

Article 4 “A Better Way” (Contains Seven Daily Devotionals) **Unequally Yoked**

2 Cor 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? NKJV

Gary, Kevin and I had been planning for months. After all, the anticipation and preparation of any adventure is half the fun. Every detail of our backpacking trip into the San Juan National Forest of beautiful Colorado had been explored. We had purchased gear beyond what was necessary. We had laid out the road maps and highlighted our route to the mountains. Next it was topographical maps, as we plotted our path through the wilderness to the elusive Bear Lake. I had been there once before, so officially, I was the guide. In a day and age before cell phone and GPS, I can still hardly believe our parents agreed to let us go.

Gary was a big guy. He was, without a doubt, the pack horse of the group. I don't recall how tall he was or how much he weighed, but he must have been at least three times my size. I was concerned about this size differential at one point. I remember sitting down with my mom before the trip and sharing my concern.

"Mom," I said, "I am not really sure I should be going backpacking with Gary. If something happens to him, there is no way I will be able to carry him out. Fact is mom, I am not sure that Kevin and I together could even manage it."

I remember as she walked away she just smiled and said, "Nope, I am sure you can't, but if something happens to either of you, he can carry you both out, one on each shoulder."

It was then that I realized that maybe it was Gary's parents who had made the biggest leap of faith in agreeing to allow him to make the trip.

Kevin, as I recall, was a linebacker for the local high school football team. He worked out with weights often and was definitely no slouch. I knew an eighty-five pound pack was not going to be much of a burden for him either. However, as the runt of the bunch, the weight of my pack was of extreme concern to me. I knew from prior experience that the warning label on my back and shoulders read, "Do not exceed 100 lbs." The truth is, 80 lbs. would have been my preference. So, it should not surprise you that I was concerned about a plan of attack for getting all the needed supplies to Bear Lake without any duplication. I made the original list. Then we sat down together, and they lengthened it substantially. Remember, this was a first for them. I had learned, "pack it in, you gotta carry it back out." My motto was, "rough it and go light." They were more of the "fill'er up" type - you know, "If there is even a remote chance I will need it, I'll take it." Which, of course, is not a problem if you are a born pack mule instead of a little donkey. Anyway, with some deliberation we had our list established with no duplication of needed utensils, tools, and supplies. Next, we negotiated what each person would carry based both on volume (the amount of space the object would consume in a pack) and weight (so that every mule, or little donkey in my case, was carrying his fair share of the load.) Looking back, I believe a more equitable way of handling the situation would have been to do a body mass and strength index test to determine what each of us could carry. However, I was young, and pride alone was enough to keep me from admitting my own limitations. Before I get too far ahead of myself, let me back up for a moment.

Every adventure we embark on in life comes with great expectations. Sometimes those expectations are founded on previous experiences. Sometimes they are founded on other's experiences. Sometimes they are nothing more than a wish we want to come true. But, they are one of the marks by which we measure each adventure we embark on. We step back and ask, "Did that adventure meet my expectations? Did that adventure surpass my expectations? How can I improve the next similar adventure?" Or maybe our evaluation leads us to, "I will never do that again!!!" Remember, I was the one in our party with experience. Thus, I was full of great expectations and, in fact, had plans as to how I might more richly savor some very special moments. My friends had expectations as well, but none so refined as mine, as this was their first trip.

A part of my vision for this experience included fishing in that high mountain lake for rainbow trout

- and not just fishing, but catching. Bear Lake, as I remember it, was nestled in the top of a mountain like a baby cradled in a mother's arms. It was nurtured and well-fed from the east side of the lake which was pressed against sheer bluffs. The snow in these bluffs, melting slowly and methodically, provided all the water needed to keep the lake stable year round. It was with much difficulty and great danger that one could move along the water's edge on this side of the lake. The south side of the lake, though not dangerous, was encased in tall timber. The north and west sides mounded up and then dropped back down to the water's edge. Unless a storm rolled in from the west where the terrain dipped down to allow a small stream to exit, this lake would remain calm and serene.

If the terrain continued its downward descent into the lake respective to its approach, the water on the north and south side was surely deep beyond imagination. Thus, it was unlikely even in winter's most deadly cold, that the deep waters below would ever become frozen.

