

First Love

‘Encourage one another daily...so that no-one may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We share in Christ if we hold firmly to the confidence we had at first.’ (Heb. 3:13, 14)

My life and the life of Desert Stream Ministries is bound together in marriage: Annette and mine, 39-years-old, just one year short of our first Desert Stream gathering in 1980. Marital growth multiplied our offering to others. No doubt about it: as we learned to submit to each other out of fear and joy, God increased the quality of our service. Water levels rose from the well we dug together.

Maybe it had something to do with our brokenness. I was in love with this woman but selfish and subject to immoral shadows; she was abused and hesitant to give up control in certain areas. We knew sin’s deceitfulness!

We shared in Christ together, actively, deliberately. We told the truth of our wounds and learned to prayerfully extend mercy to each other. We strove for justice too, to give the other his or her due. We had a right, lovingly, to the other’s body—to share our love physically. But this had little meaning if we weren’t willing to do the hard work of real ‘foreplay’: sharing the whole of ourselves, as best we could, with our clothes on. It is easier to open your pants than your mouth! As I denied my isolated, wordless brooding for her wise and soft response (usually!), I became a stronger, more whole man. I solidified into a spouse who could help tenderize her sometimes wary heart.

Trust is a gift and a condition of heart that one must cultivate daily in marriage. ‘Sin’s deceitfulness’ is sly, subtle: we harden over time in little unspoken ways as we project old fears and shames onto the beloved.

More than ever in this 40th year of our ministry, the enemy of our marital soul wants to tempt us onto separate tracks. There Anette and I function well enough, like well-tuned roommates, but fail to access marital grace. Only as we submit to one another (Eph. 5:21) deliberately is that grace ours. Time does not make us better spouses; it may well make us presumptuous, unwilling to reveal the blessed, broken, still-needing-confirmation parts to each other.

The marital blow-ups that have singed us all did not begin with a brazen seduction, just a slow cooling of trust and affection then the pull of other gods, other covenants. We can say without hyperbole that the world has never been more effective in firing marital discontent and driving us to dissolve our vows.

This year Annette and I celebrated 40 Christmases together. I want 20 more. To actualize my desire, I must hold fast to these words from Hebrews: ‘We share in Christ IF we hold FIRMLY to the confidence we had at first.’ I have a responsibility to strengthen today what I promised 39-years-ago.

This year I have committed to initiate a weekly time with Annette where we will deliberately go where we may not want to go—focused blessing and also pointed questions about where we are, how we are. We pray and talk spontaneously during the week but in the roar of things we skim hard stuff. It is my duty to take us deeper. If you are a husband, would you consider joining me in this initiative? It is always refreshing to me when the man leads the conversation. What most wives long for, we men dodge. Stop dodging. Slay your enemy by revealing your love, however uneven, to the one who needs it most.

Marital confidence should never become passive; it demands our engagement if we are to thrive in its benefits and reveal something of Jesus' love for His Bride.

'Repent and do the things you did at first.' (Rev. 2:5)

Please take time to watch our new video and become '[Chaste Together](#).'

Going the Distance: 40 Years of Healing, Equipping and Proclaiming.