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Chapman: Marriage can work by communicating, not running Baptist Press
By Art Toalston 9/11/95

HENDERSONVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--People don't have much luck running from unhappy marriages.

While 40 percent of first marriages end in divorce, 60 percent of second marriages and 75 percent of third marriages end in divorce, said Gary Chapman, marriage enrichment speaker and author, in one of 16 "Toward a Growing Marriage" regional seminars to be sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board in the coming year.

"We've got to learn to love the person we're now married to," said Chapman during the inaugural seven-session, Scripture-referenced seminar Sept. 8-9 at First Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tenn.

Communication is key to achieving an intimate, lasting marriage, said Chapman, of Winston-Salem, N.C., whose books on marriage include "Toward a Growing Marriage" and "The Five Love Languages."

However, statistics again reveal trouble, Chapman said, citing a study reporting 50 percent of wives say their husbands are uncommunicative and another study reporting 86 percent of divorces were fueled by deficient communication.

"Any couple can have good communication," Chapman asserted. It's not a matter of personality, he said, even when a person who tends toward a "Dead Sea" personality has a spouse who tends toward a "Babbling Brook" personality.

"Communication is basically an act of the will," Chapman said. "It's something we choose to do or not do."

For example, beyond making efforts to learn and discuss each other's interests in life, asking each other for advice and giving compliments, Chapman suggested couples read a marriage enrichment book, chapter by chapter, week by week, with both partners sharing what they've learned about themselves; have the courage to apologize for words and actions that have built walls in their relationship; and pray together, if only silently, holding hands.

In times of conflict, Chapman suggested couples call a "temporary time-out" to avoid saying or doing anything at the moment that later might be regretted and to examine within themselves why they're angry. Then, they should set a time to talk, taking five-minute turns voicing their feelings without interruption. Spouses should give credence to facts and feelings voiced by their mates; express what they understand each other to be saying, whether or not they agree; and then offer, "What can I do to help?" or "How can we solve this problem?"

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Too often, couples can't resolve their conflicts because they're "preaching to each other," Chapman said. The average person will listen to his or her spouse 17 seconds before interrupting, he recounted. Screaming, he added, is "a learned phenomenon -- and it can be unlearned," so that negative feelings can be expressed in kinder words.

"There are no conflicts that cannot be resolved," Chapman said. "There are only people who will not resolve them."

Chapman encouraged spouses to examine themselves in prayer for sin, rather than blaming all their marital problems on their partners. The sin should be confessed to God for forgiveness; likewise, the partner's conscience should be cleared with his or her spouse; and the partner should focus on living by the power of the Holy Spirit, whose control can enable a person "do things they wouldn't ordinarily do," Chapman said.

For behaviors that "bug" a person about his or her spouse, Chapman suggested voicing only one criticism a week for the partner to work at changing. "Don't give an overdose" of criticism that sparks a blowup or kills the partner's motivation to change, Chapman said. Many couples, unfortunately, are destroying their marriages by giving each other overdoses every day, he said.

Constructive criticism should be voiced only when the partner has been given time to become emotionally ready, Chapman said. It should not be before a meal when the partner may be hungry and prone to irritability, he said.

If a partner can change the behavior, do it, Chapman counseled, reminding that marriage is ministry to the other partner.

And if a partner will not or cannot change the behavior, the other partner must work at remembering that biblical love accepts many imperfections, he said.

The five "love languages" provide more marriage-building help, Chapman said, drawing from his book listing:

- Words of affirmation that build up the other person.
- Gifts, showing that a partner has been thinking of his or her mate.
- Acts of service, even in household chores such as vacuuming or taking out the garbage.
- Spending quality time, giving one's spouse undivided attention.
- Physical touch, such as holding hands, kissing or sexual intercourse.

"Each of us has a primary love language, the one that makes us feel most loved," Chapman said. A partner may think he or she acts lovingly toward the other person, yet "we're not connecting emotionally" with the other's emotional needs, he said.

No husband should act as "dictator" in the home, Chapman said, calling the notion unbiblical. The husband must give leadership, he said, yet there must be a "mutual sharing of ideas and feelings, shared in honesty and love with a view to unity."

"There is no place for selfishness" on the husband's part, Chapman said.

Mistaken notions about sex also must be addressed, he said, disputing such statements as "Good Christians don't talk about sex" and that sex is "dirty" or "worldly."

