

YURIY STOLYAROV

CLOSENESS



Closeness

The translation from Russian into English has been done by

Gulnara Zulina

Relationships, intimacy, conflicts, loneliness, friendships – these are just a few issues that have been addressed in this book. The author openly and sincerely talks about a lack of intimacy in marriage and absence of understanding between people. Based on real-life examples the author demonstrates simple steps which may help people to build close relationships, learn to listen to each other and bring joy to yourself and the people around you. I would recommend this book to every believer who is not satisfied with the quality of their relationship with God and with other people, who passionately desires to grow in their service to others and who strives to discover the riches hidden by the Lord in the deep relationships that each of us can establish and maintain.

Yastrzhembskiy Sergey Vladimirovich – Pastor, Doctor of Ministry (DMin), President of Moscow Theological Institute.

The author of the book shares practical tips on how to avoid depression and loneliness and how to enjoy a relationship with God, friends and family members. The book is very helpful both for young people and for married couples.
Buck Vitaly Pavlovich – Bishop of the Union of Evangelical Baptist Christians in Kemerovo Region.

This book sheds light on the essence of inner processes of a human soul. It teaches the reader to build quality relationships within a family, between husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and associates.

Khoroshenko Andrey Alexandrovich - Bishop of West-Siberian Union of Russian Churches of Christians of Evangelical Faith.

At first I thought that I would quickly flick through the pages of the book to get the idea of its content, but page after page the book kept scanning my feelings forcing me to think and re-evaluate my relationships with the loved ones.

With the intrinsic discernment Pastor Yuriy unveils the essence of intimacy and closeness. Sincerely, without excessive pudency he highlights the problems of intimacy and touches on the theme of sex. His tips on maintaining relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children are simple but sensible.

I would recommend everyone to read this book not only using the gift of eyesight, but with the heart wide open, as well. If your family boat has sprung a leak, if your marriage is bursting at the seams, this book is for you!

It instills hope for the future, and, I believe, it will help a lot of people to avoid suffering and pain and will lead them toward happiness and harmony.

As every driver has a first-aid kit in the car, this book should become an emergency kit for your life. If you ever need a piece of advice, it will always be at your fingertips.

This book can be used as a manual for building trusting relationships within a family and within a church. It is good for husbands and wives, as well as pastors and church leaders.

The book stands out due to its author's sincerity, frankness, humor, wisdom, scientific approach and practical application. At times it made me laugh, at times it forced me to shed tears.

Novotorzhin Oleg Vasiliyevich – Bishop of “Gospel to the World” church association, Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith; Pastor of the “Resurrection of Christ” church, Prokopyevsk.

Contents

- 1.Closeness
- 2.Several Causes for Loneliness of the Human Soul
- 3.Closeness Does Not Imply Absence of Boundaries
- 4.How to Develop a Close Relationship
- 5.How Are You?
- 6.A Close Relationship Between a Man and a Woman
- 7.Friendship and Conflicts
- 8.Close Relationships Within a Family
- 9.A Sexual Relationship Between a Husband and a Wife
- 10.An Intimate Relationship with God and His People

«As water reflects the face,
so others reflect your heart back to you”
(Proverbs 27:19)

Foreword

In my opinion the root of all problems both in the heart of each single person and in the life of a family as a unit lies in the lack of closeness and intimacy. A soul that doesn't have an intimate relationship with another soul cannot open up and show its beauty. It is impossible to feel happy and appreciated in a family if the only thing its members know about one another is names. Naturally, sooner or later each member of such "cold" families starts searching for appreciation and fulfillment on the outside and, eventually, finds them in the most inappropriate places. You are sure to learn that anger, tears, rebellion and misbehavior find their source in misunderstanding, neglect and a great lack of love under the roof of your own sweet home.

A great many of research works have been carried out in order to prove that close relationships with people present a vital source of life satisfaction regardless of a person's age or social status.

1. Closeness

Several years ago I made a very important discovery which totally changed my attitude toward people. More precisely, not my attitude but behavior patterns toward some people. Now I am not as easy-going in my relationships with people as I used to be before my discovery was made.

I am confident that there is no person on the face of this planet who doesn't search for warmth and attention of other people. This is the way we are created – each human-being yearns for approval and acceptance. No doubt, we can live without being accepted, but deep down our hearts we are all waiting for someone to show us approval and to accept us for who we are. Just as dry soil yearns for rain to let the planted seeds grow and sprout, so does a human soul that craves for attention and warmth of others in order to awaken and bloom. You have probably noticed that even the people who look “scary” turn into “lambs”, gentle and fluffy, when they are near their loved ones. Why does it happen? Because these loved ones water the soil of their hearts and give them enough warmth. They treasure the relationships that bring mutual satisfaction and enjoyment. If lambs are not regularly attended to and taken care of, they may soon turn into pups and then grow into wolves. The state when yearning “soil” receives proper care from its “gardener” and is encouraged to bloom and bring forth fruit for the one who waters it and cares for it, the state of mutual understanding and enjoyment is called CLOSENESS.

Only those people whose depth allows them to show wisdom and let others see inside their hearts, only those who trust each other and devote their lives to mutual service, can reach true closeness.

To be close in marriage is an essential goal that two loving people should strive for; unless this task is fulfilled, marriage is doomed to be shallow and void of reason.

Some people who are potentially open for close relationships,

mainly husbands and wives or parents and children, oftentimes reach the point when the soil of their hearts cannot stand the dryness any longer. At this stage of life they become vulnerable and ready to find water in any suitable source. This state is quite dangerous and causes people to mistake evil intentions of others for respect and love. It is very easy to buy a vulnerable person turning them into slaves just by offering them a “sip” of kindness and attention that they have been craving for. Imagine your children, your husband or wife in this situation and, I hope you will clearly see and be terrified by the danger you place them in by depriving them of your care, words of approval and love.

Having heard so many stories of children “being taken captive” by sinful practices and drugs, husbands and wives leaving their families and diving into new relationships, I could see one underlying reason. These miserable people were like thirsty soil that was watered by someone who eventually took them captive and became a master of their lives. Their strange and unexplainable actions resulted from the feeling of gratefulness for being rescued from the inevitable death in the midst of a “waterless desert”. We surely disapprove of such decisions, and we do fight for families and relationships, but the “drought” in the hearts of our loved ones should never be overlooked. Nature doesn’t bear emptiness. If you are not near, someone else will be. If closeness with your soul becomes impossible, another soul is very likely to take your place.

Let me explain what type of people my conclusion applies to. One time I slightly hugged a woman as a sign of gratitude. It was done in public and I didn’t give it much thought, but her reaction seemed a bit strange. Later I began to notice a similar reaction in other people when I complemented them or gave them my attention in some way. It was the reaction of thirsty soil. They were inadequate and scared, but very grateful. As if they had been waiting for this warm attention for a long time, but to no avail; and now, all of a sudden, they got what they had been craving for but got it from the wrong source. Their eyes expressed gratitude and a

desire to feel the same warmth and attention again. It seemed like I was buying them by merely being kind. A terrifying thought crossed my mind: what if somebody else had been in my place? Had it been somebody else, they could have easily used this trust against these people. They could have turned them into slaves and done them a lot of harm. It is so much like a stray dog which is ready to follow anyone who strokes it and gives it some food.

I realized that you have to be very careful around such people. You should not get overly engaged in order not to let them glue to you while “ungluing” them from those who was supposed to show them due love and care in the first place.

I continued to watch people’s reaction to complements and hugs, and saw that there were those who remained indifferent to the courtesies. First such indifference made me upset, but later I realized that I should have had a deep feeling of respect for these people’s loved ones. It was obvious that complements and hugs were not out of the usual for these people. They were not shocked or surprised by my courtesies. These people were loved, admired and often embraced. They felt loved and therefore took my courtesies as something absolutely common and habitual. I knew that these people were surrounded by their loved ones: their husbands, wives, children, parents, friends... I do admire those people who are able to create a thick cloud of love and protect the soul of their significant others by meeting their inner needs.

One time I heard a story of a man who became homosexual when he was still a child. When he became a believer in God and started coming to church, his orientation changed, he got married and turned into a happy biblical man. The church showed him much needed acceptance and helped him to receive God’s forgiveness and love. So, what happened to him? How could his mindset change so drastically? To be honest, his story impressed me very deeply.

The boy’s childhood was nothing out of the ordinary. He had everything a child needs to grow up and grasp the world. The only thing he did not have was affection. His parents never hugged him,

never said kind words, they didn't praise him for good grades, and didn't even scold him for poor school reports. Eventually the boy took up football, but his parents didn't have time to come to the stadium to watch a match, to appreciate their son's progress and to share some advice. One time after a successful game where the boy demonstrated excellent football skills a man from the bleachers came up to him, shook his hand and said: "You were the best player out there today!" The boy's parents were not there that day, as usual. Soon the boy and his new friend decided to go to a café together. The parents had never invited the boy to a café before, so it was a whole new experience for him. So, slowly but surely the boy and the man built a steady relationship. Every teenager wants to have older friends to be able to share secrets and to learn wisdom from. One time the boy came to his friend's house and they watched an X-rated movie together. After that the man offered the boy to become "close friends". To refuse meant to lose a friend. The teenager could not take such risks despite being scared of what this relationship could lead to.

There is no need to go on with this story, but I bet you got the point. You should make sure that you never make your place vacant for somebody else. The sad thing about this story is not only that nobody cared for the child even though his soul longed for love and attention. The sad thing is that one day his parents will end up lacking their son's love and attention, as well. It is frightful to think that minding their own business and not caring for the loved ones such people lead the life of self-destruction. Following the pattern of a snowball effect the hearts of people in such families accumulate rejection and pain, insecurity and bitterness which results in a generation of people who are unable to love and be loved, even though every human being was created by God to live in love. A life without love loses any sense; it lacks beauty and power. Just as heartless and thoughtless robots we exhaust our life span and get discarded.

Here is what the Bible says about this: "Drink water from your

own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.” (Proverbs 5:15-17). In this passage the emphasis should be made on two things: DRINK WATER FROM YOUR CISTERN. It is quite possible to have a good cistern of your own but NEVER DRINK from it, or you might DRINK water but from the WRONG CISTERN. In both cases a man who does not drink FROM HIS OWN CISTERN cannot be happy.

You must admit that oftentimes we look around and notice that our neighbors’ wells look more attractive than ours. Their water seems fresher and the wells look nicer. It makes you want to exchange your well for your neighbor’s. Or sometimes we get so upset about our wells that we decide to leave them or punish them by neglecting or pretending that they don’t exist. Unfortunately, by doing so we end up punishing ourselves. Think about the wives who were dumped by their husbands or the husbands that were dumped by their wives, think about the kids who didn’t receive any love from their parents and the parents who weren’t cared for by their kids. At some point of their lives they all made a mistake of quenching their thirst from the wrong cistern.

Imagine that your friend gives you an apple. Will you consider this apple as a blessing? Yes and no? We can say that the apple is a potential blessing. If you eat it then it will become a blessing. If you lose it or leave it somewhere by mistake, it won’t have a chance to bless you.

Try to picture a parent who has children but refuses to spend quality time with them, kiss them or hug them. Obviously he or she can’t expect any affection in return. Most likely such a parent lectures and scolds the kids over little things day in and day out. Will the kids become a blessing for this type of parent? Definitely not! These children do not drink water from their cisterns and their prickly souls don’t receive enough warmth which they are craving for. The conclusion is as simple as that – we all need to learn to

drink from our own cisterns.

Imagine a husband who is so busy with his work and other business matters that he cannot find enough time to spend with his wife. Whom does he ignore – his wife or himself? In fact, both, himself and his wife. Potentially he might have a blessing, but in reality it's not there. Why? Because he doesn't use what he has been given, he doesn't drink from his own cistern. Let's go back to the Biblical passage: "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman?" (Proverbs 5:15-20). It is hard to escape a conclusion – no matter how tired you might be, no matter how wrong or hurt your emotions are, no matter what other people think of you – **DRINK WATER FROM YOUR OWN CISTERN** and do not let other people use something that belongs to you alone.

Ecclesiastes confirms these words by saying: "When God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil – this is a gift of God." (Ecclesiastes 5:19). In other words, a gift of God or His blessing mean not only having what He gives you, but using what you have been given, as well.

Sometimes it seems like somebody's strong hand tries to throw us off course changing our values and priorities. On one occasion I was talking to a man of God, and when he heard me quote this Bible verse from Ecclesiastes, it looked as if he recovered his eyesight. He realized that he worked a lot and was able to put aside a lot of money, but he could never find time to spend with his family, he didn't buy gifts for his wife and children and he didn't buy anything for himself. Earning money turned into his reason for existence.

Fortunately he accepted God's conviction and began to spend more time with his family on regular basis. From then on he didn't only accumulate wealth, but he began to apply God's power in order to use what he was given. His family definitely gained from this change and became stronger.

The same principles can be applied in an office or a church setting. Some people choose to act like guests wherever they are instead of developing close relationships with people and enjoying their lives.

There are a lot more profound words in the Scripture that help us realize the importance of drinking from our own cisterns. Every believer treasures God's promises for their lives. Christ gives us promises and by doing so He buys our souls for His kingdom. We believe Him and start following Him. We expect that everything He said will definitely come true. Here is what apostle Paul says in this regard: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27) Put in another way, Christ said the word and sanctified (separated from all others) the Church for Himself. It means that if we want to separate our husbands, wives, children and friends for ourselves, if we want them to belong to us, we have to say a lot of words that are very important for their self-esteem and for our mutual relationships. This will give us a chance to be true leaders in expressing our love for them. By words and actions we should separate them making them ours. Every kind word, every complement, every embrace given to our loved one can be compared to a knife that cuts off a piece of a delicious cake which is meant for our enjoyment and pleasure.

Now ask yourself if you are drinking from your own cistern or if you are jealously looking around trying to whip away somebody else's cup of water.

As a matter of fact, any person who is not trying to develop a close relationship with their loved ones seems to be a bit inadequate. A lack of close relationships makes our lives dull and deprives them of their sense and true beauty. It can be compared to partaking of an exquisite meal on the run or in some foul-smelling basement. You don't enjoy yourself, but simply swallow pieces of food and keep running. It is such a pity that people can't stop in order to enjoy what God has given them as a gift! I do feel sorry for those people who chase after something they consider important and lose the ability to build up close relationships and take delight in love. They set themselves up for aimless floating in the water without a sail or a compass hoping that the current will take them to some place nice.

Let's consider the story of King David whose life was marked by a tragic period that I would like to lay special emphasis on. In my opinion his story may serve as the best illustration of what has been said above. Let's look at 2 Samuel, chapters 13 – 15. Awful things happen in the house of David. One of his sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. This incident hurt a lot of people, but especially Absalom, another son of David. Absalom made it his express intention to take vengeance on Amnon for his sister's assault. Having waited for the perfect time Absalom killed Amnon, which caused his father a lot of grief. Scared that his father might want to take revenge Absalom fled to his uncle – the king of Geshur, where he spent three years of his life. What surprises me the most about this story is that David did not even try to find his son in order to bring about reconciliation. Most likely this terrible incident broke David's spirit and it was the reason why he didn't want to reconcile with his son. As a father he lost his ground.

Let's leave the story of David for a minute and remember the story of the prodigal son (Luke, chapter 15). In this parable Jesus Christ Himself described the father's true heart. Despite a grievous farewell that practically meant that the son had disowned his father, the loving father never gave up and waited for his son dreaming of their reconciliation and renewed closeness. The man did not allow

bitterness and pain to harden his heart. We can see that the father was waiting for his son, and therefore when the young man decided to return home, the father saw him from afar and ran to meet him.

