

# *Hope Chest Society*

## *Handbook of Hope*

*By*

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*Tidbits of wisdom to help you as you start out in marriage*

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## Introduction

The purpose of this book is to give a little bit of advice and encouragement to young ladies who are contemplating marriage in their future, and young married women who would like their relationship with their husbands to be better.

These little tidbits of information are based on my own life experience, some gained through painful ordeals, and others were gifts of insight from God.

If you will incorporate some of the things in this book into your relationship with your husband, it can do nothing but improve the way you think about your husband and your marriage.

Years ago, I overheard someone talking about the time they got married; they said when they married, they felt like someone had put handcuffs on them, and that their wedding ring felt like a handcuff. I could not believe my ears. When my husband and I married, I felt more free than I'd felt in my entire life, free to be myself, loved for who I am, free to start on a big adventure with God and my husband, and who knew where that would lead!

As of the writing of this book, we've been on this adventure together for 26 years and counting. We've had good times and difficult times, ordinary and extraordinary. We've had experiences we thought would break us and we've had some experiences that are unbelievable, that God dropped into our lives just as a gift to make life exciting.

I've told my friends that it seems like my husband and I have been married forever (because we know each other so well) and at the same time, not nearly long enough (I still want to know him better and grow old with him). I want to be an asset to my husband and to God's kingdom.

I hope you will enjoy the stories I tell, and glean some valuable things from my experiences. All I can say to you is: Let the adventure begin!

## God first

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)*

It was the spring of 1980. I was to be married in June. I had served the Lord for as long as I could remember and wanted to please Him. On this particular Sunday morning, I made a request of God. I wanted to know for certain that I was marrying THE man God had for me. I had already informed the Lord that I was not going to leave the church that day until I'd heard from Him, no matter how long it took.

A missionary from South America was the speaker. He preached a powerful sermon. Then at the end of the service, during prayer time, he mentioned several circumstances that the Lord had revealed to him about people in the congregation. Suddenly, I heard him say, "There's a couple here who are to be married this summer and you're having some doubts. God has a word for you this morning." I stood to my feet and went to kneel at the altar, along with many others, and started praying and asking God for guidance and His will.

A few minutes passed and the missionary then said, "All right. You've talked to the Lord. Now wait quietly in His presence and let Him speak to you." I did just that. When I quieted myself before the Lord, suddenly, off to my right, with my peripheral vision, I saw the Lord and I heard His voice saying, "It's okay, Ruth. It's okay." His voice and His presence were more real than my surroundings. I had heard from the Lord and He answered my question in an awesome way.

We were married that summer and we've never looked back to question God's will. We had His answer.

## Love with Abandon

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies...He who loves his wife loves himself. Ephesians 5:25-28*

I remember when my husband and I went to our pastor for our pre-wedding counseling session. We were older than his usual couples (we were in our 20s) and he knew we were committed to the Lord, so he didn't go into anything heavy and prolonged. Instead, he encouraged us, once we were married, to "love with abandon." This past year, we celebrated our 26<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, and those words still echo in my ears.

To me, this means that when you're contemplating marriage and then after you're married, you don't have a little voice in the back of your mind, saying: "If this doesn't work out, you can always get divorced." You don't look at marriage as a contract you can just make null and void, as if it never happened, and then move on if it doesn't work out.

Love your spouse with abandon, holding nothing back, no matter what circumstances you may face. You totally commit yourself to your spouse and grow together in your relationship with God and each other.

## No Overnight Stewing

*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*

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1*

*The Lord...is slow to anger, abounding in love. Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:18, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, 103:8, John 4:2*

We have all heard stories about couples who got angry with each other and (a) didn't speak to each other for days, (b) one of them got in the car and sped away and didn't come back for hours, or (c) spoke words in anger that deeply hurt the other person and it took a long time to forgive the person who spoke the hateful words.

We will all encounter moments when we are angry with our spouse and we need to have it worked out ahead of time how we will react when that happens. Scripture clearly tells us not to go to bed angry, immediately followed by "Do not give the devil a foothold." My experience has been that when you sleep on anger, it grows and turns into something much more sinister than it started out; it turns into bitterness and bitterness can destroy you.

One thing my husband and I have always tried to do, when we have a misunderstanding, is to talk it out until we understand where each of us stands, understand the other person's viewpoint or perspective, and come to some sort of understanding we both can live with and then move on. It's also permissible to agree to disagree. No one wins or loses; it's more like a mutually beneficial compromise – we both win!

