

The mission statement of Union28 is to enhance marriage relationships, to communicate a positive image of marriage, and to encourage/support the sanctity of the marriage covenant between a man and a woman in a fun and stylish way.

REFLECTION (Thoughts from the founder of Union28):

As a little girl I often dreamed of becoming a wife and a mother and, like every other girl, I wanted the fairytale—the perfect man, the perfect wedding, the perfect married life together, all beautifully wrapped in golden sunsets, shared ice cream cones, and breathless moments together of awe and wonder. I would pray and tell God the desires of my heart, but deep down, I knew I wanted something more than butterflies in my stomach. I wanted a relationship. A deep, intimate, “share-my-whole-life-with-this-person” relationship.

And then one day...Greg called. We've shared quite the adventure so far. We have grown so much individually and as a couple since we've been married. Growing is not always easy, but it is always rewarding and necessary if you want to maintain a healthy and joy-filled marriage.

On our wedding day, we publicly declared that divorce would not be an option for us. We have been tested and tried time and again by our flesh (our innate desire to be selfish and defensive) and Satan, who would love nothing better than to see our marriage destroyed. But God is always faithful to lead us into victory...and we choose to follow His lead! We made a decision to love (see 1 Corinthians 13) and we're sticking by it.

In this world where Satan would like nothing better than to tear the God-breathed foundation of marriage apart with divorce, infidelity, selfishness, pornography, abuse, and an overall lack of lifelong commitment to marriage vows, the family structure must stay strong! Our thoughts can be our biggest enemy or our best ally when it comes to doing just that—building a solid foundation. One little thought can impact a person's situation like nothing else. Why? Because our mind is the control center of our whole being, our thoughts affecting us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is the port through which the physical and spiritual realms are acknowledged and given reign. Romans 8:6 says, “The mind of the flesh (what we can accomplish/understand morally on our own) is death, but the mind controlled by the Holy Spirit (when we invite him into our life and yield our ‘flesh’ to His leading) is life and peace.” This is why we are to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds” and why we are to “take captive every thought” and why “whatever is good, whatever is lovely, whatever is just, whatever is pure, (we're to) think on these things.”

A mind is like a door. Whatever it's opened to, that is what will be given right to enter and whatever it's closed to, that is what must stop, turn around, and go home. The challenge is developing the courage and the determination to take the vital, active role of managing your own mind! You cannot help or prevent every thought that first enters, but you have full control over if it stays around or not.

Determine to become aware of the state of your mind and the thoughts which are constantly trying to fill it. Become aware of how a simple thought, dwelled upon—even for a moment—affects your attitude, your emotions, and your feelings towards a

person or a situation, even affecting your physical well-being. Notice that our “flesh” is the target. If a thought can get us to *feel* badly, then our situation will be directed by the lesser of two truths: feelings rather than truths based on God’s word, physical rather than spiritual. Nothing happens on the earth (the physical realm) that hasn’t first happened in the heavenlies (the spiritual realm.) Therefore, the spiritual realm and the things of the spirit are more real than the physical realm and the things that we see and feel. A thought can be born of the spirit (the indwelling of the Holy Spirit inside of us or a direct message from God), the flesh (our sinful nature which operates on a physical level—how we *feel* about something (that hurt me, why did he do that?, I’m so depressed!, No one will know if I just do it once, etc), or Satan himself (lies and confusion...either he whispers them in our ear himself, or he has somebody else tell us, most often a loved one or a close friend since negative words from such people in our lives hurt the most.)

A thought can take a situation that’s teetering on the fence and can change the atmosphere to facilitate a good outcome or a poor outcome. Don’t believe me? Try it! It’s been wisely said that “words create worlds” and our words, simply put, are our spoken thoughts.

