

## Your Marriage and Your Love Life Will Never Be the Same If... You Do the Homework Exercises

(Instructions for getting the most results from the *Marriage: A Taste of Heaven* series)

Patsy Rae Dawson

About ten years after I'd taught the first *Marriage: A Taste of Heaven* classes at a congregation in Seattle, Washington, we moved back to the area from Texas. Soon afterward, I spoke at a ladies' conference at one of the largest congregations there. As we broke for lunch, a woman, I'll call Judy, introduced herself.

Finally, I met the woman who had written me several months after those first classes about the effect the lessons had made in her life and marriage. Judy asked if she could visit with me over lunch. I was meeting with some other ladies and invited her to join us.

Eight of us sat at a round table. All the other ladies had attended the first seminar and this was our first chance to reconnect. They had been part of a group of women from all over Seattle who filled the auditorium to help me test the material before publishing the first *Marriage: A Taste of Heaven* book, *God's People Appreciate Marriage*.

After we ordered, Judy couldn't keep quiet. She rehearsed for the other women and me much of what she'd written years earlier:

Dear Patsy,

A preacher gave me a copy of the tapes of the lessons you gave there. [This was the seminar the other women had attended.] I put them on cassettes. I want you to know how much I have enjoyed them! Along with some personal counseling from the preacher, the instructions saved my marriage, my sanity, my children, and maybe my life and soul as I had considered ending it. I'm sure that sounds a little dramatic, but to me, at least, it's a reality.

I learned so much about being an individual—a woman and person responsible for my own soul. I tried as hard as I could before, and I was faithful in my study and attendance—yet something was missing! Before, I never thought of the Bible and God talking to me as a woman, for I felt everything was unisex or something—that I was an “it,” not a woman. This upset me and frustrated me because I knew I had a lot of influence. I felt like something drastic was missing somewhere.

I also felt frustrated that somehow my brain was withering which probably sounds crazy. I did study my Bible, but I didn't know what to do with it. As a woman, I felt useless. Yet it was so important to me.

My children were unhappy and grouchy, too. My marriage was miserable, although we, mostly I, tried to hide it. My husband is a big, sweet, grouchy, yet happy, completely devoted honest Christian who drove me crazy (I thought).

I finally wound up with some form of breakdown in the hospital. There were some other difficult pressures, but the personal insecurities and doubts and fears were crumbling from inside. The doctors had me taking four tranquilizers a day plus twelve antidepressants a day plus another pill to up their effectiveness!

I have a friend who was at least as unhappy as I was or worse. I shared your tapes with her and several other women in a home class. After a while she said, “You know, I've fallen in love with my husband and do you know what caused it? The tapes!” They had hated each other and had filed for divorce twice, I think. Yet they were both Christians—sincere, faithful ones. Now they are really happy, now that she knows how to be happy. Many times I stayed up and tried to talk her into not leaving him. Once when she did, I went and got her and took her back home before he found out. But I didn't know how to help her, except for her not to leave him.

It seems to me, most Christians have been fighting doctrinal disagreements or the social

trends in the church world, which all need to be done; but the home has been neglected. Many older women complain they would teach the young women, but we won't listen. Many of these women are wonderful, sweet women, but the young women look at them and know they don't enjoy the kind of marriage they want.

In fact, I can look back in my own life and see where my not being submissive has caused many problems. We all go around and pretend we don't have any problems, but inwardly we are killing ourselves being so lonely and wanting help so badly. I am looking forward so much to the book.

Judy

The other women sat spellbound. She slowly looked each of them in the eye. Then she looked at me and quietly continued. "I treasure deeply the things I learned from you. My husband and I have had many loving, joyful moments since I first started studying your lessons. We thank and praise God every day for the blessings of a happy home. That's why we adopted two children in addition to our own – we couldn't *contain so much happiness inside the walls of our lives.*"

I assured her, "You learned these lessons from God.... I was just a vehicle he used. His wonderful word changed you and your home. Truly, God loves men and women! It thrills my heart to hear how love is bursting forth from your life."

Then Judy said, "I can't stay any longer. I just had to meet you and tell you how much these lessons have meant to me. May God bless you in your work." And she was gone.

