

FamilyEXPO²⁰⁰²

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE & FAMILY A one-day parenting seminar full of effective and practical ideas and strategies

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An Edited Transcript of the Presentation by
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on

21 Days To A Better Marriage

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Actually I should have spoken before John Lund, because we have had to speak together previously and the organisers said “Who should go first?” and I said “I should go first. I put them to sleep and John wakes them up!” So I hope you won’t start dozing for the next hour. I still have jet lag; I must look like I have jet lag. You may have heard about the university lecturer who was dreaming about lecturing to his class and woke up - and he was. If that happens today, my wife will just come up and shake me.

I am grateful for Jeff Hill for explaining that elevator story. This is a true story. We flew over with Jeff and Juanita; their children had come ahead; and we were in the Los Angeles airport and Juanita had gotten ahead somehow. Now just imagine, Susan my wife, got on the elevator, I got on the elevator and Jeff Hill got on the elevator, three of us on the elevator, and Jeff says, “I feel like kissing.” It was a moment. I didn’t want him to kiss my wife. I was tired. Jeff was my student one year. I knew we had bonded. That was the funniest experience. “I feel like kissing.”

We are learning a language down here. Alan Baker came to our apartment the other night. He rang for my wife Susan to visit some elementary schools, because she is an elementary school teacher. And he was on the phone and he couldn’t get the lady that was coming and he hung up the phone and he said, “She’s engaged.” My wife said, “Well, that makes sense, she’s getting married, and we just can’t get to her.” No. Engaged means busy over here.

We went to get some lunch, and went to the food courts and the lady said “Do you want salad in your sandwich?” I said “No put it on the side, and put some blue cheese dressing on the side also.” She said “Would you like some lettuce and tomato on your salad?” OK, so we learned you put salad on a sandwich.

I do have a lot to say and a short time to say it. But I want to compliment you as Australians. That in 1998 the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia published this publication *To Have and to Hold: Strategies to Strengthen Marriage and Relationships*. You were the first. You’re the first nation to say, Marriage matters. Then the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, maybe we ought to be teaching marriage education to all elementary school children and junior high students, mid schools and high schools. Yes, marriage does matter. And you started it all. You should be very proud of that.

I just got back from a trip to Washington DC, along with John Lund and others. That report, *Why Marriage Matters*. I was supposed to go to that conference a year ago on September 21st 2001, well with what happened on September 11th, it was cancelled. We came back February 12th and they held up that pamphlet and said there is a new era in marriage education in America.

21 Reasons why marriage matters, 93 references. We apologise to no one anymore about trying to promote marriage, it's a new era. There is also a new video called *Marriage: just a piece of paper?* It is being shown on all of our public television stations. Marriage really does make a difference in the lives of people; that's why I congratulate you for being here today.

We just picked up this pamphlet *Does Divorce Make People Happy?* No, the statistics are there. **The study nationwide of people who are divorced reveals that five years later, only 18% are happily married to somebody else. Now, how about those who stayed married and stuck it out? And this is part of my presentation today. Sixty-six percent, or two thirds, five years later were happy or very happy , just sticking it out. Commitment. Staying in there.**

And it was not the therapist and the counsellors that kept people together. Who was it? A friend, hairdresser, a religious leader. Only one third of the people that got divorced went to a marriage counsellor. Marriage counselling isn't going to save marriages in America; I don't think they are going to save them here. Don't underestimate them, we need counsellors. But I say up front, before you go for marriage counselling you make sure that they are going to work on your marriage. Because in the United States the chances of getting divorced are greater if you have marriage counselling than if you don't. Because many marriage counsellors are no longer committed to keeping a marriage together. They see divorce as therapy. So, I am a marriage counsellor, I believe in marriage counselling. But you have to be careful where you go. You have to walk in say, "We want to work on our marriage. We think our marriage deserves a chance." And most therapists will do that. This is listed on the back of my handout. It's called *Marriage Crossroads: Why divorce is often not the best option*. It's now on our website www.utahmarriage.org It's my best effort to explain to people, why divorce is often not the best option. I gave a lot of reasons in there.

