

A DEVOTIONAL *for* COUPLES

NIGHT
LIGHT



DR. JAMES & SHIRLEY
DOBSON



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Night Light

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This book is dedicated affectionately to married couples around the world. May the Lord grant you loving and caring relationships that will endure to the final moment of your lives together. It is our prayer that this devotional will help you achieve that worthy objective. God's blessings to you all.

Jim and Shirley Dobson

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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INTRODUCTION



In a warm August night in Pasadena, California, a twenty-four-year-old man dressed in a black and white tuxedo and a twenty-three-year-old woman wearing a resplendent gown stood in a church and solemnly pledged their undying love to each other. The young man slipped a silver band on the woman's finger, wishing he could have afforded a diamond ring. Then the couple knelt at the altar as the minister (the groom's father) prayed this beautiful prayer of dedication:

O eternal God: We bring Thee our children, Jimmy and Shirley. They were Thine, but Thou in love didst lend them to us for a little season to care for, to love, and to cherish. It has been a labor of love that has seemed but a few days because of the affection we bear them. Fresh from Thy hand they were in the morning of their lives. Clean and upright, but yet two separate personalities. Tonight we give them back to Thee—no longer as two—but as one flesh. *May nothing short of death dissolve the union here cemented.* And to this end let the marvelous grace of God do its perfect work!

It is also our earnest prayer for them, *not* that God shall have a part in their lives, but that He shall have the preeminent part; not that they shall possess faith, but that faith shall fully possess them both; that in a materialistic world they shall not live for the earthly and temporal alone, but that they shall be enabled to lay hold of that which is *spiritual* and *eternal*.

Let their lives together be like the course of the sun—rising in strength, going forth in power, and shining more and more unto the perfect day. Let the end of their lives resemble the setting of the sun—going down in a sea of glory, only to shine on

undimmed in the firmament of a better world than this.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Many in attendance that night had moist eyes by the time the minister had finished his prayer. Then he pronounced the couple “man and wife” and said with a wry smile, “Kiss ’er Jim.” The groom didn’t argue. After greeting the well-wishers, eating some dreadful cake, and posing for the perspiring photographer, they left on a low-budget honeymoon. And . . . they had only just begun.

How quickly the years have flown since that humble beginning more than four decades ago. Marriage has fulfilled all their youthful expectations and dreams. The man and woman are still deeply committed to each other and have enjoyed the sweet benefits of a happy, successful, loving relationship. Every good and perfect gift has been showered upon them, including the blessing of two great kids, who are now grown and serving the Lord in their communities.

Of course, the journey has not been without stresses and difficulties. The man’s beloved parents died much too soon, and an assortment of illnesses and challenges have visited the couple along the way. But there has not been one moment in these forty years when they have wished to be free or have regretted the decision they made in their youth.

As you may have guessed by this point, we are the fortunate couple—Jim and Shirley Dobson. Our purpose in preparing this devotional has been to share some of the experiences and concepts that have strengthened our marriage through the years, in the hope that what we have learned will benefit those who are younger.

We are deeply concerned about the scourge of divorce that plagues mankind today. A recent study conducted at Rutgers University concluded that the institution of marriage appears to be dying in the United States. Similar trends are occurring in nations around the world. Since 1960 cohabitation has increased by 1,000 percent, with millions of naive couples entering into nonbinding, uncommitted relationships that are destined to flame out. Boredom and disenchantment, or both, are virtu-

ally inevitable after a few years. By the time they go their separate ways, the man and woman may have a child or two—children who will never enjoy the security of a stable, dedicated, two-parent family. It is a very sad sign of the times.

Why do young couples do it? Why do they settle for impermanent, unsatisfying, counterfeit relationships instead of committing themselves to lifelong love? We believe it is because many have a pervasive fear of marriage. They have watched their mothers and fathers claw each other to pieces. Teens and young adults want desperately to find someone to love but are afraid of being vulnerable—of being rejected and abandoned. Some wonder if marriage itself is *passé* and whether lifelong love is still achievable in today's world.

