

Biblical Marriage



Man. shall a man leave his
mother, and shall cleave
to her: and they shall be
one flesh. were both naked, th
were not ashan

BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

First Baptist Church

COURSE DESCRIPTION

There are no perfect marriages. Whether you are newly married or past your Silver Anniversary, struggling significantly or enjoying smooth sailing, there is always room to grow and improve. Marriage is the most significant human relationship you will ever have, and it takes work. This class will apply the truths of Scripture to all aspects of marriage: roles, communication, resolving conflict, intimacy, children, facing challenges, and working together to learn and grow.

COURSE OUTLINE

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THE PURPOSE, POWER, AND PARADOX OF MARRIAGE¹

INTRODUCTION

1. Goals for the class

- a. To align our thinking about marriage with Scripture
- b. To see the beauty of God's gift of marriage

2. How to make use of this class

- a. If you're not married
 - i. Consider the marriages of your married friends.
 - ii. Consider your potential future marriage.
 - iii. Consider the beauty of what God has designed.
- b. If you are married
 - i. **Don't** let the ideal discourage you.
 - ii. **Don't** use this class as leverage in arguments with your spouse.
 - iii. **Do** use this class to examine your purposes for your marriage in light of God's purpose for your marriage.
 - iv. **Do** use this class as a mirror to your own attitudes, instincts, assumptions, and struggles in marriage.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

1. The purpose for humanity

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his

¹In addition to the resources cited, this course was developed in part from the "Marriage" core seminar at Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Washington, D.C.), John Kimbell's "Biblical Marriage" class at Clifton Baptist Church (Louisville, KY), and Rick Anderson's "Back to Marriage Basics" class at Faith Community Church (Oxnard, CA).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 1

own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28).

- a. Our purpose as human beings
 - i. Perceive the glory of God.
 - ii. Portray the glory of God.
 - b. This purpose applies to man and woman *together*.
 - c. We work out this purpose through filling the earth and subduing it.
- 2. The purpose of marriage is deeper than what it produces (e.g. children, companionship, community, etc.).**

“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him” (Gen. 2:18).

“This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32).

- 3. If marriage is a portrayal of God’s love for us, who is watching this portrayal?**
- a. You
 - b. Your spouse
 - c. Your kids
 - d. God
 - e. Those around you
- 4. If God would be at the center of your marriage, you must remember that the purpose of your marriage is to perceive and portray his glory.**
- a. You need this perspective when you encounter your spouse’s sin—and your own.
 - b. You need this perspective when you need to forgive.
 - c. You need this perspective when you’re ten years in and you realize that this marriage will not be what you hoped for on your wedding day.

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Lesson 1

5. The purpose of marriage isn't fundamentally in what it produces but in what it shows—about God—to the two of you.
 - a. Example of decision-making
 - b. Example of conflict-resolving

THE POWER OF MARRIAGE

"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him" (Gen. 2:18).

1. The differences are the point of marriage . . .
2. . . .and yet, the differences are what will drive you crazy.
3. A key task in the early years of marriage: learn to trust the differences between you.

THE PARADOX OF MARRIAGE

1. They are different (Gen. 2:18, 20) . . . yet one (Gen. 2:24).

"Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him." 19 The Lord God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky, and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man no helper was found corresponding to him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. 22 Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said:

This one, at last, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called "woman,"
for she was taken from man.

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Lesson 1

24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame” (Gen. 2:18–25).

- a. Leaving
- b. Cleaving/Holding Fast
 - i. Implication: fidelity to one another
 - ii. Implication: reorienting to make your spouse primary

“It is not the same to say that you approach marriage as a lawyer, teacher, architect, or whatever you do. Married people are not to balance career with marriage, but to approach career as a married person” (Mike Gilbert-Smith).

2. Three tools to bridge from Genesis 2:20 (husband and wife are different) to Genesis 2:24 (husband and wife are one flesh)

- a. Roles
- b. Communication
- c. Sex

CONCLUSION

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you” (Matt. 6:33).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “Moses on Marriage” by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/moses-on-marriage

THE DESIGN OF MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

Cultural perspectives vs. Biblical perspective

“Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers” (Heb. 13:4).

1. **Marriage must be prized: Our regard of marriage must be right.**
2. **Marriage must be kept pure: Our enjoyment of marriage must be undefiled.**

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF GOD’S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.” 19 The Lord God formed out of the ground every wild animal and every bird of the sky and brought each to the man to see what he would call it. And whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all the livestock, to the birds of the sky, and to every wild animal; but for the man no helper was found corresponding to him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man, and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. 22 Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said:

This one, at last, is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
this one will be called “woman,”
for she was taken from man.

24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame” (Gen. 2:18–25).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 2

1. Marriage is precious in its origin: a God-designed, God-defined relationship and institution.

2. Marriage is precious in its design: a beneficial companionship and partnership.

“A man who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov. 18:22).

“It is a mercy to have a faithful friend that loves you entirely . . . to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs . . . And it is a mercy to have so near a friend to be a helper to your soul and . . . to stir up in you the grace of God” (Richard Baxter).

“There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage” (Martin Luther).

3. Marriage is precious in its character: an intimate communion between a man and a woman.

“Monogamous heterosexual marriage was always viewed as the divine norm from the outset of creation” (Kenneth Matthews).

“It is the profound fusion of two lives into one shared life together, by the mutual consent and covenant of marriage. It is the complete and permanent giving over of oneself into a new circle of shared experience with one’s partner” (Ray Ortlund, Jr.).

4. Marriage is precious in its commitment: a covenant commitment designed to be permanent.

“Because even though the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, you have acted treacherously against her. She was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant” (Mal. 2:14).

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, 5 and he also said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?’ 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt. 19:4–6).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 2

5. *Marriage is not a civil contract, but a holy covenant with one another before a holy God.*

- While a contract is based on distrust,
a covenant is based on trust between two partners.
- While a contract is based on limited liability,
a covenant is based on boundless responsibility.
- While a contract protects individual needs and rights,
a covenant prioritizes commitment to the relationship.
- And while a contract has conditional terms,
the marriage covenant is unconditional, binding, and permanent.

a. *The marriage commitment requires self-denial.*

“At marriage a single man and a single woman die to self, and the two become one flesh. The wedding marks the end of the former man and woman . . . Christian marriage vows are the inception of a lifelong practice of death, of giving over not all you have, but all you are” (Kent Hughes).

b. *The marriage commitment is unto death.*

“A wife is bound as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

i. “Leaving” parents

ii. “Cleaving” to one’s spouse

iii. Implications for in-laws

- **Two Controlling Realities**

- 1) Something new (Gen. 2:24)
- 2) Something old (Exod. 20:12)

- **Three Controlling Principles**

- 1) Love them (1 Cor. 13).
- 2) Have open, gracious communication with them (Col. 4:5–6).
- 3) Be at peace (Rom. 12:18).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 2

- **Four Practical Suggestions**

- 1) Keep in touch with them.
- 2) If you're visiting, don't stay long.
- 3) Enjoy them rather than endure them.
- 4) Speak well of them.

6. *Marriage is precious in its picture: a reflection of the relationship between Christ & his church.*

"For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church,³⁰ since we are members of his body. ³¹For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. ³²This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:29–32).

God designed marriage, "so that the world would have a category for understanding the relationship between Christ and the church. Every marriage should be a minidrama of the gospel" (Jim Hamilton).

"The mystery of Genesis 2:24 is that [marriage] is a parable or symbol of Christ's relation to His people. There was more going on in the creation of woman than meets the eye. God doesn't do this willy-nilly. Everything has a purpose and meaning. When God engaged to create man and woman and to ordain the union of marriage, he didn't roll dice or draw straws or flip a coin as to how they might be related to each other. He patterned marriage very purposely after the relationship between His Son and the church, which He had planned from all eternity" (John Piper).

"As God made man in His own image, so He made marriage in the image of His own eternal marriage with His people. Through marriage the glorious mystery is unveiled" (Bromiley).

7. *Marriage is precious in its goal: the glory of God.*

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read "The Best Is Yet to Be" by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/the-best-is-yet-to-be

THE COMMON REALITIES OF MARRIAGE

THE COMMON GROUND

1. The Foundation of Your Marriage—The Bible

Four basic approaches:

- a. The approach of *rationalism*.
- b. The approach of *traditionalism*.
- c. The approach of *pragmatism*.
- d. The approach of *Scripturalism*.
 - 1) We need the grace of God.
 - 2) We need to be humble and teachable.
 - 3) We need to think hard.
 - 4) We need to apply the truth.

2. The Fountain of Your Marriage—The Gospel

- a. The *possibility* of change (Eph. 2:1–10).
- b. The *pattern* for change (1 John 3:1–3).
- c. The *power* to change (Mark 11:22–24).

3. The Focus of Your Marriage—The Glory of God

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 3

THE COMMON REALITIES

1. A Common Created Dignity

“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

27 So God created man
in his own image;
he created him in the image of God;
he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth” (Gen. 1:26–28).

- a. Man and Woman . . . Created in God’s Image
- b. Ruling as Representatives . . . to Display God’s Glory

2. A Common Poor Family History/Sin Nature

“This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim. 1:15–17).

- a. The problems in your marriage are caused by a war within your own heart.
- b. Dealing with the sin problem is the key to a thriving marriage. When sin becomes bitter, marriage becomes sweet.

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Lesson 3

3. A Common Redemptive Privilege

Marriage can be faithfully practiced and fully enjoyed only by those who have received the *gospel grace* of Christ and who, in dependence upon Christ, are actively appropriating and exercising *gospel graces*.

“Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. 14 Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. 18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and don’t be bitter toward them” (Col. 3:12–19).

- a. You need the Savior, so check in at the cross.
- b. Remember that your spouse married a sinner in need of the Savior, and so did you.
- c. Seek Christ first in your marriage.
- d. Establish patterns of practice in your marriage that allow gospel graces to be cultivated and exercised.

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Lesson 3

THE COMMON RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Mutual Charity (Affection)

“In choosing a spouse one should look, not necessarily for one whom one does love, here and now, but for one whom one can love with steady affection on a permanent basis” (J. I. Packer).

2. Mutual Commitment (Attachment)

“Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death; jealousy is as unrelenting as Sheol. Love’s flames are fiery flames—an almighty flame! ∇ A huge torrent cannot extinguish love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If a man were to give all his wealth for love, it would be utterly scorned” (Song 8:6–7).

3. Mutual Complement or Care (Assistance)

4. Mutual Communication (Association)

5. Mutual Confession/Covering (Acknowledgement/Absolution)

“I pray you, next tell me my duty to my wife and hers to me. The common duty of husband and wife is:

1. Entirely to love each other; and therefore choose one that is truly lovely. . . .; and avoid all things that tend to quench your love.
2. To dwell together, and enjoy each other, and faithfully join as helpers in the education of their children, the government of the family, and the management of their worldly business.
3. Especially to be helpers of each other’s salvation: to stir up each other to faith, love, and obedience, and good works; to warn and help each other against sin, and all temptations; to join in God’s worship in the family and in private; to prepare each other for the approach of death, and comfort each other in the hopes of life eternal.
4. To avoid all dissensions, and to bear with those infirmities in each other which you cannot cure; to assuage, and not provoke, unruly passions; and, in lawful things, to please each other.
5. To keep conjugal chastity and fidelity, and to avoid all unseemly and immodest carriage [conduct] with another, which may stir up jealousy; and yet to avoid all jealousy which is unjust.
6. To help one another to bear their burdens (and not by impatience to make them greater). In poverty, crosses, sickness, dangers, to comfort and support each other. And to be delightful companions in holy love, and heavenly hopes and duties, when all other outward comforts fail” (Richard Baxter).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “The Threefold Newness of Marriage” by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/the-threefold-newness-of-marriage

OVERVIEW OF THE DISTINCTIVE ROLES OF MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

TRUE FREEDOM

“But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does” (Jas. 1:25).

1. What is a *law of freedom*?

2. Freedom *from* and freedom *to*.

“And having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness” (Rom. 6:18).

“Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 A slave does not remain in the household forever, but a son does remain forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free” (John 8:34–36).

“You are good, and you do what is good; teach me your statutes” (Ps. 119:68).

THE ORIGIN OF ROLES IN CREATION (GEN. 1–2)

1. Different Orientations to the Task

a. The man: “work and watch over” the garden

b. The woman: “a helper corresponding to him.”

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Lesson 4

2. Leadership of the Man

- a. Created first from the dust of the ground (2:7)
- b. Given responsibility to tend God's creation (focus—vocation) (2:15)
- c. Receives the commands of God for obedience (2:16-17)
- d. Receives a helper to fulfill God's plan (2:18)
- e. Names what God created, including the woman (2:20; 3:20)
- f. Leaves father and mother to hold fast to his wife (2:24)

3. Supportive and Submissive Role of the Woman

- a. Created after the man, not simultaneously (2:18)
- b. Created in order to be a "suitable helper" to the man (2:18)
- c. Created from the man, not from the soil (2:22)
- d. Named by the man (3:20)

THE DISTORTION OF ROLES IN THE FALL AND IN THE CURSE (GEN. 3)

"He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you. 17 And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust" (Gen. 3:16–19).

1. Reversal of roles takes place in the fall itself.

2. Roles are affected in the curse on the man and the woman.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 4

THE DISPLAY OF THE GOSPEL IN THE ROLES OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband” (Eph. 5:22–33).

1. **Christian marriage is a display of the gospel because two sinners have personally experienced the grace of God in Christ and are living and loving each other in a way that is consistent with that grace.**
2. **There are particular ways that a marriage relationship distinctly displays the glory of God in the gospel.**
 - a. The husband and a wife are bound together in a permanent, life-long covenant relationship that is different from any other earthly relationship.
 - b. The husband and the wife are called to live out particular roles that picture forth the way Christ relates to the church in that covenant relationship.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “3 Questions about Submission” by Melissa Kruger at crossway.org/articles/3-questions-about-submission
- Read “The Goal of Submission in Marriage” by Abigail Dodds at crossway.org/articles/the-goal-of-submission-in-marriage
- Read “What Authority Does a Husband Have over His Wife” by Jonathan Leeman at crossway.org/articles/what-authority-does-a-husband-have-over-his-wife

THE DISTINCTIVE ROLES OF MARRIAGE - RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE WIFE

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS FROM EPHESIANS 5:15–21

“Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise— 16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: 19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (Eph. 5:15–21).

1. “Be filled with the Spirit” (5:18)
2. “In the fear of Christ” (5:21)
3. “Submitting to one another” (5:21)

THE ROLE OF A WIFE

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of the body. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives are to submit to their husbands in everything. . . 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband” (Eph. 5:22–24, 33).

“In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live 2 when they observe your pure, reverent lives. 3 Don’t let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, 4 but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. 5 For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also adorned themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands, 6 just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation” (1 Pet. 3:1–6).

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Lesson 5

“Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts” (John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 80).

1. Submitting as to the Lord

a. What submission is not:

- i. Submission does not mean agreeing with everything your husband says.
- ii. Submission does not mean leaving your brain or your will at the wedding altar.
- iii. Submission does not mean avoid effort to change your husband.
- iv. Submission does not mean putting the will of the husband before the will of Christ.
- v. Submission does not mean that the wife gets her spiritual strength mainly from her husband.
- vi. Submission does not mean acting out of slavish fear toward the husband.
- vii. Submission does not mean blind or unqualified obedience to the husband.

b. What submission is:

- i. Submission exercises a singular reverence.
 1. To Jesus Christ, supremely.
 2. To your own husband, subordinately.
 3. In everything, scripturally.
- ii. Submission embraces a subordinate role.
- iii. Submission expects a renunciation of rights.
- iv. Submission entails an obedient response.
- v. Submission expresses a proper respect.

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Lesson 5

2. Showing Respect

- a. What is your *attitude* toward your husband?
- b. How do you *address* or speak to your husband?
- c. How do you *act* toward your husband?

3. Working at Home/Managing the Household

“Therefore, I want younger women to marry, have children, manage their households, and give the adversary no opportunity to accuse us” (1 Tim. 5:14).

“In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to excessive drinking. They are to teach what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God’s word will not be slandered” (Tit. 2:3–5).

“Homemaking—being a full-time wife and mother—is not a destructive drought of usefulness but an overflowing oasis of opportunity; it is not a dreary cell to contain one’s talents and skills but a brilliant catalyst to channel creativity and energies into meaningful work; it is not a rope for binding one’s productivity in the marketplace, but reins for guiding one’s posterity in the home; it is not oppressive restraint of intellectual prowess for the community, but a release of wise instruction to your own household; it is not the bitter assignment of inferiority to your person, but the bright assurance of the ingenuity of God’s plan for complementarity of the sexes, especially as worked out in God’s plan for marriage; it is neither limitation of gifts available nor stinginess in distributing the benefits of those gifts, but rather the multiplication of a mother’s legacy to the generations to come and the generous bestowal of all God meant a mother to give to those He entrusted to her care” (Dorothy Patterson, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 377).

