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HUSBANDS LOVE YOUR WIVES

“Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it,” Eph. 5:25.

Sometimes, it seems that people get the idea the Bible is a Sunday book; but, the Bible is not just a Sunday book. The Bible is to be the man of your counsel every day in the week. And for that matter, if the Bible is not your guidebook from Monday through Saturday, you are wasting your time to consult it on Sunday.

There is a little wall motto I have seen, and no doubt, most of you have seen it. It says, “When all else fails, read the instructions.”

Just about anything you buy, nowadays, comes with an instruction booklet. If you can buy a \$3.95 pocket calculator, it will generally come with a little paper leaflet, or if you buy a washing machine, or an automobile, you will get a more comprehensive owner’s manual; but most everything comes with instructions.

Well, the Bible is the owner’s manual for my life and yours. These are God’s instructions for constructing our lives.

There is no situation in which you will ever find yourself, but that the Bible gives full and complete instructions as to how we ought to behave ourselves. It will teach us how to be better citizens, better neighbors, better parents, better husbands, better wives, better children. It will teach us how to be better employers, better employees, better business men.

No matter what situation in which we may ever find ourselves, the Bible gives us all the instruction we need as to how we should conduct ourselves in that situation. It does not describe every conceivable detail of every problem we might ever face. If it did, it would be a volume so large nobody would ever read it.

It is not necessary for the Bible to describe every detail of every conceivable problem. But, it does provide broad, basic instructions, and those instructions go to the very heart of every conceivable problem. They give us all the tools we need to work with. If we will apply those principles to our lives, we will get along much better, and we will get along much better with other people.

It is hard to imagine a more important relationship, than the relationship between husbands and wives.

The family and the home are the very foundation of civilization itself. God established the family and the home, before he provided mankind with any form of human government. He established the family and the home, before he gave the Law of Moses to Israel, before he established the New Testament church.

In the very morning of time, when there were only two people in the world, God provided marriage, provided the family, provided the home, as the very foundation of all human society; and you can count on it, that any time the family and the home begin to fall apart, the way those institutions are falling apart in America today, our very society itself is in danger.

Our society seems to be coming apart at the seams. It is not necessary to recite all the problems we are facing. The people on the six o'clock news keep us well informed. And every time some new outrage takes place, news commentators want to know what is happening? What is causing it? Where is the root cause?

They tell us the solution is that we have to pass more laws against guns; but, we already have more laws against guns than anybody is trying to enforce. Somebody says we need to spend more money on schools; but, we are spending more money per student, even after inflation, than we have ever spent. They tell us we need more school counselors; but, again, we have more coun-selors than we have ever had, and the situation gets worse. Little feel-good projects will never solve the problem.

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Psa. 11:3.

The foundation of civilization itself is in the loving relationship between husbands and wives, and parents and children. And when that foundation begins to fall apart, no band-aid you can put on the problem will ever provide the solution. Our problems began in the home, and if they are ever solved, they will be solved in the home.

A person could make a career out of writing on this subject, and a little booklet like this cannot do more than glance at the subject, and only one aspect of the subject, at that. But while we can never tell everything that needs to be said, I believe we do well to say as much as we can.

Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

Notice that this is not a statement of fact, and it is not a promise. It is a commandment.

It simply tells us what we are to do. “Husbands, love your wives.”

I am sure that very few people are aware of how society, and the attitudes of society, affect our own way of thinking. We talk the way we think. We listen to others talk, and we learn to think and talk the way others around us think and talk.

In many ways, we are the product of our culture, our environment. Different people, in different countries, and different cultures, think differently. To name just one example, people talk about how Americans cannot understand the Chinese. We come from a different background than the Chinese. We think differently than the Chinese. We look at things differently than they do.

People in India have an entirely different culture to ours. And because they have a different culture, they think differently. If you do not know where they are coming from, there is no way you can entirely understand the way they think. The only way you can entirely understand it is to have grown up there, and to be acquainted with that way of thinking.

