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TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

A Daily Marriage Devotional



Barbara Canale



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January 1

He has endowed them with skill to execute all types of work: engraving, embroidering, the making of variegated cloth of violet, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen thread, weaving, and all other arts and crafts.

EXODUS 35:35

The first time I taught my daughter to knit, there were numerous mistakes. She pulled out more stitches than she stitched. When it was completed, the slipups were barely noticeable. Only she knew how much went into making it and repairing it.

The frustrations surrounding the time and energy to repair marriage blunders are worth the extra effort. You might make mistakes along the way, use improper approaches, inappropriate language, or even feel like giving up. Your marriage is a valuable gift that God intended for you to have: sharing your lives with each other forever. Ask God to cast off the unsuitable practices that wear your bonds down and allow you to evoke the best ways to tackle your quandaries. God has blessed you with many coping skills and strategies to resolve difficulties in your marriage.

You know the problems you need to face and the best methods to resolve them. If you are unsure of what the problem actually is, ask your spouse in a loving manner. Spouses usually can identify problematic areas. When tackling it, establish ground rules to guide you through it: stick to one topic at a time and don't move on to another matter until the first one is solved to both of your satisfactions. It is essential not to dredge up past mistakes, hurts, or problems. If the past continually resurfaces, it's an indication that those issues were never completely resolved and at some point you will have to revisit them to bring them closure.

After repeatedly practicing healthy conflict-resolution skills, perhaps through the art of compromise, they will become second nature, and you will be glad you invested the time and energy to enhance your marriage and brighten your future together. It is not enough to toil over problems; you must also pray on them. When you find yourself in the midst of conflict, how will you stop a quarrel and pray for God to enlighten you with the skills to resolve it amicably?

Dear Lord, help me to knit my marriage back together, one careful stitch at a time. Keep me focused on you so that I do what is right and just. Don't let me be offensive and hurtful to the mate you brought into my life. Fill me with grace, so that I convey my thoughts, feelings, and ideas tactfully and lovingly. I ask this in your sweet and holy name. Amen.

January 2

But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.

MARK 13:13

I ice skate a few times each winter. I might enjoy it more if I didn't fall so much. No one likes bruises and tired, achy muscles, not to mention cold feet. If I practiced more, I might not fall and actually enjoy myself more.

When times are difficult in a marriage, it's exhausting to keep falling and getting back up only to fall again. If there are verbal attacks, bruises can result, taking even longer to recover. It's critical to remember that humans make mistakes. The key is to get back up and keep trying. God would not want you to give up. He brought you both together and equipped you with the skills and knowledge to continue on your journey through life. Do it prayerfully and peacefully in God's love.

Whatever you are struggling with, give it to God and ask for his guidance. God will never abandon you in your struggles and with his almighty power you will be able to overcome anything, no matter how big it is or how frightening it might seem. If you have cold feet in this matter, don't lose your nerve talking to God for help. God is only a breath away from you at all times. He will fill you with inspiration. If you have cold hands, God will take them and warm them and lead you safely to the place he wants you to be. If you have a cold heart, cry out to the Lord and let him build a fire of his blazing love in it. With God's love in your heart, you will succeed at everything you do, no matter how slippery the surface is that you are skating on.

Perhaps you frequently use "you" statements, making your spouse defensive, feeling as if he is being attacked or accused of something. Try replacing each "you" with an "I" statement: I feel, I wish, I love you. It is not easy changing the way you speak, but it will make a world of difference in your relationship. Can you spend the rest of week using "I" statements with your spouse?

Dear Lord, I feel fatigued from failing to make my marriage sound. I wish I could say the right words to my partner because I care so much about our future together. I desperately want to make my marriage work. I will keep trying, no matter how difficult it is. Stay close to me Lord, and help me back up on my feet each time I stumble and fall. You are my salvation. With you I have no fear. Amen.

January 3

*I went down to the potter's house and there he was, working at the wheel.
Whenever the vessel of clay he was making turned out badly in his hand,
he tried again, making another vessel of whatever sort he pleased.*

JEREMIAH 18:3-4

Watching a potter throw clay on a wheel is amusing because he can transform a glob of mud into an art form or a useful earthenware object. Centering the clay is critical because if it is not done accurately, it will be off balance, and the potter will struggle with it the entire time. Some potters smack the clay down with a bat, knowing that the success of the pot depends on the centering.

Every marriage is centered differently. Some are centered on sex or seeking pleasure solely through entertainment and vacations. Some are centered on their careers, while others are centered on hobbies or sports. Some are centered on rearing children. Contemplate what the center of your relationship is and what activity do you put the most time into. Whatever it is, consider molding it from that worldly function into a more spiritual one focused on God. When you put God first in your life, everything else will fall into perfect place.

Make it a goal to create an intimate relationship with God. Find a way each day to spend quality time with your partner in prayer. Connecting with God and your spouse on a deep spiritual level will strengthen your commitment to each other and reinforce your relationship. Allow him into all of the areas of your life. Upon waking each day, you could spend a few minutes in prayerful reflection and offer your prayers, works, and joys to him. Before each project you tackle, perhaps you could spend a few moments in heartfelt prayer, seeking God's guidance and direction. Praying before meals is another way to bring God into your world.