Well, we are living testimony to the fact that marriage based on a foundation of biblical principles is not only still workable, but offers the most fulfilling human relationship possible. There is nothing quite like being loved unconditionally and intimately, decade after decade, by someone who promises to be there for better or worse, in sickness and health, whether richer or poorer, forsaking all others—*all* others—until separated by death. It is a plan that bears the wisdom and compassion of the Creator Himself. The three pillars on which such a relationship is based are a deep and unshakable faith in Jesus Christ, an ironclad commitment to each other, and a dependence upon the eternal truths of the Holy Scriptures. With those weapons in the family arsenal, nothing can tear down the fortress of love.

Night Light is designed to help you build on such a foundation. It provides twenty-six weeks (six months) of devotionals that explore different topics relating to marriage: communication, romance, forgiveness, money, humor, and many more. Each Sunday an inspirational story, followed by a brief commentary, introduces a different theme. The sessions planned for Monday through Friday address the theme through Scripture verses, insights, suggestions, and a few provocative questions to encourage deeper intimacy between you, your spouse, and the Lord. A prayer concludes the day. Then Shirley gets the last word on Saturday, when she wraps up the week with a final comment.

A key feature of *Night Light* is that it is intended for couples to read *together*. We know that you are busy and under stress. We understand that you often approach the end of the day with barely enough energy to brush your teeth, let alone think about analyzing every facet of your marriage. That's why we've designed each session to offer helpful information and insights in ten minutes or less. As you read the stories and commentaries, we hope you will reflect on the relevant passages of Scripture and consider how they apply to your family. There is hope, humor, and practical wisdom in the pages of this book. Our prayer is that our words will enrich your spiritual life, bring you closer to your partner, and renew your marriage.

May God bless you both. Happy reading . . . and don't forget to turn off the light.

Jim and Shirley Dobson

W E E K O N E

True Love



"SHMILY"

by *Laura Jeanne Allen*

*M*y grandparents were married for over half a century. From the time they met each other they played their own special game. The goal of their game was to write the word "shmily" in a surprise place for the other to find. They took turns leaving "shmily" around the house, and as soon as one of them discovered it, it was his or her turn to hide it once more.

They dragged "shmily" with their fingers through the sugar and flour containers to await whoever was preparing the next meal. They smeared it in the dew on the windows overlooking the patio where my grandma always fed us warm, homemade pudding with blue food coloring. "Shmily" was written in the steam on the bathroom mirror, where it would reappear after every hot shower. At one point, my grandmother even unrolled an entire roll of toilet paper to leave "shmily" on the very last sheet.

There was no end to the places "shmily" popped up. Little notes with a hastily scribbled "shmily" were found on dashboards and car seats or taped to steering wheels. The notes were stuffed inside shoes and left under pillows. "Shmily" was written in the dust upon the mantel and traced in the ashes of the fireplace. This mysterious word was as much a part of my grandparents' house as the furniture.

It took me a long time before I fully appreciated my grandparents' game. Skepticism has kept me from believing in true love—one that is pure and enduring. However, I never doubted my grandparents' relationship. They had love down pat. It was more than their flirtatious little games; it was a way of life. Their relationship was based on a devotion and passionate affection that not everyone experiences.

Grandma and Grandpa held hands every chance they could. They stole kisses as they bumped into each other in their tiny kitchen. They finished each other's sentences and shared the daily crossword puzzle and

word jumble. My grandma whispered to me about how cute my grandpa was, how handsome an old man he had grown to be. She claimed that she really knew “how to pick ’em.” Before every meal they bowed their heads and gave thanks, marveling at their blessings: a wonderful family, good fortune, and each other.

But there was a dark cloud in my grandparents’ life: My grandmother had breast cancer. The disease had first appeared ten years earlier. As always, Grandpa was with her every step of the way. He comforted her in their yellow room, painted that way so that she could always be surrounded by sunshine, even when she was too sick to go outside.

Now the cancer was again attacking her body. With the help of a cane and my grandfather’s steady hand, she went to church with him every Sunday. But my grandmother grew steadily weaker until, finally, she could not leave the house anymore. For a while, Grandpa would go to church alone, praying to God to watch over his wife. Then one day, what we all dreaded finally happened. Grandma was gone.

