

Cultivating a Christ-Centered Marriage

Oak Park Marriage Retreat

Guest Teacher: Dr. Robert Jones

February 11-12, 2022



**Oak Park
Baptist Church**

Welcome!

Thank you for being here! If you're reading this, it means you are committing to *Cultivating a Christ-Centered Marriage*! Watching the registrations roll in for this event has been a great joy over the last few weeks as I consider the potential impact on our marriages and our church family. I have been praying for each of us that God would use this event to encourage, strengthen, and bless our marriages.

As the basic building blocks of our church family, the healthier our marriages are, the healthier our homes, families, and church will be as we carry out the work God has given us to be salt and light in this world. Marriage was designed by God to picture the relationship between Jesus Christ and His bride, the church. As our marriages are strengthened, so our witness to a watching world will be.

It is a great joy to have Dr. Robert and Mrs. Lauren Jones with us for this retreat. Dr. Jones brings with him nineteen years of experience as a local church pastor, almost twenty years experience as a professor of biblical counseling, and as of a couple weeks ago, thirty-eight years experience in his own marriage to his sweet wife Lauren. If you have been attending our *Peacemaking* classes, you are already familiar with the breadth of biblical wisdom Dr. Jones brings with him. Join me in praying for him and Lauren as he leads us in *Cultivating* our marriages into greater Christ-Centeredness.

Lastly and briefly, a few thanks are in order. First, I would like to thank Allison Preston for her vision for an Oak Park Marriage Retreat and her patience as she waited for our men to take the lead in its undertaking. Secondly, I would like to thank the Oak Park Men's Ministry and Oak Park Women's Ministry Leadership Teams for their hard work in making this event happen. Lastly, I would like to thank our Deacon of Men's Ministry, Kirby O'Brien, for his heart, vision, planning, and execution of this event. It's such a joy to co-labor alongside such faithful servants!

God bless our marriages,
Pastor Brian

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Schedule

Friday, February 11:

6:40pm – Dinner
7:20pm – Welcome
7:45pm – Session 1
8:45pm – Dismissal

Saturday, February 12:

8:30am – Doors Open/Breakfast
9:00am – Session 2
10:00am – Break
10:30am – Session 3
11:30am – Q&A
Noon – Dismissal

Bookstore

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Session 1
Building a Christ-centered Marriage
Robert D. Jones

A. Understanding God’s View of Marriage¹

1. Marriage is a God-ordained, lifelong, covenantal, one-flesh union of a man and a woman

- God-ordained (Gen 1–2)
- Lifelong (Matt 19:3–6)
- Covenantal (Prov 2:17; Mal 2:14)
- One-flesh union of one man and one woman (Gen 1-2)

2. God created and _____ marriage

Genesis 1:26–27, 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.²

Genesis 1:28, 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.”

Genesis 2:18, Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him.”

Genesis 2:19–23

Genesis 2:24, This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

3. Genesis 2:24 gives us the essence of marriage and provides the _____ for all marriages.

The essence: the _____-_____ union

The pattern for all marriages—the four generations of Genesis 2:24

B. Four Perspectives for Building a Christ-Centered Marriage³

What does it mean to have a Christ-centered marriage?

¹ For an excellent, readable summary of a biblical view of marriage, see Andreas Köstenberger, with David Jones, *Marriage and the Family: Biblical Essentials*. Crossway, 2012.

² All Bible quotes are from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), unless otherwise noted.

³ I adapted the idea for section from Jay E. Adams, *Christian Living in the Home*, 9-13.

1. A Christ-centered marriage is a union of two believers _____.

All people have sinned and continue to sin (Eccl 7:20; Isa 53:6; Rom 3:9–20, 23), including Christians (1 Tim. 1:15; James. 3:2; 1 Peter 2:11; 1 John 1:8, 10).

While “sinner” is no longer our fundamental identity as Christians—we are sons and daughters of the living God—sin remains and continues to hamper and plague us.

