

Marriage Ideas (Short Version)

Monte F. Shelley, 8 Feb. 2008

During the summer of 2006, Elona and I had the privilege of being on staff at Wood Badge, an adult Scout leadership course. While we were there, we celebrated our 34th wedding anniversary. The staff and participants made it a very enjoyable experience!

As I prepared some Wood Badge lessons, I reviewed some ideas and stories that have helped Elona and me resolve common marriage conflicts. Later, I put these ideas and stories in a paper that I could share with my children and with my friends. Many of these ideas and stories came from books that we have recommended or given to our family and friends. As I reviewed the ideas and stories, I was reminded of things that I had forgotten or stopped doing in my own marriage. Frequently, the Spirit helped me realize what I needed to change. Elona said she was glad I was writing this paper because I was being so nice.

Love is a Decision (by Gary Smalley) emphasizes honoring one's spouse as shown in the following story.

Gary and Norma (from *Love is a Decision*)¹

It's easy for us to get excited about *another* person's need to change. For years, I was like the husband I once heard about. In his personal devotions he was reading Proverbs 31, the section in the Bible that gives a picture of a practically perfect wife.... The more her read about this godly woman... the more frustrated this husband became with his own wife. Finally,... he laid the Bible down in front of her and pointed his finger repeatedly at the verses he'd been reading....

"Honey, do you know about this section in the Bible?" ...

"Yes... I know about that section." ...

Then straightening up to his full stature... he said, "If you *know* about this section, how come you don't get up every morning and make me a hot meal?"

"Dear," she said, "if you want a hot meal, *light your cornflakes on fire!*" ...

The story... points up a key problem in many homes. For years I felt that if only my wife Norma would change, every problem in our relationship would disappear. And during all that time, Norma was feeling exactly the same way I was—with one exception. She wanted *me* to change and then marital intimacy would finally be within reach.... As much as I pushed Norma to change, and as much as she pulled me, neither one of us budged an inch.... When our best efforts go into trying to change another person, we seem to reap the worst relationship rewards....



When I married Norma... I didn't have a plan to go by, and after marrying a sparky, enthusiastic, godly woman, it took me about five years... to knock the sparkle right out of her life.

Early in our marriage, I could tell we weren't doing well, so I decided to try a few quick-fix remedies.... Many a night, 99 percent of my dinner table conversations were actually lectures aimed at drilling into Norma what the Bible said *she* should do to make "us" happy. During all that time, I conveniently ignored the Scriptural words of wisdom that applied to the husband....

Norma kept hoping that I'd "get with it," but I never did. As she saw her hopes for a warm, fulfilling family life slipping away, she felt resigned to a marriage that would never match her dreams.

After nearly five years of watching our relationship grow more and more strained, I came home one day... and greeted

Norma with the usual, "Hi, I'm home." But she did not respond.... I knew from the look on her face and her nonverbal expressions... that something was drastically "wrong." ...

I had been battling my conscience for years and spent untold energy to keep up a facade of closeness at the church. Here I was teaching and counseling each week... and in my own marriage I felt like a failure. After years of pretending,... I needed the kind of total heart transplant that only God can give. And so I gently put my arm around her and asked, "Norma, what do *you* think is wrong in our relationship?"

"Oh, no, you don't," Norma said,... her eyes filling with tears. "You're not going to get me to share what I'm feeling and then turn it into another lecture on what I'm doing wrong."

"Honey... could you *please* just tell me one more time?..."

Reluctantly, Norma did share with me the concerns that had been building up in her heart.... "Gary, I feel like everything on the earth is far more important to you than I am.... I feel that all the football games you watch on television are more important than I am, the newspaper, your hobbies, your counseling at the church.... Taking one night to spend with your wife isn't going to bother them—but it's killing us. It's like I don't matter to you, but other people do. In fact, sometimes I feel that you're more polite to total strangers than you are to me. You'll say the most awful things to me, but never to anyone else...."

Little did I know that for five years of marriage, I had also been violating a crucial biblical concept which lies at the heart of any strong relationship.... "honor." ... For a Greek living in Christ's day, something of "honor" called to mind something "heavy, or weighty." Gold... was the perfect picture of "honor".... The word for "dishonor" actually meant "mist" or "steam." Why? Because the lightest, most insignificant thing... was the steam rising off a pot of boiling water....

When we honor particular people, we're saying in effect that who they are and what they say carries great weight with us. They're extremely valuable in our eyes. Just the opposite is true when we dishonor them. In effect, by our verbal and nonverbal statements we're saying that their words or actions make them of little value or "light-weights" in our eyes....

One of the most powerful statements in all the Bible for husbands is, "You husbands... be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect (honor) as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (NIV 1 Peter 3:7). In 1 Peter 3:1-2 the apostle states the same idea about a wife's relationship with her husband.... Romans 12:10... states "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. *Honor* one another above yourselves."

When I came face to face with the concept of "honor" in a home, I realized why a major part of my prayer life was being hindered. When it came to Norma,... I put a hundred things ahead of her. Work projects..., a mountain trout, a small white golf ball, numerous church meetings, close friends and acquaintances—and almost anything "interesting" on television—took the place of honor which should have been reserved for Norma....

At our kitchen table, I pledged to change.... She threw out a half-convincing, "Yeah, okay," at my vow to honor her and got up from the table to continue preparing dinner.... She needed a track record of being "honored" from a husband who had never practiced it....

I wasn't going to keep Norma on a starvation diet of praise and three meals of criticism and unrealistic expectations anymore. I was going to consistently feed her with a nourishing meal of significance and high value in our home....

I often asked myself (and Norma), “How am I doing at making you feel like you’re up in the high nines, above every one of my hobbies and friends and favorite sports teams? What can I do to keep you believing you’re a high nine?”

It took [Norma] almost two years of a consistent track record of honoring acts to finally believe the “new Gary” was for real....

The most effective way to open the door to needed changes in a relationship is to honor a loved one. Once we’ve made that decision to honor, love is the action we take no matter how we feel. Genuine love is honor put into action, regardless of the cost.

Top Ten Dishonoring Acts in a Home²

(from *Love is a Decision*)

1. Ignoring or degrading another person’s opinions, advice, or beliefs (especially criticizing another person’s faith).
2. Burying oneself in the television or newspaper when another person is trying to communicate with us.
3. Creating jokes about another person’s weak areas or shortcomings. (Sarcasm or cutting jokes act like powerful emotional word pictures and do lasting harm in a relationship.)
4. Making regular verbal attacks on loved ones: criticizing harshly, being judgmental, delivering uncaring lectures.
5. Treating in-laws or other relatives as unimportant in one’s planning and communication.
6. Ignoring or simply not expressing appreciation for kind deeds done for us.
7. Distasteful habits that are practiced in front of the family—even after we are asked to stop.
8. Over committing ourselves to other projects or people so that everything outside the home seems more important than those inside the home.
9. Power struggles that leave one person feeling that he or she is a child or is being harshly dominated.
10. Unwillingness to admit that we are wrong or ask forgiveness.