People who have grown up in a Bible-based environment, who have gone to church Sunday after Sunday, and heard evangelical Christian ministers expounding the moral principles of the Bible, come from an entirely different environment, a different culture, than those who have never been inside a church. Every person born of Adam has the same carnal, sinful nature, but your environment, and the ideas you are hit with day after day, have an effect on the way you think.

In many ways we have allowed the thinking of society to shape our thinking about the marriage relationship. We should rather listen to the Bible to learn what that relationship should be. And because our society is not so well acquainted with the Bible as it should be, much of our thinking about marriage is not nearly as scriptural as we might think it is. Our attitudes often come more from the influence of our friends, than they do from the Bible.

One common expression has to do with what we call *falling in love*. That is a good and valid expression, and it represents a very real and precious experience with most every married couple. In a moment, I want to make some comments about the time when you first meet that special person, and the bells ring, and the lights flash, and from that day on, nothing is ever the same.

But, notice that is not actually the way this text says it. Notice what the text says, and this is the rule for every child of God. It says, “Husbands, love your wives.” How is

the husband to love his wife? “...as Christ also loved the church.” Husbands are to love their wives “as (in the same manner that) Christ loved the church.”

Do you remember reading in the Bible about the Lord *falling in love* with the church? It does not say it that way, does it? He does not love us because of us; he loves us in spite of us. It was not that we caught his eye, and he was so attracted to us, that he could not help falling in love with us. No. No. No. Ezekiel tells us, “None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou was born,” Ezek. 16:5. That does not sound like we were so attractive, we just caught his eye. There was nothing about us to commend his love for us.

But before I say too much on that thought, let me make a few comments about the other side of the question.

We are taught to wait for the time, when we meet that special person, and we are instantly attracted to her, and the lights flash, and the bells ring, and the skyrockets burst in the air. Well, that is very often the way it does happen.

I well remember the first time I ever met my wife. She caught my eye the first time I ever saw her.

When I got out of high school, there were no jobs to be had. Those of you, who are my age, will remember, that in the mid- 1950's, jobs were hard to find. Alcoa Aluminum is the major employer in our area, and they had people laid off with twenty years seniority. You could not find a job.

If there had been any jobs, I would have had trouble finding one. I was so thin, when I got out of high school, that my wife will not let me tell in her presence how thin I was. And since she will not allow me to tell it in her presence, I will just keep it to myself. But anyway, I was not a prospect for a job that required any kind of physical exertion.

But, I finally got a job in direct sales. You spell that *door-to-door*. They do not do that any more. Nowadays, direct selling is done over the telephone---usually while you are eating supper. But back in those days direct selling meant going door-to-door, and the reason you did not have any trouble getting a job in direct selling is that they did not have to pay you, if you did not make a sale. Every dollar you made was a percentage of a dollar you took in.

Those people on the telephone are paid, at least, minimum wage. Federal law requires

it. But with those door-to-door sales jobs, they did not even have to pay you that. So it was no problem to get that kind of job. I got a job selling small household furnishings door-to-door. We sold most any small item you could throw on your automobile. We sold on credit, *a-dollar-down-and-a-dollar-a-week*. That is not a figure of speech; that is the way we did it. A dollar down and a dollar a week. We went back each week to pick up the dollar. I would go door-to-door selling my goods, and collecting those dollars.

Anyway, when I started to work, my wife's mother had an account with the company. One Tuesday, I went by to pick up the payment. Nobody was home; so I went back that evening. You were required to make back-calls. When I went back that evening, they were all there. It seemed like the whole clan was there. That little house was full of people.

But over in the corner sat one of the prettiest girls I think I ever saw. She was not paying any attention to me, but she sure caught my eye. She was sitting in an easy chair on the other side of the room. I did not say anything; the room was full of people. But the ideas began to form, and the wheels began to turn, and I began to think about the situation.

