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# INTRODUCTION

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## Understanding The Word . . . “Harmony”

If you compare the wording in various dictionaries, you will find the word “harmony” defined in a way similar to this:

**Harmony** (har’mo-ne) n. – 1. A combination of *different parts* into a pleasing or orderly whole. 2. A careful arranging of *diverse elements* to form a pleasant unit. 3. Applied to music, harmony is the simultaneous sounding of two or more *distinct tones* that, combined, create a sound that is satisfying to the ear.

You create “harmony” when you take—*different parts...diverse elements...distinct components...and* blend them together so as to create something that is—*pleasing...orderly...pleasant...and satisfying*. Using these same descriptive words, we can say that homes with harmony are family settings in which very different individuals learn to co-exist in ways that are generally *pleasing, orderly, pleasant, and satisfying*.

Living together in “harmony” is not the same as living together in “unison.” The word “unison” means, “actions that are completely uniform.” When humans act in “unison,” they think, speak, and act identically. When two people sing in “unison,” they sing the same notes at the same time.

“Harmony” is different. When two people sing in “harmony,” they make very different tones that are blended to create a sound that is pleasing and pleasant to the ears. We can never live in homes with unison. We can, however, learn to live in homes with harmony!

## Harmony In The Home—A Great Challenge

When God designed the family, He began by uniting two very different specimens—a man and a woman. How different are we? Our differences can, at times, feel like we are from different planets—Mars and Venus. The reality, however, is that both men and women

are from planet Earth—the miraculous and marvelous creations of God. Still, we are very different in every cell of our bodies—the anatomy is different, the hormones are different, and the emotions are different. Learning to live harmoniously with these differences is one of life’s greatest challenges.

### **Let’s Look Forward—Not Backward**

This study will promote the biblical principle that harmony in the home is greatly enhanced when husbands and wives are committed to the truth that marriage is to be a permanent relationship. God’s plan and desire is for marriage to last a lifetime.

While stressing the permanency of marriage, we are sensitive to and aware of the reality that, for some, relational harmony has already been broken. Melody may have turned to misery along the way. The intent in this material is not to re-open old wounds or revive feelings of pain and failure from the past. We simply cannot journey back in history and relive those painful days or remake those important decisions. What we can and must do, however, is rely upon God’s grace and experience new beginnings. Starting today, we can go forward practicing marital commitment and building strong homes of health and harmony for the future.

### **Harmony Requires “A Concert”—Not “A Contest”**

In a contest, the opposing parts compete with each other. In a concert, they complete each other. For example, in a musical concert, the tuba is not in competition with the trumpet. No! These two instruments, along with all the others, have one common goal—uniting their very different sounds under the leadership of one conductor so as to create one concordant sound, which results in beautiful harmony.

God wants your home to resemble “a concert”—not “a contest.” The major goal must be “to complete”—not “compete.” This can only happen when we submit ourselves to the authority and direction of our one great conductor—the Lord Jesus Christ. Following His plan for marriage and the family, we can experience “Homes With Harmony” and create beautiful relational music that will be an honor to heaven and a blessing to earth.

**May God help us to have “Homes With Harmony!”**

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. . . God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:27, 31)*

*The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18)*

*So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said,*

*"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (Genesis 2:20-24)*



## CHAPTER 1

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### The Marriage Merger—Harmony Or Havoc?

#### Marriage—Life’s Greatest Merger

We are living in a day of big mergers, but one of the biggest and most challenging mergers of all has to be the union of a man and a woman in marriage. The marriage merger is entered into with a simple “I do,” and this may be the only simple thing about the entire process. Only the naïve could ever imagine that “*two becoming one*” would be an easy undertaking. As tough as a wedding can be, it is easier than the hard work required in marriage. The wedding occurs on one day. The marriage involves a lifetime.

Think about it! Two members of the opposite sex bring their backgrounds, beliefs, bodies, brains, bloodlines, belongings, bills, and burdens and merge them into what they hope will be the core of one big happy family! What a challenge! Someone has said, “The best place on earth to find optimists is in the waiting room of a Marriage License Office.” The merging of two lives is never easy!

