
“When two people loved each other they worked together always, two against the world, a little company. Joy was shared; trouble was split. You had an ally, somewhere, who was helping.” Paul Gallico

Chapter Twenty-One

Virtue in Marriage

Insight #21 Men and women of virtue, by their very nature of integrity and respect prepare for successful, marriages; virtue after marriage keeps love and intimacy fresh and evergreen.

On one speaking engagement, I was worried because my assigned hour to speak was right after the lunch break--on the last day of a four-day university conference. Usually the youth stay up all night talking at such conferences and the worst time to attempt to teach them anything is after the lunch break. As they entered the lecture hall, my fears were confirmed. Some sat down and stared blankly ahead--without showing any vitals signs of life. Others didn't even try to stay awake; they simply laid their heads on the desk in front of them and fell promptly asleep.

With enthusiasm, I launched into my topic of chastity, but they were just too exhausted to listen. Then it occurred to me that their weariness might be linked to discouragement--discouragement with the possibility that they would ever really have a lasting love, and the belief that romantic love happens only in fairy tales.

I stopped teaching and began telling a simple story, “In order to continue my education, I have spent fourteen summers at a private university away from home. The children usually accompany me, but my husband is unable to leave his business, so he stays home. After one of these summers spent in separation, the children and I were walking through the airport to pick up Daddy. Six weeks had passed since we last saw him, and we were all excited to be together again. As we were rushing to get to the gate where the plane would arrive, I noticed a man to my left walking towards us who was the kind of guy you want to look at twice, or maybe three times. I forced myself to look away--after all, I was a married woman. The attraction was electrifying; in a flash of surrender, I turned to look just once more. What a hunk--blond, tanned, and handsome! A wave of guilt came over me, then the

realization: this handsome man was my husband! How convenient!" The youth broke into a frenzy of applause; I continued.

"I sense that some of you are discouraged; you're skeptical of waiting till marriage when maybe that marriage won't last anyway. You're also wondering if there's a chance that the excitement of sexual intimacy can last and survive the day-to-day hassles of life. I want you to know that I know love can last, and that sexual feelings can continue to bloom in an honorable marriage.

"Have you ever stopped to think that chastity before marriage is like a training period to prepare you for the glorious powers of love and intimacy after marriage? We have the wrong idea about chastity; we think it's like a grueling test before marriage, and that after marriage the test is over and the virtue of chastity is not needed. But that's not true. True chastity isn't just what we *do* with our actions; it's what we *are* in our attitudes. Someone could have the actions and practice abstinence--but not have the attitude. A guy that tells off-color jokes and makes fun of women and sexuality is not chaste in attitude--even if he is chaste in body. Marriage contracts don't change attitudes, they merely change marital status; coarse, vulgar men or women leave their mates feeling cold and unloved--even in marriage. The promiscuous, loose, undisciplined or sexually flirtatious do not change their attitudes or nature with marriage. Sowing wild oats before marriage contributes to the same craving for oats after marriage.

"The whole point of chastity isn't just to *not* have sex, but to *have* love and respect. The love and respect before marriage keeps the love alive, and marital intimacy fresh and evergreen after marriage. Those with a disrespectful attitude towards sex before marriage will have that same attitude after marriage. The promiscuous before marriage are more likely to be promiscuous after marriage as well. It takes self-discipline not to have sex before marriage, and it takes self-discipline not to have extra-marital sex after marriage.

"But let's look at the action part of chastity--the self-discipline part. It, too, is needed after marriage. While it might be always *legal* in marriage to engage in sexual intimacy, it's not always *loving*. Nothing shuts these tender, fragile feelings down in a woman more than the attitude of her husband, 'You owe me--because you're my wife.' There are natural seasons of desire for intimacy. Sometimes we just need and want to be alone--to think, to pray, to meditate--but these times alone, if respected, make the times together all the more wonderful.

