

# Consulting the Owner's Manual

## By Howard Hendricks

Howard Hendricks:

Well, good morning. The students' sense of humor is often quite perverted. Some time ago, I walked into the classroom, some wag had written on the chalkboard these words, "There once was a student, a Vasseur, whose knowledge grew lesser and lesser and at last grew so small he knew nothing at all. So they made him a seminary professor." I've discovered that students have ways of seeing to it that professors do not think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. I would be most remiss be treasurer of my heart if I did not convey to you and to God how deep is the honor and privilege I have had of spending these few days on campus. And I want to assure you that I not only appreciate your response to the word of God, but your total commitment to make Christ the difference maker in your life. And I want to assure you, I'm going to be making intercessory investments on your behalf and I'm going to pray that God will lead you to be a person of influence in the sick society in which we find ourselves.

I want to speak this morning on the subject "Consulting the owner's manual." If you have a Bible may I invite you to turn in our Father's word to the book of Genesis. I want to focus on a verse in chapter 2 and verse 24. It's a seminal passage of scripture, which is not only repeated by the Lord Jesus, but also by the Apostle Paul. Dr. Harold Voth, distinguished senior psychiatrist at the famed Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas wrote a book some time ago entitled The Castrated Family in which he placed a burr in my saddle with these words, "The cycle of sick or weak people who are the product of sick and broken families keeps repeating itself. The effects spread from one generation to the next. And slowly but surely, the sickness tears down the best

traditions of mankind which made our society strong. Sick families produce sick children. And sick children produce sick marriages. And the cycle is perpetuated. Marriages and families today are exploding like firecrackers on the Fourth of July. And we are compelled to ask why.”

You see, you cannot make use of anything until you know what it's made for. That's true of a sailboat or a safety pin I hold in my hand a felt tip pen.

I deal for the purpose for which it was made. But if I should attempt to use that pin pen as a screwdriver. Instead of writing instrument. It does not accomplish the purpose. But it's in danger of ruining the pen. For the purpose for which it was made. In Genesis, chapter two and verse twenty-four. You have marriage as God planned it. It calls for a threefold commitment. First of all, a commitment to exclusivity. And that's why the text says for this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, because without leaving there will be no cleaving. Not leave in terms of responsibility. That's everywhere, taught in the scripture, the Fifth Commandment. You are to honor your father and your mother. The Apostle Paul says a man who does not care for his family is worse than an infidel. Rather strong language. And the Spirit of God is not saying you are to abandon, to forsake your parents in terms of responsibility, but you are to abandon and forsake them in terms of relationship, one relationship has to be broken before another relationship can be established.

The family must be severed in order for the marriage to be secured. What has always intrigued me is the God said this to a couple who never had to leave their parents. And He said it to a couple before they ever had any children, which is the time you need to get the message. See, God is always anticipating the needs you are going to face in whatever realm you function. And

the last thing to be broken is the psychological umbilical cord. We have students at the seminary who arrive on the campus with their umbilical cords in their hands looking for a place to plug them in. I was talking to a woman some time ago, she was sobbing. I said, "What's the problem?" She said, "My son's gone away to college." "Oh," I said, "Wonderful! What you've been doing for the last 18 years is preparing him for college. Then you ought to be singing the Hallelujah chorus." She had been down this road four times. I know what it is to have teenage boy, tell ya he can hardly wait to get out of here. To which I say that's mutual. Boy says, "I tell you if I ever get out of here, I'm not coming back." "Is that a promise?"