#### Can We Fathom The Enormity Of This Merger?

One young, inexperienced minister was preparing to officiate at his first wedding ceremony. He was nervous—extremely nervous. His greatest fear was that in the middle of the ceremony, he would go blank—forget what to say next. He decided to speak with an older, more experienced preacher about his nervousness. The older gentleman advised the young man to stay calm. He said, “If you go blank and forget what to say next during the ceremony, just begin to quote Scripture—whatever comes to your mind. Once you remember where you were in the ceremony, then you will be able to proceed.” The young man was grateful for the advice and felt greatly relieved.

The day of the wedding came. As expected, he was very nervous and as feared, he went stone blank during the ceremony. Panic! What did he do? He did precisely what the older preacher had told him to do. He began to quote Scripture. And, the first words out of his

mouth were, *“Father, forgive them. For they know not what they do.”* The harsh reality is that no bride or groom fully comprehends the magnitude of the merger they are entering when they say, “I do!”

### **Help! Living With Another Human Is Not Easy!**

Have you noticed? Human beings tend to be selfish, independent, and even domineering? Try sharing a bed, a bank account, a bathroom, and a TV remote and see what happens. These tendencies may reveal themselves in living color when we begin to interact in marriage. One wife said, “Things started to change the moment we cut the wedding cake.” For many couples, there is a crash into major disappointment as they discover the “deep divide” that can exist in connection with temperaments, money, sex, chores, in-laws, time, friends, entertainment, space, and other areas where personal preferences frequently emerge. Differences that never surfaced during the courting phase can suddenly arise as high, thick walls that discourage and divide us. We soon discover that there are two ways of looking at things—your spouse’s way and your way, also known as “the right way.” One lady said, “I knew I married Mr. Right. I just did not know that his first name was ‘Always’ and his middle name was ‘And Forever.’”

### **The Core Problem That Makes Merging Difficult**

Many factors may explain the strains and struggles that arise when two people attempt to blend their lives. Every bride and groom bring baggage into their relationship—cultural, emotional, social, spiritual, and otherwise. Some of this baggage can be extremely heavy and burdensome. Why is it so difficult to unpack our baggage and live in harmony with each other?

At the very core of our struggles to “*become one*” is what the Bible refers to as the problem of the sinful nature. The painful fact is that in marriage, we each live with a sinner. Note what letter of the alphabet is at the center of the word “s ‘I’ n.” The tendency to be self-centered and self-serving affects every human being and every marriage relationship. None of us had to go to school to learn how to be selfish. This tendency comes as standard equipment in the human species. He wants “his way.” She demands “her way.” The sinful nature is frequently at the core of our marriage struggles. Can you see how a self-serving spirit affects harmony in the home?

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...(Isaiah 53:6)*

*So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. (Galatians 5:16-17 NLT)*

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. (Ephesians 2:1-3)*

*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7:18-19)*

Even the strongest of Christian couples will inevitably find themselves engaged in a battle of wills as two powerful centers of self-assertion collide. It is a myth to believe that Christian marriages are free of conflict. However, through mutual submission to the Prince of Peace, Jesus, marriage can become a crucible in which these stubborn wills are melted and merged.

## **Other Factors That Mar Our Marriage Mergers**

There are numerous other problems that complicate our efforts to merge two lives and create harmony in marriage. Let's mention four of these.

### **1. Our courting practices are flawed.**

Someone has said, "Dating is marketing and courting is the process of closing the sale." When people date repeatedly, this evolves into courtship. "Courtship" should be what the word implies—treating someone "kingly" or "queenly" with the intent of convincing him or her to spend the rest of life with you.

The courtship process in our culture has weaknesses and flaws. Thus, what you see in courtship is not always what you get in marriage. True, the typical dating couple talks for hours and hours



and they believe they know each other well. Yet, in many ways a dating relationship can actually conceal information rather than reveal it. Someone said, “Marriage is like deep sea fishing. You never know for sure what you have on the hook until you get it in the boat.”

