

How Can We Change?

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

Life often gets tense and intense.

Where has the laughter gone? Larry and Helen's relationship is drying up because there's no more fun in it. They want the joy back. But how? What can they do to change their lives, their relationship? *Can* they change?

George has a problem. He blows up at the least little thing. He hates himself for it, but seems helpless to do anything. He wants to change and prays passionately every day for God to take away the anger. But instead of it melting away, he becomes acutely aware of even more angry feelings inside. He reads God's command to "put away anger." But how? *How* can he begin to change?

We all can see patterns of behavior and weaknesses in our lives personally and in our relationships (especially with our spouses) that need to change—that we want to change. But getting from here to there...ah, that's the challenge! How? How do we change? Where is that elusive door? Those steps that will take us where we want to go?

There is no easy answer. There never is, is there? Have you ever noticed that the words the Bible uses concerning growth are all active? "PREPARE your minds for action" (1 Peter 1:13). "LOVE one another deeply" (1 Peter 1:22). "MAKE it your ambition to lead a quiet life" (1 Thess. 4:11). "BE joyful always; PRAY continually; GIVE thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:16-18). Active commands that mean CHANGE in our lives. But God is not cavalier. If He commands us to

change, then He must give us the resources to do so. And He does!

Among these resources are His Word, the Holy Spirit, and fellow believers. Since we fit into the category of fellow believers, we would like to suggest to you a tool for change. Since beginning to use it, we have found that it works. Here it is: **Agendas and Covenants.**

An Agenda is simply a list of things to be done. Look at your life. What patterns of behavior are there that you wish were different? In what areas of your life do you want to grow? These compose your **personal Agendas.**

Now look at your marriage relationship. What are the changes you long for? What are the patterns of behavior that gnaw away at your intimacy? How do you want your marriage to grow? These constitute your **couple Agendas.**

The next step is to make a **Covenant** about each Agenda. You and your spouse contract together in an intentional **PLAN for change.** You agree on a plan together and covenant to work out the plan.

Remember Larry and Helen? They each have an agenda to put some play back into their lives, to make their relationship fun again. They must share this agenda with one another and enter into a covenant together for a plan to accomplish it. Their plan might be to schedule one-half day per month just for fun. Larry plans the fun the first month; Helen plans it the next. They both put the date on their calendars and treat it as a binding appointment. This, then, is a covenant

between them that they both are responsible to fulfill. And if they do, they will start enjoying one another again.

How about George with his personal agenda concerning anger? He needs a Covenant with his wife Marion for a **specific plan** of action. He might say to her, "I really need your help to make me aware when I'm starting to get angry. Will you give me a time-out signal when you see me beginning to steam?" If she agrees to this plan, George is going to know the exact moment he must act on handling his anger constructively. It would be difficult to disregard a woman frantically waving her hands in a time-out signal. Granted, this is just a very small first step in George's coming to grips with his anger, but it's a bigger step than he has been able to take alone.

This is **Active Change** — and that's the only way it happens. Gordon Bear, a dedicated Christian counselor, said that change is "intentional, purposeful, conscious and by design." He's right. So that means if we want to change, then we must do so intentionally, on purpose, consciously and have a design to reach our goal.

Sounds like work, doesn't it? It is! But remember your resources — God's Word, His Holy Spirit, your spouse, other believers who love you and want to help you grow. And keep in mind the results. This process of growth that we're all in doesn't mysteriously slide uphill. It happens **intentionally, consciously, and by design.**

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