

CARING FOR MARRIAGE NEWSLETTER



**NOVEMBER-
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Christmas Tableaux

Lori Odhner

COVER PHOTO BY JENNY STEIN

Early in December there was a Christmas play in our small town.

John and I were clad in beige stripes and leather boots, with a herd of other singers disguised as shepherds. Hope and Aurelle were in sparkly white, with a frosting of gold lame.

The story slipped easily off my lips when the minister began to read.

"There were in the same country shepherds, abiding in their fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them."

We were part of the retelling not because the details have changed, but because they are constant. People are not listening so that they can acquire more facts but because the remembrance resonates deeply. *Frankincense. No room. Pondered in her heart.*

We have been participating in Christmas pageants for thirty years in four states without changing the script. One time we had a heavenly host with five little girls whose lineage spanned India, Japan, Mexico and Holland. They danced for joy across the altar and tossed velvet stars. Music linked the brief scenes together like red circles in a paper chain between the green ones.

Part of the power of Christmas is that it is a shared story.

Following the same verses year after year, generation after generation, we build ties with each other. Community grows. It is a story that gives us hope, telling us that in a place where thorns and apathy fester there is a portal for love to come into the world.

There is another script that hasn't changed for ages. It's the story of boy meets girl, and both overcome challenges by finding true love. Generation after generation each says "I do," committing their lives and fortunes to a higher purpose. Again and again they venture out to escape the Herod of self-righteousness and find the healing myrrh of compassion. And when the journey reaches its darkest times they may even hear the whisper of angels, if they are looking, or see a star gently moving to a place where True Innocence lays sleeping in their lives. ■

THIS FIRST APPEARED AS A MARRIAGE MOAT. EMAIL RESPONSES ON NEXT PAGE.

Responses to this article from our web readers:

- That was really beautiful, Lori! The final paragraph pulls us right back into our own lives, gracefully, yet powerfully. Well done! Makes me eager to live “aright!” and SO HAPPY that my grandchildren will be coming for Christmas, and that I get to help them celebrate Christmas! -- JB
- Thanks for this one. On a personal note I enjoy Christmas so much and when you wrote the quote about the shepherds from the Old King James Version, I felt a flood of joy enter my heart. You see, as a child in the Carmel Church School, that was one of the Christmas recitations we learned, and of all the Christmas recitations it was my favorite, maybe because of the association of it with the beautiful illustration in the Christ Child book, or maybe it was the humble reverence with which Geoffrey Childs read the story at the tableaux or on the evening Christmas Eve service. I still recite it to myself to this day from memory. Thank you again. -- MH
- Love this Lori, Thanks. — SH
- Beautifully said — ES

Reminder:

Marriage Moats is now in Book Form from Fountain Publishing

Marriage Moats: 101 Thoughts to Inspire and Protect Your Marriage By Lori Soneson Odhner

Visit fountainpublishing.com and enter “moats” in the search box

As with anything that is truly worthwhile, marriage is a long-term project. Sometimes things roll smoothly, and sometimes they don't. *Marriage Moats* assures couples that they are not alone in needing to work to build and maintain their marriage. This book uses everyday stories and examples to encourage husbands and wives to believe in themselves and in their relationship. It assures couples that ups and downs are completely normal, and that needing some help, advice, perspective and support now and then is part of the journey. This book is a collection of her most popular “moats”.



BOOK COVER PHOTO BY CHARA ODHNER



The Ten Commandments of Communication

John
Odhner

Often people who are having trouble in their relationships

can benefit from learning to communicate better. Of course the psychology of listening empathetically, expressing feelings clearly, and avoiding negative feelings, can be very helpful. I highly recommend learning what psychology has to teach.

There is other advice that is much older and even more effective. While most of us have heard of the Ten Commandments, I suspect that most of us have not applied them with the purpose of improving communication. Yet, if you are having trouble getting along with someone else, especially someone close to you like a married partner, sibling, parent or child, the Ten Commandments can be a very good place to start.

Two of the ten are specifically about things we say: “Do not take the Lord’s name in vain,” and “Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Yet all of them greatly affect how we communicate and get along with others. Here is a summary:

1. Have no other gods.

God is pure love and wisdom, or complete compassion and integrity. What He asks of us is that we love one another as He has loved us. Putting this God in first place means having compassion and integrity as our ideals and most important values. God wants us to love people and use things; having other gods means we love things and use people. Having other gods means we care more about power, possessions and pleasure than we do about principles, people and compassion.