Our Skylight (from *Love is a Decision*)³

“One afternoon I was very late coming home from boating with my son Greg. I had taken the car, which left Norma with only our mini-motor home for transportation.... When I was several hours later than I had predicted, she decided to take our mini-motor home to the grocery store....

She had almost made it out from under the carport when she turned the wheel the wrong way and sheared off an entire section of the roof. The falling roof bounced off the hood of the camper, scraping away paint and leaving a deep dent....

When I pulled into the driveway an hour later, I couldn’t believe my eyes.... I instantly felt like ordering [Norma] out of the house and asking her questions like, ‘Where did you get your driver’s license? From a gumball machine...?’

Instead, I sat in my car, frozen, with my hands on the steering wheel, praying, ‘Lord, you have to give me strength. Every fiber in my body wants to lecture my wife now and not be gentle with her. This is one of those pressure situations, and I know I have a choice. Lord, help me figure out what I’m going to do.’... Being tender at such a moment is definitely not natural....

Finally, I got out of the car and walked toward the piece of roof lying in the driveway, but just as I got up to the camper, Norma came flying around the side of the house.

I fought off the voice ringing in my mind, *Lecture her! Lecture her!* And I did what didn’t feel ‘natural’ at the time. I simply held her in my arms and gently patted her on the back. I hadn’t spoken one word when finally, Norma pulled away and

said, ‘Oh, look what I did! I wrecked the motor home and knocked off the roof... I told the neighbors across the street what I did, and they’re watching to see how you’re going to respond.’

Thankfully, I hadn’t given the neighbors anything to gossip about by exploding at Norma. I just put my arms around her again and [said].... ‘You know I love you. You’re more important to me than campers and roofs. I know you didn’t do this on purpose, and you’re feeling really bad about it.’

At that very moment, I could feel Norma relaxing. What’s more, I immediately felt better myself as my own anger drained out of me to be replaced by feeling of tenderness....

After a few more minutes of talking and holding her,... I went out to the garage to lay my hands on the few tools I had.... Just then,... a friend from our church pulled up into our driveway.... He was a local contractor pulling up in his pickup filled with hammers, saws, lumber, nails, paint, and a long ladder. He jumped out and said, ‘OK, Gary. Let’s get at it!’... With his expert help,... we had our impromptu skylight patched and repainted within two hours.

As I went to bed that night with Norma snuggled up next to me, I was amazed that I had actually done something right for a change, during a stressful situation. What would I have normally done? I could have zapped the life right out of her emotionally with angry words and lectures, and it would have taken days for us to feel our way back to each other.”

The Blessing (by Gary Smalley and John Trent): This book discusses five parts of patriarchal blessings as found in the Bible and in Jewish culture. It shows how the five parts can be done together in a formal setting or separately in informal ways.

Ideas from *The Blessing*

“Today, as in centuries past, orthodox Jewish homes bestow a special blessing on their children. This blessing is much like the patriarchal blessing.... If you are a parent, learning about the family blessing can help you provide your child or children with a protective tool. The best defense against a child’s longing for imaginary acceptance is to provide him or her with genuine acceptance.... The blessing is also of critical importance for anyone who desires to cleave, or draw close, to another person in an intimate relationship.” (p. 20-21)

“A flower cannot grow unless it has the necessary elements of life. Every flower needs soil, air, water, light, and a secure place to grow.... When these five basic ingredients are present, it is almost impossible to keep a flower from growing.... The blessing also has five key elements.... The family blessing includes: (1) meaningful touch, (2) a spoken message, (3) attaching ‘High Value’ to the one being blessed, (4) picturing a special future for the one being blessed, and (5) an active commitment to fulfill the blessing.” (p. 26–27)

“From Old Testament times to today, the blessing has been an important gift offered to Jewish children. In fact, it has been a *duty* of parents to their children. It has also been a regular part of the rabbis’ duties toward children on *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) and on feast and holy days [holidays].” (p. 33)

“‘Word pictures’ capture an emotional feeling apart from the literal meaning of the words” (e.g., she’s a cute chick, he’s a moose). As Jacob gave patriarchal blessings to his sons, he used word pictures to depict how he valued each son. “Judah is a lion’s cub,” “Naphtali is a doe let loose,” “Joseph is a fruitful bough.”⁴ Word pictures: (1) use an everyday object, (2) match the emotional meaning of the trait you are praising with the object you’ve picked, (3) unravel our defenses, and (4) point out a

person's potential. "One picture is worth a thousand words. When we link a word picture with a message of high value, we multiply our message a thousand times."⁵

Laura and Truck Driver (from *The Blessing*)⁶

Laura was fed up with her husband.... He often traveled... and when he was home, he drank and made life miserable.... Her friend Gayle talked her into going to see her pastor.... For nearly forty minutes this wise pastor simply listened.... [as] Laura shared her nonstop description of every one of her husband's faults.... Finally he... said gently, "Laura, have you ever forgiven your husband for all his many faults?" ...

Of course she had not forgiven her husband! ... He had caused her to suffer, and she wasn't going to let him off the hook that easily.... In spite of telling herself repeatedly that she should simply forget what he had said,... it began to dawn on her that it wasn't her husband who was on the hook—she was! He didn't lose any sleep about his behavior; she was the one getting ulcers.... That afternoon... she surrendered her life to Christ. She also decided to give up her need for revenge, to forgive her husband for all he had done, and to learn to love him....

Laura's husband was a truck driver, and almost a week went by before he returned home. When he came into the house, he could have sworn he was at the wrong address. He couldn't believe how peaceful things were. Just a week ago everything he did made his wife mad; now she was going out of her way to do things for him.

When this rowdy truck driver found out Laura's change of heart had something to do with religion, he tossed her behavior aside as though it were another diet his wife had discovered.... After five months, Laura's *husband* made an appointment to see the same pastor.... "You've got to tell me about what happened to Laura.... She's changed so much. It's made me realize what a rotten husband I've been.... I have a drinking problem, and I need help with it."

What made all the difference for this couple was that Laura, in spite of the fact her husband didn't "deserve" it, decided to give him *the blessing*. For years she had made just the opposite decision. She had devalued him and even cursed him to his face. She hated his occupation.... When Laura's life was changed..., she was able... to *attach high value to her husband* and bless him. Instead of riding him about getting another job, she found ways to build him up and encourage him. Where once she had gone days without speaking to him when she was angry, now she told him her feeling, but without anger and hate. *Meaningful touching* even began to come back into their relationship, something that Laura had withheld from her husband when her spirit was unforgiving and bitter. As a result, her husband became so convicted about his behavior at home that he made an appointment to see the pastor.

The Five Love Languages (by Gary Chapman): This book identifies five love languages and discusses the "emotional love tank". This book helped my wife and me to recognize our different primary languages, and to communicate our love better.

