

## LET LOVE'S LIGHT SHINE

by

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**Theme:** Each Christian married couple is a ministering unit whose love and oneness is a powerful means of sharing the gospel and uplifting the lives of other couples and individuals.

**Theme Text:** Gen. 2:24; John 13:34, 35; 17:21; Eph. 2:14

**Presentation Notes:** Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate items from the section called *Sermon Illumination* which may be used for illustration. The addition of your personal illustrations will enhance the presentation.

Is there anyone who doesn't enjoy attending a wedding? Everything about a wedding, the candles, the flowers, the music, the attire, especially the bride's gown, all are intended to make a glowing statement about marriage. Marriage is important to us. On their wedding day each couple is eager to find some way to give expression to their feelings! (1)

Human marriage is important to God. God intends that each marriage will make a special statement to the world. That statement grows out of the uniqueness of marriage, its oneness.

### **Biblical Uniqueness of Marriage: "One Flesh"**

Genesis 2:24 conveys what the Bible considers the central, unique quality of marriage—the experience of being *one-flesh*. This "one-fleshness" refers to more than just the physical union of husband and wife. The intent is that they also would be one in spirit, one in their hopes and dreams and goals. (2)

Male and female share a common origin. The same Creator fashioned them. The woman was fashioned from Adam's rib. She comes, therefore, from the same earth material as he (Gen. 2:7; 3:19). Neither one was superior to the other. "Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.

Through the narrative of Genesis 2 until this point, *adam* designates the one who awaits a companion. With her arrival, the sexual distinctiveness of the two genders of humankind becomes evident. "Man" is now called *ish* and the "woman" *ishshah* (Gen. 2:23). Originally one being, they are now two beings. They are complementary, harmonious parts of one humanity. Genesis 5:2, like Genesis 1:26, 27, indicates that this oneness was so complete "in the day when they were created" that they had one name, "Adam," given them by God. Together they were "Adam." Only after the Fall do we read of the name "Eve" being given the woman.

### **Barriers to Oneness**

When sin altered human nature at the Fall, the husband-wife relationship was changed. The curse of sin brought a curse upon the marriage relationship (Gen. 3:16). Henceforth, where sin reigned, marriage would suffer from selfishness, the quest for personal gratification, and the tendency to exploit or dominate another. In their sinless state neither of the sexes ruled the other. But with the Fall, their masculinity and femininity were distorted and their delicate alignment in marriage was disturbed. (3)

Scripture points to the sinfulness of the heart as the source of difficulty in relationships between us as human beings as well as between us and God (Jer. 17:9). This heart condition often produces a sense of worthlessness, and one may consciously or unconsciously act this out by withdrawal, by hiding feelings, by a lack of communication, or by fighting, blaming, or seeking to control others. Selfishness causes normal human differences in age, race, gender, temperament, attitudes, habits and experience to be aggravated. Disagreements, anger and conflict often result. The closer together we try to bring our fallen hearts, as in marriage, the greater the potential for discord.

Culture often institutionalizes fallen models of marriage, which are then considered normative. As both Scripture and human history bear witness, marriage has fallen far from the way of Eden. The curse has brought to marriage abuses and distortions of every kind imaginable. Culture often institutionalizes fallen models of marriage, which are then considered normative. The assault of the enemy upon marriage and its unique quality of oneness is comparable to the perversions and corruption brought upon the Sabbath truth. Many couples today long for more from marriage. In various ways they try to cope. (4) For those who apply the gospel of God's grace to their relationship, marriage takes on the qualities our loving Creator intended.

### **One Again in Christ**

Despite sin, God did not abandon His original plan for human beings to experience oneness in marriage. According to Genesis 2:24, the divine intention for marriage is for each couple, even after the Fall, to reenact in their relationship such oneness. Jesus reaffirmed the Edenic ideals of marriage (Matt. 19:5, 6), knowing that the gospel He brought redeemed marriage, redeemed men and women, and provided the means whereby couples could experience this sacred institution as God planned.

"Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty."—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

"Without any fuss or publicity, Jesus terminated the curse of the Fall, reinvested woman with her partially lost nobility, and reclaimed for his new kingdom community the original creation blessing of sexual equality.—John Stott, *Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World*, p. 136.

Genuine Christianity abolishes all religious, cultural, social or gender barriers which separate people from each other (see Gal. 3:28). The cross of Christ is the source of reconciliation (see Eph. 2:14-18). The curse involved the wife's subjection. When the gospel concept of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21-28) is believed and practiced, it has the practical effect of neutralizing the curse and its effects by emphasizing instead the love and service of husband and wife to each other. Christ makes a difference in the marriage of Christians. A new mutuality prevails. Husbands and wives are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:1-7). (5)

### **The Witness of the Oneness**

Jesus was concerned for the witness of His disciples to others (John 13:35). Where better to find a love for one another that would testify to the world about Him than in Christian marriage? He

longed for oneness among His followers which likewise would be a testimony for God in the world (John 17:20-23). Where better could He look for such oneness than in the hearts of couples who have found their salvation in Him and demonstrate His grace toward each other in their married life?

"Jesus once told His disciples that we are the 'light of the world,' and that we should not try to be like other people, hiding our light under convention's bushels, but rather that we should put our lamp on a stand and let it give 'light to all in the house' (Matt. 5:14-15). Could it be that that is finally the task of Christian marriage? Is it not only a lifelong vocation in which we wrestle and grow and learn and fight for our commitment to God and to each other, but is it also to be a light shining into the darkness of our society's homes? . . .

"By the way we spouses get along with each other and with our children, we tell our agonized society that there is hope of healing for its grievous wounds, or we announce that the patient has the 'sickness unto death' and that there is no possibility of recovery. By the way we conduct our marriages, we proclaim that Jesus Christ has won the victory over sin in the marital sphere too, or we confess that He is powerless to reconcile husband and wife, parents and children, old folks and youth."—Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage*, pp. 107, 108.

### **Marriage as Ministry**

Setting the home atmosphere. The health of the whole family depends heavily on the health of the marriage relationship. (6) The first setting in which marriage ministers is to those who dwell in our homes with us.

Beyond the sphere of our homes. "Our sympathies are to overflow the boundaries of self and the enclosure of family walls. There are precious opportunities for those who will make their homes a blessing to others. Social influence is a wonderful power. We can use it if we will as a means of helping those about us."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 354.

Each Christian married couple is a ministering unit which can be highly effective in reaching out to strengthen and encourage other couples and individuals. Needs exist today for couples to minister to other couples within and outside the church. A great need is present in the lives of countless husbands and wives for guidance and encouragement in their marriages. Fewer and fewer couples have models of lasting, committed, satisfying marriages. Fewer and fewer have any genuine friends. We, as Christian couples, could be those friends. (7)

Special meetings needed for couples. Ellen White wrote of the benefits to be gained by talking out our experience, so that others may be aided in their spiritual growth.

"All have not the same experience in their religious life. But those of diverse exercises come together and with simplicity and humbleness of mind talk out their experience. All who are pursuing the onward Christian course should have, and will have, an experience that is living, that is new and interesting. A living experience is made up of daily trials, conflicts, and temptations, strong efforts and victories, and great peace and joy gained through Jesus. A simple relation of such experiences gives light, strength, and knowledge that will aid others in their advancement in the divine life."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 2, p. 579.

