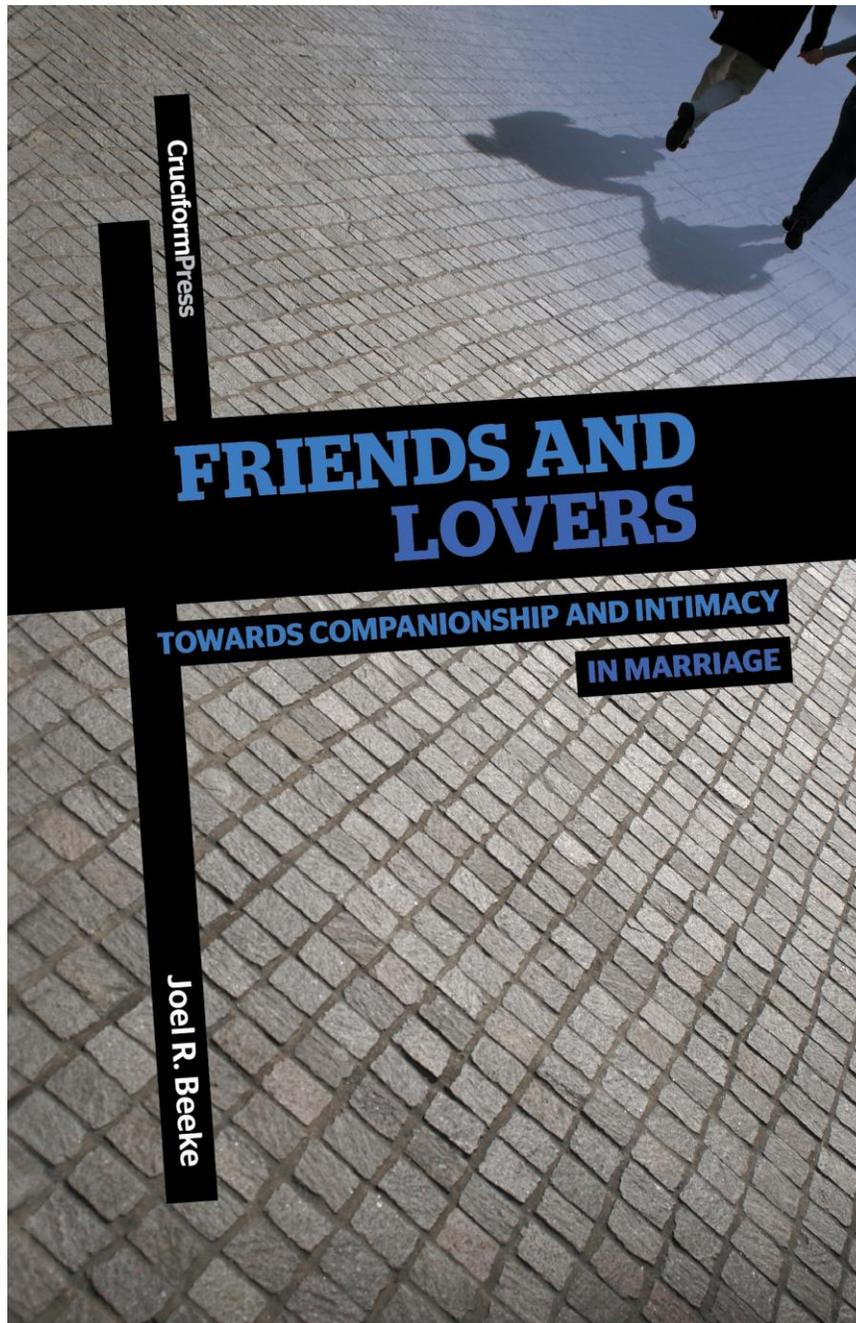


Friends and Lovers

Towards Companionship and Intimacy in Marriage

Joel R. Beeke

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Preface

Rekindle the Fire

What once was a blazing fire has cooled into a smoldering heap of ashen coals. But when you blow gently upon the coals, you discover that fire is still smoldering in them. To renew the fire, shave thin slices of wood off a dry log, gently pile them on the coals, and blow on them. Soon flickers of fire will reward your efforts. Now carefully place small sticks of pine over the burning shavings. After they catch fire, add larger pieces of wood, one at a time, pausing periodically to blow more air on the fire. Then smile as the flames mount higher. Soon the fireplace will blaze and crackle with fire.