“Shmily.” It was scrawled in yellow on the pink ribbons of my grandmother’s funeral bouquet. As the crowd thinned and the last mourners turned to leave, my aunts, uncles, cousins, and other family members came forward and gathered around Grandma one last time. Grandpa stepped up to my grandmother’s casket and, taking a shaky breath, began to sing to her. Through his tears and grief, the song came, a deep and throaty lullaby.

Shaking with my own sorrow, I will never forget that moment. For I knew that, although I couldn’t begin to fathom the depth of their love, I had been privileged to witness its unmatched beauty.

S-h-m-i-l-y: See How Much I Love You.

Thank you, Grandma and Grandpa, for letting me see.



LOOKING AHEAD. . .

Is there any doubt that this tender couple knew the joy that springs from true love? That they understood the meaning of intimacy and commitment in marriage? Through a simple message sent in simple ways—traced in a flour container or on the bathroom mirror—this husband and wife continually expressed their love to each other for over fifty years. And when the time came for “Grandpa” to face the world alone, through his tears he sang his bride a lullaby that told her one last time, “See how much I love you!”

So many couples today reach the end of their days without ever experiencing such genuine love—the kind that includes stealing kisses, finishing each other’s sentences, and holding hands whenever possible. They sincerely desire a deep, intimate love, but they assume it will just “happen” somewhere along the way. When it doesn’t, disillusionment and even divorce follow.

We’ll talk this week about true love—what it means and how you can achieve it in marriage. I’ll close tonight’s reading with this question: What does true love mean to you?

JCD

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Love is of God.

1 John 4:7

Some people believe that true love can occur the moment a man and woman lay eyes on each other. But “love at first sight” is a physical and emotional impossibility because you cannot love someone you don’t even know. You have simply been drawn to the package in which they live.

A lifelong emotional attachment is much more than a romantic feeling. It is more than a sexual attraction or the thrill of the chase or a desire to get married. Such feelings usually indicate infatuation and tend to be temporary and rather selfish in nature. A person may say, “I can’t believe what is happening to me. This is the most fantastic thing I’ve ever experienced! I must be in love.” Notice that those who make these statements are not talking about the other person—they’re excited about their own gratification. Such individuals haven’t fallen in love with someone else; they’ve fallen in love with love.

Genuine love is not something one “falls” into, as though he or she was tumbling into a ditch. One cannot love an unknown object, regardless of how beautiful or handsome it is. Only when a person begins to develop a deep appreciation and admiration for another—an intense awareness of his or her needs, strength, and character—has one begun to experience true love. From there, it should grow for a lifetime.

Just between us . . .

- Do you remember thinking that you were in love as a teenager, only to have that feeling fade over time?
- What did you think and feel when we first met?
- How did God show you that I should be your marriage partner?

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the wonderful gift of love. Grant us your blessings, Father—more than we can even imagine right now! Amen.

 “THEN YOU CAME”

Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:8

The young husband was desperate. His wife had abandoned him and their two children weeks before. Though she still called occasionally, he had no idea where she was. On the phone, he pleaded with her to come home and told her how much he and the children loved her, yet she continually rebuffed him. Was it time to give up and move on?

No. The husband used his meager savings to hire a detective, who found his wife living in a third-rate hotel across the country. The husband borrowed money for a plane ticket. Soon he was on her doorstep saying, “We love you so much. Won’t you come home?” She fell apart in his arms, and they went home together.

Weeks later he asked why she hadn’t come when he expressed his love repeatedly on the phone. “Because,” she answered, “those were only words before. But then you came.”

True love is more than words. It may involve flying across the country, even when it costs you your last nickel, to bring your spouse home.

Just between us . . .

- How have I shown you my love this week?
- If “actions speak louder than words,” are my deeds shouting or whispering my love for you?
- What can I do this week to show my love for you?
- How, specifically, did Jesus show us His love?

Dear Lord Jesus, we want both our words and our actions to say “love” in personal, powerful, and positive ways. Show us new ways to “honor one another above ourselves.” Amen.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

Are you married? Do not seek a divorce.

