

The HoneyYear (Volume 2)

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Preface

The book ***"The HoneyYear"*** is a unique work about marriage, love, and faith. It combines personal experiences with biblical wisdom and vividly shows how a young couple embarks together on the path of family life. Open, honest, and profound, it invites readers to build the foundation of a happy marriage with God. Alongside this book, many other thematic works have also been written in the light of Agape love. In addition to this book, many other thematic books have also been created in the light of agape love.

The Wedding Ceremony

Our relationship with my beloved friend had gone so far that we realized there was no way without a wedding. And so that we would not constantly think about each other while being apart, we decided to create a family.

When I proposed to my dear friend, she did not hurry with her answer, although I already knew it. But still, she decided first to pray about this important step, and also to give me time to reflect. We prayed together that the Lord would destroy our plans for each other if they were dangerous for us. But no breakup occurred, and we became even closer. How wonderful it is to be friends with someone who wishes to become your other half and spend a lifetime with you!

Our agreement not to touch each other in order to avoid unnecessary temptations we carefully preserved in our meetings. And if there were touches, they were only in the nature of a greeting.

When my friend gave her consent to our union, I suddenly realized what responsibility was placed on me for the future family, and I decided to pray about this especially. I appointed a time of fasting and prayer and began asking for help from above to have wisdom in this matter. According to my faith, I was given everything necessary.

We calculated on which days it would be best to hold the wedding celebration and paid attention to ensure that the female days would pass before all the important events. We made an agreement with the pastor who would perform the ceremony. Before our church wedding, we registered our union at the civil registry office and decided to invite only the closest relatives there.

And when everything was decided and the dates set, we began compiling the guest list and notifying them about our celebration. To our surprise, everyone responded with joy and gave their agreement to be present. Since there were many guests, we had to find cooks and a place for the festive banquet.

The Lord helped us even in these matters. And in this pre-wedding bustle, we discovered each other's organizational abilities and joyfully shared our findings.

The day of the civil registration of our union arrived. We dressed smartly and went to the registry office. The representative of the state authority solemnly asked me first, in front of many witnesses, about my decision to take my friend as my wife. I said, "Yes." It was the most thrilling word of my life.

Then my friend was asked if she agreed to become my wife. There was silence, in which a short but very clear "Yes" was heard. Something extraordinary happened in our hearts. From that moment, by the law of the country, we were considered husband and wife, which was joyfully announced to us, and we were asked to sign the documents. Our witnesses also signed. How simple it all turned out to be!

Then the congratulations began. But we told our unbelieving relatives that we would truly become husband and wife only after the church wedding, where we warmly invited them.

For the wedding celebration, we chose Sunday. We made arrangements in advance with friends to help conduct the program and decorate the hall. We wanted to make everything modest, but the expenses for preparation still turned out to be large.

On Saturday, after sunset, such a bustle began in preparation and decoration in every direction that we did not know if we would get any sleep. But we had no time for sleep.

And then came the morning of the very day when we decided to stand before God, to enter into our marriage covenant with Him, and to receive His blessing and approval. When I woke up, I prayed, dressed in my prepared suit, called all the organizers of the celebration, and went to get ready for the important event.

At that time, my other half was being prepared by her bridesmaids, adorning her as their imagination suggested. Our friends arranged transportation to bring the bride to the place

of the celebration. All the guests had gathered and were waiting joyfully in anticipation of our appearance.

Since there are no special rules for conducting a wedding ceremony, we decided to create them ourselves and had written a program in advance, describing step by step all our actions in accordance with the traditions accepted in our society.

And here she came, adorned in pure white linen, prepared for me as a gift from Heaven, to be solemnly given to me for the rest of my life.

The bride's father solemnly led his daughter to me and took his place in the first row. I had never seen a more beautiful woman than the one who decided to become my wife. My heart trembled with excitement and the solemnity of the moment. From the expression on her face, I noticed that my bride was also very nervous. Oh, if only I wouldn't faint from happiness!

We were invited to take our seats on the stage, and the minister gave a short sermon about what family means and how it appears in the light of the Bible and our time. I sat overwhelmed with different feelings and thoughts, glancing at the one who gave me her happy smiles. And our guests had their cameras ready so as not to miss anything.

Then the pastor asked us to stand and began asking me whether I agreed to take my bride as my wife and to tenderly care for her in different situations. I understood that at that moment the Lord Himself was present there and was binding in Heaven what we were binding on earth. I gave my consent with a gentle word, "Yes."

My beloved also, after hearing the pastor's questions, gave her consent with her solemn answer, "Yes." We were invited to kneel for a solemn prayer, after which the pastor announced us as husband and wife. And under the joyful noise of cameras, he added: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

It is difficult for us to convey our emotions, but something very important happened in our lives, and in our minds we crossed a boundary after which a new countdown of time began for us.

The pastor took our hands and solemnly joined them together. Finally, I can embrace you, my dear friend, without being embarrassed by curious eyes. How joyful it is to embrace your wife, given to you by God for earthly joy!

This was the beginning of our new relationship. I quietly asked: “So, how are you, wife?” To which she said: “Everything is wonderful, husband!”

Together with all the guests, we sang a song to the glory of the Lord, prayed solemnly, and walked to the exit of the church to receive congratulations.

How pleasant it was to see the happy faces of our friends! And what wonderful wishes were given to us by all those who came to congratulate us!

Flowers, envelopes, hugs, and kisses—all of this joyfully poured down upon us like a waterfall. And our friends recorded it all on video and received our gifts, laying them beside us.

While the guests went to the banquet hall, my wife and I left for a photoshoot to preserve the unforgettable moments of our first family day.

I had never imagined how wonderful it is to have a wife. A storm of feelings unknown until then burst into my life—a very pleasant and lasting storm. I kept drawing my other half close to me and enjoyed her unusual warmth and tenderness of body. And now this is all mine forever! How wonderful! And within this body is hidden the most beautiful soul, which from now on will always delight me with its uniqueness, reveal its secrets, and share its concerns.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Genesis 2:22-24; Ephesians 5:22-32; Amos 3:3; Song of Solomon 2:16; 4:1-16; Isaiah 49:15-19; 54:5; 61:10; 62:5; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2; 22:17; 1 Corinthians 7:36 in the light of our lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. What is the purpose of a wedding ceremony? What is it?
5. Why are families created? What is the goal of marriage?
6. Why does the Lord compare Himself to the Bridegroom and us to the bride?
7. Does the Lord, through His Word, wish to show us how important, close, and dear we are to Him?
8. Did you experience your own wedding? If so, share what you felt and how you perceived everything.
9. How do you imagine the wedding of Jesus, and who do you see yourself as at this celebration?
10. Does the Lord wish to know His bride more closely before the wedding?
11. Do you rejoice in the happiness of others expressed in marriage?
12. Should a family be created just for the sake of having a family with someone you do not love?
13. What happens in the mind and life of those who say “Yes” to each other before the altar?
14. If I insist on becoming the bride of Jesus, will He take my desires into account?
15. Was this lesson useful to you?

The Wedding Night

The wedding feast was over. Beautiful wishes were spoken. Gifts were given. The guests, satisfied and content, went home, while my friends brought me and my beloved wife to my place and, after saying goodbye, left us alone.

Entering the empty room, we both flopped onto the couch and sighed with relief. It is not so easy to be the center of attention all day and also think about making sure that all the guests are happy and entertained.

They say that at night one should sleep, but for some reason on this night we did not feel like it. I looked with a smile at my dear and closest person and smiled joyfully. She was beautiful in her white dress and looked at me with interest, wanting to understand what I would do next. I suggested that we pray, to which my wife immediately agreed, and we knelt and offered thankful prayers to God, asking for His blessing on all our future actions.

Then came the suggestion to relieve the tension of the past day by taking a shower. Said and done. Water is a gift of God.

And so, both clean and wrapped in towels, we stood facing each other and smiled joyfully, not knowing how best to continue our family life. I decided to embrace my dear half, and we gently pressed ourselves to one another.

What happened next we will not tell you. This part of our family life will remain closed to you, friends, forever. This night became the beginning of a new chapter for us, but we also realized: marriage is God's design for us, and we should approach it with wisdom. For if God created intimacy between husband and wife, then He also has answers as to how to live rightly in this sphere. We understood that intimacy is also worship of God through the unity of husband and wife.

When creating man in His own image and likeness, God gave the command to be fruitful and multiply and placed within His creation certain abilities, feelings, and instincts. The Lord made

sex beautiful and blessed within the framework of marriage and covered this act with a mystery that is revealed only to husband and wife in their close relationship.

Through Hollywood, the enemy decided to present his own version of such intimacy to the world and reduced God's plan to animal passions, adorning this craft with sensual experiences and vivid scenes. And many people took such images as their textbooks and swallowed this bait, wishing to build families with such ideas.

As a result, we see a sad picture of people disappointed in family life, insatiability, various perversions, and adultery.

Few people talk about how things should be, believing that newlyweds will figure it out on their own. And this ignorance Satan uses for his purposes.

If God does not teach us this art through dedicated and wise people, then the enemy of souls will take charge of our education and teach us that which will kill us or make us sick.

The first wedding night can become the beginning of the most wonderful relationship, or it can lay the foundation for various diseases and psychological disorders.

I think everyone who enters into marriage at some point faces a similar question: "How should intimacy be started correctly?" We also stood before this mystery, feeling joy and slight excitement. So as not to rely only on our guesses, we decided to include here the advice of a specialist we consulted before the wedding, which can help newlyweds avoid mistakes and immediately build intimacy on a solid foundation.

The first and most important thing to know and understand is that man and woman differ from each other both physically and emotionally. They will never experience physical intimacy with the same perception and feelings.

As a rule, the husband takes the entire initiative of these relations upon himself, but without knowing the structure of the woman's body and psyche, he cannot understand what he

should rightly do and what he should not do, while the wife waits for what the husband is not able to give her.

To avoid such misunderstandings, it is important simply to discuss all these issues both before physical intimacy and during it.

If a woman thinks that her husband should guess how to give her maximum pleasure, she will be surprised. For he does not possess such intuition, nor is he supposed to. The responsibility for one's own enjoyment each participant in intimacy must take upon themselves. We are given the gift of speech so that we may use it to express our thoughts and feelings, and this gift should be used also in intimacy, striving to understand each other, explaining our sensations.

The bedroom is not a gym for setting records in speed or number of exercises. It is a holy place where one should invite God and ask for wisdom and blessing for all that happens there. And the Lord will answer.

For a man, as a rule, a few seconds are enough for his imagination to make him ready for intimacy with his wife. A visible image gives a signal to the brain, and the corresponding hormones are released into the blood. A woman perceives this differently, and she needs more time for emotional readiness. Therefore, she should gently restrain her husband's spontaneous impulses so that he does not rush to start and finish everything quickly.

But if one of the spouses is tired, overstimulated, or in emotional struggle, then they should not be pressured into intimacy.

The second important rule for harmony in intimate relations is understanding and caring that the wife first experiences the joy of intimacy and is not left unsatisfied. During mutual caresses, the woman's hormonal system prepares for the release of prolactin, estradiol, and oxytocin into the blood, and when orgasm occurs, her body, experiencing positive stress, calms down and produces hormones of happiness, which afterwards promote a closer spiritual perception of her husband.

If this does not happen, and the husband rushes, thinking only of himself, then after ejaculation he calms down without bringing the wife to climax, and all of the woman's internal arousal turns into vascular congestion, which with frequent repetition can lead to serious physical and spiritual illnesses. A woman's body is not designed to calmly react to the sudden cessation of the process that has been begun.

The ignorance of a husband is in that he judges his wife by himself, not understanding the structure of her body. As a rule, the most sensitive erogenous zones are located not inside the woman but outside, and the husband's task is to recognize and find these places through kisses and caresses. And the wife can tell her husband where it is most pleasant for her to feel his touches and caresses.

When a man receives what he wants, his body calms down, and he loses enthusiasm to continue intimate play, and the wife's body and psyche can suffer from this. And when such one-sided relationships become the norm, emotional cooling can occur on the part of the woman, and nothing will excite her anymore.

Intimacy is an expression of love and faithfulness, not just technique. If spouses focus only on "correct actions," they may lose the joy of the heart. The main thing is not "how," but "with whom" and "for what purpose."

It should also be said of a man that when he is brought to the peak of arousal and then denied continuation, he, like a woman, experiences inner imbalance, which can cause serious illnesses of internal organs and the psyche.

Newlyweds should, if possible, first study each other's bodies, sharing their discoveries with simplicity of heart. They are given to each other for enjoyment. Wisdom in any family sphere will never be excessive.

Newlyweds must remember: the first intimacy is not an exam for success, but the beginning of a long journey. It is important to create an atmosphere of trust where there is no fear of judgment. Mistakes and awkwardness are normal and no reason for shame.

The first wedding night does not necessarily need to include everything at once. Sometimes it is wise just to be together, embrace, sleep, and give each other time to get used to the new. This is also a part of intimacy. Sometimes the expectations of newlyweds do not coincide with reality. It is important to learn to accept each other's imperfections and to forgive, even in intimacy. This will relieve pressure.

Though we are all different, and not everything described above may apply to your situation, in this matter it is necessary to have a clear understanding of physiology and inner processes. Love in marriage is always a path of learning. Husband and wife gradually discover one another, share their feelings, and learn to hear the heart of the other. Sometimes this happens easily and naturally, sometimes it requires patience and humility. But in any case, God gave spouses time so that they could grow in love and unity.

Love for a spouse helps endure their ignorance and can protect the psyche from destruction. Mistakes and misunderstandings in the beginning are inevitable, but they should not become a barrier. If spouses invite God into their relationship, learn to speak openly with each other, and strive for mutual love, then their intimacy will not be a source of pain but of joy and strength for the whole family life.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Ephesians 5:25; Genesis 2:22-25; 4:1; Proverbs 1:20-33; 5:15-19; Song of Solomon 1:1-3; 2:4-6; 4:10-16; 7:2-11; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Romans 7:2; Colossians 3:18-19; Proverbs 2:10-11 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. Are such topics dangerous for reflection?
4. Should such topics be raised with young people to warn them against mistakes?
5. Do you know any specialists in your church on such questions who deal with this professionally?
6. What relation does this lesson have to family happiness?

7. Can ignorance in such matters be destructive for health and the psyche?
8. Are all people the same in their sensual perception of relationships?
9. What should be done if the problems described in the lesson are already too late to correct?
10. Does the Lord desire that we be wise people in such relationships?
11. Do our lessons help build proper relationships?
12. Did you notice a difference in the perception of what was written between the first and second reading of this lesson?
13. Is it worth learning more about what is not usually discussed publicly?
14. Can such topics be applied to all married couples?
15. For what purpose was this lesson written?

The Honeymoon

What do you hear and imagine when someone tells you about a "honeymoon"? In fact, it is thirty days after the wedding. There is a version that according to ancient tradition it was customary to give newlyweds a barrel of honey at the wedding, which they were to eat within a month. In some places, it was customary for the young couple to go on a romantic trip to stay away from everyday worries, which is also welcomed in our time.

Such a pastime has no Biblical foundation, but in the Word of God there are some indirect references to the first year of married life. We read in Deuteronomy 24:5: "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, nor shall he be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken." Here it is not just about the husband being free from responsibilities, but about the fact that he must bring joy to his wife.

What happens in the first month of family life? Two lonely people get to know each other as husband and wife, adjust to each other, find points of connection, and build their new family happiness. In this process, there is active discovery of one another, for which one month is very little. Intimacy is not only the physical side of marriage, but also an expression of love, trust, and spiritual unity between husband and wife.

It is also worth noting that the first month of family life is the most active phase of sexual intimacy, where newlyweds gain full freedom to do what they want, and no one and nothing can hinder them in this. But all friends and relatives smile approvingly at their union and wish them happiness.

If we take into account the fact that our modern world excessively emphasizes sex, and this influence has affected everyone, then it is worth talking about what happens to the human body, which suddenly begins to behave quite differently than usual.

In some ways our body, in many hormonal functions, is similar to the nature of certain animals. Scientists have conducted

research in the field of intimate relationships of our younger brothers and saw a direct correspondence of many indicators with human life. But man differs from animals in that he has reason and can make decisions.

If a male and a female rat are placed in the same cage, immediate frantic mating occurs, and high sexual activity is observed in these animals. After a short time, this activity decreases and then disappears completely. The female no longer attracts the young male, and he loses interest in her. But if a new female is introduced into the cage, the male begins to show intense interest in her, and then calms down again. And so it happens every time a new female enters the field of availability of the male. And after three and a half years the male completely exhausts himself and no longer desires to mate with anyone. This is called the Coolidge effect in psychology and biology. The same pattern occurs among people who enter into intimacy and begin setting records, desiring to receive eternal pleasure from this connection. But the opposite effect occurs, and the law of satiation comes into force, when what once brought pleasure ceases to bring joy, and something unusual is desired.

What happens in the human body at this time?

We have an extensive hormonal system that responds to our feelings, events, and facts by releasing appropriate hormones into the blood. The center of pleasure, receiving signals from these releases, sends the brain a sense of satiety, satisfaction, fear, or whatever corresponds to our choice or situation.

The hormone dopamine is a stimulus to seek pleasure and by its influence can make a person dependent on certain actions if the will does not oppose with the principle of self-control. If there is no restraining force of will, dopamine begins to dominate and drive a person to repeat certain actions, controlling lower powers of consciousness such as appetite, sexual desire, infatuation, craving for novelty, and sociability.

Also in our body there is the hormone testosterone, which is responsible for the sexual sphere of life, for emotional and

creative abilities, for the development of bones and muscle tissue, and in women also for the distribution of adipose tissue. This hormone affects sexual desire and joyful mood, physical, mental, and creative activity, and is responsible for the quality of semen.

During sexual contact, testosterone is released together with semen, and the body needs time to restore this hormone. The body requires about a week to restore hormonal balance, after which the body reenters its normal rhythm of work and mental abilities return to normal.

Active intimate life or frequent forced stimulation of the sexual organs takes additional resources from the vital reserves of the body, the lack of which exhausts the body and damages the mind of a person.

Taking this hormone from outside disrupts hormonal balance and can lead to the body ceasing to produce it on its own.

The conclusion is this: the more pleasure one seeks, the less it comes. The world teaches that a lot of sex is wonderful, but common sense and the human body cry out: "This is a catastrophe!"

The same can be said about food. Dopamine encourages us to seek and consume tasty and pleasant food. And if it is healthy, in small portions it brings benefit and joy to the heart. But if it is consumed constantly and in large quantities, the taste is lost, and it no longer satisfies the appetite. The search for new products begins. Dopamine is also responsible for addiction to alcohol, smoking, and other drugs.

When experimental animals were artificially given drugs that increased their sexual desire, their activity rose, but then declined, and then even the drugs did not help, but destroyed the exhausted body, causing various mental disorders and different diseases.

It is written in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is self-control."

It is worth honestly asking yourself the question: “Why did what was the norm of behavior before marriage, keeping souls and bodies pure in thoughts and feelings, suddenly disappear after the wedding and become a distant memory?”

We are not going to establish any criteria or norms in this chapter, but simply give information for reflection and independent search for answers to cases in your life. Though we are all different, with different inclinations and boundaries, the laws of health are common to us all, and they should be known, studied, and observed.

The wisdom of the wise is that they not only know what is happening and what is right, but they also live in this right light of their knowledge and walk in this light, and have fellowship with one another.

Being wise in the last days is very important. The eye salve offered by Jesus will open our eyes to many things that should be controlled and observed in our lives. Only love, based on faithfulness and God’s wisdom, is able to preserve the freshness of feelings for many years.

Falling in love with your other half opens the door to many wonderful experiences and feelings. Intimacy is the culmination of these relationships, but it should not become the meaning and rule of a happy life.

Communication with each other, reflections on this topic, the search for necessary answers will make any family wise and enlightened in these matters. And when there is knowledge and understanding, then feelings and instincts are easily controlled and subordinated to reason and will.

God wants to give His blessing and preserve the joy of marriage if husband and wife will seek His wisdom. The Creator made intimacy for the joy and closeness of spouses, but it requires wisdom, self-control, and constant seeking of God’s will. Choose for yourselves which path is closer to you, and do not fall into extremes, even in the matter of self-control. Do not be someone else’s conscience. “...Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5).

The honeymoon is only the beginning. But if husband and wife learn to preserve love and respect, their “honeymoon” can last a lifetime.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Proverbs 25:16; 30:9,15; Ephesians 4:17-19; Luke 6:25; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Amos 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 5:6; Romans 14:5; Proverbs 5:15-19; 23:15-21; Ezekiel 16:49; 1 Corinthians 4:8; Galatians 5:22-23; Deuteronomy 24:5 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. What is a “honeymoon” in your understanding?
5. Should such topics be considered in the light of the Bible?
6. Are we accountable to God for the strength and resources that He has placed in our bodies?
7. Is God interested in how we care for our health and the health of our household?
8. Did you learn anything useful in this lesson?
9. Is it important to understand the laws by which my body lives?
10. Do you think there is a connection between my body and psyche? Will bodily diseases affect mental health?
11. Should one abstain from everything just in case, so as not to sin?
12. What extremes can occur in those who misunderstand this lesson?
13. What should be done if God calls for self-control, but hormones draw us toward pleasure? Philippians 2:13.
14. Since everything is so complicated, perhaps it is better not to create a family?

The First Family Council

And so the wedding is behind us, the “honeymoon year” is ahead, and we live somewhere between these events in the “today,” already needing to take steps, but now within the framework of our family.

How wonderful it was, waking up early in the morning, to see my dear wife next to me and to give her my morning blessing in the form of a gentle embrace. How unusual it is to touch your beloved woman and not worry about being misunderstood! And we didn’t want to go anywhere at all, yet we had various matters and events waiting for us that we needed to take part in.

Although we were drawn to each other, we decided to continue our celebration in the everyday solutions to different tasks that no one else could resolve but us.

Our first family morning began with a joint family prayer. How unusual it was to pray about our needs with my wife! We prayed for blessing for one another, for our family, and we believed that our words were heard and that a Heavenly answer was already being prepared. I, she, and the Lord—what could be more beautiful?

In the other room, a mountain of gifts and unopened envelopes awaited us, which friends had neatly placed on the table. These were further surprises, but we decided to have breakfast first.

There wasn’t much to choose from. Friends had made sure to bring, along with our gifts, the leftovers from the wedding feast. How timely that was! Thanking the Lord for such abundance, we began our meal.

I had the idea to hold the first family council in order to determine the concept of the further arrangement of our private enterprise called “family.” My wife supported my proposal, and we decided to immediately proceed with the discussion of the proposed agenda.

We asked for God's blessing, turned off our phones, and, accompanied by the cheerful crunch of breakfast, began to put forward constructive proposals for the improvement of our family hearth.

Understanding that many proposals would not pass ratification without mutual agreement, I first decided to bring up my conclusions for discussion, trying not to touch on contentious issues.

First, I confessed my love to my lawful life partner. My speech was not long, and in an hour and a half I was able to "lay all my cards on the table" and rejoiced in the fact that I loved. How joyful and unusual it was for me to love my wife, to tell her about it, to open my heart, and to try to convince her that it was forever and genuine! And she listened to me and for some reason cried while smiling joyfully.

I understood that something very important was beginning in our family, and so I decided to establish it on a right foundation, grounded not on feelings and emotions, but on a deep principle.

Before our wedding, we had already spoken about many things and made important decisions, but now we began building that very project, "A Happy Family," in which we already found ourselves, and we could now see, understand, and develop it from within.

My dear half took the floor and began to tell me her thoughts and feelings toward me. Though during our friendship I had heard her modest confessions of love, now, already within the family, it sounded sincere, so sweet, and so real.

We agreed not to interrupt each other in conversation but to give short answers and ask leading questions. How many things can be quickly resolved in simple communication! You simply, calmly state your opinion and listen to another. And how much is resolved!

After exchanging confessions of love, we gently embraced and moved on to planning our future. I proposed to build happiness, and I was unanimously supported in this. We discussed the

matter and decided that each of us would contribute to our union without changing the set course.

I did not know what would come of it, but the desire to have a happy family and to do something mutually to achieve it began to inspire me with different thoughts, which immediately came to mind. I realized that God approved of our decision and was already sending us useful ideas in the form of good thoughts that we could voice and put into practice.

I looked at my hands and reached them out to my beloved, asking her to choose for herself the place on her body where they could have free access at any time when we were alone. Without thinking long, she leaned her back against me, took my hands, pressed them to herself, and showed me where and what they could touch. I immediately remembered everything and decided to pass my first exam, for which I received the highest grade in the form of her joyful exclamations.

Then she decided to give me her hands so that I could also show them their place on my body. How fun it was to introduce such rules into our life! But this is our family, and within it we can plan everything we like.

We agreed that all our personal and intimate matters that we would have and resolve would always remain only between us, and we would not share them with anyone.

We also agreed that our affectionate embraces, pressing against each other, and kisses would not be put on public display, but we would keep them to ourselves, behaving modestly and with dignity in public.

Communicating in a friendly spirit, we identified so many interesting aspects of our new relationship that we decided to write everything down so as not to forget or miss anything. For this, each of us took a notebook and wrote down everything most necessary and important.

We became so engrossed in each other and in making our future plans that we forgot about everything else in the world.

The time for lunch came. And again the wedding leftovers came to our rescue. After eating, we decided to take a walk and continue discussing our happiness.

Touching on the matter of the family budget and finances, we agreed to combine what we had into a common fund and to jointly decide how to use it. It was decided to honestly give to God what is God's, and to Caesar what is Caesar's.

We already knew that the Lord had designated the husband responsible for obtaining and spending family resources, but we could not understand how this would happen in practice. Yet our ability to agree on everything and discuss everything helped us reach agreement in this area as well.

Returning home from the walk, we decided to unpack all the gifts. We prayed for wisdom in this matter and began to open the beautiful boxes, examining their contents. We decided to rejoice in everything we received and to thank each person who gave us something.

Opening another envelope with money or a gift, we read the enclosed congratulations, briefly prayed for these people, and then tried to call them personally to thank each one. And to those we could not reach, we left a thankful voice message. And those with whom we had no contact we wrote down in a list, so that we could thank them when we met. How many kind words we additionally heard addressed to us, and our happiness grew from our spirit of gratitude.

Counting all the money that was given, we set aside a tithe and dedicated it as holy to the Lord. But from the gifts we decided not to set anything aside, since we did not know their value and did not understand how this would be right.

We enjoyed planning our happiness so much that we decided to continue doing it with simplicity of heart and mutual joy.

The first day passed wonderfully.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Proverbs 15:22-23; 27:9; Philippians 2:1-5; Amos 3:3; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Galatians 5:13; Proverbs 5:18-19; John

15:12,17; 1 Peter 1:22; Song of Solomon 1:1; 7:7-11; Ephesians 4:2-4; 5:25 in the light of this lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?

4. Do you think that if two people decide to agree on something, they will succeed?

5. Can various questions and tasks be resolved through communication? Or should this be done alone, only informing others?

6. Is a family council necessary in a family?

7. What should be done if I want to have a family council, but my close one does not?

8. Do we have the right to establish our own rules, traditions, and holidays in our family?

9. Should we involve our relatives or close friends in our family matters and questions?

10. Does God take into account our earthly councils and decisions?

11. What should be done if our opinions do not coincide, and neither wants to yield?

12. Is it right to think more about the happiness of one's spouse than about one's own?

13. Do you think that if one constantly thinks about the happiness of their other half, something good will come of it?

14. If these lessons contradict the accepted standards and ideas in my life, should something be changed?

15. Will wisdom be punishable if we try to have it in our family?

The Wedding Trip

Even before the wedding, my friend and I were already thinking about how we would spend a special time of rest or vacation. Each of us shared our own understanding of this matter. We did not want to take worldly traditions into our union, especially since all of it cost a lot of money, which had to come from somewhere, and money does not come so easily. But we have minds enlightened by Christ and prayer that has power. And in order to make the right decisions in this matter, we decided to seek counsel from the One Who is the Fullness of Wisdom. We wanted to have God's blessing in all areas of our life, so we trained ourselves to always turn to Him in prayer with all our questions and requests.

When we already knew that we would have a wedding, we decided in advance to think through the question of how we would rest after the celebration, and whether we would rest at all. We decided that if we did do something, it would be something active for both the soul and the body.

But any trip costs money, costs our time, and we agreed to look at this situation rationally. We heard that our brothers in faith build sanatoriums and hold health camps, open cafes and health food stores, and that they are constantly in need of both funds and people. We could simply donate something, or with the same funds pay for our lodging and food, and at the same time with our personal presence support their meaningful work. Even if we would not bring profit with our visit, we could at least serve someone. And our money would not go to support the world, but would remain within our large family.

It was hard for us to choose whom to please with our visit, and so we decided to ask God for wisdom from above to solve this issue. Then we took the list we had made and began calling everyone, trying to understand how the Lord would answer. Some joyfully invited us as guests, some had no space available for our dates, and some we could not reach.

Both of us felt impressed to go to a sanatorium under construction and participate in the project as much as we could. We coordinated the time, thanked God for His answer to our request, and began preparing for the wedding.

And then the decisive moment of our first wedding trip came. Gathering the necessary things and tools, we decided to take along some missionary books as well, to give them to the people whom the Lord would bring into our path.

Loading the necessary things into the car, we entrusted our lives into God's hands and set out on the long-awaited journey. We had no need to hurry, and we decided to take along fellow travelers whom the Lord would send us. And new acquaintances did not take long to appear.

The Lord taught us that everyone would know that we are His disciples if we had love for one another. We decided to bear this witness to all strangers, especially since we were overflowing with this very love and longed to pour it out on each other.

Picking up the first woman, we realized that she was not going our way, but we decided to deviate from the route to take her to where she needed to go. My wife gave her the front seat, gently fastened her in, and sat in the back herself. The woman was at first frightened by such attention to her, but when I began to tell her how wonderful my beloved was, she calmed down and listened with surprise to my stories. And my other half kept trying to prove that I was the best friend in the world and that she was very happy to have such a husband. At first, the fellow traveler tensely looked at the road, not understanding where she had ended up, but then she began to smile broadly and watch us, trying to figure out whether she was dreaming. In the end, she asked us which church we belonged to and whether everyone there was like us. We gave her the prepared books as a gift, exchanged phone numbers, and went on.

All the following fellow travelers experienced something similar in our cheerful company, and we did not even notice how we arrived at our destination. We enjoyed telling about our love for

each other so much that we decided to continue doing so at the sanatorium.

At God's institution we were warmly welcomed and given a separate room. We prayed, paid for our lodging, and went to get acquainted with new friends. We did not want to be just guests, so we began looking for work, since we saw that activity was bustling all around. My wife quickly found a place in the kitchen and began telling everyone how wonderful a person I was, generously given to her by the Lord. Meanwhile, I found work in landscaping and, working with my hands, got to know new people, engaging in casual conversation about everything.

At lunch we met again, and she introduced me to her new friends, who examined me carefully, trying to compare what they had heard about me with reality.

I let them know that in my wife they had found the most wonderful person in the world, and it would be our great joy to become their friends so they could delight our hearts all our lives.

At lunch we introduced ourselves to everyone present and announced that we had come to love them, and that we had much of this good to give. Some looked at us suspiciously, some simply listened, and some studied us very carefully, trying to catch every word. And we had many words of love for everyone. And how could we not love, when we had been taught this?

After lunch it was customary in this institution to take a walk in nature, and we, dividing into small groups, all headed into the nearby forest. My wife ran ahead with her new friends, embracing them joyfully and telling them something animatedly. And I discovered a new world of the people who kept me company. It was so interesting to test my knowledge of love on living "training grounds"! In the course of conversation I would periodically point to my other half and thank God before everyone for such a wonderful gift. But people tried to assure me that at first everything goes smoothly, but then problems begin, and then we would see about our love.

Mentally I gave all these words to God and prayed for His protection for my family.

My heart was increasingly confirmed in the necessity of fighting for happiness and keeping love no matter what.

The vacation days passed in joyful work for the benefit of the developing institution. All of its staff were our fellow believers, and by the end of our stay we had become part of our large worldwide family.

Sowing God's love into the hearts of strangers, we noticed how quickly it took root and solved many issues in the best way. How joyful it was to give ourselves and our time to our new friends, sharing with them our knowledge of love and friendship and receiving sincere warmth from them.

Meeting with my wife in the evenings in our room, we joyfully shared our daily experiences and discoveries, and then prayed by name for all our friends and all the needs that had been revealed to us by that time. Then we went to bed together. Sweet is the sleep of a laborer.

How exciting it was to wake up with the thought that today new discoveries and new opportunities awaited you.

Returning home, we carried in our hearts a wealth of new experiences and new friends.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Amos 3:3; Galatians 6:10; John 13:34-35; Ecclesiastes 1:8; 2:24-26; 3:22; 4:9-12; 5:17-19; 6:11-12; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:16-18; Proverbs 31:10-12,25-31; James 4:13-17; 2 Corinthians 12:14-15 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. Do ideas from the lives of others help you change your worldview?
5. Should we support our fellow believers financially?

6. Is it useful to combine rest with work for the benefit of others?
7. What benefit does a person gain from three meals a day and doing nothing during another vacation?
8. Should we pay attention to the society and environment in which we will be during our vacation?
9. Will it be right to combine our travels with useful work and fellowship?
10. Should we tell other people about our love for each other?
11. Will it be right to make new friends on every trip?
12. What should be done if I want to go to a sanatorium to visit friends during vacation, but my wife wants to go to the sea?
13. Should we pray for every trip and every undertaking?
14. Does Heaven observe how we spend our free time?
15. Can the second tithe be spent on missionary trips?

The Ongoing Family Council

Even before the wedding we agreed to meet once a week to discuss all the issues concerning our relationship. And these very meetings led us to the decision to create a family union and unite our two lives into one.

For such gatherings we chose a convenient time and always remembered that on that day and at that hour we would not plan any other matters, but only our communication with one another.

Although we did not stop communicating on other days and at other times, our pre-marital council was a very blessed time, which we joyfully awaited, to immerse ourselves in each other and discover something new about ourselves and about the one we were dealing with.

For our meetings we chose Wednesday and decided to begin our gathering at 7:00 p.m. This day was convenient for both of us, and we planned all our affairs in such a way that nothing and no one would distract us. Even though we did not yet live together, we had the opportunity to meet for such conversations. And when that was not possible, we called each other and spoke by phone.

I noticed that when you set aside a special time to get to know your friend and invite God, something wonderful happens in these conversations. It feels as though our hearts are intertwined into something very strong, in order to reveal to us the important facets of one another.

When the family was formed, I did not forget our custom and decided to continue it already in our family union. We had an agreement that we would continue to hold our meetings and do everything possible so that no other events would interfere with that time. Of course, we could not foresee everything that might await us ahead, but we decided that our meetings should be most important to us and always remain a priority. And if something interfered, then in that case we could hold them by phone or on the following day.

The wedding was over, and our first family Wednesday came. I reminded my wife about our meeting, and she responded affirmatively that she was ready and awaited it with joy.

And so the day came when the time arrived for the two of us. Though we were not separated and were always in communication, doing much together, and were even preparing for our wedding trip, still on Wednesday evening we set everything aside and sat at our table in the kitchen. The phones were turned off, all tasks completed, and I sat across from the one who had said to me, "Yes." Bowing our knees, we asked for God's blessing and presence in our fellowship.

I took the initiative to lead the meeting and proposed the rules for these conversations. It was suggested that we discuss all questions relating to our family, our relationship, and everything connected with our union. At this time we would not talk about anyone else, but only about each other, sharing thoughts and feelings on this subject, putting forward proposals and grievances. My wife nodded affirmatively at all my statements and added her own corrections and clarifications to my speech. Although I saw that she valued these meetings no less than I, I still decided to express my expectations and establish rules that would suit both of us.

It was decided:

- * To hold our meeting for two and a half hours and extend this time only when necessary;
- * To let the other speak, respecting their opinion and point of view;
- * To write down important decisions and thoughts;
- * To forget at that time about all tasks, arguments, and quarrels, if any, and gather regardless;
- * To not eat during this time;
- * To not be distracted by outside things;
- * To do everything with love.

Then my wife added her proposals: to have time before the meeting to eat dinner, wash, tidy up the house, and gather in festive clothing, and not in night pajamas, work clothes, or in a naked state.

I took all this into account, and we moved on to family matters. Not knowing what awaited us ahead, I decided to make suggestions for the near future and live in the present day. Looking into the shining eyes of my dear half, I told her of my love, of how glad I was of her presence in my life, and of what new things had been revealed to me in her. I decided not to beg for kind words for myself, but to allow her heart to say to me whatever it was full of, while I shared what I had already discovered in our family. And, of course, I added into my words thanks to my Lord for such a wonderful gift, whom I could not only see, but also have, touch, and experience.

I wanted to invent new expressions to beautifully express all my feelings of joy and gratitude. I tried to clothe each of my words in an atmosphere of love and respect, to somehow convey to my beloved the idea that I loved her very much. And, judging by everything, she guessed it even without my words.

And when she began to speak, I tried not to miss a single word, seeking to understand the meaning of what was said. I could not even imagine how wonderful it is to love your wife and constantly think about what you can do for her happiness. And the most interesting thing was that I could immediately put all my ideas into practice, not fearing condemnation or misunderstanding.

We agreed not to tell anyone about what we discussed at our family councils. Our secrets should belong only to us and to God.

The only exception was the School of Agape Love, in which we decided to share our experiences and revelations, hoping that they might help someone and make someone's life better and more beautiful.

We have no name, no age, no religious distinction, no nationality, no specific place of residence. But we love each

other and we love God, and we keep His commandments, and we prepare for His coming, desiring that you too, friends, would be with us at His Second Coming to the Earth.

I very carefully listened to the words of my beloved and wrote down important thoughts in theses, so that I could later reread and rethink them, and in a prayerful spirit accept all that would serve to strengthen our unity. I would have liked to record all our conversations on a recorder, but we decided not to tie our relationship to technical means, but to live simply and independently.

Sometimes I heard in my wife's proposals something I did not agree with, but I did not interrupt her speech. Instead, I noted these questions for myself to later discuss them more specifically or rethink what I had heard. I understand that my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and therefore I greatly fear any such manifestation in our relationship. Choosing love and friendship, I decided to build all our communication in this light and to resolve all issues in such a spirit. I cannot demand this from my wife or my friends, but I always subconsciously expect it, sincerely rejoicing when it is present.

How pleasant it is when your dear one confidently tells you of her unconditional love and desires to be established in it no matter what. Such an attitude resounds in every word and is present in every small deed.

All our first family councils were like the breaking of a dam, where we poured waterfalls of our love upon one another, bathing in these wonderful waters and rejoicing in such a blessing.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Proverbs 21:30; Job 12:13; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Psalm 33:11; 73:24; 111:1-3; 119:24; Proverbs 12:11; 13:10; 15:22; 27:9; Ecclesiastes 4:13; Isaiah 9:6; 46:10; John 15:12; Ephesians 4:1-3; 5:25 in the light of this lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other verses came to your mind?
4. What is the purpose of a family council?
5. Can one live without such gatherings?
6. How many issues do you think can be resolved at a family council?
7. Should we respect another's opinion and viewpoint?
8. Do family councils have authority in Heaven? (Matthew 18:18).
9. Does God take into account our earthly decisions made at a family council?
10. Should we invite God to our councils?
11. Can I better know my life partner by counseling with them on different matters?
12. What should I do if I disagree with my spouse's opinion?
13. What should I do if there has never been anything in my family like what this lesson describes, and perhaps never will be?
14. If my spouse does not want to have a council with me, can I have one with friends?
15. Is it God's will for families to hold such councils?

And There May Be Children

Our family relationship had grown to the point that it was already easier for us to move forward together than to live without each other. I could not even imagine that life with a beloved friend called “wife” could bring so much joy and blessing. How wonderful it is to wake up every morning and see the one you love with all your heart, and to receive from this dear friend reciprocal blessings in the form of mutual love, rejoicing that we have each other!

Family life, filled with mutual love and respect, becomes an endless source of God’s blessings for our hearts.

At one moment of our mutual joy, an interesting thought struck me: “What if we have children? And we are not even ready for such a gift from the Lord.” This thought was so clear and important that I decided to share it with my beloved and understand what to do next. She told me that she was thinking the same. We realized that we might receive an addition to our family that we had not even asked for yet. We agreed to hold an unscheduled council and carefully look into the situation.

After prayer, I decided to take the initiative in the conversation and asked straight out: “Will you give us a child?” She smiled and said, “Yes.”

I asked further: “And will you give us two?” She thought and replied: “I will.”

I decided to find the limits of her endless hospitality and asked another bold question: “And will you give us three?” To which I immediately received a firm reply: “Let’s stop at two and see what that is like!”

I understood that it was not worth asking further questions about increasing our family, but I expressed my concern that we knew nothing about raising children, and that perhaps we should resolve this lack before someone appeared. She agreed with such an approach, and we expressed the desire to begin

studying from the very conception of a child and to understand what and how best to do so as not to make mistakes.

We did not know when the Lord would bless us with children, or whether He would give us anyone at all, but we decided to pray about it already now and ask for God's blessing and guidance in all our discoveries and knowledge in this matter.