It was on this north side that we would camp. The north side contained the least amount of timber and the gentlest slope toward the water's edge. It was from the north side that all of the breathtaking beauty of God's creative genius was most observable. With any luck, we might even secure a spot that was relatively level. Past experience had taught me not to get my hopes up too high for a level camp site.

The water in that lake was crystal clear. I would launch a lure into that body of water and watch it swirl its way back. My memory was filled with fabulous moments where the clarity of the water had allowed me to see some hungry trout pursue and attack that swirling enticement. There were few places I had fished that afforded me experiences such as these.

I also knew that the right eggs, weight, and a good bobber could land a nice Rainbow along the bluff side of the lake. Even though it was beyond navigating by foot, it was not beyond the distance of a good cast. Just the thought of those fish makes my mouth water still. A deep-fried rainbow trout that has been rolled in cornmeal is cuisine fit for a king. If you are from the south, you know what I am talkin' about. Mmm-mmm good!

Needless to say, my expectations for this trip included catching some of those tasty morsels and cooking them as prescribed. It was my plan to deep-fry them southern style - fresh out of the lake. This was not really a practical plan for the type of trip we were taking. It required that we carry cornmeal for batter, three pounds of grease, and a fairly good-sized cooking pan. This is not your usual lightweight, nutritious, Mountain House Freeze-Dried entree. It was an artery clogger for sure. However, I knew I wanted it. So, I proceeded to sell my buddies on the **need** for the extra equipment and supplies necessary to make this experience happen.

Their first response was predictable. "How do you know we will even catch any fish?"

"That's easy," was my response. "You are going with me!"

I am not sure they were heartily convinced, but they moved on to question two. "Three pounds of grease? You want us to pack three pounds of grease into the wilderness?"

I explained that it was one of the four basic food groups and that each of us only had to carry one pound apiece - not three. I concluded that it would not be too big a burden, volume wise, on any of us.

Reluctantly, they agreed to their pound of lard, but only after I agreed to carry my pound, the frying pan, and the cornmeal. I considered it a small price to pay for such a succulent southern feast. However, looking back, I am not sure they really shared my vision.

Well, the day finally came, arriving with all the anticipation of a child's first Christmas. I drove my baby blue Ford Torino to their respective houses, and we threw our packs in the trunk. It was hardly breaking sunrise when we rolled out on to the highway. Two days on the road, and we were finally there.

Dragging out our packs, we strapped them on and took off like we were carrying nothing but feather pillows. The first part of our trek was downhill, and we shot through that mile or so like greased lightning. However, once we crossed the creek, everything changed. Words like uphill, steep, climb, crisscross were beginning to apply. It wasn't long, and the guide had to find himself a walking stick. Pretty soon the guide was pointing out all sorts of inspiration points at which we were forced to stop and gaze. While we were observing all the beautiful flowers and awesome mountain views, we were, of course resting and refreshing ourselves with water. Then there were those bear tracks; we had to slow our pace a bit when we came upon them. Our guide explained that we didn't want to inadvertently stumble upon some bear, or worse, some sow with her cubs. This added time to the mountain trek, but it provided needed rest and a moderate pace

for our guide. Oh and yes, it was certainly much safer.

Well, we arrived, and as I suspected, found ourselves a semi-level camp site. Everything was set up and tents pitched just as the evening sun was setting. There we were, huddling around that campfire in the cool mountain air, warming our hands. We sat there as good friends, gazing across that little serene lake. So far, this adventure was everything I was expecting and hoping that it would be. It was a perfect end to our long three day journey.

When we awoke the next morning, my expectations for the adventure began to fall apart. I had one thing on my mind, which was the farthest thing from my compadres minds, and that was fishing. Up to this point we had a shared vision; we were not divided in our objectives and goals. Our purpose was shared and our means were secured, but that was about to change. I am a fisherman. I am not a 10-minute hobbyist. My focus is set, my course determined, my patience engaged when I fish. I will try every method, use every bait, and move to every location on the lake before the sun sets or my limit of fish is reached. Then, and only then, will I break down the pole and head back to camp.

My buddies were more interested in throwing rocks, taking pictures, nature hikes around the lake, stoking the campfire and basking in a hammock. They were campers of the first order. They cut wood, boiled some drinking water, and stirred themselves up a fine breakfast and lunch. They had a blast, but they fished very little. This was of no particular concern to me until evening fell, and it was time for supper.