Communication is easier when we share values. Partners who are compassionate, committed and caring will usually get along. Those concerned more about who controls the schedule or the money, who does the most chores, and whether one is making the other happy, will seldom get along.

So we can put God first by always starting with loving words and compassionate listening. When love controls the conversation, then God does, because God is love. We may need to talk about money, cars, house, schedules, chores, sex and food, but without letting them control the conversation.

2. Do not take the Lord’s name in vain.

I find TV shows, music, and daily conversation are increasingly filled with four-letter words. Sadly, in a time when we have an opportunity to show respect for people of all faiths, it is becoming increasingly popular to show disrespect and anger towards anything we dislike or disagree with.

We assume free speech means having a right to label, criticize and mock anything at all. Unfortunately, the habit of contemptuous speech leads us to verbally abuse our partner, and it poisons relationships with the thought that life is miserable and being together is no fun. You might say that the first commandment means letting love guide our conversations, while the second means there must also always be respect for others and their values.



ALL PHOTOS FOR THIS ARTICLE BY ANDY SULLIVAN

3. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

The seventh day was for rest from six days of labor. One way to keep the Sabbath is to take a break whenever the conversation becomes too intense. (John Gottman says take a break anytime your heart rate goes over 100, because no real communication will take place when you are overwrought.)

Another way is to remember to quiet our own thoughts (about what we will say next or what happened earlier in the day) when the other person is speaking. Be patient and peaceful when listening, setting aside the need to respond, defend, convince or control.

4. Honor your father and mother.

Like the second commandment, this one encourages respect; respect for the relationship that created us, for the family and community that nurtures us, for the passing of values and traditions from older to younger. In marriage, this could include your partner's parents: honor your father-in-law and your mother-in-law, that your days with their child may be long. Disrespecting in-laws is a common first crack in a romantic relationship. My wife has often told me how much it means to her that I gave her mother care and respect during her illness.

5. You shall not murder.

Obviously, murder stops communication, but so can violence, threats, rage, revenge and contempt, which is why Jesus said that rage and contempt are a form of murder (Matthew 5:21-22). One of the foundations for good communication is safety. We share deeper feelings when we feel safe with a person. We communicate better by helping another person feel safe, knowing that we will not hurt, threaten, punish or humiliate them in any way.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

Extramarital affairs devastate marital communication by deceit and hiding. Even if the partner doesn't know about the affair, it takes away honesty, transparency and trust. The cheater becomes defensive and protective of the affair and is no longer able to be vulnerable in the marriage.

Even without an affair, obscene language, pornography and sexual fantasy can violate the relationship. Lustful behavior shows a loss of commitment to one's marriage vows, and makes any expression of love seem two-faced. Lust brings shame, shame brings hiding, and hiding ends real communication.

continued next page

Ten Commandments of Communication – *continued*

7. You shall not steal.

Obviously if you were to sell your partner's prized heirlooms on eBay for beer money, it might make communication more challenging. Theft is the opposite of sharing. For most of us the theft is done in small ways. I might interrupt my partner, stealing the attention that others were giving, or stealing her moment of self-expression. Or I might steal time, giving the TV, internet, or other diversions attention that should have gone to my partner.



8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Honesty can be very difficult. I may hide the fact that I wasted 3 hours with TV shows when I could have cleaned the gutters. I think a little lying won't hurt and will help avoid conflict. But every lie makes me less trustworthy. Like the boy who cried wolf we find after a few lies that people won't believe us even when we are telling the truth. Honesty is the bedrock of a relationship.

9 & 10. You shall not covet.

Oh, there are so many things to covet! My neighbor's car, clothes, salary (and benefits!), home theater system, health and yes, a few other things... But coveting leads to breaking the other commandments. On the level of marriage, I find myself sometimes coveting my wife's conscience. I know in my heart that she is right (about whatever we last argued over), and I wish I had that *rightness*. To make myself look right, I might lie a little, or steal a little attention, or criticize her. I could also covet her freedom. I may not like a choice she has made (to like a certain food or person that I dislike, or to spend her time doing something I don't enjoy), so I want it to be *my* choice instead. I might try to convince her that my choices are better than hers, or show a little contempt for her choices.

The shared commitment to keep the Ten Commandments

is a commitment to have love and compassion, to give respect, act with integrity, to not cause harm, to be safe and honest. "True married love together with its delights comes solely from the Lord, and is granted to those who live in accordance with His commandments" (*Married Love* §534). "I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love" (Psalm 119:47). ■



We welcome your support for this newsletter. Thank you to the people who have sent donations! \$18 a year covers the printing and mailing costs. Some people have sent more and we are very grateful.

