

I Do or I Don't

**Cultivating a Godly Marriage in
Today's World**

John Lehman

Endorsements

In *I Do or I Don't*, Dr. Lehman provides an insightful and practical resource for church leaders and couples alike. Readers will sense John's gracious spirit as he encourages couples to strengthen their marriage for the glory of God using time-tested, biblical principles. John's expertise flows, not just from years of counseling and pastoring and conference-speaking, but from leading a marriage that really works! Struggling couples should take heart ... and take notes!

Brad Stille, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Wixom, MI

Gospel truth and biblical principles—this book will take both and bring them to bear on marriage. The Scripture is full of truth that will guide and direct our marriages. So, whether you are soon to be married or have been for years—read, meditate on, and apply the truths in this book.

Jeremy McMorris, Lead Pastor, Liberty Baptist Church, Dalhart, TX

In an age when marriage books guide couples with man-centered, self-help principles and ideas, *I Do or I Don't* is a refreshing resource for couples who desire a Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered marriage. John's book lays out the essentials of a godly marriage in an approach that is straightforward, easy to

read, practical, and above all biblical. The teaching found within this book has personally impacted my marriage and has equipped me to counsel other couples. Thank you for this blessed resource!

Ben Ice, Family Life Ministries, Calvary Baptist Church, Simpsonville, SC

Every day is really a choice of I Do or I Don't. I Do or I Don't want to be humble. I Do or I Don't want to be kind. I Do or I Don't want to be patient. I Do or I Don't want to be selfless. I Do or I Don't want to be compassionate. I Do or I Don't want to love like Christ loved the Church. I Do or I Don't want to submit as unto the Lord. This books lays out a "how to" in following biblical guidelines and "how to" be that spouse who says, "I Do want to love as Christ loved the church in very practical terms." I have lived alongside this man for thirty-three years and he has proven his faithfulness over and over again to me. Because he "practices what he preaches," I Do encourage you to consider utilizing this book for your own personal edification and your own marriage enrichment, as well as assisting others in their pursuit of God's will for their lives in the portrayal of Christ and the Church.

Suzie Lehman, John's wife

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Cultivating a Godly Marriage in Today's World

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Dedication

Proverbs 31 is a wonderful tribute to a woman whom God honors. I would like to offer the same tribute, as a dedication, to Suzie Lehman.

As verse 11 shares, “The heart of her husband trusts in her ...” and what a blessing that is to have been able to rest in the relationship in this regard.

Verse 12 shares, “She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life,” and she has been a wonderful help in all endeavors of my married life.

Verse 26 shares, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue,” and she has helped me, and our children, be guided to do what would most please God.

Verse 28 shares, “Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her,” and what a privilege to have her live in such a way to receive these sincere accolades.

Verse 30 shares, “charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised,” and although she is charming and beautiful, her desire to put God first is captured in this verse.

As of the writing this book, It's been my privilege to have been married to my wife, Suzie, for thirty-three-and-a-half years. During that time, I can share she has been nothing short of the Proverbs 31 woman and wife to me! I therefore, in honor, dedicate this book to her!

About the Author

A counselor licensed by Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, John Lehman was born in Indiana, but spent fifteen of his first eighteen years of life in Taiwan. As an MK (missionary kid), part of his upbringing was spent in dormitory settings away from his parents. Though minimal time was spent with them during his upbringing, he was reminded about the importance of a godly marriage and home life. His parents were those who loved God and loved others. They were ones who wanted to bring out the best in each other and their children. A wonderful by-product of his parents' Christ-honoring marriage is that he was able to glean truths from their lives, as well as see them impact many others with the gospel, even if not spoken.

Early in his life, John felt called of God to *help* people, so that's what he's been doing throughout his ministry years. Initially, he thought this would be in the field of formal education, and, in essence, helping people with their marriage is an education in itself. He trusts this book will be that *help* to couples, whether engaged, newlyweds, seasoned marriage partners, or those who are having conflicts in any of those circumstances.

As God's Word reminds us in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me," so, with God's help, marriages can be all they should be because of all that Christ can do in enabling sinful souls to live according to the model of Christ and the church.

Acknowledgements

I would like to personally thank Dr. Tim Jordan, Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Lansdale, PA, and Dr. Larry Thornton, retired professor, Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, Lansdale, PA, for their faithful instruction and encouragement throughout my early years in ministry. Much of what I have become, and have included in this book, are gleanings of truth from their pulpit and lectern.

One of the most influential books I've read, and therefore have encouraged others to implement truths found within its pages, is *His Needs, Her Needs*, by Willard Harley. I trust this book can be used in others' lives like it was in mine.

Craig Seelig helped in proofreading this book, helping with punctuation and sentence flow. His encouragement and direction in staying on task was a great blessing.

I thank Caroline McCausland for her attention to detail in taking this manuscript from writer and editor to being published!

I have appreciated Jim Holmes, editor and publisher consultant, who has been a confidant and resource during the questions that I have had in completing this book.

