in the engine control room. At night, when there wasn't much to do, he often wrote personal experiences and thoughts in it. "Hopefully Peter hasn't discovered it yet," John thought. Peter was the 1st engineer on board, so his superior. John had a lot of problems with him because he was both controlling and curious. John quickly took the elevator to the control room. There he saw Peter reading his diary with a wicked smile. In anger John shouted, "How dare you!" "Your own fault; why do you leave your stuff lying around here?" answered Peter. "Besides, I'm your boss and need to know what's going on." Angrily, John took the diary and left the room. He had to wait for Jeff for a few hours until he finished his duty.

- John:** Peter's behaviour is unacceptable. I'm not going to put up with it.
- Jeff:** You're right. Also a superior must respect the privacy of his staff. You should talk to him again later. Hopefully, he'll understand.
- John:** I doubt it. Peter never gives me any freedom. He doesn't trust me, so he wants to control everything.
- Jeff:** I know. I am lucky that he mostly leaves me alone because I have already a lot of experience as a 2<sup>nd</sup> engineer. But you are unfortunately his present target.
- By the way, what do you say about Egbert's testimony?
- John:** Well, he wrote about his wife begging him to live separately from his parents and his refusal for a long time. Cora and I are always arguing about this point. She doesn't want to live under the same roof as my parents, but I do not agree. It would be more expensive if we had to rent our own apartment and my parents' house is big enough. My mother can also help Cora raising our children since she has a lot of experience.
- Jeff:** What reasons does Cora give for renting your own apartment?
- John:** She says she needs her privacy and that my mother is constantly interfering in her affairs.
- Jeff:** It reminds me of what you said about Peter.
- John:** In my eyes, you can't compare both cases. After all, she's my mother, who does her best to support us. Cora should be grateful to her instead of complaining.
- Jeff:** Let's see what the Bible says on this subject. Please read Genesis 2:24.
- John:** ... a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
- Jeff:** Throughout our whole childhood, our parents were our most important people, who loved, cared for and supported us. But the time comes when a certain detachment from them should take place. We start to take responsibility for ourselves, which is especially true when we get married. From now on the spouse is the central person in life. It is even said in the Scripture that the couple will become one flesh. This certainly means that the role of the parents must change. They have to step back to the second row, which is not easy for some of them.
- John:** But the Bible also says we have to honour our parents. My mother wants to stay together with us, and Cora should appreciate and respect that.
- Jeff:** Put yourself in Cora's position. Most of the time you are on board and not at home. Unlike sometimes in western culture, older people are highly respected here, which is of course good. But that on the other

hand means that Cora cannot feel that she is on a level footing with her mother-in-law, able to act with equal freedom. Your mother does not have the right to interfere in her children's marriage. Even if your mother isn't as controlling and curious as Peter, Cora probably still feels that she is expected to submit to your mother's demands.

**John:** But she can learn a lot from my mother's experience.

**Jeff:** Sure, she can, and Cora is clever if she does it. On the other hand, she has to make her own experiences and should be able to make her own decisions. Please consider that it is normal for the next generation to do things differently than the previous one.

**John:** But then she could make unnecessary mistakes.

**Jeff:** You can make mistakes when you do something new, but also when you do it in the way it has always been done. But that is not the point. Cora needs the freedom to shape her own life and to be responsible for it.

One question: How do you react when Cora and your mother have different opinions?

**John:** It depends, but often I agree with my mother.

**Jeff:** Why?

**John:** As I have said before: it is good to respect the mother and often she is right in my eyes.

**Jeff:** First, maybe you just think that she is mostly right because she has shaped you since you were a child. Throughout childhood, of course, we are all strongly influenced by the views of our parents.

Second, to respect your mother is good, but you are married to Cora and not to her. Your wife deserves a unique place in your heart. As I have said before, the role of parents changes over time and Cora has to be the most important person in your life.

**John:** And what about our children?

**Jeff:** Your children play a very important role in your family, but the spouse should come first! Your children will leave you one day, and you also have to learn to let them go. The detachment process becomes most apparent when your children are teenagers. However, your marriage covenant lasts for life, until death parts you.

Your mother also needs to understand that she has to let you go. She must not seek control over your family. This would be the case even if you were always at home. It is all the more important since you spend a lot of time on board. Cora has both the right and the duty to shape her own life and that of your family. To be able to do this, she needs freedom, not a feeling of having to live according to your parents' demands and expectations. It is good to ask their advice

from time to time, but the way you form your marriage and family life is a matter between the two of you. That's challenging enough because even you don't always agree. If other people are involved, it's not good. If Cora sees over and over again that you and your mother join against her, it causes a great deal of frustration. And that is neither healthy for her nor for your relationship.

**John:** Are you sure?

**Jeff:** Yes. In our culture, generations often live together. Grandparents take on some of the responsibility for their grandchildren. The old are looked after and cared for at home until they die. This is far better than in western culture, where they are sometimes sent to old people's homes because they are a burden on the family.

But a balanced perspective is still necessary. On the one hand, you should appreciate the solidarity of the extended family, from the great-grandparents to the little ones. But it is also important to consider that every new generation needs its own freedom to develop. You should take Cora's request seriously.

**John:** It will be very hard for my mother to accept this.

**Jeff:** We've already talked about how it is of supreme significance for a wife to be the most important person in her husband's life. If he shows divided loyalties, problems will follow.

God has already made it clear in connection with the creation that the roles of parents and children change when they grow up. Even if a young man or woman continues to love, respect, and support his or her parents, a process of detachment should take place. The distance does not have to be great. Sometimes it makes sense if the parents live nearby in case they are able to keep a healthy social distance. Certainly a private space has to be created for a marriage and young family that allows their independent development. If parents are wise, they don't advise upon the marriage of their children without being asked.

By the way, Jesus highlights this verse from Genesis 2:24. Please read Matthew 19:4-6.

**John:** ... "Haven't you read," He replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

But what if a young couple cannot afford to rent their own flat?

**Jeff:** Then at least three things should be considered:

**First,** it is important that the rooms in the shared apartment are

divided in such a way that the young couple has privacy. That means there must be agreements about who occupies which rooms and how they are used. Parents should not read private things unwanted or open cupboards where personal belongings are stored. Think of your anger when Peter opened your diary.

**Second**, it is important to stand by your partner in the event of a conflict. Even if Cora seems to be wrong in your eyes, she must not feel that you are siding with your mother against her. It is often better to talk to each other in private first. Then you can find a common position on how to react.

**Third**, you need to make your position clear to your parents in a friendly but clear manner. They have to know that Cora is your first priority. You should never allow a person to stand between the two of you.

By the way, you are now a 3<sup>rd</sup> engineer. You make enough money to buy or rent your own home. Just do it!

**John:** Maybe you are right. I will tell it Cora once we see each other again.

**Jeff:** Why do you want to wait so long when you can give Cora great pleasure with this message right now. Better call her tonight.

**John:** Okay, I will do it. See you tomorrow.

**Jeff:** Here is another testimony of a sailor. Enjoy its reading.

### *Testimony of an oiler*

My biggest challenge being a sailor regarding family life is to keep myself feeling at home despite the great distance from it. In terms of our relationship, it is important to me to value my wife's trust. It's a challenge because there are countless opportunities for unfaithfulness here on board. But thank God that victory over it is assured.

Sometimes my wife and I have small disagreements; very small arguments, for example how to do certain parts of the housework. In such cases, if my voice gets a little hard, she keeps silent. To resolve such situations, I leave my wife alone so that she can do her job as she wants. I then hold back in order not to hurt her. Then I prayed to the Lord and asked for forgiveness. I ask him to give me the wisdom and gentleness to explain my point of view to my wife in the right way. Then I talk to her again, but before she expresses her frustration at my voice rising, I ask her to forgive me. Then I explain my idea and by God's grace she understands me, and all is fine again. After less than one hour our dispute is usually settled because of the Lord's help. This situation has happened several times. During

the last one I made a promise to never again harden my voice when we have a disagreement. Thank you, Lord!

I have two pieces of advice to offer to all seafarers regarding their partnership:

**First**, they must truly give their lives to Jesus Christ, embracing Him as their Lord and Saviour. Only God can give us the love that we must show towards our wives despite the great distance between us. It is even better if both husband and wife truly trust in the Lord Jesus.

**Lastly**, one of the things the Lord has helped me to embrace is that watching porn is a sin and an act of unfaithfulness towards one partner and above all towards God. In order to be truly faithful to our partner we must truly put God above all.

*“I believe that the Bible alone is the answer to all of our questions and that we only need to ask persistently and humbly to get the answer from it.”<sup>8</sup>*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

### *Questions to think about*

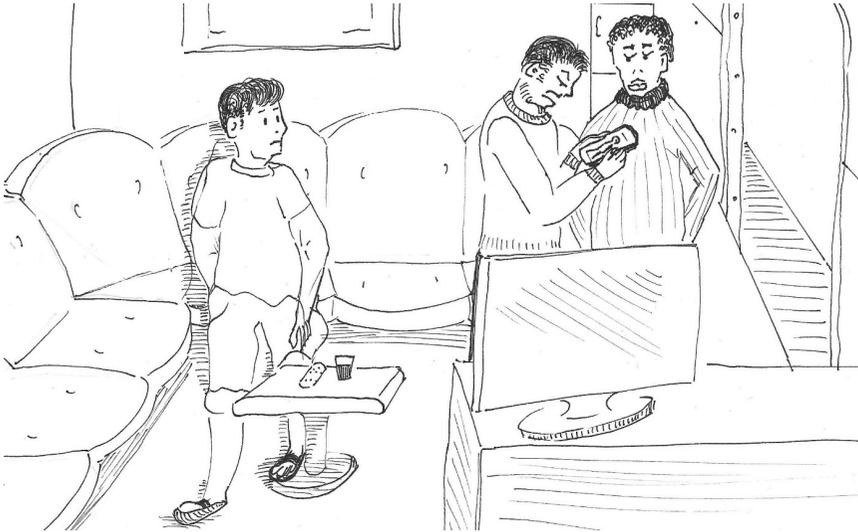
- 1) How should we behave when parents interfere too much in marriage and family?
- 2) What does it mean in practice to basically give your wife the first place after God?
- 3) What do you learn from the oiler’s testimony?
- 4) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you need to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.

## CHAPTER 7

### To become one

*The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one?*

*Malachi 2:14-15*



The Silver Saturn had been in dry dock for repairs for two weeks. That gave the crew the chance to go to town in the evenings for sightseeing. But some of them used every opportunity to have fun in bars of the red-light district. In particular Richard the bosun and his buddy, the wiper Romeo, used to boast about their dirty adventures.

It was 11.45 p.m. and John was standing in the TV room, eating a little before his shift started at midnight. Suddenly he heard loud laughter and Richard stumbled into the room with Romeo. Obviously they had a lot of alcohol in their body. John knew that with their mobiles they often took

photos of the women with whom they had fun together. Sometimes they sent them to like-minded friends world-wide to boast about it.

Suddenly Richard stopped laughing and looked wide-eyed at the display of his cell-phone. “Oh no, what an idiot I am”, he groaned. By using the wrong button he had accidentally sent one of the photos to his wife, a mistake he couldn’t undo. John left the room hardly able to suppress a smile.

Late next afternoon Jeff knocked at his cabin door.

**Jeff:** Have you heard about Richard and the “beautiful” photo he sent to his wife?

**John:** I was present when it happened. The whole crew is laughing about him.

**Jeff:** You actually want Richard to have this experience, but it must be terrible for his wife.

**John:** I suspect she knows her husband well enough, but certainly it is still very painful. With Richard you often have the impression that he always gets away with his behaviour. But this time it got him.

**Jeff:** The day will come when God will give the last word about everyone’s life. Please read in 1 Peter 4:3-5 a serious warning. In this case you should better take my Contemporary Version, which is easier to understand.

**John:** You have already lived long enough like people who don’t know God. You were immoral and followed your evil desires. You went around drinking and partying and carrying on. In fact, you even worshiped disgusting idols. Now your former friends wonder why you have stopped running around with them, and they curse you for it. But they will have to answer to God, who judges the living and the dead.

**Jeff:** Unless Richard and his friends repent, they will face severe consequences. As we discussed the other day, God takes the wedding covenant very seriously. It is holy and marriage is under His special protection.

**John:** I hope that Cora and I can get our marriage back on track.

**Jeff:** You will by the grace of God.

**John:** Recently we have talked about Genesis 2:24: For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Become one flesh: this probably refers to having sex with each other.

**Jeff:** That’s true, even if the meaning goes much further. This passage leads us to another important point that we should be aware of. It’s normal for many young people these days to have sex before

marriage. Unfortunately, this also applies to some Christians as well. As justification it is often said that the Bible does not clearly forbid this, or that God is not interested in marriage certificates. But I think the expression *become one flesh* is deep and meaningful and goes beyond the physical aspect. After all, a couple during sexual intercourse come very close to each other, but obviously remain two bodies.

I think that the expression that a couple *becomes one flesh* speaks about a binding together in the broadest sense. Deep emotional areas are touched in the soul during sexual intercourse. It goes far beyond pleasant and exciting feelings. A strong passionate bond to one another is involved. To cut it short we can conclude: that God wants sex to be always associated with real love and a lifelong bond, when after all two individuals do indeed become one. If you break a relationship after having had deeply fulfilling sexual intercourse, painful scars remain in the soul. God wants to protect us from that.

We men should keep in mind that the emotional connection often affects women more than us. Some men are just seeking fun when having quick sex without the desire to be strongly emotionally bound to the woman in any case. Women are much more vulnerable at this point. We need to consider it and be sensitive. If a man talks about the latest basketball results five minutes after fulfilling sex, it can be hurtful to the woman.

**John:** But aren't there also women looking for non-committal pleasure?

**Jeff:** Of course there are. But for those longing for a love relationship, the hurt is often deep and painful if the man is looking only for quick sex.

**John:** I understand. But let me come back to the question of why sexual intercourse should take place only in marriage. After all you can love someone without yet being married. Why not have sex if you love the person and plan to get married later?

**Jeff:** This deepest spiritual and physical union needs a framework in which to happen. Therefore, a vow and a marriage covenant are necessary in God's eyes. This covenant is in principle unbreakable, with only a few exceptions. We've talked about adultery, which can be a reason for divorce. Do you remember some other reasons?

**John:** Yes, if the physical or mental well-being of the wife or children is threatened. This could be the case if physical or sexual violence is involved.

**Jeff:** Or when there is constant abuse of alcohol, drugs, or medication. The same applies to gambling addiction when financial ruin threatens.

All of these reasons can lead to divorce but don't need to. If God is involved, restoration of a marriage is possible. However, there is often a long way to go, when repentance and reconciliation may be sought with the help of a pastor or counsellor.

But let us come back to why sexual intercourse should exclusively take place in marriage. Within this covenant, the partners can be sure that they are giving themselves to someone who has sworn an oath of loyalty: "in good and bad days, until death do them part." It is about responsibility that both accept for one another with unbreakable faithfulness. While the couple are not yet married, they haven't made a binding covenant before society and God. A back door to parting when things get difficult remains open.

Often nowadays, when people get married they have already had sex with different partners. Consider the meaning of Genesis 2:24.

**John:** They have already *become one flesh* with several people. That sounds almost like a contradiction: becoming one with different persons.

**Jeff:** Yes. During sexual intercourse I give myself with body and soul to the other as a gift in order to become one with the beloved. I am a unique gift for the other and I receive the other as an exclusive present. This uniqueness is lost after having sex with a number of partners.

Genesis 4:1 is also interesting. The New International Version is unfortunately not correct for here it is written: *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain...* The King James translation is more exact. It says: ... *Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived ...* At this point, the expression "to know" means a deep and loving recognition and understanding of the partner.

**John:** Another aspect of the picture is the children who result. By *becoming one flesh* new life can come into being.

**Jeff:** This is an important point as well! Some men enjoy sex with a woman. After that, however, they deny any responsibility for possible consequences, for example a child. First, it is not fair since the woman is now a single mother, which is a huge challenge. Second, children need both father and mother for their healthy development. If a child is born into a complete family, the conditions for it are better.

**John:** But there are contraceptives available to avoid pregnancy.

**Jeff:** Sure, but reality shows that many children are still conceived unwanted.

**John:** And an abortion is certainly no option.

**Jeff:** Life must not be destroyed at any stage. Not at the beginning and not at the end either. Only God is the Master of life and death.

**John:** But sometimes it is said that in the beginning of a pregnancy it is just about a clump of cells. Is it really a sin to remove it?

**Jeff:** God gave His response to this wrong opinion clearly enough, for example in Psalm 139:13-16. Please read it.

**John:** For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

**Jeff:** Human life begins at conception and is from that moment under God's protection. Even genetic science confirms that from the instant of fertilization all genes are fixed, and from this point nothing will be changed. The gene code has already determined everything, be it the future size, the colour of the eyes, the fingerprints, also later strengths, as for example that maths will be easy, or whatever. Most abortions are performed at a time when the heart is already beating, the brain and nerve tracts are in place and pain can be felt.

All of this only affects the physical development. Nobody knows when the foetus gains a soul and therefore it shouldn't be speculated about. Who can prove that this is not the case at a very early stage or even at the beginning? Nevertheless, in many countries abortion is allowed up to the twelfth week or far beyond.

In addition, many women suffer after an abortion. Little by little they become aware that they have extinguished the life they carried within them. Some of them feel lifelong guilt as a heavy burden without talking much about it.

**John:** But sometimes it is argued that if the woman is raped or has serious health problems, an abortion is legitimate.

**Jeff:** There are at least three things to consider:

**First**, it affects only a relatively small percentage of pregnancies. In these cases, solutions must be carefully considered, giving the woman all necessary practical, emotional, financial, and pastoral support. Perhaps in a few cases an abortion cannot be avoided. But it should be the last option, for example when the mother's life is threatened.

