

A romantic couple in formal attire are kissing on a path in a forest. The trees are filled with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and green. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The couple is positioned on the left side of the path, which leads into the distance. The overall mood is intimate and serene.

# MARRIAGE WITHOUT REMORSE

RULES FOR THE ROAD

JIM ANDREWS

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# **MARRIAGE WITHOUT REMORSE:**

**RULES FOR THE ROAD**

Jim Andrews

Truth Encounters

Marriage Without Remorse: *Rules for the Road*

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ISBN 978-0-9891549-3-2

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Printed in the United States of America

## Dedication

To my son-in-law, Paul Grose, who is without doubt as fine a man as I have ever known and has been a husband to our daughter, Juli, like we have never seen. Godly, brilliant, humble with a patience beyond understanding, seldom on earth has one man given so much for so long to one woman under so many trying conditions for so little in return in the ordinary sense.

***Marriage Without Remorse: Rules For the Road***

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## **Marriage Without Remorse: *Rules for the Road*<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Perhaps you have heard that statistics show that Christian marriages these days are failing at approximately the same rate as non-Christian marriages. Given that I have hated statistics ever since my youth (due to being frequently overdosed by visiting missionaries), I will spare you a recitation. Suffice it to say, there are a number of skew factors in those sad statistics, not least among them is what passes for a “Christian” when these surveys are taken.

That said, far too many Christian marriages are troubled. Any pastor knows that. Something is going haywire somewhere and we need to address the topic if we want to build stronger family units. Part of the equation, I am convinced, is demonic attacks on the family. They are escalating and intensifying as the sun sets on our culture and the darkness thickens.

In a course on “Contemporary Society” I once taught in Bible college, I used as one of my texts a book by Os Guinness, entitled *Dust of Death*. In it Guinness offered such an apropos illustration, describing what used to happen in the evening on an African safari. They would build a huge bonfire in the middle of the camp, and the light would keep wild beasts at bay. But in the wee hours when the fire had pretty much burned itself out, one could look around the edges of the camp and see the eyes of curious beasts growing bolder as the light in the center diminished.

That is similar to what is happening in our once more deeply Christian-toned culture. America, like other

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<sup>1</sup> The “Rules” all begin with “Be. . .” When I refer to one’s “Be” game, I am talking about conformity to one or all of the Rules for the Road, each expressed as in “Be (this or that).”

countries, has always been in a state of spiritual darkness, but relatively speaking, in times past, the light at the center of our culture (in the form of dominant biblical assumptions) has been just intense enough, it seems, to thwart to some degree more aggressive demonic activity. Over time, these presuppositions have more and more given way under the advance of secularism and other hostile influences. With that light at the center dying down, the demonic is more active and less intimidated by the forces of the truth. Hence, the demonic encroaches inward from the edges of our culture, ready to pounce at every opportunity, stalking every marriage and every child within its savage reach. That is my theory, at least.

The only defenses are the common grace of God, that is not yet allowing things to be as bad as they might become, and the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10ff) deployed in our lives and in our homes. Unfortunately, vast numbers of professing Christians are not performing their due diligence, not ordering their personal lives and marriages after biblical principles, thus setting up themselves and their children as sacrificial lambs for the enemy.

It is pretty much as simple as that. We are in a battle for our very souls inside our homes. However, the problem is not that Satan is so overpowering; the greater problem is that we are so negligent in appropriating the truth in the contest.

Whether or not you are married, the content of this book I think you will find relevant. Anybody reading this book is either married, or hopes to be happily married one day, or maybe was once unhappily married and wondered what went wrong. Married or not, you will be in a position from time-to-time to advise or counsel someone who is having difficulty. Even if you don't need any of this counsel for yourself, you will come across those who will.

Secondly, it should become clear that the very same biblical principles that build solid marriages are, in many cases, the very same social principles that build better and more satisfying relationships generally. More importantly, they are the very social principles that Christ has taught us



to live by, married or not. Though I will be writing with marriages in my sights, the principles I will expound transcend marriage and bear upon other relationships.

I will guarantee you this: all the things I am talking about are the trip wires. By that I mean they tend to be marriage makers or marriage breakers. If both spouses follow this advice, your marriage will survive and thrive for the rest of your life. Ignore this advice and your marriage will suffer. It may not fail, but it will falter and be less satisfying and fulfilling than it could be.