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Lesson 5

APPLICATIONS

1. Applications for unmarried women

- a. What would it look like for you to prepare for this role?
- b. Questions to ask about the man you're dating:
 - i. Is this guy worth it?
 - ii. Is what he's doing with his life worthy of me orienting my life toward him?
 - iii. Can I trust his leadership?
 - iv. Does he give up his life for others? Or does his world revolve around him?

2. Applications for married women

- a. The challenge of following a flawed husband.
- b. Recognize it will take time for him to really know you.
- c. It will take several years for your marriage to fully take on this shape (headship/leadership; helping/nurturing)

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read "As Christ Loved the Church: Instructions for Husbands from Ephesians 5" by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/as-christ-loved-the-church-instructions-for-husbands-from-ephesians-5
- Read "The Purpose and Limits of a Husband's Authority" by Jonathan Leeman at crossway.org/articles/the-purpose-and-limits-of-a-husbands-authority

THE DISTINCTIVE ROLES OF MARRIAGE - RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HUSBAND

INTRODUCTION

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband” (Eph. 5:25–33).

“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

THE NATURE OF A HUSBAND’S HEADSHIP

“Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home” (John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 80).

1. Leadership/Authority

2. Provision (Spiritual & Physical)

3. Protection (Spiritual & Physical)

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 6

THE CHARACTER OF CHRISTLIKE LOVE

1. Husbands ought to love their wives with *sacrificial* love.
2. Husbands ought to love their wives with *selfless* love.
3. Husbands ought to love their wives with a *singular* love.
4. Husbands ought to love their wives with a *surprising* (unconditional, freely given) love.
5. Husbands ought to love their wives with a *sanctifying* purpose.
6. Husbands ought to love their wives with a *self-caring* love.
7. Husbands ought to love their wives with a *studying, sensitive* love.
 - a. Living with her in an understanding way.
 - b. Understanding what she is by nature.
 - c. Esteeming and appreciating what she is by grace.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 6

APPLICATIONS

1. Applications for unmarried men

- a. Don't wait for marriage to live a self-sacrificing life.
- b. Look to marry someone who responds well to your leadership.

2. Applications for married men

- a. You are in a position of inescapable leadership.
- b. Embrace God-given differences for a God-honoring marriage.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read "Ladies: Read This Before You Nail His Socks to the Floor" by Susan Verstraete at bulletininserts.org/ladies-read-this-before-you-nail-his-socks-to-the-floor
- Read "Hope for the Dense Husband: Your Selfishness Can Work for You" by Jim Elliff at bulletininserts.org/-hope-for-the-dense-husband-your-selfishness-can-work-for-you

MARRIAGE AND SIN

INTRODUCTION

SIN'S ARRIVAL (GEN. 3:1–7)

“Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. 3 But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’” 4 “No! You will certainly not die,” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:1–7).

1. Sin disputes God’s goodness.

2. Sin disputes God’s truth.

a. The world, the flesh, and the devil are all lying to us.

b. The danger of isolation.

“One who isolates himself pursues selfish desires; he rebels against all sound wisdom” (Prov. 18:1).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 7

SIN'S EFFECT (GEN. 3:8–13)

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 And he said, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” 11 Then he asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” 12 The man replied, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.” 13 So the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (Gen. 3:8–13).

1. Sin corrupts your relationship with God.

“Against you—you alone—I have sinned and done this evil in your sight. So you are right when you pass sentence; you are blameless when you judge” (Ps. 51:4).

2. Sin corrupts the relationship with a spouse.

a. Responding to your own sin

“Those who do not think about their own sins make up for it by thinking incessantly about the sin of others” (C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 127).

b. Responding to your spouse's sin

i. Not all that you *think* is sin is really sin.

ii. Beware the danger of growing to disdain your spouse.

iii. Trust God with your spouse's sin and weakness.

“And those parts of the body that we consider less honorable, we clothe these with greater honor, and our unrespectable parts are treated with greater respect” (1 Cor. 12:23).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 7

SIN'S CURSE (GEN. 3:14–19)

1. God's curse on Eve

"He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16).

"If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7).

We better understand what "desire" and "rule" are in Genesis 3:16 by looking at Genesis 4:7. Neither term is being used in a benevolent way.

2. God's curse on Adam.

"And he said to the man, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust" (Gen. 3:17–19).

Note how God's curse on both Adam and Eve lines up with his command in Genesis 1:28. Our attempt as a human race to find satisfaction in being fruitful and exercising dominion as ends in themselves will fail. Labor and love have lasting significance and satisfaction only in how they show off the one who made them.

3. God's curse on the serpent: the gospel in seed form.

"So the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this, you are cursed more than any livestock and more than any wild animal. You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life. 15 I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:14–15).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 7

CONCLUSION: WEAKNESS AND SWEETNESS

When sin and weakness confront your marriage, your temptation is to run away from your own sin and weakness and to condemn your spouse's. But when you resist these temptations and respond with honesty to your own sin and weakness, and with compassion and tenderness to your spouse's, you'll see the redemptive power of marriage.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read "When He Will Not Lead: Suggestions for Christian Wives in a Difficult Situation" by Susan Verstraete at bulletininserts.org/when-he-will-not-lead-suggestions-for-christian-wives-in-a-difficult-situation
- Read "A Wake Up Call to Husbands in Hibernation" by Steve Burchett at bulletininserts.org/a-wake-up-call-to-husbands-in-hibernation

BEAUTY IN A FALLEN WORLD (1 PETER 3:1–7)

INTRODUCTION

Context: the evangelistic power (1 Pet. 2:12) of submission to unrighteous authority (1 Pet. 2:13–3:22) because submission shows how much we trust the goodness of God.

BEAUTY AS THE GOAL (1 PET. 3:1–4)

“In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live 2 when they observe your pure, reverent lives. 3 Don’t let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, 4 but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Pet. 3:1–4).

1. What is true beauty?

- a. “the hidden person of the heart”
- b. “a gentle and quiet spirit”

2. Why beauty matters.

- a. This woman’s trust in God makes her beautiful to her husband. For her, beauty is the external evidence of an evangelistic trust in God.
- b. Beauty is God’s goal for your marriage because it shows off his beauty and portrays his goodness.

“Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the Lord will be praised” (Prov. 31:30).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 8

FEAR AS THE OBSTACLE TO BEAUTY (1 PET. 3:5–6)

“For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also adorned themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands, 6 just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation” (1 Pet. 3:5–6).

1. A wife’s temptation to fear what Sarah’s life illustrates.

2. For a wife, the God-given shape of marriage in a fallen world tilts toward fear.

3. Fear as the driver behind control, distance, anger, etc.

A WIFE’S TRUST IN GOD RESISTS THE TEMPTATION TO FEAR

1. Trust in God

2. Hope in God

3. The result: Courage and beauty

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 8

A HUSBAND'S CARE HELPS HIS WIFE RESIST FEAR (1 PET. 3:7)

"Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7).

1. In marriage, she has put herself in a vulnerable position.

2. A husband's role is to help his wife trust God:

- a. Make her feel understood (literally, "according to knowledge")
- b. Honor and cherish her.

3. This is extremely important to God ("so that your prayers will not be hindered")

"Because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil" (1 Pet. 3:12).

4. How verses 6 and 7 work together:

- a. For the good: understanding makes trust easier.
- b. For the bad: a lack of understanding tempts a wife to fearfully respond with self-protective anger, withdrawal, etc.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 8

CONCLUSION: SWEETNESS = BEAUTY = GLORY TO GOD

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you” (Matt. 6:33).

1. **As a wife trusts God, and as a husband tenderly cares for her out of his own trust in God, they will together make vulnerability feel safe—and in that there is a satisfaction, a joy, a sweetness that they will not experience in any other human relationship.**
2. **The thing everyone wants—a sweet and intimate and safe marriage—comes as God’s purposes for their marriage are fulfilled, to reveal him as good and delightful so that he can be enjoyed as good and delightful.**

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “Jesus on Forgiveness” by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/jesus-on-forgiveness

GRACE AND FORGIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is unfair. Grace is the glory of marriage, and it shows off the glory of God's grace.

GRACE

1. What is grace?

"No need in Christendom is more urgent than the need for a renewed awareness of what the grace of God really is" (J. I. Packer, *God's Words*, 95–96).

"But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don't hold back your shirt either. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don't ask for them back. 31 Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them" (Luke 6:27–31).

Grace is favor that's granted regardless of what's deserved, and quite often *despite* what's deserved.

2. What does grace look like in marriage?

a. Kindness

"Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them" (Luke 6:31, the "golden rule").

b. Mercy

The "golden rule" is intended specifically for when we've been wronged.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 9

c. Forbearance

“A person’s insight gives him patience, and his virtue is to overlook an offense” (Prov. 19:11).

Forbearance means covering over your spouse’s sin and wiping the slate clean.

When we shouldn’t forbear:

- Their sin is too big.
- Their sin is too dangerous to them.
- You’re not godly enough to truly forbear.

3. How can we show grace?

“But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35–36).

- a. “Your reward will be great.”
- b. “You will be children of the Most High.”
- c. “For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil.”

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Self-righteousness is a sense of moral superiority that appoints us as prosecutor of other people’s sinfulness [or weakness]” (Based on Dave Harvey’s definition in *When Sinners Say I Do*, 91).

“Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. 14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean. 15 For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:13–17).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 9

1. The real problem is not their sin or error but your self-righteousness.

2. Dave Harvey's questions to identify self-righteousness in yourself:

- Am I confident that I see the supposed "facts" clearly?
- Am I quick to assign motives when I feel I've been wronged?
- Do I find it easy to build a case against someone that makes me seem right and him or her seem wrong?
- Do I ask questions with built-in assumptions that I believe will be proven right? Or do I ask impartial questions—the kind that genuinely seek new information regardless of its implications for my preferred outcome?
- Am I overly concerned about who is to blame for something?

FORGIVENESS

"Then Peter approached him and asked, 'Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?' 22 'I tell you, not as many as seven,' Jesus replied, 'but seventy times seven. 23 'For this reason, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle accounts, one who owed ten thousand talents was brought before him. 25 Since he did not have the money to pay it back, his master commanded that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. 26 'At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan. 28 'That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay what you owe!' 29 'At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' 30 But he wasn't willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed. 31 When the other servants saw what had taken place, they were deeply distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had happened. 32 Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart' (Matt. 18:21–35).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 9

1. *Forgiveness is the canceling of a debt in full that someone else has accrued.*
2. *Forgiven sinners forgive sin.*
3. *Forgiveness always costs something, because forgiveness pays the cost of the offense. Too often, what passes for forgiveness isn't true forgiveness because it has not embraced the true and complete injustice of forgiveness. Unless forgiveness is unjust, it is not true forgiveness.*
4. *What does appropriately unjust forgiveness look like?*
 - a. It resists the urge to punish (Jas. 1:19–20).
 - b. It resists the urge to pretend that no harm was done (cf. Prov. 18:11).
 - c. It pays the cost of the sin (1 Cor. 13:6).
5. *“Forgiveness” sometimes fails to lead to reconciliation because it settles for being moderately unfair rather than anti-fair.*
6. *While forgiveness is costly, unforgiveness is even more costly.*
7. *Our forgiveness is powered by Christ's (Eph. 4:32; Isa. 53:4–6).*

CONCLUSION

When we respond with grace, marriage is a sweet and safe picture of the God who showed us grace.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “The Endless, Downward Spiral of Harbored Hurt” by Bill Elliff at bulletininserts.org/the-endless-downward-spiral-of-harbored-hurt

COMING CLEAN AND CANCELING DEBTS

INTRODUCTION

“The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

“If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8–10).

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect” (James 5:16).

Key Principle: *No change takes place in a marriage that does not begin with confession.*

COMING CLEAN: CONFESSION

1. The Grace of Confession

- a. It is a grace to know right from wrong.
- b. It is a grace to understand the concept of indwelling sin.
- c. It is a grace to have a properly functioning conscience.
- d. It is only grace that protects us from self-righteousness.
- e. It is a grace to see ourselves with accuracy.
- f. It is a grace to be willing to listen and consider criticism and rebuke.
- g. It is a grace not to be paralyzed by regret.
- h. It is a grace to know that we can face our wrongs because Christ has carried our guilt and shame.

2. The Daily Habits of a Confession Lifestyle

- a. We will be lovingly honest.
- b. We will be humble when exposed.
- c. We will not excuse.
- d. We will be quick to admit wrongs.
- e. We will listen and examine.
- f. We will greet confession with encouragement.
- g. We will be patient, persevering, and gentle in the face of wrong.
- h. We will not return to the past.
- i. We will put our hope in Christ.

“When the shadow of the cross hangs over our marriage, we live and relate differently. We are no longer afraid to look at ourselves. We are no longer surprised by our sin. We no longer have to work to present ourselves as righteous. We say goodbye to finger-pointing and self-excusing. We abandon our record of wrongs. We settle issues quickly. And we do all these things because we know that everything we need to confess has already been forgiven, and what is needed for every new step we will take has already been supplied. We can live in the liberating light of humility and honesty, a needy and tender sinner living with a needy and tender sinner, no longer defensive and no longer afraid, together growing nearer to one another as we grow to be more like him. Now who wouldn’t want a marriage like that?” (Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, 83).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 10

CANCELING DEBTS

1. The Harvest of Unrighteousness

- a. The law of sowing and reaping

“Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

- b. Stages of the harvest of unrighteousness

- i. *Immaturity and failure*
- ii. *Falling into comfortable patterns*
- iii. *Establishing defenses*
- iv. *Nurturing dislike*
- v. *Becoming overwhelmed*
- vi. *Envy of other couples*
- vii. *Fantasies of escape*

2. Then Why Don’t Couples Just Forgive?

- a. Debt is power.
- b. Debt is identity.
- c. Debt is entitlement.
- d. Debt is weaponry.
- e. Debt puts us in God’s position.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 10

3. What Is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a *vertical commitment* followed by a *horizontal transaction*.

- a. Begin by realizing the level of debt God has forgiven us.
- b. Make a commitment to forgive whatever grievance you may have against your spouse as being a small amount compared to what God has forgiven you.
- c. Forsake putting yourself in God's position of demanding, "Pay me what you owe me!"
- d. Give yourself fully and humbly to God.
- e. Take the matter completely to God and give it to him.
- f. BUT do not merely eat the offense and never mention it. Then the spouse cannot grow.
- g. Be willing to initiate with your spouse and humbly show him/her his fault, just between the two of you (Matt. 18:15).
- h. If he/she confesses humbly, then forgive warmly and immediately.
- i. If not, it will take a longer process . . . forgive judicially in your heart based on the atonement of Christ, while working on relational reconciliation.
- j. You may have to go to your spouse more than once on the issue; be patient; pray for the spouse to repent; give the matter to God; do not withhold kindness in the meantime.

4. When Is Forgiveness Needed?

- a. Only when the spouse has done something the Bible calls sin.
- b. You do not need to ask forgiveness if something happened as a matter of human weakness (like forgetting in the busyness of a day to pick something up at the store), or a complete accident (like tripping and breaking something). In such cases, it is good to express remorse at the cost to the other person . . . but it is not a sin issue; therefore, it is not a forgiveness issue.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 10

5. What Forgiveness Requires

- a. Humility
- b. Compassion
- c. Trust
- d. Self-control
- e. Sacrifice
- f. Remembering

CONCLUSION: A BETTER HARVEST

1. You can choose to carry the bitter list and punish the other.
2. Or you can invest in forgiveness . . . and reap the kind of marriage everyone wants.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “Understanding Love” by Kole Farney at bulletininserts.org/understanding-love
- Read “The Two Men My Wife Married” by James McAlister at bulletininserts.org/the-two-men-my-wife-married

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

“Love dies a natural death. It dies because we don’t know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings” (Anais Nin).

“Love at first sight is easy to understand; it’s when two people have been looking at each other for a lifetime that it becomes a miracle” (Amy Bloom).

“Marriage love is ofttime a secret worke of God, pitching the heart of one party upon another for no known cause; and therefore when this strong lodestone attracts each to the other, no further questions need to be made but such a man and such a woman’s match were made in heaven, and God hath brought them together” (Daniel Rogers).

“In choosing a spouse one should look, not necessarily for one whom one does love, here and now, but for one whom one can love with steady affection on a permanent basis” (J. I. Packer).

WHERE IS THE LOVE?

1. The Love Drought

- a. Many things we call love aren’t really love.
- b. We lack a clear definition of what love is and what love does.

2. Markers of a Love Drought

- a. Disunity

“I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me” (John 17:22–23).

“If, then, there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 make my joy complete by thinking the same way, having the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look not to his own interests, but rather to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:1–4).

Question: Is the unity of your marriage growing?

Biblical Marriage

Lesson II

b. Misunderstanding

“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Question: Do you live together in the joy of true understanding?

c. Separation

“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him. . . . 22 Then the Lord God made the rib he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 And the man said: This one, at last, is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called “woman,” for she was taken from man. 24 This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:18, 22–24).

“The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved” (Matthew Henry).

Question: Is your marriage more a picture of cohabitation than it is of relationship?

d. Physical Dysfunction

“Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame” (Gen. 2:25).

“Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers” (Heb. 13:4).