If there is any place where sex should be discussed, it's the church, Chapman said. "We have a word from God on the subject. ... God is the author of sex," intending it for procreation, companionship, meeting physical and emotion needs and pleasure. "Sexual intercourse within marriage is beautiful," Chapman said, noting the Bible itself, various evangelical books and Bible-based counselors can serve as key resources for attaining a wholesome view of sex.

"I believe the hope of this nation is in Christian families," Chapman said, warning, "We cannot survive another 30 years in this country like the last 30. We've got a whole generation that doesn't know what Christian marriage is all about."

If the church can "get it together" in the area of marriage, "I believe the world will beat a path to our door and ask us how to do it. We can have a significant impact on our generation ... by getting our marriages on a growing track ... and spilling over into the communities around us," Chapman said.

Information about upcoming Chapman seminars may be obtained by calling the BSSB's adult enrichment line, (615) 251-2277.

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Coppenger's sermon series
focuses on 'Servant of God'

By Jennifer Mauldin

Baptist Press
9/11/95

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Pulling a shiny trumpet out of its case, Mark Coppenger, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, began talking about his days playing in the band.

"Each of you is an instrument the Lord has taken out of the case to make a joyful noise," he explained. "But just because you're an instrument out of the case, it doesn't mean you're ready to play in concert or to make beautiful music in a church or seminary."

With that illustration, Coppenger began the 28th annual Week of Preaching on the MBTS campus in Kansas City, Mo., Sept. 5-8, delivering chapel messages on the topic, "The Servant of God."

Challenging the seminarians to be faithful to God's calling, Coppenger said some people are called to greatness, while others are called to fail in the world's eyes. "You don't know the impact you will have," Coppenger said. "It's not your business. We don't need a fourth member of the Trinity. You just be the servant."

"I ask you to renew your vows to the purity of the call that you enjoyed in the presence of the living God," Coppenger said, "and don't let the world tell you otherwise or lure you otherwise."

Christians should work toward spiritual heroism, Coppenger said. "A consistent spiritual hero will have a life of quality as well as a ministry of quality," he noted.

"Work it out in seminary," Coppenger advised. "Preachers are falling left and right over money, sex and power. If you're going to spend your life fretting over what someone else has, you're going to eat yourself alive and be ineffectual for the Holy Spirit."

"It's a day for heroes and heroines," Coppenger said. "Our nation is on a fast track to destruction. It is not a day to be quiet and on the sidelines."

He also reminded the congregation servants are marked by love and are full of hope. Coppenger used an illustration of a ride at the fair. "If you can't reach up to the sign, then you can't take the ride," he said. "The Bible gives us one of those measuring stakes when it comes to love. If you don't measure up to what Scripture says, then you are not ready for ministry."

But Coppenger said Christians have reason to be encouraged. "No matter how tough it is for you on this earth, it's a learning experience, because you'll be leaving soon. You're real home is in heaven."

"Remember, whatever God has for you to do today, he will give you what you need to do that job."

When asked why he chose the topic of servanthood, Coppenger explained, "It is scary and unnerving to think about what God requires of us. What I hope to do is to take some of the perplexity out of the job and show how God equips us to do his calling."

Ron Rogers, MBTS visiting professor of missions, assessed the Week of Preaching, saying, "We'll be seeing the effects for weeks, maybe months to come. ..." He said the series offered "an overwhelming sense of the simple power of the Word of God in our lives. It was straightforward and right out of the Word of God. It was very powerful."

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Ron Prevost, visiting professor of religious education, commented, "We heard some things that needed to be said."

Some faculty members described how Coppenger preached in a warm, clear style. "He exposed biblical truth, laid his life beside it with personal examples and then asked us to see where we stacked up," said Don Hammer, professor of evangelism and urban missions.

Among students, Scott Willsey said of Coppenger's style of preaching: "He came across as a real person. He has the same problems we do."

Chris Morris agreed. "He allowed us to enter a journey with him. He gave personal experiences and drew us in so we were able to relate to him on a personal basis."

Other students said the Week of Preaching was a good time of renewal. "It helped bring focus back to my life concerning God's call," Mike Roy said.

"I was challenged," Kelly Dunn said. "All of the messages were relevant. I now have a window to Dr. Coppenger's heart and feel more comfortable with him."

The annual Week of Preaching serves as a time of inspiration and spiritual renewal for the seminary family and the local community.