Marriages can be like that fire. What once blazed hot now smolders faintly. The fire has not gone out, however, and the coals may retain their heat for some time. But the marriage is no longer warmed by the blazing fire that was there at first.

I am writing to tell you that God can rekindle the fire in your marriage.

Some people would say that the fire of marriage is the pleasurable intimacy of sex. Others would say that the fire is the companionship of dearest friends. In reality both are true. Hand in hand, face to face, body to body, and heart to heart—marriage aims at *intimate companionship*. God gave us a picture of this grand aim when he made the first woman out of the man's side. When Adam saw her he exclaimed, "Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!" The two became "one flesh" (Gen. 2:23, 24). It was a perfect match.

God intends a husband and wife to walk together, talk together, work together, and sleep together. Matthew Henry famously said the woman was "not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near to his heart to be beloved." He then added, "See how dear the affection ought to be between husband and wife; such as there is to our own bodies (Eph. 5:28)."¹

Sadly, sin and death entered the world, and with it came shame, blame, and power games within marriage (Gen. 3:7, 12, 16). The relationship that was once the fairest blossom of paradise is now a rose with thorns. The sins in our marriages pierce our hearts. But thorns and all, marriage still remains a fragrant flower worthy of desire. We were not made to be alone. So how can we keep the hearthfire of marriage burning?

God, our Creator, is also our Redeemer. The divine Lawgiver who cursed us for our disobedience has sent forth His Son to redeem us from the curse of His law (Gal. 3:10–14, 4:4–5). God sent His Son to save sinners. He is the Mediator who brings His people back to God and leads them once more in the paths of righteousness. By nature we are ignorant of what true love and marriage should be. Christ our Prophet offers us guidance in the Bible. We are guilty of dishonoring marriage through our disobedience towards the God who designed it. Christ our Priest shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins, and now intercedes for us. We are rebels without the strength to overcome the

evil that distorts and disrupts our human relationships, but Christ our King conquers sin and rules us by His mighty Spirit, making all things new, including our marriages.

God's ultimate goal in saving us is far greater than just saving our marriages. One day Christ will raise up all believers and summon us to a wedding feast, the likes of which we have never seen. What a day it will be when we are face to face with Him! On the way to glory, however, God transforms us in every area of life. Our submission to the heavenly Bridegroom requires doing His will today as husbands and wives.

This book aims to help you rekindle the flames of love in your marriage by the grace of God. If your marriage is still burning cheerfully, I hope it will help your love burn even brighter and hotter.

This little book is not a comprehensive marriage manual, nor is it a complete exploration of the theological significance of marriage. Instead it focuses on two key ingredients in a vital marriage: *friendship* and *sexual intimacy*. Drawing from the wisdom of the Bible, especially the Book of Proverbs, I hope to help you grow closer to your spouse both emotionally and physically.

I dedicate this book to my dear wife Mary, the WMWW (world's most wonderful woman), who has given me untold joy in nearly a quarter of a century of marriage. I love her far more than words can ever express and thank God every day for her. Thanks, too, to our children, Calvin, Esther, and Lydia, who have been a joy to raise and have given no gray hairs to their parents.

May the Spirit of God blow upon your marriage through the Word of Christ so that smoldering coals of love may burst once more into flame, and the fire of love be refueled, to produce marriages that blaze with love to the glory of God!

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This book grew out of two addresses I gave at a conference sponsored by the National Council of Family Integrated Churches in Asheville, North Carolina, on October 28, 2011. I am grateful to Scott Brown and the leaders of NCFIC for the invitation to speak and for their warm, gracious hospitality. It is a blessing to be among them. I also thank Rev. Paul Smalley, Rev. Ray Lanning, Phyllis Ten Elshof, and Kevin Meath for their work in assisting me with this book.

