

EXCELLENCE
IN
MARRIAGE

DIANE HAMPTON



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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FOREWORD

I wish I could tell you that our marriage has always been perfect and that our attitudes and concern for each other have always been above reproach. I wish I could say that harsh words and hurt feelings have never been a part of our lives. If I could honestly tell you that, then this book would probably never have been written.

The excellent marriage that Diane and I have today did not come easily. We are distinct individuals with our own personalities, habits, likes, and dislikes. If we had not discovered more in life than just ourselves, our marriage could have failed as so many others have. We praise God for His wisdom that has enabled us to change our lives—wisdom that has transformed our marriage and kept it strong.

Throughout this book, Diane opens her heart and soul to share personal experiences similar to your own. The principles she teaches are founded on God's Word.

Since God is no respecter of persons, you, too, can receive all the rewards we have received. May this book be a blessing to your marriage!

—Don A. Hampton

INTRODUCTION

Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:8 NKJV). Of course it doesn’t! As the Bible teaches,

Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong.
(verses 4–5 TLB)

I could get along just fine with *love*. It’s my husband that I need help with. Unfortunately, my husband is not always very patient and kind. He occasionally exhibits jealousy and has been known to be selfish and rude. There are times when he demands his own way. And when he hasn’t eaten, you should see how irritable and touchy he can get! As a rule, he doesn’t hold grudges, but it would be ludicrous to suggest that he seldom notices when others do him wrong.

If you are married to *love*, this book will be of little value to you. If, however, you happen to be married to an imperfect mate,

as I am—or if you are willing to admit to being imperfect yourself, as I am—then this book will be of help to you.

It's difficult enough to try to make a marriage wonderful when you are not married to *love*. But when he is not married to *love* either, it can get really tricky.

I am not a professor or a psychologist, but I have had my “Mrs. degree” for more than thirty years. The greatest recommendation I can give myself, since I have no impressive credentials to offer, is that although my husband and I are both imperfect mates, we are wonderfully happy together. I still delight in our relationship, and I have reason to believe that he does, too.

If you are willing to spend the time reading, I am willing to share some of this hard-earned knowledge with you. I'm going to skip over the platitudes and get down to the nitty-gritty. I will be quoting liberally from the Scriptures because I have found them to be the most practical and helpful source in dealing with imperfect mates.

Your Marital Heart

What a learning experience marriage is! What a testing ground! At its worst, you learn more in one year of marriage than in fifteen years of any other relationship. At its best, you begin to become what God intended you to be. You grow and help to shape one another as nothing else can. You learn what you are made of, you learn what God is made of, and you learn what love is made of.

In every marriage, there is a part I like to call the heart of the marriage. It serves much the same function as your physical heart. Your physical heart is constantly taking in the old, deoxygenated blood, which is full of useless waste, and pumping out fresh blood that is full of life-giving oxygen.

Your marital heart is also constantly taking in the tired daily routines of married life and pumping out fresh, revitalized love. When the heart of your marriage is free from obstructions, you can make it through seemingly impossible circumstances.

The past thirty years and two children have created some struggles in our marriage. But when my heart is right, problems don't seem as big, and bad habits don't seem as irritating. Part of this book contains the valuable principles God has shown me about keeping my heart right before Him.

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow.... Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

(Ecclesiastes 4:9–12)

I have tremendous respect for God's plan for marriage and the family. May these pages help you and your imperfect mate build a marriage of perfection—one heart, one flesh, one love.

1

STORING TREASURES

God has taught me a powerful principle that is one of the keys to a happy, fulfilling marriage. This principle concerns the treasures we store in our hearts.

Jesus taught a great deal about the care and tending of the heart. He said, “*A good man [or woman] out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things*” (Matthew 12:35).

The dictionary defines *treasure* as “something to value greatly or to cherish for future use.” It is “accumulated or stored wealth.” Notice that a treasure is not for now, but it is something put away for the future.

Jesus said that from the good treasures in our hearts, from the stored wealth put away for future use, we bring forth good things.

We know from Scripture that this was one of the attributes that Mary, the mother of Jesus, had. She knew how to store treasures in her heart. The Bible tells us, “*Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*” (Luke 2:19).

God showed me that I needed to develop this quality in my marriage. Let me give you a few examples of “treasures” that I have stored in my heart with regard to my husband. These are everyday experiences from our lives—the kind of experiences on which a marriage is built. They may not seem like treasures to you, but they are priceless to me!

The Rescue

Several years ago, my father, whom I loved very much, had terminal cancer. At one point, he was bedridden, and I was needed in Chicago for a few days to take care of him. That meant I had to drive from St. Louis to Chicago with our daughter, Heather, who was five. I had never taken such a long trip by car without my husband before.