I was very troubled by the state of the world, and I understood that modern society is not the best place to raise children. And with these concerns, I bowed in prayer, trying to understand how best to proceed in this situation. I understood that the battle for our souls would never cease, and if new people entered this battle, the enemy would also attack them. But the Lord would protect them according to our faith. My wife had the same concerns and poured out her soul in begging for wisdom from above. As a result, we came to the conclusion that life and death are in God's hands, and we gave this matter to Him, deciding that if He gave us offspring, we would do everything possible to raise them worthy of Eternal life. In a prayer of thanksgiving we gave this question to Jesus and began searching for the necessary material.

First, we decided to find out whether there were any works on this topic by Christian writers. We began calling our fellow believers, trying to find out from them which books were best to start with and whether they had anything for us.

Listening to the answers of our friends, we concluded that giving birth to and raising children is a whole science and an unexplored world of new discoveries, not yet closed to us, but awaiting our research to surprise and delight us with its wonderful revelations.

Our brethren gladly answered all our questions, and we decided to write down everything new and interesting that experienced people told us, and then discuss it all together at our family councils.

An ocean of new discoveries poured into our family. We could not even imagine how responsible it is to bring new people into the world and to plant our worldview into their hearts, teaching

them to see this world as we see it. And at the same time, how interesting and exciting it is to form the character of the one whom God has given you forever!

Observing my wife and listening to her stories, I realized that she dreamed of becoming a mother and caring for those little people who were not even in the plans yet. Though we had decided to have two children to begin with, we did not know how the Lord would answer our desires.

Our search was successful. We were given books on child-rearing, child psychology, and on everything connected with conception and birth. We also decided to receive medical consultation on this matter, so that later we could compare our spiritual and physiological knowledge and understand their connection and beauty.

Realizing what responsibility we were taking upon ourselves by deciding to bring new people into this world, we began to pray even more for God's guidance and blessing in this matter. We wanted to consult specialists on how compatible we were for childbearing, and what kind of lifestyle we needed so that our offspring would be healthy. On the recommendation of our brethren, we quickly found doctors who professionally dealt with this matter and were ready to cooperate with us and take us under their observation.

We were given certain recommendations and advice. We were told what foods and drinks to abstain from and what lifestyle was best to lead. Our health principles, by which we already lived, fit perfectly into the new medical advice, and we were very glad that we were already on the right path to experiencing new discoveries in the beauty of health.

We also decided to study all the books together so as not to have future conflicts of revelation, but to create something common and right in one spirit.

It felt as if someone was already supposed to be born to us, although in fact nothing had yet happened. All our friends began calculating the date of the appearance of our new family member, and we politely joked, letting them understand that we

were only preparing for this and wanted to have the necessary knowledge in order to meet this blessing fully armed and with wisdom from God. Few understood us. They told us that once someone appeared, then we could learn. But we decided to study this science in advance.

The doctors told us about all kinds of dangers that could be prevented if one consulted and was examined in advance. They also made us understand that they could help us conceive if it did not happen naturally. But we decided not to rush things and to wait for God's blessing in this matter.

It was so interesting to learn a new science, which would never be unnecessary, but contains so much information that would be useful both now and in the future.

Discussing these matters with my wife, we noticed that our different opinions merged into a single concept, where each of us had our own role and responsibilities. I understand that I will not be the one carrying the child, but my influence on its development exists, and therefore I am learning how to become a proper father, so that through my ignorance I do not make fatal mistakes in this matter.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Psalm 126:3-5; Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18,23-24; 9:1,7; Psalm 127:3; 144:12; Proverbs 17:6; 20:7; Matthew 18:3; 19:13-15; 1 John 3:2; Malachi 4:5-6 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. Is wisdom from above needed in the matter of childbearing?
5. Is having children in the last days a sin?
6. For what purpose does the Lord give us children?
7. Would it be wise to study materials on raising children before they are born?
8. Are children a good thing?

9. What would happen to our world if no more children were born?

10. Will the Lord give the necessary knowledge to those who ask and seek?

11. Can our children understand whether they are dealing with wise parents, or whether their father and mother are ignorant in raising them?

12. What gives parents wisdom in the matter of child-rearing?

13. Does the world offer its own alternatives if we do not seek God's?

14. Do father and mother need unity of opinion in the matter of raising children?

15. What will happen if parents do not have unity in raising their children?

The Uncut Umbilical Cord

Our union was becoming more and more firmly established in love and harmony each day. Our family councils brought something very delightful and joyful into our relationship. I understood that I had been given a lifelong friend who was willing to cooperate with me and who expected me to fulfill certain responsibilities. And it gave me great pleasure to serve my beloved and constantly invent something that would bring joy and comfort into our relationship.

One day my parents decided to visit us. They did not warn us about their visit and entered our home as if it were their own. At that time, my wife was out in the city taking care of some matters, and I was home alone. My father and I went into the living room and settled comfortably on the couch, while my mother went into the kitchen and began to busy herself with something there.

After a while, I heard the sound of dishes being moved and some quiet grumbling, so I decided to check what was happening.

My mother had taken all the clean plates out of the cupboard and was demonstratively re-washing them, carefully inspecting each one in the sunlight and quietly complaining that this was not the way dishes should be washed. I quickly assessed the situation and was glad that my wife was not at home. Realizing that something was not right, I decided to intervene. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that the kitchen had been rearranged in my mother's style. Not wanting to escalate the situation, I began to silently pray for wisdom from above, to know how to behave properly. Standing next to my mother, I started drying the washed dishes with a towel and checking them in the sunlight to ensure there were no spots left. We quickly finished this task, after which I turned to my mother, inwardly asking God for wisdom: "Mom, thank you for your help. I really appreciate your care for us. But I have a big request: please do not interfere in our life in this way, as you did today. This is our family, and we will figure out ourselves

how to live best. Allow us to make our own mistakes and correct them ourselves. I love and respect you, Mom, but my wife is dearer to me, and you must accept that.”

My mother looked at me in surprise and then, saying, “It is not for you to teach me!” demonstratively called my father and, slamming the door, left our home.

I stood there confused, not knowing what to do next. To avoid disrupting the peace in our home, I quickly put the kitchen back in order as it had been and decided not to tell my wife what had happened, instead asking the Lord for wisdom in how to convey to my parents the thought that I was now independent, and that my wife and I wanted to build our life according to our own understanding. Knowing that having such a conversation with my mother would be very difficult, I decided to write her a letter to calmly and clearly express all my thoughts and to convey the important truth she needed to understand. I began to pray for wisdom from above to write such a letter.

When I was courting my future wife, I did not pay much attention to whom she spent time with when I was not around. In marriage, however, I quickly noticed that my beloved spent a lot of time talking on the phone with her mother. I was not against her speaking with her parents, but when this communication began to take away from the time we could spend together on shared activities, I began to wonder what was happening. I did not know what was proper, but I understood that something was going wrong. So, I began to pray for wisdom from above on how to address this issue and to ask the Lord to show me how to respond correctly.

During one of our conversations, I asked my wife this question: “Which people are the closest and dearest in a person’s life?” She immediately replied that parents are the closest people. I asked: “And why are they the closest?” She answered: “Because they, in their union, gave birth to me, and I am flesh of their flesh.” I continued: “And can you imagine them living separately and independently from each other?” She thought for a moment and replied: “Theoretically yes, but in reality they are one whole for me, and I cannot separate them.” I went on:

“So who is closer to each other, they to one another, or you to them?” She quickly answered: “They are closer, because they are a family, husband and wife.”

I kept silent, waiting for my wife to realize why I was asking these questions. At first, she seemed lost in her thoughts, and then she looked intently at me and asked: “Do you mean that you and I are the closest people to each other? Closer even than my parents?” I replied: “You are saying it yourself.”

The rest of the evening we spent in silence. I prayed quietly in my heart, asking for God’s presence in our relationship, while my wife was working through a very important matter that required her deep concentration. I did not disturb her and busied myself quietly.

In my heart, I resolved to talk with my wife’s parents, to thank them for their wonderful daughter, and to let them know that she was now mine forever, and that I would take care of her better than anyone else could. But I understood that without God I could not express this properly, so I prayed for wisdom from above to deal with this matter. I realized that speaking with my wife’s parents was necessary and that I needed the right spirit to explain my position clearly. I also needed to clarify for myself how to arrange our life together.

As a backup, I always had the option of writing a handwritten letter, where I could clearly and consistently present my position and ask her parents for understanding.

In such reflections, I came to a deeper realization of how close my beloved and I had become—that only death could separate us. But since I did not want to die, I decided to live and plan this life in my own way.

After a while, my wife came home, hugged me, and said that she wanted to tell me something very important. I tensed up, trying to anticipate her mood, and silently called on God for support and blessing.

Looking me straight in the eyes, as if trying to reach my very soul, she said that from now on I was the closest and dearest

person to her, and that she would never give me up to anyone or consider anyone dearer than me. I listened and thanked God for such a great blessing. The meaning of what she said became clear to me as well, and I decided to assure my wife of the same. We embraced tightly and continued telling each other how close and dear we were.

When we let go, I suggested that we share these realizations with our parents and take turns explaining this truth both to hers and to mine.

Together, we decided to call both sets of parents “Mom” and “Dad,” not dividing them into yours and mine. And if they did not like it, we would ask them to suggest how they would prefer to be addressed.

In the following days, I wrote letters to our parents and handed them personally, which caused their genuine surprise. Later, my mother called me in tears, sharing with me the role she had been in within her own family, how she had always struggled for her rights, and how wonderful it was that I had chosen the right path.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Genesis 2:23–24; Colossians 3:21; Song of Solomon 7:11; Deuteronomy 5:16; Matthew 19:19; Ephesians 5:25; Colossians 3:19; Malachi 4:5–6; 1 Timothy 5:8; James 1:5–6; Job 12:13; Proverbs 2:10–11; 3:13 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. How do you understand the expression “the uncut umbilical cord”?
5. Do parents influence their children? If so, is this bad?
6. Should parents control the behavior and life of their children when they start their own families?
7. What should you do if your parents set rules for life in your family?

8. How can we distinguish where we should honor father and mother, and where we should limit their influence in our family life?

9. How do you understand Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife..."?

10. Is it possible to be one flesh both with your wife and with your parents?

11. What should you do if you want your parents to be in charge of your family, but your spouse is against it?

12. Is it right for newlyweds to live with either set of parents?

13. Would it be right to leave parents who support my family financially and cook delicious food?

14. If I see that my son or daughter behaves foolishly or wrongly in their family, should I interfere in their life?

15. If I do not have a family, can I "leave" my parents?

Family Responsibilities

How unusual and wonderful it is to unite your destiny with the one you love, and then already within the family, to build your future life, taking into account new circumstances!

Every day brings us discoveries and provides opportunities for a deeper knowledge of each other. Step by step, we move toward harmony in our relationship and look for any opportunity to improve what we are building. And what we are building is happiness, in which we plan to live until death separates us.

As we got to know each other more closely, we began to discover that our entire household consists of carrying out all sorts of daily chores that never end and never disappear.

You get up — make the bed. You take off your clothes — put them in the laundry. You want to eat — buy and cook. You eat — clear the table and wash the dishes. You live in a house — learn to clean it. You are going to church — prepare your clothes. And there are dozens more actions you cannot escape from. It turns out that from morning till evening we are always doing something.

But over time, I realized that I could quietly shift part of these family responsibilities onto my wife and create the important appearance of a busy man, immersed in reflections on global world problems. And when my conscience began to weigh on me, then I would show initiative and start helping my beloved in her daily work.

But I was quickly exposed and made to understand that my serious look interested no one, and at home we are all equal before each other. When, after another meal, my wife began washing the dishes, I decided to support her in this matter by hugging her from behind and pressing close, enjoying the warmth of her body. But she, apparently, did not appreciate such care and asked me to stand next to her and dry the washed dishes. I explained that I was busy with something very important and could not leave it. Then my hands were

mercilessly freed from all my “important” activities, and I was summoned to an extraordinary negotiation.

The agenda was clear: the distribution of family responsibilities. A serious discussion followed. I allowed my wife to express everything on her heart and was surprised at how clearly she listed all my evasions from household duties under the guise of feigned importance. She did not miss anything I had tried to conceal, reminding me that before the wedding, I had been much more helpful.

She recounted all this with tenderness and a sense of humor, while I marveled at what a keen observer I had in my home. Nothing can be hidden.

Eventually, I stopped her, saying: “Enough of reading my thoughts. Make your proposals.”

I realized my guilt and understood that I was wrong, because I had allowed my fleshly tendencies to dictate to me how to adapt to the new conditions of life. I suggested that we pray, and we knelt down, asking God’s forgiveness for our carelessness and pleading for wisdom from above to understand how to organize our household and distribute family responsibilities.

After the prayer, we began to counsel with each other, sharing our ideas and proposals. We considered each little task and agreed on who would perform it, and who would help or take it over when the other was occupied with something else.

I decided to write down the key points that concerned me personally, trying to understand what the Lord expected from me.

From the Bible, I remembered that the husband is the head of the wife and the family, but I did not quite understand what that meant in practice. I did not strive to occupy this place, because I understood that it must be received from the one who chooses to make you her head. It is like in the church: if we place Christ at the head of our lives and keep what He has commanded, supporting His authority, then He takes that place and blesses us with His presence.

So in the family: if my wife chooses to make me her head, creating my reputation and supporting my authority by living as the Lord teaches her, then I will gladly take that place and serve her at all times. I understand how great a responsibility it is to be the head of a family, and that I cannot become one on my own if my wife does not decide so. Not to mention that the Lord Himself will ask me how I managed my household, receiving strength from above.

I also heard that in some cultures, a man must not do what does not befit him by status as a husband. I thought about this and concluded that we should discuss such matters together in our family councils and decide how we will behave if we end up in such cultures or invite someone from exotic countries into our home.

I was also hindered by examples from the lives of my parents and the families I observed as a child. I saw constant wars, heard complaints and laments about duties that someone should do but did not. I remember the humiliation these people suffered when their behavior was publicly discussed. I did not want to have all this in my family, so I decided to always first consult with my wife, understand her point of view, and then come to mutual agreement. And if she does not mind that while washing the dishes, I can hug and kiss her, and she gives me permission, then I will fulfill this duty with a clear conscience.

My beloved and I also discussed those everyday responsibilities that each of us decided to do on our own, without coercion, not expecting help from the other. However, if help comes, it should be received with joy, and we will do our little work together.

The distribution of duties and clarification of our roles in one matter or another took a lot of discussion, but I wrote down all the important points so that, in case of disputes, I could present these notes as evidence of our agreements and make adjustments as we gained a clearer understanding of who should do what.

I really like the description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31, but I understand that a woman must grow to such a state of mind herself, and it is the Lord Himself who must teach her. And my direct responsibility is to love my wife unconditionally and to praise her at all times, discovering new features that the Lord shows me. I cannot make my wife into Ruth or Abigail, nor do I intend to, but I know that God has a plan for my family, and its fulfillment will be a blessed gift for us both.

Right now, we are building our family happiness from what suits us and what we decide to have in our relationship. This is our home, and it is for us to live in it. In our family, we are both indispensable, and no one else can do for us what we need from each other.

By mutual agreement, we discussed all imaginable responsibilities and even the upbringing of future children. It was so joyful to think about each other's happiness and to plan our work at home for the sake of making life comfortable and pleasant for your loved one. And about some tasks, we argued fiercely, not wanting to give them up to each other, understanding that their performance would bring special joy to the other.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:12-25; Matt. 19:10; Mark 9:35; 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-30; Heb. 7:7; Prov. 13:23; 18:17-22; Jer. 17:7-10; Rom. 14:1,12-13; 1 Tim. 3:1-5,11; James 1:5 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Is it necessary to distribute responsibilities within the family?
5. What if I think my wife should take care of the house while I earn money, but my wife disagrees with such an approach?
6. Is it important to take into account and observe family traditions accepted in our society?
7. Should we hold family councils on various disputed issues about the distribution of duties?

8. How should we understand God's command in Gen. 3:16:
"To the woman He said... and your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you"?
9. What does it mean to be the head of the family? What should it look like, and what spirit should such a head have?
10. Does being the head of the family mean that the husband does not have to do anything?
11. What are the husband's responsibilities?
12. What responsibilities are placed on the wife?
13. Should spouses negotiate the distribution of responsibilities, or should they fight for their rights?
14. What should be done if, after agreements, someone irresponsibly performs his or her duties or does not want to do them at all?
15. How can we understand what God expects of us? What responsibilities, in His view, should we fulfill in our families?

The Husband's Duties

Having divided our family responsibilities, my wife and I eagerly set out to fulfill them. But I constantly pondered what specific duties I must carry out as a husband, as the head of the family, and as the father of future children. These thoughts led me in prayer to God, to study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, because I longed to understand myself and what the Lord expected of me. I wanted to have firm confidence that our decisions were approved by Heaven, and that we were doing everything correctly.

Reading God's verdict for the first couple, I realized that the Lord appointed man as the head of the family and would require of him an account for managing his household. I was encouraged by the thought that if I adhered to God's plan, He would help me in my labors and cares.

It was interesting for me to observe how my wife came up with different tasks for me and gladly laid upon me what was beyond her strength or not to her liking. I decided to give her a little lesson and began reflecting on her duties as they were revealed to me during our interaction, writing new ideas into a notebook. But no matter what, what interested me most was how I should lead my family. Realizing that I was the head, I also recognized the necessity of being the leader in my home. Yet I did not fully understand what that meant, nor how to be a leader. My lack of knowledge and experience in this sphere frightened me. I wanted everything somehow to be resolved on its own. By observing the behavior and attitude of my beloved, I understood that she did not mind me taking the initiative and bringing useful suggestions. She supported me in everything, though at times she would tease me when I acted uncertainly or resisted something that was not to her taste. I also noticed that if certain duties concerned my wife directly, she would do them without complaint and wholeheartedly — and all I had to do was praise her, which she enjoyed very much.

My fears of being a leader often slowed my enthusiasm, and at times robbed me of courage when I had to take responsible

steps. I searched for the necessary information wherever I could, and asked family friends how they managed to be leaders and heads of their households. But from some of their answers I realized that they were more interested in their work and friends than their families, and I did not want to end up in the same place. After all, God entrusted me with His most precious daughter, so that I would care for her all my life.

Often, I lacked confidence in my own strength, and sometimes my wife resisted my new role, declaring that we were equals. Then I would open the Bible and explain that since God had decided so, it was better to listen to Him than to follow our own feelings.

With each day of family life, I gained new experiences in my role as leader.

What helped me most was the realization that my greatest duty was to love my wife. Before marriage, I was simply in love with my feelings toward my friend, with whom I planned to create something common. I just enjoyed that infatuation, which stirred all my hormones and gave me energy in everything. For the sake of my beloved, I was ready to perform any feats and do anything just to gladden her heart. But now I was surprised that the reality of family life was not as bright as it had been back then. Hormones reminded me of themselves occasionally, but the couch called me far louder than the gentle requests of my wife. Yet my love for her helped me make the right decisions and shut my ears to the alluring voice of the couch, which so sweetly invited me into its embrace.

I once thought that loving my wife was as simple as snapping my fingers and being filled to overflowing. But in reality, my selfish nature constantly resisted outside requests and tried to drive me into irritation and anger. However, the lessons of unconditional love, which I had learned before marriage in the School of Agape Love, helped me resist my carnal impulses and build my relationship with my wife on the foundation of God's love.

Time and again I reread the verses that called me to love my wife as Christ loves the Church, trying to understand how this should be fulfilled in my life. My low self-esteem made it very difficult to grasp such a great responsibility.

I realized that this was the talent entrusted to me by the Lord, and I must invest it properly and return it with interest. I deeply desired to please God, and always asked Him for wisdom and strength whenever new questions arose.

Loving my wife turned out to be not so difficult. She gladly accepted this attitude toward herself and sought to respond in kind. And I, every morning, asked God for this love and found in my heart far more of it than the day before.

I also realized that I must be the main provider, ensuring that we had everything necessary for food and daily life.

Understanding that my wife was not a housewife and the family not a business club, I prayed and pondered how best to manage this matter. I already had several professions, and I wanted to choose one that would not completely consume me, but would still bring stable income. In short, I decided that my wife could work if she wished or found something meaningful, but she should not have to bear this burden on her own. Although she had her own income, sickness or children could change everything unexpectedly. My wife fully agreed when I voiced my decision.

I also realized that God expected me to be the priest in my family and always to ask Heaven for the blessings that our home constantly needed. At this point I felt lost. But I decided: since the Lord Himself had entrusted me with this role, He would also support me.

I had already learned that if I did something according to God's will, then I would succeed, because He Himself is the Teacher and the Leader.

Understanding the responsibilities of a loving husband, head of the family, provider, leader, and priest, I asked the Lord to teach me all of this and to bless me with heavenly wisdom. And

the Lord heard and answered. He always responds when His children ask for something according to His will.

In the evenings, I shared with my wife my decisions about which roles I wanted to fulfill, and she sometimes listened with delight, sometimes with surprise, trying to understand how it would all work in reality. I told her that love makes all this possible. Then, with fear and trembling, I prayed that I might remain faithful in my decisions and justify such a high trust in the eyes of Heaven.

I longed so much for my wife to be surrounded with love, comfort, and security in our home, that I was ready to do everything possible in my strength and means.

To decide is not yet to act, but I knew the Lord would help and support me in these matters, and I would receive His praise if I remained a faithful steward.

I was also pleased that my wife was thrilled with my decisions and wanted to cooperate with me in putting my duties into practice. She promised not to remind me of my responsibilities or point out my duty, but to pray for me and support me morally if something did not work out. And this inspired me even more.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Romans 12:1-3; 1 Peter 1:22; Ephesians 5:25-33; Colossians 3:14,19; Genesis 3:16; Revelation 5:9-10; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Corinthians 7:33; Philippians 2:2-5; Matthew 25:21 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Should a husband know his duties before God?
5. Should a wife explain to her husband what his duties are?
6. Will God give wisdom in family leadership to those who desire to be wise stewards?
7. Will the Lord grant wisdom to those who neither ask for it nor seek it?
8. What happens if a husband does not fulfill his duties before God, but shifts them to his wife, considering himself only the head?

9. Does worldly wisdom have anything to do with oil for the lamp?
10. Is it important for a husband to know who he is in the eyes of Heaven?
11. Should a man know all his duties and have experience as a faithful steward before entering marriage?
12. What if you agree with this lesson, but in your family you see a different picture and cannot change anything?
13. Is it realistic to become such a husband as this lesson describes?
14. Is it important to know God's will for your family?
15. Do you think family happiness comes by itself, by chance, or can it be built with your own hands?

The Duties of a Wife

As I studied my own duties, I noticed that God also calls women to a certain kind of behavior. Heaven is interested that the co-heirs of Eternal Life possess the right spirit and be fit for the life of Heaven. And when reading about the duties of a wife, I wanted to highlight them in red, frame them, and hang them in a visible place so that my beloved would never forget those words. But the Lord has called us to respect the choices of another person, even the closest one, and He has given us freedom in choosing our path.

And yet, I very much wished to clearly identify all the duties of a wife, write them down on paper, and solemnly hand them to my other half, so that she would understand how serious I was and what my goals and expectations were regarding our union.

The preparation of this list of duties was a very joyful event for me, and I anticipated interesting consequences. My wife tried to figure out what and to whom I was writing, but I stood firm and did not reveal my secret.

Finally, the day came when I decided to solemnly present my wife with the list of her obligatory duties. We gathered in the kitchen, and I took out the prepared envelope to hand it to my homemaker. I decided to record the whole event on video, so I set up my phone to record.

My speech was solemn but brief. My wife was glowing with happiness, waiting to see what surprise I had prepared for her.

I said:

“My dear, I hasten to inform you that our honeymoon is over, and now begins the gray everyday routine. And so that you will not be bored, I have drawn up a list of your daily duties that you must faithfully fulfill under my attentive guidance. Please acquaint yourself with this list of what will now be considered your family obligations. I think that every decent wife dreams of receiving such a letter in order to know her exact status and place in the home.”

After this, I solemnly handed my wife the prepared envelope, which she, for some reason, did not hurry to open. I noticed that my beloved seemed somewhat saddened, and I waited to see what would happen next. Tears began to flow from her eyes, and she covered her face with her hands. I had foreseen such a turn, so I had made a copy of the list and waited attentively, anticipating her future joy, continuing to record everything on camera. After a while, my beloved calmed down, resolved something in her heart, and opened the envelope. It was so interesting to watch the changes on her face! First came surprise, then a delighted smile, then sparkling eyes, and at the end of the reading, I was met with strong embraces and passionate kisses. I modestly sat and waited to see whether my helper would approve this list.

Finally, she cried again, but this time out of joy. She clung to me tenderly and began to speak the most beautiful words she could come up with, holding me as tightly as possible. From all that I heard, I understood that my list of duties had been approved, accepted, ratified, and was already in the process of being carried out. I sighed with relief and embraced my beloved tightly.

Inventing duties for one's wife is the most fascinating and blessed activity for every loving husband. Though not everyone practices it, I recommend you try.

Although reading someone else's letter and putting it on public display is not customary, I will make an exception and share the contents with you.

"The Duties of a Wife, which she must fulfill daily regardless of health, mood, or life circumstances.

My wife is obligated to:

1. Know that she is the most beloved, wonderful, and beautiful person in the world.
2. Believe that she is unique, one of a kind, and a thousand times better than all other women.
3. Always remember that I love her in any form, in any mood, at any time of day or season.

4. Know that she has a reliable friend in me who will never betray her or allow her to be harmed.
5. Do for her family what her loving heart prompts her to do.
6. Not worry about the financial well-being of her family, but entrust this care to her husband.
7. Share all her concerns with her husband so they can be solved together.
8. Believe in God as her conscience and heart lead her.
9. Recognize herself as a free person, capable of having her own opinions and views on different things and events.
10. Arrange our home according to her own taste.
11. Turn to her husband for advice at any time of day or night, without waiting in line and without fear of not being heard.
12. Express her love whenever she wishes, and in whatever way her heart desires.
13. Speak of her desire to hear kind words and compliments from her husband at any time of year or day.
14. Be sincere in her love for her husband and not hide it when she wishes it to come out.
15. Choose her life path according to the dictates of her conscience and her understanding of truth.
16. Respect the choices of other people and accept them as they are.
17. Ask her husband for help in any matter, under any circumstances, whenever there is a need.
18. Never doubt that she is the best and most beautiful.
19. Know that her husband's love for her is destined to grow and develop.
20. Remember that she will always remain her husband's friend, no matter what.
21. Choose her friends according to her heart.
22. Prepare to continue their friendship in love throughout all Eternity.
23. Not seek work for the sake of money, but choose that which brings joy and happiness.
24. Care for her health and seek the best ways and means to preserve it.
25. Cook and eat what is healthy and enjoyable.
26. Always share her happiness with the family.

27. Not take family secrets outside the home.
28. Give her love to all who need it and to whom she wishes to give it.
29. Believe that God will give strength where human strength is lacking.
30. Remember that her husband will never take the place of God and will not interfere in her personal relationship with the Savior.
31. Not forget to ask God's blessing on every good undertaking.
32. Gladly receive what is given to her from a sincere heart.
33. Be herself, as she is, knowing that she is the best.
34. Always remember that there is always something better yet to achieve.
35. Be loved, allow this for herself, and always remember it.
36. Not restrain her joy when it overflows her heart.
37. Believe that God has much love, and that it is enough for everyone and for all life's circumstances.
38. Not remove anything from these duties.
39. Learn this entire list by heart and diligently carry it out.
40. Remember that these duties are not all-inclusive and may be added to over time."

My wife decided to put this list into a frame and hang it in a visible place so she could strive to fulfill what was written out of pure love. And that is what we did.

I ask you, dear students, not to impose other people's duties on someone else, but you may practice them in your own life. It is important to remember that they are good for the soul and effective.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read 1 Cor. 16:14; 1 Pet. 3:1-7; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:18; 5:21-24; 1 Thess. 5:13; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 12:9-10; Col. 3:12-14; 1 Tim. 2:9-10 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. What would your husband write if you asked him to list your duties?
5. Should wives be given the duties described in this lesson?

6. What did you think when you saw the title of the lesson but did not know the content?
7. Do you think every wife would be happy to receive such a list of duties?
8. Should the husband himself correspond to what he wrote for his wife?
9. Will such a list have any strength if someone simply copies it from this lesson and hands it to his wife without understanding its meaning?
10. Will God help the wife and husband live in the light of such duties?
11. What should you do if no one ever gives you anything like this, but you would very much like it?
12. What was the purpose of writing this lesson?
13. Did you notice the respect for freedom of choice that the husband gave his wife?
14. What risk does a man take by giving such lists to his wife?
15. What was not written in the "duties of a wife"?

The Helper

Who is a woman? She is a human being of the female sex, who is the complete opposite of a man.

In terms of her physical structure, a woman's body contains many internal organs identical to those of men, and many of her sensory processes function the same way as those of the opposite sex. The five senses transmit information about the perception of the world in the same way, without significant differences. But by her nature and divine design, a woman is the complete opposite of a man. The fact that she was created out of man's flesh makes this mystery of creation so profound and fascinating that it will take eternity itself to fully comprehend, and at every stage of discovery one will marvel at the depth and wisdom of our Creator.

The greatest difference between a woman and a man lies in the fact that she *is* a woman, and this is an irreversible reality that was determined at the very moment of conception. It cannot be changed, but it can be accepted and enjoyed as a source of abundant blessings.

To understand the role and purpose of a woman in society, we must go back to the very beginning, to her creation, and listen to what God Himself says about His masterpiece.

It is captivating to read this account in various translations and to discover fresh aspects of this divine event.

A woman was already intended in God's plan before man appeared. Even heavenly beings could not fully understand what she would be like or why she was designed in this particular way. But that is the uniqueness of God—He veils His works in mystery, and then gradually reveals the depths of His plans to those willing to explore them, so that they may marvel at the infinite wisdom of the Creator.

God created woman out of man, for man, at the moment when Adam realized he had no equal companion. Significantly, God chose to create *a helper*. This definition contains the very essence of a woman's nature and purpose. If she had been

created simply as a partner, a comrade, a friend, or a neighbor, human relationships might have taken on an entirely different form. But God designed woman as a **helper** to man, and He instilled into her very being this attribute of the soul, setting her apart from male nature.

We read in Genesis 2:18: ***“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”*** In some translations, the word “meet” is rendered as “opposite to him” or “corresponding to him.” From the beginning, the Creator purposed to make two different beings who, in their differences, could complement one another and fill in what was lacking in each other. God divided man in order to unite him again.

The very first marriage was thus established. Though Adam had no choice, he gladly accepted the wife given him by his Creator. She was not taken from his head, nor from his hand, nor from his foot, but from his rib. Even this carried a divine symbolism: the wife’s place is beside her husband—under his arm, protected, and equal to him in belonging to his very flesh.

Physically, Eve differed from Adam in her form and in her reproductive design. Adam could not by himself fulfill God’s command to be fruitful and multiply. He needed someone like him, yet different, to help him accomplish this divine plan. Though God could have given Adam the ability to create life through mere thought, He chose instead to design a helper, through whom His purposes would be realized in a far more beautiful way.

A helper is one who aids in accomplishing tasks, lightens another’s burden, and also takes upon herself responsibilities that the other cannot bear.

A key and a lock are each beautiful and unique in themselves. Yet apart, neither can fulfill its purpose of opening or closing. They must work together, each performing its role.

When creating a helper for man—his opposite—God endowed woman with everything needed to fulfill this mission. Her purpose and destiny were to help her husband. Only in this role

could she be true to herself, in harmony with God's plan, and experience complete happiness in carrying out His design.

What kind of help did Adam need? We read that among all creation there was none equal to him—none who matched him in reason, in physiology, or in emotional perception of the world. Adam's soul longed for something, though he could not identify what. Within him was implanted the need for society, the need for communion with an equal, and no animal could provide this. His life's journey stretched ahead of him, full of tasks and challenges. To enrich and lighten this journey, God gave him a helper, one with a different perspective who could complement and beautify his worldview.

A helper is one who does what is needed and useful for the whole body, while preserving unity and harmony of feelings and emotions. To truly help someone, you must understand the task at hand, possess the ability, and have the strength to accomplish it. Help can be expressed in practical deeds, in spiritual support, or in emotional encouragement. Human beings consist of body, soul, and spirit—or of feelings, reason, and flesh—and each part requires outside support, even though they may be somewhat self-sufficient for a time. God's plan, however, is for people to form families, bear children, populate the earth, and govern it. This is beyond the ability of one alone.

A man is a creative being, capable of achieving and accomplishing much. Yet the inspiration of his wife opens up remarkable horizons, enabling him to solve problems and giving wings to his thoughts. And in this creative process, there are many tasks to perform, and a wife can be of great help here as well.

It is often said that behind every great man stands an equally great woman. And this is undeniably true.

Of course, there are exceptions, when Christ Himself takes the place of the woman. The apostle Paul was such an example. Yet even he advised this only as an exception. God desires to be the Helper of each of us—and also the Helper of every woman who dedicates herself to serving her family.

Though society today seeks to distort God's original design for woman through concepts like feminism, emancipation, and gender ideology, His purpose for the family remains unchanging. It continues to be a source of blessing for all who willingly embrace their role with joy and responsibility. It was not man who created himself a helper, but God. And when two halves are united into one in the right spirit, with common goals, then the Creator Himself unites with His creation, and in this harmony the family receives a special blessing.

Help can be varied and multifaceted, touching every sphere of human activity. Everything can be worked out together, as long as each one knows their role in the common purpose.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Mark 9:35; Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7,18-25; Romans 16:1-2; Proverbs 11:16; 12:4; 14:1; 19:14; 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 11:7-12; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:9-15; Revelation 19:7-8 in light of our lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to mind?
4. Why did God call the wife a helper?
5. Will God bless those who desire to conform to His plan?
6. Can sin distort God's design for woman and present her role in another form?
7. Do you think Jesus can personally fill the absence of a husband for single women?
8. What does a wife's help for her husband consist of?
9. Is it important to know God's plans for the family, or should cultural traditions take precedence?
10. What kinds of help for a husband do you know?
11. Can a man do everything in the home alone without any help? Should he be helped even if he doesn't ask?
12. How can you know whether your help is truly helpful?
13. Is help only about actions, or is it also a state of mind and will?
14. Should we take as an example those families where the selfishness of one or both spouses brings conflict and division?

15. Do you find joy in serving your family?

Love in the Family

The friendship that existed between us before marriage led us to mutual love within that friendship. Realizing that it was right to love each other, we also began to pray about it — that our love would be true and never cease. And understanding that we truly loved each other, we decided to carry such a relationship into our union and develop it on a new, family level. And what did we discover? That we never had enough time to dive even deeper into each other. Even though daily responsibilities sometimes separated us, even under the same roof, we always tried to stay connected.

The newness of family life brought us many discoveries that we never tired of sharing with each other, delighting in how interesting we both were. I considered my wife the best person in the world, and she would always unfairly accuse me of being better than her, refusing to accept any objections. And so the two “best people” spent their days, constantly reassuring one another of the sincerity and depth of their love.

They say that when the working days begin, romance ends — and we kept waiting for that to happen to us, but it never did. After all, how could it, when every morning you receive from God an ocean of His love to share? And your beloved, even before fully waking up, overwhelms you with her declarations of affection and pours out such a waterfall of tender words that you realize the day will pass in joy for both of you. This is not a fairy tale, but the reality we chose in order to build our happiness.

The theoretical knowledge we received in the School of Agape Love helped us to understand the right spirit in our relationship and confirmed us in mutual love. It was so easy to build happiness when you know what it is not, and from what it is truly made.

In one of our rooms there stood a couch with low armrests. Sometimes I would sit on the edge of it, and my wife would perch herself on the armrest, draping her legs across mine and

embracing me with one arm. In this position we would converse for long periods. It was very comfortable for us both — it seemed as though she was sitting on my lap, but without pressing on my legs, and I could embrace her at any moment without discomfort.

How joyful it is to converse with your wife at a distance of just 5 -20 centimeters, breathing in the fragrance of her presence and hearing the original timbre of her voice, unmuted by distance! I also noticed how warm she was, able to warm me with her body's heat without overheating me. And, most wonderfully, she found similar things in me — often pressing close and telling me what a wonderful man I was. What more could two close souls need? Well, perhaps one thing: for a union to be complete, it helps to have a little one! But that does not come to everyone at once, and one never knows when.

At times we experienced special blessings from realizing the joy of being one flesh. In that state of heart, it was so meaningful to speak tender words of love to each other.

I noticed that all the love we shared with each other before marriage during our friendship had been romantic, yet cautious. We were afraid to play with our own feelings or with the feelings of the other, and so we always added to our declarations of love the qualifier: "as a friend." Sometimes it was hard to know where friendship ended and boundaries had to be placed. But our agreement to be honest in describing our feelings restrained us from misusing them.

Now, nothing hindered us from speaking about our emotions, our desires, our expectations, and our longings. We joyfully discussed everything, seeking to understand how to love each other even more deeply — in such a way that both of us would be blessed.

Although love for a friend shares the same roots as love for a spouse and comes from the same Source of life, attachment to one's wife contains something special — a fullness of feeling and other experiences which, in friendship, must be restrained.

Our love for each other within marriage had no restrictions in its expression and always gave us new opportunities for exploration, testing, and discovery.

I never ceased to marvel at how deep a person God had given me, and how profound were the hidden treasures of her soul that I still had yet to uncover. Oh, that this fountain of blessing would always remain open to me!

I understand that only unconditional love can enter the heart of a wife — a love that awakens a response, breaks down stereotypes, opens rusted locks, and releases deep fountains that nourish both of us.

To love one's wife is a gift from God, one that can first be conceived in the heart, and then requested from Him for fulfillment and blessing. From observing my beloved, I realized that she can change unpredictably, making it difficult to foresee how she might react next. But God's agape love, given to me for her, helps me meet everything in the right spirit, giving not necessarily what she asks, but what she truly needs.

I am learning to listen with my heart. It is not always easy, especially when my flesh protests at unexpected challenges. But love helps me make the right decision — to keep loving no matter what.

When I prayed for a wife and thought about what she should be like, my expectations did not match reality. But now, being married, I realize that we can build in each other whatever we desire, if we apply joint effort, share our plans, reveal our thoughts, and love one another.

Loving one's wife is a whole science, revealed more and more as you study it. I rejoice in this prospect — will I be able to grow in love toward my wife? Like any revelation that requires deeper immersion to see all the beauty of its depths, so too does love for one's wife contain endless discoveries about her soul and spirit, about her thoughts and feelings, given to you in the form of her stories and experiences.

How different we are! And this very diversity draws us to each other. We gladly put everything aside in order to dive into our shared life and find in it what is of true value.

This is family life: that a husband may know his wife, and a wife may know her husband. And in this knowing of each other, we began to understand the meaning of our marriage. We realized that this process had begun never to end. We are given to one another in order to discover one another — and to allow those discoveries to become a special blessing for our union.

I believe that loving someone you know well is far more interesting than “loving” a voiceless refrigerator that produces nothing but cold, ice, and icicles. Thankfully, we realized this together and made a joint decision to love each other, to know each other in this love, and to discover a new world within our family.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read John 15:12,17; Ephesians 5:25-29; Colossians 3:19; Romans 12:9-10; Song of Solomon 1:1; 1 Corinthians 16:14; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-3,15; 1 Peter 1:22; Amos 3:3; 1 John 3:11,18 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Why are we commanded to love our wives?
5. Do you think a person who loves his family will also show the same love to others?
6. Is it truly possible in our time to have love in families?
7. If husband and wife decide to love each other, agree about it, and begin to make efforts, will something good come from it?
8. Is it really so important to have love in the family? After all, you can't put it on a plate or wear it as clothing.
9. Is it important in loving each other to know the other person's “love language” and to speak it?
10. Should we continue making discoveries about each other even within marriage?
11. Can love grow within family life?
12. What benefits does love bring into the family?

13. Do you know families where husband and wife truly love each other?
14. Does life success depend on family relationships?
15. Could it be that love in the family might make me defenseless in the world, an easy target for the enemy of souls?

The Family Altar

Since I believed in Christ and asked Him to become my Lord, I understood one important thing: with Him, one can have fellowship. When I read the Bible or other books written by God-inspired authors, my Savior speaks to me through these works. And then I decided to talk with God through prayer. I used to think that there were special prayers that had to be memorized and recited like mantras in case of need, which I did, but later I understood that I could pray in my own words and express what was relevant to me and what troubled my heart. Over time, I learned to turn to Jesus for every reason, for any little thing, with every question, or simply to tell Him about my joys and blessings. My prayers carry a different spirit: they may be prayers of thanksgiving, informational, containing requests and questions, or a thirst for wisdom for one task or another. I became accustomed to consulting God on many matters, and each time I would receive interesting thoughts and ideas for solving the issues that arose.

Starting a family is a time for fasting and prayer. Choosing a life partner is the most responsible decision, upon which the entire future life depends. Eyes may see the face and the beautiful figure of the chosen one, but the Lord reveals the heart. That is why prayer is vitally important and necessary in the matter of choosing a spouse. The Lord reveals much in response to my prayers, but the final choice remains with me.