Part One: Friends

Companionship in Marriage

There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

—Proverbs 18:24

This is my beloved, and this is my friend.

—Song of Songs 5:16

Introduction

Next to new life in Christ, close friendship in marriage is life's greatest gift. I am privileged to be engaged in a number of ministries, but friendship with my wife is worth more to me than any of them. Her friendship is priceless to me.

There's something deep and mysterious about this bond of Christian friendship because it reflects the very nature of God. We might define it as *the personal bond of shared life*. By this I mean something that joins two people together for a time. Friendship does not have to last for a lifetime to be true friendship, but typically the bond of true friendship can take months to build and lasts for years. It is not an accidental connection; it is a mutual bond of faithfulness. The highest form of such a bond here on earth is the lifetime covenant of marriage between a man and woman.

Friendship is not just any bond or relationship, but a bond of *shared life*. Deuteronomy 13:6 makes a passing reference to "thy friend, which is as thine own soul." This implies that losing such a friend would be like death. Your lives are so bound together that whatever touches your friend touches you.

Friendship is like the force that holds together the nucleus of an atom. It is an intimate bond that holds us together when other forces would push us apart. The stronger the friendship is, the closer is its intimacy. R. C. Sproul writes, "In modern usage the term *intimacy* suggests merely a sexual relationship. But the word goes deeper than that. In its broad meaning, intimacy moves beyond the external and the superficial and penetrates the innermost dimensions of our life."²

As a bond of shared life, friendship brings our hearts and minds together in harmony. You might work closely with someone who has a very different mindset than you, but you are not likely to be friends. Friendship requires kindred spirits, that is, hearts and minds on the same wavelength. After a time, you often don't even have to speak for a friend to know what you are thinking. You are like two strings on a well-tuned guitar: when one is plucked, the other string vibrates in harmony.

In choosing a marriage partner, we should seek such harmony. We want commitment, companionship, and closeness. We want to be best friends.

True friendship is as precious as it is rare. The concept of friendship has become quite shallow today. For many people, "friends" are mere acquaintances. It may be only someone you've "friended" on Facebook. Frankly, many people are so busy making money and entertaining themselves that they have little time for real friendships. The relational networks of our culture are breaking down as our opportunities to communicate multiply through electronic media. In cyberspace we are awash in superficial connections and conversations, yet, in reality, many Americans are very lonely.

When it comes to human relationships, nothing is more tragic than loneliness in marriage. It is certainly possible to live in the same house, have joint bank accounts, and sleep in the same bed without being true friends. On the other hand, long ago Puritan Thomas Gataker (1574–1654) said, "There is no society [i.e., relationship]³ more near,

more entire, more needful, more kindly, more delightful, more comfortable, more constant, more continual, than the society of man and wife.”⁴ By the grace of God, such friendship between husbands and wives is possible and practical and should be our priority.

Few books on marriage include a chapter on friendship. But, with God’s help, I will first talk about the foundation of friendship in marriage; second, how to cultivate friendship in marriage; and third, the temptations of friendship in marriage.

1: Remember

The Foundation of Friendship in Marriage

Marriage was instituted by God at the dawn of human history. Both the sweet possibilities and bitter tragedies of marriage are rooted in the Bible's description of God's dealings with our first father and mother in Genesis 1–3. In Genesis 1:26, the Lord said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." The divine image in man is the reflection of the divine "us," that is, the three Persons of the Godhead, one in substance and equal in power and glory, living together in unity and eternal love. The three Persons constantly commune with one another and cooperate as one God in all they do (John 5:19–20). At the same time, as they work together, they subordinate themselves one to another in love. The Son delights to do the Father's will, and the Spirit delights to glorify the Son. This is beyond our comprehension, but by faith we believe that authentic friendship in Christ is rooted in the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity with each other.