Just as individuals are refreshed and encouraged by meeting and sharing together, so married couples need the periodic refreshment, encouragement and renewal that comes from sharing their experiences, their thoughts and feelings with other couples. The sacred circle that gives a couple individuality and privacy should remain in place, but that circle should not become a wall which prevents fellowship and encouragement to flow into the relationship and out of it. In the presence of other caring couples, husbands and wives have seen a practical demonstration of God's love, have found reassurance for their identity, comfort in the midst of difficulty, hope to carry them forward and inspiration to work together for God. (8)

## Conclusion

The nurture and outreach potential of marriage to marriage ministry is enormous. As couples realize the healing, enriching implications of Christian faith for marriage, the way will be prepared for them to reach out in dynamic relational evangelism, building bridges of friendship to non-Christian couples which will put them in touch with One who greatly cares about our marriages, who likened Himself to a bridegroom deeply in love with His bride, His Church. (9)

## Sermon Illumination

**One (1): Weddings give a glimpse of the couple's love for each other.** "Recently some young friends of ours gave us the great honor of participating in their wedding ceremony. . . . It was a day for making memories. Enraptured by the setting, the music, the inspiring words of the minister, and most of all the presence of his beautiful bride, the groom excitedly replied to the question, "Will you take this woman . . . ?" with a resounding "I sure will!" His romantic flair overcame all inhibitions when, upon their introduction as husband and wife, he boldly scooped her into his arms and strode exuberantly off the rostrum down several steep steps to the sanctuary floor."—Karen and Ron Flowers, *Love Aflame*, p. 76.

**Two (2): "One flesh"—the essence of marriage.** "Scripture upholds one all-encompassing ideal as the essence of marriage—becoming 'one flesh'. This tiny phrase has tremendous implications. It speaks of physical intimacy, yet much more. Emotional and spiritual bonding, mutual giving and receiving, exclusiveness, unswerving devotion, total commitment—all find themselves encompassed in this compact blueprint for marriage. Such oneness does not call for the surrender of personhood, of one becoming lost in the shadow of the other. Rather it represents a complete unity, mutuality, and harmony between two distinct persons who maintain full personhood and full equality."—*Ibid.*, p. 98.

**Three (3): Subjection of Eve identified as a part of the curse.** "When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. . . . But after Eve's sin, as she was the first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3, p. 484.

**Four (4): Wife seeks better marriage through karate lessons.** An abused wife confided in her doctor that she truly wanted to stay in the marriage, but could endure her husband's attacks no longer. Not being a Christian doctor, he told her that to survive the marriage she would need karate lessons. So for six months, unknown to her husband, she trained. At length the instructor notified her doctor, "She's prepared." "Now", said her doctor, "You know what to do." When the husband started to abuse her again, she knocked him to the floor and held him in a strong grip for more than an hour. He was surprised. He raged. He reasoned. He pled with her. Finally, he wept. He never beat her again.—Adapted from a report in the newsletter *Marriage and Divorce Today*.

**Five (5): Equality and unity between husband and wife restored.** "It is because of our commitment to Christ that we are able to grant one another in marriage full equality, personhood, and freedom. It is in Christ that the brokenness of the relationship between male and female is

overcome, and the possibility of joyful equality and unity between husband and wife is restored."—Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Committed Marriage*, p. 104.

**Six (6): Marriage: the home heating system.** "Mutual affection between husband and wife will be to the family what the heating system is to a house. It will maintain the relationship of all family members in a pleasant and comfortable atmosphere. That does not mean, however, that the peace of the family will never be disturbed. Striving to maintain a superficial peace may actually create a less happy home than allowing hostility, when it arises, to express itself and be resolved. The point is that a family in which there is true affection can meet disturbance of this kind without suffering harm. It is not the absence of problems that marks the truly happy family, but the confident assurance that relationships in the home are so basically sound that family members can deal with any problems which may arise."—David & Vera Mace, *In the Presence of God*, p. 109.

**Seven (7): Centers of contagious friendliness.** "A Christian home should be, in fact, a center of contagious friendliness, with open doors toward all human need."—*Ibid.*, p. 98.

**Eight (8): Marriage enrichment program brings blessings.** "It has been almost two years since we went through the Marriage Enrichment Seminar. There has been a dramatic change in our home. The hours we used to spend watching television are now spent reading and studying. The tapes on righteousness by faith that had been in the desk drawer for a year have been taken out and listened to. The Lord has led us step by step in our Christian growth. Our communication skills have improved as a result of the things we learned at Marriage Enrichment. We find it much easier to communicate our deep feelings to each other and to talk over our problems. Our relationship with our teen-agers has also improved.  
"I used to worry about not being able to witness to those around me. After Marriage Enrichment that was no longer a problem. When Jesus has changed your life the way He did mine, you can't help but share it with others."—Arlene Jenkins, quoted in Roger and Peggy Dudley, *Married and Glad of It*, pp. 138, 139.

