

While You Have Her

By Milt Hughes

On April 14th of this year (1997), Gladys Hughes went to be with her Lord in heaven. She was a dear friend and valued member of our GTO Board of Directors. A few weeks ago, Milt, her husband of 46 years, wrote a letter to the men in his church in Nashville, Tennessee. His letter moved us so deeply, we asked him for permission to print it in this *Seeds for Growth*. **So here it is in its entirety: a letter of encouragement and exhortation from a widower's heart.**

OBSERVATIONS FROM EXPERIENCING GLADYS' DEATH

As I watched my dearly beloved slip away day after day during her last few months, I couldn't help but wake up to the terrible realization that she would not be with me for very much longer. Every embrace, every moment of sharing became more precious than all the money in the world. I wished we could have experienced more of it in past years, but now it was too late, and I had to make the most of her limited responses and remember the many years of fulfillment we had enjoyed together.

I do not wish to imply that Gladys was perfect, for no one reaches that plateau in this life. But as far as I can tell, from my observations over 48 years of knowing her, I can honestly say that she came nearer to reflecting the essence of the Proverbs 31 wife than any person I ever met. Nor do I wish to imply that I have been a perfect husband; far from it, because I know many times I neglected her needs. I was preoccupied with my own ministry and work, and I put other people before her.

So, what have I learned from this experience? What can I scoop up from the charred embers of remembrance? What can I pass on to those of you who still have the cherished privilege of going to bed at night with the ultimate person in your life?

Never take tomorrow for granted. It may never come. Life can be snuffed out quickly and without warning. Circumstances can bring an unplanned separation. Disease or injury can bring physical and psychological limitations. We had not counted on such an intrusion into our lives. We fully expected to have many more years together before cancer changed our expectations. But remember, cancer is not the only dread enemy bringing separation

Live each moment. Since life is short and tomorrow cannot be counted on, make every moment count. Cherish every moment, every event, every experience. Simple things like a quiet dinner, a walk through the park, getting the children ready for bed, worshipping together at church, discussing a book, listening to romantic symphonies, watching a favorite TV program. I remember these kinds of moments whether they took place along the Big Sur coast of California, the beaches of Hawaii or simply driving down the freeway, or standing in line at Kroger. Touch, kiss, hug, look into her eyes, hold hands, give compliments, as if it could be your last opportunity to do so. *Carpe deum!*

Keep short accounts. Never go to bed angry, or with unresolved conflicts and harsh words. The most miserable nights we ever spent together were those which held misunderstandings and unresolved issues. Pride is the enemy of confession and forgiveness. Men, take the initiative. Learn to be aware of the feelings of your wife, she is under your protection. Be sure your conscience is clear before God and your wife.

Share a lot. Communication is the key to successful relationships, especially marriage. Didn't your pre-marital counselor tell you that? That doesn't mean to talk all the time. Non-verbal times speak volumes and can be a positive factor in many situations. Talk about your feelings,

your victories, your doubts, your desires. As Gladys slipped away in those last few days, and when she could no longer talk, I was filled with deep sorrow as I thought of all the many things I wanted to say to her and talk about. Several months before, after the cancer diagnosis, we had started reviewing our life together, beginning in college when we first met. We only made it through the first few years before running out of time. Don't get yourself in a situation where you have to play catch-up. It can all stop in the middle of a sentence. Don't leave things unsaid that should be said. But say them with love.

Read the Word to her and with her. For many years we shared Scripture, particularly in the mornings from Psalms and Proverbs. Recently we had been working through the New Testament. On the night before she died, I read the book of Philippians aloud to her, not even being sure she was able to hear or understand. I wish I had been a more creative leader in this matter. There were so many passages we could have discussed and consumed for our relationship. As the husband, God holds you responsible for the spiritual development of your wife. Nurture her. Encourage her. Open the Word with her.

Pray together, not just at meals. We prayed on the way to church on Sunday mornings in the car. We prayed over the phone with friends. We prayed before meals and a lot of times at night. But we didn't pray together enough. We made a lot of lame excuses for neglecting prayer, but we seemed to have plenty of time for other projects that proved in the end to be meaningless and trivial. You will each have your own personal quiet time, of course, but you need a regular time together. Keep a separate prayer list for this time.

Learn to use the OFF button on the TV remote. I regret that we spent

too much time watching meaningless programs. Even though we had cut down a lot, to less than 10 hours a week besides news programs, there could have been so much more time for the more important things. Most programs are ultimately worthless. It is an addiction, a mega time-waster, and I still fight it. The old battle of the tube. I think TV causes more mediocrity in marriage than anything else in the house. Of course, some programs can be beneficial and relaxing, if properly balanced and discussed.

Take time for sexual intimacy, not just sex. We enjoyed a very healthy and enjoyable time together in intimate love-making. Through the 46 years we were very consistent in this important matter. This requires time and priority. That's why we never allowed a TV in our bedroom. We considered the bed for sleeping and love-making, not outside entertainment. Over the years we learned how to meet each other's sexual needs and preferences. This also took time and openness. We tried to keep romance alive and enjoyed this intimacy more as the years went by. In our sixties we were more sexually active than even in younger years. I encourage you to learn how to be romantic. Take time to satisfy her needs, not just your own. We had a little "code" we used to indicate sexual readiness. I had to learn to give her time to get ready. I compared my "warm-up" period to turning on a light switch — one brief flick and the light was on! She was like an iron, which requires a few minutes to warm up. So we would refer to

"plugging in the iron." Guys, never use your wife simply to relieve sexual tensions. That is only a natural by-product of intimate and careful love-making. The slam-bam approach has absolutely no place in a Christian marriage.

Never, never, never put down your wife in the presence of others. Nothing can damage her self esteem or her trust in you any more than making her look bad or using her as the object of a laugh. She is your treasure. She is your very being, a living part of you. When you damage her, you ultimately damage yourself. Speak well of your beloved. Hold her up for praise, not derision. Enable her to be the wife and partner described in Proverbs 31. If your wife is not deserving of this kind of praise, at least withhold your negative comments until you are in a private counseling relationship with a trained counselor. When I know that a guy is degrading or abusing his wife, I want to punch him out. I cannot tolerate a man who does this.

Keep your eyes on her and remain faithful to her. For many men this is a difficult task. We are constantly surrounded by sexual attractions all around us. Temptations are great to turn to someone else when all is not well in the marriage relationship. That is why all the above tips are essential if you are to succeed in this one. Gladys and I remained faithful to each other throughout our entire marriage. I had a close call one time, but the strength of our commitment to each other won the brief battle because I knew that I could

severely and perhaps permanently damage my dear wife by giving in. Only the grace of God and forgiveness of the wounded can make a marriage work when one is unfaithful. Men, you made a vow to God and to your wife. She is your temple. Resolve to be faithful and pure. You will be rewarded.

May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer - may her breasts satisfy you always, and may you be captivated by her love.
Proverbs 5:18-19 (NIV)

Your elder brother,
Milt

Milt's letter was written to husbands, but the message is for both husbands and wives. We often tell couples, "**Spoil each other, and then you'll never have to live with regret.**" This sounds like such a simple statement, and yet it is profound, for when we focus on our mate and spoil them, there's little time left to focus on ourselves. **Self-focus makes for a miserable marriage. Mate-focus brings joy!**

We have never stood by the grave of a precious husband or wife and heard the surviving mate lament, "Oh, if only I had spent more time at work!" or "How I wish I hadn't told her so many times how much I loved her." No, we've never heard that, and neither will you.

Mark Milt's words well...while you have her...while you have him.

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