This means the root causes of marriage problems are not, for example:

- ◇ Past abuse, dysfunctional families of origin.
- ◇ Present mistreatment, spousal failure, abuse, neglect, unmet needs.
- ◇ Situational pressures—children, in-laws, job problems, financial problems, school pressures.
- ◇ Sinful influences, bad friends, secular humanism, worldly media.
- ◇ Diseases, injuries, disabilities.
- ◇ The devil, inhabiting demons.

These factors influence us and make it harder to build a Christ-centered marriage. But they are not _____ or determinative factors.

Instead, the root cause of marriage (and family) problems is _____.

Genesis 1–2 → Genesis 3–4

Happy are they who, in the matter of marriage, observe three rules. The first is to marry only in the Lord, and after prayer for God’s approval and blessing. The second is not to expect too much from their partners, and to remember that marriage is, after all, the union of two sinners, and not of two angels. The third rule is to strive first and foremost for one another’s sanctification.⁴

When sinful people live in the same world, and especially when they work in the same office or sleep in the same bed, they sin against each other. Troubles arise. Some of those troubles are very serious and not subject to easy solutions. God knows all about them and knew about them long before they happened. He made provision for them.⁵

2. A Christ-centered marriage is a union of two believers who _____ their sins.

As Christians we confess our sins—to God (1 John 1:8–9; James 4:6; Ps 32:1-5; Prov 28:13) and to each other (Matt 5:23–24; Acts 24:16) 1

What keeps us from more quickly and thoroughly confessing our sins to God and others?

Luke 18:9–14, He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a

⁴ J. C. Ryle (1816–1900), *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Mark* (1857), 200.

⁵ Elizabeth Elliot, *Trusting God in a Twisted World* (Revell, 1989), 96

tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven but kept striking his chest and saying, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Warning:

*James 4:6, But he gives greater grace. Therefore he says:
“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

3. A Christ-centered marriage is a union of two believers who find _____ for their sins in Jesus Christ and who _____ that forgiveness to each other.

1) Forgiveness received from _____.

God’s forgiveness is his decision, declaration, and promise to not hold our sins against us, on account of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:7; Col 1:13-14; 2:13-14; 3:13-14; Heb 6:13–20; 8:12).⁶

2) Forgiveness extended to _____ other.

Colossians 3:12–14, 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.

When you forgive your spouse, like God, you decide, declare, and promise to not hold your spouse’s sins against him (or her).⁷

Matthew 18:21–35

No one, including your spouse, has ever sinned against you as much as _____ God.

Yet God in Christ has forgiven you fully. We must do the same.

⁶ Also consider the many word pictures of God’s forgiveness in the Bible: Ps 103:8-12; 130:3-4; Isa 1:18; 38:17; 43:25; 44:22; Jer 31:31-34; 50:20; Mic 7:18-20. For a summary of the Bible’s view of forgiveness, including a brief exposition and application of these verses, see my book, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide for Handling Our Conflicts* (Crossway, 2012), chapters 7–8.

⁷ Throughout the conference notes, I will often use the pronouns he, his, and him in a generic sense.

4. A Christ-centered marriage is a union of two believers who are making progress in _____ their sins and in being and doing what _____ wants them to be and do.

God in grace has made us new in Christ (2 Cor 5:17; Phil 2:1-5; Col 3:1-4, 12-14) and gives us help and hope to change, grow, and become like Christ (Eph 4:17-32; 2 Peter 1:3-10; Col 2:3, 8-10).

Our foundation for growth is our _____ and _____ with Jesus our Redeemer.

Philippians 2:1-5, 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. ⁵ Adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. . . .

God's provisions for our personal and marital growth

1) God's _____ (Rom 8:11-14; 15:13; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 3:16-17)

- *2 Corinthians 3:18, We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.*
- *Ephesians 3:16-17, I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love,*

⇒ Pray as a couple, even briefly, at key points in your day for God's Spirit to help you.