"There's a time "for embracing and a time to refrain from embracing." There's a time for romantic passion, and a time for

emotional, even intellectual passion. There's a time for intimacy of spirits, and a time for intimacy of bodies. There's a time for building a patio together, or caring for elderly parents together. There's a time for caring for the baby together. There are also times for a healthy constructive disagreement that clears misunderstanding. It's all a part of the love making.

"A loving husband doesn't simply want sex, he wants his Beloved to experience the joy of intimacy together. He realizes that will never happen if he tramples over feelings, and disrespects the natural seasons of desire. This requires self-control and patience. He is willing to protect the glorious--and I do mean glorious--honor of sexual intimacy from the world's vulgar perspective, from infidelity, and even from himself. Again, true chastity--the attitude of love, respect and self-control is the very key to keeping love and intimacy fresh and evergreen after marriage.

"Now let's turn to marital intimacy itself. The deepest sexual feelings and sexual joy come from the feelings of the heart, not simply sensations of the body. The attitude of respect for sexuality--lifts it all to heights that those who make a joke of it will never know. Cherishing the life of their Beloved makes it an honor to even hold hands; consequently sexual intimacy is a banquet of delight. True lovers have the greatest sexual stimulator of all: they treasure the whole life of their loved one--not simply the body, or the face, or the muscles, but the wholeness of life. Because of this, love-making becomes a multi-colored tapestry as rich as life itself. Sometimes the body leads the way. Sometimes the emotions lead the way. Other times the depth of the soul leads to rebonding. Wholesome sexual intimacy inspires ambition, purpose, direction, security, comfort, safety, compassion, and goodwill. Those who only experience physical or fragmented sex will never know such glory of intimacy.

"C.S. Lewis, Christian philosopher, was a bachelor and professor until he met and married a woman named Joy--a woman who brought him complete joy. After a few brief years together, she died of cancer. He tells of the banquet of lovemaking that they had together, "For those few years (we) feasted on love; every mode of it--solemn and merry, romantic and realistic, sometimes as dramatic as a thunderstorm, sometimes as comfortable and unemphatic as putting on your soft slippers. No cranny of heart or body remained unsatisfied."

"Sometimes we get the idea that marital intimacy is not as exciting or as passionate as sex outside of marriage, but maybe that's because those who truly experience this magnificence of love making realize that

it is so wonderful, so sacred, that it needs to be kept private and separate from the world.

“The world’s perspective is totally different: the emphasis is upon the bodily senses, and satisfaction, but for those who truly love the emphasis is from the inside out--the emotions, the spiritual bonding, the depth of gratitude for the life of the Beloved. The world looks to physical stimulation and variety to bring back the feelings again, but it’s like pouring hot salsa on everything to bring back the taste again. In time the taste buds become so seared they taste nothing at all. The better plan is to restore the ability to taste again, or the ability to love again; to value with intense appreciation the life of one’s Beloved.

“This time of practicing self-control is preparing you for the most glorious opportunity of your life--the opportunity to fall in love and to keep that love alive, fresh and evergreen forever. It’s the height of human happiness; nothing comes close to it. Don’t do anything to jeopardize it.”

Original Construction and Maintenance

Our journey of understanding together is almost over, but I want to share a few personal scenes from my marriage for a couple of reasons--first of all, I want those who are single to realize that true romantic love is not luck, it’s a process of building together on a foundation of loving, honoring and cherishing. And for those who are married, I hope to assist you to capture the glory of your sweet love together.

We have learned some valuable lessons about marriage from remodeling our almost century-old farmhouse. We’ve learned that there are two important factors that determine the success of houses--and love relationships--original construction and maintenance. The original construction is important, in houses and marriages. No doubt, relationships bonded together with healthy motives and maintained properly have the best foundation and the best chance for progressing ever after. Those with deception, betrayal, and collusion (loss of conscience together) start out on a shaky foundation.

There’s a way to restore houses and relationships: junk what’s bad replace with good, and beautify. This process keeps houses new and love growing.