Ideas from *The Five Love Languages*

"Seldom do a husband and wife have the same primary emotional love language. We tend to speak our primary love language, and we become confused when our spouse does not understand.... We are expressing our love, but the message does not come through because we are speaking what, to them, is a foreign language.... If we want him/her to feel the love we are

trying to communicate, we must express it in his or her primary love language." (p. 16-17) The five love languages are:

1. **Words of Affirmation** (compliments, appreciation, encouraging words, kind words)
"I am not suggesting verbal flattery in order to get you spouse to do something you want. The object of love is not getting something you want but doing something for the well-being of the one you love. It is a fact, however, that when we receive affirming words we are far more likely to be motivated to reciprocate and do something our spouse desires." (p. 42) "Love makes requests, not demands." (p. 48)
2. **Quality Time** (undivided attention, togetherness, conversation, empathetic listening, activities)
"The essential ingredients in a quality activity are: (1) at least one of you wants to do it, (2) the other is willing to do it, (3) both of you know why you are doing it—to express love by being together." (p. 70)
3. **Receiving Gifts** (visual symbols of love, gift of self)
4. **Acts of Service** (chores, do things with or for spouse, help with work or projects)
5. **Physical Touch** (hold hands, kiss, embrace, intimacy)

Emotional Love Tank: "Inside every child is an 'emotional tank' waiting to be filled with love. When a child really feels loved, he will develop normally but when the love tank is empty, the child will misbehave. Much of the misbehavior of children is motivated by the cravings of an empty 'love tank.'... The emotional need for love, however, is not simply a childhood phenomenon. That need follows us into adulthood and into marriage.... Could it be that deep inside hurting couples exists an invisible 'emotional love tank' with its gauge on empty? Could the misbehavior, withdrawal, harsh words, and critical spirit occur because of that empty tank? If we could find a way to fill it, could the marriage be reborn? ... Could that tank be the key that makes marriage work?" (p. 21, 23)

Jean and Norm (from *Five Love Languages*)⁷

After 35 years of marriage, Jean and Norm went to a marriage counselor. Jean said, "We are like two roommates living in the same house.... I don't feel any love coming from him...." Norm said, "I have done everything I know to show her that I love her.... No matter what I do, she continues to complain that she doesn't feel loved.... I have dinner almost ready when she gets home.... After dinner, I wash dishes.... I do all the vacuuming... [and] the yard work." Jean replied, "We haven't talked in thirty years. He's always washing dishes, vacuuming the floor, mowing the grass. He's always doing something. I want him to sit on the couch with me and give me some time, look at me, talk to me about us, about our lives." Jean's primary love language was "quality time" and Norm's was "acts of service." Norm said, "Why didn't somebody tell me this thirty years ago? I could have been sitting on the couch talking to her fifteen minutes every night instead of doing all this stuff." "Jean and Norm went home and started loving each other in the right love languages. In less than two months, they were on a second honeymoon."

Ann and Glenn (from *Five Love Languages*)⁸

[Ann begged Glenn to go with her to marriage counseling. His attitude was] "I don't have any problems. You are the one with the problems." In his mind he was right; she was wrong.... Her feelings of love for him had been killed through the years by his constant criticism and condemnation. After ten years of marriage, her emotional energy was depleted and her self-esteem almost destroyed...."

After talking with her, I said, “It seems to me that you are torn between your religious and moral beliefs that tell you it is wrong to get out of the marriage, and your emotional pain which tells you that getting out is the only way to survive.... Before you make that decision, I do have one idea.... I want to read something that Jesus once said....

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.... Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them.... Give, and it will be given to you. (NIV Luke 6:27-28, 31-32, 38)

Does that sound like your husband? Has he treated you as an enemy rather than as a friend?... Has he ever cursed you... mistreated you... [or] told you that he hates you?”

After Ann said he often treated her that way, I said, “I would like you to do an experiment. I would like to see what would happen if we apply this principle to your marriage.... Let’s hypothesize that if you could speak Glenn’s primary love language consistently for a six-month period, that somewhere along the line his emotional need for love would begin to be met and as his *emotional love tank* filled, and that he would begin to reciprocate love to you.... There is no guarantee that Glenn will respond to your acts of love. We can only say that there is a good possibility he will do so....”

“Now, let me suggest a plan.... What if you go home and say to Glenn, ‘...I’ve decided that I would like to be a better wife to you. So if you have any suggestions..., I am open to them. You can tell me now or you can think about it....’ Whatever his response, negative or positive, simply accept it as information. That initial statement lets him know that something different is about to happen.... Then based upon your guess that his primary love language appeared is ‘Physical Touch,’ and my suggestion that his secondary love language is ‘Words of Affirmation,’ focus your attention on those two areas for one month.

“If Glenn comes back with a suggestion..., work it into your plan. Look for positive things in Glenn’s life and give him verbal affirmation about those things. In the meantime, stop all verbal complaints. If you want to complain..., write it down in your personal notebook.... Begin taking more initiative in physical touch and sexual involvement. Surprise him by being aggressive....”

“Oh, Dr. Chapman, this is going to be difficult,” Ann said. “I have found it hard to be sexually responsive to him when he ignores me all the time. I have felt used rather than loved....”

“Your response has been natural and normal,” I assured Ann. “For most wives, the desire to be sexually intimate with their husbands grows out of a sense of being loved.... If they feel loved, then they desire sexual intimacy. If they do not feel loved, they likely feel used.... You will probably have to rely heavily upon your faith in God in order to do this....”

“But, Dr. Chapman, isn’t it being hypocritical to express love sexually when you have such negative feelings toward the person?”

“Perhaps it would be helpful for us to distinguish between love as a feeling and love as an action,” I said. “If you claim to have feelings that you do not have, that is hypocritical.... Certainly we do not have warm feelings for people who hate us... but we can do loving acts for them. We hope that such loving acts will have a positive effect upon their attitudes and behavior....”

“After the first month..., ask him ‘Glenn, you remember a few weeks ago when I told you I was going to try to be a better

wife? I want to ask how you think I am doing.’ Whatever Glenn says, accept it as information. He may be sarcastic,... flippant, or hostile, or he may be positive. Whatever his response, do not argue but accept it and assure him that you are serious... and if he has additional suggestions, you are open to them. Follow this pattern of asking for feedback once a month for... six months.

“Whenever Glenn gives you the first positive feedback..., I want you to make a request of Glenn—... something in keeping with your primary love language [Quality Time].... For example,... I’d like to play Scrabble with you on Thursday night.... Make the request something specific, not general.... Make a specific request of him each month. If he does it, fine; if he doesn’t do it, fine.... If he chooses to begin loving you in your primary love language, your positive emotions toward him will begin to resurface.” ...

“I would like to meet with you... every two weeks, and I would like you to keep records on the positive words of affirmation that you give Glenn each week. Also, I would like you to bring me your list of complaints... [so] I can help you build specific requests for Glenn....”

In the next six months, Ann saw a tremendous change in Glenn’s attitude and treatment of her. The first month, he was flippant and treated the whole thing lightly. But after the second month, he gave her positive feedback about her efforts. In the last four months, he responded positively to almost all of her requests, and her feelings for him began to change drastically. Glenn never came for counseling, but he did listen to some of my tapes and discuss them with Ann.... Scores of people whom I have counseled have experienced the miracle of love.

