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One Flame

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Designed by Timothy R. Botts

Edited by Lynn Vanderzalm

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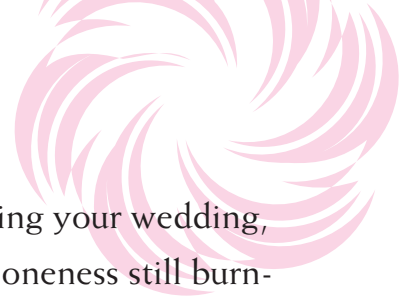
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FEW THINGS are more beautiful than the flame of a unity candle burning brightly during a wedding ceremony. It is a picture of the truth that in marriage, the two become one.

Oneness is the strength of marriage, a safe harbor. It is the place where the couple is stronger than either partner is separately.



If you lit the flame of a unity candle during your wedding, the question to you is this: Is your flame of oneness still burning brightly?

In other words, do you feel a deep sense of oneness in your marriage today? Do you feel safe and satisfied with a deep intimacy that you both enjoy? Are you as happily married as you would like to be? I truly believe that this little book can bring you the simplest but greatest truth I've ever learned about how couples become very satisfied and stay in love.

The Amazing Secret of the Unity Candle

If you used the unity candle in your wedding, did you understand what you were doing? Norma and I used it, but I'm not certain I understood the meaning behind the lighting ceremony at the time.

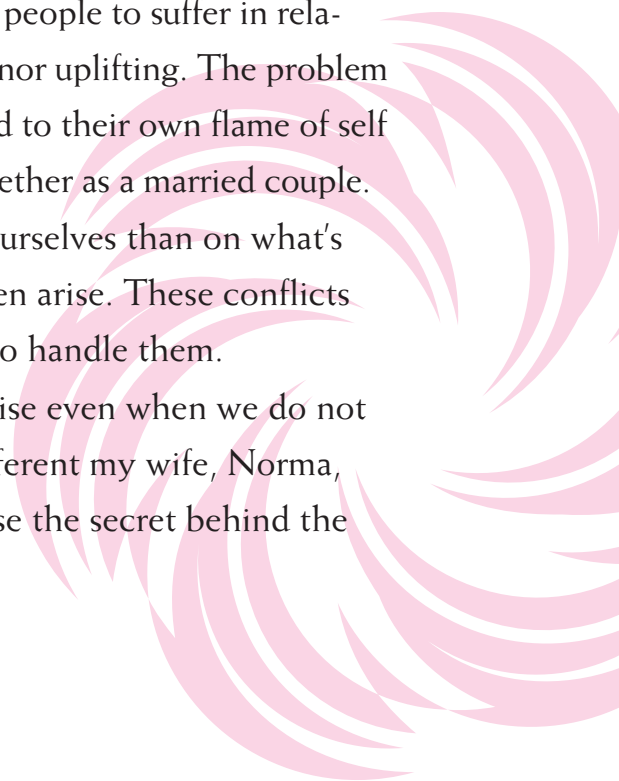
Now that I do understand it, I believe that within this

simple ceremony lie the secrets to a better marriage. The greatest secret of all is oneness: the ability to let go of our single status and join together with our spouse for all of life. By the end of this book, I believe you'll understand what I have learned about the unity-candle ceremony's amazing value.

The lack of oneness causes many people to suffer in relationships that are neither rewarding nor uplifting. The problem is that these people are more devoted to their own flame of self than to the one flame they share together as a married couple.

When we are focused more on ourselves than on what's good for our marriage, conflicts often arise. These conflicts can drain us if we don't know how to handle them.

Conflicts are inevitable. They arise even when we do not invite them. Take a look at how different my wife, Norma, and I are. Before we knew how to use the secret behind the



unity-candle ceremony, this event could have been one more conflict to blow out our "light."

A Hot Time in the Smalley Home

One day I was getting ready for a trip and wanted to do a bit of laundry before I packed. When I opened the washer, I saw that some of Norma's clothing was in the bottom, waiting to be placed in the dryer. I took out the clothing—some lacy lingerie and a few white sweaters—and put them on top of the dryer. I then put my clothes in the washer and started to walk away.

Suddenly I was struck by an idea. I could do a very loving, sensitive thing for my wife. And loving, sensitive things, I told myself, are rare.

I put Norma's delicate items in the dryer to fluff them for five minutes. I had seen her do this before and knew it was what she would have done. After five minutes I would take



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them out of the dryer and hang them in the laundry room. I could picture her coming downstairs and thanking me, telling me what a loving, thoughtful husband I was.

So I did that very thing.

I put all her clothes in the dryer and left the laundry room to do something else. Something that would take five minutes.

But one minute led to three, and suddenly my ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) kicked in and I got distracted. I had things to do in the kitchen and upstairs and outside.