I cannot assure you that your marriage will be ideal if *you* do what I prescribe. That is simply because, as mentioned above, it takes two people to “bring it,” as we say in the sports world. Sometimes one spouse will not participate or at least fully cooperate. That unfortunate circumstance does not necessarily nullify the value of the counsel I am about to impart. If you (alone) follow this guidance, your home will at least be less of a battle ground, and that is always helpful. Your domestic situation will become better ground instead of bitter ground. You see, even one person trying to do the right thing is better than two persons doing the wrong things.

## **Who Am I to Say?**

I am a great believer in the principle that wisdom is self-justifying and that one does not need a sterling résumé to validate it, even if it comes from Peter Rabbit. Still, most people in this expert-conditioned society are curious about the “authority” of anyone who proposes to offer help on any given topic. So in that spirit I will oblige.

For more than 50 years now, as of this writing, I have been a student of the Scriptures. I know pretty well what the Bible has to teach on this subject and what it doesn't. Though biblical direction about marriage is by no means exhaustive and most certainly provides us no blueprint, I will promise you that no marriage can fail if *two* people do what God's Word says.

In addition, I am the most fortunate beneficiary of two great parental models (of devout Christian spouses) who brought to our home their “Be” game. I know from the inside the shape and spirit of a truly Christian marriage. I don’t mean perfect; we will never see one of those. What I mean is a marriage in which the partners seriously love, respect and serve one another till death parts them.

Moreover, my wife and I have enjoyed 55 happy years together. In that time together, we have seen happy times, harsh times and heavy times. We have seen it all in our walk together with God. After all this time we still say, marriage is the best state to live in. What a wonderful institution of God is this marriage thing! But only if you treat it right. Otherwise, it can be a vestibule of Hell. In this book, I will open by way of illustration many windows into our own marital experiences.

In addition to all that, during my long years in church life and as a pastor I have seen the good, bad and the merely tolerable; I know why the best marriages are happy, fulfilling and long-enduring, and why the rest are not. I have watched a lot of people torpedo their marriages and in many instances I know why. The parties did not bring their “Be”<sup>2</sup> game.

Like most pastors, I have had the chore of counseling folk in dysfunctional marriages and have learned in the process that most of the unhappiness is over the same ol’ stupid errors. The “sick” relational conditions persist because one or both refuses to conform to some or all of what God’s Word teaches and/or what common sense would tell a three-year-old. People run to marital counselors to fix what they can fix right at home, if they would. They always want to fix their spouse, but seldom consider that they themselves may be part of the problem.

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<sup>2</sup> See Footnote 1 on page i

## A Tired Myth

This marriage business is not rocket science. We make it way too hard. When folks say (and one hears it a lot), “Marriage is hard!” I honestly can’t relate to that. I always have to ask what they mean, because Olsie and I have not found that to be true. Not at all. Sure, we have had our bad moments, we have exchanged harsh words at times (mostly from me), and been so angry with one another we could spit nails. We can so relate to that story, about when somebody at a marriage seminar asked one partner if she and Bill ever had a time in their marriage when they considered divorce and she responded, “Divorce? Oh, heavens no. Murder, yes.” Yeah, we’ve had those moments, but to us those sticky times seem like blips on an otherwise bright clear, HD screen.

Now at this point some reader is probably thinking, “Yeah, Jim, you and your wife must be pretty mellow folk.” Actually, no. The plain truth is I am far from that. I am a strong, natively intense, no-nonsense (oh, I have been known to have a little fun now and then), get with it, get ‘er done, and be quick about it model of a man, I have always said that I came into this world wired for divorce. I could polarize a love fest.

My wife is a dream, most of the time. She is not just a good woman, but a great one. And great people are great because they have great strengths, yet those strengths in some situations can be hard to deal with. Olsie, for example, can make me look like a wimp. Oh, she possesses a will that could face down Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar in the same room. Generally she’s a peach, but when that will kicks in, whoa! baby, hang onto your hat. Later in this book I will share one great story about that clash of wills, the worst fight we ever had in our marriage.