His professionalism helped get the book printed, while his personal touch helped me stay on task to get to the final product!

I thank my wife, Suzie, for encouraging me to complete this task, as she has known my passion for helping couples in their marriages, and this has allowed me to have a resource to use both pastorally and personally!

Ultimately, I thank the Lord, for He has allowed me to stay focused on this task, and has helped me to pen what I trust will be a resource to point couples to Christ, and therefore to show the world how Christ not only expects His Son and His Church to relate one to another, but also how husbands and wives are to mirror that image within their marriages.

*The purpose of this book is to provide a resource so that marriages
will be all that they should be for God's glory.*

“He,” “she,” or “we”? Because the text is written with both men and women in mind, it seemed tedious to pedantically keep saying he or she, his or her, etc. So I have sometimes used the feminine gender, and other times the masculine gender, as well, at times, as using “we” and “us.”

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Foreword

It has been my privilege to know John Lehman for almost twenty-five years. I have known him as friend, mentor, fellow-laborer, and as the man who performed my wedding ceremony. After all those years, I can still remember his words of encouragement and advice as we went through the process of preparing for our wedding. Little did I realize that the kind truth he was sharing with us was more than merely advice for our wedding, but advice for our marriage. For twenty-one years, now, I have been performing wedding ceremonies, and countless times over those years I have repeated the advice that John shared with me. So, it is with great joy that I now recommend this book to you.

For those who are preparing for the journey of marriage, this little book contains the sound application of Scripture in practical ways that will help you navigate the joy-filled twists and turns of the most important relationship that you will ever share. For those who have traveled a while and find that your walk has become more of a march or turned into a trudge, these loving words will lighten your step by lifting your heart to remember God's purpose for your marriage. For those who perform wedding

ceremonies and feel the weight of preparing young people for their most important relationship—desiring for them to experience all the joys that God intends for marriage to bring and to avoid all the disasters that selfishness and sin can usher into a home—this little book contains the vital truths that you hope to give these couples but either don't have the time in your counseling sessions, or struggle to find just the right words with which to share it.

Alan Benson, Senior Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church,
Schaumburg, IL

PREFACE

Five Major Areas to Always Consider for Marriage and Intimacy

In any marriage, it is extremely important to recognize that there are certain areas which must be guided and guarded. The five areas which can attract significant challenges and difficulties are as follow: *role relationships, communication, physical relationship, finances, and parenting.*

You should consider these areas in some detail in order to enhance each one. You also need to recognize that if one area is failing, it will eventually erode the others. A simple illustration is found in the case of an automobile. Perhaps the car has four cylinders. It is amazing how, when one spark plug misfires, it affects the entire car. A driver doesn't discard the car because of the one fouled plug; instead an arrangement is made to repair the small misfiring part so that the entire car works properly again.

At times a marriage can use a "tune-up." There may be times when each spouse is "misfiring." Too often, couples consider difficulties as a reason to separate. Yet difficulties

can actually enhance and improve the relationship when marriage partners work toward being and doing all they can for God's glory and each other's good. Resolving conflicts is a wonderful way to experience and to extend God's grace!

The purpose of this book is to provide a resource so that marriages will be all that they should be for God's glory. Love, according to Ephesians 5, is a decision of the will to give. Love specifically knows what to give to the object of affection and is not about emotionally performing it. If love turns sour, it can be made sweet again; if love's fire burns low, it can be rekindled. Love is based upon a choice, not a feeling.

The title *I Do or I Don't* brings to light exactly why marriages will or will not succeed. It is based on how willing the couple may be to follow and fulfill the marriage vows they made on their wedding day. Too often, people emphasize the wedding day rather than the marriage itself. Simply saying, "I do," and making all of these wonderful promises, does not guarantee that you will follow through. What assures the fact that you will follow through is when you commit to biblical guidelines such as these presented here.

CHAPTER 1

Marriage—under the Master

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Hebrews 13:4

Why get married? Too many folks simply say, “Why not?” and proceed into a relationship that, as their marriage vows express, shouldn’t be entered into lightly. A marriage should be entered into soberly, deliberately and with the peace of God.

Marriages today are under attack. Satan is doing all he can to erode the sanctity of marriage. Selfishness abounds. Sex is not sacred. Vows are not important. Obeying God is not considered unless it is convenient.

Marriage is a gift from God. He saw, from the beginning of time, that “it was not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:24). After creating Eve for Adam’s companionship and joint dominion of the earth—together they were to rule over His creation—God pronounced that it was good. Just as marriage is a gift from God, in marriage, you and your spouse should be a gift, one to the other. Since God saw fit to create the woman suitable for the man, He wants man and

woman to correspond to each other. It will be so much more blessed to both parties if they will fulfill their marriages as God would desire. The questions to ask are, “How valuable are you as a gift?” and “How treasured is your gift?”