Send it to The Bryn Athyn Church, Box 277, Bryn Athyn, Pa 19009 with caring for marriage in the memo line.

Caring for Marriage Conference In This Together!!

FEBRUARY 16-17, 2013 ■ caringformarriage.org

Welcome to the possibility of joining us for the eighth annual conference. Perhaps you are a regular and have attended each year. Maybe you have never crossed the threshold, and are uncertain about if this weekend is a good fit for you. Feel free to try the idea on for size, and talk it over with your partner if you are married or dating. FYI, people do come without a partner for any number of reasons. We have workshops aimed at singles, parents, widows and couples. You are all an important part of the community called *Loving Marriage*. — Love, Lori and John Odhner, Conference Coordinators.



Workshops & Presentations

PLENARY SESSION | Sat. Feb. 16 9:15 | A Child of Divorce: *Brianne Good*

WORKSHOP SLOT A

Sat. Feb. 16 10:15 – 11:45

- A1** Writing Your Love Story Forward:
Chandra Hiffman
- A2** Coping with Grief: *Erica Hyatt*
- A3** Marriage Manners:
Greg and Meryl Simons
- A4** Mentoring is Easier than You Think:
John and Lori Odhner
- A5** Baggage: *Erik Buss*
- A6** Learning Self Care: *Ali Smetanick Childs*
- A7** Coping with Disabilities:
David and Brooke Debelius
- A8** Making Bad Moods Spiritually Productive
Judah Synnvestedt

WORKSHOP SLOT B

Sat. Feb. 16 1:15 – 2:45

- B1** Young Women's Discussion:
Rachel Buss
- B2** Keeping Marriage Alive while Parenting: *Solomon and Tirah Keal*
- B3** Shhhh! (How Secrets affect Marriage):
Gwenda and Michael Cowley
- B4** Marriage the Easy Way: *Ned and Theresa Uber*
- B5** Love and Respect: *Lori and John Odhner*
- B6** The Art of Getting What You Want
Marah Boyesen
- B7** Creativity and Relationship:
Deev and John Murphy

PLAYSHOP SLOT C | Sat. Feb. 16 3:15 – 4:45

- C1** Play's the Thing: Learning to Play Fair in Our Relationships:
Justine Brannon
- C2** Interlocking Rings:
Christina Orthwein
- C3** "October Baby" Movie
- C4** Couples' Shiatsu:
Michelle Morey Synnvestedt
- C5** Sports Acro for Couples:
Hilary Bryntesson
- C6** Marriage and Coffee:
Andrea and Bradley Cranch

CELEBRATING LORI'S 1000th MOAT

Here is a reprint—with many responses

One thousand moats.

How about that. If I had suggested to John in late March of 2010 that I was going to compose and send out 1000 consecutive marriage boosting messages to 600 people I would have laughed at my own bravado. But here we are in the waning light of 2012. One thousand moats.

Some were ordinary, with ne'er a forward or backwards glance. Others got sent to husbands, adult children and friends to share the laughter. I only know this because the server tells me a simple number of opens, and on many days people pause to say thank you. Here is one.

Dear Lori,

Thank you for your daily inspirational messages. As Tony the Tiger used to say, "They're GREAT!" But somehow those eleven letters don't really express the feeling inside. If you ever wonder whether writing them is worth all the effort, time, energy, creativity... just remember - "You have no idea"

Love to you and John

It is just as well, that most of the time we have no idea. Your relationships, for example, shine out like candles or tree lights on the darkest night of the year. I know because God told me.

You are the light of the world. Matthew 5

"But I am not good enough," you argue. "I get angry. I am controlling."

I suppose if candles were inclined to self deprecation they could come up with material too.

But a person who is stumbling in the dark is not so picky as we might think. A small light will do. Your brightness may not outshine Times Square, but it is enough for a person who has lost their way.

So today I extend my gratitude to you. Thank you for the thousand small flickering kindnesses, and gestures of generosity that glow in your wake. Most days you are too busy to look behind and see them, but others do.

I do. ■

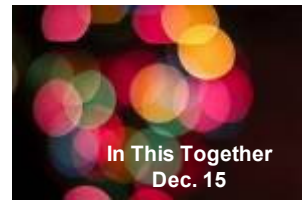
Selected Responses:

- * CONGRATS! and, yes, THANK YOU for your willingness to share your talent and love for the work, joy and beauty that is the gift of marriage from the Lord. Much love -- SK
- * Lori, Congratulations! Enough for another book! I look forward to reading your moats each day. Thanks for keeping them coming. You are an inspiration! – SA



Selected Responses—cont'd.