Let's read about this precious reunion: "So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:20-24). I deeply admire this unbroken father who treasured the relationship with his son above his manly pride. Due to his right heart the prodigal son who had been lost, was now found. A close relationship between the father and the son was completely restored

Now let's go back to the story of David and try to understand what happened to him. For three long years he showed no interest in Absalom's life. One of David's servants, Joab, saw that David's heart longed for Absalom, and he decided to bring the son back to his father. In chapter 14, verse 24 we read that the son was allowed to return, but the father refused to meet his son face to face. Two more agonizing years passed by filling Absalom's heart with pain and indignation before the meeting of the father and the son finally took place. They hadn't seen each other for 5 years. What do you think their meeting was like? Let's read about it in the Scripture and try to compare it with the scene described above: "So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom." (2 Samuel 14:33). How different are these two scenes? In the first one the father "ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" while in the second scene the father simply kissed the son. It might have been a very

formal kiss on the son's forehead. It seems like David is broken, he lost his ground as a father. He doesn't desire to be close to his son anymore. It is my firm belief that no parent has a right to act this way. By giving up and losing our ground, we allow malignant bacteria to spread all over our hearts and our homes. So, what was Absalom's reaction to his father's cool reception? We are told in chapter 15 that after the reunion Absalom didn't want to see his father for 4 years and devised a plot against David. It sounds awful. For 9 years the father and the son didn't have a close relationship! For 9 years David was feeding his pride or inner pain and didn't take any effort to restore the relationship with Absalom. Such attitude is absolutely impermissible for any parent. Just as we believe in God's love and forgiveness, just as we are sure that He won't reject us and will always love and cherish each one of us, our kids and spouses should have the same confidence in us. Our overly reserved demeanor, multiple ambitions and pride may consequently cost us too much. This is what happened to David. He had to pay a very high price for his hardened heart – another son's life. Have you ever thought what would have happened if David had met Absalom just like the father from Christ's parable met his prodigal son? Most likely it would have prevented a tragedy between them. There is a chance that David wouldn't have lost another son. In my opinion, when David was lamenting the death of his son, his eyes opened and he came to the understanding of true fatherhood. "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33). How often do we grieve over the loss of our loved ones, a divorce or a hard break-up and realize that we sold something precious for a very low price.

Invest in the relationships with your loved ones so one day they would not drift away from you! Don't risk losing them. Drink water from your cistern!

2. Several Causes for Loneliness of the Human Soul

A human soul yearns to feel needed, fulfilled and loved. We all desire to be loved unconditionally. Thankfully, every believer receives this kind of love and fulfillment through the relationship with God. Truly, if I am a man or a woman of God I am capable of influencing this world through prayer. And since God adopted me and His love for me is unconditional I will be loved by my Heavenly Father no matter what. Thanks to our spiritual life we have an opportunity to experience God's love, but oftentimes we find ourselves lacking human care and attention. Listen to the stories of mighty men of God who were unable to withstand difficulties. Have a heart-to-heart talk with someone who used to be a "spiritual giant" and then simply gave up. What did they all lack? The answer is simple – they didn't have a kindred spirit. They were left one on one with their inner and outer turmoil. They didn't have anyone to share their feelings with. They didn't feel understood, needed and fulfilled. Unfortunately, nobody was there to listen to them and to share a word of encouragement when they needed it the most. The state when you come to the realization that you are facing the whole world and there is no one else around to give you a hand is called LONELENESS.

You don't have to be physically alone to feel lonely. You may be a big boss or a father of a large household, the fifteenth son in a huge family or a grandmother of thirty grandchildren but, nevertheless, you may indeed feel lonely.

It is not uncommon when trying to escape from loneliness people part from this life. It is easier for them to die than to live, for life seems frightening when you try to overcome multiple problems and cares without assistance. You don't have anyone to rely on, to talk to or to expect help from, YOU ARE ALONE! It is indeed terrifying.

From time to time every leader faces loneliness. When you lead others, it is quite common to look to your side and see no one. They

are all behind you, following in your footsteps. Sometimes God brings us through trials and tribulations expecting us to make a personal decision. It may seem as if He places us in the vacuum of loneliness so nobody would hinder us from hearing His voice. It is a difficult but a vitally important time in the life of a believer. We can call such situations “the moments of loneliness” which should be considered as normal periods of life. However, if loneliness has become your lifestyle, I would dare to call this development a curse. A human being hasn’t been created for loneliness. We have been created for love and closeness. These alone can make our lives happy and satisfying.

So, why do some people seem to fall into the trap of loneliness? Why do love, friendship and closeness turn into something unobtainable for some of us? Let’s try to figure it out and find some causes of this major problem.

- The first cause of loneliness – BEAUTIFUL OR UGLY GARMENTS OF A SOUL. I came to a conclusion that some people are not capable of loving and accepting love. It means that such a notion as closeness is out of their reach, as well. In order to enjoy fellowship with people it is essential to accept them for who they are, respect their views, and not be afraid to share yours. In fact, the most fascinating things about a person are hidden inside. What you see on the outside is just a cover. Some covers are more beautiful and trendy than others. Just like candy – we look at a pretty wrap and imagine the taste. However, sometimes having taken off the wrap I turn out to be in for a big disappointment. There have been a lot of sweets in my life that I had to throw away after the first bite because they were not delicious at all. People are the same way – the most interesting stuff is inside. If people are only interested in covers and wraps, we call them shallow. But those who want to keep digging and find a person’s soul and feel the power of their spirit can be called deep people.

Look at some “beautiful” girls and “handsome” guys. They spend hours in front of the mirror perking up. They waste a lot of money

on clothes and shoes. When you meet these people, you willy-nilly notice their sophisticated taste and think of the time they've spent to prepare for the meeting with you. Alas, as soon as they open their mouth, your opinion immediately changes. You begin to understand that the person in front of you is no more than an empty-headed doll. Then you start feeling sorry for them because most likely on the inside they are full of fears. They have become hostages of stereotypes and paradigms. They put so much effort into their outer appearance that they completely forget about the inner content. These people are hardly capable of deep solid relationships, selfless devotion, sincere fellowship and true love.

Moreover, there are people who are wearing grey garments of indifference and offence, disappointment and dismay, fear and envy. Having gone through a lot of pain these people allowed circumstances to destroy their lives. They decided to hide from the world without trying to heal inner wounds. Under those garments they are trying to find peace. They hope that no one would try to reopen their aching wounds, but doing so they are losing their ability to love and be loved in return.

Love is impossible without pain. Opening up to people and becoming close, listening to their opinions that are often contrary to ours or seeing their unusual behavior we will inevitably feel pain. However, after we learn to accept people the way they are and to appreciate their openness and trust, we feel close to their soul, we begin to feel love for another human being.

The Scripture calls love a perfect unity of virtues. Thus, a person capable of loving other people is close to perfection. Is it easy? Of course, not! When will we learn to love? Nobody knows if we ever will. We are called to love and to accept the love of others, which is impossible without the 'nakedness' of the soul. I am not saying that our souls should be naked at all times. It would be impossible. What I mean is that we should never lose this ability – to open up and to appreciate the openness of others.

Very often I look at some married couples and feel pain. These

people don't know each other. They have no idea whom they share the house with. As years went by, they managed to put on so many layers of clothes that now they don't feel any joy or pain of their relationship. Living together they remain lonely. If you are reading these lines and realize that I am talking about you, I beg you to learn to take off the garments that you have been wearing in order to hide your soul. Try to open up and become sincere with your spouse. Get a grip on life, overcome pain and learn to admire the soul of your loved one. Help each other to feel the taste of love and closeness.

“And they were both naked, and they felt no shame.” (Genesis 2:25)

- The second cause of loneliness – YOU ARE NOT A TYPE OF PERSON OTHER PEOPLE ENJOY TO BE WITH.

I am sure you would agree that some of us seem to always push other people away. Negative or angry words, intrusiveness, bad odor, untidiness, constant dissatisfaction, resentment over people or things, gossiping, strange sense of humor, stupidity, a desire to live off other people, and a lot more, - if you admit that you are guilty of some of the qualities mentioned above, then you risk getting on a black list and becoming a persona non grata. Surprisingly most of those who possess these qualities do not understand how critical the situation is. They may not know about their flaws or they may not see them. In my opinion it is the duty of those who surround these people to draw them out and honestly talk to them about their problem. Call things as they are, don't tone the problem down. This way you can express your love and kindness. We can't always see our own negative features – sometimes we need to look in the mirror more carefully in order to see our own insufficiency. We are called to be that mirror for each other, so our loved ones could change and reach their maximum.

One time there was an interesting situation in my life. I knew one young man who was and still is very ambitious, athletic and manly. I liked a lot of things about him and it was pleasant to be around him. However, he had one peculiarity – he almost always

smelled of sweat. He wasn't married and often talked to me about wanting to get married. I thought to myself that with the odor like that he would most likely scare all the potential girlfriends away. I was not the only one who knew about the problem – other people told me about it, as well. But the guy was so nice that nobody wanted to hurt his feelings and tell him about the smell. I think many of us went through similar situations in life. After all, I decided to take the plunge. When I mentioned the situation, the young man was dumfounded. He had no idea about the problem. He was a very neat person by nature, therefore he took a shower a couple of times a day, but as it turned out he did ignore deodorant. He was afraid that using deodorant could lead to cancer. After we had talked I gave him the best deodorant I knew of and I assured him that he would not get cancer. This is the way I helped him to solve a problem in his life. Never again did I smell sweat around him. Shortly afterwards he got married. I feel good when I think about the spiritual closeness I share with this man. It is great to realize that I did something useful for him and helped him to change his life.

Very often lonely people look for reasons of their loneliness on the outside. They start blaming others of indifference and lack of care, scrutinize their behavior in order to find faults with them. By doing so they only drive themselves into a dark cell of their soul's prison. If you realize that I am talking about you then I want to encourage you to stop looking for problems on the outside, instead look inside your heart and deal with your own self. Become a person who attracts people. Try to change and become a fun companion to be around. Use your intelligence, respect for people, good smell, friendly jokes and amusing conversation to help you open the hearts of other people. It wouldn't be easy, but the result will be satisfying. Try to change – stop asking for attention and indulgence and start pouring your love on those who need love. Don't look for the cause of loneliness on the outside. Remember that it is hidden inside.

- The third cause of loneliness – YOUR PAST HINDERS YOU FROM BUILDING UP YOUR FUTURE

We all grew up in a specific cultural atmosphere of a family or an orphanage, we had friends and teachers who exerted influence on our lives. Many people feel that their past is forcing them to change something about their lives. Unfortunately, many people spin their wheels at the decision making stage and only a few make a firm decision and truly change.

New life is like new clothes. It is not enough to pick out a nice outfit, you have to learn to wear it. You must admit that some of us happily put on our old shoes after the new ones have given us a couple of blisters. This is why sometimes we look at the seasoned church-goers and don't see any sign of salvation about them. It is the reason why some men and women that claim to be believers get married and act just like their unbelieving parents did. This may lead to a pathetic situation where "a believer who is wearing his or her old shoes" would feel more lonely in a family or at church than they did before they came to know God. No wonder Christ said that the Kingdom of God is taken by force. It is absolutely vital to make an attempt to reach your goal and to become a man of God's own heart.

If today you feel lonely at church I would recommend that you test yourself. Try to estimate if your life reflects Jesus. Are you a man of God? Try to become interesting and exciting to be around. Don't look for the cause of loneliness in your surroundings. Remember that the cause is hidden deep inside your heart.

- The fourth cause of loneliness – SIN AND DOUBLE STANDARDS.

Sin is a very broad concept. There is no need to list all known transgressions because different people at a different spiritual age perceive the notion of sin differently. When I first received salvation I saw smoking, swearing and alcohol as sins. Having gotten rid of these weaknesses I saw myself as one of the greatest saints. Not long after I began to realize that I had to do away with a lot more issues in order not to lose my place in Christ. Up to this day I search my heart and find things that Christ wouldn't like – the things I need

to get rid of.

Every sin has one peculiarity – it is committed as if the dark. We know that “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5). When committing a sin we enter the darkness trying to hide from God’s presence. If we keep on sinning, we stay in the dark. We are frightened that the light of God or people may shine upon the things that we are trying to hide. Cutting ourselves off from other people we hide inside our souls and set ourselves up for loneliness. Eventually we have to think of excuses and justifications. We don’t want to get exposed. We become spies in a strange land scared of disclosure and condemnation. The price we pay for committing a sin is loneliness. Admit it, the price is way too high. It is much easier to live with a clear conscience and a pure open heart. It is possible that you won’t get everything you want, but it will definitely rid you of a heavy burden of loneliness.

A person who doesn’t have anything to hide is in a better position than the one who is trying to hide from the light. This person does not have to wear a mask, is not afraid of people’s disapproval or God’s punishment, does not live by double standards in order to justify his or her sins. This person lives according to the standards of God.

Let’s remember the story of Adam and Eve. Until sin entered their lives they walked in the Garden of Eden, enjoyed peace and didn’t know fear. They found pleasure in their relationship and enjoyed their wonderful life. When the sin of disobedience came into their lives they saw that they were naked. It means that they now had a feeling of shame which they had never had before. They were ashamed and didn’t want to be seen by God. They began to hide from Him for they feared His wrath. They lost the peace that they had enjoyed before, they began to blame each other and finally lost their closeness. Having lost God’s presence they let envy and separation enter their house. Won’t you agree that it is a very high price for a sin?!

So, a person who chooses sin sets himself or herself up for

suffering both internally and externally. On the outside you risk being condemned by multiple spiritual laws, and on the inside you lock yourself up in the prison cell of your soul and remain there one on one with your sin.

It is unbearable to always live under the conviction of God's spirit, therefore we start making up double standards which, as we think, justify our sinful behavior. These new standards along with our inner prison make us strange, incomprehensible and lonely in the world of people.

If you realize that I am talking about you and you see that sin has crept into your life, try to get rid of it as soon as possible. No matter how sweet your sin may seem, the price you pay is too high. Don't expect that the problem will solve itself. Don't expect that people will be lenient toward you. Don't justify yourself. Rid of your sin. Do not look for the cause of your loneliness on the outside. Remember that the cause is hidden deep inside your heart.

- The fifth cause of loneliness – YOU HAVE FALLEN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF MANIPULATIONS AND WITCHCRAFT.

It is not uncommon to see people who suffer from the lack of love and attention. Some of them end up in the clutch of rejection and grievance, complexes and fears, while others choose manipulation. To manipulate people means to overmaster their will and force them to do things they would never do otherwise. Manipulating others a wounded soul subconsciously searches for healing and love, but obviously cannot find them. Manipulation is like anesthesia - it kills your pain for a while, but when it wears off it leaves you one on one with your suffering. Moreover, in a situation like this there are two suffering sides – the one who manipulates and the one who is manipulated. The human soul can find healing only in giving and accepting love. Unfortunately very few people come to this realization. Enslaved, broken will, unfulfilled gifts and talents, inferiority complex and fear all result from manipulation. If a broken person finds some spiritual sources and powers to overmaster the will of another human being, we call

it WITCHCRAFT.

To be bewitched means to live in spiritual slavery. A bewitched person doesn't have strength to fulfill the will of God and achieve your own potential. It is quite logical that a bewitched soul will feel lonely. It can be compared to a chained dog that feels strong enough to run and play, but it cannot do it because of the power of the constraining chain.

Co-dependent manipulative parents, immature grown-up children, scared friends and relatives, people ruled by their friends' opinions and behaviors are all terrifying examples of manipulation and witchcraft that drive a human soul into the prison of loneliness.

When you are controlled by a manipulative power of another person it is impossible to establish a happy family, become strong and successful and develop your natural abilities. The person who manipulates you will never let you become happier than he or she is. Considering that manipulators cannot become happy because they choose wrong means for achieving happiness, your happiness becomes absolutely impossible until you make a conscious decision to change the situation.