The topic of this book is important because a marriage relationship is intended to reveal how Christ and the church are to respond to each other. Jesus is to be the Head of the church, and love it and cherish it. He revealed that by His very birth and death. The church is, as a result of His leadership, supposed to submit to Him. This was the specific model that God had in mind from the beginning. If that is the model, then the husband, as the head of the wife, is supposed to love and cherish her. The wife, as the church, is to submit to her earthly head and leader.

This is very difficult to comprehend, especially since we are sinners by birth and sinners by choice. Humanly speaking, it makes no sense to love like Christ and submit as to Him. However, if man is willing to base his foundation on God's Word, then he will—in a determined way—follow God's lead. By knowing what is right and being willing to do what is right, it is amazing how right the relationship will be.

LIVING IN LIGHT OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

We need to be sure to note what Scripture says in determining what God wants in our own personal lives.

There are not many specific Scripture references given that specify exact ways that husbands and wives are to act and react. Just like anything else, *fundamental principles* are laced throughout Scripture. Scripture reveals how to specifically invest and live lives that would please God. It is easily understood, then, that if man is pleasing to God, as a result, he is sure to be pleasing to others.

Often people go to the passages such as Ephesians 5 to recommend what would be great qualities for husbands and wives to embrace. It is so true that husbands need to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord. However, it is extremely important to note that Scripture will do wonders in helping a person to be a godly man or woman. By the very nature of being a godly man or woman, that person will definitely be a God-honoring husband or wife. Notice, in these passages, the scriptural directive always points to God or Christ as the basis for leading and following. The men are told to love as Christ loved; the wives are told to submit as unto the Lord.

If two people base their relationship upon their human ability, they will fail. However, if instead they base their relationship upon God's will and way, they are well positioned to be the properly and biblically functioning

husband and wife, enjoying success in their respective roles.

* * *

Agape love finds its reason in the one loving, not the one being loved. In other words, when one marriage partner knows that the other partner needs love, he or she will intentionally show love to that partner, no matter what. To help ensure that they stay on track in this area, agape love—that is qualitatively the same kind of love that God has for His children—finds its reason in God, not in human beings. Jesus showed the perfect example of this when He came to die for our sins. Because of His example, it is quite easy to note that we must parallel that to the best of our ability. We are to pursue, in our humanity, the agape love that God extended to us.

God gave because we needed it; He did not give because we deserved it. 1 Corinthians 13 makes the point that agape love is the only love that will endure. It is God's love, showered upon us continually and repeatedly, that causes us to want to do what is right. It is our willingness to follow His example that causes us to not only want to do it right, but also keeps us doing right!

The goal within your marital union is to please the Lord and to please your marriage partner. To do so will involve diligent effort on both accounts. As God's Word

says, “A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul” (Psalm 13:19). Therefore, set out to make your desire the joy of your spouse. In practical terms, each marriage partner should always consider the following:

- 1) Determine to consider your marriage partner and your position (whether as husband or wife) as the highest priority. Do not let anything else get in the way. As great as children, parents and friends are, they are never to take the place away from your spouse in becoming the greatest priority;

- 2) Make sure that your priorities and activities are such that you still have the time necessary to know your partner as you should;

- 3) Think back to your dating and courting times, and how much effort you applied, showing your loved one how much you cared. However, this time of effort and initiative should not be all you ever did to make the other one feel loved and needed. Rather, you should allow that pursuit to continue, grow, and never stop. There are innumerable pressures and stresses every day in lives today. Too much of this, without a break for renewing marital love, will cause couples to focus on the minor frailties of their marriage partner and to fail to revel in their strengths. To assist in this regard, couples should do all they can to be alone for a time. Scheduling time to

“get away” was what you sought when you first were together—so do it again, and do it often!

If you are already married, enjoy this wonderful calling; if you are not yet married, may the thoughts and biblical principles on the pages that follow be of help and guidance to you as you determine whether you are to say, “I do” or “I don’t”!

CHAPTER 2

Communicating in a Christlike Way

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against

another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. 22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Colossians 3

Consider God's Word—Colossians 3 quoted above—
An extremely helpful scriptural passage directing spouses to be the right type of person before God. As a

result of being the right type of person, you will be the right type of spouse.

The first verse speaks to the importance of seeking those things which are above, which is stating and directing people to want to do what will most please God. This thought is followed by verse two which tells all to set their minds on things that are above and not on things that are on the earth. When people think and act like God desires them to, it does wonders to their human actions and reactions. Spouses need to be sure to parallel their responses with those with which Christ would be most pleased.

The third verse continues with the fact that because believers have died to their sinful desires, their lives are then hidden with Christ. So as a result of being hidden with Christ, they will be certain to have their lives reveal Christ rather than reveal self. Therefore verse 5 continues, emphasizing the importance of putting to death that which is earthly. The awful sins of our time are unambiguously addressed, and it is made abundantly clear that no one should be involved at all with sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is tantamount to idolatry.

God said from the beginning when He wrote the Ten Commandments that we were not to have any other idols