2) God's _____ (Psalm 1:1-2; 19:7-8; 119; 2 Tim 3:14-17)

- *Psalm 19:7-8, The instruction of the LORD is perfect, renewing one's life; the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, making the heart glad; the command of the LORD is radiant, making the eyes light up.*
- *2 Timothy 3:16-17, All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

⇒ Find a regular time at least weekly to read the Bible together and to share an observation or application that helped you, comforted you, challenged you, etc.⁸

3) God's _____ (Rom 15:14; Eph 4:7-16; Col 3:16; Heb 3:12-13; 10:24-25)

- *Colossians 3:16, 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.*

⁸ Resources for couple's Bible reading: David Helm, *One to One Bible Reading* (Matthias Media, 2010); Kerry Ptacek, "Getting Started: The Biblical Elements of Family Worship" (<http://www.graceonlinelibrary.org/home-family/family-worship/getting-started-the-biblical-elements-of-family-worship-by-kerry-ptacek/>); Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship: In the Bible, In History and in Your Home*. (The Center for Biblical Spirituality, 2006).

- *Hebrews 3:12–13, Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.¹³ But encourage each other daily, while it is still called "today," so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception.*
- *Hebrews 10:24–25, And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.*

⇒ Besides the usual personal and corporal means of grace (e.g., spiritual disciplines like Bible reading and prayer, worship, preaching, fellowship, small group life), consider ways to connect more deeply with another Christian couple or two. Perhaps host them for a meal or dessert and include a time to share your testimonies, to read some Scripture, and prayer.

Discussion Questions:

1. What truth(s) in this session helped you, encouraged you, or challenged you?
2. What hardships have you or your spouse faced, or are you now facing, that might tempt you to excuse your sins or might rob you of the hope of change?
3. In what ways has God's Spirit, God's Word, or God's church helped you in recent months in you and your spouse to have a more Christ-centered marriage? What further steps can you take?

**Session 2:
Growing Your Marriage through Christ-Centered Communication**

Introduction

1) The essence of marriage is a one-flesh relationship marked by oneness and relational intimacy

Genesis 2:24, This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife, and they become one flesh.

2) Growth in marital oneness requires godly communication

3) Godly communication involves both godly _____ and godly _____

A. The Starting Point in Godly Communication: Your Heart

Like all behavior, Christlike communication comes from the _____

Proverbs 4:20–24, My son, pay attention to my words; listen closely to my sayings. ²¹ Don't lose sight of them; keep them within your heart. ²² For they are life to those who find them, and health to one's whole body. ²³ Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life. ²⁴ Don't let your mouth speak dishonestly, and don't let your lips talk deviously.

Matthew 12:33–34, "Either make the tree good and its fruit will be good, or make the tree bad and its fruit will be bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil? For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.

Matthew 15:17–19, "Don't you realize that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander."

Principles and Implications:

1. Your mouth _____ what your heart believes and _____

2. You can use your ears and mouth to serve you or to serve God and your _____.

3. God's Solution? Change your _____

Joel 2:12–13, Even now—this is the LORD's declaration—turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. ¹³ Tear your hearts, not just your clothes, and return to the LORD your God. For

he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and he relents from sending disaster.

Hebrews 4:12–16, *For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*¹³ *No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.*

¹⁴ *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to our confession.*¹⁵ *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.*¹⁶ *Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.*

B. Listening to Your Spouse in Christ-like Ways

1. The three Persons within the Godhead listen to _____ (John 8:26; 11:41–42; 14:24; 16:13)
2. God listens to ____, his _____ (Genesis 16:7–14; Exodus 2:23–25; 3:7–9; Psalm 10: 17; 34:15 – 18; 116:1–2; Isaiah 59:1; 1 Peter 3:12)

Exodus 2:23–25, *After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out, and their cry for help because of the difficult labor ascended to God.*²⁴ *God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.*²⁵ *and God saw the Israelites, and God knew.* [See also 3:7–9.]