The next week, I went by at the regular time, on Tuesday morn-ing, to pick up the payment, and she was the only one there; her mother was gone. She came to the door, and brought the receipt card, and the dollar, and paid me. I asked if it would be alright if I came calling that evening, and it would, and I did, and as the expression is, the rest is history.

I did not find out, until years later, that it was by design, that her mother had gone visiting that particular day. And it was by design, that she was at home on Tuesday morning, on a school day. She laid out of school---I had been set up. I got the idea later the whole clan was in on it. I was the only one involved who did not know what was going on.

I am not complaining. Sometimes, God intervenes to do for us what we do not have the judgment, or the foresight, to do for ourselves. I have no doubt the hand of God was involved in bringing us together. I shudder at the thought of how my life might have turned out differently, if it had not been for that series of events. I do not even want to imagine what might have become of me, if I had not had her by my side for all of these years.

There are some people who believe God is the effective and moving cause of

everything that ever happens. I do not believe that. God is not the cause of everything that happens in this world. But while that is true, God is still in charge; he still reigns on the throne. He does cause things to happen, and he does stop things from happening.

That is one of the most reassuring of all thoughts. Every evangelical Christian finds comfort in believing it. He believes it, whether he thinks he does or not. The fact that we pray is evidence that we believe God intervenes in the affairs of men. Why would anybody pray, if he did not believe God intervenes in the affairs of men?

Even those who claim to be atheists pray. When they really get in trouble, they pray. I am not entirely sure whether there are any real atheists, in the first place. He may be an atheist five minutes later, but when he gets in a really tight spot, even an atheist prays. And even an atheist believes that God intervenes in the affairs of men, and causes things to happen, or stops things from happening. That is why he prays.

When I look back over my own life, at some of the times when God has clearly intervened in my life, and changed the course of events, I cannot help but marvel at the way he has cared for me, and protected me. Sometimes, he has protected me, most of all, from my own folly.

I do not want to take anything away from the expression *falling in love*. How we enjoy recalling that special time in our lives.

But the point I am getting to is this: no matter how special a relationship any husband and wife may have, in every marriage there come times, when the lights do not flash, and the bells do not ring, and there are no skyrockets. Nothing. Those special feelings are just not what they were at one time.

Imagine a young couple who have just met. All the right things happen. One thing leads to another. They marry. There are children. Then one day, she is at home with the children. They are all sick, or at least, they are all crying. The phone is ringing. The bill collectors are calling; they want to know where is their money? The landlord wants to know where is the rent? The washing machine is out of balance, and it is bouncing around like it is going to turn over, but she cannot see about it now; she has to change a muddy diaper. She is all stressed out.

There was a time, when I would preach on this, that I would talk about how she was sitting on the edge of the bathtub, leaning over the commode flushing out dirty diapers, til my wife explained to me, "They don't do that any more; nowadays, they just load them and throw them away." But, when ours were in diapers, they did flush

them out. It is probably good they did sell the old *birdseye* diapers, when ours were little. If the disposables had been available, I don't think we could have paid for them. I have no idea, how many thousands of times my wife has there flushing out dirty diapers.

But she is at home; the kids are sick; they are all crying; the washing machine is shaking the house down. She is seeing after one of children, and she thinks she is coming down with the same thing they have, and if that happens, she does not know who is going to change those diapers.

She is wondering, "How in the world did I ever get myself in this kind of mess?" She is wondering, "Where are all those bells now? Where are all those lights, and all those skyrockets now? What happened? How did I ever get in this kind of predicament?"

He is in about the same frame of mind. He is broke. The old car is making a racket. He is sure it is liable to quit any time. There was a time when he had the shiniest car on the block. He kept it all waxed and shined, and he was proud of it. Now he would just be glad, if it would start in the morning.

And she does not look the way she used to. The first time he saw her, she was the prettiest little thing he ever saw. He could not keep his eyes off her.