A wife must be a believer from the same denomination as I am, otherwise conflict is unavoidable. From the history of other people's lives, I know that religious disagreements inevitably cause wars, enmity, and opposition, and it would be completely wrong to invite such a spirit into the home. It is important to understand before marriage what the person you wish to join your life with lives by—what and how they pray, what they read, what they watch, and what they believe in. The Lord reveals these questions in fellowship.

I did not know what a family altar was; no one gave me this example in childhood. But I often read about it from other

authors and heard many testimonies that this is the most important family practice, through which the Lord pours out special blessings upon all members of the family.

An altar is a place where sacrifices were offered to God and where people worshiped Him in spirit and truth. I decided that in our home there should be such a place where our whole family could gather for prayer and spiritual fellowship. At first, we did this wherever we wished and knelt in any place when the need arose. But over time, I realized that if we had a special place set apart for this, it would bring abundant blessings. We did not know exactly how it should be, so we asked advice from other brethren. It turned out that many did not have it either, and so we decided to do everything our own way, as the Lord put on our hearts.

The living room was the best fit for this service. The sofa and two chairs seemed to invite us to their company, and in the middle we decided to place a soft carpet on the floor so that it would be comfortable to kneel. If guests came, we could place a table and chairs by the sofa.

We decided to gather at this place for our worship in decent clothing, suitable to the room's temperature. At first, we had no fixed rules regarding the time and order of this service, and we decided to find out what and how was best to do.

From the Bible, we learned that sacrifices were offered to God morning and evening. Therefore, it was decided to gather for worship of our Lord after rising and in the evening before sleep. On the days when we had family councils, we would bow in thanksgiving prayer before holding all our activities.

Since we did not have a fixed schedule, we decided ourselves when and how to hold our meetings.

On Friday evenings, we gathered shortly before sunset to enter into rest together. The two of us sang our favorite hymns, read spiritual works, and thanked God for all the blessings we had throughout the week.

If we had to receive guests, we invited them to join our family altar as well, casually acquainting them with our family tradition of worshiping God. And when we were guests ourselves or at camp meetings, we followed the rules of that house or place. If we stayed overnight, we tried to pray together when the opportunity arose. Our God is always with us, wherever we go, and we can worship Him in spirit and truth in any place and under any circumstances. And even when circumstances separated us so that we could not be together, we agreed to continue praying for one another at all times, especially morning and evening. And if we had a connection, we would hold our service together over the phone.

It was not difficult to establish the family altar, nor was it difficult to maintain it. God condescends to our abilities and accepts from us what we do wholeheartedly and sincerely. We agreed to organize our family worship with love and joy, leaving all other tasks aside at that time. We knew that different circumstances would always interfere in this matter, but after all, everything depends on us, and we can agree on everything.

We also decided that if for some reason we could not gather or gathered at the wrong time, we would not blame ourselves for such exceptions but would look for an opportunity to correct it. We did not want to worship God under the lash of our own whip or in stress.

All this so naturally entered our family life that we did not even think about how best to organize it. Everything was decided as if by itself. And we did not need to spend much time preparing or holding the service. Sometimes our meetings were very quick, and sometimes they lasted until midnight. In good weather, we preferred to pray briefly at home and then continue fellowship during a walk. We were our own masters and together decided how best to arrange things. Every opinion went through a trial period, and then was approved or replaced with a better decision.

In the matter of faith, we gave each other absolute freedom to worship and to understand everything as conscience and reason

prompted. But we exchanged our convictions and found much in common, and we tried to bring this into our gatherings.

We also had a common enemy—our laziness, which constantly called us to do nothing, and we had to resist it all the time, saving one another and ourselves from its deadly embrace. The struggle was fierce, but we always won.

We noticed that our order in holding worship brought us great blessings in all areas of our lives. We ourselves, our health, our property, and all our affairs were under God's protection, and in everything, we felt God's presence. It is difficult to describe this in words, but it can be experienced.

If we do not give time to God, it will be filled with something else. And whether this other thing will bring blessing to us and our union, we do not know, nor do we want to know. It was decided that I and my house will serve the Lord. For one person this was possible, but for two it became right, interesting, and beautiful.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Ex. 29:39,42; Num. 28:3; 1 Chr. 23:30; Josh. 24:15; John 4:23-24; 1 Pet. 2:1-5,9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 9:4; Acts 10:1-2; 16:32-33; 1 Tim. 3:12; 1 John 2:15-17; Eph. 5:15-33; Col. 3:14-21; Ps. 55:18; 119:40; 143:6; Eccl. 4:5 in the light of this lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?

4. What is the purpose of family worship?

5. Should you be concerned if there is no such service in your home because of your spouse's unbelief?

6. Does the Lord expect families to hold spiritual gatherings to worship Him?

7. Is it possible to worship God alone if your spouse does not support you in this matter?

8. Do you find in the images of the Old Testament an example for holding family prayers?
9. Should family worship be planned in your home?
10. What blessings await those who worship God as a family in spirit and in truth?
11. What should I do if only I believe in God in my family?
12. Is there a certain order for home worship, or may each family establish its own rules?
13. Should we judge those who believe in God in their own way and do not organize anything in their home?
14. Does joint worship of God influence family happiness?
15. Should family members be forced to come to common prayers if they do not want to?

Family Finances

Every morning in our home began with prayers of thanksgiving for all the blessings that the Lord had prepared for us for the new day. And every evening we thanked God for everything we had experienced and endured during the day. We also asked for wisdom on how to be happy in our family and how to manage our household.

At the wedding, we were given money, part of which was given to God, part went to cover wedding expenses, and the remainder we set aside for our future. In addition to these funds, I had small savings that I was not in a hurry to spend. As for my wife's financial situation, I did not ask.

Our life together showed the necessity of acquiring many things we needed for daily life. We discussed all upcoming purchases together and then bought what was necessary.

Our trips also cost money, and we were spending twice as much on food as when I lived alone.

I worked in a construction company, and my wife, due to moving into my house—which I was renting cheaply on the outskirts of the city—left her job, since it was too far for her to commute. I did not inquire about my beloved's finances and handled all financial matters myself, but over time I realized we needed to discuss this topic and understand how we would live and on what.

I suggested holding an emergency family council to sort out the money issue. My wife agreed, and after asking for God's guidance in prayer, we sat down at the table of negotiations.

First, I explained how much money we had left in cash and how much was saved on the card. I also wrote down on paper all current expenses for rent, car insurance and fuel, our food, church offerings, and household needs. After calculating everything, it was revealed: if I lost my job, we would have enough for eight months of modest living without additional spending.

Then I asked my wife to share her financial history and her plans for the future, so I could understand how to plan further. She told me how much she earned, how much she saved, and how much she had on her card at that time. I wanted to understand how my wife viewed the management of money and listened very carefully to her report, without interrupting, but asking guiding questions. I noticed that during her story, my wife paused to think and made some decisions before saying something. She expressed the idea that we should each have personal money to spend at our discretion, and also a joint family fund, replenished from our main income.

During our discussion, it became clear that the financial issue was not so simple, and there were many disagreements about resource management. I suggested asking God for special wisdom in this matter, and we continued to discuss.

I shared my understanding, expressing my desire for us to have everything in common and transparent, deciding together where and what to spend. My wife disagreed, saying we would lose personal independence in small matters, and this would cause many quarrels. I believed that love would cover everything, and it was not worth worrying about. I knew how it was done in my parental home, while my wife had her own ideas. I noticed a conflict arising and suggested consulting other brothers and sisters in faith to see how they managed their households and who was the main manager of finances.

We chose some believing friends and arranged a meeting with them. After talking about our issue, we gained a clearer picture than we had imagined at first. We realized that each family solves such issues in its own way, but there are common principles that are the same for everyone. We wrote down the main thoughts and then discussed them at home. We were read quotes from wise books, and we began to understand what God expects from us and what kind of stewards He wants us to be.

We decided not to argue about conflicting issues, but first to discuss them with friends, drawing our own conclusions.

I did not want to dictate in my family, but I realized that in some matters my wife would not yield, and I decided to leave it in God's hands, asking Him to soften my wife's heart or change my view.

Together we understood that ultimately all money belongs to God, and we will take nothing from this world. It was decided:

1. To give a tithe from every income to God, and offerings and donations would be determined by us based on income size and visible needs for various projects.
2. The husband would be responsible for earning money to support the family.
3. We would have a joint family fund consisting of the husband's salary, from which current bills and family expenses would be paid.
4. Since God will require an account from the husband for managing family finances, he must be the chief steward of all money.
5. The wife must give a weekly report to the husband about what she bought and spent from the family fund and keep accounting records of all income and expenses.
6. Savings for emergencies must be set aside regularly as a separate fund, available but untouchable otherwise.
7. Each of us would have a personal fund, from which we could spend money as we wished, without reporting to the other.
8. If the wife had no personal income, she would receive from the joint fund a fixed monthly amount for personal needs.
9. Each month, funds would be set aside as income allowed, to improve living conditions or build our own home.
10. We would have no debts to anyone and would not spend more than we earned.
11. New points would be added to these rules as necessary.

We recorded these resolutions as rules for OUR family, so that in case of conflict, we could refer to them and make

amendments as needed. We realized that even in this matter, we could agree in a friendly spirit.

It was also revealed that love of money could quickly destroy our relationship with each other and with God, so we entrusted this issue to Him, asking Him to cleanse our hearts from all unrighteousness.

The next issue was deciding how much we needed for life and what was not necessary. We knelt down, asking for wisdom from above, and began our discussion. This question again caused many disagreements, and it was very interesting to see how two natural egoists came to common decisions, which even God should approve. The spirit of mutual love helped each of us patiently listen to the other's opinion and arguments. The most controversial points were postponed for the future.

We realized that we were hindered by the influence of wealthy friends who allowed themselves certain things we were not yet able to afford, but we wanted not to lag behind. Yet even here we were able to agree and decided not to exhaust ourselves with unbearable work for money, but to place our spiritual and physical health first.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Ps. 118:36; Heb. 13:15; 1 Tim. 3:2-4; 6:10; Prov. 2:6; 14:8; 15:27; 23:23; 28:16; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; James 1:5; Ex. 31:3; Rom. 12:10 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Do you think that in a family where there is love, everything can be agreed upon?
5. Is it important for spouses to discuss the family budget together?
6. Should family values be imposed on others?
7. Can outside people with experience solve your family's problems?

8. Can spouses plan their budget relying on constant help from parents?
9. Is the husband truly the chief steward in the family?
10. Do financial issues affect family happiness?
11. What if a spouse does not believe in God and has other values, claiming all of the wife's salary?
12. Should each spouse have personal funds to be independent?
13. Do you think Heaven watches how and on what we spend our money? (Rom. 14:12)
14. Does God expect something for Himself from our means?
15. Why does God need our money if He already has everything?

Let the Marriage Bed Be Undeiled

The more my wife and I got to know each other, the more we fell in love with one another. How joyful it is to love each other within the framework of our family and to constantly come up with something new and interesting so that both of us feel good. We found it very exciting to agree on everything, to test all things, and to hold fast to what is good.

Having studied the laws of abstinence and accepted them with all our hearts, we noticed that there are certain aspects of intimate relations that are not entirely clear, and so many questions arise to which we could not give each other answers. We decided once again to turn to believing specialists in this field and listen to their recommendations. We understood that if our brethren did not explain to us certain details of the rules of intimate life, then the world would teach us its rules, which could destroy us or make us sick people.

Here is the useful counsel we learned:

— Any lustful thoughts about sexual relations with another person, and the act itself, are sins that destroy the life and health of the family. They bring not only tragedy into the marital union but also all sorts of venereal diseases.

— Pornography must have no place in the home in any form.

— In intimate relations between husband and wife, there must be mutual respect and absolute freedom of choice. Everything must be voluntary and happen by mutual desire and agreement. It is necessary to ask whether your partner allows you to do or receive what you desire. Any form of violence defiles the relationship and inflicts deep emotional wounds.

— One should take a shower or wash before planning intimacy. This must also be done afterward.

— In a woman's physiology, there are certain days when blood cleansing occurs. During this period, it is necessary to abstain from all intimacy, while remaining tender and loving spouses. After the end of these days, according to the Bible, it is

necessary to wait another seven days, and only then may one plan intimate life (Lev. 15:28).

This matter is so important and serious in God's eyes that He Himself declared that violators of this prohibition are subject to death. We read in Ezek. 18:4-9: *"Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die. If a man is righteous ... he does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her impurity ... he shall surely live ..."*

And the use of artificial means of protection during these days is deception and an attempt to lawfully break God's command.

If the husband does not understand this prohibition, then the wife must stand for the happiness of her family and firmly refuse any intimacy.

— Clean clothing and bedding are to be maintained at all times. Hygiene products (wipes or towels) should be prepared in advance so that any discharge does not soil clothing or bedding. If it does, those items must be changed immediately and washed. Ignorance in this matter defiles you and your bed.

— If you decide to use contraceptives, it is necessary to study their side effects and ask God for wisdom in their use.

— All your intimate relations must be hidden from others' eyes and must never be recorded on photo or video, even for your personal viewing. Nor should anything take place in public or where outsiders might become accidental witnesses of your intimacy.

— You must know that sexual organs have a special microflora which, receiving positive stress from the first intimacy, adapts to a new partner and thereafter accepts him as the norm of life. This microflora contains many fungal elements that naturally live in this environment and are not dangerous if cleanliness is observed. If these enter the oral cavity, however, various inflammations or irreversible diseases can develop. When it comes to oral sex, one should think of all possible

consequences. Do not risk your health just to give someone fleeting pleasure.

— A woman's body is not designed for anal sex. The anal and rectal tissues of the large intestine are very delicate and are easily damaged by rough contact, causing inflammation and infection. Constant practice of such actions relaxes the anus muscles naturally, which can lead to serious problems in that area of the body.

— Both spouses need to study each other's temperament and physical constitution in order to understand how much time each one needs to help the other reach satisfaction.

— Do not injure your own body or your partner's body in the pursuit of special or exotic pleasure.

— Do not resolve family conflicts through intimacy. Intimacy should be a celebration and an expression of gratitude for love and respect, not a battlefield for licking wounds.

— The stimulation of one partner's sexual organs for the purpose of giving them one-sided pleasure, or to satisfy a whim, destroys respect and something sacred and intimate in the relationship. Likewise, secret self-gratification (masturbation) defiles and destroys the body and health.

— When using public toilets or showers, ensure that physical contact with surfaces or towels does not become a carrier of infection into your body. It is best to use personal hygiene items.

— If in your practice there has been anything mentioned above, and you realize your ignorance or mistakes, knowing that your bed is defiled, God will accept your repentance if you bring all your sins to Him with a pure heart.

— Women must remember that the laws of your country protect your life and body from violence and will take effect if you ask the appropriate authorities for protection and intervention.

— Intimacy must not be routine or an obligation, but joy—a way of expressing gratitude for the love and care of one another.

— Let all you do be done in love.

The purity of the marriage bed and mutual respect lay the foundation for long-term happiness. This is not just “rules for today” but a strategy for all of married life. It is not only the absence of sin but also the fullness of God’s blessing.

We were very grateful to our spiritual mentors and to God for timely warnings and counsel, and we decided to discuss each point at our extraordinary family council so that these principles would become part of our consciousness, not just a set of written prohibitions. In all these instructions we saw God’s love and care for our family happiness, which can be so fragile and vulnerable because of our ignorance. We understood that the enemy of souls seeks to use our natural attraction to each other to destroy us through our lack of knowledge. Although this sphere of family life is hidden from others’ eyes, it is worth understanding and studying so that we do not defile our bed or become sinners in God’s sight.

We realized that even in these delicate matters, everything can be agreed upon in advance, and by knowing God’s will we can remain pure and undefiled. In the gift of abstinence we also saw how precious and desirable our meetings become when we subject our passions to the control of reason and will.

God cooperates with us in our decisions and gives us strength and the spirit of self-control where man is weak or powerless.

All advice and rules must not turn into a dry code of prohibitions but should flow from love for one another. *“Love does not seek its own”* (1 Cor. 13:5)—this means that each spouse thinks not of their own pleasure, but of their partner’s happiness. A pure bed is not a heavy burden of prohibitions but a source of joy, health, and spiritual unity. If husband and wife keep this sphere holy, God blesses their marriage with many years of trust and love.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Heb. 13:4; Rom. 13:13-14; Gal. 5:22-24; Lev. 15:16-28,31; Ezek. 18:4-9; Lev. 20:18; Ex. 19:14-15; 20:14;

Matt. 5:28; 1 Tim. 5:6; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Rev. 21:27; 22:11 in light of this lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?

4. When reading the regulations for ancient Israel, should we keep in mind that they had no hygiene products, underwear, washing machines, or showers in every tent?

5. Does the Lord desire to see His children's families happy?

6. Did this lesson limit you in anything beautiful or shed light on what could make your marriage unhappy?

7. Should all desires be kept under the control of reason, and should you take into account your spouse's will?

8. If we do not receive helpful information about such questions from fellow believers, will the world offer us something else?

9. Do you think the world puts lust first and pushes purity and holiness into the shadows?

10. Will a person striving for holiness listen to the counsel given in this lesson?

11. Should a wife fight for the happiness of her family, for her purity and holiness, if her husband has another understanding and insists on his way?

12. Does Heaven observe what and how things happen in our families?

13. Am I accountable to God for the strength entrusted to me?

14. Will the Lord endlessly give health to those who place it on the altar of their passions?

15. Do you think Jesus reads our lessons? If so, does He approve of what we study in them?

Parents

Parents are not chosen. Perhaps they did not even plan us, but here we are. And our connection with our parental home is very strong, and this influence accompanies us throughout our entire life. Even when death takes away our dear relatives, memories of them continue to live in our hearts.

Parents are different. It is very easy to say that some people were lucky with them, while others' lives were ruined by poor influence and upbringing. But we have "today," in which much can be changed and something beautiful begun, if you know where it is waiting for you, so that you may enrich yourself with it.

We are given a commandment to honor father and mother, so that our days may be prolonged on this earth, which the Lord gives us. This command does not speak of which parents are to be honored and which are not. Also, the word "honor" itself has quite a broad and deep meaning. It includes respect, reverence, care, love, communication, friendly relationships, obedience, trust, and much more.

When I create my own family, I understand that my parents will not disappear anywhere, but will remain my father and mother. In addition, my wife's parents appear in my life, whom God's commandment also calls me to honor as my own blood relatives. In fact, by taking their daughter as my wife, I become their son, and there is no escaping that.

If I have loved my future wife as the most wonderful person in the world, this does not yet mean that her parents are just as wonderful. Here, anything can be expected, but the commandment written by God in my heart helps me take the right position and remain faithful to God's requirements in this matter.

I do not marry her whole family and all her relatives. I choose only one person with whom I plan to live my whole life away from all our relatives, as far as this will be possible — and this we decide within our family.

Before offering anything to my future wife, when she was still only in my plans, I consulted my parents about her, asking for their advice and permission for this friendship. And then, seeing my beloved's warm attitude toward me, I asked her parents for permission to be friends with their daughter, to understand whether I could take her as my wife. My parents carefully studied the photos of my girlfriend, asked me many questions about her, and then, seeing my excitement, gave their approval.

With the parents of my future wife, it was a little different. They were surprised that I asked them about this, but I gave them time to think in order to receive a clear answer. I was determined that if they refused me, I would not go against their will but would try to understand the reason and correct all the shortcomings in my life before the next attempt, if there would be one. While they were pondering and questioning their daughter, I prayed that everything would be according to God's will. As a result, we were given approval for our friendship, after which I asked my beloved whether she desired to be friends with me in order to get to know each other better for the creation of a family. She agreed. After that, I personally introduced her to my parents and then visited her family as well.

Having secured the support and understanding of our relatives, we began to calmly develop our relationship, getting to know each other in friendship.

When we realized that we could not do without a wedding, we decided to ask for the blessing of our parents, which we received in full measure. Even though we did not know how it should sound, we longed to hear from our parents words of approval and blessing for our future union, and they gladly spoke many kind words for us.

I was prepared for the fact that my wife's parents might be unbelievers and take an active position in opposing our faith, and therefore I decided to be very cautious in this matter and not provoke unnecessary conflicts. Also, knowing the proud character of my mother, I tried to be personally present at her

meeting with my beloved, so that, if necessary, I would take all the blows upon myself and protect the tender soul of my beloved from possible wounds. But my chosen one turned out to be a very good psychologist and immediately understood my mother's character. Therefore, she began very delicately to build her relationship with her, to avoid all sharp corners and not to give occasion to those seeking one.

Our parents were independent in terms of health and financial well-being, had their own housing, knew how to solve all their problems themselves, and did not need outside help. But even before the wedding, my friend and I discussed the question about our parents and decided that we would live separately from them, would not pull money from them, and if, because of illness or old age, there would be a need to care for them, then we would change all our plans according to the situation. Not knowing what awaited us in the future, we decided to live today and entrusted everything into God's hands.

When the opportunity came, we shared our plans concerning them with our parents, which frightened them, since they were not at all going to grow old or get sick, and they assured us not to worry about it, because they would somehow manage on their own.

After the wedding, we became one, and we could freely visit our parents or invite them to our place without worrying about whether they liked something in our home or not.

After some time, my wife and I had to finally cut our umbilical cords and make our mothers understand that we were now independent people and would spend more time with our own family. With this, we made our mothers suffer for a while. However, our decision to leave father and mother and cleave to each other was so resolute that our parents had to accept it and build their lives without our presence in it. But we did not cut off our relationship with them; we still kept in touch with our relatives, but already as a union equal to theirs.

Our parents, seeing our respect for them and independence from them, submitted to their new role and accepted their new

status, periodically inviting us to visit them and constantly asking if an addition was expected somewhere on the horizon. And every time, we assured them that so far we had not received such a blessing, and that we would immediately let them know when it came.

One day, we decided to ask our parents about all our ancestors to understand who our forefathers were. It turned out that in our families it was not customary to keep genealogies, so we desired to gather everything ourselves.

Honoring father and mother also includes honoring the parents of our parents. We found out which of our grandparents were still alive and personally met each of them. How interesting it was to see the differences between elderly people and their children! The wisdom they had gained from their lived lives was evident in each of their words and in their balanced behavior. They were not in a hurry, demanded nothing, but were ready to joyfully share with us what they saw as our need. Their advice was calm and very deep. They loved their children and gladly recounted episodes from the childhood of our parents, which cheered our hearts. But grandmothers are also different, and the influence of the world also leaves its mark on their minds. We decided to honor these relatives as well and prayed for them, remembering their needs.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Ex. 20:12; 21:15,17; Deut. 5:16; Prov. 19:26; 28:24; Matt. 15:3-9; Mark 7:6-13; 1 Pet. 2:17; Eph. 6:1-4; Lev. 19:32; 1 Kings 2:19; Gen. 2:22-24; 44:19-22; Ruth 1:16-18; Matt. 19:4-6,29 in light of this lesson.
2. What have you understood from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. How do you understand the words “leave” and “cleave” from Gen. 2:24?
5. Can your parents destroy your marital happiness if they continue to dictate and tell you how to live?
6. What should you do if your parents do not understand that you are now a separate family and continue to care for and oversee you?

7. Can I ask my mother not to impose her order in my kitchen?
Will this be an expression of my honor?
8. Should you set boundaries in your family for the influence of your parents?
9. Should you care for your parents when they no longer have the strength to do so themselves?
10. Should I honor my wife's parents as my own?
11. Is wisdom from above needed to understand when the care of our parents for us ends and our care for them begins?
12. Why does God's commandment not tell us which parents we should honor and which not?
13. What should we do if our parents are no longer alive?
14. How can one rightly honor father and mother while also loving one's wife?
15. Does God remove from us the responsibility for keeping the fifth commandment?

New Relatives

When choosing a friend for life as my wife, I understood that she would bring with her into our relationship a whole train of her close and distant relatives, through whom our life would be filled with new experiences and responsibilities. And on my side, there would also be an addition to this team of relatives of different ages and views. I have a sister, and my wife has a brother. And if we take into account that my father has three sisters who have their own families and children, and my mother has four sisters and three brothers who also are not childless, then there is a wonderful perspective of interesting acquaintances and entertaining time together. On my wife's side, the picture looks more modest, but still attractive.

Relatives are not chosen, and relatives can be of all kinds. When I chose a friend to be my wife and my partner for the rest of my life, I did not invite anyone else into our relationship, but I understood that our relatives are bound to us by blood ties, which we cannot escape. And time would show whether they would accept us as one whole or try to divide us. I decided to love everyone and show unconditional respect and honor to all new relatives.

I divided my relatives into several groups: those who live nearby and have been in contact with me since early childhood, those who live far away but maintain relationships with me, and those with whom we do not interact. Though all of them are my relatives, in spirit, of course, the closest will always be those people with whom I communicate the most. And from my sister and my parents there is simply no getting away, nor do I plan to.

In my circle of relatives, there was not a single person of the same faith as me, and my wife had a similar picture, but we decided to love everyone, even those with whom we had no relationship since childhood.

At our wedding, everyone who could come did, and by their behavior it was clear that they wanted very much to get to

know their new relatives better — and we were not against it. We decided to be God's witnesses in any society in which we might find ourselves.

And then the time came when my dear and close relatives came to visit us with their children. In our culture, it is customary to feed guests, and therefore my wife disappeared into the kitchen, taking my cousin as her helper. They cheerfully chattered about their concerns, while I took a place on the couch with soft armrests and easily conversed with the other guests, waiting for a delicious meal. I wanted to talk about the plan of salvation, about the great hope, and about everything I have in Jesus, and I seized every opportunity to express all this. The children looked for something to do nearby their father and listened attentively to our conversation. When the table was set and everyone was invited to sit, my sister's husband solemnly took out bottles of fine wine and vodka from his bag and placed them in the center of the table, asking for glasses. My wife looked tensely at me. I was prepared for such situations and quickly intervened, asking politely to put those things back in the bag, since in our home at our table it is not customary to drink alcohol. I was not rude, but spoke very politely and with a smile, but from the guests' faces it was clear that they were displeased with such an attitude toward their gifts. Yet I remained firm. Tense silence reigned, into which I inserted a suggestion to pray for the prepared food, explaining that this was the custom in our home. My wife and I folded our hands in gratitude and prayed while sitting. The guests listened with interest to my thanksgiving for the bread, for our dear guests, and for blessing upon our fellowship. After the solemn "amen," we began to partake of the food.

Our friendly spirit soon dispelled all tension, and we easily engaged in conversations on topics that interested our guests.

When the guests left, I helped my wife clear the table, and we cheerfully discussed this new event in our family, trying to understand how to behave at the next visits, what was right, and what was not. It was decided that we would warn all guests in advance that in our home alcohol is not consumed, and we

live a healthy lifestyle, therefore we do not use alcohol in any form.

Some time later, my wife's relatives invited us to their home for a birthday celebration. We decided that a spiritual book would be the best gift. After praying, we chose what our hearts suggested, beautifully wrapped our gift, and went visiting. We also prayed for wisdom and protection for the upcoming event.

Upon entering the unfamiliar home, we realized that a completely different spirit lived there. Loud music confidently beat the rhythm and set the mood for everyone present. Jokes and bursts of laughter came from all directions. We were received as family, and after taking the gift, they invited us to the table. Friends of our relatives looked us over with curiosity and shared their greetings. We immediately evaluated the contents of the table and realized that we would attract attention when the meal began. Some guests had already started eating without waiting for others. My wife kept glancing at me, as if apologizing for her relatives. And I smiled and prayed silently that the Lord would grant wisdom on how to behave.

Finally, everyone sat down, and the celebrant raised a glass of champagne and made a short toast for his prosperity and health. The guests clinked glasses, while we sat still, observing what was happening. Everyone was surprised that we did not participate in their celebration and silently asked with their eyes: "What is the matter?" And we were wondering what to put on our plates, since we saw that there was unclean food on the table. As a result, we became the center of everyone's attention, and I decided to use this to our advantage.

I admitted to everyone that I was a new person in this society, but that I had a wonderful wife whom they all knew. And I began, under the sound of knives and forks, to tell everyone how wonderful a person she was and what qualities of soul I had managed to discover in her during the short time of our life together. And the more I praised my other half, the more I realized how truly wonderful she was. The women guests listened to me with admiration and a touch of sadness, inwardly

wishing to hear something similar about themselves. Then I was politely interrupted and offered the next toast. This time, stronger drinks appeared in the glasses, and I understood that things would become even more interesting. I announced to everyone that we were non-drinkers because God forbids it, and I asked those gathered to accept us as we were, to which they agreed and continued their celebration.

My wife and I found salad and bread for ourselves, and after a quiet prayer, we modestly partook of this food, watching the development of events. After some time, when we noticed that the guests were beginning to lose their reason, we decided to leave the gathering. We quietly stood up, called the birthday celebrant into the kitchen, and explained that we urgently needed to leave.

We wanted to discuss further visits to such events and decided not to attend gatherings where alcohol would be consumed, and in our own home not to host such banquets.

I understood that we had many relatives, and there would be many trials, so I preferred to prepare for them in advance. Having secured each other's support, we laid all our concerns upon Jesus and continued to build our happiness in our family.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Ps. 1:1-3; Prov. 23:29-33; 27:10; Luke 21:15-17; Amos 3:3; Micah 7:6; Matt. 10:32-38; 1 Cor. 15:33; Mark 6:4 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Can your relatives influence your marital happiness?
5. Should you understand that not all your relatives will inherit the Eternal Kingdom?
6. Can evil associations corrupt your morals?
7. Is it right to come into another person's home with your own customs and rules?
8. What is the difference between relatives and believing brethren?

9. How should you behave when visiting relatives where worldly entertainments are offered?
10. Is it permissible in your own home to establish your own rules of conduct for all guests?
11. What is the meaning of Christ's words that we should love Him more than our relatives?
12. How should we understand the words of Jesus in Matt. 12:47-50?
13. What should you do if your relatives pull you toward the world, and it is difficult for you to refuse them?
14. If I have relatives who do not believe as I do, should I separate myself from them?
15. How can one witness to God among one's relatives?

Knowing One Another in the Family

My wife and I defined for ourselves the common goal of our marital union, which we decided to achieve with all our strength. The purpose of the creation and existence of our family is the knowledge of one another. We did not come up with this ourselves, but when, during our training at the Agape Love School, this was revealed to us, everything immediately fell into place. And the more I pondered this topic, the better I understood the importance of achieving precisely this endless goal. If families were created for a short time for the sake of building a house, bearing and raising children, or planting trees, then the meaning of the family would be lost once these tasks were completed. But when I plan to build my union forever, I need to have the firmest foundation and eternal goals, which are achieved not only in this life, but extend into all Eternity.

We managed to discuss such tasks even before the wedding, and after our marriage we set about jointly achieving the intended goal. It turned out not to be so difficult. To understand what knowing one another is, we decided first to understand what it is not. If I begin to build something out of hay, thinking that this material is quite cozy and warm, will I build anything? Such a structure may not withstand simple tests and collapse or quickly burn down.

We understood that the following are not the knowledge of one another:

- The fact of our marital union.
- Living together in one house.
- Our joint purchases.
- Our intimate time together for the sake of obtaining what we desire.
- Housework and chores.
- Conscientious fulfillment of our family and social duties.

- Our conversations about nothing.
- Our attendance at worship services and participation in missionary projects.
- Our joint prayers.
- Earning money for the good of the family.
- Visiting guests together and receiving guests.
- Bearing and raising children.
- Preparing and eating tasty and healthy food.
- Our travels and outings in nature.

And much else from the list of similar things.

Although, engaging in these activities and having fellowship at that time, we get to know each other better and have much in common and joyful, all this still cannot serve as knowing one's other half.

A very important, foundational truth was revealed to us: we know one another only when we begin to study one another in fellowship, when we speak with interest about me, about her, and about both of us. And something amazing happens between us that unites us into one whole. Our union gives us the right to such behavior and allows us to touch the most intimate sides of our souls, where no other people are admitted. Everything else is a consequence of our knowledge of one another and takes on a spiritual coloring depending on the spirit with which we open our hearts and which spirit we bring into them.

My wife becomes so much mine that I take her with me into all my plans, into purchases, into work, and into other undertakings. She does not leave me anywhere alone, because she has become my part. And I know that I am everywhere with her, whatever she may be doing.

In our selfish nature, we do not have unconditional love for each other, but we ask for it and “buy” it from God to immediately give it away. In the light of this Love, our relationships in everything acquire the most correct motive,

and it no longer matters what we do; what matters is how much love we invest in knowing one another. And Love works wonders in our fellowship.

It is so interesting to speak and to listen, to look into the heart and be imbued with new knowledge! And intimate closeness brings into our study of one another special, inexplicable revelations that are understood only by the two of us. It brings us so close in the joy of our relationship that we want to thank God for one another and for such a wonderful plan called "family."

We decided to discuss one another in turn or as inspired. It is not our custom to ferret out faults in the interlocutor. Although we are imperfect people, we have a vast potential of soul riches that must be discovered and studied.

In our knowing, I agreed with my other half not to flatter each other and not to invent what is not there. For example, if I describe something new that has been revealed to me in her, then I must explain in detail what it is expressed in and how it manifests itself. For example, I noticed that she is patient and told her about it. Then I point to moments from my observations of her when she displayed this character trait, how she behaved. She, perhaps, had not even thought about it, but thanks to my testimony she understood that it was so and agreed that she is like that. And thus, in many respects we discover in each other unique features, so that later we may be confirmed in them and then consciously develop.

When my wife tells me that I am kind, explaining how it manifests itself, then I try to develop this character trait, attempting to understand to what extent it can be governed.

I rejoice that I can discover in my beloved qualities that will adorn her even more in my eyes, and I always hasten to tell her about my discoveries. And she gladly listens to me and is sometimes surprised at what the Lord is making of her. It is so interesting for her to study herself by my lips that she immediately drops everything and listens to my every word, fearing to miss something important.

We decided to write down all our discoveries about ourselves and not be afraid to repeat what we have already discovered.

I am not in the least wearied by words about how wonderful a husband I am. I am ready to listen to this from morning till evening throughout my whole life. And I never get tired of it. And I have noticed that it is also always pleasant for my beloved to hear that she is the best, the beloved, and the most wonderful wife in the world. We even have some family expressions that we constantly beg for and wait from one another, so that we may rejoice with all our hearts. And words of love are like food for the heart, with which we feed each other constantly, regardless of the weather, the dollar exchange rate, and the political situation in the world.

Our family councils have turned into a detailed discussion of the beautiful facets of our family life and reflection on how to make one another happy.

We definitely invite God into our fellowship, for it is He Who gives us the opportunity to live for one another, to love unconditionally, to think about happiness, and to share everything that we have.

We did not invent the science of knowing one's spouse in such a way, but took it from our personal experiences of fellowship with God and applied its foundations to each other.

Understanding what God expects from me, I can understand the expectations of a believing spouse. And understanding and seeing our expectations in love for one another, we begin to better realize all that God desires from us.

In our knowledge of one another, a much greater plan of God regarding the family and family relationships is revealed to us. After all, the whole Universe is built on the model of a family. And through our love and knowledge we visibly show to the visible and invisible world how deep God's plans are concerning humanity, and how in this Love God's Character is revealed.

God does not plan to separate us from Himself and leave us alone, but wishes to be glorified in our relationships and to

visibly show how great He is in our knowledge of one another, and how endless this path of family happiness is.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Eccl. 3:11-14; John 17:21-26; 1 John 1:7; 4:7-8; Rom. 12:9-10; 15:13-14; 1 Cor. 1:4-8; 13:12; 2 Cor. 10:4-6; Eph. 5:15-33; Phil. 1:9-11 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Is it difficult to know one another?
5. What constitutes the knowledge of one another?
6. What happens to the hearts of those who open themselves to one another?
7. Do you want to open your heart and learn from another person how beautiful it is?
8. Is it possible in our time to have such knowledge of one another?
9. What should be done if such knowledge is impossible in my family?
10. Does the Lord desire that, as we know one another, we also not forget to know Him by the very same rules?
11. If the knowledge of one another is impossible in the family, can it be had in the church?
12. Do you understand the depth and importance of this lesson? If so, share your revelations.
13. Is it worth understanding what knowledge is not, and not building one's close relationships on that?
14. Do you believe that if the knowledge of one another is right and deep, then all deeds will proceed from these relationships in the right spirit?
15. Will God teach and bless those families that desire to have the knowledge of one another and begin to practice it?

We and God

If you ask any believing person to set their priorities, each will tell you that God is in first place, and the remaining places may be filled differently. Let us give a brief list of what is in your life:

Health, work, friends, home and household, God, hobbies, children, yourself, useful things, rest and tasty food. After you read this list, try to arrange its contents according to your understanding by priority, from the main to the less important. I think that God will end up in first place for you, and everything else will differ from the lists of other people.

Let us look into a happy family and find out how its members evaluate their lives.

Once I suggested to my beloved that we make a list of priorities, but in such a way that everything would be honest—as it really is—and not as it is “supposed” to be. We know what ought to be primary, but by our attitude we very precisely determine what truly stands in first place for us and what is less valuable. From the position of time, it is difficult to judge one’s priorities, because sleep and work consume the largest part of daily needs.

If in my personal life I can understand what place God occupies for me, then how am I to assess this within my family and our relationship? We decided together to sort this out.

God desires to have personal fellowship with us, and He speaks unambiguously about this, declaring that if He does not know us, then we will be lost for Eternity.

It would be wonderful to receive the visible Jesus as a guest, as at one time Lazarus’s sisters did. Christ loved to stay in their hospitable home and rest there from all His labors. But even there Martha and Mary had different priorities. Jesus treated their life position with understanding and judged no one for thinking this way or that, but He made it clear that where God truly stands in first place, He will help to set everything else in order rightly.

In our family we decided to place God at the head of everything. But questions arose as to this: if, according to Scripture, the Head of the husband is Christ, and the head of the wife is the husband, what should this look like in our priorities, and will God punish the wife for putting me in God's place?

I by no means want to be at the head of her priorities, because I understand that each of us must have personal fellowship with God. And it must be constant and duly ordered. And if each of us will commune with the Lord, then we can bring the fruits of such a relationship into our family, seeing in this the essence of God.

Reflecting on what constitutes our fellowship with God, we understood what it is not:

- Attending church.
- Participating in spiritual ordinances.
- Reading the Bible.
- Our prayers for one another.
- Our ministry.
- Our healthy lifestyle.
- Our listening to spiritual information.

All this must be present in one's life, and we do not refuse it, but such things are the natural consequence of the fact that each of us has, as a priority, personal fellowship with our Savior, which is defined by:

- My fellowship with Him about me.
- My fellowship with Him about Him.
- Our fellowship with Him about us.

When my wife and I decided to commune with one another, it turned out that our relationship—in which we best came to know one another—was formed according to this very same pattern. We spoke about me, we spoke about her, and we spoke about us, and everything else naturally flowed from what we were building for ourselves. Everything else is our deeds. And if

we decide that our fellowship is that which it is not, then we will do many good and kind things, but we will not know one another nor understand the heart of our chosen one. Fellowship is the foundation of everything; it is that upon which everything can be built. And what should be in second place in our priorities? Here imagination and reality may suggest anything at all.

We discussed all our values and concluded that in this place should be we ourselves, each personally for himself or herself. Not in the sense of one's egoism, but in thinking about one's personal salvation, developing one's faith, doing everything possible to enter Eternity, to acquire God's Character and to possess Heavenly Love and wisdom.

It will be very easy for me to love my wife if, having a personal relationship with God, I begin to receive from Him love for my neighbor. I can take God into all spheres of my life and ask Him to participate in everything that I experience and do. My relationship with Him does not cease even when I sleep. I am God's even in that state.

My wife and I also noticed that when everything is wonderful in our personal relationship with God, then this same marvelous spirit spreads to our family. And even if something goes wrong, it does not upset us much, but urges us to seek the answer in God and in His wisdom.

Our personal health must also be in its proper place, and it is worth preserving it by studying the laws by which our soul and body live. Health should be preserved and not squandered on temporary pleasures. We know that there are eight basic factors of a healthy lifestyle, which should have their proper place in our home, being understood in the right light. If health is lost, nothing else will replace it. One must care for health and keep it in the best condition.

We also decided that in our family personal relationships with God must be respected at all times. This means that if I decide to retire for secret prayer, no one should hinder this. Likewise, I will respect my wife's choice. And in our common fellowship

we can together reflect on what the Lord is doing for us and how wonderful He is in our family. By our personal relationships with God we do not abolish our family worship and joint study of the Bible. They are in their place and accomplish what God decides and what we desire to receive.

The choice of the congregation in which we would carry out our ministry and where we could worship God together with our co-believers sparked a heated discussion. Each of us had friendly relationships with brethren, and we did not want to lose them because of a move to another church. But we resolved this question as well after our common prayers, when the Lord showed us what should be paid attention to and what should be changed. We desired that all our personal friends henceforth be our mutual friends, and we would love and receive them. And if they begin to bring division and enmity into our union, then we will decide together what to do about it, but we will not allow friends to take the chief place in our hearts.

While we did not have children, it was difficult for us to determine where to place them, but we decided that if the Lord gives them, we will raise them not for this world, but for Eternal life.