How we resist or yield to promptings: Several years ago, Elona and I attended a seminar taught by C. Terry Warner. This seminar helped us recognize what happens when we resist our own promptings. As we began to yield to our own promptings, we were happier in our marriage.

Years later, Terry published a book called *Bonds That Make Us Free: Healing Our Relationships, Coming to Ourselves*. The Arbing Institute teaches seminars based on these ideas to help businesses and families. They have published two excellent books that have helped us: *Leadership and Self Deception*, and *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*. James L. Ferrell, a BYU graduate and a managing director of The Arbing Institute, wrote an excellent book called *The Peacegiver: How Christ Offers to Heal Our Hearts and Homes*. The last three books are novels or extended parables that show (a) how resisting promptings leads to pride, contention, and unhappiness, and (b) how yielding to promptings (“enticings of the Holy Spirit”) leads to humility, patience, charity, and happiness. These ideas and examples helped change my “viewing and doing” in ways that have improved my relationships with my wife, family, and others.

In a BYU devotional, Terry Warner shared the following.

If You Had Come Unto Me...⁹

[Concerned about her marriage, a woman read a self-help book and later wrote:]

As the author described the intense need we each have for love, I began to feel more and more deprived.... I decided to write all of this down for my husband to read, and [to list] the many times I had felt emotionally deprived.... The longer I wrote, the more I began to feel that what I was writing was false. “How could it be false?” ... “I saw and felt it....” But the feeling became so powerful.... [I] began to pray, saying, “If it is false, show me how....” And then a voice spoke to my mind and said,

“If you had come unto Me, it all would have been different.”

I was astounded. I went to Church. I read the scriptures..., I prayed..., I tried to obey the commandments. “What do you mean, ‘Come unto You?’” I wondered. And then into my mind flashed pictures of me wanting to *do things my own way*, of *holding grudges*, of *not forgiving*, of *not loving* as God had loved us. I had wanted my husband to “pay” for my... suffering. I had not let go of the past and had not loved God with all my heart....

I... did not mention to my husband anything.... But I gave up blaming.... I prayed more earnestly, and listened to His Spirit. I read my scriptures, and tried to come to know Him better. Two months passed, and one morning my husband... said, “...we find fault too much with each other. I am never going to find fault with [you] again.” He did stop finding fault, and he began to compliment me.... Three years have passed.... We care deeply about one another, and share... thoughts and feelings, something we had not done for the first 16 years of marriage.

The Critic Game and the Murmur Game: Two close cousins of the *Blame Game* are the *Critic Game* and the *Murmur Game*. Each starts with finding fault.

In the *Critic Game*, like TV gymnastic critics, we focus attention on and replay the faults or mistakes of people instead of what was done well. After watching a TV show, walking in a house, eating out, hearing other opinions, etc., we talk about what we did not like and how terrible or unacceptable the faults are. People who do not believe as we do are idiots. Those who master this game are cynics (“A person disposed to rail or find fault;... one disposed to deny and sneer at the sincerity or goodness of human motives and actions” OED). In the MTC, one cynical missionary believed everyone was a hypocrite. Thus, he could ignore anything they said and any promptings he was given to change, to live the Scout Law (trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful,...), to love others, or to sustain leaders. I have never known a cynic who was happy. None of the people I admire or look up to are cynics. I have never heard a church leader (or anyone else I admire) encourage fault finding or cynicism as the pathway to happiness or success.

In the *Murmur Game*, we find fault with or murmur about adversity, opposition, or events we don’t like but can do little or nothing to change. “A basic cause of murmuring is that too many of us seem to expect that life will flow ever smoothly, featuring an unbroken chain of green lights with empty parking places just in front of our destinations!”¹⁰ In the *Murmur Game*, we blame circumstances for our unhappiness, problems, or lack of success. “If circumstances had the power to bless or harm, they would bless and harm all men alike, but the fact that the same circumstance will be alike good and bad to different souls proves that the good or bad is not in the circumstance, but only in the mind of him that encounters it.”¹¹ Nephi was in the same wilderness with Laman and Lemuel who complained about many things. Viktor Frankl wrote “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”¹²

- The mind can make a heaven of hell... or a hell of heaven!

Loving What Is. The *Blame*, *Critic*, and *Murmur Games* all start with finding fault with *what is* [reality]. Recently I read a book called *Loving What Is* by a lady who uses four basic questions to help herself and others love *what is* instead of finding fault. This reduces much suffering, stress, and unhappiness while improving relationships. The four questions have helped me change my viewing. *Awaken the Giant Within* (by Anthony Robbins) is another book that has helped me love *what is*. I suggested that my children read chapters 8–11 and 16 first.

Excerpts from *Loving What Is* (by Byron Katie)¹³

- “We are disturbed not by what happens to us, but by our thoughts about what happens.”¹⁴
 “Suffering is optional,” Katie says. Whenever we experience a stressful feeling — anything from mild discomfort to intense sorrow, rage, or despair — we can be certain that there is a specific thought causing our reaction, whether or not we are conscious of it. The way to end our stress is to investigate the thinking that lies behind it, and anyone can do this by himself with a piece of paper and a pen. *The Work*’s four questions... reveal where our thinking isn’t true for us. Through this process... we discover that all the concepts and judgments that we believe or take for granted are distortions of things as they really are. When we believe our thoughts instead of what is really true for us, we experience the kinds of emotional distress that we call suffering. Suffering is a natural alarm, warning us that we’re attaching to a thought; when we don’t listen, we come to accept this suffering as an inevitable part of life. It’s not....

The Work was born on a February morning in 1986 when Byron Kathleen Reid, a forty-three-year-old woman from a small town in... California, woke up on the floor of a halfway house.

In the midst of an ordinary life...Katie had entered a ten-year-long downward spiral into rage, paranoia, and despair. For two years she was so depressed that she could seldom manage to leave her house; she stayed in bed for weeks at a time, doing business by telephone from her bedroom, unable even to bathe or brush her teeth. Her children would tiptoe past her door to avoid her outbursts of rage. Finally, she checked in to a halfway house for women with eating disorders, the only facility that her insurance company would pay for. The other residents were so frightened of her that she was placed alone in an attic room.

One morning..., as she lay on the floor (she had been feeling too unworthy to sleep in a bed), Katie woke up without any concepts of who or what she was. “There was no me,” she says.

All my rage, all the thoughts that had been troubling me, my whole world, was gone.... Laughter welled up from the depths and just poured out.... It was as if something else had woken up. *It* opened its eyes. *It* was looking through Katie’s eyes. And *it* was so delighted! *It* was intoxicated with joy....

When Katie returned home, her family and friends felt that she was a different person. Her daughter, Roxann,..., says,

We knew that the constant storm was over. She had always yelled at me and my brothers and criticized us. I used to be scared to be in the same room with her. Now she seemed completely peaceful. She would sit still for hours on the window seat or out in the desert. She was joyful and innocent, like a child, and she seemed to be filled with love.