Now the women sat in stunned silence. One of them was Margaret, a long-time personal friend. She was one of the first ones with whom I'd shared what I was learning when I began studying marriage and the Bible. She had peppered me with questions and encouraged me to keep studying. She had eagerly bought the book.

Margaret turned to me and asked, "Patsy, why did Judy get such dramatic results when she had such major problems? We have little problems in comparison.... But we haven't gotten nearly the results she did.... Why is that?"

"Did you do the homework?"

Margaret hung her head, "No."

I remembered a private conversation when she and her husband spent a weekend in our home. While we washed the evening dishes, I excitedly shared what I had learned since we had moved across the state several years earlier. Margaret argued and disagreed with me on nearly every point. When we finally put the last dish away, we sat down at the table and opened our Bibles. Then I presented the same material we'd just talked about, only now we read the scriptures. It was no longer my opinion and Margaret embraced the principles because she could read them for herself.

I looked at the others as they all shook their heads indicating they had skipped the homework, too. I explained, "Anybody can listen in a class or read a book and give either mental assent or dissent. Yet mentally agreeing or disagreeing isn't the same as understanding. Opinions formed from merely listening to or reading material are often fuzzy and quickly forgotten. I've observed many times, the ones who get the results are the ones who do the homework...put the mental effort into making changes from the inside out."

"You know," I continued. "I didn't design the homework as busy work. Most of the exercises are ones I did for myself when I started trying to sort things out. They helped me learn by forcing me to meditate on the scriptures. I haven't memorized a single verse—doing the homework has made many of them a permanent part of me. That's why I emphasize the homework. Doing the pencil work crystalized key points for me."

"Boy," Margaret replied. "Listening to Judy tell how studying transformed her life makes me want to go back through the material and do it right." The others nodded in agreement.

"Okay," I said, "start a class. Lots of women have written that they've conducted neighborhood classes with everyone sitting around the kitchen table...just like Judy did. A class will keep all of you accountable to each other. When you're not in a class, it's too easy to keep reading and skip the

homework.”

I paused, then continued, “I can’t emphasize the importance of doing the homework enough.” I looked at my watch, “Wow! Look at the time! We need to get back for the afternoon sessions.”

Teaching these lessons for over 40 years, I’ve observed many times how stewing over questions and projects transforms cloudy concepts into concrete convictions. Thus, to aid Bible students in reaping the most from these lessons, thinking exercises are given at the end of each chapter for students who are willing to toil for wisdom and happiness—to work at making their marriages the best they can be.

These projects not only help produce definite changes in the students’ lives, they also build self-confidence and self-respect. They assist the students in maintaining a positive outlook by focusing on matters they can change. This discourages blaming the spouse for the marriages’ faults, which is a major cause of depression. The exercises address real problems. Many students claim they’ve learned how to study other Bible subjects through doing the exercises. Most important, doing the exercises increases a person’s faith and love for God.

With the exception of the personal and goal-achieving exercises, all homework should be turned in to the teacher. This helps class leaders determine their effectiveness and provides accountability for the students. This, in turn, develops better understanding. Doing the exercises can make the difference between success or failure. Sharing the less private ideas in class on how to apply the lessons motivates the class to work harder.

### Special Exercises for Couples

During the writing of *God’s People Make the Best Lovers*, about a dozen proofreaders, both male and female, went through the material and made comments. They often insisted I teach on sensitive topics stating, “People need to hear about this from a Christian.” In considering their suggestions, my husband and I spent many hours in his office talking about the scriptures and how they apply to the sexual relationship. We hashed over sexual activities and attitudes we had never talked about before with each other. When the volume was finished, we realized we had each greatly profited from this non-personal, but detailed discussion of God’s teaching about married lovemaking.

I often related our experience to other couples who asked for help. I recommended they do the individual exercises separately and then go over their answers together. I emphasized their discussion was for learning the fine points of God’s regulations – not a license to spotlight what the other did wrong. While past wrongs often need to be discussed, worked out, and forgiveness sought, the couple must first fully understand God’s plan before they will know how to solve their personal problems.

Studying together this way frequently proved to be very effective in healing the pain of previous sexual hurts for both the husbands and the wives. This method even helped restore love and trust in marriages damaged by adultery. All couples, whether they experience adjustment problems or not, can benefit from discussing God’s word together.