I suggested the other day that we need to start, Marriage Week, Australia. The United Kingdom has been doing this for six years. I am trying to get this started in the United States. We started it this year. Our Governor [Utah] signed a declaration on marriage and had Marriage Week USA, February 7th to the 14th. It was during the Olympics. Was that a problem? Not to the Governor. He bought three couples down and gave them gold medals, right on the gold medal platform. One was a young man I had as a student 19 years ago. He is a paraplegic, he has been married 19 years, he is a wonderful man, and he is an Olympian. They gave him a medal. An African-American couple, who came to Utah 62 years ago - just went through terrific hardships as a couple - he gave them a medal. Then they gave a medal to the couple married longest in Utah. How long would you guess they had been married? Seventy-six years. That has changed my marriage. Allstate Insurance flew them to Las Vegas, to honour them. Seventy-six years of marriage is a long time to be married. It's on my list of things to do. Start getting a long-term perspective of your marriage.

Two years ago, 34 couples in Utah had been married 70 years or more. We got them together in the rotunda. The Governor gave them all a medal, and had their picture taken, but I don't know if I've done anything more to strengthen my marriage than to be around three or four couples that have been married 70 years or more. Realising that many of us that get married and stay married, may well have 50, 60 or 70 years of marriage, you need to start getting together your 70 year plan. We have been married 37 years and I came home and I said, "We have to be married, 33 more years before we get a letter from the Governor." We just launched our last child last month. He's 18. Susan said, "What are we going to do for 33 more years?" I said, "I don't know what we are going to do. But we have got to get that long term perspective."

Here's what happening in the United States: Half your married life with children, half your married life without children. We're not ready for that. And you might not be either. Because it used to be - married, many children, the children would leave home and the husband would die between three to

five years later. Women live longer than men, but almost all your married life was spent raising children. Well, today it's changed.

That's one piece of advice for young married people today: Have children, and work with your children, but start planning for when the last child leaves home, when you will have significant time to do good things. And maybe become involved in promoting marriage. I am going to talk to Kevin Andrews next Wednesday night. He wrote this report. Great fellow, came to America, attended the Smart Marriages conference. I am going to ask him if he would be interested in promoting Marriage Week, Australia. So we can all get together, join the United Kingdom, and say marriage is a good thing, marriage really does matter in the life of people. That's what we are going to talk about today. We are going to talk about your marriage and my marriage and see where we can go.

This Smart Marriages conference. If you want to get involved with what's going on, just go log on to www.smartmarriages.com and join the news list, they will send you six emails a day, of what's going on. This conference has been going on for a while now, and we went back there and learned an awful lot about marriage and why governments ought to be involved.

Utah happened to be the first state to have a Commission on Marriage. I was asked to be the chair of that. We are trying to do the best we can in Utah. Governor Leavitt's been in office 10 years and has had a marriage conference every year since 1992. One of the few Governors and Governor's wives that have been pro-marriage. And we are really proud of that, and they are trying to do all they can. People ask should government really be involved in marriage? Have you ever heard that? Governor Keating in Oklahoma spent \$10 million to promote marriage in Oklahoma. You know what their response is to should governments be involved in marriage? If you don't want government to be involved in your marriage, don't get divorced, because then governments really get involved! I think that's a great answer. Governor Leavitt says, it's not that we are trying to promote marriage, but when marriages don't work it costs the government a lot of money and we have to become involved.

How much does divorce cost in Australia? In 1998 divorces cost \$3000 million in direct costs and \$3000 million in indirect costs; it's a lot of money. In Utah it's about \$30,000 per divorce in the state. For every \$1000 a divorce costs, we invest \$1 for prevention.

Now, I want to say something about attending these meetings. I went back to Washington DC meeting on July 12th, three days, 32 hours non-stop of meetings. Heard some of the best presentations. But you can get overloaded at these meetings. I was getting overloaded, I was getting tired and I got into the elevator with a Presbyterian minister from Nebraska. It was his first time there and he was tired, saying, "I am getting overloaded too much" and I said to him, "You know, you get information thrown at you so much you get analysis paralysis!"

So what is the best way? I said, "Just get one thing from this conference and apply it." That's my approach. 21 days – the Marriage Buffet. Just take one thing and go practise it.