People in trouble started knocking on our door, asking her for help. She’d sit with them and ask them questions....

Shortly after Katie got back from the halfway house, her home began to fill with people who had heard about her and had come to learn. She was able to communicate her inner inquiry in the form of specific questions that anyone who wanted freedom could

apply on his own.... Soon she began to be invited to meet... in people's living rooms. Her hosts often asked her if she was "enlightened." She would answer, "I'm just someone who knows the difference between what hurts and what doesn't." ...

People who have been practicing inquiry for a while... describe how... their internal argument with reality has disappeared, and they find that what remains is love — love for themselves, for other people, and for whatever life brings.... Loving *what is* becomes as easy and natural as breathing....

The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought that argues with *what is*. When the mind is perfectly clear, *what is* is what we want. If you want reality to be different than it is, you might as well try to teach a cat to bark.... "People should be kinder." "Children should be well-behaved." "My neighbors should take better care of their lawn." "The line... should move faster." "My husband (or wife) should agree with me." "I should be thinner (or prettier or more successful)." These thoughts are ways of wanting reality to be different than it is.... All the stress we feel is caused by arguing with *what is*.

After I woke up to reality in 1986, people often referred to me as the woman who made friends with the wind. Barstow is a desert town where the wind blows a lot of the time, and everyone hated it.... I made friends with the wind — with reality — ... [because] I realized that it's insane to oppose it. When I argue with reality, I lose — but only 100 percent of the time. How do I know that the wind should blow? It's blowing!...

The Work reveals that what you think shouldn't have happened *should* have happened... because it did, and no thinking in the world can change it. This doesn't mean that you condone it or approve of it. It just means that you can see things without resistance and without the confusion of your inner struggle. No one wants their children to get sick, no one wants to be in a car accident; but when these things happen, how can it be helpful to mentally argue with them? We know better than to do that, yet we do it, because we don't know how to stop.

I am a lover of *what is*, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality.... When we stop opposing reality, action becomes simple, fluid, kind, and fearless.

I can find only three kinds of business in the universe: mine, yours, and God's [reality].... Much of our stress comes from mentally living out of our own business. When I think, "You need to get a job, I want you to be happy, you should be on time, you need to take better care of yourself." I am in your business. When I'm worried about earthquakes, floods, war, or when I will die, I am in God's business....

To think that I know what's best for anyone else is to be out of my business. Even in the name of love, it is pure arrogance, and the result is tension, anxiety, and fear.... The next time you're feeling stress or discomfort, ask yourself whose business you're in mentally, and you may burst out laughing! ...

When a thought appears such as "Do the dishes" and you don't do them, notice how an internal war breaks out. It sounds like this: "I'll do them later. I should have done them by now. My roommate should have done them. It's not my turn. It's not fair. People will think less of me if I don't do them now." The stress and weariness you feel are really mental combat fatigue.

What I call "doing the dishes" is the practice of loving the task in front of you. Your inner voice guides you all day long to do simple things such as brush your teeth, drive to work, call your friend, or do the dishes.... [see also www.thework.com]

In football, every play begins where the ball *is*, not where it should or could have been. Blaming and complaining do not

move the ball forward. Loving *what is* does not mean that I stop trying to get to the goal line; it helps me focus on the next play. It helps me play the *Change Game* effectively because my mind and heart do not waste time finding fault with *what is*.

How we fall in, fall out of, and stay in love. I read a chapter in a book that described common patterns in the way people fall in, fall out of, and stay in love.¹⁵ That which follows is loosely based on some ideas in that chapter, some previously mentioned ideas, and my own experience.

How Love Begins	
Focus: What I like	Attraction
View: "Rose-colored"	Appreciation
Do: Please and honor other Golden Rule	Affection (time, touch, talk) Ask and Accept

How do John and Mary fall in love? Love begins with attraction, appreciation, and affection. They focus on what they like about each other, express appreciation, do things to please or honor each other, and show affection by spending time together talking and touching (e.g., holding hands, kissing). They treat each other as they like to be treated (Golden Rule). They count the positives and discount the negatives (faults) of each other. This usually continues through the honeymoon and first stage of marriage.



Habituation	
Focus: What is different	Less Attraction
View: Take each other for granted	Less Appreciation
Do: Normal	Less Affection

After several months of marriage, John and Mary become used to each other. They enjoy being with each other and feel comfortable in their relationship. Things they used to appreciate are now normal, expected, and taken for granted. They show less appreciation and affection.

Expectations (Rules)	
Focus: What I dislike (find fault)	Disappointment
View: <i>Blame Game</i>	Depreciation
Do: Displease and dishonor other My will be done! Gold rules	Disaffection Demands

The road to divorce is paved with great *expectations*. When John or Mary fails to meet expectations, the other plays the *Blame Game* (find fault, blame, punish, justify). The focus turns to "what I dislike" and finding fault with spouse and marriage. It is easy to find fault when looking for it. With a magnifying glass, you can see blemishes or faults in beautiful diamonds. It is also common to "raise the bar" making it even harder for the spouse to meet expectations. They count negatives (faults) and discount positives. Disappointment, depreciation, disaffection and demands are ways of "punishing" a spouse who fails to meet expectations.

• Love is blind... but marriage is a real eye opener!

I am unhappy because my spouse does not do what I expect. If my spouse would change, I would be happy. The *Blame Game* seems like the right way to change my spouse.

There is a way that *seemeth right* unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of *death*. (Prov 16:25; 14:12)

What seems right will kill you! Throwing water on a chemical fire may seem right but the explosion it causes can kill you. Trying hard to get out of quicksand seems right, but your efforts cause you to sink faster. When lost in the wilderness, it may seem right to save your water until you die of dehydration.

The *Blame Game* seems like the right way to change other people. Therefore, we continue using these methods even though they make things worse and lead to the death of the relationship.

A young man asked his girlfriend to call every night when she got off work late. When she forgot to call him one night, the *Blame Game* began. The next morning he “chewed her out” for not calling. Within a few weeks they were no longer dating. What seemed right led to the death of the relationship.

“A man dragged his wife into a stake president’s office, thrust her in a chair, and said, ‘President, tell my wife to obey my priesthood. Then all our problems at home will be solved.’ The president opened... [to D&C 121:36-37], looked into the man’s eyes, and said quietly, ‘According to what I read here, you have no priesthood.’”¹⁶ What seemed right to this man was leading to the death of the marriage.

Ways That Seem Right But Usually Don’t Work
1. Do my will! (You should...)
2. Do my will or else! (You must...)
3. Do my will because I am smarter, wiser, better, or more righteous than you!
4. Do my will cheerfully, willingly, and without being asked!
5. Your will be done, not mine. (Lose-Win)

It is natural to do unto others as they do unto you. When attacked, we tend to defend ourselves and fight back. It is not long before both John and Mary are finding fault with each other and feeling justified in “punishing” each other with “verbal grenades”. The Golden Rule now means that he who owns the gold (what the other wants) makes the rules. Neither John nor Mary likes being treated as they are treating the other. Neither feels happy but it is the other’s fault. Each would prefer to be right than happy. Each knows the top 10 ways to make the other mad, and feels justified in doing these things to punish the other. Even if one “submits” and acts as a “slave”, the “master” feels resented and feared instead of loved. They expect that what they are doing will lead to peace, love, and happiness. They seem surprised when their war escalates.