The triune God has chosen to display His glory in our common humanity, our gender differences, and our relationships with each other. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). There is but one humanity, shared by both men and women as creatures made in the image of God; yet there are two sexes, male and female, each distinct from the other, and both essential to human reproduction. Genesis 2 reminds us that without woman, man would be alone and bereft of companionship. "It is not good that the man should be alone." A search of the animal world revealed that there was as yet no creature fit to stand alongside the man as his companion in life and work. So God created woman—and man met his match!

As different as male and female are, they are united in marriage on the basis of their common humanity. "Marriage is honorable in all," but there is an added dimension to Christian marriage. Christians are to marry only in the Lord. The partnership of two becoming one grows to include the Lord as a third party. Such marital friendship then must add the words *in Christ* to its definition, for friendship then becomes *the personal bond of shared life in Christ*. Moreover, where husband and wife love and serve the same Lord, we see an earthly tri-unity that reflects the Trinity in heaven. The bond I feel with my wife, by which I experience that we two are one in the Lord, has helped me to know God better. It has helped me understand just a bit more how God can be three Persons in one essence.

The purpose of marriage is more than emotional satisfaction or the fulfillment of physical desires. Married persons, living together in love as heirs of the grace of life, glorify God, who is a community of three, divine Persons who share love, communication, cooperation, and their very essence. Alan Dunn says, "Marital intimacy

is something more wonderful than mere biological mechanisms or animal urges.... Our inclination to intimacy is essential to our being: we are creatures made in the image of God.”⁵

God’s intent for marriage is clarified in the way He created woman. In Genesis 2:18, we read, “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” He then showed the man that no mere animal would fit that description. Man’s well-being depended on having a companion who could come to his aid in time of need and unite with him in doing God’s will in the world. He needed someone “meet,” or suitable, to who and what he was. This was a true friend.

So the Lord formed woman out of man’s side. Genesis 2:23–25 says, “And the man said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” This is a remarkable description of God’s design for marriage, which includes oneness, separation into a special and unique relationship, mutual commitment to one another, and total openness.

Sadly, our first parents fell into sin, and their corruption had dire effects on their marriage. We see this in Genesis 3. Paradise ended even before the man and woman left the Garden of Eden; the loss of original righteousness severed their relationship with God and damaged their marriage bond. Their openness gave way to shame, guilt, and covering their nakedness with aprons of fig leaves. As for mutual commitment, when God confronted them, the man tried to shift blame to the woman, knowing full well that the penalty of sin was death. God told the woman that the result of her sin was that her desire would be to conquer her husband, but he would continue to rule over her, resulting in conflict, anger, and bitter estrangement. If you wonder why friendship in marriage can be difficult, the short answer is: original sin.

But God also showed grace to the couple. In Genesis 3:15, God declared that He would turn the hearts of the woman and her offspring against the devil. One day a descendant of the woman would crush the serpent’s head and by His redemptive suffering bring deliverance to fallen mankind. They believed God’s promise, so the man gave his wife a new name. He did not call her mother of the dead, though death was now due to the race because of sin. Instead, he repented of having blamed her for his own sin, and called her “Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20). He blessed her with a name of hope. He used his authority over woman to bless her, not to curse! By calling her “mother,” he also recommitted himself to her as his wife and the mother of their children. Thus, by the grace of God revealed in the gospel, their relationship as husband and wife was renewed.

We learn from the first three chapters of the Bible that friendship in marriage has a theological foundation. Married persons are to be friends in the best and deepest sense of the term. Such friendship glorifies the triune God by realizing the full, God-given

potential of the marriage bond. Marriage is rooted in the basic facts of our creation; we were made to have communion with each other, and the closest possible communion is that between husband and wife. The beauty of this communion was marred by the Fall and obscured by the curse of sin, but friendship in marriage can be restored and renewed by faith in the promise of a Savior.

We could go on. We might speak of the law and how marriage must be regulated by the commandments of God such as, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14) and “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife” (Ex. 20:17). We could delve into the mystery of how marriage reflects Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph. 5:22–33). But let us pass by those topics and come to our second point.