As I mentioned, our turn-of-the century house was built before

building codes, accurate measuring, and uniform building materials. The wood had been obviously recycled, the plumbing and electrical was jimmied together with the attitude: whatever works. The remodeling process always has some unexpected surprises: termites, water damage, even frayed electrical wires. We've uncovered beams too small to support the weight, and weathered old lumber crumbling into a sponge-like texture. My husband says there's a rule to remodeling. You determine the cost and the time, and then triple it. Remodeling houses takes time, money and energy, and maintaining love relationships does the same; it doesn't *just* happen.

We've learned that some things just don't work in love relationships; others work every time. Feeling honored, feeling loved, feeling respected, feeling cherished, feeling trusted works in any heart, any home, any friendship, or any marriage. On the other hand, some things we do to one another eat away the tender and fragile bonds of love like termites in the foundation of a home: disrespect, disloyalty and dishonor eventually destroy.

There are other poor maintenance practices: thinking that once love is won it will last without nourishment, demanding respect without earning it, flirting with other men or women to get even, staging a battle with one's mate, arguing to win rather than to understand, craving more love and attention than the other can freely and honestly give, thinking that sex is a marital right, using marriage to escape life rather than using it to enhance life, hiding away together rather than bringing other into the love circle, thinking that marriage means ownership.

Remodeling a house creates clutter, confusion and lots of dust storms--so does remodeling a marriage. Sometimes it's hard to keep the end in mind. One of our first projects in our home included remodeling the kitchen, living room, and bathrooms. The first few weeks were not difficult; I endured the mess with the vision of the completed project in mind, but after several months my patience wore thin. I kept saying to my husband, "I thought this was going to take just a couple of months; I wish we had never started."

In this same way, sometimes it's hard to keep the vision in mind when we're in the remodeling, refining process of marriage. A few years ago we struggled for months through the most extensive remodeling project of our marriage. We had accumulated the clutter that destroys marriages: resentment and misunderstanding. Besides, we were still dealing with defects of original construction and dysfunctional upbringing. (My husband's alcoholic heritage has been difficult; he still hides from the pain, embarrassment and guilt. Do all

children of alcoholics inherit this guilt?) So much had to be put on the table, discussed, resolved and forgiven.

We talked, talked, and talked--sometimes through the night. Our daughter Jessica, then eight, started urging, "Please don't talk to each other anymore." Sometimes the talking seemed to be tearing away what was good, and sometimes it seemed to be building again. There were times in the dust storm that we lost vision. Prayer helped. Sometimes, we stopped talking and just started praying.

One night, our talking was digging a deeper and deeper hole. I was sitting on the floor, and wondering how we could ever climb out of all this. In my emotional turmoil, I began to pray. Even as I was praying, it all seemed hopeless; there were no words that would resolve the conflict. Then, for some reason, I reached out my hand to my husband. He was standing across the room, looking completely drained and depressed. Even as I reached out my hand, I wondered, "Why?" My stubborn pride wanted resolution of issues before affection. My husband walked over to me, put out his hand, lifted me into a hug, and for the moment the issues were resolved. Drawing upon divine power can make all the difference. It can refill an empty tank with faith, love and hope again.

During another difficult remodeling season of our marriage, my husband had to travel to Southern California to bid on a construction job. While he attended a business meeting, I sat in the car and waited. I prayed for the strength to see things clearly. I prayed for renewed faith. Then I opened my journal and wrote words that I hoped would recapture the vision of my love for him. I knew that without vision, I could not, I would not, go on.

Recapturing the Vision

"Is it time to leave, or time to begin again? Are all marriages like mine--a never ending, wrenching process of becoming one by being forged together in pain? My mind reasons that I am not loved, but my heart clings desperately to whatever there is, for it loves this man now more than ever. Why do I love you? I need to remember.

I love you because you give me that look of love--sweetest of all--the look that is my life's purpose.

I love you because you are tender-hearted, and cry through movies.

I love you because you have the most wonderful hands ever created, masculine, strong, yet, soft, creative, artistic.

I love you because you have a delightful, original sense of humor that always catches people off-guard.

I love you because you're ambitious; I love you because you're smart.