**Second**, we shouldn't underestimate prayer. God will help and intervene if we try in all circumstances to do His will. In any case, it is not right to take the relatively few cases as a justification for the termination of pregnancy in general.

**Third**, it is not about condemning women, even those in seemingly easier conflict situations. Basically, every kind of help and encouragement should be offered, pointing out that the Lord is a God of life. We should appreciate the fact that He creates countless things every day and praise Him for these miracles.

**John:** I understand. Are there any more reasons why sexual intercourse should take place only in marriage?

**Jeff:** Think of how unfair and hurtful Richard and Romeo are to their wives. Nowadays there are many flat-rate payment offers. Flat-rates for mobile calls, for drinks, and other stuff. Some of them make sense, others don't. It is perverse when a red-light district's bars offer flat-rate sex. Men get women's bodies as cheap and exchangeable goods. The dignity of a unique person whom God loves and created in His image is trampled underfoot.

Our Creator entrusted us with sexuality as a wonderful gift to enjoy and to thank Him for. But it must be used with the utmost care. The more precious and wonderful a gift is, the more it should be valued, preserved, and protected. The closeness and intimacy that a couple have with each other mean that one makes oneself vulnerable.

**John:** That would mean that sex practised without love, without responsibility for each other, without unbreakable commitment, is in principle wrong in God's eyes.

**Jeff:** Correct! Of course, everyone wants fulfilling sex for their own sakes. However, when real love is involved, it is much more about making the partner happy and satisfying him or her. It is clear that this does not apply to one-night stands or superficial emotional relationships and certainly not to anything connected to the sex business.

By the way, there is another remarkable passage in the Bible on the subject of *becoming one flesh* in marriage. Please read 1 Corinthians 7:3-4.

**John:** The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

**Jeff:** Paul seems to express here that *becoming one flesh* even means, that one no longer disposes of one's body at will.

- John:** Does that mean that one partner can always ask for sex whenever wanted?
- Jeff:** Of course not! If you have thought well so far, you can answer the question yourself.
- John:** You are right! Nothing should be pushed through, because after all it is primarily about making the partner happy. Egoism has nothing to do with true love.
- Jeff:** What is this text about? How do you understand it?
- John:** I sometimes have the feeling that Cora refuses to have sex in order to punish me or as an instrument of power.
- Jeff:** That is exactly what Paul is talking about. Both are therefore wrong: to use physical superiority to enforce sexual intercourse, and as well when denial of it is used to demonstrate power.
- John:** What should happen if one partner longs for sex and the other doesn't?
- Jeff:** You know the answer, don't you?
- John:** If the couple really love each other, then they will find a way together. On occasion one gives to the other, even though there is no great desire for sex, on another occasion the other abstains, despite desire.
- Jeff:** Problems arise when both think of themselves. However, if each has it in mind to please the other, good outcomes are possible.
- John:** I fear that plenty of things are going wrong in many relationships because of what we have discussed today.
- Jeff:** I'm sure you're right. Sinful attitudes and wrong behaviour will always play a role in marriage. Because of this, the willingness to ask forgiveness from both God and one's partner is fundamentally important. And of course, the readiness to grant forgiveness is needed as well. Please read Ephesians 4:26-27:
- John:** ... Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.
- Jeff:** Being willing for immediate reconciliation is in general important, but it is especially true in marriage. After all, you share table and bed with your partner and cannot escape. Therefore, all negative things should be promptly confessed and instantly forgiven.
- I have the long testimony of a Filipino captain. Today I give you the first page. Another time you may continue with the second and third one. See you tomorrow.

*Testimony of captain Reynan Aclera from the Philippines  
(Part 1)*

I asked God to give me the right partner. When I was in college, I read Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight, and Proverbs 16:3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. They became my life verses and gave me wide understanding when it came to making a decision. I believed in His Word and entrusted Him with my plans even in regard to finding the right partner. Though I had my own ideas about an ideal woman the Lord reminded me to desire a partner who is God-fearing and spiritually mature. She should be able to teach, train, guide and lead our children in the right direction (Proverbs 22:6).

In my eyes marriage is not just a state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband and wife in a relationship recognised by the law. It is a commitment before the Lord that no one can break. It is necessary for both to keep in mind that vows were spoken before God and people.

Nothing can be compared with a family life where Christ is the centre. It should be a strong and deep relationship with each other, whatever challenges and struggles may be encountered along the way. The family stays together and works hand in hand because of Christ who dwells in the family. Joshua says in chapter 24 verse 15: *... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.* In 3 John 4 is written: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

In order to have a good relationship with my wife, I as a husband must know my responsibility to her. I have to love my wife as the Bible says and let her feel this by constantly communicating it to her. I never forget to send her messages or greetings especially on occasions which matter to a woman in our culture.

Overcoming difficulties and crises in marriage can't be easy because of often being away from my family. More prayer and more faith in God are needed. We should rely on the Word of God and His promises in order to be able to stand against difficult circumstances.

*“The whole water of the oceans cannot sink a ship  
as long it does not penetrate.”<sup>9</sup>*

*Eugene H. Peterson*

*Questions to think about*

- 1) What does the expression that a couple *becomes one flesh* speak about in the broadest sense?
- 2) Why is abortion a sin?
- 3) What do you understand from captain Aclera's testimony?
- 4) What can you learn about your marriage from this conversation between John and Jeff? Do you need to change your attitude? What practical steps do you want to take to improve your marriage? Write them down.



## CHAPTER 8

### What helps a wife to feel loved?

*God demonstrates His own love for us in this:  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.  
Romans 5:8*



Jeff had given John a Christian magazine in order to read the following true story:

When Bible translator Lee Bramlett began studying the language of the Hdi people in Cameroon, West Africa, he was convinced that God's nature had to be recognisable somewhere in their culture. Where have the footprints of God been found in the history or in the daily life of these people? What clue did God put in their culture so that they could see who He is and that He longs for a relationship with them? But as much as Lee searched, he couldn't find any connecting factor.

One night God told him in a dream to take another look at the Hdi word for “to love”. Lee and his wife Tammi had already found that all verbs ended with one of three possible vowels, namely i, a, or u. But at the end of the word “love” they found only either i or a: “dvi” or “dva”. Why was there no “dvu”?

Lee turned to the men of the Hdi people who were helping him with the translation and asked them, “Is it possible to say in connection with loving your wife: ‘... dvi?’” “Yes,” they answered. “It means that you once loved your spouse, but that all feelings are gone.” “Okay,” Lee said, “is it possible to say: ‘... dva?’” “Yes,” they responded. “That depends on her behaviour. She is loved as long as she remains faithful and takes good care of her husband.” “I understand,” Lee replied. “Is it thinkable to say ‘... dvu?’” Everyone laughed, “No way! If you say that, you would have to love your wife all the time, no matter what she’s done, even if she never brought you water or prepared food for you. Even if she cheated, you would be obliged to love her unchanged. No, we would never say ‘... dvu’ because that is impossible.”

Lee was silent for some time, thinking about John 3:16: God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Then he turned to the men again and asked: “Can God say in connection to humans: ‘... dvu?’” For a few minutes there was complete silence. Then the tears flowed down the faces of the old men. Finally, deeply moved, they answered: “This would mean that God has always loved us, for millennia and millennia, while all along we have rejected His infinite love. This would mean that He has committed Himself to love us even though we are the greatest sinners among all peoples.”

A single word changed the meaning of the word “love” fundamentally. No longer “I love you, depending on what you do and what you are”, but “I love you, depending on who I am.”

As a result of this deeper understanding about God’s love, many of the Hdi people turned to Him. Since then, Ephesians 5:25 has given them a new meaning: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. It was the first time they had been given a clue to the concept of unconditional love.*<sup>10</sup>

**Jeff:** What do you think of the story you read in the magazine?

**John:** Really touching, indeed! Of course I do know why you gave it to me. I should love Cora unconditionally. But how can I do it when my feelings are gone?

**Jeff:** If something is unconditional, there is no point in saying “if ...”. In your case: “I love Cora only if I feel something”. We have already

talked about the possibility of making a decision to love. When love is connected with great emotions, that is certainly nice, but this is unfortunately not always the case. If the feelings are not there at present, you can start with behaviour and deeds for the benefit of Cora as an expression of love or at least with the intention to revive it.

Because of love Jesus did a lot of things for us that were practical; yes, even big sacrifices and not at all sentimental or romantic. Do you remember what is written in John 15:13?

**John:** Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Do you think that Jesus loved us only through His deeds, without positive feelings for us?

**Jeff:** Jesus is God and certainly loves us with His heart and mind, also people who do not appear lovable. But we have our limits. However, we can decide to love, simply because God wants it, not because our feelings make us do it. If practical steps for the good of Cora are taken, it can also contribute to positive changes in her. Bit by bit the flame of loving feelings, which has become small, can increase again in both of you. In short: it is certainly possible that positive emotions can be renewed when dealing with a person with whom you were once in love.

**John:** How shall I start?

**Jeff:** Emerson Eggerichs mentions in his book “Love & Respect” six things which help a woman to feel loved by her husband.<sup>11</sup> Let us take some time to talk about them.

The first one is **closeness**.<sup>12</sup> Remember Genesis 2:24:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

We have already talked about the fact that being united with one’s wife refers to sexual union but goes far beyond that. It is also about spiritual and emotional intimacy. Cora will feel loved by you when you seek her closeness and express it to her with looks, touches, warm smiles, etc. When a couple has been split for the day and finally reunites at home, the first few moments will determine how the rest of the evening goes.

**John:** You know very well that Cora and I are not separated for a day, but usually for many months. This makes it impossible to let her feel close to me.

**Jeff:** Then what is important is what your first words are and how you say them when you communicate with her over the phone or on social

media. The point is that you understand and apply the principle. We both know very well that things are much more difficult for overseas workers. A wife always wants to feel inwardly connected to her husband. When Cora senses that you really want to be close to her heart, that gives her a lot of confidence.

**John:** Is it possible for a man to meet all of his wife's emotional needs?

**Jeff:** Probably not. But Cora will certainly recognise and appreciate your honest efforts. Especially when she sees a positive change in your behaviour.

It is not always that way, but in a typical marriage, it is more the woman who desires to be close. Although men tend to strive for freedom, if you often insist on your independence Cora will not feel connected to you. It probably gives her the impression that you don't love her very much, whether it's true or not.

**John:** It is correct that my freedom is important to me. I don't want to be controlled by her either.

**Jeff:** We all need our freedom, but if you want to improve your marriage, one building block is that you make an effort to respond to Cora's need for closeness. If a husband is only tender to his wife and kisses her when he desires sex, it rather blocks her. It's always about the following: Either you motivate Cora, or you discourage her. It is your choice.

**John:** Okay, what is the second point I should be aware of?

**Jeff:** Emerson Eggerichs writes about **openness**.<sup>13</sup> A woman usually wants to express her feelings. She naturally reacts to the impulses of the partner and wants to talk about them. She wants to speak openly about problems in order to solve them.

**John:** I prefer to keep some things to myself instead of endless discussions or emotional outbursts.

**Jeff:** This is typical for most men. But usually the wife notices that something is disturbing her husband. She suspects he might be angry or disappointed, even though he claims everything is fine. This confuses her, so she seeks explanation, which makes him feel under pressure. The husband should understand that it is about love. In her eyes one of the ways to show love is by opening one's heart.

**John:** So men and women are different on this point too.

**Jeff:** Yes, quite often. Eggerich gives a nice example to illustrate it. Imagine two different circuits. In the first, 3000 light-bulbs are switched in such a way that the entire chain of lights goes out if a single one of them is destroyed. The second string of lights is wired so that 1000 light-bulbs will continue to burn even if 2000 of them do not work.<sup>14</sup>

Now guess which of the two chains of lights correspond to the woman's soul in case of a marriage problem?

**John:** From what we've talked about so far, certainly the first.

**Jeff:** Yes. Most women desire to clear up even a small misunderstanding, otherwise she feels that the whole relationship is threatened.

**John:** It is often like that between Cora and me. It rather irritates me when everything has to be discussed. I believe that we can forget insignificant differences of opinion without much talk.

**Jeff:** Therefore we men have to understand how women are "switched". In her eyes, all lightbulbs need to work in order to feel comfortable in the relationship. For her, openness is an important value. This knowledge can help us to be better prepared to meet her desire.

**John:** Sometimes, because of her constant criticism, I have the feeling that Cora despises me.

**Jeff:** She probably doesn't mean it that way. She just wants to fix the one lightbulb that she thinks is problematic. But since it is especially important for men that we feel respected, our reaction is often to withdraw. Now guess what kind of emotions are triggered in our wives if we do it?

**John:** She feels unloved and questions us all the more, since to be loved is most important to her.

**Jeff:** She desires to be loved, we on the other hand to be respected. If neither of us see through this mechanism, the wheel of marital craziness will quickly pick up speed again.

**John:** Okay, **closeness** and **openness** are very important to most women. What is the third point?

**Jeff:** Understanding.<sup>15</sup>

**John:** To be honest, I often don't understand Cora.

**Jeff:** Maybe we should read 1 Peter 3:7 again.

**John:** Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

**Jeff:** The question is, how can we be empathetic with our wives? I love this verse because Peter is not saying that I always need to understand Sarah. None of us will always succeed in doing this in depth. However, the crucial thing is to express to her that I do my best to engage with her in an understanding way. That alone means a lot to her.

**John:** Cora would reject what Peter says, because she doesn't see women as weaker than men.

**Jeff:** In order to understand Peter correctly, we should keep in mind that he is making a comparative statement and does not mean it is qualitative. He does not say that women are generally weaker, but that they are particularly vulnerable to their husbands in the marital relationship. Because husbands tend to keep silent on relationship problems, they usually don't suffer so much from them. This is different with most wives, which makes them more vulnerable.

**John:** I understand.

**Jeff:** Even when wives don't put it that way, they tend to view their husbands as the ones who should carry the heavy loads rather than the other way around. If our wives seek understanding from us, we should take it as a compliment.

**John:** What else can I do so that Cora feels understood?

**Jeff:** We men should simply listen to our wives. We talked about it some time ago. Often wives want to share their worries, concerns, and everything else on their mind. If we comment or correct too quickly, it won't help them but causes negative feelings. They long to feel understood, not to receive advice.

**John:** Men usually believe that solving problems will help one another.

**Jeff:** That's true. Men often communicate with each other by exchanging ideas. For women, the focus is usually on the relationship.

We should also consider another aspect: women manage emotions much more than men by speaking. Talking even helps them to understand their feelings and put them in order.

**John:** Okay, so I have learned to make Cora feel like I'm trying my best to understand her. Here, sympathetic listening is more important than talking or advising. What is next?

**Jeff:** Fourth, after closeness, openness and understanding comes readiness for reconciliation.<sup>16</sup> Can you guess why?

**John:** The answer is not difficult if you apply it to the example with the 3000 lightbulbs.

**Jeff:** That's the way it is. If something stands between Cora and you, she will find it more of a burden on the relationship than you do. In her eyes all lightbulbs need to burn in order to feel relaxed. It is about the willingness to restore peace.

There are disagreements in every marriage, which is perfectly normal. Everyone has his or her own character, tendencies, and preferences. Each brings his or her own experience to the marriage. In addition, women and men often think and feel differently. So conflicts are normal and don't always have something to do with sin. You can actually see many things differently. However,

the question is how to deal with them. It is possible to become guilty if you act or react incorrectly to distinct opinions. What could that look like?

**John:** When you always insist on yourself and disregard the will and feelings of the other; if you believe that you know everything better; when you don't let your partner speak; when you become aggressive or quickly assume that the other has bad motives, and so on.

**Jeff:** What is the magic sentence in these cases?

**John:** I am sorry darling that I hurt your feelings.

**Jeff:** Right. Particularly if someone is known to be often stubborn, makes excuses, or blames others, this short sentence immediately cools the heat down. Because one unexpectedly reacts positively and humbly, the partner will most certainly accept the apology and the relationship is soon in a better way.

At this point it is again important to understand the different ways men and women deal with conflicts. Men tend to resolve conflicts without talking about it much. Also, they don't like to speak about feelings and find it difficult to apologize.

**John:** Do you always have to give in?

**Jeff:** Of course not. The ability to deal with conflict in a proper way is an important quality. But it is about remaining calm, loving, and positive. Of course, this is more difficult for someone with a quick temper. Please read Proverbs 25:28.

**John:** *Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.*

But what should you do if your partner is guilty of a major sin, for example marital unfaithfulness?

**Jeff:** The willingness to forgive is generally important. But we should talk about the difficult cases another time. To wrap up this point for today, please read Colossians 3:13.

**John:** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances (complaints) you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

What comes next?

**Jeff:** Fifth, after closeness, openness, understanding, readiness for reconciliation comes loyalty<sup>17</sup>.

We live in a world that is dominated by sex, pornography, and a body cult where only ideal weight counts. Every woman knows that she cannot keep up with the models in certain magazines, particularly if she gets older. Again and again, a wife needs serious assurance that her husband will always stand by her. Please read again the promise Job gave in chapter 31:1.

**John:** "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."

**Jeff:** When a woman feels that her husband has made a covenant with God and that he wants Jesus to be Lord in all areas of his life including marriage, then she feels safe. If she repeatedly receives the assurance of love and loyalty from her husband, it has an enormous motivating effect and inspires her. That is how God created women, and that is why the marriage covenant is based on loyalty – “*until death us do part*”.

Please read Song of Solomon 8:6:

**John:** Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death ...

**Jeff:** Here is another important advice: It is good if the husband wears his wedding ring constantly. He may think it’s just an outward sign, but for her it’s an important signal that he shouldn’t underestimate. A man who leaves the house without a wedding ring can signal to another woman that he is available. A wife wants to be sure that her husband will be loyal to her for a lifetime. This is why we shouldn’t make jokes that involve divorce.