How Love Ends	
Worthless	Last Straw
Hopeless (Impossible to change.)	Rewrite history
Helpless (I can’t change it.)	“Divorce”

Eventually, one gives up on the marriage and may feel worthless, hopeless, and helpless. The history of the relationship is reinterpreted or rewritten to remove any good memories and magnify the bad ones. “Emotional divorce” occurs even if the marriage continues.

- Love is grand... but divorce is 100 grand.

Yellow Grass: Cause and Treatment?

When I water and fertilize my lawn, the grass is green. If I stop watering and fertilizing, the grass turns yellow and may appear to be dead. However, if I start watering and fertilizing again, the grass *gradually* becomes green again.

Relationships are like grass. Attraction, appreciation, and affection are the “water and fertilizer” that cause love to grow. In the habituation stage, these are less common. Once the *Blame Game* starts, these usually stop altogether and are replaced with the weeds of disappointment, depreciation, and disaffection.

A man says, “I don’t love my wife anymore!” In TV English, “love” refers to feelings and thus the man means he no longer has loving feelings (his grass is yellow). However, in the scriptures,

“love” is a verb that refers to actions and thus the man means he has stopped watering and fertilizing the relationship.

Remembering how we watered and fertilized the relationship when it was green and growing, gives us ideas of what we can do again to improve our marriage. My wife and I like to ask couples how they met and about their courtship. We enjoy their smiles and laughter as they share those fun memories of being in love and of what they appreciated about each other.

Remember	
Focus: What we liked	Attraction
View: How we saw each other	Appreciation
Do: What we did	Affection (time, touch, talk)
Golden Rule	Ask and Accept

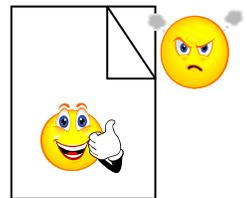
The next step is for one (or both) to change Focus, Viewing, and Doing. The **Focus** changes from what I don’t like to what I *do like*. The **Viewing** changes from the *Blame Game* to the *Change Game*. The **Doing** changes from displeasing and dishonoring to pleasing and honoring the spouse. The relationship is nourished with honor, appreciation, and affection.

Expectations and needs become **preferences**. I am not the God of my world. I accept instead of resent *what is*. I “lower the bar” and celebrate progress instead of expecting perfection. I stop taking my spouse for granted. I follow the Golden Rule by doing things to please and honor my spouse without waiting to be pleased first.

Preferences	
Focus: What I like and prefer	Attraction
View: <i>Change Game</i>	Appreciation
Do: Please and honor spouse	Affection
Golden Rule	Ask and Accept

FOCUS: I make our bed and leave a corner turned down to remind us of the daily choice we each face.

1. We can focus on what *we like*, and be happy and grateful, OR
2. We can focus on what *we do not like*, and be upset and ungrateful.



Whatever we focus on will increase! People tend to do things that are appreciated and to stop doing things that are ignored or are never considered good enough. It is fun to please our friends and to annoy our enemies.

VIEWING: In the *Change Game*, I focus on what I do want, instead of what I don’t want; on my business not her business. My goals are in my control (I am response-able). I strive to achieve my goals and learn from feedback. However, I can play the *Change Game* with a proud or humble heart. If I play the *Change Game* with a proud heart, I still believe my spouse should do my will. She will sense my attitude of superiority. My attempts to change her will feel like put downs, control or manipulation.

DOING: When my viewing changed, my “doing” changed also. Instead of demanding that my family do my will, I began treating them as investigators in the mission field. I encouraged and celebrated progress instead of demanding perfection. I encouraged them to receive the Holy Ghost by seeking and following promptings. I did more teaching and less preaching.

I have noticed less contention when I focus on following my own promptings and encourage my wife and children to hear and obey their own promptings. I have learned that the Spirit prompts each person to do what is most important, not *what I think* is most important. These promptings are often baby steps, not the BIG steps I would like. I have also noticed that I am prompted to

help my wife and family with their goals, and to rejoice with them. What is important to them becomes important to me. I serve them instead of expecting them to serve me. When they fall, I help them up. When they make mistakes, I help them learn and recover instead making fun of them or persecuting them.

I am often prompted to live the *Scout Oath* and *Law (SOL)* in specific ways. It is easy to live the *SOL* when my spouse is. But the real test is: will I live the *SOL* even if my spouse does not? Will I be helpful to the unhelpful, friendly to the unfriendly, courteous to the discourteous, kind to the unkind, and cheerful around the uncheerful. Will I be trustworthy when others break commitments? Will I be loyal by telling others what I like about people who talk about my faults? Will I continue to live the *SOL* even if my spouse does not change?

Covey likens relationships to an Emotional Bank Account.¹⁷ Deposits are made by living the Golden Rule as well as the Scout Oath and Law. Withdrawals occur when I try to make others do my will, I break the Golden Rule, I break the Scout Oath and Law, or I play the *Blame Game*. When I read *The Five Love Languages*, I realized that I can make deposits only when I say “I love you” in my wife’s language(s) rather than my own. However, if I have a *proud heart*, even using her love language is a withdrawal.

During courtship, we make more deposits than withdrawals. When I play the *Blame Game*, I make more withdrawals than deposits. To improve my relationship, I must make deposits and avoid withdrawals. (One withdrawal seems to equal 5-10 deposits.) This may take a long time if I am very overdrawn or in an emotional debtor’s prison.

One woman who was considering divorce went to a marriage counselor. The counselor could see that both were playing the *Blame Game* and engaging in verbal warfare. He asked, “If you filed for divorce now, would your husband be glad or sad?” She admitted that he would be glad. The counselor suggested that she make some changes during the next six months so that when she got a divorce he would be sad and realize what he was losing. She stopped playing the *Blame Game*. Instead of criticizing him for getting home late, she had food ready for him and asked how his day had gone. Instead of nagging him to do things, she did or had others do things that he didn’t do. She thanked him for things she appreciated. She began doing things to please him. She was doing these things so that he would be sad when she filed for divorce. However, she noticed that he started coming home earlier, and began doing things to please her. Her Emotional Bank Account was now positive. After six months, they were back in love. As in an Aesop’s fable, when she had acted like the north wind and tried to blow the coat (his faults) off her man, he held his coat tightly. When she acted like the sun and warmed him with love and gentleness, he took it off gladly.

The following stories illustrate what happens when the husband or wife stops playing the *Blame Game* and begins to play the *Change Game*.

A Story For Valentine’s Day¹⁸

Larry and Jo Ann were an ordinary couple... in an ordinary house on an ordinary street. Like any other couple, they struggled to make ends meet and to do the right things for their children.

They were ordinary in yet another way — they had their squabbles. Much of their conversation concerned what was wrong in their marriage and who was to blame.