If you can admit that I am talking about you, then make up your mind to set your soul free in order to start enjoying your life. Most likely it would be too hard for you to deal with the problem without exterior assistance. These shackles are too strong and you are so used to being chained that you need an experienced mentor or a pastor who would help you sort out your circumstances and by combined efforts find the way to freedom.

Of course, this by no means is a complete list of traps that a human soul can fall into. The purpose of this book is not to create a compilation of encyclopedic knowledge related to a human soul and its problems. The purpose of this book is to sow the seeds of hope so they would grow and help every reader to become a fulfilled person, able to accept and give love, capable of building and developing intimate relationships with other people.

It is important for us to make two conclusions: 1) To live a full

life we should have a strong personality capable of keeping close deep relationships. 2) If your soul has been caught into a net of loneliness and is not able to give or receive love, you have to release your soul from this net as soon as you can. To do this you must find and get rid of the cause of your loneliness.

3. Closeness Does Not Imply Absence of Boundaries

There is a well-known Christian book that deals with the issue of barriers and boundaries. The author of the book shares a thought that is very hard to disagree with. He says that it is very important for every person to set specific boundaries. One can go beyond these boundaries only when invited to do so. Any attempt to break through such protective boundaries of the soul in order to charm a secret out or force a person to do something he or she has no desire to do is a crime. The soul whose territory has been invaded will be hurt and dismayed, and we cannot know for sure if it will ever be able to deal with the pain that has been caused by the invasion. The dictator who has illegally seized the power can't be at rest, either, because the captured soul will try to throw off the yoke in every way possible. You can hardly find a person who seized power and was able to be happy afterwards. Read life stories of famous dictators and note the nightmare most of them ended up living in. They were afraid of being overthrown and revenged for all the violence that they had caused. They were afraid of being rewarded according to their evil deeds against other people's freedom.

As it was said above, every soul needs boundaries. We all need to know what is permissible and what is not in regard to our personal space. It will allow us to set some righteous boundaries in relationships with other people. First and foremost their respect for us will be expressed through their respect for our boundaries. It is quite interesting that we may allow ourselves to be rude toward some people because they themselves are rude by nature, while we would never let ourselves be rude to other people because we perceive such behavior as something impermissible. For instance,

people may smoke in one house, while they would not even enter another house with a cigarette in their hands. Or, when talking to some women men might allow themselves to tell vulgar jokes or even swear, while in the presence of others they would not think of saying something of the kind. Why does this happen? Because some people know how to set boundaries and insist on being treated with respect, while other people do not. Those people who never set boundaries are like a “city with broken walls”. Anyone can enter its territory and do damage to the inhabitants. This city is not safe to stay in. In this case love, joy and peace are jeopardized, as well.

So, what does it have to do with the topic of closeness? In fact, these two are inextricably linked. Closeness is a voluntary unity of human souls based on deep mutual trust. You cannot build a close relationship by force. Sometimes husbands and wives desperately try to penetrate the soul of their spouse and parents try to break the walls of their children’s inner world. It turns out that in order to learn some personal secrets and to come in touch with the soul of our loved ones we are ready to become treacherous. Such an approach cannot result in anything positive. We might learn some secrets by jerking clothes off a person’s soul, but we will not feel any closer after such treacherous acts. The price we will have to pay for this invasion will be even thicker walls and heavy locks on the souls of our loved ones. Even God does not allow Himself any treachery toward people. He always gives us a choice. Even more so should we stop ourselves from breaking other people’s boundaries. When we desire closeness with someone, all we can do is build a relationship and wait to be invited to enter. Resentfulness and overindulgence are chronic disorders of those who are used to regular soul invasions. I suppose that no one in their right mind would ever want to develop these pathologies in the souls of their loved ones.

The story of my close friend comes to mind. Let me call him E for his privacy sake. Having finished university he applied for a job in a big successful company. It is a well-known fact that HR officers do

not usually welcome young specialists with their arms outstretched. E prayed and began to open doors one after another until he finally met his future mentor. From the very beginning they established a very good, almost friendly, relationship. Being a guileless guy E allowed his mentor to enter his soul. Weeks passed by. E began to notice that his mentor was not always fair toward him. He kept giving E different tasks justifying it by the fact that he was his disciple. When the work was completed, the mentor would get all the praises and bonus pays from the boss. Surprisingly, he seemed to forget that the work that got him all the praises and the incentive pay had been done by his disciple. Besides, if there were some problems and the boss was unsatisfied, the disciple was there to shift the blame on. He was guilty of all the “sins” of the department it seemed. The feeling of injustice grew with each passing day. E began to realize that he was being used by his superior who didn’t even remember to thank him for the work well done. Of course, he should have talked to his mentor about that but there was one more obstacle. The man always took a lively interest in E’s personal life – his family, friends and his spiritual life. E didn’t want to risk losing a friendly relationship with the mentor and this is why he was leery to start a tough conversation. By that time his soul was so full of contradictions that he woke up and went to bed overcome with depressive thoughts. The young man couldn’t fathom how such a nice person who took very keen interest in his life could wrong-foot him before the boss without any remorse. Prayers, talks with family members and the pastor didn’t bring about any results. E decided to consult a psychologist. No visible result, either. Only the book called “Boundaries” by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend that has been mentioned above was able to reveal, diagnose and prescribe the treatment plan for the disorder. So, the cause of the problem lay in the fact that there were no boundaries in the relationship established between E and his mentor. Their professional and personal relations were mixed up. Probably, the mentor was experienced and lucrative, but it is not improbable that he was

really interested in E's life. In reality, though, the mentor used their personal relationship to get into the disciple's soul. Eventually this relationship caused E a lot of pain. The young man listened to the advice given by the authors of the book. He came to work and told his mentor that from then on at work he would only fulfill his professional duties. As for his personal life, he would be glad to talk about it only outside work if his mentor ever had a desire to listen. For the record, E was an excellent employee. Putting up boundaries first filled his heart with peace even though it did hurt to realize that the relationship with the mentor would not be as warm as it used to. Artificial closeness between the young man and his mentor soon came to an end. A bit later the boss noticed the young specialist and E had a promotion. Had he not built up boundaries, he might have remained an apprentice all his life suffering from inner pain and spiritual torments.

Think about it for a minute. Does your soul have boundaries? If so, what are they? Make it a rule to respect the boundaries of other people. Help other people to see and understand yours. People around you will not always make out the boundaries you have established. Honor other people and develop your own self-respect. Only if you respect others, will you be able to have close relationships that will bring joy and life satisfaction.

4. How to Develop a Close Relationship

There is no one on the face of this planet who wouldn't mind a cold formal shallow relationship with the person they love. Then why is the world full of people who fall into the pit of coldness and indifference? Why do some people lose their ability to love and trust? Let's try to find proper answers to these questions.

It is hardly possible to answer "why" it happens, because every relationship has its own difficulties and issues that need to be solved. In my opinion sometimes the question "why" cannot be answered at all. It would be wiser to try to understand what we can do to establish and keep close relationships. What causes our

reactions? The way we were brought up? The way we perceive the situation? It is important to sort things out and make a set of rules that will help us control our reactions. This way we will not wound the souls of our loved ones or destroy the closeness we share.

A close relationship is a result of mutual work of two or more people. We set a goal and then we start moving towards it. Building a relationship starts with fellowship. Step by step we open the curtain of our soul and let in those who are dear to us. We seek after their understanding. Sharing our feelings and concerns we expect that our loved ones won't judge, hurt or ridicule us. We hope that they won't put us on a public display and point their fingers at us. The soul that has been understood feels like it's been warmed up by a bonfire on a frosty day. A close relationship is so pleasant that a warmed up soul will likely desire after the warmth again and again. Therefore when we are working on a close relationship it is vital for us to sort out our feelings and answer one important question – are we ready to develop and support this relationship for a long time, maybe all our life? If you cannot say yes, then you should stop as soon as you can, for one step back will mean betrayal that will leave a deep wound on a betrayed soul. I would like to quote one famous saying: «We are responsible forever for what we have tamed”. This is exactly what closeness is. The price you have to pay for it is high.

Sincere heart to heart fellowship is a constant price you need to pay for a close relationship. Coldness, offence, disappointment and even hatred start at the loss of sincere personal interaction. Conversely, sincere fellowship can be lost when people don't give it enough quality time. The most common mistake made by family members is that parents and children or husbands and wives start thinking that their fellowship will happen all by itself. Then, as the time goes by, unresolved conflicts, constant rush and caused pain start taking their toll. People drift away from each other and become estranged. In this case you may not only lose your loved one, but even become enemies. Animosity, in my view, results from one person being offended with the other for a lost or damaged

relationship.

How do we establish a close relationship? Spend enough time with each other and be sincere! If we pay a good price of time for fellowship, our heart will surely take us to the very depth. A close relationship will become a natural result of such depth. What should be done in order to keep a close relationship? Constantly and diligently keep paying the price! I have witnessed that only those who set aside special time for each other regardless of circumstances become close and, therefore, happy.

All the ruined relationships and divorces have one and the same cause – people stop being close. For some reason they stop paying the price of time for their relationship. Thankfully, I have watched some relationships come back to life – when nearly estranged people came to senses and began to sacrifice their time and their comfort for the sake of each other in order to restore their broken relationship. When they didn't give up after a couple of failures the result was surprising! Many people testified that having conquered the estrangement they became even closer than they had ever been before. However, other people who were not ready to pay the price simply broke up filled with pain and anger.

There are several rules that can help us to build a relationship the right way. Here they are:

- Listen people out without interrupting. Try to understand what they are saying. It is better to ask to repeat or admit that you are tired and continue your conversation later than to be uninterested and superficial.
- Don't deceive and don't force your dialog partner to deceive you back. Usually people lie when they feel pressured or manipulated. Do not put pressure on others and if at some point you feel pressured try to gently or humorously resist it. This way your defense won't sound like an accusation.
- Think before you give an answer. Your rush words may deeply wound your loved ones, especially in the beginning of your relationship or during a crisis.

- Never ridicule your dialog partner. If you want to build a relationship with this person, he or she should be able to count on your understanding even in the most unusual circumstances.

- Never be arrogant or dismissive. Remember that something that is very important for your dialog partner may seem quite inessential to you. Your partner might still be trying to solve some issues that you solved in your childhood years. Go down to his or her level and then together rise above the problem they are trying to solve. Treasure each other's feelings.

- Respect the opinion of your dialog partner however strange or wrong it might seem to you. Every point of view has its foundation. Therefore every person has a right to their own opinion. The interesting thing about every relationship is not the views of the parties concerned, but their foundation. Try to get down to the very basis and maybe your opinion will change, too.

- Do not react aggressively if you have been hurt by your partner's words. Consider them as an expression of pain and trust. Think about what you can say in response. Be apprehensive about "shutting" your dialog partner down.

- Never accuse your dialog partner. Most likely your perception of the situation is not objective. Share your feelings but don't force the other party to be defensive.

- Try to use the name of your dialog partner when you address him or her. Note the character qualities that they are proud of. Don't spare compliments, but be sincere. Hypocrisy cannot be tolerated when you want to build a close relationship.

- Try to be in a good mood, and if it has been spoiled, let your dialog partner know what is happening in your heart so you wouldn't look frightening or confusing in their eyes.

- Look in the eyes of your partner. Don't just bore a hole right through them, but try to peek into their soul. Beware of the "flat-eyes" effect, when you look at the person, but your brain is turned off. Don't yawn during a conversation. Don't keep looking at your watch. Don't look around or get distracted. Show that you are

interested.

- Develop your sense of humor. There are times when only a joke can save a situation. Remember that some jokes can kill a person or stomp their dignity down. You must be absolutely sure you're your humor is appropriate and understandable. If you have any doubts whatsoever, do not tell jokes.

It doesn't matter how well you know the person or how many years you have lived together. Always remember that a close relationship is similar to a tuned a musical instrument. If you handle it roughly, the strings of the human soul will immediately change their sound. Even if you've become one flesh and now consider your spouse to be your possession, he or she is still a unique human being with a very delicate inner world. "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31,32)

These ideas and suggestions would not be of any use if we didn't pay special attention to the problem of conflicts and the process of their resolution. I often talk to married couples whose relationships are bursting at the seams. I have come to a conclusion that the main reasons of family conflicts are not very serious. She thought about something... He said something back... It seemed to them... Their feeling got hurt... - such things happen just like a pimple on the skin. If you give this "pimple" due attention, or if you ignore it altogether, then the problem will soon be solved. However, if you try get rid of it with dirty hands (and what I mean is that if you deal with your conflict in a fit of temper allowing yourself to insult and hurt your partner) then you are setting yourself up for a long period of healing or even death. Disguised whirling words, offensive intonation, lack of attention or rudeness are able to stand between people and break up a close relationship once and for all. How can we overcome pain and indignation? How should we handle a whirlwind of emotions? Every person should find his or her own answer to this question. In fact, I wouldn't call it an answer

– just like wrestlers practice their techniques until they reach perfection in order to surprise the viewers by their expertise, so should we perfect the techniques of making up with our loved ones. This skill should become automatic. A protracted healing of the wound or negligent treatment may result in gangrene. We simply don't have time to pout and show out. We have to start building bridges of communication as soon as possible. One of the most important Biblical principles is: "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." (Ephesians 4:26, 27). We can get angry all right, but we need to make sure that our behavior cannot be qualified as a sin against our loved one. If we have suffered separation and the heart is full of anger, we have to deal with it before the sunset. Everyone is familiar with the fact that if you start feeling unwell at night and you do nothing about it, then you will wake up flat out sick. So, how can we resist the wave of anger that attacks our soul? I can give you only one piece of advice. If you have enough wisdom, love for God and your dear one, this advice will help you. I say this with confidence because it works without failure in my life. It is important that you and your partner would make a deal to follow through with these suggestions when one of you makes them. The one who is stronger should be the first to propose these steps, and the other should yield and accept the suggestion. I won't tell you anything out of the ordinary. These steps include a joint prayer and a hear-to-heart conversation. No matter how hurt your feelings are, trust in God should always be bigger than your pain. To humble oneself before the Lord in this case would mean to invite Him into your situation and to have a sincere talk. Pray for each other, open your hearts to God, share your feelings and your pain, ask Him to heal your relationship and then continue with a heart-to-heart conversation with your loved one. I am sure that the wall that has been separating you will start melting like ice on a bright sunny day. You must admit that to love and to enjoy a close relationship with each other is much better than to feel offended and hurt. At times

it feels good to show that you are offended, but it is much more advantageous to make up and go on with your life!

Unfortunately, nor every believer has a believing spouse. What should be done in this case? The principle remains the same. It is important to shed the light on the problem – you need to share your inner feelings and pain. Having talked about it you will cut off the roots of the problem and it will disappear. It is important to keep to this principle from the very beginning of your relationship. If you have lived together for a long time, though, and your hurts and misunderstandings have become calloused, it will complicate the healing process, but won't make it impossible. Be prepared for a sincere conversation. Be the initiator. Seek after sincerity. Learn to deal with a strained relationship immediately, without tightening knots and loops. The tighter you tie the knot, the harder it is to untie.

5. How are you?

If you have visited the USA or have talked to Americans, you've heard the question that always bewilders me. It concerns your life, but it doesn't imply your sincere answer. When I hear this question, I want to give a detailed answer in a truly Russian manner, but every time I have to stop myself because I realize that no one expects or wants my reply. I am talking about a banal question that you can hear wherever you go: when you see strangers or people you know, in a store, when you are out and about... everywhere. It may be the most common question, but, as I said before, nobody is interested in the answer. As you have already understood, the question is: "How are you?" It is the same as "How are things with you?" or "How is your life going?" I remember the time when I got into an awkward situation. I heard somebody ask me this question and it made me think. It took me about 5 seconds to figure out what I want to say in response. But 5 seconds later the man who had asked me the question turned to another person and got involved in a conversation. I was just standing there not knowing whom I should share a brief story of my life with.

