

GTO Seeds for Growth

Couples Rejoice (Part 1 of 3)

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

Throughout Scripture, there is a distinct current of celebration, especially as God reveals His intention in creating marriage. When God fashioned Eve and brought her to Adam — they **celebrated** (Genesis 2:22-25). When Ruth and Boaz were finally united, there was **jubilation** (Ruth 4:14). Solomon and his Shulamite wife **rejoiced** their way through the Song of Songs, from chapter one, verse one to the last sentence in chapter eight. Proverbs is full of exhortations to married couples to **enjoy** their relationship. Proverbs 5:18 is especially encouraging: *May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.* “Rejoice” here means **to reel as though intoxicated**. No doubt about it! God’s talking about **CELEBRATION!**

To rejoice in your coupleness — to celebrate your oneness — these are words of action that demand choices. If the Holy Spirit lives inside you, you have the power to turn your marriage into jubilation. We’re not saying that every minute of the day is going to be fun and games. But we are saying that even when reality hits you hard between the eyes or tries to numb you with monotony, you can **still rejoice** in each other’s love.

We have identified eleven **actions** you must decide to take in order to enjoy such celebration in your marriage. To help you remember these choices, we’ve made an acrostic of the first letter of each one — spelling C-E-L-E-B-R-A-T-I-N-G.

CLEAR YOUR CONSCIENCE — Paul states in Acts 24:16, *So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.* And in 2 Corinthians 1:12, he amplifies: *Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.* Obviously, we need to start by clearing our conscience **before God**, praying with the Psalmist, *Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there is any offensive way in me* (Psalm 139:23,24). Then we need to clear our conscience **before others**. This may mean humbly seeking someone’s forgiveness. And the “someone” on the top of our list should be **our mate**.

We have learned as a couple that to **keep** our conscience clear before each other, **we need to pray together regularly**. When we are sharing together honestly with God, we are, at the same time, sharing honestly with each other. The two go hand in hand. In our marriage, this is the way we have learned to

keep short accounts with one another and with God.

James 5:16 discloses that we reap a great reward for keeping our conscience clear... We reap healing in our lives. *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed....* Many couples cheat themselves out of personal, emotional healing by refusing to be real and honest with their mates. If you keep your conscience clear before God and your mate, if you pray *for* each other and *with* each other, your marriage will be blessed with health. For when we share our failures with each other, we **unmask** them and **defeat** their power over us. When we pray for one another in our areas of weakness, we enter into an attitude of **mutual help** rather than judgment. Our bond of friendship and trust is strengthened. Our relationship grows healthier. And we’re able to freely rejoice in our love without barriers.

ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL GROWTH — The key word here is “encourage.” Another word for encourage is “**spur**” as in Hebrews 10:24, *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.* Newsflash: nagging, criticizing, hinting, pushing, advising, preaching and even heavy sighing are not what we’re talking about!

We encourage best when we stop focusing on our mate’s growth and begin focusing on allowing God to work in our own lives, changing us into the image of His Son. You might even say the best way to spur is to duck. That’s right — **duck!** Get out of the way! All our efforts to make our mate grow can actually be a barrier between them and God. We have to get out of the way so God can get a good shot at ‘em. So sometimes the best way to encourage is to shut our mouths, smile sweetly, and pray like crazy.

There’s another way we have found that encourages spiritual growth in our relationship. We **read God’s Word together** regularly, taking God’s command seriously to *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom* (Colossians 3:16). All this verse is saying is that we should read God’s Word together and talk about it. This is beneficial in any relationship, but it is especially beneficial to us as a married couple. It gives us a natural environment in which we can share with each other what God is doing in our lives. Sometimes as we read, one of us will say,

“I didn’t know God wanted me to do that...” or “That verse really hits me between the eyes....”

Choosing to encourage spiritual growth in your relationship will help you celebrate your love and oneness in a very special way. So remember, spur...duck...and read.

LOWER YOUR DEFENSES — Harv is rushing around trying to leave for the office. His wife Louise remarks, “Your tie is crooked.” Harv responds sarcastically, “Do you have any more encouraging words for me today?” Louise is stumped by her husband’s reaction. “I was only trying to help,” she shrugs her shoulders in a helpless gesture. “Well, thanks! I don’t know how I ever made it before I married you,” Harv bellows as he storms out the door.

Does anything like this ever happen at your house? This is **defensiveness...self protection**. Somewhere deep inside us, we feel we must protect ourselves at all cost — and that cost is usually our mate’s feelings. Defensiveness destroys relationships. It is the assault weapon we use to “mow ‘em down” when we feel threatened in any way.

Self-protection is centered around **self?** That’s why it’s called **self-protection**. It will brutalize our marriage relationship unless we take action. We must choose a better way — God’s way. *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:4,5). In other words, we have the **responsibility** to learn to protect ourselves **from** protecting ourselves.

Self-protection is centered around self.