Until one day when the most extraordinary event took place.

“You know, Jo Ann, I’ve got a magic chest of drawers. Every time I open them, they’re full of socks and underwear,” Larry said. “I want to thank you for filling them all these years.”

Jo Ann stared at her husband over the top of her glasses. “What do you want, Larry?”

“Nothing. I just... appreciate those magic drawers.”

This wasn’t the first time Larry had done something odd, so Jo Ann pushed the incident out of her mind until a few days later.

“Jo Ann, thank you for recording so many correct check numbers in the ledger this month. You put down the right numbers 15 out of 16 times. That’s a record.”

Disbelieving what she had heard, Jo Ann looked up from her mending. “Larry, you’re always complaining about my recording the wrong check numbers. Why stop now?”

“No reason. I just wanted you to know I appreciate the effort you’re making.”

Jo Ann shook her head and went back to her mending. “What’s got into him?” she mumbled to herself.

Nevertheless, the next day when Jo Ann wrote a check at the grocery store, she glanced at her checkbook to confirm that she had put down the right check number. “Why do I suddenly care about those dumb check numbers?” she asked herself.

She tried to disregard the incident, but Larry’s strange behavior intensified.

“Jo Ann, that was a great dinner,” he said one evening. “I appreciate all your effort. Why, in the past 15 years I’ll bet you’ve fixed over 14,000 meals for me and the kids.”

Then “Gee, Jo Ann, the house looks spiffy. You’ve really worked hard to get it looking so good.” And even “Thanks, Jo Ann, for just being you. I really enjoy your company.”

Jo Ann was growing worried. “Where’s the sarcasm, the criticism?” she wondered.

Her fears that something peculiar was happening to her husband were confirmed by 16-year-old Shelly, who complained, “Dad’s gone bonkers, Mom. He just told me I looked nice. With all this makeup and these sloppy clothes, he still said it. That’s not Dad, Mom. What’s wrong with him?”

Whatever was wrong, Larry didn’t get over it. Day in and day out he continued focusing on the positive.

Over the weeks, Jo Ann grew more accustomed to her mate’s unusual behavior and occasionally even gave him a grudging “Thank you.” She prided herself on taking it all in stride, until one day something so peculiar happened, she became completely discombobulated:

“I want you to take a break,” Larry said. “I am going to do the dishes. So please take your hands off that frying pan and leave the kitchen.”

(Long pause.) “Thank you, Larry. Thank you very much!”

Jo Ann’s step was now a little lighter, her self-confidence higher and once in a while she hummed. She didn’t seem to have as many blue moods anymore. “I rather like Larry’s new behavior,” she thought.

That would be the end of the story except one day another most extraordinary event took place. This time... Jo Ann spoke.

“Larry,” she said, “I want to thank you for going to work and providing for us all these years. I don’t think I’ve ever told you how much I appreciate it.”

Larry has never revealed the reason for his drastic change of behavior no matter how hard Jo Ann has pushed for an answer, and so it will likely remain one of life’s mysteries. But it’s one I’m thankful to live with. You see, I am Jo Ann.

The Formula That Saved Our Marriage¹⁹

“Are we going to make this marriage work, or not?” he asked. Seven months married, six months pregnant, I sat on the bed, tears streaming down my cheeks and spotting my nightgown. I couldn’t give my husband an answer!

Jim, ... a lieutenant junior grade aboard a U.S. destroyer, sailed out of San Diego harbor every other week. He loved his duty, his friends aboard ship, and coming home to his sweetheart. But I was miserable! Alone every other week and living in a strange city with no friends, no family, ... I sank often into a state of despondency. Morning sickness, nausea, and a growing waistline did not improve my attitude. I felt trapped!

Now we sat facing each other across the bed, our relationship teetering seriously. What were we going to do? The word *divorce* arose. Is that what we wanted? It carried a sound of finality, of permanency, and made us involuntarily shudder. But how could we change?

We sat in silence, pondering. Then Jim looked up. “Judith,” he said, “I think our problem is one of selfishness. Are you willing to make an honest effort to try an experiment? For the next thirty days, I’ll think only of you and your needs, and you think only of me and my needs. If at the end of that time our marriage has not improved, then we’ll talk about ... about another solution.”

I agreed. I wanted—hungered for—happiness.

“But we must guard against one thing,” Jim warned. “We must not predetermine each other’s actions judging them against what we would like. Our wants may be out of proportion to what we receive, and disappointment may occur. This is to be a total concentration on what we can do for each other.”

The next morning I slipped out of bed early, fighting nausea and bleary eyes. Jim loved large hot breakfasts; I preferred sleeping later, with a light morning snack. Nevertheless, muffins, bacon and eggs, and fruit arrived on the table. The aroma was my breakfast bell. Jim came in with a grin of eagerness that would have melted any self-serving heart. So much for sleeping in!...With this encouragement, my breakfasts continued to improve—and so did my willingness.

The second big change came during those week-long assignments out to sea. I took walks every day, started conversations with the local grocer and his wife, immersed myself in uplifting books and music, and slammed the door on every “poor me” thought. Fridays required long preparation. I knew his optimism envisioned me running out the door and into his arms—so I ran! And then I led him back into the house to discover the living room transformed by candlelight, soft music, a lace-covered card table set for dinner, and a little bit of heaven wafting from the kitchen. Romance blossomed again!...

Of course I didn’t do all the changing in our marriage. Jim, too, kept his part of the commitment—and he did it in ways he knew would be most meaningful to me. His largest contribution was personalized attention. Five-minute rubdowns to my aching limbs and back expanded to an hour, soothing nerves as well as body. He provided more opportunities for talk and relaxation—taking me away from our four walls on weekends into the sunshine, to the beach, or to the park for archery or picnics. And he listened more attentively to what I was feeling and going through. He perceived how easily my feelings of confidence could fail, and so he reminded me of my positive traits during those periods to bolster my ego.... In a matter of two weeks, I began to feel cherished, appreciated, and loved.

Our “extreme” commitment meant keeping each other’s needs always in the background of our thoughts; it meant asking ourselves each day “What can I do for him/her? How can I show I care?” It meant... literally eliminating “I demand!” and “What about me?” and “Why doesn’t he/she ... ?” ...

About a year later, an elderly friend added his gift of wisdom to our formula: “Think of marriage as if it were an empty jar, waiting to be filled,” he said. “Each act of kindness places a spoonful of sugar into it; every selfish act takes one out. At the end of each year, will your jar be empty or overflowing? Your marriage, bitter or sweet?” ...

The next six years sped by quickly, and our marriage continued to improve with the foundation and application of gospel principles. Little by little we dropped off the excessive, unneeded baggage that bad habits provide....

Treat Like An Investigator

An older woman was very unhappy that she could not go on a mission with her husband because he was inactive and didn’t believe in the Church. A church leader suggested that she was already on a full-time mission and that her husband was her investigator. For the first time she saw the entire situation differently. Although she regretted how she had treated him, she enthusiastically went to work.²⁰

Changing Me Changed Our Marriage²¹

...For the first seven years Brent and I were married, I nagged. Not a lot, mind you, but my husband certainly knew that he smoked too much, went out with the boys too often, didn’t spend enough time with me and the children, didn’t handle money very well, drank too much, and didn’t do enough chores around the house.... I sat down... and analyzed what I was doing.