One time I met an American pastor called Micah. He touched my heart by his sincerity and the love for God and His people. I perceive him as a very deep and sincere man, so I decided to ask him why Americans ask this question. His answer surprised and amused me. He had no idea why people ask this question so often. This is a part of their communication standards, a matter of courtesy – to take an interest in the life of the person you’ve met. Nevertheless, he agreed that nobody expects you to give a serious answer to this question. I began to wonder what would happen if you start giving a detailed response when asked the question. Most likely the person who asked you how you were doing would get embarrassed at your sudden bout of sincerity. When this pastor saw me the next day, as is common he asked me “How are you?”, but then he suddenly got flustered having remembered our talk the day before. He quickly apologized and we both laughed.

Of course, we should have some everyday questions and answers which can be used as “ice breakers” to prepare our hearts for a further conversation or simply to express our favorable attitude. The problem may occur if we start getting used to such questions. One day you may realize that you are not quite interested in the answers that people give you. Maybe you have lost interest not only in their answers, but in their intonations, the expressions of their faces and their eyes. When you develop a relationship with your loved one, it is very important to be ready to stop and to give them enough of your time. If you cannot manage to do it right away, you can propose to meet later. It is essential to develop your ability to penetrate a human soul, develop a deep relationship and consequently become a deeper person yourself. I personally love fellowshiping with deep people. In fact, I want to be a person whom no one can fault for superficiality. When you talk to deep people it feels as if you are being X-rayed. A person asks you a question, looks into your eyes and you realize that you cannot hide anything or hold anything back. This person watches you, reads you, takes sincere interest in you and respects you. It is

such a pleasant feeling that this person quickly wins your favor and you admire their depth. It is important not to confuse this principle of communication with intrusiveness when somebody tries to get under your skin without being invited! All you want to do is get rid of these people as soon as possible.

I would like to illustrate what has been said above with a true story. One evening a father came home after a long working day. There he saw his daughter. He asked her: "How are you?" and heard a familiar reply: "I'm fine". That answer would have been good enough if the father's probing eyes hadn't noticed an unusual expression on his daughter's face. Her eyes were different. Something was wrong. The father was not satisfied with a superficial answer and began to ask the girl one question after another. After all, the girl realized that she could not hide anything from her dad and gave up. Having overcome fear and embarrassment she admitted that she was pregnant by the guy she had been dating for a while. The girl asked the father not to worry because she had already made an appointment for an abortion and soon all their problems would be solved. The father of the baby decided to break up with her and made up his mind to join the army as a contractor. The father who was quite broad-minded talked to the daughter for a long time and was able to persuade her that an abortion was out of the question. He took the situation under control, called the military base and had the young father-to-be sent back to his home town where he was soon to marry his pregnant girl-friend. These events preceded the birth of the man I deeply respect as a sincere Christian, a powerful leader and my good friend. It hurts my heart to understand that there are a lot of fathers who are satisfied with superficial answers of their kids as if they are not able to go into the curve of their life. They keep lying on the couch staring at the TV, playing a computer game or reading a book.

A while ago when I had already fallen into the habit of following these principles it became interesting for me to "read" people. I cannot brag to have become a human X-ray apparatus,

but it always gives me satisfaction to see through a human soul. It is quite exciting to get to the depth of the soul along with its owner and try to unravel all the hidden feelings and sort out all the misfortunes that have been dumped on him or her. If our meetings result in a victory or healing in some area, I take each of them personally. Meeting with these people, recalling victories and triumphs you start loving life and people more and more. Of course, we aren't always capable of unraveling the situation, but sharing a problem with a person in need solves half of the problem. It is customary to think that when you share someone's difficulties, you help them move forward. In turn this person might help somebody else or maybe even you. This is what love is all about. This is the sense of human existence – to help one another to get to the finish line without being broken.

I would like to emphasize one more thing. When you expect people to be open, you should remember to be an example of openness. Mutual openness will lead to a close friendly relationship which in its turn will nourish your soul and allow you to feel satisfied with your life.

Let's develop an ability to be thoughtful of others. Let's try to look deep down their souls. When asking people "How are you?" and hearing "I am fine, thank you" in response, let's be ready to stop and say: "Tell me a little more about yourself!"

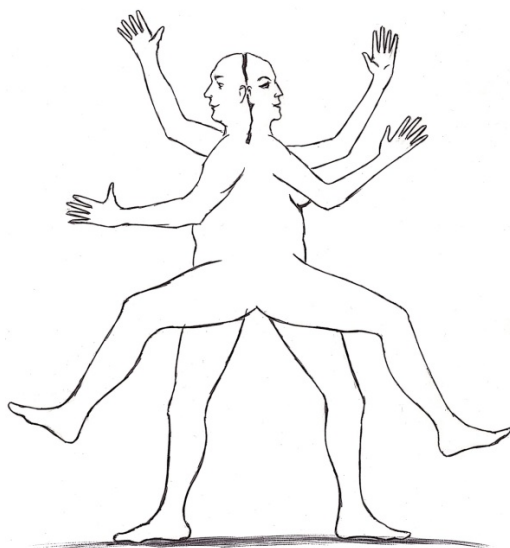
6. A Close Relationship Between a Man and a Woman

Indeed, a relationship between a man and a woman has always been and will always be the most vital and the most widely discussed issue. Most poems, songs, movies, plays and books are dedicated to love. A lot of discussions are held on the nature of love. Some people tend to believe that love is a mere chemical reaction, while others insist that it is something absolutely supernatural, given to humanity as a gift from above. In any case, no human being can avoid love. This is the way we were created by God – some amazing power attracts men and women living in this world toward each other.

A lot of people tried to resist this power proclaiming themselves as men or women-haters, but most of them melted like wax when they met a person that, as they think, was generously sent on their way from heaven.

Many philosophers noted that men and women are very different, and these differences are exactly what the two genders need to complement each other. When we meet a person whose looks, thoughts and attitudes are similar to ours but, yet, different, we feel drawn toward them and a bit later we start feeling that we cannot live and be happy without this person anymore. This feeling – sweet on one hand and quite languishing on the other - we call love between a man and a woman. I suppose it is impossible to explain what love is in a few words. It is a chemical reaction of our bodies, a feeling that you have found something that you have been subconsciously looking for all your life. There is a lot of mystery in the love between men and women. We feel drawn or pushed away, sometimes it feels good to be around each other, while on other occasions this feeling can cause a lot of pain. At one point we think that we are one, but a little later we see ourselves as complete strangers.

People have tried to solve the mystery of love between men and women since the old days. Plato attempted to explain this relationship through a legend of two halves. The notion of two halves, in fact, was invented by him. Plato compared the feeling that occurs between a man and a woman to a body that was cut in halves and was suffering from loneliness until it finally met its other half. This term became widely used in the Christian environment, although it is not biblical. According to Plato this is what a complete person looked like:



Here is what he said: “The original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, of which the name survives but nothing else. Once it was a distinct kind, with a bodily shape and a name of its own, constituted by the union of the male and the female: but now only the word ‘androgynous’ is preserved, and that as a term of reproach.

In the second place, the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and the same number of feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways, set on a round neck and precisely alike; also four ears, two privy members, and the remainder to correspond.

He could walk upright as men now do, backwards or forwards as he pleased, and he could also roll over and over at a great pace, turning on his four hands and four feet, eight in all, like tumblers going over and over with their legs in the air; this was when he wanted to run fast. Now the sexes were three, and such as I have

described them; because the sun, moon, and earth are three; and the man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round and round because they resembled their parents.

Terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts were great, and they made an attack upon the gods; of them is told the tale of Otys and Ephialtes who, as Homer says, attempted to scale heaven, and would have laid hands upon the gods. He said: 'I have a plan which will enfeeble their strength and so extinguish their turbulence; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg.'

He spoke and cut men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling, or as you might divide an egg with a hair; and as he cut them one after another, he bade Apollo give the face and the half of the neck a turn in order that man might contemplate the section of himself: he would thus learn a lesson of humility. Apollo was also bidden to heal their wounds and compose their forms. So he gave a turn to the face and pulled the skin from the sides all over that which in our language is called the belly, like the purses which draw tight, and he made one mouth at the centre, which he fastened in a knot (the same which is called the navel); he also moulded the breast and took out most of the wrinkles, much as a shoemaker might smooth leather upon a last; he left a few, however, in the region of the belly and navel, as a memorial of the primeval state."

This is what the Bible says about the creation of human beings: "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and

whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." (Genesis 2:18-25)

Biblical understanding of marriage is a partnership relationship between a man and a woman entered into by both parties in order to "cultivate a garden", meaning to take care of their family. God gives us skills and abilities so after being united in marriage we could help each other to fulfill God's will in our lives. Each of us will face God on the Judgement Day and will give an account of his or her life alone. Each of us individually will have to give an account to God for the proper use of His talents (Mathew 25). Therefore when we get married it is very important to choose a person who would be able to help us fulfill God's purpose for our lives. In turn we should respect God's purpose for the life of our partner without trying to take God's place in his or her life. The families where spouses don't respect each other's gifts and talents and only try to use them for their own good are doomed to become unhappy.

A lofty sense of love and devotion to each other comes after the feeling of infatuation. Oftentimes infatuation is called a chemical reaction that takes place in a human body. I would like to explain the nature of these reactions. An infatuated person is often called "drunk with love". In my opinion this definition is absolutely correct. Infatuation is a sort of intoxication which happens after a release of chemicals found in a human body into blood. This is the

way our body is set up – under specific circumstances it releases chemicals into the blood stream, which enforces or provides for particular reactions of our organism. For instance, you are walking in the forest, you get tired and your feet hurt really badly. You want to eat and sleep. All of a sudden you see an angry bear. Your body is most likely to follow this pattern: you will forget about being tired and hurt, your sleepiness will immediately disappear for several hours, your body will become fit and fast. Moreover, you will run faster than ever in your whole life! So, what's happened in your body to cause such a reaction? The answer is very simple. In a critical situation our bodies release a dose of adrenalin into the blood stream. Our unusual behavior is caused by a chemical reaction that happens in our body. I would compare it to special latches or shutters that prevent different chemical matters from getting into our blood-circulatory system. Therefore it is vital for a sensible person to differentiate between a chemical reaction and a volitive decision which are worth giving our lives for. For example, if an attractive woman sees a young man for the first time, gives him a passionate hug and whispers a few words about his good looks and her readiness for love into his ear, then most likely this young man will feel a deep sense of love for this woman. Would it be correct to call this feeling love? I suppose not. It simply means that a chemical reaction took place in the body of the young man. It is possible that with passing of time this sensation might grow into a deep feeling of mutual love and devotion, but usually such happenings end up differently. This is why the Bible tells us to control ourselves and never base our actions on feelings alone. We must be sensible when making important decisions.

Most scientists who have studied the process of infatuation note 5 main hormones of love. I am making no pretense to having done a research myself. Nevertheless, I would like to tell you a little bit about these hormones:

*Dopamine – hormone of determination and concentration. It forms in a human body at the initial stage of infatuation and makes

people achieve their goals, one of them being a complete ownership.

*Serotonin – hormone of pleasure. Strange as it may seem, at this stage its production decreases because very often love is associated with suffering.

*Adrenalin – hormone of stress. It increases our ordinary abilities. Its production in infatuated people increases leading to the feeling of inspiration and a desire to “move mountains”.

*Endorphin – hormone of peace and satisfaction. It is released during a physical contact with the love object, providing infatuated people with the feeling of security and happiness.

*Oxytocin and vasopressin – hormones of affection and attachment. They are released in infatuated people when their relationship reaches the stage of mutual love and confidence. Curiously, these hormones reduce the production of the hormones of the first infatuation stage. As a result, passion diminishes while affectionate attachment increases.

I would like to mention a few body reactions related to the state of infatuation. I suppose, this study clearly shows that we cannot do without chemistry. So, here are the reactions:

- Your heart starts racing ready to jump out of the chest
- You feel hot and cold all over, your palms start sweating
- You have goose-bumps
- You experience the feeling of euphoria, it seems like you are always a bit drunk
- You lose your appetite
- You experience an unusual surge of energy. You feel like “moving mountains”.
- You find it very hard to be able to concentrate.
- You don’t want to argue with anyone.
- You feel like singing, going crazy or doing something out of the ordinary.
- You can sleep for only a few hours a day without feeling tired.

You must admit that a person cannot make any serious decisions in this condition. It should be mentioned that living through these

moments is extremely pleasant but it is not easy to make sound decisions. This cannot last forever, though. However, it is essential for married people to learn to create the moments of love and affection for the mutual good of both spouses. Without such pleasant feelings a marriage cannot be complete. Those people who never feel this type of emotions in their marriage can be easily infatuated by an outside source.

A relationship between a man and a woman cannot stay at the friendship level for a long time. Our heart will try to take us deeper. That's why it is important to maintain a distance in our relationships with the opposite sex so as not to cause a strong unwanted chemical reaction in our brain. As for married people, their relationships should always be deep and fulfilling so that chemical reactions would work as they are supposed to by God. Deep, fulfilling close relationships in marriage provide a person with everything that is necessary for a happy peaceful life. I would call a family happy if both spouses regularly experience all the above-mentioned chemical reactions in their family life. It has to be noted that such relationships do not come from nowhere. Only long years of spouses' diligent, meticulous work on their marriage can result in a deep close relationship. I would like to share a quote from Ecclesiastes: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Marriage is hard work. It requires that two people constantly invest in each other. I noticed that very few people are ready to fight for their happy marriage. Just as faith is dead without deeds, marriage is dead without mutual sacrifices. Having done years of counseling with couples at the edge of divorce and having developed strategic plans for their rescue, I must sadly admit that nowadays

most people are led by emotions and selfish desires. There are very few of those who are ready to “deny their souls even unto death” for the sake of their marriage. It makes me feel utterly discouraged when I realize that I am more interested in a family restoration than the husband and the wife who have lived together for many years and have given life to several children. And quite the contrary, I deeply respect those who overcome their own pride and look for a touch point in their relationship. When such determined couples find common grounds, they turn their whole life upside down and restore the lost happiness.

We should not laugh at family troubles and divorces. We should never judge those who were not able to overcome their own reactions. There are many people in this world who have given up on their family life and have persuaded themselves that they are not meant for a happy marriage. I am sure that in 95% cases it is not true. They simply need somebody’s help and a humble heart in order to sort out their problems and reach their maximum potential. It would be good if in the hour of need you had a good friend or your pastor by your side. These people would help you not to give up.

It is very important for our society to learn to be happy in marriage, otherwise we are in for a major shock. Sadly, these days we are not surprised to see gay couples or couples that don’t want to register their marriages officially. We get used to hearing that the birth of a child may interfere with the enjoyment of life or that you should live for yourself and not worry about consequences. There was a time when I was very disturbed by such ideas. I tried to argue and articulate the position of the Bible concerning these issues. Today I understand that talking about it is not enough. We need to have something substantial in order to oppose to these ideas and tendencies. Every person desires to be happy. We all use different means to obtain happiness. If it is impossible to be happy in a marriage, we start looking for an opportunity somewhere else. I am sure that homosexuality and other types of open relationships are nothing more than the result or the fruit that grew and ripened in

the society that hadn't learnt to love and be loved within a marriage relationship. This is the reason why talking is not enough. If our children see their parents happy, it won't occur to them to look for another kind of existence or satisfaction of their inner desires. However, if the kids see that their parents' family life doesn't bring any joy or satisfaction, they will choose another way of social validation. We won't have anyone to blame and we won't be able to judge our kids unless we set a good example of a good family relationship. This is the only way to see them happy and fulfilled in the future.