I don't understand, all I know, the more you get a grip on your kids the more they want to split, and the more you let them go the more eager they are to come back. Particularly if they are coming back to a relationship between a husband and a wife which is dynamic in its growth. One of our great problems in evangelicalism is the problem of emotional incest. You see, what happens is we get so attached to the great gift of children that God gives us. That we'd become possessive instead of remembering they're not my children. They are God's gift to me, to have for a limited period of time and to equip and train and encourage and affirm. To penetrate the society of which they are apart. I had a mother come to me some years ago. She had a boy who was about 9 years of age. She said, "My son wants to go to camp." "Oh," I said, "That's fantastic." "Oh," she's said, "I'm not sure I'll make it." I said, "Look, we won't have any problem with him. Our only problem is with you." So I turned to her husband and I said, "Sir, you've got an assignment. I want you to see to it that kid gets to camp." Well, mom packed a suitcase, seven sets of underwear. The kid goes away for a week, comes back at the end of the week. All seven

sets still in the suitcase. She's got to peel off the original ones. And the kid has never been the same since.

I assure you, every single time you do anything for your child which that child is capable of doing for himself, you are creating a potential marital cripple. And all you need to do is to be married to one like that, and then you'll know how devastating are the results. So the first thing called for is a decisive, irrevocable act, and all of us who will be parents and many of you are need to ask. Am I making it easier? Or am I making it harder for my children to live, to leave. The second commitment in the text is a commitment to permanence. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife. It's a very strong verb in the Hebrew text. It means to weld. It means to glue. It means to bond. He's talking about a separation proof relationship because God's pattern is always one man for one woman for life. And it's that permanent relationship that you have to start out convinced, that is my commitment. Because Malakai tells us it's based on a covenant. And that's why you should never have a private wedding ceremony. You need a group of people, your friends, the people you love, the people who are committed to you to stand around so that they listen to the vows you take to that man, to that woman and who hold you accountable for. I heard you say, "Till death do us part," and you have not died. Nor has your partner. The reason that's so important, guys, is that God is a covenant keeping God.

And he takes covenant's very seriously, and he expects his children to do the same. I was called to testify in a-in a court some time ago in Dallas, and the judge dismissed us for a recess. And I had not been in a divorce court recently, so I decided to slip into the divorce court and I saw

something I will never forget. I saw two supposedly intelligent people, one with a PhD, the woman with two master's degrees. I saw three kids, the bailiff spent the bulk of his time trying to get the kids back in the chairs. Because they were causing all kinds of confusion in the courtroom. I was watching, my eyes were riveted and on this judge, I could tell he was losing it. And pretty soon he turned to that woman, said, "Look, woman, do you want to live with a man or not?" She said, "No, I don't." Bang, down came the gavel. And I saw a marriage decimated with three kids to experience the crisis. I'm so tired of people talking about what divorce did to them as a couple, how tragic it is, I agree.

But having been the product of this kind of home, I'll guarantee you it's the kids that paid the ultimate price. And God says, "I take a dim view of that superficial, shallow relationship. You are married for life." Now, the fascinating things, guys, is this. I've done an awful lot of study, happily married people and poorly married people face exactly the same problems. The only difference is in commitment. Let's suppose we're having a wedding ceremony here, and I said, "We now pronounce you man and wife." My friend, now the test begins as to what's the level of their commitment. People have often asked me, "Do you ever anticipate divorce?" Never one. Murder? Yes. Well, my wife and I came into our marriage, I convinced you we only had two things going for us: unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ and unreserved commitment to each other. You know, it's amazing how far you can go with that. And it took us the first 10 years of our marriage to get our act together, to see the Spirit of God begin to do what we were talking about on Monday, delivering us from ourselves so that were free to flow into the life of another.

But if in the ceremony we send this couple out and somewhere I hear them say, you know, at least to themselves, "If this doesn't work, we can always bail out," the possibilities of that couple becoming divorce are absolutely phenomenal. Statistically. But you show me a couple that goes out of that service convinced there is no way out, and I will show you a couple who will work out the problems. And over a period of time, will develop an intimacy and a commitment such as they have never experienced in their life. You see, your team in marriage is to build a team that your task is to build a team. And you don't have to be brilliant in terms of heat of football to know you don't tackle the guys who wear the same color uniform and the product in most marriages I'm working with is they are competitive. They are not cooperating. They're not working as a team. But there's a third. Commitment. And that's a commitment to intimacy. Don't miss this. There's a commitment to exclusivity. That's why you are to leave. There's a commitment to permanence. That's why you've got to cleave. And there's a commitment to intimacy. That's why the text says and become one flesh. Don't ever forget it. That's a developmental process.