Question: Is your sexual relationship a picture of patient, self-sacrificing love?

e. Conflict

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:16–18).

Question: In your marriage, do you hate conflict and work in whatever way you can to create peace?

Biblical Marriage

Lesson II

3. Watch Out for Faux Love

- a. Physical Attraction
- b. Emotional Connection
- c. Spiritual Unity
- d. Cultural Unity

WHAT IS LOVE?

Are the following statements true or false?

1. It is possible to experience “love at first sight.” TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. The closest biblical case for “love at first sight” occurs when Jacob meets Rachel in Genesis 29. Immediately after he makes her acquaintance, we learn that “Jacob loved Rachel” (v. 18), but this Hebrew word for “love” applies to more than just romantic love between a man and a woman. Jesus helps us gain a better understanding of true love in John 15:13, “No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.” Love is sacrificial and self-giving in nature, so it is difficult to envision a situation where a person would give up his or her own life upon first sight of a potential spouse. A powerful initial attraction may indeed be a seed that grows into lasting, covenantal love, but we must reject the notions that every instance of instant chemistry is true love or that every example of true love will necessarily start with shooting stars.

2. Love is a random, overwhelming, and uncontrollable force. Love is something that we fall into (and out of) inexplicably and irresistibly. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “There must be a better way. Love must be more than the myth [that it is an uncontrollable force]. The myth won’t endure hardship, overcome adversity, or triumph over disaster. The myth brings no comfort to the woman whose beauty has faded, as she must live in constant fear that her husband will be zapped by this random, uncontrollable, sensual force as he looks upon the beauty of a younger woman. Nor can it assuage the fears of the man who loses his job, his confidence, and his wife’s adoration. This love also offers nothing to the young couple trying to navigate the peaks and valleys of the early years of marriage . . . Fortunately, there is a better way. God has given us a definition of love that transcends the myth . . . Love is an act of the will accompanied by emotion that leads to action on behalf of its object” (Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 54–57).

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3. Love is what happens to us when we meet the right person—when we find our soul mate—and it helps us to discern whom we should marry. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “You always marry the wrong person. It is as important to note, of course . . . that the reverse of the law is also true: namely, that you also always marry the right person. The point of the law is to suggest the inadequacy of the current assumption that the success or failure of a marriage can be determined by marrying the ‘right person.’ Even if you have married the ‘right person,’ there is no guarantee that he or she will remain such, for people have a disturbing tendency to change. Indeed, it seems that many so-called ‘happy marriages’ are such because of the partners’ efforts to preserve ‘love’ by preventing either from changing” (Stanley Hauerwas, “Sex and Politics: Bertrand Russell and ‘Human Sexuality,’” *Christian Century* [April 19, 1978], 417–422).

4. The feeling of love is what sustains a marriage. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “God is guiding your marriage. Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God’s holy ordinance, through which He wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time . . . As high as God is above man, so high are the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of marriage above the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of love. It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell,” *Letters and Papers from Prison*).

5. Marriages will inevitably become loveless or end in divorce. TRUE or FALSE

FALSE. “Biblical love says, ‘I choose to love you and I’m not going anywhere.’ Biblical love knows nothing of backing out when things get tough. Biblical love gives without expecting, goes the extra mile, sacrifices for others, and views divorce as a tragic and unnecessary plague visited upon a culture that has settled for a lie. Biblical love is not constantly seeking the emotional high that often characterizes immature relationships but instead is content with the depth and breadth that only the love of a maturing, godly relationship can provide. Biblical love is not constantly looking for a *better* deal; it is busy thanking God for the *real* deal” (Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*, 64).

What is biblical love?

“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way,

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we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:7–12).

“Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving” (Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, 188).

1. Love is willing.

“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father” (John 10:18).

2. Love is willing self-sacrifice.

“No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

3. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another.

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. 8 But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6–8).

4. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

5. Love is willing self-sacrifice for the good of another that does not require reciprocation or that the person being loved is deserving.

MARITAL LOVE IN ACTION

Five Love Languages or Lust Languages?

Five Love Languages: words of affirmation, quality time, gift-giving, acts of service, and physical touch.

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“Love can be expressed and received in all five languages. However, if you don't speak a person's primary love language, that person will not feel loved, even though you may be speaking the other four. Once you are speaking his or her primary love language fluently, then you can sprinkle in the other four and they will be like icing on the cake” (Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*).

“Love languages are part of the story of human relations. But speaking love languages is surely not the whole story. In fact, it is practical, *immoral* wisdom—manipulation or pandering or both—when it becomes the whole story. Part of considering the interests of others is to do them tangible good. But then to really love them, you usually need to help them see their itch as idolatrous, and to awaken in them a far more serious itch. That's basic Christianity. . .

The love of Christ speaks a “love language”—mercy to hellishly self-centered people—that no person can hear or understand unless God gives ears to hear. It is a language we cannot speak to others unless God makes us fluent in an essentially foreign language. We might say that the itch itself (an ear for God's language) has to be created, because we live in such a stupor of self-centered itchiness. The love language model does not highlight those exquisite forms of love that do not “speak your language.” You and I need to learn a new language if we are to become fit to live with each other and with God. The greatest love ever shown does not speak the instinctively self-centered language of the recipients of such love. In fundamental ways, the love of Christ speaks contrary to your “love language” and “felt needs.” Does anyone naturally say, “I need You to rule me so I'm no longer ruled by what I want”? Does anyone naturally say, “For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity for it is great” (Psalm 25:11)? Does anyone naturally say, “My greatest need is for mercy, and then for the wisdom to give mercy. I long for redemption. May Your kingdom come. Deliver us from evil?” God's grace aims to destroy the lordship of the five love languages, even while teaching us to speak the countless love languages with greater fluency. . .

The love of Christ controls us in that one died for all, and therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Grow fluent in the love of Christ, the love language that no one naturally speaks or hears, but everyone needs” (David Powlison, “Love Speaks Many Languages Fluently,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Fall 2002, 4–5, 9–10).

Personality Types?

“God makes people with wide variations of temperament, personality, interest, and motivation (overlying the core commonalities of human nature). He arranges and governs wide variations in life experience, opportunities, socialization, and enculturation (also adding coloration to core commonalities). These variations on the human theme find expression in our often marked individual differences. Furthermore, the Lord of all the earth often seems to put people together in marriage who are wired differently. As a result, either we grow to complement each other by

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learning to give intelligent love, or we incinerate the marriage on the battlefield of insistently different demands" (David Powlison, "Love Speaks Many Languages Fluently," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Fall 2002, 3).

1. *Love is being willing to have your life complicated by the needs and struggles of your husband or wife without impatience or anger.*
2. *Love is actively fighting the temptation to be critical and judgmental toward your spouse, while looking for ways to encourage and praise.*
3. *Love is the daily commitment to resist the needless moments of conflict that come from pointing out and responding to minor offenses.*
4. *Love is being lovingly honest and humbly approachable in times of misunderstanding, and being more committed to unity and love than you are to winning, accusing, or being right.*
5. *Love is the daily commitment to admit your sin, weakness, and failure and to resist the temptation to offer an excuse or shift the blame.*
6. *Love means being willing, when confronted by your spouse, to examine your heart rather than rising to your defense or shifting the focus.*
7. *Love is the daily commitment to grow in love so that the love you offer to your husband or wife is increasingly selfless, mature, and patient.*
8. *Love is being unwilling to do what is wrong when you have been wronged, but to look for concrete and specific ways to overcome evil with good.*
9. *Love is being a good student of your spouse, looking for his physical, emotional, and spiritual needs so that in some way you can remove the burden, support him as he carries it, or encourage him along the way.*
10. *Love means being willing to invest the time necessary to discuss, examine and understand the problems that you face as a couple, staying on task until the problem is removed or you have agreed upon a strategy of response.*

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- 11. Love is being willing to ask for forgiveness and always being committed to grant forgiveness when it is requested.*
- 12. Love is recognizing the high value of trust in a marriage and being faithful to your promises and true to your word.*
- 13. Love is speaking kindly and gently, even in moments of disagreement, refusing to attack your spouse's character or assault his or her intelligence.*
- 14. Love is being unwilling to flatter, lie, manipulate, or deceive in any way in order to co-opt your spouse into giving you what you want or doing something your way.*
- 15. Love is being unwilling to ask your spouse to be the source of your identity, meaning, and purpose, or inner sense of well-being, while refusing to be the source of his or hers.*
- 16. Love is the willingness to have less free time, less sleep, and a busier schedule in order to be faithful to what God has called you to be and do as a husband or wife.*
- 17. Love is a commitment to say no to selfish instincts and to do everything that is within your ability to promote real unity, functional understanding, and active love in your marriage.*
- 18. Love is staying faithful to your commitment to treat your spouse with appreciation, respect, and grace, even in moments when he or she doesn't seem to deserve it or is unwilling to reciprocate.*
- 19. Love is the willingness to make regular and costly sacrifices for the sake of your marriage without asking anything in return or using your sacrifices to place your spouse in debt.*
- 20. Love is being unwilling to make any personal decision or choice that would harm your marriage, hurt your husband or wife, or weaken the bond of trust between you.*
- 21. Love is refusing to be self-focused or demanding, but instead looking for specific ways to serve, support, and encourage, even when you are busy or tired.*
- 22. Love is daily admitting to yourself, your spouse, and God that you are not able to love this way without God's protecting, providing, forgiving, rescuing, and delivering grace.*

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CONCLUSION

“Jesus suffered in love so that in your struggle to love, you would never, ever be alone... So don’t let regret paralyze you. Don’t be overwhelmed by love’s call. Don’t be discouraged by the size or number of things you are facing. Don’t let the failures of the past rob you of hope for the future. No, left to yourself you don’t have what it takes, but he is with you, in you, and for you. Walk forward in hope and courage, and commit yourself to real, active, and specific cruciform love, knowing that his grace really does have the power to make you ready, willing, and waiting” (Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect?*, 202–203).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “The Key to Christian Contentment” by Daryl Wingerd at bulletininserts.org/the-key-to-christian-contentment

CONTENTMENT IN MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

“I don’t say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. 12 I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. 13 I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11–13).

“Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition” (Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*).

MARRIAGE IS A BLESSED CONDUIT OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS . . . BUT IT NEEDS PROTECTION

1. Song of Songs: Tremendous delight in marriage.

“So, to him I have become like one who finds peace” (Song 8:10).

2. Like a Garden of Eden . . . but the snake of sin is always slithering.

“Catch the foxes for us—the little foxes that ruin the vineyards—for our vineyards are in bloom” (Song 2:15).

3. Too many people idolize love and marriage.

You surely must know magic, girl, 'cause you changed my life
It was dull and ordinary
But you made it sunny and bright
I, I was blessed the day I found you, gonna build my whole world around you
You're ev'rything good, girl, and you're all that matters to me
(1967 Temptations song, “You’re My Everything”)

I can't live
If living is without you, I can't live
I can't give anymore
I can't live
If living is without you
(1971 Harry Nilsson song, “Without You”)

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4. Marriage is a workshop of sanctification . . . and contentment.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Eph. 5:25–28).

5. The need for continual humility before God.

“Many times in a family, when any affliction befalls them, oh, what an amount of discontent is there between man and wife! If they are crossed in their possessions at land, or have bad news from across the seas, or if those whom they trusted are ruined and the like, or perhaps something in the family causes strife between man and wife, in reference to the children or servants, and there is nothing but quarrelling and discontent among them, now they are many times burdened with their own discontent; and perhaps will say one to another, ‘It is very uncomfortable for us to live so discontented as we do.’ But have you ever tried this way, husband and wife? Have you ever got alone and said, ‘Come, oh, let us go and humble our souls before God together, let us go into our chamber and humble our souls before God for our sin, by which we have abused those mercies that God has taken away from us, and we have provoked God against us. Oh, let us charge ourselves with our sin, and be humbled before the Lord together?’ Have you tried such a way as this? Oh, you would find that the cloud would be taken away, and the sun would shine in upon you, and you would have a great deal more contentment than ever you had” (Jeremiah Burroughs).

MARRIAGE VOWS: A MUTUAL PROMISE TO SEEK CONTENTMENT

1. The language of vows is similar to Paul’s assertion.

“For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, forsaking all others, till death us do part.”

2. A lifetime quest for supernatural contentment.

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there is no fruit on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though the flocks disappear from the pen and there are no herds in the stalls, 18 yet I will celebrate in the Lord; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation! 19 The Lord my Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like those of a deer and enables me to walk on mountain heights!” (Hab. 3:17–19).

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REALITY: OVERWHELMING TEMPTATIONS TOWARD DISCONTENTMENT

1. Martin Luther's evaluation

"Good God, what a lot of trouble there is in marriage! Adam has made a mess of our nature. Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their nine hundred years. Eve would say, "You ate the apple," and Adam would retort, "You gave it to me."

2. Paul on the superiority of singleness

"I want you to be without concerns. The unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is concerned about the things of the world—how he may please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. The unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the things of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But the married woman is concerned about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is proper and so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction" (1 Cor. 7:32–35).

3. Richard Baxter on the difficulties of marriage (*A Christian Directory*)

1) Marriage ordinarily plunges men into an excess of worldly cares; it multiplies their business and usually their wants. There are many things to mind and do; there are many to provide for . . . you must look for many rubs and disappointments. Your natures are not so strong, content, and patient as to bear all these without frustration.

4) A married life contains far more temptations to worldliness or covetousness than a single life. For when you think you need more, you will desire more . . . Birds and beasts that have young ones to provide for are most hungry and inordinately greedy . . . And it is not only till death that you must now lay up; you must provide for children who survive you.

7) There is a meeting of faults and imperfections on both sides that makes it much harder to bear the infirmities of others aright. If one party only were [discontent] and impatient, the steadfastness of the other might make it more tolerable; but we are all sick of the same disease. When weakness meets with weakness, and pride meets with pride, and passion with passion, it exasperates the disease and doubles the suffering.

9) The business of a married state often devours almost all your time, so that little is left for holy contemplations or serious thoughts of the life to come. All God's service is contracted and thrust into a corner and done as it were on the by. The world will scarcely allow you time to meditate or pray or read the Scripture; you think yourselves like Martha, under a greater necessity of dispatching your business than of sitting at Christ's feet to hear his Word.

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10) There is so great a diversity of temperaments and degrees of understanding that there are scarce any two persons in the world but there is some unsuitableness between them. Like stones that have some unevenness that makes them lie crooked in the building, there will be some crossness of opinion, disposition, interest, or will, by nature or by custom and education, which will stir up frequent discontents.

THE DEADLY DANGER OF SEXUAL DISCONTENTMENT

1. The devastation of sexual infidelity.

“The one who commits adultery lacks sense; whoever does so destroys himself. 33 He will get a beating and dishonor, and his disgrace will never be removed. 34 For jealousy enrages a husband, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. 35 He will not be appeased by anything or be persuaded by lavish bribes” (Prov. 6:32–35).

“At the end of your life, you will lament when your physical body has been consumed, 12 and you will say, “How I hated discipline, and how my heart despised correction. 13 I didn’t obey my teachers or listen closely to my instructors. 14 I am on the verge of complete ruin before the entire community” (Prov. 5:11–14).

“He follows her impulsively like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer bounding toward a trap 23 until an arrow pierces its liver, like a bird darting into a snare— he doesn’t know it will cost him his life” (Prov. 7:22–23).

“Why, my son, would you lose yourself with a forbidden woman or embrace a wayward woman? 21 For a man’s ways are before the Lord’s eyes, and he considers all his paths. 22 A wicked man’s iniquities will trap him; he will become tangled in the ropes of his own sin. 23 He will die because there is no discipline and be lost because of his great stupidity” (Prov. 5:20–23).

2. The root cause: Discontentment in marriage.

“No one undergoing a trial should say, “I am being tempted by God,” since God is not tempted by evil, and he himself doesn’t tempt anyone. 14 But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. 15 Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death” (Jas. 1:13–15).

“What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from your passions that wage war within you? 2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war” (Jas. 4:1–2).

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3. The evil eye: Constantly seeking “something else.”

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:22–23).

“They have eyes full of adultery that never stop looking for sin. They seduce unstable people and have hearts trained in greed. Children under a curse!” (2 Pet. 2:14).

4. Clear counsel from Proverbs 5

“Drink water from your own cistern, water flowing from your own well. 16 Should your springs flow in the streets, streams in the public squares? 17 They should be for you alone and not for you to share with strangers. 18 Let your fountain be blessed and take pleasure in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving deer, a graceful doe—let her breasts always satisfy you; be lost in her love forever” (Prov. 5:15–19).

5. Matthew Henry’s incisive comments

- a. You should be satisfied with your choice and God’s choice.

“Let him that is married take delight in his wife, and let him be very fond of her, not only because she is the wife that he himself has chosen and he ought to be pleased with his own choice, but because she is the wife that God in his providence appointed for him and he ought much more to be pleased with the divine appointment, pleased with her because she is his own.”

- b. Enrich your marriage by loving your wife dearly and expressing that delight regularly.