We had already learned to agree about everything, and in the matter of priorities we were likewise able to understand what is primary for us, and then to verify what actually stands in first place. The mind understands what ought to be primary, while the heart tells what in fact is in first place for us—what we love and value most, and on what we do not begrudge our free time.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Isa. 40:25–31; 42:8; Ps. 58:17; 100:1–4; 102:1–5; 104:4; Rev. 3:20; John 8:32; 1 Cor. 15:34; Amos 3:3; Mark 8:36; Hab. 2:14; Luke 12:29–32; Eph. 5:22–28; James 4:10; Prov. 4:5–9 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Have you tried arranging priorities in your life?
5. How can one understand that God is in first place for you?

6. Can words about setting priorities differ from the real picture?
7. What should I do if I do not know what is in which place for me? Is it really that important to determine?
8. How can one know God within the framework of the family?
9. Does our love for one another testify that God is in our relationship?
10. Should one respect the choice of one's spouse and not put obstacles in the way of fellowship with God?
11. If for someone God is in first place, but everything else in the home does not interest him, will this be a blessing for the family? 1 Tim. 5:8.
12. Do you think a person's priorities will change before and after creating a family?
13. Can my personal relationship with God become the common possession of my family? In what way can this be useful in the family?
14. What role does Love play in one's personal knowledge of God?
15. What role does God play in my love for my family?

What Will We Eat?

Our friendship and premarital relationship with my dear friend so filled the mind and heart with various romantic experiences that we did not want at all to be distracted by the various particulars of our life activity. I did not think about food at all, because all my main thoughts were about her. Sometimes I ate at my parents', sometimes at friends', and mostly I bought fruit and ready-made semi-finished products at the store and quickly improvised something, not worrying about cooking. And when we met for personal fellowship, food interested me least of all, since there were more important matters. We enjoyed spending mealtime in cozy little eateries where we could sit at a table and look at each other to understand whom we were dealing with.

We had been taught by God to eat clean food, and this question was not even discussed by us. As for the rest, we were unpretentious and indiscriminating.

When creating a family, we did not touch on the question of nutrition, assuming that everything was fine with us in this regard, but the Lord kept drawing our attention to the fact that ignorance concerning eating can negatively affect our relationship with Him. My body, in turn, kept sending me warnings that something in my diet was not right. At times drowsiness would come upon me, at times excessive internal gas formation would begin, at times my stomach would cramp, at times my head would not think at all. And I ascribed all this to random processes beyond my control.

But the Lord did not leave us to live in our ignorance and sent us the light of a dietary reform. Although we had heard about this before and knew something, at one moment I came to a sharp realization that radical changes needed to be made in my diet. I voiced my thoughts to my wife, and she supported me, answering that she often thought about this as well. We decided to sort this matter out together and asked in prayer for wisdom from above.

It turned out that on this topic the Lord had already sent so much light that one could study the laws of health and nutrition from morning till evening. And some things were so clear and easy in practice that we decided to implement them in our lives immediately.

First of all, we wished to put the refrigerator in order and sort out our dishes. All store-bought products were checked for the presence of chemical additives; suspicious and dangerous semi-finished products were identified, and our trash can helped us solve this interesting task.

As a result of the investigation, we discovered that our plastic electric kettle was the most dangerous kitchen appliance, which, when boiling, releases so many poisons into the water we drink from it that we became uneasy. We immediately decided to replace it with a metal one without internal seams, but the best and safest option turned out to be a kettle with an enamel coating that must be heated on gas.

All plastic bowls and cups into which we put hot food we decided, as far as possible, not to use, but to replace them with glass or porcelain.

In the matter of the safest food, we came to a unified conclusion that the safest food is that:

1. Which we ourselves have grown in our own garden, which we did not yet have.
2. That which we ourselves have prepared, knowing the composition and the method of preparation.

We understood that, being believers, we trust the integrity of the producer and as it were believe that they think about our health. But as we studied this issue, we realized that business and the desire to make a profit with minimal costs push many producers toward various bad things that can subsequently cause us serious ailments and various diseases.

Although we could not immediately abandon everything, we decided to minimize all possible risks to reasonable limits.

We were helped by the books of the Spirit of Prophecy, in which the Lord very clearly showed many principles in the taking and preparation of food. In our family we decided to be guided by this light.

We had already been taught that when visiting our relatives it is necessary to discuss our diet in advance and ask them to take our tastes into account. But we decided that such a reform would concern only our home, and we would not impose our new principles on anyone.

We considered that when we buy and cook food ourselves, though it takes more time, it is much cheaper than if we continue to eat in eateries of unknown fare and preparation.

My wife decided to improve her culinary knowledge by learning this craft from our brethren who had learned much before us and are now engaged in instructing others. And even in these courses we are guided by common sense and the light that the Lord has given us during our research. We also understood that the best drinking water is not that which flows from the tap, but fresh water that nature gives. But it also should first be tested to ensure it is clean and safe.

We plunged headlong into the science of drinking and eating and understood that it rewards with health those who master it and apply it correctly.

We became discerning and prudent people regarding what gets onto our plates. We also decided not to take an interest in or comment on the contents of other people's plates and refrigerators, or even the plates of each other.

Our food must be not only wholesome but also nourishing. It would be quite wrong to give up everything we are accustomed to eating and not replace it with anything. We began to study what this or that product contains, what it loses and gains during processing, and what our bodies need and in what quantities.

It was also revealed to us that it is better to make healthy sweets ourselves rather than buy them, so as not to deprive our bodies of life forces and health.

Our food must be not only nourishing but also tasty, attractive, have an aromatic smell, and arouse a healthy appetite. Here we have much to learn. We decided to acquire beautiful tableware and dinner sets so that the setting of our table would also inspire us.

We also understood that our food, with all its benefits and taste, must be consumed moderately and on a schedule. We decided to eliminate snacking between meals and not to serve dozens of different dishes at one time.

Our research on the matter of nutrition took many months of intense struggle with our appetite, which included the search for wise solutions, understanding various interconnections between the stomach and the mind, reverting to old ways, a fanatical approach, upset stomach, and spoiled mood. But the Lord each time lifted and encouraged us and invited us to go further. Although for you, friends, all this has fit into a short message.

We understood that the laws of health and nutrition are given to us by the Same God Who once said, "Thou shalt not kill." And the violation of such commands can cost us very dearly.

Now, when we enter stores where the counters are bursting with beautiful packaging, we are not interested in what does not nourish and what destroys, and God's principles inscribed in our hearts prompt us as to what is clean and safe. And to the question, "What will we eat?" we always have a wholesome and tasty answer for ourselves and for our guests.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 2:2-11; Eccl. 5:11-19; Prov. 23:1-3, 6-8; Rom. 14:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:9; John 21:9; Luke 12:29-32; Isa. 55:1-2; Lev. 11:44-47; Amos 3:3; 1 Cor. 19:22 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Read 1 Tim. 4:1-5. Do these verses give permission to eat everything? Does the Word of God sanctify every kind of food?
5. Is it worth watching what enters my stomach and what the quality of that product is?
6. Can the verse in 1 Cor. 10:25 be permission to buy and eat everything indiscriminately: "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question for the sake of conscience"?
7. What is the purpose of dietary reform in the family?
8. Is it worth heeding the warnings of the Spirit of Prophecy about the importance of proper nutrition?
9. Is Heaven interested in what lies on our plates?
10. Is righteousness imputed to us through knives and forks?
11. Should dietary reform be adopted into one's life if other family members are against it?
12. Should we trust all producers and assume that they release high-quality and wholesome food?
13. What food is considered the safest and most beneficial?
14. Does the dietary reform in your life extend only to your home, or should it be observed everywhere?
15. If nutrition does not save me, then why deprive myself of the joy of gustatory pleasures?

What Shall We Wear?

I had heard a lot about a reform of dress and even made some efforts to bring something from the experience I had gained into my life. I even decided in my heart that my future wife would dress in such-and-such a way, and otherwise I would not even pay attention to her.

The worldly environment smeared all my ideas like butter on bread. I read one thing, but around me and even in the church I saw something entirely different. When I tried among the brethren to express protest against their outward appearance, I was called a fanatic who was very old-fashioned and understood nothing. But I believed that God has a special plan for His people and desires through this to be glorified and to test our faithfulness to the light received.

But then she appeared. I did not at once let her into the depths of my heart. I was especially troubled by the fact that at times her outward appearance did not at all correspond to what the Lord expects of us. But in other matters she turned out to be very open and energetic. At first I was charmed, and then I fell in love with this wonder. Having understood that this little person met many of my expectations, I fully opened my heart to her and decided not to attach special importance to her manner of dress.

I noticed that in hot weather, when she wore light dresses, the exposed parts of her body gave me a special aesthetic pleasure and evoked ambiguous thoughts with which I had to struggle constantly. But for fear of losing her I decided not to raise this topic, since I knew that my views could destroy our relationship.

Fortunately, summer in our region was not so long, and she had to dress more warmly so as not to freeze for the sake of fashion.

For our wedding she had ordered a decent white dress that completely covered what ought to be covered. And this calmed me, because it seemed the person understood the principles of dress reform.

When our family was formed and I received forever the one for whom I had dreamed and prayed, I noticed that elements of clothing began to be added to our wardrobe from time to time that were very provocative and did not at all correspond to what had been revealed to me. And at times I felt ashamed of my wife when she went out with me among people wearing very short skirts and blouses. When she came into our bedroom in such attire, I rejoiced in my heart at the beauty of her body; but when other men admired it, I was very saddened to catch their lustful glances.

I realized that something needed to be done; otherwise I would do something very bad. I decided to pray for wisdom from above and began to ask for the power of the Holy Spirit for a serious conversation. Then I undertook a fast and asked during that time for a special Presence of God at our family council. I very much wanted everything in our union to be right—not as I understood it, but as God wants it.

On the third day of the fast, it dawned on me that I must not establish a dictatorship in the home, but, after expressing my opinion and presenting to my wife evidence from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, allow her to decide for herself what to do with the light received.

My beloved understood that I was undergoing some inner struggle and did not ask me unnecessary questions, carefully observing my wrestlings and trying not to hinder me in solving my tasks. And when I invited her to an important conversation, I noticed that she was very worried, which she did not hide.

We prayed together, and I began carefully to voice my feelings and thoughts regarding appearance in my family, watching the expression on my wife's face and giving her the opportunity to say what she thought about it.

Since I had studied this question, it was not difficult for me to find places in the Bible and the Testimonies that speak of God's will on this matter.

To my surprise, she did not interrupt me but listened very attentively to my arguments and carefully read what I gave her.

I did not set an ultimatum, but spoke very tenderly of my love for her and of the fact that I would not want to lose her because of embitterment in this matter.

I promised her that I would accept any decision of hers and would love her further no matter what, but at the same time I would have my firm position and see to it that my clothing corresponded to God's standards.

I also explained that all those parts of her body which I so like to touch when no one sees should not be displayed to outsiders.

She had long since accepted the fact that I did not visit public beaches and, for my sake, denied herself this pleasure, not understanding what was wrong about it. For her it was very simple, without any embarrassment, to bare her body down to a swimsuit. And I explained to her that strings and little rags are not clothing in my eyes nor in God's. I also expressed my opinion that in certain clothing my wife very much resembled a man or a harlot, which did not suit her at all.

Although I tried to be very restrained and tactful in my presentation, I often caught myself that my tone was rising to a high degree.

In my thoughts I constantly turned to Jesus, that He would give me humility and His wisdom in presenting all that had been revealed to me.

When I finished speaking, I began to wait for what my wife would say. She sat quietly looking at her hands and said nothing. I suggested we pray, and we knelt. She did not say anything more, but said she would think about the matter and thanked me for my effort and care.

Since it was already evening, before going to bed I decided to go out alone for a walk and talk with Jesus about everything I had experienced during that time. I understood that in our family we had come to some deep crisis that could turn into who knows what. But I was also sure that I needed to do something about it, and I could no longer remain silent, seeing a direct violation of God's principles in my own home. I needed

Jesus very much, and walking and praying I asked for wisdom from above, so as not to take the path of a fanatical or dictatorial spirit. The Lord calmed me in His Love and gave peace to my heart.

When I came home, I saw a strange picture. My wife was sitting with large scissors in her hands before a pile of cut-up swimsuits and blouses, and, humming familiar psalms under her breath, was eyeing the next batch of her clothing that awaited the same fate. I froze in amazement. And with a cheerful voice she let me know that she could not sell these things or give them to other people, since they could become a snare for weak souls; therefore she decided to act after the example of the Ephesians who, having understood the perniciousness of their evil deeds, desired to burn everything that was abominable to God (Acts 19:18-20).

I embraced my dear wife and thanked God for such a wonderful gift.

I was ready for anything, but such experiences impressed me greatly with the depth and simplicity of such quick decisions, although I had braced myself for many years of battles, not knowing what would come of it.

Rejoicing at what was happening, I also decided to review my things and found old athletic briefs and a pair of shorts that I did not intend to wear but for some reason kept. I solemnly brought this clothing to a farewell ceremony and, to the merry sound of scissors, bid them farewell forever.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 7:10; Matt. 6:28-33; Eccl. 9:8; 1 Pet. 3:3-5; Gen. 3:21; Exod. 19:10; 20:26; 28:2; Lev. 10:6; 19:19; Num. 15:38; Deut. 22:5, 11; Isa. 47:2-3; Ezek. 28:13; Zech. 3:3-4; Luke 12:22-23; Rev. 16:15 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Does Heaven pay attention to our clothing and our manner of dress?

5. Why does Jesus tell the Laodiceans that they are naked and counsel them to cover the shame of their nakedness? Rev. 3:17-18.
6. Have you heard anything about the Reform of Dress? For what purpose did God give it to His people?
7. Will God save His people through righteousness by clothing?
8. If salvation is not given by clothing, then what difference does it make how it looks?
9. Can one discern a person's occupation by their clothing?
10. Can Satan make fashionable and popular what is abominable in God's eyes? If so, whom should we obey?
11. Can clothing and manner of dress say something about a person's character?
12. Should we force other people to adhere to your understanding of modesty in clothing?
13. If the question of clothing is not a criterion for admission into church fellowship, should we hold discussions about it?
14. Will it be right to establish in one's family certain standards in clothing according to God's light?
15. Is the question of clothing one of the tests for God's people?

Shall We Stay Friends?

Before our wedding my wife and I agreed that we would remain friends under any circumstances, even if we did not manage to form a family. And if we became husband and wife, we would bring our friendship into our family relationship and develop it further, not quenching this beautiful spirit of friendliness, but giving it at all times.

Fortunately, we still managed to get married, and we noticed that being friends in the family is quite interesting. The only difference was that we had a special physical contact, in which new sensations and experiences were revealed that had previously been impossible even to imagine.

We rejoiced so much that we had each other, and that our friendship was growing stronger with each day. And some dear brethren watched us with sadness and warned us that soon this would pass, and we would plunge into the routine of everyday cares, where there would simply be no place for friendship, and our innate selfishness would finally destroy all our romance, and we would plunge into a reality that would not be as rosy as we saw it.

It was always amusing for us to listen to such words, but somewhere deep in our hearts everything resisted the idea that this could come, for then our life would be completely different and incomprehensible.

Involuntarily we looked closely at other families and saw that all of them were not like ours. And when we got acquainted with members of those families and tried to find out how they loved one another and how their friendship was formed, they listened to our questions with surprise and did not understand what we meant.

But we very much wanted to understand whether true friendship would preserve its beauty and freshness over many years. Studying this question and taking the path of love, happiness, and friendship, we understood that we were dealing with eternal values, for which time is not an obstacle; rather, on

the contrary, it cleanses and polishes to Heavenly brilliance what GOD has conceived and given to us.

Every time we sat down opposite each other to discuss our love and friendship, we were convinced that we had this and that it was growing stronger each day, turning into an unshakable principle conditioned by our choice to relate to each other in precisely this way. And the very spirit of friendliness filled our relationship so deeply with natural happiness that it would have been very foolish to refuse this blessing for the sake of conforming to the world.

Everywhere we were present, new acquaintances appeared who watched our friendship with genuine interest and tried to understand whether they could have the same attitude in their own families. And we gave seeking souls the hope that in JESUS everything is possible, and there are no obstacles to loving one another from a pure heart and being constant in this matter.

Over time we noticed that our friendly attitude toward one another extended also to our new acquaintances, who were not against our becoming their friends as well. And we did not begrudge taking the water of life from the ocean of GOD's Love and giving it to others, pointing them to the True Source of happiness, love, and friendship.

There were also people who did not know how to receive GOD's blessings of love directly and always wanted to use us as their personal source, which at first made us wary, but then we learned to bring them to JESUS and to lay all their cares upon Him.

It is so simple to love your friend when you want this and desire to live this way, no matter what or who! What could be better than when you agree with your friend about mutual love and consciously do everything to live up to that agreement?!

Even during our premarital relationship I understood and appreciated how much joy your words of love—spoken or written to your friend—bring to the heart, as well as his or her similar attitude toward you. One can appreciate the blessed influence of love only by being in a relationship of love toward

one another. No theory or other people's experiences will give you the joy contained in the love of friend for friend.

Our family friendship did not hinder us from doing everyday tasks and routine duties; rather, on the contrary, it helped us in all this routine to see the end result—when all this would be finished and we would unite with our friend again in order once more to assure ourselves that we love one another and are ready to continue living in this state, building our relationship precisely on this foundation.

We also understood that our mutual friendliness has its origin in personal relationships with JESUS. It is He Who is the firm Foundation of what we are building for ourselves. And we are building happiness. It is impossible without a joint decision to love one another and to be friendly at all times.

Also, observing how one can treat each other respectfully without losing the joy of love, we understood how JESUS has fellowship with each of us. We have a living Heavenly Friend Who teaches us to commune personally with Himself, and then to bring this experience into our earthly relationships. Likewise, seeing vividly how wonderfully our friendship takes shape, we took from it certain examples in order to practice them in our relationship with CHRIST or to understand how these relationships can be improved or diversified.

Our very decision to be friends very often helped us find the right way out of many contentious issues and unpleasant situations. When we reached a dead end in our relationship and understood that we understood nothing, then the question from one of us, "Shall we stay friends?" showed us the best solution to all problems and helped to reduce everything to love and friendship. And it was precisely love that covered many things that could not be resolved otherwise.

We had previously lived in different families with different ways of life, but in our family we agreed to build our way of life based on love and friendship.

We became accustomed to constantly learning love, begging it from JESUS for our relationship, and we liked to listen to

others' experiences to understand what we could take from them into our life. Even if someone shared with us what a family should not be like, we took note of that as well and thanked GOD for a timely warning.

When a conflict was brewing in our relationship because of some trifles, then the proposal "let's be friends" quickly quenched the warlike spirit.

Our agreement to love one another sobered us when this world tried to intoxicate us with its wine of fornication. We long ago understood that discussing our love for one another is much more interesting and useful than pondering politics or delving into the global problems of world order.

We are no different from ordinary people, and when we are silent it is difficult to understand from us whether we love one another and whether we are close friends. But our words give us away completely when we begin to communicate. We noticed that we speak to each other in a special dialect of love, which is not accepted in many families, but is understandable to everyone with whom we communicate. Although we also sometimes tell other people about our love for one another, it seems they guess it without our commentary on this matter.

And we remain friends and do not wish to live otherwise.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 17:17; Amos 3:3; Eccl. 4:9-12; Rom. 12:9-10; John 13:34-35; Matt. 5:5, 9; 1 Cor. 13:4-8; Prov. 18:24; 31:10-12, 30; Matt. 5:48; 7:12 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. What is friendship in the family?
5. Are friendly relations something short-term or something eternal?
6. Can husband and wife be friends in marriage? Will such a spirit hinder them in fulfilling family duties?
7. What should those do for whom friendship is only a dream, while a completely different spirit lives in the family?

8. What role does GOD play in our decision to be friends? Does He help us to have such a spirit?
9. If two people in a family agree on mutual friendship, will they succeed in something?
10. Can those who jointly make such a decision to be friends preserve their friendship?
11. Do you think your love for one another will be noticeable to other people?
12. Why did JESUS say that our love for one another would be the truest testimony that we are His disciples?
13. Can our personal example in loving one another influence those close to us?
14. Is it possible to be friends without having agapē for one another?
15. Do you think JESUS will be friends with His Bride?

A Family Quarrel

The house I rented for myself, and later for my family, consisted of two floors and was, as it were, squeezed between two neighboring houses. On the street side there was an entrance and three windows. And on the back side of the house— a wide exit to a small terrace with a small lawn and two windows from the upper rooms.

In warm weather we kept the back door open so we could easily go out into the fresh air and sit at the outdoor table. Along the boundary with the neighbors, high walls had been erected so that we would not see one another, and our property was surrounded by a low fence.

One day a field mouse ran into our house. Apparently, it decided to explore a new space for its further use. My wife was at that moment preparing something in the kitchen, and I was removing weeds from the lawn. Suddenly a loud, piercing shriek from the house interrupted the course of my thoughts, and I decided to find out what was happening. Entering the house, I saw my wife up on the kitchen stove with her feet and trying to say something to me, pointing her finger at the lower cabinet. I understood that we had “uninvited guests,” calmly looked under the kitchen, and saw in the corner a poor little mouse that was perhaps, like my wife, trembling with fear. The sight of these two frightened creatures struck me as very funny, and I voiced the idea of filming all this on camera.

My beloved cried out for help and shouted that I should not fool around but do something to save her. I was amused by her fear and could not hold back my feelings. And she implored me to take action, otherwise she would die of a broken heart.

I took a mop and began driving the mouse out from under the kitchen, and it decided to find a safer corner and started darting about the room, eliciting a shriek from my other half with each change of direction. And, apparently, my wife was already eyeing a refuge for herself on the upper kitchen cabinets. I was having fun with what was happening, but

somewhere in my heart I wondered what the neighbors would think, hearing screams from our house.

After a short attempt to catch the mouse, it found an exit from the house and, jumping out into the street, disappeared into the grass.

I felt like a savior and solemnly approached my wife to lift her down from the stove. But she began to reproach me with all her indignation about my foolish humor and to call me callous and indifferent. And I, still under the influence of what had happened, kept smiling, barely restraining myself from laughter.

My beloved fell silent for a moment, and then, jumping to the floor, began accusing my mother, saying that I was just like her and that together with her I did not love my wife. My mirth began to evaporate quickly, and I asked, "What does my mother have to do with this?" In response I heard a tirade of lamentations that I do not rinse the bathtub after myself, leaving hair in it, that I walk around the house in outdoor shoes, that I do not dry the dishes after washing, that I scatter my socks all over the house, that I snore in the middle of the night, that I have an unshaven chin, and that I do many things that tell her I do not love her.

I stood, listened, and did not understand what was happening. I had ironclad arguments for all the accusations, which I tried to insert in my defense, but my wife would not relent and in the end burst into bitter tears, asking to be left alone.

I understood that something was not going according to plan for us and decided to comfort my beloved. She pushed me away in every possible way, but then decided that my T-shirt would be the best place for pouring out her grief, and, pressing herself to me, she cried out all her tears.

Somewhere in my heart I understood that my wife was under stress and could not control herself, and, gently embracing her, I stroked her back. But what I heard addressed to me seriously concerned me, and I decided to sort it out later. Just in case, I began apologizing for my foolish behavior and asking for

forgiveness. And she, pressing her face into me, was silent and, quietly sobbing, calmed down.

When the “storm in a teacup” subsided, I suggested we pray, and we knelt to turn to GOD in our situation.

I decided not to bring my questions to the family council that day, but quietly asked, “Shall we stay friends?” I was given an affirmative answer, and we decided to leave everything and go for a walk in nature.

In the following days we avoided the topic of our quarrel in conversation, but when enough time had passed and we returned to our normal mode of love and friendship, at the next family council I decided to discuss what had happened, to understand what it was, and to make some decisions so as not to repeat anything similar.

In that time I managed to speak with my pastor, and he explained to me that what I call a mouse, in the eyes of many women looks like a tank from which they must be rescued instantaneously.

After praying with my wife, we sat down at the negotiating table, and I recalled what had happened, trying to understand what all the other accusations against me had to do with it, if the problem was only the mouse. My beloved began to apologize for everything she had said. But I understood that all this was overflowing her heart and would not leave it just like that. And, possibly, next time I would learn something else interesting about myself.

I suggested we sort out everything that had been said in accusation against me and that I would not be offended by anything, but would try to correct everything within my power.

We peacefully discussed many points of my behavior and found that they were divided into those I could fix and those with which we would have to make peace. For example, I promised that I would rinse the bathtub, not walk around the house in shoes, and put my socks together with my work clothes. But I cannot forbid myself to snore at night, nor can I stop my beard

from growing. Also, I cannot control the smell of sweat and the smell from my mouth, but I will watch my hygiene and do everything so that these parts of the body are, as far as possible, clean and fresh.

We also decided that if ever another conflict or quarrel arose, then we would quarrel only within the framework of the pressing problem, without weaving into the situation our relatives, friends, or our behavior in other spheres of life.

If the cause of the strife was my foolishness, then we discuss the foolishness; if I am dissatisfied with how clean the dishes are, then we talk about the dishes without recalling how and who behaves.

I had heard that during women's days many women may behave out of the ordinary, be very irritable or tired, lose initiative, or fall into apathy. I expressed my opinion that if my wife would feel something like that, then I would turn a blind eye to it and not pay attention to her behavior and not aggravate the tension. She is very dear to me, and I do not want the enemy to use our human or hormonal ailments to make us quarrel. To this my wife promised me that she would try to keep herself in hand or warn me that something was not right with her.

I also made the decision that I would not invite all my problems at work and outside the home into the family so as not to spoil everyone's mood, but would give everything to GOD in prayer, and bring joy, love, friendship, and happiness into the home.

Our council passed in a friendly spirit, and we asked GOD to establish us in love and understanding and to help us reduce everything to peaceful resolution.

We also decided not to share with others what happens in our family, but to settle all problems within the bounds of our home.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:9-10; Prov. 3:30; 15:1; 17:14, 17, 19; 18:6, 19; 20:3; 26:21; 28:25; 29:22; 30:33;

Rom. 13:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:23-24; 1 Cor. 1:19 in light of this lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. What is a quarrel?
5. Why do quarrels occur?
6. Is it worth bringing into a quarrel the entire history of your former grievances or misunderstandings? Prov. 17:9.
7. Can quarrels reveal serious problems in relationships?
8. Are quarrels a blessing?
9. What should be done so that there are no strifes in the family?
10. Has anyone ever taken offense at you for your love and care?
11. Will an evil spirit behave calmly with loving and peaceable people?
12. Is a spontaneous quarrel an indicator that you do not know GOD?
13. What should you do if someone has quarreled with you and your opponent is deeply offended at you?
14. Are both people always to blame in a quarrel?
15. What should be done so that there are no quarrels in the family?

A Strange Test

I began to notice that with each day of married life our friendship with my wife was becoming stronger, and our love—deeper and more interesting. Many good things became so habitual for us that we understood each other at half a word and very skillfully avoided contentious moments, which were becoming fewer and fewer.

Family councils brought special blessings to our family. Communicating with friendliness, we understood that about everything one can come to agreement and settle everything amicably. And this harmony of views greatly rejoiced my heart, and my home became for me the place in which the soul found comfort and peace, and where, as it seemed to me, it was pleasant to be also for our unseen angels who minister to us day and night.

One day my wife told me that her former classmates were delighted with our family. They often meet to share with one another the achievements they have in this world. And my beloved presented me and our family to them as the most wonderful blessing from the Lord. It was pleasant for me to hear such a high assessment, and in my soul there arose a special feeling of pride that we are not like this world and that we have something other people do not have. I always felt special joy when someone praised us for our purity. And if my wife went to meet with her friends, I anticipated the pleasure of her stories about how everyone admired us and envied us.

One day my other half informed me that she was going to another meeting with her classmates. I rejoiced at the new portion of praise and gave my wife my blessing.

But when she came into the room to say goodbye, I was shocked by her appearance. She had on something like a slip, which she called an evening dress. Bright makeup shone on her face, and her eyelids were painted an unnaturally gray color. Around her neck hung several large beads, and on her hands there were more than a dozen various bracelets and rings. I

silently examined her, not knowing what to say. And she, as if nothing had happened, pecked me on the cheek and went to put on her shoes.

From the street came the car horn of her friends, inviting her out, and my wife ran out of the house to the joyful laughter of her classmates.

I set aside all my affairs and tried to understand what was happening. I had the feeling that the ground had gone out from under my feet and that something terrible was about to happen. For several minutes I sat in a stupor, not knowing what to do and trying to answer the question: "What is going on in our house?"

I wanted to call my wife and ask her to return home urgently to explain what was happening, but something restrained my feelings. I remembered that I must respect a person's choice, and I had nothing left but to ask GOD's help in this matter.

I decided to spend the rest of the day in prayer. At first I asked GOD why He had permitted this. Then I began to reproach myself for worldly pride. After that I asked for wisdom, trying to understand how to live further. Then I declared my decision to love my wife further and to fight in prayer for her salvation.

Speaking of everything with GOD, I realized how unclean I was and how saturated with selfishness, and how I now needed the Lord and His Grace. I began to ask forgiveness from GOD for myself and for my wife. In those moments I understood how dear this person was to me and how painful it would be to lose her. I could not imagine what awaited us further and how we would live under the new conditions, but I understood that something in my heart had broken. How painful it was to accept these changes, but I decided to love, no matter what.

During prayer, Bible verses about trials and apostasies came to my mind. I pondered the Will of GOD and so wanted to look into the future to get an answer for what was happening in the present.

Around 10 p.m. my wife called and, to loud music and the noise of merriment, reported that all her friends were drunk and would not be able to drive her, and that she herself was in a drunken state and incapable of getting home on her own. I had the feeling that the whole world had collapsed, but I gently told her that I would come and pick her up myself. She asked me to come in an hour so that they could have some more fun.

I now had time for special prayer. My head could not accommodate what was happening. I only kept asking GOD: "Why? For what? After all, everything with us was pure and right!" But the Lord was silent and gave me no answers. And in my head stood the question of what decisions I would make further. After a heavy inner struggle I declared to all Heaven that I choose love. I rose from prayer and went into the garden, cut flowers, set them on our dining table, brought two teacups, put our favorite cookies on a saucer, lit a candle, and went to the car.

With a heavy heart I drove up to the classmate's house. To my surprise, my wife was already standing on the street, dressed in a decent dress, without adornments. Her whole face was smeared with mascara that had run down her cheeks together with her tears. She was weeping bitterly and, seeing me, covered her face with her hands.

I understood nothing at all. She was completely sober, but her sobs grew very loud when I got out of the car to open the door for her.

She sat down beside me and, laying her head on the dashboard, burst into full sobs. I drove slowly home.

On the way I remained silent and reflected on what had happened. I wanted to receive explanations. But I decided not to hurry events, and to wait until my wife calmed down and told everything herself. Entering the house and seeing the set table with the burning candle, she sat on the sofa and, pressing her head to her knees, began to cry even more.

I began to understand that not everything was so bad, and I decided to take upon myself the role of savior. I suggested we

pray. She agreed. First, in addressing GOD, I asked forgiveness for what had happened and thanked Him for the Sacrifice that was made for our sins. Then she, with tears, asked forgiveness from GOD and from me for what had happened.

After prayer my wife calmed down and began to tell how, falling under the influence of her friends, she began to argue with them that I love her for who she is and will accept her in any way. And her friends convinced her that all men are the same and do not know how to love, and she decided to prove to them that I am genuine. They taught my wife how to dress, what to say, gave her adornments, and waited for their victory in this argument. And then they decided also to deceive me, to understand how I would react to a drunk wife, listening to our conversation on speakerphone. After I gently told her that I love her and would come to get her, they grew quiet, and their merriment turned into a general weeping where each of them began to pour out her soul and tell about all her earthly troubles. At the end of the meeting my wife could not endure the pangs of her conscience and, all in tears, went out onto the street to wait for me.

Our conversation continued until morning, and that night we learned something else very good about one another. We spoke peacefully, confessing our love to each other. Although my heart ached from what I had experienced, I was very glad that the Lord turned everything to good.

We agreed that we would never again tempt one another and the Lord in a similar way. And my heart thanked GOD for everything.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 3:29; 26:18-19; 1 Cor. 15:33; Rom. 13:10, 13; 1 Pet. 3:7-12; Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7; Luke 18:10-14; 1 Tim. 6:6, 11-12; 1 Cor. 11:19; Col. 3:19; Eph. 5:25-28; Prov. 31:10-12 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Is it worth testing your spouse's love in such a manner?

5. Is there a risk in such tests that the relationship may be destroyed?
6. For what reason are we given the counsel not to tempt the Lord?
7. Does the verse in Matt. 4:7 also apply to relationships between people?
8. Does the Lord tempt us? James 1:13-14.
9. Can your friends bring discord into your family?
10. What should be done if such a test turned out to be real and not merely an attempt to check love?!
11. If I decide to love no matter what, will the Lord give strength for this?
12. Will tests of your love come from another source?
13. Does our love for one another call us to mutual trust?
14. Is it worth being proud of our wonderful relationship?
15. Should we guard our love for one another from such tests?

What Shall We Read?

Each new day of our family life brought us fresh experiences, fresh revelations about one another, and added new blessings to our treasury of family happiness. How easy it is to speak about the beautiful qualities of the soul of the person you love! You do not need to invent anything—only to immerse yourself in the blessings of mutual love, scoop up by the handful what you live by, and give it to those who are interested.

I saw that our mutual love and the spirit of friendship became noticeable to other people as well. And when our acquaintances see the two of us together, they always smile at us, as if sharing our joy.

In fellowship with my wife, I noticed that, sharing with one another new knowledge and events, we bring up for discussion what we have read, watched, listened to, or pondered during the day.

I decided for myself to exclude television, and my wife supported me in this intention, but we still had the internet. Free newspapers are thrown into our mailbox. And not far from our house stands a former telephone booth with books, where anyone can bring and place everything he does not need so that others can take and read it.

I began to notice that different books started periodically appearing in our home, to which at first I paid no attention, trusting my wife. But when another spirit began to penetrate our conversations, I began to wonder where the source of what we were discussing was located.

Our meetings after forced separations began with hugs and kisses, and then came the question: “Do you know? ...,” and a detailed retelling began of everything with which my wife had fed her mind during the day. And it was very easy for me to determine what my beloved had “eaten.” At first I did not attach importance to this and let all conversations about world events and about the lives of certain fictional characters pass by my ears, assuming that my wife is a spiritual person and

would not allow something dangerous to our confession of faith into her heart.

I did not want to be a gendarme in my family and violate someone's freedom by establishing my own rules. And I myself, having read all sorts of news on social networks, willingly shared with others what touched me. Over time our boundaries became blurred, and certain things that I had initially considered unclean and dangerous no longer frightened me and at times even began to attract me with their sensations. And the brighter the event was, the more of a "wow" it elicited in me. And when my wife told me her discoveries, I skillfully inserted into her narrative my knowledge of the political world order.

During the hours of Sabbath rest we laid aside all our worldly news and tried to spend the holy time in reverence. But it became more and more difficult for us to sanctify this day. And at times we impatiently glanced at the clock, awaiting sunset, in order to learn quickly what had happened in the world or how events would develop in the lives of the heroes of the books we were reading. At first, all these things did not hinder us from studying the Bible, and we even managed to have special revelations, because we saw how world events speak of the soon Coming of CHRIST.

And we also learned to mask our interests under feigned righteousness. It was so pleasant, sitting in church, to solemnly open the Bible at the needed place and to compare what was said with what was written. My spirit was even caught up by how spiritual we appeared from the outside.

One day our pastor visited us, and he did not begin to have conversations with us about religion but simply told about his life and attentively listened to our stories. He silently studied the contents of our bookshelves and asked whether we read what stood on them. Although not a word was said to us about this, I felt uneasy at the thought that someday the LORD might ask a similar question. The whole abyss of the condition to which we were so confidently moving opened to me. I suddenly realized how far I was from GOD, and how uninteresting it had become for me to spend time with Him, because I was

pondering empty and earthly things. Although I continued, out of habit, to pray, it no longer brought the joy I had experienced at the very beginning of my acquaintance with the Truth.

And my wife, as if nothing had happened, in the simplicity of her heart began to tell which books she liked most and which events from them had influenced her feelings. I listened to her and realized that we were somewhere other than where we ought to have been.

The pastor listened to my wife with special interest and worked out some important task in his mind. I intervened and told our guest that I had understood everything, and that we would settle this matter within the circle of the family. The pastor was surprised but said nothing.

In the evening, when we were alone, I invited my wife to talk about what had been revealed to me and shared with her that my attachment to the world through reading news and various secular books posed a danger to our family. We were at risk of falling away from GOD while remaining members of His Church.

Although I spoke only about my own problems with reading, my wife guessed that this concerned her as well, and she said that she had also thought about it; but, seeing my silent agreement, she had not attached great importance, assuming that everyone in the church lives this way and willingly shares everything that is happening in the world.

I proposed that we take a spiritual fast and read nothing but the Bible. And together with this we decided to study on this topic the works of the Spirit of Prophecy as well.

And I myself began to pray even more, trying to understand what was wrong in my life. In ***Testimonies for the Church*** we read quite convincing recommendations about absolute abstinence from reading worldly literature and about how destructively it influences a person's spiritual life. And when we both understood that through these means we were inviting into our home another spirit, we decided to rid ourselves of

everything unclean and to remove from our shelves and from our phones the excess trash.

It turned out to be difficult to leave our social networks, where it had been so interesting to spend free time.

But we decided to replace virtual communication with live communication.

We also agreed that until we had studied all the books of the Spirit of Prophecy, we would not read anything else.

When I went to my profile in my favorite social network, I could not imagine how all this could be left. So many years had been spent on creating my world there, surrounding it with friends, gathering thousands of likes, filling albums with beautiful photographs. And to cross it all out just like that?! This was beyond my strength. My finger would not rise to perform such an action. To be lost in this world of fantasies turned out to be beyond my strength. I decided to tell on this platform about CHRIST, but I did not know how to implement it or what to say.

At first I was only able to delete everything empty and worldly. This took several days.

And my wife did not hide her tears, telling me that she had deleted all her social networks, and now she had only me and the LORD. And that from this time on only we could remain with her as her meaning and support. And I looked for justification for my decisions, but she did not ask me about myself, granting me the right to decide everything on my own.

The blessings did not delay themselves, and our spirit revived under the new conditions. It began to develop quickly and to bring abundant gifts.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Mark 1:17-18; Ps. 1:1-3; 101:2-4; Eccl. 12:11-14; Prov. 29:18; Isa. 29:13-16; Luke 4:16-20; 1 Thess. 5:27-28; Neh. 8:1-8; Acts 8:26-35; 19:18-20 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?

4. Can the enemy of the soul influence your mind through what you read?
5. How do you understand Mark 1:17-18 in the light of our time? Prov. 1:17-18.
6. What is best to do with those books in your home that have been revealed to you as dangerous for the soul?
7. Is it worth sometimes setting your dwelling in order to get rid of the accursed thing? Deut. 7:25.
8. Is it worth having wisdom when deciding to undertake a thorough housecleaning in your life?
9. Can newspapers, books, and social networks serve for the good of one's neighbor?
10. Does GOD observe what you read and publish? Mal. 3:16.
11. What should be done if the LORD calls me to get rid of something, but my heart resists this and does not want to obey? Hos. 4:17.
12. Can my books of various subjects attract evil spirits?
13. Are various media interested in my salvation?
14. How do you understand Josh. 24:15 in the light of our lesson?
15. What will happen if I remove from my life all that is bad but do not fill that place with good? Matt. 12:43-45.

What Shall We Watch and Listen To?

Reflecting on how reading all kinds of literature and being on social networks influence us and our family, my wife and I also paid attention to the following: no less do we get affected by what we listen to and what we watch.

There is a radio in my car, and when my wife and I drove long distances, we chose a station where we could listen to chanson or pleasant contemporary songs. Although not all of them turned out to have good content, and some even provoked irritation, there were also pleasant melodies with romantic lyrics. And this convinced us that such radio programs could be listened to.

Sometimes we put on discs with Christian songs, which at times were no different from worldly ones, but the frequent repetition of the same melodies tired us, and we returned to the radio again, which did not cease to delight us with its variety.

When a song about debauchery or violence came on, we tried to turn it down, hoping that the next piece would be better.

Somewhere we had heard that music can influence our character and turn us away from GOD. And we even tried for a time to abstain from listening to worldly melodies, but the habit of being in constant noise prevailed, and we turned the radio on again.

Some songs we liked so much and they stuck to the tongue that we had to hum them during the day. Sometimes that, too, became annoying, but we did not know how to get rid of it—and did not want to.

It always surprised me that any performer has a couple of lyrical songs that open your heart, and when you think that everything about him is so wonderful, you run into all kinds of impurity. And you end up listening to that too, since this singer sang something beautiful for you.

One day our pastor advised us to watch a television program called “Hell’s Bells,” which talked about the author of worldly

works, especially rock music. We watched it and pondered. It turned out that all this time we had been listening to Satan and singing his songs to him while calling ourselves GOD's children! We felt uneasy. We decided to discuss this matter at a family council.