I think the longest time period where we didn't speak to each other was three hours and that was once. We've gone 20 minutes without speaking to each other, but it's so uncomfortable that we have to get together and discuss the problem and resolve it.

I have always been a very serious person and have tended to take a lot of things personally that were not meant to be taken that way. My husband really helped me one day when he said, "Ruth, you know I didn't say that to hurt you; if you'll just laugh and not take it so personally, it might really help." I started trying to do that and you'd be amazed how a lighthearted laugh can totally defuse a tense situation. I don't ever mean you can laugh at the other person in a serious situation, but at times when you tend to take things too seriously, it can really help and totally change your outlook on life.

## **MAS (Mutual Admiration Society)**

*Honor one another above yourselves. Romans 12:10*

*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought... Romans 12:3*

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. Romans 12:6*

“Mas” is the Spanish word for “more” and that’s a wonderful word, but to me, it stands for Mutual Admiration Society. That’s a club my husband and I formed many years ago.

We all have faults and we tend to enjoy dwelling on one another’s shortcomings. This is quite easy to do in a marriage relationship because you’re with each other all the time and see the other person’s weaknesses on a daily basis. We have a decision to make. We can either point out the other person’s faults and constantly try to change them, or we can give their weaknesses to God to change and we can concentrate on the strengths of our spouse.

Several years ago, I don’t know exactly when it started, but we decided to concentrate on each other’s strengths. We encouraged each other when we saw strengths in action. When we were apart from each other, speaking to others, we built up the other person and proudly shared their strengths, even if one of their weaknesses was bothering us at the time.

Guess what happened? As we shared each other’s strengths and abilities with others, we began to think of more strengths and abilities we each had. Before long, we constantly saw the good things in the other person and their weaknesses began to fade into the background. We decided to call it our Mutual Admiration Society; we honestly admire each other and enjoy sharing that with others. If that’s not “mas” to a marriage, I don’t know what is!

## He's not one of the kids

*...[T]each the older women to...teach the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Titus 2:3-4*

I remember sitting in the gymnastics center, waiting with other moms, for our daughters to finish gymnastics class. One mother came in and stopped to speak to a group of mothers near me. Talking quite loudly, she shared how her husband was not feeling well and how that affected his behavior, and then she commented, "It's just like having another child in the house." I cringed, and waited for someone to respond that she shouldn't say things like that, but they all nodded their heads in agreement.

Let me make one thing clear: your husband is not one of the kids and will never be like one of the kids. He is the head of your household and your marriage relationship and Scripture tells us to respect him so that we don't bring reproach on God's word, making it appear weak and ineffective.

Yes, we all have our moments when we feel like kids at heart, but there's a difference between being child-ish and child-like. God's word teaches us that it's important to approach spiritual things with childlike faith and childlike wonder. Some of us have our moments when we act like spoiled children and want our own way, but we are God's children, always becoming more like Him.

In a marriage, you must be careful not to belittle your husband, even in a joking way. Someone once said that there's a little bit of truth in every joke. If that is true, although you may say something in a joking way, the enemy of our soul will come to that person later and whisper, "Maybe there's some truth in what they said," and it will hurt that person and make them feel less than who God made them to be.

If there is some truly immature behavior going on, you can respectfully and lovingly discuss it and see if some changes could be made. If that doesn't work, you must pray for your husband and trust our loving God to work on his weaknesses just as He must constantly work on our own.

## Communicate

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.  
Hebrews 10:24*

*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know  
how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6*

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. Proverbs 25:11*

When we are equally yoked together with our husband, we are aiming for the same goal: to grow in the Lord and please Him and bear fruit for His kingdom. We are also brother and sister in Christ and it should be our desire to spur each other towards our mutual goal.

One way we can do that is by communicating with our husbands. This means we must talk, ask questions and listen. Timing can be everything in this particular element of our relationship. I find that it is not a good time to discuss serious issues (a) when my husband comes in the door at the end of a long day at work, (b) right before bed, and (c) when he has an empty stomach.

When I have something I need to discuss with my husband, I try to let him have some transition time after he gets home and give him time to change his mindset from work to family. I try to be sure he's had a meal, so he's not hungry and cranky. And we made a mutual agreement, years ago, not to discuss serious issues when we were both tired; it would only make a bad situation worse.