Please read Malachi 2:14-16.

**John:** ... the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the Lord God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

**Jeff:** God speaks here of the *wife of your youth* to whom the husband should remain faithful. Why?

**John:** Perhaps because some men in their mid-life crisis might start looking for a younger and more attractive “alternative”.

**Jeff:** Good answer! Of course, there are unfaithful women as well, but God originally created woman in such a way that she loves loyalty and commitment.

**John:** The Lord indeed expects a lot from us.

**Jeff:** Don’t worry, another time we will talk about what the Lord demands from our wives, which is not easy either. Let’s turn now to the sixth and last point: After **closeness, openness, understanding, readiness for reconciliation** and **loyalty** comes **high regard** or **appreciation**.<sup>18</sup>

Please read Song of Solomon 7:6.

**John:** ... how beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights!

**Jeff:** Proverbs 31:28-31 gives us an idea, how to praise our wives. Please read this passage.

**John:** Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

**Jeff:** God created women to long to be valued and honoured. Just as we honour our covenant with God, so we should honour our wife by keeping her as our precious treasure. If you do that, Cora feels loved, which gives her security and inspires her. What I am saying now sounds old-fashioned to many Westerners, and yet I believe that it is true. Most wives don't want to lead their relationship, but they desire to be the most important person to their husband. They want to know that they come first in his mind and heart and desire deep appreciation.

**John:** Should you buy your wife expensive gifts to show how much you value her?

**Jeff:** The price of a gift is not important in the eyes of most women. What matters more is how much thought you have given a present. She desires things that come from the heart.

Many wives make great contributions to their family life. Dealing with the children is often stressful and challenging. Doubts can arise as to whether everything is being done correctly, particularly if the kids are in difficult stages of development. Her contribution doesn't look spectacular on the outside and is often little appreciated in society. In Western culture, women who mainly take care of the children and the household even have a negative image. It is therefore all the more important that a husband reassure his wife again and again how much he values her commitment and how important her involvement is in his eyes.

**John:** I understand.

**Jeff:** This refers not only to her work. You should also make it clear that you value Cora as a person. If, for example, you look at her and say, "You make me happy!", it will mean a lot to her.

A man might think that because he told his wife last month that he loves her, she should know it for the future. But love has to be expressed in different ways every single day so that the heart is constantly filled with it.

I think we've said enough to reflect upon. Do you want to repeat the six important points again in order to better memorise them?

**John:** Most wives desire from their husbands:

- **closeness**
- **openness**
- **understanding**
- **readiness for reconciliation**
- **loyalty**
- **high regard or appreciation**

**Jeff:** Perfect! Let us put them into practice better than in the past. I am also far from always implementing them perfectly.

Here is the second part of Captain Aclera's testimony. About the third part we will talk next time.

*Testimony of Captain Reynan Aclera from the Philippines  
(Part 2)*

The biggest challenge that I've been through as a sailor is misunderstandings and conflicts with my wife. This happens when we are not able to talk it over because of limited time. This is especially the case when there is no internet connection. It upsets my wife when we have an unfinished matter to be settled. I am grateful to God because my wife is a prayerful and God-fearing woman, holding to the Bible. Ephesians 4:26 says: In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.

My advice to my co-sailors is that we need to find enough time to communicate with our families and focus our dreams and future on them. If we are inspired by our own families, we are motivated to do our work.

Finally prayer for guidance and protection for the whole contract is important. We ask the Lord to sustain both our families and us as sailors. It is hard to be separated from them, but we can make it because we want a better life for them.

We as husbands have a responsibility to handle carefully and manage properly whatever situation needs to be settled, in accordance with the Scripture. This is the way to overcome problems. Matthew 6:33-34 says: *But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

In Matthew 19:26 is written: *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Problems can be solved with God's help, whether regarding money, relationships, health problems, etc.

*“Pay attention to your thoughts as they become words.  
Pay attention to your words because they become actions.  
Pay attention to your actions because they become habits.  
Pay attention to your habits as they become your character.”<sup>19</sup>*

*Questions to think about and a task to do*

- 1) Think about the 6 points and write them down. What is especially important for most wives?
- 2) Husband should reflect about how they can help their wife feel well loved.
- 3) Wives should think about how to express her needs to her husbands in a good way.
- 4) If you are single, consider how you can prepare yourself to become a good spouse in regard to the 6 points.
- 5) Why does God expect unconditional love from a husband for his wife?
- 6) What do you understand from captain Aclera’s testimony?



## CHAPTER 9

### What helps a husband to feel respected?

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God:  
that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*

*And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask,  
we know that we have what we asked of Him.*

*1 John 5:14-15*



**Jeff:** Hi John. Do you have time to continue our talk?

**John:** Yes, I am free.

**Jeff:** I suggest we speak about the points which are so important to men in marriage, and which their wives need to understand.

**John:** You would explain them better to Cora. Yesterday we had another unpleasant conversation on the phone.

**Jeff:** Maybe my wife Sarah can talk to her sometime. But we should also speak about them. It helps us as well if we are aware of the points. Sometimes we react impatiently if we don't understand the mechanisms within us.

**John:** We can do it, but I don't have any hope that Cora will ever change.

**Jeff:** Do you remember the last sentence of Captain Aclera's testimony?

**John:** I brought it with me. He wrote: "Problems can be solved with God's help, whether regarding money, relationships, health issues, etc."

**Jeff:** We should trust God and recall that prayer is not a self-talk. Jesus wants us to share everything with Him because nothing is impossible for our Lord. We spoke last time about what you can do to improve your marriage by responding to the needs Cora probably has. But everything must be accompanied by lots of prayer.

Captain Aclera wrote in his testimony: "Prayer for guidance and protection for the whole contract is important. We ask the Lord to sustain both our families and us as sailors ... More prayers and more faith in God are needed. We should rely on the Word of God and His promises in order to be able to stand against those difficult circumstances."

God hears and answers our prayers according to His wisdom. Captain Aclera didn't have big marriage problems, however, he became very sick. He reports about it in the third part of his testimony and how the Lord helped him. Let us read it now.

### *Testimony of Captain Reynan Aclera from the Philippines (Part 3)*

Some years ago I had a health problem. During a medical examination it turned out that one of my kidneys was slightly enlarged. I could not have further tests by a specialist due to scheduling conflicts. So I went on board to start my contract. After some time I felt numbness in my feet and arms, had hypertension and other symptoms of a kidney failure. During my watch I suddenly lost my sight and had a total blackout. After a few minutes I regained it, but my right eye did not fully recover.

I was chief officer at that time. In Spain I went for an eye check-up and the remark was, that I was unfit for duty. More medical tests should be carried out. My master thought that I only had an eye problem. Also, my company didn't know about the other health complications. I chose to stay on board because I believed that the Lord would heal me. I fully entrusted my life and my work to God. Humbly kneeling down before Him, I asked sincerely for healing. Miraculously after three months, I felt better. I also did my part, by avoiding eating fats, sweets, and salty foods, and drinking plenty of water. I thanked God for being able to finish my contract.

Now my kidney is recovered. I know that God has a purpose for my life and because of that I want to be used for others as a living testimony that God is able to help. My faith has been tested and I overcame all problems. The Lord has proven His favour many times and I believe Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

**John:** A touching testimony.

**Jeff:** It reminds us that we should expect God's help in all situations. Your efforts to improve your marriage should be accompanied by intense prayer. You think that Cora will not change, but nothing is impossible with God. Please read John 16:23-24, where Jesus said:

**John:** "... I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

Will every prayer be answered?

**Jeff:** It would take a long time to discuss the topic of prayer, how and when God answers it. I'll just give you a few important points to consider:

- 1) We should pray in the name of Jesus, as you have read in John 15:23-24. This means that we do not come to God on our own authority but ask to be heard for Jesus' sake.
- 2) We should pray with faith. James 1:6-8 says that doubters cannot expect prayers to be answered.  
... he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.
- 3) James 5:16 says that the prayer of a righteous person does much. It is not our own righteousness, but that which is given to us by God, in which we however should live continuously.  
... *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*
- 4) In James 4:3 we read that if we pray with bad intentions, we will not receive anything.  
When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
- 5) We should also pray that God's will be done. Even Jesus did it before his execution, recorded in Matthew 26:39.  
*"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

- 6) When and how God answers our prayers is His decision. Both are said in the Bible:
- a) If we pray with faith, with the right attitude and for the right reason, God will answer our prayer.
  - b) Because God has the oversight and perfect wisdom, He will answer our prayers in a way that is best for us. This can differ from our expectations and timetable.

**John:** Thank you. That's helped me.

**Jeff:** Let us now talk about the points Emerson Eggerichs considers important in the eyes of most men. He mentions six in his book, which all have to do with the subject of the way wives show respect for their husbands.<sup>20</sup>

**John:** One more question first: We are required to love our wife unconditionally, even if she sometimes seems unlovable to us. Should she also respect us unconditionally?

**Jeff:** What do you suppose?

**John:** Probably yes?

**Jeff:** Please read Ephesians 5:33 again.

**John:** *Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

You are right! If God's commands to love and respect were dependent on our own conditions, by that the Lord would make himself reliant on us. However, it must be the other way around.

**Jeff:** We have spoken about Ephesians 5:21: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* Ephesians 5:22-24 makes it clear that the husband has the leadership responsibility in the marriage. But he is not to exercise it by dictatorially enforcing his will. Verse 21 calls for mutual submission. This is about the serving heart that both should have. Husbands should take Jesus as a model, who, for example, washed the feet of His disciples, a servant's job.

**John:** Also, a husband who unconditionally loves his wife and would even be willing to die for her, will not arrogantly misuse his authority.

**Jeff:** Absolutely! We have already discussed the fact that husbands can be called the first among equals in terms of responsibility in marriage.

**John:** Some wives will probably still find it difficult to accept this.

**Jeff:** For sure, but what is expected of the husbands is not easy either.

Everything in the Bible is about trusting God and His word. In many cases we have no problem with that. But we are asked to do it also if we disagree with Him. To trust in these cases means to submit to God in the knowledge that He loves us, that He has the oversight and that obedience means remaining under His blessing. Obeying

God only when it suits us means that we will continue to be our own bosses, which He will not accept.

**John:** I understand. Shall we start with the first of the 6 points?

**Jeff:** Sure. Emerson Eggerichs speaks about men's **desire to conquer**.<sup>21</sup>

**John:** My goodness – if Cora could hear that!

**Jeff:** Don't worry, he does not talk about men having the right to conquer women, be it physically, sexually, mentally, or emotionally. But a wife should know and respect man's natural will to move out, to face the challenges of this world, to work, and to achieve something.

**John:** I've noticed that men who meet for the first time usually ask about their jobs.

**Jeff:** Correct. For some women a job is an option. This usually doesn't apply to a man. He identifies himself strongly through his profession. If he is unemployed for a long time he can become depressed. He feels himself to be a failure because he has a strong desire to support his family financially.

**John:** And what can a wife do to encourage her husband?

**Jeff:** He is happy when his wife sees and expresses her gratitude for his efforts. She could for example say, "Honey, thank you for working hard for us and taking care of us so well." Her recognition for his professional efforts will motivate him in return to express his love for her.

Next, after his **desire to conquer** Emerson Eggerichs mentions **leadership**<sup>22</sup> as being of high value for most men.

**John:** Cora would say: "This is what I have always thought, men want to rule over women."

**Jeff:** It is certainly true that many men have seized power in order to control others, including in marriage. It is therefore understandable that many women have problems with some of the statements in the Bible. But we've already talked about the fact that the Bible means a serving leadership, with Jesus being the perfect example. It's not about men's abuse of power, but about taking responsibility for their marriages and families.

**John:** You are right, sometimes Cora has criticised me for not getting on with things because of laziness or lack of interest. It seems that many wives wish their husbands would take responsibility when it matters, and not leave the difficulties to them.

**Jeff:** This is true. Nowadays, especially in western countries, it is said that men and women are forced into certain roles by society and upbringing. Of course, the environment and the family shape us a lot. Nevertheless, I am convinced that God created men and women

differently and that they have diverse gifts, needs, and areas of responsibility. God has put the desire in men to protect and provide for their families. That is part of men's nature.

**John:** So it's not about putting the man above the woman in order to hold her down.

**Jeff:** Not at all. In his book, Emerson Eggerichs quotes a woman's testimony:

"When I used to drive on icy roads, I always slipped because I hit the brakes too suddenly. My husband would constantly tell me to take the brakes off. When I was travelling alone recently, I came across an icy spot again. I stepped on the brakes hard and the car started to slip. Suddenly I heard his voice inside me to let off the brakes. It saved my life and for the first time I fully realised that he had given me this advice for security. It was because he took the protector's role that he was so strict with me at this point. When I got home, I told him about the incident and that he had just saved my life. I wanted to show him my respect. Before that, I had felt rather degraded, even though he hadn't intended that with his warnings."<sup>23</sup>

**John:** But when a malicious man abuses his power?

**Jeff:** If a man is wicked, he will misuse his strength anyway, regardless of the family structure. The different roles and responsibilities in marriage have little to do with it. A man with bad plans will always mistreat those around him. However, if a man has good intentions in general, his wife's respect and his leadership position will not direct him to abuse his power. He will not turn his position as head of the family against the people he loves and wants to protect.

In Ephesians 5 Paul unfolds the biblical teaching of the marriage relationship. The wife subordinates herself to her husband and is therefore under his protection. The husband loves his wife and would even be willing to die for her. Taking advantage of his position, degrading, or minimizing her is the last thing he would do.<sup>24</sup>

**John:** Ideally, but not in all cases.

**Jeff:** On another day we will talk about the question of how to behave correctly if the partner acts wrongly. Because even men and women with good intentions don't always act wisely. We are all sinful with many weaknesses and sometimes strange character traits.

Let us now continue with the next point. After the **desire to conquer** and **leadership** comes **authority**.<sup>25</sup>

**John:** I heard the following once: A young couple got married and decided that he should make all the bigger decisions and she the smaller

ones. After 20 years of marriage, he observed that no single major decision was ever made.

**Jeff:** Yes, a funny story indeed. Many modern wives find it difficult to accept the responsibility and authority that the Bible gives husbands. But if the couple submit to God's Word, both partners must learn to trust God with what He says about husbands and wives. It is about trusting that God always has our best interests in view, also when it comes to the different roles in marriage. There is nothing special about following God's instructions when we are of one mind with Him. But it is important to rely on Him even if we and the entire social background disagree.

**John:** We've already talked about Ephesians 5:21: *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. Can you give a practical example of how to understand this verse in light of husbands' and wives' different roles?

**Jeff:** For example, if a couple disagrees about what a large sum of money should be spent on, the husband subordinates himself to his wife, considering her need to be loved by him despite of the conflict. He will avoid giving her the feeling that her view is not taken seriously. On the other hand, the woman subordinates herself to her husband in recognising his need to be respected in the face of differing opinions.

**John:** And who decides finally?

**Jeff:** The way the money is spent can vary. After an extensive exchange of views, the husband will often give in out of love, but in some cases he will insist on being the guide and having the last word.

**John:** And if it later turns out that his decision was wrong?

**Jeff:** Of course that can happen. But it could also be the case if God had given wives the leadership role. Very often a compromise is possible and if the husband is wise, he will seek it. Women usually have an intuitive gift for grasping particular situations better than we do. But there are circumstances where someone has to have the last word. I repeat however, a husband who really loves his wife, will not seek to dominate her but to do everything to make her happy.

**John:** What if the husband demands something that is wrong according to the Bible?

**Jeff:** You certainly know the answer. Read Acts 5:29.

**John:** Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men."

What is the next point after men's **desire to conquer, leadership and authority**?

**Jeff:** Many men have the ability to **think analytically** and enjoy being an **advisor**.<sup>26</sup>

Emerson Eggerichs writes about a woman who had not much respect for her husband. Behind his back she spoke ill of him and made fun of his ideas and thoughts. One day when she was shopping, she thought it would be interesting to see where and how her husband was working.

When she got to his office, he was very busy, and she had to wait a few minutes. From her chair she could see the respect with which his colleagues treated her husband. Then an elderly gentleman came to her husband's desk, obviously someone who had worked for the company for a long time and was his boss. He also spoke extremely respectfully to him. Then his attractive young secretary brought some papers. The wife felt shame and also a little fear when she realised that this well-dressed young woman looked up at her husband and seemed to admire him.

After all that, her husband had time for her. However, she did not stay long and soon said goodbye. She just made it to the car and then burst into tears. She remembered the number of times she had made fun of him behind his back. She realised that she had not lacked respect for her husband because he had done something wrong or because he was a bad partner. She understood that her real problem was that he wasn't what she wanted him to be.

This woman had overlooked at least two things about her husband. First, he had intelligence and many skills that she had always overlooked before. Second, he desired the same respect at home that he had at work.<sup>27</sup>

**John:** I hope Cora doesn't behave similarly behind my back.

**Jeff:** That would be painful.

Here is another testimony of a woman from the book. Please read it.

**John:** "I longed for a deeper relationship and more intimacy with my husband after 23 years of marriage. Little did I know that my lack of respect countered that longing. I had a real problem with my arrogance; I always thought my ideas were the right ones and didn't find it necessary to even think about my husband's. I thought that I was 'helping my incompetent' spouse.

It was amazing what happened after the Lord brought this point to my attention. When I stopped speaking out loud and gave my husband more space to share his thoughts, an incredible thing happened. He started telling me what was on his mind. I no longer do mono-

logues, instead we have real conversations. My love and respect for him have grown immensely. In return, he has blossomed and transformed more and more into the husband I always longed for.”<sup>28</sup>

**Jeff:** Wives should understand that husbands want their gift of analytical thinking and counselling to be respected and valued.

**John:** What is the next point after men’s **desire to conquer, to lead**, that his **authority is respected** and as well his ability of **thinking analytically** and being an **advisor**?