Now, when she gets up in the morning, her hair is in curlers, and the part that is not in curlers is going off in every direction, and she comes paddling through the house in that ratty old housecoat she has been wearing ever since before they got married. And make-up? She has forgotten what that is for.

Then, one day, they go trailing off to a marriage counselor. Now, I don't want to disparage that profession. A lot of those people give some good advice---and some of them give some mighty bad advice. It would not do to make a blanket condemnation of the profession, but some of their advice is not as good as it could be.

I used to work with a young fellow. He was still in his twenties. He had been married three times, and divorced twice, and he was in process of being divorced the third time. When I worked with him, he was going to night school at the university---studying to be a marriage counselor. I thought, "Fellow, with your track record, you really do need to take some classes on that subject." I don't know if he ever became a marriage counselor, but if he did, I am not entirely sure I would recommend his services.

Now, I don't want to be disrespectful of the profession, and I don't want to imply that

that young man is typical of those who are engaged in that work. I just want to point out that there is a better way.

They explain to the marriage counselor that---along with all the other problems---they just don't feel the same way they used to feel toward each other. They are not sure they even love each other any more. What do you expect? They fell in love; why should they be so surprised if, after awhile, they fell right back out again.

All this talk about *falling in love* makes it all sound too much like an accident. You can be sure that, no matter how exciting and all-consuming a love two people may have for each other, building and maintaining that relationship over a lifetime is no accident. If two people want the warmth and the satisfaction of that relationship to survive and to grow, it is up to them to make it happen.

In every marriage there come times, when the bells do not ring, and the lights don't flash, and the skyrockets don't burst in air. But, God knew that would happen before he provided us with the benefits of marriage and the home, and, before we had the need, he provided the solution. The Bible gives us all the instructions we need to keep the fire and the excitement in a marriage.

In the text before us he says, "Husbands love your wives." Those few words are a much more profound statement than most people have ever realized. God can say more in one sentence that the rest of us can say in an hour.

If you go to any large book store, you will find an entire section on self-improvement, motivation, marriage-enrichment, and the like. Among other things they will tell you how to generate a better, happier, more congenial marriage.

But the Bible provides all that and more. In the very morning of time, it was God, who performed the first marriage ceremony, and it was God who wrote the first marriage manual. Those instructions are scattered all through the Bible, but there is one book in the Bible, that is almost entirely given over to that one subject.

I am talking about the Song of Solomon. There are two main themes in the Song of Solomon. On one level, the entire book is an allegorical lesson with regard to the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. No human production could paint a more beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and the church than Solomon paints in the Song of Solomon.

But notice. Solomon uses the relationship between a devoted husband and wife as an

allegory---an illustration---of the relation-ship between Christ and his bride, the church. The two subjects go together. We cannot study the one without learning something about the other.

I enjoy preaching from the Song of Solomon from an allegorical point of view. I enjoy preaching about the sweet and tender relationship between Christ and the church. I like to explain how Christ loves the church, and the church loves her Lord. I like to preach about the way they talk to each other and about each other.

But more often than not, I preach on the book from a practical point of view. I like to show that the relationship between Christ and the church is the pattern for the relationship between husbands and wives.

Once, years ago, I was reading the Song of Solomon. I have no idea how many times I have read it. For many years now, I have made a point of reading the book, at least, once every month. Somebody may wonder, "Do you need to read it that often?" You do, if you want to keep it in your mind. It is a good idea to keep reading it over and over and over.

While I was reading it, I could not help but notice how many times this man told his wife how much he loved her, and how many times she told him how much she loved him. And I wondered, if I talked to my wife the way that man talked to his wife, is it possible that, maybe, just maybe, my wife might talk to me the way that woman talked to her husband. As I recall, about that time, that was not exactly the way she was talking to me.

Did anybody ever tell you, "My wife and I never have short words?" If anybody ever tells you that, do you know what that proves? It proves he will also lie about other things.