### First: Cast the Beam Out of Your Own Eye

In several cases, one of the marriage partners couldn’t resist using their joint study time to accuse the other of misdeeds. In every instance, the spouse who was being browbeaten soon lost interest in studying together. Keep in mind, until we fully understand God’s teaching regarding marriage and our own role, we can’t see clearly enough to reform our mate:

*Matthew 7:5: “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”*

The abuse of this principle required me to make a new rule:

*You cannot use the study time to discuss anything your mate does wrong. You can only talk about what YOU do wrong. For example, you can say something like, “I realize I’ve been doing...and I now*

*know I should not do that. Will you please forgive me?"*

## Let Your Mate Work on His or Her Own Beam

I teach about holding the other accountable in my classes *Challenges in Marriage: What to Do When Sin Inhibits Love*. If the mate throws a temper tantrum, commits adultery, or gets drunk...whatever it is, don't be an enabler and make excuses for him or her. Let the spouse accept responsibility for his or her own actions. If you go around smoothing things over between the children, neighbors, in-laws, etc., or stay in denial yourself about the seriousness of the situation, it never allows your mate to suffer the full consequences of his or her actions. Consequences help motivate people to make real changes.

The husband of one of the women who proofread *God's People Make the Best Lovers* verbally abused her and their children. They had been married for twenty-some years. This woman would talk to my husband and me about the situation, wondering what she should do. She said, "It's harming the children and I'm emotionally exhausted from trying to deal with the problem."

My husband repeatedly told her, "If he poops in his mess kit, let him clean it up. You quit going around and trying to patch things up for him. Let him suffer the consequences of his actions."

Not too long after this, the husband and wife were at a school function when a neighbor kid began to pick on their child. This husband, who was a Christian, began to browbeat the neighbor child in a very loud voice. He said things like, "I ought to stomp your head in!"

The wife tried to get her husband out of the building because the principle and boy's mother were hearing all this. She was afraid he would get arrested. He immediately turned on his wife, "You're never on my side! You're always on the other person's side!" and he began to verbally abuse her.

She finally got him out of the school and took him home. She told him, "I'm going to go get the preacher," as she stormed out the door.

When she got to the building, we were in a special committee meeting, but she came in and took my husband out to the hall. My husband told her, "I'm sorry, but I can't go over there tonight because this meeting is too important. I need to be here. Tell him I will come see him tomorrow morning."

The next morning this husband called my husband and said, "I know what I did was wrong and I shouldn't have done it. You don't need to come talk to me."

My husband said, "I'm going to come talk to you anyway," and he did.

The husband went forward at the next worship service and confessed sin since what he had done had been done publicly. But it wasn't over yet. He still had some consequences to suffer. The mother of the boy called a lawyer. The lawyer threatened to sue him. For several weeks he didn't know if he was going to be sued or if he was going to jail. His wife stepped back and let him sweat it out all by himself as he suffered the consequences. As a result, he began to come face to face with the seriousness of his problems.

Prior to this happening, I was working on writing *God's People Make the Best Lovers*. I asked this wife to be one of my proofreaders because I knew they had problems. When I asked her to do this, she said, "Oh, you don't want me to proofread it! It will only make me mad."

I said, "That's okay. You can get mad if you want to, but you have to talk to me about it. I want to know what you think about it."

Many times when I'd see her, she'd be angry. As we'd talk, her rage would disappear. Later I learned that when I'd asked her to read the manuscript, she was trying to figure out how she could leave her husband because of his temper. I didn't know that while we worked on her feelings going through the book.

A big part of their problem revolved around her husband's strong sexual drive. She wasn't a prude, but when he was ready for lovemaking, she was still seething because of the way he treated her all day long. As she went through the book, she began to realize she was going to have to deal with some of the problems. They needed to learn how to communicate if their sex life was going to

be what it should be.

One Sunday I sat behind them during the evening services. For the first time ever, I observed real affection between them. Later, I asked her, "What happened? There's something special between you two."

She said, "We had a talk this weekend. I got a lot of things off my chest and he got a lot of things off his chest. We cleared a lot of the air."

About this time is when the school incident happened. Soon Vol. II was published and I gave her a copy. Since she'd already read it, she left it laying around for her husband to see. I added many paragraphs to the book for men like him who wanted their wives to enjoy lovemaking, but whose anger turned their wives off.

