

You've seen it happen — a marriage that, from all outward appearances, has every reason for success crumbles from within.

Sad to say, it may have happened — or be happening — in your own marriage!

A couple may be what you would consider well-off. They own a house, car and nice furniture. They have plenty of food and clothing. They are well educated and have a good job and money in the bank. They have several beautiful children.

The husband can tell his wife 10 times a day that he loves her, take her out often, help her with household chores and with the children. The wife can cook delicious meals, keep the house spotless and be a model mother. They can have an excellent sex life.

All the external, tangible quantities that one might consider necessary for a successful marriage may be present. But still the marriage fails.

Why?

Because the marriage has no substance. All these "externals" do not constitute the substance or core of marriage. They make up only the shell around it.

Have you collected shells at the seashore? If you have, you know how beautiful they can be. Yet shells are brittle. And once broken, they are almost impossible to put together again.

So is marriage without substance — without a solid core — just a brittle shell.

The shell — the externals — is what you are doing or what you possess. These things can add to physical happiness. But material things come and go. Business opportunities and jobs can suddenly be swept away. Eventually the children are going to leave home and the nest will be empty. The shell will change.

But real substance will remain. Substance is what you are and what you are becoming. Substance is the progress that husband and wife are making toward

Your Marriage-SHELL or SUBSTANCE?

What makes the difference between a solid, substantial marriage and one that is on shaky ground? Here's vital information on how you can strengthen your marriage.

By Donald L. Ward

becoming one in every aspect of their being. Substance is that quantity that, beyond everything else, they live for — where they are headed.

For true Christians, substance is the goal of always serving God, of becoming part of God's Kingdom.

Jesus Christ said that a wise man builds his house upon a rock, whereas a foolish man builds his house on the sand. The rains descend and the floods sweep along and the winds beat upon both houses, but only the house that is built on the rock stands (Matt. 7:24-27).

We who are married know that the storms of life are going to beat against our marriages. If you are not married but hope to be someday, know this: The storms of life are going to beat against yours, too.

How can we build substance in our marriages, so that even if the externals are removed — even if the shell is broken — the marriage will continue to stand, and beautifully?

Here are several steps we can take to build real substance — a

solid, lasting foundation — into our marriages.

Respect marital roles

There are concerted efforts on the part of some individuals and groups to do away with any distinctions related to gender. Yet God made a clear demarcation when He "created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen. 1:27).

God could have created a sexless human society. He made the angels sexless, after all. But God had a great purpose in creating humans both male and female.

Notice Hebrews 1:5: "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'?"

God's transcendent goal is to reproduce Himself! He gave humans a physical image like His spiritual image. Humans are to ultimately be born into God's Family and become spirit as God is spirit. If you have not been aware of this startling truth, request our free book, *The Incredible Human Potential*. It explains in detail man's destiny,



with biblical proof. God created mankind male and female for marriage. God is the author of marriage: "God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'" (Gen. 2:18, Revised Standard Version).

Men and women, with their biological and psychological differences, were created in such a way that when they are joined in marriage they complement and complete each other. They both have the same marvelous human potential of becoming literal, spirit-born members of the Fami-

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ly of God. Together they form a beautiful union.

After God created woman as a help to complete the man, He ordained marriage:

"And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (verses 23-24).

Matthew 19:6 quotes Christ as saying, "Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate." So the marriage contract is not bound by man, but by God.

One step, then, to building real substance into our marriages is for both husband and wife to respect their masculine and feminine roles.

Realize the purpose for marriage

Another way to build substance in marriage is to realize and understand the purpose for which God ordained marriage and the family.

God is a family. Notice Gene-

Photo by Hal Finch

sis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" The Hebrew word for *God* in this verse is *Elohim*, a plural noun that signifies containing more than one member.

God's use of the pronouns *us* and *our* was no mistake. At that time there were two persons in the God Family, God the Father and the Word, who became Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3, 14). God ordained a family plan that will eventually allow all mankind to have an opportunity to become children in His Family.

family, we have a spiritual husband, Jesus Christ, and a spiritual mother, the Church of God. Christ is going to marry His Body, the Church, just as a husband is married to his body, his flesh, his wife (Eph. 1:22-23, Rev. 19:7).

Obey God's government

Making sure that God's government operates in our marriages and families is a major step toward building substance into them.

The structure for God's government in the family is given in

ually strive to become one in mind and spirit.

Wives, on the other hand, should understand submission; Ephesians 5:22 instructs wives to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord.

The key to submission, wives, is understanding that you are serving God, not man (Col. 3:18, 23-24). If you keep your focus on the big picture and realize that you are not just serving men, you will be able to submit with understanding.

Submission is not just blind obedience. It is a state of being — a reflection of what a woman is in her heart. A submissive woman radiates this attitude to the family: "Do not let your beauty be that outward adorning [which is, at best, a fragile shell!] . . . but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands" (I Pet. 3:3-5).

The key words are "trusted in God." If a woman submits as Christ has given commandment, then she is trusting in God for protection and deliverance, just as Christ submitted to death on the stake, even though He had not sinned (I Pet. 2:21-23). If her husband takes advantage of her submission, he will be judged by God — and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31)!