Now, I do recall a few times when my wife and I have gone for some period of time without so much as one short word. Well, actually, we were not having any long words either. It would not do to say anything.

But, I wondered, if I talked to my wife the way this man talked to his wife, is it possible that my wife might talk to me the way this woman talked to her husband. I tried it; it works.

One thing I have noticed about wives. They just will not be outdone. If you are mean, and smart-in-the-mouth, and always saying more than you need to say, she can get just

as mean, and smart-in-the-mouth as you can. And there is a thing called escalation. Every response raises the discussion to higher level. Each person winds up trying to outdo the other; things get out of hand, and you wind up saying things to each other that leave scars that will never heal. Nobody ever wins that battle.

I have heard that for husbands and wives to fuss and fight is not so bad; that just makes it so much sweeter when you make up. Don't kid yourself. The only reason it is so sweet to make up is because you were so miserable in the meantime.

On the other hand, if you try to see how considerate and understanding you can be, generally, after awhile, she will outdo you in that way too. She will be more kind, and considerate, and understanding than you are. If I am going to be outdone, I had rather be outdone be outdone that way than to be outdone in the other way, wouldn't you?

Now, it may take her awhile to figure out what is going on. If you are not used to talking to her that way, it may leave her very bewildered to start with. She may wonder what you are up to. But, if she finally figures out that it is genuine, she will not likely be outdone. But bear in mind that it may take awhile. A huge ship does not turn on a dime; it takes awhile to change course.

The God-ordained relationship between a husband and wife reflects the genius, and the love of God. When God created Eve, he took a rib from Adam's side. There is a beautiful symbolic lesson in that. He did not take a bone from his foot. That might have signified that the man had the right to grind her under his feet. He did not take a bone from Adam's head. That might have signified that she had the right to domineer over him. But he took a rib, a bone from his side, to signify that she should be his constant companion. He took a bone, the very nearest to his heart, signifying that she was to be the nearest thing to his heart. He took a bone from just under his arm, signifying that she should be the subject of his constant embrace, the subject of his constant protection.

From that bone he fashioned the woman, and brought her to the man. God performed that first marriage ceremony, and in that ceremony he said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

Over the years, as two people live together, work together, struggle together, and sometimes suffer together, in a very real sense, they become one. When one is happy, the other is happy. When one is sad, the other is sad. When she hurts, he hurts.

My wife has been sick for the last several days. I cannot say for sure, that I would be glad to trade places with her. But I think I would be glad to trade places, at least, for awhile. It hurts me for her to hurt.

I am almost never sick. I am not sure whether I have ever had the flu. I have allergies every now and then. I have just a trace of an allergy right now. It is no real ailment, just a little drainage. I don't think I have had a cold more than twice, and that was years ago. So it does not seem like such an unfair thought for me to trade places with her for a little while. In some sense, two people really do become one. Anyway, I think I would be glad to trade places, but you cannot do that.

Mothers often feel that way about their children. There have been any number of times a mother has sat by the side of a child, who was burning up with fever. The mother would have given anything if she could just swap places, if she could just crawl in the bed, take the ailment herself, and let the child get up and run and play. She would be glad to do it.

A devoted husband and wife have that kind of feeling for each other. When the Lord said, "They twain shall be one flesh," he meant it. There is a sense in which two people really do become one.

But, on the other hand, when he said, "They two shall become one flesh," notice that he did not say, "They shall become one mind."

I learned a long time ago, that my wife still has a mind of her own. I have been trying for over forty years to teach her to think the way I think---and she just cannot get the hang of it. I get the idea, that she does not want to think the way I think. Somehow or other, she has it in her head that I am not always right.

But, as much as I would like for her to agree with me, she is not supposed to think the way I think. If you ever find a husband and wife who always think exactly alike, that just proves one thing. One them is not thinking.