First, we want to do no harm. We want people to leave happier today than when they came. And I will tell you what not to do. Don't go home, those of you who are here without your spouses, and say "Read this!" "Read this and report back to me by 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, what you intend to do." That happens all the time, all the time. So you have to be very careful attending these meetings.

I was overwhelmed with all that information, it was so good. But the information that John mentioned that you should spend 15 hours a week uninterrupted time, that's on my list if you turn there, its number 6. He said spend 15 hours uninterrupted time together. I went home and my wife

said, "What did you learn?" I said, "Sit down, we're supposed to be spending 15 hours uninterrupted time together a week in order for our marriage to survive." She said "Does that man have children?" And we had a long talk. That was one of the best things I got out of that conference and it changed our marriage. I reduced it down to 10. I think you're busy too. You know what he said? He has counselled over 2000 couples. He makes them put in writing that they will **spend 15 hours a week uninterrupted time or he won't even see them as a therapist and he guarantees it will change their marriage. Because what brings us together when we're dating? When we're dating we spend a lot of time, uninterrupted together. Am I right? And you have to do that after you're married as well as before.**

Well here is **one of the greatest myths** perpetuated in America and I hope not in Australia. **If you take care of the family, you'll take care of the marriage.** An absolute myth. We have to do things with children, do you not? **You have to separate the marriage out of the family because I believe: As goes the marriage, so goes the family.**

Cicero, the Roman Centurion said the first bond of society is marriage. He said that 2000 years ago. We all talk about family being the basis of communities, but Cicero said that it is marriage. **A good marriage is a good foundation of a family.**

We got this myth that if I do all these family activities, it's going to take care of the marriage. It won't. That's why Dennis Rainey wrote the great book called *Staying Close*. He said once you get married you get into **the natural float of isolation**. You spend all this time together, holding each other, going to nice places, then you get married, go to school or children come and you go to work and get involved in community, church and it's the natural float, you **end up as what we call married singles. You have this relationship, but we kind of let it go, and often we let it go in the name of good things.** I've got on this list keep your marriage a high priority. **Everyone says "Oh, our marriage is a high priority." Well, I can measure it. How are you spending your time, your energy and money? Show me your cheque book, show me where your money goes and I will tell you what you value. Where your treasure is, there's your heart also. Tell me where you spend your time. Are you doing your 15 hours or not?** We were on the plane for 16 hours coming over here, and my wife says "Does this count?" Yes, this counts. She says, "Ah, we don't have to speak to each other for the rest of the week; we got our 16 hours in right here." But it's a true principle and it's the first thing I ask you to do to improve your marriage.

What counts as time? Does television count? No. Could dinner time count? It could, if there's just two of you. Does church count? It might. It's uninterrupted time going together somewhere. They took us yesterday down to the Gold Coast, honestly one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen in my life. And I said this must be the only place in Australia where you have a beautiful coast. Ah no, we have thousand of miles. I saw couples walking along holding hands at that beach, I said I have to talk about this tomorrow, because they were relaxing, there were waves coming, I'll never forget it. Maybe we need to go down to Gold Coast beach and walk together and just talk together. How many hours are you getting in? What are you doing? Paul Pearsall wrote the book *Love Takes Time, Love Makes Time*. You have to make time, so that is the main thing we are going to start with today.

In our marriage, that's what we're working on. We're committed. We started last week after that conference, when we were getting ready to come here. We get up and talk to each other in the morning, pillow talk. Just talk for half hour, 45 minutes. I don't know if she knows how much I appreciate that, just talk about what's going on and bond together. Uninterrupted times, and you can start maybe with three hours, then four, move it up and bring that bonding back.

Well, be careful then with not rushing home with all these ideas, but the marriage buffet - that is my approach. To improve my marriage by 21 days, I commit to do the following. Now before you get out of here today I am going to get some of you to tell me at the end of the hour what you commit to do. I've got the doors locked, no one is leaving. My theory is we need to learn less and apply more. I honestly believe this. We've just been inundated with information - just pick one good idea that you're willing to do in your marriage and do it in the next 21 days.