And I think at least five areas will manifest your intimacy. First of all, what do you have in common intellectually? I think that's one of the great values of going to a university like this. When I was at Wheaton, we always had a motto, we don't encourage love at Wheaton. We don't have to. And people will often make fun of this type of thing, oh you went to Biola to get your degree. That's a laughter of identification. What better place to find a gal and a guy? Two people totally committed to Jesus Christ. Totally committed to each other, because ultimately you're going to get together in a relationship and you will thank God that you took a course in literature, that you took a course in whatever subject where the professor stretched your thinking almost to

the breaking point by suggesting reading. Greatest times, my wife and I have are reading together, we not only read to each other, she reads one set of literature, I read another set, and then we get together and share what God is in the process of teaching, that we can use in my ministry and her ministry of discipleship and writing. While tragic to end up married to someone who may be beautiful as all get out, but is an empty head, a person who hasn't had an intelligent thought for years. I think the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life lives in Oklahoma City. What a heartbreak she married the great football star in her class. Oh, there were all kinds of women who were after him, but she got him. And to hear her say it's the greatest pain of my life. Every night to see a guy come home overweight. Sitting down to down a six pack and to watch television until he falls asleep. And she said to me one day, "And to think the other girls tried to get him. Honestly, I have to tell you, Prof. I wish they had succeeded."

You see, the reason it's exacerbated is the intimacy of marriage demands that you have someone who's willing to read, who's willing to think, who's willing to discuss, who's willing to stretch their mental muscles so that as life goes by they have something to contribute to the relationship. Just never forget the stat. Every guy, every gal in this room, if you are married, will spend one-over one half of your marriage without children. Which is why you don't build a good marriage just around your children, because then when you're out of children, you're out of a relationship. And this is what is happening with people fifty years of age and older. And why? It's one of the highest periods of divorce. Because the children are gone, but they have absolutely nothing in common. Not only becoming one intellectually, but emotionally, so that you discuss how do we feel about having children?

Are they a bother or are they a blessing? Are they something we're to avoid? Or are they something that challenge the socks off us so that we realize we've got an opportunity to build into the life of the next generation. As a result of our time, what are your values? How do you feel toward money? Wealthiest person I have ever known in my life does not have a stench of materialism in him. He's so blown me away by a sacrificial giving to the cause of Christ and to people and works in his community, and I said to him one day, "How did you ever grow up in the midst of such wealth and be so non-materialistic?" He said, "It's simple. My parents taught me that everything we own was either a tool or an idol." Imagine what you get out of that. You get the head of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, from its very start until more recently when he retired, a man who just distinguishes himself not only as a leader in the cause of Christ, but also in the city of Boston.

What do you have together socially? Are you involved with other people? Is your home a center where lost people are invited. You wouldn't believe when I present this type of thing to the average audience on, "Dr. Hendricks, you know, we're not going to have any lost people in here." I said, "Why not?" "Well this is a Christian home." I said, can you think of a better place to have lost people than in a Christian home?" Well, they're liable to smoke. Well, put out an ashtray. You want to borrow one? I'll give you one. Most distinctive thing about our family, the reason two of my four children are totally involved in an evangelistic ministry is they cannot remember any time when there were not lost people in our home.