We knelt and asked for GOD's guidance for our conversation. Reflecting on what we had listened to and how it influenced us, it became clear to us that the worldly spirit was gradually taking possession of our consciousness and hindering our spiritual growth. GOD's truths did not touch our hearts as they had at the beginning of our acquaintance with GOD. And calm Christian hymns seemed boring and droning to us. Although we had read that music has an enormous influence on the human mind, we for some reason thought that this must be some kind of angelic song, especially beautiful, which everyone likes.

Regarding rock and jazz we agreed at once that this is bad and harmful, but we did not know what to do with lyrical songs that so tugged at the soul.

We decided to fast and pray about this topic. I proposed, just in case, to delete from the house and from all electronic devices all works that have no relation to religion and our faith. Although this was hard for us, we thought it better to listen to nothing than to feed our minds with all sorts of trash. Perhaps this looked radical, but we needed to do something, for we so wanted to remove from our home everything accursed.

All discs, cassettes, and electronic files were mercilessly destroyed. It was joyful for us to find yet another worldly fellow and break him together with the storage case. Many so-called "Christian" songs also came under censorship, which, though they had religious words, were in performance style very similar to pop music.

I understood that we had perhaps taken extreme measures, but this was our family and our home, and we consulted over every find before disposing of it.

After the global cleanup we again sat down at the negotiating table and decided to discuss everything. I asked my wife

whether she would have broken my discs if I had been against it. After thinking, she answered that she would not have wished to do such a thing against my will, but would only have deleted that over which she had authority.

“And if I had continued to listen to what I had listened to before?” She said she would not have been able to forbid me, but would pray more for me and ask protection for her mind.

I was inclined to such an attitude and told her so. And together we rejoiced in the freedom we have in love for one another, while at the same time being able to come together to right unity in matters of principle.

Along with the music we removed all sorts of audiobooks by suspicious authors.

Reflecting on how wonderful it is not to read and not to listen to what does not edify, we realized that we also needed to do something about our home video library. It contained old cassettes from our former life, as well as all sorts of discs with films that occasionally entertained us.

We had already understood the principle of the purity of our shelves and thoughts, and therefore there was no need for long explanations. Everything suspicious and dangerous was quickly spoiled and destroyed by us and followed its fellows into the trash bin.

We rejoiced and were amazed by how long all this had accumulated, how expensive it had been, and how quickly it was going off to the next world without any regret on our part.

Only the one place we failed to cleanse was our memory. The enemy kept reminding us of familiar melodies that would casually appear on the tongue, or different scenes from films that suddenly surfaced in memory and hindered us from thinking about what is essential.

We decided to fill the resulting vacuum with something spiritual, valuable, and beneficial.

Audiobooks of the Spirit of Prophecy and other spiritual authors helped us greatly—our brethren had recorded them and posted them for free on the internet on various platforms.

There were many Christian films in our collection, which we did not get rid of immediately; but as we grew spiritually, we understood that in visualizing GOD's messages many Biblical truths are distorted and presented with directorial additions, which does not correspond to GOD's principles.

Interestingly, although we limited our "spiritual kitchen" to a minimum of harmful products, we did not starve; rather the opposite—we began to have a healthy appetite for wholesome and spiritual information, which began to gladden our hearts and reveal the beauty and depth of GOD's Character, making it our possession.

My wife and I agreed to be accountable to each other for what we read, watch, and listen to, and to choose something shared that we could then discuss together and draw benefit from.

Over time the LORD showed us in what mortal danger our souls had been, which we had so actively been watering with Babylonian wine. The call to come out of Babylon became very clear to us when we completely left that territory. It was frightening to think that we had lived there and had no cares. But the LORD led us out of there into His Light.

In the purity of thoughts and feelings our love and friendship continued to grow actively and become established.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Eccl. 7:5; Rev. 14:8; 18:4, 22-23; Eph. 5:15-21; Exod. 32:17-19; Ps. 68:31; 100:3; Isa. 30:29; Amos 8:3, 10; Rev. 14:3 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Does what a person looks at and listens to influence the mind? 2 Cor. 3:18.
5. Can worldly music or films harmfully affect my mind? Phil. 4:8.

6. Should any cleansing begin with oneself and one's own home? Matt. 7:3-5.
7. Will it be important in the last days to leave and remove from one's life everything that can corrupt my mind?
8. Is it right to consider all worldly songs unclean? Job 14:4.
9. Should we judge those who do not understand the danger of connection with the world through films and music as you do? Matt. 7:1-2.
10. What happens in a person's mind who looks at the works of Satan and listens to his music?
11. Can a person cleanse his memory of what he has seen and heard?
12. Do you think the authors and performers of worldly songs think about your repentance and salvation?
13. Does Satan succeed in seducing the world through the film industry?
14. What should I do if I cannot imagine life without radio and films, but desire to enter GOD's Kingdom?
15. What seal can GOD place on a forehead with a damaged mind?

Jealousy

My wife and I trusted each other, and this was expressed in the fact that each of us, within the framework of the family, could choose their life path that was most according to the heart. We did not hinder each other in communicating with other people and did not control how that communication took place.

One day something strange happened to me. And heavy experiences entered my life because of it. A brother began attending our congregation who had once had designs on my wife when she was single and had even offered her his hand and heart. But I turned out to be better, and he received a polite refusal. At the time, this story brought me joy—after all, she chose me. I did not take an interest in that brother's life but concentrated all my attention on the one who had conquered my heart. But now, when the hormones had calmed down, I began to notice that my wife became very creative and joyful when that brother appeared nearby. Although she always kept her distance and allowed no one any familiarity or flirting, either before marriage or after it, I somehow began to see in this brother a rival who, as it seemed to me, could take my other half from me. And this man was very tactful and friendly, giving me no reason for jealousy, yet remaining cheerful, fellowshipping with all the brethren and with my wife.

Every time he appeared within our field of vision, I immediately began to watch my wife's reaction, and she naturally rejoiced over him as a brother and friend and did not hide this joy from me.

I did not understand what was happening in my heart, but at first it began to disturb me, and then to anger me. I restrained my feelings for a long time, but one fine day, when my wife was overly emotional, I could not stand it and sarcastically expressed my opinion that she should not look at that brother that way, because I did not like it. After these words strange things began to happen in my heart. Some new and incomprehensible emotions rushed to my mind, arousing in me a spirit of indignation and trying to throw me off spiritual

balance. I became wary, because I understood that this was not like love and had a different nature; but the very memory of my wife's joy toward that brother upset me more and more. And when at the family council she asked me to explain my nitpicking, I simply exploded, accusing her of terrible sins which, it seems, she did not even have in her thoughts.

Something arose between us, and an evil spirit suggested to me that my wife belongs to me and that no one but me has the right to her warmth and friendliness. All her assurances of love for me did not calm me in the least. And although I understood that I loved this person and at times calmed down, just one thought about that brother and how my wife smiled kindly at him drove me out of my wits.

I noticed that I was becoming unreasonable in my jealousy, and that it was gradually spreading to all other brothers, and even some sisters no longer pleased me, since they distracted my wife's attention from me. Although I tried to restrain myself and conceal my feelings, my wife saw and understood everything.

Our relationship began to cool, and the family councils boiled down to my claims that one must not trade the family for some men and spend so much time with girlfriends.

I began to notice that because of my claims my wife did not become closer to me, but looked for any activity just so as not to stir up that strange spirit in me. And I myself understood that something was wrong, yet I could do nothing about it.

One day, when my wife was in the bathroom, I took her phone to understand with whom and about what she was communicating. I carefully reread all her correspondence with the brothers, but it was businesslike communication, while I so wanted to find evidence. At that moment something touched my heart and I asked myself: "Friend, what is happening to you? You were not like this." I set the phone aside and thought: "Where have I come to, and where am I going?" These thoughts tugged at my mind. Suddenly I realized that I was losing love and did not have it in my empty jealousy, and that by my own strength I could not correct anything.

I decided to speak with the pastor. Setting up a meeting, I told my whole story without hiding anything. And he listened attentively to me and then explained that I had entered forbidden territory and violated my wife's freedom without any cause. Her fidelity is based not on my demands but on fidelity to GOD, and she belongs to her Savior as one redeemed by Him from the power of sin. Although family places us within strict bounds, we must not become each other's conscience, and in CHRIST we have freedom, being dependent on GOD's Grace; and such jealousy is one of the varieties of pride.

Also, the pastor, realizing what was happening with me, let me understand that this sin would destroy me and our family if I did not repent and receive deliverance from above. The only justification for jealousy can be a spouse's infidelity—but those are completely different experiences.

I understood that the enemy had seized me and desired to ruin me and destroy my family. And the pastor taught me that I myself must resolve this matter with JESUS and pray until the Lord sets me free.

I set myself for victory in this matter, although pride kept me from understanding my true pitiful state. We prayed with the pastor, but nothing changed. And I did not know what should happen. But I decided to go to the end in this struggle, because I understood that an evil spirit was depriving me of love and bringing no joy into fellowship. I also noticed that my wife began to retire for prayer more often, and her cheerfulness in our relationship was unnatural.

One evening I decided to pray for myself and my family until I received an answer. I told my wife about my plans and, retiring, began to ask GOD for deliverance. The longer I prayed, the more I wanted to sleep, but I became ever more resolute, and my prayer ever more humble. Then I came to the realization that I had nothing good in myself, and if the Lord would not set me free, I did not know to whom to go with my need. I began to ask for tears, and they came. It was so joyful to acknowledge myself as nothing and GOD as great. Morning came, and I continued to pray and told the Lord that I would not let Him go

until He blessed. Day came, and I kept asking and asking, confessing my sins, to cleanse my evil heart and remove all iniquity. I believed that the Lord hears and answers.

Toward evening something happened in my head, and it became so easy and joyful. I understood that JESUS had set me free. I remembered that brother and was so glad that he exists. With enthusiasm I ran to tell my wife about it and found her in prayer and tears. I knelt beside her and, apologizing, told her about what I had experienced. She embraced me and said that she forgives and loves me.

I was so ashamed of my behavior and so glad for the deliverance. And then I invited that brother to our home and deliberately left him to converse alone with my wife and stepped out briefly on some errands. I wanted to test myself, and I was convinced that I was completely free from all evil. Returning home, I found our guest peacefully conversing with my wife and joined the conversation. My love was with me again, and everyone saw it.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read 1 Cor. 13:4; Ps. 36:1-11; Prov. 6:32-35; 24:1; 27:4; Num. 5:29-31; 11:26-29; James 4:4-7; Eccl. 9:5-10; Acts 17:4-5; Gal. 4:16-18; Phil. 3:6-7 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. What kinds of jealousy described in the Bible do you know? Is it important to understand these kinds and distinguish between them?
5. Why in one case is jealousy a manifestation of pride, and in another case it is the Name of GOD? Deut. 4:24; Exod. 34:14.
6. Is it right to consider your other half your property and to limit their freedom of communication?
7. Does freedom in JESUS allow permissiveness in sin?
8. What does a person experience who is being jealously watched regarding everyone they meet?
9. What is the difference between faithfulness from fear and faithfulness from love?

10. Can a person by his own strength get rid of a jealous spirit?
11. Will someone else's jealousy make a person happy?
12. Are jealous people happy by nature?
13. What should I do if I see in myself jealousy without cause?
14. Why are jealous people killers of love and friendship?
15. How can one understand that I am not a jealous person?

The Husband's Illness

In my heart I had decided never to be ill, because it was not fashionable in my parental home. From my forebears I had inherited strong health, and I thought it belonged to me by right and was for me a matter of course. But when the LORD, in His Mercy, opened to me the light of the health reform, I understood that health is a Gift of GOD, which must be cared for and carefully kept. Then it will gladden you all your life and accompany you in any trial. And if you lose your health, it is not sold anywhere so that you could just get it back like that.

My wife had a more modest opinion of herself and constantly worried that no external factors would become the cause of illness for anyone in our family, and she would periodically ask me to do this or not do that so as not to fall ill by accident. I understood that such requests were not always reasonable in the light of the health reform, and that many things have commonly accepted stereotypes as their basis; but our love for one another helped us find compromises and live peaceably under one roof.

One day a test came to our family called "I fell ill." By its symptoms it resembled the flu and very quickly completely took me out of my normal state. My head began to split with pain, my body was thrown into chills, my strength left me, and I wanted to lie down somewhere and do nothing and think about nothing. It felt as if I were living my last day and would no longer be able to change anything. At that time I could not even pray as usual, but limited myself to short words of thanksgiving to GOD for the sudden trial and weak requests for healing.

My wife at once assessed the situation and took the initiative to care for me, while I asked her to keep her distance so as not to become infected. To this she replied that she had no time to be ill and needed to manage to ease my suffering. And I only wanted to lie down and think about nothing. They say men endure illness more heavily than women, and therefore it is better not to burden them during this period with excessive tasks.

The only activity for which I had enough strength was to take a contrast shower and collapse into bed after it. I did not want to eat anything, nor did I have the strength. And my wife kept offering some new dishes, trying to feed me with something. As a result she managed only to give me tea with honey, after which I fell asleep.

Sleep eased my suffering but did not solve the problem of the illness. I lay quietly in bed and humbled my soul and body. After another question from my wife about whether I wanted something to eat, I firmly said that I was taking a fast and would drink only water. She understood that arguing was useless and went to study what to do with such patients and how to help them get back on their feet. Consulting with specialists, she learned that with such an ailment one needs to wait a couple of turning days, and then the body will head toward recovery. She tried to close the window and draw the curtains in the sickroom, against which I voiced a protest, since I knew that light and fresh air are the best allies for recovery.

Although I was incapacitated, the light received from the health reform helped me keep my situation under control and take independent steps toward healing. I remembered that a merry heart does good like a medicine, and decided to be joyful in this hard trial, asking GOD for Joy in accordance with my choice, creating on my face a semblance of a smile. And Joy came.

Meanwhile my wife prepared a portion of some tablets for me, persuading me to take them. I assured her that I had not fallen ill from a lack of pills, but because in something I had violated the laws of health and was now reaping the consequences.

After a couple of days I understood that I would go on living, and this gave me moral strength to fight the ailment. Fresh fruit and pure water became my food, and fresh air—my constant companion in the sickroom. My wife in the meantime settled in the living room and did not disturb me unnecessarily, but was always on the alert to serve in any way. I knew that she was praying for my healing, and I was very grateful to GOD for such a wonderful Gift.

When my head began to work normally, I started to ponder the cause of my illness. I very much wanted to find it. I decided to check myself by the eight factors of health. This turned out to be not difficult at all. To my shame, I understood that, knowing how everything should be and teaching others to live by these principles, I myself grossly violated all these points, except for Trust in GOD.

The LORD clearly showed me how presumptuous I was in my decision not to be ill, for at the same time I was violating everything that contributes to the preservation and strengthening of health. I became like the foolish virgins of Matt. 25:1-12, who knew what needed to be done but did nothing for their salvation.

Take at least air, sun, water, and physical activity. It would seem that all this is present in my life, but I do not know how to breathe correctly and do not understand what that is. The greatest thing I achieve is sleep with an open window, thinking that this is sufficient.

I rejoice in the sun, but I do not allow its rays to touch my body, hiding at every opportunity in the shade or wrapping myself in dark garments. Yet it nourishes and restores my organism through direct contact with it.

I drink water—but what kind and how? The best water is fresh, from a natural source or melted. But where can I get it? The city is not the best place to obtain clean drinking water. And my body needs it both inside and out. What can I offer it?

Why do I, knowing what I need, content myself only with making a healthy appearance, observing only superficial things?

I, as I suppose, am physically active—but what kind of activity is this in the light of the health reform? Walking from the sofa to the kitchen and the toilet are also movements, but minimal ones. My blood needs periodic loads on the body to be renewed and to flow faster through the veins, nourishing every cell. But the flesh seeks a soft sofa, to observe from its summit the world

events around itself. As a result, drowsiness and laziness cling to me, depriving me of any desire for active movement.

I love to eat tasty and wholesome food, but it does not appear on my table just like that out of nowhere. And I have adapted to trusting unverified producers to feed me with who knows what, thinking that they ought to care for my health, offering me the very best and freshest. But reading the contents on the packaging, I am horrified at what we are fed. And do I want, while eating with wholesome food all sorts of emulsifiers, to be healthy?

My temperance must extend to everything. Beginning with drinking and eating, touching work, hobbies, and the bedroom—everything must be within certain bounds of self-control. But I, being firm in one thing, am excessive in another. And that should not be so.

My rest has become unclear to me. In the evening it is hard to go to bed, and in the morning it is hard to get up. Over the week I become so tired that I have to sleep off the whole Sabbath. But this is not right.

And so, lying on the bed of sickness, I pondered myself and did not know how I should be and live.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 17:22; Matt. 24:8; Ps. 90:10; Exod. 15:26; 23:25; Deut. 7:12, 15; 28:58–61; 2 Chron. 16:12; Job 33:16–20; Ps. 114:3–4; Isa. 53:3–4; Matt. 4:23–24; Luke 9:1; Rev. 21:4 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. What is illness, and why does it come?
5. Why do people fall ill?
6. Does the LORD desire to see us healthy and to teach us not to be ill?

7. Have you heard anything about the health reform? If so, what place does it occupy in your life?
8. Is it worth trying all of GOD's methods of healing for prevention?
9. Why did JESUS warn us about the beginning of illnesses in Matt. 24:8, and then add that the love of many would grow cold?
10. Does a joyful spirit have power for a quick healing? Prov. 17:22.
11. What should be done in order not to be ill?
12. What awaits those who will reject the light of GOD's health reform?
13. Is it important in the last days to care for one's health and understand the laws of health?
14. What relation does health have to the last time and to the final warning message?
15. Should I study the laws of health if I do not have a medical education?

Stolen Property

One day my wife came home with a pile of paper bags and, with great enthusiasm, began telling me what useful things she had purchased that day. A friend had invited her to attend a “free” presentation at a beauty salon, where foreign specialists “just like that” performed all kinds of procedures and let people try various creams and skin-care products, explaining the healing and magical properties of these ointments. And my dear other half decided to gift herself, me, and all her friends with these wonder-working preparations, whose price, though high, was, in her words, justified by their originality and uniqueness.

I watched her enthusiasm and did not understand what was happening. She was advertising her purchases with such rapture that it gave the impression she was the seller and I the buyer. But the most interesting part came at the end of her story. She announced to me that, since she had not had that much money with her, they had offered to arrange a loan and have her pay a fixed monthly amount for two years. I quickly added it all up and was surprised at the result. It turned out that all this time we would have to labor to cover the interest and the payment for who knows what.

I had no words to comment on what I had heard. I was silent and thought about what we had gotten ourselves into again. Sensing something was wrong, my wife grew quiet and also began to ponder. Then she asked me, “Dear, did I do something wrong?” What could I answer?

After a long pause my wife began to sob, and then she cried so hard that she frightened me. I began to comfort her and tell her not to grieve—“let’s first sort everything out.” And while she tried to compose herself, I took her receipts and signed documents and began to study them carefully.

I knew that there are consumer protection rights, and that we possibly had a chance to calmly get to the bottom of things and fix something.

Carefully reviewing the names of the various creams and other purchases, I decided to look up information and comments on this topic on the internet. It turned out that this had been a well-organized campaign by which trusting clients were found in this way and sold pretty packages with ordinary contents at astronomical prices.

I carefully read the terms of the bank's loan agreement and realized that things were not simple there either, and even if it were possible to annul it, we would still lose something, since the money had already been transferred to the sellers' account.

It was very sad to lose our hard-earned savings so quickly and easily, and I wished first to give this problem to GOD.

I began to pray quietly, and when my wife had calmed down a little, I decided to discuss everything with her and find out the details of what had happened. From her story I understood that there had been some kind of hypnotic power in all of this that had convinced my wife to take such a step and then had tried through her to tempt me as well.

I did not accuse my spouse of anything, understanding how hard this was for her now, and I assured her that I would not abandon her, that I loved and valued her, and that together we would cope with this too.

We prayed and cast all our care upon JESUS according to the Promise, because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). My wife finally calmed down and declared that she would throw all the purchases into the trash so as not to be upset anymore. I objected, saying that we would first try to return them to the sellers.

On a forum where other victims of deception shared their indignation, grief, and thirst for retribution, I found the phone number of a lawyer who, for a certain fee, was ready to help resolve this issue. First I wanted to verify this person's data, and it turned out that he had an entire firm that successfully handled such cases and had very many grateful clients who had turned to them for help.

We consulted together and decided to contact this lawyer at once. They turned out to be professionals in their field and immediately took up our case. And since the scammers knew this firm, we were unconditionally refunded all the money for the purchases, and they took their goods back. But it was more difficult with the bank, since the payout had already been made, and they wanted to keep all their interest even with early repayment of the loan. But we bore that as well.

I understood that in such a trial love is also needed in all its fullness, just as in favorable times.

After some time I received a call from “bank employees” where my account was opened, and they stated that scammers had hacked my card and withdrawn all the money from it, leaving only a certain amount. And the bank was forced to block my account. Then they connected me with a “security service employee.” He said the remaining money could be saved if I urgently withdrew it in cash and deposited it through a terminal to another account which they would indicate.

Being a quick person, I decided to act immediately and, without praying, ran to the ATM, withdrew the required amount, and immediately transferred it to the indicated account. The “bank employees” called me back and reported that now my money was safe and that they had been able to track down the scammers and return the stolen money to my account. Now I needed urgently to withdraw it and transfer it to the same account where I had deposited the previous funds. I rejoiced and decided again to act quickly. But something stopped me, and I began to think. Why could they not protect my card themselves and were asking me to transfer money who knows where? Opening the banking app on my phone, I saw that no one had withdrawn anything from me; only I myself had withdrawn what I had transferred to who knows whom. I felt sick. I suddenly realized that scammers had swindled me and wanted to strip me further. I did not know what to do and began to pray. How difficult it was! Indignation and bitterness over my naivety hindered my speech. I even tried in prayer to accuse GOD for not protecting me from evil people and for my

now bearing such losses. But, in the end, I humbled myself and even shed tears from the powerlessness to change anything.

My wife, seeing what was happening, at first watched me, and then asked what had occurred. I told everything, expecting that she would begin to cry and scold me. But she began to comfort me and assure me that she would not leave me and would carry this burden together with me. Through the words of this dear person the LORD began to heal my wounds.

I decided to contact the police. From the investigator's words I understood that there are very many such cases. These numbers and accounts are fake, and these scammers are uncatchable. No one wants to take on such cases. I understood that where people are powerless, GOD begins to act.

The scammers tried to contact me several more times, but when they realized that I had exposed them, they blocked my number and ceased communication. I managed to testify to them about GOD and about my faith and called them to repentance. I very much wished that these people would turn from their evil deeds and live, but this is for them to choose.

Later other scammers contacted us, offering for a certain sum to find the swindlers, but I refused them at once.

Such trials struck our family budget very strongly, but instead of condemnation we decided to love and support each other under such circumstances.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read 1 Cor. 16:14; Exod. 23:1; Job 15:20-35; 16:11; 31:7-8; Ps. 1:1-6; 9:22-35; 36:16, 35-36; 73:1-28; 94:3; 119:95; 140:9; Prov. 3:33; 4:14; 6:12-15; 15:6; Eccl. 7:15; 8:12-13; Isa. 57:21 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Have you ever become a victim of deception?
5. What do you think Adam's wife experienced when she began to converse with the serpent? Gen. 3:6.

6. Can advertising offer you unnecessary things as if they were vital necessities?
7. If your loved one has become a victim of deception, should you scold and humiliate them for this?
8. Why in our time do the wicked prosper, while the righteous have many sorrows and fiery trials?
9. What should I do if I understand that I am being deceived and they want to rob me, but I have no strength or wisdom to resist?
10. Will the LORD accept the repentance of swindlers? Luke 19:8-10.
11. Is it worth giving your friend advice about not trusting scammers, if he has become a victim of deception and is suffering from it?
12. Will the LORD execute His Judgment upon those who earn by deceiving and exploiting the trust of other people?
13. Is it worth being proud if no one has managed to deceive you so far?
14. How much longer will various scammers exist?
15. Is it necessary to value the trust of those near us and not be a stumbling block for them?

Fast Money

When creating a family, I solemnly promised GOD and all the witnesses that I would care for my wife and love her under any circumstances. And my promise immediately came into force and thus placed upon me a certain responsibility.

Working with my hands, I noticed that my income, though stable, was rather small to satisfy all our appetites and desires, and I began to think about where and how to earn more—and faster.

The first thing that came to mind was the lottery on the principle of 6 out of 49. I decided to look into this system and began to study all the possibilities of winning. The chance to get anything turned out to be so small that I did not even try to participate. But, observing the progress of the game and seeing how ordinary people weekly hit the Jackpot (the grand prize), I decided that I too could become the holder of this prize, for I have GOD, Who will help me get the desired. I decided to pray about it, promising to give GOD what is GOD's, to support with this money orphanages, to gift this winning to those in need, and to leave something for myself to buy our own home and a new car. I declared my faith that the Lord is able to answer such good plans. And then I enthusiastically initiated my wife into the prospect of quick wealth. She, to my surprise, did not support me in this matter, but neither did she condemn me, saying that she did not understand this whole system, but that it all reminded her of fraud. I protested, but also did not dare to play blindly, expecting that the Lord Himself would name for me the needed numbers, and I would then receive the grand prize. But GOD was silent despite my fervent prayers.

The time came when the Jackpot had grown so large that it turned into a great sum, which I could not even spend in my thoughts.

And I resolved to step onto this territory, considering that success would be given to me according to my faith. Finding the nearest point of ticket sales, I went there and took a form to

fill out. Looking at the field with numbers, I did not know where to put a cross and decided again to pray that the Lord would guide my hand. During the prayer a thought came to me: to whom does this system belong, which regularly fleeces millions of people to give something to one? Somehow this does not resemble Heavenly principles. And then I thought that the cross I would place with my hand is my signature on a form with an unknown owner. And, by signing, I acknowledge his power and come under the jurisdiction of this power, since it was my choice. I felt uneasy at such revelations. Somewhere in my soul a firm thought arose that the lottery is the business of the enemy of the soul, who feeds this world with the illusion of quick happiness. Putting the blank ticket back, I left that office and decided never again to play in anything of the kind.

But the thoughts of fast money did not leave me. I understood that there must be some path, for our world gives many such opportunities. Looking at beautiful houses and cars, I saw that these possibilities had become reality for someone. A thought came to mind—to go into the local casino and see how money is earned there. Although I felt that a casino is a suspicious place, the temptation to get rich quickly was very great, and I could do nothing about it, for I wanted to buy so much and to appear before the neighbors as people especially blessed by GOD.

Inside the casino building everything was solemn. People smiled at me kindly. I walked between the tables and various machines, studying all sorts of ways to get rich quickly. The roulette promised instant income with a high probability of winning. I saw players raking in winning chips and imagined how I would become one of the lucky ones. My mind tried to tell me that I needed to leave this place as quickly as possible, but I so wanted to prove that I could become rich, for there must be some way out. But when on one of the machines I saw the image of a smiling demonic creature, I suddenly realized that I was again under some strange spell, and I quickly left that building as well. The fresh air finally sobered me, and I began to feel shame for my greedy thoughts.

But the thirst for quick gain did not leave me, and I tried to test myself in stock-market games. There, at least, everything was clean—so it seemed to me. I saw how my neighbor, a broker, prospered; and why was I worse than he, for I am also a believer, and the Lord would surely bless me with special wisdom.

Since I had neither the opportunity nor the time to attend brokerage courses, I downloaded a popular stock-market program and set up a demo version with a notional account. At first I lost all the virtual money, trying to buy something and sell something in this new world of stocks and rates. But over time I began to analyze the market and foresee various jumps and to make my trades precisely at that time. My virtual account began to grow rapidly, and I could make large bets and receive large winnings.

I shared my success with my wife, to which she reacted skeptically; but, seeing the large sum in my account, she did not comment. When my imaginary capital passed a million, I decided to try to move on to real money. Informing my wife, I heard her lamentations that we might lose everything; but I showed her the history of my winnings and how wisely I bought and sold stocks and securities. She, having studied what she saw, gave silent consent. I decided first to secure GOD's support and in a sincere, fervent prayer asked for His Blessing on my decision; then, by faith, I transferred all our savings to a real account and began to watch the securities market closely.

In a few days I was able to earn a tidy sum and even managed to withdraw this money and send it to my wife's card, which greatly surprised and delighted her. We calculated that in the near future we could change our old car for a newer one. My wife rejoiced in my successes on the stock markets, and every evening we offered GOD prayers of thanksgiving.

One day I missed a promising trade, and, so as not to lose my money, I decided to pour the amount in the account into one enterprise in order to come out a winner. But the owner of the shares I had bought declared himself bankrupt, and I was left with nothing.

I sat at my empty account and could not believe my eyes. Again and again I analyzed the whole path of buying and selling. One of the banking companies immediately offered me a loan so that I could quickly win back and repay the loan taken. But I was so shocked by what had happened that I did not know what to do next and, in a stupor, stared at the computer screen, trying to get an answer to the mute question: "For what, Lord?" I had no money on the exchange, nor in my bank account, nor in my wallet. I understood that I had lost something.

Knowing the laws of happiness, I decided to rejoice and give thanks, but in my soul "cats were scratching."

When I told my wife about my loss, she at once began to weep bitterly, which aggravated my condition. In the following days I spent time in deep reflections and prayers. I took a fast and read the Bible, trying to find an answer, and it was given to me in the Book of Proverbs 28:20.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 28:20; Deut. 8:10-18; Ps. 62:11; 139:23-24; Prov. 11:16, 28; 23:4-5; Eccl. 2:18-19; 5:9, 18; Jer. 9:23-24; 23:13; Mark 4:18-19; 10:23-25; Rev. 3:17-18 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Have you ever tried to multiply your wealth by a quick method?
5. Is it important to understand who is the true owner of the gambling business?
6. What is the difference between quick accumulations and windfall profits and consistent saving?
7. Is the desire to have quick profit something bad?
8. How do you understand CHRIST's expression about laying up treasures in Heaven? Matt. 6:19-21.
9. Are money evil? 1 Tim. 6:10.
10. What role in the spiritual world is played by my signature on the documents of the enemy of the soul?
11. Is it worth considering whether the place where I earn money is something good in GOD's Eyes?

12. What kinds of accursed business are familiar to you?
13. Should GOD's children think about what nature and source the money they earn have?
14. Have you ever lost your money, wanting to double it quickly?
15. How do you understand Prov. 19:1: "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips, and is a fool"?

I Am a Bad Wife!

My family greatly rejoiced my heart, and with each passing day I became more and more convinced that joining my life to the most wonderful person in the world had been the very best decision.

When I shared my joy with my parents, my mother always asked what my wife was doing, what she occupied herself with, whether she planned to work, and what contribution she was making to our family budget. At first these questions seemed informative to me, and, answering them, I did not think about their hidden meaning, believing that I could tell my parents everything so they would rejoice in my happiness together with me.

Whenever my mother crossed paths with my wife, she always tried to find out what she had done and what she had been busy with, and my wife always answered in the simplicity of her heart, sharing the joys of our family life.

Some of my friends also asked me similar questions, trying to understand what benefit my other half brought me. And I told them how I loved her and how she gladdened my heart. They could not understand my feelings and reduced our conversations to the idea that a wife should think about the well-being of the family and make her contribution to this enterprise, and not lead a consumer lifestyle and sit on her husband's neck.

At first I joked away such statements and explained that this was our family and we would sort it out ourselves, but this spirit among friends was relentless, and this conviction exerted the corresponding influence on me.

One friend told me how his mother worked three jobs to feed the family, and another boasted that his mother, even after retiring, continued to labor.

My wife and I had discussed our work life even before the wedding, and I assured her that I would care for her even if she

could not work or would be at home with children. I did not know what that would look like in practice, but I believed that the LORD would provide for this as well. I was not looking for a horse that had to be able to plow, but neither was I against it if my wife found a job to her liking.

The influence of my relatives and friends affected our relationship. When I came home from work, I started occasionally asking my wife what she had done; but most often she herself gladly told all the household events and the good that had happened in her life.

Her positive outlook and unfading optimism in everything always rejoiced me.

When my mother came to visit us, the first thing she was interested in was what my wife was doing. But, knowing that I would stand up for my beloved, she did not give us any instructions, although with her questions she sometimes disconcerted us. I had to explain to my wife that my mother had lived a different life, had gone through various difficulties, and had her own view of family order.

But over time I myself began to take an interest in how my wife spent her time while I labored by the sweat of my brow. Sometimes I tried to clarify which tasks took her a lot of time, and I rejoiced when she did something quickly. It was incomprehensible to me how one could cook in the kitchen all day what I ate in half an hour. I tried to compare the home kitchen with a snack bar and wondered why my wife always needed more time to prepare something similar. And if I saw yesterday's dish served on the table, I involuntarily asked what my wife had been doing that day.

My wife proved insightful, and when she realized she was being controlled, she decided to be the first to tell of all her affairs and accomplishments. And I reported to my mother how wonderful everything was in our family. My mother casually inquired whether my wife was going to work to remove part of the burden from me, explaining that I would very quickly break down if I pulled this strap alone. I decided that my mother had

more worldly wisdom and raised this issue at a family council. My wife immediately understood which way the wind was blowing and assured me that she would look for a job, about which I gladly informed my parents and friends.

By a certain inner sense I began to notice that a strange tension had appeared in our home, and for the sake of peace my wife constantly apologized for something and justified herself for not managing to do something or for buying the wrong thing.

Once she was so sad that she bought expensive cucumbers to feed me, though the very same could be bought much cheaper in another store. And her daily reports on the work done became more and more joyless and sad.

My wife tried to find interesting work, but either they paid little there, or they asked her to work on Sabbaths, and she had to refuse. With sadness she apologized for having found nothing at all. And I began to think about what, in fact, was happening in our family. Where had the happiness and joyful spirit gone? Did we really unite in order to work somewhere together? It was hard for me to sort it out until one evening I found my wife crying. To my question, "What happened?" she answered that she was a very bad wife, and she no longer had the strength to be good and to please everyone. She said that her home life had turned into hard labor where she had to do and do, constantly reporting to everyone. And after these words she burst into even stronger tears, only repeating that she was a bad wife.

I was at a loss. Before my eyes quickly flashed all my mother's counsels, my friends' opinions, my own questions, and I saw that my family was collapsing for reasons unclear. Something had to be done quickly, and I was silent, trying to understand the root cause. I had allowed the enemy to convince me of that with which I had originally disagreed, coming under the influence of someone else's opinion. I did not want to continue in such a spirit and lose our family happiness because of it.

The first thing I understood was that I had become the cause of this grief, not realizing what spirit I was bringing into my home. The beauty of our relationship before I began to demand

anything, and what we had come to, was opened to me. All the money in the world was not worth the happiness we had in love for each other. I embraced my wife and carefully began to apologize. And the more I spoke, the more I understood how much I had managed to ruin in recent times. My apologies brought me to the point where I myself wanted to weep over my weak character. My wife accepted my apologies and, pressing herself to me, quietly sobbed, trying to calm down. And I assured her that I would no longer allow anyone to intrude into our relationship and tell us how to live rightly. After that I began to convince my wife that she is the most wonderful wife and that she does not need to prove it, does not need to try to do something to report to someone. And I permit her not to work for the sake of working, but to decide for herself how to approach this question.

The wounds did not heal so quickly. It took many more days to restore our former relationship. I politely explained to friends not to intrude into our life, and gently forbade my mother to ask such questions, explaining that we would figure everything out ourselves.

Peace and happiness returned to our life, and thereafter we protected our home from similar attacks.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Eph. 5:25; Prov. 16:28; 19:14; 26:20; 31:10-31; 1 Cor. 7:32-33; Eph. 5:28-33; Mark 9:6-9; Eccl. 8:11; 1 Tim. 2:9-10 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Have you experienced anything described in the lesson?
5. What if, in your family, deeds are demanded of you which you already do from the heart?
6. Can controlling a person destroy friendly relations?
7. Must a wife necessarily earn something for the good of the family?
8. Can the cultural features of your locality influence relations in your family?

9. How should one deal with friends or relatives who want to establish their rules in your family?
10. Must a family report to other people about what is happening in their life?
11. If I am satisfied that my wife does not work, must I change this opinion to please others?
12. What should be done if your other half spends the whole day on the internet and does nothing at home?
13. What if you have plans for improving the home, but no one supports you in this and nothing helps?
14. What should be done if a similar situation exists in your family, and your spouse does not want to change anything or understand in this regard?
15. Does the Bible condemn lazy people? 1 Tim. 5:8.

Believing Friends

Our family was becoming ever more established in love and friendship. There is nothing more joyful in a vain earthly life than to have at home a dear friend who loves you likewise and, in the spiritual sense, understands everything just as you do. All our disagreements came to a common denominator, and in everything we managed to find points of contact, removing what divides and discussing what would be for our good.

We agreed to be glued to each other with a special Heavenly glue called “Love and Friendship.” And this agreement helped us to take an exceptionally right position toward one another. Although there were moments when someone or something tried to separate us, the Lord pointed out our problems in time, and we again pressed very, very close to each other to become one flesh according to the commandment.

But we had friends who came into our life of their own free will, and whom we ourselves acquired, showing them unchanging friendliness.

Contact with new people whom you wish to make friends always brings with it a freshness of relations. And you so want to plunge deep, deep into an open heart and rejoice over a new friend—this next gift from the Lord.

Although my wife and I were open to everyone, over time we began to notice that not all are like us. Each brother or sister has their own notions of friendship, and there are their own invisible boundaries beyond which you are not allowed. Sometimes they are set rather delicately, and at times they resemble an impregnable iceberg that lives by itself.

But we understand that the Lord has called us to love, and we first embodied this love in our life and tasted how good the Lord is in it, and then decided to gift it to everyone around and, like the sun, shine on both the good and the evil. We noticed that, within our family, in our love and friendliness we memorize our model of behavior and relations, and then we very easily manifest the same spirit toward other people. We

gave each other special intimate names that sound in personal fellowship, expressing tenderness and our belonging to each other, but we try not to bring this out among people, because some begin to laugh at it, showing their ignorance.

In fellowship with the brethren we are always open and good-natured, and this is naturally reflected in our life.

When, before the wedding, I presented my friend to the church as a candidate to become my other half, many brothers and sisters showed a lively interest in our friendship and wanted to have closer fellowship with us. And we, in the simplicity of our hearts, received everyone, sharing what the Lord was giving us.

Usually every Sabbath someone came either to visit us, or invited us to themselves. And even when we wanted to be alone together, there always appeared a person who wished to share with us their presence. We did not oppose this, because we understood that in society one can make very many discoveries—both about oneself and about each other.

At first we considered that all believing people are the same and should adhere to one model of behavior; but, fellowshiping with the brethren, we understood that we are all different, and each of us is unique, needing a special approach. Over time we involuntarily divided all our acquaintances into different social groups that were very different from one another in spirit and interests. Some loved to criticize ideas, and some—people; some liked to speak of spiritual things, and some—of worldly things; some came only to eat, and some desired fellowship with us; some loved to talk about themselves, and some were interested in our relations and heeded what we told about ourselves; some were satisfied with everything, and some found problems in everything; some wished to have everyone as friends, and some created family clans into which you were not admitted.

Not knowing many people personally, we learned details of their life from carriers who tried to create an image for each person and offered us to accept it. But we were taught to get to know a person personally and to form his image thanks to our

direct contact with him. This protected us from many disappointments and perplexities. We also found out that bad rumors were going around about us, and we were being credited with things to which we were not connected. Once even the pastor himself came to visit us in order personally to check the rumors about us and to be convinced of their veracity. We understood that the environment of GOD's people is not without hidden rocks, and one must be vigilant and cautious.

We did not want to prove anything to anyone or to find out who was slandering and what. We were especially amused by the unusual approach in communication when something was told to us with the request to tell no one that it had been passed on to us. In a word, there was no time to be bored.

At the very beginning of such fellowship my future wife and I caught the same spirit and together "gossiped" about those of whom we received information. But the Lord strictly reproved us through the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, and we became more attentive to our behavior and to the conversations of others. It was very easy to slide into the ditch of gossip, but it strongly affected our friendship, and we decided not to discuss anyone in any way, but to pray for those about whom evil was spoken. Practicing such an approach, we sifted out an alien spirit from our environment and drew to ourselves those who loved to live and walk in the light.

Our friendliness and hospitality were known to all, but not all wished to be our friends. There were also those who politely greeted us, but did not let us come near, and were not interested in us.

Knowing that the church is more a hospital than a club of interests, we tried to minister with our gifts to people to whom we could and to whom it was necessary. And someone ministered to us.

Also, men and women came into our family with whom we accidentally became acquainted, in order subsequently to acquaint them with CHRIST. Sometimes we said nothing about

GOD, but simply loved those whom the Lord sent us, and these people themselves asked what we believed. And when we spoke about our hope in GOD, someone called us sectarians and closed up, and someone wished to know more about what had so changed our life. If these people had a living interest in spiritual changes, we passed them on and then led them with the whole church, where each could minister with his gift, and someone did nothing. And we love everyone.