But, hey, the point is the two of us are over a half-century later still living together, still sleeping together, still loving it and wishing it never had to end. This wonderful marriage did not happen by accident. It did not survive and thrive because the two partners were just a couple of

easy-going kids with no sharp edges who luckily just happened to find each other. No way. Olsie and I are still truckin' because by the grace of God, we both were born again, we both look at life from God's point of view<sup>3</sup>. We both share His values, strive to walk in His ways, though we have often tripped or slipped out of line, and just try to conform in our relationships, especially our domestic relationships, to His wisdom. And it works. And it works beautifully despite the rubs along the way.

*No, marriage is not hard. It is the hard-headed individuals in it who foul it up.*

In our selfishness and stubbornness and general foolishness, we ignore God's Plan A. We do the stupidest things and then allow ourselves the luxury of being too proud, too inflexible and stiff-necked to rectify the wrong we do. The problem is not with the institution; the problem is with the individuals in it who persist in trying to be married on their own terms instead of God's. All it takes to mess up the model is one stubborn, selfish idiot, of which species there is no small supply.

By the way, you are seeing it already. I have said elsewhere that I don't always talk tender, but I do talk turkey. If you are not up for that, this would be a good point to find another marriage book.

Now, if by that "marriage is hard" mantra, couples simply mean that one has to make painful sacrifices, sometimes even great personal sacrifices, to honor and fulfill one's marriage vows, that is all true. Certainly there will be those situations where one will say, "Boy, when we stood at the altar and said our 'I dos', I didn't know I was signing up for this." Things happen not of our own making. Often those idyllic dreams of marriage to the love of our life are shattered by unwelcome intruders (like disease, death, poverty, endless caretaking, etc.)

Yes, promising careers may have to be sacrificed or put on hold. Or, one may wind up being a caretaker of a

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<sup>3</sup> I start and end with the premise that the Scriptural point of view is the divine point of view. If one wants to argue with that, he has the freedom to do so and also to bear the consequences.

sick or injured mate rather than one of life's big playmakers. One may be exposed to indigence or bankruptcy because the family breadwinner, due to some unforeseen circumstance, is unable to provide adequately for his family. Then too, one partner in a marriage may bring into the relationship some severe, but previously-unknown or unmanifested psychological disorder that makes living with him/her at times a testing experience, to say the least.

To the extent that those kinds of things are what is meant by the "marriage is hard" complaint, that is understandable. But even in those cases, we know very personally, marriage can survive and thrive in the face of the wickedest challenges, if we will just follow the rules for the road and bring our "Be" game.

Yet where love is, affection lightens every burden. All this is really no different than our relationship with Christ. For example, one might also say walking with Christ is hard, for there is hardness to be endured in the pathway of faith. No question. Yet how many of us are rushing out the door to divorce the Lord Jesus Christ? Who of us would want to return to the old life where we had nothing to eat but the devil's husks and no higher purpose in our lives but slopping the devil's hogs and sowing to the flesh which reaps corruption and death? Who wants to trade places with the unbeliever?

The fact is, there is *some* pain that somehow feels *good* because of love, some sacrifices that one readily makes because of affection. That is why Jesus said,

"Come unto Me, you that are burdened and heavy laden. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light [even if it is heavy]" [brackets mine] (Matthew 11:28-30).

So then our marriages should resemble our marriage to Christ. Formidable burdens, yes, but love makes them lighter than they seem from the outside. Love and joy are a kind of adrenaline that mocks the heaviest loads. The bottom line is, marriage may require much of us, but it

doesn't have to be a big pain. If both you and your partner follow the rules for the road, your marriage can be, should be and will prove to be the most beautiful state to live in, a fulfilling bond and a thing of "beauty that is a joy forever" and the envy of all who do not treat the institution right or ignore those rules for the road.

## Chapter One

### Rules for the Road: *Be a Servant*

*“ . . . be subject to one another in the fear [reverence] of Christ” [brackets mine] (Ephesians 5:21).*

**I**n my pastoral life counseling has been both exhilarating and exasperating---exhilarating when people have “ears to hear,” actually apply the wisdom you have shared with them, and later say, “Thank you, pastor! That’s exactly the advice I (we) needed,” and exasperating when couples blow off remedies that could have healed their homes.

Frankly, most dysfunctional marriages I have encountered could be put back in order pronto if only the couples would just take this one piece of biblical advice: **Be a servant!**

That is the first rule for the marital road. Start there and the rest of this book may be unnecessary, for this one relational principle covers, like love, a multitude of marital sins.