At this same time, we were in the midst of a big rape scare in St. Louis. Every day the newspaper had frightening headlines. The banks were even giving out “Send Help” signs for women who might be stranded in their cars. That year I was Safety Chairman of our school PTA, and we had arranged to show a police department film dealing with rape. All this was very much on my mind as my daughter and I started out on our long trip.

About halfway to Chicago, in a desolate area of Illinois, my heart dropped as “*the thing which I greatly feared*” (Job 3:25) came upon me. The “hot light” glared at me from the dash as I pulled over to the side of the road.

It was a bitterly cold, windy October afternoon. We had left for Chicago directly after church, so my daughter and I were dressed in our Sunday clothes. I can still remember how cold I was in my heels and lightweight coat as I opened the hood of the car.

When I saw the “hot light,” I thought the radiator must need water. “Praise God!” I said to myself. “I have some water in a bottle in the car. I’ll just pour some in the radiator.”

As any man will tell you, a little knowledge and a woman with a car can be a dangerous combination. I opened what I thought was the radiator because it had a screw cap. It didn't look exactly like other radiators I had seen, but it was a new car, and I thought they had changed the design. I poured the water in with all the confidence of someone who doesn't know what she is doing. Relieved that I had taken care of things, I happily got back into the car and tried to start the engine again, but the "hot light" was still on.

Frankly, at this point, my spirits began to sag. But being basically optimistic by nature and confident in the care of my heavenly Father, I began to pray. At the same time, I tried to keep my mind off what could happen to a woman and a child stranded alone on the highway.

Eventually, a man and his young son stopped to help. As he looked under the hood to try to diagnose the problem, I explained how I had poured water into the "radiator." He then explained that I had poured water into the crank case—not the radiator.

I was devastated and sure I had ruined the engine in my brand new car.

The man said that it would be all right to drive for a few miles, even with the temperature gauge reading hot. He followed me to a service station a few miles ahead where a huge sign read, "Open Twenty-four Hours—Mechanic on Duty." Relief flooded me as I thanked God and thanked the man who had stopped to help. Feeling that he was leaving us in good hands, he continued on his way.

By this time, it was late afternoon, and my daughter and I were chilled to the bone. We headed for the warmth of the station only to discover that their heat was not working. Not only was the heat not working, but the mechanic was not working. In fact, there was no mechanic on duty at all. Furthermore, there was no mechanic

in the whole town! Not only was there no mechanic, but the station did not stay open twenty-four hours at all; they closed at six on Sundays!

I would like to report that, as a mighty woman of faith, I was unmoved by the circumstances. However, in truth, I was beginning to feel desperate. To make matters worse, the station attendants ignored us completely except to inform us that they would close soon.

I called my father in Chicago to let him know what had happened, but, of course, there was nothing he could do. I knew that Don wasn't home, because we had discussed his plans to take our oldest daughter skating that afternoon. Thankfully, I did know how to reach him. As I searched for the coins to make the toll call, I realized I had used up the last of my change in calling my father.

It is still hard for me to understand how uncaring the service station attendants were. When I took a bill and asked for change for the phone, they refused, saying they needed their change for their customers.

In my whole life, I don't believe I have ever felt so alone and so vulnerable. In tears, I called a neighbor collect and asked her to reach Don for me. More quickly than I dared to hope, the phone rang.

When I heard Don's voice, I felt as if I had gotten hold of John Wayne and all the U.S. Cavalry! Fifteen years of knowing him and knowing what kind of a man he was came flooding up inside me. I knew he would drop everything and come for us in a second. That sure knowledge and the memory of it on one of the worst days of my life has become a treasure I have stored in my heart over the years.

To this day, I am in awe of how much help he was—even over the telephone. He comforted me, consoled me, and knew just what to do.

Sometimes now when he does something that is not so wonderful, when he lets me down, as we all do to one another at times, I go to the treasure—to the accumulated wealth stored in my heart—and it sustains me. It sustains our love, and it sustains the precious heart of our marriage.

Memorized Moments

Another treasure I store in my heart about Don is a sweet, romantic gesture I have never forgotten. At one time, I sewed a great deal. One winter, I decided to make a winter coat for myself. I almost got cold feet when I saw the expensive price of the fabric. What if I made a mistake and ruined it? I would still have no winter coat, yet all my available funds would be depleted.

But Don encouraged me, so I began. What a project! I worked and worked on it. One day, as I was finally getting near the end, Don called from work and asked how the coat was coming. I told him that I was just putting in the hem. We talked for a little while and then hung up.

That evening when he came home from work, he handed me a beautiful, gift-wrapped package from Neiman Marcus. When I opened it, I found the most beautiful black nightgown I had ever seen.

He said, “That’s for wives who make their own winter coats.” This was so unexpected that tears came to my eyes. It made me feel so special. Don’s thoughtfulness on that occasion became a treasure I have stored in my heart, a precious memory I put away for future use.