2: Nourish

The Cultivation of Friendship in Marriage

Cultivation is rooted in farm work. Seed is sown, and tender plants spring up. They cannot flourish if they are not cultivated. Cultivation is rewarding work, for it results in an abundant harvest, when God gives the increase. But it is hard work. Nobody wakes up one morning and is pleasantly surprised to discover that, without any effort on his part, a field of ripe corn has appeared on his property.

Likewise cultivating friendship in marriage is hard work, yet most rewarding. Many people in our culture think that love is something you fall into and then somehow fall out of. That might be true of passing emotions, but true friendship relies on cultivation: uprooting bad attitudes, planting daily seeds of love towards one another, pulling out weeds and eliminating pests that threaten to choke the relationship, watering the tender plants with daily prayer, and then taking time to reap a harvest of love and enjoyment in each other's company.

We must resist the laziness and ingratitude that often creep into marriage. Before you were married, didn't you invest a lot in each other? You couldn't wait to be together, and you made time for each other. You sent each other notes and talked often on the phone together. You paid each other compliments, brought each other gifts, gave each other hugs, and shared each other's daily joys and trials. If you stop doing such things after you marry, what will happen to your friendship? The tender plant of friendship will languish and die away. Friendship does not persist, deepen, and grow automatically.

What often happens is that married people begin to take each other for granted. They go their separate ways in the face of the pressures of work and the multiplying responsibilities of maintaining a home and providing for children. Instead of becoming more interdependent, a husband and wife become more independent. Before they know it, they wake up six years later and say, "Who is this person laying beside me in the bed?" The commitment may still be there. You still say, "I love you," and mean it. In fact, people can go on this way for years. But what happened to your friendship?

In Song of Songs 5:16, the bride says of her husband, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend." On one level, that verse reveals the beautiful love between Christ and His bride, the church. But on another level, it shows that our marriages should mirror Christ's bond with His church. What a blessing to be able to say of your spouse, "This is my beloved, and this is my friend."

Friendship has many aspects, but what is common to all of them is *sharing*. Another word for friendship is *fellowship*, which comes from the Greek word *koinōnia*. We tend to think of fellowship as drinking coffee and eating cookies with other people from church. But the word actually means *sharing* or communing with each other: sharing each other's joys, bearing each other's burdens, and being involved in each

other's lives. Fellowship is one of the goals of the gospel. First John 1:3 says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." As members of the body of Christ, the gospel of reconciliation brings us into bonds of faith and love with one another. The same gospel should increase our love for each other as husband and wife, and our longing to have fellowship with each other.

Let us explore several aspects of cultivating friendship in marriage under the theme of sharing.

Sharing Yourself

The Lord describes His closeness with His people in terms of friendship. Exodus 33:11 says, "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." God is a Spirit (John 4:24), so this verse does not refer to physical closeness or seeing any physical form or face of God. It refers to an immediacy of Spirit to spirit. God sent messages to His other prophets in dreams and visions, but spoke His Word directly to Moses (Num. 12:6–8). In the new covenant, this kind of spiritual intimacy is extended to true believers who yearn to walk with God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). God compares this closeness to what friends should be to each other: "as a man speaketh unto his friend."

John 15:15 tells us that Jesus said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Christ's words remind us that sharing ourselves is the heart of friendship. We must love each other as Christ loved us. Ephesians 5:2 says, "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us."

A woman once told me that when her husband was gone for four or five hours, she would ask him, "Where were you? What did you do?" He said, "I don't ask you what you did today, do I? Don't ask me what I did today." A man who treats his wife that way has a servant in his house, not a friend. Jesus says friendship is not just giving commands but sharing what is on one's mind and heart. Richard Baxter (1615–1691) wrote this about marriage:

It is a mercy to have a faithful friend, that loveth you entirely, and is as true to you as yourself, to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs, and who would be ready to strengthen you, and divide the cares of your affairs and family with you, and help you to bear your burdens, and comfort you in your sorrows, and be the daily companion of your life, and partaker of your joys and sorrows.⁶

When you marry, the Lord says you enter into a covenant of companionship. Malachi 2:14 says, "the wife of thy youth" is "thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant." You promise to walk together all the way through the pilgrimage of life. One couple I know uses the five Ts to remember what companionship is: giving each other time, thought, talk, tenderness, and touch.