I strolled back to camp with great expectations knowing the feast I was carrying in my trout bag would soon be on everyone's palate. I pulled out the pan, lit the fire, and put my pound of grease in the skillet, salivating all the way. I rolled six rainbow trout in cornmeal, anticipating that everyone would want seconds. I requested the pound of grease both of my compadres were to have brought, so that I might heat it up as well. It was then that I found out they had not purchased nor packed any such item. I reviewed with them our previous discussion and arrangement. It was not that they did not remember; it was that they didn't care. They had chosen to use the space in their pack otherwise. Their thinking was that surely two pounds would be enough without their meager contribution. Now I was stuck with only one. Clearly they had not shared my festive feasting vision.

As I looked at the grease in the pan, every ounce of charity in my heart and soul was gone. Instead of deep-fried, it was now going to be pan-fried. I could live with that. I would just have to give them a flip when they were half-done. I also knew from experience that with each fish that was cooked, the grease in the pan would diminish. Last man out would probably just burn his fish as they were sticking to the pan. At least I was hoping I was right. As I said, I was not feeling too charitable. Well, I fried two big beautiful rainbows and threw them on my plate. I dug out a couple of hard biscuits and poured myself a cup of Joe. I handed the frying pan to Kevin as I leaned up against a tree and let each mouthwatering morsel melt in my mouth. It was a meal for a king. The cool mountain air, the picturesque lake, the sense of accomplishment at having caught and prepared my fresh entree, all added to the moment. It was all I had envisioned, less one thing. But before I get to that, back to my friends.

As I was frying my fish, I had managed to spill about a half-pound of lard over onto the hot coals. It was an innocent enough mistake. I set the pan on the fire rather precariously. The handle on the skillet was an odd shape and attached with a wingnut so it could be removed and carried more compactly in a backpack. I was not accustomed to such, and accidents do happen. Really, it was an accident! The loss was so bad I barely managed to get my second fish out of the grease without it sticking. As I passed the skillet on to Kevin, I knew what was about to happen. I had to smile as he fried and scraped and cursed and burned his succulent morsels into oblivion. Gary knew he couldn't improve on what had just been observed. Therefore, he used his ingenuity and roasted his rainbow trout marshmallow style. Much to my amazement, it worked rather well. He was at least able to enjoy a Fish-Ka-Bob.

Let me again address the one thing that was missing from this perfect festive meal. **It was not a shared meal.** We ate together but **no one shared my moment.** They had no anticipation of this moment. They did not share in the labor that made the conquest so satisfying. They failed to share my serenity as I slowly savored each bite, sip, and second of time. When the moment was gone, I looked around and realized we had all received no more and no less than what we had envisioned in that living room months before; we simply had different visions and expectations. In a very real sense we were unequally yoked together.

The illusion was that we shared the same purpose, vision and objective. We all wanted to arrive at Bear Lake in the Wilderness of the San Juan National Forest of Colorado. We all wanted to test ourselves against the elements of nature. We all wanted to rough it for a few days. We were all seeking a getaway from our normal routines and looking for a week of adventure, but in the end we were not building the same dream.

Take away my fishing pole, and I would have just as soon stayed home. This was of little significance to my companions. With every plunge of the bobber, with every swirl in the water, with every strike and the thrill of each catch, my trip was catapulted into utopia. This was not the case for my friends. Their trip would have been complete without so much as a single cast.

In like fashion there is an illusion that surrounds marriage in our country in which the amiable fall into believing that all are of the same purpose, vision, and objective, only to find themselves eating alone. They all want to be married. They all want to build a home. They all want to build a family. They all want to get away and be independent. They desire success and happiness, and welcome the adventure called marriage. As they look at the map of the San Juan National Forest, they believe they are sharing the same dream. Then the bottom drops out, and they realize that their partner on this adventure didn't pack the appropriate provisions which would allow them to share the moment. Their moment is burnt and roasted. They would gladly share their moment with their spouse, but then their own provision would be diminished and wasted, because all the explanation in the world cannot create passion where passion does not exist. Dreams are caught, not taught. It is at this point that one realizes, as they eat together and yet alone, that what they were reaching for in marriage is not obtainable because their wagons are hitched to different stars. It is no big deal on a backpacking trip that will come to an end in seven days. It is an extremely big deal if the adventure planned was to take a lifetime.