“Think thyself very happy in her, look upon her as a blessed wife, let her have thy blessing, pray daily for her, and then rejoice with her.”

- c. Let your wife be the rest you seek from your labors.

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“Let him be fond of his wife and love her dearly (v. 19): Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant doe . . . Desire no better diversion from severe study and business than the innocent and pleasant conversation of thy own wife; let her lie in thy bosom, as the poor man's ewe-lamb did in his (2 Sa. 12:3), and do thou repose thy head in hers, and let that satisfy thee at all times; and seek not for pleasure in any other.”

- d. Despise with all your heart the very thought of turning away from her to another woman.

“Why wilt thou be so sottish (i.e. drunkenly stupid), such an enemy to thyself, as to prefer puddle-water, and that poisoned, too, and stolen, before pure living waters out of thy own well?”

- e. Let the men of the internet age cease from roaming in their hearts to build a cyber-harem by which they can wander any time they choose and lust after a limitless number of rivals to their wives. This sin has devastated many Christian marriages in the 21st century.

“Enjoy with satisfaction the comforts of lawful marriage, which was ordained for the prevention of uncleanness, and therefore ought to be made use of in time, lest it should not prove effectual for the cure of that which it might have prevented. Let none complain that God has dealt unkindly with them in forbidding them those pleasures which they have a natural desire of, for he has graciously provided for the regular gratification of them. ‘Thou mayest not indeed eat of every tree of the garden, but choose thee out one, which thou pleasest, and of that thou mayest freely eat; nature will be content with that, but lust with nothing.’ God, in thus confining men to one, has been so far from putting any hardship upon them that he has really consulted their true interest.”

6. Wives also need to be content with their husbands.

“When David returned home to bless his household, Saul's daughter Michal came out to meet him. “How the king of Israel honored himself today!” she said. “He exposed himself today in the sight of the slave girls of his subjects like a vulgar person would expose himself” (2 Sam. 6:20).

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CONCLUSION: INDEPENDENT JOY IN CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF GROWING UNITY IN MARRIAGE

1. Each of you should seek an independent contentment in Christ alone through your prayer and Bible intake.

2. Illustration: Air masks on a plane.

3. We owe it to the Lord and to each other to be content in Christ!

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “What They Did Before TV” by Jim Elliff at bulletininserts.org/what-they-did-before-tv

COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

The paradox of marriage (Gen. 2:20, 24–25). Communication is an important way to pursue being one flesh amidst great difference.

- Problem with oneness but no difference
- Problem with difference but no oneness

“To the degree that two people reveal themselves to one another, to that same degree they will or will not experience relational intimacy” (Lou Priolo).

Definition: *Good communication is a process of sharing information in order to come to a common understanding so that we are edified and encouraged with the result of increased intimacy and unity.*

PREREQUISITES TO GOOD COMMUNICATION

1. Common Requirements

- a. We ought to be motivated by a desire to please God in all things, and especially in our speech (2 Cor. 5:9; Ps. 19:14).
- b. We must remember that we are accountable to God for what we speak.
- c. We ought to be listening more than we are talking. The best communicator is a good listener (Prov. 18:13; 20:5). Be quick to hear and slow to speak. How can we be good listeners?
 - Be actively attentive. Are you interruptive?
 - Be eager to understand. Are you argumentative?
- d. We must remember that communication is more than words: body language, tone, gestures, etc. We can communicate interest or disinterest, delight or disgust, without saying anything.
- e. We must be willing to work at it. We must put off sin in order to improve at communicating with one another: pride, impatience, selfishness, laziness, etc.

2. Specific Roles of Husband and Wife

- a. A husband
 - Moving toward his wife in communication, making vulnerability safe.
 - Making sufficient time for communication.

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- b. A wife
 - Responding to his leadership in communication.
 - Helping him to lead better.

PURPOSES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

1. To Know and Be Known

- a. How God communicated: the Word became flesh
- b. The importance of vulnerability
- c. Barrier #1: to vulnerable communication: you're not having the same conversation

Six types of communication (from *Love That Lasts*)

- Small talk
- Information exchange
- Spiritual conversation
- Self-disclosure
- Value sharing
- Correction

- d. Barrier #2: different communication styles

Drawing out the internal processor

- Asking good questions
- Summarizing what they said

2. To Be One

- a. Oneness doesn't necessarily require agreement.

"Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17).

- b. How to pursue oneness when you disagree?
 - i. Focus on understanding.

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ii. Start with values

We're tempted to act as if a spouse's values are wrong when, in fact, we simply disagree on how to apply those values in the present situation.

When values conflict

3. To Build Each Other Up

"No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. 30 And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:29–30).

- a. Our words must be *controlled*.
- b. Our words must not be *corrupt*.
- c. Our words must be *constructive*.
- d. Our words must be *considerate*.
- e. Our words must *convey grace*.
- f. Our words must be *consecrated*.

Encouragement

- a. The importance of encouraging faith

"But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception" (Heb. 3:13).

"And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

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b. Paul's example:

"I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge. 6 In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, 7 so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:4–9).

c. Practically: observing evidences of God's grace.

- Observing how God's grace has gifted your spouse in different ways.
- Observing how God is giving them grace to live with their hope trained on him during times of difficulty.
- Observing how God is giving them grace in places where they tend to struggle.
- Observing evidences of God's grace in their speech, actions, desires, and ambitions.

Correction

a. If Scripture is perfect and you are not, then correction should always be welcomed.

"The one who has contempt for instruction will pay the penalty, but the one who respects a command will be rewarded" (Prov. 13:13). "A rebuke cuts into a perceptive person more than a hundred lashes into a fool" (Prov. 17:10). "Let the righteous one strike me—it is an act of faithful love; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let me not refuse it" (Ps. 141:5).

b. How to receive correction well:

- i. Agree with God's *judgment*.
- ii. Agree with God's *justification*.
- iii. *Listen* to correction.

c. How to give correction well in marriage:

- i. *Don't* correct in order to punish.
- ii. *Don't* correct because you are in a bad mood.
- iii. *Don't* seek to do what only God can do.
- iv. *Do* be specific as to what you see.
- v. *Do* be constructive.
- vi. *Do* be gentle.

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PRACTICE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

1. Keep it *honest*.
2. Keep it *under control*.
3. Keep it *in season*.
4. Keep it *positive*.
5. Keep it *tactful*.
6. Keep it *private*.
7. Keep it *going*.
8. Keep it *considerate*.
9. Keep it *cleaned-up*.

“For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart” (Matt. 12:34).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read the two appendices attached to this lesson: “Principles for Effective Communication” and “The One-Minute Rule.”

APPENDIX: PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

When you need to address a sensitive topic or find yourselves in the midst of conflict, these are helpful principles for communicating with your spouse.

PRINCIPLES FOR THE SPEAKER

1. **Request permission to share.** Try saying something like this: *"I have something I would like to share and I would appreciate your listening. Is this a good time to talk? I would like for you to listen and try to understand if you are able."*
2. **Avoid exaggerations (only, always, never).** When you have something legitimate to share, using absolutes and exaggerations will make it very difficult for the person to receive what you are saying without getting defensive.
3. **Use "I" statements instead of "You" statements.** "You" statements tend to make the other person feel attacked or judged. If you focus on your own emotions in your communication, you will be sharing what is important to you while inviting the other person to enter into your experience.
4. **Avoid name-calling.** When you call a person names (like "liar," "loser," "nag," or "jerk"), you are reducing his or her identity to his or her strange or sinful behavior, which will drastically decrease the likelihood of a positive response.
5. **Be brief.** Stay on one subject at a time and try not to ramble. Share your thoughts and feelings in bite-size pieces so the listener does not get overwhelmed. Give the other person a chance to paraphrase what you just said.
6. **Be persistent.** If the listener violates the principles, don't quit. It is your responsibility to remind him or her what you want. *"I do want to listen to you, but will you first try to understand me? Would you share what you just heard me say so I can see if I am being clear? I know this may be hard, but it would mean a great deal to me if you would listen to what I have to say for a moment."*

PRINCIPLES FOR THE LISTENER

1. **One person talks at a time.** Don't correct, defend, interrupt, or interject, which breaks the speaker's flow of thought. Do not talk, because when you talk, you're not listening and learning. Your goal at this point in the conversation is to learn and understand as much as you can. There will be plenty of time later on for you to present your side of the story once you have earned the right to be heard by first listening. God knows the truth and he will set the record straight in his timing.

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2. **Enter the speaker's world.** This is a difficult skill to learn, but it is important to suspend your own frame of reference and try to see things from the other person's point of view. Learn to appreciate your differences as gifts from God.
3. **Seek to understand.** Don't assume you understand; check it out first. The goal is *reflective listening*, which involves reflecting back to the person what he or she has shared so that he or she knows that you are listening and seeking to understand.
 - a. Select a key word, a key sentence, or a key phrase and repeat it back. Summarize the core message or the underlying implication you hear.
 - b. Paraphrase the person's thoughts by saying something like this: *"Here's what I am hearing you say... Am I close? Am I understanding you correctly?"*
 - c. Don't ask questions or change the subject until the other person feels understood. Request permission before sharing your perspective. Ask: *"Do you feel like I have understood you? Is there anything else you would like me to understand? May I comment on what you have just said?"*
4. **Focus on the heart.** What a person means to say and what a person actually says are often two different things. Remember that the initial statement or problem is seldom the real problem. Be patient and if possible, try to help the person to go deeper to discover the root problem. At first the person may start out at a surface level by attacking you and trying to make you the problem. Later on, if you have listened long enough where the person has gone to a deeper level, you will discover you are not the problem at all. The issue may actually be about them, not you!
5. **Don't correct emotions.** Allow the speaker to have whatever feelings they share without judging or correcting the validity of the emotions. Your goal is to create a safe environment where the person has permission to explore his or her feelings and to discover what is happening at the heart level.
6. **Don't fix.** This is not the time to try to solve the problem, offer advice, or take responsibility, etc. This is a time to listen, learn, and understand.
7. **Be patient.** Recognize that people open up in stages. The person may stop every so often, expecting something from us. He or she could be checking to see if we understand before continuing. The person may also want to know if we are accepting him or her before going any deeper. Reflective, non-judgmental listening gives the person a green light to continue.
8. **Don't steal the spotlight.** Shifting the focus to your emotions will invalidate the speaker's emotions. Avoid responses like these: *"You think that was bad? Let me tell you what happened to me"* or *"Oh, yeah? What do you think that was like for me?"* or *"How do you think that makes me feel?"*

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9. **Express gratitude.** Always thank the person for sharing. Acknowledge how difficult it is to share feelings. Compliment the person by saying *“Thank you for sharing that with me. I appreciate your effort to help me understand.”*
10. **Pause and pray.** Take some time to reflect on what the person has shared with you. Pray and ask God to help you respond with grace and repentance.

APPENDIX: THE ONE-MINUTE RULE

The One-Minute Rule is a tool that enables couples to hear each other and thus improve communication. It is particularly helpful for practicing reflective listening in difficult conversations.

GUIDELINES OF THE ONE-MINUTE RULE:

1. Each of you will be given opportunities to speak, in one-minute segments, on issues of concern to you. Each of you will be given opportunities to listen to your spouse in one-minute segments.
2. When you speak to your spouse, smile, look him or her in the eye, and speak for only one minute, using a gentle and pleasant tone. Use a timer to make sure that you speak for only one minute. Your objective is to communicate your point of view on a particular issue of your choice clearly and concisely, in the most appealing way possible.
3. When you are listening to your spouse, smile, look him or her in the eye, and seek to understand his or her point of view. Focus on understanding your spouse. Do not prepare rebuttals, interrupt, or give negative, non-verbal feedback. After your spouse has spoken for one minute, repeat back what you heard in thirty seconds or less. Do not add commentary or state rebuttals; simply communicate what you heard. If your spouse confirms that you have indeed heard what he or she shared, then you have one minute to speak and your spouse must listen to you and observe the same listening guidelines.
4. Continue the process until you both believe that you have been heard and understand each other's points of view.
5. After you have understood each other on a specific issue, then select new topics to discuss using these guidelines of the One-Minute Rule.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

Why do we fight with the people we love the most?

Conflict = Disagreements that result in warfare

BIBLICAL GOALS OF CONFLICT

1. Engage in conflict in a God-honoring way.

“A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath” (Prov. 15:1).

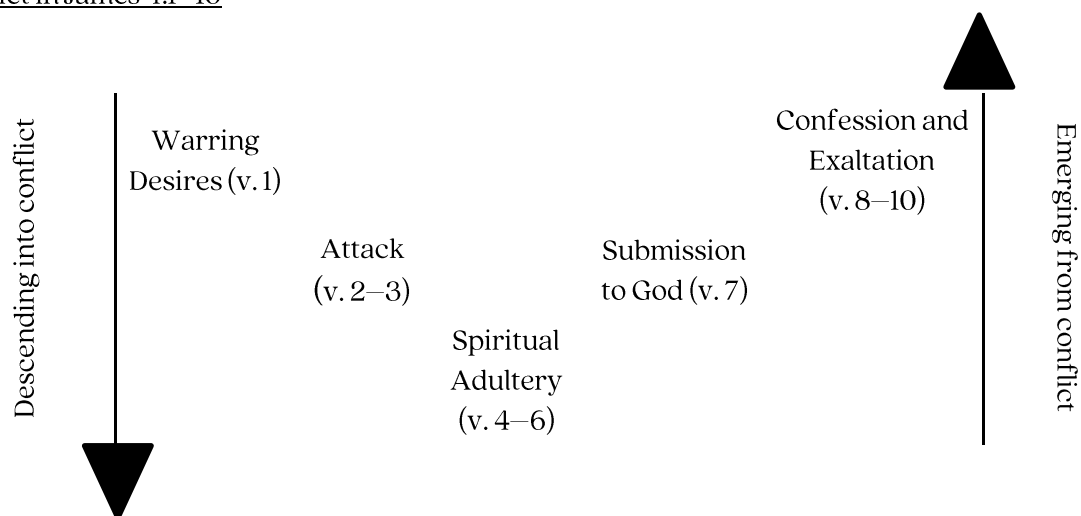
2. Grow in wisdom.

“Honor belongs to the person who ends a dispute, but any fool can get himself into a quarrel” (Prov. 20:3).

3. Pursue peace.

“God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

Conflict in James 4:1–10



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THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT: WARRING DESIRES

“What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from your passions that wage war within you?” (Jas. 4:1).

How to seek understanding in the midst of conflict

1. Listen

“My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (Jas. 1:19).

2. Ask questions

“Counsel in a person’s heart is deep water; but a person of understanding draws it out” (Prov. 20:5).

3. Clarify assumptions

“[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7).

TEMPTATION IN CONFLICT: SELF-PROTECTIVE ATTACK

“You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don’t receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (Jas. 4:2–3).

1. Self-Protection

a. Husbands

b. Wives

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2. Attack

Self-control in our speech

“When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is prudent” (Prov. 10:19). “A city is built up by the blessing of the upright, but it is torn down by the mouth of the wicked” (Prov. 11:11).

- a. Don’t respond in kind.

“Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

- b. Pause the fight.

“Patience is better than power, and controlling one’s emotions, than capturing a city” (Prov. 16:32).

- c. Rely on the Spirit.

“... to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, 23 to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, the one created according to God’s likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth” (Eph. 4:22–24).

THE TURNING POINT IN CONFLICT

“You adulterous people! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So, whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God. 5 Or do you think it’s without reason that the Scripture says: ‘The spirit he made to dwell in us envies intensely?’ 6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore, he says: ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ 7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:4–7).

The turning point: “Submit” to God

Implications

1. **Wherever you see an opportunity to obey God, obey.**

2. **Don’t indulge your sin and create greater distance in the marriage.**

“For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love” (Gal. 5:13).

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3. Hit the pause button.

4. Ask for help.

RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (Jas. 4:8–10).

1. An amazing promise from God if we draw near to him

Taking it out for a spin (Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say I Do*, 63–75)

- a. First Gear: In humility, suspect yourself first.
- b. Second Gear: In integrity, inspect yourself first.
- c. Third Gear: Admit that circumstances only reveal existing sin.
- d. Fourth Gear: Focus on undeserved grace, not unmet needs.

2. Anatomy of a good confession

- a. Confess your **action**, heart **attitude**; **ask** for forgiveness.
- b. Use **biblical** language when you confess.
- c. Articulate the **cost** of your sin as best as you can.
- d. Explain what you're going to **do** to repent.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read the appendix attached to this lesson: “Handling Conflict.”

APPENDIX: HANDLING CONFLICT

(Adapted from Winston T. Smith's *Marriage Matters*, pp. 152–157)

Difficulties in communication are likely the result of desires in your heart that your spouse is not fulfilling. You will eventually discover as a couple that you only have one or two disagreements in your marriage—stemming from these unfulfilled desires—that you will repeat over and over again. A key aspect of growing in conflict resolution will be discovering the root sins that are feeding these desires and cooperating with the Holy Spirit in putting them to death so you can walk in holiness.