Husbands and wives do not think alike. God did not intend for us to think alike. That is one of the profound differences between men and women. We do not think alike. For one thing, men have a tendency to be risk-takers. We have a tendency to take chances. We like to think, "It's alright; I can do it; I can pull it off; I won't have a bit of trouble." It does not matter that we have failed the last ten times. We tell ourselves, "I can do it; I know how to handle it."

Women, generally, have a tendency to be more interested in security. They want to be assured they will have tomorrow what they have today. That is not a universal rule. Of course not. But it does tend to be that way. Men are more apt to be risk-takers; women are more concerned with security.

God intended that, every now and then, she would rain on your parade. He intended for her to help you keep your feet on the ground. Very often, you need that anchor to bring you back to reality.

My wife does not always think the way I do. Sometimes, I look back in retrospect and realize that she was right. I am more idealistic; sometimes I get my head in the clouds. I have a tendency to see things the way I wish they were. She has more of a tendency to see things the way they actually are.

She has not always gone along with every idea I have come up with, and it has been a great benefit to me that she has not. A few years ago, I was called as pastor of a church in Mississippi, almost four hundred miles away. I went down there twice every month---twice a lot of weeks.

Why did I not move to Mississippi? Well, at that same time I was serving another church here in Tennessee, and preaching here six times a month. It makes more sense to live in Tennessee and drive to Mississippi twice a month, than it does to live in Mississippi and drive to Tennessee six times a month.

Now, the thought of moving to Mississippi did go through my mind, and my wife was agreeable enough. She said, "That is alright with me; I do hope you will come back and visit me every now and then." That settled that discussion.

I served the church in Mississippi for several years, but after awhile I felt like my work there was done, and I was no longer needed. Serving the church there was one of the most beneficial experiences of my life. I believe my work was some benefit to them, but I cannot imagine that I helped them nearly so much as they helped me. I shall always thank the Lord, and look back with fond memories at the time I spent with them.

But, after a few years, my work there came to an end---and I did not even have to move back to Tennessee. I was still living right where I had been for over thirty years. Her concern for security balanced my idealism, and it saved me the trouble---and the expense---of relocating twice in seven years. God used her to keep my feet on the ground, and I learned to thank him for it.

Women are not intended to think exactly like men. We need their point of view to balance and complete our own. It is kind of like a car battery. When you go to an auto supply store to buy a battery, suppose the man told you, "This is a brand new kind of battery. It does not have a negative pole; it has two positive poles. We do not like anything negative; so we have started manufacturing batteries with two positive poles." Would you buy it? Of course not. You would not have a battery with two positive poles. It would not start anything. The two poles of a battery are supposed to be different.

Men and women do not think alike; they were not intended to think alike, and that is to our benefit.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church."

That is a commandment. It is not a promise. And it is not a statement of fact. If you want those lights to flash, and those bells to ring, it is your responsibility to make it happen.

But anyway, back to a point I started to make a moment ago. I wondered if I talked to my wife the way that man talked to his wife, might my wife talk to me the way that wife talked to her husband. If I was as careful to tell my wife how much I loved her, and how special she was to me, might she respond in the same way. I tried it; it works.

Several years ago, after I had preached on this subject, somebody asked me, "Brother Hunt, how often do you think I ought to tell her that?" Well, I believe the first thing in the morning, and the last time at night, and just a lot of times in between, is a very good measure.

Now, bear in mind, there are times when that is not the best thing to say. In fact, there are times when nothing you say is right. There are times that the only thing you can do is to take a walk---a long walk---and you would probably do well to be right quiet, when you get back. It might even be a good idea to wait till the next day before you say very much.

But, generally, the first thing in the morning, and the last thing at night, and a lot of times in between is a good enough rule.

But, will she not get tired of hearing you say it? It goes without saying that there will be times when she does not want to hear anything you have to say. Right in the

middle of a heated argument is not the best time to say it. At the wrong time, it might sound a little like mockery. But still, that little book, the Song of Solomon, is our instruction manual, and it serves as a mighty good pattern.