The first thing I saw was that seven years of nagging had produced no results; Brent knew by now what I didn’t like, so I might as well stop repeating myself. Second, if I couldn’t change him, I would have to change *me* and find ways to live cheerfully with what he was. I needed to work on my perfection, not his....

I decided to begin by remaining cheerful when Brent stayed out late. Prayer was the key to this change. The first time Brent came home late to find me in a good mood, his reaction was, “What’s going on here?”

I told him I was wasting too much energy worrying about him and so I was asking our Heavenly Father to take care of him because he had more influence on circumstances than I had. I also said that Brent had enough sense to keep himself out of trouble. He laughed, and within two months was phoning me if he planned on being late. He was also coming home consistently earlier since he had a pleasant wife to come home to. It was hard. I had to discipline myself; when I couldn’t contain myself after he arrived home from drinking late, I learned to leave the house. But the results were worth it: our quarrels over Brent’s drinking were drastically reduced....

I quit nagging Brent to take us places. Instead, I planned outings and family home evenings for us, then invited him to come with us. Sometimes he did; sometimes he didn’t. We were glad to have him with us, but went ahead without him if he was busy. I also invited myself along if he was going somewhere we would enjoy. If he said no, I didn’t let it bother me.

Even more important, I began finding ways to communicate my love. I began thanking him for every chore done and every compliment, gift, good turn, considerate action, and show of affection he gave me. I also started complimenting him on the way he dressed, on his sense of humor—on every good point I

noticed. Needless to say, I began seeing more and more good things about him. The more I saw, the more my respect grew, and the more I loved him.

Slowly I learned to really think of him as the head of the house. I learned to go to him and ask for his help when I had a problem instead of accusing and blaming whenever I made a mistake. Doors of communication that had been shut for years began opening....

And I worked on me. Brent disliked to come home to unwashed dishes, so I resolved to have the dishes done no matter what else was left. I also resolved to get more sleep so I'd be more pleasant to come home to. That would take more efficiency than I had. I studied, planned my schedule, and then replanned it. My children helped more willingly after I told them I needed their help in making our home a happy place. I lost some weight, dressed more neatly, and let my hair grow a little longer because Brent likes it better that way. I especially worked on forgetting what I wanted Brent to do for me and concentrated on what I could do to make him feel more loved.

It is now four years later and I am still working on all of these areas, but the blessings can't be counted. Months ago Brent paid me the supreme compliment of saying he would never have had the confidence to recently start his own business without my support. Daily I feel loved and cherished.

A smile over the heads of our children, holding my hand as we walk down the street, his teasing to make me laugh, telephone calls to let me know he misses me, small gifts that say "I love you," a lunch date without the children—all these things show me he loves me. And when he tells me he wants us to be married forever, I am completely happy.

He has changed greatly. He has quit smoking, cut his drinking down, enjoys spending time with us, and takes one child ... on a special outing every few weeks. He is a kind, loving husband and father, interested in what we do, think and feel....

Divorce:

"There are legitimate reasons or grounds for divorce. An estimated 30 percent of the divorces in the U.S. involve marital relationships with a high degree of conflict.... Sometimes violence, physical and mental abuse and/or threat of life to spouse and children are also present in these highly conflicted relationships. As such, divorce in these situations is most often in the best interest of those involved.... [What about] the other 70 percent: Should they divorce or stay married?" (Brent Barlow, *Marriage Crossroads*. Go to www.utahmarriage.org, and click on "Marriage Crossroads" to see entire paper.)

"The decision to divorce or remain together to work things out is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. It is crucial for those considering divorce to anticipate what lies ahead in order to make informed decisions. Too often the fallout from divorce is far more devastating than many people realize when contemplating the move."²²

The *Blame Game* results in many unnecessary divorces. However, many marriages have been saved when people start making more deposits than withdrawals or start playing the *Change Game* as shown in the above stories.

Divorce Busting, by Michele Weiner-Davis, has fun *Change Game* ideas and stories of how couples changed instead of getting divorced. (see www.divorcebusting.com.) Knowing that my wife wanted to change me, I read and then gave her the book, *Getting Through to the Man You Love: The No-Nonsense, No-Nagging Guide for Women*, also by Michele Weiner-Davis.

The author states, "The only thing more universal than a woman's desire to change her man is a man's resistance to it."²³

I liked the *Change Game* ideas and stories. These methods have a good chance of working on me.

Sometimes divorce is appropriate. Before my wife and I married, we got the approval and signature of our bishop and stake president. I have felt that one should get the approval of the same two witnesses before getting a divorce. They have responsibility and concern for the husband, the wife, and their children. They are also able to hear both sides and to receive revelation. Although marriages have been saved, I have known several people who followed this pattern, got a divorce, and married someone else who tries to live the gospel.

- The Golden Rule is of no use to you whatever unless you realize it is your move. (Frank Crane)

¹ Gary Smalley, *Love is a Decision*, p. 14-15, 18-25, 40

² Gary Smalley, *Love is a Decision*, p. 33-34

³ Gary Smalley, *Love is a Decision*, p. 59-61

⁴ Gen. 49:9, 21, 22

⁵ Gary Smalley, *The Blessing*, p. 77, 87. See chapter 5.

⁶ Gary Smalley, *The Blessing*, p. 176-178

⁷ Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, p. 141-145

⁸ Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*, p. 148-159

⁹ C. Terry Warner, *Honest, Simple, Solid, True*, BYU Devotional 1-16-96 (reworded somewhat for time and space)

¹⁰ Elder Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, p. 82

¹¹ James Allen, *The Path of Prosperity*, p. 22

¹² Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 1985, p. 86

¹³ Byron Katie with Stephen Mitchell, *Loving What Is*, p. ix-xiii, 1-4, 188-189

¹⁴ Epictetus, a Greek stoic philosopher (c. 55-135 AD) quoted in Byron Katie with Stephen Mitchell, *Loving What Is*, viii

¹⁵ Leslie Cameron-Bandler, et. al., *Know How*, p. 169-213

¹⁶ Stephen R. Covey and Truman G. Madsen, *Marriage & Family: Gospel Insights*, p. 54.

¹⁷ Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p. 188-190

¹⁸ Jo Ann Larsen, *Deseret News*, reprinted in *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, p. 43-45

¹⁹ Judith Long, "The Formula That Saved Our Marriage," *Ensign*, Mar. 1983, 14

²⁰ Stephen R. Covey, *The Divine Center*, p. 92.

²¹ Name withheld by request, *Ensign*, Jan. 1981, 8

²² Michele Weiner-Davis, *Divorce Busting*, p. 25

²³ Michele Weiner-Davis, *Getting Through to the Man You Love: The No-Nonsense, No-Nagging Guide for Women*, inside front cover.