**Jeff:** Most men want their wife’s **friendship** and that they **walk as a couple side by side**.<sup>29</sup>

Talking and exchanging ideas is important to many women. For them, speaking is the way to get together. Men, on the other hand, usually grow together by doing something. Over time, their shared experiences and common interests lead to a stronger relationship. They don’t focus on it and they rarely talk about how they feel about each other. However, one thing is clear when they become friends: they faithfully stand up for one another.

Husbands should learn that conversations are important to most women. A wife should understand that the husband values her being a friend to him, with whom he enjoys doing things. Men sometimes like to experience things with their partner without much talking.

**John:** What is the last point.

**Jeff:** Guess it.

**John:** Has it anything to do with sex?

**Jeff:** Bingo! It is **sexual intimacy**?<sup>30</sup> Once someone said: “The devil will do anything to get two people into bed before marriage. After the wedding, he does everything possible to keep them away from each other.”

**John:** It seems that women and men think and feel differently at this point too.

**Jeff:** Yes. Sometimes women want intimacy and tenderness without sexual intercourse, while men hope for sex and show little patience with pure tenderness. It is again a matter of giving and taking. The husband should serve his wife’s soul to gain access to her body, and the wife should serve her husband’s body to gain access to his soul.

**John:** Could one say that women need talking as an emotional outlet? If this need is met, she feels loved. If the man is lazy and little interested in conversations, she assumes that he doesn’t really love her. The man, on the other hand, needs sexual intimacy as a physical outlet. If a wife refuses herself too often, he concludes that she does not respect him and his needs.

**Jeff:** Excellent! No professor could have expressed it better.

**John:** I think it's also unfair when she demands that her husband have eyes only for her and not look at other women in turning him away when it comes to sex.

**Jeff:** This is true. Let us read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 again.

**John:** The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of lack of self-control.

**Jeff:** A wife should understand that in sexuality her husband is probably more vulnerable to the devil than she is. It is sometimes harder for him to resist temptation. In terms of sexuality, too, God created men and women differently. Again, the rule for spouses applies: You can't get what you need if you withhold what your partner desires. A husband should meet the emotional needs of his wife to let her feel loved and a wife should meet the physical needs of her husband to let him feel that his desires are respected. Marriage is always about give and take.

**John:** It is late. Shall I repeat the six points so that we can remember them better?

**Jeff:** Sure.

**John:** Most men desire that their wives respect their following needs:

- **to conquer**
- **to lead**
- **that his authority is not called into question**
- **that his ability of thinking analytically and being an advisor is appreciated**
- **to be her friend and that he walks side by side with his wife**
- **sexual intimacy**

*“Love alone understands the secret of giving gifts to others and getting rich yourself in the process.”<sup>31</sup>*

*Clemens von Brentano*

*Questions to think about and a task to do*

- 1) God has set certain conditions so that our prayers will be answered according to His wisdom. Which are they and which of them do you still have to work on?
- 2) What is meant by the mutual submission of wife and husband in marriage that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 5:21?
- 3) Think about the 6 points, that most men value in marriage and write them down.
- 4) Wives should reflect about how they can help their husbands feel well respected.
- 5) Husbands should think about how to express his needs to his wife in a good way.
- 6) If you are single, consider, how you can prepare yourself to become a good spouse in regard to the 6 points.
- 7) What do you learn from captain Aclera's testimony?



## CHAPTER 10

### Five different love languages

*How beautiful you are, my darling!*

*Oh, how beautiful!*

*Your eyes behind your veil are doves.*

*Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.*

*Song of Solomon 4:1*



John was looking forward to using a new notebook for the first time on a video call with Cora. He was sitting in the crew mess-room, alone except for Jeff, who was eating his lunch late because of some extra jobs he had to do.

**John:** Hi Cora, how are you doing?

**Cora:** Fine so far. Which port are you at now?

**John:** Antwerp, in Belgium. How are the kids?

**Cora:** Playing outside with their friends. It's been a very stressful day. As soon as I got home from work I had to prepare dinner, help the children with schoolwork, and do a thousand other things.

**John:** I understand. By the way, the kitchen doesn't look very orderly.

**Cora:** I just told you that I've hardly had time for anything today.

**John:** Sure, there are days like that sometimes. You should try out my new notebook. It's really great and, above all, very fast. The graphics card for the visual display is much better than on my old one.

**Cora:** I don't want to deal with your technical equipment now. I'm tired.

**John:** By the way, I think it's time for you go to the hairdresser. You don't look that great anymore.

**Cora:** Thank you very much for the compliment.

**John:** Don't be so sensitive. I should be allowed to simply tell you that.

**Cora:** I'm afraid you will never change.

**John:** What have I done wrong again?

**Cora:** To be honest, you're doing almost everything wrong.

**John:** Come on – you aren't perfect either.

By the way, don't forget to visit my parents next Sunday. It's father's birthday. You should take a big cake to have with you in order that they don't have that much to do. You know how he loves mango cake with a lot of cream and chocolate chips.

**Cora:** Thanks a lot for your great tips. Every day my deep desire for your regular advice becomes stronger. I'm tired now, so good night.

**John:** Bye, bye and sleep well.

Two days later John and Jeff met for another conversation about marriage.

**Jeff:** Hi John, we've talked a lot over the past few months about God creating women and men differently. Let me repeat a few thoughts. We find these differences attractive at first and it plays a role in falling in love with a person. There is a saying: opposites attract. But it can also mean that we have trouble understanding our spouse's way of thinking and behaviour. This usually shows when the excitement of early love has cooled down. Now it is important whether or not a couple appreciates the individual differences. Someone once said as a joke: "Don't try to change a person to become like you. It's enough that there's only one such character on earth."

**John:** Right. The challenge is now to grow from being in love to mature, deep love.

**Jess:** Correct. Of course it's important to express this love all the time.

**John:** I heard this funny story some time ago: once a wife complained to her husband that he would hardly ever affirm his love to her. He replied, "Honey, I assured you when we made our marriage vows that I love you. Why should I keep repeating myself?"

**Jeff:** A good example of what matters. It may be enough to mention scientific facts only once for everyone to know; but love should be shown anew in marriage every single day. Gary Chapman, an American author, wrote a book with the title: *The 5 Love Languages*<sup>32</sup>. He explains that we do not all speak and understand the same love language equally well. He says that each of us is particularly receptive to one of the five.

**John:** Does that also have to do with the differences between women and men?

**Jeff:** Not necessarily. Both can prefer just one of the five different love languages.

**John:** What are they?

**Jeff:** Chapman speaks of:

- 1) **Words of Affirmation**
- 2) **Quality Time**
- 3) **Receiving Gifts**
- 4) **Acts of Service**
- 5) **Physical Touch**

**John:** Does he say that you feel loved only if your partner speaks to you in the love language you understand?

**Jeff:** That doesn't have to be the case, and yet it is possible that one partner expresses love very differently from the way the other longs for. It is likely, especially if there are other problems in the marriage, that one hardly notices that the other is trying his or her best to express love.

**John:** I'm sure that Cora and I speak different love languages.

**Jeff:** Yes, I think so. There are at least two challenges for each of us. First, trying to find out which of the five love languages your spouse desires most. Second, that you recognise when your partner is making an effort to express love, even if it is not your favoured love language. You should appreciate the attempt.

**John:** Is it important to explain to your partner which love language you prefer?

**Jeff:** Sure. And you should also inquire and try to observe what is good for Cora. It's also generally good to take the first step. Try to get involved in the love language she desires. This will help her to use your favourite one. It's especially important when love on both sides has cooled because of marital problems.

**John:** Well, then we should discuss this. Maybe it will help me to respond better to Cora. Shall we start with the first love language, "**words of affirmation**"?<sup>33</sup>

**Jeff:** Sure. Do you think you speak it well?

**John:** Certainly not so bad.

**Jeff:** To be honest brother, I think you still have a lot to learn at this point.

**John:** Why? What makes you think that?

**Jeff:** Remember the conversation you had with Cora two days ago. She had been working hard, was exhausted, and obviously longed for your friendly appreciation. But instead your reaction was rather cold and business-like. She had had a long day at work, taken care of the children and all other concerns at home. For that she deserved your gratitude, regular kind words and much more besides.

**John:** I expected her to be more interested in my new notebook.

**Jeff:** Maybe she would have shown more if you had encouraged and built her up. Instead, you complained about the messy kitchen and her hairstyle. I saw it as rather hurtful. Whether or not **words of affirmation** is Cora's primary love language, your next phone-call has to be completely different. In your case, I would ask her forgiveness.

**John:** I don't see my behaviour as negatively as you do.

**Jeff:** If two people live together for a long time there is a risk that they will get used to a lot and take much for granted. It isn't enough that you told Cora years ago that you appreciated her double burden at work and in the family. It must be repeated from time to time. Although her hair looked a bit messy, Cora is a beautiful woman in my eyes. You have to keep telling her that, or do you want me to do it for you?

**John:** Of course not!

**Jeff:** And you certainly have to continuously tell Cora in different ways that you love her.

Another point: consider also that love make requests, not demands.

**John:** Was I really too straight with my approach? I thought that I have to be clear about what I mean. Otherwise, your partner may not understand you well.

**Jeff:** A captain must give his crew clear orders and instructions. This sometimes also applies to parents and children, but certainly not to spouses.

What would you say when you wish Cora to get a certain tool when she goes shopping?

**John:** It's very simple: "Don't forget to get the tool when you are in the city!"

**Jeff:** That's how the boss speaks to his employees, but not a kind husband to his beloved wife.

**John:** How would you tell her?

**Jeff:** “Sweetheart, I know you have a lot of shopping to carry home with you. Would it be possible for you to get me the tool, or would it be too heavy for you? If you can, it would be a great help to me... Thank you darling, I love you more every day!” Now guess what words would make Cora feel valued and loved?

**John:** Okay, you’ve convinced me, and I’ll try to improve.

What is the second love language mentioned in the book?

**Jeff:** To spend “**quality time**” with your spouse.<sup>34</sup> What do you think is the difference between ordinary time together and having real **quality time** as a couple?

**John:** Hard to say.

**Jeff:** By spending **quality time** you give your spouse undivided attention. If you’re talking to Cora while constantly looking at your mobile phone for messages, then you are spending time with her but not at all **quality time**. What would be another expression for **quality time**?

**John:** Maybe meaningful time?

**Jeff:** Very good. In what way can time become meaningful?

**John:** Maybe by fully caring about the partner’s words and concerns. By listening sensitively and not constantly interrupting. By being focused on the matter and not wandering around in your mind.

**Jeff:** Very good. One of the most precious things we have is our lifetime. Every second brings us a little closer to the end of it. If I pay undivided attention to a person for half an hour of my life, then that is of great value. I will never have those thirty minutes again and given a part of my life to the other.

**John:** During my two-month vacation at home I’m often very busy with lots of important things to arrange.

**Jeff:** There are two things to say about that: First, **quality time** does not mean that you always have to spend many hours together. Thirty meaningful minutes are much more valuable than spending three bored or stressful hours together.

Second, you talked about important things to do while on vacation, which is of course true. I know that a lot of things are left behind while at sea. On the other hand, there is hardly anything more important than your marriage. It is significant that you spend several hours with your partner at least occasionally. Some things are said only when the feeling of closeness has revived again. Expressing love takes time, and rekindling cooled love even more.

**John:** And what about the kids? They also need my attention.

**Jeff:** When you come home after many months on board, it's actually a challenge to keep an eye on different things:

Spend time with each of your two children individually. Every child must be allowed every now and then to have his dad to himself.

Sometimes play together with both children. The experience is of great value to them.

Of course, you must do things together as a family too, whether enjoyable trips or simply long meals, where everyone participates in the conversation and you enjoy being together.

But there must also be times exclusive to a couple. This is vital to the success of marriage and family life.

**John:** I get it! What is the third love language?

**Jeff:** "Receiving gifts."<sup>35</sup>

**John:** Well, everyone is happy to get a present.

**Jeff:** Sure, but for some people this is the most important love language. Imagine it's Cora's birthday tomorrow. You haven't thought too much about getting her a present; that's how you come under pressure of time. In a hurry you buy her a small bouquet of flowers at the gas station, and they're no longer fresh. Then you rush into a store and get a present and put it in old wrapping paper. When Cora opens the present next day she finds old tape still stuck to the paper. You forgot to remove the price-label and it occurs to you too late that she doesn't like the colour you've chosen. On the attached greeting card you've written some general phrases with spelling mistakes. Unfortunately, you forgot to put the flowers in water, so they're no longer acceptable.

**John:** You're exaggerating. I would never act like that.

**Jeff:** Yes, I know, but you understand what I'm talking about. It would offend even someone whose favourite love language is not **receiving gifts**.

**John:** Does the price play a major role?

**Jeff:** Yes and no. On the one hand, a gift with which you want to touch your partner's heart shouldn't be the cheapest plastic stuff bought carelessly in a discount store. On the other hand, it's important to give something which makes it clear that you really thought about it. Which gifts could have a special value for the partner where the price doesn't have to be high?

**John:** Perhaps when it comes to something the spouse mentioned a long time ago which you've remembered.

**Jeff:** Why?

**John:** Because it shows that you've listened carefully and are interested in small things only mentioned in passing.

**Jeff:** Very good! What else can give a present special value?

**John:** When the gift is connected with a happy experience the couple had together.

**Jeff:** Yes. With a gift it's important to be clear: I have thought about it, you are important to me, by this gift I want to make you really happy and I desire to express my deep love for you.

**John:** So it's more about the heart of the giver than about the material value of the gift.

**Jeff:** That's right. Which of two gifts will touch Cora's heart more?

A luxury vacuum cleaner for \$ 450.

A heart-shaped stone which you picked up on the lonely beach where you kissed for the first time.

**John:** I think I've got it. What's the fourth love language?

**Jeff:** It is "**acts of service**".<sup>36</sup> By them Chapman means doing things you know your spouse would like you to do. You seek to please Cora by serving her and express your love by doing things for her. Such actions as cooking a meal, setting the table, emptying the dishwasher, vacuuming, changing the baby's diaper, keeping the car in operating condition, paying the bills, walking the dog, and dealing with insurance companies are all acts of service. They require time, effort, and energy. Done with a positive spirit they are indeed expressions of love.

I have a friend who always cleans the bathroom and toilet at home. He does it because his wife is allergic to the cleaning products. Perhaps she could do the work with the windows wide open, but he knows his wife will be grateful if he takes on the task.

**John:** These are all common things, seem to have little to do with deep feelings.

**Jeff:** We've already talked about how real love can be expressed through practical actions. Do you remember how shortly before his death Jesus showed his love to the twelve disciples in a very practical way?

**John:** When he washed their feet; a slave service.

**Jeff:** Please read John 13:15, about what he said to them afterwards.

**John:** "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

**Jeff:** This sentence doesn't apply specifically to marriage; but why shouldn't it be? Please also read John 14:21 and 23.

**John:** "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My

Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

**Jeff:** These two verses show that love does not always have to be expressed through strong emotions, but often through practical actions. Jesus is speaking here of serving for love. We should be ready to do this in principle, but especially in our marriage.

**John:** Let's talk about the fifth love language.

**Jeff:** It is “physical touch.”<sup>37</sup>

**John:** Does Chapman mean sexual intercourse?

**Jeff:** Touching each other gently and allowing plenty of time before sexual intercourse is especially important for women. But a husband should also know that many wives desire regular friendly touches during the day, without sex in mind. If a wife realises that her husband is thinking about it whenever he approaches her, she will probably reject him.

We should use many natural opportunities during the day to gently touch our partner. Have you any ideas?

**John:** For example:

- when we go shopping, taking her hand
- giving a kiss when we say goodbye or come home
- even in the presence of other people, putting an arm round her shoulder
- while listening to music, giving her back a relaxing massage

**Jeff:** Exactly. If you take these opportunities over and over again during the day, it creates a strong inner bond.

**John:** If it is true that everyone has one favourite language of love, what significance do the other four have?

**Jeff:** We should learn to speak well all five languages of love in our marriage. I repeat, by:

- often saying **words of affirmation** during the day
- spending **quality time** together, whenever possible
- surprising our spouse with a small **present** every now and then, even without a special occasion
- consciously seeking opportunities to please our partner with **acts of service**
- and using everyday encounters to **touch** our partner in a friendly way

But we should also find out our partner's favourite language of love and pay it special attention.

Can you give me two examples where the partner might feel

unloved if the preferred love language is rarely spoken in the relationship?

**John:** Let's suppose that Cora's most important love language is **quality time**, but I'm used to expressing my love for her through **acts of service**. It may be that she doesn't see them as signs of love. Maybe she thinks that I'm just fulfilling my household responsibilities and still feels little loved.

Let's imagine Cora's main love language is **physical touch**, but I express my love for her by sometimes buying her presents or flowers. It may be that she appreciates these gifts and still longs for me to often kiss her, to hold her in my arms or touch her gently.

**Jeff:** These are good examples. I have another sailor's testimony. Enjoy reading and see you tomorrow.

### *Testimony of a sailor from Mindanao in the Philippines*

I met my wife in a gathering with our high school batch mates. Shortly afterwards she went back to Taiwan, where she worked. So I didn't have the opportunity to court her, but luckily she gave me her contact details. While I was working on the ship again, we had regular communication with each other. It was the same year that she agreed to my request to start a relationship. Unfortunately, when she was on a one-week vacation during my stay at home, we couldn't see each other because I was called back on board a ship at short notice. I prayed, "Lord, give me a sign that she should become my life partner by granting me at least a short opportunity to meet her." Then my flight was actually cancelled and rescheduled for the next day. So we met for the first time at the airport and were able to hug and kiss each other. We had only a few minutes, because she had to take a connecting flight to her province.