Some discover that they have married virtual strangers. Courtship is designed to eliminate the element of surprise, yet frequently we hear marriage partners say, “I had no idea he or she was like that!” The truth is that discovering and dealing with individual differences is a never-ending process for married people.

In some cases, courtship can be a period of time when each partner puts his or her best foot forward while hiding embarrassing facts, habits, flaws, and temperaments. We reveal our “social personalities” and conceal many of our “selfish beliefs and behaviors.” Consequently, the bride and groom enter into marriage with an array of private assumptions about how life will be lived after the wedding. In time, major conflict breaks out when they discover that they differ radically on what each partner considers non-negotiable issues. This can be frightening to couples as they hit the wall of reality and realize that they have married an imperfect person. For some, this can lead to feelings of entrapment, anger, and despair. Harmony can turn into havoc!

## ***2. Many of our role models are corrupted.***

In recent decades, the divorce rate has been extremely high with approximately one-half of marriages splitting up. And sadly, for many of the couples that did manage to stay together, it was a story of “endurance”—not “enjoyment.” Some toughed it out for the benefit of the children or social status. Incredibly, only a small percentage of couples have managed to achieve a high level of healthy intimacy in the marriage relationship.

In view of these realities, it is a fact that more couples are going into marriage having no healthy role models to instruct and inform them in their efforts to build solid relationships. The finest way for Christian husbands to learn how to treat their wives and for Christian wives to know how to relate to their husbands is to witness healthy married love being modeled within their homes of origin. Many have never seen such models and have grown up in environments where unhealthy and unholy patterns were the norm. Sadly, for many in our culture, the abnormal has become

the normal. In a recent survey taken in a “small hometown setting,” in the Bible belt, it was discovered that in the typical public middle school classroom, less than one-half of the students were still living in homes occupied by both biological parents.

Into this vacuum where role models are lacking, the television industry and Hollywood have flooded our culture with models that glorify and perpetuate behavior that is weak, perverted, and even violent. The lack of healthy role models in family life today has created huge gaps and deep holes that make it difficult to navigate on the road that leads to marital harmony.

### ***3. Our depth of commitment is shallow.***

Commitment in marriage is a deep resolve to stand, stick, and stay by the conditions of the marriage covenant or contract that we vowed to honor and uphold. Vows are to be kept—not broken. As a way of “sealing” their vows, one newly married couple went to the cemetery shortly after their wedding and purchased two burial plots. They were sending a powerful message to each other—for us, the relationship will end in death.

In today’s society, too many have allowed the culture to shape and mold their view and definition of marital love and commitment. If there are not the “vibes,” “feelings,” and “emotions” that once existed, that’s supposed to settle it. Divorce is the only alternative. The situation is totally beyond their control—they “fell into” love and now they have “fallen out of” love. For some, love has become an uncontrollable case of the “tingles.” Where and when this is the case, commitment in marriage cannot exist and marital harmony is impossible. Strength of character and depth of commitment are always at the base of a home that can create beautiful harmony.

### ***4. Our cultural and sub-cultural patterns clash.***

Every bride and groom bring cultural and sub-cultural baggage into a marriage relationship. What is a culture? What are sub-cultures?

A “**culture**” is a discernable pattern of learned conduct, which tends to reflect the acceptable principles, patterns, preferences, pleasures, and priorities of one’s daily environment. These learned patterns of daily life significantly affect the beliefs and behaviors of every individual.

**“Sub-cultures”** are distinct divisions and groups within the larger culture. These smaller sub-cultures have their own unique features and characteristics that distinguish them from other sub-cultures. For example, within the broad religious culture of American life, there are many sub-cultures made up of various religious groups that reflect distinct beliefs and behaviors.