Well, when DO you discuss things with your husband? After supper is a good time, weekends are relaxed and you can spend some time discussing things, Sunday afternoons are nice. You can also put little notes in with your husband's lunch so he's thinking about you during the day. My husband and I will have one or two short telephone conversations during the day to just make contact with one another. We e-mail each other with carefully crafted code letters to say "I love you" (ILU) or "I love you very much" (ILUVM), so co-workers don't look over his shoulder and see something personal. We occasionally IM (instant message) each other if the occasion warrants it. It's important to have some sort of contact during the day, in short spurts, and then continue communicating when he gets home.

We have also set aside Saturday mornings to catch up on the week, chat, and dream. We make breakfast together, go and sit on the porch, eat breakfast, drink our cup of coffee, watch the birds at the birdfeeder, and talk. Our children know that this is our special time and at least for a certain period of time, mom and dad need some alone time together before they can come outside and join in the conversation.

### **Communicate (continued)**

When you're discussing things, ask questions and then wait for the answer. Be genuinely interested in what your husband does for a living; his work is supporting you and your family. You may occasionally feel as if you've done something wrong and then find your husband was only stressed because of a project at work and it had nothing to do with you. Keeping the communication lines open keeps your relationship fresh, with nothing building up, waiting to explode at some inopportune time that will end up hurting you both. **Make** time to spend together; then talk, ask questions, and listen.

## Dream big dreams

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. Proverbs 13:12*

*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. I Corinthians 2:9*

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

*In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps. Proverbs 16:9*

I have been constantly amazed at how few people actually look UP at the sky in the daytime or nighttime. If we looked up more often, we would be thinking about more than our current circumstances; we'd be thinking BIG thoughts about the universe and the planets and stars, sun and moon, and GOD!

For some reason, so many of us tend to only see things that are around us, people close to us, their problems, our problems, our needs, our wants.

Sometimes, we need to sit down and ask ourselves, "What do we really want out of life? What do we really want to accomplish in our lifetime? What are our goals as a couple? What goals do we have for our children?" Then dream big. Don't settle for just a big raise at work if the goal of your life is to operate your own business! Don't settle for a job as a secretary if your goal is to be a mother or scientist or beautician or politician!

Well, what if your goal seems unreachable? Let me tell you a story. I didn't realize until I was in my 40s that I was a latchkey kid when I was 13. I'd come home to an empty, cold house and go in the door, lock it behind me and start supper before my family started arriving an hour or so later. One day, I came in the door, locked it behind me, and started to turn the light on. Suddenly, I drew my arm back, stopped and told myself to stand there and absorb the cold and darkness and remember how it felt. Then I prayed and said, "God, don't ever let my children that I'll have in the future, know what this feels like." Then I turned on the light.

I went off to nurse's training, to a 3-year RN program. I quit after 13 months, and went home, exhausted emotionally and physically. Subsequently, I did what I really wanted to do, attended college, majoring in pre-med. After I got my bachelors degree in biology, I was scheduled to take my MEDCATS, a test you must take in order to qualify to go to medical school. The night before the test, I backed out of it, and decided I didn't want to be on call for 24 hours a day for the rest of my life. All my goals seemed elusive.

## **Dream Big Dreams (continued)**

I then learned how to operate a computer. A few years later, after we'd moved to another state, I wanted to stay home and raise our children and we started an in-home medical/legal transcription business. When our son was 5 and we had a newborn daughter, the Lord led us to home educate, a task we've been doing for over 17 years now. When our son was high school age, he needed to take some of the sciences and most of the mothers were terrified of high school science. I had the background and motivation and started teaching science to home educated high schoolers, and have been doing it ever since and enjoying it tremendously.

What does all that have to do with anything? I had dreams as a young person. It seemed that they kept coming to a dead end. But God honored the prayer of a 13 year old girl and ultimately gave me the desire of my heart. My children have never come home from school to a cold, empty house. I did not become a doctor, but have trained many young people in God-honoring science in a way which I believe will yield eternal results. God took my dreams and put them into a package that I didn't expect and He fulfilled the desire of my heart.

All of this to say to trust God and allow Him to direct your life. Dream big dreams and work towards them. The road may fork out into unexpected places, but you will always end up in the middle of His will, and that's exactly where you want to be!