Not a long time ago I went on Facebook and saw a photo of a homosexual wedding ceremony. Two men were kissing and there was a sign under the picture that talked about their deep love for each other. I knew one of those guys. To say that it was hard for me to look at that photo is to say nothing. It hurt my heart a lot, I literally felt sick. A bit later people began to leave their comments under that picture. I also left a comment, but I will refrain from quoting my comment here. I began to wonder how something like that could ever happen to this guy. Then I saw his mother's comment. She wished him all the best and hoped that he would be happy. If I understood her words correctly, she was hoping that he would be happier than she was. That comment explained a lot.

Let's talk a bit more about human sexuality. This sensitive topic associated with relationships between men and women is so popular today that people tell jokes, spread rumors, and gossip about it. It is a well known fact that a man's body constantly produces a hormone called testosterone which sends signals to the brain causing a man to think about sex. We can reduce this influence on our brain by distracting ourselves with various activities and by avoiding looking at "vile things". "I will not look with approval on anything that is vile. I hate what faithless people do; I will have no part in it." (Psalms 101:3) Nevertheless, no matter how hard you try, you cannot completely do away with the influence of this hormone. The level of testosterone in a male body is 10 – 20 times higher than in

a female body. This is why men have such a strong desire to have sex, and have it often. Testosterone makes a man larger, stronger, more aggressive and more sexually driven. Due to this hormone men have more body hair. At the same time the level of oxytocin in a male body is significantly lower than in females. Oxytocin, which is also called the “hormone of affection”, is abundantly produced in males and females during orgasm. As soon as a man is ready for a new erection, the level of oxytocin drops. This is why post-coital cuddle is so important for women and practically unnecessary for men. When people are in love, I mean when they are emotionally attached, the level of oxytocin in their bodies is rather high. This hormone causes them to feel affection toward the object of their desire. A higher level of oxytocin in women at the beginning of a new romantic relationship explains why women fall in love faster and more deeply than men. The more oxytocin their body produces, the more caring they become. Consequently it makes their emotional connection with a man deeper.

As I said before, a man should always be on the alert in order not to be provoked. Any such provocation may cause a man's body experience a chemical release into the blood stream. I guess you could say that a man's “search system” is always turned on. Most women are less concerned with the sex issue, but every woman has a God-given desire to belong, to be protected under a strong wing. A man's desire is to possess such a wing. Therefore when you look at men's behavior, you can often see sham bravado, cockiness and a desire to demonstrate their physical strength. Indeed, we have been created by God to complete each other. If a man and a woman help each other to develop their potential to its fullest, they become happy. If it doesn't happen, though, we place each other in a very tickly situation. We feel overwhelmed with the desires which can break through and take on the most unexpected forms. If spouses do not want or cannot make each other happy in marriage, they automatically send each other to a high risk zone. Our sexuality is like worn out tires on a slippery highway. It can let us down any

moment. It is very important for us to satisfy each other's needs in a marriage! As a friend of mine once said: "If you don't want your gun to shoot where it shouldn't, it must be discharged."

Those people who make sexual satisfaction a priority in marriage will be greatly disappointed. An ability to find emotional delight in your spouse should be placed above all else on the list of your priorities. If a husband and a wife have regular heart-to-heart conversations, pay each other compliments, send each other text messages, go for walks, gently kiss and touch each other, their sexual life will always be at its best. Unfortunately, there are many families where a husband remembers about his wife only in the evening, when he comes home from work. Hormones speed through his body and he is ready to fulfill his "matrimonial duties", forgetting about his wife's desire to feel safe under his wing. This type of a love scene can be viewed as violence. With the course of time the wife will take this "time of intimacy" as an unpleasant duty, and for the husband the time of mating won't be any more important than going to the bathroom. Obviously, this kind of situation cannot last long. With the passing of time the spouses will become indifferent to each other. I would like to say that the reason of such troubles lies in a disability to communicate in order to understand each other and be able to meet each other's needs. This is why there is only one way out of this situation – sincere communication! If it doesn't happen and spouses don't try to understand each other, their life turns into a survival. It is hard to say where this slippery road could take a married couple. One thing is for sure – if they don't take the situation into their own hands, if they don't start communicating, even if it requires inviting a trustworthy mediator, nothing good will come out of it.

In my opinion, not every woman can comprehend such a delicate topic as male sexuality. If this is the case, the book "Every Man's Battle" by Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker and Mike Yorkey can be of assistance. From time to time I have sincere conversations with men and see that many of them suffer from getting caught in

the nets of pornography. There is no need for me to talk about how developed this industry is. Listening to the confessions of repentant married men I always ask them one and the same question: "Are you satisfied with your sexual relationship with your wife?" So far no one has given me a positive answer. I don't have the heart to call such men sinners. I would call them not just sinners, but martyrs, as well. Their sexuality pushes them toward an intimate relationship with their wives, but when they approach them, the only thing they feel is coldness and indifference. What should they do? What do they need to do with a flow of thoughts that are about to blow up their brain and heart? Every man finds his own way-out. I am not trying to blame women, all I want to do is show the reader the whirlpool of excruciating emotions that we get in if we are not capable of communicating and understanding each other. I think women are as anxious in this situation as men. Deep down their souls they suffer from the thought of not being needed. They feel cast-off. Inferiority complex sets in, a deep feeling of loneliness and hopelessness fills their hearts. So, we should either learn to understand and satisfy each other, or our family life will turn into a nightmare which many married couples are trying to escape from as we are talking!

I want to finish this chapter with a phrase that I once heard in a wedding ceremony. The pastor was pronouncing the words of a marriage vow and the bride and groom were repeating after him. I doubt that they were as meticulous about the text of the vow as I was, but, in my opinion, this phrase was the most important part of the whole vow. So, this is what the pastor said: "From now on my soul and my body will belong to you till death do us part!" Never before had I heard of people devoting their soul along with the body to their spouse. I was deeply touched that day. It literally means that you are ready to do your best so your feelings, your thoughts and your decisions would be open to your marriage partner. It means that you would never declare a boycott, wouldn't hold a grudge or you wouldn't keep secrets from your spouse. It means that from

now on your soul will be open for your husband or your wife. And this is the key to a happy marriage, provided that your partner loves you more than they love themselves and even their own life! I think the following words give a precise description of such people: “Planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.” (Psalms 92:13–15).

7. Friendship and Conflicts

I think subconsciously every person desires to have a close friend. We have this inward desire because we are not satisfied with superficial relationships. A human soul needs to go deeper than the surface. Having looked around we won't find many people who could say that they have a true friend. It can be explained by the fact that very few people are ready to pay the price for a friendship, very few of us know how to be a friend. In a marriage spouses are tied together by multiple duties, and it helps them not to look back but strive forward and keep building their relationship. As for a friendship, it is absolutely voluntary. This type of relationship is very fragile and therefore very precious. If you hear that your acquaintance has one or several true friends and their friendship has been tested in the crucible of years, you must admit that this fact says a whole lot about this person. An ability to maintain a friendship or friendliness is a state of heart which involves a person's ability to forgive, to sacrifice for the good of your friend, to open up and accept and love people for who they are.

As it has been mentioned above, we, humans, cannot find satisfaction in superficial relationships with the people who are dear to us. Our hearts willy-nilly take us deeper until we reach the very depth. In a relationship between a man and a woman this depth will mean a marriage, and in a one-gender relationship this depth will mean a true friendship. When we communicate with people, it is very important to understand the boundaries of the

potential relationship. If you do want to get to know the person better, you should be ready to take responsibility for their soul. Flirting or initiating a relationship for your own benefit or for fun is a dangerous thing, for once you have entered the game, you invade the soul of another human being refusing to take responsibility for the consequences. However, the problem is that you will have to accept responsibility whether you want it or not.

A deep, close, trusting relationship between people is called a friendship. This is the definition of the word friendship that can be found in a thesaurus: "Friendship is a personal unselfish relationship between people based on love, trust, sincerity, mutual sympathy, common interests and hobbies. Necessary characteristics of friendship are reciprocity, trust and tolerance. People connected by a friendship are called friends." In my opinion a husband and a wife have to become and remain friends. Friendship is a special form of kinship that causes people to come to unity both emotionally and spiritually. Opening up to each other they gradually build a close relationship, learn to respect each other's opinion and "cover each other's back" and help to deal with weaknesses. This is what the Scripture says about it: "If you want to find a friend, you must be friendly. One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24)

What is the most difficult thing about a friendship? Definitely an ability to accept another person the way he or she is. We all come from different backgrounds: we have different upbringing, personal goals and interests. When it comes to a friendship, we don't look for what makes us different, but for what can unite us. If I were asked to depict a friendship, I would draw two steep river banks with a hanging bridge between them. This bridge is held by two people. They want to hold the bridge, and this is the only reason why it exists. In order to hold the bridge the people need persistence, strength and mutual devotion. If one of these characteristics weakens the bridge will not stand firm. As I said before, an ability to be a friend is a good sign of a strong personality.

No one can say that they have too many friends because it is physically impossible for a human to deeply love and cherish many people at once. This is the way our hearts work. And for the same reason we cannot have several husbands or wives. We are strongly against married people starting new relationships outside their marriages, because we realize that it will steal from their families. This is the way our hearts are woven. Can there be a true “pure friendship” between a man and a woman outside marriage? I would love to say YES, but considering the research data mentioned in the previous chapter I must say that they can have a good relationship, but its boundaries can be easily broken due to the influence of chemical reactions. What will be the result? No one can tell for sure. This is why we should always keep this danger in mind and never cross the boundaries of our relationships.

Relationships tested by years are always treasured. Therefore when you build a new relationship never sacrifice the old one. Sociable people can easily find “friends” and easily part with those they get tired of. They are hardly capable of understanding the depth and the joy of a close relationship – both in marriage and with other people.

In Biblical times people made covenants with one another that implied their life-long mutual devotion. People under the covenant could not conceive being separated, as if they had become one inseparable being. They shared joys and sorrows. You must admit that it is very powerful, but the price they paid was very high, too. A covenant relationship meant absolute self-denial. Entering a covenant relationship was followed by oaths and shedding of blood. God Himself stipulated shedding of blood as part of a marriage covenant. Shedding of blood means that the one who breaks the covenant is not worth living.

A great illustration of a man-to-man covenant relationship is a story of David and Jonathan. “After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because

he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.” (1Samuel18:1, 3, 4). These men were tied by deep devotion. They were prepared to give the life for each other. A covenant relationship between people was considered equivalent to blood relations, therefore it spread to other family members of the men who had made a covenant. “So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD call David’s enemies to account.” And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.” (1Samuel 20 : 16, 17). In order to understand the depth of friendship and devotion between David and Jonathan we should read the words that David said while mourning the death of his dear friend: “I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.” (2 Samuel 1:26).

On multiple occasions I heard people say: “I try not to establish close relationships with anyone. Sooner or later every relationship ends. I want to guard my heart from brokenness and pain, therefore I don’t let anyone come close.” This position reminds me of the “yellow-bellied” life philosophy vividly described by Saltykov-Shchedrin. Some people turn into such half-dead yellow-bellied hermits in their family relations, which is a paradox. It is a mere caricature of a real family. The final of such life is quite predictable and uninteresting.

It is true that one way or another all relationships between people are related to inner turmoil, pain and emotional distress. Life itself is full of pain. Some people are so afraid of pain that they stop living. Nevertheless, we should learn to overcome pain moving towards the goal we have set. It helps us see the boundaries that you cannot push and shows us the lines that we cannot cross in order to keep developing as a person. We should keep in mind that pain may be a sign of a serious disorder. If we don’t pay attention to pain, we might overlook a serious disease or even lose our life.

I would like to draw your attention to a very important verse from the Bible: “As iron sharpens iron so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs27:17). The Scripture compares two close friends to two knives which can be used to sharpen each other’s dull blades. The blades slide against each other causing heat and even sparks, but the final result is wonderful – two sharp knives. They make each other better, that’s the point. This is a perfect illustration for describing a relationship between two close people. It happens very often – people meet, get to know each other a little better, then conflicts start, and if they don’t give up at the conflict stage they obtain a right to become friends. Does it hurt? You bet. But the reward is worth it – a life-long reliable friend tested by time.

In fairness it must be said that striking sparks from each other does not occur in 100% cases. Some lucky people manage to detour this stage. Nevertheless, such luck is more of an exception than a rule. Most friendships and marriages have fallen apart because they were not able to stand the pain they faced. They were simply not ready for it. They had no idea that pain was a possibility.

I remember attending preparatory courses before entering university. The teacher got deep into the topic of marriage psychology and said a phrase which I didn’t quite agree with but have remembered to this day. He said that if a husband and a wife never argue, it means that either they deceive each other or they are not all there. I was young, dreamt of sublime love and was looking for the ideal girl who would understand me without words and preferably would keep quiet most of the time. The prototype of my ideal woman was Yekaterina Matveyevna, the wife of comrade Sukhov from the movie called “The White Sun of the Desert”. Only after 10 years of marriage did I suddenly realize that two people with different characters are not likely to live together in peace and quiet all their life. By showing our character we force ourselves to sharpen and we sharpen our friends and spouses. Having gotten used to this thought, I stopped trying to reprogram my wife with the purpose of turning her into my carbon copy.

We should pay more attention to the concept of conflict within a close relationship. Let's refer to a dictionary to see the definition of this word.

Conflict (Lat. *conflictus* — colliding) — an acute way of settling arguments and dealing with disparate ideas, interests and purposes within the process of social interaction of several parties and based on the parties' opposition; it is usually followed by negative emotions which go beyond set social norms. It includes open disagreements leading to contention.

A conflict is a state of war involving two people who have not been able to deal with a difficult situation at the initial stage. Here is what the Scripture says: "Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out." (Proverbs 17:14). It is hard to escape a conclusion that wise people that treasure their relationships are able to manage misunderstandings without letting them grow into a full-fledged fight and contention. However, if people are not wise enough or if they do not value their relationships, they continue to argue in order to force their opponent to yield a point in a debate. In my opinion, it is very important for a person who makes a decision to develop a relationship with another human to answer the following question: do I want people to admit that I am right at any cost or do I want to keep and develop a relationship with a particular person? If you choose the former, then I would like to ask you one question. What are you going to do with your rightness? Based on the words of the Bible we will take our relationships to Heaven because we will be able to recognize each other once we get there. And where will you take your rightness? You might as well put it on a dusty shelf in the storage room of your pride. Just think how many relationships have been ruined due to unresolved conflicts! An unresolved conflict is when potentially close people have a fallout and part their ways each cherishing his or her rightness. They are both right in their own eyes, but they are both guilty of breaking a relationship. It is especially sad when families break up causing children to suffer. All

because their parents reduce their relationship to animosity and cannot step over their own pride.

To be honest, every time I face misunderstanding or even a conflict in my family life, I try to pull myself together, put aside my boiling emotions and make sure that my words and my actions are based on peace and love. Self-love and wounded pride scream inside of my heart, but my sensibility quietly whispers from the depth of my spirit firmly tugging me toward reconciliation.

Once I heard a parable which has remained in my heart to this day. I would love to share it with you: There was one family. People had lived together for awhile. One day the husband came home from work earlier than usual. The wife was preparing to meet her husband: she was cleaning the apartment, washing the floor and cooking dinner. The husband opened the door with his own key and accidentally tripped over the bucket with water which had been standing by the door. The water went everywhere. The man grabbed a rag and began to wipe the water telling his wife: "I am so sorry, honey, I am such a klutz! I just wanted to come home earlier to make you happy. I should have called and told you, then you wouldn't have put the bucket by the door." His wife replied: "Oh, honey, please, forgive me, I should have guessed that you could have come home earlier! It was very thoughtless of me to place the bucket so close to the door!" The husband: "Oh, darling, it is not your fault! I know that you have been waiting for me and wanted to have cleaned the apartment before my arrival. I should have been more careful when opening the door!" The wife: "Oh, no, sweetie, I should have been more careful. Please, forgive me!" Their neighbors were watching the situation through a peep-hole. Having heard this dialogue the neighbor turned to his wife and said: "I don't understand anything! Our neighbors are both wrong all the time, but they live in peace and never argue. On the contrary, we are both always right, but have quarrels all the time!" I assume that comments are needless.