Take, for example, printed t-shirts. Whether they contain words, graphics, or both, they are presenting a thought. That’s why some private schools ban them from the dress code—they’re distracting. Why? Because they make you think. Everyone knows what a white check mark on a t-shirt stands for. You see one and, whether consciously or subconsciously, you have a thought. You may think, “Nike” or “Just Do It” or “She must be into sports” or “Michael Jordan” or a myriad of other possibilities... simply from seeing something on a shirt—symbols that translate into and provoke thoughts. And thoughts, as discussed before, have the power of affecting our emotional state. We form quick opinions about the messages people portray. And regardless of what we think and how we feel as the result of seeing/reading something, the fact is that we do think and then we do feel. So with all of this powerful thinking and feeling, why not send a positive message that facilitates a positive outcome?

With the great level of personal involvement that comes with it, marriage has the power to greatly affect us. Our life becomes completely entwined with another’s and so our thoughts are greatly generated and affected by what’s going on in our marriage relationship. This is why a great marriage where both spouses give and take, apologize and forgive, and love out of a desire to serve and bless one another, feels the closest thing there is to heaven on earth. This is also why a less-than-great marriage (whether there’s abuse and infidelity involved or selfishness and lack of respect, appreciation, or verbal affirmation) can seem like hell on earth.

The truth is that God wants marriages to prosper and to represent a foretaste of the beautiful intimacy that we will share with Him one day—Him overwhelming us by His loving Presence, us adoring Him and basking in His delight. And we won’t have to THINK about how to conjure up such emotions and actions of devotion because we will be perfect and the love we have and give will be perfect.

While we are on this earth, perfect love which requires no effort or skill (as we will experience in heaven) is impossible...so love must be a choice and it begins with our thoughts. Love must be a constant succession of thoughts that we constantly take

captive in order to love ourselves, our spouse, and those around us. We must speak against lies, we must take control of our emotions before they take control of us, and we must nurture thoughts that are Holy Spirit-inspired—thoughts that set us free. So let's get practical.

If my husband and I have a miscommunication and I end up feeling hurt, I have a choice to make. As soon as I feel offended, thoughts begin to pour into my mind and all of a sudden there's a battle. "He hurt you *again!* What are you going to do about it?" "Why can't he just love me." "What can I say that will hurt him as much as what he said hurt me? Then he'd know how it feels." "Fine. I'll just ignore him and act like it didn't hurt me. I can play this game, too."

Obviously, none of those thoughts are Holy Spirit-led. They are all based on revenge, on *my* hurt, on how I'm feeling and my body and mind respond accordingly. I either get mad and my jaw clenches and my heart begins to beat and my whole body tenses up...or I cry and physically drain myself...or I try to play cool and my heart hardens a little more to the man I love most in the world...or am supposed to love most in the world.

But a Truth-led, Holy Spirit-inspired thought sets me free...if I'm willing to accept the challenge. When I catch myself, I can change my thoughts to things like, "There *is* an enemy (Satan) in this world and it's *not* my husband" "I forgive him. I know he's not trying to hurt me. And even if he is, I still forgive him. Lord, minister to the things in his life that I can't see or don't understand." "I will calm down. Lord, give me the wisdom to communicate effectively and lovingly." "Lord, I praise you. Thank you for being my First Love. Thank you that *you alone* can satisfy me and fill my heart completely. Thank you for my husband. Help me to place all of my expectations for our marriage in you and not in him." "Lord, I feel so hurt, but help me not to retaliate."

Thoughts like this facilitate a better perspective. They de-emphasize emotions and heighten your awareness to the leading of the Holy Spirit, facilitating better, more effective communication. You can't change your spouse but *you* can change and alter the atmosphere and therefore your circumstance.

So where does this leave t-shirts? Well why not use something as simple as what you wear to portray a message that not only ushers life into your marriage relationship but also into the lives of those around you? We give off messages by what we wear anyway and sometimes printed words can speak louder than actions when there's not time enough for actions to be noticed. (Imagine the impact when the words are backed up by the noticed actions of the one wearing the words!)