Coppenger assumed the office of president at MBTS Aug. 1. Before coming to the seminary, he had been vice president for convention relations with the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and earlier was executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana.

A 1970 graduate of Ouachita Baptist University in Arkansas, he earned a doctor of philosophy degree from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn., in 1974 and a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, in 1983.

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Attention -- draw swords -- charge:
Whatever happened to Sword Drills?

Baptist Press
9/11/95

By Jeannie Swafford

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The name is changed and younger children can get involved, but Sword Drills -- now called Bible Drills -- are still a staple in Southern Baptist churches across America.

"One of the greatest benefits of the Bible Drill is that children learn discipline and confidence," said Mary Allen, Tennessee Baptist Convention staff member. Also, "They memorize Scripture and learn to find the books of the Bible. Our doctrine becomes real and biblically sound."

Last year, Mississippi Baptists recorded more than 3,000 participants in their state Bible Drills, more than 1,600 of them young children. Says Mose Dangerfield, of the Mississippi Baptist Convention staff, "We've been in Bible Drills as long or longer than any other state." Texas had about 2,000 children participate and Tennessee 1,400.

Sword Drills, as they were once called, began in 1927, originally involving older students. Now children are allowed in the competition, although they're given 10 seconds to find their verse, rather than the fleeting eight-second clock used for youth. There are 24 verses to learn and participants are allowed a certain amount of mistakes as they compete to advance through three levels of competition: church, associational and state.

No matter how far the students make it in the competition, Bible Drill leader Beverly Moore of Parkway Baptist Church, Goodlettsville, Tenn., says it's worth the long hours of practice. "Every year we have some children who draw closer to the Lord through their involvement in Bible Drill, and sometimes we have children come to the Lord for the first time."

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After 15 years of leading Bible Drill at her church, one of Moore's students won at the state level this year. Jokingly, she says, "Endurance is not only a trait needed by the drillers, but also the leaders." Moore says her students come back to tell her that, years later, knowing a verse from Bible Drill helped them in school or on the job.

Kathy Shannon, who participated in Bible Drill for six years, agrees: "Being able to know the Scriptures in times of need was the greatest benefit of the Bible Drill. I will definitely encourage my own son to join the drill."

One of this year's verses, 1 Timothy 4:12 -- Attention -- Present Bibles -- Start: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and purity."

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Swafford works with SBC Life of the SBC Executive Committee.

Baptists find ministry
at Vietnamese celebration

By David Mallory

Baptist Press
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CARTHAGE, Mo. (BP)--Christians are encouraged to share a cup of cold water in the Master's name, and to greet foreigners and welcome them. Members of First Baptist Church, Carthage, Mo., fulfilled both admonishments during Marian Days festivities August 12.

Marian Days is sponsored by the Congregation of the Mother Co-Redemptrix, a Vietnamese Catholic seminary founded in Carthage shortly after the end of the Vietnam War. Originally intended strictly as a religious activity honoring the Virgin Mary, Marian Days has grown to become a national cultural event.

The normal population of Carthage is less than 12,000. Carthage police chief Ed Ellefsen estimated this year's Marian Days crowd at around 50,000. "This was the 18th year of the event," he said, "and it was the biggest ever."

Since it takes place outdoors during one of the hottest months of the year, Marian Days stretches local resources to the limit. There have even been instances of adverse reactions to these "outsiders."

T.O. Spicer, chairman of the missions development committee for First Baptist Church, said these instances "cast a bad light on Caucasians, on Christians and on Carthage." Spicer recalled pastor S. Ray Crews wanted to do something hospitable to welcome the visitors.

So, four years ago, the church began ministering to the crowds at the event by serving free ice water and lemonade and distributing gospel tracts printed in Vietnamese. George and Pam Stines, members of the church who live across the street from the seminary campus, opened their yard for the ministry.

"The first year, we just set up a booth," Spicer said. "Then when the sun came out, someone put up a tarp to provide some shade."

Later, John Weiser, owner of Weiser Tent Service in Monett and another member of the church, donated the use of a 12-by-12-foot tent awning. The Royal Ambassadors helped put up the tent; the Girls in Action placed labels bearing the words of John 3:16 on Styrofoam cups.

With a few folding tables from the church, some ice chests, a couple of water coolers, lemonade mix and a garden hose from the Stines' faucet, they were ready.