We got married two years later. At first we had bigger problems, because we had hardly gotten to know each other personally. We were different in our thoughts, feelings, and many more things. But little by little we found each other through giving and taking, through patience and understanding. When we had quarrels or problems that we couldn't solve during the daytime, I would lower my ego and ask for forgiveness. We never fell asleep without sorting things out in a friendly way.

After a year, our daughter was born and two years later our son, two precious gifts of God. We have been married for fifteen years now, have survived, and still give and take. Sometimes, when we have misunderstandings, we need to learn to put aside our pride and I as a husband, my

ego. Even if the wife sometimes makes a mistake, we need to be humble and willing to reconcile. We must treat our wife as a queen, then she considers us as a king. The most important thing is that we have a loving heart and that we trust in God and pray to Him.

*“The account of love is unlimited.  
We get from God as much as we need.”<sup>38</sup>  
Corrie ten Boom*

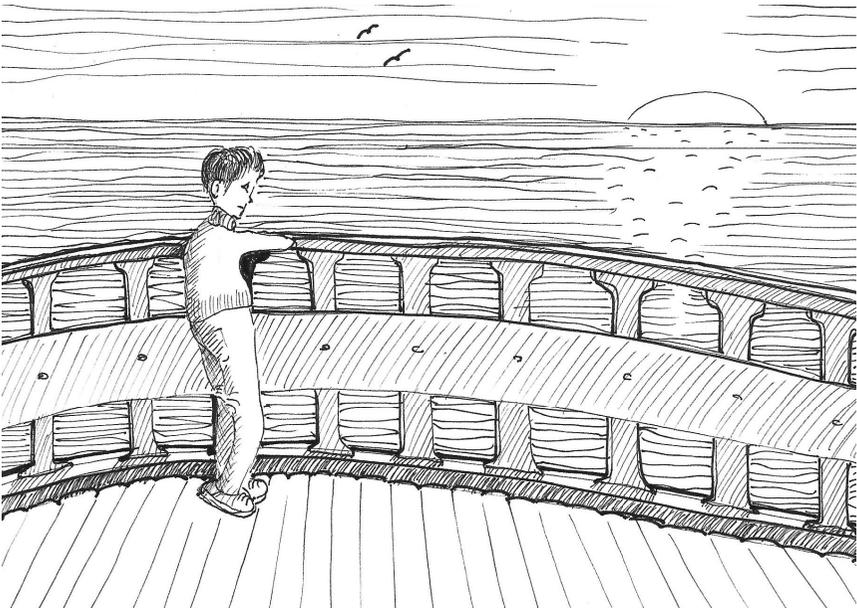
### *Questions to think about*

- 1) How is a marriage affected when one partner rarely encourages and shows appreciation? Give an example of **word of affirmation**.
- 2) What is the difference between spending time and **quality time** with your partner? Give examples.
- 3) Which **gifts** could have a special value for the partner, where the price doesn't have to be high? Give a few examples.
- 4) Why can **acts of service** be an expression of deep love, even if emotions are seemingly not involved?
- 5) Give examples of how **physical touch** can be practised that were not mentioned in the conversation between Jeff and John.
- 6) What is your partner's favourite love language according to your observation?

## CHAPTER II

### Doing right when the spouse behaves wrongly

*Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong,  
but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.  
Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances,  
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire.*  
| *Thessalonians 5:15-19*



John stood alone on the quarterdeck and watched the sun slowly disappear behind the horizon. Again he began to doubt whether he had chosen the right profession. As a seaman he was away from home for an average of 8 to 10 months. Sometimes even more if he needed money, for example to support his siblings. He was homesick, missed his children, and had major

marital problems that were difficult to resolve at a distance. Of course, John was grateful that he didn't have any financial problems. He was also aware that his career choice was voluntary because nobody had forced him. But still it wasn't easy having to spend so much of his life far from home.

He remembered his excitement when he passed the marine engineering school entrance exam. "Finally away from home", he thought, and dreamed of seeing the big wide world and experiencing exciting adventures. But the reality was different, and it lasted only a few months before all illusions were gone. The job soon became monotonous because the daily routine was always the same: getting up, eating, working, a little free time and sleeping. The same procedure the next day. He could hardly ever get off the ship because time in port was short. His world was limited to the same activities, the same environment, and the same people. Next evening he shared his depressing thoughts and emotions with Jeff.

**Jeff:** For me as a young man it was like you back then. I too had many illusions about the life as a sailor. They soon disappeared in the rough reality.

**John:** I think to experience delusions happens in many marriages too. The other day Cora shouted at me on the phone, "You are not the person I married!"

**Jeff:** And what did you answer?

**John:** "Oh yes, I am! But the person you fell in love with was an illusion."

**Jeff:** Pretty good response. It is possible that both our marriage and our profession start with rosy illusions only to be later disappointed. In our job you either learn to make the best of the situation and recognise the positive aspects or seek a chance to start another career. The claim upon marriage is much bigger. In this it is necessary to successfully walk the difficult path from first being in love through the phase of disillusionment to mature love.

**John:** Without the option of seeking another wife.

**Jeff:** Indeed. We have talked a lot in the last months about the fact that big changes are possible in marriage. For example, by

- trusting prayer
- seeing the desires and needs of the other and, if possible, fulfilling them
- understanding and enduring weaknesses in character, mistakes, and sins of the partner
- appreciating and focusing on the positive sides and strengths of the spouse

This works wonders in many cases and can improve a marriage a lot. But it is also part of the truth that sometimes all efforts seem to be useless if the partner is unwilling. We can't re-educate an adult, particularly one not seeing the need for major changes. I have read another helpful book by Leslie Vernick with the title *How to act right when your spouse acts wrong*.<sup>39</sup> We can learn a lot from it, and should talk about some important insights, because acting with wisdom and maturity is always the best option. Even if it doesn't lead to a positive change in the partner, someone else will be transformed. Guess who.

**John:** Us?

**Jeff:** Sure. God often uses problems to question our attitudes, to shape our character, to make us more mature, and grow spiritually. Can you think of any examples from the Bible where we can observe this?

**John:** Perhaps Moses, whom God prepared in the wilderness over 40 long years, later to lead the people of Israel into the promised land?

**Jeff:** Very good answer!

**John:** David, who was persecuted by Saul for a long time before becoming king of Israel?

**Jeff:** Excellent, you know the Bible well! Jesus also uses different kinds of problems in order to change us to become more like him. This could be, for example, an illness, losing our job, financial problems, having permanent troubles in marriage, or being persecuted because of one's belief. When we face difficulties, we often see only the negative aspects and want to overcome them as quickly as possible. This is natural, but the Lord has a different perspective. It seems that tough times can transform us more than when the sun is always shining. Please read 1 Peter 1:6-9.

**John:** *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

**Jeff:** Turn also to Romans 5:3-5.

**John:** ... *we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.*

**Jeff:** Matthew 5:38-39 is usually not applied to marriage. But the fact is that some marriages look like a battlefield. Please read what Jesus taught His disciples.

**John:** *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*

**Jeff:** As I said before, God wants to change us through difficulties. In her book, Leslie Vernick writes of an interesting experience. Please read it.

**John:** “Unfortunately, I meet many people who are not looking for deep personal changes and growth. Instead, they are desiring a quick fix or relief from their pain. They often ask me, ‘Just tell me what I can do to make it better – now!’

I recently held a seminar on ways to make a marriage happier. After my lecture, voice recordings and books were available for those interested. All copies that were about making your life happier were sold out within minutes. The material of deep life, spiritual growth, and maturity remained. Such topics were less attractive to these participants. Yet God tells us that deepening our relationship with Him is the basis for our well-being and happiness, despite problems.

Maturity and growth usually happen in the context of relationships. From the beginning of life, God places us in a family. In this environment of personal interaction, we begin to experience love and conflict, joy and sadness, familiarity and division. Our parents help shape our character, both positively and negatively. We begin to realise who we are, mainly through contact with people we are close to. Are we kind, loyal, selfish, or helpful? Do we also think of others or only of ourselves? The dealings with the members of our family reveal who we are. In this context, we cannot long pretend something to one another. Conflict, pain, disappointment and anger tear down our friendly facade and bring light on our unpleasant sides.”<sup>740</sup>

**John:** Do we mainly have to endure the wrong behaviour of our partner without complaint?

**Jeff:** Of course not. Changes in the relationship should be sought through prayer, intense conversations, and proper behaviour. Sometimes it is necessary resolutely to raise a stop sign. In certain cases, physical separation is advisable, but seldom divorce. However, couples separate far too quickly these days. We should consider that in principle God is against it. Therefore for believers it is an option in only a very few cases. For example when physical or emotional abuse takes place or in adultery without repentance.

**John:** So adultery does not have to lead to divorce.

**Jeff:** Honest repentance and complete forgiveness can result in reconciliation. This is always the best option.

**John:** But if the adulterer is not willing to repent?

**Jeff:** This is certainly very painful; but I repeat, we should always keep in mind that God has great goals for us. He wants to change our nature, shape our character, and mature us so that we become more like Jesus and are prepared for Heaven. Therefore, He often doesn't take our pain away from us immediately. Yes, sometimes our path through a dark valley seems to be very, very long and we ask the Lord "why?".

**John:** How should one know how to behave in cases of different marriage problems?

**Jeff:** There is no single or simple answer. What is right in one relationship may be wrong in another. If a spouse commits a serious sin, it must be brought up. Sometimes clear consequences need to be enforced. However, our response to wrongdoing is also often incorrect. Instead of first thinking carefully and asking God for wisdom, we burst out in anger with evil words, which escalates the situation. Sometimes not only is the other person's behaviour sinful, but so is our reaction. Doing right can occasionally mean keeping your mouth shut and accepting our spouse's weaknesses.

**John:** It would be much easier to have wise answers or good solutions to each single marital problem.

**Jeff:** Imagine that six people with back pain go to the same doctor, who prescribes the identical therapy for all. But in fact the first would need only a painkiller, the second antibiotics for a period, the third physiotherapy, the fourth to learn how better to carry heavy loads, the fifth would be helped by a new mattress and the sixth only by an operation. Believe me, marriage problems are even more complicated than back pain. Because of this, now and then the advice of an experienced counsellor is necessary.

**John:** I understand; there are no single or simple answers.

**Jeff:** None at all. But in each situation, God's Word challenges us to act with a loving attitude. Today we live in a culture more about taking than giving. It is often said, "my needs are not met in my marriage." Dissatisfaction, anger, resentment and bitterness can result from entering marriage on the wrong basis, first and foremost that it is about being happy instead of pleasing the partner.

Leslie Vernick writes, "Doing the right thing when our spouse misbehaves is no guarantee of greater happiness in the marriage,

although it is often a consequence. Our correct behaviour may not cause our spouse to turn around, change behaviour, and meet our needs, although that may be. Because God says that if we take care to treat others lovingly, we can have a powerful influence on them."<sup>41</sup>

Please read the following verses from the Bible. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24.

**John:** *Encourage one another and build each other up ...*

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds ...*

**Jeff:** Leslie Vernick continues, "As we learn to do the right thing when our spouse does wrong, we will become more aware of what God is doing in the midst of marriage difficulties to make us more like Him. We become able to view our spouse's various characteristics as less of a problem. We learn how to respond wisely when we are mistreated. Perhaps most importantly in an effort to do right when our spouse acts wrong, is that we seek a deeper relationship with Christ. Because it requires faith and trust in God to do the right thing from a pure and sincere heart in the midst of suffering. It is a matter of submitting our will to God's divine plan for our life. The marital relationship is a picture of the covenant of our relationship with Christ. He will be our teacher in this learning process because He always does the right thing, even when we do wrong."<sup>42</sup>

You told me when we were together on board for the first time that you didn't have a good father. I am grateful that I grew up in a very good family. Of course my father refused many of my wishes and requests, which I didn't like. So I asked him, as all children do: "Why?" Sometimes he gave reasons, but not always. Can you imagine how he responded occasionally to me?

**John:** Perhaps "Do it because I have told you!"

**Jeff:** Correct.

**John:** I am sure that you didn't like it.

**Jeff:** Certainly not. Do you think my father had the right to give this answer?

**John:** I believe so.

**Jeff:** Why?

**John:** Just because he is your father.

**Jeff:** You are right. When my father replied, "because I told you," that statement assumed that he had authority and that I had to trust and obey him. Of course, it is good when parents explain their reasons to their children. And yet it is not always for children to understand or

agree to their parent's commands or prohibitions. They must learn to recognise their father's authority. My Daddy certainly knew that I was too immature, too unreasonable, or too rebellious then to always understand his wisdom.

**John:** But did he always make the right decisions?

**Jeff:** Probably not. Human fathers make mistakes, but our Heavenly Father never. Often God explains to us the reasons for His commands or prohibitions; but sometimes He just points to His authority and much greater wisdom. We find a good example in Isaiah 45:5-12. Please read it.

**John:** *I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things. You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the Lord, have created it. Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "He has no hands"? Woe to him who says to his father, "What have you begotten?" or to his mother, "What have you brought to birth?" This is what the Lord says, the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: "Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I arranged their starry hosts."*

**Jeff:** As I said before, when my father answered: "Because I told you", it was about his authority, and certainly we need to acknowledge the much greater authority of the Lord.

But there was another response my father sometimes gave that I didn't like at that time either. Can you guess it?

**John:** Is it: "You do it, because it is good for you"?

**Jeff:** Bingo! Why don't children like this answer from their fathers?

**John:** Perhaps because necessary orders and advice can be uncomfortable at first.

**Jeff:** Can you give any example?

**John:** Yes. If I need to take my son to the dentist he never wants to go. Not even when I try to explain the importance of keeping his teeth healthy. If he continues to complain, I say finally, "You must come with me because it is good for you!" That is the end of all discussions.

**Jeff:** Very good. Your son may even understand the significance of healthy teeth, but still prefers to avoid possibly painful treatment. The long-term consequences of bad teeth don't matter to him now. But you would be an immature father if you agreed with your son's opinion. No parents like to see their children suffer even a little pain, but they know what is best for them. Please read Hebrews 12:5-11.

**John:** *And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Are you sure that persistent marital problems can be one of God's methods to educate and discipline us?

**Jeff:** Yes, the Lord can use any circumstance to help us grow spiritually. But whether we accept or rebel against it, it is a matter of trusting in Jesus. We should trust that He means well by us, otherwise we will gain nothing from the difficulties we suffer.

**John:** This means that the Lord is using other people's sins, mistakes, and weaknesses for our best interests?

**Jeff:** Yes. But that doesn't mean that one is not responsible for one's sins. Both truths need to be observed: first, that everyone is accountable for their behaviour, and second, that God can use wrong conduct in us for others' betterment.

It was even God's will that David was persecuted by Saul for a long time before he became king. It shaped David and made him more dependent on Him. In addition, even we are blessed because of what David suffered.

**John:** Sure?

**Jeff:** During this period many of the Psalms were written that we benefit from today. But Saul was still fully responsible for his own wrong behaviour. He even died at an early age in war because of his many sins.

It is also interesting to notice how David acted in this difficult phase of his life. He had several opportunities to kill Saul. His officers

even advised him to do so because, in their opinion, he had the right to do so. But David refused strongly. He didn't want to attack God's anointed king, although he could have justified himself with his right to self-defence.

**John:** That thought goes well with the book's subject: "How to act right when your spouse acts wrong".

**Jeff:** Absolutely. It is always necessary for us to act rightly. The wrong behaviour of others should not be cause for us to sin as well. This is particularly important with regard to marriage. After all, we must do all we can to improve our marital situation.

**John:** But David did not silently endure Saul's wrong behaviour all the time.

**Jeff:** You observed that well. David repeatedly confronted Saul about his wrong attitude and thereby put him to shame.

**John:** This temporarily improved the relationship between the two, although Saul finally ended up in ruin because of his own stubbornness.

**Jeff:** Correct! Let's summarise these thoughts in terms of marriage:

- It is fundamentally necessary to behave correctly, even if spouses are wrong. Therefore, one should not react hastily and in anger, but allow time for the emotions to cool. This helps to avoid responding in a sinful way.
- Correct behaviour in a marriage can look otherwise. The question often arises whether to resolve a conflict consistently but lovingly, or whether one endures it in silence for certain reasons.
- If one decides to behave correctly it can be in different ways. It needs a lot of wisdom to make good decisions. God can give it to us in prayer, through the Bible and in counselling books. In some cases it might be necessary to seek advice from an experienced adviser or pastor.
- In many cases, correct behaviour will bring about positive changes, but there is no guarantee. Sometimes God uses long-lasting problems to shape us, to make us more dependent on Him, to mature us spiritually and to make Jesus' being in us visible in the world through our positive example.

*Testimony of Eduardo Sombilon, a Filipino bosun*

When I enrolled in college, I chose mechanical engineering against the wish of my father to study nautical science as he did. All went well until my third year when I entered into a relationship that led to the birth of our first son. I was unemployed and dependant to my parents until we had three children. Life was miserable so I decided to seek a job as a sailor. Seaman'ship books and other important papers were hard to get but I was lucky to gain a scholarship to a Seaman's Training Course. I decided that my family should stay in the province for the duration of my training. At graduation I was very happy to be top of the class, taking a gold medal in academics.

My happiness turned into sadness when I learned that my wife had had a love affair. I decided to leave her, but she came after me and I forgave her. It was more than two years before I was able to join a ship. Life improved and we built our own house. When she got pregnant with our seventh child, we began quarrelling frequently. Money was the main reason, but I suspected that she was having another affair based on evidence I observed. She never admitted it. In one of our quarrels I cried out, "What more could I do to give this family peace and joy?" When I lifted up my eyes, I read on a calendar John 14:6, where Jesus said: "*I am the way, the truth and the life, nobody comes to the Father except through me.*" I whispered, "Oh, yes Lord, but how?"