How joyful it was to be present at the baptism of people whom you somehow helped to know the Truth, as a result of which that person entered into covenant with GOD and became your brother or sister in CHRIST.

Over time we realized that our church is a living organism where each is occupied with his own work, but many of us have a common goal toward which we all go together, serving one another as each can and knows how. There are different people in the church, and the larger it is, the more problems we have in relations. But we also noticed that the message to Laodicea unites many different people in one spirit of love, which dominates in relations and helps to grow and develop spiritually quickly. Not everyone understands what it is to love one another, but he who steps onto this path has the same blessings that we experience in our life. And we recognize one another by the spirit of love between us.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Ps. 133:1; Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35; Rom. 12:9-10; 14:1-26; Lev. 19:16-18; Prov. 11:13; 20:19; Matt. 7:1-5; John 13:34-35; 1 Pet. 1:22 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Is the church you attend ideal?
5. Is it worth understanding that the teaching in your church must be Biblical, while people may be different?
6. Did JESUS warn that not all among believers would have the right spirit?
7. What does the Lord expect of me when I join His Church?

8. Should one leave the congregation if wrong people appear in it?
9. How much time, do you think, does a sinful person need in order to become righteous and holy?
10. What is the Church of CHRIST, and Who is its Head?
11. Why does the Lord place all who believe in Him into His Church?
12. Do you have friends from your church?
13. What unites GOD's people, and what divides them?
14. For what does GOD need the Church?
15. How can one distinguish the true church from the false?

Learning to Love My Wife

Once the Apostle Paul wrote these words: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). And such an awareness of one’s sinful nature is inherent to every believing person. Sometimes I want to say the same words about myself—not to you, friends, but to GOD. I know the answer, which always sounds the same: “Surely I come quickly.” (Rev. 22:20).

In our family relationships there are many interesting phases which, like the wind, come from the unknown, break upon my heart, and then go away in an incomprehensible direction.

Being a believer, I understand what struggle goes on in my mind and how my soul has been trained to discern good and evil. But any right settings are not created by themselves and are not preserved automatically, by default. Yet at the same time GOD’s mercy and Grace are constant, like the sun, waiting for the one who will open his life to their life-giving rays.

In fellowship with a wonderful person of the opposite sex I noticed a very interesting peculiarity. This miracle of GOD’s Grace is for me a continual miracle that constantly rejoices and amazes, tests my firmness, and establishes me in love. Before the wedding I knew my chosen one as she was before marriage and thought she would be like that always. I had heard that women can be different, and that their mood often changes with the speed of thought; but, observing my future wife, I decided that, broadly speaking, this was not about her—but I was mistaken. It always amazed me how faith in GOD and the presence of CHRIST in life adorn any woman. I also noticed that this faith does not deprive a person of individuality, but helps to develop the good qualities of the soul.

In friendship with my beloved I was convinced more than once that I am dealing with a strong-willed person who shows unexpected feelings and is quite emotional, and all this is so harmoniously woven into her character that any joint undertaking is like a new film whose script is very interesting

and unpredictable. All my logic sometimes falls under the blast of all sorts of emotions and feelings, or marvels at the stability and firmness of volition, or strains in expectation of something unusual.

Love helps me accept my wife as she is, whenever this is at all possible. But my old man sometimes tries to suggest to me thoughts alien to GOD and to force me to act according to the flesh, rejecting GOD's Will.

Although my decision to always love my wife is constant and stable, no matter what, yet every new day is my new choice of precisely this path; and my morning request to GOD is for this unconditional Love for the whole day.

The Lord has a whole Universal Ocean of Agapē which He desires to pour into each person's life, but not everyone asks for this and desires to have it. I cannot ask for this Love for myself and toward myself. It does not work that way. But when I decide to be a channel for this Agapē, then all the resources of Heaven are directed into my life so that, passing through my heart, they may reach the souls of those who will open them to such blessings.

To love my wife, as it turned out, is not so simple—and at the same time very simple—when I learn it from GOD. I could not even imagine that someone would appear in my life who could, by a light decision of her idea, cross out all my morning plans and persuade me to do what does not fit into my mind at all. I still do not understand why flowers in a vase delight my wife more than the same flowers in the neighbor's flowerbed. Or why mice are the scariest monsters that cause so much screaming and panic. Or why it is necessary to wash a clean floor so often, while at the same time categorically not paying attention to the uncleanness of the car.

At times I do not know how to plan my personal time, because it is already scheduled in my wife's plans. And she knows how to attract me so convincingly to selfless labor for her good that I constantly marvel at how she manages to do this without extra words. Her happy smile, gentle words, and tender embraces

can very quickly change all my settings and direct the course of my thoughts in the direction she needs. And I am powerless before such arbitrariness. But then, thinking over how I could so easily, without a struggle, yield and take up what I had not even thought about, I do not cease to marvel at the power of persuasion that my wife's kind words and deeds have.

But the most interesting thing is that the Lord, it seems to me, very often stands on the wife's side and quietly counsels me: "Do it, listen, forgive, forget, put everything aside, give, stop." And what is left for me to do against such a union?

But I have also noticed that when I begin to serve my spouse, this leads her to a wonderful mood and disposition toward me, and I can receive from her everything—any service, including all of her—for reasonable relations. And how tasty the food in our home is, even the most modest, when everything is done and served with love!

Our mutual love works wonders in our relations. Although I often cancel many of my plans for the sake of my wife's requests, I notice that she too can put off all her affairs and begin to do what I ask her—and do it with love and with all her heart.

Sad as it is, sometimes our plans do not coincide, and it is necessary to defend one's point of view and to exercise the authority given by GOD in spite of all persuasions.

Sometimes I hear strange counsels which I cannot quietly accept. For example, when out of pity for my physical fatigue after work my wife asks me to leave this occupation and to find something easier or simply to be at home with her. I understand that there is something romantic in this, but I also remember my duty to be the provider and steward of my family.

And I have also understood that to love my wife is a whole science with its own laws and customs, which must be learned all one's life. Some things in our order have become a norm or a tradition; and for something else it is necessary to apply an act of will so that nothing be destroyed.

It is characteristic also that the difference between my wife and me and her way of thinking from mine greatly pleases and rejoices me. I receive from these relations what my brothers cannot give me. A gentle voice, tender touches, physical weakness, dependence on my help—all this and much more helps me feel strong, needed, in demand, and unique.

My family is that very only place in the whole world where no one can ever replace me. The same I can say about my wife. She is unique and irreplaceable by anyone. And such a miracle I am learning to accept and to love, and in this there is something beautiful and important that draws us to each other. And to love a beloved person is not so difficult—rather the opposite: it is impossible not to love.

But however good this may be, it is my daily choice and a constant resistance to every evil that tries to persuade me to something else.

When in our fellowship we come to another crossroads, I so want to go my own way; but the Lord asks me whether I want to learn something good, and I humble myself and give consent.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read John 3:8; Rom. 7:13–25; Eph. 5:25; 6:10–12; Heb. 5:14; 1 Pet. 1:7, 22; 3:1–4; Col. 3:19; 1 Cor. 7:3, 32–35; Prov. 15:17; 25:15 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Does a person have complete knowledge of how to love his other half?
5. Is it worth studying your life partner and discovering something new in him or her?
6. Can two opposite people be made into one whole?
7. Why, when our world was created and everything was good, was it not good for man to be alone? Gen. 2:18.
8. What should I do if I have no family and no one to learn to love?
9. Can another person's love for you and his or her requests change all your plans?

10. Where does love go when conflicts or disagreements arise?
11. What should be done if my wife and I see and understand household order in our home completely differently?
12. Is it difficult to serve the one whom you love?
13. Do you consider that loving one's spouse is a whole science that is worth studying?
14. Is GOD interested in happy families? Or is it most important to Him that everyone be believers?
15. Can a person who believes in GOD make his family happy?

A Treasury of Treasures

Although I understood that I found my wife and chose her for myself, and that no one forced me into this decision, I still realized that she is a gift from the Lord. And the more I pondered this, the more I saw it and became established in it.

There was no more wonderful occupation for me than to discover something new and beautiful in my beloved. And it turned out to be not difficult at all. I asked GOD to show me another feature of her character, and my eyes and heart, in a single alliance, identified yet another blessing that my wife so clearly possessed. And all that remained for me was to voice this and explain in detail my next discovery.

I never ceased to marvel at how Love can quickly find and reveal remarkable qualities in the human soul, and how that soul is endlessly beautiful and inexhaustible in such discoveries.

The main thing was to begin. I did not have great experience in such relations, although in our friendship I had already begun to practice this. And the family gave me boundless opportunities for such discoveries, and it turned out to be the most interesting occupation at all times.

There were times when the affairs and bustle of this world distracted my mind from my spouse, and I wanted to immerse myself completely in solving the tasks at hand, but the next call or message, or appeal from my wife reminded me of her, and I began to ask for new discoveries in this good person, and the Lord gave them to me.

All these discoveries were not empty words, but, announcing another feature of my wife's character, I explained to her in detail how this manifests itself in her life and how it opened to me. And my spouse each time found it very interesting to listen to me, and she wondered where I saw and found so much. Sometimes, out of modesty, she declared that this was not about her; but after my explanations she agreed with me and rejoiced over herself.

How wonderful it is to love your wife and constantly think about how to gladden her heart! When you live by this, it seems that everyone around is the same, and that the whole world is filled with such things, for every person is infinitely unique and beautiful, and one only needs to begin to discover him. Thus it becomes clear to us how interesting it will be in Eternity to have friendship with eternal friends whom one will be able to explore forever and to discover forever.

In all my discoveries it was also interesting that I find all the good qualities of my wife's soul in JESUS when I reflect on the beauty of His character and try to understand how glorious He is in my life. For we were created in the image and likeness of GOD, and now the Lord desires to reveal His image to people and to restore it in us. And this becomes relevant in the lives of those who have believed in JESUS and become part of His Body in this world, having joined His people.

My discoveries happen approximately like this. I reflect on my wife's behavior and try to understand what special thing she possesses and how it manifests itself. And then I tell her what has been revealed to me in her. There are many visible qualities of her soul that are noticeable to everyone. For example, she is kind, cheerful, positive, and this is manifested in her life in the sight of all. But such features as thrift, love of order, diligence, attentiveness, and other qualities are noticeable only to me and are revealed during various life situations.

And the longer we live together and the more joint matters we have, the more discoveries I can make in her for myself.

Of course, one can refrain from this and simply live quietly, do one's business, and conscientiously fulfill marital duties; but such discoveries in the character of my beloved bring something romantic into our relationship, and I am so glad that such an amazing person has been given to me by GOD forever, to always gladden my heart with herself and the unique features of her soul.

Sometimes I repeat myself in my revelations in order once again to emphasize what I like very much in my wife; but she

does not mind hearing this again and again and marveling at how I noticed it. She cautiously declares that she is not like that, but then nevertheless agrees with me and rejoices that she is as she is—and mine forever.

She also tries to find something similar in me, but I see that her mind is not tuned to such discoveries, and it is very difficult for her to tell something new about me; but this does not embarrass me—I know that ahead of us waits a whole Eternity, during which all our talents and abilities will develop to absolute perfection, and we will endlessly discover one another.

In John 17:3 JESUS said: “And this is Life Eternal, that they might know Thee the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom Thou hast sent.” In this definition the Savior gave us to understand that the knowledge of GOD and the revelation of the beauty of His character will never end. In this lies the essence and law of Eternal Life. We understand that we will unceasingly discover something new in the Lord and marvel at these qualities, living by them.

We, though not as perfect as JESUS, nevertheless have His command to be perfect as the Father is perfect. So there is something to strive for and to attain.

Every evening, when I sit down on my couch, and my wife—beside me on the armrest, and she embraces my neck with her beautiful hands, a wonderful atmosphere for discoveries is created, and I begin to tell my spouse what I have seen in this marvelous gift from the Lord. And by the strength of her embrace I understand how much she liked my revelations. Although she tries to assure me that she is not like that, her resistance does not look very convincing against the background of my iron arguments, and she has to agree with me and declare each time where such a good one as I came from. To which I already have a prepared answer—that I am from the Lord, from His hands, given to her forever—with which she immediately agrees, and we become very joyful to be with each other.

One must be very blind not to notice the beauty of the character of the one whom you have chosen for life and love at all times. But blindness is a characteristic sign of modern Laodiceans, from which the Lord desires to heal each one.

And I also noticed an interesting feature in my discoveries. When my wife hears the description of the qualities of her soul, she then very much wants to correspond to these criteria, and with pleasure becomes what she is in my eyes; and this gives me a reason and an idea for new discoveries.

Very often I ask our friends and brethren to tell me what they like in my wife, and I listen very attentively to their answers, noting for myself what I did not notice myself, or becoming established in what had already been revealed to me.

It is difficult to find a more wonderful person in this world than the one whom I have chosen for myself for life. This is some kind of inexhaustible treasury of treasures that constantly enriches you and brings no sorrow with it. And our mutual love helps to recognize all these treasures, to purify them, and carefully to lay them up in our hearts, in order to enrich with them each other and all our neighbors.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 19:14; 31:28-31; Phil. 4:8; Song 1:6-10, 14; 2:2-4, 14; 4:1-7; 6:4-10; 7:7; 8:6-7; John 17:3; Rev. 3:17-18; Prov. 5:18-19; 10:22; 12:25; Eph. 4:29 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Can one do what you read about in this lesson?
5. Do you believe that each of us is an endless treasury of Heavenly treasures?
6. What does a person become in whom the Lord restores His image?
7. Do you know such people who by character resemble JESUS? If yes, how did you determine this?

8. Is it permissible in a family for a husband to praise his wife, searching out new features in her, and to do this constantly?

9. Will the heart of a woman not become proud if her husband constantly loves and praises her?

10. Is it worth studying such lessons if there is none of this in your family and none is foreseen?

11. Will the Lord punish a husband for praising his wife so much and constantly discovering something good in her? Will such an attitude arouse GOD's jealousy?

12. In this lesson, how does a wife differ from a sister in the faith? May brothers make such discoveries in their sisters?

13. Did this lesson give you a useful idea for changes in your life?

14. What should I do if I consider that my wife is not worthy of praise?

15. Do you believe that the principles of Eternal Life are presented in this lesson? If yes, which ones?

A Firm Anchor

I could not previously have imagined that anyone could bind me to themselves so strongly. When I heard about other people's heartfelt attachment to one another, I considered them narrow and sentimental, for there is so much that is interesting and instructive around us, and yet you limit yourself to one person and begin to build your world around them. But when such a person appeared in my life and began to give me what the whole world cannot give, my worldview began to change.

At first this Person was JESUS. He drew me by His Love and friendliness. And the more I know Him, the more I discover the power, depth, and beauty of GOD's Love for me and for all people. The LORD cares for me so tenderly and treats my imperfection with such Love that I have no words to relate all my thoughts and feelings toward Him. He drew me to Himself and bound my life to His by the invisible threads of sacred Love. With my own mouth and my own heart I dedicated myself to serving Him and living with Him; I entered into covenant with Him through water baptism and joined His people. And now everywhere I go, I take JESUS with me, and He never leaves me alone. And in this mutual Love of ours, JESUS gives me His visible representatives of His Kingdom, desiring that we also love one another and in this Love bear faithful witness of Him. Though we are imperfect, and not everything succeeds immediately, we have one common Friend, Who teaches us mutual Love and gives it to us at all times.

The very presence of friends in my life binds me to them by invisible threads of heartfelt attachment and makes me dependent upon their Love to such an extent that I always want, once again, to make sure that they are mine and have not disappeared anywhere. And even when such dear and beloved friends become more and more numerous, our heartfelt attachment does not vanish anywhere, but adorns our relationships and protects us from every kind of evil.

However, when an interesting person by the name of "she" appeared in my life, I did not imagine how this wonder could

bind my heart to herself, and hers to me, so strongly that we would be unable to live without each other. More precisely, we could physically, but our hearts would always strive for spiritual union. And since nothing hindered us from getting to know each other more closely, we did not resist this natural attraction but tested whether it was from GOD—whether it would prove some terrible mistake. Receiving each time evidence of GOD's approval of our relationship and confirmation of His Love, we ceased to resist one another and decided to form a family union.

I did not know what a family gives a person until I had one. It is a new world of relationships in which you are no longer alone, but together with the one who so successfully complements you with her characteristics and opposite view of life and of all sorts of things. And this fragile creation binds you to itself so firmly that you can no longer go anywhere—and do not wish to. However far we may be from one another, these invisible bonds unite our hearts, and nothing separates them. Whatever life's storms may try to carry my ship off into the open sea, I know that I have a reliable anchor that has firmly tied me to a quiet harbor and securely holds me in my home.

My home is now where my wife is. However many moves there may be in our life, wherever she will be, there will be our world, which we will arrange together, creating in it our personal family comfort.

Things and household items make our existence in this world easier. The building in which we live we begin to call our home, but we know that all this on earth is temporary and that we have a true eternal Home in Heaven, where we shall someday arrive. And from this sinful world we will be able to take there only our characters and our relationships. Therefore we decided to invest our best efforts in the development and formation of precisely these features of our earthly life.

The more we communicate with each other, the more new details we learn about ourselves and about the other, and the more strongly we are bound by the invisible bonds of our hearts to one another. And this attachment is so strong that it helps us

always to find the best time for fellowship and to share with each other what is inaccessible to others.

I begrudge nothing of myself for my wife—neither my time nor all my money, for the earning of which I spend part of my life. It is very joyful for me to understand that she treats me in exactly the same way and does not spare all of herself, agreeing always to be mine.

And in this unity of ours called “family,” not only do I have a reliable anchor that so firmly holds me and binds me to home, but my spouse also possesses something similar in relation to me. She arranges all her plans and all her affairs so that, after completing them, she may return to me and gladden me with her presence. And I, understanding her attraction to me, do not hinder her in achieving this goal, but gladly receive and cherish her.

I have heard that there are families where a grumbling or dictatorial spirit is practiced. It is difficult for me to imagine this in our relationship, but I think it is like a person who chops at those strong chains of heartfelt attachment that invisibly unite each other into one whole. One time will not destroy a strong union; but if such a spirit becomes constant, the anchor can break loose, and the ship will be carried off to an unknown place and dashed upon rocks that will not adorn your life but rather destroy it.

But the LORD can save a family even in such situations, showing a better way out. One small sin is capable of spoiling the strongest relationship if it is allowed to be present in life. Though we have decided to love one another unconditionally, the purity and strength of this Love depend upon GOD’s constant presence in it. Only He can unfailingly detect every evil and uproot it according to our prayers and desires.

I am bound to my wife by the firmest anchor of GOD’s Love, which I begged especially for her. This does not make me her slave, but moves me constantly to think about her happiness and to do all that will bring her benefit and joy. How wonderful it is to be free in JESUS and at the same time to be so strongly

bound to Him and to those whom you love greatly. Although there are many sisters in my life whom I also love, and they reciprocate, none of them claims my anchor for her own life, for it has found its place in the heart of my spouse. Though I am bound by the strongest bonds of GOD's Love to my dear friends, my family is closer than all of them and brings far more special joy and Love than others can give, although the Love of many friends is just as pure, strong, and firm.

How interesting it is to sail in the ocean of GOD's Love, having fellowship with one another, splashing about in joyful blessings, and plunging into the still waters of this Agapē in order to know by one's own experience its depth and purity!

And the most interesting thing in our family is that we are always near, to be available to one another at all times.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read John 3:16; 1 John 5:10-12; Gen. 1:27-28; 2:22-24; 3:16; 1 Cor. 7:3-5; 11:8-12; Prov. 11:16; 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10; Eph. 5:31-33; 1 Thess. 4:9-12 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your memory?
4. Is the family union something firm?
5. What binds a man and a woman in family relationships?
6. At what moment does a husband's attachment to his wife begin?
7. What will happen to a family in which there is no heartfelt attachment to one another?
8. What should I do if I love my wife but am not drawn to her?
9. Is it good for a person to have his own home—and, in the home, the one who belongs to him?
10. What do you consider to be your home? Are you familiar with the words from the song: "The river flowed, flowed by..."?

11. Is there anything in family relationships that is common to and similar to relations with CHRIST?

12. Is the awareness of attachment and belonging to someone a human thing or ordained by GOD?

13. Is every marriage joined together by GOD? Mark 10:9.

14. Why must we not separate what GOD has joined together?

15. Is there anything in common between the divorce of people and the rupture of relations with CHRIST?

Our Home Is Our Fortress

For me, the place of my residence was always something where I could rest, eat quietly, wash, and sleep. I did not pay much attention to the coziness and comfort of my dwelling. It resembled more a warehouse of what I had accumulated in my life. Although I loved order in the house, I did not consider this place to be something in which it was worth investing my time and money. When you live in rented housing, it is even less desirable to improve it, and cleanliness and order are usually enough so as not to be ashamed in front of guests. And if you have to move, no one will reimburse me for my investments in repair and improvement.

Observing my wife's behavior, I noticed that for her our home was something special. It was the place where she felt like a queen—of course, if there was a king beside her. At first, such thinking was incomprehensible to me, and I began to observe other family people and take interest in their attitude toward their home. It turned out that many women have a special attachment to their place of residence and a desire to decorate their home. At the beginning of our life together, my wife often went to her parents' house, where she had her own room, which her parents had preserved in the same form as it had been when their daughter lived there. I was always surprised with what delight my wife entered this place, hugged her stuffed toys, and lay on her bed. But over time, she increasingly preferred to stay in our home, bringing into it her personal belongings from her parents.

When we discussed together our interests and attachments to our place of residence, at first it was difficult for my beloved to determine where her home was, and very often by that word she meant her parents' house. But over time her mind was restructured, and our house became her home. She was not at all concerned that this dwelling was not in our ownership. She immediately determined that the wallpaper was not to her taste and urgently needed to be replaced. I was against such a waste of money and energy, but she so convincingly explained to me

how important it was for her that I realized resistance was useless.

Her joy and gratitude did not cease to amaze me when our walls were transformed. In my eyes, this undertaking made no sense, but she, with such enthusiasm, stroked the new wallpaper and beamed with happiness. I understood that I still brought her greater joy, but the additional coziness helped her to keep up her inspiration even when I went to work.

Over time, the question arose of new kitchen furniture. At first, I was categorically against it, because I thought that the existing stove and sink were enough to cook something, and vegetables could be cut on the dining table, which greatly upset my wife, and she repeatedly cited as an example the kitchens of our friends, where everything was compact, cozy, and beautiful. I agreed that theirs was better than ours, but I could not understand why we needed to invest in all this when we already had the most necessary things for life. And where would we put all these things if we decided to move? I even complained in my personal prayers to God about such requests from my wife, hoping that something would change. But my wife was relentless, and many days later I had to give in when an advertising newspaper came with a very cheap offer of beautiful kitchen furniture.

I decided that I would choose the kitchen myself, since I was the main breadwinner. But in the furniture store, I realized that I was the most incompetent fellow in this matter and had no reasonable answers to the numerous questions of the seller. And my wife already had the whole plan in her head, and she clearly knew where and what should stand and what color it should be. I also decided to show initiative and order a table of a special size and shape, which would adjoin the corner of the kitchen and be of the same color as the countertop. We spent half a day in the store, placing the order and choosing household appliances that were built into the kitchen furniture. The final cost turned out to be three times higher than the advertised price, but there was no way out. Since we did not

have enough money for the purchase, we arranged a loan and decided to repay it within a year with God's help.

A few weeks later our order was delivered, and for the first time in my life I began to assemble and install a kitchen. My wife's joy knew no bounds, and I resigned myself and began to see the advantage of such an innovation.

When the kitchen was assembled, there were a lot of empty cabinets, which I decided to use for storing books and tools, but my wife objected, making it clear that this was her territory, where she herself would decide what to do with it. I was surprised at how quickly all these cabinets were filled with everything necessary.

Communicating with friends from church, I realized that all wives are like this, and they exchange with each other their achievements and ideas, and also think a lot about the improvement of their homes, considering it the most important thing.

When our kitchen took its place in the house, there was an empty space between the refrigerator and the wall, where I decided to put mops and brooms, but my wife wished to buy a narrow cabinet, and we again went to the furniture store. When we drove up to it, we saw empty halls. It turned out that they had gone bankrupt, and the bank was selling off all the contents at low prices. And in the kitchen department, it was empty, and in the middle of the hall there stood one single cabinet of our color and size at a symbolic price. We were surprised at such a miracle and immediately bought it.

All my modest furniture in the house was gradually replaced with more comfortable and beautiful pieces.

Over time, I got used to the fact that our home is a special place for my wife, where she feels like a fish in water, and my task is to improve this "aquarium" and maintain in it the spiritual atmosphere of love and friendship.

It was very difficult for me to introduce such innovations into my life, since I understood that everything would burn at the

Second Coming, but life taught me to make concessions to my wife, listening to her iron arguments about how important it is to have coziness in the home. But there was something right in this as well. And when I shared my concerns with our pastor, he finally reassured me, saying that his wife was the same and that it is difficult to understand, but it must be accepted, although in some families there are exceptions.

Understanding such a structure of my wife's thinking, I learned to use this quality of her soul for my benefit, and when I wanted to especially please her, I began to do something around the house or offer ideas for improving our dwelling. Although it was a pity to invest in a rented apartment, what would you not do for a loved one?

They say that one quickly gets used to good things, and that happened to me as well. I got used to the fact that in our house it is cozy, clean, everything is delicious, and there reigns a special atmosphere of God's presence. I also noticed that the Lord does not leave our home, even when we buy new furniture for it, and gives us the blessing to enjoy the fruit of our labors, while never ceasing to prepare us for the coming events. And I also saw that wherever we appear, my wife begins to make it cozy according to her taste.

Oh, these women!

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Gen.2:18; 1Tim.6:6; Phil.4:12-13; Eccl.5:12-19; 6:1-6; 11:8-9; 1Jn.2:15-17; Ps.48:17-20; Prov.21:17; Luke 12:16-31; Deut.26:11 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. Is it worth knowing and remembering the difference in male and female thinking and outlook on life?
5. Does a person have power and freedom over the use of their money?

6. Is the improvement of one's dwelling something bad and wrong?
7. Is it right to make everyone equal according to your standards?
8. What should be done if the wife desires to decorate her home, and the husband considers it unnecessary?
9. Is it important to understand what is more important to a woman and support her in this matter?
10. Do you think the saved will decorate and improve their heavenly dwellings?
11. What should a wife do if her husband does not give her money for new furniture and does not intend to change anything in the house?
12. Does Heaven approve or condemn us when we wish to comfortably and beautifully improve the place where we live?
13. At what moment does the improvement of housing become sinful and cause God's disapproval? (Hag.1:4,9).
14. Does God desire that we have wisdom in the matter of our well-being and management of entrusted resources?
15. Should every desire of the wife be carried out without fail?

Birthdays

In our family, certain holidays and traditions were established which do not have biblical foundations, but which we really enjoy and which bring special joy into our relationship. Some of these holidays coincide with worldly ones, but we do not make a cult out of this and do not impose anything on anyone, nor do we consider it something obligatory. All of this is our family decision, and based on our choice we set aside dates for ourselves that we spend differently than other days, experiencing special joy.

One of our family traditions is the celebration of our birthdays. This is our private holiday, for which we prepare in a special way and which we spend without involving other people in our life. I take vacation ahead of time for this and do not plan any business, so that I can spend the whole day together with the one whom I received as a gift from the Lord.

At the very beginning of our friendship, we discussed this matter and even tried not to give these days special significance, but to regard them as something ordinary. However, later we understood that this deprived us of the opportunity to do something special for our friendship and family happiness. On this very day, we have a kind of solemn expectation of something joyful, and there is no escaping it. And if your closest people do not react at all to your expectations, then it becomes somehow sad because of their indifference.

As for gifts, we decided not to spend money on something unnecessary just for the sake of having a gift. If something is to be given, then only what is necessary and brings joy.

We also decided to mark in our wall calendar all the birthdays of our friends and to give them our kind words, declarations of love and friendship, and wishes for special blessings. It happened that for some people we were the only ones who remembered them on that day. We heard many opinions that all this is worldly and that it is necessary to ignore these holidays on principle, but seeing how much joy our attention and kind

words bring to people on this day, and how happy those whom we congratulate become, how our hearts anticipate something special, we decided that we would observe this tradition in our family and bring happiness to those we know.

Before each holiday, we discuss how we will celebrate it and what we will do on that day. And if one of us decides to present a surprise and keep it secret, then we have to humbly wait in anticipation of something unusual. In another surprise, what is important is not what was prepared for you, but how much love was invested in it.

Once I decided to make a surprise for my wife on her birthday and did not warn her about it. I invited many members of our church to our home in the evening, without telling anyone how many of us there would be. Each one thought that he would be the only guest and agreed to his visit. I bought food for the guests in advance and hid it in the house, and also asked one friend to bring his field kitchen in order to treat everyone to something special.

And so the day came. Beautiful words of congratulations were spoken, necessary gifts were presented, and bright prospects were promised. We talked a lot and discussed our family matters in a spirit of love and harmony. By evening, my wife was tired and was going to rest in her own way, but at the appointed time invited guests began to appear. Someone arrived a little earlier and sang a song for my wife, which delighted her greatly. And when the set time came, the guests poured in as if from a horn of plenty. My wife looked at me with bewilderment, as if asking: "What is this?" And I let her know that everything was fine and that she should not worry. I had prepared a large table outside and began to bring out the food, while my friend's field kitchen was running at full capacity, filling everything around with the pleasant aroma of delicious delicacies.

From my observation I understood that all the guests were also surprised that they were not the only ones. They and my wife asked me with their eyes the same questions, to which I gave them the same answers.

When there were very many of us in one square meter, then everyone had to accept it, and we welcomed each new late-arriving guest with special joy, who did not hide his surprise at such a company. The children who came with their parents immediately found something to do and joyfully played at something. And the adults sat at the table that was set, and after praying, began to eat, sharing jokes and witty sayings.

I knew that many of the guests did not have close friendships with each other, but our hospitality and friendliness united everyone into one cheerful community, and by our prayers our Lord was with us that evening.

I tried to serve the guests as best I could, finding out all their needs and striving to please everyone. As a result, the whole gathering came to peace, and at the end of the meal it was suggested that we sing some of our favorite songs.

I had warned all the neighbors in advance that we would have guests because of the celebration, since I knew that such events do not pass without noise.

Our singing spread throughout the neighborhood, filling the atmosphere with special reverence. One song followed another. And then I suggested to each guest that he present my wife with his favorite verse from the Bible. We all listened together to the words of blessings, rejoicing that they had passed through the centuries and preserved their power and purity until our days, to be poured out like such a wonderful waterfall into my wife's soul. And she sat, tired and happy, leaning against me.

When it grew dark, the guests began to leave. Some left without saying goodbye. And some said goodbye and did not go anywhere. Some helped to clean all the dishes and tidy up, while others continued to cheerfully communicate with my wife.

When we were left alone, I heard a request not to make such surprises again or at least to give advance notice about them. I took note of this and decided in the future to be more considerate and prudent.

When my birthday came, my wife always prepared something special at that time and gave herself for the whole day, trying to be very helpful and cheerful. But everything came down to the usual rhythm of life, and we communicated a lot on that day, discussing all our plans for the future.

Once my wife also made me a surprise on my birthday by secretly inviting my friends, who sat in one of the rooms and quietly waited for me to come home and enter that room. I was very glad and surprised by their visit, and our meeting passed in pleasant fellowship.

In our family traditions there is something that belongs only to the two of us and is not imposed on anyone else. We do not discuss this matter with anyone, since we believe that it is in our power to arrange such events and decide how and what to celebrate and how to treat it.

There are also spontaneous exceptions when I take my wife, drive her to the ends of the earth, and make her an unexpected holiday just like that, without any dates, not promising that this will now become a tradition.

And, of course, any of our family holidays we consider within the framework of God's law, so that all our human matters are in complete harmony with the Divine.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Rom.14:15; Gal.6:9-10; John 13:34-35; 1Pet.1:22; Eccl.2:24; 5:17; 8:15; Esth.9:18-22; Rom.12:9-10; 13:9-10; 1Tim.1:5; 2Tim.3:17; 2Thess.3:13; James 4:17 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. Is it bad to celebrate some event with friends?
5. Can we make our own holidays and establish our own family traditions?
6. Is it right to impose your values on other people?

7. Read Mark 6:21. Does this verse teach that celebrating a birthday is bad?
8. How do your birthdays go?
9. What holidays and gatherings are dangerous to attend?
10. Is every family tradition normal in the eyes of Heaven?
11. Do you enjoy making kind surprises for your friends and loved ones?
12. What should you do if you want to make a family holiday, but your spouse does not want it, or vice versa?
13. Is it important to ensure that our family traditions and holidays are not sinful and dangerous for the soul?
14. What traditions will there be in Eternity? (Isa.66:23).
15. Do you enjoy congratulating your friends on their holidays?

Receiving Guests

When I was growing up in my parents' home, it was customary for us to welcome guests warmly. Since there were not always enough sleeping places for everyone, my sister and I were given a mattress on the floor, and we gladly slept on this unusual bed, while our guests spent the night in our beds. When there were many guests, some of them lay down on the floor with us, and we, cheerfully talking with them, fell asleep together. I remember how my mother always prepared a big feast and then complained about being tired. And I was always glad for new guests and did not understand how one could get tired of them, because they were all so interesting. But, listening to my parents' conversations, I understood that guests can be different.

At that time there was no mobile communication, and we did not always know when someone would drop in on us. But my parents were always ready for spontaneous visits and refused hospitality to no one. And when the weekend began, it definitely meant that either someone was coming to visit us, or we were going to visit someone.

In my wife's home, a tradition of receiving guests had also been introduced, and everything looked different, but this situation was familiar to her.

When creating a family, we discussed the matter of receiving guests and decided to act according to the circumstances and show warmth to everyone. We did not know who and how people would visit us, where we would accommodate them, and what we would do when someone unexpectedly came to see us.

In the Bible we read that hospitality to strangers is good, and we decided that the doors of our home would always be open to guests. We also agreed that we would invite all the members of our congregation to our home in turn, so that we could get to know everyone better at the dinner table. And if someone would invite us to their place, then we would not refuse.

Such visits were short-term, and, as a rule, no one spent the night with us, and we always planned to leave the hospitable home without lingering there until midnight. Such meetings brought us closer to people, and we acquired more and more new friends.

It also happened that someone, passing by, would stop in to greet us or simply to see us, and we had to put off our household chores and devote our time to the guests.

My wife and I decided that in our home our family would testify to everyone about Christ, and we would lead all our conversations to the plan of Salvation. And when we visit other homes, there we would look at the situation—how to conduct the conversation, what to eat and what not to eat—and learn many things through contact with others.

When we got married, my wife moved into the house I was renting on the outskirts of the city, and together we desired to make this dwelling a place of habitation for God and holy angels, about which we prayed, dedicating our home to the service of Heaven.

We decided that in our dwelling our rules would apply, which the guests would have to take into account, and for some things we would close our eyes and grant everyone freedom of choice. For example, we decided that we would not force guests to take off their outdoor shoes, and if they decided to enter the house in them, we would quietly clean everything later, but at the same time we demonstratively put out guest slippers which were impossible to pass without noticing.

We also decided that in our home we would not feed people meat dishes or give them what the Spirit of Prophecy does not recommend to eat and drink. But to show the beauty and benefit of proper nutrition, we had to learn this from professionals.

If unexpected guests suddenly came who were also hungry, then for such a case we always had in reserve jarred preserves and other foodstuffs that could quickly be put on the table without extra expense.

If we knew that someone would stay with us for a long time and in large numbers, then for such a case we had purchased inflatable mattresses and set aside bedding.

It also happened that we sometimes held youth meetings with an overnight stay at our place, and there was much trouble with accommodating all who wished to come. But usually we knew about such events in advance and asked everyone to come with their own sleeping pads and sleeping bags.

You cannot foresee everything, and at the very beginning of our family life we had a lot of awkward situations with receiving guests, but each time the Lord helped us and taught us how to find the right way out.

I noticed that when receiving guests a very great burden fell on my wife's shoulders, and she wore herself out trying to please everyone. Therefore, I decided to help her with this and to actively involve the guests in the process of setting and serving the table. Just in case, I had disposable tableware prepared, to reduce the burden on my wife, but we did not use it very often, although sometimes these supplies helped us out.

Interesting experiences were brought to us by spontaneous or uninvited guests. It happened that I got acquainted with someone in church and invited them to our home without warning my wife. She always had many questions for me about this and many concerns. But everything was somehow peacefully resolved. Over time, we learned to warn each other about such situations and agreed on what to do if this happened.

Our family councils were held in the usual manner. We tried not to invite anyone during that time, but if someone was already visiting us, then we let them know that we had family time for fellowship, which surprised many, and then we answered numerous questions about how this is and why we do it.

I do not know exactly how, but I know for sure that all our guests somehow strangely guessed that my wife and I love and delight in each other. Although we did not flaunt our close relationship and tried to behave with dignity, not kissing in

public, friends always recognized our caring attitude toward each other. And when we began to tell how we love each other, then for some reason everyone believed us and rejoiced for us, although we had no special proof of our love besides ourselves. Well, so what if we smile or joyfully admire each other. Our friends liked to watch us, and we often caught their joyful looks.

And we also noticed that when guests saw mutual love in us and then heard assurances of love addressed to them, then they believed us and gladly accepted everything that we offered them.

Our family councils helped us to determine our approach to hospitality and to introduce various rules and suggestions into this endeavor. We agreed on everything and always discussed our missteps and mistakes.

It also happened that my wife did not want to receive anyone into the house for personal reasons, and then I had to politely refuse everyone and invite no one, and have a proper understanding of this matter. Usually everyone understood everything, and no one was offended by this.

We were interested in gathering in homes to study spiritual truths and reflect on the Eternal. We prayed, sang, and read together, and such meetings filled us with special joy and the understanding that in Jesus we are one family.

When we were ill, which happened very rarely, then all guests were canceled, and we ourselves did not go where we could get infected.

Our doors and hearts were always open to everyone.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Heb.13:1-2; Rom.12:9-13; Gen.18:1-8; Matt.25:34-45; Job 31:32; Ps.38:13; 118:19; 1 Pet.2:11-12; 3 John 1:5; 1 Tim.3:2; 5:10; Titus 1:8 in the light of our lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?

4. What is hospitality?

5. Why does the Bible advise us to be hospitable?
6. Should we invite absolutely everyone into our home?
7. Did Lot know Whom he invited into his house? Can we experience a similar thing? (Gen.19:1-3).
8. Have you ever felt joy because someone invited you to their home?
9. Should you arrange your home so that guests can be received in it?
10. Does Jesus compare Himself with those who were sojourners?
11. What do you think—if someone receives you as a guest, are you at that moment a representative of Christ?
12. Are there guests who bring curses into your home?
13. How can you develop the gift of hospitality if you do not have it?
14. Should you take into account the opinion and desire of your family when inviting guests?
15. Have you ever invited Jesus as a guest? If so, how did He respond to this?

Jesus in Our Family

God, in Whom I believed, gave me a family several times. At first it was my parents and relatives, who from the very first day of my life took care of me and rejoiced in life together with me.

When I became independent and almost an adult, I believed in Christ as my personal Savior and, together with this faith, received as a gift a new family called the "Church." I had so many brothers and sisters, and even all over the world, that I have not stopped rejoicing and marveling at this to this day. And among this new kin the Lord showed me the one who later turned out to be closer than all people in the world. We became lifelong friends, and then decided to create our own family.

How many prayers were offered on this matter! How many different thoughts had to be thought through in order to make a final decision! How many conversations we had with each other before we irrevocably decided to create something in common!

I always invited Jesus into all my relationships and rejoiced that He was present in everything. But I also began to notice that my relationship with my wife had become so close and constant that, as it happened, we spent 24 hours a day together for several days in a row. I became more and more attached to this dear little person, and she responded in kind. I could no longer leave her just like that and go for hours to walk in nature, communing with my dear Savior. We now did this together, and during the walk we talked with each other. True, I set aside personal time every morning for secret prayer, shutting myself in a separate room, but this was so little compared to what it had been before the wedding.

I very much wanted to sort out this question and understand whether the Lord would be jealous of me for the one whom I had chosen. I very much did not want to lose Eternity because of strong love for my wife, and as for how it was possible not to love her, when I asked for this every day and received an answer from Heaven, I did not know.

I understood that to love my wife is right, biblical, but this placed me in a strange position. I no longer had such communion with God as before, but spoke more with my beloved.

We did not want to quarrel and sit alone in different rooms, and when we were together, we liked our communication so much that we never tired of inventing new topics for conversation and always found a common language.

Even during our friendship I understood that the time we spent together did not allow me to spend this time with the Lord, although we invited Him in prayer. And all this was so hard to glue together in my head. It always somehow seemed to me that we were being condemned for our joy in the relationship, since this prevented us from spending more time with God. But at the same time I so thanked my Savior for such a friend, and then for my wife, and was so grateful to Him for such a wonderful gift for life, that I did not even know how I would be able to live further without her.

Although my happiness was built on the true Foundation, from sturdy materials, my wife brought so much joy into my life that thanks to her I was especially happy as well. And how could one not thank Him who is the Source of love and happiness?!