We were down at the Sheraton and we had this lovely breakfast buffet. I counted yesterday 79 items. I would just pick up this or pick up that. Everybody chooses different things. That's my approach - the Marriage Buffet - pick one thing. Pick one thing you think you would like. That's the other thing - what works for one marriage doesn't work for other marriages. You ever heard that? You have friends who say, "My husband and I or my wife and I, we did that..." You try it, nothing happens. But I think you could pick out something. You know what to do in your relationship right now. So let's get started I'm going to throw the buffet up and you choose one idea and write it down before we go.

I started this several months ago. I've given this talk several times. It works. My oldest son had invited me over to speak to his church group on marriage. He said, "What are you going to talk about?" I said, "I'm working on a new topic - 21 Days to a Better Marriage. I just talk and tell them to do just one thing."

So I went over to Doug's church group, my best eloquent self, to tell them all the things they could do. I said, "Has anyone in here decided what you can do in the next 21 days to have a better marriage?" One young man said "I'm going to bring my wife flowers, I just think she needs flowers." I said, "You understand flower-power, just take her some flowers. Don't explain a lot of things. Women just love flowers." Another woman said, "Well, my husband is going to school and we live in this small apartment, kind of crowded. I am going to try to keep the children away from him in the evenings while he studies." Now is that an act of love, on her part?

Now my son, Doug raised his hand he said: "Dad, I mean Dr Barlow, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I am going to wash all the dishes in the house for the next 21 days." Was that an act of love? They have four young sons and his wife was eight months pregnant, was that an act of love? Doug's gonna wash dishes! (He's the oldest child, how many of you in here are the oldest child? Do we need a national holiday for the oldest children? Your parents practised on you. All the younger kids on this national holiday should bring you a gift.) I was overwhelmed. That was powerful speaking, was it not? To have a man commit to doing the dishes for 21 days. If anyone here is willing to commit, I'll have you stand up, say I'll do the dishes for 21 days. Did his wife Becky appreciate that? Ladies? Pregnant women? She was in tears, she said, "Oh Brent, thank you, so much for coming over."

I said to my wife on the way home, "Did you ever believe that Doug would commit to doing the dishes for 21 days? I can't remember him ever washing dishes, when he was at home!". And she said, "That was a very kind and loving thing for Doug to do." We drove another block, she was sending me a message. Silence is deafening. We both hate to do the dishes. Her father washed all the dishes when she was growing up, so what did she expect? My mother washed all the dishes. So what happened in our marriage? We got together and said to each other simultaneously, "Do the dishes." We found out neither of us liked to do them. We said we must have children. Our children hate to do dishes. I said, "If Doug Barlow can wash dishes for 21 days, Brent Barlow can wash dishes for 21 days." She said, "Really? This has been a miraculous evening." I washed dishes for 21 days, every dish. It was an act of love. My wife likes things done.

Let's run through the list. There are 21 things. I can add to this list. If something works for you let me know and I'll add it.

Number 1: If you were to do one thing from this Expo today, **go home and recommit to your marriage**. What does recommitment mean? In this Oklahoma study they found, just came out, they spent \$150,000 to find out why they are second in the nation in divorces. Terrible thing. But **what was the number one reason for divorce? Lack of commitment**. Its very simple. **Just say to each other, I am still in this relationship. I am still committed to you**, that may be the most important thing.

What did you say to each other. Do you remember what was said? I taught in Illinios and Wisconsin, many of the religious leaders allowed the young people to write their vows, I thought it was a good idea. What did you say to one another? **Do you know what is said in 48 of the states today? Do you know what is the commitment? "We marry for as long as our love shall last."** That's the commitment, and when you quit loving each other, you can get out of it. They are trying to start the covenant marriage and bring back the "till death do us part." Isn't that interesting? Louisiana and Arizona, brought back the covenant marriage. You people just ought to be willing to say, not a government-enforced thing, till death do us part. What did you say? Did you say, "We shall stay in this just as long as our love shall last"? Go home and recommit to each other, I think it is a wonderful thing to do. I don't know how many times in our marriage, my wife has said, after we have a confrontation and showing an increase in love, she says, "I am not going anywhere, I am still into this. Let's start over."