I love you because you're so stable, so constant.

I love you because you don't give up. In the blackest hour, you come home--you simply come home.

I love you because you're not like me, you think first and speak later; you are reserved, calm, and predictable.

I love you because you have such class; you never need to be first or outshine others or have the last word.

I love your willingness to do laundry, to get in to get the job done.

I love your hair--and your no hair.

I love the way you play the piano; I love sitting with you on the bench, watching your hands make love to music.

Because of this love that consumes me at times--consumes me with such longing, I so fear your silence! I fear pretense. I fear separation. Even more I fear feeling separate when we're together."

"How do I love thee?"

When my husband returned to the car, I read to him these words of hope, and recaptured vision. A few days later, he wrote a similar letter.

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. . .

I love the way you look. . . I love your face, your hair, your figure.

I love the way you look in your clothes; you dress with class and at the same time you always look very gracious.

I love the style in which you present yourself--not gaudy with things hanging all over you and over-made up, but simple and gracious.

I love the way you carry yourself with poise and confidence.

I love to watch you walk--especially from behind.

I love your femininity which is not cute or mushy, but mysterious.

I love the look in your eyes and the small smile reserved only for me--it's the look that tells everyone else you and I share a secret that is so good, so unique that it's explainable only with the 'look and smile.'

I love the electricity that you generate in me when I see you.

I love your acceptance of me and your willingness to work with me.

I love you for your intimacy with me--body, mind, heart and spirit.

I love you for making an atmosphere that makes everyone feel welcome in our home.

I love you for making people more important than things.

I love the way you have developed your special gifts: writing,

speaking, caring, sharing; I'm extremely proud of your accomplishments. I love the way you teach without putting on any airs, and your willingness to expose yourself to the whole world if it will help someone with their life and problems.

I love you for your drive to learn, to grow, to progress, and I love the way you inspire these feelings within me.

I love you for making the best soup in the world."

We both read these letters over and over; gradually the vision returned. We were able to get through that remodel project with our love stronger. In this world of pragmatic pessimism, it is hard to hold onto the vision of love. Even those of us who have discovered the sweetest of soul-bonding are ever taunted by the voices that would say "It's only chemistry. . .It can't last. . . Monogamy isn't natural. . .True love is a teenage fantasy. . .Soul-bonding is a myth."

Our environment, and the attitudes that surround us, are love-unfriendly; it takes remembering to hold the vision. We have come to believe that most marriages, and loves, are lost because the vision is lost. Emerson wrote, "One of the illusions of life is that the present hour is not the critical or the decisive hour. Write it on your heart that every day is (a decisive day). . ." A decisive day to fall in love again, to recapture the vision again, to be more loyal and true, and keep building

Most of us will never realize how precious our loved ones are, or how glorious the present hour is, without a tragedy to awaken our senses. Young husbands are notorious for their complacency, and young wives destroy happiness over a lawn not mowed. My heart aches for human inclination to overlook the love that exists for the love that is "hidden in the mist". (Remember, Scarlett O'Hara in the novel, Gone With the Wind.) Those of us, who are in an honorable marriage, have a portion of majestic love in our midst, but the smokescreen of apathy prevents us from seeing and realizing. When will we learn to glory in the present hour? When will we learn to truly cherish the lives around us?

They Still Hold onto the Dream

As I was walking through the main living room of a convalescent home, I noticed that a group of elderly women were talking together. One was saying, "My husband will be here any minute to pick me up. We're going out for the evening." Another woman responded, "You too? Well my husband will be coming to take me home any moment now. I'll be so glad to be home."

I asked my friend, who was staying there to recuperate from a stroke, “Are their husbands really coming for them?”

“No,” she said. “They say those things every day. Most of their husbands have died long ago, but they still hold onto the dream.”

As I drove home, my heart ached for these women; I wondered if they captured this appreciation for their husbands before or after their deaths. I believe that there’s glory and romantic bliss in most marriage: if complacency is overcome. Too many of us miss out on our only “glimpse of eternity” by trampling upon our happiness with petty arguments and put-downs. Worst--we bomb it with the tragedy of disloyalty.