Somebody is probably saying, “All of that sounds good, but saying it does not make it so.” You have heard that comment made about a lot of things. And in most instances that is true, but this is one instance, that---over a period of time---if saying it does not make it so, it does make it more so.

God has blessed you to have her, and she is the most precious thing in all the world to you. Why should you feel intimidated to tell her early and often how much she means to you. And the most important thing is this: the more you explain to her how much she means to you---the more you realize that fact for yourself. Perhaps, that is the most important point of all. We are all so prone to forget. The better job you do of convincing her, the better job you do of convincing yourself.

What a great benefit God has provided for us in the marriage union. What a beautiful thing it is when two people come together, and love each other, when they live together as husband and wife, and raise children, and grow old together.

For years, I have heard people talk about something called *the empty nest syndrome*. My wife and I are learning all about that. And I will tell you it is great. We raised four children, and we love every one of them. We are sure those four children are the most special people in the world.

Somebody will surely say, “Now, Harold Hunt, don’t you think you are just a little prejudiced.” Of course, I am prejudiced. They are my children, and I am supposed to be prejudiced.

One of them lives next door. Another lives across town. One lives just across the highway. And the other lives in Birmingham. We don’t get to see her and the grandchildren as often as we do the others.

About two years ago, our youngest daughter, and her husband, moved right next door. She was born after we moved here, and she tells us she had wanted to own that house all her life. The man who lived there became very old, and finally died. She called his son the morning after the funeral, before he could get to the real estate broker, to ask if he would sell the house to her. After he agreed to sell her the house, she started jockeying for the price. She wanted the house, but she wanted it at a rock bottom price. But, anyway, they got a good buy, and they moved next door.

She and her husband explained that since my wife and I were *getting on in years*, they wanted to be next door, so that if one or the other of us got down, and could not get up, they would be close by to help. I don't think we are quite that feeble yet, But, I suppose it is good to have somebody looking out ahead.

Anyway, most of them live fairly close, and they all call or come by on a very frequent basis. We love for them to come by and visit. But, they have their own homes, and after they finish their visit, it is alright for them to go on home. *The empty nest syndrome?* Well, yes, we are experiencing it, and it is great. We are enjoying the company of each other. Granted, we have learned to stay out of each other's way. She spends most of her time, puttering around downstairs, and I spend my days upstairs, buried in a pile of books.

There is something very comforting, something very beautiful, for two people to enjoy growing old together. The children are grown. Generally, the house is paid for. There are not as many responsibilities as there have been in the past. There are not as many debts. Often, the only debt is a car payment. Most of the really big problems, outside of death and dying, are behind them. And those two people can just enjoy the company of each other.

Recently, I had somebody to tell me that it was just a natural consequence, as two people grew older, for them to begin to drift apart. But that is not right. That is not the way it is supposed to be, and it is not the way it has to be. There is no reason two people cannot become closer and closer as every year passes.

My wife is not nearly as young as she was that first time I saw her forty-three years ago. But her smile does as much for me as it did that first day, when all the bells rang, and all the light flashed.

In the Song of Solomon the husband, not only kept telling his wife how much he loved her, he kept telling her how pretty she was. "Thou art beautiful, O my love as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem..." (ch. 6:4).

Do you get the idea, that no sight in all of nature had the effect on him the sight of his wife did? "Thou art beautiful, O my love as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem..." I don't know how pretty those two cities may have been. But this man, obviously, thought these were two enormously beautiful cities. But, as beautiful as they were, they could not compare with the sight of his wife.

In spite of the sin all around us, we live in a beautiful world. In Knoxville, every April, the garden clubs put on a program called the Dogwood Arts Festival. They line out

nature trails through the most exclusive parts of the city. Some of the streets are lined with huge mansions, and beautiful gardens. You can drive through those sections, and see the azaleas, and the dogwoods, and the lilacs, and the little pink bushes, and the little white bushes, and you can just, *Ooh* and *Ah*, to your hearts delight.