It was very difficult for me to answer all these questions for myself, since I had heard many times that the Lord must always be in first place and have priority in everything. And in the light of the Message to Laodicea I completely lost peace, considering that my relationship with my wife would never allow me to come out of my lukewarm state and become hot in my relationship with Christ.

The reality was such that I drove myself to anxiety in these thoughts and loaded such a burden of guilt onto my head that I no longer knew what to do with it. Not to love my wife I considered a crime, but how to love her and not communicate with her, I did not understand.

My beloved noticed that something was wrong with me and asked what was troubling me. I decided to share my

experiences with her, fearing that she would also begin to worry.

But she turned out to be more perceptive and decided to sort out this question together with me.

God is love, and when we converse with Him, He remains with us in communion, and when we begin to love each other, He is already with us in the relationship. Without Him we would not be able to tenderly care for each other, do something good, have right motives, and love from a pure heart. Everything would be permeated with selfishness and self-interest. Each would think only of themselves and would not care about the needs and happiness of the other.

In love for each other our relationship with God moved to the highest level, when we already love not in word and with the tongue, but in deed and in truth.

I began to reflect on which Spirit is leading me. All my thoughts came down to serving, loving, giving, understanding the needs of others, comparing everything with the light received, and living in the truth. And this became the norm of my life. I did not even think about why I live this way. Although I consider myself a sinner, because I see what constant struggle is going on inside me and what evil thoughts relentlessly attack my mind, I do not live in sin, but avoid it and any contact with it.

In all my work I consult in my thoughts with Christ, ask Him to help me, to bless me for success and understanding. I invite Him into any of my undertakings, and in every little thing He takes part, not leaving me.

And when I communicate with my wife, I always ask Jesus in my thoughts to prompt me what I could do for this person so that she would feel very good with me. In essence, the Lord has so strongly saturated me with Himself that it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. I live by Him and move and exist.

Probably this is some new level of relationship with Him, which I did not know before.

When I go to work, I take Jesus with me, and together with Him we labor all day, and although my work is done by my hands, I always see the Lord before me. And when there is an opportunity, I put on headphones, call my wife, and share with her my love for her, which brings her special joy and helps to solve many household tasks.

After long communication and reflection on this topic we came to the conclusion that everything we are now experiencing in mutual love is a new level of our relationship, which was previously unfamiliar to us, and now has become an unusual reality, from which we do not even want to depart.

We love each other, and our hearts do not condemn us for such a mutual attitude. We feel very good in this, and everything else enters into full harmony with the spirit of love.

If earlier I divided my time into communion with God, reading the Bible, works of faith, work, and personal time, now all this has become one single time, where in every action and in every minute the Lord is present and fills everything with Himself. I love by Him, I speak by Him, I think by Him. It was difficult for me to understand this, but when I realized it, I was amazed at how far our relationship with Him had gone. It is now closer for me to reach Heaven than to perish. And the laws of Eternal life have become part of my character, and the world is so alien that it is very strange to me why I still live in it. I do not plan to die, but I understand that we will all have to cross this boundary in order to enter Eternity with a pure heart.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read John 13:34-35; 17:21, 26; 1 John 3:18; 4:7-17; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 12:9-10; 13:8-10; Matt. 18:18-20; 19:4-6; 22:37-40; 1 Thess. 4:9, Eph. 5:25-33, Gal. 2:20; Ps. 15:8 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. Read Jer. 33:3: "Call to Me—and I will answer you, I will show you great and inaccessible things which you do not

know.” Does this verse teach that God has something for us which we have not yet attained?

5. Do you understand how God abides in love, and we, loving, abide in Him?

6. How do you understand the verse from Rom. 13:8, where it is written that the one who loves another has fulfilled the law?

7. Should one fear one’s growth in Christ?

8. When someone says that Jesus lives in them, how can it be determined that this is so?

9. What do you think—does the Holy Spirit bring His fruit in the lives of people who love each other?

10. Is it bad for a husband to love his wife, and for a wife to love her husband, and to have special joy in these relationships?

11. Are we learning that love crowds out communion with God from life?

12. For what reason does Jesus advise us to buy from Him love in the form of the symbol of gold? (Rev. 3:18).

13. What will happen to you if you ask God for love for your neighbors and receive it?

14. Is it possible to love your neighbor from a wholly pure heart without experiencing a change in your mind?

15. When the person who loves you is silent, is he different in any way from other people?

Serving God

Each of us possesses some talent and unique abilities that others do not have. But it happens that not all these gifts are uncovered by us and discovered, and even if recognized, they are not developed to the proper degree.

The problem may also be that, out of modesty, I begin to consider myself unworthy to contribute something to society or somehow stand out from the general mass. Or, looking at how wonderfully others manage to develop their talents, I consider my own endowments pale and unnecessary to anyone. And there are very many of us like this, and we, like “gray mice,” dissolve into the diversity of the world and live unnoticed by anyone and needed by no one, finding an occupation for ourselves in observing others’ achievements and the successes of other people, considering them advanced in life.

My wife and I decided for ourselves to uncover each other’s hidden abilities and to tell what each of us had discovered in the other, what features we had found. It was very fascinating to strain all one’s mind to see what is not always noticeable at a superficial glance, and then to explain how the next discovery is expressed and what benefit it can bring to this world or to ourselves.

But most of all we were interested in how to apply our talents for the good of the church, and what ministry each of us is best able to perform. We understood that all the gifts the Lord gives us must be directed, first of all, to the glorification of His Name and to the edification of the body of Christ.

Being members of a local congregation, we carried out those kinds of ministry that were entrusted to us. At times we did not even understand why this was being done. Sometimes we were asked whether we could take up this or that ministry, since someone must perform it, and we did not even know what was expected of us, and we formally agreed without having understood what needed to be done.

But the most interesting in our ministry happened when we did with all our heart what we liked and what brought benefit to God's work, and this brought us closer and closer to other brothers and sisters. We decided to take our love into every ministry and to give it to everyone with whom we crossed paths in life.

In addition to church duties, we constantly looked for the opportunity to serve our neighbors outside the church. Inviting guests or going to visit other people became a norm of life that we did not even discuss; we only decided what to take with us or with what we would treat guests if the need arose.

The features of our time of digital technologies opened many opportunities to perform certain kinds of ministry through the internet and to reach in social networks those people whom we would never meet in person. We were not frightened by discoveries in the digital world, and watching the development of this field, we always thought and prayed about how it could be used for the good of others.

We did not really want to take people's time in order to fill it with emptiness, and we always weighed and discussed what we published and offered to people.

I tried to become a blogger on YouTube, but I did not manage to do this continuously, and I left this venture, taking up another matter.

In our prayers we constantly asked the Lord to show us what we could do to bring closer the day of His Coming. And over time we understood that in every such case the Lord offers us to do exactly what is accessible and within our power and brings special pleasure, although at times it requires very much of our energy, time, and all kinds of expenditures.

My wife liked to work with other people's children, and she oriented herself so wonderfully in this sphere, everything worked out so well for her that I could only praise her and marvel at how she managed to cope with all this. In addition to this she did soul care among her acquaintances, made publications on the internet, organized various spiritual events

in our home, conducted culinary courses on the principles of a healthy lifestyle, managed to learn something, and always helped everyone who asked her for something. And with all this busyness she still had a lot of free time to communicate with me and friends and to plan something for the future.

We noticed that the love we had for each other fits very well into any of our ministries and gives it a special flavor. When you do something with love, consciously investing this spirit into every work, then it does not tire or strain, but brings deep satisfaction and the awareness of God's approval.

We labor for God not in order to earn salvation for ourselves, but because we are already saved by Him, and we so want to be participants in God's great work, using our small strength.

When we have very many different tasks and duties that we gladly perform, and someone tries to put on us yet another ministry that we will not be able to do worthily, then we simply refuse, explaining that we are already loaded as it is. It is better for us to serve a little and with all our heart, bringing the matter to completion, than to take on everything without having the strength to do it in the best way.

We also decided at a family council that, if possible, we would take that work and that ministry which would not separate us, either spiritually or physically. We cost each other far too dearly to lose this relationship because of something earthly. Sometimes people tried to shame us for such an approach, proving to us that we must offer ourselves as a sacrifice to God, and then it would be pleasing to Him. And we asked the Lord to give us such a ministry that we would always be together and have enough time and strength to fulfill different tasks.

We were honest with Jesus, and if we did not like something, we sincerely told Him about it, asking for wisdom for every undertaking and decision.

We know that the Lord considers our choice and our desires, and finds for us exactly what will work for the good of each.

How joyful it is to see the fruits of your ministry, to observe how your character is formed, how a clear vision of many issues is developed, how firmness in principles appears, and to understand that God's hand is present in all our work.

If you ask us what ministry we perform, I think it will be difficult for us to answer clearly and concretely, for we love what we do and invest all of ourselves in every good work, not counting it as a special ministry for God, since our entire life has become constant service, and our mind is tuned precisely to such a life approach. Our life is our service to God, and He knows this and uses us as He needs, giving us to understand what and when to take up.

It is not difficult for God to use in His work those who wholly belong to Him and are open to cooperation.

We also do not judge anyone if someone sees their life differently and does God's work as they see fit or does nothing. We decided to love everyone and think about their happiness, forgetting what lies behind.

And how joyful it is to gather together and share the experiences and victories of the past day, planning our wonderful future in Jesus. And if we also agree on some common endeavor, then we believe that success will be given to us by the Heavenly Father.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read John 12:26; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Rom. 7:5-6; 12:9-11; 14:17-19; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:3-8; Gal. 5:13-15; Heb. 12:28-29; 22:3 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. What is ministry?
5. What kinds of ministry do you know?
6. Does Jesus' definition from Mark 10:3 fit family relationships? "...But whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant."

7. What kind of ministry can a family perform?
8. Is it worth investing all of yourself in your ministry?
9. What will ministry without love look like?
10. How can I understand what gifts I possess and what ministry I should perform?
11. What should I do if I am not used to serving anyone and do not see the necessity of it?
12. What do you think—does this School serve any of you?
13. Does God serve His creation?
14. What is not ministry?
15. What gift of service do you possess, and which of them would you like to have?

Wife's Illness

Our family life brought us daily happiness and delighted us with constant discoveries in each other. All our big and small concerns were resolved in a spirit of love and friendship. Our household was arranged according to the principles and habits that we brought into our home. But the enemy of the soul does not sleep, and if he cannot lead us into temptation, he sends various ailments in order at least to mock us in this way.

One day my wife complained of a strange condition and fatigue. I realized that something unusual had happened and began to observe what was going on. And she became worse and worse. Although illnesses were not a frequent occurrence in our family, this time it was clear that this was something new.

Leaving for work, I prayed with my wife for her healing and left the house with a bad premonition.

We led a healthy lifestyle, and I was surprised that something had clung to us. My wife knew what needed to be done in such situations, for she herself taught others those procedures that speed up the process of recovery.

While working, I began to reflect on various problems that can come along with illness, not excluding even a fatal outcome. To somehow dispel my anxieties, I called our prayer support group, and together with friends we decided to pray for my wife, believing that the Lord would certainly answer.

Periodically I called my wife, and she, so as not to upset me, replied that she was resting and needed peace. She did some hydrotherapy procedures and, putting aside all her affairs and plans, took to her bed.

I had many questions for God, to which I was not given quick answers. I thought that "healthy-lifestyle people" had no right to be ill, but illness had come. I knew what I would do, but I did not know how to help the one I love. I began to ask for wisdom and peace in my heart.

In the meantime, our friends informed other church members about our problem and began to bombard me and my wife with all sorts of advice and recipes. Understanding that I was the same way myself, I had to listen to everyone and thank them for everything. But there were also those who asked again whether we had done what they told us and were indignant if I had undertaken nothing, urging us to act according to their recommendations. As a result, my wife warned me that she would be out of touch, since she wanted to disconnect from everything and be in quiet. Our friends began to call me, asking whether everything was all right with my beloved, and asking me to pass on to her the best tips for a speedy recovery. It was difficult for me to continue working, and I asked to go home after lunch.

Coming home, I quietly looked into the room where my wife was ill and was puzzled by how bad she looked in her suffering.

We had previously agreed that during an illness of either of us we would, if possible, avoid physical contact with each other and other people. And I so wanted to hug her, hold her close, and say something kind, but I decided only to ask what was needed and, understanding that nothing was, I went to pray.

Our friends beset me with calls and messages, and I was afraid that if I turned off the phone, they would certainly come to the house, and I had to answer everyone.

Fears and dark forebodings filled me as I saw the crisis of the illness intensify. I prayed and reflected on our life, on our plans, on the future. It was difficult for me to imagine all this without the one whom the Lord had given me. And in despair I cried out to the Lord for healing.

We did not trust doctors very much and decided to turn to them only in extreme cases, relying more on God's methods of prevention and healing. In prayer I asked for wisdom, protection, and God's intervention in our situation.

Judging by the symptoms, the illness was like the flu, but with very severe headaches.

While my wife lay and rested, I decided to stock up on fresh fruit and greens and to set about cooking healthy food, and then to do damp cleaning of the house, without ceasing to pray.

When my wife came out of her room to the bathroom, with my eyes I asked her: "Well, how do you feel?" And she let me know that she was fighting as best she could. I briefly spoke to her of my love and asked her to live, to which she smiled and promised that she would certainly fulfill my request.

Reflecting on what was happening, I came to the conclusion that with anxieties I would correct and achieve nothing, and therefore I decided to rejoice and give thanks for everything, to be happy and content with all things. This turned out to be not at all difficult. As soon as I began to thank God for this illness, peace came to my heart, and happiness began to overcome my mind.

I decided not to restrain my positivity and began to hum good songs and speak words of gratitude and periodically looked into the patient's room, telling her of my joy. At first she listened to me with bewilderment, and then, understanding what I was driving at, decided to rejoice together with me, despite the severe condition.

I intended to go further in my happiness and began to "attack" with good wishes and blessings. My wife did not resist such a turn of events and smiled back more and more often. And my joy knew no bounds, although I understood that some proprieties still needed to be observed. In bursts of happiness I showered my wife with very many words of my love, making it clear that this was the very best medicine for her. And she implored me with her eyes to leave her in peace. But at the same time she smiled joyfully.

Leaving for work in the morning, I prepared breakfast for my wife and informed her that she did not need to cook anything and did not need to wash the dishes after herself.

I had heard that in many families husbands do not like it when their wives are ill, and it was incomprehensible to me how one could relate in such a way to someone who already feels bad. In

my case I tried to free my wife from all tasks and asked her not to do anything without urgent necessity. Her gratitude knew no bounds, and, judging by everything, she had neither strength nor desire to do anything. And I understood that since my wife had come to such a state, it was already serious, and therefore she should not be burdened with anything else.

It was so pitiful for this dear little person, and it seemed that it would be better for me if I were ill and she rejoiced in life, but alas, everything was the other way around.

From the numerous tips of friends I found out that there are effective ways to fight illnesses that are universal for any case, and therefore I decided not to ask my wife about anything, but to do what she needed to take. Although she was not enthusiastic, seeing my care for her, she did not resist and obediently fulfilled all my requests and drank what I brought her.

During this period we did not manage to hold the next family council, but we were not upset about this and waited with understanding for the turning point in the course of the illness.

On the fourth day my wife woke up in a wonderful mood and without headaches. She joyfully jumped up, thinking to take up her usual chores, but, realizing that she was still weak, decided to stay in bed a little, to which I strongly urged her.

I prepared another breakfast for her, told her what to take for lunch, and went to earn our living.

In the following days the illness subsided and then disappeared completely, bringing no complications, but leaving in our life warm memories of my care and joy in the Lord.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 17:22; 27:9; Luke 9:1; Matt. 25:36; Eph. 5:18-20, 25, 28, 33; 1 Tim. 5:8; James 1:3; Rom. 8:28; 12:9-10; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:16-18 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?

4. Have you experienced what is described in this lesson?
5. What feelings does the illness of your household members evoke in you?
6. Does a wife have the right to be ill?
7. Will illness bypass my house if I decide not to be ill?
8. Is it proper to rejoice when someone in the family is ill?
9. Are all friends' tips during your illness appropriate and practical?
10. Is a wife entitled to count on a husband's care if she falls ill?
11. Can families leading a healthy lifestyle sometimes be ill?
12. Does the Lord sometimes allow illnesses in the lives of His children in order to teach them something? (Job 2:3-7).
13. Do you have experience of joy during your illness or the illness of your household members?
14. Do you believe that a joyful heart is like medicine?
15. Was there anything important and new for you in this lesson?

Family Health

Going through various trials of our family happiness, my wife and I came to the conclusion that health is a significant factor that strongly affects the atmosphere in our home. Although health itself cannot be the building material of our happiness, because on this earth a person can lose it, the lack of physical strength can turn into a great misfortune for us, with which it will be very difficult to live.

Having gone through trials with unwelcome illnesses, we realized how vulnerable, weak, and dependent we are on God's protection in this matter and in the matter of healing. We heard that a Health Reform was given to God's people, and God expects that we will accept it into our home as well and live in this light constantly.

Even before the wedding I had repeatedly encountered this topic, and my wife was also familiar with the principles of health. And since this light was part of our church's teaching, we assumed that we would be healthy by default and would agree with everything that is told to us about this in sermons and in all sorts of lectures on a healthy lifestyle. But after we were ill, it became clear to us that the message of the Health Reform needs not only to be heard, but also to be studied, asking the Lord to reveal the depth of all the health principles set forth and pleading for wisdom from above to apply this light in our lives.

It seemed to us that our faith in God's ability to heal any disease would be enough to fight any ailment. But in practice we were convinced that God does not answer every prayer for healing in the way we ask and expect. And sometimes we saw that the recovery of the body of some ignoramus in the matter of health would not be a blessing for him, but would give him a reason to further destroy his organism, expecting another miracle from above if illness should come again.

If we take into account the latest political events that are happening around us, it becomes clear that soon medicine will

be monopolized by the enemy of the soul, and it will begin to be used against humanity to carry out the cunning designs of Satan and to enrich certain pharmaceutical corporations.

The prophecy in Rev. 18:23 that the pharmakeia of Babylon (translated “sorcery”) will deceive all nations also made us think about the conformity of our life to God’s principles and to the light that we have. We became concerned about how brightly this light shines in our family. After all, the established system of Satan will either soon cross us out, refusing to serve us with its achievements, or ruin us, convincing us that one must pay for health.

We were familiar with the 8 factors of health, and we could recite all these principles by heart, assuming that this was enough for God to bless us with health and joy of life.

The foundations of health are set forth very clearly in the works of the Spirit of Prophecy and include such concepts as air, sun, water, physical activity, rest, temperance, proper nutrition, and trust in God. This sounds very beautiful. But having applied only one of these directions, we understood how deep the principles set forth are when you begin to study them and delve into the essence of things.

What do we know, for example, about water? That it needs to be drunk from 1 to 2 liters a day depending on body weight. This is worth doing, but it is also necessary to understand what water is, what properties it has, what its shelf life is, how its purity is determined, and how dangerous it can be if it is drawn from unfamiliar sources. Water is the most universal solvent and begins actively to dissolve and absorb everything with which it comes into contact. We do not know how all sorts of invisible waves and sound vibrations affect it, and how it reacts to our speech and to the spirit in which we drink it. Are the kettles in which we boil our water useful? Is this same water useful when contained in all sorts of drinks and products? Having tried to study only this factor, we saw a whole world that was unfamiliar to us and greatly surprised us. The question immediately arose—where to get clean water in urban conditions. We did not want to trust the manufacturers of

bottled water, and the prospect of being constantly dependent on them did not delight us either. Tap water as a drink categorically did not suit us. And our own wisdom on this issue was not enough, and we began to pray.

In a similar way we approached each point of health. Delving into our church's teaching regarding the Health Reform, we understood that our consciousness is so filled with various stereotypes and barriers, and the message itself is held in such neglect, that we became frightened for our health. The result was the following. We expend our natural potential of energy and reserve of strength granted to us at birth and live, assuming that it will always be so. Or we clog our organism with whatever comes to hand with our own money, assuming that prayers for blessing will be sufficient. But our body periodically sends us signals and warnings that something is wrong with it.

Any point in the message of the Health Reform is an entire science which harmoniously combines with the Word of God, with common sense, with the Spirit of Prophecy, and with scientific discoveries in this field. God, by sending this light, desired to see His people happy, healthy, and wise. The Lord repeatedly assured us through His messenger that everything we eat and how we live has the most direct relation to our salvation, although it is not salvation itself. God indicates that neglect of the laws of health is the same sin as failure to keep God's commandments.

All these discoveries prompted us to approach each point of the message about health very seriously and to take a definite position on this question.

The most difficult thing turned out to be to abandon the commonly accepted stereotypes that simply shackled our consciousness and blocked our will. But when the Lord very clearly showed us the true beauty of His creation, the power of His nature, the depth of His laws of health, then all fears left us, and faith in God's power helped to overcome all barriers in our mind and to break all the fetters of laziness and ignorance.

And, of course, we very much wanted to share with others our discoveries and that wonderful light which so brightly illuminated our path. And for some reason we were asked not to be fanatical in this matter and to show temperance and moderation in all points.

We thought that our older brethren already knew everything long ago and that we would tell them nothing new, but everything turned out exactly the opposite, although there were those who rejoiced in our research and listened to us with pleasure, striving to live in the light received.

Our understanding of the truth in other matters also became more perceptive and clear. Many causes of our ailments were discovered, and we no longer wanted to live in ignorance.

Our mutual love and ability to agree about everything led us to unity in all matters, although we understood some things in our own way.

The blessings of health did not keep us waiting long. It was so pleasant to realize that health is not an accident, but a conscious harmony of our will and mind with God's laws of nature and happiness.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Jer. 33:3; 3 John 1:2; Prov. 3:5-8, 16; 4:20-22; 5:7-13; Ps. 126:2; Isa. 1:2-6; John 5:6, 14; Matt. 9:12, 21-22; 10:1; Hos. 11:3; 1 Cor. 10:31 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. What is health?
5. Is health an accident?
6. Has the Lord invested in the natural world around us a power of life unknown to us?
7. Is it worth studying the secrets of nature and extracting for ourselves knowledge useful for health?

8. If I do not see air, does this mean that it does not exist and contains nothing special?
9. What do you think—does water, air, sun contain something great and accessible which we do not know?
10. If I begin to study the laws of health and the deep properties of each principle of health, will the Lord reveal their depth to me?
11. Will the laws of health lose their power if I do not believe in them?
12. Are you not frightened by the simplicity of God's laws for the healing of body and soul?
13. Have you ever heard such a saying about the health reform: "It is so simple as to be hard to believe"?
14. What will happen to the body of a person who neglects even one principle of health?
15. Is it really so important to have health in the last days and to know in practice the laws of health?

Sharp Corners

When we were courting, my future wife and I noticed an interesting feature in our communication, which we later brought into our family. It consisted in the accidental discovery of the “sharp corners” of our characters, which were very unpleasant to bump into. We are all different. We all differ greatly from each other. We grew up in different families, in different circumstances, and the environment around us was also different. And then we met, liked each other, and united our two different lives into one. Although we had a common worldview and one goal, and our faith was centered on the One God and Jesus sent by Him, still it sometimes seemed that we were going to this by different paths.

The expression “to avoid sharp corners” means avoiding conflicts, arguments, or unpleasantness in communicating with one another in order to preserve harmony and peaceful relations. It also implies the ability to find compromises, to step away from confrontation, and to show mutual understanding. It is also necessary to be tactful and diplomatic in communication so as to avoid possible unpleasant situations. This can be a useful skill in interpersonal relationships and professional activity.

In addition, “to avoid sharp corners” also means avoiding dangerous or risky situations to ensure one’s well-being. This phrase can symbolize a striving for smoothness, flexibility, and harmony in actions and approaches, and a rejection of more abrupt and aggressive methods. This can be connected with a philosophy of stepping away from confrontation and a preference for more peaceful ways of achieving goals. It is the ability to find bypass routes or creative ways out of difficult situations, discovering non-standard ways of solving problems that allow you to avoid direct collision or overcome difficulties by means of unexpected methods.

We began to build our relationship on mutual love and friendship, and this love helped us to see in each other many wonderful qualities of the soul that would never have been

discovered as a precious treasure by any other viewpoint. But despite all our love and mutual respect, unexpected icebergs surfaced in our communication from time to time, provoking us to create tension and conflicts.

For example, when we touched on any political events, this immediately introduced a strange spirit of discomfort, and my wife asked that we not discuss these topics in the family.

My better half believed that pets bring much joy and warmth into life. I, however, thought that people who do not love them are not so bad. It was difficult for me to understand why bind yourself to speechless creatures and take responsibility for their upkeep when there are already enough concerns.

As for food, we also sometimes did not have a common taste and understanding of the usefulness of products, although we adhered to the health reform. I considered ice cream the most terrible enemy for the stomach, while my beloved often dreamed of eating it.

Sometimes my stories about my worldly life before faith in God frightened my wife, and she worried so much because I could have perished forever and remained in this world that afterward she could not sleep well.

One way or another, such differences led us to conflicts and discomfort, which we needed to eliminate urgently, not allowing them to develop.

But since we decided to reduce everything to love, we always succeeded in this, and love prompted us which topics should be closed forever, what should be ignored, what needed to be delicately sorted out, and what not to allow even in thought. Sometimes compromise was the most correct solution to some difficult problem, and at times it was necessary to gently stand our ground, considering that this would be the way out of the situation.

Once there was a case when my wife was offered a job in a supermarket, where after its closing she would need to put new goods on the shelves. The work took 3-4 hours a day, and the

salary was paid for a full working day, and Saturday was free. But I understood that my wife would come home late at night, exposing herself to unnecessary risk, or I would have to stay awake and pick her up by car. It was necessary to explain for a very long time and at length that such employment was not for our family and was destructive for health. As a result, my beloved understood everything and later thanked me for not agreeing with her.

We both have a sense of humor and joke very often, but sometimes these jokes turn out to be very silly and can wound the feelings of the other and cause pain, therefore even in this matter we began to show caution and foresight.

Sometimes we thought that something pleased us both and that we would do it, and when we delved into the matter, we understood that for someone it was good, and for someone it was bad, and it brought pain. Such things had to be taken into account and set aside.

I saw nothing terrible in walking through the house in outdoor shoes, while for my wife it was a catastrophe with which she absolutely could not reconcile herself despite all her love for me. And the most terrible punishment for violating this order was the reproach that I did not love her and did not respect her work. And it was difficult for me to prove the opposite when she once again caught me in boots in the middle of the room. But for the sake of peace I decided to break this habit, although I still did not understand what was so bad about it.

Some of my friends and relatives brought discomfort into our family life when they visited us, and having understood this, I decided to meet with them outside the home, finding different pretexts so as not to embarrass my wife with their next visit.

In all spheres of our life there was much that we saw in our own way. Sometimes this delighted us, but when tension arose, I tried to look for a diplomatic approach to solving the issue.

My wife was also a very sensitive and intuitive person and could foresee various difficulties in relationships in advance. She understood any situation very well. Very often her cheerfulness

and positivity smoothed over many sharp moments and then very skillfully avoided them.

Although we had an agreement that we could hug each other without prohibitions and limitations, sometimes this had to be consciously canceled when I understood that it was not the time or was inopportune. For example, if my wife is carrying heavy bags and I start to support her with my kisses and embraces, then I can hear everything about myself except what I want. And when I am focused on some task, then it is very difficult for my wife to get answers from me to her numerous questions. And she has to first ask me whether I hear her and what she is saying to me.

We also noticed that the more we communicate and live together, the fewer “sharp corners” we have in our relationship. The Lord teaches us not to fight for our rights, but to build what unites us and makes us happy.

It is difficult to live with someone who makes their “sharp corner” a law for the family and demands recognition of their exclusivity. We do not bring ourselves to this, since we have like-mindedness and unanimity in Christ, and the Holy Spirit guides the flow of our thoughts and destroys our wrong views of life, bringing us into the unity of the faith and the knowledge of Jesus.

Pride is alien to us, and love for each other resolves everything in the best way.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 3:30; 15:1; 17:14, 17, 19; 18:6-7, 21; 20:3; 26:21; Rom. 12:9-10; 2 Thess. 2:17; Eph. 3:16-19; 5:15-33; 2 Tim. 2:22-26; Gal. 5:19-21 in the light of this lesson.

2. What did you understand from this topic?

3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?

4. What are “sharp corners” in family relationships?

5. Have you ever experienced collisions with “sharp corners” in communication with others?

6. Where do conflicts come from?
7. Should one take into account another opinion if you are right?
8. Will a yielding person be a winner? (Prov. 20:3).
9. Will it be correct not to “avoid sharp corners” in the family, but to break them so that they do not exist?
10. What should I do if I am “pressed into a corner” and they do not want to submit to my “sharp corner”?
11. At what period of family life do the most frequent conflicts occur?
12. Read Deut. 24:5. Is this time given by God for a special “fitting” in the family?
13. Is there a difference between a quarrel of two egoists and disagreements of two people who love each other?
14. Does God help us remove from our life everything “sharp”?
15. What should one do in order not to have “sharp corners”?

Irreplaceable

While working in a construction company, I noticed the high turnover rate in this field. The boss would hire different workers, then dismiss them and look for others. And some workers found something else and left on their own, shifting their duties onto the shoulders of those who remained. For some reason, I was not going to be dismissed, but was entrusted with the most responsible work, which I myself had to organize and perform.

Sometimes it was very sad to part with those I had known for a long time, but others would come in their place and do the work no worse than the rest. And if one of the older workers lifted his nose too high, the boss immediately noticed this and skillfully brought them back down, making it clear that, for him, there were no irreplaceable people.

Watching all this, I understood that one day my turn would come, and I would be replaced by a more skillful or younger worker. And there was no time to think about where to go next. Such a spirit creates in the mind an illusion of uselessness and worthlessness. I know people who fell into depression after being dismissed early and suffered greatly from it.

Uselessness is probably the worst state of the soul in any society or community. When you feel like an object that can quickly be thrown out onto the street or replaced with another, it becomes very difficult to build personal happiness in such an atmosphere.

I know people who build their “family unions” on such shaky ground, choosing and trying what they think might suit them, and easily discarding from their lives those they did not like or who turned out to be worse than someone else. And just to be sure not to make a mistake and to keep a way of retreat, such people do not plan to register their next unions, so that they can always quickly get rid of a person who may fall out of favor.

When creating our family, my wife and I understood that this union was for life, and we did not plan, even in the most distant

future, to divorce and look for someone else. But the question of our need for each other was not immediately revealed to us.

At first, after the wedding, we behaved like close friends, getting used to the new status and enjoying the new advantages of family life. And this made us even closer and dearer. And when we parted briefly for some reason, I began to notice that I was already missing something, and how good it would be if my beloved were somewhere nearby. The phone partially helped to satisfy this attachment, but the personal presence of a dear person cannot be replaced by anything else.

And my wife did not even try to hide her attachment to me and was also very happy when we were together or somewhere near each other, even if each was busy with their own work.

Reflecting on the turnover of staff at my work, I tried to imagine what it would look like in our family, and whether someone could replace me in it. With these foolish thoughts I turned to my wife, which frightened her very much. She for some reason thought that I wanted to leave her and began to overwhelm me with all sorts of questions, trying to find out whom I had found. I had to calm her for a very long time and convince her that she was my best, my only, and irreplaceable one.

And while we were thus sorting out our relationship, a simple truth dawned on me—that in our family we are the most necessary and irreplaceable people for each other on earth. I don't need anyone else, even a thousand times better and purer. I need only the one whom I chose for myself forever. And only by her side do I have that special blessing with which God fills our hearts in our love for each other. Although among our friends there are many brothers and sisters with whom we are close and whom we truly love, in union with my wife we represent a special world. And no one is admitted into this world except our Lord.

About the same thing my wife shared with me when she understood that I simply had foolish questions. She told me so many interesting things about her love for me and about how

dear and irreplaceable a man I was to her, that I am even embarrassed to recount all this to you, friends, so that you don't think I am boasting about myself.

We also have those moments in life when we want to be alone and rest from everything and everyone, or to be alone with God to discuss numerous tasks and questions, but this is in no way connected with our family. It is simply the human factor that longs for a reboot of thought. In such moments of life we leave each other in peace, knowing that this is a temporary necessity that needs to be lived through. And then we reunite again to always be together.

It is so wonderful to understand that in this world there is a special place where we are irreplaceable and where we belong, always needed.

There are companies that build their business on the abilities of one or several people and are ready to pay them any money, as long as these employees work for them. And when they leave or fall ill, then everything collapses. Such need is pleasant for the specialist, and it can even go to his head, and he imagines himself to be something great. However, such an attitude is based on success and prosperity, which are very conditional and can disappear at any moment.

But our family builds its need for each other on the basis of the deep principle of being so always, regardless of the prospect of flourishing or withering. It is not so important to us what our income is and what economic benefit we can receive from each other. Such things are not measured in sums or kilograms. We have each other. And this is the essence of our union.

And the more and closer we get to know each other, the dearer and more needed we become in our own eyes. My wife is a miracle to which it is impossible to grow accustomed. I am always amazed at this gift from the Lord. She was conceived just like this by the Creator Himself, embodied in reality, and given to me forever, to always be the most needed and irreplaceable person in my life. This place in my heart can never be occupied by anyone else. No person can fully

correspond to the one to whom I once said, “Yes.” And this is not something I invented, but the Lord, who made us irreplaceable for each other and blesses us in our need with Himself in the form of mutual agape love.

Whatever periods of life we go through in our family, we always remember that we are irreplaceable for each other, and in addition we have an agreement to love each other no matter what.

If you ask any person who the closest and irreplaceable people are for them, everyone will say—their parents. And it is difficult when they are not together. And this is true. And why did parents become so close? Because they once decided to become one whole, called “family.”

We are irreplaceable for our relatives, and they for us. And this is normal. But the enemy of the soul offers us emptiness instead of one another, in order to tear apart, destroy, and ruin us in suffering. But we will love each other and value one another, because in this is God’s will for us.

Every one of my friends has a similar status of an irreplaceable person, because each one is unique in all their features. He is the only one of his kind. Therefore, these people also become very needed and irreplaceable in Christ.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Isa. 43:4; 1 Sam. 20:17; Jer. 3:1; 31:3, 20; 1 Cor. 12-27; Prov. 12:10; 14:1; 17:17 in the light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
4. In what spheres of life are we irreplaceable?
5. Where is it good to be irreplaceable, and where can this become a problem?
6. How will a worker feel if he is made to understand that he is irreplaceable, and without him the company’s affairs will collapse?

7. How can I understand whether I am an irreplaceable person in my family?
8. Do you have irreplaceable people in your life?
9. For how long does the Lord unite our lives and destinies?
10. Is it important to understand the fact that if someone considers me a thing, I need to know that I am unique and one of a kind?
11. Do you like to be in the company of those people who consider you irreplaceable?
12. Did this lesson help you understand something very important?
13. What should I do if I feel lonely and unnecessary?
14. Can I by my decision make my friends irreplaceable?
15. Who are we for God? How does He see us?

Conflict Resolution

My wife and I love each other, and that love always helps us find a way out of any situation. Love unfailingly points to the best solution, yet our human nature sometimes tries to “throw a wrench into the works” and bring unnecessary problems into our lives.

We are learning to avoid “sharp corners,” but conflicts still happen. Sometimes they catch us off guard and place us in a difficult position, where we must search for a way out. We came to understand that surprises can arise in any area of our relationship. They are often so diverse and unpredictable that one may feel lost in choosing the right approach.

Words of love are always good, but sometimes they seem out of place—especially when tension fills the air, demanding quick action, while wisdom in that moment is lacking. Thankfully, we have the Lord, Who is always near and constantly helps us find the best solution in any conflict of interest.

What is conflict?

Conflict is when someone’s opinion or behavior does not align with your own understanding or worldview. Not every conflict is something evil or sinful. But when a barrier of disagreement begins to grow in my mind against the worldview of my beloved, the best course of action is to resolve it quickly, before a small sprout becomes a large tree.

Over time, we identified several ways of resolving conflicts. They are not always the same, but they helped us greatly:

1. Overlooking minor issues.

Sometimes a person blurts something out without thinking, not realizing it. If it is truly insignificant, then after a while it fades from memory. But if you choose to “make a mountain out of a molehill,” prepare for war. Even in such a case, it is still possible to ignore the situation and avoid conflict. We must remember: in God’s eyes, I am not better than the one I live with—nor worse.

2. Adapting.

Not everything in a spouse's view may please me, but sometimes I can adjust to their outlook for the sake of peace. Love suggests how to do this with minimal risk and loss. At times I simply agree with something I do not fully accept, in order to preserve harmony, while also reflecting on whether the problem might actually lie in me.

3. Open confrontation.

Not everything contrary to my view can be ignored, and my wife is not timid either. Sometimes we openly clash in opinion, each defending our ideas and expecting to win. We do not break dishes or slam doors, but firmly and—importantly—with love, we voice our disagreement. In the end, however, we usually realize it was a storm in a teacup that changed nothing. Love reminds us: better to apologize than to prove oneself right.

4. Compromise.

When neither side is persuaded, we sometimes seek a middle ground. For example, when choosing the color of a car, each of us had strong but opposite preferences. After much debate, we compromised on a neutral option. Compromise is valid as long as it does not contradict conscience.

5. Time to reflect.

Simply postponing a discussion can resolve many issues before they escalate. With time, emotions cool down, and it becomes easier to talk.

6. Admitting mistakes.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit reveals the situation from a different angle, making you ashamed of what you allowed yourself. Then a quick "I'm sorry, I was wrong" can resolve everything. Love leaves no room for pride, and a loving heart seeks peace above all.

7. Heart-to-heart conversation.

An honest dialogue, free from bias or pressure, can quickly diffuse tension. When both voices are heard, common ground is found, and many conflicts are resolved at the root.

No matter what happens between us, we always strive to discuss it together, identify the cause, and find a solution. Even if conflict sometimes requires us to step over our own pride, discussion allows us to process everything calmly, often leading us to new insights that we carry into the future.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Psalm 4:4; 139:23-24; Eph. 4:26; Prov. 3:30; 12:6; 15:1; 17:14,17,19; 18:6; 19:11; 20:3; 26:21; 29:11,22; 30:32-33; 2 Tim. 2:24; Gal. 5:19-21 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. What is conflict?
5. Is conflict in a family always bad?
6. Should we learn to identify and resolve conflicts even if we rarely experience them?
7. When does conflict become sin?
8. Can one foresee conflict and learn to avoid it?
9. Is avoiding conflict always the right solution?
10. Why do conflicts arise even among believing spouses?
11. Can love help avoid conflict—or at least resolve it properly?
12. What should I do if I am a peaceful person, yet I am constantly attacked and accused?
13. Is it worth starting a conflict if you know it will be resolved anyway?
14. What other ways of resolving conflicts, not mentioned in this lesson, do you know?
15. Do you know people who are completely conflict-free?

A Serious Conversation

One morning, as I was getting ready for work and enjoying a delicious breakfast with my wife, I wanted to know what I would have for lunch. She cheerfully listed everything she had prepared and packed in my bag. Right away I began praising my little homemaker, wondering aloud what I would ever do without her, how I would suffer from hunger, and how impossible life would be without her. She always rejoiced that, thanks to her, my life had been transformed, but out of modesty she insisted that everything would have been fine anyway. I could never agree with that.

After breakfast, my wife asked me if I could talk with her that evening, because she had something serious to tell me. I immediately became alert and tried to find out the subject of the upcoming talk, but she avoided answering, asking me to wait until evening. I had no choice but to agree and resign myself to the unknown.

All day I was left with thoughts, praying continually for myself and my wife. Many ideas came into my mind. Somehow I felt that nothing bad should happen, but the seriousness of what was ahead kept me uneasy.

I set aside all other plans, and when I came home, I announced that I was ready to listen and to talk. My wife invited me to pray and began thanking God for me, asking Him to bring to my awareness the full meaning of what she was about to share. Listening to each word, I tried to guess what she was going to say. I felt no guilt or reason to expect something negative, yet inside I was tense.

I sat down on our “conversation sofa,” while she, as usual, perched on the armrest beside me, looking at me intently before quietly asking if I loved her. I affirmed that I did, and focused all my attention on her.

She gently fixed my hair, as if unhurriedly preparing me for her secret, while I patiently waited, deciding not to ask unnecessary questions but to let her speak first. She sat close, admiring me

with a mysterious smile, smoothing my appearance with her kind hands.

Then she assured me of her love too, and once again fell silent, leaning her cheek against me. We sat quietly for a few minutes, waiting for the moment of revelation.

Then she asked how deeply I loved her. In response, I hugged her tightly, holding her close, which was clearly what she wanted. Then she asked, "Do you know?" and stopped. I answered that I didn't, but if she told me, then I would know. She looked into my eyes intently again, while I quietly waited.

Finally, she said: "You have no idea what you mean to me, how much my life has been transformed because of you, and what I am experiencing now under the influence of your love." I grew very curious and listened with all my attention, trying to understand where she was going.

My wife searched for the right words to clearly express her thoughts, while I tried to piece together the mosaic of her words into a complete picture.