COMMON STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

Understanding how your wants and desires are contributing to conflict can be a challenge. There are three general ways that we tend to respond to conflict. Recognizing which strategy you favor can provide clues to the underlying desires that are fueling your quarrels. Which describes your typical approach?

1. **Appeasing**: *Finding a way to placate or satisfy others so that there's no reason for conflict.* People who appease often say things that they don't really mean and agree to things that they don't want to do. If this is your strategy, you likely appear very laid back and easy-going. Others, including your spouse, seem to think well of you and enjoy your company. But relationships are difficult when you constantly have to hide what you think and how you feel to avoid the possibility of offending others. When you misrepresent your true thoughts and feelings, you feel unknown, unloved, and misunderstood. When you do things that you don't really want to do, you feel frustrated and unhappy. Saying yes to everything is an overwhelming burden. Because you don't feel the freedom to talk directly to the objects of your anger, you tend to stew in silence or discuss the situation with someone else. When attempts to appease begin to fail and conflicts with a person become more frequent or intense, appeasers usually find a way to cut off the relationship.
2. **Ignoring**: *Pretending that the problem doesn't exist. Ignorers avoid the conversation entirely.* They may avoid sharing their opinion, or they may share it and shut down any attempts to have open and honest dialogue about the issue. Rather than agreeing to requests, ignorers just delay decisions in an attempt to avoid getting pinned down, or when pressed, they tend to say, "no." Conflict is still possible but only if it's unavoidable. Even if you choose not to acknowledge the problems and conflicts in your relationships, they still exist and they will only get worse over time if you don't address them directly.
3. **Winning**: *Settling problems by prevailing.* People who want to win will work hard to ensure that their interests prevail in conflict. They don't seem intimidated or reluctant to engage in conflict; in fact, they might even enjoy it. Winners tend to be skilled in communicating, persuading, and even intimidating. If this is your primary strategy, your emotions (like anger, fear, and frustration) are

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an active part of the argument. Your emotional tendencies tend to add pressure to your words. While this strategy escapes most of the pitfalls of avoiding and appeasing, it tends to drive problems underground when others, realizing that they are unlikely to be heard, simply cave into this emotional pressure.

Based on your preferred strategy for handling conflict, you can begin to identify the desires and fears that are fueling the conflict.

Strategies	Appeasing (Moving Toward)	Ignoring (Moving Away)	Winning (Moving Against)
Desires	Acceptance, intimacy, belonging	Comfort, security, perfection, order, control	Success, power, control, admiration
Fears	Rejection, isolation, shame	Hassles, chaos, punishment, being controlled	Failure, humiliation, being dominated, weakness

BIBLICAL STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING CONFLICT

- 1. Yielding.** “Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5). Defensiveness is an obstacle to resolving conflict, but we can defuse it by following Jesus’ exhortation to examine ourselves first. When you realize that you have erred—whether by misunderstanding, misinterpreting, or sinning—you must yield and admit your mistake or confess your sin. Even when you are right, you may need to yield to your spouse’s desires or preferences because to do otherwise would cause harm. This follows the example set by God, who had every right to reject or destroy us because of our sin but instead sacrificed his rights and his Son to restore relationship with us. Loving your spouse well may require you to surrender what you think you deserve for his or her benefit.
- 2. Waiting.** “Honor belongs to the person who ends a dispute, but any fool can get himself into a quarrel” (Prov. 20:3). Choosing to avoid or postpone conflict may reflect how God loves us. No matter how aware you are of your sins, you can safely assume that you’re guilty of countless others. If our holy God were to confront us every moment we sinned, it would be unbearable. In this sense, God postpones challenging us until we are ready to grow and change. As you try to love your spouse as God loves you, it may require postponing a conflict when he or she is not ready to hear what you have to say. It may mean overlooking a minor offense altogether because it’s out of character and you can sympathize with the circumstances. Or it may mean taking a longer view

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and understanding that some of your spouse's weaknesses and sins are part of a long-term battle. Rather than addressing every instance of failing, we need to be patient with our spouse.

3. **Confronting.** "Do not harbor hatred against your brother. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:17–18). Once you realize that sin, not your spouse, is the real enemy, then you can begin to understand the necessity of addressing it. We must not react angrily, but we must also resist the temptation to think we have overlooked an offense when we have only tucked it away and allowed it to become a silent grudge. The Bible teaches us that there are times to speak directly and honestly about a problem.

MARRIAGE AND MONEY

INTRODUCTION: MAKING MONEY A JOY AND NOT A BURDEN

TWO DITCHES TO AVOID: ASCETICISM AND MATERIALISM

1. Asceticism

“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 3 They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer” (2 Tim. 4:1–5).

2. Materialism

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. 8 If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Tim. 6:6–10).

MONEY IS A SPIRITUAL ISSUE

1. All of life (including finances) falls under the lordship of Christ.

“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matt. 6:24).

2. The way we relate to our money can dramatically impact our experience in eternity.

“How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (Luke 18:24).

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“Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:19–21).

3. We are responsible to provide for our families.

“But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

4. Our goal: to be responsible with what God has entrusted to us without putting our hope in money.

“Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, 19 storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:17–19).

PRINCIPLES OF MONEY

1. Everything that we have belongs to God.

a. Corollary #1: God gives money and the power to make it.

“Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the splendor and the majesty, for everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to you. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom, and you are exalted as head over all. 12 Riches and honor come from you, and you are the ruler of everything. Power and might are in your hand, and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all” (1 Chron. 29:11–12).

b. Corollary #2: We ought to hold loosely to everything we possess.

Then he told them a parable: “A rich man’s land was very productive. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What should I do, since I don’t have anywhere to store my crops? 18 I will do this,’ he said. ‘I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. 19 Then I’ll say to myself, “You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.” 20 But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?” 21 That’s

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how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16–21).

- c. *Corollary #3: Money is given to us and it can be enjoyed.*

“Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17).

- d. *Corollary #4: We need to learn to be content.*

“Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you” (Heb. 13:5).

2. Everything that we need expects diligent labor.

- a. *Corollary #1: Avoid get-rich-quick schemes.*

“Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it” (Prov. 13:11).

- b. *Corollary #2: Settle into working hard for the glory of God.*

“The one who works his land will have plenty of food, but whoever chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty” (Prov. 28:19).

3. What we gain is to be shared.

“Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need” (Eph. 4:28).

“When it is in your power, don’t withhold good from the one to whom it belongs. 28 Don’t say to your neighbor, “Go away! Come back later. I’ll give it tomorrow”—when it is there with you” (Prov. 3:27–28).

- a. *Corollary #1: We ought to exercise a moderation in our own spending and indulgence.*

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b. Corollary #2: *We are not responsible for the debts of others.*

4. What we spend must not exceed what we make.

“Don’t be one of those who enter agreements, who put up security for loans. 27 If you have nothing with which to pay, even your bed will be taken from under you” (Prov. 22:26–27).

John Wesley’s Principles of Finance: 1) *Make all you can.* 2) *Save all you can.* 3) *Give all you can.*

THE FAMILY BUDGET: A LIST OF VALUES

A budget is a list of values. Therefore, it is primarily a spiritual tool, not a financial tool. In marriage, it is also a communication tool.

When we fight over money, we are fighting over values.

Three common challenges:

- 1. Your financial values are primarily intuitive.**
- 2. Your financial values feel more moral than they really are.**
- 3. Your financial values are deeply rooted in your upbringing.**

A family budget is a shared value system.

A family budget helps prevent most marital conflict about money because it takes financial conversations from being *reactive and constraint-driven* to *proactive and opportunity-driven*.

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THE FAMILY BUDGET: LEADERSHIP AND DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

- 1. The husband is the spiritual leader of the family, so he is ultimately responsible before Christ for the family's money.**
 - Leading the process
 - Leading in regularly reviewing finances
 - Leading in sticking to a budget
 - Leading in breaking the budget
 - Leading in planning for the future
 - Taking responsibility as the primary provider
- 2. Husband and wife operate as a team. But leadership and responsibility are with the husband.**

THE FAMILY BUDGET: WEAPON OR TOOL?

- 1. Finances as a weapon**
 - a. Hiding
 - b. Controlling
 - c. Attacking
- 2. The budget as a tool**
 - a. To build trust
 - b. For communication
 - c. To bridge value differences

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- d. For working through the unexpected
- e. For saving and managing debt

“Precious treasure and oil are in the dwelling of a wise person, but a fool consumes them (Prov. 21:20).

“Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise. 7 Without leader, administrator, or ruler, 8 it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest” (Prov. 6:6–8).

“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender” (Prov. 22:7).

- f. For giving

- *Giving to your church*

“Let the one who is taught the word share all his good things with the teacher” (Gal. 6:6).

- *Giving to those in need*

“When it is in your power, don’t withhold good from the one to whom it belongs (Prov. 3:27).

“If anyone has this world’s goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God’s love reside in him?” (1 John 3:17).

- *Giving to invest in relationship*

- i. All we have belongs to God.

“For every animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird of the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and everything in it is mine” (Ps. 50:10–12).

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- ii. We want to invest in what is to come.

“Don’t store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal” (Matt. 6:19–20).

- iii. We want to excel in the grace of giving.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

3. A note for the engaged or newly-married

CONCLUSION: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read the appendix attached to this lesson, “A Trust Questionnaire.”

APPENDIX: A TRUST QUESTIONNAIRE

(Adapted from Paul Tripp's *What Did You Expect?*, pp. 137–149)

Use the following 22 questions as a barometer to measure the trust in your marriage relationship. You should answer the questions individually, then come back together to discuss your answers. Once you've completed the questionnaire, read on for analysis and follow up for each question.

1) *Is there more unity, understanding, and love in your marriage now than there has ever been?* Perhaps this is the best indicator of all. When there is a strong bond of trust, the intimacy of marriage grows. Trust allows a couple to work through differences and build unity. Trust allows you to work to understand your spouse and to know that he or she will work to understand you. When your spouse proves that he cares about you enough to demonstrate to you that he can be trusted, your respect and affection for him will grow. This does not mean that your marriage will be free of difficulty. Remember, you do live in a fallen world, and you do live with a flawed person. Trust won't alleviate all of your problems and differences, but it will give you a means of dealing with them.

2) *Do you both do what you promise in the time that you have promised?* Like it or not, you must face the fact that the way you follow the promises you make will function as a barometer of your trustworthiness to your spouse. And this is how it should be. If you love her, you will take your promises to her seriously. If you love him, you will enjoy the fact that he is able to rest in the assurance that whatever you have committed to do for him, you will do, and you will do it in the time that is best for him.

The problem here is that most of the promises we make in marriage are little-moment promises. They are promises that have to do with the daily needs, duties, and schedule that make up the lifestyle of any couple anywhere. Because these promises are not promises of consequence, it is very tempting not to take them seriously and to fail to consider the consequences of not following through. Remember what we have already considered: the character of a marriage is not built on three or four significant moments. No, the character of a marriage is established through ten thousand little moments. It is the character that is built in the little moments that you carry into the big moments of life. So, trust is not built in two or three significant moments of promise (although those moments are formative as well), but trust is built moment by moment and day by day. It is the degree of your daily reliability that tells your spouse that you are a person who can be trusted or not. Loving your spouse means you love to serve her, and you love to gift her with the rest that comes from knowing that you will be faithful to the promises you have made, no matter how small.

3) *Are you attentive to what your spouse sees as important?* Because of the selfishness of sin, it is easy to be self-absorbed and self-focused. It is easy to be captured by your own schedule and interests. Perhaps there is no more dangerous force in marriage than garden-variety selfishness. Perhaps there is no greater marital mistake than to somehow give your spouse a reason to wonder if you really do care about your interests more than you care for hers. Love is about opening yourself to your spouse and her interests. Love means committing yourself to care about what he cares about; to be interested in a thing simply because it interests him. Love is about acknowledging, anticipating, and meeting your spouse's needs. Love is about sharing your sorrows, joys, and concerns. And when you love someone this way, you are building a bond of

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trust. It is hard to trust a person who cares so much for himself that he fails to care for others. However, you will entrust yourself to the person who loves you enough to trouble his life with what troubles you.

4) Do you make excuses for failures to do what you have promised, or are you ready to confess? Self-righteousness, inapproachability, defensiveness, and self-excusing are all toxic to trust. You will not entrust yourself to your spouse if he is defensive and unapproachable. You will not trust your spouse if, in time of failure, she is unwilling to look at herself. You will not trust your spouse if, when it is time to humbly listen and humbly confess, he fails to be willing to do either. Trust doesn't demand perfection. Trust demands humility. In your heart of hearts, you know you will never marry a perfect person. In your heart of hearts, you know that you will both fail. So, in your heart of hearts you want to live with your spouse with the assurance that when he has failed you in some way, he is willing to face it and deal with it. Patterns of self-excusing tell you that your spouse is more interested in herself than she is in you. Self-defensiveness tells you that he is more interested in being right than in forging with you a relationship of unity, understanding, and love. Humble openness, coupled with the commitment to admit to and confess wrongs, is an essential ingredient of a bond of trust.

5) Do you listen well to your spouse and act on what you have heard? If you are living with someone who just does not listen, sooner or later, confronted with the futility of getting the person to listen, you will quit talking. You and I are drawn to people who listen. One of the most amazing things that God promises to you and me is that he will never turn a deaf ear to our cries. You can run to God with no fear whatsoever as to whether he will ignore you. Yet, there is probably no marital pain that I have heard expressed more frequently than the pain of not being heard. Have you said or thought anything like this?

"She just doesn't listen."

"Talking with him is like talking to a brick wall."

"I can't believe that you won't give me this one thing; just be quiet and listen to what I'm trying to say."

"It took me a while, but it finally became clear: he quickly checks out when I begin to talk. No, he doesn't walk out of the room, but when I am finished there is no response whatsoever."

"I am so tired of hearing her say, 'Do we have to talk about this now?'"

"The time doesn't ever seem right, so we seldom talk about anything that matters."

I cannot tell you how many times I have sat with couples and heard words like those. The one being ignored quits talking, but not only that; he does something even more debilitating to their marriage—he quits trusting. You tend to trust people who care about you enough to listen to what you have to say and who have demonstrated to you that they are committed to respond to what they have heard with words and actions.

6) Do you follow through with mutually agreed-upon plans? Planning together in things large and small is what marriage is about. It is the life-plan of two people coalescing and becoming one plan. Marriage is the most comprehensive form of shared life that a human being can ever experience. God's goal for marriage is that a husband and wife would live in a relationship so deeply blended and unified that it could only be called "one flesh." So, the work of every husband and wife is the work of unity. Because you desire life together, you need to plan together. It is no longer his and hers. Therefore, you need to do the give-and-take work of discussing and planning together. And you need to rest assured that when you have agreed

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together upon a goal with a plan of action, the other will remain loyal to the plan and follow through as you have agreed. When this happens, trust is strengthened, but when you agree to a plan and then go out and do it your way, rather than the mutually decided way, you present yourself as a person who cannot be trusted.

7) Do you work together on planning and scheduling priorities, or do you demand that the other do it your way? Let's be humbly honest here; we all want our own way. The instinct to be sovereign over your little world and to get what you want and what you tell yourself you need doesn't leave when you are publicly mouthing your vows. God is working right now on you so that you would live for something bigger than yourself, but there will be artifacts of the instincts to live selfishly in your heart until you cross over to the other side. Demand and entitlement destroy trust because, as you live with your spouse, she soon comes to understand that no matter what commitments you have made to her, what you really want is your own way. You have vowed to cooperate with her, but what you really want is for your wife to participate in supporting the desires and plans of your little kingdom of one. When she sees you operate this way, she knows that you cannot be trusted to work with her and to care for her.

8) Do you share with your spouse your thoughts, desires, hopes, dreams, and concerns, or is it easier for you to be quiet or to share with someone else? Has your life together encouraged greater and greater levels of trust? Have you learned that you can say anything to your spouse because he approaches you with a heart that is gentle, kind, understanding, and patient? Have you experienced starting at opposite ends of an issue and watching honest and patient communication bring you together? Or has your spouse not taken your concerns seriously? Have you been dismissive of your spouse's thoughts, hopes, and dreams? Are you better able to communicate with one another today than you were earlier? Do you go into a conversation assured that you will get a patient ear? Or do you find it easier to talk candidly with someone other than your husband or wife? When someone outside of the house has become a replacement confidant for your spouse, it is a sure sign that trust has been broken.

9) Is there any evidence that you have withdrawn from the other in protective distance? Are you afraid to be honest with your spouse? Are you afraid to disagree with him? Are you afraid to lovingly confront or contradict her? Are you afraid of what would really happen if you told him what you really think? Are you afraid to stick your neck out and be vulnerable? Do you ever feel that you are walking on eggshells? Do you feel the need to measure your words? Do you ever feel that you need to protect yourself from her? Have you withdrawn in some way? There is no getting around it: withdrawal is a sure sign of a lack of trust. Yet, there are many, many couples out there who have no intention of divorcing, which is a good thing, but they live in self-protective distance from one another, which is a bad thing.