We've all heard of "combative people". Let's try to determine

what kind of personality these people possess. Sometimes I find it odd when people start talking about all the jobs they have lost or multiple relationships they have broken off. Usually all these stories are combined with heart-piercing comments on the injustice of life, constant setups and betrayals. It makes me think that hell itself is trying to make the life of this poor person miserable. But then if you should ever by chance have an opportunity to talk to one of this person's offenders, you may be surprised at how different their story will sound. It becomes obvious that your poor suffering friend has only one priority in life – to be right no matter what. They are ready to sacrifice peace and joy, lose a relationship with a friend or even end up lonely, but are not ready to “sacrifice their rightness”, not one bit. This is an example of a combative person. I personally feel sorry for such people. Perhaps, their readiness to initiate a conflict lies in rejection or some other inner pain, but they are willingly depriving themselves of the benefit a close relationship can give. Nothing can be done to help them unless they have a desire to change the situation. They will sincerely think that they are always right and suffer at the same time. Who needs their rightness, in this case? No one! Even they themselves don't need it...

As it has been mentioned before men and women are very different from each other. Simply put, when talking about conflicts we may state that men are more prone to be rude while women are usually softer. It is important to remember if you are determined not to have conflicts with an opposite sex. It is especially important to remember when a husband and a wife are trying to sort out their relationship. When men sort things out they might allow themselves to be rude or even hit each other. However, neither of them will consider such behavior as strange, unless the ranks have been broken. Women sort things out in their own special way. Usually they raise their voices and say a lot of emotional meaningless words (I might be wrong here). In a conflict between a man and a woman it is important not to forget who you are! For instance, it is impermissible for men to be rude and use his fists,

as if talking to another man. Women should watch their words in order not to provoke impertinence from the men. Despite their assumed manliness men can be quite sensitive. Insulting words said by a woman to a man may cause aggression in one and stomp out another. When I talk to the men who have been struggling with alcoholism I notice that at some point of time in the past most of them went through a personal breakdown. Very often it was a woman's fault. A few stray words can paralyze a man and he nearly loses heart and gives up. In this case the heaviest he can pick up is a shot glass of vodka. I don't want to justify alcohol addiction in any way. I am only trying to encourage you to be more careful with your words. Especially, I want to encourage women to watch what they are saying.

Another extreme of such conflict may be expressed through aggression. It happens if during an argument a woman crosses the line and starts acting like a man. One time I talked to the woman who wanted to tell me about a conflict situation that had come about in her family. I should mention that both the husband and the wife are educated people whom I truly respect. During our conversation the lady slightly opened her mouth and showed me a broken tooth. I asked her what had happened and in response heard an unbelievable story. I began to ask her some leading questions and she confirmed that, indeed, it was her husband who had broken her tooth. I tried to imagine the scene but could not believe that this nice man was capable of such violence. Honestly, I was taken aback and couldn't say anything for a few minutes. Finally I decided to ask the lady about the reason of such inadequate behavior on her husband's part. Her reply was nothing out of the ordinary: "Well, nothing special. Everything was good, we were talking, trying to sort things out and then all of a sudden he set upon me with blows." It just didn't make sense to me. After all I asked her about the last words she had said that caused such a fit of temper. I cannot remember exactly what she said but after her response everything

fell into place and my attitude toward the situation changed. It felt as if the male self-respect exploded inside me. I stopped defending the woman and told her the following: "If you had told me something like this, most likely I would have done the same."

Thus, the wisdom of those who are seeking after close relationships involves an ability not to reduce quarrels and disagreement to open-fledged animosity. We need to learn to put off the fire before it flares up. It is easier to figure out the cause of the fire than to deal with its consequences afterwards. Sometimes we simply need to keep quiet or try not to react to some remark. Most likely your loved one will regret saying something inappropriate to your face. In my young days when we saw arguing people we used to say: "Well, get some muck in your mouth and spit at him!" I know it sounds rude, but some real life situation can be much worse than that. Self contented people who are absolutely sure of their rightness and those who have been spat at run away from each other having given up on their uncompleted relationships which at some point in time used to bring them lots of joy and satisfaction. It should never be this way!

I would like to share a verse from the Bible: "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs15:1). These words always remind me of one female character from the Scripture. Having read about her for the first time in my life I was deeply impressed by her courage and femininity. Her name is Abigail. In spite of being married to an evil, tactless, unspiritual man named Nabal and living in imperfect conditions she was able to save her face and remain beautiful, feminine, notable, wise and tactful. When her husband insulted David and by having done so signed his own death-warrant and caused his family a lot of problems Abigail did something outstanding. She prepared gifts and went to meet David who was coming to their house in order to kill Nabal. David had been insulted by Nabal. I assume a lot of strong powerful men had witnessed the situation and it was a matter of honor for David to deal with his offender. Enraged, David was on his way to

take revenge upon Nabal, closely followed by his men, when some woman managed to stop this cavalcade! What did she tell then? What kind of voice did she have? How did she act standing before the king? What did she look like? I tried to picture this situation so many times and every time I admired the woman who was wise enough to stop a great wave of aggression. You may wish to read this story in 1Samuel, chapter 25.

I am sure that every woman possesses such wisdom and strength. You simply need to learn to press a lever and bring peace and love to hotspots of tension. As for men, we should be more sensible and humble before God so that we could stop ourselves from doing stupid things followed by rude words, which we later regret.

How can a conflict be resolved? What should we do not to reduce our relationships to blatant confrontations and contention? If there is no fear of God in your heart it wouldn't be easy. However, if you fear God and do not want to go against Him in your life, then make it a rule to communicate and pray together especially if you are facing a conflict. It isn't easy, because in such situations the least you want to do is pray with a person whose appearance literally puts you off. This is exactly why you need God's fear. For if you fear Him, you will not follow your human ambitions, but follow God and do His will. And God's will is always the same: "Love one another". Don't expect Him to say something different. Don't hope that He will judge your friend or spouse. As far as I understand, the truth never belongs to one person, it is always somewhere among all of us. The truth is near when we are together. When you pray and communicate with each other, the truth will become simple and clear to you. Everyone will most likely understand what he or she is supposed to do. If they don't understand it right away, they may get it later, when emotions subside and everything becomes clear. When you know what God expects from you, it is important to go ahead and do it. «Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.» (Ephesians 5:21)

As for me, I do not view these words as a mere philosophic wisdom. Only yesterday I had an argument with my older son. We

had some disagreements and couldn't get all the answers that we expected from each other. Having expressed our wishes we took each other's hands and began to pray for God's wisdom. Later that evening our whole family prayed in unity thanking God for the day we had lived through and for the joy we could share. "Let not the sun go down in your wrath." (Ephesians 4:26)

8. Close relationships within a family

Let's dream for a while. If it is possible, close your eyes and picture a happy family. I can see a man and a woman who are taking their kids for a walk in some beautiful park. They are having a great time talking and laughing. Another picture that I envision more rarely is of a family that has gathered together at the end of the day. They are all doing something: watching TV, reading a book, enjoying their quiet evening together. This picture reflects the warmth that prevails in the family. Most people would say that this picture is way too idyllic for their family. If this is what you have thought, I would like to stop you and remind you that everything is in your hands. Your life is what you make of it. Different barriers and difficulties will drift away if you really desire something with all your heart. We often make up excuses in order not to do anything. The surprising thing is that after we have made them up, we start believing in them ourselves. We begin to suffer wondering deep down in our hearts what and why has gone wrong. A human being is full of contradictions. On the one hand we want something, while on the other we look for excuses for our own inadequacy. Successful people are the ones who can see a clear goal and start striving toward this goal not paying attention to any resistance. It concerns all the spheres of our lives: school, work, sports, spiritual service, discipline and family.

Talking about families usually elicits some associations in our minds. Some people are reminded of their mom's warm hands and her beautiful smile, others remember their dad's belt, somebody else may think of a family dinner or a part of a movie about family

values. These memories make some of us feel better, while others feel pain or sadness. One way or another there is no person on the face of this planet who would be indifferent toward family issues. God programmed people to have a family. We all have this desire. We associate our happy future with a family: a reliable, loving and gentle spouse and, of course, children. To put it in a nutshell, I would say that a family life – is our way to find closeness with a soul similar to ours.

Unfortunately, there are many families that agree to something less profound than true closeness. Some couples simply start “living together”, others simply “bear with their spouse”, somebody else lives with their spouse only for the sake of their children. All of this looks like a loss of a dream or a vision. As for me, I would like to ask the reader not to lose a vision of a CLOSE FAMILY RELATIONSHIP. Do not cry over something that didn’t work. Even if you didn’t succeed, do not blame yourself or your marriage partner. What you do need to do is keep building!

A preacher once said that every person is quite imperfect, but God has not finished with us yet, and in fact, he will not have finished until the last day of our lives. It is very important for us to remember this and let God change our character. According to the words of this preacher every human should put on two posters like an adman. On the front poster we should write “Be careful, I am under construction”, and on the back poster – “God has not finished with me yet”. These posters would definitely come in handy in a family life. We should always remember that marriage does not mean that the construction is over. In fact, that’s when the real construction begins. If you are determined to “get your dividends” from the very first day of marriage, you might be disappointed. But if you are determined to build, you will rejoice at every floor of your family skyscraper.

Getting to know the soul of your loved one is a great revelation and a true pleasure. Just like treasure hunters we look for treasure in our loved ones and, seeing a shining diamond, we feel

deeply satisfied. Being able to cultivate and care for this precious stone makes us feel like a real hero. And when at the end of our lives we look around and see a collection of exquisite gems, we feel ready to stand before our God without shame and fear.

In opposition to what has been said about the satisfaction derived from deep sincere relationships I would like to quote a passage from a short story called “Loneliness” written by A.I. Kuprin : “Vera Lvovna felt lonesome and frightened. For the first time in her life she came to a terrible realization which sooner or later occurred to every sensible, thoughtful person, - she was able to perceive the dispiteous, unfathomable barrier that constantly separated two close people. “What do I know about him? – Vera Lvovna whispered to herself, touching the burning forehead with her hands. – What do I know about my husband, the man I eat, drink and sleep with, the man with whom I am destined to live through the whole life? Suppose, I know that he is handsome and fond of his physical strength, he cherishes his muscles, he is quite musical and recites poems in a singing voice. I even know his gentle words, I know the way he kisses. I am also aware of five or six habits of his... What else? What else do I know about him? Do I know what marks were left in his heart and mind by his previous amorous pursuits? Am I able to tell the moments when he smiles while suffering on the inside or when he covers up his malevolence by ostentatious hypocritical pensiveness? How can I work out all these subtle threads of his thought, this whirl of feelings and desires which constantly and impetuously rushes through the soul of a stranger?”

She suddenly felt such inner sadness, such pinching pain caused by realization of her eternal loneliness that she couldn't resist crying. She remembered her mother, brothers and her younger sister. Aren't they as strange to her as this handsome dark-haired man with a gentle smile and affectionate eyes who is called her husband? Will she ever be able to glance at the world with their eyes, to see what they see and to feel what each of them feels? .

At about four o'clock in the morning Pokromtsev woke up and

was quite surprised not to see his wife on the other sofa. He quickly dressed and yawning and shivering with early morning coolness went up the deck.

The sun hadn't risen yet, but half of the sky was illuminated under a backdrop of pale pink light. The transparent quiet river looked like a gigantic mirror framed in green moist fields that suddenly came alive. Barely discernable pink wrinkles hardly touched its surface, and the foam coming from the paddle wheels of the steamboat appeared to be milky-pink. On the right bank of the river there was a young birch forest with its array of trees with thin white trunks as if mantled with misty gauze. A dove-colored heavy cloud hovering in the east sky was the only one fighting with the shining solemnity of the beautiful summer morning. However, even the cloud was already sprinkled by pink and crimson strokes.

Vera Lvovna was sitting in the same place leaning her elbows against the lattice. Her head was resting on her hands when Pokromtsev approached her and, embracing her, recited with the deep voice still trying to wake up after a healthy sleep:

- "And as soon as early Dawn appeared, the rosy-fingered..." But when he saw her serious, tear-stained face, he nearly choked on the last word.

- Verusenka, what has happened? What's the matter, my dear? She had already prepared for this question. She had been thinking for so long that night that she came to the only sensible decision: they had to go on living like other people do. They had to submit to the circumstances. They had to lie if it was necessary, if the truth was inappropriate. So, she smiled guiltily and answered:

- Nothing, sweetheart. It is only insomnia."

I would love for us to look at our loved ones and ask ourselves whether close relationships are in scarce supply in our families. In order to help you figure this out I want to suggest that we look at several symptoms of closeness deficiency in a family:

- When the whole family gathers together under the same roof, every member escapes to his or her own room or each one does

something on their own without attempting to do anything jointly as a family

- Talks within a family are usually concentrated on its members business, not his or her inner world
- Relationships outside home are treated as a higher priority than those inside the family
- When a family member is lonely or goes through a hard time, he or she looks for comfort through food, alcohol, hobby, TV or some other sources that do not involve relationships with the immediate family

Members of a family that suffers from closeness deficiency develop the following symptoms:

- Feeling of isolation and depression
- Sense of life and existence meaninglessness
- Alcohol and other psychedelic substances addiction
- Obsessive devotion to work or to some other activity
- Suicidal thought and actions

It is common for families with closeness deficiency to have cold relationships which lead to regular conflicts, arguments and depression.

So, how should we establish and develop close relationships within a family? Let's try to determine several useful principles. I would like to note that a lot of people make the same mistake – they want to do everything at once. It has never worked and never will. First of all you need to decide where to start, and then slowly but surely begin to take gradual steps towards the set goal.

The first principle is – SENSE OF IMPORTANCE WITHIN A FAMILY. Think how you can show your husband, wife, children or parents that they mean a lot to you. Feeling important and meaningful is formed when your loved ones listen to your opinion, take interest in and meet your needs. There is one indicator which can show whether a person needs you or not. It is TIME. If you are needed, if a person is interested in you – he or she will spend time

with you. This is why you don't have to break your head over the ideas of what you can do for your loved ones when you want them to feel special. Start by spending more time with them. As for kids, you can play with them or read them a book, watch a movie or go for a walk. If it concerns a relationship with an adult, you can ask him or her what they want to do and then do it together.

The second principle is CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST within a family. Such atmosphere can be created through sincere communication and heart-to-heart conversations. Before you can get to the level of sincere communication you need to have at least some communication. It is impossible to sit your husband or child down and order them to open up their inner world to you if you talk to each other once a year. Adults need to have trusting relationships so they could pour their heart out to each other. This is the way a human soul is woven – it always looks for someone to open up to. Women need it even more than men. This is the reason why we hear so many jokes about talkative wives who reveal all their family secrets, especially secrets about their husbands, to their friends and parents. In my view such chatty women are miserable. They don't have a relationship with the closest person, their husband, which forces them to pour out their hearts to other people. If a person doesn't have enough communication in a family and isn't talkative by nature, with the passing of time he or she becomes withdrawn and gloomy. I used to believe that a loose tongue is a flaw, now I simply feel sorry for excessively talkative people who don't have anyone to share their inner feelings with. If you don't want your neighbor or a colleague or parents to know about your family more than you do, talk to each other! Set aside special time. Sincere communication should not be spontaneous. The time of your fellowship should be marked in your daily planner just like the time of church services or workouts. Only if you do it diligently and consistently your communication will become smooth. Sincere communication cannot establish and maintain itself – it is your responsibility.