In the ship I joined there were books by Billy Graham. I read them all. I experienced both enlightenment and confusion. By the next contract an oiler, who was a true believer, led me to Jesus Christ. When I went home I shared my faith with my wife and she also accepted Jesus as her Saviour and Lord. Our house became a home church and we received our eighth child. My wife became busy serving the Lord. On board, I was always visited and encouraged by chaplains from the *Seaman's Christian Friends Society*.

Time passed and my wife began to change. She told me bad things about our pastor and church leaders and hindered my communicating with them. It turned out that she was having an affair with one of the leaders. Other church elders advised them to separate, but they went on with their relationship. One event led to another and exposed the evil before me. Again I forgave her and suggested that we go to a far unknown place and start anew. She refused and chose to stay with the guy. It turned out that the ninth child she delivered was not mine.

For five years I lived a sinful bachelor life. Because of many temptations I decided to marry again when I met a Filipino lady in Hong Kong. When we were invited by her friend to attend a worship service, she agreed. She

accepted Jesus as her Saviour and Lord and started to serve voluntarily in the Kids' Church. I recommitted my life to God and from then on we were both active in children's ministry. I retired from the sea after 25 years of service. I cannot imagine what my life would have been if I had not met and known Jesus Christ.

*"I've seen too much hatred to want to hate myself.  
We must learn to either live together as brothers or to perish as fools.  
Love is the only power that can turn an enemy into a friend.  
I chose love because hate is a too heavy burden for me.  
Forgiveness is not a one-time thing; forgiveness is a lifestyle."<sup>43</sup>  
Martin Luther King*

### *Questions to think about*

- 1) Why does God allow difficulties and pain in our lives? Give some possible reasons.
- 2) Do we principally have to endure the wrong behaviour of our partner without complaint? What other options are there?
- 3) Since the Bible allows divorce in case of adultery, should it be sought if it happened?
- 4) What can help us to make wise and mature decisions when dealing with marriage problems?
- 5) What do you learn from Eduardo's testimony?



## CHAPTER 12

### Trusting God despite marriage problems

*This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God,  
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

*John 17:3*



John sat in his cabin and ate chocolate. It was exactly the kind he loved most. There was a pile of other sweets on the table in front of him. John was thinking about how he could get more supplies. It would take another three days to reach the next port, but the call would be very short, probably from 9.00 a.m. until 5.00 p.m. Unfortunately, this time he would be on duty, without a chance to visit the city. The day before he had asked Jeff whether he could replace him for two hours, but his friend had refused because his mobile phone was broken and he wanted to get a new one. Besides this, material for the engine room was expected and every hand would be needed to get it on board before departure. John

wondered whether the chief engineer would give him permission to go shopping for chocolate.

John was a bit angry with Jeff, who had told him several times that he ate far too much chocolate. Instead, vegetables were important, which he didn't like at all. It was enough for him if he had meat or fish with rice on his plate and of course half a bar of chocolate afterwards. He didn't like his friend giving him instructions on the matter.

He went to bed early because he had caught a cold and was not feeling well. Strangely, it had happened three times during the last few weeks. Five days later he met Jeff for another conversation.

**John:** It is too frustrating that I couldn't go shopping in the last port. I haven't a single piece of chocolate left.

**Jeff:** You talk about your sweets all the time.

**John:** I need my chocolate every day or I don't feel well. You are not my mother so please don't instruct me. I am old enough after all.

**Jeff:** You have often caught colds in the past few months. Why do you think that is?

**John:** How should I know?

**Jeff:** You hardly ever eat vegetables and fruit, only soup, meat, fish, rice, and plenty of chocolate or other sweets. You say that you absolutely need it, but maybe your body is telling you that it rather needs vitamins for protection against diseases.

**John:** You always want to be right.

**Jeff:** If you like, we can continue our conversation about marriage, but you've given me a hint saying, "I need my chocolate every day or I don't feel well".

**John:** In what way?

**Jeff:** I suggest that there are things that we only believe we need and there are things that we do indeed need.

**John:** What do you mean?

**Jeff:** I often feel the need for recognition, admiration, appreciation or gratitude from people whom I have helped. But what I might really need is to improve in humility, kindness, and selflessness.

**John:** Does this have anything to do with marital problems?

**Jeff:** If we let God decide what we really need, we can learn to trust Him even when we don't understand why He allows our difficulties. When our spouse is doing wrong and we feel hurt, lonely, unloved, ignored or misunderstood, the Lord can use it to help us grow spiritually. To understand this, we need to see something more important in our marriage than just a framework in which our spouse is supposed to

meet our needs. Perhaps God wants to use our marriage difficulty to show us our true needs, namely that we seek His presence above all else.

When the apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote in Philippians 4:19: *My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ.*<sup>44</sup> This is interesting, because he was in a state of great need and hardship. Instead of grumbling, complaining, or asking God for quick freedom, he focused on the much deeper needs of his fellow believers.

**John:** Yes, he is really amazing.

**Jeff:** Let us talk now about some more insights from the book of Leslie Varnick. She gives four clear reasons why we should do the right thing even if the partner behaves wrongly.<sup>45</sup> What do you suggest?

**John:** It definitely improves the marriage itself.

**Jeff:** That's right, because living together at home quickly gets worse when two sinners continue to sin at the same time.

**John:** Secondly, it is also good for our spouse.

**Jeff:** No doubt! Do you have any other ideas?

**John:** Thirdly, it pleases God.

**Jeff:** Correct, we have talked a lot about it. Next?

**John:** I have no idea.

**Jeff:** Think of your children. When a marital situation gets worse, those who aren't responsible for the problems and are particularly vulnerable, suffer most.

**John:** Right! They are certainly the ones who are in need of a good home for healthy development.

**Jeff:** It is selfish when married couples load their problems onto their children's backs. Kids need both parents, even if their marriage performance is poor. They aren't stupid but see for themselves what shortcomings and sins their parents have. Yet children have a remarkable ability to love their mother and father even though they often fail. Still, we should keep in mind that young kids are unable to deal with the serious details of their parents' sins.

**John:** In my opinion it is also important that one parent doesn't try to pull the children to his or her side in order to hurt the spouse.

**Jeff:** You have mentioned a very important point. One should never use children as a weapon in a marriage fight. There are two points to consider. On the one hand, children understand very well when there are marital problems. So you can't pretend an ideal world for them, and you shouldn't try. On the other hand, it is also important to protect them. Their young souls are still too vulnerable to be

burdened. We must never make them feel that they have to side with one parent. As I said before, they love both. Not to allow them to do this is extremely harmful.

**John:** It is also likely that children are afraid of losing a parent through divorce. The fear of possibly being bereaved of father or mother is a huge pain to them.

**Jeff:** This is certainly true. It is one reason why divorce should be avoided whenever possible.

**John:** Often parents with marital problems give too little thought to the harm they are doing to their children. Apparently, they find many good reasons to continue their conflicts.

**Jeff:** What we consider to be our rights are often in mind. But God wants to change us deeply through such difficulties. Leslie Varnick writes in her book of possible intellectual barriers we might have to allowing the Lord to change us. The first objection is to our having to work on certain behaviours alone when the spouse is not willing to play his or her part.<sup>46</sup> Many ask, "Why should I change alone?"

**John:** But the question is whether you can expect or demand that life or people always treat you fairly.

**Jeff:** That's what it's all about. However, many have this illusion, and argue that nobody can expect them to give more than they get. But this way of wishful thinking will always leave us trapped in immaturity and bitterness.

**John:** But it is widespread. To be honest, I know it well with me.

**Jeff:** Me too. But God never promised that we would get as much here on earth as we give. It also applies to marriage. We have no guarantee that if we do the right thing the situation will definitely improve, though there is a good chance that it will. Besides this, to expect a marriage without suffering at times is unrealistic. And because doing the rightly thing is hardest in the midst of sorrow, we have to decide whether we want to behave right, despite feeling a lack of fairness. Do we respond with anger, being easily offended, revenge, and withdrawal, or are we willing to learn how to be humble, patient, and kind like Jesus is?

**John:** Okay. What's the second intellectual barrier to God's spiritual growth in us?

**Jeff:** Sometimes the problem in marriage isn't arguments, but boredom and a lack of passion. It is often asked, "What about my needs and desires?"<sup>47</sup> We no longer love each other and have drifted apart." Some choose to leave their partner because they don't see their own wishes met. They conclude that they shouldn't have married and

that they do not fit together.

For example, a wife complains, “He is not interested in developing our marriage but watches his sport all the time. He is usually tired in the evenings, drinks too much beer, and shows no appreciation of my contribution to our family life. It’s already years since he last told me that he loves me. The children have grown up and now is the hour to realise myself. After so many years I have the right to think about me and that is why I am leaving him now. I don’t want to waste the rest of my life with him. Besides, I’ve recently met someone else who seems to be interested in me.”

What does the Bible say about self-realisation?

**John:** I think for example Matthew 10:39 gives an answer: *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

**Jeff:** Good suggestion! Nobody is more interested in our personality than Jesus. We need to understand that no-one can find his true self without the Lord, but only in Christ and together with Him.

Of course, the marriage situation just described would require hard work to improve, but divorce is not an option if you ask the Bible.

**John:** What’s the third intellectual barrier to God’s spiritual growth in us?

**Jeff:** Many people say: “I just want to be happy!”<sup>48</sup>

**John:** Sure, everyone has this wish.

**Jeff:** Yes, me too. But God never guaranteed us permanent happiness on earth and we certainly cannot claim any rights.

**John:** At least not in terms of the kind of happiness most people desire.

**Jeff:** Absolutely. Our world bombards us with the message that we deserve to be happy and that personal fulfilment should be our ultimate goal. When we are not feeling fine, we must do whatever is necessary to achieve it. This can mean pushing aside people and things that hinder our happiness. It’s one reason why many couples decide to divorce far too quickly.

Jesus places much more value on our personal happiness than the world does. Yet His way of realising it is in complete contrast to what we are always told. Please read Matthew 5:3-12.

**John:** Jesus said: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom*

*of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

**Jeff:** Often we believe the lies of the world and the deception of Satan, that lead us to doubt God’s word and His guidance. We seek our own ways of finding personal happiness and fulfilment. Spiritual maturity includes trusting in God’s knowing what He’s doing. He will use the many needs in our life to transform us into the likeness of Christ. There is nothing wrong with striving for happiness, but we are mistaken if we think we will find real and lasting happiness independently of God or the Bible’s framework. It’s all about knowing, loving and obeying Him.

**John:** What’s the fourth intellectual barrier to God’s spiritual growth in us?

**Jeff:** Some people argue, “I don’t feel like doing it and I don’t want to be a pretender.”<sup>49</sup>

**John:** I suspect a lot of people let their feelings guide them.

**Jeff:** Yes, but I am convinced that through obeying God we come to a new way of feeling. We simply feel well if we do the will of God, because the Holy Spirit gives us peace. We aren’t likely to behave properly in a challenging situation through our feelings.

**John:** Choosing to do the right thing even when we don’t feel like it is not lack of sincerity, but obedience.

**Jeff:** That’s a very true statement! When Jesus prayed in the garden before His crucifixion, He did not surrender to God’s will because He felt like it, but because He wanted to please and obey His Father.

**John:** What’s the fifth intellectual barrier to God’s spiritual growth in us?

**Jeff:** Leslie Vernick writes about the fear of trusting God unconditionally.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes we are afraid to rely on God because we believe that we will find joy and happiness in what we want. We fear that God will ask us to sacrifice our desires by trusting Him, but the apostle Paul tells us that there is nothing greater than knowing God.

Paul was a respected Jewish theologian before his conversion and had a lot to offer that brought him recognition and fame in his community. And certainly he was proud of it. But after meeting Jesus, he wrote in Philippians 3:4-11 a remarkable testimony. Please read this passage.

**John:** *If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But*

*whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Yesterday in my devotion time I read John 17:3 where Jesus said to His Father: *This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

**Jeff:** Very good! There is no real life here on earth and no eternal life after death without a close relationship with God. We have to regard everything else as secondary.

Let me summarise a few important thoughts we have talked about.

- We usually think that we know exactly what we need and that we deserve to receive it. If we don't get it, we become angry, irritated, or offended.
- We all have our expectations of other people, for example our spouse. We hold our partner responsible for satisfying our needs. But we are quickly disappointed when our desires are not always met. After all, in marriage, one sinner meets another sinner, and often one egoist meets another big ego. But we should first seek the best for our partner instead of thinking of ourselves.
- We may also be disappointed with God. This is mainly because God's view of what really matters is often completely different from what we desire. We want an easy and carefree life, but God's way to give us spiritual growth often happens during difficult times.
- To come back to your chocolate consumption: You think that you need a certain amount of chocolate every day. But your body craves a lot more for vitamins and other healthy nutrients. These would help it to fight bacteria and viruses and make you more resistant to infection. I repeat: what we think we need and what we really need are often far apart, also in regard to spiritual matters.

**John:** I will never mention chocolate in your presence again.

**Jeff:** Don't worry, and enjoy your sweets but keep in mind what is really beneficial for you.

In Leslie Vernick's book we find a beautiful prayer, which I've slightly adapted to our situation. Take time and consider whether you want to make it your own prayer. See you tomorrow and sleep well, even without chocolate.

### *A prayer*

Dear Lord Jesus,

I confess that I am afraid to surrender completely to you. I am more concerned about my happiness and well-being than to trust you wholeheartedly. I really desire a good marriage. I want to get along well with my spouse and have a home that is full of laughter and compassion, respect, and love. I need you to make it happen.

But even more than that, Lord, I am beginning to understand that you want to use the difficulties in my marriage to teach me to become more like you. Help me willingly go to your school of sanctification. Thank you even for any behaviour of my spouse that irritates, hurts, or worries me. You will use it to shape my character. Help me to get involved in this process of change with a willing heart and whole devotion. Teach me your ways: how I can love selflessly, how I can forgive even if I don't feel like it, how I can tell the truth in love when it is necessary, and how I can overcome evil with good. This attitude is still strange to me.

Remind me, Lord, what life is really about: to love you, to serve you, to glorify you and to show you to other people. If I do this, I will become a good spouse to my partner and parent to our children. Dear Jesus please increase my faith. I want to love you with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength and with all my will. Amen.<sup>51</sup>

### *Testimony of E.D.A., a sailor from the Philippines*

I was married before I came to know Christ personally. There were many challenges ahead of us. My wife was separated from her previous spouse. So I had had difficulties trusting her completely at the beginning. However, since real love always prevails, I was able to stay with her in all situations.

We gave our lives to Jesus many years ago. During this time we had to struggle with illnesses that she had because she was involved with

witchcraft. During this time my eyes were opened to the Word of God and His unfailing and loving kindness. I came across 1 Peter 4:8 where it is written: *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.* As I meditated on this verse, I understood how gracious God is to me. This applies to all of my failures, shortcomings and inability. I understood that I had to grant this grace to other people as well. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I became able to love others too.

We have been helped in many ways by the Word of God and fellowship with other believers. We received counselling and guidance. Without the Bible, we could have had great difficulties and many problems. But the right company helped us a lot. It is as the Bible in 1 Corinthians 15:33 says: *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."*

I learned to overcome problems, for example raising our children despite my long absence in my job as a seaman. God helped me to learn from initial mistakes. Sometimes I failed or stumbled because of wrong decisions and priorities. But the Lord kept sustaining me.

During a discipleship training I understood a lot from the testimonies of others, especially that I have to leave everything to Jesus through prayer. We are now very much blessed that our children follow Jesus Christ. They participate in serving in our congregation. Two are musicians, one is a youth pastor and the youngest has joined in many evangelism tours in the Philippines. He is mature and knows the Word of God well.

These are my ultimate advise to all fellow seafarers:

- Seek fellowship with God through faith. Accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. For this, honest repentance is necessary.
- Surrender all the keys of your life to Him. This refers not only to your financial needs. All areas of life must be completely surrendered to Him. We must trust God completely.
- We need to devote ourselves daily to His word. Here God our good Father in heaven speaks to us and the Holy Spirit, our teacher, gives wisdom each day. We learn that God is present in all situations and what it means to us. God also gives us commandments and prohibitions and answers to our questions. The Bible is very much present in the life of believers. A Christian cannot overcome difficult circumstances without the "Spirit of the Sword". As it is written in Ephesian 6:1: *Take ... the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*

*"There is a meaningful life despite many unrealised desires."<sup>52</sup>*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

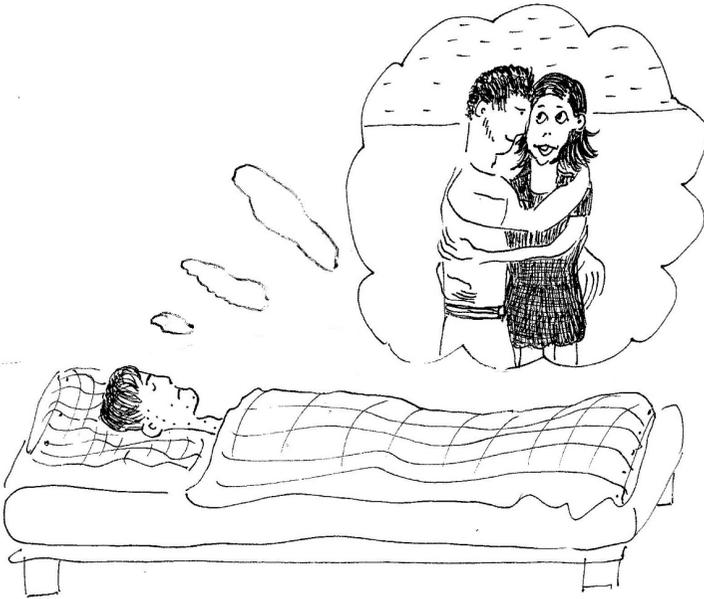
*Questions to think about*

- 1) How can we learn to distinguish between what we think we need and what we really need?
- 2) What should a married couple consider about their children if they have marital problems?
- 3) How do you understand the following statement and what do you learn from it? Find a practical example.
- 4) “I am convinced that through obeying God we come to a new way of feeling. We simply feel well if we do the will of God, because the Holy Spirit gives us peace. It isn’t likely that through our human feelings we will come to the right behaviour in a situation that challenges us.”
- 5) Jesus prayed in John 17:3: *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* How is this statement of Christ very important to us?
- 6) What do you learn from the testimony?