When you fly on an aeroplane, you are off course 95% of the time, that's why they have a navigator. You have to allow for the curvature of the earth and wind. What do we need to get this marriage back on the right course for the long 70 year duration? So what did you say to one another. Recommit. Attend a marriage ceremony, whatever, and just repeat to each other again. I saw in Washington DC this analogy. **If I give you two pieces of paper. I want you to keep them together for 10 years. What would the probability if I just gave you those two pieces of paper. Would it be high? Maybe, maybe not. What if I handed you two pieces of paper, with a clip on them? Would it increase it? Yeah. But what if I handed you two pieces of paper with a staple through them? Would that increase the likelihood? Yes. That's commitment. The staple is the commitment. If I took all of these papers and threw them, which most likely would stay together? The stapled.**

I'll tell you something else. Where you are married makes a difference. At the Governor's Commission on Marriage, we found out 12% of our divorces in Utah were people married in Nevada. I tried to figure that out. Why would people living in Nevada come to Utah to get divorced? It was not people from Nevada, it was people from Utah, who went to Nevada to get married by Elvis, in the little white chapel and then they come back. High divorce rate. **Anytime you have the absence of family and friends and religious leaders - higher divorce rate. There is something about that commitment ceremony. Where you are surrounded by family and friends and if you are married in a faith-based community, the divorce rate is much, much lower.** So it does matter where you get married? It does matter. The Governor once asked what can we do to lower the divorce rate? I said, "Put two highway patrolmen on the border, between Nevada and Utah. And when people come through a patrolman could ask, "Why are you going to Nevada?". If they say "We're going to get married", the patrolman would say, "Would you step out of the car please?" I thought it was funny; no one else thought it was funny.

So number 1: Maybe **just go on home and say to one another, "We are still in it." Put a staple in it. Maybe put two more staples.** Forty to 50 percent of people get divorced and another 20 – 30% are unhappy. But the people who are unhappy are not in the same group. They rotate in and

out. There's good and bad, and bad and good. So when you are down, you don't get divorced, five years later you're back up. Maybe the next five you're down. Now, that's life.

I was presenting to some single people and they said, "Wow, we've heard all these statistics about marriage. It's up and down, up and down." I said, "How about single life?" They said, "It's up and down, up and down." It's life. **You just want to choose somebody in life to go up and down with, that's commitment.**

Number 2: Estimate how long you are going to be married and develop a long-term plan. Go on the Internet to www.realage.com, figure out how long you are going to live. Once you've done that, estimate how long you are going to be married. I've done this. I have a big chart on my wall. What will be our plans when we are married, 50 years, 60 years, 70 years? Because what you do when you are married 30 years and 40 years, will determine the 50s and 60s. Did you know that in the United States that divorce goes up 16% after 30 years of marriage? Because the kids are starting to leave. We are not used to being alone together. We had all this energy raising these kids. There is a transition from a child-centred couple to a couple-centred couple. Some of you are in that transition. Estimate how long you are going to live. Start making plans to be married for a long time.

If you could turn back to page one - Points to Ponder, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much effort are you making to improve your marriage? 1 being minimum 10 being maximum. Very few 1s and 10s. Just put down 5, look over and see what your spouse put down. See how much effort they are putting into their marriage. Our goal is to increase it by ½ to 1 point, small increments of change. Just increase a little bit over the next 21 days.

Number 2 in Points to Ponder: How can you and your spouse overcome the natural float of isolation in marriage? Everyone experiences a natural float in marriage. I don't care who you are. And you can't just go all this time and just fly to Maui or wherever you go, to recoup. It's got to be every day. Maybe its 10 minutes a day, 20 minutes a day. I have **the three T's in there. Time, Talk & Touch**. Sit down and talk to each other for 20 minutes, for 10 minutes; one talks and the other listens, then you reverse. We have got to do those little things to keep our marriage together. What is meant is that more marriages end from small leaks than from blow outs. People say people ought not to be forced to stay in a bad marriages. **What percentage of marriages end that are high conflict and abusive? Twenty to 30 percent. What about the other 70% - 80%, why did they divorce? They just lose it. They fall out of love. There is justification for divorce. Some people should not be married together. But it's a small minority. The rest of them just fall out of love. If you can fall out, you can fall back in.** You just have to work at it and do some things. Just pick one in the next 21days.