That spirit, which is a choice by the way, is God’s direction for all our relationships in the body of Christ and preeminently in the home. Just because the man may be God’s designated head of the family does not mean by any stretch that he is exempted from the obligation to act as a servant in that domestic order. God did not anoint him to selfishly dominate or tyrannize his wife, but, like Christ, to be a servant to her. And likewise, the wife does not exist to manipulate her husband or to seek her own fulfillment, but, as in the beginning, to be a helper or a servant to her Adam in all his legitimate needs and desires.

Why is that so hard? As I suggested above, “getting it” would fix most distressed marriages in a New York minute. What is so hard about a husband dedicating himself to pleasing his wife, and a wife adopting her husband as her marital mission (after God, of course)? How can the wheels come off a marriage if each partner seeks to outdo the other one in love?

In my lifetime I have seen a lot of mutually fulfilling marriages. Though I cannot remember all I have ever seen, of those that come to mind, they all have this attribute, to one degree or another.

But this “servant” prescription is not very sexy. The fact that people do not readily resonate with that word “servant,” in fact may even blanch and balk at it, tells a story about the degree to which human pride acts as a deterrent to marital bliss and fulfillment. The truth is, if you want your marriage not only to survive, but to thrive, then you and your partner must learn what it means in marriage to be mutual servants. You will *never* see a miserable marriage where *both* partners serve one another. Never!

But hear this: to be a servant is not to be servile nor slavish. These are two different spirits altogether. The servile spirit is to conform to another’s will out of intimidation or in a weak, fawning way. The slave spirit is grudging consent to conform to the will of another.

In marriage what shape does serving one another take?

### **A true servant is unselfish, not self-centered.**

To be a servant is to imitate Christ, joyfully looking out for the best interest of another (in light of God’s Word), and sacrificing my own selfish desires, where necessary, in order to fulfill the needs of my wife, my children or whoever, all for Christ’s sake.

It’s called “putting others first.” Original, huh? When two people love each other (why else would they get married?), one would think *that* instinct would be as natural as breathing. But, no, when you get down to brass tacks,



when you get past all the excuses, the thing that typically blows marriages apart is pure and simple selfishness on the part of one or both spouses.

If we are going to get on with our marriages, we have to get over that. All the high-priced counseling in the world will accomplish little more than put Band-Aids on symptoms if that source is not extirpated.

As followers of Christ, our Lord is our arch-example of the spirit of serving. For, when speaking to His disciples who had been jockeying for the top spot in the “food chain” in His coming kingdom (Mark 9:34), just as couples in their pride of gender sometimes jockey for control in their homes, Jesus rebuked their egotism. Later, after a similar incident, he added,

“Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man [speaking of Himself] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-44).

This example of our Lord is what we believers, as those whom He redeemed with His blood, are morally obliged to emulate in all venues of life, and most especially in our marriages. For “He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:15). Living for Him starts with being a servant to those nearest and dearest to us, our families.

What does that unselfishness of a true servant look like in a marriage?

**First of all, a true servant delights to please the other more than himself.**

Is that too idealistic? Absolutely not.

Look, I, for example, am no wuss. But I just flat-out like to please Olsie. Now I have my moments to be sure

when I am kind of out of sorts or maybe ticked off about something. We are all fallen flesh, and at times the flesh rears its head and a brouhaha is on. In those cases I am far more often at fault than she. Yet even with those lapses, I can honestly say (and I speak for both of us), that the norm for us is to intentionally please the other. Despite all the flaws in my character that would militate ordinarily against a solid marriage, that desire and purpose is absolutely redemptive martially.

Frankly, I know it's beginning to sound like the proverbial broken record, but I cannot for the life of me figure out why *Christian* couples entering into marriage can't get on that page. Nor can I comprehend why, when they discover they aren't on that page, they don't say, "Oops, we are blowing it here. Let's take a step back, confess our selfishness to one another (at least I will confess mine) and get this relationship on proper Christian ground." This is not brain surgery, folks.

So far as I can see, the single greatest obstacle to marital retrenchment on that score is simply pride---raw, stubborn pride. "I'll have this marriage on my selfish terms or bust." And "bust" is usually the outcome. And then we go whining around to all within earshot complaining that "marriage is so hard!" No, the real problem is, I say again, we're so hard-headed.