## **Worship together**

*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:20*

*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Hebrews 10:24*

*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. Hebrews 10:25*

Isn't it exciting to know that if even two people come together to worship God, He has promised to be present there with them! I find it an awesome thing to know that when the two partners in a marriage come together to worship, God's presence is there to work in their lives as individuals and as a couple.

My husband and I read a short passage of Scripture and pray every night and it's amazing how much you learn. I also find it so encouraging to hear my husband pray. You can tell a lot about a person's relationship with the Lord and things that are going on in their lives by how they pray. It's a tremendous blessing.

One thing we did together was to join the worship team at church. God has gifted my husband with the ability to do spectacular things with sound and music, and He's gifted me with a musical ability. Although my husband was at the back of the church in the sound booth and I was in the front, playing an instrument and singing, we actually considered practice night a date. It was a way for us to worship and minister together as a team. Now our children have joined us. Our son plays the drums every other Sunday, and God has gifted our daughter with an ability to understand lighting, PowerPoint, computers, and she now sings on the worship team. Now we worship and minister together as a family. What a blessing!

Don't ever underestimate the power of two plus God! It's an unbeatable team!

## **Duplicate your successes**

*Teach the older women...to train the younger women to love their husbands.... Titus 2:4*

Older women are to teach the younger women. Older women can't teach younger women if they're never in contact with each other, so you might want to consider a mentoring program in your church, or befriend a young woman in your circle of influence at work, church or in your neighborhood. Sometimes you have to be friends for a while, nurturing the friendship, nurturing trust, before that young woman will confide in you. Sometimes you're not in a position to give advice, but must wait until asked.

Then when you're asked for advice, give encouragement and sound advice, always based on Biblical principles. If you don't know the answer to a problem, it's okay to say, "I don't know. Let's find out together." Then work towards a solution.

One thing I've found over the years is that when you befriend someone and give advice, they tend to pass that advice on to others, who also use it. You want others to benefit from things you've done right in life and to avoid making the same mistakes you made. This is how you duplicate your successes, and hopefully, the young women you influence will do even better than you did in handling what life brings to them.

## Time alone

*Throughout the New Testament, we see Jesus spending time alone with His father, and with His disciples, in order to develop a more intimate relationship. We need to do that as individuals to keep our relationship with God fresh, but we are also united as one body when we marry and we need to refresh that relationship, as well.*

You have a lot of time alone as newlyweds, and that time is difficult to find once you have children.

But don't neglect to spend time alone with your spouse, even if it's a designated 15 to 30 minutes a week. We have what we call porch time. When my husband is home on the weekend, he is very protective of our time together on the porch, having breakfast (he even helps me cook it now) and watching the birds come to the bird feeder (laughing at the different personalities), enjoying the pretty weather. It's a great time to talk over events of the week (let him talk about work and you can talk about what happened at home), hopes, dreams, your goals for your children.

It also allows your children to see that you're still special to each other and that not only keeps a marriage strong, but gives your children a good role model to follow when they have relationships of their own. Although it's unavoidable that very small children need a huge chunk of your time, as they get older, your children need to understand that Dad comes first and they come next. That way they won't play Mom and Dad against each other because Mom and Dad are on the same side.

My husband and I have our own devotions at night just before bed, and that's wonderful, but recently, the Lord spoke to my heart and told me that He wanted time alone with ME and could I please do something about that. It was amazing how I found a chunk of time every morning, while having my cup of coffee on the porch after my husband left for work, to read my Bible and meditate for at least a few minutes. It has been refreshing, and a shot in the arm of energy to start the day.

## He's not the enemy

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)*

Remember, we're all sinners and no one is perfect. We all have moments when we make mistakes. God has forgiven us and we need to extend God's grace, forgiveness and love to our husbands when they make mistakes, just as they need to extend the same to us when we make mistakes.

Scripture says that love covers a multitude of sins. We often cannot do it alone, but God working in us will get the job done. When we allow God to work, our relationship with God and our spouse can only grow stronger.

For years, I have given a piece of advice to many of my married friends: your spouse is not the enemy. The enemy of your soul is the real enemy. Have you ever seen the Three Musketeers movies, how they stand back to back, facing out, and fight the same enemy together? I have always pictured my husband and I, standing back to back, holding swords, and covering each other's back while we fight the real enemy. I don't ever remember saying to him, "It's all YOUR fault!" The enemy uses us all to push each other's buttons and lose our tempers or our peaceful countenance. We just need to understand what's really going on.