I enjoy living here in the mountains. I like to travel. I was out in flat country yesterday. I drove almost four hundred miles each way, there and back, yesterday. I like to go, but I like to come back home. When I get out in flat country, it kind of feels like sitting on a stool with no back on it. I know I don't lean back against the Smoky Mountains, but when I get where I cannot see the mountains, it feels like I am sitting on a stool.

I like to drive through the mountains. I don't often get up in the mountains. I get too busy to take the time. I suppose I am like just about everybody else. Most everybody seems to think he is the busiest person around. That is one of the reasons I enjoy having a visiting preacher. If he stays more than one night, I generally take him to the mountains between the two services. I am not likely to do much except visit with him during the day, anyway, and that lets us experience some of the natural beauty of the land, and at the same time we can visit, and talk about the good things of the Lord. I have lived here all my life, but I have never ceased to wonder at the beauty, and the majesty of these mountains.

I was driving along the interstate, yesterday morning, way before daylight. It was dark as could be, and even driving along in an automobile, the stars were especially bright. Stars are always brighter, the farther you are from the city lights. Yesterday morning, Venus, the morning star, was just blazing. On a cold, clear, moonless night, especially out in the country, the stars are a beauty to behold.

I like to go to the ocean, when the wind is up, and the waves are high. It is an awesome sight when those huge breakers come rushing in to shore. In spite of all the sin there is in the world, this is still a beautiful world.

But having said all of that, there is nothing in all of God's creation that compares to the feeling that rushes over me, when my wife smiles at me. Awesome as the rest of creation is, it does not have anything to compare. When she smiles at me, all the rest of God's creation just has to stand aside.

Somebody may say, "Now, Harold Hunt, aren't you just a little prejudiced?" No, no, I am not a little prejudiced. I am eaten up with it. That is my point, don't you see? We don't have to wait for the lights to flash. We don't have to wait for the bells to ring. It

is our job to make to make it happen.

All of that brings me to this: the human mind is a peculiar thing. Thoughts do not usually travel alone; more often they travel in pairs. We associate things in our minds. One thought causes you to think of another. Some things, and some people, just naturally trigger good thoughts, and warm feelings. Others trigger unpleasant thoughts.

If some person has been especially unfair with us, we have trouble thinking about that person without having unpleasant feelings. Sometimes those feelings can be very strong, and sometimes they stay with us for years to come. There may be some person, about whom you have such unpleasant memories that you have a very negative reaction any time you hear his name, or see his face. His very presence makes you uneasy.

That same principle works between husbands and wives. If you become petty, and spiteful with each other, there is a good chance that, when she thinks of you---consciously or subconsciously---the thought that comes to mind will be some unresolved hurt. Those hurt feelings have a way of feeding on each other. Negative thoughts generate negative feelings, and those feelings generate more negative thoughts. We begin a downward spiral that goes on and on, and poisons what could have been a sweet and tender relationship.

Positive thoughts work the same way. Positive thoughts generate warm and positive feelings. And those feelings generate more of the same kind of thoughts.

This is why it becomes such a powerful force for husbands and wives to be constantly reminding each other, and themselves, how much they mean to each other. The mind is rarely ever idle. It is either generating and feeding on good thoughts, or it is generating and feeding on bad thoughts. It is a good idea for husbands and wives to be ever so careful, and so determined to remind each other of their special love, and their special relationship, that anytime the one thinks of the other that is the thought that instinctively comes to mind.

It is when you have so often reminded yourself of that fact, that you cannot think of her without thinking of that special love you have for her, without thinking of all she means to you. You remember all the little kindnesses, all the sacrifices, all the unquestioned devotion. The very thought of her, or the sight of her face, brings that special feeling you have learned to associate with her. Then is when the lights, and the bells, and the skyrockets become a constantly more real part of your experience.

It is then that your marriage begins to most resemble the union between Christ and his bride the church.