There is no substitute for spending time together. You are not a friend to your spouse if you work so many hours that you never have time together. Gary Smalley spent three years interviewing more than thirty families, all of whom were very happy. The families had very diverse geographic, social, and economic circumstances. But all of these relationships had two things in common. First, they had “a concern for togetherness.” They avoided doing too many activities that required them to be apart from each other. Second, they loved camping.⁷ Now, maybe the thought of campfires and sleeping under stars thrills you. Or, maybe the daddy-long-legs in the camp bathroom are more than you can handle! The point is: do things together.

Friendship cannot be warmed up by thirty seconds in the microwave. So much today is instant; but friendship is not. It costs something. It costs you yourself, your commitment, and your vulnerability. There are no rush orders in friendship. It must be baked slowly, gently, and continually if we want the flavor we are looking for.

One aspect of sharing your minds and hearts is discussing major decisions together and waiting until you have unity before moving ahead.⁸ Any decision that significantly affects your time or money, or that involves a major change for your family’s life, home, work, or church, should be made only after talking together about it, praying together, and coming to a point of unity. Although the husband is the head of the household, a godly man should not—with rare exceptions—lead his family against his godly wife’s desires. As William Gouge (1575–1653) said, “Though the man be as the head, yet is the woman as the heart.”⁹

To cultivate sharing yourselves, you must listen to each other. Be a good sounding board when your spouse needs to talk. Husbands, I will directly address you here because men in general are not known for their superior listening skills. When your wife says, “Honey, I feel this way,” do you say, “Do this or that, and you will get over it”? She will most likely say in response, “I didn’t ask you to tell me what to do. I just wanted you to know how I felt.” So understand that your wife wants you to listen to her feelings and to affirm them.

If you are a good listener, you can listen to your wife for twenty or thirty minutes about her concerns, and she often will be satisfied even if you offer her no solutions. That doesn’t mean your wife never needs counsel. But more often she just wants to know that you are there for her. She wants to connect to you. So share yourselves with each other.

Sharing Your Faith

The deepest fellowship is spiritual fellowship, in which you share your life with a dear friend in the presence of the living God. It is remarkable how so few Christians actually enjoy spiritual fellowship with their spouses. I’m not talking about having family devotions, though that is a crucial spiritual discipline. I’m talking about sharing your faith with each other.

Obviously that assumes that you both have a living faith in Christ. Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” Spiritual fellowship is impossible unless Christ lives in both people in a marriage. For this reason Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:39 that if a woman’s husband dies, “she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; *only in the Lord.*”

If you are Christian who is single, do not enter a romantic relationship with a person who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ and is not walking with God. Don’t settle for someone who goes to church but has a questionable profession of faith. The minimum standard for dating or courtship should be a faith that is producing good works through love.

If you are a Christian and are married to an unconverted person who is willing to live with you, do not leave your spouse (1 Cor. 7:12–13). But do not try to nag your spouse into the kingdom! Be the best husband or wife that you can possibly be so that you might win your spouse’s heart with your godly conduct (1 Peter 3:1–2). Similarly, if your spouse professes to be saved but resists talking about spiritual things, give yourself to private prayer and serve your spouse with true love.

But if you are both Christians, then share your spiritual experiences. Share your spiritual concerns, frustrations and triumphs, your pilgrimage and your progress. Talk about how the Lord is working in your life by His Word and Spirit.

A pastor will sometimes visit a mourning widow and ask, “Do you believe your husband was a child of God?” Too often the bereaved says, “Seriously, I don’t know; he never spoke about it. He read a lot, he went to church faithfully, he was serious, he was a good example, but he never shared one thing with me.” How devastating! The most important part of life is faith in Christ Jesus, yet your partner knows nothing about it? Please don’t be that way; share your spiritual struggles and hopes with your spouse.