When Don says something that is not so wonderful—and we all do at times—I go to the treasures stored in my heart, and they sustain me.

The apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:8:

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Storing treasures in your heart is not a natural tendency, but you can develop it with God's help. Take a few moments, and think back over your married life. You should find many treasures stored there.

Another way of expressing this vital principle from God's Word was contained in a popular song of a few years ago. It made mention of "memorizing moments that I'm fondest of." Later, the singer says that his "cup runneth over with love." Storing treasures will help keep your marital cup running over with love, too.

This is not just some fuzzy-headed ideal that Paul thought up; it is a vital part of a strong marriage! You see, your heart shows. One of the most foolish things I ever believed was that my husband couldn't sense my heart. I thought that if I acted a certain way, that would be enough. How wrong I was. A man senses a woman's heart.

I can talk with a man or woman for thirty minutes and get a good idea of what is filling his or her heart. If I can discern so much in a total stranger from a few moments of conversation, how much more can your marriage partner tell what is in your heart?

Out of the Abundance of the Heart

When a woman begins to store treasures and accumulate wealth in her heart, something amazing happens: her words change.

When you keep your heart full of good treasures, you don't have to watch your tongue. Jesus said, "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*" (Matthew 12:34). Words of encouragement and appreciation come forth when your heart is full of good thoughts and precious memories. Like the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, your tongue becomes "*the law of kindness*" (v. 26).

You can store good treasures in your heart, but the opposite is also true. Jesus said, "*An evil man [or woman] out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things*" (Matthew 12:35). You can also accumulate evil treasures in your heart by dwelling on your husband's shortcomings, on the times he has embarrassed you, on his physical flaws, or on some other area in which he may have a weakness.

You can get to the place where you are living contrary to the Scripture. Your thoughts take on the following pattern: "If there be any fault, if there be any criticism, if there have been any disappointments, think on these things."

You don't have to spend much time thinking on these negative things before you discover what they can do to harm your marriage.

When you keep an itemized list of another's shortcomings (evil treasures), you have to watch your tongue! You have to guard every word, but you still get into trouble because "*the tongue can no man [or woman] tame*" (James 3:8).

If you are having trouble with your tongue, look to your heart! When your heart is not right, something inside you has to bring forth something evil. Your heart controls your words.

The opposite is also true. When your heart is full of good treasures, it is hard not to express them. When I was a young woman, I remember "falling in love" many times. One of the hardest things for me was not to tell the young man how I felt. I longed to say, "I love you. I think you are so wonderful."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning didn't have to watch her tongue. Can anyone doubt what was in her heart as she wrote the beautiful *Sonnets from the Portuguese* to her husband-to-be, Robert Browning? She penned,

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach....

These words were written out of the abundance of her heart. It is interesting to note that during the period when most of her forty-four sonnets were written, Elizabeth's health dramatically improved! Just prior to her marriage, she was transformed from a semi-invalid to a vigorous woman.

Healing and restoration often result from a heart filled with good treasures.

Jesus said that out of the "*abundance of the heart*," the mouth speaks. *Abundance* doesn't mean that you aren't mad at him anymore. *Abundance* means having more than an adequate supply. It comes from storing treasures, from dwelling on "*whatsoever things are good*," and from "memorizing" moments that you're fondest of.

Outside Influences

I used to spend a lot of time with a group of friends whom I particularly enjoyed. But for a while, we couldn't seem to get together. Something would come up, or we would have conflicting plans. I began to sense God's hand in this, so I followed the leading in my spirit and backed off from seeing these women for a time.

After a number of months, we met for lunch again. We hadn't been together very long when I realized I was saying things that I didn't even believe! As the other women criticized their husbands,

I heartily joined in and began finding fault with Don. I was tearing down rather than building up. Suddenly, it became clear that the Lord did not want me to be involved in such destructive conversation.

That experience taught me to choose my friends more carefully. Now all my friends and I have one thing in common: we build up our husbands! After having lunch with these wise women, I can come home full of love and new appreciation for my mate.

Proverbs 14:1 tells us, *“Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”* I’ve often thought that this Scripture could be paraphrased to say, “A foolish woman plucketh it down with her mouth.”

Many people find it impossible to control their tongues because they start by trying to restrain their words. Jesus advised us to start with our hearts.

You can begin today to store treasures and to accumulate wealth in your heart regarding your husband. If your heart isn’t full of treasures, it doesn’t need to stay that way. It isn’t spilled milk; it’s just an empty cup!

Begin to memorize fond moments and store precious treasures, and you will quickly see the change it will make in your marriage. As Jesus promised, it will bring forth good things.

As you pray this prayer, let the Lord show you special incidents in your married life that you can store away.

Dear heavenly Father,

I want to have a heart filled with good treasures. Help me to be sensitive to the precious moments that pass through my life. Help me to dwell on the good things and to store them away for the future, so that my heart will run over with love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.