For instance, I was traveling home once by myself (I was wearing my "my husband rocks" t-shirt) and had arrived at the airport where I hurried to baggage claim in hopes of seeing my husband (who was picking me up) sooner than later. As I waited for my bag to appear on the conveyer belt, the man standing in front of me turned around and said, "I really like your shirt." He'd had his back to me so he must have seen the shirt prior to baggage claim and he so caught me off-guard that I replied, "I'm sorry, what was that?" And he repeated himself. He had such sadness in his eyes and tone of voice that I looked to see if he wore a wedding ring; he didn't. Now, my husband wasn't anywhere around and this man couldn't know if we really truly loved each other, but he

took me at my shirt's word. My understanding was quickened and I could tell he was thinking of someone and wishing she'd worn a shirt like that for him.

I've had other people stop me in the grocery store, the post office, or at church. From the many comments I've received, I conclude that we all just want to be adored and have someone to adore. Women normally say one of two things: "I want one of those; my husband rocks, too! Where did you find that?" or "So how much is your husband paying you to wear that?" Men normally comment: "That's so cool. I need to get one of those for my wife to wear!"

One man, after seeing my shirt, quickly and emphatically said, "Oh, my wife has the same shirt!" He was just kidding; his wife didn't have a shirt like that, but he wanted me to think that I had nothing on his wife when it came to having an amazing husband. Then there was an elderly man pushing a cart in the produce department at the grocery store. I noticed he was watching me as he waited for his wife to bring this and that from the shelves and place them in his charge. Finally, as I circled around and our paths merged, he said, as if reading my shirt, "My husband rocks." (This was apparently his way of getting my attention.) "Now is that something your husband is or something your husband does?" Again, I was taken by surprise. I responded, "A little bit of both, I think. He's a wonderful husband." He smiled and I went on my way and it occurred to me that he must have been thinking on that one for awhile and really wanted to know just what I was trying to say with my shirt.

The simple matter of fact is that if I'm going to wear a shirt that presents my husband as being amazing, then that's how I need to think about him. No husband is perfect and it doesn't really matter. What matters is how I set myself up to think about him. If I focus on his failures, his annoyances, or ways in which I've felt hurt by him, then I will interact with him as a hurt and frustrated and disappointed wife. That makes for miserable living for me and my husband and those around us.

But if I focus on his strengths, his potential, and the ways in which I feel blessed by him, then I will interact with him as a forgiving, blessed, and contented wife. And there's no greater need a man has than to feel respected by his wife. If he feels like all he does is hurt, disappoint, and frustrate, then the same atmosphere and the same actions will be perpetuated. But if he feels that his wife can be happy and responsive regardless of his shortcomings, he feels respected and empowered. Then a positive atmosphere is perpetuated and actions, once destructive, can improve in an environment that is rich for cultivation and growth into deepened respect and intimacy.

Some may say it's a stretch to attribute marital improvement to a slogan or symbol on a t-shirt, but I know better. God intricately designed us to be affected by simple things. Why else would we get such joy from an ice cream cone on a hot day, be moved to tears by watching a new dad hold his baby for the first time, or feel completely withered by one harsh word?

Simple works for me. I'm going to keep telling my husband that I love him and I'm going to keep doing the things that speak love to him like making dinner and forgiving (or apologizing) quickly and helping him mow the lawn, but I'm also going to wear my feelings for him and let the world know that "my husband rocks" and maybe that message will make a difference to someone who needs a little hope or encouragement

for their marriage. Maybe it will kindle or rekindle a desire in someone to let their spouse know how much he/she means rather than assume they know. Maybe it will open someone's eyes to see the blessing they've been missing in their spouse. Maybe a couple will be inspired to take the steps to repair a wounded relationship so they can wear the same message and mean it with all their heart. However God wants to use this message, wherever He wants to send it, whoever he wants to heal with it, may it be so. My spouse rocks. Does yours?