Most importantly, share your faith as a couple by praying together. I realize that praying out loud can be intimidating for some Christians, and we should be patient with each other in this. But there is nothing like spending time each day as a couple, offering thanksgiving together for the day’s blessings and petitioning God for the grace you need. Moreover, don’t put off prayer if your spouse asks you to pray together at some point during the day when you don’t normally pray together. Men, put down the book, set aside your tools, turn away from the screen, and pray. Women, turn off the stove, put down the phone, and pray. Baxter said, “It is a mercy to have so near a friend to be a helper to your soul.”¹⁰

Sharing Your Trust

The traditional wedding vow includes the phrase, “I plight thee my troth,” which means “I pledge my trustworthiness and fidelity to you.” We need more “troth” in our marriages. Proverbs 18:24 says, “There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.”

Cultivate with your spouse a commitment that is more intimate and enduring than blood relations. Super-glue your hearts together in an unbreakable bond.

Don't be a fair-weather friend. Proverbs 19:4 says, "Wealth maketh many friends." Proverbs 19:6 says, "Every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts." Before you married, you probably lavished gifts and attention on each other. But will you keep your troth when the fervor of first romance wears off? Let your spouse know through consistent faithfulness that you can be relied upon in good times and bad. Wives, don't be resentful if your husband's job takes him away from you more than you like. Husbands, don't be disappointed if your wife isn't as slim and cheerful as she was before having three children. Don't give way to such resentments. Don't make comparisons or covet other people's mates. Keep your hearts open to each other so that when your spouse wants to talk to you, you won't respond with a deaf ear or a critical spirit.

Trustworthiness nurtures trust. Trust develops over time as your relationship matures. You trust each other more and more as you learn to feel comfortable and confident with each other. Both of you should refrain from flirting with members of the opposite sex and should offer no reason for suspicion. Over time you should be drawn together in a deeper sense of troth, which binds you in friendship. You will feel comfortable when you see each other. That is what happens in a good marriage.

It can be like a pair of shoes. Don't take the parallel here too seriously, but let me admit that I don't like shopping for a new pair of shoes. I much prefer slipping into my comfortable old shoes that fit so well. Most new shoes are too hard to break in! Well, a good marriage, like a favorite pair of shoes, includes the wonderful, warm, cozy feeling of trust that builds over years in a marriage. Even more importantly, your mind and heart are at ease with who your spouse is and who you are when you are apart from each other. That is how a good marriage should be. You know deep down that your partner would do anything for you, if you asked. That is true friendship.

So whatever you can do to cultivate mutual openness and confidence to build a sense of trust will build your friendship. Let me warn you here against things that tear down trust. First is lack of discretion and confidentiality. If your partner does not keep your secrets, trust will erode. Your friendship and maybe even your marriage will be destroyed. Proverbs 17:9 says, "He that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." To make yourself vulnerable in marriage, as you are called to do, you must be able to fully trust your partner not to tell your secrets to another person, such as a mother-in-law or friend at work. This is disastrous.

You should also be slow to believe rumors that you hear about each other. Rumors are very divisive, even if they have no basis in fact. Proverbs 16:28 says, "A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends." I'm not suggesting that you ignore any signs that your spouse may be involved in a sinful behavior. There are times when a wayward spouse must be confronted, if need be, with the help of your pastor. But realize that gossips don't care about the truth as much as the poisonous

pleasure of speaking evil. You can't take seriously all that you hear, especially when it is contrary to what you know about a person's character and conduct.

Proverbs 31:11–12 says of a virtuous woman, “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.” Strive to be worthy of the trust that every man should place in his wife, every wife in her husband.

Sharing Your Joy

If you have a sour disposition, you will not cultivate friendship in your marriage. Whining, complaining, and otherwise ventilating your negativity are all forms of murmuring, which is condemned in Scripture as serious sin. A sense of humor, smiles, warmth, and optimism are important ways to encourage each other as best friends. So develop a joyful spirit. Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” Laughing together is a sweet way to refresh your spirits and draw closer together.

Your children and your own human foibles should provide plenty of material for humor. Of course, God, sin, heaven, and hell are not laughing matters; we must never respond to the truths of God with levity. But there is much in life that we should not take so seriously. Learn to laugh at situations that are not inherently weighty. It's a way of saying, “The Lord is with us despite our idiosyncrasies.”