Your life is like a ball of clay that can be molded into something extraordinary if it is centered correctly and completely on the Lord. How will you and your spouse incorporate more prayer time together?

Dear Lord, allow me to keep working at my marriage, to enable it to withstand any distractions that could wear it down or possibly destroy it. Enable me to avert diversions, to push aside commotions, focus on what is really important: you. Don't let me squander my valuable time on petty nuances that consume my neighbors and friends. Instead, let me dwell in your infinite love and mercy that you so willingly provide. Help me to center my marriage around you so that together we can do all that is good, right, and just in this world and the next. Amen.

January 4

*The just shall flourish like the palm tree, shall grow like a cedar of Lebanon.
Planted in the house of the Lord, they shall flourish in the courts of our God.*

PSALM 92:13–14

When Ephesus Technologies, inventors and producers of LED lights, installed their fixtures in a dairy-cattle barn, the cows exposed to the new lights produced an additional five gallons of milk each day. It was concluded that happier cows produce more milk. It would be fantastic for couples to turn on a light in their marriages to make it better and brighter.

A happy marriage produces more love. Reflect on what is working in your relationship and focus on making that area better. After you feel satisfied with that success, you can contemplate other areas of your marriage that could use more enhancing. No one has a perfect marriage: everyone's relationship could use a little polishing and a little brightening. Perhaps you speak condescendingly to your partner and want to correct that behavior. Imagine your spouse is Christ; that might prompt you to treat him or her with more dignity. Let God influence your decisions to be more kind and compassionate to your spouse.

Consider what else you could do to make your marriage more productive and dynamic. Often, making simple modifications or adjustments is all that is necessary. Maybe you need more physical contact with your spouse; hug more often or acknowledge the good they do each day. Thank your spouse when he or she does something nice. Those simple gestures tell your spouse you care. Don't take your spouse for granted. Ponder if you give minimally to your partner or keep score who does the most to build up the relationship. Consider what changes you might make. Perhaps setting aside time to reconnect in prayer by bringing God into your relationship could be the brightness your marriage needs. Contemplate the many ways God can illuminate your union.

God is the light of the world and whoever walks with him will never be in darkness. How will you let God's love shine on your marriage this week?

Dear Lord, I don't want to live in the shadows of those around me or those who suppress me. Let me break out of the darkness. Shine forth your love and bless my marriage to make it more productive by teaching me to reach for a deeper level of trust and loyalty. Remind me to be more thoughtful, speak kinder, and act more compassionately to my partner. When I please my spouse, I am also pleasing you. You are the light of the world and I want my relationship to flourish in the brilliance of your unconditional love. Amen.

January 5

After a time, his master's wife looked at him with longing and said, "Lie with me."

GENESIS 39:7

A whimsical mobile dangled lazily over my daughter's crib at the perfect distance, enabling her to admire it with curiosity. The temptation for her to grasp it was enticing. Through creative measures, she yanked off a trinket, forcing the mobile to be lopsided.

There will be myriad temptations that can derail a marriage if one person succumbs to it. If you feel temptation stirring within you, call out to Jesus, and he will strengthen you. He will give you the courage to boldly walk away. If you are addicted to food, alcohol, drugs, gambling, the Internet, or shopping, cry out to God to resist the lure. God is stronger than any enticement and he can help you avert any trap. The worldly pleasures that are addicting can create havoc in your marriage. It's not worth it to risk succumbing to a temptation if it will cause injury to your marriage. When you leave this world for the next, you will leave all earthly pleasures behind. If you cannot take it with you, leave it now. Instead, feed the hungry, talk to the lonely, share what you have with those who have nothing.

Implore the Holy Spirit to keep you focused on keeping your marriage the sacred union God intended it to be. Remember the marriage vows you made to your spouse, and honor them. If there are infidelities keeping your marriage askew, stop them immediately and seek advice from your parish priest or go to a marriage counselor. If there are impure thoughts, flush them out with prayer and fill your mind with loving thoughts of your Lord and savior. Pray for guidance. God will illuminate your path and show you the way out of your disparity. If there are betrayals, apologize for them, and make a plan to avoid that reckless behavior in the future. Seeking forgiveness is imperative. Start by going to confession and seeking the sacrament of reconciliation. You will experience peace and spiritual consolation after going to confession. Your encounter with a loving, merciful God will enable you to renew your strength to thwart temptations, turn away from sin, and walk together with God. What are healthy ways to you can work through your temptations so that your marriage doesn't become lopsided?

Dear Lord, exude your tender mercies on me. Keep me strong and holy as I journey onward with my spouse and strive for reconciliation in my marriage. Keep me on the right path, avoiding inducements in every alluring form. Enable me to see the good in my partner. Allow me to remember that you created [name] for me to share my life with. I trust in your plan even though I do not understand it. Amen.

January 6

Does the snow of Lebanon desert the rocky heights?