Psalm 34:15–18, *The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry for help.*¹⁶ *The face of the LORD is set against those who do what is evil, to remove all memory of them from the earth.*¹⁷ *The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.*¹⁸ *The LORD is near the brokenhearted; he saves those crushed in spirit.* [Cited in 1 Peter 3:12]

Psalm 116:1–2, *I love the LORD because he has heard my appeal for mercy.*² *Because he has turned his ear to me, I will call out to him as long as I live.*

But Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work they should share. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
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3. God calls you to listen to _____ in godly ways:

Guideline #1: Listen _____ and attentively

James 1:19, *My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. . .*

Proverbs 18:2, A fool does not delight in understanding, but only wants to show off his opinions.
Proverbs 18:13, The one who gives an answer before he listens—this is foolishness and disgrace for him.
Proverbs 18:15, The mind of the discerning acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks it.
Proverbs 18:17, The first to state his case seems right until another comes and cross-examines him.
Matthew 7:12, Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Guideline #2: Listen _____ and compassionately

Exodus 2:23–25 (above)

Romans 12:15, Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.

1 Corinthians 12:26, So if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

C. Speaking to Our Spouse in Christ-like Ways

Four Qualities from Ephesians 4:25–5:2 (plus some footnoted Proverbs):

1) H _____ (4:25)⁹

Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another

➤ How can I _____ up my life to my spouse with my words?

2) B _____ (4:29)¹⁰

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.

➤ What words will best _____ to my spouse?

3) T _____ (4:29)¹¹

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.

➤ What words will best help my spouse at this _____?

⁹ See also *Proverbs 6:16–19; 12:17,19,22; 16:13; 19:9; 24:26; 26:18–19*

¹⁰ See also *Proverbs 10:11,20,21; 12:18; 27:5; 31:26,28–29.*

¹¹ See also *Proverbs 10:8,10,32; 15:23; 17:14,27,28; 25:20; 27:14.*

4) **K**_____ (4:31–5:2)¹²

³¹ *Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.*

³² *And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.*

➤ What words/tones will best convey _____ kindness?

Conclusion:

Is it really possible to learn to listen and speak in Christlike ways?

Discussion Questions:

1. What truth(s) in this session helped you, encouraged you, or challenged you?
2. What can you do to listen to your spouse more actively, attentively, caringly, and compassionately?
each of you do to speak more
3. What can you do to speak to your spouse in words that are more honest, beneficial, timely, and kind?
listen more actively, attentively, caringly, and compassionately? each of you do to speak more

¹² See also *Proverbs 12:25; 15:1,18; 16:21,24; 22:11; 24:29; 25:15.*

Communication Growth Activities for Couples

Structured Listening Sessions

Preparation

- 1) Schedule two or three listening sessions each week and allow 30–45 minutes per session to allow each spouse to talk. Select times when you will not be interrupted.
- 2) Decide the topic to discuss and who will go first. (Alternate who goes first each time thereafter.)
- 3) Begin by reading aloud one or more of these verses: James 1:19–20; Proverbs 18:13; 1 Peter 3:8, 12; Colossians 3:12–13. Then ask God help you to listen and speak to each other in Godlike ways.

Steps

- 1) Spouse A shares his (or her) concerns, opinions, desires, dreams, fears, etc., about the topic for 5–10 uninterrupted minutes. During this time, Spouse B listens according to the principles of godly listening. Spouse B may ask Spouse A clarifying questions solely to understand Spouse A.
- 2) Spouse B then summarizes back to Spouse A what Spouse B heard but Spouse B must not defend himself, explain his own view, or attack Spouse A.
- 3) Spouse A then affirms that Spouse B did or did not understand. Further clarification might be needed until this one, common goal is reached: that Spouse B believes he had heard Spouse A (even if Spouse B disagrees) and that Spouse A believes he has been understood by Spouse B.
- 4) Reverse roles and repeat the above three steps: Spouse B speaks and Spouse A listens.