Cultivate joy that does not depend on physical circumstances. “Be of good cheer.” Proverbs 15:15–16 says, “All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast. Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” If you have each other's love and fear the Lord, you can feast on inward joys even if you have nothing but peanut butter sandwiches for supper. Lead your family in giving thanks for all of God's blessings, even in hard times.

Learn how to please your spouse. We read in 1 Corinthians 7:33–34, “But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife,” and “she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.” Pleasing someone (without compromising your faith) is a mark of friendship. Baxter wrote, “When husband and wife take pleasure in each other, it uniteth them in duty, it helpeth them with ease to do their work, and bear their burdens; and is not the least part of the comfort of the married state.”¹¹

Don't be so super-spiritual that earthly things don't matter. Wesley said that cleanliness is next to godliness, and he was not far off the mark. Personal hygiene is a must when two people live in close proximity. Grooming and dress are also important. Find out what your husband or wife likes, and do it. And avoid, as much as possible, doing things that displease your spouse. When my wife and I first married, I thought I was a careful driver, but my wife saw it differently. What to me seemed a safe distance

between my car and the one ahead to her seemed dangerously near. I had to be willing to sacrifice my ideas about driving in order to make her feel safer in the car with me. Since her feelings about this were much stronger than mine, it was only reasonable that I should be the one to yield. Baxter said, “Avoid therefore all things that may represent you unpleasant or unlovely to each other. . . . whatever is loathsome in body or mind, must be shunned as temptations which would hinder you from that love, and pleasure, and content, which husband and wife should have in one another.”¹²

To please your spouse, you must know him or her. A big part of knowing your spouse involves your spouse honestly telling you what is pleasing or displeasing to him or her. One man, early in his marriage, was asked by his wife if he liked the meal she prepared. He hated it, but he was afraid to offend her, so he said it was good. He ate that meal once a week for the rest of his life. Is that kind of deception a recipe for friendship in marriage? Be honest with one another about your likes and dislikes. That will help your spouse love you.

Sharing your joys also means sharing activities that you both enjoy. Look for areas of common interest and invest in them. If your spouse enjoys something that is not your favorite activity, learn to enjoy it. Go along to an event, and even if you can’t appreciate it, enjoy his or her enjoyment. The more your lives overlap, the closer your friendship will become. Of course, all things must be subject to the glory of God. I am not suggesting that you make an idol out of leisure time activities—for example, skipping church to go hunting together. On the other hand, if you are so busy with church and school that you never have time to go to a concert or have a picnic, you are missing out on pleasures God wants you to receive with thanksgiving and enjoy.

Not all of life is about pleasure, for marriages also suffer pain and trouble. They can also suffer from temptation. That leads to our third point.

End of Sample

¹ Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (Philadelphia: Ed. Barrington & Geo. Haswell, 1828), 1:36 [on Genesis 2:21–25].

² R. C. Sproul, *The Intimate Marriage: A Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2003), 13.

³ Archaic term for “the quality or state of being connected; relationship” (Webster’s).

⁴ Quoted in J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 262.

⁵ Alan Dunn, *Gospel Intimacy in a Godly Marriage: A Pursuit of Godly Romance* (North Bergen, N.J.: Pillar and Ground Publications, 2009), 17.

⁶ “The Christian Directory,” 2.1, dir. 9, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme (London: James Duncan, 1830), 4:30.

⁷ Gary Smalley, *Hidden Keys of the Loving, Lasting Marriage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 325–26.

⁸ Smalley, *Hidden Keys*, 328.

⁹ William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (1622; repr. n.p.: Puritan Reprints, 2006), 194 [3.4].

¹⁰ Baxter, "Christian Directory," 2.1, dir. 9, in *Works*, 4:30.

¹¹ Baxter, "Christian Directory," 2.7, dir. 4, in *Works*, 4:122.

¹² Baxter, "Christian Directory," 2.7, dir. 4, in *Works*, 4:122.