Survived Everything That Life Could Throw at Them

Love is meant to be a refuge and a buffer--too many of us run during the remodeling and miss out on the newness and enhanced beauty that could follow. I found this sweet little story by Ernest Havemann. It captures the process of becoming one:

“You can see them alongside the shuffleboard courts in Florida or on the porches of the old folks’ homes up north: an old man with snow-white hair, a little hard of hearing, reading the newspaper through a magnifying glass; an old woman in a shapeless dress, her knuckles gnarled by arthritis, wearing sandals to ease her aching arches. They are holding hands, and in a little while they will totter off to take a nap, and then she will cook supper, not a very good supper, and they will watch television, each knowing exactly what the other is thinking, until it is time for bed. They may even have a good, soul-stirring argument, just to prove that they still really care. And through the night they will snore unabashedly, each resting content because the other is there. They are in love; they have always been in love, although sometimes they would have denied it. And because they have been in love they have survived everything that life could throw at them, even their own failures.”

One Self-Centered Passion or Another

Remember the play “Our Town”? Emily, who has died, is allowed to return to her mortal life for just one day. She picks her twelfth birthday. She is ecstatic to see everything and everyone again--as they were when she was a girl. She cries, “Oh, that’s the town I knew as a little girl. And, look, there’s the old white fence that used to be around our house. Oh, I’d forgotten that! Oh, I love it so!” Looking at her parents,

she moans, "I can't bear it. They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to get old? Mama, I'm here. I love you all, everything--can't look at everything hard enough."

With intense appreciation, and sharpened awareness, she sees the contrast--how apathetic everyone appears. She cries to her mother, ". . . just for a moment now we're all together. Mama, just for a moment we're happy. *Let's look at one another.*"

As she returns to the hill and to her grave, she calls out, "Oh, earth you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you." Then turning to the stage manager, she says, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?--every, every minute? . . . that's all human beings are! Just blind people."

Then Simon Stimson, a man who warned her that her day in mortality would be discouraging, says, "Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know--that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness."

If we could just capture the vision of how important our lives are--our loves are. If we could just really *look at each other*. If we could remember to love, fully love, each day. Why do we wait so long to realize?

If we could maintain such awe, reverence for human life there would be no wars, no mobs, no gangs, no poverty, no contention, no murders, no molesters, no pornography, no prostitution, and hardly a divorce.

In the novel *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy writes of the love Levin had for Kitty, ' . . . all the women in the world were practically of another planet to that on which Kitty had been born.' This has been the story of my life. For me there has only been one *real* man--Norm Sorensen. We still
thrill

to see each other across the room. We've discovered the tapestry of love-making: watching the baby together, putting gardens in together, putting on plays together, singing around the piano together, making dinner together, writing books together, cleaning together, raking the leaves together, riding the tractor together, making love together.

We

share the same vision of "life as it should be". We certainly don't have a happily-ever-after relationship, but we do have a progressively-ever-

after
relationship--the type that's available to almost everyone who wants it bad enough. Our lasting love has not been a gift, but a day-to day victory over the forces that would drive us apart. It's a victory after tremendous struggle, and lots of remodel projects.

A Last Word

As my husband and I were editing this part of the book, he began to chuckle. I sensed that he didn't really want me to ask why, but I did. "Oh," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "I was just thinking about that happily-ever-after idea, like the time you planted yourself on the hood of my car so that I couldn't get away from the argument. By the way, that really wasn't fair. And the time that I exploded and tore off across town on my bicycle to brood in my cave at the office. I know it seems kinda stupid riding a bike instead of taking the car, but there was no way you could sit on the hood of my bike. Besides, bike riding is a great way to work off frustration and anger. I'll have to say we've got the passion and excitement stuff down pat--but happily-ever-after? I'm not so sure what that means. This much I do know though; we love each other now more than ever, and I think it's because when the going gets rough, we ultimately pull together rather than pull apart."