Godly Speaking Activities

- 1) Study Proverbs 10 and 12 and write out all the verses pertaining to speech. Review daily, record your successes and failures, and evaluate patterns. Continue to repent, believe, and obey.
- 2) Memorize study, apply, record growth, etc. based on Ephesians 4:25–5:2 (or verses 25 or 29), combined with my four qualities above in 4:25–5:2.
- 3) Study the life of Jesus in the Gospels as your perfect model of godly speech. Consider this outline:
 - Words that refresh weary hearts (Isa 50:4; Matt 11:28-30)
 - Words that comfort grieving hearts (Luke 7:11-15; John 11:17-43)
 - Words that humble proud hearts (Matt 16:22–23; 23:1–39; Mark 10:13–16, 17–31, 35–45; Rev 2–3)
 - Words that instruct ignorant hearts (Isa 9:6; 11:2; John 3:1–15; 4:1–26)
 - Words that assure doubting or distressed hearts (Matt 12:18–20 [citing Isa. 42:1–3]; Luke 4:17–22 [citing Isa 61:1–3]; John 14–16 [e.g., 14:27; 16:33])
- 4) Read John 14–16 and record observations about Jesus’s words to his disciples. Consider the categories of honest, beneficial, timely, and kind.
- 5) Read (or audiobook) Paul David Tripp, *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles*

The Proverbs 10 & 12 Growing in Godly Speech Assignment

Robert D. Jones

Proverbs 10 and 12 provide two of the richest deposits of biblical teaching about your speech. The following steps will help you identify your tongue sins and replace them with godly speech:

Step #1 -- Read Proverbs 10 and 12 in one sitting. Ask God to make you more conscious of godly and the sinful aspects of your speech.

Step #2 -- Re-read Proverbs 10 and 12. On a separate sheet or separate document, write out or type every verse that speaks about speech (tongue, mouth, etc.).

Step #3 -- Based on Proverbs 10 and 12, list three specific forms of *sinful* speech you most need to get rid of (put off) and three specific forms of *godly* speech you most need to develop (put on). Under each, write a key verse or phrase from Proverbs 10 or 12 that you can meditate on or memorize.

Sinful Speech to Put Off

1. _____
Verse:

2. _____
Verse:

3. _____
Verse:

Godly Speech to Put On

1. _____
Verse:

2. _____
Verse:

3. _____
Verse:

Step #4 -- Keep a record or journal of your daily progress in putting off sinful speech and putting on godly speech. Note specific incidents of success and failure. If possible, include some journaling of your prayers to the Lord concerning this putting off/putting on process.

Reminder: Remember that your tongue will always speak what is in your heart (Luke 6:43-45; Matt 12:33-37; 15:16-20; Prov 4:23). Therefore, you must continually repent of the sinful desires, selfish motives, and unbiblical lies that fuel your tongue sins. And you must continually believe the gospel and the specific truths about God that will produce godly speech.

Session 3:
Handling Marriage Conflict in Christ-Centered Ways¹³
Robert D. Jones

Introduction

A. The Gospel and Biblical Peacemaking

Genesis 3:15 → Romans 16:20 (also Ezek 34:22–25; Eph 2:14-18; Heb 13:20–21)

Various aspects of God’s peacemaking work (seen in Romans)

- Vertical (Rom 5:1–2)
- Internal (Rom 8:6; 15:13)
- Horizontal (Rom 12:18; 14:19)
- Global (Rom 16:20)

B. Three Foundational Perspectives for Viewing Conflict:

1) Conflicts are inevitable; therefore _____ them.

2) Conflicts are sinful; therefore _____ them.

God calls us to resolve them actively, diligently, and quickly

(*Matt 5:23–25; 18:15; Acts 24:16; Rom 12:18; 14:19; Eph 4:3; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14*)

3) Conflicts are opportunities; therefore _____ them.