This does not mean that a wife should never say anything when she is being mistreated. Matthew 18:15-17 applies equally to the wife as to the husband. If she cannot be reconciled to her husband, then she should seek the aid of a second party; in most cases this should be her minister.

Nonetheless, if she will submit as Christ has commanded, she may win her husband by her conduct (I Pet. 3:1).

Practice the way of giving

Oneness in a marriage is not

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We must develop God's character in order to become members of God's Family. Hebrews 1:2-3 reveals that Jesus, the Son, is heir of all things and that He is the express image or character of God's person. When we are born into the Family of God, we will also be the express image of God's person.

God created, ordained and sanctified marriage and the family to reflect His spiritual Family. God's ongoing spiritual creation can be understood through the family — the physical family pictures God's spiritual Family. Family life is a God-plane relationship.

If it were not for the creation of male and female and the necessity for male and female to come together in marriage to reproduce, there would be no need for family. There would be no bond to hold society together.

God is the Father of the whole family in heaven and earth (Eph. 3:14-15). Just as there is the father role in the physical family, God is our Father in the spiritual Family. And just as there is a husband and wife in the physical

I Corinthians 11:2-3. God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man and man is the head of woman.

Christ taught His disciples how to administer authority (Matt. 20:25-28). They were not to exercise dominion over their neighbors as the gentiles did; they were to serve their neighbors, just as Christ came to serve them. The literal meaning of the word *neighbor* is "the one nearest you." Our wives or husbands are the ones nearest us.

Ephesians 5:25 gives specific instructions to husbands: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it." The husband, then, who wants to exercise authority as Christ did will give himself in service to his wife. He should, symbolically, lay down his life for her. How?

The husband, as the spiritual leader, should always strive to make peace and to create an environment in which God's way of life can flourish. When things go wrong it is his responsibility to initiate the reconciliation process. Husband and wife should contin-

produced simply by a man and a woman repeating the marriage vows. Unity is produced by husband and wife obeying God's instructions on loving their neighbor as themselves.

As Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong has said, just about all marital problems stem from one partner or the other or both trying to *get* from the other — expressing a selfish attitude. Some couples are able to maintain a precarious balance as long as each mate feels that he or she is getting as much as he or she is giving, but such an explosive situation certainly does not reflect the type of selfless, outgoing love and concern that should be present in a marriage.

Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Nothing pleases God more than His children being at one with Him and their neighbors.

Psalms 133:1 expresses God's pleasure in unity: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Husbands and wives must never forget that they are neighbors.

Nothing will give husbands and wives any more satisfaction and pleasure than dwelling together in peace. Peace and unity should be the goal.

When you go to bed at night and reflect on the events of the day and you know you are at peace with your wife, your children and your neighbors, you experience a deep joy. You may be sick or your family may be in great physical distress, but if you are at one with God and neighbor, God will supply the courage and resolve to gain the victory over trial and tribulation.

Husbands are instructed in Ephesians 5:28-29 to "nourish and cherish" their wives. The most important nourishment that a husband can provide for his family is spiritual. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Husbands should take the lead in encouraging family Bible study

and prayer and activities that please God.

Another kind of nourishment is physical. Men should be the physical providers for their families (I Tim. 5:8).

Men derive much of their sense of worth from their jobs. And, though many today want to deprecate true femininity, women feel most fulfilled in being what God created them to be — helpers of man. The man is supposed to cherish his wife and praise her for her help and for being a virtuous woman (Prov. 31:10-31). Of course, the wife must strive to *be* a virtuous woman.

In I Corinthians 7:4, Paul writes: "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." Husbands and wives belong to each other. They are to become one literally in physical intercourse and one spiritually by obeying Christ's instructions on loving each other.

Master the art of communication

Another key to building substance in marriage is mastering the art of communication.

Husbands and wives should be best friends. Marriage is not a master-slave relationship. In John 15:15, Christ said: "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." Husbands and wives should be constantly communicating with each other and building their friendship.

Hebrews 13:16 refers to communication as a sacrifice that pleases God, and God wants us to become living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). It requires time and effort to communicate with our mates. It is often much easier to simply withdraw into the recesses of our own minds — turn off and ignore everything around us. But this is a selfish approach. Couples should talk.

Notice how important commu-

nication between God's children really is:

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3:16-17, Authorized Version).

Are you and your husband or wife in this special book of God's — are you going to become His jewels? How much do you really communicate with each other?

Stay close to God

The most important step overall to building substance in marriage is staying close to God. This means maintaining oneness of purpose — and that purpose is serving God with all your being and preparing for positions of leadership and service in the coming Kingdom of God.

Staying close to God also requires constant repentance. Nearly all marital problems spring from breaking spiritual laws. We must repent, become more deeply converted and humble ourselves as little children so God can live in our marriages. We need to pray as David prayed for a clean heart and a right spirit (Ps. 51:10).

Is your marriage all that it could be — that it should be? If not, start right now to put your marriage aright. Humble yourselves before God and repent of your mistakes. God will help you: "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (Jas. 4:10).

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

The storms of today's world that beat so heavily on marriage can be weathered. Our homes and our marriages can be filled with the fruits of God's Spirit if we will build on the rock. □