## CHAPTER 13

### It is so hard to forgive

... this is what the Lord says, He who created you ...  
“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions,  
for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”  
*Isaiah 43:1 and 25*



John was lying on his bed and was very sad. His best friend had called him three weeks before and told him that he had seen Cora in a bar with another man. They stood tightly embraced on the dance floor and kissed. In the meantime John had spoken to Cora several times. After initially denying it, she eventually admitted to having had a relationship with this man for two months. Apparently, they also had sexual intercourse a few times. But meanwhile the relationship was over, at least so Cora claimed. She also assured John that she was very sorry for the affair and asked for his

forgiveness. John kept imagining the two of them dating and having fun together. Although their marriage had been in crisis for some time and he had doubts about loving Cora, he felt a deep pain in his heart. Finally, John picked up his Bible, opened it, and started reading.

*Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

*(Matthew 18:21-35)*

**John:** Sometimes God asks us to do things that are impossible.

**Jeff:** Only sometimes? I think it happens more often.

**John:** But it is unfair that God commands us to do things that we cannot perform.

**Jeff:** The Lord wants us to come to Him with our inability. We usually only understand when we are at the end of our strength how dependent we are on Him.

**John:** But Jesus said that a divorce is possible in case of marital unfaithfulness.

**Jeff:** Yes, but reconciling is always the better option. Besides this, I am convinced that a divorce it is not allowed in your case.

**John:** Why?

**Jeff:** At least if Cora's repentance is sincere, you have to be ready for reconciliation and to forgive her. Think of the text you just have read.

The Bible agrees to a divorce if persistent adultery occurs without the will to repent.

**John:** What if Cora's repentance is not honest?

**Jeff:** Give her a chance.

**John:** What if she disappoints me again?

**Jeff:** That is indeed possible.

**John:** Do I have to forgive her again?

**Jeff:** You just read the answer in the scriptures, which Jesus gave to Peter. Seventy-seven means in this case always and generally. It is not a maximum limit. By the way, how often have you disappointed Cora?

**John:** I am not faultless, but I never was unfaithful to her.

**Jeff:** Are you sure? Recall that Jesus said that marital unfaithfulness begins in fantasy, not when it actually happens. And how often did you disappoint God? How many times did He forgive you?

**John:** I know that I have my limitations.

**Jeff:** Listen, the first servant owed the king ten thousand talents. Someone worked out the approximate value the debt would be today: \$ 12 billion.

**John:** But that's an unrealistically high amount.

**Jeff:** Right! Through this Jesus wants to make it clear that we owe God an extreme amount when He has forgiven us our life debt.

**John:** So that we don't have a chance to refuse forgiveness when others are guilty of wronging us.

**Jeff:** That's the way it is. This becomes even clearer if one converts the value of hundred denarii that the fellow servant owed the first one: only \$ 9600.00. I did the math: The first servant owed his king 1.25 million times more than what he could demand of his companion. Obviously, Jesus chose these extreme numbers to make it clear what needs to be done anyway. In God's eyes forgiveness is not optional, but by His command. The reaction of the king when he heard of the behaviour of the first servant speaks the same language.

**John:** Does the king in this parable represent God?

**Jeff:** Sure. Let's talk about seven points that are important in the context of forgiveness.

**John:** Okay. What is the first?

**Jeff:** It is not possible to get rid of major emotional injuries by forgetting or repressing them, but only by forgiving.

As a child, did you sometimes try to push down a large beach ball while bathing in the sea?

**John:** Yes, it happened, but it was hardly possible. It took a lot of strength and the ball quickly jumped up again.

**Jeff:** It is the same with painful injuries that are suppressed. Mental healing can only happen when one forgives. To suppress the disappointment without actually forgiving harms both the guilty party and the person who refuses to forgive. Healing cannot happen while anger, hatred, and bitterness poison the heart.

**John:** I understand. What is the second point?

**Jeff:** In forgiving it is important not to follow your feelings but to make this decision because God requires it.

**John:** We talked about this before.

**Jeff:** Right. Do you remember why it's important?

**John:** When someone has hurt you badly, your feelings are generally negative. Waiting for better emotions is pointless as it is unlikely to happen. But if you choose to do the right thing out of obedience to God, He helps your feelings to improve.

**Jeff:** Yes, it sometimes happens immediately and occasionally after a while, but you can expect it. By the way, we often make decisions contrary to feelings, just because it is reasonable. A simple example: your emotions prefer to continue sleeping in the morning because you still feel tired. But since you don't want to get into trouble with your boss, you get up anyway.

**John:** I understand. What is the third point?

**Jeff:** God helps us when we choose to obey Him in all circumstances.

**John:** About forgiving Cora, I really need God's help because I can't do it alone.

**Jeff:** Tell God. For example: "The pain is so great that I cannot forgive. But I want to do it because You command it. Please help me!" God ensures that He will always stand by you if you seriously desire to obey Him. One of God's great goals for us is that we become more dependent on Him. It is probably because of this very reason that the Lord allows some of the difficulties that we have.

**John:** I remember that we have talked about this before. What is the fourth point?

**Jeff:** Forgiving is never fair or just. You choose to pay the price for the injustice of others yourself.

**John:** What is the price?

**Jeff:** The willingness to abstain from justice. It's not easy, especially when the emotional injury is big. What was done to you is certainly a great sin by God's rules.

Let's compare sin to financial debt. Suppose someone destroys your smartphone in anger. The device had cost \$ 499.00 when it was purchased. Now there are two possibilities: the first is that you

demand that he pays for a new mobile. But he can't because he's bankrupt.

The second option is that you cover the cost yourself. Either way, someone has to pay for the damage. If you ask the guy to do this, it is fair because he is the guilty party. However, if you choose to pay the cost yourself it is unjust because the person is not held responsible for the consequences of his actions. In other words, forgiving guilt is unjust because enforcement of the law is voluntarily refused.

This principle also applies to non-material damages. If someone ruins a good chance you have, spoils your reputation, or otherwise harms you, then he will become your debtor. Again there are two options: the first is that you get back at him. You do it by stealing his chances, damaging his reputation, and putting all sorts of obstacles in his way. You are looking for ways to make him suffer as you have done. But this method has one major disadvantage: you act like him and become a tough and cold person, full of hatred and contempt.

The alternative is to forgive. True forgiveness, however, is not easy. Knowing that revenge is just, but not seeking it, can be very painful. Why? You pay the price for an injustice that someone else has done you. Those who are ready to truly forgive accept this pain.

**John:** That is exactly what Jesus did for us.

**Jeff:** Correct! Someone had to suffer for our sins and Jesus agreed to pay the price instead of demanding it from us. The price was the cross.

**John:** Now I understand. Let us talk about the fifth point.

**Jeff:** Real forgiveness has nothing to do with weakness; it shows strength. Why do you think that is?

**John:** If you give in because you are afraid, it is weakness. But if you forgive of your own free will, it shows great strength in God's eyes. You are doing something that most people wouldn't do.

**Jeff:** You are right; let other people think what they want. What matters is how God sees us.

**John:** What is the sixth point?

**Jeff:** **Not forgiving can let the devil into one's life.**

I give you an example: a security hole in software can be a gateway for dangerous hacker attacks. Experience shows that a lack of willingness to forgive is like a security hole. It can serve God's adversary, the devil, as a gateway into our lives.

**John:** Why?

**Jeff:** Well, there are only two sides to the spiritual world: God and Satan. God commands: "Forgive!" If you do that, you take God's side and can count on His help and blessing. If you refuse Him, then you

automatically reach out your hand to His adversary. There is no such thing as neutrality. Those who are not ready to pardon give room to evil thoughts. An invisible negative chain is created between you and the person who hurt you. The result can be hatred, bitterness, self-pity, and many other harmful feelings. This vulnerability will be used by Satan to hack into your life. The problem is that the destructive attachments have a tendency to harden instead of disappearing over time. But God wants your freedom.

**John:** I've got it. What is the seventh point?

**Jeff:** God is the LORD and will judge righteously in all circumstances, but in His time.

**John:** That doesn't refer to Cora, does it?

**Jeff:** You are right, because she felt sorry for her affair. This relates to guilt without repentance. Please read Romans 12:19.

**John:** Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

**Jeff:** When someone does a great injustice without ever repenting or being held accountable by a court of law, it is felt to be a great injustice. But the Lord is a righteous God. However, He demands that we do not take revenge ourselves, but leave it to Him to exercise justice. He will most certainly do it, in His own good time.

Please also read Matthew 6:14-15 where Jesus said something else, which is important to forgiving.

**John:** "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

**Jeff:** The price we would have to pay if we don't forgive is actually too big. We would risk our salvation.

**John:** The parable of the king and the two servants makes this very clear.

**Jeff:** You are right.

**John:** Let me repeat the 7 points so that I don't forget them:

- 1) It is not possible to get rid of major emotional injuries by forgetting or repressing them, only by forgiving.
- 2) In forgiving it is important not to follow your feelings but to make this decision because God requires it.
- 3) God helps us when we choose to obey Him in all circumstances.
- 4) Forgiving is never fair or just. You choose to pay the price for the injustice of others yourself.
- 5) Real forgiveness has nothing to do with weakness; it shows strength.

- 6) Not forgiving can allow the devil into one's life.
- 7) God is the LORD and will judge righteously in all circumstances, but in His own time.

**Jeff:** Very good! You may remember that I gave you a note a few years ago. Twelve steps mentioned are of great help if you want to walk the path that leads to forgiveness. I have another copy with me that you can keep. You should apply the general statements to yourself and your relationship with Cora. I also quote two more testimonies. They are from a captain and a chief mate, who talk of their marriage experiences.

### *12 steps to forgiveness*

#### **Step 1**

Write the names of those who hurt you on a sheet of paper. Describe exactly what they did to you (for example: rejection, withdrawal of love, injustice, wickedness, abuse of a verbal, physical, emotional or sexual nature, deception, disregard, etc.). Very often, the first or second name on the list is the father, mother, spouse or other close relative.

#### **Step 2**

Write down your negative feelings and be very honest. It is not a sin to accept their existence. God knows your emotions whether you admit them or not. If you hide your feelings, you will not be able to forgive.

#### **Step 3**

Remember the significance of the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ makes forgiveness a legitimate, morally right thing. Jesus took all the sin of the world on himself – including the one you have committed. He died once for all. Be willing to forgive, even if your heart cries out “That’s not fair, where is the righteousness?” Justice happened on the cross of Calvary.

#### **Step 4**

Take on the load of those who have wronged you. Do not talk about their sin to others. True forgiveness is always on behalf of someone, as Jesus died on your behalf.

#### **Step 5**

Decide to forgive. This is an act of will, a conscious decision to release the person and to let the past go. Do it in spite of negative feelings you may

have. God commands it but you have the choice of whether to obey or not. The other person has acted completely wrongly and maybe will be brought to justice. But that's none of your business. It is your responsibility to release the person. If you make this decision, in spite of your negative feelings – don't worry, they will change over time.

**Step 6**

Take the list with the names of those who have hurt you and pray in each case: "I forgive (say the name) that he/she (state the nature of the injury)". If the offence done you is especially big or very bitter, pray together with a person whom you trust. The shared prayer has a special promise.

**Step 7**

Destroy the list with the names. You are now free! Those who hurt you don't need to know it. The act of forgiveness is something between God and you alone.

**Step 8**

It may happen that the persons you have forgiven will change. Pray for them in order that they gain the freedom of forgiveness as well, but don't make your forgiveness dependent on their reaction.

**Step 9**

Try to understand the guilty people. They have often been victims as well.

**Step 10**

Expect positive developments in your own life if you have forgiven. Over time you can think of the people who have harmed you without pain, anger or feelings of vengeance. You can be in the presence of those people without reacting negatively.

**Step 11**

Thank God for what he has taught you and for the maturity you have gained.

**Step 12**

Think about whether you are partly responsible for the injuries you have suffered. If necessary confess to God your share of the blame.<sup>53</sup>

*Testimony of a Filipino master*

When I first met my wife I was still an OS and underwent some training. She was living next door to my friend. During that time I had a girlfriend. One day, when I saw her standing outside her apartment, our eyes met and I was immediately attracted to her.

After my training was completed I decided to court her. First I asked permission of her elder sister. After a week, I invited her to our home in order to introduce her to my family. Sometime later I had to go back on board again and our long-distance relationship started. I also asked my former girlfriend to stop writing me because I had found another woman whom I loved.

We had our church wedding in my hometown. After that we moved to Manila and lived in her uncle's house in Makati. Shortly afterwards, when I had to join my next ship in Manila, my wife was so sad and continued crying until she couldn't see our ship. The vessel was calling at Manila every 70 days so we were always happy when we met. After nine months she delivered our first son. We were so glad and started to dream of great things. After another 11 months we were able to buy our own house.

We had a lot of struggles in our marriage about financial problems and relations with my parents and sisters. It was so hard for me to please both of them, my wife and my family. When I was aboard I always asked myself what I should do. When I was a 2nd mate I had a big quarrel with my wife because she discovered that I was still helping my younger sister to finish her studies in college. I nearly decided to separate from her, because I felt that she was only looking after her own interests. But it was not true. Her concern was for the future of our own family, because she was aware that my job was not stable. So she tried to save as much as possible so that we had enough to support our family.

In 25 years of being together, God gave us two sons and two daughters. We were able to provide them with a good education through my work as a sailor. From time to time we still quarrel, but since we know each other better after being together for such a long time, we settle problems more easily. We are blessed that after so many troubles that we have encountered we are able to survive with the help of our dear Lord Jesus.

Our marriage is not perfect but through the guidance of our dear Lord Jesus we are hoping that we will stay together till death us do part. My advice to newly married couples or to those who experience problems in their relationship is: try to settle them in a quiet way; always remember that we cannot fight fire with fire. We must learn how to give and take in any situation. Just set aside your pride and be ready to admit your mistakes. Finally, always put the Lord in the centre of your relationship.

*Testimony of William D. Cosep, chief mate by profession (holding a master's licence), Philippines*

I came from a previous marriage of 12 years and we were blessed with two beautiful kids, Chesha Wynel and Sweet Caress but unfortunately I lost my wife to heart failure.

Having Laileen as my second wife was far beyond my imagination. A second marriage after the death of one's spouse can mean other challenges. One may wrestle with various emotions when considering remarriage. Children are a potential block because they could view the newcomer to the family as an invader, threatening to take away the time and affection of the parent upon whom the child most relies. But I took on the challenge. I loved Laileen and was confident that my children would be in good hands. Luckily, I am spared from undergoing such crises. My children loved their stepmom so much. Even before I courted Laileen, my kids already made the first move way ahead of me, without my knowing it.

No one wants to be in a second place. That's why I never do anything that could make it seem that my first wife is still actively present in me. I always assured Laileen that she is my life now.

There is nowhere we can go to gain a degree in how to be married. We can't even purchase a guarantee that ensures us a successful, happy marriage. Our marriage is good but not perfect. It comes with a price label: TIME. Especially in the case of overseas workers, time is a big factor. But I always make time for her even in the midst of work. Distance doesn't lessen our love for each other or our commitment to the relationship. When I am home, I make conscious effort to express my love for her by doing the following:

- Hugs and kisses as often as I can
- Calling her whenever possible especially when she is at work
- Leaving a love note or surprises
- Taking her to work or picking her up afterwards
- Cuddling her anytime
- Complimenting her
- Expressing charming words for her
- Weekend dates
- Cracking jokes most of the time
- Doing the household chores for her
- Giving her massage every night

For me, a highly effective marriage is the result of more than just compatibility and commitment. Acceptance, respect, effective communication, conflict management skills and most importantly, spiritual leadership are vital. A fulfilling and highly satisfying marriage can be the most critical factor in achieving happiness throughout life.

Do not focus on each other's weaknesses and do not try to change your partner because when you do, love begins to die. Team up with your partner to protect your marriage from invasion. Recognise that if problems succeed in dividing you, you both lose.

Continual challenge lies ahead and it's unavoidable. Meet each changing stage as it comes enthusiastically and confidently. Keep an open heart for the one you have married. Be willing to risk opening yourself honestly to that special person. The reason why we marry in the first place is to share our lives with someone we care about. Highly effective marriage arises out of the crisis in which husband and wife work to resolve unsettling issues before they become major disasters. It takes team work to do this: two people who love, trust, and respect each other, who are totally committed to allowing God to rule in their lives. You will find that working through each crisis leads to a stronger, more fulfilling, and more successful marriage, one that will last through all the years to come.

When I slide into bed beside her at night and listen to her deep sleep and rhythmic breathing, I feel a place of sanctuary. This is where I belong.

*"God does not love us because we are lovable,  
but because His character is love."<sup>54</sup>*

*Oswald Chambers*

### *Questions to think about*

- 1) Why is forgiving not optional, but commanded by God?
- 2) Why isn't it possible to get rid of major emotional injuries by forgetting or repressing them, but only by forgiving?
- 3) When it comes to forgiving it is important not to follow your feelings but to make a decision. Why?
- 4) Forgiving is never fair or just. You choose to pay the price yourself for the injustice of others. In what way is this statement true?
- 5) Forgiveness doesn't have anything to do with weakness but shows strength. Why?
- 6) Not forgiving allows the devil into your life. Why?
- 7) What do you learn from the testimonies?