JEREMIAH 18:14

Each tiny snowflake is a beautiful ice crystal that forms in a wide variety of intricate shapes, making each one unique. When snowflakes stick together, whatever they attach to appears clean, bright, and magical. A snow-covered landscape is a remarkable sight.

Because people are different, when they stick together in marriage, they emanate the same mystique and radiance as the first snowfall. Think about the personality traits that you have in common with each other. Maybe you are both outgoing and enjoy socializing or perhaps you are both night owls. Other commonalities might be that you are both from the same town, the same nationality, or have the same religion. Perhaps you have similar traditions that you brought with you into your marriage. Contemplate what initially drew you and your spouse together. What was so appealing about those character traits; were they similar to yours or different? For today, dwell on those charming qualities and remind your partner about them.

Ask your spouse what unique traits he or she finds endearing about you. There are undoubtedly personality traits you have that are different from your spouse. Consider stretching to meet them and become a student of them, trying to be appreciative and learn as much as you can to be better-rounded. Opposites attract; perhaps that is your situation. If so, you can balance out each other's differences. If your spouse is a socialite and you are a recluse, you can learn from your mate how to step outside your comfort zone to be more social. And occasionally your spouse could enjoy quiet time at home with you. God made all of us different and he wants us to embrace those differences. This is one way we can honor God, by appreciating, tolerating, and caring about each other's variances. Our differences are what God loves about us the most. Therefore, it behooves us to accept and celebrate our spouse's uniqueness.

What activities do you especially enjoy sharing and participating with your spouse? Do you appreciate taking long walks together? What new endeavors might you do with your spouse? Perhaps you could teach a religion class together. As God for direction; he will guide your journey.

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing [*name*] into my life and for filling my days with abundant joy and love. Thank you for the ability to overcome the sorrows and disappointments I have experienced by not appreciating my spouse's differences. Teach me how to embrace them and to move beyond any idiosyncrasies that once held me back. I love you, Lord, for choosing such a wonderful life partner for me. Amen.

January 7

For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18

When the snow falls, it's understandable how some people are bothered by it. The leading complaints by northerners are being too cold and having to work to shovel it. Some southerners long for it. They think about building snow forts, snowmen, and having snowball fights. Many people fly to mountain resorts to ski or snowboard. Do you abhor the snow, or do you adore it?

There are positive and negative aspects of most everything, including marriages. Contemplate the favorable characteristics of your relationship. Perhaps you enjoy the companionship aspect, because you are never really alone and your partner is a great listener or conversationalist. Your mate shares a living space with you, and you might find sharing chores and responsibilities comforting. Marriage gives you the ability to pool your assets and to cohabitate more affordably. If one of you is down, the other one can lift you up and act as a sounding board to help you through your personal difficulties. God planned many benefits for you to enjoy as a couple. You might not actually see the benefits, but they are there.

When two people share a living space, there is room for conflict. Perhaps you might get annoyed with the way the laundry is done and your spouse might not like the way you shovel the driveway. However, find contentment in the fact that your partner makes attempts to share in the responsibilities, even if the job is not done to your satisfaction. Again, you might not actually see the intention, but it is there.

Tap into your creativity to generate better opportunities for a loving environment in your home. Maybe your spouse needs to hear you say, "Thank you" for doing the dishes, or "I love you." Perhaps your partner is struggling with health issues. Think of ways you can nurture your spouse while bringing happiness and love back into your union on a deeper level. One of the best ways to strengthen your marriage is to pray together and offer prayers for one another. Your holy union has been bound together in God's love. How can you promote an insightful commitment to your spouse while you weather the mechanics of living together in harmony?

Dear Lord, reaffirm the many respectable qualities in my relationship and help me be resilient to the struggles we face. Please, Lord, don't let me become ensnared in nitpicking and being overly critical. Open my eyes to the goodness of my partner that I sometimes overlook. Let me embrace the wonderful qualities and mature in your love. Amen.

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Richard R. Gaillardetz

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William E. Rabior and Susan C. Rabior

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About the Author

Barbara Canale's writing career began in 1994 with the publication of a nonfiction book titled *Our Labor of Love: A Romanian Adoption Chronicle*, about her experiences adopting two orphans with enormous medical needs. Feeling God calling her to change her life drastically, she decided to write about the sagas of raising post-institutionalized children with unique medical problems. She documented her daughters' growth and development through lighthearted stories that she published in a variety of magazines, including *Seek*, *Exceptional Family*, and *Whispers From Heaven*.

After her daughters' health improved, Barbara returned to her career in healthcare and wrote more spiritual pieces, particularly twelve narrative inspirational stories for the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series. In 2007, she began writing "The Word of the Lord," a column for the Syracuse diocese's *Catholic Sun*, as well as other journalistic pieces. She also began writing for *55 Plus Magazine*, a retirement publication, and *In Good Health—Central New York's Healthcare Newspaper*. Today, Barbara Canale is a full-time writer. Her previous work with Liguori Publications is titled *Prayers, Papers, and Play: Devotions for Every College Student* (2013).