She confided later, "I always knew when he'd been reading your book, because when I came home from work, he was especially nice to me."

This was a man who cared about God, yet he was blind to his own sin against his wife and children. What convicted him was reading the scriptures and seeing the thing he wanted the most – to satisfy his wife sexually – he couldn't do because of the way he treated her during the day. The scriptures convicted him.

One day when she came home from work, he apologized to her for all the ugly things he had said and done over twenty-some years. She forgave him. The next day when she came home from work, he apologized again. She again told him, "I forgive you." The next day, he apologized still again. She again told him, "I forgive you." This went on all week until she finally said, "We can't go back and live over the past. I forgive you. We can only make the future be something really marvelous."

A year later, she called and said, "I want you to know I'm convinced my husband has really changed. He hasn't gone back to any of his old ways. Life is better than when we first married. I never thought our sex life could be this wonderful. A couple of years later, she called again and said, "It's still great! He still hasn't gone back to the way he was."

Somewhere in here, her husband called me saying, "I want to thank you for teaching me how to love my wife." Of course, it wasn't me who pricked him and showed him he needed to change. It was his respect for the scriptures and letting God speak to him through the Bible's words. His wife letting him accept responsibility for his actions and nearly being sued or going to jail made him come face to face with his abusive behavior. The consequences motivated him to change from the inside out.

Sometimes other Christians in the church try to force a wife to accept responsibility for her husband. If a husband is out of duty, not attending like he should or some other problem, instead of going directly to the husband and talking to him, they talk to the wife at services. They tell her, "Tell your husband we really missed him," or tell your husband this or that. It isn't the wife's responsibility to relay such messages to her husband. It's the Christian's responsibility to talk directly to the husband. One woman who was in this message-relaying position finally told the preacher, "Look, we're not joined at the hips. You tell him yourself."

## Don't Let Crisis Points Stop You

Many students become greatly encouraged about their marriages in the first few classes after noticing some improvements. However, those with deep problems usually reach a plateau somewhere in the middle of the lessons. They become discouraged because their mates haven't completely responded. Sometimes these students come to class fuming, "It's not fair! Why do I have to make all the sacrifices?" They blame their mates for every problem.

Suddenly, the plateau turns into a crisis as they desire to reject God's plan for their lives as being unfair and unworkable. Yet this crisis point signals the opportunity for the students to step across the threshold of misery into God's glorious light. If the students face the crisis their emotions created and choose to obey God regardless of how their mates treat them, the battle of the will is

won. Only after they deliberately make this decision can dramatic changes take place in their minds and marriages. Before this point, changes in the mate are often subconsciously perceived as manipulation.

First, we must learn God's plan for our own lives and muster the courage to change our hearts in love for him. But we can make that decision only for ourselves to create an environment that makes it easy for our spouses to obey God. In the end, our mates must make their own choices and suffer their own consequences.

Observing this phenomenon time after time in my students convinced me of the necessity for many classes over a period of several months. While some students make this transition alone with the aid of a study such as this, others need the help of a teacher who knows the subject and has confidence in the word of God. Going to class week after week and listening to lessons focusing on what the students can do to make their marriages happier encourages students to keep working instead of giving up.

In fact, one of the primary goals of teachers should be to help their students understand God's word and make this decision to obey God regardless of what their spouse does or doesn't do. Failure to make this commitment to God is one of the greatest stumbling blocks affecting the happiness of modern marriages. Just reading or listening to a lesson fails to supply the effort, sacrifice, and persistence necessary to implement God's word into one's life.

## God's Timetable Is One Year

Through the Law of Moses, God instructed the bridegroom to "be free at home," and to spend the first year of his marriage "giving happiness" to his bride:

*Deuteronomy 24:5: "When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness [cheer up-KJV] to his wife whom he has taken."*

"Give happiness" or "cheer up" means "to brighten up, (make) blithe or gleesome-cheer up, be (make) glad, (have, make) joy (-ful), be (make) merry, (cause to, make to) rejoice." (Strong, 118.)

It takes time and practice to lay a good foundation for a lifetime of loving and sharing the problems of life. For this reason, God told the new husband not to leave with the army, or to take on work responsibilities such as a traveling job or extra duties in the camp. God wanted the bridegroom to concentrate on cheering up his wife and strengthening both their emotional and physical bonds before tackling the normal problems of life. The real world is filled with problems with health, jobs, in-laws, children, retirement, death....