She continued: "You and your steadfast love helped me discover myself. I never even imagined who I really am, or what qualities I truly possess. I never thought of myself as a bad person, but I also didn't know the gifts of my soul. From the beginning, even in our friendship, when you started uncovering my hidden talents and traits, explaining how they showed in my life, I realized God was using you to show me something important. I wrote everything down and deeply reflected on your discoveries. And you, tirelessly, kept diving into the depths of my soul, sharing each new finding with me. Together we marveled at how you managed to see all this and describe it so simply. You helped me realize my uniqueness and worth in God's eyes. And I understand now that without unconditional love, these discoveries would never have been possible. Only God's love, revealed through you, convinced me not to fear your exploration and to let you into places no one had ever been. And when you asked me to be your wife, I knew the Lord wanted to keep blessing me with discoveries through you, and

seeing no serious obstacle to our union, I gave you my “yes,” a decision I have never once regretted. Thank you, my dear one, for being you!”

I sat listening, trying to understand my role in all of this. I always enjoyed noticing good things in people, but I never realized the influence my words could have on someone’s consciousness. I began to grasp the deep meaning of her words and rejoiced that the Lord could use me in such a beautiful way.

She continued: “Because of your exploration of my soul’s qualities, I began to notice them too and develop them fully, rejoicing in these discoveries within myself. You convince me so strongly of who I really am that I can only agree with you and rejoice in our relationship of love. And as I develop these traits, I grow in them and delight in the amazing changes. God is using you to show me something great and hidden that I never knew. Thank you, my beloved!”

I realized that all this was being said about me, yet everything I had done was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, often without realizing how it affected my bride. And she wasn’t the only one in whom I noticed good things, but she had let me into her heart so deeply that I was extremely careful not to harm anything there. The Lord used our mutual trust and turned it all into a blessing.

I also reflected on how deeply my wife had entered my heart, and how many wonderful things she had found in me. In that reflection, I realized that I too had undergone meaningful changes and growth.

She went on: “Seeing your genuine interest in my inner being, and how it benefits you and others, I was able to cultivate all this and now I am firmly convinced that without you, my love, I never could have become who I am today in your hands. Please don’t stop, but continue doing what you do so well! Thank you so much for being in my life. Be here always. I receive you with love and joy. And this is very serious for me, because you do all this in the name of God, letting Him be your Head.”

My tension disappeared, replaced with sincere joy for such a wonderful gift from the Lord—this chance to make someone better and happier. I had no argument against her words and had to accept everything she said about me as the truth. Joy filled my heart, and I realized I was holding something priceless that cannot be measured by anything earthly. I saw that before us lies an eternity of wonderful discoveries in each other, which will help transform us and make our lives into something even more beautiful—something we have not yet fully experienced, but which is still ahead.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read 1 Cor. 16:14; Song of Solomon 1:1-2,15-16; 2:3-10,16; 3:1,4; 4:7,10-12; 5:1-2,8-16; 6:3-4,10; 7:7,11-13; 8:3,6-7,14; Gal. 5:6; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Thess. 3:12 in light of this lesson.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Should a wife love her husband? Does the Bible give a command for wives to love their husbands?
5. Can a husband's love, kindness, and attentiveness open his wife's heart?
6. Is love strong enough to conquer any heart?
7. Can love bring goodness into the life of your spouse?
8. Is love able to discover and reveal something unique and hidden in the heart of another?
9. Have you noticed how people wrap themselves tighter in strong wind but freely uncover themselves under warm sunshine? Can the same be true in family and friendship?
10. Do you know that every person carries within themselves an unlimited potential of countless talents?
11. What is the best way to uncover hidden qualities in your spouse—by shovel and excavator, or with tenderness and love?
12. Are there people in your life who see you as a wonderful person filled with treasures?

13. Can a person discover themselves alone, or is a loving friend necessary?

14. Do you enjoy when someone lovingly tells you how beautiful and unique you are?

15. Why does love see and discover so much good in a person, while strict justice sees only faults and mistakes?

My Beloved

The Song of Solomon contains many tender and beautiful expressions, given as an example for every family and for those preparing to build one. At the very heart of the Bible, the Lord has provided us with a model of the most proper relationship between friends and spouses.

Some of the images and comparisons may not fit well with our modern cultural understanding, and some may even seem offensive, but they are given to us as a guide—to teach us not to be afraid of comparing cultural values.

For instance, if a young man in India tells his beloved that she is as beautiful as a cow, for the girl this will be the highest compliment, and she will glow with happiness at such high praise. But in European culture, it is better not to call women this way, as it could be understood in the exact opposite sense.

The Song of Songs contains lofty poetry and a deep expression of tender and sincere feelings between a man and a woman. They exchange their fantasies about one another with harmony, without embarrassment, clothing them in exquisite images that are clear to both, while also carrying profound meaning for those studying this message of love.

It is worth remembering that such words are considered proper in Heaven when spoken between close friends or spouses, but they are not given to us as a way of charming the innocent and enticing them to break the seventh commandment: ***“You shall not commit adultery.”***

Our words are like a sharp knife. In the hands of a cook or carpenter, it can be a very useful and skillful tool. But in the hands of a robber or a madman, it becomes a dangerous weapon.

Within the family, however, all compliments and affectionate phrases are proper and welcome. The Bible gives us examples of correct expressions and comparisons not so we may simply read them and “like” them, but so we may use these beautiful

words in daily life and constantly practice perfecting them. We should not limit ourselves to a small vocabulary of refined phrases. Every language is rich in kind expressions and interesting combinations, and each of us has a creative imagination that is worth developing fully in the family setting.

I decided to consider Solomon's book within the framework of our own marriage. Recalling the days of our friendship, I saw how our love and attraction helped us easily invent all sorts of affectionate phrases, which we eagerly repeated and created from morning till night, delighting each other's hearts with romantic experiences. And after the wedding, we poured upon one another waterfalls of the most tender and intimate words, which I would not dare to repeat here. Later, however, our little fountains seemed to dry up, and we fell into the routine of daily cares, drawing from memory a few joyful expressions just to gently soothe the ears of our beloved. I realized this should not be so, and resolved to restore romance into our union, striving to make it into as much of a celebration as possible.

I carefully thought out my plan and decided to give it the most solemn atmosphere.

One morning, after breakfast, I told my wife that in the evening I had a very serious conversation to have with her. I asked her to set aside all her plans and tasks for that time and to prepare carefully for this meeting, as we would need to discuss the most important matters. My wife grew alert and tried to learn the topic of the coming conversation, but I kept assuring her that she would soon find out, and that she needed to be patient.

She told me she would pray for the upcoming talk, and let me leave for work.

During the day, I tried to recall all the kind words I had ever spoken to my beloved, and wondered how well they would sound today. I also strained my mind to invent some new refined compliments and comparisons, but away from my wife this proved difficult, since my work required focus and concentration. In the end, I realized that the best words for my wife are born in her presence, in direct communication with her.

I decided to test my memory and called a friend, asking him to listen as I spoke about how wonderful my wife was. With a live listener, it became much easier to describe her virtues. But my friend politely interrupted me: ***“It seems to me you are trying hard to advertise your wife to me for some strange purpose.”*** Hearing this, I explained the real reason for my call, and he calmed down. Once he understood my plan, he was very surprised and began to reflect on his own wife.

When I came home, my wife was already there, quietly busy with household tasks. She patiently waited for the “serious conversation” and did not rush me to begin.

After washing and changing, I invited her to pray with me, then asked her to take her usual place on the armrest of the couch. I could feel she was like a compressed spring, waiting for something significant. I began gently speaking of my love, telling her how beautiful she was, how much I cherished her. Yet she still awaited the “serious conversation,” not realizing it had already started. At one moment it dawned on her, and she said she was in her special days, so I should not expect anything physical that evening, meaning my efforts were in vain. This only filled me with joy, and holding her tightly, I shared my ideas about continuing, in a deliberate way, the romantic practices we had cultivated in our pre-marriage days. She looked at me, trying to understand what I was getting at, but when the meaning reached her, she smiled, pressed herself gently against me, and asked me to continue and not stop.

I was amazed at the beautiful words of love that came to me, and at how wonderful a person was living in my home, whose soul I had explored so little.

From the way she pressed herself against me, I could easily tell which expressions she enjoyed the most, and which words gave her special delight. In the middle of our conversation, I realized that the list of compliments from the Song of Songs, adapted into modern speech, had run out—but I still had an infinite potential for new discoveries that could begin to unfold.

I decided also to experiment with repeating certain beautiful and tender words in different combinations. My wife did not object, and with joy accepted everything that came from my lips. Then I wished to test how long she could listen if I kept repeating the same phrase: ***“My beloved.”*** To my surprise, she could hear it endlessly, without weariness, smiling all the while.

When I paused to gather new compliments, she quietly waited for me to continue, giving me space to find my words. And as I listened to myself, I marveled where all this came from. Then I realized—it was the Lord helping me, placing His hand upon my efforts. With this thought, I began to dig deeper, discovering new revelations.

We resolved to continue this experience on other days as well.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read the Song of Solomon from beginning to end.
2. What did you understand from this topic?
3. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
4. Why and for whom was the Song of Solomon written?
5. Does the Lord want to teach us something from this book of Solomon?
6. Is it proper to express words of love and appreciation to your spouse within the framework of God’s law?
7. Should we be afraid of words of love?
8. Why do words of love in many families become rare or only a memory of the past?
9. What can words of love do in the heart of your beloved?
10. How can I learn to speak kind words if I lack such experience?
11. What should I do if I long to hear words of love, but no one speaks them to me?
12. Do you have a plan for your family or for your friends in this area?

13. Does Jesus desire to have such a relationship with us?

14. Does the Lord participate in our exchanges of love and kind words?

15. Should we love those who do not return the same?

Oh, This Friendship

Friendship among brothers and sisters is interesting in that many friends sometimes come to know the beautiful qualities in each other so closely that they develop an irresistible desire to deepen the relationship with the aim of creating a family. And this topic can be so captivating and unpredictable that you marvel at the turns of fate that seem to arise out of nowhere.

The School of Agape Love has many branches that may be formed at the initiative of enterprising missionaries who decide to study the lessons of love in their small groups and to practice in life what is revealed as they learn.

It happened that in one city a team was gathered from those who wished to study the great and the inaccessible, and as a result these people became very close friends and rejoiced in new insights about love and friendship, enjoying the right spirit within right relationships.

And the more they learned the Heavenly science, the more experience they gained in close relationships. After many of them made the decision to love one another according to the commandment, some developed a wholesome interest in creating a happy family. And one brother named Timur (name changed) even dared to make an offer to his friend Olya (name changed) to court with the purpose of forming a family.

Olya was not against such a turn of events, but she was tormented by doubts on many issues to which no one could give precise answers, and she had to pray earnestly and seek solutions to her challenges among wise people.

In this company of learners were also their friends—Alexander and his wife. They rejoiced with all their hearts over the new union and supported Timur and Olya with good counsel and stories about their own experience of managing a household. Things were quickly moving toward another wedding, and everything was developing according to the usual scenario, where friendly relations culminate in a mutual “Yes. Yes.” before the altar.

But tragedy struck. Alexander's wife suddenly died of a heart attack, and he was left alone with his grief. The support of friends helped the unfortunate brother bear this tragedy with dignity, and work kept shifting his attention from sorrow to solving various tasks. Faith in God was his main consolation, and fellowship with the Savior his constant support. At the same time he did not abandon his study of the science of love, but diligently delved into the mysteries of Heavenly agape, wishing to see its power in practice.

While Alexander was married, his personal inviolability was under protection—no one tried to violate it. But after he became a widower, in due time he began to notice a special goodwill from some single sisters, who would readily serve him when needed and were quick to engage with him.

Olya had already been close to Alexander as a friend, and now she became a truly kindred soul. But Alexander, knowing that his friend Timur had particular intentions and plans regarding this sister, kept his distance from her, giving no occasion for the development of a closer relationship.

After another round of wrestling with her doubts, after fasting and prayer, Olya decided to break off the relationship with Timur and not marry him for personal reasons, plunging her friend into deep sorrow.

When Alexander learned of his friends' breakup, he sympathized with them and suggested that they remain friends. They agreed. But literally shortly thereafter he turned his attention to Olya and saw in her the one who matched his heart, and Olya in turn did not hide her sympathy for Sasha. And then something happened that no one expected: they decided to court with the purpose of creating a family.

When Timur learned of this turn of events, he was very disappointed in his friends and regarded their behavior as a betrayal toward himself and even as open infidelity. Yet he understood that there was no violation of God's law, and that any person free from marriage has the right to choose a life companion as he deems fit. Alexander was also very unsettled,

for he did not want to lose any friend, but neither could he forbid his heart to love the one who loved him.

Timur's hurt toward his friends, toward the whole world, and even toward God was so great that word of it reached my wife and me, and we decided to help our friend by inviting him to live with us for a time. He agreed, took unpaid leave, and came to our home. At first we calmly listened to all his laments about the outrageous injustice, and we prayed with him and for him that this matter might be resolved.

One day I asked Timur whether he loved Olya. He thought and nodded in affirmation. And I let him see that he loved himself, and that nothing good would come to Olya from such love. "If you love this girl, you must respect her freedom, her choice, and her understanding of life. And the fact that she chose someone else should make you glad, and you can do everything possible so that she would feel this friendly love and not be afraid to share with you her experiences about her friendship with Alexander. And if they decide to form a family, then as a loving friend you should be on the front line of all organizational matters and help them prepare and conduct the wedding celebration, find out what they would like to receive as a wedding gift, and present it to them wholeheartedly.

Love does not stumble over such trials, but changes its approach to the person. A male friend continues to love the girl not as a future wife, but as a dear friend whom another friend has decided to take as his wife.

Until friends say before witnesses a short 'Yes' to each other, they have every right to change their decisions without penalty, to break off relations, and to choose someone else. You do not know the future of your new family, and therefore it is better not to rush—especially if someone has doubts that do not go away.

God shows friends the features of their character, revealing the problems and prospects of a future union, but people determine their fate by their own 'yes' or 'no.'

Love thinks no evil and does not accuse a friend for his choice of path. It will be wherever it is asked to come, and it will not surrender its positions where its banner stands. When you decide to love, replacing it with something else becomes dangerous, and no counterfeit will be approved by God except pure love from a pure heart.”

Timur listened and seemed to be solving some important problem. We prayed together about his struggle and committed everything into God’s hands. The next day Timur told us that he had called Alexander, asked his forgiveness, and blessed his friend to create a happy family, assuring him that he greatly regretted his behavior. He said the same to Olya, which both surprised and delighted her.

In time, Timur shared that this experience had been very necessary and valuable to him—thanks to it he was freed from the spirit of pride and began to esteem others more than himself. And the Lord replenished his “loss” so wonderfully and marvelously that afterward he was ashamed of his former attitude and frightened by what might have happened if he and Olya had formed something. A friend loves at all times—during close fellowship and during separation.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 17:17; 1 Sam. 18:3-4; 20:17, 42; 2 Sam. 1:26; 1 Cor. 13:1-8; 16:14; Prov. 17:9; Song 8:7; John 5:42; 1 John 4:20-21; Jude 1:21; Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 5:1-2; Heb. 10:24 in the light of this lesson.
2. What other Bible verses came to mind as you studied this lesson?
3. What did you understand from this topic?
4. Do friends who decided to form a family have the right to change their decision?
5. Is it right to consider as your property the friend with whom you plan to create a family?
6. Do you know people who intended to form a family and then parted ways? If so, did they remain friends afterward?

7. Do the trials described in this lesson refine the gold of love that we buy from the Lord?
8. Is it important to preserve friendship and love among friends, even if their marital status changes?
9. How should you relate to a friend with whom you failed to form a family, when they managed to build a relationship with your friend?
10. Does love for a friend die if the friend refuses a closer relationship?
11. Do you think friendship between two people of the opposite sex can lead them to create a family union?
12. Is breaking off a relationship before marriage a sin? Should people continue loving one another if this happens?
13. Is it right to set a friend free if they do not wish to create a family with you, even if you cannot imagine life without them?
14. What should you do if breaking off a relationship with a friend with whom you planned a family has caused you pain, robbed you of happiness and sleep, and plunged you into despondency?
15. How can true love resolve the problems described in this lesson?

Forced Leave

It is written in Prov. 21:19: “It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and angry wife.” There are also other similar verses that complement this thought.

One of our friends named Andy decided to share with us his experience of life with his wife Mira, his family problems, and how the Lord taught him to endure such trials with love. (Names changed.) And we decided to pass on to you fragments of his story, believing there is something informative and useful here for us as well.

In the first years of marriage, peace and harmony reigned between the newlyweds, but sometimes disagreements occurred, and the wife would run to the kitchen, lock herself in, and stay there until she calmed down. Meanwhile, Andy tried to understand his guilt and somehow fix the situation. Over time, such scenes became more frequent and turned into open grumbling over various issues, after which it was very difficult to find points of contact and they had to wait until the “storm in a teacup” subsided.

After a while they had a child, who became a witness to frequent family conflicts arising out of nothing. Andy worried not only for himself, but also about the influence Mira had on the household. For the sake of peace in the family, he was ready to make any concessions and apologize for any reason. But sometimes he grew tired of the constant struggle with a quarrelsome spirit and tried to soberly clarify the situation, striving to present everything in the right light—only making things worse.

Another quarrel would plunge Andy into despondency, and he would leave the house for a long walk. He wandered around the neighborhood, communing during this time with his Savior, wishing to understand his guilt and asking for protection for himself, his wife, and his child.

Mira was not a foolish person and behaved friendly, cheerful, and smiling in public, in no way betraying her quarrelsome

spirit. And when Andy sought counsel from his brethren, no one understood him, and many took the wife's side, aggravating an already difficult situation.

There were moments when divorce seemed the best solution to all these family problems, but it did not bring peace or wisdom; rather, it opened doors to greater temptations.

Over the years, Andy's family life turned into a constant struggle to keep his soul in the right spirit. He grew tired of arguing and defending something without any result. He began to understand that love could solve all these tasks in the best way and started asking for this power and receiving answers from the Lord.

At one wonderful moment, after yet another prayer for love, Andy realized that he loved, and that something had switched in his consciousness. He did not yet understand the full force of what he had received, but he was so glad that God had found a more excellent way, which opened grand prospects for victory and spiritual growth.

Andy's numerous anxieties were replaced by a decision to love his wife whenever an evil spirit broke out from under control and again began to defile the peaceful home atmosphere. Andy noticed how love for his wife helped him correctly assess the situation and restrain a fair natural emotional reaction, yet behave calmly under all kinds of attacks and reduce everything to love and peace.

Mira, not encountering the usual resistance to her rudeness, at first was at a loss, not knowing how to behave further, but then decided to demonstratively slam doors as a sign of her "victory," after which she would not speak for weeks until she came to herself. After some time she wished to leave the ranks of God's church and live her own life, which greatly grieved her husband.

Meanwhile, love continued to teach Andy to gain victory after victory over his egoism and brought into his life new revelations about its power, its might, and about how God manifests Himself in this Heavenly quality of the soul. To every foul word

and spit in the face from his wife he responded with a quiet prayer for love toward this person and did not offer corresponding resistance, grieving that his love was not being accepted by the dearest person.

At a certain point in his interesting trials, Andy decided to look at his situation from another side. He realized that anxieties about the lack of peace in the family and the “silent treatment” brought no positive result to his experience, and he decided to accept this as an inevitability with which he would have to live. And since such scenes began to take on a stable character, he called this time a “forced leave” from his wife. At the next explosion in their relationship, Andy thanked the Lord for a new “leave,” during which he could attend to his own affairs, solve his issues independently, report to no one about his daily routine, and not suffer from empty anxieties. And notably, what had previously destroyed his happiness and peace of heart now delighted him with an abundance of free time, which could be filled with various kinds of ministry and work.

At the same time, Andy did not throw off the family duties placed on him by God, but continued to care for his wife with tenderness and love, not allowing himself even the thought of leaving her.

Mira demanded attention only to herself and was jealous of any kind of fellowship Andy had with his friends and fellow believers. Therefore he had to build any relationships outside the home and tell Mira nothing about new friends and the blessings the Lord gave him through these acquaintances and personal interactions with other people.

He understood that it is not always right to give holy things to one who has an evil temper, and to cast the pearls of trusting relationships before people who are unable to distinguish the holy from the unclean. Therefore he had to carry all these heavenly treasures with himself and share them with those who needed and longed for them.

The situation in Andy’s family was not resolved even when the entire Heavenly Agape was brought into the family atmosphere.

But Andy himself became different—a more loving, sensitive, and responsible husband, who consciously did not allow anything that could harm his wife. He understood that perhaps Mira would be able to appreciate his true attitude only after his death, but for now he was not planning to die and cheerfully looked at life, bringing forth the precious from the worthless.

Love does its work in the lives of those who open their hearts to it and thirst to wage every battle and gain every victory precisely in this way.

The problem in Andy's relationships did not go anywhere, but became even more complex and incomprehensible. But his outlook changed. And what had previously killed and destroyed him now began to strengthen and cheer him—in the sad sense of the word.

Though he is sorry that his wife is losing so many blessings, he respects her choice and lives in what he chooses himself.

And how many similar families are there in every church? And how important it is to understand that a different view of an impossible situation can change everything in the heart and bring that solution to the problem which one had not previously considered.

We will be glad to learn if this unusual view of family problems helps any of you.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Prov. 14:1; 19:13; 21:9-10, 19; 25:24, 28; 26:21; 27:15; James 3:13-18; 1 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 3:1-7; 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Matt. 5:44-48; Eph. 5:25-28; 1 Pet. 3:7; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 6:6-7 in the light of this lesson.
2. What other verses from the Bible came to your mind?
3. What did you understand from this topic?
4. Why is it written that "it is better to live alone," when in another place it says that "it is not good that the man should be alone"?

5. Is it pleasant to Heaven to see one person tempt another and then make him guilty of their sins?
6. Where does a quarrelsome spirit come from, and is it needed in a family to establish order?
7. Have you lived together with a quarrelsome person under one roof?
8. Can one and the same temptation be met with different reactions and different behavior?
9. Is the saying correct that everything that does not kill us makes us stronger?
10. Have you decided to reconsider your attitude toward some factors in your life that trouble you?
11. Do you think the one who overcomes evil with good can teach this to other people?
12. Is power from above needed in order to resist all evil with love?
13. What did Jesus mean when He said that a man's enemies will be those of his own household? (Matt. 10:36).
14. Are you able to learn from the examples and mistakes of others?
15. In your opinion, is Andy from this story a victor? If yes, in what? If not, why?

One of the Secrets of Family Happiness

Try to tame some animal. What is needed for this? You simply start feeding it every day, speaking gently to it, if possible stroking it, and you remain consistent in this process. What will happen? This animal will get used to you, begin to trust you, love you, wait for you, and stop being afraid of you.

When two people plan to start a family, they very much want to know how well they suit each other, how ready they are to receive something from one another and to serve one another. And then you begin to search, choosing from a thousand people the one you could take care of. And thanks to such an attitude, this person becomes attached to you over time, because everyone likes those who take care of them.

But when a family is created, something amazing and interesting happens. Someone may decide that since he has a second half, she must now look after him, take care of him, think about his happiness, please him in everything, not argue about anything, and do everything his soul desires. And the other half wants the same. And what happens? Two egoists cannot figure out why before the wedding everything was so wonderful, and now no one even thinks about me.

Love is constant care for the one whom you love. It is the study of their needs, satisfying their necessities, constant attention to the one you have chosen among your beloved people. Caring for another person revives love in the heart, and the more you care for this beloved person, the more you love them.

Let us take, for example, inanimate things. I bought myself a car. And I wished to buy all sorts of accessories for it—new tires, beautiful stickers. I decided to wash it and maintain order inside and out. The more I invest money, effort, and time into this car, the more I begin to love it. This is a law. If I begin to invest my time, my means, my strength, my interests into something, then I involuntarily begin to value and love it in a special way. I grow attached with my heart to that in which I have an interest and about which I care most. Ask yourself what

is dearest to you. I think that the most valuable thing will turn out to be that which cost you very much in money, in time, in care, in necessity.

And people are not things. They can receive something from you and give you something in return.

One can look at family relationships in the following way. When I come to love my wife, then I will begin to take care of her, do everything for her, and all my motives and deeds will have the firmest foundation and the right motives. But here is the problem: love never came. I even decided to read about love and figure out how it works. And how can one take care of someone without love? It will be some kind of hypocrisy and theater. People will think that I love, but I do not feel it at all.

But one can look at the family differently. Even though I have no feelings that I could call love, there are obligations—to love the one I chose and promised to care for in joy and in sorrow, in health and in sickness, in poverty and in wealth, until death parts us. And I simply do what I promised. At first this may seem difficult, but constant care for my second half teaches me many good things. I invest my strength in her, my earned means, I devote time to her—time from which my whole life consists. I study her habits and tastes, listen to her stories about life, and through them get to know better the one who, as it turns out, is such a wondrous soul. And after many years I suddenly realize that this person has become very dear and precious to me, although I still do not understand what love should be. My attitude toward my wife is not like in a movie or a popular novel, but I am comfortable and cozy with her, and I do not begrudge anything that I invest in her.

Some acquaintances of mine bought a small iguana. This is one of the varieties of reptiles. For several years they cared for this lizard, and it grew in size to two meters including the tail. Every time the owner came to clean up its droppings, this lizard tried to bite him. But he already knew its habits and was much more agile than this iguana. If an animal has a damaged mind, then you will not be able to tame it, and it will always be a danger. But if we speak of a cat or a dog, you can predict how

your care for these animals will end. You will become inseparable friends, and these creatures will always love you and consider you their master.

There is a law of love which says that you will certainly come to love the one you care for and into whom you invest with all your heart. And this person will someday also come to value you and become attached to you with all their heart. But there are exceptions, when the person you care for has a damaged mind or a seared conscience. He simply does not understand that he needs to value your care and somehow respond in kind.

It also happens that at the center of the chosen person's life there is an idol named "self," which dictates only: "I, mine, to me, for me, about me..." How can such people be helped? Hard to say. And even your love and care for them will change little in their worldview. But perhaps after your death, when the one who thought only of them is gone, they will understand what kind of friend was beside them for so many years, and now they are needed by no one.

The commandment to love one another excludes one-sided egoism and calls friends to right relationships in mutual care for the needs of the other.

When you buy yourself a kitten, you do not think about how often it will bite and scratch you. You plan to give it a home in your house, to feed it, to love and care for it, and you have no doubt that this animal will love you. And in caring for it you receive what you expected.

And what prevents you from receiving from marriage that for which you created it? Did the spouse turn out not to be the right one? And how much have you invested in them?

Someone will say: "I did this and that for him, and also this. And he... If I had known, I would not have done anything!" Do you think your life will be better without caring for another? Do you really wish to become an egoist who thinks only about himself?

My acquaintance who raised reptiles in his house, although he received nothing from them in return, nevertheless learned to care for the needs of others. And when he had a wife, he transferred all his experience of care to her. She bore him two daughters, whom he also joyfully cared for and continues to do so to this day. Good habits help form good character and bring much benefit to the soul. And if a reptile likes being a reptile, then that is its concern and its choice, which may differ from mine.

Someone may read this and decide that all this is only words and nothing works. But try it, and you will see how something changes in your heart—how the world becomes more interesting and loved ones become closer. And you will certainly come to love that into which you begin to invest, and the one for whom you begin to care. And whether they respond in kind or not—that is the personal choice of the one to whom you decide to do good.

Here it is—family happiness—right nearby.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read 1 Tim. 5:8; Phil. 2:4-5; Ps. 141:4; Prov. 12:10; 29:10; Eccl. 3:9-13; 5:8-9; Isa. 32:9-18; Jer. 29:7; Luke 10:41-42; 1 Pet. 5:7; 1 Cor. 7:32-35; 12:21-27; Phil. 2:19-22; 4:10 in light of this lesson.
2. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
3. What did you understand from this topic?
4. Is it necessary to care so diligently for family happiness, or will it come on its own?
5. Do you have favorite things? If yes, in light of this lesson, how do they differ from others?
6. Do household animals understand the language of care toward them?
7. Do you think your language of caring for your neighbor is the language of agape love?

8. Why do we become attached with our hearts to that into which we invest the most? (Matt. 6:21).

9. Do you enjoy caring for someone?

10. What happens in the heart of the one who begins to care for someone?

11. How and in what is care for another expressed?

12. Do you think there will be happiness where he and she care for one another?

13. What should you do if you want to care for someone, but there is no one?

14. What should you do if those you care for do not value your efforts?

15. Do you think caring for your neighbor will become a habit if you begin to practice it?

The Weaker Vessel

I have a lot of different dishes in my house. There are disposable plates and cups that I can use for various needs and then throw away without even washing them.

I also have everyday dishes that I can use without fear of breaking anything. These plates are so sturdy that I don't think about how careful I need to be with them. If they fall and break, I easily replace them with others, rejoicing that I can at last legitimately renew my dishes.

In my wall cabinet there is also a white porcelain dinner set with a gold ornament. I usually use it only when guests come, and they need to be fed and especially delighted. I carefully take out these dishes, set them on the table, and then just as carefully collect them and wash them thoroughly, so I can put them back in the cabinet and admire them until the next visit of guests. And if guests do not come, then this set remains untouched until better times and, by its appearance, lets me know that it exists. I have grown used to its presence and sometimes do not even notice it, and I admire it only when there is a need to use it.

But the most valuable thing I have among my dishes is a bone-china tea set—a cup and saucer with a beautiful pattern. I received it as a gift from my best Friend. It is so thin and delicate that when you take it in your hands and look through it at the light, it shines through with purity. This set stands in the sideboard in the place of highest honor and constantly delights my eyes. I always take out this set with special tenderness to drink tasty beverages from it and show remarkable caution so as not to accidentally break anything. Any wholesome drink in this vessel acquires an unusual taste, and the sound of the cup touching the saucer is like a crystal bell, which also delights my ear. And the very awareness of how precious a gift it is makes my handling of it a celebration and the most solemn event of my meal. I wash it with special care, wipe it, and put it back in place under the protection of glass doors, so that it is visible to

everyone, but does not gather dust and remains intact and unharmed.

When guests come and ask permission to hold this set in their hands, I give it not very willingly and immediately warn them to be very careful. I always keep my hands at the ready to prevent any breakage and take this set from other people's hands if any danger threatens it. Guests usually understand my care for this set, especially when I name its price and tell how dear it is to me, how it delights my heart, and how many pleasant memories it brings me.

A wife is not a disposable plate that can be used for any selfish purposes and then thrown into the trash heap of history.

A wife is not everyday crockery that can be scratched and broken without regret and, if necessary, replaced with something new and modern. This is not a table utensil for satisfying daily needs.

A wife is not even a festive dinner set to be displayed for show with beautiful shapes and ornaments, in order to amaze friends with exotic looks and rare contents.

A wife is a fragile, weaker vessel that must be guarded with special care, constantly looked after for its safety, kept away from curious eyes, protected from dirt and dust, and from personal use bring the maximum of delight, safeguarding this precious set as the apple of one's own eye.

My wife has been presented to me by my Heavenly Friend as the very best gift, in order to teach me to treat this precious vessel—which the Bible calls weak—with special tenderness and love.

Why does the inspired Word call wives so? Weaker does not mean unnecessary and ready-to-be-broken. It means that such a person needs a special attitude and an understanding of how carefully one should treat her, how deeply one should study the inner content of a woman and try to understand her with one's limited mind.

Not every man is given to understand a woman, but every wise person can begin to study this creation of God and see how perfect this being is, which, by the way, is created in the Image and likeness of God and reflects a special facet of God's character, uniquely revealing the beauty of the Creator in combination with the nature of man.

Women are more emotional and receptive. They are distinguished by greater sensitivity and impressionability than men, and this makes them more vulnerable to all sorts of emotional shocks.

Hormonal changes in a woman's body can very quickly change her mood, both in one direction and in the other, and you cannot predict what to expect from this person in various life trials—especially when she feels loved and free in expressing her feelings and emotions.

A woman, as a rule, is physically weaker than a man and is not created to perform coarse and heavy labor, but always needs someone who would help and do what is beyond her strength. And it can be so pleasant to feel strong next to such a weak being and to serve her with all your heart, evoking genuine admiration for your physical capabilities!

In many women, during the days of cleansing, the body loses beneficial substances, without which she quickly becomes tired and deprived of cheerfulness and productivity. Circumstances force many wives to work beyond their strength, which ultimately exhausts them and makes them more weak. And a man sometimes cannot understand these internal processes, and a conflict arises that only makes everything worse.

The female body is more vulnerable to all kinds of physical, emotional, and spiritual attacks from outside; therefore it should be carefully guarded and, as much as possible, protected from external negative impact.

A wife is a beautiful, tender flower which, with proper nourishment and treatment, delights you with her beauty and unusual fragrance. Any sensible gardener understands that a delicate plant will perish with improper care and takes

measures to grow what he wants to have. But in family relationships, husbands sometimes for some reason think that they have acquired a wild plant that should somehow take care of itself and defend its interests.

Although in some respects women surpass men in development and intuition, this does not make them strong and independent. We are still needed by them as protectors and as those behind whose back they can feel safe.

A wife is given for love, and she always needs this from her husband.

We read in 1 Pet. 3:7: “Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered.” The Apostle calls me to show special honor, delicacy, and caution in my relationship with my wife. And it is worth paying attention to this counsel of the disciple of Jesus. And the commandment of Jesus about love for one another calls me to love my wife at all times.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Isa. 53:4; 2 Cor. 12:9; Col. 3:19; Rom. 12:9–10; 15:1; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:1–13; Gen. 2:22–24; Amos 3:3; John 13:34–35; 15:17; 1 Cor. 7:3–6, 33; 11:8–12; 12:22–27; Eph. 5:25–33 in light of this lesson.
2. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
3. What did you understand from this topic?
4. How do you understand the expression “weaker vessel”?
5. Did the Lord create woman as a “weaker vessel”?
6. Is there anything wrong with the fact that in some cases men are stronger than women and more resilient to various trials?
7. What will happen in the relationship of spouses who understand God’s plan for their happiness and realize who they are in the light of the Bible?

8. Have you ever felt strong alongside those who are weaker than you?

9. Is strength given to men so that they would offend the weaker, or for some other purposes?

10. Is it pleasant for you to realize that you are a weaker vessel, and there is no getting away from this now?

11. How does Heaven look at those women who decide that they are the main ones in the family and desperately fight for this right, considering their husbands weak?

12. What does the Lord expect from “mighty husbands” in their attitude toward “weaker wives”?

13. Do you think a woman who is loved as the weaker one, who is protected, cared for, shielded from dangers, and served—will be happy? Will this demean her?

14. Does the Lord consider His Church a “weaker vessel”?

15. Can we see, in the example of Christ’s love for His Church, how husbands should love their wives?

Humor in the Family

A sense of humor is a God-given gift embedded in human nature that helps to resolve many issues very quickly, smooth out “sharp corners,” destroy the schemes of the evil one, find ways to a person’s heart, change the mood, and bring joy into life.

We should not confuse a sense of humor with buffoonery, which is condemned by the Word of God. Humor is part of human nature. Everyone has a sense of humor, and everyone understands it. But if any gift of God is driven to extremity or fanaticism, this can be regarded as sin and become a curse for the soul.

A sense of humor is the ability to see positive sides in everything, to emphasize them, and to present them to others in a positive light. It is the ability to convey complex information in an understandable way, using visual aids and helps. It is the opportunity to highlight important details in life and everyday living so that listeners pay attention to them. It is refined sensitivity to the mood and perception of the interlocutor, able to find access to the heart, break down barriers, bring out the bright sides of life, introduce friendly notes, and create an atmosphere of optimism.

We are made in such a way that we are drawn to people with whom we can have a fun time, converse joyfully, and receive a charge of positivity to improve our mood and quality of life. Cheerful people possess the gift of influencing the hormonal system of other people, thereby increasing the level of endorphin and serotonin, removing stress and tension.

The family is the very best platform for developing a sense of humor, where no one is afraid to look silly or absurd. The understanding that humor is appropriate in family relationships and should be present in our interaction should not become a reason for the artificial production of this gift.

Internet culture greatly contributes to teaching us frivolity, vulgarity, foolishness, ignorance, and buffoonery under the

guise of humor. This unclean spirit appeals to our carnal nature, and if my mind is saturated with such information, then this spirit will manifest itself everywhere. There is a very fine line between innocent joy and sinful buffoonery, which only the Holy Spirit can determine.

A cheerful atmosphere is welcomed in our family, and we are tuned to positivity, jokes, and merriment. But there are also serious things that we never try to treat ironically or turn into a joke. This concerns the science of Salvation, relationships with God, and any Biblical narratives, which we set apart as holy things to be treated with reverence and respect. No jokes on this topic are welcomed or supported. Also, if any of our friends experiences grief, we treat this with particular seriousness. In other cases we are open to joy in the Holy Spirit.

I do not know how this happens, but in communicating with those whom you love, the heart always prompts some feature of these relationships in order to express a positive thought in a cheerful key. And this evokes a responsive smile and creates a pleasant atmosphere in communication. Usually the interlocutor who also has a sense of humor very quickly finds appropriate cheerful words in order to make his own good contribution to our relationship.

Humor in our family makes our home bright, freeing us from many complexes and reducing various anxieties to nothing. Although we are not deprived of the choice of what mood to spend our personal time with, our mutual cheerfulness helps us choose what will delight the heart and become a fellow traveler in good spirits.

If you think about it, God is not a stranger to a sense of humor either, since He put it in us, creating us in His likeness. Now a very serious stage of Christ's ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary is underway, and jokes are out of place there. But the time will come when sin will be removed and evil will not be. Then we will see how wonderful a God we have, and how wise and cheerful He is.

When King Solomon described his relationship with the Shulamite in the Song of Songs, then, I think, they exchanged in real life those images and comparisons about which we read with amazement, trying to understand what it looks like. And, most likely, it was very joyful for both of them to hear whom they resembled and to devise images in response, some of which have come down to us as an example of building a friendly family.

In our family we try and test everything we agree on, and we adhere to that from which we both feel good. In our communication there are many jokes and catchphrases that are understood only by the two of us, and we do not need extra words for explanation. But we keep this within the framework of our relationship. It also happens that, wishing to turn something into a joke, one of us begins to look very silly or demeans the other. Then this is immediately voiced, and a polite request “not to do this anymore” is made, which is received with humility and marked in memory as foolishness that should not be repeated.

Everything we experience together is our family heritage, and we do not share all this with others, although we often immerse ourselves in the world of pleasant memories to rejoice again in the blessings experienced earlier.

Our family humor unites my wife and me into one good team in which we can solve difficult tasks without unnecessary stress and tension. We remember all the good that we experience in our relationship and approach the solution of other issues with ease.

When you love God and love the one with whom you have decided to live your whole life, then this love makes all your jokes appropriate, kind, and wise, helping you also to shape your consciousness in a positive key. And then this same spirit of love can be very easily transferred into other communities, sharing the purity of thoughts in the simplicity of heart. Pure humor is appropriate everywhere, and this speaks of a developed intellect capable of noticing important details and presenting them as understandable images.

What do parents do when their little children fall into despondency? They try to cheer up their sad offspring and know how to do it. And usually humor, love, and respect for the child very quickly solve his problem.

What do we call those who are deprived of a sense of humor? "Dry sticks" or "gray mice," which we will never say about cheerful people.

"A merry heart does good like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

It is written about Jesus that "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied..." (Isa. 53:11). How do you imagine our Lord in the light of this description? I think it will be the most beautiful face with a radiant smile. Jesus will be ready to receive anyone who wishes into His arms and to say to each personally something so cheerful that it will bring immeasurable joy to the heart. And if we consider that the Lord is perfect in everything, and every one of His words has a special meaning and wisdom, then I think He will vividly open to us such depths of His satisfaction with us that we will be amazed at the possibilities that can be revealed and known only in the spirit of mutual and pure Agape.

If someone practices a different model of relationships in his family, this does not embarrass us. We build our country according to our laws and rules, which suit us very well.

Questions for Reflection

1. Please read Eccl. 3:11-13; 8:15; 11:8-10; Prov. 8:29-31; 15:13-17; 17:22; Deut. 12:12; 16:21; 24:5; 28:47; Ps. 18:9; 32:11; 96:11; Isa. 65:18; Acts 2:44-47; James 5:13; Rev. 19:7 in light of this lesson.
2. What other Bible verses came to your mind?
3. What did you understand from this topic?
4. What is a sense of humor?
5. Does the Bible prohibit merriment in the simplicity of heart?

6. What is the difference between merriment and buffoonery? (Eph. 5:4).
7. Have you experienced cases when appropriate jokes brought a joyful spirit into your life and relieved tension in relationships?
8. Does it not embarrass you that one of the components of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy?
9. How do you imagine joy without a smile, merriment, and optimism?
10. What is the difference between jokes and humor in the family and the same behavior in church?
11. Is it permissible to smile during worship?
12. How can a gift of God be driven to extremity or fanaticism and be made into a curse?
13. Are internet gags and fun entertainments part of God's plan for cheering the heart?
14. Do you understand the difference and distinction in humor between its holy and unclean manifestations?
15. Is a serious look always appropriate in a happy family?
16. Does a happy atmosphere in the family imply something joyful and fun?