Church members scheduled themselves to man the tent in two-hour shifts from 10 in the morning until 8 at night. During the day, as people were going onto the seminary grounds, business was light. But at 5 p.m., the annual parade began. This is a one-mile walking parade through the neighborhood, ending almost at the Stines' driveway.

As 5 o'clock approached and it began to look as if the booth would be overwhelmed, minister of administration and education Andy Leininger called some of the youth to see if they could assist. Not only did the youth come out, but some of the senior adults who already had put in two-hour shifts came back to help.

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As the head of the parade neared the tent, members of a Vietnamese youth organization broke from the parade, came to the tent to collect cups of water and returned to distribute them among the marchers. Then, as the parade ended and more and more people left the formation, throngs of thirsty people converged on the little tent.

"It's a good experience, both for Carthage and for the people who come to visit," George Stines said. "It's a neat way to minister to these people. It says, 'Welcome, and we accept you.'"

Janette Hodson, a church member who helped at the tent, appreciated the cultural significance of Marian Days. "I think it's wonderful they have a place to come together for a family reunion. If I was in another country and my family was scattered all over, I would want to meet with them."

Crews said the booth crew received many favorable comments from the Vietnamese people. "They ask, 'Why are you doing this?' And we always answer, 'Because you are here, and Jesus told us to take care of you.'"

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Mallory is a correspondent for Missouri Baptists' newsjournal, Word & Way.

Kentucky church raises
\$60,000 in a single day

By Joyce Sweeney Martin

Baptist Press
9/11/95

GLASGOW, Ky. (BP)--It may have taken Glasgow (Ky.) Baptist Church two years to lay plans for remodeling their sanctuary, but it took just one day to get the project off the ground.

The 179-year-old county-seat church with an average attendance of 390 collected \$60,000 for the project Aug. 20.

The one-day sacrificial offering did not just happen, pastor Scott Mackey said, but was the result of two years of discussion and consensus-building among the people. Mackey also spent seven days in prayer and fasting prior to the day of the offering.

In early August, as Mackey contemplated the remodeling project, he said he felt the time had come to ask the congregation to make a decision.

Architectural drawings were in place for a redesigned platform which would make it easier to use drama, an expanded altar area which would be more conducive to prayer and decision-making, and angled pews which would create a "family atmosphere," Mackey said.

"Town meetings" held over the two years had given ample opportunity for church members to express their wishes. But "nothing had been said about how to finance" the \$100,000 project, Mackey said.

Some people in the church had suggested using money the church had in the bank; others wanted to set up a special building fund. But Mackey was unsure about what to do.

And so, he prayed and fasted for seven days. Not only did he pray for direction concerning the financing, but also for direction concerning the remodeling itself. And he prayed that the church would be in agreement about what to do.

At the end of the seven days, Mackey said he was sure God wanted him to lay the challenge of a one-day sacrificial cash offering before the people.

On Sunday morning, Aug. 13, Mackey asked the congregation to pray that God would show them the direction to take. He announced that the next Sunday, at the beginning of the worship service, they would vote on whether to go ahead with the project. If they voted to undertake the project, they also would take a one-time sacrificial offering that same day. And he challenged them to give \$50,000.

The next Sunday, Aug. 20, the church voted unanimously to proceed with the remodeling. They took the offering. And when the money was counted, the total was not \$50,000, but \$60,000.

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FIRST-PERSON

Macho image, sports, parties,
business degree left him empty

By Tom Sirotnak, with Ken Walker

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The measure of manhood is Jesus Christ. Sound crazy? Sissy? Wimpy? That's what I used to think. But I learned otherwise by seeking fulfillment in other ways.

Striving to find worldly acceptance, I sought to become the image of the rough, tough macho man. At the end of my quest, I felt confused and defeated. I may have looked big, but I was a weak-kneed, spineless jellyfish.

A chubby, slow, uncoordinated youngster, I grew up desperately seeking approval.

Though often jeered for my clumsy, slow-footed ways, my size worked to my advantage when I started putting my efforts into sports. But my red-letter day in elementary school came when I took on the toughest kid in class. I made this bully mad on the playground and he came running full speed at me.

Actually, I didn't stand up to him. He scared me to death. Trembling, when he swung, I ducked. He missed and his momentum sent him flying over me.

Without realizing what I was doing, in the same motion I stood up and caught him with my shoulder. I tossed him in the air; he landed on his back, got up and slumped off, crying.

Suddenly I was the school hero. Though my success was a complete fluke, I thought, "Hey, look at the acceptance I got through fighting this guy."