Sharing the same space and the same adventure is not the same for two people who have no unity of purpose, vision, and objective. In the devotionals that follow I will attempt to show just how lonely that can really be. As you look at marriage and pack according to your vision, your purposes, and your objectives, take a good long look at what experiences you want others to be able to share with you. Consider what the home you hope to build will look like. Will it serve the Lord? Will it nurture godly children? Will it build a ministry? Will it be a home that shares worship and prayer? Will it build a business or nurture careers that honor God? Will the Bible be the centerpiece on the coffee table or the prime directive for your marriage adventure? Will your means and time be invested in eternal matters or only what is temporal? These are important questions to answer if one is going to avoid being unequally yoked together. If you end up unequally yoked together you will spend your life sharing the same experiences yet never sharing the same experiences.

The great ideas and plans you have for marriage can vanish as quickly as did my feast if **both** partners have not packed well. Approach the marriage altar with the knowledge that it is not only what you bring to the marriage altar that matters, but what your partner is bringing as well. **What another brings to the marriage altar says a lot about what they are expecting out of the marriage.** My friends had not forgotten but rather chosen not to bring their contribution to the meal, seeing other gear as more important. Because of my vision for that meal, I made the space for its provision even though it cost me space for other items. Looking back, I am not sure my friends ever shared my vision. Be patient, take the time to find a spouse who will share your vision for marriage. Being equally yoked is worth the effort.

Possibilities!

Week 4 Day 1

Amo 3:3 Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

The obvious answer to this straw question is “no”. It is not a hard concept. If I want to go left and you want to go right, then we will not walk together unless one of us decides to yield their desired direction. So, this leads us to a few questions. Do you have a direction you are going in life? If not, then following someone else might be no problem for you. You may have a direction you are going but you are not real set on it. You’re just improvising until you finally settle on a real direction. I see this a lot with young folks in college. They change their major every semester. However, you may have a direction that has caught your heart, mind, body and soul. You find yourself passionate on this matter and if denied for a time the opportunity to pursue this passion it will not dissipate but will eventually resurface with a vengeance. I have many things I am passionate about. As you have already noted, I am passionate about fishing. I would add to that list hunting, clamming, and honeybees. I would have a longer list, but time and money have forced me to narrow the list down to those four hobbies. So, can I co-exist with a marriage partner that does not like fishing, hunting, clamming or beekeeping? Of course, but come October and November she had better be prepared to be a hunting widow. You get the picture. Fortunately for me there is some overlap that allows my wife and I to share some of our different passions together. She loves to hike. Guess what, there is a lot of hiking in hunting. She likes to picnic, and fishing trips can always include a picnic. She is passionate about gardening (which I am not) and honeybees can sure increase a gardens yield. We at least find enough agreement to spend some quality time together without feeling like we are being forced to walk in a direction that is displeasing to us. Important? I think so, because my pursuit of these passions cost me vacation time, money, and energy that she often reaps very little from and that takes away from our shared resources. I like vegetables and she likes venison, fish, razor clams and honey. Therefore, it is easy to agree to and encourage each other in these passions. I follow her lead in the garden and she follows my lead in the great outdoors. We can walk together! Woohoo!

There is a deeper walk I desire with my wife however than just sharing recreation. We have a spiritual side to our existence where I desire to connect and agree as well. Here things get a little tricky. To do this she doesn’t follow me and I don’t follow her, because to do this we both have to follow God. That really is what the verse above is about. If you want to walk with God...guess what...you have to agree with Him and go His way. He gets to lead every time. So she walks with God and I walk with God and sometimes those walks overlap and what follows is Amazing. There are moments when something is shared beyond words like a sunset or a prayer. On other occasions I sit mystified at the work of God in her life. I am in awe at the unity we share as somehow God in leading her agrees with and solidifies how God is leading me. Our vision for our future is directed by the truth of God’s word and connects us to Kingdom agendas that weld us together spiritually. So because we have both agreed to follow God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have a spiritual agreement and a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We also have a covenant relationship with each other, a spiritual agreement in which we have become one in marriage by the divine sanction of God’s Word, our vows and the witnesses present. These two covenants are at the heart and soul of our spiritual connection. Without them, there is so much we would have missed. Over the next few days we will consider what a joy it is to be in a marriage that is enriched with a spiritual connection that only two Believers (Christians) can share. When a couple is equally yoked in Christ Jesus the possibilities for connection in the spiritual realm are boundless.