1 Corinthians 7:27

What you have observed by looking around your social circles is born out by the numbers: According to nearly every relevant statistic, the institution of marriage is in serious trouble. The Council on Families in America reports that half of first marriages are likely to end in divorce. The National Center for Health Statistics tells us that the number of Americans choosing to marry is declining. And Brent Barlow, professor of family sciences at Brigham Young University, says that if cohabitation and divorce trends continue, “married” could become a minority status within ten years.

Obviously, millions of couples who were once deeply in love and believed they were wonderfully suited for each other are seeing their marriages fall apart. If you and your spouse are going to beat the odds, you will need to bring dedication and hard work to your relationship.

Does this challenge seem more like a threat than a promise? We have good news. First, couples who are willing to invest in their relationship will find the greatest fulfillment and meaning that life has to offer. That is the promise of a godly marriage. Statistics bear this fact out too! Second, you need not try to beat the odds alone. In fact, you were never meant to. But more on that tomorrow. . . .

Just between us. . .

- What, specifically, does having a “happy marriage” mean to you?
- Are you happy? Why or why not?
- What can I do to bring more happiness to your life?

Heavenly Father, You designed the covenant of marriage from the beginning, and our marriage belongs to You. So bless our union with Your best! Draw us together, and draw us to You. Amen.

THE THIRD PARTY

No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11

To experience genuine love with our mate, we must bring a third party into the equation—Jesus Christ. Only through this spiritual connection with Him can we begin to fulfill all the potential of the relationship we call marriage.

Anyone who studies the Bible will recognize numerous principles woven throughout that apply to married life. Judeo-Christian values have effectively guided men and women from the beginning. These values were inspired by the Creator Himself, the originator of the institution of marriage. No matter what society says, or how laws change, the precepts that make up this scriptural system remain *the* way to find love and happiness in life.

Establishing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the critical first step toward attaining every meaningful goal, including the intimacy we all seek. If you haven't already given your heart to Him, we urge you to do so. It will bring meaning and purpose to every dimension of your life—including your marriage. Tomorrow we'll explain how.

Just between us . . .

- How have we been putting biblical principles to work in our marriage?
- How can I encourage you to spend more time in God's Word?
- Have we both personally invited Jesus Christ to be Lord of our lives and of our marriage? If not, can we take that life-changing step right now?

Lord Jesus, You are the foundation of our marriage. Help us look to You and Your strength in every way as we build a life together. Amen.

THE MOMENT LIFE BEGINS

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!*
2 Corinthians 5:17

*I*f you and your mate genuinely want to experience true love—the kind that lasts throughout eternity—you must face the truth about your standing before God. According to the Bible, we are all born with a sinful nature (Romans 3:23). This sin problem prevents us from living God’s way, whether as individuals or as a married couple. In fact, unresolved sin will block even your best efforts to have a successful marriage, because the inescapable outcome of sin is slavery to our worst impulses and—eventually—death (Romans 6:23).

But there is a wonderful alternative! Jesus Christ paid the price for your sin through His death on the cross. And through His miraculous resurrection, He rescued you from eternal destruction. You can reach out in faith to receive your free gift of new life. Jesus put the Good News this way: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

It really is that simple: If you choose to repent of your sin and receive the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, you *will* be forgiven and receive His gift of eternal life.

If you do not know Jesus Christ in this intimate way, we invite you to offer the following prayer tonight. For every human being who invites Jesus into his or her heart, that is the moment real life begins!

Just between us . . .

- Have each of us made a choice to receive God’s gift of salvation?
- If not, what is keeping us from making that choice?

God, I am a sinner in need of You. I can’t live right or hope for eternal life on my own. Please forgive my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your only Son. You sent Him to die in my place and set me free from sin. Thank You! Amen.

I LOVE YOU!

“This is my command: Love each other.”

John 15:17



One of the best ways to sustain true love between you and your mate is to build a bridge of loving memories. I am reminded of a husband named Jim who was tragically killed in an accident while driving home from work. It was his wife Carol's fiftieth birthday. Rescue teams found two plane tickets to Hawaii in his pocket; he had planned to surprise Carol with them.