*Friends, when our marriage is insolvent, it's typically not because the price is too high; generally it's because, even though we have ample funds, we refuse to pay the "utility bills." No wonder the "lights go out" and the "water gets cut off."*

## **Secondly, a true servant puts the welfare of his spouse above his own.**

Now, I fully realize these points I'm making are not entirely discrete; they overlap somewhat. However they are nuances of the whole that deserve separate mention, I think.

In these marital scenarios, you will notice that I tend to frame my illustrations more often on the male side. That is because I am a man, and also, because it is my experience that, more often than not, the males in these marital dramas tend to contribute most to the delinquency of the domestic order. I know however there are plenty of exceptions.

One time a fellow in my church brought me a book written by some counselor who took the position that, if there was a problem marriage, it was uniformly the man's fault. Maybe my restatement of his thesis is not sufficiently nuanced to be totally fair to the author, but even so, his premise was extreme, in my view. That said, I do find in my personal experience that, much of the time what is dysfunctional in the home starts with poor leadership on the part of the male partner and creates crises and tensions that could be largely remedied if the husband would just get his act together. Be a servant, Jack!

That bias acknowledged, I have seen women also who could mess up any marriage in a heartbeat. So to the ladies I say, in what you read here, no matter from what point of view things are framed, if the shoe fits, wear it.

Sometimes I don't know where men get off. Here's a wife, "Mary Doe," maybe she works outside the home, or maybe she is a virtual prisoner at home while her hubby "John" is earning a living, but either way, when he walks in the door, she's as tired and run down as he is by the end of the day's rat race, maybe more so. But ol' John expects her to heave to, prepare his dinner, while he, at his multi-tasking best, clicks on the evening news, reads the paper and texts his friends, etc. Then like a pig, he devours his meal, never says, "Thank you dear," then changes his clothes and heads out to run or to work out, leaving Mom to contend with the kids and clean up the dishes.

That is not being a servant; that is being a jerk. Did John ever consider that Mary is his partner in this domestic enterprise, not his betrothed slave . . . that just maybe *she* needs somebody to share the load with her, that she is probably as wiped out as he is, possibly even more so if she

has been chasing little “ankle-biters” all day? Does he ever consider that maybe he should stay home, tend the kids and give her some time outside the asylum, rather than go play with the boys? Grow up, boy!

A guy gets a big bonus (maybe not so much these days!), and the first thing Clod rushes out to do is buy himself a big plaything of some kind. Did it ever occur to him to come home and say, “Dear, I got my bonus today. Bigger than expected. Tell me, hon, what do you think we ought to do with it? Anything you need? I can always think of things I want, but you and the kids come first.” Unfortunately it seems never to occur to half the male population to think like that. No wonder so many marriages are relational marathons to endure rather than a little taste of heaven to enjoy (which, believe it or not, they can be).

Hard to hate a man in the latter mode. Sometimes, sure, you may want to kick him where the sun never shines, but, you know what, a spirit like that can flush out a lot of bad air.

This me-first attitude is so common. To persist in it is begging for marital discontent. And for a husband, who is getting flak for that lack of consideration of his wife’s needs, to whine, “I can’t understand women” is not far from admitting a room-temperature IQ. Why is it so counter-intuitive with so many couples to daily survey the domestic landscape and assess the needs of their mates and step up and help as much as possible?

Put on that servant hat and you will be amazed how the sun will shine again in your marriage. You fell in love once. I’ll bet a dollar to a donut that didn’t happen because you related to one another back then the same way you have become accustomed to relating now. Right? Sometimes, to get to where you want to go, you have to go back to where and how you started. Somewhere along the line you forgot to “dance with who brung ya,” as the old saying goes.

Let me illustrate this principle from our marriage. I cannot begin to tell you how many exhausting burdens my wife carries every day. If she were a pack animal, she’d be

all broken down by now. (Read my book, *Polishing God's Monuments: Pillars of Hope for Punishing Times*). The last thing in this world Olsie needs is one more weight on her long-suffering shoulders. Yet she is constantly surveilling me and my ministry and doing anything and everything she possibly can to make things easier for me to function. Though I cannot match her, I try, as she will tell you, to reciprocate.

Even so, we are flesh, the two us. There are frictions at times, sharp words and testiness (mostly from my side of the fence). Were it not for that grace---a servant spirit in our marriage (most of the time), a fundamental putting aside of selfishness---our marriage would have more holes than Swiss cheese. So there's hope for any of you to get it together, if you will rededicate yourselves to serving one another for Christ's sake.

