

**Reflection Paper on *A Lasting Promise*:
5 Profound Points**

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Point 1: Prayer for your marriage nourishes it to keep its roots going deeper, its branches growing stronger, and its fruit becoming more abundant (Stanley et al., 2014, p.35).

I selected this first point as one of the “5 Profound Points” from the text because I was reminded of how God desires for us to pray to him and for our own good. I am currently in a four-year relationship with my boyfriend, mutually planning to get married in the near future. As someone in a serious relationship, I naturally reflected on my relationship with the contents of this book. I, first, appreciated that the chapter that I found this point in was not about what the two of us were to practice together, but rather about something I, as an individual, can do for my marriage (or my relationship) through prayer. I thought about how busy my weeks are, and as a result, my boyfriend and I have gone weeks not being able to take out intentional time for just us. It took a toll on our relationship, and so, we learned not to only prioritize the responsibilities we have in our lives, but our relationship as well. We intentionally began to take out more time for us, even if it did not amount to how much we wanted it to be. On my part, I found myself trying to squeeze so much into our time when we met. I feel like I started to put a lot on myself to keep growing our relationship. I am, however, reminded that God desires me to pray about my relationship and means for it to make a difference. I have experienced how praying for my relationship has deepened my trust in God, and I am encouraged to start praying daily for my relationship once again as it will help deepen my trust in God and allow Him to lead my relationship to the place He wants it to go. I also definitely want to encourage Christian couples to incorporate praying for their mates and marriage regularly (if they do not already) in order to fight for their marriage. I believe that going deeper in praying for your mate and marriage leads to many good things. Prayer can help the couple find new ways to love or to show love, and it

can help them focus God's love, acting through them, into their spouse's life. Prayer has the power to soothe an angry heart and heal as well.

Point 2: "Often a gentle answer is all it takes" (Stanley et al., 2014, p.22).

We learn about escalation in this text. According to the author of this text, escalation occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so that the conversation gets more and more nasty. I have most definitely experienced escalation in my closest relationships, and I have also learned that often a gentle answer is all it takes to short-circuit escalation sequences. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." I personally think remembering and putting this one verse into practice could change relationships for the better drastically. The author of the text says that it could make the whole world a much better place to live, and I agree. However, it is not as easy as said to have one person back off in an argument and say something to de-escalate the argument, which would break the negative cycle because this often takes humility to choose to soften one's tone and put down one's shield.

We see examples of conversations of couples in the book, and we see a particular example in Hector and Maria that tended to veer into escalation (which is like a ladder), but were able to quickly get back down while they were still on the "lower rungs." In this specific example, Maria chose to back off and soften her tone, in which Hector followed by responding in a calmer way. Although one can view backing off first to soften one's tone as losing (and I would say that no one likes to lose), I want to challenge couples to view it as winning it for the team when either one of them chooses to back off first and de-escalate the argument, as I also strive to practice this in my own relationships. This is especially difficult to do when we are hurt

and angry, but remembering and practicing the Proverbs verse will save relationships more time and energy spent that result to more hurt feelings.

Point 3: “You can’t be focusing on issues all the time and have a really happy and connected marriage” (Stanley et al., 2014, p.65).

This statement resonates with me even if I am not married yet. I feel as though this statement also applies to those in a long-term relationship, which I am in. After noticing relational issues that bother me, and at times feel unresolvable, I found most of my attention going towards resolving the issues in my relationship, especially as life got busier. I tend to get into “work-mode” with everything in my life, as someone who grew up in a household that valued working hard. I am learning, however, that I cannot have a really happy and connected relationship with my boyfriend when I tend to focus on issues all the time. It makes sense that we also need nurturing and safe times for relaxing by having fun and talking as friends in which conflict and problems are off-limits. I am finding the importance of intentionally setting aside time for doing positive activities together. Letting this slide in my relationship with my boyfriend as we started to get busier in life has resulted in literally having fewer positive experiences in our relationship.