10) Would your spouse say that you are good for your word and faithful to your promises? The Bible holds out the real possibility that your view of yourself may be less than accurate. Yes, I know we all tend to think that we know ourselves better than anyone does. But is that actually true? The Bible teaches that sin blinds, and because it blinds, we do not know ourselves as well as we think we do. I like to say it this way: sin blinds, and guess who it blinds first? We have no problem seeing the weaknesses and failure of others, but we can get surprised when ours is pointed out. So, we actually need people in our lives who will help us to see ourselves with accuracy (see Heb. 3:12–13).

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This is one of the benefits of marriage. Because you are actually living with your spouse 24/7, he or she has a comprehensive view of who you are and how you operate. No, your spouse's view of you will not be perfectly without bias, but it will tend to be more objective than your view of you. So, take this question and the others to your spouse. Ask your spouse if he has come to consider you to be trustworthy and why or why not. Open your heart to see what you could not see by yourself and commit yourself to respond to what your spouse helps you to see with humility and a commitment to change.

11) Do you carry wrongs around with you, or do you trust one another to confront and confess? Choosing to be bitter is choosing what feels good to you but not what is best for your spouse or for the relationship to which you have committed yourself. When you are unwilling to go through the difficulty of helping your spouse to see how she has hurt you and the tension of disagreement, you love your comfort more than you love her. When you are not sure that it is safe either to confront or to confess to your spouse, then you are saying that you are not sure that your spouse is a person who can be trusted. Silence is a sign of the lack of trust.

12) Do you ever wonder what the other is doing when not with you? Trust means you have no concern whatsoever about what your spouse is doing when he is out of your presence. The need to follow him, check up on him, and to cross-examine him when he returns are sure indicators that you do not trust him. Trust means that you know that your spouse would not think of doing anything when she is away from you that she would not do in front of you. Being trustworthy means you never feel the need to look over your shoulder to see if you're being seen, and you never feel the need to cover your tracks or rehearse your story. Trust means living with the rest that comes from knowing that neither one of you has anything to hide.

13) Are you conscious of editing your words and withholding your feelings because you can't trust your spouse to deal with them properly? The nature and style of your communication with your spouse is a very good indicator of the degree of trust that exists between you. If you are withholding your thoughts and feelings from the other, it means either that you don't love him enough to share yourself with him, or you don't trust him enough to place yourself in his care. I don't know how many times I have heard a husband or wife say, "I had no idea you felt that way about..." Have you experienced situations in which you have shared something with your spouse and he used it against you? Have you ever shared secret things told to you by your spouse with someone else? When you're not sure that you can place the fine china of your life in the other person's hands, then you are being confronted with a weakness in trust in your marriage.

14) Is your marriage partner the best friend in your life or has your dream of this kind of companionship evaporated? Marriage really is a human covenant of companionship. God wasn't so much giving Adam a physical helper for the work in the garden as he was giving him a companion. God knew that he had created a social being, and because of Adam's social hardwiring, it was not good for him to live without the companionship of one made from him and made like him. You could argue that this is the most basic reason for marriage. God created a lifelong companion for Adam, and his relationship with Eve would exist on earth as a visible reminder of God's love relationship with people and as the God-ordained means by which the earth would be populated as God designed. So, the character and quality of the friendship between a husband and wife always functions as an accurate measure of the health of their marriage. It is also an

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accurate barometer of trust. When trust is present between two people, their appreciation and affection will grow, and as these things grow, friendship flourishes.

15) *Is your sexual relationship mutually satisfying, or is it hard for you to give yourself physically to your spouse?* What does good sex have to do with trust? Everything! I must be honest here. I am a bit tired of Christian marital body-part books. I don't think that the problem for most couples in the area of sex is that people don't know where stuff is! I don't think the average couple needs sexual maps and charts. Now, a little education can be helpful, but I don't think biology is the solution to the overwhelming sexual dysfunction that is the plight of many Christian marriages. I think that this particular dysfunction is directly related to trust. It is important to understand that you do not leave the character and quality of your relationship at the side of the marital bed. You drag the nature of the relationship right in the middle of this naked and vulnerable moment. If you have experienced the selfishness of your spouse in a variety of ways, why would you not conclude that he or she will be selfish in bed as well? If your spouse has been demanding, critical, and vengeful in other times and places, wouldn't it be logical to assume he or she will be the same during the act of sex? On the other hand, if you have been able to entrust yourself to your spouse's care in other situations, would it not be safe to conclude that your spouse will care for you in this most vulnerable of all marriage moments? There is a direct relationship between joyful, mutual, marital sexual satisfaction and trust.

16) *Do you say things to other people about your spouse that you have not communicated to him or her?* Exchanging honest marital communication for marital gossip is a clear sign of the breakdown of trust. Now, I do not mean talking about your marriage with another person when you have come to the realization that there are things you are facing together that you will not be able to solve together. When you seek out external help, you do it because you have talked, and you now know you need help. No, I'm talking about giving up on your spouse and giving in to releasing your steam by talking about him without his knowledge. Our churches are riddled with women's gatherings, formal and informal, that are not so much times of healthy fellowship but unhealthy times for complaint against the men in their lives. If you are trustworthy, you would not think of saying anything to others that you hadn't first said to your spouse, and you wouldn't say it to others unless they were part of the problem or positioned to be part of the solution. And if you know that you can trust your spouse, you know that you can speak to him with candor, and he will hear and respond. There are too many marriages out there where the husband or wife has been replaced, when it comes to communication, by a friend who functions as a replacement spouse.

17) *Do you look forward to sharing times together, and when you have these times are they peaceful and enjoyable?* Joyful anticipation of time together is a good indicator of the health of a marriage. Actually being able to have peaceful and mutually satisfying times together is an even better indicator. Longing to be together is a sign that you know you can trust the other to share of him- or herself and to care for you. Experiencing peace between you is a sign that you are both willing to make the sacrifices that need to be made in order to experience unity, understanding, and love. Here it is: you anticipate being with people you trust.

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18) Are there problems between you that remain unsolved because you don't have the bond of trust necessary to work together on a solution? The inability to solve problems is a sure sign of the breakdown of trust. It takes patient love and persevering humility to work together to solve problems. It takes loving the other person more than you love yourself. It takes a willingness to make concrete sacrifices. It takes exchanging a demanding attitude for servanthood. It takes ears that are ready to hear and a heart that is ready to receive. It takes a commitment to not walk away until the problem is solved. When you gift the other with these things over and over again, your spouse comes to understand that he can trust that, in a moment of difficulty, you won't run over him and do it your way. He knows that you will love and care for him as you are working with him to solve whatever needs to be solved. The more your spouse experiences this, the more she knows she can trust you, and the more she knows she can trust you, the more she will be willing to hang in with you and work toward a solution to the problem of the moment.

19) Are you comfortable with the vulnerability that a good marriage involves? You can't have a relationship without vulnerability, and the reason vulnerability is called vulnerability is that it requires risk. Are you still willing to stick your neck out and be vulnerable because you know that your spouse will care for you when you do? Or have you long since quit putting yourself in any situation of personal vulnerability in your marriage? Think about the fact that marriage without vulnerability is not marriage. Even the most basic of marital acts, cohabitation, requires vulnerability. The degree to which you are comfortable with emotional, physical, and spiritual nakedness in front of your spouse is a sure indicator of the quality of trust that exists between you.

20) Do you ever wonder if you made a mistake in marrying the person who is your spouse? It is probably blatantly obvious, but I will say it anyway: marital regret is a powerful indicator of the breakdown of the relationship and the breakdown of trust. If you are there, I have two words for you: seek help. If there is a fundamental breakdown of trust between you, then you probably do not have the bond that it takes to reconcile and restore your marriage. Let the pain of your regret not tempt you to run but motivate you to seek God's help. Go to your pastor or a mature brother or sister and begin to share your dilemma. Look for someone mature who takes God's Word seriously. Don't wallow in regret. Remember, Jesus died for what you are now facing. He is with you, and he is for you, and he will not leave your marriage, no matter how bad it gets!

21) Do you ever fear that you are being manipulated or taken advantage of in any way? If you have come to the place where you actually fear the other person, then you are in a situation where there has been a complete breakdown of trust. You simply don't fear someone who loves you. You don't fear someone who takes your best interest to heart. You don't fear someone who has treated you with kindness and gentleness. If your companion has become your adversary, then trust is gone and the marriage cannot work. No, that does not mean it is over; it simply means it needs fundamental change and healing. You cannot let yourself or your spouse live with the status quo. You can't allow yourself to be content with learning how to avoid danger. You must commit to doing everything in your power to rebuild what has been broken. God will honor your commitment to do what is right by giving you strength as you go.

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22) *Do you ever wonder if your spouse cares for him- or herself more than for you?* Remember our definition of trust at the beginning of this chapter: ***Trust is being so convinced that you can rely on the integrity, strength, character, and faithfulness of another that you are willing to place yourself in his or her care.*** Don't be willing to live in a marriage where trust has died. Believe that God will never call you to do a thing without giving you the wherewithal to do it. His grace will take you places you hadn't intended to go, but it will also produce in you things that you could never produce on your own.

So, how did you do? If the answers are scary, shocking, or saddening, you don't have to despair. Don't run away from these answers or put on a fake righteousness that you don't have. There is help for you, both in the Word of God and in the Body of Christ. It's okay to honestly discuss and reveal the weaknesses and failures in your marriage.

If you have sinned in your marriage — that includes 100% of all readers — you will need to confess and repent to the Lord and to your spouse. Repent vertically before you repent horizontally, and when you do confess to your spouse, don't justify or defend. If they have something to say about your weaknesses and failures, listen with a humble and softened heart.

When your spouse confesses to you, give them grace. Forgive freely, like Christ forgave you. Know that your spouse is a broken person, and that brokenness will touch your life in ways that will leave pain and hurt. But God provides the ultimate example of forgiveness for you to follow.

Finally, seek help. You might not need professional counseling, but find a mature couple and ask them to pray for you and check back on areas of weakness. ***I didn't say run to your pastor;*** the body of Christ was designed for ministry. Take advantage of the church of Jesus Christ.

SEX IN MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

A topic that's both important and awkward

PERSPECTIVES ON SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Cultural: greatest or grodiest?

2. Familial: parental example and instruction

"My son, pay attention to my wisdom; listen closely to my understanding 2 so that you may maintain discretion and your lips safeguard knowledge" (Prov. 5:1–2).

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"This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame" (Gen. 2:24–25).

"The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain" (Gen. 4:1).

- a. The word the Holy Spirit chose for sex (נָטָה)
- b. "One flesh" – not merely recreation but relationship
- c. Sex is a picture of the union.
 - As many different moods to sex as there are to a relationship
 - The thermometer of marriage, not the thermostat
- d. The aspect of union that sex reflects most particularly: vulnerability made safe

"Now in response to the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." 2 But because sexual immorality is so common, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman should have sexual relations with her own husband. 3 A husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4 A wife does not have the right over her own body, but her husband does. In the same way, a husband does not have the right over his own body, but his wife does. 5

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Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:1–5).

Scary . . . but safe through love.

When vulnerability is held in trust, marriage is wonderfully sweet—and sex pictures that better than any other aspect of the relationship.

“How beautiful you are, my darling. How very beautiful! Your eyes are doves” (Song 1:15).

The goal of sex is to give expression to the secure love that is the marriage union.

Implications for a husband.

“Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

Implications for a wife.

“In my bed at night I sought the one I love; I sought him, but did not find him” (Song 3:1).

PROPRIETY OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. **God’s design for marriage includes a “one-flesh” sexual union between a man and a woman.**

“Everything is permissible for me,” but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me,” but I will not be mastered by anything. 13 “Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will do away with both of them. However, the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 God raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 15 Don’t you know that your bodies are a part of Christ’s body? So should I take a part of Christ’s body and make it part of a prostitute? Absolutely not! 16 Don’t you know that anyone joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For Scripture says, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ 17 But anyone joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. 18 Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. 19 Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.

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2. Sex is intended to be a physical expression of a broader union within the marriage relationship.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. 27 He did this to present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and blameless. 28 In the same way, husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hates his own flesh but provides and cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, 30 since we are members of his body. 31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 To sum up, each one of you is to love his wife as himself, and the wife is to respect her husband” (Eph. 5:25–33).

3. Sexual union is only intended to be experienced within the covenant of marriage.

“For this is God’s will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, 4 that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don’t know God. 6 This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister in this manner, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. 7 For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness” (1 Thess. 4:3–7).

4. God gave us marital sex for our enjoyment.

“Oh, that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your caresses are more delightful than wine” (Song 1:2).

“Let your fountain be blessed, and take pleasure in the wife of your youth. 19 A loving deer, a graceful doe—let her breasts always satisfy you; be lost in her love forever. 20 Why, my son, would you lose yourself with a forbidden woman or embrace a wayward woman?” (Prov. 5:18–20).

“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 3 They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer” (1 Tim. 4:1–5).

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5. Sexual pleasure is not intended to be an end in itself.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31–32).

6. One of God’s purposes for sex in marriage is to bear children.

“God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth . . .” (Gen. 1:28).

“Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, offspring, a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth. 5 Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. They will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate” (Ps. 127:3–5).

7. Sexual love should be Christ-like in its expression.

Improper expressions include:

- Adultery (extramarital sex)
- Fornication (premarital sex)
- Homosexuality
- Bestiality
- Polygamy
- Self-centered sexual expression (i.e. masturbation)
- Pornography
- Immodesty with regard to dress

PURPOSES OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. The *preservation* and enhancement of the marital bond (relational purpose)
2. The *procreation* of the human race (biological purpose)
3. The *purity* of one another (moral purpose)
4. The *pleasure* of one another (recreational purpose)

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PRINCIPLES OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Sexual relations in marriage are holy and good.
2. Pleasure is not forbidden, but it is assumed.
3. Sexual pleasure is to be regulated in that sex does not exist for my pleasure but for the pleasure and satisfaction of my spouse.
4. Sexual relations are to be equal and reciprocal.
5. Sexual relations ought to be regular and continuous.
 - a. Enough to satisfy the spouse's need
 - b. Enough to avoid temptation

"Tender words and tender play, throughout the day, are the best foreplay."

PROBLEMS WITH SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. Shame

"For it stands in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame" (1 Pet. 2:6).

2. Embarrassment

Sex as a pathway to worship (1 Tim. 4:4–5)

Desire as a command (Prov. 5:18–19)

Educate your taste for beauty!

Are there restrictions in what we may do as a couple? Three thoughts:

- a. In your expression of sexuality, there may be some things that are harmful or unnatural. Be of the mind that you will not harm or hurt your spouse.
- b. Love demands that you don't selfishly demand that your spouse do something they do not want to do.

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- c. If you can't do it in faith with a clear conscience, don't do it. We do not want to force our spouses to go against conscience.

3. Broken trust

When vulnerability no longer feels safe, your whole marriage will suffer—but nowhere will that be more apparent than in sex, where you are at your most vulnerable.

“Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept undefiled, because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers” (Heb. 13:4). What kinds of infidelity destroy trust?

Trust: the reason sex gets better with time.

4. Selfishness

The massive damage that selfishness in sex creates in a marriage

- Using sex as a weapon
- Wanting sex but never wanting children
- Selfishness that *looks* unselfish

“Flee sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18).

5. Busyness

“Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5).

PURITY OF SEX IN MARRIAGE

1. **Enjoy one another:** *Marriage is faithfully protected in the context of a conscientious commitment—a commitment of jealous delight and devotion—to sexual purity.*

- a. Maintain “visible sexual devotion” to one another, so that all can see.

“When Isaac had been there for some time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from the window and was surprised to see Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah” (Gen. 26:8).

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"[I condemn] the disposition of such husbands as have no heat, or heart of affection in them . . . a disposition no way warranted by the Word. The faithful saints of God . . . were no Stoics, without all affection; nor did they think it a matter unbecoming them, after a peculiar manner to delight in their wives (witness Isaaks sporting with his wife) for this is a privilege which appertaineth to the estate of marriage" (William Gouge).

"That the Husband tenders his Spouse with an indared affection above all mortal creatures: This appeareth by the expressions of respect, that all he hath, is at her command, all he can do, is wholly improved for her content and comfort, she lies in his Bosom, and his heart trusts in her, which forceth all to confess, that the stream of his affection, like a mighty current, runs with full Tide and strength" (Thomas Hooker).

"Mating, though not the whole nor the heart of the matter, is a necessary and important expression of wedded love, which would be maimed and stunted without it. Accordingly, . . . there must be no holding back on either side at this point" (J. I. Packer).

- b. Maintain strict propriety in relationships with members of the opposite sex.

"The man whose heart is endeared to the woman he loves, he dreams of her in the night, hath her in his eye and apprehension when he awakes, museth on her as he sits at table, walks with her when he travels and parlies with her in each place where he comes" (Thomas Hooker).

- c. Maintain a watch over your heart, guarding your heart, your eyes, your thoughts against any defiling influences.

"Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"When you are looking on the cup, or gazing on alluring beauty, or wantonly dallying and pleasing your senses with things unsafe, you little know how far beyond your intentions you may be drawn, and deep the wound may prove, how great the smart, or how long and difficult the cure" (Richard Baxter).