Trusting relationships are vitally important for kids, as well. They are going to make a lot of important decisions in the future in spite of many dangers lurking ahead. If we don't want the TV and people outside our families to influence our kids' choices, we should spend quality time with them on regular basis. Trusting relationships and regular communication with the parents will insure our kids from doing foolish things and will help them sort out the things that are very important for them at their age. From time to time I ask my kids if they can answer any question I ask absolutely sincerely. I consider their positive answer as a reward for good fatherhood.

Once I heard a story that made me believe in the importance of close trusting relationships with children even more. Here is what one father told me: "My son studies in primary school. Recently he went to a summer camp not far from our city. When he came back home, my wife and I noticed that he had made friends with one of the camp counselors. They texted back and forth till late at night. Soon our son put a framed picture of himself with the counselor on his desk. He was talking about him in an unusually warm manner, which was strange. We began to sense a wall growing between us and our own son. We had some questions, but we didn't know where to get the answers that would fully satisfy us. Having talked to God first, I decided to talk to my son. When I asked him if he was ready to talk to me openly, he gave me a positive reply. I asked my boy to show me his phone and tell me about his counselor's texts. In his phone I did find a lot of strange things. The guy was constantly telling our son that he loved him and couldn't wait to see him. He said that they had become best of friends and their friendship was the most important thing for him. I told my son that I found those words weird and that I really wanted him to stop his relationship with the guy. Of course, he tried to resist my decision, but then I felt God intervene in the situation because I had asked Him for help before the conversation. I began to make some suppositions about the counselor's personality and why he was writing such words to a young boy. I can't recall everything I said, but I assumed that

maybe he had lost a close friend in the recent past. Surprisingly, he really had a friend who had recently committed suicide. I tried to explain to my son that maybe the counselor missed his friend a lot and wanted to find him a replacement. It turned out that I hit the nail on the head again. It was amazing that all my suppositions about the personality and the life of the counselor coincided with everything he had told my son in secret. I was absolutely sure that God was revealing some secret plot against my family by giving me the word of knowledge. After our conversation we both realized that something was wrong. I asked my son to tell his friend that his parents were aware of their friendship and their texts were not a secret anymore. Then the counselor asked my son to come see him for the last time by a building site nearby. He said that when they meet, they can go and check out the building. I thank God that my boy was able to resist this offer. He stopped the relationship once and for all. It gives me the shivers when I think of what might have happened if we hadn't helped each other to get out of that situation."

Trust isn't easily established, but is easily lost. In order to start establishing trust we should be open and sincere. We should be able to ask for the help and encouragement of our loved ones. We need to learn to undress our souls. This type of personal openness brings forth mutual openness. If we regularly open up to our loved ones we will receive more and more satisfaction from close relationships.

The third principle is LOVE within a family. If you start applying all the principles mentioned above in your everyday life, it will serve as an expression of your love. This word is so often used that it is very hard to comprehend what it really means. However, it is very important for a person to realize deep inside that he or she is truly loved. Children need to feel the love of their parents so they wouldn't look for love among their peers or older people. Usually this love vacuum gets filled with something that doesn't have anything to do with love at all. Flirting, promiscuity, succumbing to other people's manipulations all result from the lack of love in

the hearts of our children. Grownups need to feel the love of their spouses and their children as much. Our soul was created in such a way that when it doesn't receive enough love inside the family, it starts a subconscious search for love someplace else. It is interesting that every human has his or her own understanding of love and of being loved. For some people it is very important to hear the words of love, to receive love texts or find sticky notes with love messages on the mirror at home, hear those special words on the phone and when meeting face to face. For other people words don't mean much. They want to see the application of love in real life – whether it is a gift or quality time spent together. I won't discourse on this topic too long because you can find a very vivid explanation in the book “The Five Love Languages” by Gary Chapman. Here are the love languages he points out in his book:

- The words of encouragement and forgiveness
- Quality time spent together, undivided attention.
- Receiving gifts.
- Helping.
- Physical touch, embraces, kisses.

I would like to remind you that the goal of Chapman's book is to understand what actions could help us express love for our loved ones. Once we discover their needs, it is important for us to meet these needs on regular basis.

You have probably heard it before and you do meet the needs of your marriage partner. Then what about your children's love language? Do you know the needs of your child's soul? Are you aware of the things through which your kids feel your love the most? I would recommend that you find a test that would help you determine your kids' love language or watch them closely in order to understand their love language. I am pretty sure that you might be in for a surprise.

We all know that it is absolutely vital for little children to feel hugs and kisses of their parents. Parental affection shapes their self-esteem and their inner world. To my surprise I came to a conclusion

that even grown-up kids need to be hugged and kids no less than the little ones. Girls need affection more than boys. So one day they wouldn't waste their lives trying to find attention of the opposite sex, I am sure they need to have a generous portion of hugs, kisses and compliments inside their home, especially coming from the father.

We always associate children with our future and therefore treat them with special affection. Bad relationships with children, loss or absence of children are always painful. Our being in a church allows us to find spiritual children. Investing in the lives of other people we, in a way, reproduce ourselves, thus leaving a lasting impression in people's hearts. There are many families that cannot have children due to some circumstances. They can become parents by adopting or fostering children. We want to invest ourselves into others. It is our inner need.

I noticed that every book of the Bible has a passage dedicated to parent-child relationships. It should be noted that no family in the Holy Scripture is given to us as an example for slavish adherence. I assume it is so because every family is a living organism. Today we may have ideal relationships, and tomorrow we may lose everything we have. I would compare a family to a musical instrument. A musician plays the instrument and the audience enjoys the sound. If some strings become loose an experienced musician will hear it and will immediately tighten the strings, while amateurs will torture the instrument until it becomes of no use. The same can be said about a family. Everyone enjoys harmony and close relationships within a family. We rejoice and admire those who are able to perfectly "tune their instrument". If someone can't tune their family relationships it always hurts the hearts of those who understand how fragile and precious this world is.

Many years ago I met a young man from Pakistan. He was an only child in his family. His dad was an important bank clerk. They never had a need of money. The father spent a lot of time at work and therefore he didn't have much time to build a relationship with his

son. Very often the son tried to tell the father, whom he had a great respect for, that he really needed his attention, but the father would always reply: "When you grow up, you will be grateful for what I have done for you. I will give you the best education and I will build you a big house so in the future you will not need anything." The son tried to explain to his father that his attention was much more important than any material wealth, but the father wouldn't listen. Time passed by. Their relationship grew worse and by the time the young man turned 18, there was no relationship at all. On his 18th birthday the father gave the son an amazingly expensive gift, just as he had promised. To his surprise the son looked at the father and said something like this: "Dear Dad, when I was growing up I desperately needed your attention and warmth, but you chose to give all of your time to work. Your gift cost too much. It cost us our relationship. Therefore I refuse to accept it. I decided to enter a university in another country. So, I am leaving home and I don't need anything from you." When I met him, this foreign student was finishing medical university and hadn't been talking to his father for several years. It is hard to imagine what was going on in the heart of this young man, but one thing I know for sure – he was not happy. To a close relationship with the son the father oddly preferred something that no one needed. What a frightening and painful disappointment!

Thinking about my childhood I cannot boast about a close relationship with my parents. With a deep respect for my father I cannot say that I knew him well. He was a high rank military officer and spent a lot of time at work. Our joint outings to the store, hairdresser or a holiday demonstration were rather rare, but they forever stuck in my mind. Even now when I look at my childhood photos and remember those events, I almost physically feel that joy. When I was seventeen, my dad died. Sorting out his things and reading the notes that he had made in his notebooks I often cried. It was very sad to realize that I hadn't known my own father, that I hadn't learnt from him and that I hadn't told him a lot of important

things. After his death, probably for a year, I often had dreams of us going for a walk together or just sitting and talking and laughing together. Our dialogue would often stop at mid-sentence and having woken up I couldn't immediately realize whether it was a dream or reality. I didn't want to get up right away and would lie in desiring to sink into my sweet dream again. When my dad was still alive I often got angry at him and one time I said that I hated him. A heavy feeling weighed me down for a long time after that and I was waiting for a convenient moment to have a heart-to-heart conversation with him and apologize for my words. The time never came... He died before I even had a chance. I didn't have enough of my father. Maybe this realization made my soul yearn for closeness with dad and tried to catch up on it in the world of dreams where my soul reunited with the soul of my beloved father.

Today I often see that the daily routine of my hectic life steals from my relationships with the kids. I need to give them more of my time. After I leave this world I don't want them to suffer from loneliness and regret the words that remained unspoken. I want to be an open book that they will read, learn from, become better and avoid my mistakes.

I am confident that every believer is responsible for restoring something that has been ruined by sin or non-biblical relationships. Very often we are bound not to build, but to restore our relationships with spouses, children, parents and other people that we used to be close with. Unrestored relationships make grounds for a sin and a curse to devour our souls from the inside. I want to quote two Bible verses in order to confirm this thought: "Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings." (Isaiah 58:12) and "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction." (Malachi 4:5, 6). The nearer is the coming

if Christ, the more division there will be in the world and the more the Holy Spirit will prompt us and give us strength to go and restore what has been broken.

A testimony of one young woman at church deeply touched me. "I have never had a close relationship with my mother. She spent all day at work and in the evenings she was concerned with the housework. I never needed anything and had a very good education. I even found my first job with my mum's assistance. What I didn't have, though, was her attention. She had no clue about what was going on in my heart and I was afraid that she wouldn't understand me, wouldn't support my choices or would scold me. I was afraid that we might lose even the superficial relationship that we had then. When I grew up and moved out, our relationship was limited to a couple of minutes of a telephone conversation once every few weeks. It was not enough for me. Years passed by. I felt guilty, punished and deprived of something I deeply yearned for. After another shallow talk I made a decision to act in a way I had always pictured in my imagination. I was determined and I didn't care if I would get anything back or not. I did want my dream relationship with my mom to become a reality. First I began to attack my mum with phone calls. Then after every visit I would always kiss her goodbye. The situation didn't seem to improve, though. After one of such visits we were standing by the door when I leaned to kiss my mum. Being very short, she awkwardly moved and let me kiss the top of her head. I realized that while I was in a desperate need of her attention, she was also torn apart not knowing how to act with her grownup daughter. Now I am almost 30 years old. Every day I talk to many people of different ages. I am married and I have a wonderful mother-in-law who treats me as a daughter. But the truth is – no one can ever replace the love and the hugs of your mother. Mum and I are VERY different, but in spite of our differences we do talk EVERY day and almost every week we share a Sunday dinner. We have a lot to talk about! I know that every morning she waits for me to give her a call. I know that if I touch her, she will smile

and hug me back. I am very pleased to feel loved. It is so satisfying to be a beloved child. We go for a walk on a snowy day. We play in the snow. She pulls a tree branch and a million of fluffy snowflakes cover me from head to toe. We spend time together. Just me and her. The whole world goes silent when I hear my mum's voice."

I am sure that most children and parents dream of having a close relationship with each other. Neither our age, nor social status can change this desire. One of us should make the first step and move toward closeness. Let it be me and you.

Not a long time ago I talked to a pretty successful businessman. He was going through a hard time and, emotions ran so high that when we talked and prayed together he couldn't help crying. Sharing his troubles he told me that in time of need he usually goes to his father who is always ready to give a piece of advice and pray with his son. Without even knowing his father I felt a deep respect for this wise older man because he was able to establish and maintain a close relationship with his son. This is the type of a father that I want to be. In the decline of years I want my kids to know that they have a firm foundation to stand on with their father's support.

Thus, a formal, cold or shallow relationship is a crime against family because due to coldness we lose the fundamental nature of a family. It is also a crime against children because due to the lack of love on their parent's part they grow up emotionally crippled. Seeking after love they fall into the traps that can kill all the good things that have remained in their souls. Maimed by traps and nets, unable to live in love, they start their own families and reproduce similar inner problems in the hearts of our grand-children. Thus, generations of emotional cripples may die out, destroying one another morally and physically. It should never be this way. After we pass away, I want us to be remembered for our love. And when our grandchildren ask their parents about grandma and grandpa, I want them to hear: "They knew my heart and loved me the way I was."

9. A sexual Relationship Between a Husband and a Wife

So far I've been intentionally bypassing the subject which is implied by the name of this book. When people hear the word CLOSENESS they often think of an intimate physical relationship. Let me devote some time to this side of family life.

The issue of sexual intimacy, in my opinion, is the most sensitive and illustrative when it comes down to marriage. Other spheres of a person's life can be estimated by the amount and quality of his or her sexual activity. Sexual desire was intricately woven into a human body by God, but on the way to sexual satisfaction we often face a lot of barriers which we need to learn to overcome.

As far as I was able to figure out this matter, it is very important to start off right. The main problem of a lot of men is that they start and finish in the same manner. For men the fact itself is important, whereas women tend to think that the most important thing is the process. As a result of such haste many women don't have a chance to figure out what has just happened – is everything already done or is it only about to begin? But then when they hear their husband's snore they realize that most likely everything has already finished. Should I say that sooner or later any woman will get fed up with such a relationship. After awhile this type of intimacy results in women becoming cold and losing any desire whatsoever to have a sexual relationship with their husbands. They don't want to be treated like dolls designed for sexual exercises and many of them start avoiding such "superficial relationships". Husbands start blaming their wives of frigidity, become a bit frustrated and from time to time get into awkward situations which we don't want to mention here.

What can we do not to fall into this pit? How should we build our relationships in such a way that they would bring pleasure to both husbands and wives? The answer is the same – spend time together. COMMUNICATION is the key!

If you do your best to develop a close relationship with your spouse, it means you will know how to satisfy each other's needs. Only those people who don't know and don't understand their marriage partner end up unhappy and sexually unsatisfied. So, why don't they know and understand each other? Because they don't ask and don't take any interest in the lives of their loved ones. Well, why don't they ask then? Because they have a lot of work, they get very tired by the end of the day, because their kids are always in the way, because they get offended, because they have already spoken out all their words somewhere else, because they are depressed, because it is awkward to ask a person such questions, because they cannot find an appropriate time and place, because they are not sure that they will be understood...! Well, the true reason is a lack of goal. They don't set a goal to develop a close relationship with each other. These people just let nature run its course.

One time I spoke to a man whose religious views, as I thought back then, had to play a low-down trick on him in the sexual sphere. For some reason I thought that I would have to spend several years ministering to this man so I could help him sort out his inner feelings and the relationship with his wife. I hardly knew him but had already concocted my own story about him and his life in my mind. I do feel ashamed to even admit it now. So, we met and had a sincere conversation. After we had talked I realized that I wanted to learn a lot of things from this man. I was very wrong in my judgement concerning him. When we talked about his sexual life, I asked him to share his secret of success. Unfortunately, he didn't say anything that I had never heard of, but I "drank" his testimony as a glass of fresh spring water. He said that from the very beginning of his married life he and his wife decided to be absolutely honest with each other in order to be able to understand and care for each other better. They had been faithful to that promise for many years. In other words, they made a decision to build a close relationship and be close friends all their life. This was their secret of success.

If you are interested in each other, have regular heart-to-heart

conversations, tell each other kind inspiring words, if you don't try to satisfy your own desires first but try to satisfy your marriage partner, then you will have mutual understanding in your sexual life, as well. I don't know any families where a husband and wife claim to be close friends but have problems with sex, unless there are some physiological or psychiatric problems involved. But even these issues can be solved if two people are deeply devoted to each other.