Prayer: Lord give me eyes to see and a heart that values a spiritual connection with my spouse. I want to walk into the possibilities of Your “immeasurably more than I can imagine” for my Marriage.

Shared Worship

Week 4 Day 2

Ps 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. NIV

It had been a long day. I had been on the boat since early that morning and the setting of the sun was fast approaching. I was cold, tired, hungry, nearly seasick from the turbulent waves and totally fishless. It was one of those days when a true fisherman asks himself, "Why do I love this sport?" Most would have called it quits and just went on home. But not me, I was going to milk this outing for every chance at that trophy sturgeon, even if it meant a dark, turbulent, grueling ride back to the dock in precarious ship channels.

Then it happened! In an instant I knew the day had been worth all the sacrifice for just this one moment. Nope, it wasn't that trophy sturgeon, it was something better. As I looked down the river, the sun was setting behind a bank of clouds that rested on the mountains. The colors were phenomenal: orange, red, yellow, blue, purple - a magnificent tapestry. Rays of sun shone through the clouds like spotlights on a stage illuminating the river below. I stood, staring, not wanting the moment to end. I grabbed my camera, snapped a shot or two, picked up my coffee cup and forgot about my fishing pole and fishing. I thought to myself, *Truly the Skies Proclaim the Works of His Hands!* I declared in a loud audible voice, "Praise the Lord! Thank you Lord for a totally awesome sunset! This moment, right here, made the day worthwhile!" I cannot describe to you what I was feeling in that moment of worship. I felt as if I was totally consumed by the presence of the Lord.

The other gentleman in my boat glanced up, muttered some borderline obscenity and complained about catching no fish and being bored and tired. I'd like to say that we shared a moment, but we didn't. The only theistic exchange that took place between us were the words of witness that I shared in hopes that he would be able to see what I saw. He never did.

I can imagine nothing more frustrating than to have to walk through life with a spouse that never knew the worship of the living God in a sunset. I got off the boat that day wishing my wife had been there, eager to show her the picture, and tell her the story. Experience had taught me that moments like these were some of the most precious that we share. I was sorry she had missed this one. To be unequally yoked to a nonbeliever at the very least will mean that you never truly share the same sunset. In the deepest sense, you will never be able to connect with your spouse on a spiritual plane at all. The intimacy of your marriage will always be missing something. In your quest for a spouse, share a sunset with that someone special, the revelation that follows can be quite illuminating.

Prayer: Lord give me the wisdom to discern and wait for a spouse with whom I can share the intimacy of true worship and find the unique spiritual connection that only Your Spirit can bring.

The Best - In Giving!

Week 4 Day 3

2 Cor 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. NIV

Jerry and Cathy were some of the most incredible people to ever cross my path. They had two children of their own, kept foster children, and adopted three children - all three of a different race. The foster children that crossed their path always seemed to come from the most troubled situations. They usually came with meager possessions and great need. Jerry and Cathy were gifted with an incredible ability to deal with these troubled children and teens. Even the state recognized this, and often sought out their residence for placement of their more difficult cases.

One of the truly wonderful teens that landed in their home was a girl named Rita. She came to them with literally nothing except the clothes on her back. From all information received, it appeared that her temporary stay was going to be a lengthy one. Most notable on the day of her arrival was, as I have already mentioned, her need for a wardrobe. Cathy was not even close to her size. That meant there would be no sharing of garments between the two of them. This left the young lady in a lurch until new ones could be purchased. My wife and I also knew this couple was in no position financially to go out in the immediate future and purchase the needed items, and neither were we.

My little wife, however, was size-wise, a perfect match. So, she volunteered to help Rita out in the clothing department. As she jumped in the car and headed for home to retrieve a few items, I sat on the porch swing with Jerry drinking ice tea. The hot Texas sun made the shade and the tea seem especially enjoyable. Minutes later my wife arrived and started hauling what looked like her entire wardrobe out of the car. Other than what was in the dirty clothes, I don't think there was a garment missing. I was figuring she would just pick out a few things and bring them over. That is what I would have done. Puzzled by all this, I was thinking to myself that she has gone crazy. I figured, well, she will just be the one going to work half-dressed in dirty clothes tomorrow.