Months later, Carol was asked how she was coping. She answered that on their wedding day, she and Jim had promised to say “I love you” before noon each day of their marriage. Over the years it had become a fun—and often difficult—challenge. She recalled running down the driveway saying “I love you,” even though she was angry at Jim. On other occasions she drove to his office to drop a note in his car before the noon deadline. The effort it took to keep that promise led to many positive memories of their years together.

The morning Jim died, he left a birthday card in the kitchen, then slipped out to the car. Carol heard the engine starting and raced outside. She banged on the car window until he rolled it down, then yelled over the roar of the engine, “Here on my fiftieth birthday, Mr. James E. Garret, I, Carol Garret, want to go on record as saying ‘I love you!’”

“That’s how I’ve survived,” Carol said later. “Knowing that the last words I said to Jim were *I love you!*”

We can build bridges across the span of our lives in many ways—with cards and flowers, through special shared moments, or, like Jim and Carol, with a simple “I love you” expressed each day. Cherished memories established over the course of your marriage will give you and your mate the foundation for a genuine love that endures a lifetime.

SMD

EPILOGUE

*W*e hope that the words in this book have in some way inspired or encouraged you as you seek to strengthen your marriage. May the rest of your years together be full of joy and a deepening appreciation for each other.

In many ways, marriage is like a marathon. To succeed at it, a husband and wife must be disciplined and committed. But that may not be enough. Only when you both turn to Jesus Christ will you find the love, courage, and answers you need to keep going right on to the finish line. As you apply the biblical principles in this book, you will be better prepared to make the words of the apostle Paul the autobiography of your marriage: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Marriage is a wonderful gift from God—and so is your mate. Enjoy each day of your journey together! We both will be waiting for you one day at the finish line called eternity.

Jim and Shirley Dobson

INTRODUCTION

Marriage study conclusion from David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America," The National Marriage Project, Rutgers University, 1999.

WEEK ONE

Sunday: "SHMILY" by Laura Jeanne Allen. © 1997. Used by permission of the author.

Tuesday: Illustration from *Jumping Hurdles, Hitting Glitches, Overcoming Setbacks* by Steve Brown (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress Publishing Group, 1992).

Saturday: Illustration by Debbi Smoot from *Moments for Each Other* by Robert Strand (Green Forest, Ariz.: New Leaf Press, 1993). Reprinted in *More Stories for the Heart*, comp. Alice Gray (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 1997).

WEEK TWO

Sunday: "I'm Third," retold by James Lund. This story originally appeared in the *Denver Post* in the late 1950s.

Thursday: Survey result from *Love for a Lifetime* by Dr. James Dobson (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1998)

WEEK THREE

Sunday: "Protected by Prayer" by Cheri Fuller. Taken from *When Families Pray* by Cheri Fuller. © 1999. Used by permission of Multnomah Publishers, Inc.

WEEK FOUR

Sunday: "Do You Want Me?" by Park York. Taken from the June 1989 issue of the *Christian Herald*. Reprinted by permission of the *Christian Herald*.

WEEK FIVE

Sunday: "Men Have a Six-Word Limit" by Erma Bombeck, from *Forever, Erma* © 1996 by the Estate of Erma Bombeck. Reprinted with permission of Andrews and McMeel Publishing. All rights reserved.

Wednesday: "Quick Listening," in *Incompatibility: Still Grounds for a Great Marriage* by Chuck and Barb Snyder (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc. 1999).

Thursday: Word picture illustration from *The Language of Love* by Gary Smalley and John Trent (Pomona, Calif.: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1988).

WEEK SIX

Sunday: "Head of the House" by Thom Hunter. Taken from *Those Not-So-Still Small Voices* (NavPress). © 1993. Used by permission of the author.

Tuesday: Tendencies of the single man from *Sexual Suicide* by George Gilder (New York, N.Y.: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Company. 1973).

Friday: Quotation from *From Ashes to Glory* by Bill McCartney (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers, 1995).