As a rule, unfaithfulness and betrayal do not come out of nowhere. Sometimes it seems like we start testing each other's limits. In this case things might turn out badly. If you don't want to build a close relationship with your husband or wife, then do not blame them for looking for another person who would like to get close to them. It is very hard for a soul to be lonely; it always looks for closeness with another human soul. We can't blame anyone of what has happened, instead we should figure out what we want, and then keep building our relationship. Some people who have been through difficulties in their marriage make up their minds to fight for their family and are able to build their relationship and become happy. Having gone through turmoil they learn to appreciate each other more than ever before.

Most likely you have heard the phrases: "You cannot step in the same river twice" and "Everything flows, everything changes". These two sayings belong to one man – Heraclitus. People are still arguing about the meaning of the philosopher's words. What was he thinking about when stating these observations? I think at that moment he was looking at his wife and was meditating on the issue of intimate closeness between a man and a woman. Of course, I am joking, but let me attempt to explain to you the reason for my humorous assumption.

There is a lot of difference between male and female sexuality. Men's physiology is very basic. Several minutes or even seconds is usually enough for a man to climax. Male reproductive system is quite uncomplicated. One doesn't have to search for anything out of

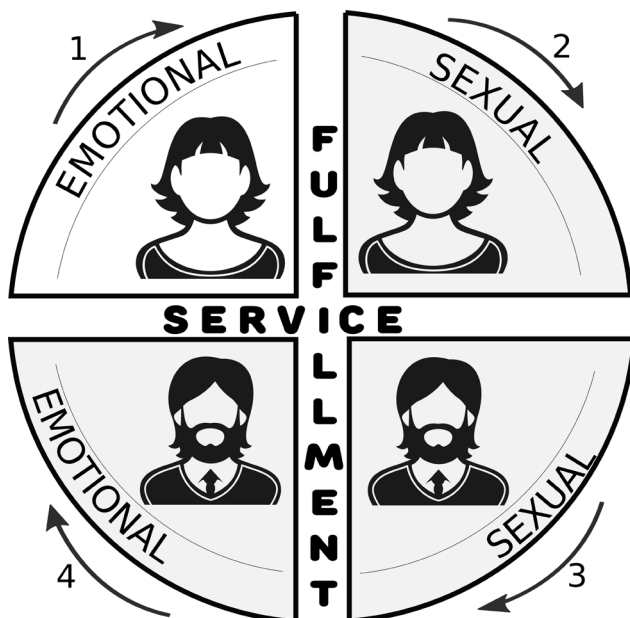
the ordinary to find satisfaction. If you move in a habitual manner, you get a habitual result. However, female sexuality is quite similar to a mountain river or a maze. Remaining the same on the outside, it constantly changes inside. You can manage this journey only with a good instructor who knows all the turns and mysteries of the route. The instructor, of course, is the woman herself. Only your wife can openly share her feelings and sensations. I am talking about the most sensitive zones which a man should stimulate in order to lead a woman to a sexual climax. This process requires complete involvement on the man's part. Habitual mechanic movements will unavoidably lead to a "failure".

A man should be like a pianist who starts off by tuning the piano and creating a special atmosphere and only then proceeds to play an exquisite melody.

Sometimes listening to men talk about frigid women I come to the same conclusion again and again: the root of the problem is not about the piano; it is about the pianist who didn't bother to educate his ear and kept pushing the keys without trying to adapt to the mood of the audience. This is the reason why the musician didn't hear any "applause" at the end of his performance. Unlike men, women never experience satisfaction in the same manner. A man who always sticks to habitual techniques is unlikely to reach a desired result.

A sexual relationship between a man and a woman is like a work of art. You trust an inspiration that awakes inside your soul and start creating. A woman's satisfaction can be compared to a musical masterpiece. It is impossible to get used to it. The key problem of the married couples that got tired of sexual intimacy or faced disappointment lies in their disability to satisfy each other's needs. They simply haven't found out how their sexuality works.

For those who sincerely try to sort out these issues and desire to learn the art of sexual satisfaction I would like to propose a visual illustration, a diagram. The main key to success is to feel free while communicating with your loved one!



Let me explain what the diagram means. An intimate physical relationship provides us with both sexual and emotional satisfaction. Due to constant hormone production a man most often becomes an initiator of a sexual intercourse. Simply put a man is always ready! Due to this the most common mistake men make is rushing things up and going straight to the intercourse, whereas a woman is usually a recipient. She derives emotional satisfaction from gentle words and touches of her husband when she feels loved and cared for. Very often a woman's emotional satisfaction makes a path toward sexual pleasure. You cannot bypass this stage. A man gets satisfied by the realization that he has been able to meet the needs of his spouse.

On the diagram you can see that satisfaction and service intercross. These notions are closely connected. When we serve, we do not look for personal benefits, but desire to please others. Without a desire to serve each other a sexual relationship turns into a sexual exploitation or a violent act. Therefore we should treat sexual intimacy as a chance to serve each other.

So, based on the proposed diagram I would like to suggest the following algorithm to those who want to improve their sexual life:

1. A man satisfies a woman emotionally allowing her to feel treasured and loved. You can start this process the minute she wakes up by a gentle kiss and a few sweet words, like: “Good morning, honey.” In the course of the day show your wife that you care. Use your phone. Call and text her. You can buy flowers or a cake and surprise her at work. All these care tokens remind a woman that she is not alone - she is the wife of her husband. The husband who loves her and takes care of her!!! The process of female satisfaction can be compared to a blooming flower. A flower-bud that has drunk enough moisture and warmth finally opens up and is prepared to share its nectar with a craving bumble-bee.

2. At the second stage in a suitable place at a suitable time a man should satisfy a woman sexually, gently following her instructions and using the knowledge of her desires.

3. Having made sure that his spouse is fully satisfied or is about to be satisfied, a man can remember about himself. Thankfully, at this stage you don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Reaching the climax at this stage a man automatically passes on to stage 4, where he feels like a strong man and the head of his household. He is confident about his own ability to take care not only of his own needs, but the needs of his loved ones, as well.

Maybe some discontented reader would exclaim: “It is not fair! What should the woman do? What is her function?” I strongly believe that God gave a woman a special function – to inspire her beloved man. Only think how encouraging can be the words of the woman you love! And imagine how much pain a woman can cause if she is unloved and unsatisfied. Therefore, dear men, if you want to soar like eagles, love your wives.

To sum up I would like to say that when we seek after our personal satisfaction forgetting about our partner, we will be disappointed. However, if we put the interests of our partner first, in the end we won’t come off as a loser. It will be a win-win situation.

I do hope that these words will help you to sow and reap good fruit in the field of your family love life. And in turn sexual stability will help your relationship to remain close at all times.

10. An Intimate Relationship with God and His People

It is interesting that some people always move forward, grow, become more intelligent, get fitter and healthier while others freeze in one position and refuse to move on. In some families it is normal for spouses to understand each other better and to care for each other more with every passing year, while others live to the ripe old age and have no idea who they have joined their lives with. It all depends on our desires, decisions and actions. Our lives will be full of things that we deeply desire.

I venture to say that if a Christian doesn't want to develop a relationship with another believer, we may put the realness of his or her faith in doubt. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another", - said Jesus. It's impossible to picture love without a close friendly relationship. A lot of Bible verses related to love and service contain the phrase "one another". We will not be able to keep God's commandments if we don't communicate with one another on regular basis. Every Christian believes that God revealed Himself to us through three persons: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit, which implies a close relationship within the Trinity. God advocates effective communication and close relationships. No matter what kind of interpersonal situations we find ourselves in, I believe that God's will is like a compass that will always lead us in the right direction – in the direction of sincere communication with one another. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1John1:7)

Sincere communication is able to teach a person live in unity

with other people. Christ prayed for His disciples to be as one. Without unity there cannot be a healthy family, a healthy church or a healthy society. Everyone understands this truth, but few manage to become part of a united organism. If our “SELF” means to us more than a team’s success, if we value our goals and visions more than the success of the team we belong to, then we can forget about developing close relationships with the other team members. If we haven’t learnt to work in a team, we are destined for loneliness and self-admiration or, on the contrary, for self-condemnation. Meanwhile, being on the team we learn from one another and help one another succeed. Sharpening each other’s character we help the members of our team to reach their potential.

We should never perceive our relationships with people as a walk in the forest – go wherever you like and do whatever you want. Every group of people, every family, every church has its rules that have to be respected and observed.

Thus, it is necessary for us to respect the position and the words of the leader, the person who is responsible for the work of the team as a unit. Undermining his or her authority we risk destroying the whole team. It doesn’t mean that you have to turn into a voiceless machine or somebody’s slave; it means that we should learn to hold the line without losing our own opinion and trying to help our team reach its potential.

When we try to prove our opinion or promote our ideas without considering other people’s interests we may catch a spiritual disease that I would call “EXCLUSIVENESS”. Anyone who catches this virus will not be able to adjust to any group of people. Their pride and inflated self-esteem will push them out of any social circle. Instead of loving people and building them up they will bring in division and bitterness.

This is what Paul says about it: “I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but

their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice because of you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.” (Romans 16:17-19)

The Word of God is calling you not to become hardened, to keep your heart pure, to build and to love. If something threatens your close relationship, don't hesitate - go to God in a joint prayer. Unfortunately, not very many believers possess this skill, that's why in time of trouble or separation we try to solve daily problems by the power of our own intellect or experience, which is an inevitably losing situation. Both sides start imposing their thoughts and feelings upon each other. If you truly look for unity and closeness in your relationships, make it a habit to find the unity of your views and compromise alternatives in the Lord. He is our best Councilor. He is able to turn people's heart toward each other.

“Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.” (1Peter 4:7-11)

I would strongly recommend to those people who have lost their motivation to build and develop sincere close relationships with their loved ones to pray for the lost or broken relationships. I am confident that soon enough you will feel the motivation for fellowship and God Himself will help you to make the first step toward the restoration of your relationship.

People's relationships with God can be formal and superficial, as well. A formal relationship won't fill our hearts with peace or bring us joy and love. Christ constantly accused the Pharisees of

hypocrisy – on the outside they looked like strong believers in God, but on the inside they were very far from the Lord. What can we do to develop a close, intimate relationship with God? The principle is the same. We need to set aside enough time in order to meet with God. Try to do it at the same time every day. If you do it, you will see how your heart starts tugging you to the very depth of your intimate relationship with the Lord. When we spend time in prayer and Bible study we will understand the desires and plans God has for our lives. And this is where the most important thing starts. If we understand the desire of our Heavenly Father and we give the best of ourselves to fulfill His will, we will soon feel how our relationship becomes more intimate.

Just like in a relationship with a human being, our relationship with God will require an everyday choice. We will have to choose whether we want to fellowship with God or not, whether we want to please Him, or do everything our own way. People who have chosen to develop a close relationship with God will never be able to betray Him. Those who know what it feels like to be safe under His wings and how wonderful it is to be embraced by His loving hands, those who've learnt to enjoy His forgiveness and daily leading will never be able to leave Him. It would be quite foolish. Those who have never experienced anything like that often abandon their newly born faith without having tried to understand its value for their souls. A great many of married couples leave each other, leave their children without having understood what a true family really is.

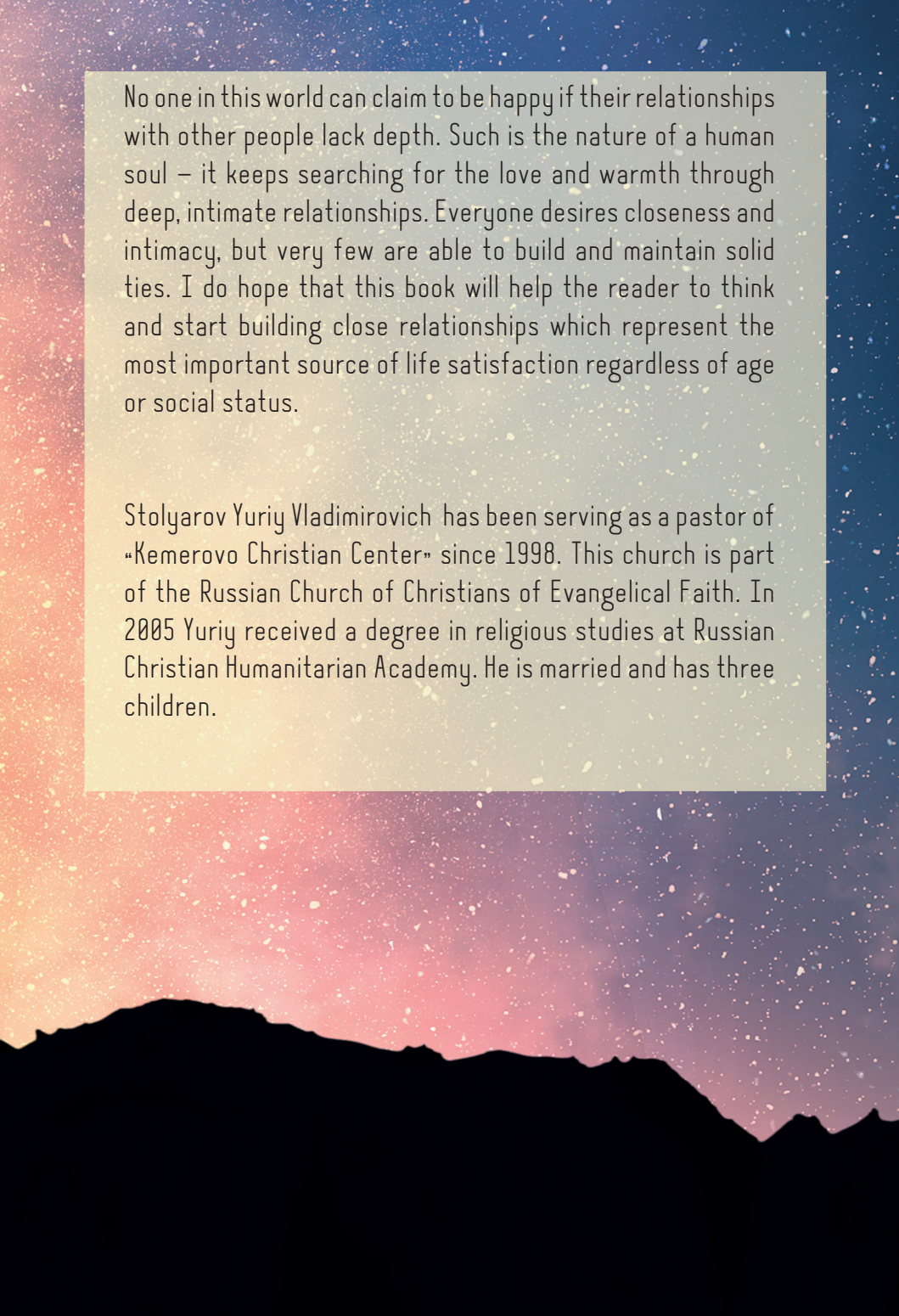
Our relationship with the Creator inspires us to fulfill the purpose we have been created for. Developing a close relationship with God we attempt to solve the riddle of our consciousness, which eventually helps us to understand God's plan for our lives. Developing close relationships with each other we help each other to fathom God's purpose and to do our best to let it come true in our lives.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully

made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

(Psalm139:13-17)

Never agree to a superficial relationship.
You do deserve better!



No one in this world can claim to be happy if their relationships with other people lack depth. Such is the nature of a human soul – it keeps searching for the love and warmth through deep, intimate relationships. Everyone desires closeness and intimacy, but very few are able to build and maintain solid ties. I do hope that this book will help the reader to think and start building close relationships which represent the most important source of life satisfaction regardless of age or social status.

Stolyarov Yuriy Vladimirovich has been serving as a pastor of “Kemerovo Christian Center” since 1998. This church is part of the Russian Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith. In 2005 Yuriy received a degree in religious studies at Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy. He is married and has three children.