I watched as the three of them spread clothes out all over the living room. My wife announced to Rita, "You go through these, pick out what you like, and get enough to cover you for at least a week or so without having to wash."

That girl's eyes lit up like she had been turned loose in Sax Fifth Avenue. She tried on and modeled clothes for what seemed like hours to Jerry and I, as the three of them laughed and giggled.

Most of my favorite dresses left the house that evening. I was tempted to crawl off of that porch swing and put a stop to the whole matter. I could have said, "Just loan the girl a few items," and hauled my crazy wife home. However, I knew her compassionate heart, valued her self-sacrifice, and saw an eternal investment being made as she cheerfully gave the best she had. She had given, *not grudgingly nor of necessity*, but according to her heart. We loaded the remaining clothes back into the car, and I drove her home, with her hand in mine. We shared an incredible moment I will never forget, because we were not unequally yoked together. How lonely and divisive this moment could have been for us had we not shared the same love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Through the years Lori and I have given thousands of dollars toward heavenly purposes. Never have we argued over a single dollar that was given. Being equally yoked in the things of the Lord has given us a freedom in giving that has produced many special ministry moments such as the one I just described. All of them are treasures for those equally yoked in the Lord.

Prayer: Lord help me to be a person who can share from my heart and soul such moments in ministry and give me a spouse who will appreciate such moments as well.

Together on our Knees

Week 4 Day 4

*Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.
NIV*

I have never been one who was good about regularly praying with my wife and family. However, I don't suppose we hardly ever sat down to a meal without giving the good Lord a word of thanks. My memory also holds lots of bedtime prayers by a daughter's bed, and moments on our knees all lined up along the living room couch. Even though we weren't what I would call religious about it, we did pray a lot as a family.

We have prayed as a family about everything from a sick rabbit to a lost uncle. If it was a matter that concerned us, then it was a matter that we needed to tell the Lord about, and we did. On many occasions, I left one of these prayer sessions with a tear in my eye and a deep sense of gratitude in my heart.

It was God's cruel sense of humor to give me four girls. Never have I faced anything in this life to which I have felt so ill-equipped as the raising of those daughters. My patient little wife knew it too, and it was there that we met most often in prayer as a couple, and still do. With an absolute helpless dependency, we still come to the Lord seeking wisdom perpetually. My testimony is that He has been faithful! But it doesn't stop there.

It was the most absolute bleakest moment of our married life. The covenant we made at the altar of God seemed completely shattered. We had nothing left and no reason to go forward as a couple. Our living room confessions, as we honestly shared the anguish of our hearts, had served as the final blows needed to dismember our marriage. I have discovered in my many years of pastoring that most couples have one of these moments.

Well, instead of walking out and slamming the door on our life together forever, I turned to my wife and said, "Get your coat, and follow me."

As night was falling, I led her through the mesquite bushes and briars to the top of a west Texas mountain. She had never been there before, but I had. It was a place I had slipped off to on numerous occasions. From its vantage point I could see the entire town of Sweetwater Texas. It seemed to me the perfect place to intercede for the city, so I visited it as often as I could. The rock on which I perched myself was about thirty feet in diameter. It was smooth and level with the ground - perfect for sitting on or laying prostrate in prayer. It was free from dirt, fire ants, or any vegetation. For this season, it had become a sort of 'holy of holies' for me. I had never shared it with anyone else before, but this seemed an appropriate time. In tears, I invited my wife of five years out onto that rock and we prayed. It was the moment our marriage was reborn. It was a moment.....beyond words.....even as I see it in my mind today. It defined our future marriage relationship. It was a moment that prepared our home for the children that were soon to come that would keep us on our knees in prayer, together, forever. Had we been unequally yoked, no such moment would have occurred, and our marriage would have been over before it ever really began. Marry an unbeliever, and you will never be able to share moments in prayer that weld two hearts together with the power of God that overcomes all of Hell's most vicious assaults. Your plight will be that of praying for the salvation of your lost spouse until death do you part or salvation comes. You will be sharing the same space but never the same truth, dream, or spirit. Oh how lonely, how very, very lonely, that world can be. Don't rob yourself of God's best with an unequal yoke.