Here are some practical steps you can take to lower your defenses:

- 1. Analyze your defensiveness.** Understanding the **roots** of our defensive behavior is essential if we are to overcome this stubborn barrier in our relationship. Ask yourself questions like “What was I feeling when I responded defensively? What did I think my spouse was trying to say to me? What did my reaction communicate to my mate?” “Are there particular words or scenarios that are triggering my reactions?”
- 2. Talk about your defensiveness.** This should be treated as an extremely important discussion. Choose a time when you and

Rejoice (cont')

your mate can talk **without distractions**. Really **listen** to each other. Make it your goal to **understand** your mate's feelings — not to judge them. And decide beforehand that you will *speak the truth [only] in love* (Ephesians 4:15).

3. **R and R your defensiveness.** As you **Review** and **Rehearse** a particular situation where your defensiveness reared its head, we suggest these three simple R and R Rules:

(1) Avoid statements that **sound judgmental**.

As you **Review** what happened, stay away from "You should...." "You never...." "If you would only...." Instead, use "I" messages: "I think...." "I feel...."

(2) State your opinion as **only your opinion**.

As you **Rehearse** ways to handle your defensive reactions in the future, *suggest* ways that *might* help. Don't let your R and R become "Rant and Rave" instead of "Review and Rehearse."

(3) **Ask** your mate for changes, don't demand them. "Next time, don't treat me like a baby!" probably won't work. But "I think if you let me know I can make my own choice, perhaps I wouldn't feel like you were trying to parent me" might work.

The best way to lower your own defenses, is to begin giving your mate every reason **not** to be defensive toward you. Let them know you are **with them**, that you **believe in them**, that you **value them**. As their defenses lower, you will find that they, in turn, will show you they are **with you**, that they **believe in you**, and that they **value you**. Lowering your defenses is a prerequisite to rejoicing. (For further help in the area of defensiveness see **Seeds for Growth** Vols. # 22 & 23.)

ENLIST IN HIS SERVICE TOGETHER

— Serve the Lord together. God **made you a team**. He wants to **use you as a team**. Priscilla and Aquila are a great example of a couple in Scripture who served God as a team. They were

tentmakers in Corinth when Paul first met them. He was a guest in their home for a year and a half, then took Priscilla and Aquila with him when he continued his missionary journey to Ephesus.

Serving together promotes real joy.

When the three of them arrived in Ephesus, Paul, after preaching in the synagogue, left our missionary couple in Ephesus to carry on. Can you imagine how they must have felt? They had been left alone in a foreign land, far from home, just the two of them. So they began their Ephesian ministry in the most logical place for Jews — the synagogue. They must have reasoned successfully there about the Messiah, because in Acts 18:27, we are told that by the time Apollos got there, others had become Christians. And later in 1 Corinthians 16:19, Paul writes a letter to Corinth from Ephesus stating that the Ephesian church *meets in their [Priscilla and Aquila's] house*.

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos...came to EphesusHe began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:24-26). Can't you just see it? Priscilla and Aquila attend synagogue regularly, speaking a word for Jesus whenever given the opportunity. Then one Saturday, a stranger shows up and requests permission to speak. This guy really knows the Scriptures, and speaks *with great fervor and teaches about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John*. The couple thinks, "This guy is good, but he doesn't have the whole picture." So they invite him to dinner and catch him up on the rest of the story. There would be so much they had to teach him, that they must have had him over to their home many times. Finally, the day came when Apollos was ready to go on alone. And Aquila and Priscilla

and the rest of the believers in Ephesus gave him a big send off to Achaia.

Priscilla and Aquila were ready for God to use them **anytime, anywhere**. They worked together in ministry, bringing people to the Lord, opening their home whenever needed, giving of themselves to people who needed discipling, and letting go of their disciples when their work with them was done. This was indeed a couple God could count on. **Can He count on you?** Is your home open for Him to use? Is your time and energy available for the Master's use? Ministering together in your home is one of the most rewarding things you and your mate will ever do. Do you believe that? Then it's time to throw another chicken leg in the pan, and invite someone home for dinner.

Ministering together might have an additional aspect as well. One of you may teach a Sunday School class or lead a boy's or girl's club or whatever. But you can still be ministering as a team by being involved in one another's service. You can help each other cut out flannel graph figures, serve in the nursery together, and, most importantly, you can pray together for one another's areas of ministry.

God gives something useful to do as a couple

If you choose to let God use you as **His** couple, you can be sure He will give you something **useful** to do **together**. The joy and fulfillment in mutual ministry exceeds anything you've experienced alone. (**Seeds for Growth** Vol. # 26 amplifies this point.) So far, we've covered C — **Clear** your conscience — E — **Encourage** spiritual growth — L — **Lower** your defenses — and E — **Enlist** in His service together. We urge you to start making these first four choices to rejoice and celebrate your marriage. In our next SEEDS FOR GROWTH, we'll continue the acrostic with B-R-A-T-I-N-G.

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