Trust me, I'm no angel, pastor or not. Sometimes I can be a pill even to myself. But I'll tell you something: all that investment builds a lot of value into our marital stocks. That mutual habit of thinking of the other first, so that you have one another's back, well, that goes a long way in the marital accounting game---many losses get written off.

### **Thirdly, a true servant bites his tongue rather than his spouse.**

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt [a preservative rather than a corrosive] so that you may know how you should respond to each person” [brackets mine] (Colossians 4:6).

The prepositional phrase “with grace” means with constructive, edifying intent.

In World War II, with the risk of enemy spies infiltrating the country and its infrastructure, there was a saying, “Loose lips sink ships.” They also sink marriages and can create almost irreparable wounds.

A true servant makes a habit of building his (her) spouse up, not tearing down with an acerbic tongue. Women tend to be more verbal than men. They can slice and dice their men with sharp words at a moment's notice and leave them for dead. Men can do the same, but in this particular vice women excel. And then they wonder why their husbands go passive-aggressive on them! A smart mouth will always get you in trouble in any venue.

I think couples have no idea how many "glass walls" their harsh and biting words build up between them. By glass walls, I mean those unseen, but felt barriers that have distorted healthy communication between them and "frozen the sheets" in their marriages. More about this in a later chapter. Tongues that should be instruments of service become weapons of marital destruction, as we in heat, spray words around like gangsters in the 'hood, wildly firing off rounds at rivals and leaving behind trails of emotional blood.

The Proverbs warn again and again about the social and personal mayhem that results from careless tongues.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (15:1).

"There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (12:18).

"He who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles" (21:23).

"Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (29:20).

Yet we never seem to learn. How dumb do we have to be, to go on and on in the same reckless patterns, then wondering why we can't get a different result.

James in his NT epistle (3:5-6) is right to the point:

". . . the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a

fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life [a part of which, I add, is marriage], and is set on fire by hell” [brackets mine].

Without intending to be profane, I can tell you (in the spirit of James’ teaching) that angry tongues make a “hell” of a difference in too many homes. How can we expect heaven in the home, when we allow our tongues to run off at the mouth like verbal pyromaniacs set on fire by hell itself? Again, you can squander all your means running from marital counselor to marital counselor, but until you learn to use your tongue to build up one another instead of burning up one another, you may as well flush your hard-earned cash down the toilet.

The Apostle Paul was not speaking of marriages, but the same principle applies, when he told the Galatian believers, “If you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another” (5:15). Many a marriage is suffering because instead of being servants to one another by means of edifying words, couples persist, like piranhas, in biting one another to death with sharp words. In that mode, it is possible that a couple will stay married, but it is unlikely they will ever stay happy.

What’s the cure? Well, with all due respect to the counseling industry, this is an easy fix. It is? Yes. Just STOP IT!

“But Jim, it’s not that easy,” someone will complain. But, yes, it is. That is, if you see and hate the consequences. Strong incentive is all you need to shut the trap. And if saving your marriage, and not just saving it, but actually reviving it and renewing that original happiness is any motivation, then you should have all the incentive you ever need to bridle that mean mouth.

Ever had a contemptible boss whom neither you nor anyone else could stand . . . the kind who was harsh and cussed you out and demeaned you in front of others, the kind you would like to have two choice minutes alone

with in a dark alley when he didn't know who hit him? (We are speaking very Christianly here, of course, but you know what I mean.) How did you (and most others) manage to hold your verbal fire in that situation?

Maybe it wasn't easy, but the stakes were too high to risk lobbing verbal grenades at him, weren't they? Well, it's bad to lose a job, for sure, but the long-term consequences of a bombed-out home, or a dissolved one, are usually worse than losing a job over a conflict with a nasty boss.

I'm just saying, let's not make this serving one another with the tongue something harder than it is. Oh, you may actually desire to control that rapier of a tongue. Breaking news, folks. *Desire to* won't cut it; you need to *intend to*. Winning at anything begins with *intending to*, not just desiring to. All kinds of people desire to succeed at this or that, but those who cut it are nearly always those who *intend to*.