Three Steps in Pursuing Peace:
Step #1 – Please God
Step #2 – Repent (on heart and behavior levels)
Step #3 – Love

Step #1 – Please God

A. Meaning: (see chapter 3 in *Pursuing Peace*)

In response to God’s saving grace in Christ, to bring God delight by being and doing what God desires (2 *Cor 5:9, 14–15; 2 Tim 2:3–4; 1 Thess 4:1–2; Ps 19:14; Heb 13:20–21*)

¹³ This presentation overviews much of the content in my book, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Crossway, 2012).

2 Corinthians 5:9, Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to him.

2 Corinthians 5:14–15, For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.

B. Implications for Resolving Conflicts

- 1) Failure to please God is the ultimate _____ of all conflicts
- 2) This goal keeps your focus on _____, not on the issues or your spouse
- 3) In Christ, this goal is always _____, no matter how your spouse behaves.
- 4) This goal will _____ your efforts
- 5) God might _____ your efforts and bring about reconciliation
- 6) If you both please God, reconciliation is _____
- 7) Even if your spouse does not please God, _____ can experience God's blessing, favor, and comfort
- 8) You must continue your pleasing-God commitment, even if your spouse does not or even if the relationship gets _____
- 9) When this goal governs you, your spouse's bad habits, offenses, and failures become _____ not obstacles to please God and grow as a Christian.

Step #2 -- Repent

A. Heart Demands (see chapter 4 in *Pursuing Peace*)

James 4:1–3, 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. 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.

James addresses conflicts, especially their cause.

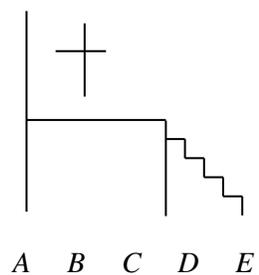
These conflict-causing desires are not necessarily desires for evil things but inordinate, ruling, warring desires for good things.

“I must have a _____ who _____”

A desire becomes a sinful demand when . . .

- It consumes me
- I sin to get it
- I sin when I don't get it

Throne-Staircase Diagram



What should we do when our desires become demands?

- 1) **R**_____ the source
- 2) **R**_____ of letting the desire rule me
- 3) **R**_____ on God and his grace, provisions, and promises
- 4) **R**_____ sinful responses with Christlike graces and actions

Examples: Prayer, forgiveness, the fruit of the Spirit, self-control (Prov 16:32; 25:28; 29:11), learning contentment (Phil 4:11–13), peacemaking, godly listening, godly speaking, serving, etc.

B. Behavioral Offenses (see chapters 5–6 in *Pursuing Peace*)

The problem of self-righteousness (Luke 18:9–14, see Session 1 above)

Owning and confessing your behavioral offenses:

Matthew 7:3–5, Why do you look at the splinter in your brother’s eye but don’t notice the beam of wood in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ and look, there’s a beam of wood in your own eye? ⁵ 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.

- Jesus presents the proper order: You must start with _____
- Jesus assigns a greater weight to your sins than to your spouse’s sins by calling yours “beams” (or logs or planks) and his “splinters” (or specks)

Step #1: Identify your offenses in prayerful self-examination. Consider sins of commission and omission

Psalm 139:23–24, Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.

	<u>Commission</u> (What I said/did that I <i>should not</i> have said/did)	<u>Omission</u> (What I did not say/do that I <i>should</i> have said/did)
W o r d s		
A c t i o n s		
H e a r t		

Step #2: Confess your sins to God and receive his forgiveness

Step #3: Confess your sins to your spouse and seek his forgiveness

Ken Sande's "7 A's of Confession":

- 1) Address everyone involved
- 2) Avoid "if," "but," or "maybe" language
- 3) Admit specifically
- 4) Acknowledge the hurt (express regret over how your sin hurt him)
- 5) Accept consequences
- 6) Alter your behavior (or at least explain how you intend to do so)
- 7) Ask for forgiveness, and allow time

Step #3 -- Love

A. Show Grace and Forgiveness to Your Spouse (see chapters 7–9 in *Pursuing Peace*)

1. Remember God's forgiveness, mercy, and compassion in your life (Matt 18:21–35; Heb 6:13–20; 8:12; Exod 2:23–25; 3:7–10; Neh 9:16–21)

Matthew 18:21–35

Hebrews 8:12, "For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins."