Scripture says that (in reference to Satan) "We know his devices." (II Corinthians 2:11). If we know the weapons he uses against us, we can strengthen our defenses (with God's word) and fight him together and in the end, God gives the victory.

Yes, there will be things that hurt us, we'll say things out of anger, we let something little get blown up out of proportion, but if we truly love God and our spouse deeply, God's love that covers our own sins and imperfections will work in us to forgive our spouse (and them to forgive us) and to love each other more deeply than before because we've come through a rough time together and are stronger because of it. Romans 8:28 says that we can't lose; it says that no matter how bad a circumstance may be, if we are serving Him, he promises that it will work to OUR good in the long run. That's a win-win situation from where I'm standing.

## Don't worry

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:4 (NIV)*

*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. Isaiah 59:19(b) (KJV)*

*I have always treasured the entire chapter of Psalm 91 with regards to worry and fear*

My brother is a minister and I heard him preach a sermon several years ago in which he made the statement: "Worry is a subtle form of atheism." That statement bothered me for a long time and I pondered it and meditated on it. I came to the conclusion that he was correct. I had been the world's worst worry-wart and although I knew what Scripture said about not worrying, I still did it. Do you realize that when you worry, you are acting as if there is no God? If you worry, you're not trusting God to take care of that situation or that person you're worried about; in effect, you're acting no better than an atheist who believes there is no God. That made me really think hard and I decided I would ask the Lord to help me do better in that area of my life. And He did!

When we're serving the Lord, the enemy of our soul is not happy and he will do what he can to make us worry unnecessarily about anything and everything and try to get our minds off of what God's word says and off of what God is trying to say to us and accomplish in our lives. We are to be aware of Satan's devices (II Corinthians 2:11), which we can learn through reading God's word, and we are to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-18) so we have protection against the fiery darts of the enemy of our soul.

I've taught my children a little saying since they were small in order to help them not to worry. When we worry, we're fearful, and we know that God has not given us the spirit of fear (II Timothy 1:7), so the fear must be coming from the enemy. We know that the enemy is the father of all lies (John 8:44). So the chances are that whatever you're worrying about, the opposite is true, and you can stop worrying.

With our armor on and knowing how the enemy operates, we can gain the victory over worry.

## Rehearse the blessings

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it. II Timothy 3:14 (NIV)*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8, 9*

Why is it that we remember bad things that have happened to us with such detail and we have a difficult time remembering the good things?

When we first got married, I kept short journal entries of blessings for each month of most of the first year we were married. Over time, I forgot many of those things and remembered a lot of difficult circumstances that had occurred during that same time frame. One day, I found my blessing list and I was amazed at how many I'd forgotten and was reminded just how good God had been to us and how many of those things had just faded from my memory.

The apostle Paul told Timothy to rehearse the things that he was convinced of. That means we are not to forget, but to constantly remind ourselves of what God has done. And when we're finished rehearsing those things, Philippians 4:8 tell us what God wants us to think about and concentrate on in order to keep us spiritually healthy.

I would encourage you to make short entries into a journal, especially for the first year or two after you're married, and then keep them somewhere close where you can refer to them often for encouragement from your Heavenly Father.

## Conclusion

These little tidbits of wisdom are my gift to you. They have been acquired over 26 years of marriage to a wonderful man, God's gift to me. Scripture tells us, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Next to the Lord, our spouse is our best friend, or should be, and God uses those little daily irritations to sharpen us for use in His kingdom. If we will learn something profitable from every pleasant and uncomfortable experience, we will be the better for it. We just need to approach every occasion with a spirit of humility, understanding that we don't know everything and can always learn something new and can benefit from it.

I have found that one of the most important things in our marriage is kindness. When you think of others more highly than yourself, you have a genuine love for people and you always try to season every aspect of your life with kindness, I will tell you that your life will be richer, your marriage stronger and the foundation of your walk with God deeper than you ever thought possible.

I hope these stories from my own life will bless and encourage you. It has been my pleasure to share them with you.

If you have been touched by these devotionals or would like to let me know how God is working in your own life, I'd love to hear from you. You can e-mail me at [hopechestersociety@bellsouth.net](mailto:hopechestersociety@bellsouth.net).

My prayer is that God will bless each and every one of you as you walk with Him.

Ruth Sundeen