The medical wisdom behind God's instructions wasn't obvious until recent years. Doctors Joe E. McIlhaney Jr. and Freda McKissic Bush explain in *Hooked* how this bonding phenomena occurs. They discuss how brain scans and new developments in neuroscience are providing greater understanding of the role of major hormones released during sex. These hormones literally change the brains of men and women to affect how they bond emotionally with each other through sexual contact. In their chapter "Meet the Brain," they introduce the hormones. Notice the quality of the bonding a female experiences after being sexually active which releases the hormone Oxytocin:

The important thing to recognize is the desire to connect is not *just* an emotional feeling. Bonding is real and almost like the adhesive effect of glue—a powerful connection that cannot be undone without great emotional pain. Real brain chemicals act on real brain cells, causing those brain cells to bind individuals together. (Joe E. McIlhaney Jr., MD and Freda McKissic Bush, MD, *Hooked, New Science on How Casual Sex Is Affecting Our Children* [Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2008], 37-38, quoting Louann Brizendine, MD, *The Female Brain* [New York: Broadway, 2006], 111.)

Interestingly, the doctors' description of oxytocin-bonding sounds similar to Adam's declaration, "A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." "Cleave" means "glue

together, cement, join or fasten firmly together, join oneself to, cleave to, give oneself steadfastly to, labor for.” (Thayer, 353.) God didn’t leave out husbands when he passed out bonding hormones. Doctors McIlhane and Bush continue:

Women are not the only ones who bond during intimate physical contact. The neurochemical responsible for the male brain response and synaptic change is called vasopressin. It plays a role in many body functions such as blood pressure regulation and, through its influence on kidney function, fluid regulation in the body. Vasopressin seems to have two primary functions related to relationships – bonding of the man to his mate and attachment to his offspring.

Due to the remarkable structural similarity between oxytocin and vasopressin, it should come as no surprise that these two neurochemicals share similar activity. Often referred to as the “monogamy molecule,” vasopressin seems to be the primary cause of men attaching to women with whom they have close and intimate physical contact. (McIlhane and Bush, *Hooked*, 41, quoting J. F. Leckman and L. C. Mayers, “Preoccupations and Behaviors Associated with Romantic and Parental Love,” *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 8, no. 3 [1999], 635-665.)

God built-in glue to literally bind a husband’s and wife’s hearts together. Researchers have now proved that hugging and kissing along with sexual activity releases hormones that literally “glue the couple together.” Thus, God’s love shows in his instructions to Jewish husbands to spend the first year of their marriage activating this glue for a bond strong enough to survive the tug-of-wars of life that try to rip a couple apart.

Rejoicing with their wife helps lay a foundation of mutual joy to bless the rest of their lives. A modern bride should be so fortunate as to marry a husband who spends the first year making her blithe, gleesome, glad, joyful, merry, and full of rejoicing as only a husband knows how! What a wonderful language of love their bodies learn to speak for a lifetime!

## Man’s Timetable Ranges from Instant to About a Year

When both the husband and wife work actively on *major problems*, it usually takes about a year before they are truly solved. That doesn’t mean just living with things going along status quo, but deliberately working on solving the problems. On the other hand, many smaller problems that are the result of plain old ignorance can often be solved overnight. And even problems of one’s sin against the other can frequently be resolved quickly.

However, when problems stem from a person carrying over childish-problem solving techniques into their marriage, it may take time to sort through and purge all the faulty thinking. Couples in this situation should give themselves time to grow. If one mate resists learning and changing, then the problem takes on a whole new dimension of misery.

Douglas Weiss, Ph.D. says many times in *Intimacy Anorexia: Healing the Hidden Addiction in Your Marriage* that he can see discernable improvement within 90 days. That is, IF the partner, or partners, who need to overcome flaws in their thinking and actions is doing the homework and wants to make changes. Dr. Weiss gives a list of things to watch for to determine if the acting-out spouse really wants change or is simply negotiating or stalling for as little change as possible. He says the spouse should believe the mate’s behavior, not what he/she says. (Douglas Weiss, *Intimacy Anorexia* [Colorado Springs, CO: Discovery Press, 2010], 161-164.)

Is this not also what Jesus said about not believing what they say, but what they do?