## CHAPTER 14

### A child of God

*You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear,  
but you received the Spirit of sonship.  
And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father."  
The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit  
that we are God's children.  
Romans 8:15-16*



John and Jose, the chief cook, had to stay two nights in a hotel waiting for their flight. They had ended their contract on board and would be happy to see their families again soon. Jeff had already been home for one month. Of course, John had mixed feelings about seeing Cora. Would he be able to follow Jeff's good advice on improving his marriage? How would Cora react? Was she really interested in renewing their relationship? Would it be possible to rekindle their love again? John had made up his mind to leave all worries to God. In 1 Peter 5:7 he had read that day: *Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.*

Jose had become a good friend to him over the past few months. John thought back to the time when Richard had treated Jose very badly. But he and Jeff had consistently sided with their new buddy. Little by little the situation had relaxed. Jose had many questions about the Bible and belief

in God. They had agreed to use the time in the hotel to discuss as many open subjects as possible.

**Jose:** Yesterday I read in Romans 8:9: ... *if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.* I want to belong to Jesus. How do I know if that's the case?

**John:** God gives those who belong to Him assurance of salvation. Please read 1 John 5:11-13.

**Jose:** *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

Of course I believe in Jesus but I am not sure if I am saved or not. To be honest, I am often afraid of God.

**John:** Why?

**Jose:** I do my best, but I often fail to keep God's commandments. Recently I read Matthew 7:13-14, where Jesus said: *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* What if our plane crashes and I were on the broad way? Where will I spend eternity?

**John:** You said you are a sinner, and therefore you fear not going to heaven.

**Jose:** Yes, but I do my best to keep God's commandments.

**John:** It is good that you take God and His law seriously. A common problem is that while many believe they are religious, God has only a secondary place in their lives. They assume that it is enough if they practise some religious activities without allowing God to control all areas of their lives. But God is the Lord. It is not sufficient to just give Him a place on the sidelines and keep everything in one's own hands. Many begin to take God seriously only when they have problems and expect help from Him.

**Jose:** No, I want the Lord to be the centre of my life!

**John:** That's good! I have a simple question: why did Jesus die on the cross?

**Jose:** To endure the penalty for our sin.

**John:** Correct! In John 1:29 John the Baptist said when he met Jesus: *"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."* Do you know why a sacrifice for our sins was necessary? Why did Jesus have to die?

**Jose:** That is a difficult question. Couldn't God have forgiven our sins without Jesus having to make this sacrifice?

**John:** The reason is that God is holy. His holiness demands that sin must be punished definitely. On the other hand, God is love. That is why he wants to spare us from the penalty. Because Jesus died for our sin, God's holiness **and** love were both satisfied. First, sin has been punished and second, we the sinners, were spared. Please read John 3:16, maybe the most famous verse in the Bible.

**Jose:** Jesus said: *"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

**John:** What are the main statements of this verse?

**Jose:** First, God loves us. Second, He gave Jesus for us. Third, those who believe will go to heaven.

**John:** Do you think there are other ways to get eternal life?

**Jose:** Perhaps if we try to be good people and keep God's commandments as best we can?

**John:** If there had been any other option for us, the Son of God would certainly not have died. Please read John 14:6.

**Jose:** *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* I understand that Jesus is the only way, not one among others.

**John:** That's true! The price was simply too high. If there had been easier or different ways to God, Jesus would not have died a cruel death on the cross. Please read also 1 Timothy 2:5-6.

**Jose:** *There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men ...*

**John:** Why do you think the price had to be so high?

**Jose:** Because all of humanity has committed an innumerable amount of sins.

**John:** Yes. And why did it have to be the Son of God to take the sin of the world?

**Jose:** Because He was sinless?

**John:** True. The holy blood of Jesus alone was enough to pay the price. God couldn't accept any other sacrifice. No sinner could have died for the sins of others.

A few minutes before you said: "I do my best, but I often fail to keep God's commandments." That is exactly why Jesus died. He gave His life for people like me and you. Even though we do our best, we keep failing. I repeat, if our best efforts were enough, Jesus would not have to die. Please read Ephesian 2:8-9.

**Jose:** *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.*

**John:** What does this verse tell you?

**Jose:** First, salvation is by grace. It is a gift of God. Secondly, we need to have faith in Jesus. Thirdly, it does not happen because of good works.

**John:** Yes. Read Galatians 2:16 as well.

**Jose:** *Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

**John:** I ask you the same question again: What does this verse teach you?

**Jose:** Keeping God's commandment cannot save us, but only faith in Jesus. Does it mean that keeping the ten commandments isn't so important?

**John:** God's law is sacred. That is why we have to comply with it with great respect. On the one hand, we cannot redeem ourselves by keeping the commandments because we are unable to do so. Nobody can say at the end of a single day that he has not committed several sins. However, we must take God's commandments very seriously. The Lord will not forgive our sins if we carelessly play with His grace.

**Jose:** I understand. No one will take sin easy when they love Jesus and consider how huge His sacrifice was for us.

**John:** Right! We can note two things: On the one hand, the fact that God is gracious does not mean that we should take sin lightly. We do our best to obey God and even ask Him to help us do it. On the other hand, we know very well that our best efforts cannot save us. Therefore we have to put our faith, that is, our trust, in Jesus.

**Jose:** That is, we keep God's commandments as best we can because we love Jesus, we value His sacrifice, we respect God as Lord, and because we know that His law is good. But we don't put our trust in our human efforts to be good, because we know that despite our best attempts, we are not good enough.

**John:** Outstanding! No theology professor could have summed it up better. Earlier you quoted Matthew 7:13-14: *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* What is the door that we should enter, and how do we find it?

**Jose:** We just read John 14:6 that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. So He Himself is the way. But how do I find the gate?

**John:** Please read John 10:9, where again Jesus speaks.

**Jose:** *"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."* Amazing, it seems, that Jesus is everything to us: way, truth, life, and the gate.

**John:** This is true. There are even more “**I am**” statements of Him in the New Testament. Read for example John 6:35, John 8:12 and 11:25-26.

**Jose:** *Jesus declared, “**I am** the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)*

*Jesus said: “**I am** the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)*

*Jesus said to her, “**I am** the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26)*

It seems that Jesus is the answer to all questions and needs we have.

**John:** That’s true. We have already talked about the fact, that we need forgiveness regularly because something goes wrong with us daily. But salvation is not just about forgiving our guilt. There is one other important point we have to talk about. In John 1:12-13 we learn that Jesus wants to give us something fundamentally new. Please read the verses.

**Jose:** *To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*

It says here that we can become children of God. I always thought that all people are His children.

**John:** All human beings are God’s **creations**. But you become His **child** if you believe in Jesus and receive Him into your life.

**Jose:** How is that?

**John:** Salvation is a gift that can be accepted or rejected. Nobody is forced to repent, to receive Jesus into his life and become God’s child. But everyone is invited.

**Jose:** And what about people who have sinned a lot and are very guilty?

**John:** The Bible tells of murderers, adulterers, liars, traitors, and many other wicked sinners who were saved. Jesus’ sacrifice is always enough.

**Jose:** What if someone took Jesus into his life and then sins again? Does he lose his salvation then?

**John:** As an answer read 1 John 2:1-2.

**Jose:** *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

**John:** We find both here: On the one hand, God does not want us to continue to sin carelessly. On the other hand, He knows that we will

never be perfect here on earth. Yet Jesus' forgiveness applies to our past and present sins, and also those we will commit in the future.

As already said, whoever accepts Jesus into his life becomes a child of God. Something fundamentally new, a father-child relationship is established. A child of God is part of His family, both here on earth and for all eternity. Also read John 3:3 and 5.

**Jose:** *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again ... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.*

**John:** To be born again does not mean that you join a religion, but that you are born into God's family. Through a natural birth you became a child of your parents, and through a spiritual birth you become a child of God. Your sins are washed away and you receive the Holy Spirit.

**Jose:** Suppose I receive Jesus into my heart, can I be sure that I will actually go to heaven?

**John:** Certainly, you will go! We speak about "assurance of salvation", which the Lord promises us. On this point, read the following Bible verses: John 5:24, Romans 5:9-10, Romans 8:1, Romans 8:38-39 and 1 John 5:11-13.

**Jose:** *Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."* (John 5:24)

*Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!*  
(Romans 5:9-10)

*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Romans 8:1)

*I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 8:38-39)

*This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.* (1 John 5:11-13)

**Jose:** Wow! I always thought that you could never be sure whether you were saved or not.

**John:** Would Jesus have given up His life for an uncertain salvation?

**Jose:** No!

**John:** Would it be possible that Jesus' blood isn't enough as a sacrifice for all of our sins??

**Jose:** Never!

**John:** Assurance of salvation is one of the most precious treasures the Gospel offers us.

**Jose:** What specific things should I do now to be saved?

**John:** **First, confess** your guilt to Jesus.

**Jose:** I do that every day.

**John:** That's a good thing. But you are still not sure yet whether you are saved. I suspect there are these possible reasons: Some people confess their sins out of routine, but without the firm expectation that God will actually forgive. It is important that you bring all of your life guilt to Jesus and that you trust that He will forgive definitely.

Also, you said earlier that you are not sure of your salvation because you are still sinning. But all people do so. It is not sinless people who go to heaven, but those who sincerely repent.

**Jose:** I understand.

**John:** **Second,** we read in John 1:12-13 that Jesus needs to be **received**. Maybe this hasn't happened yet.

**Jose:** How shall I do it?

**John:** Read Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says something important.

**Jose:** *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*

**John:** Ask Jesus in a simple prayer to come into your life.

**Jose:** I do it every day.

**John:** Why? Are you not sure that He actually entered?

**Jose:** I am not sure because I have sinned again.

**John:** I told you already that Jesus does not expect a perfect life but a sincere heart. He is not jumping in and out of your heart. Invite Him now, with the firm confidence that He will truly enter and stay forever. Jesus will do it because of His many promises.

**Jose:** Okay.

**John:** **Thirdly,** John 1:12-13 says that we have to **believe** in Jesus.

**Jose:** But I do!

**John:** To believe means to have complete confidence that Jesus has done everything to save you forever.

**Jose:** Do you think that my belief is wrong?

**John:** To put it better, your faith is divided. On the one hand, you were hoping that Jesus would save you. On the other hand, you assumed that you had to be good enough to be redeemed by Jesus. But salvation is

not 50% Jesus's work and 50% because of your religious efforts. Trust and believe that Jesus already did everything necessary for salvation 2000 years ago.

**Jose:** So to believe means to rely on Jesus 100%?

**John:** Correct!

**Jose:** Anything else I need to do?

**John:** **Fourthly: surrender!** This means that you not only receive Jesus as your Saviour, but also allow Him to be your Lord and in charge of your life. You have to recognise Him as your boss for all areas: your marriage, family, finances, job, friendships, habits, time, convictions, preferences etc must be surrendered to the Lord.

**Jose:** I understand! Otherwise everything would go as it did before.

**John:** Yes, He is the Almighty Lord. He expects us to follow Him, obey Him, and be even willing to make sacrifices, if demanded. A child of God should no longer live selfishly, but do everything to please Jesus. We are privileged to be part of His kingdom, both as God's servants and children. Sometimes following Jesus can also mean suffering for His sake. In many countries turning to Jesus means to risk even one's life.

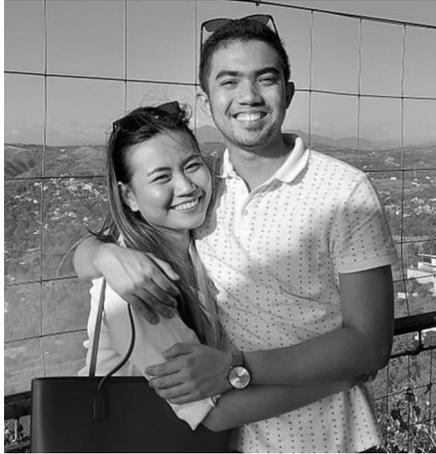
**Jose:** I really want to be part of it.

**John:** I know a young couple who gave me their testimony of how they invited Jesus into their lives. It's very inspiring so please read it through.

I will also give you a prayer that will help you to turn to Jesus. In addition, you can tell the Lord everything else that is on your mind. Trust Him because He loves you and gave His life for you. Jesus just wants you to turn to Him humbly and honestly. He is responsible for everything else.

**Jose:** Thank you very much. This conversation has helped me a lot.

**John:** You are welcome. See you tomorrow.



*Testimonies of Bryon M. Suarez and Janah N. Jacildo, both deck cadets from the Philippines.*

**Bryon wrote:**

“I’m a deck cadet from the Philippines and I will be working on my first ship soon. My father gave me the book *THE PRISON AT SEA* to read. I’m now in the third chapter and I was very fascinated by the content from the beginning.

I started reading the Bible in the past, but I did not understand it properly. The correspondence course *THE BRIDGE* is offered in the book. I would very much like to get it and study.”

**Bryon wrote later:**

“The correspondence course completely changed my perspective. I grew up in a traditional religious family. We went to church every Sunday. But I felt like we were just following a weekly routine there. That was why I wanted to study the Bible myself. In my eyes, religion is not important. Sometimes it is just about repeating rituals instead of worshipping God and experiencing Jesus.

I was terrified of dying because I probably had not done enough good to please God. However, after studying the course, my perspective changed completely. I understand that we can’t do enough good. Not what we do brings us to heaven, but what God has done for us. He sent His only Son for our sins! I used to be very scared of hell, but now I feel a peace like never

before. Now I have realised that I just have to accept Jesus and believe in Him, that He lived and died to redeem us.

My girlfriend Janah, who is also a deck cadet, agrees with me in everything. I gave her the Bible course. I want to learn more from the Bible with her. I am convinced that nothing can break a relationship in which God is the midst.”

**Janah wrote:**

“Is it normal to cry while reading the Bible and praying? I am so happy. How do I know that I let Jesus into my life? Is there any sign? I read in the course that things will change in life. Can I notice it myself? If yes, how? Or should I just entrust myself to Jesus’ guidance and move on?

I have many questions. What I do know, however, is that only Jesus can change my life. I want to be saved. I want to experience God’s overflowing love and give it to those I love. As I studied the Bible course, I realised that I should change my thinking. I should seek God first and trust Him, and everything else will come in His right timing. I believe in Jesus and know that I will live happily in His kingdom.”

**Janah wrote later:**

“Today I finished the Bible course, and I am so grateful for it! Which course should I study next? I want to read more about God. I want to listen to Him better to know what to do as His child. I know that I am saved through Him, only through Him. As a result of salvation, I am now a child of God. I want to do what pleases Him. I would like to be a blessing to other people, especially my family. I want to be an instrument in God’s hand. I imagine myself sharing the word of God with others on board. In addition, I have to work on my ability to speak in front of others. If I ever make it to the position of captain, I want to meet my crew not only as a superior, but also as a sister. I want to be changed into such a person.”

**Janah wrote later:**

“I am always a little afraid of the captain and feel an inner tension, especially when I work up on the bridge. He often asks a lot of questions that I have to answer correctly. But then I read in 2 Timothy 1:7:

*God did not give us a spirit of timidity (fearfulness), but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

I repeat this verse over and over in order to be able to show the captain what I can do. I then also ask that God be my peace. And it actually works. Minutes later I have courage and confidence and can explain to the captain how I react professionally to the high volume of shipping traffic in our

area. Always before I begin my job on the bridge, I pray that God will guide me. Afterwards I thank Him for the wisdom He gave me.”

### *A Prayer to invite Jesus*

Dear God, I am coming to you. I have lived for a long time without you. I have been in control of my life, and have done many things which were not according to how you would have liked it. I am guilty!\* I am sorry for them. Please forgive me. I ask you to set me free from the bondage of sin and the devil. I want to belong to you alone.

Dear Lord Jesus, I am counting on you. Thank you that you have given your life for my sins. Please come into my heart through your Holy Spirit.

I want to become God’s child. I want you to be with me always. I ask you to be my guide from now on. Please go before me, and show me the way I should go. Change me where you think I need to be changed. I am willing to obey you.

Thank you for everything you have done for me. Glory, praise and worship are to you alone. Amen!

Dear Sailor,

You also can speak to God with this prayer. It is important that you do so honestly, because by it you make a decision that will change your whole life. Maybe it would make sense to read the conversation between John and Jose again. Make sure you take enough time to think about the important step of inviting Jesus into your heart.

If you need help, have any questions, would like to receive a Bible study correspondence course or other helpful books, please get in touch with:

Volker Lamaack

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Mobile, WhatsApp and Signal: +49 (179) 3994457

Facebook: Volker Lamaack

You can find more material on the topic of marriage here:

<https://themarriagecourse.org/try/the-marriage-course>

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\* Here mention any sins you can recall.



# Endnotes

- 1 Gary Chapman, *The five love languages: the secret to love that lasts* (Northfield Publications, Chicago, USA)
- 2 *ibid.* pp. 28-30
- 3 <https://www.evangeliums.net/zitate/suche.php?seite=4&autor=%&titel=Liebe&>
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- 6 Emerson Eggerichs, *Liebe & Respekt* (Gerth Medien GmbH, Dillenburg, Germany), p. 91
- 7 Robertson McQuilkin, *A Promise Kept - The Story of an Unforgettable Love* (Wheaton, Illinois, 1998, USA), p. 21-23
- 8 <https://gutezitate.com/autor/dietrich-bonhoeffer/2>
- 9 Leslie Varnick, *Perfekte Ehe? Sich richtig verhalten, wenn der andere sich falsch verhält* (cap-books/cap-music, Haiterbach-Beihingen, Germany), p. 95
- 10 Author unknown
- 11 Emerson Eggerichs, *Liebe & Respekt* (Gerth Medien GmbH, Dillenburg, Germany), p. 127-198
- 12 *ibid.* pp. 136-145
- 13 *ibid.* pp. 146-157
- 14 *ibid.* pp. 147
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