Number 3: What are the differences and similarities of can't, won't and don't? This is what I have noticed as a marriage counsellor. These are interesting words. Can't means you are physically unable to do it. Won't means you're unwilling and Don't means you just don't do it. What do most marriages end on? Can't? Won't? Don't? It's Don't. We know what to do, we are capable of doing, we just don't do it. Because we are busy, we are stressed out, we are tired.

Number 4: When is the best time of married life? Is it past? Are you presently experiencing it? Or is it in the future? Or is the best yet to come? You should recognise this quote. **Robert Browning**. **"Come grow old with me, the best is yet to come."** I am 61. I met a friend in the parking lot of the university the other day who had just turned 60, and I said, "Is the best of life over?" and he said "Yes, it's over. I can't wait to get life over. I just want to get out of here and sit in a rocking chair and wait life out." Oh, that's really thrilling to hear that.

Robert Browning invites you and me to believe that the best is yet to come in marriage. It's a wonderful belief. I don't know how to bring it about. Sue and I are going to start working at it. But to believe that the best is over or that the best in marriage is over, is the most damaging belief I know. **What if your best years of your married life are still ahead? Isn't that exciting? Isn't that invigorating?** I have come to believe that. Thirty-three years ahead, and I believe the best is yet to come.

Number 5: SACCOT, Small And Consistent Changes Over Time. It's not the big trips. Every six months, or every three months. It's small repeated things you do that will bring about changes.

Lets go back to Number 5 on the menu: Can you think of something you can do now. Having come to this conference, can you think of something you can do? I bet that 95% can think of something. But you won't do it, until your spouse changes something first. It's a change first problem. "I'll do it after they do it." I wish we had time for someone to say, I want to do this but I don't know if I am willing. What I learned in Washington was work on the STOPS as well as the STARTS. What can I stop doing?

Let's go down to Number 9: Stop doing something that annoys your spouse. Could we have fun with that? Do you know what you are doing right now that highly irritates and annoys your spouse? The Stops or annoying things are as important as the Starts. So what are you doing right now that you'd like to commit to stop doing for 21 days?

I'll tell you one. Sue will tell you if you ask her, one of the most annoying things that I do that just drives her nuts. It's when I do the dishes, and you put the knife, forks and spoons in the dishwasher and then over in the draw, she has, the knives should go there, the forks there and the spoons there. It's a waste of time to sort them so I just take them out and dump them in. She can be across the street and say, "I heard that! Sort the knives, forks and spoons!" I say, "They are all right there in the draw!"

"Brent, sort!" I don't want to take the time. Tomorrow they will be all used and dirty and we'll have to sort them again. If we were ever to divorce it would be over knives, forks and spoons. What is it in your marriage? Write it down. Maybe you are going to stop doing some annoying thing, that's driving the other person nuts right now. And that will improve your marriage.

I want to talk about Number 4: **Practise the Change First Principle**. That's why I can guarantee that this lecture works. **It's not the other person, it's you. Listen carefully. If you want to change a relationship you have got to be willing to change first. If you want to change a relationship, use a mirror rather than a microscope.** Those of you who read the Bible, Matthew 3:5 - motes and beams. Why are you so skilled at looking at the small inadequacies, motes, and ignore the large inadequacies, in yourself (beams)? - that is a true principle. Everybody does it. If our marriage is going to improve, it's got to be them. People come in for counselling we ask, "What can you do to improve the relationship?" and they say, "Well, if he/she were to do these 36 things that I've written down, then we would be happily married."

"Oh, then what can you do to improve the marriage?" Now shining the halo they say, "Well, nothing really." It's him or its her. **If you want to change a relationship, use a mirror rather than a microscope.** It's a true principle. You have got to change first. I've had some marvellous experiences with the change first principle.

A women in Cedar City, Utah said, "My husband and I have been married for 50 years and I cannot remember the last time he said, 'I love you.' He says, 'I told you I loved you when we first got married. If anything changes you'll be the first to know.'" When I taught her the first change

principle, she said, “You mean, if I want him to tell me he loves me I have to tell him first?” She said, “I am not going to do it. I’m not going to change until he changes.” I said “No, you have to change first.” Well, she left, she’s in her mid-70s, she said, “I am going to write and tell you why this doesn’t work.”