People who feel comfortable being there, so we're not this little hide out in the community, scared spitless that some non-Christian is going to invade our home. But we have the greatest

opportunity of sharing the Lord Jesus as a family. See, people ask me what they ask you, "Why is it that kids often go to a pagan university and in a short period of time they're down the drain?" I'll say, "Let me ask you one question. How many people has that kid seen come to Christ as a result of his ministry in his family?" And I know the answer. "Then why do you expect that when he goes into the military, when he goes to a pagan university, when he goes to a job, he just flows into the culture. Making no distinctive different."

Becoming one physically so that you learn the intimacy that does not take place in multiple serial marriages. And we've got all the data to prove it. Jean and I have been married for fifty-five years and I have come to the deep conviction that you will not experience the sexual life that God designed in His pattern until you have lived with another individual and experience that intimacy over a long period of time. And then you will realize that most of what people talk about is of the essence, superficial. And of course, what do you have in common spiritually? Do you pray together? Do you study the Bible? Best Bible study I have is not with my colleagues. No reflection on them. Best Bible study I have is with my dear wife. And we both agreed to study a passage of scripture, we study it separately, and then we come to share what God is in the process of teaching us on an applicational level.

And I have seen not only my wife's life dramatically changed over the years, but also my own, not just because I know a lot in my head about the Bible, but because he's in the process of changing the inner being of this person. So ask yourself, when you are about to get married or in the process of preparing, how much do you have in common with this man? With this woman? If you draw two circles to begin with somewhere, it's gonna overlap. That's the area of

commonality. But as time goes by, those circles are gonna move like this. If they are, you are in the process of developing a unique marriage. If those two circles are moving in this direction, you are in the process of getting a divorce. Even though you may never end up in a divorce court.

The emotional divorce is sometimes more painful than the actual legal involvement. You are involved in a church, you are involved in the disciplining your children. We know there is no perfect marriage because there are no perfect people. And developing a good marriage is not unlike skiing. If you're not falling down, I'll guarantee you you're not learning. Good marriages are not marriages without problems. There are no such marriages. They are marriages in which problems are being solved as we become one flesh and the issue is not where are you, but in what direction are you going. Every couple, every single couple comes into marriage with a picture of what you want. But you marry a person not a picture. Therefore, you're faced with an alternative. You either tear up the picture or you tear up the person. I want to leave you with the question this morning. What's worse than being unmarried? Answer, being married to the wrong person.

There is no command in the scripture that you have to get married. That's your choice. But if you make that choice, you'd better be prepared to live with the consequences of that choice. And this is why I would say to you with all of my heart, I love you. I love you so much that I'm going to tell it like it is. And that is you need to be a person who is willing to pay the price. And you do that by allowing God to make the choice of your partner. The bad marriages I deal with even in the Christian community are where God was never involved in the equation. This is what I want.

And like a gal said to me just recently, "I got what I want." she came to see me, I love her like a daughter. She said, "You know, Prof, I'm getting married." I said, "I heard that. Tell me about it." She started to tell me, and then she said when I asked her, "Is he a believer?" Her head dropped. "No, he's not. And don't give me that Corinthians jazz because God led me to marry him." Six months later, she is in my office, she is pregnant. This is now 13 years ago. And we are still looking for the man in every state in the United States and in 37 countries. Because after she became pregnant there was no basis for the marriage. What's worse, than being unmarried? She answered my question. Because that's exactly where I got the question. She said, "Prof. Let's face it, what's worse than being unmarried?" And she walked in, and said, "Prof. I now know the answer, being married to the wrong person." May God give you grace. And that's what I'm going to pray for. Will you join me?

Father, I thank You for every man, for every woman You have an eternal plan for their life, You've created them. You've placed within them gifts and passions and desires. And You want to use them legitimately, to fulfill their hearts. And Father, I pray that You will be working in their lives during these crucial days on this campus, that the Spirit of God may direct them, enable them and give them wisdom to make intelligent and biblical decisions, for which they will have no regret. How I thank You for each one. And commit them to You and to the word of Your grace with great thanksgiving in Christ's wonderful name. Amen.

[Audience applauds]