#### **Fourthly, a true servant, if he must criticize, must be helpful, not hurtful.**

All of us, if we possess a modicum of emotional maturity, can benefit from criticism. Flawed we all are. It is important to have someone in our lives, especially a wife or husband, to whom we give permission to point out the cracks in our walls. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 27:6a).

What none of us welcome, especially from those near and dear to us, is stabbing criticism offered in a form and spirit that is more hurtful than helpful. Telling a wife that she is fat or a husband that he is a slob, as true as those opinions may be, is likely to cause more resentment than resolution to get fit. Better for them to remain unfit than unleash hissy fits that will tip the marital water, if those are the alternatives.

I for one (and I know I have a lot of company) do not rejoice in criticism. But when it is constructively offered by my wife (or anyone I trust), though I may initially



get a little defensive, when the dust settles I take it seriously. But carping criticism stings and hardly ever, at least in my case, produces the wanted effect, even if it is valid.

A servant spirit will try to frame one's criticism constructively, not destructively; it will be calculating as to the proper time and place and measured to the personality.

Now, these things are not like precise chemical equations. Sometimes, as well intentioned as we are, the mix is not quite right and we get some reaction. Nobody's perfect in these matters and you shouldn't fault yourself if you miscalculate or mis-measure at times. The point is, if we practice a little self-discipline and proceed regularly with good intentions, we will get better at it, and over time it will be easier for our spouse to forgive when our "formula" falls short. And let me emphasize: always pray for wisdom about these high-risk, high-reward situations---not just about what to say, but how to say it.

But what about those men and women who are so deeply insecure that one cannot criticize them in any manner without tipping their bucket? Unfortunately I have no pat answer for such emotionally-damaged folk.

But before you throw up your hands and excuse yourself for bailing on an all-too-touchy spouse, remember that before God, you signed up for this guy or gal. Emotional insecurity, especially of this type, does not require great discernment to spot. If you signed up for that ever-so-sensitive mate, then, as I said before, "dance with who brung ya." Don't keep complaining when criticism of any sort is testily rebuffed. Better to just learn to back off rather than to blow it up, no matter how much the spouse needs to know that certain habits or behaviors don't cut it.

It is what it is, and if any-and-all criticism is received as hurtful, though not intended as such, you are dealing with an emotional cripple; treat that partner patiently like you would a physically-handicapped person. That's not easy, to be sure, but the fallout will not be nearly so damaging long-term as a constant battling and blow-back between husband and wife, and collateral damage to

the kids. All this is to say, a true servant tries to speak in measured words, not in a mean spirit.

### **Fifthly, a true servant will do the dirty work.**

This is just another way of saying that a true servant will wash feet, i.e. do humble work. Our Lord Jesus did to His disciples to set an example for us, as recounted in John 13. If our Lord could humble himself to wash His disciples' feet when He was their Master, how can I refuse to wash my wife's feet or she mine? How can I explain such pride to Christ?

One of my brothers was at a conference in England when John R.W. Stott, the famed British scholar and preacher, was speaking there. Despite Stott's honored status at that event, my brother recalled in amazement that the speaker himself took part in washing dishes for the conferees.

Translated domestically, for a husband, that "dirty work" may be changing diapers, getting up in the middle of the night to care for the unhappy baby to give mom rest, washing dishes, making the beds, carrying out the garbage, or keeping the kids so mom can get a break.

### **Sixthly, a true servant will do the hard work.**

My youngest daughter, Juli, has been gravely ill since she graduated from Wheaton College in 1987. The incredible story of Juli and her husband, Paul, is related in my aforementioned book, *Polishing God's Monuments*. If ever there was a servant-husband, Paul Grose is a prime example. As bright as Paul is, he has sacrificed his whole career to take care of Juli. And I don't mean just to be home with her at all times, but also to suffer extreme conditions and endure humiliation in the process. He knows the meaning of hard work.

To sum up this chapter, being a servant is not being a wuss or a wimp. A servant leader is not a servile leader. The head of the house assumes responsibility for the well-

being of everyone in the home and will make whatever sacrifices are necessary to secure it. He looks out for them more than he looks out for himself. The head of the house ought always to be a servant in the house.

What does a servant look like “on Monday morning”? Being a servant is thinking about what she needs before thinking about what you need, thinking about what would please her before thinking about what pleases you, thinking about what would help her before thinking about what would help you; it is asking what she would prefer rather than telling her what you have decided.