**Nine (9): Persevering couple wins the couple next door.** "Within hours of arriving at our new home we had to leave for camp meeting. I ran next door to meet our neighbors and to ask if they would water our house plants for the next two weeks. A lady with a gruff voice answered my knock, 'What do you want?'  
'I'm Lillian, your new neighbor. We have to go away for two weeks, would you mind watering our house plants? Here's the key to our house.'  
She took it without a smile or a word and closed the door.  
Back home, I said to my husband, 'I don't know what to think of our neighbor. She looked angry. She just took the key and closed the door.'  
Two weeks later, I greeted my neighbor with a smile and handed her a gift. 'This is for being so good to me,' I said, suggesting that she could keep the key because I had another one. With no response she closed the door.  
The next day I took her a loaf of fresh homemade bread. She received it without a smile or a word. A few days later I made some cinnamon rolls, and again there was not even a smile or a 'thank you'. I tried flowers and an apple pie, but I just couldn't seem to get close to her.  
One day my evangelist husband came home with a beautiful bouquet of roses given to him by one of the couples he had visited. We decided together to give them to our neighbors. With a smile I delivered them saying, 'A friend gave us some roses, and I want to share some with you.'

With a bewildered look on her face, she invited me, 'Come in.' As I entered, I saw a man lying on the couch.

'This is my husband, Jim,' the lady said.

'Hello, Jim, I'm Lillian.'

'I know your name is *Lillian*. I heard you introduce yourself when you brought the key. By the way, my wife's name is Lou.'

Still looking bewildered and unsmiling, Lou said, 'How is it that you trusted me with a key to your home when you didn't even know me? Why are you doing all these things for us? Nobody has ever brought us homemade bread and roses. No one ever cared like you do. Why are you doing all these things?'

Putting the flowers on the table, I put my arms around Lou and after a hug and a kiss, I said, 'It's because I love you.' Lou just kept repeating, 'I don't understand, I don't understand.'

They invited me to sit down. I learned that both Lou and Jim were in very poor health.

"I was so glad I didn't give up!" He had heart trouble, and she had a combination of painful problems. Their only son had gone deep-sea fishing and the boat had never returned. He was presumed lost at sea. Before I left their home, they readily consented to my request to offer a short prayer.

Now that the ice was broken, I was a welcome visitor in their home. After learning about their health, I often made two extra portions when I was preparing a meal and took two trays over. During one visit Jim and Lou told me of their spiritual situation. They had come from different religious backgrounds—one Catholic and the other Protestant. During courtship their discussions of religion had led to arguments. When Jim proposed marriage, Lou accepted on two conditions—they would never discuss religion and he would never force her go to church. They admitted that they had missed a lot by not attending church.

One day I told them about the Gift Bible Plan sponsored by our church. I showed them the Bible and the reading guides and asked if they would like to participate. They both agreed. Before that day was over, Lou brought me the study guides with all the answers neatly written. Soon they had completed the entire series and asked if we had any more courses they could do. They finished a second course, and then, because we had to be away, we suggested a correspondence course. Lou wanted to share with her sister the things she was learning from the Bible. We were able to enroll her sister in the Gift Bible Plan also. Lou and Jim remarked that since studying these lessons they were now able to discuss the Bible without an argument.

When evangelistic meetings were held in a Seventh-day Adventist church near us, we invited Jim and Lou to attend. They went faithfully and, at the conclusion of the series, were both baptized.

As I observed their baptism, I thought back to those early visits and the lack of any visible response. I was so glad I didn't give up!"

*Contributed by Lillian Knowles, lay evangelist and wife of former General Conference Church Ministries Director George Knowles.*

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