All humans are impacted by the culture in which they live. They are affected at even deeper levels by their exposure to the sub-cultures of their daily lives. For example, a person’s home of origin is a daily sub-culture. In some sub-cultures, the price at the meat market was a priority. In other sub-cultures, the price at the stock market was the main focus. These sub-cultural emphases can clash head-on in marriage. In some families of origin, hugging, kissing, and touching were common. In other clans, these behaviors were viewed as intrusive. In one setting, people yelled and openly expressed feelings and emotions when there was conflict. However, in other family settings, people grew up witnessing silent withdrawal and isolation when differences surfaced. One sub-culture may be socially, politically, and spiritually conservative. Another may embrace and teach views that are much more tolerant and liberal. It is a fact that our sub-cultures tend to have a powerful impact on the way we think, behave, relate, make decisions, play, worship, celebrate, and work.

Practices in one region of the country can clash with those in another region. Traditions can be very different. Literally, husbands and wives can be as far apart as “north and south” or “east and west.” It is not uncommon to discover that people celebrate in different ways. What is socially acceptable in one setting may be considered morally unacceptable in another. Cooking styles in one family can be extremely different from the way other families prepare their food. What is acceptable in one local church may not be allowed in another. These differences and others can become hotspots for marriage partners. Blending our differences so as to create harmony rather than havoc is a challenge for many.

Individuals who were reared in the same culture-at-large may discover in marriage that they have radical differences due to the influences of their respective sub-cultures. It is no wonder that in the process of merging two lives in marriage, individuals can

experience severe culture or sub-culture shock! You can marry a person who was reared in the house next door and still discover that the two of you have major differences, which can cause friction and fractures in the relationship.

### **Living In Harmony With One You Love Should Be Easy! But...**

No wonder so many couples struggle with their matrimonial math— $1 + 1 = 1$ ! These numbers do not add up on a calculator and many are finding it difficult to make this formula work in marriage. There's nothing easy or simple about merging two lives into one loving relationship. But, with a deep commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, harmony in the home can be experienced and enjoyed!

### **Harmony Building Exercises**

1. In building a home with harmony, how essential is it for the husband and the wife to fully embrace the biblical truth that marriage is to last a lifetime? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Can you point to specific weaknesses in the modern day courting process? What new ideas or different methods related to courting would you like to implement when your children begin this process?
3. Do you agree or disagree with the assertion that no person can fully know the person he or she is marrying? How can the church contribute in a positive way toward healthy courting practices that prevent as many surprises as possible?
4. Based on your experience with the marriage merger, how would you rate the complexity of the process? Do you agree that marriage is one of life's most challenging mergers? What do you think about a "Marriage Mentoring" program that provides an avenue for younger couples to learn from older couples? (*Titus 2:1-5*)
5. It is true that poor role models can adversely affect the strength and stability of our marriages. However, this trend can be reversed. Can you share an example where you or someone you know has actually grown stronger because of a previous disappointment and failure? What can we do in God's church to turn this trend around and help people to learn from their negative experiences and never repeat destructive behaviors?
6. Share personal examples to illustrate how cultural and sub-cultural baggage has complicated your marriage merger. What helped you to resolve these clashes? What good counsel can you share with others who may be struggling to find a resolution to their differences at the present time?
7. Discuss the need for caution when tempted to put a spouse in a cultural or sub-cultural mold and assume things about him or her that may not be

accurate. Everyone is different and unique and must be dealt with in view of this truth. How hurtful and dangerous it can be to hastily say, "You are just like the rest of your family!"

8. As you read the following passages, look for biblical truths that, if applied, will enable us to have attitudes and take actions that will make the marriage merger easier.
  - a. *1 Corinthians 13:4-8*
  - b. *Romans 8:5-6*
  - c. *Ephesians 4:2*
  - d. *Ephesians 4:29*
  - e. *Philippians 2:3-5*
9. Imagine four people singing in unison. Then, imagine four people singing in harmony. Which style is most touching and impressive to the human spirit? Why? How could we use this illustration to illustrate the power of "harmony in the home?"