*Matthew 7:15-17: “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.”*

For now, concentrate on doing the homework and laying a foundation of understanding the ABCs of a godly marriage. Not only do these projects help produce definite changes in the students’

lives, but they also build self-confidence and self-respect. They assist the students in maintaining positive outlooks by focusing on matters they possess the power to change. This discourages the students from blaming their spouse for all their marriages' shortcomings, which is a major cause of depression. The more carefully the students perform these exercises for fine-tuning their understanding of God's word, the greater the rewards they reap.

Except for the personal and goal-achieving exercises, the students should turn in all the homework to the teachers. This helps teachers determine how effective their teaching is and encourages the students to do the assignments. This, in turn, crystallizes their thinking and develops better discernment and understanding. Doing the exercises may well make the difference between success and failure.

However, the less personal results of the personal and goal-achieving exercises can be discussed in class. Sharing ideas about how to apply the lessons to one's personal life motivates all the students to work harder.

## The Mechanics of the Exercises

### Handwrite the Exercises

In January of 2011, the University of Stavanger in Norway issued a press release, "Pen Mightier than Keyboard for Making Imprint on Brain." The researchers found that "the act of handwriting activates brain regions that help boost recall":

Writing by hand is actually a very different sensory experience than typing on a keyboard, with each activating distinctly different parts of the brain.

"Our bodies are designed to interact with the world which surrounds us," co-author associate professor Anne Mangen from the University of Stavangers Reading Centre in Stavanger, Norway, said in a university news release. "We are living creatures, geared toward using physical objects -- be it a book, a keyboard or a pen -- to perform certain tasks."

This is evidenced, she said, in tests that reveal that the act of handwriting -- literally the feeling of touching a pen to paper -- appears to imprint a "motor memory" in the sensorimotor region of the brain. ("Pen Mightier than Keyboard for Making Imprint on Brain [University of Stavanger, news release, Jan. 19, 2011], available on the internet under title of article.)

These studies and others show that handwriting impacts your brain more powerfully than typing. To get the most out of these lessons, consider doing the exercises with old-fashioned pen and paper. If this seems contrived, type your answers first and then copy them on paper. Think through the questions again as you write. What did you notice about the difference between handwriting and typing your answers?

### Study Exercise

Answer these questions in your own words. Strive for brief, concise answers. Elaborate on questions which have special meaning to you. The last question gives you a chance to disagree with anything taught in the chapter or class. However, all disagreements must be based upon scriptural reasoning *instead of feelings*. If you haven't done so before, start developing your skills for supporting your thinking with scriptural reasoning rather than just proof texting. Proof texting is making statements and then just throwing out a scripture without developing the context or showing what the words mean.

The Internet makes studying our Bibles and looking up word definitions much easier than it used to be. We can search on questions, such as "What does love mean in I Corinthians 13?" and find a variety of sites to learn from. Also, many online Bible programs let us read a passage in different Bible translations. For these lessons, I use The New American Standard Bible which gives a

word-for-word translation. Many times, when we know what the words mean, the mystery of certain passages often disappears.

## Research Exercise

This drill enables you to use the basic truths learned in the lesson to analyze the lives of Bible men and women. Many of these exercises are fun. Moreover, they guide you into a deeper study of various subjects and cover Biblical examples not discussed in this book. Rather than busy work, many of these projects are ones I did for myself when I began studying marriage and the Bible seriously.

## Personal Exercise

This activity aids you in analyzing your life with the help of the scriptures. It suggests ways you can apply the principles taught to your life. Sometimes it involves working with your mate and children. We all have blind spots. I know I've had plenty over the years. This exercise helps open your eyes to be honest with yourself and the state of your marriage. I thank God every day for opening my eyes. Many times, I've had to walk the floor for a couple of weeks to absorb the truth God's word was revealing to me. Then I've thanked him for being gentle in how he opened my eyes.

## Goal-Achieving Exercise

This exercise helps implement the principles learned into everyday habits. It focuses on changes you can make while making plans for achieving those goals. The goals should be measurable or something you can see so you will know when you attain them. Make realistic goals. By writing these goals down, thinking through different methods of accomplishing them, and then following a plan of action; you will enjoy maximum success in making lasting changes in your life. If helpful, make a chart for each day with squares to check when you finish the projects. You can create a table on your computer or with a ruler to make this easier. Look at your goals and plans every day and pray about them.