- d. Maintain pure attachments.

"As a wife deales with the letters of her husband that is in a farre Country; she finds many sweet inklings of his love, and she will read these letters often, and daily; she would talke with her husband a farre off, and see him in the letters. Oh (saith she) thus and thus he thought when he writ these lines, and then she thinkes he speaks to her againe; she reads these letters only, because she would be with her husband a little, and have a little parley with him in his pen, though not in his presence" (Thomas Hooker).

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2. Entertain no options: *Marriage is faithfully preserved in the context of a no-quit diligence.*

“Like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the young women” (Song 2:2).

“The wife is ordained for man: like a little Zoar, a city of refuge to fly to in all his troubles: and there is no peace comparable unto her but the peace of conscience” (Robert Cleaver).

“There is no society more near, more entire, more needful, more kindly, more delightful, more comfortable, more constant, more continual, than the society of man and wife, the main root, source, and original of all other societies” (Thomas Gataker).

“A good wife being . . .

The best Companion in Wealth;

The fittest and readiest Assistant in worke;

The greatest comfort in crosses and griefes; . . .

And the greatest Grace and Honour that can be, to him that hath her” (Thomas Gataker).

3. Enliven the routine.

Marriage is faithfully preserved in the context of loving creativity, imagination, and spontaneity.

“Catch the foxes for us—the little foxes that ruin the vineyards—for our vineyards are in bloom” (Song 2:15).

CONCLUSION

1. For those who aren't married

- Shape your expectations.
- Look for a marriage partner, not a sexual partner.
- Expose false teaching.

2. For those who are married

- Desire the real thing.
- Sex is a marriage-long project.
- Build a marriage that is vulnerable, and where vulnerability is safe.

“Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the one she loves? I awakened you under the apricot tree. There your mother conceived you; there she conceived and gave you birth. 6 Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death;

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jealousy is as unrelenting as Sheol. Love's flames are fiery flames—an almighty flame! 7 A huge torrent cannot extinguish love; rivers cannot sweep it away. If a man were to give all his wealth for love, it would be utterly scorned" (Song 8:5–7).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read "Reclaiming Your Eyes from Pornography" by Kole Farney at bulletininserts.org/reclaiming-your-eyes-from-pornography
- Read "Christian Romance Novels: Are They Our Harmless Little Secret?" by Susan Verstraete at bulletininserts.org/christian-romance-novels-are-they-our-harmless-little-secret

MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

MARRIAGE IS FOR MAKING WORSHIPERS

1. A key way in which marriage can portray who God is (Gen. 1:27) is by making babies (Gen. 1:28).

“Didn’t God make them one and give them a portion of spirit? What is the one seeking? Godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, so that no one acts treacherously against the wife of his youth” (Mal. 2:15).

“These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. 7 Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:6–7).

2. Implications for adoption

“Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23).

“Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. 24 The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. 25 But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:23–26).

“He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5).

3. Children as a blessing

“Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord; offspring, a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one’s youth. 5 Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them. They will never be put to shame when they speak with their enemies at the city gate” (Ps. 127:3–5).

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4. Thoughts on birth control

- a. Priority of not taking a human life
- b. Priority of obeying your conscience and caring for conscience of others
- c. Priority of trusting that God's gifts are good

HOW CHILDREN GROW A MARRIAGE

The purpose of marriage is a union that portrays the goodness of God.

1. Children and . . . the union of marriage



2. Children and . . . portraying God

3. Children and . . . seeing/showing the goodness of God

HOW CHILDREN CHANGE A MARRIAGE

1. Different pressures at different stages

- a. Preschool
- b. School-aged
- c. Teen years
- d. Beyond

2. Changes to the roles of husband and wife

- a. The "little" years can accentuate how different these roles feel.
 - A husband must encourage his helper.
 - A wife must trust God's plan.

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- b. Leading/helping through spiritual struggle of the tween/teen years.
- c. Common temptation to define “success” and “flourishing” in terms of what we accomplish (Gen. 1:28) rather than seeing/showing the goodness of God (Gen. 1:27)
 - “Little” years
 - Older years

3. Challenges to communication

- a. Different styles of communication work better/worse at different stages of parenting
- b. Communication when mom and dad don’t align in their parenting values
Goal: to know/ be known / build trust—even in disagreement.

4. Challenges to intimacy

- a. The little years: pursuing intimacy when parenting is intense
- b. School-age: (re)building a romantic friendship
- c. Teen years: preparing your friendship for life without kids at home

CONCLUSION

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “Getting Through a Miscarriage” by Steve Burchett at bulletininserts.org/getting-through-a-miscarriage

INFERTILITY

INTRODUCTION: WHY DOES THIS TOPIC MATTER TO US ALL?

- Couples struggling with infertility
- Newly married, engaged, dating
- Church member
- Thinking through unfulfilled dreams

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Childbirth throughout the Bible (Gen. 1:28; 3:16; 1 Sam. 1)

2. Two ways people dealt with infertility

- a. By sinning and not trusting in God

“Sarai said to Abram, “Since the Lord has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family.” And Abram agreed to what Sarai said” (Gen. 16:2).

- b. By trusting God and crying out to him

“Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was childless. The Lord was receptive to his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived” (Gen. 25:21).

3. Two biblical principles to guide our discussion

- a. Life begins at conception.

“For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14 I will praise you because I have been remarkably and wondrously made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well” (Ps. 139:13–14).

- b. Marriage is God’s design to produce children.

“This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

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“Didn’t God make them one and give them a portion of spirit? What is the one seeking? Godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, so that no one acts treacherously against the wife of his youth” (Mal. 2:15).

CHALLENGES FACED BY COUPLES EXPERIENCING INFERTILITY

- 1. As individuals**
- 2. In the marriage**
 - a. Each spouse may face different kinds of grief
 - b. Effect on intimacy
 - c. Blame/guilt
 - d. Disagreement on how to move forward

ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES (ARTs)

- 1. Reasons why infertility may occur**
 - a. Medical issues with the man.
 - b. Medical issues with the woman.
 - c. Other reasons that sometimes can’t be medically determined.
- 2. Three common treatments**
 - a. Hormone treatments
 - b. IUI (intrauterine insemination)
 - c. IVF (in vitro fertilization)
- 3. Four implications of biblical principles for ARTs**
 - a. Any fertility treatments should preserve the parent-child relationship.
 - b. Fertility treatments that involve the destruction of embryos must not be pursued.
 - c. Any fertility treatments must not involve the freezing of an embryo.
 - d. Any fertility treatments must seek to preserve life.

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4. Four encouragements for couples considering ARTs

- a. Read
- b. Consider
- c. Meet
- d. Rest in Christ

ADOPTION

1. Parallels with salvation

“He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5).

“For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters” (Heb. 2:11).

“The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children,¹⁷ and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:16–17).

2. Issues to consider

- a. Motivation
- b. Biological tie

3. Embryo adoption

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Pray for each other; listen to one another; talk to one another.

“Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).

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2. Recognize God's sovereignty and goodness in all things.

"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

3. Look forward to eternity.

"For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25).

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read the appendix of Frequently Asked Questions attached to this lesson.

APPENDIX: FAQs

(Adapted from CHBC's Core Seminar Lesson)

What is infertility?

The National Infertility Association defines “infertility” as the “inability to conceive after one year of unprotected intercourse (six months if the woman is over age 35) or the inability to carry a pregnancy to live birth.” They say that one in eight couples (12.5 percent) in the U.S. are affected by infertility; the Mayo Clinic suggests it may be as high as one in six (17 percent). So whether it's ever been a subject of conversation for you and a friend or not, you know people who have struggled (or are struggling) with this trial.

What other uses may there be for Assistive Reproductive Technologies (ARTs)?

Or, this technology might not even be used for infertility treatments but to let people think they have a variety of options in front of them. For example, a single woman in her late 30s may choose to get a sperm donor and have her own baby. Or, a gay couple could use it to have children.

What are other reasons why freezing an embryo may be wrong?

As humans, we can never predict the future and cannot guarantee that any such embryos will be transferred, even with best intentions – there are a number of situations that can arise: pregnancy with the first batch of embryos can be difficult and create health concerns for future pregnancies, or advanced age can make it more hazardous to the wife to bear the child. There are so many things that can happen that we should not presume that we know what is best for a life.

The process of freezing and unfreezing an embryo is inherently risky – it is getting better but still only about 90% viability, which means that 10% of the time, an embryo will die.

What's another example where clinics may recommend the willful destruction of embryos?

Clinics may recommend the willful destruction of embryos after they are frozen. If the couple decides later that they don't want to transfer these embryos, they face the dilemma of what to do with these embryos. Some may just let them thaw and therefore die while others may seek to donate them to research. Also, fertility clinics may push couples to conduct genetic testing of embryos as part of IVF treatments. Preimplantation Genetic Testing (PGD) is a screening test that

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can be conducted on embryos prior to transfer to determine the genetic health of the embryos. From the world's perspective, this can help couples weed out embryos with genetic abnormalities. For the Christian, there is nothing inherently sinful about the testing itself. However, if genetic testing reveals genetic abnormalities in an embryo, the clinic will strongly encourage the couple to discard that embryo. From a Christian perspective, trusting God with the health of embryos avoids the dilemma of what to do if genetic testing reveals a problem.

What might happen to surplus embryos?

We have been talking about surplus embryos. But what if they aren't needed in the future, either because the couple has the child they have desired or because those embryos, after undergoing genetic testing, aren't deemed to have "high development potential?" Couples may keep them frozen indefinitely. The decision to stop freezing an embryo can be gut wrenching so keeping the embryos frozen is a way to postpone the decision. As a result (as of 10 years ago—I couldn't find any more recent data), there is a surplus of these embryos scattered in fertility clinics around the US estimated at 400,000 embryos. Thankfully, embryo adoption is becoming more common. Embryo adoption is when couples, after going through IVF, decide their families are complete, have extra frozen embryos, and donate their remaining embryos to those who desire more children. It's basically adoption that occurs with embryos instead of after babies are born. The woman would undergo a frozen embryo transfer (FET) to transfer the adopted embryo to her uterus. If she becomes pregnant, things pretty much proceed like any other pregnancy. As with other forms of adoption, there are various ways to pursue embryo adoption. From legal and financial perspectives, embryo adoption is much simpler and cheaper than other forms of adoption.

Why people might not agree

First, it can be an emotional topic. Infertility has been around since the beginning of the world; in Genesis, Rachel says to Jacob, "Give me children or else I die" – and the desire for children, which is a good desire, is arguably the strongest desire that we as human beings have.

Second, Christians disagree on these topics. You'll find believers with different opinions. My call for us is for us to be gracious and to love other members even if we disagree. That being said, I am grateful that on the essentials, there is much agreement and we can be thankful for that.

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Third, the world provides very skewed thoughts on this topic. Distorted ideas about life bleed into this discussion on ARTs. Infertility treatment specialists are incentivized to make you use whatever treatment is possible in order to have a baby. Fertility clinics also report statistics of success to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, so it's in their best interest to make you go through all the fertility treatments. Any advice a treatment center gives needs to be weighed against a Biblical worldview. If you table your cynicism, then you might say their highest goal is help you have a child. As Christians, our highest goal is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Those are different goals that may lead to a very different set of decisions.

Fourth, it's good to note that we living in America are living in one of the most unregulated countries in the world when it comes to ARTs. For example, whereas countries such as Sweden and the UK have legal restrictions to the number of embryos that can be transferred to the women's uterus, America has none. That means that fertility clinics in the US are more likely to adopt an anything goes approach to fertility treatments than even in other places in the world.

“Birds and bees” question?

Let me briefly give you a description of what needs to happen for childbirth. Typically, every month or so, a woman ovulates, that is, releases an egg. The egg lives in her uterus for 12–24 hours, during which time if a sperm fertilizes it, a life starts. This is called conception. As the fertilized egg, called a zygote, grows, it becomes an embryo. For the next 9 months or so, the embryo grows into what's called a fetus and a baby is born. That's if everything goes well.

Why is private adoption not recommended?

Legally risky. Easy to fall through. Birth parents can take adoptive parents' medical support for months and then decide to parent. Also no counseling. No support system. No guidance. Emotional minefield. Also easy to make legal mistakes that could bring the validity of the adoption into question

If later a birth parent claims they signed away their rights under duress there is no agency to rebut the claim or document that everything was done properly.

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What about adopting a child from a different ethnicity?

In Christ there is no Jew or Gentile and we should be open to it. At the same time, I personally think that adopting a child of a different ethnicity requires the parents to understand potential challenges that the child may uniquely experience given his or her ethnic background.

What was Asherah?

Basically, worship of a fertility goddess involved doing things for her that, in return, would lead to fertility broadly defined, from pregnancy and childbirth to also having a good crop harvest. It is incredible how persistent this worship of Asherah was – it basically tracks the whole history of the nation of Israel, from the time of Moses through Gideon and the kings, both in the nations of Israel and in Judah. Even after the exile, the people of Israel still persisted in serving Asherah (see Micah).

How is the timing for adoption?

In some instances, domestic adoption is faster than international adoption, but there are many variables for both.

What other considerations are there for domestic adoption?

Domestic adoption sometimes has what is called “open adoption” where there is on-going contact with the birth parents and associated on-going obligations. There is also wide variety among open adoptions. Most domestic adoptions today involve some degree of openness.

Should singles adopt?

We believe that the Biblical model is for a child to be raised by a married man and woman. There are lots of ways singles can care for the widow and the orphan (e.g., mentoring a child who does not have one or both parents, supporting/sponsoring a child through a responsible organization or supporting work that helps keep children in their families such as anti-trafficking organizations). Singles can also help support adoption by helping a couple in the adoption process or by helping them care for the child.

SINGLENES AND MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

THE GIFT OF SINGLENES

1. What is the "gift" of singleness?

"For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs who were made by men, and there are eunuchs who have **made themselves that way** because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept it should accept it" (Matt. 19:12).

"I wish that all people were as I am. But each has his own **gift from God**, one person has this gift, another has that. 8 I say to the unmarried and to widows: It is good for them if they remain as I am. 9 But if they do not have self-control, they should marry, since it is better to marry than to burn with desire" (1 Cor. 7:7–9).

"I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but to promote what is proper and so that you may be **devoted to the Lord without distraction**" (1 Cor. 7:35).

The gift of singleness is an unusual, Spirit-given contentment with being unmarried, such that a person is freely led to choose the state of being single for the sake of undivided devotion to Christ and ministry.

2. Why would anyone choose singleness?

a. Opportunity to devote greater and more undistracted attention to ministry (1 Cor. 7:35).

b. Opportunity to display certain truths more brightly (Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 106).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 19

3. The “gift” of singleness often misunderstood by

- a. Assuming that anyone who is single has the “gift” of singleness
- b. Viewing singleness as inherently *superior* to marriage

“Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 3 They forbid marriage . . .” (1 Tim. 4:1–3).

- c. Viewing singleness as *necessary* for pastoral ministry

“Don’t we have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife like the other apostles, the Lord’s brothers, and Cephas?” (1 Cor. 9:5).

4. How do you know whether or not you should pursue a life of singleness?

“One way to know, then, whether or not a person may be called to singleness is to see whether or not they can exercise self-control and remain sexually pure (1 Cor 7:9) [also 7:37]. Beyond this, there is no substitute for following God’s personal step-by-step leading through the Holy Spirit; and one’s understanding of one’s own calling will of necessity be provisional, since it is impossible to know what God might have in store for someone in the future” (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 389 n. 21).

“Not only is celibacy a divine gift, it is also a divine calling that is both limited to a select few and freely chosen rather than foisted upon the individual by his or her circumstances or condition” (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 178).

“While singleness is a positive condition in which Christians are free to remain if they are unmarried, especially if they are so gifted, it is wrong to expect someone to adopt a life of singleness against their will” (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 178).

“Singleness should be recognized as a gift for the select few that holds significant advantages for ministry, but it is neither intrinsically superior nor inferior to the institution of marriage (Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family*, 182).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 19

THE TRIAL OF SINGLENESS

1. In every trial we face God calls us to place our trust in him in the midst of our suffering.

“You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials 7 so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6–7).

“Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas. 1:2–4).

2. Is there something you should be learning or growing in while in the face of this trial?

- a. Spiritual maturity
- b. Social maturity
- c. Relational wisdom
- d. Unreasonable standards

3. Pursue purity.

“Don’t let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

SINGLES AND MARRIEDS TOGETHER IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

“Then Peter said, “Look, we have left what we had and followed you.” 29 So he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers or sisters, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come” (Luke 18:28–30).

“Don’t rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters with all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

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Lesson 19

“How members of the church relate to each other as married and single will witness to the world that our lives are oriented on the supremacy of Christ and that our relationships are defined not just by nature, but by Christ” (Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, 117).

Question: What are some of the things we would want to see in the life of the church in terms of the way singles and families relate in the congregation?

1. Not age/life-stage graded in our life together

- Small groups
- Ministry service

2. Families showing hospitality to singles / Singles showing hospitality to families

- Meals
- Holidays

3. Remember there are a variety of single people

- Widows and widowers
- Divorced
- Those who are single by choice
- Those who want to be married

4. Remember marriage is not the final destination for any of us.

“Jesus told them, “The children of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are counted worthy to take part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Luke 20:34–35).