I have learned about a ground rule by reading this text, which is: When you are alone together for the purpose of enjoying your relationship, agree never to use that time to bring up issues, and if an issue does come up, agree to table it for a later time. Reading this in the book made me feel like I found a golden piece of wisdom. My boyfriend and I have had less time to be able to go on dates as we got busier, and I am guilty of multitasking on our dates, including bringing up issues, which ended up ruining the dates. Now, I plan on not letting problems intrude on the times my boyfriend and I have set aside to enjoy one another by scheduling a specific and

separate time to focus on the important issues. As a therapist, I would also like to help couples become aware of how letting things slide might not yield a good result and decide to make a change.

Point 4: “Be aware of what you expect” (Stanley et al., 2014, p.158).

I can see more clearly after reading this text that expectations can lead either to massive disappointment and frustration or to deeper connection. The book provides the reader with four keys to handling expectations well, and the first one is to be aware of what you expect. This book helped me to realize that unmet expectations can lead to great disappointment and frustration even when I am not fully aware of them. Great disappointment and frustration are actually the most important clue that some expectation is unmet in your relationship. It has been very helpful to build the habit of taking a moment when I am disappointed, sad, or angry about something in my relationship to ask myself what I expected because doing this has helped me become more aware of important expectations that otherwise were unconsciously affecting my relationship. I think it always felt like my boyfriend was doing something wrong when I was disappointed. However, this point helped me to recognize that disappointment doesn't necessarily mean that my boyfriend is doing something wrong. It did mean that I held an expectation, and I can first start by being more aware of it as an expectation. Once I am aware of my expectation and the reasons for it, I am then able to express it to my boyfriend, instead of assuming that my boyfriend was simply doing something wrong. Our significant others may simply have no idea. This is another insight I am applying to my relationship, now, and wish to share it with my clients. When all along, we thought our significant other was doing something wrong, there just may be an unmet expectation we were not fully aware of, but by practicing to take a moment in the times we feel disappointed, sad, or angry in our relationships, we can begin to become more

aware of the expectations we may have, which could be the first step towards having a deeper connection with your partner.

Point 5: “This distinction between sensuality and sexuality is important – you likely want your relationship to be alive in both areas” (Stanley et al., 2014, p.210).

For many, the first thought when we think about the word sexuality for a moment is of sexual intercourse or other specific acts of sex. On the other hand, when we think about sensuality, people usually think of some pleasant experience that involves touching, seeing, smelling, or tasting. In short, sensuality includes physical touch, but it is not always associated with making love, such as hugging, affectionate cuddling, nonsexual massages, and all the experiences that provide physical pleasure in nonsexual ways. The book talks about how in the early stages of relationships, touching, holding hands, hugging, and caressing are natural, but over time, many couples tend to bypass the sensual and move directly to goal-oriented sexual behavior. I am glad that the book mentions the difference between sensuality and sexuality and the importance of keeping the sensual alive and well. I believe that sex is a gift from God, and when couples spend less time on the kinds of touching that had been so delightful before and focus more on the end product of sex than on the process of expressing love, this leads to problems including the dissatisfaction of the couple. The book emphasizes that nonsexual touching is an important part of our overall physical intimacy. This has inspired me as a therapist to want to be one that encourages couples to make sensual experiences a regular part of their relationship, apart from sexuality, in order to better their sexual experiences with one another since physical intimacy is also an important aspect of a happy marriage. To couples that come to therapy presenting their dissatisfaction in their physical relationship, I would specifically want to talk about how keeping sensuality as a regular part of their lovemaking will elevate their pleasure

of the whole experience. This broader sensual focus will provide a much richer expression of intimacy in the physical relationship of married couples.

References

Stanley, S., Trathen, D., McCain, S., & Bryan, M. (Ed.). (2014). *A lasting promise: The christian guide to fighting for your marriage*. Jossey-Bass