Prayer: Lord teach me to pray. Teach me the fellowship and power of prayer that I might pray, and pray, and pray and never give up.

Extra Mile: Develop a prayer journal and make praying a pivotal part of your life from this moment on. If you are considering matrimony with someone at this moment, take them to a prayer meeting. The results can be quite telling.

Shared Theology

Week 4 Day 5

Luke 11:17 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. NIV

I married a little Lutheran girl. At least that was where her earliest roots rested. She was in an evangelical singing group during her Jr. High and High School years called "Lower Columbia Singers." It was under the influence of this ministry that she became a Christian. Me, I was a Baptist from the cradle on, and a Southern Baptist at that. The cry of the reformation, "Sola Scriptura" was still alive in our little country church. So for me, there was only one authority that was beyond dispute and that was the Word of God, the Bible. It didn't take long for my little wife to pick up the same battle cry and become an ardent student of the Bible as well. I believe more than anything else, it is our mutual respect for God's Word that has kept us united.

Over the years, as I have observed some of the finest families, I was often puzzled by the children I saw coming out of their homes. Before I knew about the four styles of parenting or attended a "Growing Kids God's Way" class, I sought a solution by simply interviewing lots and lots of couples. This is the result of my findings. In virtually every home that outwardly looked like a fantastic Christian home and yet still produced the most misguided and wayward teens, there was division. Usually the division between husband and wife was in those formative years of their children, before age twelve. I discovered that it only took a couple of bad years, where mom and dad were divided, and everything goes south for the children. Recuperation is nearly impossible without extreme solidarity between the parents. I stated this was the case in virtually every home, but I honestly cannot remember one couple I interviewed where this was not the case. Unity and solidarity between parents cannot be over emphasized. I believe United Loving Parents are the single most significant factors in raising a Godly seed.

So how does this solidarity happen? It is built on a common faith and a strong belief in the word of God. It wasn't until after our prayer meeting overlooking Sweetwater that I became the head of my household. It was only with one hand on the Bible and one knee deep in our own humanity that we caved to the biblical mandate for our home. It was the greatest gift my wife ever gave me. The gift of her respect and the reins to lead our home as I felt God was directing. It was undeserved then, as it is today. She had a belief that God could even work through someone as off centered as her husband and lead our home in the paths God had for us. She maintained ideas like this because the word of God was an authority in her life and she wore out her knees praying for her husband. Thirty years later **we stand undivided still**, and no one influences my life more than she. It may sound old fashion and draconian, but it still works. Trusting that I would make no decision that was not in her best interest, or the best interest of our family, did not come easily. Probably because I did not always get it right. However, as she began to see my heart, she was able to trust 'God in me' as I was able to trust 'God in her' to do His work. That meant we didn't have to play the part of the Holy Spirit in each other's lives, and the results were phenomenal. I came to value greatly her input into our decision making process. Her course of appeal was no longer divisive. Her counsel became more and more founded in God ordained authorities and the pages of God's word. It did not rest in superior debate or manipulative selfish agendas that would have earlier divided us. Her trust was now rather in God to work His ways into the heart of her husband, as I equally trust Him to work His ways into the heart of my wife. I can honestly say to my wife, "I trust God in You!" Being unequally yoked to a non-believer can make such trust difficult or impossible to find, division inevitable, and life miserable and lonely. Without a common source of truth and faith, division is sure to occur. In my experience, that division will very likely cost you the hearts and love of your children at some stage of their life and this will not be easily reversed.

Prayer: Lord, help me establish Your truth in my life. I desire Unity, Faith, and Trust to flourish in my life and will seek it. Grant me Lord a marital union that is undivided.

Shared Growth

Week 4 Day 6

Rom 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,...NIV

It is amazing to me how many people believe that improving character doesn't matter. "I am what I am and that is all I will ever be" is still the mentality of many folks. Which I suppose is alright if you are Jesus Christ! I have always wondered how that mentality looks in the arena of friendships. When I think about friendships, I have many at many different levels. I have people that are acquaintances only. I know them because of brief and not often repeated encounters. There are folks that I regularly share the same space with in my daily routines that I get to know a little better (the guy who sells me gasoline and repairs my car, the lady that I buy my groceries from.) I call them friends, but I barely know them. They have little to no influence on my life. There are others that I share some common interest with such as rooting our local sports team on to victory. I might share even more time and space with these folks and certainly consider them friends as well. This friendship does not compare with that of folks sharing the same goal or interest in a foxhole however. Comrades on the battlefield, I would think would share a deeper level of friendship than comrades on the ball field. All this said, if you were to ask me how many friends I have.... I would say three. Who are these three? Well, they are the ones that I will listen to when they say I am being a bad parent. They are the ones who I have given permission to and respect enough to let them speak to me about my temperament and character issues. Amazingly they let me do the same with them.