That launched my quest to become a "macho he-man" by building up my body to ultra-tough proportions. I thought being a man meant someone physically intimidating. I wanted to look so tough no one would challenge me to a fight.

It may sound simplistic to trace all my actions to a grade-school fight. But that was the turning point that set me on the path of "bigger means better."

Years later I arrived at the University of Southern California boasting a 20-inch neck, 20-inch arms and a 54-inch chest. I used my physique to land a job as a bar bouncer, where I brawled regularly.

I amazed people with my physical stunts. Three times I wrestled bears standing as high as 7 feet, 4 inches and weighing 650 pounds. It was all a show, but my willingness to enter the ring impressed my fraternity brothers.

I meant to prove I was the roughest, toughest, most fearless dude on campus. When I got drunk, I would run into 4-by-4 wooden stop signs and knock them over with a loud crack.

Even though I never started, and mainly warmed the bench, I was still one of the few walk-ons to stick with the varsity football team at USC. My willingness to mix it up with future NFL stars like Marcus Allen and Keith Van Horn earned more admiration in my social circles.

Besides persevering in football, my fraternity brought access to two of my primary dreams in life: great parties and lots of sorority sisters.

In addition, I was on my way to earning a marketing degree from a dynamic business school.

Despite my physical exploits and campus status, I was bankrupt inside. There was a huge void inside -- one only God could fill. My lifestyle covered up the insecurities, fear and failures gnawing at me. I wanted to be a man but didn't know how. As time passed this void expanded through a steady diet of lust, pornography and immorality. I didn't realize these things strip a man of purpose and responsibility. They made me feel even weaker.

Ironically, while I was partying away my college years, I called myself a Christian and belonged to a campus ministry. Finally, when USC made it to the Fiesta Bowl my senior year, things began to change.

Upset over the hypocrisy and inconsistencies that plagued me, I aimlessly wandered the streets of Phoenix. Fortunately, I later wound up in a Christian gathering.

The speaker was former LA Ram and Hall of Fam member Rosey Grier. Seeing through my counterfeit faith, he challenged me to get the sin out of my life.

The night he spoke I felt like laser beams were shooting out of his eyes toward me. The only way to serve God was to quit compromising, he said. The words stung with the force of a wooden stop sign against my nose.

As "fate" had it (there is no such thing, the Lord arranged it), Rosey spoke the following week at USC. He introduced me to my current pastor and an evangelist who spoke that night.

As they counseled me, I saw that I had never understood what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I saw that Jesus was not in control of my life. From studies to athletics, work, social life and family, he must be "Lord of all or not at all."

That's when I repented and God's power changed me. The void in my life vanished. For the very first time, I felt like a whole person. A real man.

This country is staggering through a leadership crisis. The times demand bold men of character who are not afraid to proclaim the Lord in the midst of a wicked, perverted society.

Everywhere, whether in business, politics or education, people are crying out, "Will somebody please take the lead?" Or, as Psalms 94:16b (New American Standard) asks, "Who will take his stand for me against those who do wickedness?"

Men are the foundational strength of any government. From family to workforce to public affairs, as men go, so goes the nation. As TV host Ben Kinchlow says, "Being male is a matter of birth. Being a man is a matter of choice."

Going against peer pressure. That takes guts. Daring to be a role model by doing what is right in the sight of a holy God. That requires bravery. Courage stands out from the crowd instead of bowing to it.

God has placed in the heart of every man the deep, burning desire to be a hero, a champion and an overcomer. Men want to stand up, do what is right and achieve greatness. That is leadership by example instead of seeking out the latest polling data to make up your mind.

In recent years the world has warred against this type of thought. Critics sneer, "Oh, you just have a big ego and you want to feed it."

But I'm here to say: God designed you with that ego. Not to exalt yourself or act like a "stud." It is so he can provoke you to do great exploits for his glory.

Having an ego is natural, since it's a gift from God. The ideal man is a hero. Women dream of a knight in shining armor who will appear at the right moment and whisk them off to safety.

It's the same with young children, who are always eager to brag, "My dad can whip your dad" or "No one is as good as my dad." In today's divorce-filled climate, there are also the kids who cry, "I just wish I had a dad."

Strong men, our society needs you!

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Excerpted from "Warriors," released this month by Broadman & Holman Publishers. Sirotnak is an evangelist based in Anaheim, Calif.; Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky.

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