2. In light of God's forgiveness, forgive your spouse

Colossians 3:12–14, 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.

a) If your spouse is unrepentant, then cultivate attitudinal/heart forgiveness (e.g., Mark 11:25). This involves three commitments to God:

- Entrust the offender to God and release him from my _____
- Repent and get rid of _____
- Be willing to grant transacted forgiveness and reconcile if my spouse _____

b) If your spouse is repentant, then express transacted/granted forgiveness (e.g., Luke 17:3b–4). This involves three promises to your spouse: I will not bring up this offense . . .

- to myself
- to others
- to you

B. Serve Your Spouse (see chapters 10–12 in *Pursuing Peace*)

Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

John 13:1–5, Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² Now when it was time for supper, the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon Iscariot’s son, to betray him. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God. ⁴ So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. ⁵ Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

Philippians 2:1–4, 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.

- 1) Godly listening
- 2) Godly speaking (Note: this might include loving confrontation; see chapter 10 in *Pursuing Peace*)
- 3) Godly practical actions

Conclusion

Numbers 6:24–26, “May the LORD bless you and protect you; may the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the LORD look with favor on you and give you peace.”

Hebrews 13:20–21, Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus—the great Shepherd of the sheep—through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good to do his will, working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever: Amen.

Discussion Questions:

1. What truth(s) in this session helped you, encouraged you, or challenged you?
2. What one principle, priority, or skill do you need to work on in your life to handle conflicts better?
3. What unresolved conflict(s) do you have with your spouse, and what steps do you need to take? (Might you need to talk to a pastor, small group leader, mature godly friend for assistance?)

Rate Your Marriage

Adapted from Wayne Mack by Robert D. Jones

This exercise assesses the condition of your marriage relationship and notes possible areas to address. For best results, complete it individually and then come together as a couple to discuss your ratings and your reasons for each item. If your responses and your spouse's responses are not what you think God desires your marriage to be, remember that God promises to help those who humbly seek his help. For questions 1–13, write the number you think best characterizes your marriage and the number you think your spouse might give, using this scale:

Never = 0; Seldom = 1; Sometimes = 2; Frequently = 3; Usually = 4; Always = 5.

Under each statement, you can note comments to help you discuss them with your spouse. For questions 14–15, list the strengths and weaknesses in your marriage; use the backside or another page to expand your answers.

	Me	Spouse
1. The lordship of Jesus Christ manifests itself in practical ways in our marriage.		
2. We use the Bible to determine our convictions, decisions, and practices in life in general and marriage in particular.		
3. We ask for and receive forgiveness from each other when we have wronged each other.		
4. We focus on things we appreciate about each other and express love in tangible ways.		
5. We communicate with each other daily, and our conversation is kind and friendly.		
6. We can discuss our differing viewpoints on values, priorities, religion, politics, etc. with efforts to understand each other and without becoming irritated or upset.		
7. We seek to understand each other's sexual desires and minister to each other sexually.		
8. We agree about the way we should handle and spend money.		
9. We agree on how to bring up our children (or about having children if we have none).		
10. We have a good relationship with each one of our parents, in-laws, and siblings.		
11. We agree concerning our specific roles and responsibilities as a husband and wife.		
12. We maintain individually our own spiritual life through Bible study, prayer, regular church attendance, and fellowship with God's people.		
13. We are faithful members of a healthy, Christ-centered church where we actively serve the Lord and the other members and where we are growing in our Christian faith.		
14. Question: What are some of the top strengths in your marriage that the Lord has brought about?		
15. Question: Where do you as a couple need to grow in your marriage? What steps might be helpful for you as an individual and you both as a couple to take?		