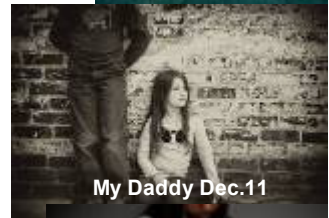
- ★ Well done, good and faithful servant. Cheerio – DE
- ★ So good to remember! Makes me think of the good old Christmas movie, “It’s a Wonderful Life.” You never know all the effects of your daily life. What a blessing from the Lord, really. – KD
- ★ Aww! Congratulations, Lori! :=) And how sweet of you to thank your readers. You’re awesome, lady! :=) xoxo -- JB
- ★ Dear Lori, I am not especially good at expressing myself but I must respond to today’s thoughts. To be able to create something new every day is a feat in itself, but to be able to inspire ramps the effort way up! I love starting my day reading from the Word and Doctrines, finishing off with Marriage Moats. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for taking the time to do this useful endeavor. I think one of the things that marriages struggle with in the early years is the sense of isolation (i.e., we are the only ones with a problem), and I can only imagine that your words bring comfort to many. Thank you for being the lovely creative person you are, for all that you do for others, and for just being you! We wish you and John a most blessed and peaceful Christmas. Much love – EP
- ★ Congratulations Lori! What an accomplishment! “Well Done thou good.....” – BH
- ★ Thanks for all you do!! Much love and merry xmas to John and all the kids as well. Love -- AP
- ★ Hi Lori, My apologies for waiting for your 1,000th moat to thank you for the wonderful use you and John are performing! It takes work to do what you do! Your moats are so many things: encouraging, helpful, inspiring, relevant, wise, creative, uplifting, and the list goes on. They are applicable to every level of marriage; from newlyweds to the golden years. Thank you – KH



In This Together
Dec. 15



Resiliency
Dec.13



My Daddy Dec.11



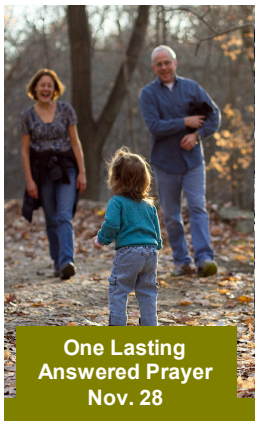
Choices
Dec. 6



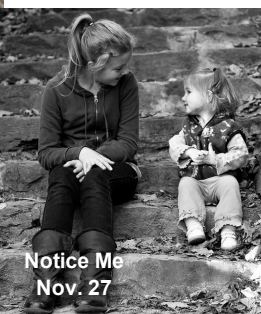
Rovong Torpedo
Dec. 8

IMAGES FROM A FEW VERY

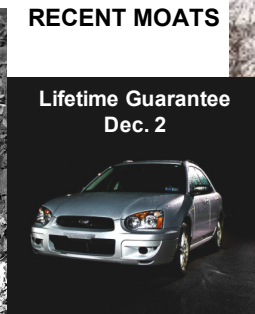
RECENT MOATS



One Lasting Answered Prayer
Nov. 28



Notice Me
Nov. 27



Lifetime Guarantee
Dec. 2



BIG HOUSES
Dec. 3

A Marriage Moat Ooops!

Note - Sometimes people forward moats to others and this woman accidentally clicked on reply which sent it to Lori instead of her husband, for whom it was intended. Here is the original moat, entitled “Him and Her”

Wife's Diary: Tonight, I thought my husband was acting weird. We had made plans to meet at a nice restaurant for dinner. I was shopping with my friends all day long, so I thought he was upset at the fact that I was a bit late, but he made no comment on it. Conversation wasn't flowing, so I suggested that we go somewhere quiet so we could talk. He agreed, but he didn't say much. I asked him what was wrong; He said, “Nothing.” I asked him if it was my fault that he was upset. He said he wasn't upset, that it had nothing to do with me, and not to worry about it. On the way home, I told him that I loved him. He smiled slightly, and kept driving. I can't explain his behavior. I don't know why he didn't say, “I love you, too.”

When we got home, I felt as if I had lost him completely, as if he wanted nothing to do with me anymore. He just sat there quietly and watched TV. He continued to seem distant and absent. Finally, with silence all around us, I decided to go to bed. About 15 minutes later, he came to bed. But I still felt that he was distracted and his thoughts were somewhere else. He fell asleep—I cried. I don't know what to do. I'm almost sure that his thoughts are with someone else. My life is a disaster.