I got a letter eight to 10 months later. She said: “Dear Dr Barlow, I am the woman in Cedar City, with the husband that had not told her for as long as she could remember that he loved her.” Isn’t that a tragedy, why we just can’t say the words? To use the love language. She said she walked in, he was sitting with the remote and asked, “How was Dr Barlow? What did you learn?” She said, “I learned a few things, but I really want you to know that I love you.” And he said, “Thank you.” She said in her letter, “I was so mad at you I could have strangled you on the spot had you been here.” The next day they were at the table eating and she said, “Honey, I just want to know that I care about you and that I love you.” He parted the paper and said, “What?” She said, “I love you.” She said, “I went on and on and nothing changed. I thought it was probably the dumbest thing I’d ever heard from a university professor.”

And then he had a heart attack. He went to Cedar City Hospital. Lying there, literally dying, machine hooked up to him. She said in her letter: “Dr Barlow, I wanted to hear from him, from his lips that he loved me, before he died.” Why do we wait until people get in a tragic situation before we tell them that we love them, and give them flowers? After they die we heap the flowers on people, right? People need flowers before they die and they need to be told they are loved. Here he was on a machine, dying and she said it was two o’clock in the morning and he was getting weaker and weaker. It’s a dramatic story. He said, “Come over here” and she went over and took hold of his hand and he said, “I know that for all these weeks you’ve been telling me that you love me.” She said, “Oh, good.” He said: “This time I want you to know that I love you too.” He squeezed her hand and died one hour later.

I treasure that letter, because she says, “Thank you Dr Barlow for teaching me the change first principle. Had I not been willing to change first and tell my husband I loved him, I would never have learned that he loves me.” That’s how powerful that principle is. It is a true principle. **It’s not what your spouse is going to do in the next 21 days, it’s what you’re going to do.** And what happens when you change is that you start mirroring for your spouse. You don’t say, “Well this is what I am going to do this week”, you just do it. And when you start changing, it gives them room to think of what they can do.

Number 13: Stop expecting perfection in marriage. That, along with the recommitment, may be the most important thing. Marriages are being ripped apart by many people because they want perfection. If you want to read a good book - Michele Weiner-Davis, *Divorce Busting*. Go to www.divorcebusting.com, Listen to this quote from her book, page 113, “**The expectation of perfection is the first step towards divorce and despair.**” Isn’t that an interesting quote? If you expect perfection you are set up to fail. She says don’t expect perfection.

You have the **80/20 rule**. First day that a student comes into my class I say turn to Page 161 of Frank Fox, a text used universally. He has a quote, “**It is impossible for one spouse to meet all the needs of the other spouse, and if you have 80% of your major needs met you have a good marriage**”. And many people are upset because they focus on what they are not getting rather than what they are getting. I’ve saved marriages on that quote.

Good is good. If you have a good marriage it’s good. I want to show you this eight minute video. Its called Fanny’s Dream. It’s about the woman who wanted to marry the perfect man. This captures this concept better than anything I know.

VIDEO: FANNY'S DREAM

(Transcript of video is not available due to copyright restrictions)

Time's gone. Let me tell you about my spoon in one minute. Go give your spouse one of those. (Shows wooden spoon). Does anyone know what one of these is? Do any of you have ancestors in Wales. It's a Welsh love spoon. It's the highest form for love you can bestow on anyone in Wales. I have my students who are married carve one of those for their spouse. Find out what Love means to them. I get up and on Monday my wife says to me, what spoon do you need from me this week? If you gave them one of these, they wouldn't know what they were unless you came from Wales. **You have to find what love means to each other.** Get on the web, buy one of these and give it too your spouse for a wedding anniversary.

In conclusion, let's just look at the thought at the end. I hope you have your one idea. We don't have time to check this out. There is a thought there I want to leave.

Several years ago I was talking to a young man, his past was just horrid and he was scared for the future and in conversation I said, "Well, what you doing right now is more important than what you did in the past." We talked a little longer and I said, "What you do in the future is more important than what you are doing right now." He wrote back and thanked me for that thought. I said, "What thought?" And it was this. **"What we are is more important than what we have been. What we can become is more important than what we are."**

So regardless of our past, our past does not become our future. Let's move on. Let's learn to have better marriages, 21 days at a time.

Thank you very much.