SINGLENESSE FROM CREATION TO THE FINAL STATE²

	CREATION	OT	NT	FINAL STATE
SINGLENESSE	Non-existent	Uncommon and generally undesirable	Advantageous for kingdom ministry	Universal
MARRIAGE	The norm	The norm	The norm	No marriage

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read “Can This Marriage Be Saved?” by Jim Elliff at bulletininserts.org/can-this-marriage-be-saved
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²Andreas Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, & Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 198.

THE DIFFICULTY OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

The impact of divorce on our society

- In our neighborhoods
- In our schools
- In our churches

The impact of divorce on us personally

Sobering topic . . .

- Because of how widespread divorce has become
- Because of the depth of sorrow and pain and anger and shame and difficulty divorce brings
- Because of the way divorce so drastically misrepresents the faithful and enduring love of Christ for his people

There is grace and forgiveness available in Christ!

GOD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

"So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female" (Gen. 1:27).

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him' . . . 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:18–25).

God's original design for marriage was a permanent, covenant commitment between one man and one woman.

The essential elements constituting a marriage:

1. **Leaving**—Steps out from own family.
2. **Cleaving**—Covenant promises to live as husband and wife in a new family.
3. **"One-flesh" union**—Consummated by sexual union, though it is more than this.

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 20

THE ENTRANCE OF SIN

“The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:6–7).

“He said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children with painful effort. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you” (Gen. 3:16).

DIVORCE TOLERATED AND REGULATED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

“If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, he may write her a divorce certificate, hand it to her, and send her away from his house. 2 If after leaving his house she goes and becomes another man’s wife, 3 and the second man hates her, writes her a divorce certificate, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house or if he dies, 4 the first husband who sent her away may not marry her again after she has been defiled, because that would be detestable to the Lord. You must not bring guilt on the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance” (Deut. 24:1–4).

Cf. also Lev 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num 30:9.

JESUS’ TEACHING ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

1. The Sermon on the Mount

“It was also said, **Whoever divorces his wife must give her a written notice of divorce.** 32 But I tell you, everyone who divorces his wife, except in a case of sexual immorality, *causes her to commit adultery*. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:31–32, CSB).

“It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, *makes her the victim of adultery*, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt. 5:31–32, NIV).

Biblical Marriage

Lesson 20

2. Jesus and the Pharisees

“Some Pharisees approached him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?” 4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that he who created them in the beginning made them male and female, 5 and he also said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 7 “Why then,” they asked him, “did Moses command us to give divorce papers and to send her away?” 8 He told them, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because of the hardness of your hearts, but it was not like that from the beginning. 9 I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt. 19:3–9).

“Some Pharisees came to test him, asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3 He replied to them, “What did Moses command you?” 4 They said, “Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away.” 5 But Jesus told them, “He wrote this command for you because of the hardness of your hearts 6 But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. 7 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother 8 and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 10 When they were in the house again, the disciples questioned him about this matter. 11 He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. 12 Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:2–12).

“Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and everyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery” (Luke 16:18).

1. God’s design for marriage is a permanent covenant relationship.

2. God unites people in marriage.

3. People do not have the liberty to dissolve this union.

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ARE THERE ANY BIBLICAL GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE?

Are there any circumstances where God sanctions the decision to divorce, such that a person is in his eyes released from their obligations of marriage to their former spouse and, by implication, is also free to remarry a different person?

1. Adultery

“I tell you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery” (Matt. 19:9).

2. Abandonment by an unbeliever

a. Guidelines for Christians married to other Christians

“To the married I give this command—not I, but the Lord—a wife is not to leave her husband. 11 But if she does leave, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10–11).

b. Guidelines for Christians married to unbelievers who want to stay

“But I (not the Lord) say to the rest: If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13 Also, if any woman has an unbelieving husband and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce her husband. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy by the husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:12–14).

c. Guidelines for Christians married to unbelievers who want to leave

“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him leave. A brother or a sister is not bound in such cases. God has called you to live in peace. 16 Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife” (1 Cor. 7:15–16).

“A wife is bound as long as her husband is living. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to anyone she wants—only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39).

LOVING THE DIVORCED (OR THOSE CONTEMPLATING IT)

1. Come alongside.

2. Speak the truth to keep it from happening.

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON

- Read the 2019 FBC Shepherding Statement “Divorce and Remarriage” attached to this lesson.

APPENDIX: DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The pastoral leadership at First Baptist Church (FBC) is committed to the living, active, inerrant, and inspired Word of God. And so, we believe that the Bible dictates and governs our lives and cultural practices, NOT the other way around.

A central aim of our ministry is to glorify God by accurately imparting and teaching the full counsel of scripture to those of First Baptist Church. This positional paper intends to define, according to our careful study of the scriptures, FBC's position on divorce and remarriage and how we will counsel and shepherd the body at First Baptist in this area.

1. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:13–16). God hates divorce and, therefore, this is our foundational premise that shapes our view on divorce. It is rare when we see the word hate attributed to God's view of someone or something in Scripture so we take this phrase in Malachi seriously.

It is our view that God's best and highest plan for all marriages is to stay married as one flesh because He hates divorce and He intends for marriage to be a lifelong covenant; moreover, His over flowing grace can restore any marriage regardless of the situation.

Yet, we believe there are two allowances for divorce in scripture as an accommodation to man's sin. However, since divorce is only a concession to man's sin (Matthew 19:5–9) and is not a part of God's original plan for marriage or even advised, all believers considering divorce should have the same attitude toward divorce as God does and see it as a violation of God's expressed purpose for marriage.

2. The only biblical grounds for divorce are (1) fornication (any sinful sexual activity, including adultery—unfaithfulness of a marriage partner), or (2) a nonbelieving partner who initiates the divorce due to incompatibility with a Christian.

The first is unrepentant fornication (*porneia*), which seems to cover a wide area of sexual activity such as adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and incest (Matt. 5:32; Mk. 19:9; 1 Cor. 5:1). Adultery will take place even after the “official” dissolution of the marriage if the divorce is on nonbiblical grounds (Matt. 5:32; Mk. 10:11,12).

The second reason for permitting a divorce is in cases where a nonbelieving spouse refuses to live with his or her believing spouse, especially because of his or her Christian testimony (1 Cor. 7:12–15). This passage gives a passive allowance or freedom for the believer when the unbeliever abandons the marriage not a proactive directive, advisement, or permission to pursue divorce. A believer should not assist in the initiation or furtherment of the abandonment or divorce by the unbeliever.

It is essential to keep in mind that the Bible merely permits divorce in these limited circumstances but never commands divorce. (This is clearly indicated in Hosea 1–3, where the adulterous wife is forgiven and restored.) We believe that although divorce may be an option under these two circumstances,

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God's highest and best resolution is the reconciliation and restoration of the marriage through repentance and forgiveness.

3. Remarriage is permitted for the innocent party when the divorce was on biblical grounds. In cases where a divorce was obtained between believers on nonbiblical grounds, the person who remarries commits "adultery" (Matt. 19:9) and the person who marries a person who was divorced on nonbiblical grounds also commits adultery (Lk. 16:18).

According to the Old Testament pattern, remarriage was allowed after the divorce (the exception is found in Deut. 24:1–4). The New Testament allows for remarriage when the divorce was based upon biblical grounds (1 Cor. 7:15). In cases where the divorce was not for the two reasons stated above, the believer is exhorted to (1) seek for reconciliation, or else (2) remain unmarried (1 Cor. 7:10–11).

4. Believers who pursue divorce on nonbiblical grounds are subject to church discipline because they openly reject the Word of God. In the case that an unbiblical divorce and remarriage has occurred, the parties should repent and seek forgiveness in an appropriate fashion (i.e. by seeking counsel of the pastor(s) – Hebrews 13:17). In the case that there are those seeking an unbiblical divorce or marriage, church restoration and discipline will be applied out of a heart to love them to genuine repentance and restoration (Galatians 6:1–2; 1 Corinthians 5, Matthew 18).

5. Salvation means that a person begins a new life. Though God's moral laws apply to believer and unbeliever alike, and all held accountable to it, the repentant believer enjoys the incredible forgiveness of his sin.

According to 2 Cor. 5:17, the believer has become a "new creature" when he or she accepts Christ as personal Savior, where one's past sin no longer describes him (Eph. 2:1–2; Col 2:13; Gal. 5:16–25). This does not mean there are no consequences of past sin that may be felt the rest of one's life, that Christ immediately erases painful memories, bad habits, or the underlying causes for past marital problems, but that He begins a process of transformation through the Holy Spirit and the Word. A sign of saving faith will be a receptivity and a willingness to obey what Christ has revealed about marriage and divorce through the Word.

The Apostle Paul's counsel in 1 Cor. 7:20–28 is that a believer is to see every circumstance that they are in as from God. And yet Paul gives his opinion as well in light of the present persecution. If they were called while married, they are not to seek a divorce / be "released" (except on the grounds given in Matt. 5:32, 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:12–16). If they were called while divorced, stay single, but if they marry (remarry) they are free to do so and it is not sin (remarried to another believer / 1 Cor. 7:29; 2 Cor. 6:14).

6. In cases where divorce took place on nonbiblical grounds and where the guilty party repents, the grace of God is operative at the point of repentance. It is assumed that the repentant party will endeavor to restore the marriage whenever possible as a sign of true repentance.

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In other words, where two believers were divorced on nonbiblical grounds, the grace of God becomes operative at the point of repentance and confession, and they can once again experience the joy of their relationship with Christ and their mate.

A true sign of repentance will be a desire to implement 1 Cor. 7:11. This involves a willingness to remain unmarried or else to be reconciled to their mate.

In cases where a believer obtained a divorce on nonbiblical grounds and remarried, the second marriage union is recognized as living in “adultery” (Mk. 10:11–12). If repentance takes place, it is recognized that to obtain a second divorce would disobey Scripture (Deut. 24:1–4). Hence, they are to remain in the second marriage.

7. The church has a responsibility to uphold the biblical ideal of marriage, especially as exemplified by its leadership. In cases where there has been a divorce in a person’s past, the church has an obligation to consider his qualification based on the general requirement of “blameless/above reproach” that could disqualify him on a number of fronts, including divorce. 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 sets the marital qualification for leadership within the church. The phrase “the husband of one wife” does not mean that a person cannot have had a divorce in his past since none of the other qualifications listed refer to specific acts in the past (prior to salvation or subsequent to salvation) but rather to qualities which currently characterize a man’s life.

It is especially important, in cases where there has been a divorce in a man’s past, that there be a period of careful observation to see that his present marriage is characterized by devotion and sacrificial love exemplified by Christ’s relationship to His church.

THE END OF THE DREAM

INTRODUCTION

Why consider this material?

- Your future might include these challenges.
- Others you love will face these things.
- We must keep mortality in view if we are to enjoy marriage as Jesus intends.

DIVORCE

God despises divorce (Mal. 2:16) as someone who knows this pain personally (Jer. 3:7–8).

“This is another thing you do. You are covering the Lord’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because he no longer respects your offerings or receives them gladly from your hands. 14 And you ask, “Why?” Because even though the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, you have acted treacherously against her. She was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant. 15 Didn’t God make them one and give them a portion of spirit? What is the one seeking? Godly offspring. So watch yourselves carefully, so that no one acts treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16 “If he hates and divorces his wife,” says the Lord God of Israel, “he covers his garment with injustice,” says the Lord of Armies. Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously” (Mal. 2:13–16).

“I thought, ‘After she has done all these things, she will return to me.’ But she didn’t return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 I observed that it was because unfaithful Israel had committed adultery that I had sent her away and had given her a certificate of divorce. Nevertheless, her treacherous sister Judah was not afraid but also went and prostituted herself” (Jer. 3:7–8).

1. What is divorce?

Biblically: the public and formal acknowledgement that the one-flesh union has been broken and the marriage covenant dissolved.

2. Why does God oppose divorce?

- a. Because God is a covenant-keeping God (Mal. 2:14).
- b. Because one of God’s purposes for marriage is to produce godly offspring (Mal. 2:15).
- c. Because divorce destroys a picture of God (Matt. 19:1–9).

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3. When does God allow for divorce?

When divorce would be a formal recognition that the marriage covenant has been broken.

Examples in Scripture:

- Sexual immorality (Matt. 19:9)
- Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:15)
- Neglect (Exod. 21:10–11)

Applying biblical teaching on divorce to an individual's situation requires a great deal of judgment and should always be done under submission to one's church, led by one's elders.

DISILLUSIONMENT

Our culture's answer: admit "irreconcilable differences" and divorce.

The pain of a difficult marriage.

God's purpose for us to portray his goodness is not undone by a difficult marriage.

"In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the word, they may be won over without a word by the way their wives live 2 when they observe your pure, reverent lives. 3 Don't let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry or fine clothes, 4 but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 5 For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also adorned themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands, 6 just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation" (1 Pet. 3:1–6).

Two ways our lives show off the goodness and glory of God:

- Thankful enjoyment when things are going well

"For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4).

- Joyful trust when things are difficult

"Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

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1. Reasons for hope in a difficult marriage

- *God will use all things for our good—no matter the source of the difficulty.*

“For they disciplined us for a short time based on what seemed good to them, but he does it for our benefit, so that we can share his holiness. 11 No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:10–11).

- *Faith-filled perseverance in love is deeply precious to God.*

“You yourself have recorded my wanderings. Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?” (Ps. 56:8).

- *God will provide all that we need.*

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you” (1 Pet. 5:6–7).

- *God may choose to intervene in this life.*

“Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife” (1 Cor. 7:16).

2. Ways to help those in a difficult marriage

- *Persistent prayer and friendship*
- *Understanding*
- *Encourage their faith*

“And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works” (Heb. 10:24).

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DEATH

"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, since that is the end of all mankind, and the living should take it to heart" (Eccl. 7:2).

How does this consideration change a marriage for the better?

1. Reminds us that we are stewards, not owners.

"A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. 2 In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:1–2).

One purpose of marriage is "to prepare each other for the approach of death, and comfort each other in the hopes of life eternal" (Richard Baxter, *Works IV: 234, The Poor Man's Family Book*).

2. Reminds us to savor the gift of marriage right now.

"Enjoy life with the wife you love all the days of your fleeting life, which has been given to you under the sun, all your fleeting days. For that is your portion in life and in your struggle under the sun" (Eccl. 9:9).

3. Helps us to see the eternal beauty that God is working into your spouse.

a. *Changes how we view weakness*

"For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. 18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17–18).

b. *Grieving with hope*

"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

c. *Death reminds us that true love always points beyond itself, to the one who gave it.*

"Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty, reigns!' 7 Let us be glad, rejoice, and give him glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has prepared herself. 8 She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure. For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints. 9 Then he said to me, 'Write: Blessed are those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb!' He also said to me, 'These words of God are true' (Rev. 19:6–9).

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“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride adorned for her husband. 3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away” (Rev. 21:1–4).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

MARRIAGE—GENERAL TITLES

- *When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage* by Dave Harvey
- *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* by Timothy and Kathy Keller
- *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* by John Piper
- *Love That Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace* by Gary and Betsy Ricucci
- *Marriage Matters: Extraordinary Change Through Ordinary Moments* by Winston T. Smith
- *The Intimate Marriage: A Practical Guide to Building a Great Marriage* by R. C. Sproul
- *Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make* by Paul David Tripp

MARRIAGE—SPECIFIC TITLES

Purpose of Marriage

- *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* by Andreas Köstenberger and David Jones
- *Building Strong Families*, Dennis Rainey & Wayne Grudem (ed.)

Pattern of Marriage

- *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* by Carolyn Mahaney
- *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective* by Martha Peace
- *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding* by Lou Priolo
- *The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective* by Stuart Scott

Practice of Marriage

- *Date Your Wife* by Justin Buzzard
- *Practicing Affirmation: God-Centered Praise of Those Who Are Not God* by Sam Crabtree
- *Sexual Intimacy in Marriage* by William Cutrer and Sandra Glahn
- *The Christian Lover: The Sweetness of Love and Marriage in the Letters of Believers* by Michael A. G. Haykin
- *Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs to Know* by C. J. Mahaney
- *Resolving Conflict: How to Make, Disturb, and Keep Peace* by Lou Priolo
- *Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home* by Ken Sande
- *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles* by Paul David Tripp
- *The Marriage Challenge: A Finance Guide for Married Couples* by Art Rainer
- *Family Money Matters* by John Temple

Phases of Marriage

- *Walking through Infertility: Biblical, Theological, and Moral Counsel for Those Who Are Struggling* by Matthew Arbo
- *Tying the Knot: A Premarital Guide to a Strong and Lasting Marriage* by Rob Green
- *Your Family, God's Way: Developing and Sustaining Relationships in the Home* by Wayne Mack
- *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* by Russell Moore
- *Fighting for Your Marriage While Separated: A Practical Guide for the Brokenhearted* by Linda W. Rooks
- *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God's Way* by Winston T. Smith



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