About two hours later I went downstairs to the laundry room. As I stood in front of the washer and dryer, I knew I was there for some special reason. But I couldn't remember what it was. I scratched my head, hoping that would help me remember what I had to do in the laundry room.

Then I remembered.

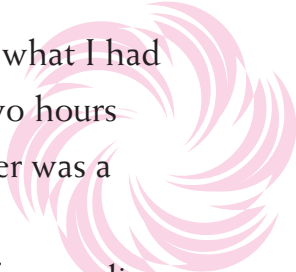


Is the flame still burning?

"Aahhhh, the dryer!" I shouted.

It was worse than I had expected. All of Norma's clothing was totally destroyed. The lace had unraveled and wrapped around other things. The sweaters had shrunk down to the size of Barbie doll clothes.

Suddenly the picture I had of Norma's seeing what I had done was very different from the picture I had two hours earlier, back when putting her clothes in the dryer was a loving, sensitive thing for me to do.



I was in water so hot I could almost feel *myself* unraveling and shrinking.

Then I had another idea.

I know, I thought, I'll just put these clothes back in the washer, run them through the wash cycle again, and wait for Norma to find them. She'll see them and say to me, "Honey, something's wrong with the washer. I think we need a new one."



And I, of course, would say, "Yes, dear! I'm sure we do. Let's go get one today!"

Then I'd be out of trouble.

But since honesty and honor go hand in hand and I truly had intended to honor my wife, I let go of the thought almost as quickly as it came to me. *No*, I decided, *I'm going to face this and be honest with her*. I blinked a few times and tried to imagine how I might break the news.

Humor!

Yes, humor always defuses anger. Not only that, but it makes our negotiation process easier. I puzzled for a while about how to make the situation sound funny and then went back upstairs to find Norma. With the courage of an elephant in a field of mice, I opened her office door and tiptoed in.

"Hi, honey," I said, smiling in a way that was meant to test

her mood. She looked up from her paperwork and cast me a level gaze.

Then she smiled in a way that said, *Why are you in my office?* Instead she said, "Hi."

I swallowed. "I've got good news and bad news. Which do you want first?" I figured she'd want the bad news since her perfectionistic personality usually wants to get past the negatives.

"What?" She sighed. "I don't understand, but give me the bad news first."

The words began to tumble out. "I want to apologize ahead of time and tell you that I'm really sorry and that I wanted to do a really nice thing for you and that I never meant for it to sour . . . but I dried your clothes."

With a quick gasp, she threw up her hands and started running toward the door. But before she could leave her desk, I gently grabbed her arm. "No, wait, you have to hear the good news."

She looked me right in the eye, and her lips formed a stiff line. "What could possibly be good about this?"

"Well," I said, forcing the corners of my mouth up, "Taylor [our granddaughter] has a brand-new wardrobe!"

That's funny! Don't you think so?

Norma didn't.

She never even cracked a smile. She was out of my grasp instantly, heading downstairs, muttering. When she finally came back up, it was with all the enthusiasm of someone who had just had her purse stolen.

"You've ruined all my lingerie and sweaters! Everything! It's gone. Just like that."

I didn't say anything because the Bible says that even a fool will stay out of trouble if he keeps his mouth shut. I left her alone, and about two hours later, I called her cell phone.



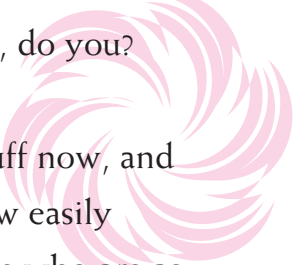
Is the flame still burning?

She listened to my apology. Eventually she forgave me. I could feel her spirit opening up to me.

"Hey," I offered. "Want me to take you to the outlet mall in Branson and replace the items?"

She was silent for a while, and I wondered if she had heard me. Finally she spoke: "You just don't understand, do you? Those things are very, very hard to find."

I didn't discuss it anymore. She has all new stuff now, and everything is fine. But the incident points out how easily conflict can arise—especially between two people who are as different as Norma and I are. Norma is very detail-oriented, and she likes to do things by the book. (It obviously works when it comes to drying clothes.) I, on the other hand, am spontaneous and scattered. (That doesn't always work.) Our individual personalities are often vastly different in areas that go beyond the care of delicate clothing.



But along the journey of marriage we have learned how to blend our differences and seek solutions that fan the flame of love that unites us.

Picture it. Our marriage is like the unity-candle display: three candles—two short ones on the outside representing Norma and me as individuals, and a taller one in the center representing our marriage.

Let's take a closer look at the unity candle and the lessons we can learn by studying the flame of oneness.

The Ceremony

If you haven't seen the unity-candle ceremony performed in a wedding, here's how it works. Three candles are placed at the front of the church. At a time early in the ceremony, someone lights the outside candles, leaving the one in the middle unlit. The two lit candles represent the bride and