Have you ever defined your temperament and character goals? If you are a Christian, they are defined for you. They are called the fruit of the Spirit and you can read about them in Galatians 5. It has been my experience that the more I pursue Jesus Christ and develop these fruit of the Spirit in my life, the more I am attracted to people who are passionately doing the same. For some reason my best and most significant friendships are always without exception these people! I believe this is the way it is supposed to be so that I can gain ground most expeditiously as I grow in Christ Jesus. The friendships I share in Christ Jesus with those who are seeking the righteousness of Christ and character fruitfulness are an amazing blessing and joy. I cannot imagine the division in a marriage relationship where these common character goals and growth in Christ are not shared. I would even question whether real friendship at an intimate level can ever actually occur. I cannot image that a life time spent with a person that was a casual friend as opposed to an intimate friend would be very rewarding.

That person you think is the one for you, how about sitting down and discussing character issues together and see where that takes you? There is no better time than the present to start your own pursuit, it may be the journey that leads you to God's best for your life.

Prayer: Lord help me to always be moving forward passionately in my single years toward becoming the person you desire me to be. Allow that shared passion be the first attraction that draws others to me.

Shared Direction

Week 4 Day 7

Josh 24:15 choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." NIV

As I read this passage of scripture, I get the feeling that if you were in Joshua's household and didn't want to serve the Lord, it would be over his dead body. His course, direction and purpose were sure. No woman in her right mind, who did not desire her household to follow the Lord, would have married Joshua.

Envision for a minute a Godless woman madly in love with Joshua because he is a powerful military and political leader. She views him as a project and decides to marry him. Her thinking is that after they are married he will change. She says to herself, "I will help him change!" He just thinks his household will serve the Lord. What would you say to this woman? "Go for it!" This poor woman is going to be miserable. This paradigm is laughable, if not totally absurd. Yet, I see Christians doing it all the time in a reverse scenario; pursuing an unbelieving spouse.

When I go to the pages of scripture and seek guidance for finding a perfect soul mate, I see very few scriptural mandates. It seems to me that God gives us a lot of liberty in making that choice. What I do see taught in scripture is that He expects me to choose a partner of the opposite sex, which seems a rather obvious choice to me. Secondly, God has given some pretty straight forward directions concerning biblical authorities and the value of receiving their blessing. Finally, the word says straight out, *2 Cor 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? KJV* So why is it that these things are not a part of our first consideration when looking for a mate?

How often some teen flutters in and announces they have finally found their true love. My first question is always, "Are they a believer, a Christian?" Invariably this puzzled look will come over their face and they will almost disgustedly say, "I think So!" Wait for it!!! You know it is coming!!!! That next absolutely absurd statement. Here are some of my favorites, "I don't know, I have only known her for about ten years." "His Grandma Goes to the Catholic Church." How about this one? "Religion is a personal thing, so we don't talk about that." Try Texting then! I could fill the rest of this page with the nonsense I have heard.

How any believer could seriously consider giving their heart away to a person whose heart is not welded to Jesus Christ, is beyond me. It is not optional; it is a Biblical mandate. God wants a godly offspring, (Mal. 2:15) and His desire is for you and your household to serve the Lord. The devil wants just the opposite. So, if you were the devil, what would be your plan of attack? Let's see, perhaps if I could get the strongest Christian young people to marry non-believing (or a mediocre non-committed Christian) then I can sabotage their ministry, marriage and family, with any luck - for life! Don't be deceived. We are not unaware of Satan's evil schemes. Determine now, as Joshua, that as *for me and my household we will serve the Lord!* Make it your motto with such gusto that any who would seek another course for you would think themselves foolish dreamers to believe you would settle for anything less.

Prayer: Lord today I Choose - As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.