Husband's Diary: Boat wouldn't start, can't figure it out.



Here is the email message that was supposed to forward this moat to her husband but Lori received it instead:

this is the thing I was telling you about. it is cute. just take 2 min. to read. and it made me grin. Xoxo me

Upon receiving this email, Lori replied to this woman as follows:

If you meant to forward this, you accidentally replied to me.

The flustered lady responded to Lori with this email:

Aack!! I am sorry! At least you know someone is reading and enjoying your messages :-)--enough for me to (try to) forward them to my husband! I would have never probably written you, but now that I am.....I really enjoy these. I found you through Sandra Dodd (we home school) and your daily messages have improved my marriage--truly. I think the work you are doing is actually making a difference in the world, and occasionally they make me grin too. Keep it up, I appreciate you! Warmly, JL

Secret Service

Brief excerpt from Lori's moat: Recently I read about the cost for providing Secret Service protection for presidential candidates. In 2000 it cost the taxpayers \$54 million. In 2004 that jumped to \$74 million. This past year the powers that be sunk \$113 million into the effort. With a population of 311 million that ripped twenty seven cents out of my pocket, an amount I had earmarked for more significant things. Like a third of a bar of soap.



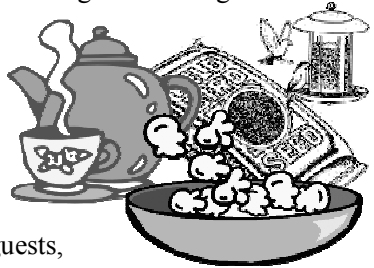
JENNY STEIN

My thoughts immediately migrate to marriage. Who is coughing up loose change to protect that? Personally I hold sacred vows on a higher plane than even the inhabitant of the Oval Office. His term lasts four years or maybe eight but my marriage is slated to soar into eternity. What safeguards do I have in place? Money is not the only barrier against attack. These daily emails are called moats because they are intended to provide a puddle of defense. Mentoring is another strategy for circling up the wagons around a couple.

But the glaring embarrassment is how many couples have no plan at all. Our culture is largely mute about the issue. Home security systems get more airtime than marital security by a long shot. So, not wanting to be nosy or anything, but hey. What are you spending on protecting your marriage this year?

Response: You ask what are we spending on protecting our marriage?

Answer: birdseed, tea and popcorn. With the nearest town with a restaurant over and hour away and a hubby who despises public eating, with no alcohol in our household or social life, with no weekend cottage: because we live in one every day—we “indulge” and celebrate the small gifts—my husband enjoys keeping the bird feeder filled and I stop what I'm doing to ooh and ah at the winged guests, their antics, colors and gathering through the winter.



And he? He celebrates the many ways I serve his needs by making popcorn for me delivered in a splendidly peacock-blue glazed hand-blown pottery bowl as soon as he senses I am relaxed and glued to a chick flick.

Other evenings he offers me tea and fills the kettle only so much, asks me what type of tea, stirs in just the right amount of a friend's hives honey and knows my favorite mug. We both feel special and these moments can be daily without feeling like a repeat. Sigh. Such blessings within such simple acts.

Oh, and one more thing. Love note emails!

Hugs to you, Moat Keeper! — E.D.

**PRESENTING COUPLES AT THE 2013
MARRIAGE CONFERENCE**

Soloman and Tirah Keal

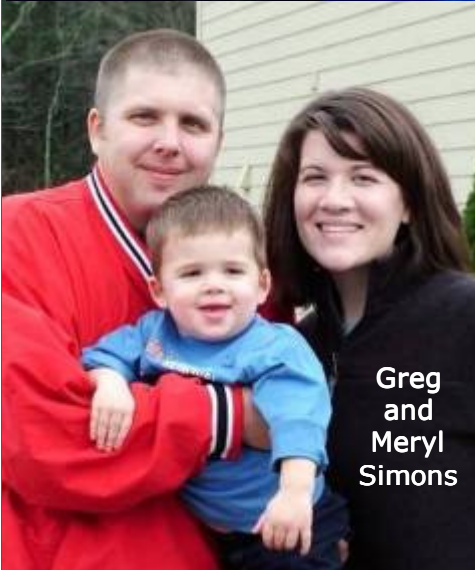


**David and Brooke
Debelius**



**John
and Deev
Murphy**

**Theresa and
Ned Uber**



**Greg
and
Meryl
Simons**