Being a servant is attending to her needs as queen instead of demanding that she attend to yours as king. Being a servant is just knocking yourself out to be there for her. It is going the extra mile to share the load and help with the dirty work. It is foregoing manly pleasures and pursuits when her needs require your presence. It is putting her ahead of everyone and everything in your life except Christ, your ultimate Master.

Those kinds of mutual servants do not grow apart; they always grow together. They are more than lovers; they become the best and most intimate of friends.

Sometime back I was talking with a member of our church whom all would agree is a “man’s man.” From where I sit, it would appear to me that he and his wife have this mutual grace---they serve one another. I forget the context, but he told me that as much as he enjoyed the company of male friends, if he was going to take a week or weekend and get away, there was no one whose company he would more prefer to spend his time with than his wife. Such is the bond that develops when two people serve one another.

But I can hear this question, “Jim, what if one partner refuses to bring his (her) ‘Be’ game? Is there any incentive to be a servant to my mate if my spouse will not reciprocate?”

Well, that very question, while understandable from a purely human standpoint, reveals that one has not yet fully entered into what it means to be a disciple of Jesus

Christ. If one motive for bringing our “Be” game is the promise of a better and more fulfilling marital relationship, at the end of the day, that is not our primary motive for being a servant. Our chief incentive is to please Christ by emulating Him who came into the world not to be served, but as He said, to serve, and preeminently in that, to give His life as a ransom for us.

Now it is *our* turn to serve others, starting with that “turkey” we may call our “spouse.” The Lord Jesus set the standard for us. We thank Him for what He did for us by emulating Him, beginning in the home. Our spouse may or may not reciprocate. But we don’t do it for him (her) primarily, not even for personal happiness primarily, but to thank and serve Christ above all. And if we do that, we just may find one day along the way, our spouse starting to follow suit.

But even if not, we still do it for Christ’s sake. And if just one spouse chooses to bring his or her “Be” game, that home will be less of a battleground than it would be otherwise. It will be far less toxic and much more secure for the children.

However, you may discover to your delight that if you set the pace, your spouse may soon get in line and reciprocate. Somebody has to take the lead in practicing Christian virtue. But if not, one-sided grace may be enough to keep the home from being a constant war zone. It has to be better even if just one decides to be a servant. No one is ever poorer for being a disciple, no matter what.

My friends, you would be amazed how many marriages could be transformed in a month (or less), how much joy could be restored, how much love would be rekindled, if couples would just start the healing right here with the first rule for the road---be a servant.

At last you would find marriage without remorse.

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**M**arriage does not have to be a bummer. There is nothing wrong with the divine institution; there is often much wrong with our execution. Marriage without remorse is not an accident. More often than not, it is our persistent foolishness and our sins that turn what God intends for a blessing into a chronic burden. Follow the rules for the road and marriage can be a taste of heaven on earth. As long as we keep freelancing it and repeating the same old killer mistakes, it is no wonder that couples throw up their hands and whine, "Marriage is so hard!" No, the author contends, it is not the divine institution that is so hard; it is the hard-headed individuals in it who give it a bad rap.

Still, the author is realistic. He acknowledges a plethora of human imperfections and foibles that can threaten peace and harmony in the home, the inevitable bumps in the relational road, and the likelihood that any couple will face jarring challenges beyond their control that at times can try the soul.

However, he claims, if we are committed enough to the marriage and wise enough not to go "off-road," but doggedly follow the rules for the road, the marriage, whatever the obstacles, will flourish and prove failsafe. His premise is that the closer two people draw to God in their personal lives, the closer they will grow to one another in their home life. That sacred center is a time-tested anchor.

And what about those marriages already in trouble? They can be salvaged if *both* partners will re-set and resolutely adhere to the rules for the road. With mutual commitment, i.e. both spouses going all-in, marital harmony and happiness can be restored, though not on the cheap and probably not overnight. For those spouses whose efforts to sustain their marriages are largely and sadly one-sided projects, the author offers encouragement and coping advice.

Jim Andrews has been in parts a pastor and an academic over his 50 years of ministry. Despite some mind-bending adversities, he and his wife, Olsie, have been happily married for 55 years (and counting). The Andrews have two married daughters and two grandchildren, all walking with God. Since 1990 Jim has led Lake Bible Church in Lake Oswego, Oregon and authored several other books.

ISBN 970-0-9891549-3-2