## Family Exercise

The Song of Solomon is perhaps the most veritable book in the Bible. It is also the most personal teaching about courting love. Being written in poetry and as a play allows the parent to supply age-appropriate details for their children. The young 13-year-old Shulammitte maiden credits her mother with teaching her about love beginning when she nursed her.

The family activities help parents to begin to teach the beautiful truths of this book to their children. These exercises create opportunities for families to communicate and share values. Some of the projects are fun and informative to share with the class.

## Problem-Solving Exercise

This exercise centers around a real-life situation. This challenge gives you an opportunity to reflect on what you've learned on this study journey. It will help you develop personal skills for using the Bible to solve problems and help others. Hopefully, the exercise will impress upon you how practical a guide the Bible is for twenty-first-century problems.

## Your First Assignment

A couple of weeks before I taught my first classes, a lady in her fifties that I had met in a sewing class, called. She said, "I don't think it's possible to save my marriage. My husband is so bitter toward me that he resents every mouthful of food I eat because he has to pay for it. I'm only taking your classes so I can say I did everything possible to save my marriage before I divorce him. In fact, he told our last daughter, who just got married, 'Your mother and I might as well go ahead and get

a divorce. We have nothing holding us together now that you're gone."

She sat quietly through the first two classes. Then she spoke up at the third class, "About five years ago, my husband quit kissing me good-bye when he left for work. I decided to teach him a lesson by not kissing him hello when he came home from work. I realize that was a mistake because our marriage has just gotten worse after that. So after our last class, I decided to start kissing him when he got home."

She took a big breath and continued, "The first day I was waiting for him by the door. But when he opened the door, the dogs ran in the house. By the time I got them back outside, he was in the kitchen getting a snack. So I went over and kissed him and said, 'Hello.'"

She imitated his voice, "Huh, what do you want?"

She continued, "I replied, 'I just want to welcome you home.' Then I went on cooking supper and didn't react to his gruffness. I've done that every day this week...every time he reacts the same."

The following week she told the class, "I still greet my husband at the door every day. He still says, 'Huh? What do you want?' Then after supper he always watches television in the den. This last week, when I finished the dishes, I started walking by his chair and kissing him on the cheek. He doesn't say anything and I don't either. I just go on my way."

The next week, we couldn't wait to hear what happened. Before the class started we asked. She laughed and filled us in on the details, "I decided to greet my husband at his car. We live in the country so I watched for him to come down the road. As soon as I saw him, I ran to the gate and opened it for him to drive through."

She laughed again, "This time he said, 'Boy! That's some welcome home!' He hasn't said, 'Huh? What do you want' since then."

The following week she beamed, "You'll never believe what my husband did! He actually helped me work in the garden! He's never done that in all the years we've been married. Then when I got a headache, he told me to go lie down and he'd finish. When he finished, he came in and covered me up. That's not my husband! He's never done that before!"

By the seventh class, she walked with a spring in her step. She gushed, "You won't believe what my husband did! He actually turned off the TV and we sat down on the couch and talked...we talked for hours. We haven't talked in years! He's always made ugly remarks about my hair. But as we were looking through the picture album, he said, 'That's the way I like your hair. I wish you'd wear it like that again.'"

The final week she came in and sat down soberly, "This morning as my husband was leaving for work he handed me his bonus check from work for \$350 and said, 'I've been spending a lot of money on myself lately. I want you to take this money and buy yourself some new clothes.'"

"Did you take the money?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied, "after class I'm going shopping. I'm going to wear something pretty when I greet him at the door this evening."

"Wow!" I replied. "In eight short weeks he's gone from resenting having to buy food for you to giving you his whole bonus check."

She said softly as her eyes misted, "I'm falling in love all over again."

Others in the class echoed her sentiments, "Me, too."

## Personal Exercise

Affectionately greet your mate when he or she comes home. Keep doing this until the last class. This exercise magnifies the results for all the other efforts you put into your marriage. Previous students have told many stories about how greeting their mates made tremendous differences in their marriages. Be prepared to share with the class your ongoing progress.

Note to Teachers: During lulls in the classes or as a before-class warm up, invite students to share new events and creativity in greeting their mates.